

Artists' Collectives and Collectivities: A Curatorial Investigation into
Assembling the Social

by

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Abstract

This thesis begins with an examination of collective art practices in Cuba in relation to the wider collectivised society. This acts as a counterbalance for engaging with the strategy of artists' groups in the United Kingdom and the differences between political thinking in Cuba and the West. Practice-based research in the form of curatorial activity has constantly responded to the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. The multi-platform project *Assembling* (2013-2015) understands the exhibition to be collaborative from the moment of inception. Through the circulation of material in a process of gathering, electing and making visible objects and ideas, *Assembling* has brought together artists previously unknown to each other from Cuba and the United Kingdom to find and cluster around a shared sense of social imaginary, a shared issue of concern.

A *Typology of Association* runs throughout the thesis to trace thought on grouping found in political theory, art history, exhibitionary practice and sociology to produce a nuanced interpretation of how it is that we envisage ourselves in relation to group identifiers. Concomitantly, the main text of the thesis asks, 'Does the "social" exist in and of itself at all?'. Although this is a wide-reaching question, it is key for understanding artists' groups as the social becomes a composed (Latour, 2005) space in which elements can be actively distributed (Rancière, 2000) to form temporal assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) making the social a *practice*. Rather than enquire for example, what is 'community art', this research removes an assumptive meaning and asks what is 'community' and how does art practice activate its composition? Shifting social space is understood in terms of consistency: solid, fluid (Berman, 1982; Bauman, 2010) and foam (Sloterdijk, 2007, 2011).



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Introduction

I

Sociability is inherent to artists' groups as an element of both their organisation and their artistic activity. In fact, all art could be said to be social in two ways: on the small scale of personal interactions and friendships between artists, curators, critics, technicians and a whole ream of others who influence the making, circulation and reception of art; secondly, on a macro level as the individual practice, ability or presence of any one artist can be seen as the outcome of a wider, collective social experience. This is clearly a very extensive topic which cannot be dealt with in its entirety within this thesis. For this research I have chosen to focus on artists' group practices that are, to varying degrees, self-reflexive or conscious of their own mode of grouping. This enables me to think through the politics and mechanisms of grouping together and to elaborate the research into curatorial practice through attempted self-organisational activity between artists.

Artists and critics who discuss and problematise relational practices, that is to say, both artists' groups and collaborations with non-artists, all point to the difficulty in defining these approaches and the plethora of terms which designate overlapping categories such as new genre art, participatory art, socially-engaged art, collaborative art, co-authored art, community art, activist art, social sculpture, social works.

Art historian Claire Bishop (2004, 2006, 2012), who has written extensively on the topic, argues that the uniting factor for these various

strategies of artistic engagement is ‘participation’. Rather than ‘participation’, I am attempting to employ a more flexible, yet hopefully more productive term, in ‘the social’ in order to expand these concepts into broader art practice. ‘The social’ is a reference both to Bishop’s (2012) historical analysis of the ‘social re-turn’ and Bruno Latour’s (2005b) theoretical concept of ‘re-assembling the social’, which I expand on in chapter 2. My investigation, unlike Bishop’s (2004, 2006, 2012) analysing of ‘participatory’ practice which tends to focus on art that engages non-artists, will mainly consider manifestations of artists’ group work and exhibitionary models that experiment socially and examine forms of organisation or grouping together. Although I am not utilising Bishop’s term, I expect many of the main concerns that she attributes to participation will also be key for expanding on my use of ‘the social’. These concerns include the creation of agency and action, finding forms of representative or non-hierarchical authorship, helping remedy a perceived lack of community and the call for collective responsibility.

I will utilise the term ‘the social’ in an attempt to relate these practices to changing structures in social theory that attempt to explain societal frameworks and social behaviours. I realise that this effort is quite expansive, but believe that one of these elements cannot be taken without the other. Maria Lind in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* writes that, ‘if group work in art may be said to be booming at present, it is important to look at how these heterogeneous collaborations are structured and motivated. It is also necessary to pay attention to collaborative work and collective actions in society in general and to current theories on collaboration within philosophy and social theory’ (2001:17). Making social theory prominent in this research has more relevance than simply comparing the structural arrangements of different artists’ groups. Sociologist Gerard Delanty understands, for example, ‘community’ from a constructivist perspective. He argues that a community is not a fixed entity, but an ongoing process continually modified and effected by all those within it. This viewpoint is, ‘defined by practices rather than by structures or cultural values [...] Communities are created rather than reproduced’ (Delanty, 2003:130). Reading artists’ group work alongside understandings of community and other sociological frameworks becomes an even more relevant task when we understand this process through ‘making’ and as a practice in itself. Instead of being understood as an

fig. 0.1. Group Material, *Primer for Raymond Williams*, installation view, 1982.



intrinsic construct, the social is built through our actions.

II

As well as examining existing forms of artists' group practice, this research explores methods for expanding models of collectivity within curatorial ways of working. Details of the curatorial activity that I have carried out which is relevant to this research or has been developed in direct relation to it, *Towards Common Ground* (2012), *Until I, I Know You Better* (2013) and the project *Assembling* (2013-2015), can be found in the portfolios provided with this thesis and will be referenced throughout. However, the practice element of this investigation can be evidenced in the treatment of text as another mode of assembly. In this way, before discussing the content of this thesis, it is important to describe the manner in which I have chosen to assemble this text as a gathering, how it is intended to function and why. As you will see, the thesis sits side by side with a *Typology of Association*, which I have been developing throughout the course of my research so that the two elements interact with one another on reading.

Language, of course, is the result of a collective effort. Through everyday speech we mould and mutate both vocabulary and its perceived meaning. Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) has been pivotal for re-evaluating the current usage of words, to describe subtle shifts in meaning through changing social and cultural context. In the introduction to *Keywords*, he describes the outcome of this endeavour as, 'the record of an inquiry into a *vocabulary*: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions, in English, as the practices and institutions which we group as *culture* and *society*' (2010:15). One of the drives for collating *Keywords* was to provide a format for exploring terms from a cross-disciplinary perspective in order to produce a richer sense of the terminology employed in everyday usage. Williams describes how opening the structural framework of distinct disciplines left him tied to a different model, a lexicographic arrangement of text:

In taking what seemed to me to be the significant vocabulary of an area of general discussion of culture and society, I have lost the props of conventional arrangement by subject and have therefore needed to retain the simplest conventional arrangement, by alphabetical order. However, since a book is only completed when it is read, I would hope that while the alphabetical order makes

fig. 0.2. *Keywords*, installation view, 2013.



immediate use easier, other kinds of connection and comparison will suggest themselves to the reader, and may be followed through by a quite different selection and order of reading (Williams, 2010:25)

Keywords has been very influential in the field of arts and culture and methods of embodying Williams' vocabulary to form a new lexicographical approach can be seen within exhibitionary models such as Group Materials' *Primer for Raymond Williams* (1982) and most recently *Keywords* (2013/4) which took place at both INIVA and Tate Liverpool. Group Material chose to modify Williams' strategy by using, 'a vocabulary of everyday, outwardly non-ideological words, i.e. 'sale,' 'photo,' 'vocal', that demonstrate sociological readings through artworks and objects' (Ault, 2010:70). The exhibition included over thirty responses that sought to tease out the political content of seemingly neutral vocabulary. It was also, significantly for their practice, the first time that Group Material placed pop culture material amongst art objects (fig. 0.1). As can be seen from this image, although the group has still included a running alphabetical list at the bottom of the gallery wall, the display of material radically distorts the lexical format. A similar, but more formal aesthetic can be seen in *Keywords* curated by Grant Watson who employs a reflexive strategy to take an overview of artistic production in the 1980s engaging with the socio-political content of artwork. Words from *Keywords* scroll along the top of the wall but are not the beginning point of investigation for the gallery-goer, so seem to hang in a rather disjointed manner. Although the expectation is that the words are there as an invitation to reconsider the works of art through a chosen vocabulary, this occurs without questioning the terminology we automatically use to describe cultural production as a starting point.

Although not directly relating to the text *Keywords*, it seems important to mention the project *Until I, I Know You Better* (2013) carried out by artists Mónica Rivas Velásquez, Katie Schwab and I. During *Until I, I Know You Better*, the exhibition became a space to reformulate the glossary as a tool to understand and broaden knowledge of text. We created a reading group and used Richard Sennett's *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012) as the entry point to our inquiry about how to work together and through this process constructed a glossary of words we felt were important from within *Together*, as outlined in the portfolio for this exhibition. This led to the development of a series of interventions in the *Ti Pi Tin* bookshop, from constructing and displaying our own shelves, to holding experiments in collective

fig. 0.3. This Book, *Until I, I Know You Better*, installation view, 2013.



reading in the space and collaborating with other artists on a programme of events reflecting the glossary content. The glossary also appeared in a visual format using strategies from the practice of Rivas Velásquez, which was projected onto one wall in an endless cycle. It contained an alphabetised list of words which we had selected from *Together* which allude to the challenges and benefits of cooperation, such as ‘anomie’, ‘commit’, ‘de-skilling’ and ‘embrace’. We collected material, images and text from our personal research, which we felt expanded these concepts. Therefore, for example, under ‘rehearsal’ appeared a reference to Francis Alÿs’ *The Rehearsal I (El Ensayo)* (1999-2001) along with the writing practice of Catherine Mansfield. This activity can be seen as an experiment in activating terminology in an exhibitionary format and in turn, finding ways to work together and associate between artists.

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams emphasises the *process* involved in developing the text, ‘because it seems to indicate its dimension and purpose’ (2010:15) and he stresses that *Keywords* is not a glossary or dictionary, but a vocabulary. In other words, it does not contain solid definitions but attempts to follow the shifting collective usage of words, capturing them in a state of flux. My insistence on a typology results from a similar emphasis on process (my own activity of gathering, collecting and disseminating), the limits and expansion of which has been informed by my period of research and by seeking out and stumbling across terminology that surrounds group practices in contemporary art. The *Typology* not only explores vocabulary, but also the *types* and *modes* of artistic and exhibitionary practice that these collective understandings of gathering give rise to, react against, or attempt to refashion. Words act like the ‘tools’ of Heidegger’s analysis in *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger describes how familiar tools are no longer consciously regarded by the user, but become like an extension of themselves. Until the tool breaks, it is not actively considered, but assimilated into the actions of the user. For example, I may not be consciously aware of the table that is holding my laptop in front of me or the chair that I am sitting on, without which I would have fallen to the floor. Heidegger writes that, ‘The peculiarity of what is ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready to hand quite authentically’ (1962:99). The aim is not to produce a meaning, but to unsettle a sense that vocabulary is concrete, to remind the reader of the hidden layers of collective understanding and shifting perception that produces meaning at any given

point in time. As I will explore in chapter 2, it is a process that also refers to Bruno Latour's (2005b) exploration of the social, in which social elements are often made to fit into groups, leading us to understand such sociological groupings, as with tools and words, as given entities. In order to destabilise these conventions, Latour employs the strategy of *tracing*, following how, where and from what these constructions came into being. Concepts which appear in bold in the thesis, like this '**social**', alert the reader to consult the *Typology* for this term. These bold words scattered on the page, allow the reader to visually assess the patterns and frequency of their usage. Therefore this thesis will function by asking the reader to view this text, with its physical pages, its cross-referencing and repetitions, as a form of gathering, an attempt to find a flexible format for recording and understanding information.

As the title of this thesis designates, this investigation explores curatorial strategies for 'assembling the social'. This social space is outlined in chapter 2 through Bruno Latour's (2005b) concept of 'reassembling the social' and Jacques Rancière's (2000) 'distribution of the sensible'. It is worth pointing here to the seemingly paradoxical reuse of the word 'social' throughout this body of work. Given that a great amount of theoretical effort has been applied to exposing layers of meaning behind words, why would I want to continue to utilise the same term over and over, therefore solidifying it as a concept within this work? One of the reasons behind this action is an attempt to 'make do'. Any neologism has the potential of becoming solidified in the minds of those who begin to use and re-use it, depending on the 'success' of its designated meaning in, for example, its community of use, for which it has been coined. Secondly, 'the social' seemed to be the most neutral term for me to employ. Apart from its use as a community group gathering, i.e. 'a church social', the social is rarely used as a noun, unlike 'the people', 'the nation', 'the society' or other such words which are swollen with both latent and manifest meaning from historical and current usage. As will become clearer in the following chapters, the social is also used in the phrase 'social imaginary' within political theory. This is the social space as imagined by those who inhabit it, how they view it as a cohesive, or at least, as a shared space. This is useful to me as it dislodges the social, reminding us that it is imagined and may well be re-imagined, rather than simply 'being the case'. Therefore, at the risk of seeming hypocritical, I will continue to deploy the term 'social' so as not to confuse the reader, but while always asking them to direct and redirect themselves towards the *Typology of Association*, displacing the process of forming meaning in their minds, like a riverbed whose

silt shifts and scatters with the steady passing flow of water, while still retaining a sense of riverbed as a thing in itself, of ‘riverbed-ness’.

Williams writes that, ‘My starting point [...] was what can be called a cluster, a particular set of what came to seem interrelated words and references’ (2010:22). The concept of clustering and assemblages will become key to my research and it seems important that Williams, in outlining his process posits the cluster in order to make apparent the shifting nature that underlies the text. In my thesis I expand on the notion of the assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). It should be mentioned here that Deleuze and Guattari view the construct of the book as an assemblage in itself, to loosen it from solidified meaning, ‘We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed’ (2004:4). It is interesting to note that this text contains a lexicon as the final chapter, although the introduction induces us away from a linear reading, suggesting the text should be treated more like an album, to be played, shuffled, repeated and revisited.

Claire Colebrook’s discussion on this lexicon in *The Deleuze Dictionary* (2010) proves useful for the discussion of my process so far. She writes that, ‘Deleuze strategically change[d] his lexicon to avoid the notion that his texts consisted of terms that might simply name extra-textual truths... Concepts are intensive: they do not gather together an already existing set of things (extension); they allow for movements and connection’ (Colebrook, 2010:1). He emphasises this point by dislodging the reader’s expectations, seemingly taking on Williams’ challenge to re-imagine lexical ordering. Deleuze and Guattari’s list of terms appear in a dictionary style with terms set under letters but out of order, running through from ‘S’, ‘A’, ‘R’, ‘C’, ‘D’ to ‘M’. Colebrook continues to say that, ‘Each definition of each term is a different path from a text, a different production of sense that itself opens further paths for definition’ (2010:3). Despite the limitations of my own alphabetically-arranged typological system, my hope is that running two texts side by side and inviting the reader to re-examine terms in a constant to and fro, will disrupt a linear reading. This activity aims to replicate my curatorial practice which explores ways to form a flexible gathering between a group of previously unrelated artists despite cultural, geographical and linguistic boundaries.

III

This research took place within both a Cuban and UK context. By choosing to work in these specific places, it is not my intention to solidify or outline a sense of nationhood through delineating a ‘national art practice’ within these two countries. The research originally began by focusing exclusively on group practices in Cuba as an exploration of collectivity from within a collectivised society. However, through developing my curatorial practice, I felt it would be productive to include my own context from where I would be working for the majority of this research period, which became a valuable counterbalance from which to understand the concept of collectivity. Frederic Jameson writes:

I think all artists work from within the situation of the national, so to say they are nationalists or anti-national is to remain on a level of ideology, of personal opinion, and so on, which may not be very useful. It may be better to see how they participate in the work of the nation, how they undercut the nation’s ideologies. It is not just a matter of patriotism: it’s a matter of deeper obligations. There *is only* the national situation. People work in that, and what they can do they do in that. What they can’t do is dictated by that. It’s a boundary which cannot really be transgressed’ (2010:14).

The research in both Cuba and the United Kingdom will, I hope, provide different textures within this thesis and produce alternating standpoints and socio-political positionings from which to try and understand social space and collectivity within artists’ group and exhibitionary practices. In this way, the act of examining Cuba is not carried out to provide either an exemplary or an exotic way of viewing collectivity, but to constantly question and reform a more well-worn conception of what the role of artists’ groups are and how I might understand their activity from within my own context. My approach here is not to re-think borders and boundaries in a cartographic sense, but to consider how collective imaginaries and associations are composed and activated. As discussed previously, this thesis attempts to dispel assumptive usage of associative terms such as ‘nation’, although of course, how nationhood is perceived as a concept and maintained is important here. But perhaps it is more useful to suggest that artists are certainly working from specific coordinates, from an imaginary of what constitutes art and how and why it should be made. My aim has been to examine collective practices from different view points in order to unravel this further and, in the process develop an understanding of what the relationship is between an artists’ collective and the nation, culture, or at least space, from within which they are working. To this end, then, rather than exclusively qualifying my research in terms of

the collective as seen through the lens of nationhood, this thesis will deal with different scales of association, whether personal interaction or global networks. I address this in three ways: firstly by considering the work of artists' groups in Cuba and within the UK; secondly through a theoretical examination of the construction of social space; and thirdly through the project *Assembling* which I have developed alongside this thesis as curatorial practice to understand in more depth how the social imaginary is collectively produced.

IV

The project *Assembling* has acted as a methodology for testing the theoretical element of this research throughout its development. *Assembling* began in 2013 utilising curatorial practice to re-imagine collectivity by activating a grouping of previously unrelated artists between Cuba and the United Kingdom. The individuals invited to participate were mostly artists I had met through my research, either during field trips to Cuba or through my growing connection with Critical Practice, a group of cultural practitioners based at Chelsea College of Arts. During the 2014 Havana Bienal I also met Maurice Carlin, Director of Islington Mill, artist and initiator of the alternative art school, Islington Mill Art Academy. Since returning from Havana we have been discussing approaches for working with artists based in Cuba and have worked together on the curatorial methodology and logistics of *Assembling*. Details of the *Assembling* artists are provided both in chapter 3 and the *Assembling* portfolio provided with this thesis. Throughout the text, I often refer to the artists by first name, Katie, Scott, Luis etc. This is not in any way a comment on status in relation to other artists identified by full or surname, but more a sign of propinquity and familiarity, which perhaps helps provide a sense of scale between the types of association found within this text.

The *Assembling* process draws on the theory of Bruno Latour (2005a, 2005b) and his concept of an expanded collective. In chapter 2, I will outline Latour's concepts at greater length by examining the term 'social'. Perhaps here it is enough to remind the reader that this research considers forms of gathering, whether a collective, society, community or nation, as an active process and therefore a site of practice.

Assembling works to collect together multiple elements such as differing ways of working, objects, opinions, contexts, etc. Latour employs the

term ‘collective’ in opposition to ‘society’, where society is an assumed social entity and the ‘collective’ is an active endeavour. Perhaps Latour uses this term due its historical richness, but also the embedded concept of ‘collecting’, or actively choosing and gathering together different things, human and non-human, in an action not dissimilar to that of the curator. This form of gathering a multiplicity of elements, whether tangible or intangible, object or living thing, can be compared to a Deleuzian assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* write that, ‘an assemblage is first and foremost what keeps very heterogeneous elements together: e.g. a sound, a gesture, a position, etc., both natural and artificial elements’ (2004:176). This expands the idea of assemblage from all of the factors that cause a social organisation or gathering, into the compiling of any material, any temporarily cohering entity, such as ideas, objects, words. An assemblage occurs whenever elements consistently cohere. Therefore, an assemblage is present as a ‘thing’ for so long as the elements of this assemblage persist, for as long as they keep cohering in that particular fashion.

It will be noted by the reader, that the project *Assembling* constantly shifts format and strategy in relation to the lack of cohesion between present elements, therefore requiring a change of assemblage, which together creates a series of attempts and trials towards an expanded collectivity rather than ever reaching an idealised form. In this way, *Assembling* existed through circulatory processes of dialoguing, which produced multiple iterations of gathering through an email circuit, a residency, a zine, an online platform and an exhibition. This, I will go on to argue, makes the formal exhibition site more fluid, expanding past concepts of the ‘collective’ that have become ‘solid’ and too rigid for contemporary self-organisational purposes. These reiterative curatorial processes have been influenced by Latour’s call for a new era of politics. He opens the prolific catalogue for the exhibition *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005) with the article ‘From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik’. For Latour ‘Realpolitik’, which claims to be built around the presentation of a no-nonsense reality, is a tactic that can no longer expect to be taken seriously after Colin Powell’s address to the United Nations in 2003 stating the ‘undisputed fact’ that weapons of mass destruction could be found in Iraq. Instead, Latour calls for a new approach, a ‘Dingpolitick’ which would be centred on gathering around ‘things’, objects, or *matters of concern*, which are multifaceted and therefore not so easily definable. The act of gathering

around this ‘thing’ is an attempt to form an ‘object-orientated democracy’. He writes, ‘It’s clear that each object - each issue - generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object offers new opportunities to passionately differ and dispute’ (Latour, 2005a:5).

In this way, politics is not solidified around ‘Facts’, but presents situations as multifaceted, changeable and complex. Latour reminds us that there are two sides to political representation, not only the group of people, but also the representation of the object or matter of concern, which gives it a visibility. The two have to be taken together, encompassing, ‘Who is to be concerned, what is to be considered’ (Latour, 2005a:6). Latour’s compositional, object-based politics is made from many different elements drawn together to express a specific matter of concern. It is an assemblage that will not calcify, but remain coherent for as long as it is required to do so.

V

As has already been stated within this introduction, this text does not act as a standard thesis, but rather takes the form of an assemblage, a flexible format where the Typology intervenes in a straight, linear reading of the text. There is, however, another way in which the layout of this thesis differs from the more traditional framework of a traditional academic thesis that provides a predetermined argument, which is then debated and concludes based on the position initially introduced. Instead, this thesis exists as a theoretical documentation of a chronological process, one that unfolds with the development of the curatorial practice. Therefore, rather than producing objective argumentation from the outset, this thesis observes the narrative passing of time, the passage of the research period itself. With the introduction of the curatorial project *Assembling*, I am part of my own object of research in an unpredictable process of practice.

It is not new to be calling for a move away from an ‘objective’ approach to knowledge-making, but since this thesis takes much of its theory from Bruno Latour’s criticisms of sociology and his understanding of the ‘social’, it is important to mention the methodology of one of the

‘fathers’ of sociology Emile Durkenheim here. Durkenheim, in *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895), argued that sociology should be treated as a distinct, positivist social science with a methodological approach based on physics. In *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (2009), Leavy writes that, ‘Positivism holds that a knowable reality exists independently out of the research process and this reality consists of a knowable “truth,” which can be discovered, measured and controlled via the objective means employed by natural researchers... Within this framework, both the researcher and methodological instruments are presumed to be “objective”’ (2009:5). This text is not written ‘at a distance’, the chronological form employed to set out this body of research, can also be seen as an extension of the curatorial approach conducted in this investigation. As described in chapter 1, to make *Assembling* ‘collaborative from its inception’, I tried to recede from a dominant position, placing myself in my research in an attempt to share curatorial agency and to create a non-hierarchical way of organising (the problems with this approach are thoroughly discussed throughout the thesis). I mention this here, as one of the most difficult aspects of this process was to allow for such a procedural methodology, so that the theme and direction of *Assembling* would never be set, but was constantly in development as communication and material shared between the artists amassed. There seems to be something similar at work in the writing process of the thesis, where this body of work follows the direction of my practice and allows theoretical content to appear as it is discovered in relation to the practice. To continue to draw on Deleuze and Guatarri’s (1980) conception of the book as an assemblage, they describe the practice of writing as having, ‘nothing to do with signifying. It has everything to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come’ (2004:5).

In this way, Cuba plays a central role in the first chapter ‘Collective’. This not only represents a starting point for my theoretical understanding of social space, considering assembly through ‘solid forms’ (as I outline in the end of this introduction), but it also stems from the initial stages of my research. This period was steeped in investigating the cultural and political landscape of the island, as I had initially began this process as theoretical research examining artists collectives in Cuba. After arriving back in the United Kingdom and once I had started the *Assembling* process, there was a lack of ‘online noise’ from Cuba, reasons for which are discussed in chapter 1. With

diminishing engagement from artists based on the island in the *Assembling* process and as I was unable to take further research trips abroad during this period, the narrative logic of this thesis designates that it is here, therefore, that Cuba more or less ‘drops out’ of the text. Instead, during this time, I started to reflect on my own context as I continued to develop my curatorial research in the United Kingdom. Chapter 2, therefore, examines Western theory on the composition of social space in relation to ‘society’, predominantly through Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière, as well as outlining contemporary forms of collective arts practice in the United Kingdom. As the curatorial practice within my research begins to reach its final stage, with the multiple *Assembling* iterations ending in an exhibition, so too does the exhibition enter into the thesis in the third chapter through a discussion on the term ‘public’. During this time, I was increasingly involved in Critical Practice, learning their particular methods of self-organisation and therefore, it is also in chapter 3 that I discuss the groups’ use of a wiki, relating their way of working to the multitude and discussing contemporary forms of online collectivity. ‘Foam’ does not fully appear in the thesis until the conclusion, as this represents the chronological development of my theoretical thinking during the research. Based on Peter Sloterdijk’s ‘thought image’ for distributed, expansive forms of contemporary collectivity, ‘foam’ concludes the way in which this research reimagines social space.

This research is attentive to terms so that their meaning is not pre-supposed, in the same way the thesis tries to avoid a ready-made, pre-existent framework for it to slot into, allowing the process to feed from the passage of my research activity. Therefore this research unfurls as it develops chronologically, layering and linking theory and practice as it progresses in a narrative format. This does not lead to a neat conclusion, but rather designates a pause in the process that this doctoral research initiated, as, simply put, the period of research came to an end. Bruno Latour depicts this process in a dialogue based on an amalgamation of several discussions held with doctoral students during his time teaching at London School of Economics:

Professor: If I were you I would abstain from frameworks altogether. Just describe.

Student: ‘Just describe’. Sorry to ask, but is this not terribly naïve? Is this not exactly the sort of empiricism, or realism, that we have been warned against? I thought your argument was more sophisticated than that.

Professor: One solution for how to stop is to ‘add a framework’, an ‘explanation’; the other is to put the last word to the last chapter of your damned thesis. (2004:69)

VI

The chapters found within *Artists’ Collectives and Collectivities: A Curatorial Investigation into Assembling the Social* are entitled ‘Collective’, ‘Social’, ‘Exhibition’ and the conclusion is ‘Foam’. This thesis, however, could just as easily be tracked through differing states of matter (‘solid’, ‘fluid’ through to ‘foamy’). I use these consistencies to describe qualities of association within both collectivised and globalised society and to trace thought on how social space has been imagined and politicised in these contexts. Solid association relates to mass culture and visible, unilateral politics (C.Wright Mills, 1959; Hardt and Negri, 2006, 2009). Fluid association refers to the space of Western global politics dominated by the ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2010) flow of capital. Finally, foamy associations relate to my interpretation of Peter Sloterdijk’s (2007, 2011, 2014) conception of contemporary spatial relations and my search for flexible, yet cohering forms of assemblage.

Chapter 1, ‘Collective’, considers the function and impetus for forming art collectives. The chapter seeks to nuance collective politics by thinking through temporal disjoints between the effects of Communism and the ‘haunting’ (Derrida, 1994) of Marx between the West and Cuba. So that the reader may have a more thorough understanding of the collective from within Cuban culture, this chapter traces the meaning and political drive behind collectivity from the beginning of Castro’s time in power (1959). Although I cover a broad period of Cuban political discourse¹, the year 1989 becomes a pivotal turning point from which to discuss group art practices within this thesis. This was a period of deepening economic crisis and insecurity in Cuba, which led to ever-increasing restraints on artists. Coco Fusco writes that with the fall of the Berlin wall, the Government took more aggressive stance towards artists, ‘numerous exhibitions were censored, artworks were confiscated and artists whose content, tactics or personal style tested the boundaries of revolutionary decorum were subject to [...]

¹ Cuban politics has constantly been played out in its relationship to the United States. Although mentioned within the text, it is not an element of the island’s political discourse that I have emphasised in this thesis as I feel it is already well known in comparison to other aspects of Cuba’s collective politics that I have recounted here. For a detailed description of Cuban-U.S. relations please see: Franklin, J., Chompsky, N. (2016) *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

intimidating interrogations and politically-motivated rumour campaigns' (2015:23). These tensions manifest themselves within artistic activity from 1989, seen in works such as Ángel Delgado's, *Hope is the Last thing we're Losing* and a performance involving several artists of this period, *Young Artists Dedicate themselves to Baseball*. This decisive moment of political change acts as a springboard for discussing the critical approach of more recent collective practices from the 2000s onwards. Chapter 1 ends with an introduction to the initial stages of *Assembling* by comparing the email exchange with similar strategies that have already been utilised by artists in Cuba. The chapter describes how *Assembling* has developed from research that reveals the restrictiveness of certain collective formats and how from the project's initiation it has sought to experiment with flexible forms of collectivity.

Chapter 2, 'Social', moves away from collective experience and identity to take an even wider stance and ask whether the social (which is continually talked about as a given entity, for example social enterprise, social work, social media, social club) exists in and of itself at all. In this introduction I have brought to the reader's attention the concept of Deleuze and Guatarri's assemblage. This denotes the cohering of different elements, which might be objects, sounds or thoughts, in other words they could be enduring or ephemeral. Their description is particularly useful as it refutes an orderly analysis of experience into unitary blocks, but provides a more subtle suggestion of interrelation and interactivity. An assemblage is continuously adapting and shifting in relation to existing and new elements. This begins to develop an idea of collectivity in very spatial terms of composition (Latour, 2005) and distribution (Rancière, 2000). Within this spatial arena, issues of scale and visibility gain importance. In a large agglomerative social space clamouring with matter - which parts are heard, seen, smelt, known and thought about? Furthermore, what is the dark matter (Scholette, 2011) lurking behind represented, prominent compositions? I examine the hidden aspects of my own practice throughout this process as an illustration of the compositional aspect of curatorial work. Current thought on space cannot ignore perhaps the largest social imaginary, the global, or the globalisation of social form. Theorist Peter Sloterdijk writes that globalisation has reduced space to, 'a silent background as a carrier of traffic and communication... From the perspective of those who demand[...] swiftness, the only good space is a dead space' (2013:250). This reduction is explored in chapter 2 by questioning the theorisation

of globalised space into a fluid, or liquid (Bauman, 2010), non-cohesive association. Chapter 2 describes the way in which artists and theorists such as Debord (1955) and Bourriaud (2009), have employed sociability and relational interaction to act as a combative force against the flow and drive of global capital, which they describe as smothering the sincerity of, or ability to engage in, authentic social relations.

Chapter 3, 'Exhibition', elaborates the way in which my reading of compositional theory has led me to understand assembling social space as a practice. I establish the exhibition as a form of expanded collective and use my own curatorial activity with *Assembling* as well as the exhibition *Democracy* (1988-89) by Group Material, as an illustration of this idea. In a continued move away from 'solid' mass association, but with the desire to avoid depictions of 'fluid' globalised association, chapter 3 asks how the social imaginary has been theorised in terms of flexible collectivity through the terms 'public' (Lippman, 1925; Dewey, 1927), 'common', and 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2006, 2009; Virno, 2004). Networked, distributed models react against the solidity of the nation-state which, arguably has been deteriorating since at least 1945 with the rise of a more global politics. Sloterdijk depicts this nation-state in a manner that is in line with 'solid' consistency, 'What was previously understood as 'society' and invoked with it was usually, in fact, nothing other than the content of a thick-walled, territorially-grounded, symbol-assisted and generally monolingual container - that is, a collective that found its self-assurance in a certain national hermeticism and flourished in redundancies of its own (that could never be entirely understood by strangers)' (2013:152). He believes that, 'after 1945 *thin-walled* societies came into view' (2014:293). Yet, despite this longing for flexibility and inclusivity, these qualities also hold potential traps. This chapter examines further the way that 'participation' and 'collaboration' are positioned in art practices and shows how these same qualities are perceived in the open politics of software culture. I start to examine the possibility of opening and closing to form textured space and examine the role of conflict (Mouffe, 2000, 2005) within relational interaction.

In my conclusion I return to the issue of scale within social space examining Peter Sloterdijk's theory of 'spherology' (2007, 2011, 2014), particularly his original use of 'foam'. I find the broad reach of Sloterdijk's approach pleasing as it is inclusive of a scale of relations from the personal to the global, which I address in this research. His 'spherology' underscores the idea that differing scales of interaction are not

separate structures. Sloterdijk's work, with its illuminating terminology adds a new texture and visual imagery to the thought of Bruno Latour and his conception of an active, compositional social space. I use *Assembling* to elaborate on my reading of foam and how the practice element of this research has attempted to enact a 'foamy' consistency. The conclusion considers the terms 'democracy' and 'equality' (Mouffe, 2000; Rancière, 2000) in relation to compositional social space, bringing non-human elements to the fore alongside human components and so further developing the exhibition as a site of expanded collective.



Chapter 1: Collective

I

All that is solid melts into air
Karl Marx

This chapter will consider how **social** spaces are peopled, inhabited and acted out; in other words, how is it that ‘we’ consider ourselves? How do artists gather, represent and conceptualise themselves as a ‘we’? In order to explore these ideas, I will discuss how the concept of the **collective** has been understood historically and within contemporary thinking. This chapter will largely address research I have carried out in Cuba, a provocative and productive site to think through the meaning and consequence of forming art **collectives** in a collectivised **society**. In making comparisons between the UK and Cuba it is not my intention to promote one

A

Assemblage

Manuel DeLanda

In *A New Philosophy of Society*, DeLanda uses the term ‘assemblage’ to theorise about social entities, such as individuals, organisations, governments and nation states. DeLanda does not view these entities as social ‘wholes’. He writes, ‘the whole may be analysable into separate parts and at the same time have irreducible properties, properties that emerge from the *interactions* between parts’ (2006:10). Rather than envisaging social entities as set units, DeLanda sees them as a series of interactions cohered into an assemblage. By removing the solidity of social concepts, he aims to uncover the mechanisms that cause the emergence of different groupings. DeLanda states that these mechanisms are recurrent, meaning that they must constantly be played out in order to maintain an assemblage, similarly to Latour’s concept of the ‘social’ examined in chapter 2. He also states that assemblages all have the potential to mass together with others to form larger populations. This however, does not occur in a neat Russian doll-like succession, as smaller assemblages occur in larger ones after the larger has already

political discourse over the other, but to use each as a counterpoint for examining artists' collectivity. This relationship will be introduced through the *Assembling* project at the end of the chapter, which outlines the concept of an expanded **collective** through Bruno Latour's theory (2005a, 2005b).

Before going further, it is important to note that artists' approach to **collective** politics and **collective** art practice in Cuba and the United Kingdom sit within two differing temporalities with regards to Marxism. In the West it is a time to re-examine Marx after a period of distancing from **collective** politics, as curator Grant Watson states, 'to talk about Communism is to try to rescue Communism from its own disrepute. To talk about it is also to depart from normative thinking and flirt with a position that is beyond the spectrum of everyday politics' (2006:1). Such discourse has filtered into exhibitionary practice in the West, for example Watson's *Communism* (2005), an **exhibition**, book and radio broadcast series, Alfredo Jaar's ongoing installation and lecture series *Marx Lounge* (2010 -) as well as Tate Liverpool's *Turning Left* (2013), amongst others. This return to Marxist thinking has been strongly influenced by Jacques Derrida's *The Spectres of Marxism* (1994). Derrida depicts the time in which Marxism exists as being out of joint. On reviewing Marx, one sees the end of History and the prediction of a communist future, an idea of futurity which now seems to exist in the past. Derrida describes this disjointed temporality as a haunting; the (non)presence of something that has been known in the past. He terms this play with presence, absence, and temporality 'hauntology',

been formed, such as organisations being created within existing cities. Assemblages are maintained through material and expressive elements which provide resources and uphold identity.

The use of the term 'assemblage' is borrowed from Deleuze (see below), as are the concepts of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, which Delanda uses to depict different qualities within these entities. Territorialised forms contain dominant centres or have dependents attached in a hierarchical structure. These assemblages exert the most control and are therefore more defined, or solid in my terminology. Populations of assemblages similar in size that form agglomerations, or those which are more scattered, such as the maritime nodes of sea ports, are described as deterritorialised in nature.

Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari

An assemblage, for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is a type of rhizome; a multiplicity that changes and adapts in a continuous formation of connections, which expand any previous existent relations. In an assemblage, these connections appear and create a cohesion between various heterogeneous elements, such as sound, gestures, the action of time on a situation or an utterance. These elements only exist as an assemblage through a consistency of their interaction. However, this interaction is also a process of becoming that will eventually

which in French sounds very similar to ‘ontology’, producing a neology to disrupt how the reader engages with the concept of the metaphysics of being. He depicts Marxist thinking as, ‘untimely spectres that one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back’ (Derrida, 1994:87). Rather than a monumental theoretical behemoth, Derrida’s Marx appears as ‘spectres’, in multiple translucent forms. He shifts temporalities to dislodge the solidity of our current political discourse, a theme which I will continue to explore within this chapter through the concept of ‘hegemony’.

For Cuba, there has never been an opportunity to detach and reevaluate, instead there has been a steady stream of uni-directional Marxist political narrative.

State-shunned artist and independent curator Sandra Ceballos often depicts the over-exposure to unshakeable revolutionary ideas as resulting in insanity and mental breakdown amongst artists. In the 1990s Ceballos expressed the mood of the **nation** by contributing a mock artist’s ‘psychiatric exam’ to a newspaper artwork by Tania Bruguera. As Rachel Weiss notes in *To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art* (2011), Ceballos diagnosed, ‘a noteworthy collapse of the upper cranial area’ because of ‘an excess of cognitive information after long periods of [...] theoretical works and forced concepts’. For artists suffering from an ‘ill culture’ she prescribes, ‘five or six months at rest in the Swiss Alps, or in Cayo Largo as a cure’ (2011:232). Twenty years later during the Havana Biennial in 2012 Ceballos

effect and change the assemblage, producing a new institution or way of thinking, behaviour etc. At the beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980) Deleuze and Guattari provide the example of a book, ‘[a] book is neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute a book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations’ (2004:4). In the introduction, Massumi writes that the open quality of the assemblage means that it synthesises, ‘a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering their potential for future rearranging (to the contrary)’ (2004: xiii).

Deleuze and Guattari reject an authoritarian ‘arbolescent model’ of thought, ‘the proudly erect tree under whose spreading boughs the latter-day Platos conduct their class’ (Massumi, 2004: xii) in favour of rhizomatic ‘nomad thought’ that does not attempt contain and edify itself, but is constantly shifting through relations of exteriority. Deleuze and Guattari have a concern for *circumstances* rather than the solidity of concepts. The assemblage is an attempt to expand philosophical interrogation from authoritatively outlining objects or subjects.

Allan Kaprow

Allan Kaprow’s use of Assemblage stems from a participatory concept, ‘[t]he artist and his [sic] artist-public are expected to carry on a dialogue

curated an exhibition including her own work after a long period of not exhibiting, transforming her home, the independent art space *Espacio Aglutinador*, into MAM, *el Museo de Arte Maníaco*¹. Rather than re-evaluating Communism and its symbols, Ceballos has been drowning in them obsessively, now more than ever through their commercialisation in Cuba. In Derrida's terminology, it could be said that Cuba is on the one hand under the spectre of Marxism (even after initial revolutionary expectations diminished), but on the other hand, this dialogue has never ceased to continue and so the country remains in a constant state of fright. Searching for a **common** space and thinking through **social** constructs in art practice has a very different meaning within each of these contexts, one which is still playing out a continual haunting by a singular, repetitive spectre and another which is reflecting and refashioning through a multiplicity of spectres. This demonstrates the disjointed context between Cuba and the West in understanding the cultural inheritance of **collective** politics, which I will address throughout this chapter and which I have explored through expanding the concept of **collective** into collectivities in my curatorial practice.

II

The **collective** has been one way for composing, organising, controlling and understanding **social** formation, both historically and contemporarily. The

on a mutual plane, through a medium which is insufficient alone and in some instances non-existent before this dialogue, but which is given life by the parties involved' (1966:173). Kaprow talks of Assemblages (Rauschenburg, Follett), Environments (Kusama, Schmidt) and Happenings (Whitman, the Gutai group), in which: 'assemblages' are casually hung, or placed compositions of objects made from a range of often impermanent materials; 'environments' invade a space, so that one must enter into them; 'happenings' are a series of composed actions, often taking place inside environments. This move within art, he argues, began with Cubist collage:

this is what happened: the pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials, and, reaching out further into the room, finally filled it entirely. Suddenly there were jungles, crowded streets, littered alleys, dream spaces of science fiction, rooms of madness and junk-filled attics of the mind... (1966:165).

1 *Museum of Maniac Art*. All translations are that of the author.

collective obviously has very specific political connotations. Scholette and Stimson argue that in the West there is an upsurge in **collective** art practices now after a period of the political left re-evaluating **social** formation, ‘collectivism had to redefine its meaning and purpose with respect to the past: it had no choice but to hedge’ (2007:xii). The distinctions between **collaboration** and collectivity in contemporary art are often nebulous and are regularly referred to within the same breath, suggesting a change from the well-formed **collective** identities of the Modernists. Krant Gestler in *The One and the Many: Contemporary Art in a Global Context* (2011) includes new media, protest-based practices, activist theatre and **community**-based art all under the umbrella of **collaboration**. However, artists working within the **collective** strongly assert their oppositional position and often equate **collaboration** as a separate form of liberalism. The co-authored text *The Rules of Engagement* (2006) by Beech, Hutchinson and Timberlake lays out the three artists’ views on collaborative working and the **collective** in art practice. Here they describe collaborators, unlike members of a **collective**, as uniting, ‘temporarily on the condition that their private interests are served’ (2006:3). Therefore, they see **collaboration** as prioritising individual needs over those of the **group**, as a platform whose primary usage is to improve the lot of each artist as a unit. Beech, Hutchinson and Timberlake view this as a corporate model of work where skills are pooled to increase production and productivity. The suggestion that collaborative practices lack a certain radicalness in their approach is also claimed by Stimpson

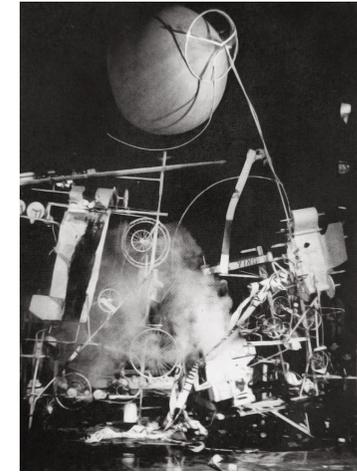


fig. 4.1. Jean Tinguely, *Hommage à New York: A self-Constructing, Self-Destroying Work of Art*, Assemblage in motion 1960.

MOMA, The Art of Assemblage

The beginning point of the assemblage in art is thought to be the Cubist practice of fragmenting objects, such as the mixed material collages of Pablo Picasso and later, the Surrealists’ juxtaposition of objects. Although not depicted as a work of assemblage itself, Claude Levi Strauss’ structural anthropologic text called *The Savage Mind* (1966) is often linked to the initiation of this concept in art. Within this text Strauss describes the ‘untamed’ mind, which constructs by making do with what is at hand, combining existing objects to create something new, rather than engineering new tools and objects.

Assemblage is often the composition of traditionally non-art materials. The 1961

and Sholette who depict these types of association as residing within dominant frameworks rather than reacting against them, ‘collaborative practice in art today is produced by the structures which mediate, distribute and consume art’ and becomes a product of ‘enterprise culture’ (2006:11). But is there still a belief that **collective** action as artistic practice can make a marked political difference, or has a scepticism appeared, dampening an ideological stance in a context where it seems that every identity can be appropriated by the market? As curator Paul O’Neil questions, ‘Can the merging of **people** and practices offer any sustainable resistance to the cult of creative individualism, or is the ‘**collective**’ just another marketable brand in disguise?’ (2010:51). In other words, do we believe **gathering** ‘works’ as a political strategy when undertaken by cultural workers and what are the perceived politics of the artists’ **collective** now?

Freee have predominantly worked in the United Kingdom in a Western context. They work collectively from a Marxist position as a way to confront the dominant political and art world forces that surround them. On their website they write that, ‘Freee occupies the **public** sphere with works that take sides, speak their mind and divide opinion’ (Freee, 2012). They are a tightly formed **collective** united in the belief that a politically and creatively rigorous **group** allows for resolute work that is focused on the organism of the **collective** rather than that of its individual members, Dave Beech writes, ‘the art **group** sacrifices individual subjectivity for

exhibition at MOMA *The Art of Assemblage*, included the work of Braque, Joseph Cornell, Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp, Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg, Man Ray and Kurt Schwitters. In the exhibition catalogue, William Seitz describes the assemblage tendency as:

The need of certain artists to defy and obliterate accepted categories, to fabricate aggressive objects, to present subjects tabooed by accepted standards, to undermine the striving to permanency by using soiled, valueless, and fragile materials, and even to present ordinary objects for examination unaltered (1961:6).



fig. 4.2. Kurt Schwitters, *Merz Picture with Rainbow*, Mixed media on plywood, 1939.

Assembling

Assembling

Assembling (2013-5) was an act of ongoing research into artists’ group practices initiated

the discipline of the **collective**' (2006:37). Beech suggests that the **collective** is its own institution, solidifying itself against a dominant other. He writes, 'As long as art [...] is problematic, then the **collective** can offer an alternative structure in which to participate, one that underwrites its own agency through the institutionalisation of **collective** action. Adhering to the **collective** rather than to art, is a way of keeping faith to the potential transformation of art' (Beech, 2006:39).

Freee took part in *Towards **Common** Ground* (2012), a project curated by Ying Tan and I that took place in the bandstand on Clapham **Common** (as seen in the associated portfolio that accompanies this thesis). For the project, Freee wrote the document *A **Manifesto** for a New **Public*** (2012) conceived as a spoken word choir and based on Vladimir Tatlin's *The Initiative Individual in the Creativity of the **Collective*** (1919). In this **manifesto**, Freee state that, 'every great inventive artist is produced by and is the carrier of the creativity of the **collective**; the artist must reconnect with the vast creative **public** that is the source and purpose of its power' (2012:1). This approach draws on the **social** constructivist thinking of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) who believed that knowledge and culture are first developed on the **social** level and then later on the individual level. Theorists such as Peter Sloterdijk (2005) and Paolo Virno (2010) argue that the most basic unit of the **collective** or human presence in **social** space, is not the individual but a form of multiple. Sloterdijk (2005) writes that an originary ontological state exists as a primordial

as part of this doctoral research with a group of artists predominantly between Cuba and the UK. It has consisted of several iterations; an email circuit, a residency, a posted zine, Loomio platform and an exhibition. Each of these processes have sought to coalesce around a shared 'issue of concern' (see Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel under 'Democracy'), to draw out a form of engaged public amongst the participants. This activity seeks to rethink the concept of solid forms of collectivity into expanded collectivities of human and non-human elements to form a flexible, foamy (a term developed within this thesis) gathering.

Richard Kostelanetz et al.

The zine *Assemblings* were an offshoot from mail art, a practice that circulates artworks by sending them through the postal system, enabling international networks between artists. *Assemblings* were compiled and distributed by Richard Kostelanetz (and at various times James Korn, Mike Metz, Scott Helmes and David Cole) between 1970 and 1982. Artists were invited to contribute work which was deemed as otherwise unpublishable. They were asked to send one thousand copies of up to four pages of any material, as long as it did not exceed the measurements 8 1/2" x 11". Kostelanetz (1995) believes that as artists knew that none of their work would be rejected and that they did not have to adapt to a uniting theme, it permitted a certain freedom without

fig 1.2. Freee, *Manifesto for a New Public*, performance, 2012.



duality which, ‘precedes all encounters’ (2009:9). This **dual** is not made from two separate units but is an intermingling, intersubjective presence which Sloterdijk compares with a mother and a foetus. The artist acknowledging and interweaving a **social** context and sphere of influence is a continuation of the most primordial development of selfhood. When a baby is born, the brain is not yet developed; it is a plastic entity that develops in response to **social** interaction with the world around us. Therefore the brain completes its construction in direct relation to the **social** through emotional exchange (Gerhardt, 2014). There is a complex interplay with no clearcut distinction between the individual and the multiple ‘vast creative **public**’. Rather, there is a constant process of exchange that dissolves the concept of a discrete individual being.

With this in mind, I will revert back to Freee’s contribution to *Towards **Common** Ground*, thinking through the form in which this ‘vast creative **public**’ became enacted. Participants invited to the Clapham **Common** Bandstand, were all given a copy of the text *A **Manifesto** for a New **Public***. Each person took time to look through the pamphlet and to underline statements that they were in agreement with. Then the gathered **group** collectively read the **manifesto**, only reading aloud the underlined sections to create a discord of opinion. Freee removed a sense of ‘**audience**’ by drawing all those present into performing the words of the text, which did indeed generate variance as the voices undulated in intensity depending

a requirement to self-censor. Removing the authorial role of ‘editor’ also meant that the judgement of quality and value fell to each reader.



fig. 4.3. Richard Kostelanetz, *Second Assembling*, Publication, 1971.

Bruno Latour

In *Reassembling the social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005), Latour employs the concept of ‘assembling’ to describe how the social is in a constant state of being constructed and drawn together, rather than existing as a shadowy backdrop to experience (which I further describe in Latour’s entry under ‘society’). For Latour, this assembling takes the form of a network of actors and the circulatory movement of actions, knowledge, connections, goods, etc. The procedure of assembling, Latour suggests, can momentarily form ‘the collective’, his alternative to ‘society’.

on the statement being read. A section of the **manifesto** reads:

New art alone does not contribute to the new **society** of the commons but the new apparatuses of art must contribute to the creation of a new system of **collective** being in which individuals are formed from a dynamic **collective body**. This is the only kind of **democracy** worthy of the name. It is also known as socialism, communism and utopia' (Freee, 2012:8).

In order to analyse the reading of *The Manifesto for a New Public* further, I will draw on an alternative **collective** reading which took place during *Until I, I Know You Better* (2013), a project described in the introduction and outlined further in the corresponding portfolio. Artists Mónica Rivas Velásquez, Katie Schwab, Siân Robinson Davies, Chloë Cooper and I read together Italo Calvino's short story *The Adventure of a Nearsighted Man* (1970) at the suggestion of Rivas Velásquez, who, as a part of her practice, has an interest in the translation of text and the possibilities of making the reading process **public**. The **group** worked together to decide how they would approach the text, negotiating strategies for the **collective** reading, at times tentative, at other moments boldly and often with amusement. The aim was to explore ways of reading the text together without previously coming to a consensus on the 'best' way to act collectively, but rather, rehearsing over and over, constantly altering strategies. Often each person carried out a different function or disrupted the narrative of another reader as we actively decided procedures through a playing out of **self-organisation**. The reading took place as part of the wider project of **collective** reading between Rivas Velásquez, Schwab and I, who were using *Until*

Associate

Verb

'connect (something) with something else because they occur together or one produces the other'
(Oxford Dictionaries: 2014).

Association

A note on Association

I have been employing the word 'association' to describe this typology. For me, this term relates to my use of 'group' and is an attempt to find the most 'neutral' terminology possible.

Audience

A note on Audience

'Audience' is not currently often applied to interactions between art/artist and art goer. The term has not been developed in this research either as it seems to suggest a passivity, when in fact no one passively receives information without appropriating, re-imagining and interpreting it.

I, I Know You Better as a tool for enacting our understanding and sharing of Richard Sennett's text *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012). In this text the sociologist and keen musician describes the dialogical processes present in a musical rehearsal:

Children discussing the rules of a game have to arrive at a consensus in order to play together. Musicians do not, or not quite. When I once rehearsed the Octet with the clarinetist Alan Rusbridger, he remarked to me at one point: 'professor' - he is a journalist by trade so this form of address is not entirely a compliment - 'your top note sounds harsh.' In practising alone, I'd forgotten how it might sound to him and he made me hear it. But I didn't soften the sound; I pondered whether it should sound harsh, decided it should, and made it even more so. Our exchange produced, in me, a more conscious valuing of the note he disliked. As in a good discussion: its richness is textured with disagreements that do not, however, keep people from continuing to talk (Sennett, 2012:16).

On the first consideration of this dialogical example, I felt that the Italo Calvino reading had been more like Sennett's description of children discussing the rules of the game. But although there was consensus enough to trial suggested rules, they were quickly usurped in another attempt to collectively read, producing a series of temporal instances of consensus. In this example, unlike Freee, the text itself was not political in content and it would be interesting to trial the same approach but with a more provocative sentiment and within a more diverse '**public**', rather than a **group** of friends who share many of the same values.

The Freee reading was overtly political. The text had been written previously by the **collective**, it was dense and difficult to access. Having written the text, the

B

Body

Æsop

The Belly and the Members is one of Æsop's Fables, a collection of stories written in Ancient Greece in the 6th Century B.C., accredited to Æsop, a slave and story-teller. This particular fable, provides an early depiction of society as body politic. It tells of the Members of the Body who decide to go on strike, realising that they do all the work while the Belly receives all the food. However, when the hands stop lifting food towards the mouth, the lips refuse to open and the teeth stop grinding, it is not just the belly who suffers, but all of the other Members, such as the legs and arms, which begin to wither. The tale ends, 'So thus they found that even the Belly in its dull quiet way was doing necessary work for the Body, and that all must work together or the Body will go to pieces' (Æsop, 2001). This tale is ultimately authoritarian as it calls for the non-questioning unity of the body as a political whole through a centralised power, the Belly.

collective were in agreement with the entire pamphlet, confidently sounding their position while the rest of the **public** floated in and out of concordance. They had a strong message and aimed to create an ‘us and them’ dynamic, as *The Manifesto* states, ‘We invite you to agree, disagree, join in or join the opposition’ (2012:6). In other words, in their **collective** dynamic, if you play differently you should leave the band. Both **collective** readings attempted to form a vocal **collective** of sorts: one around a politically neutral text between a non-diverse **public** exploring the **collective** through the strategy of rehearsal and negotiation; the other grouped around a purposely contentious text with an uneven dynamic. Here the **public** is more diverse in opinion, but the rules and words were controlled not by the entire **public** formed in the act of reading, but by the **collective** centre, which produced a more ‘solid’ approach to **gathering**.

III

The discussion on collectivity so far has been from a predominantly Western perspective and produced from within a capitalist, democratic system. Therefore it is important to question whether we analyse **collective** practices in Cuba in the same way. Art historian Rachel Weiss in *Collectivism After Modernism* provides a word of warning to her readers:

More than **collective** in the highly intentional, patently ideological sense (as figure of opposition and/or resistance) that the word generally has in capitalist settings, the Cuban **groups** have worked without **manifesto**



fig. 4.4. Wenceslas Hollar, *The Belly and its Members*, Etching, 1668.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

Hardt and Negri in *Multitude* (2006) write that under sovereign rule, the political always transforms into the solidity of a body with, ‘a head that commands, limbs that obey, and organs that function together to support the ruler’ (2006:100), whereas a *true* representation of democracy, they believe, can only be achieved through a ‘living flesh’ with no central point of leadership that is ruled only by itself, a governance for everyone by everyone.

Thomas Hobbes

The body politic is often epitomised by the cover of the 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes’ text *The Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes viewed the sovereign power along

or platform and have tended to be more loosely cohered, organisms of **friendship** first and foremost, rather than methodology or telos... [I]t seems more productive, and more accurate, to explore it instead within the terms and conditions which have principally given rise to it, rather than measuring it according to parameters which are largely extrinsic. This is not to suggest that Cuban collectivism has existed inside a vacuum, but rather to insist that it, along with other local cultural phenomena, has developed in response to the specificity of the Cuban situation, rather than mimetically in relation to 'international' practice. (Weiss, 2007:116)

For this reason, before analysing these artistic practices themselves, it is important to understand the place that the **collective** has held in recent Cuban history and the way in which it is perceived contemporarily there.

Cuba has existed under a socialist, single party **state** since the 1959 Revolution, which put Fidel Castro in power. Under this regime, there has been a clear view that the role of art is to act as an instrument to fuel the revolutionary spirit, thus furthering the revolutionary project. Castro famously stated in his text *Words to the*

Intellectuals, 'Dentro de la revolución, todo; contra la revolución, ningún derecho'²

² The translation of Fidel Castro's famous quote is, 'For the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing' (author's translation). *Palabras a los Intelectuales* (*Words to the Intellectuals*), although later printed, was originally given as a speech to Cuban artists and intellectuals at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in 1961. Par Kumaraswami provides an analysis of Castro's *Palabras*, which points to the different readings of the divisive 'for' and 'against' in this quote. He argues that despite the many readings of the text as a political ultimatum or sign of repression, there is greater complexity understood from the context of this statement (Kumaraswami 2009:528). The speech was given just two months after the Bay of Pigs, a US-backed insurgency of Cuban dissidents based in Florida, quashed in what is largely described as a fiasco. Kumaraswami writes, 'the *Palabras* can be read as a product of, and in response to, an era of siege - a heady mixture of national euphoria, national security threats and the economic threat of a complete US embargo' (2009:529). However, the lampooning of intellectuals in this era and the regular denunciations of 'counter-revolutionary behaviour', the imprisonment of intellectuals such as the poet Heberto Padilla a decade after Castro's speech and the recent imprisonment of Tania Bruguera for attempting to carry out a performance in Havana's Plaza de la Revolu-

with its subjects, the nation's people, as an organic unity, which he called 'the Leviathan', commonwealth or state. He likens the sovereignty to an 'artificial man's soul; the facilities of the law are nerves, wealth like the strength and its counsellors the memory. Lastly, he writes that, 'the pacts and covenants, by which the parts of this body politic were at first made, set together, and united' (1996:7). Hobbes believed the formation of this body is only possible under a social contract in which a person gives up certain natural freedoms in order to become a citizen. This civilising process means abiding by legal, religious and constitutional structures. Without the protection of civilisation, he believed that human nature would turn to violence, one person against the other, each out for themselves. Without the state civilising the people, distancing them from nature, life would be, 'nasty, brutish and short' (1996:84).



fig. 4.5. Abraham Bosse, Frontispiece of *Leviathan*, Engraving, 1651.

(1961:11). Officials of the time viewed cultural production through a Marxist-Leninist reading³ and deemed the individual's creativity to stem from the 'masses' (Hart Dávalos, 1983). Tzvi Medin in *Cuba: The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness* (1990) cites one of Fidel Castro early texts in which the leader writes that within, 'the **mass** and **social** organisations, our revolution has a powerful and inexhaustible flow of political and revolutionary energy. They are the link that assures the closest bond between the party and the masses. They are the guarantee of the party's educational, guiding and mobilising influence' (1990:156).

Again and again the 'masses' are alluded to in Castro's political speeches and texts on the politics of Cuba. But what does the '**mass**' mean as a form of **association**? It certainly, now, sounds antiquated. A dictionary definition of '**mass**' is, '**assembling** into one **body**, ordinary **people**; the **people** as a whole' (Oxford, 1995).

Individuality is absorbed by the whole to form a solid **body** in which the commands

ción, all serve as a powerful influence on the way we might now interpret this statement.

3 It is important to note here the difference in attitude towards the role of art in this particular newly revolutionary society in comparison with Socialist Realism in Communist countries such as Russia and China, carried out in a propagandistic format of, 'a government sanctioned stylistic system and thematic program (Rusnock, 2010:2), which evidences the distinct politics of Cuba. In fact, Che Guevara himself was critical of Socialist Realism suggesting it stagnated art rather than praising its revolutionary fervour. In *Socialism and Man in Cuba* (1965) Guevara, makes this distinction, writing, 'But why try to find the only valid prescription in the frozen forms of socialist realism? We cannot counterpose "freedom" to socialist realism, because the former does not yet exist and will not exist until the complete development of the new society. We must not, from the pontifical throne of realism-at-all-costs [...] for we would then fall into the [...] mistake [...] of going back to the past, of putting a strait-jacket on the artistic expression of the people who are being born and are in the process of making themselves' (Guevara:2005). Art was seen as part of a process of forming a new society in a Marxist sense of making new work that in turn would change the internal life of the people. There were and are limits or consequences to content as we will see later, but this endeavour was not limited in style or form.

Enema

Enema was an artists' group active in the 1990s based at Havana's main art school, *Instituto Superior de Arte*. The group were initiated by artist Lázaro Saavedra as a way to teach the history of performance to his students. Enema would carry out known performances as part of a group such as Marina Abramovic's 1984 *You See What You Feel/We See*. One of the members, Sanchez, writes that, 'ENEMA's revival of the performance's capacity for dialogue as a space for social interaction and as life experience, positions the body at the axis of a proposal where the individual, bio-political identity is absorbed by the common body that, like a social mass, brings the collective to life' (2012:65). Many of these performances were of physical endurance in which they were united together as a multiple body, such as the group all drawing blood to make a *morcilla* sausage, or spending several days tied together into one unit with rope. Saavedra comments that the idea was not to become one collective body, or annul the individual, but to question the position of the author (Saavedra, 2009). Artist and writer Coco Fusco, however, suggests a lack of criticality within their work. Performance in the 90s, she comments, was taken off the streets by art groups such as ENEMA as well as DUPP (Desde Una Pragmática Pedagógica)¹ and DIP (Departamento de Intervenciones Públicas)² which were all run by professors. This took

1 From a Pragmatic Pedagogy

2 Department of Public Interventions

of one individual are adopted and obeyed. Hardt and Negri write that, '[t]he components of the masses, the mob and the **crowd** are not singularities - and this is obvious from the fact that their differences so easily collapse into the indifference of the whole. Moreover, these **social** subjects are fundamentally passive in the sense that they cannot act by themselves but rather must be led' (Hardt and Negri, 2006:100). In 1956, three years before Castro took power in Cuba, the sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote *The Power Elite*, which represents the attempts of this period to describe societal grouping. In this text Mills differentiates the **mass** from the **public**. He writes that the '**public**' have opportunity to express as many opinions as they receive, whereas '[i]n a **mass**...far fewer **people** express opinions than receive them;...The communications that prevail are so organised that it is difficult or impossible for the individual to answer back immediately or with any effect' (1956:28). The inability to communicate, then, leaves the **mass** without agency, with little or no chance of engagement.

However, in the early years of the revolution Che Guevara wrote in his seminal text *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, that there was a, 'close dialectical unity which exists between the individual and the **mass**' (1968:6), contradicting the idea that the **mass** is an unvoiced entity. He believed that Cuban **society** could act as a huge feedback system where opinions and thoughts would loop from the **collective** structuring of the masses in a return to the party, correcting imbalances from within. Indeed, there

performance into the institution, removing the radicality of groups such as Arte Calle in the 80s. She writes, 'the art form was 'disciplined' in the 90s by becoming an academic subject... an astute form of cultural management that draws artists and audience attention away from performances more controversial forms' (2015:45).



fig. 4.6. ENEMA, *Ustedes ven lo que sienten, nosotros vemos*, Performance, 2001.

Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari

Deleuze and Guattari use their concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) to describe a body, an assembled, consistent form, without any internal organisational structure. They depict an egg to describe this, as it is an entity without a developed interior. It is in a constant state of becoming, rather than existing as a progenitive state. They write in *A Thousand Plateaus* that, 'BwO is not "before" the

was an enormous amount of political engagement during this period and enthusiasm for the politicisation of **society** through **collective** mobilisation. Guevara believed that the Cuban system could be inclusive and that, with eyes open and minds active, both ideas and criticisms from the **mass** would have a direct impact on the agents of power. *Socialism and Man in Cuba* produced a sense that art and culture could have a moral impact and would form a revolutionary consciousness. Core values of the ‘good citizen’ were seen as, ‘heroism, participation, self-sacrifice, future orientation and self-evaluation’ (Kumaraswami, 2009:537). This transformation was not just about the organising of **society**, but is spoken about in terms of an internal change, a blossoming within each individual. In *Palabras* Castro writes, ‘[...] just as we want a better life for the **people** in the material sphere, so do we want a better life for the **people** in a spiritual and cultural sense. And just as the Revolution is concerned with the development of the conditions and forces that will permit the **people** to satisfy all their material needs, so do we also want to create the conditions that will permit the **people** to satisfy all their cultural needs’ (1961:19). Coco Fusco in *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (2015) provides a strong demonstration of how this rhetoric of the ‘new man’ has been used to define ‘good’ revolutionary conduct and the definition of that which was deemed as ‘counterrevolutionary’. As Fusco writes, ‘UMAP labour camps were set up for the ‘re-education’ of these ‘misfits’ - homosexuals, the religious, hippies, prostitutes and artists - Cuban popular

organism; it is adjacent to it and is continually in the process of constructing itself’ (2004:184). It is a ‘smooth space’ of unobtainable, pure becomingness, of desire which cannot fully be attained. Kylie Message in *The Deleuze Dictionary* writes that, ‘...the BwO does not refer literally to an organ-less body. It is not produced as the enemy of the organs, but is opposed to the organisation of the organs. In other words, the BwO is opposed to the organising principles that structure, define and speak on behalf of the collective assemblage of organs, experiences, or states of being’ (2010:38). However, the BwO can never fully break away from the systems it resists as this act would erase itself.

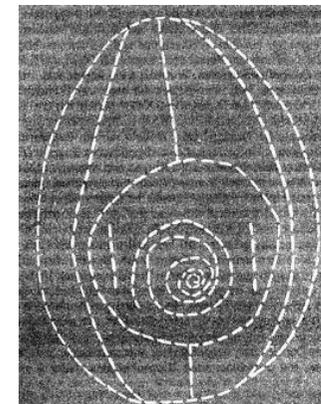


fig. 4.7. Dogon ‘Egg of the World’ or, ‘Original Placenta’, illustration from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980).

Ernesto Neto

Neto’s *Leviathan Thot* (2006) was installed in

media derided personas, tastes and behaviours that the socialist **state** associated with capitalist decadence' (2015:69). For artists, as well as the wider citizenry, it was and is essential to continually restate allegiance to the **collective** endeavour of the revolution. Fusco points out that conduct became a type of currency where the 'good' (conforming) artist would be awarded privileges whereas 'bad' conduct may lead to letters of denunciation, loss of position or, at worst, imprisonment (Fusco 2015:80). Despite early idealism, the revolutionary project became increasingly controlled and tightened with an enforced, united vision of what the political corpus should consist. The aim of Castro's leadership developed, 'a policy not only *for* the masses, but also *of* the masses and *by* the masses. The aim is indeed to emphasise the importance of the involvement of the masses - *but masses who are uniform in their revolutionary outlook*' (Medin, 1990:169). Economic difficulties and rising political dissatisfaction accentuated the reality of a divided **mass**. In 1980 the sense of fracture came to a head when an influx of 10,000 Cubans bid for asylum at the Peruvian Embassy. The government permitted the free movement of anyone to leave Cuba, causing a huge surge of the **population** to flee in what is known as the Mariel boatlift. This **mass** migration and self-induced exile prompted many artists to depart. Despite this, the 1980s has become known as a period of great enthusiasm and renewal for young artists and gave rise to several artists' **groups**, such as Grupo Provisional, Arte Calle, Grupo Puré, Grupo "1.2.3...12" and ABTV Team (Camnitzer, 1994:173) who,

the Panthéon in Paris as part of the French capital's *Festival D'Automne*. It is interesting to note, in this discussion on the body, that the Panthéon was originally built to house the relics of St Genevieve, but changed purpose to become a secular mausoleum, which houses the remains of prominent citizens, in this way, quite literally holding the bodies representing the body of the state. The lofty interior dome is also the site where Léon Foucault set his famous pendulum in motion in an experiment to prove the rotation of the earth, which, Neto alludes to through the long, hanging lycra, dependent on gravity, weight and tension.

Professor of Philosophy at Kingston Éric Alliez describes the form of *Leviathan Thot* as a, 'body that is radically heterogeneous....[like] some giant octopus-white whale whose entrails are distended and swollen' (2013:45). This Leviathan, is clearly oppositional to the united body of the state and the solid description of the giant sea monster Leviathan described in the book of Job, 'Who can penetrate its double coat of armor?... Its back has rows of shields tightly sealed together; each is so close to the next that no air can pass between' (The Bible, Job 40:23). Neto's Leviathan is a decentred body, a body without organs; weighted yet displaced, held through gravity and tension, yet light.

fig. 1.3. Ángel Delgado, *La esperanza es lo último que se está perdiendo*
(*Hope is the Last thing we're Losing*), performance, 1989.



especially the youthful Arte Calle, worked to push the boundaries of what artists were or were not permitted to do. It is also during this period that the first edition of the Havana Biennial took place in 1984, on the suggestion of Fidel Castro himself. The *Bienal de la Habana* became the fourth international biennial in existence. It sought to position Cuba as a centre of contemporary art, but also to readdress an age-old global imbalance in cultural influence. The curators represented and researched artists from the, what was then, periphery of contemporary art: Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. One of the first Bienal curators, Gerardo Mosquera, writes that, ‘The Bienal was born from a spirit of action: if we are marginalized, let us create our own space, our own **networks**, values and epistemes, and project them into the world’ (2009b:9). The success of the Bienal meant that it also became an arena in which to play out power dynamics between the **state** and the individual, or the artist.

By the third edition in 1989, the spirit of the Bienal had changed. This was a time of huge economic downturn known as The Special Period, which was at its severest in the early to mid 1990s. The Special Period had been precipitated by the Soviet Union *perestroika* and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, leaving Cuba more isolated than ever before. This led political control to tighten as the country was about to plunge into financial crisis. As a consequence, government regulators increased censorship during the Bienal of ‘89. Any artwork that was seen as controversial



fig. 4.8. Ernesto Neto, *Leviathan Thot*, Lycra tulle, polyamide fabric and styrofoam balls, 2006

Brigade

Brigadistas

Brigades in Cuba are work groups set up predominantly to assist in rural areas. The international brigade movement, José Martí European Brigade of Voluntary Workers, has been active since the 1970s, calling for people from outside of Cuba to contribute to the Cuban project by carrying out agricultural labour. In a chronicle of a *brigadista*, Luis Puicercús Vázquez writes that, ‘the Brigadistas in no way are a form of carrying out tourism, but act as a direct way to access the Cuban reality, those who contribute, are going to gain necessary experiences for the work of solidarity with Cuba’ (2014: 33). The first mass brigade movement, which was hugely successful, took place during the literacy campaign (1961), in which many young people left the cities to head

fig. 1.4. Carlos Cárdenas, *Manera de marchar adelante* (*Way of Marching Ahead*), public mural (destroyed), 1988.



became sidelined in a show called 'The Tradition of Humour' placed apart from the main exhibitionary sites in the Castillo del Morro. It is also this year that the artist Ángel Delgado famously received a strict six month sentence for defecating on a copy of the party's official newspaper *Granma* during a performance, a severe warning to artists and intellectuals about the ramifications of their work's content. The constraints that were a result of such political and economic pressure prompted a second wave of artists to flee the island, ending the golden age of 1980s artistic production (Mosquera, 2009a) and increasing artists' self-censorship (Fusco, 2015). Cuban academic Magaly Muguercia notes a distinct change in the **collective** system and the way in which political structure was viewed during The Special Period, 'popular mobilisation slowly began to change character, and there was no longer that feverish interchange between heterogeneous subjects, but more an ordered and linear march toward the "goal," a subjection to the structure, a delegation of the power of the **multitude** to those in central authority. The dance began to transform itself. The minuet began to displace the conga' (2002:177). This is exemplified in Carlos Cárdenas' *Manera de marchar adelante (Way of Marching Onwards)* (1988), a mural painted and soon destroyed on G Avenue and 15th Street in Vedado, Havana. The mural shows a brick man in military boots striding forward and gradually transforming, like an inverted Darwinian ape to man, a restrained, hopping armless person turns into a hopping one-legged, armless figure whose wooden nose has become a protruding

for the countryside as *Brigadistas alfabetizadores* to teach the rural population how to read and write.

Microbrigistas

Microbrigidistas are work teams for building 'self-help housing' in which non-specialised volunteers construct easy-to-build, pre-fabricated dwellings as a response to housing crises in Cuba. Units from work places are sent out to build these houses for themselves and their colleagues (Mathéy 1989:67). The first *microbrigidistas* set to work in 1971, focused on improving the living conditions of the rural population and there have been several manifestations of this way of working since. The artist Lázaro Saavedra joined a construction brigade to address his frustration at the lack of cohesion between his revolutionary work and his artistic practice, in other words, his role as citizen and as an artist. *Metamorphosis* (1992) is a series which charts the contradictions and tension within these two positions. Art historian Rachel Weiss writes: In Saavedra's maze, the way in is through voluntarism rather than cynicism, and so the confrontation is with himself...Saavedra as a political subject, embodies the collision of opposites - determination and despair - both one thing and its reverse, neither cancelling nor destroying each other in the course of their conflict' (Weiss 2011:147). Coco Fusco in *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (2015), also points to a performance by Alejandro Lopez in 1990 called *Commission for the Investigation of Historical*

penis, before finally transforming into one big bodiless, brick stomping leg.

In order to try to form a node of communication between artists in Havana and those who had fled, Tania Bruguera, who at this point had stayed in Cuba, created an independent newspaper as an artwork. The paper collected together news, information and articles from both the remaining and the dispersed Cuban artistic communities, listing 106 artists and their new country of residence. The artwork, *Memoria de la Postguerra (Postwar Memory)* (1993) had the same format as *Granma*, the newspaper that Delgado had defecated on just four years previously. In optimism after the first run, Luis Camnitzer wrote, ‘The diaspora is more an expansion than a break and *Memoria* is one of the spontaneous instruments which helps promote cohesion’ (1995:30). It acted as a platform for both communities to continue to dialogue. Much of Bruguera’s work aims to produce another dialogue outside of the physical work itself, which is based on rumour. This way the work could travel, mutate and form alternative histories which deviated from the monumentalised history of the Revolution found in official media. However the project came to an abrupt end after copies of the second edition were seized. Those involved were threatened that, if the paper continued, they would receive fifteen years imprisonment; not an empty threat after the Delgado affair. The protest paper folded, demonstrating the degree of ‘solidity’ required in the Cuban political project, one in which strict cohesiveness of conduct demonstrates firm ideology. Despite the want for an ideological unification, an internal discord still

Phenomena: Conditions of Work, Daily Life and Spirituality for Microbrigade Workers. Lopez dressed up in a hard hat and gloves, with a shovel and wheelbarrow and distributed flyers at a construction site. The flyers asked construction workers to detail information about their experiences as *microbrigistas*, aping the official language of state questionnaires. Lopez was threatened by authorities and asked to cease this activity (2015:168).



fig. 4.9. Lázaro Saavedra, *Metamorphosis series: “¡Me oistes comierda!”*, Acrylic on cake box cardboard, 1992

Precarious Workers Brigade

The Precarious Workers’ Brigade is a self-organising group based in London who carry out actions and research on precarious labour within culture and education. They have a toolbox of materials which they hope can be practically applied to issues such as unpaid internship culture and stop and search procedures effecting migrant communities. PWB say, ‘We focus on educating ourselves,

took place. Actions such as the creation of *Memoria de la Postguerra* show the reality of a fractured **public**, both geographically and politically, which call for new ways to understand **social association** within Cuba.

IV

Rachel Weiss suggests that the trend towards **group** artistic practice in Cuba is due to the favourability of conditions under a socialist system as opposed to a capitalist one, an environment in which an emphasis on the commercialisation of artwork is not expected. Therefore Weiss concludes that artists' **group** work in Cuba operates within the national, dominant political discourse. She writes, '[t]hese conditions were propitious for **collective**-based working processes which are... difficult to maintain under the forces of a market-driven production' (2007:119). This statement over-simplifies the relations formed under both systems into the binary alternatives of a **cooperative** socialism and a competitive capitalism and does not recognise the plethora of **group** practices that do take place in the West. Neither does it consider what the potential for reactive practices are within both of these contexts or the complexity of relations between **group** and **state**. The artist Luis Garciga adds to one element of Weiss' interpretation by suggesting that **group** work can be somehow inherent. He comments that in the 80s, a period considered to be the beginning of 'contemporary art' in Cuba, it was still, 'natural to work in a **group**

through collective processes such as mapping, together with others affected by precarity and instability in work and private lives' (Precarious Workers Brigade, 2015).



Precarious Workers Brigade, Demonstration with cleaners at the Barbican calling for the London Living Wage, 2015.

C

Caucus

Charles Esche, Annie Fletcher & Art/Not Art

The word 'caucus' in the United States means a meeting of members of a political party to nominate candidates or to decide how to vote. Elsewhere it can mean the meeting of any smaller group within a bigger organisation. *Cork Caucus*, curated by Charles Esche, Annie

because there was an environment in which you didn't individualise yourself, artists grouped together naturally. Everything was carried out in the **brigade**; a **brigade** to clean the school, to build houses, to make art' (Gárciga, 2012). I take issue with the idea of grouping together 'naturally', which leaves out of account a sense of effort, purposefulness, influence or societal restriction. However, we can perhaps understand the reasons for Gárciga's statement when remembering the level of collectivisation in all aspects of life in Cuba at the time:

[A]ll the Cubans' experience is bound together by **organisation**. They, for example, will still probably belong to the local CDR⁴ [...] and may still become involved in many of its activities, whether the nocturnal *guardia*, or some local inoculation, street-cleaning or education campaign. They will undoubtedly vote in local and national elections and will even probably attend the *rendición de cuentas* meeting of the local *municipio* [...] They will probably belong to the FMC⁵, the appropriate trade union (and therefore the CTC⁶), or the FEU⁷. They may possibly even be members of the party or the equally numerous youth wing, the UJC⁸, or will have been *pioneros* (Kapcia 2000:127)

In the early 80s, before Delgado's imprisonment and the Special Period, **collective** practices in Cuba such as Grupo Provisional, saw themselves in a guiding role and were, 'positive about [previous] ideals, they felt that it is time to create something new, 'alive' strategies to guide the revolutionary process' (Camnitzer 1994:178). The

group attempted to do so by working from the countryside in the impoverished

4 Comité Defensa de la Revolución (Defense Comity of the Revolution)

5 Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women)

6 Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (Workers' Central Union of Cuba)

7 Federación Estudiantil Universitaria (Cuban Federation of University Students)

8 Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Young Communist League)

Fletcher and Art/Not Art, took place in Cork, Ireland in 2005, a period when the city was cultural capital of Europe. *Cork Caucus* was conceived as a an opportunity to gather and start conversations, rather than acting as a form of traditional exhibition. The Caucus aimed to stimulate a critical culture in Cork by engaging with political, cultural and artistic issues in the city. The project consisted of meetings, reading groups, presentations and workshops run by artists and theorists. The project worked to engage with local artists and artistic activity, while also bringing an international presence to Cork. Esche (2006) comments that *Caucus* sought to create possible political alternatives in a search for a new democratic model and to create a debate about the collective will. Yet Esche also acknowledges the impossibility of a utopian inclusivity in this aim:

The concept of the caucus is also based on the idea of a possible meeting between self-elected people. What I'm talking about is something that runs contrary to the idea of culture as social inclusion, or art as a common asset that has to be shared by everyone. I don't share that model of culture and I don't think art operates like that, or that the audience or people associated with art are built on those premises. The idea of the caucus offers the possibility of forming part of a group, of being able to choose to participate as an active member in this encounter and, of course, in an open and unrestricted way' (Esche, 2006).

fig. 1.7. *La plástica joven se dedica al Baseball*, performance, 1989.



town of Pílon where they wanted to carry out a long-lasting engagement with the **community**, far from cultural activity in Havana. Grupo Provisional hoped to create an art that came from the **people** and the circumstances in which they were living (Weiss, 2011). This idealistic migration to the country is reminiscent of the journey made by many youths in the successful literacy campaign of 1961 when young urbanites were sent to live and teach in poor, rural communities. The campaign had been conceived not only as a government programme, but was also hailed as a journey of moral transformation into active citizenship.

However, by the end of this decade, as we have seen, there was a distinct change in the political climate and heightened interference by the **state**. This period is marked for artists by the **collective** performance *La plástica joven se dedica al Baseball (Young art dedicates itself to baseball)* (1989) as well as Ángel Delgado's *La esperanza es lo último que se está perdiendo (Hope is the Last Thing we're Losing)*. The performance took place in 1989, notably the same year as the third Havana Biennial and Delgado's imprisonment. In a show of solidarity a **group** of prominent artists chose to express their frustration through the **collective** act of forming a baseball team. Rather than devoting themselves to making artwork, the artists played ball in a form of strike action. This act has become a key moment told and retold within the history of Cuban art. Art historian Suset Sánchez writes of the importance that this protest held for artists in a system in which actual demonstrations are not permitted:

This mythical **group** project marked a paradigmatic moment in the recent



fig. 4.11. Vito Acconci lecture at the National Sculpture Factory during *Cork Caucus*, Poster, 2005.

Citizen

Jacques Rancière

When describing his conception of the 'citizen' Rancière often begins by outlining Aristotle's definition from Book III of *Politics* as someone who partakes in the act of ruling and being ruled (Rancière, 2001). Rancière points to the fact that not every 'citizen' is able to take their part to the same extent, 'another form of distribution precedes this act of partaking in government: the distribution that determines who takes part in the community of citizens' (2000:12). Aristotle gives the example of a slave not 'possessing' the language of their rulers and the artisan who has no free time away from their craft. We can see this distribution of what

fig. 1.7. Javier Castro, Celia-Yunior, Luis Gárciga, Grethell Rasúa, Renier Quer, *En Medio de Qué*, performance, 2008.



history of Cuban art, inasmuch as it expressed the tensions that had emerged at the end of the 1980s between creation and the artistic institution; as well as art's ability to respond in terms of negotiating its legitimacy as a **social** tool in a local context and under the complex conditions imposed by a totalitarian regime. The appropriation of sports terms, emblems of the **mass social** project of the Cuban revolution, their carnivalesque inversion through the pretence of a performance, converted this experience into a metaphor for resistance; at the same time that we can interpret it as a hidden articulation of the potential of collaborative space and the feelings of a generation (Sánchez, 2012:63).

The microcosm of the art **group** reflected the mood of a restricted **public**, in this case, an increasing despondency. Yet, despite the sense of uselessness, this seemingly passive action⁹ of 'taking the day off' becomes active in its status as artwork and provided a space of condemnation in a system where the freedom to criticise had become increasingly limited and which would be activated over and over through rumour and story-telling.

Group practices amongst artists are still used within Cuba as an expression of

⁹ Baseball is certainly not a neutral activity to pick for this performance and has a history of marking the nation's political stance. From as early as the 19th Century, when modern baseball first took form, the game was perceived as rebellious. Spanish rulers promoted bull-fighting and viewed baseball as a North American corruption and its players as reactionary. Before the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898) almost every Cuban town had a bull-fighting arena, whereas very few remained after this period (Solomn, 2011:12).

Castro also famously promoted the sport during the first decade after the revolution by playing pre-match games with his military team named after the guerilla fighters' nickname 'los barbudos' (the bearded-ones) (Bjarkman, 2007:307). Cuban baseball broke with North America after an infamous game played during the first Cuban Independence Day after the revolution between the Havana Sugar Kings and the Rochester Red Wings, when members of the boistrous crowd sent bullets into the air, injuring two players. Washington backers eventually pulled out of the Havana Sugar Kings' local base and uprooted them to New Jersey, causing the end of professional baseball in Cuba. However, since then, Cuban teams have played an internationally-competitive, amateur game (Bjarkman, 2007:311).

would allow or not allow for taking part by each citizen as including factors such as social status, connections, working hours, pay, language, amongst many more.

Cluster

Critical Practice

The group *Critical Practice* regularly refers to itself as a 'cluster' as its members shift and change depending on the activity and the members availability. Also, the 'cluster' refers to the fact that the group is based in rather than bound to the institution of Chelsea College of Arts, with many of its members not belonging to the art school (for more please see 'open organisation').

A note on Cúmulo

When communicating the *Assembling* project in Spanish, I would often refer to it as 'cúmulo'. Verbs that originally seemed to be a more direct translation included, 'reunir', 'congregar', 'juntar', however the association of these words with collectivisation in Cuba seemed too strong to be able to employ them for this project that seeks to find flexible modes of gathering. However, 'cúmulo', or 'cluster' in Spanish, seems part of a fresher vocabulary and evokes clouds rather than assembly meetings.

discord and as a strategy for creating alternative histories. The loose grouping formed by the artists Celia González, Grethell Rasúa, Javier Castro, Luis Gárciga, Renier Quer and Yuniór Aguiar prefer not to have a **group** name so that they do not form an official ‘**collective**’ in the manner of previous generations. They prefer to practice in different manifestations of themselves dependant on project and have a disregard for set structure (González, 2012). In *En Medio de Qué (In the Midst of What)* (2008) the **group** recreated the atmosphere of a famous bar in Old Havana, *El bodeguita del medio*, which is covered in a graffitied scrawl written by the clientele. They invited friends to drink and cover the walls with experiences of when they or others had been censored, mapping a sprawl of relationships between artists, curators and galleries, demonstrating hidden power relations and providing an unofficial chart of these events. This ‘in between’ space permits the blurring of boundaries and complicates the distinction between official and unofficial, control and transgression. *En Medio de Qué* was carried out in one of the few independent spaces in Havana, Sandra Ceballo’s *Aglutinador*, and during the performance, hearsay has it that a member of the US Interests Section was present, causing trouble for the artists with officials afterwards. Fusco points out that rumours of being associated with the US Interests Section is a tactic used by the **state** to besmirch an artist’s reputation, as this affiliation is, ‘an indicator of extreme disloyalty’ (2015:101). There are two crucial, perhaps conflicting, elements to consider here before judging

Coalesce

Paul O’Neill

The definition of ‘coalesce’ in the Chambers English Dictionary is, ‘to grow together or unite into one body’ (1988:273). *Coalesce* existed as an ongoing exhibitionary format conceived by the curator Paul O’Neill, which he initiated in 2003 and developed for six years. During O’Neill’s *Coalesce* exhibitions, the curator worked closely with artists, who used the exhibition space as a site of production, creating an accumulative effect where artworks often physically overlapped. By working in this way, O’Neill intended to form a more responsive arena for showing artwork. The curator says that he is concerned with the potential of the group exhibition to question, ‘the parameters of authorship through co-operative and post-autonomous models of production’ (2009:6).



fig. 4.12. *Coalesce: Happenstance*, Curated by Paul O’Neill, Installation view, 2009.

fig. 1.8. Omni Zona Franca, *Poesía Sin Fin*, 2012.



the political positioning of contemporary **group** practices in Cuba. Firstly, there is little artistic practice in Cuba that is not outwardly political, in other words, that does not reference the system in which artists are working. Artist Ángel Ramos, who has a personal, ontologically-directed practice, told me during an interview that:

The Cuban context is very separate, it is a very mentally isolated island, in the way that everything has to do with Cuba, the Cuban, the conditions here, its a discourse that generates more of the same. Its self-referencing.. Official discourse is something that occupies a lot of space in your mind... **people** have to occupy themselves with something else and change the discourse' (Ramos, 2013).

The perceived role of art in the early days of the revolution as a feedback system, one to form the minds of the **people** and a new **society**, has of course changed in its spiritual and ideological conception, but does, however, continue to inform *el contexto cubano*, as a pervasive, dominant way of working. Ramos, like Sandra Ceballos, recognises the psychological implications of living in an anti-pluralistic ideological system, in which the majority of **people** have limited access to outside information. However, it also has to be remembered that this is a 'solid' political **body**, 'demanding continuous performance of consensus through **collective** displays of **cooperation**' (Fusco 2015:10). In this context, it does not take much to be 'deviant' or 'political' through action. Examples of this is can be found in the actions of Omni Zona Franca (OZF), a **group** of poets, visual artists, hip hop artists and spiritual practitioners based on the edges of Havana in Alamar, the only part of the city built after the Revolution, a forgotten cluster of tower blocks with limited infrastructure far

Collaboration

Claire Bishop

Claire Bishop in the article *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents* (2006) criticises socially collaborative practices that remove an aesthetic agenda as an integral element. She argues that this leads to such projects being evaluated on purely ethical grounds where political correctness takes over and the critic is unable to assess the work as artwork, '[t]here can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond' (178). Bishop disagrees with Grant Kester's criticism of the avant-garde for positioning the artist in a privileged position from which they can expose realities through shocking an 'unseeing' audience. She argues that creating contradictions is crucial to gain, 'new perspectives on our condition' (2006:181). For Bishop, art should not *become* life, but its autonomy should teeter between boundaries and remain contradictory. The artists she gives as examples such as Sierra, Hirschhorn and Collins allow an uncomfortable tension to remain within their work, there is not a sense of easing or amelioration, rather, Bishop would argue, we are forced to face more difficult, unresolved political realities.

from the tourist centres¹⁰. One of the founding members, Amaury Pacheco, spoke to me about his reasons for forming OZF. He said:

[T]his system acts to isolate **people**. It **groups** you, they tell you that it is **collective** but at the same time they isolate you, above all, from the organisation of the masses. The vigilance in the *barrios* amongst one another, the instability from an emotional point of view, the vigilance, the paranoia. We are talking about a **society** which has these zones of silence, where **people** are censured and self-censured, we are talking about a country that has no rule of **association**, no right to meet up with four, five, six **people** in your house... we are opening spaces in which **people** can have opinions, where **people** can socialise (Pacheco, 2013).

OZF created the poetry and hip hop festival *Poesía Sin Fin (Poetry Without End)*, which has predominantly taken place in a **network** of flats in Alamar where up to seventy **people** cram into each space at any given time - a risky activity. During one of these festivals, an Omni member performed poetry at a local bus stop and was soon taken away for questioning by the police, which demonstrates the normative use of **public** space and the very limited boundaries of acceptable behaviour in Cuba.

Pacheco was also recently imprisoned before Tania Bruguera's planned performance in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución in 2015, which was prevented from taking place

¹⁰ Sujantha Fernandes writes that Alamar in particular became a centre of hip hop culture in Cuba due to the need of, 'predominantly marginalised black communities' who had been reallocated there, to rebuild a new sense of community (2006:87). North America has been seen as the source of Cuban rap music and Fernandes writes that the particular location of Alamar made it easier to tune in to Miami radio stations and therefore gain outside musical influence (88). In the 90s, hip hop became a tool for expressing discontent at, despite revolutionary promises, the lack of racial equality that the political system produced (Fernandes 2006: 85). Rappers in Cuba made ties with black activists and hip hop artists in the US such as Black August, who would put on concerts in New York to help fund the Cuban hip hop movement and in doing so, they aimed to establish an international network of black activism (Fernandes, 2006:91).

Grant Kester

Kester suggests that the recent enthusiasm for collaborative practices points to a shift in which art is permeating into other fields such as architecture, activism, social work and ethnography and that these blurred borders renew art. In his writing, he engages predominantly with collaborative practices which are 'dialogical'. He frequently refers to artists such as Wochenklausur and Suzanne Lacy who use conversation as a tool for forging social change within subaltern communities. A methodology that this type of practice shares is to use their work to provide a context, drawing in collaborators to create content which they hope will lead to action. In *Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*, Kester draws on Habermas's theory on communication as the basis for social action to explore these dialogical approaches in art. Sociologist Gerard Delanty writes that Habermas understands the making of community as an ongoing process that does not close off, but that keeps producing different stand points. He views community as transformative, 'The notion that truth can be arrived at only in a deliberative manner and settled by consensus is the kernel of Habermas' theory of communication' (2003:115). In this way, Kester argues dialogical practices are durational and not limited to the immediate, instantaneous "shock" reaction of the avant-gardist approach. He writes that the use of agonism to discuss collaborative

and Bruguera herself was also detained. What is even more notable is that Pacheco, along with other artists, was arrested even though he had not been at the site of the performance. Known as *contra-revolucionario* in behaviour, he had been imprisoned as a warning.

In this environment, although addressing the political particularities of the Cuban context is not necessarily radical in itself, the high degree of embedded control of artists' behaviour, means that to make work at all implies a constant negotiation between the individual and the **state**, mirrored by the individual's internal negotiation between spontaneity and self-censorship. As already mentioned in the introduction, Jameson suggests that it is beneficial to consider artists in relation to their context by seeing, 'how they participate in the work of the **nation**, how they undercut the **nation's** ideologies [...] **People** work in that, and what they can do they do in that. What they can't do is dictated by that [...]' (2010:14). In this way, unlike the Western context, forming collectivities is often not an act of political idealism, but an attempt to form a space sheltered from the dominant discourse where artistic practice becomes an opportunity to diversify tightly-controlled official histories, identities and actions.

V

One of the challenges within this research has been how to enter into and examine **collective** and **group** practices through curation which does not seek simply to

practices has led to an unfair assessment of collaborative practitioners as 'politically naive idealists who ignore the brute realities of democracy' (2007:115). Kester, however argues for reconciliation over aggression, that the critic should not dismiss the ethical turn for fear of the contamination of art by other sectors (2007:117).

Florian Schneider

In his article *Collaboration: The Dark side of the Multitude*, writer, filmmaker and activist Florian Schneider complains that the terms 'collaboration' and 'cooperation' are often used synonymously and sets out to distinguish political and lexical differences between them in an attempt to make apparent dynamics within different working relationships.

In Schneider's writing, cooperation is a regulated workforce, more akin to 'teamwork' which he says takes place in a 'client-server architecture' (Theory Kit: 2006). He views cooperation as an act between individuals or organisations, in other words, between identifiable units. Collaboration for Schneider, however, works outside of these set structures. He draws on Hardt and Negri's (2009) concept of the 'multitude' (examined in this Typology under 'M'), to depict 'collaboration' as an alternative form of grouping, one of singularities rather than individuals. Unlike cooperation, collaboration is a shifting process which is at times anonymous and impersonal in an age of online interaction. He claims

create an **exhibition** documenting artists' **collectives** in Cuba, but rather to experiment with actively forming collectivities. As described in the introduction, this has taken place through the curatorial project *Assembling* (2013-5). *Assembling* has sought to form an 'expanded **collective**' in three ways: firstly to transcend national boundaries and form a grouping between my initial area of research, Cuba, and my own context, the United Kingdom; secondly by considering a **collective** from Latour's (2005b) standpoint of 'collecting' together multiple elements, human and non-human, in a curated **assemblage**; and thirdly, through Latour's (2005b) calling for **gatherings** not to be considered as 'natural', but to actively circulate and mutate around shared 'issues of concern' or points of inquiry. The latter requires unknown, dispersed participants from different cultural, geographical and linguistic contexts to cohere and create a sense of **social** shared space between them. As can be seen within the *Assembling* portfolio, this reiterative process first took place as an email circuit between participants. This starting point developed partly through the participant Maurice's interest in online practices and platforms and partly in response to my research activity, attempting to form lines of communication with artists in Cuba. Although I critique this later, the email seemed at first like an 'international', '**nation-less**' space, an open platform on which to share and cohere. Despite its awkwardness for creating or depicting artwork within this space, the limits imposed by this format also appealed to Maurice and I, a point that I will expand on shortly in

it is a gathering 'for its own sake' (Theory Kit: 2006), a rhizomatic rather than a linear, or hierarchical, interaction. Schneider asks the reader to view collaboration as a radical operation, 'collaborations are the sites of revolutionary potential. In the last instance collaborations are driven by the desire to create difference and refuse against the absolutistic power of organisation' (Theory Kit: 2006).

Collective

Bruno Latour

In *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005) Bruno Latour proposes replacing the concept of society with that of 'the collective'. Latour writes that terms such as 'society' and 'nature' are illusory concepts which act as ready-made established collectors, whereas the collective suggests a project of gathering together the relevant actors anew for every fresh study or action. The social is collected, or gathered together, through a constantly moving network or assembly of human and non-human things.

Without studying the collective, actors are not perceived fully and seem to have always existed (as with Heidegger's tool analysis described in the introduction). Latour gives the example of a lecture hall whose many elements are in place due to the mediation of many actors over time:

This local site has been made to be a place by some other locus through the now silent mediation

fig. 1.10. Samuel Riera, *Galería Postal*, paper, envelopes, postal system, 2003.



discussing other influences for this process.

The email circuit set up a platform through which to assemble and develop a sense of **gathering**, a means of communication in shared, virtual space. The images and texts either form relations between artworks, as with James Bonachea's link between Beuys' *Honigpumpe* and his own *bomba* (pump) (p. 29 in the *Assembling* portfolio), or comment on the process itself, as with Katie's inclusion of the handwritten word 'sister', a term that is key to her practice and which she scanned from a postcard sent by her twin brother in an attempt at a personal response to her sense of fractured, miscommunication in the process (p.21 in the *Assembling* portfolio). The email circulation was informed by a zine of the same name, an offshoot from mail art which took place between 1970 - 1982. The zine had been compiled without any editing, neither were there stipulated curatorial narratives or theoretical restrictions to content, other than the size and format of the work. Like the zine, responses to the 'email circuit' were not prescribed, they could be text, images or video, any format that can be sent within an email. Although, the participants were told that they are simultaneously forming a **group** while searching for a shared matter of concern between them, which we hoped would **cluster** the responses into a **group** driven by a shared focus.

After conceiving the circulatory email system for *Assembling*, I discovered during a research trip to Cuba that there have been two projects which have already taken

of drawings, specifications, wood, concrete, steel, varnish, and paint; through the work of many workers and artisans who have now deserted the scene because they let objects carry their action in absentia; through the agency of alumni whose generous deeds might be rewarded by some bronze plaque' (2005b:195).

It is through this investigation of the collective that the social is uncovered. Latour writes that this tracking can produce a common, shared world, but only if there are procedures to render it common.

Hardt and Negri

For collective intelligence, please see the entry under 'Swarm'

What, How and for Whom

The curatorial collective What, How and for Whom (WHW) curated the exhibition *Collective Creativity* in 2005 at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel. The exhibition aimed to investigate collective work that is not focused on making objects, but instead rather seeks to establish 'autonomous social fields' (WHW, 2013:15) that coalesce around social tensions and social issues. WHW understand the practices they have included in *Collective Creativity* as enabling us to think through gathering as a self-representational and community building activity. They sought to frame collective work not only through productivity, but also the enjoyment entailed in working as part of a collective. Members of WHW have written that they did not seek



place in Havana that circulate information as an artistic strategy, *Galería Postal* (2003) and *Galería I-MEIL* (2006-7). It is valuable to outline these here as they provide a more in-depth understanding of how such artistic strategies are perceived from within the Cuban context. In Cuba during 2003, when *Galería Postal* began, very few **people** had internet, email addresses or mobile phones. The rapid, easy flow of information we all now expect and assume can occur is still an issue in Cuba; a BBC news report in April 2014 outlined that the government had just allowed email access on mobiles, although a wider internet connection is still not permitted on these mobile phones (BBC, 2014). Nor is internet widely available in general, very few **people** are permitted a connection straight to their homes and for most the internet services in places like hotels are prohibitively expensive. This prompted artists to seek a method for circulating and sharing information in an alternative way.

In 2003, as is still the case today, there was a big divide between official art institutions and those working independently. *Galería Postal* devised a system which would designate a shifting, hard-to-track, independent space, while at the same time announcing this act to the official, **state**-run institutions. This was achieved by passing small art works through the post, sending them to leading, **state**-approved cultural figures of the time. Samuel Riera, a member of the **group**, commented that a lot of fear had been created by this action, **people** would become nervous and ask them what they were doing and to cease this communication. Eventually they were

a linear, historical format for the exhibition, but did include a wide historical scope of work including Dada, Futurist, Joseph Beuys, Guerilla Girls, Group Material as well as contemporary collective activity. Curator Paul O'Neil criticised the exhibition for being too idealistic, for the lack of distinction and the seemingly uncritical belief that all collective work is positive, therefore portraying collectivity in a homogenous fashion (a reminder of Claire Bishop's comments under 'collaboration'). He writes that WHW almost turn this criticism back on themselves by later stating, '[a]lthough there are many common sites of departure, organized networks and self-organized practices are not a unified movement' (WHW, 2013:3).



fig. 4.13. What, How and for Whom, *Collective Creativity*, 2005.

officially asked to stop conducting this activity through threatening phone calls (Riera, 2013). *Galería Postal* highlighted both the sense of fear and suspicion prevalent in Cuba and also aimed to test limits by focusing attention on power constructs within institutional **networks**. The action provided a space with physical content, the letters, but was not easily locatable as the action existed within a system, the postal system, rather than a physical space such as a gallery. The **group** of artists involved were not known through their personal names or by giving themselves a **group** title, but were represented by the nomenclature of their virtual exhibitionary space, *Galería Postal*. Three years later, the artist Lázaro Saavedra began *Galería I-MEIL*, a project where he used emails and the virtual space created by their circulation, as a gallery for his own work. These email artworks were made for and sent to a select **audience** whose email addresses were known to the artist. Later Saavedra wrote a long, often self-ridiculing, 'Posthumous **Manifesto**' in which he points to the exclusivity of this form of communication in Cuba. Point 21 states, 'Not Everyone has email, or a computer, in the same way that not everyone visits galleries' and point 23 declares, 'Visiting a gallery is an option, having a computer is a privilege' (Saavedra, 2007). *Galería I-MEIL* worked to make apparent power constructs by producing them from within the mode of communication that he employed. The *Assembling* email communication also existed as a closed process, an **exhibition** space in transit, actively assembled through the **gathering** and circulating of material, while

Pierre Levy

The French Philosopher Pierre Levy is an expert in collective intelligence and for the last 20 years, has been developing the artificial language IEML, or, Information Economy Meta Language. Levy's language aims to formalise ideas rather than words to produce *the* language of collective intelligence. Levy compares the difference in his language and everyday language with that of mathematic numerals and algebra. Levy hopes that this language will enhance the communication of ideas in the Humanities just as formulas do in science and that this would help to interpret the wealth of information now available to us on the internet. He says, 'There is currently an immense mass of public data on the World Wide Web that is not efficiently shared, analysed and used by the humanities... IEML, could be the stepping stone leading us into a renewal of human sciences' (Masters of Media, 2011). Using a simple algebra, so that the IEML texts can self-organise, 'the result is a language where texts self-translate, manifest as semantic networks and compute collaboratively their relationships and differences' (Levy, 2014).

attempting to amass a **social** relation at the same time.

Reflecting on this part of the **Assembling** process, it is interesting to think about the assumed ‘neutrality’ or perhaps ‘democratic’ use of contemporary art as a ‘language’, as our means of communication within the email chain. As I have already alluded to, the differences in language, cultural context and lack of knowledge of each others’ practice were supposed to be surmounted by a shared visual, or at least, conceptual knowledge or imaginary. Paradoxically, maybe this process, as well as an assumed neutral platform, also presupposed, or at least hoped for, a shared sense of polemics when in actuality rather than neatly circulating around a shared ‘matter of concern’, Maurice pointed out that the emails run more like a search engine ‘infinity scroll’ than a coherent conversation. In discussing the way that Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary*, Jaques Rancière observes that:

The equality of all subject matter is the negation of any relationship of necessity between a determined form and a determined content. Yet what is this equality if not the very equality of everything that comes to pass on the written page... this equality destroys all of the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a **community** of readers without legitimacy, a **community** formed only by the random circulation of the written word (2000:14).

As with the **Assembling** process, hierarchy is supposedly levelled and an equal surface created through the openness of input or response, which in turn acts to form a **community** through circulation. But, as we have seen with the uneven relationship and access between participants and technology, the pretence of neutrality is

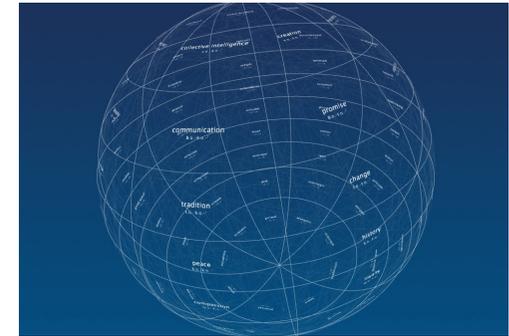


fig. 4.14. Levy IEML paradigm projected onto a sphere.

Common

Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri

For Hardt and Negri, the common is that which is shared amongst all individuals and therefore allows for the potential of gathering together. It is around a shifting sense of what is in common that the multitude (explored under ‘M’) becomes apparent and acts, rather than existing as a fixed ideology or structure. This allows the multitude to draw together through collaborative, social processes, while maintaining singularities and without the effect of fixedly uniting. In *Multitude* Hardt and Negri write that the multitude:

is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common (2005:100).

Paolo Virno

In *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004) Virno

immediately disrupted. Rancière goes on to say that the democratic freedom to write for an open readership, must be seen within the materiality of this relationship. Dynamics come into play such as, ‘the knowledge concerning typography and iconography, the intertwining of graphic and pictorial capabilities’ (2000:15). Flaubert’s aristocratic situation and therefore, for example, the time that he has to write, also disrupts a clear-cut sense of democratic or equal space on the page. These dynamics were further played out in structuring the *Assembling* activity, despite attempts to remove hierarchical frameworks, such as all responses being ordered alphabetically and sent to all members of the circuit. I was always aware of the contradictory nature of laying out rules (which can be found on page 13 of the portfolio). They were designed in an attempt to circulate and exchange without further interference from myself. It has been important to me throughout this project that the curatorial role consists of setting up systems that will initiate interaction and decision-making between the artists involved, inserting myself into the process rather than exploring collaborative methodologies from afar through observation only. This responds to Beatrice von Bismarck’s (2012: 298) main criticism of Latour and Weibel’s curatorial role in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005). This **exhibition** brought together over one hundred artists, scientists, theorists, historians and others, all responding to the question of representation in politics and how a contemporary **democracy** should be constituted. von Bismarck writes that:

Because of a blind spot concerning his own practice and position, Latour

employs Aristotle’s concept of *koinoi topoi*, or ‘common place’, to describe the shared space of the multitude. *Koinoi topoi* for Aristotle, means the basics of the structure of discourse; the topics, phrases, style of argument that all involved in the conversation are familiar with and understand. Virno states that for a multitude with ‘no home’ this common place of discourse, or public intellect, provides a shared space, a homeliness.

Amy McDonnell and Ying Tan

Towards Common Ground (2012), as mentioned in the body of the thesis, is a project curated by Ying Tan and I as part of the StudioSTRIKE *Bread and Roses Film Festival*. The festival marked the centenary of a labour strike in Massachusetts of predominantly female mill workers, which led to landmark reforms in labour law. In *Towards Common Ground* Tan and I sought to explore the public’s relationship with protest and what it is that draws people together in common to act. The project took place at Clapham Common bandstand, a performance site so often left empty, situated in the centre of common land. Artists, academics and others who participated were Catherine Long, Emma Leach, Enemies of Good Art, Free, John Hutnyk, Joey Ryken, The Precarious Workers Brigade, Caroline Smith, Alice Tatge, Jordan McKenzie, Lucy Reynolds and Siân Robinson Davies.

did not see himself or his co-curators and co-authors as part of the assembly, but instead claimed for himself - assuming to an extent his own invisibility - the tasks of showing and presenting. His concern with presenting assemblies obscures the possibility of defining the **exhibition** in which they appear as itself an assembly that sees the viewers, installations, **exhibition** space, artists, and curators as integrated into the assembly's dynamic fabric.

It is, however, precisely the integration of all the participants into the process of continuous relational definition that permits the **exhibition** to become an analogy for the evolutionary process of **society**, understood in Latour's terms as "**collective**" (von Bismarck, 2012:297).

It is key to consider the **exhibition** as a compositional, **assemblage** attempting to find alternative forms of grouping. As von Bismarck shrewdly points out, it is not enough to discuss these formats through content, but that the structuring and playing out of the **exhibition** must also be understood as an attempt to explore the same questions. I recognise the impossibility of completely removing myself, from taking on a different role from other participants involved. The extra work, commitment and importance that *Assembling* holds for me as research and as the project's initiator, will of course be apparent in the time, effort and differentiation of tasks carried out by all the participants. However, unlike *Making Things Public* I have entered myself into the systems initiated by Maurice and I. *Assembling* was intended to be collaborative from the point of inception.

VI

Assembling 'the **social**' and curating within this space, could be mistaken as an



fig. 4.15. Emma Leach and Siân Robinson Davies, *What Do We Want?*, Performance and text, 2012.

Community

Giorgio Agamben

In *The Coming Community* (1993), Agamben provides a theory of potential community that cannot be defined through set identity or being, but instead exists in a constant state of moving towards an idea, a 'being as such'. He explains this concept by outlining the latin term *quodlibet*, translated as 'whatever'. Agamben writes that this 'whatever' is not neutral, it is not asserting an indifferent 'it does not matter which' (the universal), and neither is it denoting a set, individual thing. Instead, the *quodlibet* exists as a singularity. He writes that:

In this conception such-and-such being is reclaimed from it having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) - and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-*such*, which remains

overly aggrandised task on behalf of the curator, as if this curator could ‘play god’ and were able to move around **social** ‘actors’ like pieces on a chessboard. This, however, is not the intention here and ‘curating the **social**’ in this research is in fact much more of a humble claim on behalf of the curator’s role. The ‘**social**’, as I will outline in Chapter 2, actually considers everything existing in any given situation as part of one large agglomerative space. In this view, ‘**social** space’ is flattened out and it is through assembling, or composing, different elements within this space that particular formations are made which gives, for example, more importance, visibility or recognition, to some things over others. Different elements come to the fore and different assemblages form. The curator cannot wield this ‘**social** space’ at a distance, commanding ‘this and that’ to coexist as they, as much as anything else, are a part of any given **assemblage** of elements they come into contact with. If these processes of continual **assembling** are acknowledged, then greater attention is given to the protocols that are set into play within any present set of interactions. Although the curatorial role intends to reside within the *Assembling* processes (making it collaborative in an attempt to remove a hierarchy of decision-making) there were particular responsibilities and actions that can be held up and should be acknowledged as a curatorial element of the project. This includes taking care of the process by setting up systems of engagement between artists, encouraging participation, answering queries and drawing people together for the duration of the

constantly hidden in the condition of belonging’ (2001:no pagination).

This ‘in-the-act-of-being’ rather than the ‘being-in-itself’ is referred to in *The Coming Community* as, the ‘taking-place’ of being, which is where singularities are communicated. Agamben argues that this taking-place does not circumscribe identity, but expands it:

Whatever is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simple indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities (2001:no pagination).

The *quodlibet* or the ‘whatever’ borders identity without being solidified within it.

Agamben relates these concepts directly to community in the final section of *The Coming Community*, ‘Tiananmen’. He writes that the future of a ‘coming politics’ would see the struggle between the State and, as he sees it, humanity. For Agamben, if a community has a defined identity it becomes fixed within current systems that rule in a grouped politics of political parties and nationhood, for example. In order to disband these set structures of state, humanity will form groupings with ‘whatever’ singularities instead of an individual identity, ‘[w]hat the state cannot tolerate in any way... is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition)’ (2001:no pagination).

project. It also includes facilitating the different spaces in which we met - whether online, at the residency, during a talk or installing art objects. Another particular curatorial responsibility in *Assembling* has been to act as narrator and to account for the process. Therefore the role of the curator is not to take charge of constructing **social** space and its actors, but to take care to recognise its composition and acknowledge and trial the protocols that allow for situations and ideas to assemble for any given period of time.

The beginning of this chapter outlines the differences in how artists working in **collaboration** or as part of a **collective** are perceived. This discussion is useful to elaborate on here in relation to *Assembling*. How might I position the *Assembling* process after this chapter's reflection on 'solid' association, yet bearing in mind criticism of temporary collaborative projects that unite only, 'on condition that [...] private interests are served' (Beech, Hutchinson and Timberlake, 2006:3)? This draws on three important points: firstly, whose interests were being 'served' during *Assembling*; secondly, how and why was *Assembling* structured temporally; and thirdly, what does this say about its political intention? As I have pointed out beforehand, the initial reason for the *Assembling* artists to assemble was in fact this research itself, rather than a developed issue binding participants together from the start. As I have previously stated, one of the reasons why more participants did not actually engage from the beginning may well be the lack of clear direction, as well

Jean Luc Nancy

Jean Luc Nancy's text 'The Inoperable Community' (1986) appears in *Participation* (2006), edited by Claire Bishop, and is referred to in other writing on participatory art, such as that of Miwon Kwon (2004). Nancy begins his essay by assessing 'communism' which he says, 'stands as an emblem of the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination of technopolitical dominion' (2006:54). He writes that this desire for unity and collective expression rather than collective regulation, has been betrayed by 'real' communism. But, he insists, the horizons on which the term 'communism sits must be reexamined and the word community must present itself in order to re-imagine the space in which we exist' (54).

Nancy enters onto this process by asking the reader to reconsider the notion that community has 'broken down'. He points to Rousseau as the first philosopher to depict an uneasy fracture between the State and community. Rousseau believed that evil came into being through cultivated society's distortion of an essentially good human nature and that redemption was possible via social change. Christian terms also depict an original union with the divine and perfect human communion, from which humanity has fallen. These concepts have persisted in a nostalgic pining for community, which Nancy suggests is 'suspicious' as community has never taken

as the fact that there was no clear drive, no set point of convergence or issue to care about. Reasons for artists to participate, it seems, were in fact a mixture of personal allegiance or interest in the processes involved. So for example, Luis may well have taken part despite being distanced from the majority of other active participants because I had spent a long time talking with him and developing a personal connection, also due to his interest in online processes and how information is spread. I had no personal connection to James, yet he is a good friend of Luis' and they both now live in Mexico City, so perhaps this relationship encouraged him to take part. Maurice was invested in the project as we had met in Havana and had decided to work on a project either in Cuba, or with artists we had met there, he also has a long history of working collaboratively and has a particular interest in online practices and temporal forms of **community**. Katie's work draws on forms of **friendship** and communities of making within her practice and she is used to working in collaborations as well as having an independent practice. However, she was probably also invested in the project due to her **friendship** with me, and perhaps this was also the case with Julika who has worked in collaboration with Maurice previously, which may have cemented her involvement through this relationship as well as her interest in using the exhibition space as a type of 'material exchange'. Neither Karem nor Scott had an interest in online processes, but were particularly enthusiastic about experimenting with modes of **self-organisation** in relation to building the

place, certainly not in the manner that we project it. Humanity has become, 'Entangled in its meshes, we have wrung for ourselves the phantasm of the lost community' (2006:62). Community occurs in the in-between, shared spaces of finite entities which must always 'co-present' themselves to exist, no singular being without another. There are limits to this community, as its completion, as either absolute individualism or absolute communitarianism dissolves its own possibility and would lead to death. Nancy writes that, '[a] community is not a project of fusion, or in some general way a productive or operative project - nor is it a *project* at all' (65). Community cannot be produced or presented as a subject, but is experienced, 'community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us* - question, waiting, event, imperative - *in the wake of society*' (62).

Cooperation

Tom Finkelpearl

In the text *What we Made* (2013), Tom Finkelpearl, the Executive Director at the Queen's Museum in New York, introduces the term 'social cooperation' as a way to investigate group and participatory practices. Finkelpearl draws on Claire Bishop's use of 'social collaboration' for this suggested label, finding the word 'social' a useful connecting

exhibition, which is also their reason for being fellow members of Critical Practice, a **cluster** of cultural practitioners who take their modes of organisation as part of their critical engagement. In this way, we could say that private interests were being ‘served’ in order for artists to have the motivation to take part, and to take part in differing degrees depending on enthusiasm for that particular process - for example Karem and Scott’s lack of engagement with the online process, but full participation in the residency and **exhibition** process. Rather than interests being served here, perhaps we can say that different individuals were more attached to some issues in the process over others, as well as having a willingness to work together in the project.

Assembling is a process that has always claimed to be a ‘flexible’ form of assembly, but in this flexibility does a certain sense of nuanced opinion, focused interaction or thorough artistic endeavour get lost? Flexibility in the project is expressed in various ways, firstly, the ‘non-hierarchical’ manner in which it has been facilitated means that no prior central themes and issues were at stake and the terms of engagement were to be determined. Neither has there been a set agenda for how individual artists incorporate their practices into the *Assembling* process (ie. what they share online and which element of their practice they contribute to the **exhibition**).

Through exchanging in this way, there was a hope that individual practices would be acknowledged while at the same time developing something together, to form a diversity of approaches and opinions. Flexibility also meant that artists would drop

point to social studies and social work, and he understands ‘social’ as being representative of, ‘social encounters across social classes’ (2013:6). Finkelpearl considers Bishop’s ‘collaboration’ as too constraining for the group practices he writes about as the word denotes working together right through a project in a co-authored manner. Whereas, ‘*cooperation*’, on the other hand, simply implies that people worked together on a project’ (2013:6).

Amy McDonnell, Mónica Rivas Velásquez, Katie Schwab

McDonnell, Rivas Velásquez and Schwab curated and contributed to *Until I, I Know You Better* (2013) as the reading group This Book, set up in 2012 as a space in which to discuss, share and exchange ideas on fictional and non-fictional texts. The project aimed to explore ways in which a text can be collectively read and how the expression of this reading can be externalised and shared with others. *Until I...* took place in the artists’ bookshop Ti Pi Tin in London over the Art Licks weekend when many of the city’s artist-run spaces open concurrently over three days. The project included contributions from Aleph Trio, Chloe Cooper, Nisha Matthew, Amy McDonnell, Lucy Parker, Mónica Rivas Velásquez, Sian Robinson Davies, Katie Schwab and Jonathan Tibbs.

Until I, I Know You Better attempted to craft cooperation through the act of working together on the negotiation of content, space

in and out of the process depending on interest. This open model of working means that artists' practices and approaches were more present the more they were available to take part. This 'lack of focus' could at times cause frustration and limited political purpose or ideological impulse.

So does *Assembling* fall into the trap of uniting only until self-interest is served and then disbanding? Part of the reason for the, at times, nebulous curatorial process, was to take the time to get to know one another and to get to know different processes of organising before leading into the main **exhibition**. This was a dedication to searching for a shared space between us, spending time considering what it was to work together and how to do so. This form of **collaboration** could never be confused for Beech, Hutchinson and Timberlake's description of, 'a corporate model of work where skills are pooled to increase production and productivity' (2006:5) as it would slowly stop and start as interest and enthusiasm would wane and then return. As described in chapter 3, there was also a time commitment within the **exhibition** itself, to 'inhabit' and be present making decisions together. Yet, it is important to take into account Paul O'Neill's question from the beginning of this chapter, 'Can the merging of **people** and practices offer any sustainable resistance?'. 'Sustaining' did indeed become one of the issues for *Assembling* (as will be outlined further in chapter 3) and, as with so much project-based work many issues that did finally come to the fore, circulated amongst the **group** temporarily and are so easily dropped,

and understandings of Richard Sennett's *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012). McDonnell, Rivas Velásquez and Schwab presented their reading of the book to each other as a starting point for this endeavour. Sennett writes that, 'misunderstandings, separations, transitional objects and self-criticism...are tests of how we relate to other people' (2012:51).



fig. 4.16. Aleph Trio, Performance, 2013.

Richard Sennett

Richard Sennett's *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012) discusses how cooperation is shaped, societal factors that weaken cooperative interaction and, in turn, how cooperation can be strengthened. Sennett views cooperation as a craft, an act that has to be practiced and actively carried out. He argues that in a contemporary, interconnected society full of differences, cooperative practices are crucial and must be nurtured. Sennett outlines current precarious patterns of work as a key factor that inhibits cooperation,

dispersing the **assemblage** all too rapidly. Within the 'flexible' approach maybe a message gets dissolved (unlike collectives such as Freee), a cohesive group practice is not developed (unlike the work of **Group Material** who had a very particular aesthetic, drive and ways of working together). If we look at more dispersed practices described in this chapter such as Omni Zona Franca's *Poesia Sin Fin*, the wide network of **people** involved and the multiplicity of spaces where the poetry festival took place, is instead rooted in the consistency of their context and embeddedness in the particular boundaries set for modes of gathering there. Yet in Cuba, the refusal to 'collectivise' out of political ideology, instead forming 'looser' groups based on **friendship**, means that **group** dynamics are often hidden and unevaluated. *Assembling* responds to this research in Cuba where a 'solid' **collective** politics is refused, yet also is determined for the politics of grouping not to have a laissez-faire approach where dynamics are not accounted for and considered. Despite *Assembling* appearing tentative with its trials as it negotiates different platforms of interaction (when one fails another is adopted), this seeking and discarding is a dedicated investigation of process, protocol and **group** decision-making.

VII

This chapter has been considering 'solid' forms of **collective association**, defining this social type as striving for structural and ideological unity. These forms must have consistency both compositionally and by the way in which they cohere to keep a tight,

therefore weakening social ties and interactions. He writes that, 'society is 'de-skilling' people in practicing cooperation.... people are losing the skills to deal with intractable differences as material inequality isolates them, short-term labour makes their social contract more superficial and activates anxiety about the Other' (2012:8-9). Sennett argues that the effect of these new forms of labour and the increasing inequality within this system, breeds insecurity, there is a psychological impact which produces a withdrawal from society and an unwillingness to engage.

In order to construct new ways of interacting, Sennett argues that a dialogic rather than a dialectic approach must be adopted. A dialectic mode of engagement seeks to find a point of converging agreement, whereas a dialogue provides a common, shared site for differing opinions to exist without a need for consensus (see Mouffe in chapter 3 for non-consensual gathering). The author calls for the craftspersons' workshop to act as an operative model in which dialogic cooperation can take place. He sees this space as a site of experimentation and collaborative making, where habits are developed and refined through purposeful, rhythmic repetition. Sennett's recurring message throughout *Together*, is that cooperation and community are not inherent, but are crafted through labour, skill and willing diplomacy.

controlled assemblage. The concept of ‘hegemony’¹¹ adds to our understanding of these types of association. In larger ‘solid’ agglomerations much of an **assemblage**’s workings are invisible to those within them, therefore making it difficult to re-imagine or remould. We can see clear examples of this and how **assemblages** have been conceived of as ‘naturally’ occurring rather than something actively composed by examining the entries under ‘**body**’ in the *Typology of Association*. Hegemonic dominance is outlined by Gramsci as a particular political discourse transforming into a seemingly universal discourse. In other words, a dominant, specific idea or political form appears like ‘**common** sense’, the obvious state of affairs rather than one potential system amongst others (Butler, Laclau, Žižek, 2000). Hegemony is achieved through forming institutions, circulating ideas and structuring relations. It is the construction of our world view or that which I term in this thesis, the ‘**social** imaginary’, how we imagine **social** space around us to be. Stuart Hall in *Gramsci and Us* (1987) outlines how Gramsci’s position produces a more active description of this **social** space than a Marxist one:

Where Gramsci departs from classical versions of Marxism is that he does not think that politics is an arena which simply *reflects* already unified **collective** political identities, already constituted forms of struggle. Politics for him is not a dependent sphere. It is where forces and relations, in the economy, in **society**, in culture, have to be actively *worked* on to produce particular forms of power, forms of domination. This is the production of politics — politics as

11 Although ‘hegemony’ is a term that is crucial to this thesis, it does not appear in the *Typology of Association* as it is perceived in this research as a quality of political association, rather than an association itself. In this way, both a Communist state and globalisation can be hegemonic forms.

Cooperative

Differently Screening: Textiles, Labour, Protest and Value

For Critical Practice’s (for more see under ‘Open Organisation’) screening series *Differently Screening*, I curated *Textiles, Labour, Protest and Value* (2012), which formed part of CP’s ongoing research into the production, performance and propagation of value and values. Each screening aimed to highlight a CP value, whether thinking through forms of labour or issues surrounding sustainability. This particular screening took place at the *Bread and Roses* pub in North Clapham, where a Battersea and Wandsworth Trade Union banner hangs above the pool table. The pub is named after a poem written for the 1912 mill workers strike in Massachusetts where women demanded fair pay, or ‘bread’, but also the ‘roses’ of fair treatment and care as well, a protest that led to landmark labour reforms.

This acted as a productive site for the showing of *The Women of Brukman* (2007), a documentary depicting the struggle of a cooperative of predominantly female textile workers in Buenos Aires. During Argentina’s financial crisis, the owners of a suit business abandoned their factory, leaving machinists and others without pay. The women began to self-organise and in this process became aware of their meagre salaries in relation to business’ profit for the first time. Despite police raids and the Brukman

a production (Hall, 1987:20).

In other words, ‘the **people**’, ‘the **mass**’, ‘the working class’, are not ready-made forms, but produced through socio-political composition. It is the active part of this composition that hegemony works to obscure. It could be said that in Cuba the system is ‘hegemonic with a face’, there is constant, national, outward projection of political unitary power and collective constructs that demand for the political body to be performed in a well-worn political diatribe. Within this context the seeking out of shared **group** experiences amongst artists becomes a political act in itself where, for example, playing baseball becomes subversive. In the West, however, artists are looking back to a **collective** politics while working within a differently hegemonic structure of global capitalism. In this context, the **assemblage**’s workings are not obscured by such a tightly-bound collective projection. The centres of power themselves are distributed and are often not locatable, it is more of a ‘faceless’ construct, which I will examine further in Chapter 2.

Here, it is important to re-introduce Latour’s (2005b) concept of the **collective**, which rather than a dominant discourse, gathers around multiple issues for as long as necessary before disbanding, producing the potential for dispersed ‘collectivities’ rather than the singular ‘**collective**’, layering and spreading discourse so that one narrative does not monopolise. However, the *Assembling* project brought up several problems that face the production of collectivities: How to form a coherent

brothers returning to claim their right to the factory, the textile workers persisted, forming the Cooperativa 18 de Diciembre that still runs the business to this day and which has inspired other factories in the same commercial area of Buenos Aires to form similar cooperatives. During the screening, I invited participants to consider their personal values in relation to the film and to sew this word from material during the screening. Fabric letters emerged calling for ‘empathy’, ‘severance’ and ‘security’. An initial discussion had been difficult, with well-repeated terms such as ‘equality’ and ‘truth’ ringing as too clichéd to pronounce to the group, yet these terms were reclaimed during the sewing process. The active screening seemed to lend itself to a non-prescriptive approach to spectatorship, with some avidly following the subtitles, some removing themselves from the screening area to concentrate on their stitching and others deciding to work together, voting on ‘collaboration’ as their value. The members of CP have continued work together to make these words into a banner in various sewing sessions. Sewing together seems to produce a reflective, non-hierarchical space in which individuals are focused on the task at hand, making interaction less intense, more easy-going, so that personal memories, confessions and teasing began to surface.

collective without solid mechanisms? How to cohere without a dominant narrative to unite a **social** imaginary between participants?

The *Assembling* email circuit began with twelve participants, however only those based outside of Cuba, in Mexico City or the UK, participated. There are various possible reasons for this, one being the lack and expense of internet access, as well as a concern with surveillance, making emailing problematic. Perhaps, also there was an unwillingness to start a process with no tangible end point from the beginning. Communication became very slow, waiting for people to respond for long stretches, before moving on to the next participant, which produced large spaces of inactivity. In inserting myself into the process of forming a **collective** from the point of initiation, in attempting to allow for a **collective** authorship, will or issue to arise, the process became ‘fluid’ in its formation. Levi Bryant writes, ‘Consistency and coherence are not qualities that *precede* **assemblages**, rather they are *emergent* properties that do or do not arise *from* **assemblage**... Consistency and coherence are... not about being without logical contradiction, nor about harmony, but rather about how heterogeneous elements or objects hang together’ (Bryant, 2009). Rather than entering directly into an exhibitionary process, we wanted to establish an environment (a culture or consistency) that would be woven over time between us. Chapter 2 will examine collectivities from another perspective; space and movement. This will lead to *Assembling* being evaluated through the potential of foam.



fig. 4.17. *Critical Practice* during a sewing session, 2012.



fig. 4.18. Matilde Adorno of the Cooperativa de trabajo 18 diciembre, 2011.

Crowd

Elias Canetti

In 1960, Canetti wrote *Crowds and Power* in which he explores the behaviour of people in mass gatherings, considering how and why they obey power. He makes a distinction between ‘open’ crowds; which continue to grow and



Chapter 2: Social

I

In the introduction to this thesis and within chapter 1, I have mainly discussed art practices in terms of shared, **collective** experience. However, in this chapter I will place an emphasis on the term '**social**', which I will discuss in regards to space and mutable collectivity. In order to understand this further, ideas of composition, movement and interaction are processes that become integral. It is the task of establishing these qualities as part of the way **social** space functions which will allow us to move past the concept of inherent **collective** identities, which, as seen in the previous chapter, are argued to be a result of hegemonic discourse. In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Ernesto Laclau writes, 'We gain very little once identities are conceived as complexly articulated **collective** wills, by referring to them through simple designations such as classes, ethnic **groups** and so

seemingly have no particular direction and the 'closed' crowd; which has a boundary and applies itself to permanence, its capacity and membership are limited. These forms could be compared to the 'fluid' and 'solid' forms of association found in this thesis. Canetti does not exclusively discuss crowds in terms of people, but describes aspects of nature to act as crowd. He writes, 'Crowd symbols is the name I give to collective units which do not consist of humans, but which are still felt to be crowds. Corn and forest, rain, wind, sand, fire and the sea are such units' (2000:75). This concept can be readily compared with that of the sociologist Gabriel Tarde found under 'society' in this Typology of Association.

Departamento de Intervenciones Públicas

The group *Departamento de Intervenciones Públicas* or DIP, were part of a wave of performance-led initiatives set up by teachers at Havana's principal art school, the *Instituto Superior de Arte* (see Coco Fusco's criticism in the entry for ENEMA under 'Body'). One of the members of the group stated that DIP, or Department of Public Interventions in English, wanted to, 'highlight questions of power and surveillance' (Fernandes 2006:152) in Cuban society. One of their most daring actions *Vital Space I* occurred on the 4th July 2002. On this date the Havanan population were aware that Cuban Americans had threatened to send a flotilla over the straits of Florida to 'save' dissatisfied Cubans. In response, DIP randomly contacted people

on, which are at best names for transient points of stabilisation. The really important task is to understand the logics of their constitution and dissolution, as well as the formal determinations of the *spaces*¹² in which they interrelate' (2000:53).

But firstly, can we assume that 'the **social**' exists in and of itself at all? It is only after deciding this point that we can begin to consider the application of the term to contemporary art practice. Bruno Latour explores the concept of the **social** in *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005) in which he deliberates the term '**society**'. Latour argues that the word '**society**' is employed by sociologists as a ready-made container, an unshifting **state** in which behaviours can be inserted. In a similar fashion to sociologists, art theorists readily deploy the **social** as if it were a given entity, a reassuring essential material which is a backdrop to other constructs. They discuss participation, relational aesthetics, the **social** turn, **social cooperation**, **social collaboration** and **social** aesthetics, but what does this **social** element actually mean here? It could be argued that these forms of practice relate to '**social** issues', but Latour would argue that there are no issues which are not **social** and redefines how this **social** can be understood. Here we can draw a comparison between Latour and the endeavour of Williams (1976) as outlined in the introduction, in which words depicting culture and **society** must always be understood as merely a container of shifting meanings that change with the purposes

12 I have highlighted 'space' here as, when discussing the social, relationality would normally take precedence, but we will see 'space' gather momentum and importance as this thesis continues.

with a mocked-up official notice asking them to be at the city's sea wall, the Malecón, at a set time on the same day. The police presence and the appearance of a confused grouping, consisting of those who had responded to DIP's communication, drew attention to both the suspicion and obedience embedded in Cuban society. DIP acted to infiltrate this system so that neither the body representing power, the police, nor the body representing the controlled, those that presented themselves at the Malecón, were able to identify the source of power causing them to make themselves present to one another.



fig 4.19. Departamento de Intervenciones Públicas, *Vital Space I*, Performance, 2002.

of a mutating context. Understanding has to be found through a procedural inquiry, rather than being thought of as automatically inherent within the word itself.

Latour's theory refers to three main influences. Firstly, the 19th century Sociologist Gabriel Tarde who, 'considered the **social** as a circulating fluid that should be followed by new methods and not a specific type of organism' (Latour, 2005b:13), secondly, the Sociologist and ethno-methodographer, Harold Garfinkel who believed sociology could be a documented science of how **society** is held together, and thirdly the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead who, rather than the solidity of **social** ties, envisaged, 'bundles of composite entities that endure in time and space' (Latour, 2005b:218). Latour states that the confusion in sociology is demonstrated by the fact that the concept '**social**' is used to designate both a macro-level context or realm, as well as personal and one-to-one interaction. He comments, 'It is no longer clear whether there exists relations that are specific enough to be called '**social**' and that could be grouped together in making up a special domain that could function as 'a **society**'. The **social** seems to be diluted everywhere and yet nowhere in particular' (2005b:2). Whereas in Latour's Actor-**Network**-Theory (ANT), there is no **society** 'out there' that exists as a set order of things, no gigantic forces of unknowable power. In the same way, there is no over-arching global sphere, but just more and more local connections, shifts and patterns of motion. This pliable local can extend and be vast, constructed of multiple interlinking elements that

Katie Schwab



fig. 4.20. Katie Schwab, *Crowd*, Screenprint, beech frame, 2013.

Santiago Sierra

In his Tate lecture *On Publicness* (2014), Sierra pointed out that he has a particular interest in 'the crowd for hire', giving the example of his work *430 People Paid 30 Soles per Hour* (2001). In this performance, he hired women to form a crowd at the Galería Pancho Fierro in Lima for four hours, leaving a one meter aisle so that the public could pass through. The women were asked to stare directly at any visitors to the gallery. All of the participants came from the 'Glass of Milk Programme' set up in Lima to distribute essential food to the poorest areas of the city, making the tension between payment, presence and audience even more pronounced.

form giant **networks**, but wherein each entity is traceable. Latour calls for an ANT methodology where, instead of moulding **social** experience within existing formats, sociologists and scholars must follow ‘the actors’. In other words, they must follow the trail of action, the traces from mediation between human and non-human things. The ‘thing’ taking place must take precedence over set theory, grouping concepts or expectation, ‘Let the actors do the job for us. Don’t define for them what makes up the **social!**’ (Latour, 2005b:36). It is by making these connections and traces apparent, that the **social** becomes active. Therefore the **social** is performed and has to be re-performed again and again to remain **social**; it is, ‘a very particular movement of re-association and reassembling’ (Latour, 2005b:7).

As we will see later in this chapter, there has been a continual historical drive towards **social** forms in artistic practices and thinking. There is a constant reassessment in relation to how **social** space is perceived. Latour, however, would also suggest that the repetitious nature of this **social** drive is essential for the existence of the **social** itself. By repositioning and reshuffling this space, different expressions of the **social** occur. This process relates to *Assembling* as it started to take multiple forms and existed as a series of iterations, each trying to form a sociability or coherency that the previous form had not provided. The act of **assembling** and re-assembling in this way produced a performed action of ‘togetherness’ that moved in and out of focus, or perhaps each attempt tried to activate a process that would permit a sense of **self-**



fig. 4.21. Santiago Sierra, *430 People Paid 30 Soles per Hour, Paid crowd*, 2001.

D

Democracy

Levi Bryant

In the *Democracy of Objects* (2015), Bryant brings objects to the forefront of ontology. Rather than objects only being seen subjectively through the human gaze, for example, I can only understand a table from my own subjective stand-point, Bryant calls for a democratisation in which things are acknowledged for themselves. He writes that objects, ‘equally exist while they do not exist equally. The claim that all objects equally exist is the claim that no object can be treated as constructed by another object’ (2015:20). The ontological space that Bryant proposes is similar to Latour’s ‘social’ (2005) or Rancière’s

organisation, of coherent **association**, rather than a **social** plasma trapped in a state of potentiality, shifting and circulating with no call to action.

II

Latour views the **social** as a cohesive space, one ongoing local made up of multiple **associations** and **assemblages** that, in being played out, are made apparent and take form. It could be said that Jacques Rancière has a similar concept of this **social** space as an interconnected system in which elements slip in and out of appearance. He describes this ‘distribution of the sensible’ as, ‘the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in **common** and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it’ (2000:12). In other words, it is the distribution of thoughts, images, mobile phones, trees, roads, the rustle of leaves, everything around us that is available for us to perceive and that builds up a shared commonality between these elements. We can clearly see a comparison with the **assemblage** here, which is particularly provocative when thinking in terms of exhibitionary practices; how to assemble thoughts, objects, **people** and spaces and the formation of groupings between artists? That which is apparent or not, whether elements are visible or audible, create specific aesthetico-political regimes¹³.

13 As will be developed further in this chapter, Rancière employs the term ‘regime’ within art, which he distinguishes from the concept of artistic ‘movements’. Historical identifiers such as modernism, the avant-garde, post-modernism, do not necessarily change the way that art is positioned in the

Partage du Sensible (2000) (both of which are developed in chapter 2) in that everything is equally existent, it just exists in an unequal way. In this democracy, humans and objects are not opposing entities but humans are considered as forms of object too.

Joseph Beuys

Discussing and activating political thought was an essential part of Beuys’ work. He ran as a candidate for the Green Party and set up several of his own political movements. In June 1971 Beuys founded the Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum as an attempt to form his vision of a truer form of democracy. The organisation grew out of two earlier manifestations, the ‘German Student Party’ and the ‘Office for Political Public Relations’. Beuys’ political activity was influenced by the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, who believed that, ‘the ideal society is thought to be composed ‘organically’ of three spheres governed semi-autonomously according to their own principles, so that there is liberty in culture, equality in law and solidarity in the economy’ (Verwoert, 2006). In Documenta 5 (1972) Beuys set up the *Bureau for the Organisation of Direct Democracy*, an office from which he discussed and argued ideas about art and politics with the public over the course of 100 days, fighting in a boxing match on the final day in the name of his cause (Brenner, n.d.).

If we understand this **social** space as a mesh of apparent and unapparent elements assembled over time, it opens up an arena of contention in which the ‘naturalness’ of the sensible’s distribution can be held up to question. When we consider Benedict Anderson’s (1983) notion of the **nation** as an ‘imagined’ construct, we see that it is a construct so repeated and thoroughly played out that it has become naturalised in our minds and is therefore part of a hegemonic system. The ‘imagined’ quality of the **nation** is actually the formulation of the **social** as it is the shared **common** view of nationhood, but also all of the trade routes, political structures, need for identity, etc. that have distributed to allow for such a concept as **nation** to occur in the first place.

Sean Sayers commenting in *The Politics of Aesthetics* writes that:

[T]he distribution of the sensible sets the divisions between what is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible. It functions like a Kantian categorial framework that determines what can be thought, made or done. Distribution implies both inclusion and exclusion. The **social** order

‘distribution of the sensible’. However, Rancière suggests that there have been three instances of disruption, a change in how art is perceived or practiced, and that these can be identified as the ‘ethical’, the ‘poetic’ or ‘representative’, and the ‘aesthetic’ regime. In the ‘ethical regime’, an image’s ‘truth content’ is important, in other words, whether images divinely have the right to be produced, or whether they directly tell, educate or develop the soul. During this regime, art is not considered separated from the wider ‘arts’. Rancière depicts the ‘poetic or representative regime’ as placing importance on the *substance* rather than creating a spiritual *essence*. Norms are developed about which elements belong to which type of art, what certain symbols mean and set ways for how art is assessed as either good or bad. To understand these distinctions and to read this art, one must be ‘cultivated’ to understand ‘refined’ practices. The ‘aesthetic regime’, rather than distinguishing between different ways of doing and making within the arts themselves, distinguishes the arts as a separate way of doing and making itself, giving a specificity to the products of art. This regime does not try to delineate sensitivity, taste or pleasure, but instead makes apparent the particularity of art as an action. Rancière considers this regime to be democratic, not because it reaches everybody and is made by all, but because anything may be taken as a subject matter, any material may be used as a medium and any combination of the former may be used together.



fig. 4.22. Joseph Beuys, *Bureau for the Organisation of Direct Democracy*, Social sculpture, 1972.

Group Material

Under this entry I would like to mention two projects undertaken by Group Material (GM); their recurring series *Democracy Wall* and *Democracy* (1988-9). *Democracy Wall* has been replicated as a format several times by the group, but began with the project *Da Zhi Baos* (1982), shown in the images on the following page. The idea is based on the concept of Chinese *Da Zhi Bao* posters in which public debates are produced by posting an opinion or information onto a wall. More and more *Da Zhi Bao* posters are added, forming a discourse and chain of opposing thought. Ironically, considering the name of ‘democracy wall’ that Group Material gave this project, *Da Zhi Baos* in China, although used since imperial times, where a tool for denouncement during Mao’s

is conceived as an anti-democratic, anti-political order, which attempts to maintain the existing pattern of inclusions and exclusions (Sayers, n.d.)

Therefore, the imagined **social** is not a whimsical process but, paradoxically, becomes a very real space of power and contention, filled with the solidity of objects and regulated structural frameworks that uphold function, existing as tightly cohering **assemblages**.

Rancière (2000) describes that which steadies, maintains and fortifies an existing structure the *police* or, we could say, it is the police that makes an **assemblage** cohere, continuing a status quo. It is the action of disrupting police structure that Rancière describes as ‘politics’. In fact, even distinctly political acts, like that of protest, may not be ‘political’ in Rancieran terms. For example, one of the most prominent Occupy Wall Street protesters, Micah White, stated, ‘I think the standard forms of protest have become part of the standard pattern. It’s like they are expected. And the key is to constantly innovate the way we protest because otherwise it is as if protest is part of the script... Our participation in this script is based on the false story that the more **people** you have in the streets the higher your chances of getting **social** change’ (White, 2015). In other words, White’s opinion is that protest no longer necessarily acts as such a disturbance in the general distribution of the sensible, despite the act of protest belonging to political language and despite the numbers involved in such protest movements.

For Rancière art can make visible that which is otherwise invisible in the imagining

cultural revolution and could end a person’s career, or at the very least cause one to be a target of great suspicion within the community. GM chose wide-ranging topics of a public interest to start a conversation through their posters. For example, they explored ‘Future of the Family’ in 1985 at the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff. The posters aimed to give a broad array of opinions, as GM member Julie Ault recalls, ‘The posters alternate between red and green: the green posters carrying statements given by official social organisations in Britain, and the red carrying statements given by people interviewed outside Tesco supermarkets on the street in Cardiff’ (Ault 2010:100).



fig. 4.23. Group Material, *Da Zi Baos*, Posters, 1982.

Immigrant Movement International with Creative Time rally on International Migrants Day, 2012.



of this specific political space, ‘Artistic practices are ways of ‘doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility’ (2006:18). The political potentiality of art in this thinking is not that it will enter into the dominant structure of a formal politics, but that it will contribute to the disturbance of this structure. An example can be given using the project *Immigrant Movement International* (IMI) (2010 - ongoing) by Tania Bruguera. The project engages with immigration reform and sees Bruguera working closely with her local immigrant **community** in New York, activity that has spread to a sister organisation in Mexico City. *Immigrant Movement International* seeks to question the representation of this **community** and to organise workshops, actions and services within it. Bruguera also takes this project into the international artist’s **community** that she inhabits to help promote immigrant rights as part of her wider practice. For Rancière, this project as artwork will never become an ‘actual’ political party. However, as an artwork it can make apparent alternative systems and relations that not only question the current distribution of the sensible, but can shift this distribution allowing for new elements to become apparent. Bruguera’s IMI, in fact, is very precisely attempting to redistribute the visible and the invisible, making those that go unseen present, making mechanisms that bolster certain societal **assemblages** apparent on the surface. In the Immigrant Movement International **Manifesto**, point one states:

Our voices converge on these principles:

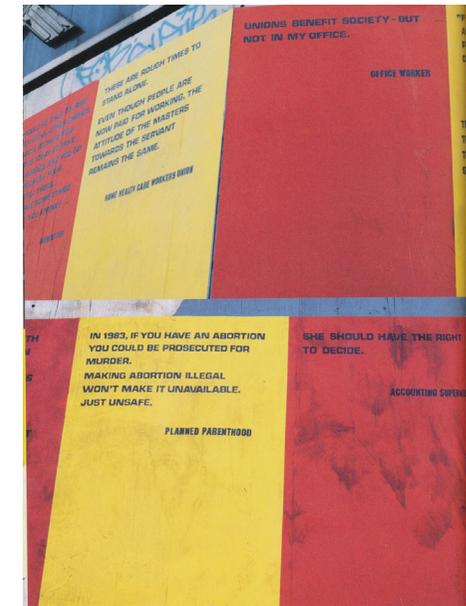


fig. 4.24. Group Material, *Da Zhi Bao*, Installation view, 1982.

Democracy (1988-9) was a project carried out at Dia Art Foundation in a series of four exhibitions, with an installation, roundtable discussion and town meeting collaboratively produced for each show. The four exhibitions were centred around issues that GM felt were threatening democracy and were titled: *Education, Politics and Election, Cultural Participation* and *AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study*. The content for each exhibition was decided upon in the round table discussion, to which they would invite a diverse range of speakers on their chosen subject. Also widely publicised ‘town hall’ meetings were held during each exhibition. GM write that their concern

Assembling Dark Matter

1. Havana Assembling

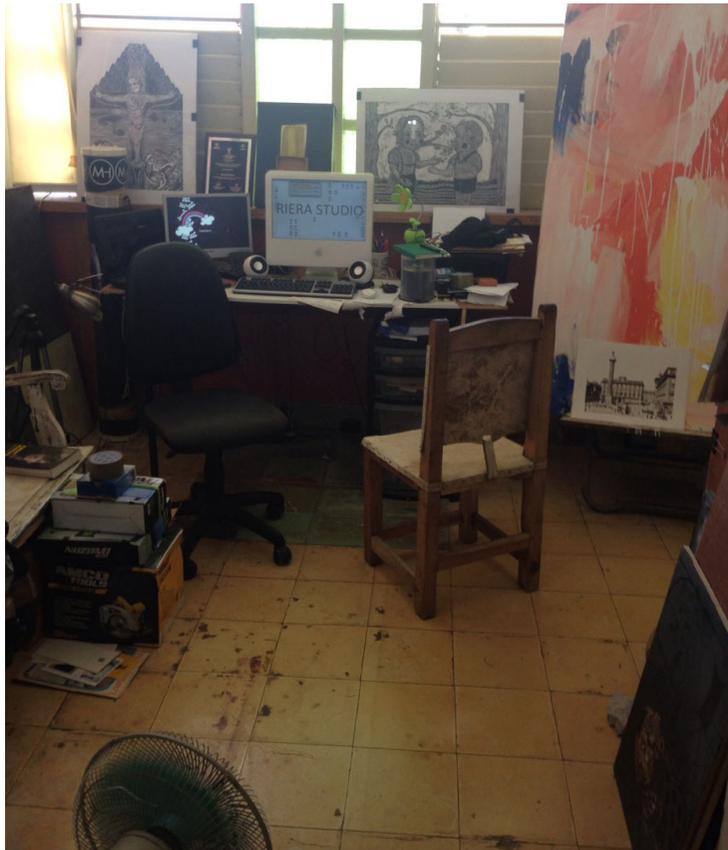


fig. 2.2. Riera Studio, Havana, 2013.

Originally, the *Assembling* project had been planned to take place in Havana between two domestic spaces, walking distance apart, which also function as independent galleries, Studio Riera and Aglutinador. I had visited both spaces and spoken extensively while in Cuba with their founders, Samuel Riera and Sandra Ceballos. These spaces would have been sites of living, work and **exhibition**.

Reason for discontinuation:

We applied for funding through Arts Colaboratory in order to develop and promote Studio Riera in the process. The application was unsuccessful. We also sought funding from the British Council in Cuba, who almost agreed to fund the project, but pulled out after consulting about the art spaces and artists involved. The Havana *Assembling*, therefore discontinued due to lack of funds and time to pursue new sources of funding.

1. We know that international connectivity is the reality that migrants have helped to create, it is the place where we all reside.
2. We understand that the quality of life of a person in a country is contingent on migrants' work. We identify as part of the engine of change (Immigrant Movement International, 2011).

Forming a **Manifesto**, a set statement, designates shared principles and political **organisation**, it groups a poorly connected, itinerant and disparate set of **people**. Or in other words, it can re-perform the **social**, contributing to new political forms of doing and making, reshuffling elements to form newly cohered space.

The distribution of the sensible does not just relate to the position of political artworks in reference to the system of politics, but also how art functions as a system whose distribution is in itself political. Gregory Scholette in *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (2011) discusses this distribution in terms of 'dark matter', that which is not prominent or visible to the dominant system, yet fuels it and makes it possible to subsist. He writes, 'creative dark matter... makes up the bulk of the artistic activity produced in our post-industrial **society**... It includes makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organised practices - all work made and circulated in the shadow of the formal art world' (2011:1). I would add that in curatorial and **collective** practices, there are multiple layers of 'dark matter' that disguise the politics of grouping together. For much of my period of research I have been engaged with the **cluster**, Critical Practice, whose way of working I will discuss further in chapter 3. Critical Practice actively strives to make

for democracy goes beyond this particular exhibition and encompasses their own working methods and the construction of each exhibition:

Our exhibitions and projects are intended to be forums in which multiple points of view are represented in a variety of styles and methods. We believe, as the feminist writer Bell Hooks has said, that, "we must focus on a policy of inclusion so as not to mirror oppressive structures" As a result, each exhibition is a veritable model of democracy. (1999:2).



fig. 4.25. Group Material, *Democracy: Education*, 1988-89.

Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri

For Hardt and Negri, democracy can be nothing less than the rule of everyone for everyone. Please see 'Multitude' for more information.

Bruno Latour & Peter Weibel

Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel curated the exhibition *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe,

2. Assembling Online

As described in chapter 1, we began our *Assembling* process through an email circuit online between 12 artists based in Cuba, Mexico City and the UK. The intention of this process was to **cluster** around a shared issue of concern we felt to be relevant to us all though a dialogue in any format, as long as it could be sent within the space of an email. Everyone was asked to respond in alphabetical order and to send a blank email if they wanted to pass. This process took place between 10th October 2013 and 14th March 2014. Some participants in Cuba did not engage with the process, communication between participants occurred at a very slow pace.

3. Assembling Residency

The residency took place over the course of the weekend 4-6 April 2014 at Islington Mill. Thanks to Maurice Carlin, *Assembling* participant and Director of the Mill, we were able to use the space for free. I catered for other activity through personal funds. Please see pages 31-39 in the *Assembling* portfolio for details.



fig. 2.3. Assembling Residency, Salford, 2014.

organisational mechanisms apparent, all agendas, minutes, points of action and budgets are published on their Wiki page. This works as an attempt to make their actions accountable, visible and replicable. In the proceeding part of this chapter, I will chart the *Assembling* activity to demonstrate all of the proposals made and the multiple formats that the project has attempted to engender. I will provide an outline of issues that have prevented certain forms of *Assembling* to demonstrate the wider extent of my curatorial activity. In an attempt to map out the activity of the *Assembling* project, I hope to demonstrate both some of the subtleties of **collaboration** and **group** formation, as well as the often hidden difficulties that have prevented instances of **assembling** to occur.

Analysing artists' **group** and collaborative practices is difficult. There are many layers of interaction that occur and experiences that seem to be unimportant when writing academically, but it is these interactions that make grouping together a rich experience. This activity slips into the 'dark matter' and is challenging to make visible. This task is particularly complex in this research as I have attempted to insert myself into the *Assembling* process. To try and overcome some of these issues, I have included a practice journal in the *Assembling* portfolio (p.36-40) as a way to give account of the residency at Islington Mill. The journal format and change in written tone allows for these informal and discursive elements to become apparent. The face-to-face interaction at the residency provided a chance for all to think about

Germany in 2005. The project dealt with the problem of representation in politics and brought together over one hundred artists, scientists, philosophers, sociologists and historians. Latour and Weibel invited these participants to re-examine the word 'politics' in order to open up the potential of this term. In the catalogue's opening essay, *From RealPolitik to Dingpolitik: Or How to Make Things Public*, Bruno Latour asks, 'What would an *object-orientated* democracy look like?'. In order to understand this question, it is important to consider Latour's terms *Realpolitik* and *Dingpolitik*. In Germany, *Realpolitik* is seen as a matter-of-fact, pragmatic approach to politics based on power as well as practical and material concerns. Latour (2003) claims that he is not attempting to distance himself from fact, but to add to it through carrying out *Dingpolitik*. The *Ding* in Latour's neologism points to Northern European archaic forms of assembly that were named *Thing* or *Ding* in England, *Ting* in the Isle of Man and in Germany there are circles of stones that formed an area to assemble, or, the *Tingstätten*. He says, 'the *Ding* or Thing has for many centuries meant the issue that brings people together *because* it divides them' (2005a:23). So rather than seeing facts as contained, the Thing is at once an object, a gathering, or relations existing around the object as well as a shared matter of concern. It is this manner of assembling that Latour has attempted to draw together in both the text and exhibition under the banner *Making Things*

4. Re-spacing the Politics of the Manifesto, Liverpool Biennial

The *Assembling* project was invited to participate in a round table discussion series at Black-E as part of Islington Mill's activity at the Liverpool Biennial 2014, #TemporaryCustodiansOf. Islington Mill were working to explore alternative forms of art distribution. I proposed to continue our activity from the residency by considering ways to perform and expand out our **manifesto**. I suggested, 'the printed list, unalterable dried ink and a claim of consensus does not fit our flexible *Assembling*. Suspicious of rules and the promises of **manifesto**, we will ask "How to re-space the politics of the *manifesto*?"' As part of Islington Mill's activity at Black-E, each *Assembling* artist will be invited to undo, re-think, hack, perform or circulate our written rules of working together over the space of a dinner'. This intended to obey by our first 'rule', to function as "The Good Kitchen".

Reason for discontinuation:

Although there was enthusiasm for this project, limited *Assembling* participants were in the UK over the summer period. Those who were available, were unable to attend as there were no funding opportunities available.

5. Communities of Foam: The Discussion Groups

During the residency at Islington Mill, there was a desire to know more about each others' practices, to engage with individual artistic approaches in depth, as a **group**. I was interested in what would happen if the issue that bound us, that made us function collectively, came from the singularity of each of our individual practices. This form of **gathering** would resemble the **multitude**, which Professor of Political Science Nicholas Tampio writes, 'designates a **social body** in which singularities are not required to shed their **social** differences in order to form a **common** notion' (2009:387). My proposal consisted of curating a discussion **group** for each *Assembling* member. I would have worked to explore each artists' practice, thinking through issues of representation, of who to draw around an issue. I would have worked closely with the artist to **cluster** round the relevant **people** to open up an element of each *Assembling* members' practice. Each discussion would have been held in different locations depending on the issues being explored, considering the appropriate environment in terms of forming a context for the discussion as well as the effects of space and activity on conversation. All of the members would have been

how we wanted to share our practices, as they had not been represented enough in the space of our previous activity. The question became, how to make the grouping more visible, more material and how to find a matter of concern to rescue it from a plasma-like state.

III

There seems to be a continual need to shift perspective in order to fully understand **social** space. As we have seen in the beginning of this chapter with Latour, **social** space can act as an abstracted container for behaviour if we forget to trace its meaning and activity, but it is also important not to forget wider implications and connections between the personal exchange of face-to-face, or thing-to-thing, relations and how they amass into larger **assemblages**. We have seen that Rancière's (2000) 'distribution of the sensible' and Scholette's (2011) concept of 'dark matter', that the **social** is arranged into the hidden and the visible, causing differences in power balance and control. We can talk about personal interaction, as with the *Assembling* journal, but how can this help us understand how this type of activity is composed into a larger **social** imaginary? How can these wider concepts be known and effected? Is all of this compositional space reachable? The scale and distribution of the **social** have been considered in art theory in relation to the perceived ever-invasive, ever-expanding globalisation of capital. Guy Debord

Public: Atmospheres of Democracy.



fig. 4.26. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Installation view, ZKM, 2005.

Chantal Mouffe

Mouffe criticises the 'deliberative' democratic approach of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, instead advocating an 'Agonistic Pluralism'. Mouffe outlines the deliberative model as, 'a democratic polity in which political decisions should be reached through a process of deliberation among free and equal citizens' (2000:1). In deliberative democracy, the public is considered as a collection of rational, reasoning individuals who contribute through open discussion and the power of communicating opinion collectively. Mouffe agrees with the deliberative aspiration to further harness a citizenship, rather than discouraging direct involvement in the production of polity. However, Mouffe largely criticises the deliberative model for three reasons. Firstly, it requires a public to share a belief in the deliberative version of democracy. Secondly, it does not place

present at each discussion and there would have been a final **gathering** between us at the end of the project, recognising a **collective** commitment between us.

Reason for discontinuation:

Unfortunately this activity would not have been possible to take place within the time restrictions of the PhD.

6. Assembling Zine

The act of sharing information online and beginning to share our practices during the residency with each artist constructing activity to carry out together, still left the the *Assembling* artists feeling that they did not know each other as a grouping or each others practices in depth. As discussed in the residency journal (found in the portfolio), **assembling** requires a lot of cultivation. We had talked about ‘matter’ and shifting material substances, as well as Katie’s comment that the process had seemed impersonal and so I felt that we needed something physically present, something personalised as a call to assemble for the **exhibition**. Therefore I made an *Assembling* zine of loose pages tied together, as the solidity of a bound format did not seem appropriate for the text as **assemblage**, as the representation of a non-solid grouping. Each page consisted of an artwork or text by the *Assembling* artists which I felt was appropriate

to the project. I gathered this information from online sources including, websites, facebook and blogs without the artists knowing my selections. I sent each zine with a hand written letter to the home address of each artist.



fig. 2.4. Compiling the Assembling zine, 2014.

and curator Nicolas Bourriaud are two figures who are important to mention here as they are both often discussed in art historical discourse to examine arts interaction with globalised **social** relations, albeit they both take very different perspectives in the practice of these social relations. Debord's work was radical, anti-institutional and involved direct political action, whereas Bourriaud's curatorial approach exists very much within cultural systems and institutions. However, in *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), Bourriaud points to the influence of Debord's text *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) on his thinking and writes that, 'The space of current relations is [...] the space most severely effected by general reification' (2009:9). As part of this discussion, I will also include the more recent work of theorist Stephen Wright (2014) who seeks to develop concepts of scale and distribution within **social** space. It is notable that despite the differing approaches that these cultural producers have carried out, all view art practice as a means of revitalising or regaining agency over **social** relations. For Debord, rather than 'dark matter' being hidden in relation to other matter, the entirety of **society** has become Othered, rarified, or unreachable, in an all-pervasive spectacle at the hands of capitalism. In *Society of the Spectacle*, he depicts a **society** completely alienated by capitalist production, a process of unification by the abstract space of the market. Debord describes the spectacle as, '*capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images*' ([1967] 2009:33). It is a one-way monologue which gives the impression of uniting, when in fact it forms a separateness in which

enough emphasis on power relations. Political practice is not the act of representing pre-formed social identities, but constitutes these identities, making them appear 'common sense'. Any form of 'social objectivity' causes an exclusion, as with Rancière's *Distribution of the Sensible*, the appearance of one thing, causes the disappearance, or lessening visibility, of another. Mouffe argues that the traces of this exclusion must be made visible. Politics is the formation of this structuring of institutions and discourses, that shape the political landscape. Thirdly, she says, politics should not be merely a rational decision-making process but a way to play out multiple forms of living, a process which does not coolly temper a citizenry, but that gives space for passionate disagreement. Instead, 'agonism' recognises the impossibility of a shared consensus, but calls for a 'friendly-enemy' interaction of 'conflictual consensus', which does not arrive at mutual agreement. Mouffe writes that the question should *not* be, 'how to arrive at a consensus without exclusion', since this would imply the eradication of the political. She continues to say that:

Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an 'us' by the determination of a 'them'. The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different way in which it is established. The crucial issue is to establish this us/them discrimination in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy (2000:15).



fig. 2.5. Discussion group at *Assembling* Exhibition, 2014.

7. *Assembling* Exhibition

The *Assembling* project culminated in an **exhibition** at the Cookhouse Gallery, Chelsea College of Arts. This location provided funding for activity in the space through the university. It also meant that we were attached to the College as a form of **community**, which provided the opportunity to expand our grouping into multiple **gatherings** which took place through discussion **groups** and meals. This will be described at length in Chapter 3. The majority of the artists involved wanted to work in the space, to make ourselves part of the **exhibition** as **assemblage** and as a way to re-perform the space, objects and activity within it daily. This concept is very time consuming, and so availability became a strategy for structuring the process, which, again, will be outlined in Chapter 3. *Assembling* aimed to remain flexible, allowing participants to move in and out of the process and for others to enter.

interaction, correction or reconsideration of the spectacle do not occur. We can see a comparison here to the concept of the ‘**mass**’ developed in chapter 1, in which dialogue is not possible, only a unidirectional passing of information. Instead, the spectacle is one long banal stream of its own self-affirmation, transforming **social** relations, ‘The cumulative power of this autonomous artificiality ends up by falsifying all **social** life’ (2009:52). Guy Debord and the **group** of artists, activists and intellectuals that made up the Situationists International (SI), experimented with urban practices and interventions with mass media in Paris, attempting to turn ‘capitalist systems of spectacle’ against themselves. The SI aimed to disrupt the spectacle through interventions such as *dérive*¹⁴, riots, strikes and *détournement*¹⁵. In the SI **manifesto**, Debord stated that:

Against the spectacle, the realised Situationist culture introduces total participation... it will be a global presence with a baring, each moment, on all the usable elements. Naturally this would tend to **collective** production which would without doubt be anonymous...The minimum proposals of these experiences will be a revolution in behaviour and a dynamic unitary urbanism capable of extension to the entire planet, and of being further extensible to all habitable planets (Debord, [1960] 2011:350).

14 *Dérive* translates from French as ‘drift’ and refers to an unplanned journey through urban space in which decision-making for how this journey will continue is spontaneous and effected by the environmental surrounds. This provides a freedom of movement on the one hand and a recognition of the limits of psychological response to urban space, its psychogeography, or as Debord described, the act of following the appealing or repelling character of certain places (Debord, 1955).

15 *Détournement* translates as ‘re-routing’ or ‘hijacking’ and was first developed by the Letterist International, a radical artists’ group initiated by Guy Debord which later merged and transformed into SI, taking the practice of *détournement* with it. *Détournement* aimed to alter expressions of the capitalist system so that they critique themselves, for example tampering with political slogans or advertising to transform their message.

Jacques Rancière

For Rancière, the term ‘democracy’ does not relate to a state system or a form of government. As outlined in the main text of the thesis, Rancière describes socio-political space as the *partage du sensible*, the distribution of all elements within this space; that which is visible or not visible, sayable or unsayable, made or left unmade etc. In Rancière’s terms, when any elements in this space are consistent, then it is understood to be a ‘police’ structure. If this consistency is disturbed, it is the action of ‘politics’. In this vision, ‘democracy’ is when those who do not usually act to distribute the composition of this space, intervene in the action of compartmentalisation, or parcelling out. This creates ‘dissensus’, by ‘confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action with the inadmissible, i.e. the political subject’ (2004:85). Rancière considers the current way in which art is understood and practiced, that which he calls the ‘aesthetic regime’, to be ‘democratic’. This is not because everyone has access and chooses to relate to it in an ‘art for all’, but because currently that which falls under the remit of ‘art’ can take anything as its theme and can be made of any medium.

Dual

Peter Sloterdijk

Theorists such as Peter Sloterdijk (2005)

Jorge Luis Borges' short story written as a single paragraph called *On the Exactitude of Science* (1946) provides a visual description which helps us to imagine the layering effect of the spectacle. Borges writes:

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographer's Guild struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it (Borges, 2000:181).

However, the spectacle does not merely overlay reality, but is a product *of* reality and therefore *is* reality itself, 'the spectacle that falsifies reality is nevertheless a real product of that reality... reality emerges in the spectacle, the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and support of the existing **society**' (Debord [1967] 2009:25).

In this way the spectacle acts as an ever-adaptable agglomerating force that is seen not to smother **society**, or to hide 'dark matter', but control to such a point that it becomes the expression of this **society** in an intermingling reality and as an expression of the **state**. As we have seen within the later writing of Latour (2005) and Rancière (2000), there is no external space outside of Debord's conception. It is as if, re-reading Debord through Rancière, the 'distribution of the sensible' has become so imbalanced that nothing outside of the dominant system is visible or, in Latorian terms, it has become purely macro space, a pure hegemonic **state**. But

and Paolo Virno (2010) argue that the basic unit of the collective or human presence in social space, is not the individual but a form of multiple. Sloterdijk (2005) writes that an originary ontological state exists as a primordial duality which, 'precedes all encounters'. This dual is not made from two separate units but is an intermingling presence which he compares with a mother and a foetus. He writes:

'being-a-pair' precedes all encounters. In my pair analysis, the number two, or the dyad, appears as the absolute figure, the pure bipolar form. Accordingly, it always takes precedence over the two single units of which it seems to be 'put together'. This can be most easily demonstrated in the relationship between mother and child or, even better, between foetus and placenta (Sloterdijk, 2005).

In *Bubbles* (2011), in which he reinterprets the history of Western metaphysics through concepts of 'air' and 'immunology', Sloterdijk employs an image of Pablo Reinoso's *La Parole* (1998) to illustrate the dual interaction.

Pablo Reinoso

This work by Pablo Reinoso is titled *La Parole* (1998) and is part of a series called *Persistentes*. The lozenge-like sculpture is made from the sewn fabric used to make parachutes and hot air balloons and maintains its shape through the constant flow of air that passes through the space. Two floating heads meet in this sealed off, shimmering form, floating together in an encasing structure which slowly expands and contracts as they inhale and exhale, sharing each others' breath. The sculptural work exists

fig. 2.6. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Free)*, 1992.



Debord goes a step further, suggesting that not only are elements invisible, inaudible, within the capitalist system, but that they no longer exist even as a latent force. A bleak view indeed.

Theorist Stephan Wright also describes his relation to the **social** as an entity to be mapped onto. In *Toward a **Lexicon** of Usership* (2014) he writes that ‘active’ art practices that intend ‘usership’¹⁶ rather than ‘spectatorship’, often take the form of a 1:1 scale. By this he means that they are artworks that are not representations of something, but become the thing themselves. They are Borges’ map that lays over and covers the ‘real’, or indeed the spectacle, below. Wright provides the on-going project *The Martha Rosler Library* (2005 -) as an example of this 1:1 scale operation, in which the artist donated her library for the **public** to view. Wright says that, ‘Scaling up operations in this way breaks with modernist conceptions of scale. By and large, the art of the twentieth century, like so many post-conceptual practices today, operated at a reduced scale; art was practiced as both other than, and smaller than, whatever reality it set out to map’ (2014:3). Latour would agree with the concept of scale here, that the **social** should be scaled down to a local level and that art should not be separated out in this space. Wright suggests that art is being ‘scaled up’, shifting its positioned to stand with ‘reality’ rather than operating as a separate, diminutive entity. Although, as with Rancière’s concept of Brugura’s IMI, in which the project as

16 For a discussion on the concept of ‘user’ and ‘usership’, please see the entry for Stephen Wright under ‘lexicon’ in the *Typology of Association*.

as viewed from the outside, but is experienced at depth from within, as Frieze columnist Laurie Attias comments:

Tiny motors that keep air pulsating through the form... create the effect of shallow, rhythmic breathing. As they silently inflate and deflate, these silvery-grey forms become metaphors for the body, but also evoke UFOs, or soft habitats such as cocoons, or giant wombs’ (Frieze, 1990).



fig.4.27. Pablo Reinoso, *La Parole*, Tissue, ventilator, mirror, 1998.

Franz Erhard Walther

Franz Erhard Walther’s work consists largely of material sculptures, objects he terms ‘instruments’. These artworks were part of a wider growing interest in body and action within art during the 60s and 70s, a period during which he famously appeared in Harald Szeemann’s *When Attitude Becomes Form* (1969). Walther often installed ‘werksets’, whole sets of fabric instruments that were arranged in gallery space, waiting for the interaction of the public to bring them to action. Actions were documented, often in landscape, to

an artwork will not *be* a political party, but will shift representations and visibility, the 1:1 artwork will not either *be*, for example a library, nor will it act as a *representation* of a library, but will use the concept and structure of the library as a platform to deviate from, rethink or reposition. **Social** relation here is reassessed through usership, through the act of ‘participating’, in Debord’s terms, of re-using and re-purposing existent structures. However, there is a limitation in Wright’s ‘usership’ concept, in which the user ‘plugs in’ to existent ‘platforms’ or structural practices without the more radical potential of changing the way that these systems function, therefore structural relations are never actually changed in and of themselves.

In *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) Bourriaud views the relational aspect of the artwork as a source of potential sociability, he writes that, ‘artistic praxis appears these days to be a rich loam for **social** experiments’ (Bourriaud, 1998:9). He explores the work of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick who create situations, environments or architectures to encourage **social** interactions and opportunities to share. An often quoted example of this is Tiravanija’s *Untitled (Free)* (1992) in which the artist set up a kitchen and served rice and Thai curry for free in the 303 gallery, New York. Drawing on Debord, Bourriaud wrote that relations in **society** are, ‘in a state of reification’ (2009:9) due to capitalism infiltrating into almost every aspect of life. He asked whether it is still possible to generate relationships and to experiment with creating **social** bonds under such a system. He writes that relational aesthetics is an, ‘aesthetic

demonstrate the sculpture. Here there are two images of Walther’s *Sehkanal (Sight Channel)*, one from 1968 and one from 2011 which shows Santiago Sierra and Walther performing the sculpture. The dual relation is a physically active experience, the form is sensed through balance, in the weight of the other, through space, the length of the fabric, as well as the bodies’ movement, through touch, the encasing sensation and stretch of the fabric.



fig.4.28. Franz Erhard Walther, *Sehkanal (Sight Channel)*, Green fabric, 1968.



fig.4.29. Franz Erhard Walther and Santiago Sierra Demonstrating work No. 46 from Walthers First Workset ‘Sehkanal 1968’, 2011.

theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt' (Bourriaud, 2009:112). This, however is not merely about the interaction of humans, but the way in which the artwork, objects, the gallery space, all work to produce, set up and allow for relations to occur. Indeed, Tiravanija's *Untitled (Free)* (1992) opened up the space of gallery production, such as the office, not normally accessed by the gallery-goer, and it was also important for the artist to leave on display packaging, dirty pots and pans, objects to demonstrate the production of the work. He states, 'The work is a platform for **people** to interact with the work itself but also with each other. It is about the experiential relationship, so you actually are not really looking at something but you are within it, you are part of it. The distance between the artist, the art, and the **audience** gets a bit blurred' (Tiravanija, n.d.). However, much has been written about the presumed unmediated benefit of these interactions. Bishop criticises Bourriaud's text for not problematising the types of **social** relation that are, or are not, created through these artists' works. By forming the possibilities for exchange, either a depth of interaction is assumed to have taken place or any **social** interaction is assumed to be of value In *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* Bishop writes:

The *quality* of the relationships in 'relational aesthetics' are never examined or called into question. When Bourriaud argues that 'encounters are more important than the individuals who compose them,' I sense that this question is (for him) unnecessary; all relations that permit 'dialogue' are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good... If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations



Encyclopedia

Wikipedia

Just as I have included the 'manifesto' as a form of textual gathering in this thesis, I also discuss Wikipedia in chapter 3 as part of my thinking through open forms of gathering. Wikipedia is an online, open source encyclopedia compiled collaboratively by experts and non-experts alike. Wikipedia states five fundamental pillars that represent the organisation's principles which are, 'Wikipedia is an encyclopedia', 'Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view', 'Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit and distribute', 'editors should treat each other with respect and civility' and 'Wikipedia has no firm rules' (Wikipedia, 2015). Anybody can edit Wikipedia, however, administrators, who have to be approved by the Wikipedia community, have certain abilities to block users and remove edits. It could be said that the Wikipedia model is deliberative, (see Chantal Mouffe under 'Democracy'), as Jemielniak in *Common Knowledge? An Ethnography of Wikipedia* (2014) points out:

Because participation and exchange of views are important, polling and voting are generally

are being produced, for whom, and why? (Bishop, 2004:65).

These questions of aesthetic representation, not as aesthetics representing reality, but of artistic practice acting as a representational space, questioning the who, what and the why, will consistently appear throughout this thesis and is of great importance for reading artists' **group** work. The interaction between **people**, objects, space, thoughts, all the elements that feed an **assemblage**, give rise to the **social**. Introducing Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*, translator Gabriel Rockhill underscores that relations are political, the political is relational, 'The essence of *politics* consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the **community**, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility. It is partially for this reason that Rancière defines *the political* as relational in nature' (2000:3). However, there is a difference here. Bishop points to the fact that collaborative or **collective** practices in contemporary art are often depicted as automatically cohesive, as always engendering **democracy**, there is an assumption that these practices automatically offer a counter view to the context in which they reside (Bishop, 2006), which I will further critique in chapter 3 and my conclusion. For Bourriaud, the relational in aesthetics occurs when art allows the possibility for encounter and sociability, as with Tiravanija. However, for Rancière, it is not just the content of the artwork, i.e. that it is about cooking and sharing, but about the placement and function of the artwork *in relation* to a wider

discouraged. In fact, voting is seen as anti-consensual, as it does not allow the full expression of all views in a discussion (2014:18).

Exhibition

Throughout this research I have been working to understand the exhibition as a site where assemblages are composed to create an expanded collective, as understood through Latour, as a gathering of things both human and non-human. This action is an instance of performing social space. The exhibition is only 'political' when it disrupts ways that exhibitions are currently carried out and made, how things are shown, presented and discussed and so creates a different composition. This is the field of action of the curator.



Foam

Assembling

During the Private View of *Assembling* (2015), we placed a foam machine in the gallery space. Bubbles rapidly exuded from it, spreading off the table and spilling over onto the floor, adapting and changing shape depending on the objects it came into contact with. The amassing

dominant (police) structure. Therefore there is a distinct difference here between Tiravanija's work, taking place in a gallery, amongst gallerists and gallery visitors and the action *La plástica joven se dedica al Baseball* (*Young art dedicates itself to baseball*), if we go back to this work which took place in Cuba as described in chapter 1. Although the work creates **social** interaction through playing baseball, this is not its relational aspect. The active non-participation of artists, works to disrupt the distribution, or structuring of a system in a specific political framework in which art was dominantly considered as a **social** tool. In this way the **social** re-assembles through performing and re-performing itself.

IV

In chapter 1, I have described contemporary Cuban **society** through an analysis of the changing role of collectivity within what I have termed a 'solid' structure striving for a close-knit unity. But as we have seen previously, there are specific coordinates and ways in which the **social** is performed and **assemblages** maintained if we take globalised space as a **social** composition. How are forms of the **social** negotiated in artistic practice from within this context? In the UK we currently receive representations of contemporary collectivity that covers our entire political strata, through hacktivist culture, networked terrorist cells, flash mob advertising, Occupy, Avaaz and of David Cameron's Big **Society**. And of course, there can no longer be

bubbles were a physical representation of my depiction of the composition of social space as an assemblage, as described in the conclusion to this thesis.



fig. 4.30. *Assembling*, Installation view, 2015.

David Medalla

Medalla made a series of *Cloud Canyons* and *Bubble Machines*, kinetic sculptures of foam to give, 'tangible form to invisible forces... to find a model which would show the transformation of matter into energy' (Medalla, 1979:11). Medalla states personal memories and experiences as inspiration for these sculptures. These vary from a visit to a brewery in Edinburgh, the foaming blood from the mouth of a young, dying Filipino soldier during

fig. 2.7. Enemies of Good Art, *Pop-up Crèche at Tate Modern* (2011).



mention of the **social** without including **social** media and the speed with which online networking builds up a sense of **social** imaginary, of tweeting and retweeting information which is shared and repeated within communities of interest.

In the previous chapter, I discussed Free and the curatorial project *Towards Common Ground* to begin to examine how collectivity is perceived in the UK, as well as pointing to a new enthusiasm for revisiting and reevaluating the work of Marx. There is also currently a movement towards grouped practices of artists and cultural workers who reflexively address conditions of **association** and creativity. They respond to the limits and failure of markets and competition to produce either a vital contemporary art, or a dominant system that they feel is representative of their beliefs. As in Cuba, the way that the artists' **group** is gathered highlights how systems function under a specific ideology in the **society** in which they are based. The act of grouping attempts to form a space which can act as a model, encouraging new ways of working and which responds to the wider political context. Much of this work taking place in the UK assumes a pragmatic approach that, unlike Bourriaud's relational aesthetics or the Cuban **groups**, aims to have a direct impact on areas of political contention such as contemporary working conditions. The Carrotworkers' **Collective** and The Precarious Workers **Brigade** address, 'the conditions of free labour in contemporary societies' (Carrotworkers' Collective, n.d.). They create practical actions that help make hidden situations in cultural labour visible, such as

World War II, to his mother cooking a frothy, Philippine coconut desert called *guinataan*. The material of foam, allowed Medalla to explore mutating form, both as it amassed into a physical presence and from this state of matter to evaporation. The artist writes that he was interested in material, 'analogous to the smallest biological unit, the cell; materials that would be capable of multiplication' (1967:unpublished).

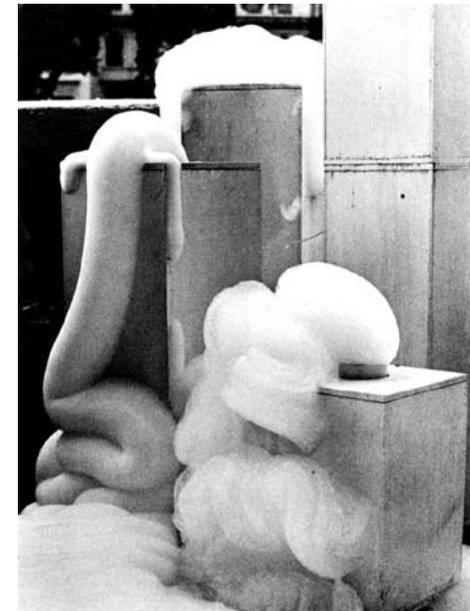


fig. 4.31. David Medalla, *Cloud Canyons, Bubblemobile no 2.*, Foam, kinetic sculpture, 1964.

Peter Sloterdijk

Peter Sloterdijk authored the *Sphären* (Spheres) trilogy of Bubbles (vol. I), Globes (vol. II) and

the publication and circulation of their text *The Counter Internship Guide* or the act of protesting to support cleaners in cultural institutions carry out their demand for sick pay. Enemies of Good Art function with a similar pragmatism. They work together to, ‘investigate the possibilities of combining art practice and family commitments’ (Enemies of Good Art, 2014) and have carried out actions such as running a pop-up creche at the Tate Modern to enable the **group** to take turns to look around the **exhibitions**, making child care a **group** responsibility.

Arts organisations in the UK are also beginning to **cluster** together in a response to cuts in arts funding and the consequent need for art spaces to find alternative sources of funding. The advocacy **group Common Practice** consists of nine small arts organisations which all started off as artist-run spaces. The **group** aims to foster, ‘the small-scale visual arts sector in London...to promote the value of the sector and its activities’ (Phillips, n.d.). This activity seeks to uncover new ways of becoming sustainable and to explore alternative methods for measuring the value of these organisations. As part of this ongoing research, three of **Common Practice**’s members, The Chisenhale Gallery, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire, are producing a programme over three years that questions, ‘How to work together?’ which enquires, ‘what we can do together that we could not do alone’ (e-flux, 2013). This demonstrates a drive for pragmatic **group** practice not only on the level of individual artists grouping together, but organisations employing new methods of

finally, Foam (vol.III). Sloterdijk comments that, ‘The Sphären project is about the creation of a specific human interior. On a metaphysical level, the meaning of my theory is that human beings never live outside of nature but always create a kind of existential space around themselves’ (Sloterdijk, 2009). In Foam, Sloterdijk develops the concept of manipulated ‘insulations’ such as space stations and greenhouses in which humans have sought to create environmental constructions of atmospheric living. This relationship between the external and the internal, nature and constructed space, refers to Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (written between 1927 and 1940, but unpublished), ‘According to Benjamin, the art of the bourgeois form of life was, in the 19th century, the effort to neutralize everything that is exterior and to create an interior that contains the totality’ (Sloterdijk, 2009). For Sloterdijk, the movement from Benjamin’s 19th Century Parisian arcades, to the contemporary shopping mall is marked by Crystal Palace in London, built for The Great Exhibition in 1851. The Crystal Palace functioned, during the exhibition, like one giant greenhouse, housing 14,000 exhibitors from around the world in a show of the latest manufactured products and technological advances, ‘the power of interiorization here reached a kind of historic maximum’ (Sloterdijk, 2009). Sloterdijk also spends a large part of *schäume* (foam) discussing the dense space of urban apartment living as fragile, interlocking micro-foam.

working in **collaboration**. Forms of **organisation**, such as a gallery, do not exist in and of themselves but through a recurrent interplay with other **assemblages** such as artists, the activity of other spaces and funding bodies, even if these **assemblages** are not directly interacting with the gallery, but are part of a wider mesh of activity. These structures are not units within one ‘world order’, which justifies their existence and provides a unidirectional flow of interaction or value, but are played out in relation to one another. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt writing for the advocacy **group Common Practice**, comments that there is a, ‘problematic perception that small arts organisations form a natural and fitting part of a continuum of development for artists and artworks... This implies a linear progression up the rungs of a ladder – the unidirectional nature of which not only construes bigger as better’ (2012:5). She argues that this is not the case, different sized organisations hold alternative functions to one another and feed the activity of the others in all directions. Understanding organisational structure in this manner allows us to reframe hierarchy into a more agglomerative format and to reassess value, making visible all stages of artistic development. This responds both to a need to re-present their function and influence in a system where footfall is crucial for funding and as an attempt to re-evaluate the terms through which creative and cultural policy is measured by analysing the structure in which they exist.

Just as in Cuba, artists’ **groups** in the UK are responding directly to their context.

Sloterdijk views these bubble units as insular monadic cells of self-care which amass into, ‘multiplicities of loosely touching cells of life-worlds’ (2007:64).

Friendship

Although ‘friendship’ as association is beyond the scope of this research, if you would like to research this form of gathering, please consider the following texts:

Maurice Blanchot (1971) *Friendship*

Celine Conderelli (2014) *The Company She Keeps*

Jacques Derrida (1997) *The Politics of Friendship*

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1580) *Of*

Friendship

Mark Vernon (2005) *The Philosophy of Friendship*

Mark Vernon (2006) *The Meaning of Friendship*

G

Gathering

Martin Heidegger

Heidegger’s *What is a Thing?* (1967) describes a ‘thing’ (see Bruno Latour under ‘collective’) as a ‘gathering’, ‘The old German word ‘thing’ (das Ding) means a gathering, and specifically a gathering to deliberate a matter under discussion, a contested matter’ (247).

Whereas in Cuba, artists' **group** practice rejects the politicised 'work **group**' or **brigade** model, all of the examples given above of activity currently taking place in the UK demonstrate that reassessing the conditions in which artists practice, often leads to the formation of practical, politically-orientated **groups**. This can be seen as an attempt to create nodes of commonality, reformulate **social** relations and/or to form micro-structures of engagement. Often these artists' **groups** utilise the visual and textual language of socialist collectivity¹⁷ and it is interesting to note that Rebecca Gordan-Nesbitt, who has written for **Common Practice**, also researches Cuban cultural policy after the revolution. Of course, unlike in Cuba, this language is being implemented in a context in which this is *not* the dominant discourse. With regards to the artists' **groups** mentioned previously, on the one hand, it could seem as if these approaches are not creating new forms of doing and making through their form, unlike **Common Practice** who are experimenting with new types of **association**. However, the activity of these **groups** does aim to change ways in which wider arts cultural practice is carried out by tracing often hidden elements of arts production and labour methods, in this way impacting on imbedded dominant practices.

V

17 Such as calling themselves 'collectives' and 'brigades', using slogans such as 'Interns Unite!' and the Carrot Worker's Collective symbol, for example, is a raised, clenched fist, grasping a carrot.

Glossary

Until I, I Know you Better

As described in the introduction to this thesis, for *Until I, I Know You Better* (2013), Rivas Velásquez, Schwab and I expressed our collective reading of Richard Sennett's *Together* by constructing a glossary which we populated with our research and projected into the space. We also used this glossary as a way to make content and explore the text with other artists. This visual strategy has since gone on to influence the construction of this *Typology of Association*.



fig. 4.32. This Book, *Visual Glossary*, Projection, 2013.

Grammar

Paolo Virno

The title of Virno's text *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004), hints at the task he carries out in the text, to broaden out our understanding

In this chapter, I have been discussing how artists' **groups** in the UK work to reassemble the **social** in which they are currently positioned. But another question here is how the **social** is currently discussed, documented and historicised within the wider art system of theorists and art historians. This is important as it makes us assess the temporal with regards to **social** space and recognises history too in terms of composition and **assemblage** rather than as a separate abstract entity. Claire Bishop provides a temporal framework for collaborative and participatory practice in *Artificial Hells* (2012) by designating the '**social** turn' as a trend towards this type of artistic activity. She argues that this turn is actually a 're-turn' and identifies three periods where an emphasis on the **social** has been of particular importance. Bishop writes that, from the Western European perspective, 'the **social** turn in contemporary art can be contextualised by two previous historical moments, both synonymous with political upheaval and movements for **social** change: the historic avant-garde in Europe circa 1917, and the so-called 'neo' avant-garde leading to 1968' (2012:3). She suggests that these waves of **social** persist in contemporary art from the 1990s to the present day. Bishop writes that this reappearance is concurrent with the fall of communism and that these three periods of sociality in art, the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde and the current movement, 'form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of history' (2013:3). She opines that these moments run concurrently with times of socio-political instability or upheaval,

of the term 'multitude'. Virno dates the concept of multitude back to Spinoza, arguing that the term lost out to Hobbes' 'the people' in the seventeenth century, 'thus the "people" have enjoyed the privilege of a suitable lexicon. With regard to the multitude, we are left, instead, with the absolute lack of codification, with the absence of a clear conceptual vocabulary' (2004:44). Virno describes the task of producing the multitude's lexicon as a vital and exciting task, which can only be carried out by the multitude itself.

Group

APG (Artist Placement Group)

Artist Placement Group was devised and coordinated by Jonathan Latham and Barbara Steveni during the 1960s and 70s. APG set up placements for artists, or 'incidental people', as they were termed, within corporations, government bodies and other institutions ranging from factories to the London Zoo. This exchange took place firstly for a trial period and then a longer placement, for which the host organisation would pay between £2,000 and £3,000. Claire Bishop points to this activity being a forerunner to New Labour's method of quantifying the social utility of art and the use of artists by management consultants, as well as being a precursor to the prominence of artists residencies (Artforum, 2010:237). However, for

when **society** is being re-evaluated or when national identity is in crisis. Curator Okwui Enwezor writes that, 'such crises force appraisals of conditions of production, re-evaluation of the nature of artistic work, and reconfiguration of the position of the artist in relation to economic, **social** and political institutions' (2007:225). This proposes a **social** history of art that demonstrates shifts in how art is perceived, caused by different reverberations in thought and action such as a *zeitgeist*, a move in **collective** consciousness or a change in national identity. Yet, the appearance of the **social** in an art historical framework is not clearcut. Stimson and Sholette (2007) delineate a period dating from the end of World War II in 1945, to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, as a second period of **collective** artistic activity. This era dates from the implementation of the Marshall plan and a new period of international politics, to the end of the Cold War era. Overlaying such as this suggests that the '**social** turn' is more of an on-going drive than Bishop outlines and that perhaps a neat historical account may not be so easily produced, that repetitions submerge and reappear.

The repetitiousness of the **social** drive in art, of artists consciously grouping together and of critics and art historians electing to focus on collaborative and **collective** practices, is not merely due to trends in art history resurfacing. As described previously, art historians have made connections between the **social** in artistic practice and actual political models and movements by pinning the appearance of

Latham and Steveni, the aim of APG was to produce social change through a slow 'time-based' process of interaction and attitudinal shift. APG wrote that:

...The industrial situation: Industry is now on the point of realising that it needs an individual who is

- Independent of commercial motive
- Independent of the industrial argument
- Engaged on an undefined activity that permit him to 'speak' to all levels (APG, 1970)

Latham devised a measure of value for this approach called the 'delta unit', which he believed would chart the gradual shift created by ideas through the amount of people influenced and the amount of people effected by such activity.

APG was criticised both for its exhibitionary approach and its lack of political radicalness. For example, the exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, *Inno70* (1970-1), has been said to be the worst attended exhibition in the gallery's history, which was blamed on its boardroom aesthetic and its preponderance of documentation. One of the spaces in *Inno70*, 'the sculpture' worked as a site of discourse in which several meetings were held over the course of the exhibition, producing the model of exhibition as site of discourse rather than showroom, which has been so influential on exhibitionary practice today. APG did act with political party neutrality and did associate the implementation of placements as a political activity. But Bishop argues that this was not necessarily a weakness:

group practices in contemporary art to specific political upheaval. However, the reoccurrence of the **social** also responds to a need to ‘redistribute the sensible’ (Rancière, 2000), either making apparent or re-imagining a dominant system. Although it is relevant to consider a wider context for movements in art, **social** space requires a more complex framework than a linear, Modernist approach of the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde and so on. For Rancière, delineating art in terms of current categorisation such as the ‘Modern’ creates a series of false distinctions. With Modernism, for example, the ‘break’ from one movement to the next and need for renewal does not actually change the way that Modernist art operates in **society** or how its function is understood and played out each time this occurs. He writes that, ‘[t]he notion of aesthetic modernity conceals - without conceptualising it in the least - the singularity of a particular regime of the arts, that is to say a specific type of connection between ways of producing works of art or developing practices, forms of visibility that disclose them, and ways of conceptualising the former and the later’ (Rancière, 2000:20). I take this to be key for how I have been exploring the concept of the **social** in relation to **group** practices; the relationships and **social** interactions amongst artists and cultural producers, secondly the active drawing together of ideas, media, colours, sound, **people**, objects etc. into **assemblages** and lastly, maintaining or reassembling structural **assemblages** of how art is produced and perceived through the act of composing **social** space. As Rancière points out, and as I have explored previously through a discussion on dark matter, the production

It is only because APG lacked an identifiable (party) political position that it could make such manoeuvres towards power, in all its ambiguous openness’ (2012:176).



fig. 4.33. APG, *Inno70*, Installation view, 1970-1.



Lexicon

Joëlle Tuerlinckx

Joëlle Tuerlinckx’s *Lexicon* accompanied her retrospective exhibition *WOR(L)D(K) IN PROGRESS?* (2014) at the Arnolfini, Bristol. In the text, Tuerlinckx provides a system for demonstrating her thinking processes and practice, a framework for both matter and material. Although alphabetically ordered, the lexicon does not pretend to objectively define in the manner of a dictionary. The text offers a structure for expanded poetic accounts and

of artworks and the development of certain practices are in constant relation to the wider **social** space and its distribution. In other words, at any given moment there are coordinates for producing art and systems for how these coordinates are understood, depending on how the space is currently laid out. Rather than this **social** space being linear or unidirectional, Rancière depicts it as, ‘a co-presence of heterogeneous temporalities’ (2000:26).

Peter Osborne’s concept of the ‘contemporary’ is useful to touch on here as it layers temporality into a disjointed present, a con-temporary, or ‘with’ the temporal, rather than being ‘in’ the container of time, or passed by it. Osborne conceives of the ‘contemporary’ as, ‘a *single historical time of the present*, as a living present: a **common**, albeit internally disjunctive, present historical time of human lives’ (2013:22). He uses the appearance of the ‘contemporary’ as a term applied to art to highlight this idea, arguing that it emerges as ‘three competing periodisations’ which occur firstly in Eastern Europe under socialism in reaction to capitalist modernism and then after the Second World War, particularly in the States; secondly in the West in the 60s with a move away from object-based art; and finally, after 1989 with the end of the Cold War, a period in which we find increased communication and travel and the rise of global biennale-ism. In this way, the concept of the contemporary emerges in a disjunctive timeline, yet this multiple envisaging can be held and seen to make sense together as lived experiences. We can see that this fragmented appearance of

personal meaning rather than the scientific rigour that such logical ordering suggests. Entries run from ‘*’ to ‘WORLDHOLE’ and includes entries such as:

ONDULÉ [UNDULATED] line with undulating curves marking the time passed (in a train), insisting on the repetitive nature of a situation, an action (19:2012).

I believe that her lexicon acts in the same way that she views the exhibition, ‘a perpetual redefinition of things, a sort of permanent and necessary form of refutation’ (2012:10). Although the lexicon visually appears final, it acts as documentation, but in the form of a diary or sketchbook that captures a process of thinking rather than fixing it.

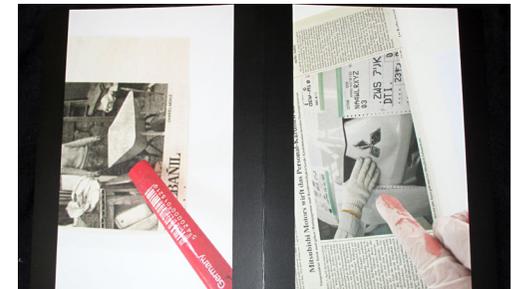


fig. 4.34. Joëlle Tuerlinckx’s *Lexicon*, Publication, 2012

Stephen Wright

In *Towards a Lexicon of Usership* Stephen Wright writes, ‘...since we can neither think nor even name art without appropriate terms, retooling our conceptual vocabulary has become a crucial task, one that can only be undertaken by fostering terminological cross-pollination with other avenues of human activity’ (2014:1).

that I have been developing as the **social**.

Yet, how to deal with this vast, seething **social** space fractured from concepts of territory or time and developed within a context dominated by notions of global flux? Many current art practices have taken up transitory or itinerant approaches, as highlighted by art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva, who writes that these artists, ‘adopt a tactic marked by cultural nomadism to escape the perverse consequence of tribal identity and, at the same time, claim the creation of what is symbol against the commodification of global economy. Thus, artists exercise their right to diaspora, their freedom to wander across the boundaries of various cultures, **nations** and media forms. They refuse the idea of belonging and choose to deny the value of space, habitat and related anthropology...’ (2008:44). Whether the disjointed temporal analysis of Osborne or compositional **social** space, our current imaginary has certainly moved away from previous solid **assemblages** and boundaries. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000), sociologist Zygmunt Bauman explores the terminology associated with states of matter similar to the ‘solid’, ‘fluid’ and ‘foamy’ of this thesis as a tool to describe the flows and movements of capital and labour in time and space under a global systematic structure. This challenges how the texture of the spatial **social** is perceived from within Western, contemporary coordinates. Bauman replaces the term ‘postmodernity’ with ‘liquid modernity’; a state of globalisation in which a free market loosens regulation and moves fluidly with a constant need

Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari

The conclusion of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) is structured as a short lexicon of their own terms. used throughout the text. Rather than an alphabetical structuring, the lexicon runs from ‘S’ for ‘Strata, stratification’ to ‘M’ for abstract machines, immediately dislodging the reader from the accepted norms of a lexical system. For Deleuze and Guattari, concepts are not set constructs that must be outlined and adhered to, but can form outlines which expand with their reading. As noted in ‘Assemblage’ under Deleuze and Guattari, this belief runs contrary to ‘arbolescent thought’ that acts to edify meaning. Rather than the usual task of a dictionary or glossary to clarify and consolidate meaning, they want to allow for movement, for the meaning to shift and expand into new paths of definition. In the introduction to *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Claire Colebrook writes:

Deleuze, far from believing that one might return thought to life and overcome the submission to system, recognises that the creation of a system is the only way one can really live non-systematically. One creates a minimal or dynamic order, both to avoid absolute deterritorialisation on the one hand and reactive repetition of the already-ordered on the other’ (2010:5).



for change, creating a remote and unreachable system which is hard to identify. In this way, hegemonic discourses are not only enacted through solid **association**, but through evasive, fluid **association** as well. Bauman describes liquid modernity as a move from the solidity of machinery and materiality, a transformation from hardware to software. He writes, ‘Fluids... neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions... fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy...’ (Bauman, 2000:2). I would argue, however, that the fluid movement in contemporary **society** is not just made up of dislocating transnational, transitional, transacting flux and flow. For example, we are threatened in political discourse in the UK that we cannot tax big business too much, or decrease bankers’ bonuses, otherwise they will up and leave the UK, they are not fixed and can easily displace themselves to another part of the global **network**, they are not committed to one location. However, this is not the same for those who are less wealthy in Western **society**, who are rooted to national labour **networks**, but who are faced with the precarious working conditions caused by the loosening of labour structure such as zero hours contracts, freelance work and unpaid internships. The reverse seems to happen in the global south, where the poorest in **society** are forced to follow fluid work patterns, uprooting to where there is a need for labour. For example, there is currently an estimated nine million workforce of migrant workers

Manifesto

Vicente Huidobro
MANIFESTOS
MANIFESTO
MANIFEST
MANIFES
MANIFE
MANIF
MANI
MAN
MA
M

Vicente Huidobro, *MANIFESTOS* manifest (1925)

Freee

For more on Freee’s *Manifesto for a New Public* see chapter 2 and the entry ‘Public’

Assembling

For more on *Assembling* and the manifesto, see chapter 3.

Anthony Huberman

In *How to Behave Better* (2014) the curator Anthony Huberman, rather than focusing on what artists make, considers how they behave. He constructs a list of attributes for artists and curators to follow in a world where the artists who are given careers, are those that know how to win. As an alternative to this approach, he outlines the following methodology:

in Saudi Arabia (BBC, 2013). This discrepancy has been pointed out by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with regards to movement where for some, transnationality comes into being through the fluidity of global movement whereas for others, the necessity of global upheaval makes national borders very apparent and rigid, 'Borders are easily crossed *from* metropolitan countries, whereas attempts to enter from the so-called peripheral countries encounter bureaucratic and political frontiers, altogether more difficult to permeate' (2003:16).

I would argue then, that rather than one united global agglomeration, there is no 'global' and no capitalism 'out there', but they are made up of actual objects, actions and interactions which multiply and create 'natural', hegemonic ways of being and doing, but that these are lived through in the same space differently. Rather than depicting current **social** space as a fluid movement in which artists slip between national identities, it is important to recognise that the world is more global for some than others, which can also be seen, for example, if we look back at this research's focus of the Cuban context in which it has been a considerable luxury that artists often receive exit visas to leave the country when other citizens do not, although these regulations are now relaxing (Guardian, 2013). The perception of a fluid, global art world of biennial after biennial gives an impression of movement, flow and fluidity, which actually veils the incredible privilege of money and time required to float between Art Basel, Documenta, or the Beijing, Havana, Jerusalem, São

1. Follow the Life of an Idea
2. Be Uncontemporary
3. Remember that You Don't Know
4. Wear Your Heart on your Sleeve
5. Speak Frankly
6. Insist on Talking Face to Face

Fischli and Weiss



fig. 4.36. Fischli and Weiss, *How to Work Better*, Wall mural, 1991.

Mass

Gregory Sholette

In *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (2011), Sholette uses the concept of the 'missing mass' to explore artistic activity that takes place outside of the spotlight, in other words outside of institutions and recognised artistic and cultural practices. It is

Paolo, Thessaloniki or Venice biennial. Globalisation creates a condition of a layered, textured space at once shared and experienced through different consistencies.

The way that the **social** has been represented in this chapter is perhaps dizzying, from the personal interactions between *Assembling* artists, to artists' **group** practice in the UK and the flux and flow of global movements. This, however, has not taken place mistakenly, but draws attention to the different scales in which the **social** is discussed, between micro and macro levels as Latour points to at the beginning of this chapter. Rather than understanding this space to be obfuscated by a rapacious global capitalism 'out there' (Debord, 1967), or to be soothed by experimenting with and reformulating **social** relations through art practices (Bourriaud, 1998), all of these **social** spaces must be seen as enacted and interrelated. They are **assemblages** which can be disrupted through analysing and re-envisaging ways of doing and making.

this 'dark matter' that actually supports and gives rise to visible artistic activity, but that goes unseen and remains obscure.

Sigmund Freud

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, forms of crowd psychology (Le Bon, Canetti) began to appear in response to factors such as increased urbanisation, a rise in far right politics as well as Chartism in Britain, the Russian Revolution and French Syndicalist agitation (Connerton, 1988). Freud described mass psychology, rather than that of individuals, as releasing unconscious drives, the activation of the 'primitive', as he demarcates it, which is normal hidden in the unconscious of the individual. He writes that the mass, or crowd, is not interested in searching for truth, but thrives on illusion. He continues to say that, '...when people are together in a mass all individual inhibitions fall away and all the cruel, brutal, destructive instincts [appear]'. However, he then writes that the masses', 'ethical behaviour can rise as far above that level as it can ascend below it' ([1907]2004:26).

Group Material

For the work *Mass* (1985) Group Material invited 200 artists to contribute a 12-by-12-inch flat object. They placed these objects amongst items of the same shape taken from pop culture, such as album sleeves and magazine adverts to spell out the word 'MASS' (this also relates to Richard Kostelanetz' entry under



Chapter 3: Exhibition

In the previous chapter, I have argued for a primacy of space over the temporal in a discussion about artists' **group** practice and the **social**. It is in the composition of this space that the political potentiality of doing and making lies and this emphasis contrasts with the conception of the linear progression of art movements. As Rancière (2000) has shown, this composition is an *aesthetic* task in terms of arranging space and, as has been demonstrated by Latour (2005), it is also a *practice* that must be constantly maintained. In this case, composition takes on a new degree of importance, not only this but the critical capacity to consider, as Latour writes in *An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'* (2010), 'what is well or badly constructed, well or badly composed. What is to be composed may, at any point, be decomposed' (2010:474). In this chapter I will think through the compositions within

'Assembling').

Group Material



fig. 4.37. Group Material, *Mass*, Mixed media, 1985-1986.

C. Wright Mills

C. Wright Mills, writing in the late 50s and 60s, depicted North American society as moving towards an ever more mass-like state. In *The Power Elite* (1959) he explores the difference between the formation of society as 'mass' and as 'public' (also see C. Wright Mills below under 'Public' for this comparison). The distinction between these two states is caused by the flow and direction of communication, as well as the ability to act on opinion, between those in power and those who are not. The 'mass' occurs as the gap widens between those making decisions and the rest of the population.

C. Wright Mills outlines four main societal imbalances that produce the mass:

- (1) far fewer people express opinions than receive them...
- (2) The communications that prevail are so organised that it is difficult or impossible for the

an **exhibition** as expanded **collective** and how the **social** could be produced in order to provide neither solid nor fluid interactions. It looks at the contemporarily debated terms ‘**public**’, ‘**common**’ and the ‘**multitude**’, which will lead into my conception of ‘**foam**’ as outlined in the conclusion. What are the political and artistic potentialities for these modes of grouping and how has my practice engaged with this exploration? This chapter will consider **group** practices and forming collectivities through ‘matter’; both in the sense of material or substance as well as the issue or topic that gives rise to this grouping. What produces collectivities, is it the cohering of the **group** around a subject, or an issue that draws a **group** around it? I will also use *Assembling* as curatorial practice throughout this chapter to continually reignite the questions of ‘*who?*’ and ‘*how?*’ within **group** practices by discussing the issue of participation. How can flexible models of **group** practice be achieved in a negotiation of stability and flux, with a movement from solid, liquid, to **foam**?

II

To begin, I will outline the continued forms and trials that composing an expanded **collective** through *Assembling* has given rise to. My preoccupation with the space of text as **assemblage**, as well as within artists’ **groups** or the **exhibition**, has continually led me to the ‘**manifesto**’ throughout this research, beginning with my interaction with Freee’s *Manifesto for a New Public* (2012) as outlined in chapter

individual to answer back immediately or with any effect, (3) The realisation of opinion in action is controlled by authorities who organise and control the channels of such action, (4) The mass has no autonomy from institutions [...] (304)

Joëlle Tuerlinckx

Artist Joëlle Tuerlinckx in her *Lexicon* (2012) (see above in ‘Lexicon’) includes the entry ‘mass’ as follows:

MASSE [MASS] ball of play dough to throw on the floor, once, or several times, while the dough is still fresh (the first one was thrown on the floor about thirty times). It will be there, on the floor, in the place and site of their respective throws that the MASSes will be left to dry for the time necessary for them to take their final shape’ (17)

Multitude

Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri

In the text *Multitude* from 2006, Hardt and Negri suggest that terms such as ‘mass’ and ‘the people’ are too reductive in their tendency to form one identity. They write that the multitude is neither made by the herd-like people, nor capitalistic individuals, but is composed of *singularities*, ‘a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different’ (2006:99). The multitude is neither a united entity nor an indifferent crowd but ‘an active... internally different, multiple social subject’ (2006:100). Whereas capital and the state aim to draw multiple bodies into one unity, the multitude mobilises

1. Interestingly, when describing this work, the mere mention of a **manifesto** produced a sense of rejection for artists in Cuba who are used to the repetitive use of the Communist **Manifesto** as sloganeering. The **manifesto** acts as the ‘solid’ **assemblage**, the ‘**body**’ of text. As The Serpentine point out in the pamphlet for their *Manifesto Marathon* (2008), in which a series of **manifestos** were performed:

1. The historic avant-gardes of the early 20th century and the neo-avant-gardes in the 1960s and 1970s created a time of radical **manifestos**
2. We now live in a time that is more atomised and has less cohesive art movements

Latour would argue that we no longer live simply ‘in time’ at all, ‘just like the time of avant-gardes or that of the Great Frontier, the time of **manifestos** has long passed. Actually, it is the time of *time* that has passed: this strange idea of a vast army moving forward, preceded by the most daring innovators and thinkers, followed by a **mass** of slower and heavier **crowds**’ (2010:472). Now the **manifesto** is performed not as statement of intent, but more as a conceptual device. There is no longer any faith in a Modernist actioning of a future Utopia. This grand politics has been discredited making the **manifesto** a site of playful derision, as seen in the **exhibition** PIGDOGANDMONKEYFESTOS (2014), which through a, ‘tragi-comedy of baroque minimalist clownery’ celebrated ‘the somewhat foolish idea of declaring your intentions to the world with the hope of changing it...’ (Doyle, Shaun & Mallinson, Molly, 2014). This, then, poses the question, if not through a **manifesto**, how can we publicly manifest intentions and to declare beliefs within an artists’ **group**?

that which is shared and produced in common. Hardt and Negri believe that it is only through this mode of political engagement that a true democracy, a democracy by everyone for everyone, can be formed.

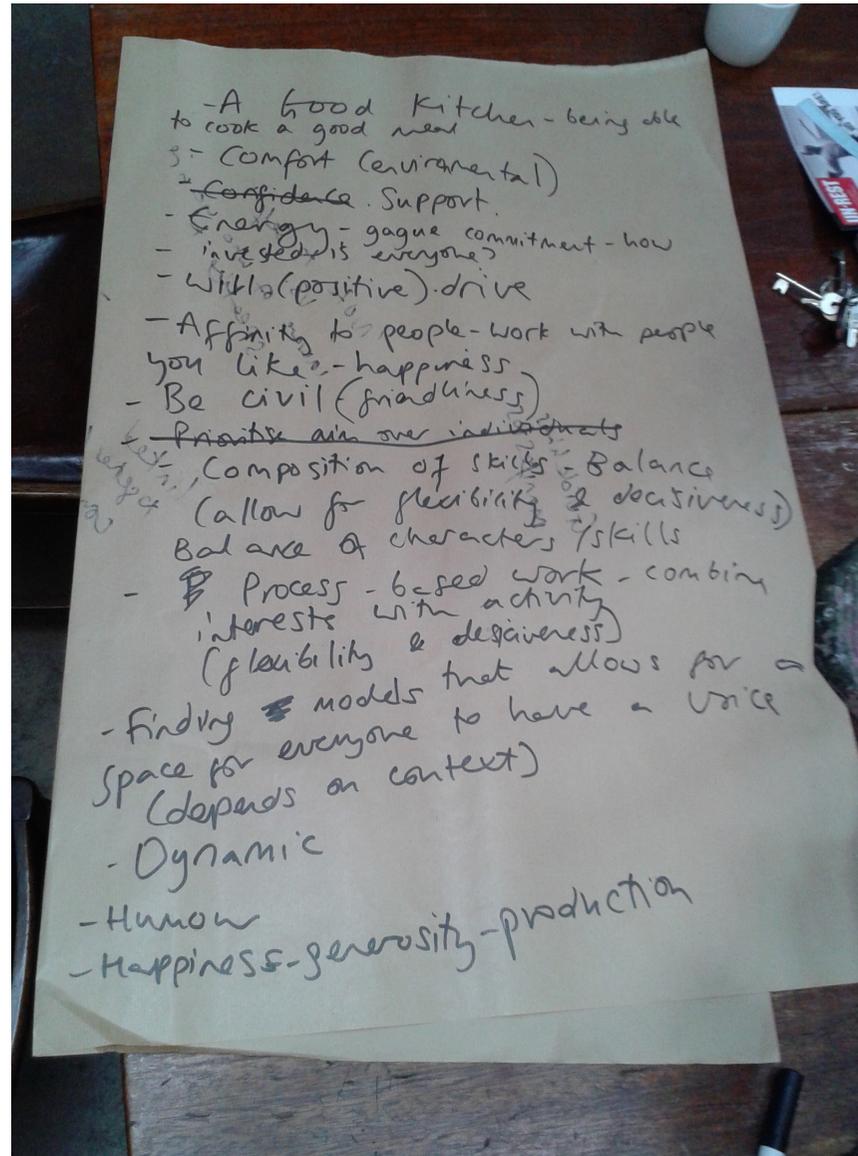
Spinoza

Although the term ‘Multitude’ has recently been taken up by theorists Hardt and Negri, the concept first became developed in Spinoza’s *Tractatus Politicus* (1677). Spinoza, writing during the same period as Thomas Hobbes (see Hobbes’ entry under ‘Body’) understood that the individual did not exist by itself, but rather through an encounter of singularities. Warren Montag in *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries* (1999), writes that for Spinoza, each entity is, ‘made of parts themselves composed of parts ad infinitum. From this perspective, the individual is no more an organic whole than “society” or “the community”’ (1999:69). Spinoza believed that the multitude could not be ignored by the individual, it must be engaged with, not through duty but through necessity. Montag writes that, ‘we are condemned to do so. Their power is the condition of our power, their weaknesses only weaken us’ (1999:82). The term ‘multitude’ fell out of favour for the Hobbesian ‘people’, as described in the Paolo Virno entry below.

Paolo Virno

For Virno the multitude is opposed to the

fig 3.1. *Assembling* Manifesto, *Assembling* residency, 2014.



As mentioned in ‘**Assembling** Dark Matter’ in chapter 2, *Assembling* also ended up producing a **manifesto** of sorts, but one of much more modest intention than that of the Modernists. Instead of reaching for grandiose national futures, this **manifesto** is located in the local, thinking through how a **group** of present artists might work together. The **manifesto** remained in note format, complete with crossings out to demonstrate disagreement and negotiation, the eschewing of false consensus and the attention of remaining as flexible a grouping as possible.

However, it is this yearning for flexibility, balanced with the desire for the formation of a coherent **gathering** that has caused tension throughout the project for me as a curator. I have wanted to relinquish authorial activity, yet have activated and set the grounds for the *Assembling* project in the first place, along with the added sense of personal investment due to the fact it has been a key part of my PhD project, a tool for me to explore the theory within this thesis. The **manifesto** suggested that the ‘matter of concern’, or issue developing between the artists became the actual process of **assembling** itself. As previously described, after the residency I still felt a frustration between participants who were willing when face-to-face, but would not engage fully with activity online or between meeting. **Collective** inactivity led me to independently produce an *Assembling* zine (which can be found on page 42 of the *Assembling* portfolio). I will not repeat here all the information that I have written about this process under ‘**Assembling** Dark Matter’ on page 137 in chapter 2, but

concept of the people, which arose from Hobbesian thinking and which gained precedence over Spinoza’s ‘multitude’ in the seventeenth century. The ‘people’ can only exist as part of the state and binds together acting as a unity. The multitude, however, appears as the state diminishes and has a more complex set of internal interactions. It neither acts as a divorced set of individuals nor a united One. According to Virno, the multitude allows for both a sense of shared commonality while at the same time refining, rather than suppressing, the individual. Virno writes that the multitude shares a ‘common place’ in the movement of language and intellect, a knowledge that is pre-individualisation. Whereas the ‘people’ belong to a territorialised state, the multitude carries the non-territorial ‘common place’ with them as a public resource.

Lygia Pape

This image of Pape’s *Divisor* (1968), or ‘Divider’ in English, took place four years after the military coup in Brazil during a period of suppression and persecution. It seems to be a work that considers collective alternatives and a way to activate or mobilise those drawn together in the voluminous diameter of the material. Originally, it was going to be shown in a gallery, whose walls would be mirrored with a hot current of air blowing from below and a cold one from above, ‘[i]n this way you would feel divided thermally and physically’ (Pape, 1980:45). The exhibition never took place, so

fig 3.2. Katie Schwab receives the *Assembling* Zine, What's App screen shot, 2015.



just to remind the reader that I wanted to post around something tangible that would continue to perform our process of circulation, but in a physical format. Each page contains images, quotes, or graphics that I considered were relevant from each artists' practice for the project, or thoughts that had risen out of our conversations together. The material is in both Spanish and English and was sent out to Glasgow, London, Mexico City and Salford. One of the reasons for calling the information posted a 'zine', despite its small circulation (i.e. between the *Assembling* artists) was to reference the *Assembling* zines compiled and distributed by Richard Kostelanetz, as described in the *Typology*. This could be said to be a form of 'leaderless' publishing in which anything is accepted, un-curated in terms of 'quality', 'taste', 'coherence', or other subjective categories. However, of course this process is very much led by Kostelanetz in terms of conception, structure and organisation. My *Assembling* zine was obviously in no way an effort to democratise processes, whether through content or structure, however, it was an attempt to physically demonstrate my normally hidden activity of persuading, explaining, **gathering**, introducing and sharing. In a lull of joint momentum, it acted to manifest some of the 'dark matter', as described in chapter 2, of curatorial, or indeed organisational, activity.

The *Assembling* zine demonstrated a tension between the need to propel and act, against the desire for a democratic, equal space of interaction. From this arises the question of participation, which will appear throughout this chapter. What makes

Pape transported the *Divisor* to a favela near her house where local children participated in the work. It forms a fabric of singularities who are separate, yet must act together in order to move or progress. Although predating Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude, it seems to play out their description of, 'an active... internally different, multiple social subject' (2006:100).



fig. 4.38. Lygia Pape, *Divisor*, Performance, 1968

N

Nation

Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), claims that 'the nation' is an anomaly in Marxist writing and that the theme of nationalism has never produced any grand

fig. 3.3. Do we want to use Loomio for Assembling?, Loomio, 2015.

The screenshot shows a Loomio proposal page. The browser address bar contains the URL: `g/d/Twb2JO7z/welcome-please-click-here-to-start-bienvenido-hagase-click-aca-para-empezar`. The search bar contains the text "podemos". The user profile "Amy McDonnell" is visible in the top right.

Proposal Text:

As you see, Loomio is an online platform for collaborative decision making. We hope to use it as a tool to:

1. Begin a material dialogue between our practices, using the platform to ask questions and share our work with the Assembling group.
2. We want Loomio to act as the 'curator' for our Assembling exhibition, to make both practical and creative decisions.

Take a look around!
Amy and Maurice xx

Hola a todos,
Bienvenidos a Loomio!
Como lo ves, Loomio es una plataforma en linea para hacer decisiones en colaboracion. Queremos usar Loomio para:

1. Empezar un dialogo entre nuestros practicas, usando la plataforma para hacer preguntas y compartir nuestro trabajo con el grupo.
2. Queremos que Loomio funciona como el 'curador' de nuestra Assembling Exhibition, para hacer las decisiones practicas y creativas.

Por favor exploralo!
Amy and Maurice xx

6 months ago · Like

Previous decisions

Do we want to use Loomio for Assembling?

closed
Closed 5 months ago
Proposed by Amy McDonnell 6 months ago

What was the outcome of this proposal?

Publish outcome

Please vote if you are in agreement with using Loomio for our Assembling.

Agree (5)
Abstain (0)
Disagree (0)
Block (0)

71% of members stated their position (5/7)

Positions

- 👍 **Amy McDonnell** I think this is a really practical tool for making decisions for the exhibition and to share with others across distances.
- 👍 **Maurice Carlin**
- 👍 **julika gittner**
- 👍 **Scott Schwager**
- 👍 **Luis Gárciga** I'm agree, but in any moment I can change my opinion.

Comments:

- 👍 **Amy McDonnell** created a proposal: *Do we want to use Loomio for Assembling?* 6 months ago
- 👍 **Maurice Carlin** agreed. 6 months ago
- 👍 **julika gittner** agreed. 6 months ago

or invites **people** to participate in an *assembling*? What drives the decision to participate or not and in which spaces? And indeed, what is it to participate?

As a way to promote more active participation in the grouping activity amongst *Assembling* artists, while at the same time attempting to prevent a stalemate between an authorial withdrawal of curatorship and the progression of the process, Maurice suggested that Loomio could act as the ‘curator’ for an **exhibition**. Loomio is an online platform which allows collaborative decisions to be made by setting up discussions and votes between members of the **group**. It is currently used mainly by activist **groups**, including many from the Spanish, grassroots political party *Podemos* as a way to make, track and visualise organisational processes. Once signed in to Loomio, you can set up a discussion, which appears on the lefthand side of the screen and can initiate votes which appear on the right. The platform offered a way to make the **exhibition** manifest and agreed upon, which I hoped would stimulate participation in the organisational aspect of the show and in this way, the *Assembling* grouping itself. At the residency Julika had suggested using the site of **exhibition** as a ‘material dialogue’ to continue our meandering online exchange in physical space through making. By using Loomio as a platform to share practice, we hoped that this activity would filter through into the period of **exhibition**. In actual fact, there were similar issues to those that arose in the email chain. Although information had been pleasingly stored in one place rather than the fragmented space

thinkers. There is a disparity between the fervour and violence caused in the name of the nation and our actual understanding of what this concept really is. Anderson warns against accepting ‘nation’, as being inherent to identity. He posits that all such relations are imagined, ‘*imagined*’ because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the idea of their communion [...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined’ (2006:6). Yet, he believes that there are no ‘true’ forms of community that stand as a solid alternative to the nation. Instead, ‘communities are to be distinguished [...] by the style in which they are imagined’ (2006:6).

Network

‘Network’ has been a highly-influential term for contemporary gathering, but one which has largely been beyond the scope of this thesis. It is a term that is often associated with the influence of digital technology on social space. For more on the concept of the network society, I would suggest Jan van Dijk’s *The Network Society* (1981) and Manuel Castells’ *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996). For more on the influence of the concept of network on contemporary art, please see *Networks* (2014) from the Whitechapel Documents in

of an inbox, which was useful, the labour of producing content to fuel discussion and set up votes largely fell to Maurice and I, despite a unanimous vote of ‘yes’ on whether to use Loomio or not.

It is interesting to note similar tensions between want for flexibility and the desire for organisation in the language of new online protest organisations such as the environmental campaigners 350 degrees, ‘If you attend a 350 action for the first time, you might be surprised that there are probably no 350.org staff running the show. 350 is a movement more than an organization. We use distributed, grassroots organizing to run adaptive, locally-driven campaigns in every corner of the globe’ (350, n.d.). There is a need to retain a grassroots feel, a spontaneous action produced through each individual, yet it is functioning as a well run, expanding, branded and media-savvy organisation. This is not a criticism of intention or function, but it suggests a wider issue between how larger **networks** feel they must be portrayed and the reality of the labour invested into these projects. The solidity of this organisational labour seems to weigh down a fluid, spontaneous image. It also points to wider tensions between the desire for inclusion and/or equal participation and the way that groupings are organised. Such issues have faced a long history within leaderless movements such as the working and consciousness raising **groups** of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the late sixties and the seventies or more recently, Occupy. In this way, the question of participation, ‘who participates, to what extent

Contemporary Art series edited by Lars Bang Larsen.

Actor-Network-Theory

For a short introduction to the network performing the social as proposed by Bruno Latour, please see the Latour entries under ‘collective’ and ‘society’.



Open Organisation

Critical Practice

Critical Practice (CP) takes its own organisation as one of its sites of critical engagement. The group, or cluster, often adheres to open organisation guidelines for working practices. On a link from the Critical Practice wiki page, to that of the P2P foundation, who dedicate themselves to studying and documenting peer-to-peer practices, an open organisation is described as:

an organisation open to anyone who agrees to abide by its purpose and principles, with complete transparency and clearly defined decision making structures, ownership patterns, and exchange mechanisms; designed, defined, and refined, by all members as part of a continual transformative process (P2P foundation, 2015).

Working processes include decision-making by rough consensus, transparency of working

fig. 3.4. Timeline of *Assembling* artists' availability, 2015.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1		Availability	Jan 6th	Jan 8th	Jan 7th	Jan 8th	Jan 9th	Jan 10th	Jan 11th	Jan 12th	Jan 13th	Jan 14th	Jan 15th	Jan 16th	Jan 17th
2	Amy	Available for 2 WEEKS													
3	Julie	Available for 2 WEEKS													
4	Katie	Available 1 WEEKEND													
5	Luis	Available online													
6	Maurice	Available for 2 WEEKS													
7	Scott	Available for 2 WEEKS													
8	Karem														
9	James														
10															
11															
12															
13															
14															
15															
16															
17															
18															
19															

	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD	AE
1	Jan 18th	Jan 19th	Jan 20th	Jan 21st	Jan 22nd	Jan 23rd	Jan 24th	Jan 25th	Jan 26th	Jan 27th	Jan 28th	Jan 29th	Jan 30th	Jan 31st	Feb 1st	Feb 2nd
2						Cookhouse Gallery Unavailable										
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																
8																
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13																
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19																

	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK	AL	AM	AN	AO	AP	AQ	AR	AS
1	Feb 3rd	Feb 4th	Feb 5th	Feb 6th	Feb 7th	Feb 8th	Feb 9th	Feb 10th	Feb 11th	Feb 12th	Feb 13th	Feb 14th	Feb 15th	Feb 16th
2														
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	AT	AU	AV	AW	AX	AY	AZ	BA	BB	BC	BD	BE	BF	BG
1	Feb 17th	Feb 18th	Feb 19th	Feb 20th	Feb 21st	Feb 22nd	Feb 23rd	Feb 24th	Feb 25th	Feb 26th	Feb 27th	Feb 28th	March 1st	March 2nd
2													NO MARCH AVAILABILITY DUE TO A	
3														
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and why?', must be placed alongside that of organisation, 'how is this **assemblage** being composed?'

These questions feed into the process of **exhibition**-making within this research and were played out in the want for flexible organisational practice as well as the way the **exhibition** amassed throughout its duration. *Assembling* worked as an opportunity

to think through two connected elements of my research, firstly, the question 'what is **social** space?' and secondly, to explore **exhibition** as an **assemblage** or type of **gathering** in itself. In order to do so, I felt it was important to have the artists 'inhabit' the space, to be present as part of the composition of the **exhibition**, working together in order to allow for a dialogue to occur and an **assemblage**

to form between us, artworks, ideas, space, etc. The **exhibition** took place at the Cookhouse Gallery at Chelsea College of Arts, from the 9th - 21st February 2015.

The way that the **exhibition** functioned often resulted from practical, very real **social** elements such as commitment, energy, willing, interest, schedules etc. As you can see from the chart on page 188, some artists were not actually available during the most convenient period, which involved persuading Scott to change plans and Julika not being able to fully participate due to teaching and parenting commitments. Time became a functioning limitation.

During periods of availability we 'inhabited' the space, performing it each time, through re-arranging and re-purposing for each of our needs. The space, therefore,

process and knowledge production and the creation of working groups to focus on different tasks at hand. Functional rules within the open organisation include publishing a charter, or aims and objectives, open participation for anyone who agrees to the charter and self-management within working groups.

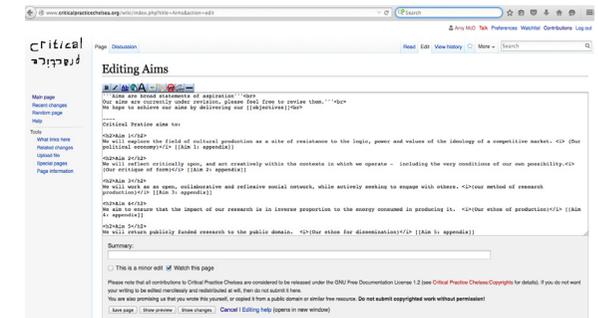


fig. 4.39. Critical Practice, Wiki page, 2015.

P

People

Group Material

The People's Choice: Arroz con Mango (1981) took place in the gallery run by Group Material on East Street, New York. They invited the local community to contribute personal items or collections to the show, things that they felt were beautiful, noteworthy or meaningful. Items including wedding photos, family

started as white and empty, apart from my own personal intervention, a version of the *Typology of Association*. Using letterpress and a laser printer, the *Typology of Association* (2015) became transformed into large pages which ran along the gallery walls from 'A' for 'Assembling' through - due to lack of space but not inappropriately - to 'F' for 'Foam'. This worked as a device to thread together other objects and activity present in the space, allowing for a certain degree of coherence. Artwork was positioned and entered the gallery with the arrival of each artist so, for example, Katie's work was not actually installed until halfway through the **exhibition** as she could not arrive in London before this point due to MFA commitments in Glasgow. Those who had more time to contribute, Karem, Maurice, Scott and I, decided to have an 'incubation period' in which we would 'clock in' to the Cookhouse for a period of **exhibition** from 10am to 8pm, which ended up lasting for about ten of the twelve days. Although this allowed, again, for other commitments to take precedence and for late arrivals or early departures. This procedure was greatly encouraged by Maurice having use of the flat at Chelsea College of Arts, based in the lower floor of one of the main college buildings. This meant that we always had an onsite *Assembling* member. The time spent there and the use of the space for both official and domestic activity provided a sense of ownership and care that otherwise would not have existed. Maurice compared this experience with that of a now old-fashioned janitor system where someone works and lives onsite making official space

portraits, religious icons and a collection of PEZ sweet dispensers were lent for the exhibition. Thomas Lawson writes, 'Nearly everything came with a story, as a whole, the show turned into a narrative of everyday life' ([1981] 2010:32). The exhibition demonstrates an ongoing desire within Group Material to democratise exhibitionary space by disrupting the hierarchy of objects.



fig. 4.40. Group Material, *The People's Choice: Arroz con Mango*, Installation View, 1981.

Thomas Hobbes

As described under 'Body', the *Leviathan* (1651) outlines Hobbes' concept of the sovereign as one body, which the people give themselves up to be represented by in order to become a citizen. Hobbes would argue that on their own, people are not able to form themselves into a body as, 'there is no such thing as a body of people awaiting representation. Because nothing exists in nature except a "multitude

seem familiar and **public** space more personal. In this format we held discussions, took decisions and conducted activity day-to-day, allowing the **exhibition** to play out and re-assemble as the sense of shared issue fluctuated and developed between whoever and whatever was present at that moment.

At times this approach felt too internalised for an **exhibition** process, too focused on ourselves as a form of grouping amassing within the gallery space. Yet, it was between ourselves that we had been trying to form a '**public**' to assemble or act as assembly around a matter that concerned us, inciting us to act collectively. It is worth re-quoting Latour from chapter 1 here, where he says:

It's clear that each object - each issue - generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object offers new opportunities to passionately differ and dispute' (Latour, 2005a:5).

Later I will expand on how I believe the **exhibition** produced a series of collectivities throughout its duration, allowing different elements to enter and leave, forming a responsive dialectical approach as suggested previously, which fluctuates but with a consistency of presence around these issues. Normally we might imagine a '**public**' to be a large scale, largely unknown entity, in the case of the **exhibition**, the unknown visitor 'out there'. So how can we evaluate this concept further within the *Assembling* process?

of men''' (Skinner, 2007:167). This seething mass of individuals, argues Hobbes, must give authority to just one to act as representative for them all.

Jacques Rancière

Rancière defines the 'people' as 'the part that has no part' (Rancière, 2001). As we have seen above under the term 'citizen', the ability to take part in a democracy, depends on the apportionment and positioning of different qualities that make them less or more able to be present and participate. In this way, any part of the population that can be accounted for or delineated is not 'the people', 'the people' is that which is not currently designated or spoken for. He writes, "the people' refers to subjects inscribed as a supplement to the count of the parts of society... Whether this part exists is the political issue and it is the object of political litigation' (Rancière, 2001).

Population

Cuba = 11.27 million (2013)

UK = 64.1 million (2013)

Public

Craig Calhoun

New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society, is based on Raymond Williams'

fig. 3.45. Alice Tatge, *A Reflection on the Idea of Free Labour in Art*, Towards Common Ground 2012.



III

In order to investigate the **social** imaginary of the interior space of the **group** and the **public** ‘out there’, I will firstly examine further how this concept of the ‘**public**’ has been perceived. I began to explore the formation of a ‘**public**’ through curating the project *Towards **Common** Ground* (2012), details of which can be found in the **exhibition** portfolio. Curator Ying Tan and I, wanted to investigate what it is that makes a **public** politically activated and under what circumstances is this **public** moved to protest? This question became coupled with a concern for the enactment of **public**, shared space and Tan and I were both interested in the bandstand as a site of performance so often left empty, yet an architecture that almost ‘calls’ for a **public**. We were also intrigued by the potential engagement of passers-by, who might be drawn into the performative space of the bandstand, widening the demographic from which a potential **public** might form. Participating artist Jordan McKenzie commented that he found the diversity of practices exploring the topic refreshing with its mixture of politically rigorous, activist approaches juxtaposed with the humorous and profane. Activity carried out in the bandstand included Reynolds’ screening of *Silo Walk* (2008-10), a moving-image work which re-visits routes inhabited by female anti-nuclear protestors at Greenham Common’s American military airbase; *A Reflection on the Idea of Free Labour in Art* (2012) which, it was agreed was only to be performed if we received funding and could therefore could pay

Keywords (1976) which sought to unpick familiar words used to describe culture and society which, although often simplified, tackle complex concepts and may become distorted and change their meaning over time. In *New Keywords*, sociologist Craig Calhoun provides a description of ‘public’ which he identifies as having its roots in the Latin *publicus*, ‘of the people’ and that contemporarily, it increasingly acts as an opposite to ‘private’.

Calhoun argues that the expansion of the ‘public sphere’ has been at the cost of the quality of public debate, used to decide what issues are of public interest. He points out that during the 19th and 20th century, ‘public opinion’ ceased to represent tested debate conducted with informed citizens and instead become a generalised, mass opinion, regardless of individually held and expressed beliefs.

There grew up a distinction between ‘private’ individual opinion and aggregated, more anonymised ‘public’ opinion. He writes that:

The transformation of the notion of public opinion into an aggregate of private opinion was influenced by the rise in liberal individualism and especially of market society and social theories derived from markets (Calhoun, 2005:284).

John Dewey

For discussion on ‘state’ and ‘public’ from *The Public and its Problems* (1927), please see the John Dewey entry under ‘State’. Dewey wrote this text in response to Walter Lippmann’s *The Phantom Public* (1925) (see Lippman under ‘Public’) in order to reanimate ‘the public’ with

Tatge (which thankfully we did); and *Chronotopic Invocation 1: Profane Articulations of the Autosarcophagic Orchestra (BZZHHHHJT!!!)* (2012) by Joey Ryken, a highly theatricalised performance exploring political sloganeering through karaoke. Tan and I were often disappointed with the lack of ‘accidental’ **public** present, rather than the ‘ready-formed’ **public** of art **community** and friends. Although a wider **gathering** of unknown persons did not occur, several instances of unexpected interaction did take place such as when young **people** relaxing in the park at night were intrigued and joined in at the end of Ryken’s performance, changing the content from overtly political, to pop. Free’s performance also saw more of a diverse attendance with the interaction of artists, academics, musicians and government workers from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport during *The Manifesto for a New Public*, which Tan and I intentionally gathered. We also felt that the **gathering** of different approaches, practices and opinions was an important act of forming a **public**. This prompts a reconsideration of the idea that if there is no antecedent ‘**state**’ or ‘**public**’, then how should it be compiled and who should be assembled to form it? This enquiry is of great urgency for artists’ **group** practices if we are to consider **social** space as having no grand external societal ‘other’ but as existing as sprawling local space which must be tried and tested. North American writers Walter Lippmann (1925) and John Dewey (1927) debated the position and role of the **public** in enduring arguments in the 1920s, a period after World War I during the rise of

agency in response to Lippmann’s pessimism about the democratic system.

Free

See chapter 1 for Free’s *Manifesto for a New Public* (2012), a text based on Vladimir Tatlin’s *The Initiative Individual in the Creativity of the Individual* (1919) and performed as a spoken word choir as part of *Towards Common Ground* (2012).

C. Wright Mills

As stated in C. Wright Mills’ entry under ‘mass’, the sociologist viewed mid-twentieth century North American society as changing inexorably from a ‘public’ into a ‘mass’ due to an increasing control over the direction of communication and the ability to act out opinion. For Mills, there are four main points that provide a ‘public’ with certain democratic freedoms:

- (1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them, (2) Public communications are so organised that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back [...] Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action [...] (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public’ (304).

Walter Lippmann

Walter Lippmann wrote *The Phantom Public* (1925) after World War 1 and during the rise of fascism under Mussolini in Italy. The text expounds Lippmann’s disillusionment with democracy and the ability of the public to

fascism in Italy. Lippmann wrote sceptically about the **public**'s ability to act and engage with **democracy**. In the *Phantom Public* (1925) he writes that:

The private citizen today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row. Yet these **public** affairs are in no convincing way their affairs. They are for the most part invisible. They are managed, if they are managed at all, at distant centres, from behind the scenes by unnamed powers. As a private person he does not know what is going on, or who is doing it, or where they are being carried (1925:13).

Lippmann believed that it is impossible for all members of the **public** to engage and impossible for the **public** to know, understand and express an opinion on all of the issues facing the democratic **state**. It would be better, he thought, for the **state** to take care of itself and the **public** to focus on their own individual preoccupations. The **state** here acts like Hobbes' **body** as described in the *Typology*; inaccessible, tightly bound, consistent and controlled by an interior with very limited input from others, a true solid **association**.

The philosopher, educational reformer and leading American pragmatist John Dewey is often cited as key to the theoretical debate for understanding the term '**public**' in response to Lippmann and has been influential in recent debates on **social** artistic and art historical practices, for example in the writing of Tom Finkelpearl (2013) and Molly Nesbit (2013). John Dewey provides a space where the **public** is redefined and the **state** as 'solid' **association** shifts so that we may understand it as a construct instead of a pre-made structure. He argues that **community-as-a-whole** is treated as

opine about, and practically effect, the running of society. The text begins, 'The private citizen today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row' (1925:13). Lippmann outlines a feeling of disengagement for most people towards the invisible machinations of democratic society, a system constructed and regulated without them. He believed that it was impossible for the majority of the population to find the time to be actively engaged and knowledgeable enough to enter into a self-governing community and that it is more realistic that people get on with their own tasks without concerning themselves with the functioning of society. After all, for Lippmann, it is individuals who act and not some fantasy 'spirit of the age' or collective mind. Instead, he writes:

It is [individuals'] relations with each other that constitute a society. And it is about the ordering of those relations with each other that the individuals not executive concerned in a specific disorder may have public opinions and may intervene as a public (1925:172).

Res publica

Res publica is a Latin phrase meaning 'public affair' and is the root for the word 'republic'. *res* translates as 'matter', 'affair' or 'thing' and *publica* means of or pertaining to the state. Bruno Latour uses the phrase to bolster his concept of 'object-orientated democracy' in which the relevant people and objects are gathered around a 'thing' or 'matter at hand',

a self-evident fact, but that this **community** is actually drawn together with various associative ties which should be sought out, understood and made *visible*. How we perceive the **state** should not be limited, but explored and continually reformed. In *The Public and its Problems* (1927) Dewey writes, ‘There is no antecedent universal proposition which can be laid down because of which the functions of a **state** should be limited or should be expanded’ (1927:74). Instead, the **state** must be ‘rediscovered’, as Dewey suggests, refashioned and composed. It must be understood *who* are the **public** that make up this **state** and *what* are their **common** needs, it is only through research and calculation that you can ascertain and reassess these pliable entities and in turn carry out the politics of associating. Although, through my reading of Latour and Rancière I am going further by asserting that the **public** cannot be sought out as an entity in and of itself, the systems and structures in place that form a **public assemblage** can be made visible and Dewey’s tentative, seeking approach is key to this process.

Curator Simon Sheikh shares Dewey’s view of the **public** as something which is called into being:

A **public** only exists by virtue of being addressed... a **public** is an imaginary endeavour with real effects: an **audience**, a **community**, a **group**, an adversary or a constituency is imagining, and imagined through a specific mode of address that is supposed to produce, actualise or even activate this imagined entity, “the **public**” (2007:178).

Rather than ‘being addressed’ we could also think of **social** formations as appearing

creating a different assembly for each ‘thing’ investigated.

Simon Sheikh

In the text *Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator* (2007), curator Simon Sheikh outlines different modes of address found within exhibition making during the ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’. He begins with 19th Century Europe and argues that the exhibition during this period acted in the ‘production of a public’ (2007:175). The exhibition made publicly available an organised, demarcated and disciplined knowledge through the display of objects. In the present, Sheikh argues, the public is a constructed one. Making things public is also an attempt, in fact, to make a public. He writes that a public only exists:

by virtue of being addressed... a public is an imaginary endeavour with real effects: an audience, a community, a group, an adversary or a constituency is imagining, and imagined through a specific mode of address. that is supposed to produce, actualise or even activate this imagined entity, ‘the public’ (2007:178).

In order to articulate and produce new ways of being in the world, Sheikh suggests that the future must consist of a plurality of exhibition practices to agitate formal structures. These varied modes of display could transform from market-led repetitious trends into a more continued, clear aim that can produce new approaches and therefore imagine a more diverse sense of public.

through shared moments of action which form an **assemblage** of shared issues. The recurrent interrelation of these components causes ‘the **public**’ to become manifest. These instances erupt and in doing so have the potential to interrupt the ‘police’, in Rancière’s terms (2000), or in other words, the way the distribution is persisting at that moment, that which is currently visible, or that has been given at that moment as ‘the **social**’. This is much like Gramsci’s envisioning of politics as outlined in chapter 1 where in contrast to Marxist thought he posits that politics does not represent ready-formed **collectives** in **society**, but produces them. The challenge of making a **public** visible is that this ‘**public**’ is a constructed ‘imaginary’. As with Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘**nation**’ discussed in the previous chapter, the **public** is not personally known to us on a one-to-one basis, but is made up of multiple perceived elements. These elements may include the communication and information that is constantly received by each individual about the perceived **public** ‘out there’, enacted through multiple platforms; friends, colleagues, newspapers, twitter, facebook, advertising, emails, etc. Then there are the systems and structures through which a sense of publicness is constructed, such as work schedules, schooling, voting systems, roadway and pedestrian systems, monetary circulation, holiday destinations, an almost inconceivable number of ways in which ‘being in **public**’ and interacting with an unknown **public** are played out and performed. All of these ‘systems’ are densely populated with ‘things’ that act out and give space to the **social**



Self-organisation

Anne Szefer Karlsen

Self-organisation in contemporary art is largely used to describe the activity of exhibition-making outside of the institution, which often investigates non-hierarchical models of gathering. Curator Anne Szefer Karlsen argues that self-organisation goes beyond the traditional labels of ‘alternative’, ‘non-profit’ or ‘artist run’ into groupings, ‘governed by common interest more than formality or obligation’ (2013:11). In her writing on self-organisation, Karlsen often describes the exhibition *No Souls for Sale: A Festival of Independents* (2010) at the Tate Modern. Seventy international independent art spaces were asked to take a unit of space in the Turbine Hall in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the gallery. This gives rise to many questions about the relationship between independent and institutional spaces, which I comment on using the work of Rebecca-Gordon Nesbitt analysing this two-way dependency in chapter 2. Karlsen states that:

The fact that the Museum hardly offered any financial or other support to the contributors to this event, and that the contributors accepted these terms of participation, shows how the current Institution of

fig. 3.6. Maurice Carlin, *Cluster Series: Phantom Demographic # 3*, Cast coated paper, acrylic inks, tape, airbnb listing, loomio listing, 2015.



as **assemblage**.

The concept of a ‘**public**’ and ‘publicness’ in *Assembling* was perhaps in one way less open and in another, more complex than in *Towards Common Ground*.

Assembling was not carried out in a ‘non-art’ context, i.e. a common in Clapham, but through a variety of closed, shared platforms, within an arts organisation and at an art school. However, *Assembling* did work to actively produce a ‘**public**’ or a series of communities, rather than hope that one would passively emerge merely by being present. This can be seen through the formation of ‘communities of practice’ discussion **groups**, the changing form of the **exhibition** space as ‘expanded **collective**’, seeking a ‘matter of concern’ between artists in the ‘incubation period’ and also within individual artworks themselves, for example, *Cluster Series: Phantom Demographic # 3* (2015) by Maurice Carlin. Carlin had been working on a series of layered prints which could be disassembled and distributed. Previously he had compiled large quantities of prints to be distributed to **exhibition** goers, but wanted to create a different dynamic between artwork, distribution process and their relationship to ownership and **audience**. This thinking has been developed with curator Helen Kaplinsky as part of an ongoing series of investigations into the lifecycle of an artwork and the idea of temporary custodianship, of finding structures for lending rather than selling or giving away artwork. Carlin writes, ‘Unlike previous works which consisted of one hundred plus pieces, I’m working

art, the art world, is sustained (2012).



fig. 4.42. *No Souls for Sale: A Festival of Independents*, Installation view, 2010.

Stephan Dillemath, Anthony Davies and Jakob Jakobsen

Dillemath, Davies and Jakobsen wrote *There is no Alternative: The Future is Self-Organised* in 2005, in a call to change cultural institution relations. They write that the state and institutional bodies have become inextricably caught up with corporate and neo-liberal agendas and that certain social principals must be required, including transparency, accountability, equality and open participation. Interestingly for the arguments of solidity and fluidity in this research, they describe self-organisation as, ‘a fluid, temporal set of negotiations and social relations which can be emancipatory - a process of empowerment’ (Dillemath, Davies, Jakobsen, 2005).

fig. 3.7. Group Material, *Democracy: Education*, installation view, 1988-89.



with reduced numbers in order to explore working with smaller **groups** of **people** to develop a range of structures for shared ownership. The working title is ‘Phantom Demographic Series’ – which is an idea around imagining the **audience/public/community** that you’re making something for (which brings with it lots of questions/challenges’ (Carlin, 2015). By reducing the number of prints, Carlin is able to focus more acutely on the process of distribution and the calling together of a **public** or **community**, rather than forming a grouping merely, as with *Towards Common Ground*, through those who happened to be present.

IV

Creating systems to assemble a **public** can also be found as a point of focus in other exhibitionary practices and I would like to argue that *Democracy* (1988-89) by **Group Material** (GM) can be read as an example of a form of expanded **collective** performed as **exhibition**. As outlined in the *Typology of Association*, the project consisted of three elements; an **exhibition**, a round table discussion and town hall meetings held in the gallery. There were initial discussions held between the members of GM to decide upon four issues which they felt were affecting **democracy** the most at that point in time. The **group** chose education, politics and election, cultural participation and AIDS. During the round table discussions on each topic, they drew in experts in these fields, or **people** they felt had a stake in

A note on the ‘self-’ of ‘self-organisation’

The term used within the arts, has been borrowed from the natural sciences to describe, ‘systems whose internal organisation tends to increase in complexity without being guided by an outside source’ (Bradley, Hannula, Ricupero, Superflex, 2006:5). On Wikipedia, self-organisation is described as, ‘a process where some form of overall order or coordination arises out of the local interactions between smaller component parts of an initially disordered system’ (Wikipedia, 2015). Examples in nature can be found in the process of swarming and crystallisation. Yet, I am suspicious of the ‘self-’ in ‘self-organisation’. It suggests an ‘apartness’ that does not sympathise with the conception of the social found within this research. Self-organisation occurs with the social, therefore will always lead to empowerment for some and not for others, it does not ‘just happen’ or occur out on a limb, but needs to be driven and worked at.

Superflex

The group Superflex often describe its projects as ‘tools’. They are interested in intervening in social and economic situations to create empowering structures that can be picked up, used and replicated. Superflex work collaboratively with experts to get these projects off the ground and have formed companies to keep ideas afloat. In Superflex’s publication *Tools*, the editors write:

Through the tools, Superflex investigate

each particular matter. These meetings fed the curatorial decisions that GM made for inhabiting the **exhibition** space. Lastly, the town hall meetings were designed to make these conversations **public** and were carried out in this format to try and produce a non-hierarchical environment in which **people** would feel comfortable to contribute opinions. They tried to use the same non-hierarchical approach with the objects they choose to represent issues within the **exhibition**. GM write:

Mirroring the various forms of representation that structure our understanding of culture, our **exhibitions** bring together so-called fine art with products from supermarkets, mass-cultural artifacts with historical objects, factual documentation with homemade projects. We are not interested in making definitive evaluations or declarative statements, but in creating situations that offer our chosen subject as a complex and open-ended issue (**Group** Material, 1990:2).

In this way GM produced an expanded **collective** centred around particular issues at hand, peopled by both human and non-human objects. They gathered both a specialised and non-specialised **public** as well as engaging specialised and non-specialised objects (in other words, objects of ‘fine art’ as well as items from the ‘everyday’) into their debates. This is clearly a good example of representation as ‘object-orientated **democracy**’ in which the ‘thingness’ of an issue is very present, that is to say, ‘what is the current “material condition” of education, politics and election, cultural participation and AIDS?’ (**Group** Material, 1990:2).

The concept of the active ‘**public**’ coalescing around a ‘matter of concern’ carries through into the approach of Swiss-Argentine Psychoanalyst Enrique Pichon-Rivière,

communicative processes in which power, hegemony, assertion and oppression, the gain and loss of terrain become evident (Steiner,2003:5).

I am not suggesting that this process of constructing ‘tools’ is ‘self-organised’ in itself, but for this *Typology*, am referring here to the particular project *Guaraná Power*, which has gone through several manifestations since being initiated in 2003. For this project, Superflex set up a collaboration with a farmers’ cooperative in Maués, Brazil. These farmers have been suffering from an extreme fall in the price paid for guaraná seeds, popular in the region for their caffeine properties and used in soft drinks. Multinational companies squeezed the price down from \$25/kilo to \$4/kilo in four years, while increasing the price of products for the consumer. Superflex comment that they wanted Guaraná to regain its power-giving potential in a literal sense, not just as an energy stimulant, but to give back power to the people who have cultivated it for so long. They worked with a cooperative, COAIMA, formed by the farmers, to brainstorm and develop their own product, the soft drink *Guaraná Power*, which Will Bradley writes is intentionally similar to the branding of Pepsi’s *Antartica Guaraná* (Bradley, 2003). Superflex comment that the self-organised cooperative has now, ‘established a small plantation of their own. Nowhere near large enough to supply their needs, [but] it functions as a veiled threat to the local producers accept the situation, or we will expand and put you out of business completely’ (Superflex, 2003).

who explored the potential of **groups** for solving **common** tasks. Rather than a traditional therapeutic **group** which sought to change the individual, Pichon-Rivière's 'operative **groups**' (1971) aimed to radiate between individual, **group** and societal context. This was achieved through carrying out a **common** task to resolve a problem and in doing so, modifying the dynamics within the **group** to be better suited for the task. This, he believed, could be used in multiple environments from therapeutic sessions, the workplace and no doubt **community groups**. Tubert-Oklander and Hernández de Tubert in *Operative Groups: The Latin American Approach to Group Analysis* (2004) write that operative **groups** are, 'explicitly centred on a task, which can be learning, healing (thus including therapeutic **groups**), diagnosing difficulties in a workplace, another implicit task, which tries to break, by means of elucidation, the stereotyped patterns that impede learning and communication, thus acting as an obstacle to any progress or change (2004:152-3). As with Dewey, the **group** or **public** only cohere *to do something*. It is the task that makes the **group** appear. This is perhaps why the moments of most cohesion within *Assembling* before the **exhibition** where when cooking ('making a good kitchen') together during the residency, or when explicitly centred around the task of creating the '**manifesto**' stating what we emotionally and materially needed to form a grouping, which at times felt more like a **group** therapeutic session in itself. With **Group Material's Democracy**, operative **groups** in the form of round table discussions on each topic,

As alluded to, the intervention of Superflex and other experts was not a self-organisational format, but the process provided a template and the space for self-organisation on the part of the farmers.



fig. 4.43. Superflex, *Guaraná Power*, Guarana Power bottle, 2003.

Social

Lars Bang Larson

'Social aesthetics' is a term coined by Lars Bang Larson to describe activity by artists and artist activists, which places itself in the reality of turbulent social situations. It aims to expose or to find solutions to social issues within specific communities, often through collective action. He writes that, 'The social aesthetic artwork involves a utilitarian or practical aspect that gives a sense of purpose and direct involvement' (Bang Larson, 2000).

led to the task of honing issues to be focused on and how the **exhibition** should be composed to represent these areas. In the *Assembling exhibition*, the **group** acted to formulate the issue or topic itself, an ever-changing project that became the strategy for the **exhibition** as task. Throughout the period of **exhibition**, we attempted to form multiple communities as a way to address the **social** as an active, continually performed entity. As we can see under ‘**community**’ in the *Typology*, Giorgio Agamben (1993) understands **community** as a process of ‘taking-place’, it is ‘in the act of being’ rather than the ‘being in itself’. I would argue that there is a quality of ‘**community**-ness’, but that this definition and how it is played out is constantly being remade and re-imagined, it is ‘up for grabs’ or constantly contended and so always in the process of being formed. With this in mind, *Assembling* attempted to constantly reform itself as a grouping, through inviting **people** into the space to explore certain issues, by moving and bringing artworks and ideas into the gallery, causing the **exhibition** seen as a **collective** of these elements to change almost daily.

V

Assembling highlighted for me the need to have a textured space in which to call together a **public**, form communities, or establish **group** practices between artists. There is a difference here, perhaps, between forming a ‘**public**’ (a visible entity with a stake in the persisting dominant structure) and the degree to which this **public-**

Tom Finkelpearl

In *What we Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (2012), Tom Finkelpearl, Director of the Queens Museum, outlines his use of the term ‘social cooperation’. For Finkelpearl ‘social cooperation’ is the most appropriate terminology for describing artists’ practices which engage in the forming of a political public through working with others. He writes: Though no word can sum up the efforts of any group of artists, the word *social* - as in social encounter across social classes - helps locate this practice in an experimental and intellectual realm that also includes social studies, social work, and social housing (2013:6). Finkelpearl discounts the use of ‘collaboration’ as he believes that this suggests the equal participation of all participates from conception to the end of the project, instead favouring ‘cooperation’ to simply mean working together.

Bruno Latour

For discussion on ‘the social’ please see Bruno Latour under ‘society’.

Charles Taylor

The philosopher Charles Taylor employs the term ‘social imaginary’ to explain how Western culture has attempted to make a false uniform pattern of modernity. In actual fact, he argues, we need to speak of ‘multiple modernities’ to reflect the fact that non-Western cultures have developed their own sense of what modernity is, pluralising how a dominant concept of

fig. 3.8. Public or Private?, Loomio, 2015.

loomio BETA
Log in

1 year ago

👍 **Maurice Carlin** agreed: *I think we could have a mixture of public and private discussions.*
1 year ago

👍 **julika gittner** agreed: *I think it can be all public.*
1 year ago

 **Amy McDonnell**
Hi All,
As Maurice pointed out, there is another option where we can choose to have some conversations set to private - such as the Material Dialogue, or any new page that is set up. So I will set up another vote.
1 year ago

🗳️ **Amy McDonnell** created a proposal: *Do we want to make SOME of our Loomio group private?*
1 year ago

K **Katie**
I would prefer some aspects of the conversation to be private....
1 year ago

MC **Maurice Carlin**
I would be happy with some elements as private, maybe the discussion that was evolving in the Material Dialogues should be private to us... what conversations would be public? I wonder how we attract other Loomio users to conversations we make public?
1 year ago

👍 **Maurice Carlin** agreed: *I think the 'material dialogue' discussion that has been evolving should remain private.*
1 year ago

Do we want to invite other Loomio users to contribute?

closed
Closed 1 year ago
Proposed by Maurice Carlin 1 year ago

Recently I've been having a look around Loomio to see who else is using it. In most categories including 'Arts' there seems to be just 20 to 30 groups. The category 'Political Initiatives' seems most popular, you can find small political parties such as the Pirate Party in this category. Most of these groups are spanish language groups. It seems like there is very little 'cross pollination' between groups which to me seems to somewhat defeat the purpose of having discussions in a public context. I wondered if we should let some of these people know about our group and invite them to contribute to any of the discussions which take their interest? This could also apply to anyone whom we think might be interested enough to join Loomio to contribute to the dialogue. This would of course only be open to those discussions that we have set as 'public'. I guess the fear with opening out is that we upset the balance that we have developed between us which I think is working quite well.. Would be great to hear what you think!



Agree (2)
Abstain (0)
Disagree (0)
Block (0)

28% of members have stated their position (2/7)

Positions

👍 **Amy McDonnell** Yes, I think this could be interesting and

forming activity is visible. Perhaps in distributing the **social**, hidden spaces are not always a negative, are not always hidden while another element dominates. Since a **public** is in a constant state of performing and reassembling itself, this process needs a series of spaces in which to do so, of inclusivity and exclusivity, of visible and more safe, secluded, nurturing spaces without the sense of a **public** scrutiny, imagined or otherwise. This became apparent in our use of Loomio. Before this point the nascent **assembling** had occurred in closed or less visible spaces within the **social** such as emails, a residency and a posted, targeted zine. With Loomio, you can decide whether the **groups** are **public** to the rest of the Loomio users or not, more than this, you can decide whether this is the case for each conversation that you set up, allowing some of your activity to remain private and some **public**. As seen in the conversation on page 210, although those who voted were happy to invite other Loomio users to engage with our activity, there was a mixed response, shown in the discussion on the lefthand side, about whether or not to make all of our activity **public**. Katie felt that she did not want to share the development of her work and the discussion about this in relation to *Assembling* further than the *Assembling group* itself until it had developed further. The publicness of some activity, therefore, effects the level in which some will engage, it will mask the type of information given and the depth of conversation which takes place. If all is **public**, then it does not allow for a level of uncertainty, for the ‘tentative’ quality described by Dewey (1927).

historical movement has been understood. The title of the 11th Bienal de la Habana, ‘Artistic Practices, Social Imaginaries’ alluding to the work of Charles Taylor and his concept of proliferating conceptual meaning outside of the dominant system. During the Biennial’s events, curator Danys Montes de Oca acknowledged that:

I think that choosing the theme of social imaginary was [to do with]... the fact that the art that interests us from the peripheries of grand centres of power is associated with social production, to social life. (Montes de Oca, 2012).

Taylor writes that multiple modernities are inseparable from Benedict Anderson’s concept of the ‘imagined community’, which is outlined here under ‘Nation’. He writes that the social imaginary is, ‘not a set of “ideas”’; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society’ (2001:1). Taylor writes that we have a difficulty in seeing the social imaginary at any one given time as one potential amongst others and that concepts such as the economy or the public sphere are often assumed as inherent mechanisms. Taylor links this idea that there is a normative order underlying political society, to Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, who laid out the beginnings of international law based on concepts of natural law in the 17th Century. Taylor is against such concepts of naturalism, of societies being based on judgments of innate moral ‘right’ and criticises approaches which attempt an ‘aculturalism’, that place meaning outside of the boundaries of culture.

Similar issues are described by sociologist Richard Sennett, who gives an account of testing a beta model of an online platform designed by Google as a tool for **cooperation** called GoogleWave. The programme allowed participants to type responses, add graphs and link up information. Sennett talks of the potential for this technology, but describes its failure as being its dialectical rather than dialogical way of functioning. Sennett writes that:

One reason for failure may be that the program mistook information sharing for communication. Information sharing is an exercise in definition and precision, whereas communication is as much about what is left unsaid as said; communication mines the realm of suggestion and connotation. In the hurry which attends emailing, responses tend to get stripped down to the bare minimum; in online exchanges like GoogleWave, where the visual dominates, it's hard to convey irony or doubt; simple information sharing subtracts expression (Sennett, 2013:28).

Just because information has been shared and made visible, this is not the same as actively composing a more complex **assemblage** of interactions. With *Assembling*, the **public**, more permanent, typed space of online interaction was not a comfortable way to communicate. Written interaction was not an even ground for us all, some *Assembling* members felt they did not want to engage in this way and were a lot more able to communicate orally and in person. During our incubation period, we tested the ability of Loomio to discuss difficult issues by provoking other users not present that day in the gallery. We set up the vote, 'Should each of us choose a work in the **exhibition** to 'improve'? Despite the clear provocation and my own vote

Taylor also suggests that the social imaginary is not restricted to theory, which is only shared by a few, it is nothing so elite, but that it is a common understanding shared by large groups, even whole societies. It is built through producing common practices which constitute our social life. He writes:

I am thinking rather of the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations (2001:18).

Joseph Beuys

Beuys coined the term 'social sculpture' in the 70s to describe his expanded view of sculpture and sculptural material, which includes thought, speech and will. He would often use a blackboard as a mediator for these materials. Beuys saw social sculpture as a process which could mould and actively change the world we live in, transforming the work of art into a social organism. He believed that everyone has a creative potential, that everyone is an artist and that this latent creativity can be realised, 'I am referring to the ability to express, carry out or accomplish something, recognising the artistic quality in this ability to perform a task' (Beuys, 2001:64). One of Joseph Beuys' most enduring social sculptures is the construction of the Free International University (FIU) founded in 1973. The university aims to provide an umbrella for research and communication with its chief goal, 'the encouragement, discovery

being 'disagree', all other members voted yes, regardless of clear apprehension, as Julika wrote, 'Maybe each of us can define the boundaries of 'improvement'?' The vote had been made and the decision was 'yes' without the intended humour of the question being conveyed or space for real questioning, irritation, scepticism or doubt to come across or indeed for a casualness of conversation, a few words and a glance to challenge or cajole.

Interestingly, an artist from Cuba and New Zealand, Gaby Montejo, happened upon our Loomio **group** and started to discuss her experience of using the platform with me, which produces a very different perspective on online participation. She writes, 'Last night we tried to gather 21 **people** together in person after two weeks of conversation on Loomio. There was lots to talk about and so many **people** suggested a meet up. Only 3 showed up. There's always a bit more security of anonymity in expressing views, I think, when it's online. It can also save time. So I'm big on the electronic chat, if it's the right kind of engaged folks involved'. This demonstrates the complexity of outlining where 'being in **public**' is situated. It is not my intention within this stage of the thesis to suggest that forming **publics** should only be carried out on a reduced scale, only through face-to-face interaction or that I am against the use of technology and **social** platforms. Professor of Interdisciplinary Methodologies at Warwick University Nathaniel Tkacz writes that within networked and software culture, 'ideas of **mass audience** and its retrospectively strengthened connotations

and furtherance of democratic potential, and the expression of this' (Beuys and Böll, 1973). *7,000 Oaks* (1982) is another example of Joseph Beuys' social sculpture in which he planted seven thousand trees in Kassel during Documenta 7 (1982). Each tree was positioned next to a solid stone marker, which remain unchanged while the oaks adapt and grow. In an interview with Richard Demarco, Beuys commented that the oak:

[...] has always been a form of sculpture, a symbol for this planet ever since the Druids...They used their oaks to define their holy places. I can see such a use for the future.... The tree planting enterprise provides a very simple but radical possibility for this when we start with the seven thousand oaks' (Richard Demarco, 1982:46).

Beuys understood the sculptural organism of society as flowing with energy and ideas which could be syphoned off in different directions through the act of sculpture. He demonstrates working through this thinking in *Honey Pump in the Work Place* (1977), which took place at Documenta 6. The artist constructed a butter-lubricated pump made from a motor with a series of plastic tubes attached, through which Beuys pumped two tons of honey. Within this circuit, Beuys and the Free International University produced one hundred days of lectures, discussions and seminars with lawyers, artists, sociologists, actors, politicians and others. The flow of honey and activity in the space represented both the circulatory systems in the human body as well as the flow and movement of energy within a social organism.

of passivity are replaced by ones of intelligent bodies of peers in motion, whose relationship to production is both direct and multiple' (2015: 42). The potential for creating a sense of imaginary, for forming **mass** movements on every political scale, whether ISIS, Anonymous or climate change activism, is clearly potent and has radically altered contemporary notions of participation. Rather than advocating a closed, personalised, shared but exclusive space or an open, freely participatory space of 'being in **public**', I have been attempting to argue for a more textured space that allows for both of these approaches to occur simultaneously and with the possibility for constant change. But why is it necessary to multiply space, or form 'texture' out of localised private and **public** spaces? Why not unify **social** space into one shared, open entity? The formation of textured space in which numerous scales of interaction must feed off one another, aims to solve Latour's problem stated in chapter 2 that, '[t]he **social** seems to be diluted everywhere and yet nowhere in particular' (2005b:2). Textured space prevents the **social** imaginary from being performed as one enormous, unreachable entity and instead transforms it into the continual construction of traceable **social** spaces. I will develop this concept further in the conclusion in an exploration of the **social** texture of 'foam'.

Beuys commented that, 'The whole thing may be considered complete only with the presence of people along the course of the honey artery, at the end of which there is a bee's head formed by the tangled spirals of the tube and the iron antennae' (De Domizio Durini 2001:84).



fig. 4.44. Joseph Beuys, *7,000 Oaks*, Social sculpture, oaks, stone, 1982.

Social Systems

Please refer to Nikolas Luhmann for thinking through society as communicating systems that filter and process information. For more read *Theory of Society* (1997).

Social Ties

Social ties is a method that I developed to explain and examine Latour's social theory. The idea came from a workshop I participated in to decide upon a physical structure for *Utopography: Evaluation, Consensus and Location* (2014). This two-day event held at Chelsea

VI

*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

Walt Whitman *Song of Myself* (1892)

I have been employing curatorial practice to seek flexible formats of collectivity throughout the *Assembling* process, providing space and adaptability for decision-making, participation and activity. But how has this more amorphous space already been conceived? Political philosophers Hardt and Negri (2006) describe an **association** that does not seek to cohere or unify into one movement. They transform the solid corporeal entity into flesh, surface rather than bulk. The ‘**multitude**’ is an elusive, seething collection of communicating singularities, ‘[r]ather than a political **body** with one that commands and others who obey, the **multitude** is *living flesh* that rules itself...’ (2006:100). Unlike ‘the **people**’ who attempt to cohere into one ideologically singular force, the **multitude** remains plural and multiples, it remains differentiated. This **association** does not require each singular element to be a self-sufficient individual, but keeps selfhood while feeding into and from the **multitude**, a middle ground between individual and **collective**, which relates to the concept of textured space which emerges through this research. Singularities are not hermetically sealed, as Hardt and Negri write in *Commonwealth*

College of Arts sought to explore the, ‘projection and criticism of ideal societies’ (Critical Practice, 2014). We were asked to make something with materials in the room in response to a word, in my case, ‘connection’. I decided to try and link everything I could see to everything else around me; tables, chairs, shoes, pistachio shells, Kitkat wrappers, doors, by making paper piping and cellophane twine, and later, frantically with reels of cellotape. In doing so, objects in the room became more apparent, things that previously had receded into the ‘usual’ make-up of the space. This reminded me of Latour’s description of performing the social through movement, displacement and transformation.

As described in the introduction, Heidegger wrote about the receding nature of objects, or ‘tools’. He described a relationship with objects that we use which are ‘ready-to-hand’, or, are in their place and can be applied to their function. As also quoted in the introduction, he writes, ‘The peculiarity of what is ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready to hand quite authentically’ (1962:99). In other words, we might pick a pen and begin to write without thinking, you are not continuously aware of the ‘chairness’ of the object that you are sitting on, but apply its function thoughtlessly. These ‘tools’ only become apparent when they are broken, when the pen leaks, the stool buckles, or, for example, when we become ill, we are suddenly aware of an ankle when twisted, or a

(2009), ‘Singularities do communicate, and they are able to do so because of the **common** they share. We share bodies with two eyes, ten fingers, ten toes; we share life on the earth; we share capitalist regimes of production; we share **common** dreams of a better future. Our communication, **collaboration**, and **cooperation**, furthermore, are not only based on the **common** that exists but also in turn produce the **common**’ (2009:128).

Therefore, the **multitude** is not united, but does share a looser connection, not of the same ways of living and envisioning politics, but a much more basic ‘humanness’. In *Multitude* (2006) Hardt and Negri **state** that it is this **common** on which the **multitude** bases its ‘constitution’ and ‘action’. Paolo Virno writes that, ‘the **multitude** does not clash with the One; rather, it redefines it. Even the need to form a unity, of being a One. But here is the point: this unity is no longer the **state**; rather, it is language, intellect, the communal faculties of the human race’ (2004:25). Virno is drawing on Spinoza’s metaphysics here, in which the fabric of being is made up of one substance, ‘the One is no longer a *promise*, it is a *premise*’ (2004:25). Virno believes that the **state** will be dissolved, that the **multitude** rises from the One to convene and act around **common** affairs and then dissolve, never forming a consistent entity that solidifies or institutionalises, a form of leaderless organisation.

This, however, goes against the conception of the **social** as outlined in chapter 2, as it assumes a pre-existent, shared, even space, however loose these ‘communal

lung when punctured.

I thought that the process of making objects and their interconnectedness apparent through actively linking them together would function as part of a workshop, which I carried out at the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art in an exploration of objects and at the Islington Mill residency for *Assembling*. For ‘social ties’, I place several different coloured balls of wool in middle of the room. I then invite everyone in the workshop to connect as many objects as possible to other objects within 10 minutes. The resulting web of wool rapidly alters the space, forcing those present to move within it differently, carefully stepping over, or ducking under twine, purposefully sipping from a mug of coffee attached to a chair. It is a way of performing a social, ‘a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes’ (Latour 2005b:65). One participant commented on the similarity with *First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition* (1942), which can be found here under ‘Web’. The interlinking ‘social tie’ is not material, it is not the wool itself, but the act of threading the new movements and pathways found through a space and the transformation of a space, allowing for a different interaction. In this case, the space normally becomes more playful in the knowledge that it is mutable, that different behaviours are permissible. The development of the *Utopography* structure took on an uncanny resemblance, as can be seen below, although did not attempt to

faculties' may be. There is no space that is 'outside', no space that cannot be redistributed, or made political. We can easily dispel this sense of the **common** from a feminist perspective in which elements of 'common' such as language and concepts of the **body** have been developed in a patriarchal framework and are therefore not neutral territory, but highly charged arenas of contention. Rancière refutes the concept of a passive communality writing that, '[e]quality is not, what I have called a presupposition. It is not, let it be understood, a founding ontological principle but a condition that only functions when it is put into action. Consequently, politics is not based on equality in the sense that others might try to base it on some general human disposition such as language or fear' (2000:52). I believe, in this way, it is more useful to see **multitude**-like activity as another combination of **assemblage** that shifts and redistributes the **social**. When the **multitude** 'disappears', the **social** has been reassembled and is, at that moment, being performed in another way. However, the mutable quality of the **multitude** is convergent with expanded collectivity as **assemblage**. Chantal Mouffe writes, 'The **democracy** of the **multitude** expresses itself in an ensemble of acting minorities which never aspire to transform themselves into a majority and develop a power that refuses to become government' (Mouffe, 2008). As mentioned in chapter 2, throughout much of my period of research, I have been engaging with the **group** Critical Practice, a **cluster** of researchers, artists, curators and others based at Chelsea College of Arts. The

connect objects within the space, instead forming a web-like structure which would disrupt the usual use of the gallery while also acting as a practical means to hang posters, or cordon off sections of the room for activity.



fig. 4.45. *Object Narratives: A Dialogue on Assemblage* workshop, 2014.

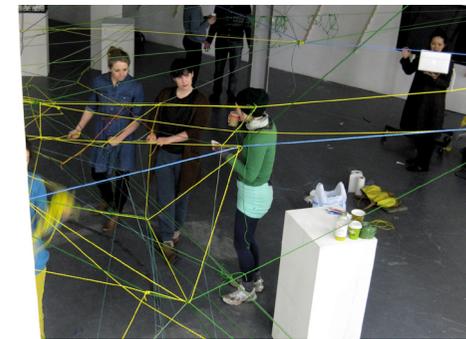


fig. 4.46. *Utopography: Evaluation, Consensus and Location*, Install, 2014.

Society

Guy Debord

Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), in which he describes the accumulation of capital in

fig 3.9. Critical Practice, *#TransActing: A Market of Values*, installation view, 2015.



way that this **group** functions attempts to take on a multitudinous way of being based on the principles of **open-organisation**, as described in the *Typology*, where coordination arises at a local scale from a previously disordered situation. Each new project requires a **network** to emerge through collaboration with others in the creation of participatory platforms. These platforms, such as the form of the market in the **group**'s most recent project *#TransActing: A Market of Values* (2015) aim to gather participants engaged with a certain issue, in this case the production of value(s) through the circulation of different types of currency and/or exchange. These platforms often take physical sprawling forms which aim to encourage others to plug-in and populate them, demonstrated here by the use of the market stalls. Critical Practice uses a wiki in an attempt to make all of the **group's** activity, documentation and processes commonly known for those who seek it, but also as an expression of **self-organisation**, where each member can redefine aims, purposes, meeting notes; in other words, how the **group** functions and how it is perceived. I am not suggesting that Critical Practice is a direct model of the **multitude**, it does not disband with each project and has a level of consistency in the way that the **group** operates and in its interests. Even when members change, we can still say that there is a consistent 'Critical Practiceness' that survives. However the **cluster** does fluctuate according to the task at hand, by cohering with others to collaborate as described previously. Perhaps the tool applied by Critical Practice, the **encyclopaedia** that

society as falsifying and masking all human relations, is examined in chapter 2.

Bruno Latour

In *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005), Bruno Latour claims that society does not exist as a domain. 'Society' has been conceived of as a reified background to our actions and thoughts. Latour argues, however, that, 'society', far from being the context 'in which' everything is framed, should rather be construed as, 'one of the many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits' (Latour 2005b:4-5). In Latour's Actor-Network-Theory, rather than social ties, momentary associations occur and they have to be remade over and over in order to maintain their shape and relations. This concept of social space is explored fully in chapter 2.

Gabriel Tarde

Gabriel Tarde is a late 19th century, French sociologist. Bruno Latour suggests that Tarde is the forefather of much of his own theory in two ways; firstly he does not divide nature and society when exploring human relations and secondly, Tarde does not make a sharp distinction between macro and micro space in his understanding of how society is constituted (Latour, 2002). For Tarde, the word 'society' can be used to identify any type of association. In his work *Monadologie et sociologie* (1893), Tarde writes, 'everything is a society and [...] all things are societies... why not atomic societies?...

is 'wikipedia', is a more ready example of functioning as **multitude** than Critical Practice is. Here the **multitude** can be seen to amass at a specific site on one hand, the Wikipedia webpage, and its spatial formation is unspecific in another sense, geographically. Singularities cohere with a shared task, to create a **common** source of knowledge as understood and shared by the **multitude**. Members contribute anonymously and then disband. The **encyclopaedia**, when understood as a **gathering** is a constantly shifting entity which mutates as it accrues more information and previous entries are adapted or re-written.

It is interesting to note here, a crossover in terminology and ways of working found in current art **group** practices and also employed within software culture, such as the Wikipedia approach. As outlined in my introduction, **group** practices in contemporary art are described as 'participatory art', 'socially-engaged art' or 'collaborative art', amongst others. The language of **network** and software cultures uses similar descriptors, 'participatory cultures', 'open participation' and 'collaborative production'. Nathaniel Tkacz in *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness* also points to the use of 'transparency, participatory' and 'collaborative' filtering into the rhetoric of Western politics for example, Obama's presidential speeches in the United States (Tkacz, 2015:2). These open political structures are advocated by Tim O'Reilly, who coined the term 'open source' and who has been propagating the idea of 'government as platform' or 'Gov 2.0' in which the system of government runs

societies of stars, solar systems' (1999:58).

Raymond Williams

Raymond Williams in his text *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), describes the term 'society' as, 'our most general term for the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of people live; and as our most abstract form in which such institutions and relations are formed' (2010:291). He partners the abstractness of 'society' with 'state' where society is an abstract belonging and state is the power apparatus that, presumably, holds relations of society in place. It is interesting to compare this with Latour's definition, as he criticises the supposed "abstractness" of sociological terminology. Williams points out that contemporarily, society has been coupled with class, 'high society', and that previous more general concepts of society are now often replaced by the term 'community' .

Palle Nielsen

The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society (1968)
Nielsen's 1968 experiment at the Moderna Museet was a large scale production of one of the playground 'actions' that Nielsen and the activist group Aktion Samtal (Action American Dialogue) produced in and around Stockholm. These 'actions' often took the form of building playgrounds in public spaces in order to aid the development of new social norms, to reconsider structured society through the free play of

via open data feedback. It seems appropriate to quote Wikipedia here to outline this further:

Algorithmic regulation is an alternative form of government where computer algorithms replace written laws. It... is supposed to be a system of governance where more exact data collected from citizens via their smart devices and computers are used for more efficiency in organising human life as a **collective** (Wikipedia, 2015).

However, how neutral are such online platforms so often viewed as unmanaged and spontaneous, fully fluid entities? It could be said that, for example, the Critical Practice Wiki does not make apparent the conflict and tensions within **group** practice and probably does present a united front within the **group** even when this is not the case. The division of labour and sense of permission to uphold this platform is definitely not shared evenly within the **group** and is itself a source of contention. In *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness* Nathaniel Tkacz explores the way in which there is an assumed ethics of an ‘open’ or ‘collaborative’ agenda within platforms and that the politics of such structures are actually hidden. He describes interaction on Wikipedia, like Sennett’s GoogleWave and my experience of Loomio, as dialectical, ‘I call the totality of statements that constitute a project like Wikipedia a *statement formation*. Statement formations are cohered and ordered, but they do not constitute an entire discourse’ (Tkacz, 2015:40). Firstly, this limits the ability of an open politics as the actual discourse and subtly of interaction are not fully present. Secondly, Tkacz describes the Wikipedia content produced by users

children. Over the course of three weeks, *The Model* saw more than 20,000 children make use of a foam pool, dressing up clothes, swings, climbing frames, work tools, paints, turntables with LPs and more. Parents were invited to look on from TV screens set up to transmit the activity of the gallery into a restaurant on the premises. Lars Bang Larsen writes that, ‘The playground architecture embodied the project’s aim: the white cube was transformed into an open area for protected play and social irrationality’ (Bang Larson, 2000).



fig. 4.47. Palle Nielsen, *The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society*, Installation view, 1968.

State

John Dewey

In *The Public and its Problems* (1927), North American philosopher John Dewey takes a pragmatic approach to understanding the functioning of the public in producing the democratic state. For Dewey, the public is

as only a part of the actual interaction taking place, the ‘statement formations’ are:

[...] empirical aggregations, not necessarily or not only brought together by the rules of a discourse, but by any number of forces; they might be strongly ordered by one discourse in certain sections such as the discourse of encyclopaedic knowledge - but they also consist of other statements organised by different rules, such as rules of etiquette when discussing articles or the rules of programming language when modifying the wiki software (2015:41).

The ‘police’, in Rancierian terms, of this **assemblage** is found in the organisation of the platform and the elements that make it durable. These concerns about ‘open’ platforms are often picked up in feminist discourse which agrees with Tkacz’s suggestion that power within these fluid structures is placed below the surface, hiding selection processes, therefore making inclusion and exclusion appear inherent (Tim Chevalier, 2013). The feminist and political scientist Jo Freeman in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (1971) writes that within the Women’s Liberation Movement there was a strong desire to fight the perceived over-structuredness of life that, ‘**people** would try to use the “structureless” **group** and the informal conference for purposes for which they were unsuitable out of a blind belief that no other means could possibly be anything but oppressive’ when in fact, ‘there is no such thing as a structureless **group**’ (Freeman, 1971). However open, leaderless or ‘structureless’, **assemblages** are always composed, i.e. there is a process of selecting, making visible or apparent different elements over others.

generated when a group is affected in some way, positively or negatively. If the group is too big to be known to one another personally, through friendship and familial ties, it requires political organisation. Dewey argues that it is representatives of this public who form the functioning of the state. The state is not formed organically like a foetus, but when broken down, the origins of this state are, ‘singular persons, you, they, me’ (1927:37). This means that there is no set structuring of the state and that it should not be conceived of in a delineated way, ‘[t]here is no antecedent universal proposition which can be laid down because of which the functions of a state should be limited or should be expanded. Their scope is to be critically and experimentally determined’ (1927:74). In this way, the state is something to be decided upon.

Bruno Latour

Latour asks us to take John Dewey’s pragmatic approach to ‘rediscover the state’. He says that it is important to both be visible and invisible and to carry out political epistemology, constantly re-considering ‘what should the state be?’ This enacts Latour’s definition of politics, the ‘progressive composition of a common good’ (Latour, 2007). To do so requires research and the apparatus to do so, there must be systems of measurement, but these must not replace the act of politics. The crucial political point comes when a decision is made and a public is formed around an issue. It is this

VII

The discourse of ‘open’, ‘participation’ and ‘**collaboration**’ must not be assumed to be non-hierarchical or equal spaces, as this is never possible and such conceptions obscure the compositional tension between intention and power structure, situations which are always present in a constantly reassembling **social** space. Claire Bishop argues that the ethical drive of ‘participation’, ‘**collaboration**’ etc. in contemporary art practices can lead to a stalemate of ‘post-criticality’ in which, as previously quoted in chapter 2, ‘all relations that permit “dialogue” are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good’ (2004:65). Similarly, as we have seen previously, the rhetoric of ‘open’ in politics and technology is a label that seems impossible to refute and which covers the power within the mechanisation and functioning of systems. Within the democratic rhetoric of an open, transparent politics, Chantal Mouffe identifies a ‘post-political’ character to the way in which the potential of global political space is understood in the West:

To believe in the possibility of a cosmopolitan **democracy** with cosmopolitan citizens with the same rights and obligations, a constituency that would coincide with ‘humanity’ is a dangerous illustration. If such a project was ever realised, it could only signify the world hegemony of a dominant power that would have been able to impose itself on the entire planet and which, identifying its interests with those of humanity, would treat any disagreement as an illegitimate challenge to its ‘rational’ leadership (Mouffe, 2005:1).

Therefore, the fluid consistency of these open discourses creates its own hegemonic form. In response to this, Mouffe does not suggest an alternative to **democracy**,

moment that must also be made accountable and visible.

Latour says that we do not know what the state should be, but know that it is not either a nationalistic, archaic connection to the land, nor the ‘great winds’ of a global empire. The rediscovery of the state should not be projected through immovable structures:

It is never the case that you first know and then act, you first act tentatively, and then begin to know a bit more, before attempting again. It is this groping in the dark that is so difficult to map (Latour, 2007).

Welfare State

It is beyond the scope of this body of work to include the Welfare State, although I feel it is important to include it here as a sign of recognition of a crucial element in my political context.

Deleuze & Guattari

The ‘State apparatus’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) is described as a process of marking our borders and boundaries, limiting movement and creating spaces of interiority. A state is defined by ‘the perpetuation or conservation of organs of power’ (2004:359). They oppose this process with ‘the war machine’, exterior to the state, which pierces as it attempts to pass through the State apparatus in perpetual, nomadic movement. The war machine does not have war for its object but ‘adopts it as its object when it allows itself to be appropriated by

but instead calls for a re-ignition of the politics within this model. She views the concept of the **multitude** as outlined by Virno (2004) and Hardt and Negri (2006), as a stance of ‘desertion and exodus’ as it completely withdraws from existing institutions, or societal models of grouping. In contrast, Mouffe’s theory of agonistic relations depends on a shared desire for **democracy** and its principals (2000). Mouffe argues that to avoid a post-political hegemonic state of being, there always has to be space for tension within a **group** relation. However, rather than construct an antagonistic friend-enemy relation, which becomes destructive, an ‘agonistic’ conflict can be played out. She writes that the relationship of ‘adversaries’ takes place, ‘the major difference between enemies and adversaries is that adversaries are, so to speak, “friendly enemies,” in the sense they have something in **common**: they share a symbolic space. Therefore what I call a “conflictual consensus” can exist between them: they agree on the ethico-political principles that inform the political **association**, but they disagree on the interpretation of these principles’ (Mouffe, 2012:10-11).

Grant Kester (2007) utilises the concept of agonism to upend Bishop’s critique of collaborative practices by commenting that rather than a purist ethicality holding back this kind of practice, it is the critic that needs to go beyond a dependency on negation. He relates this to Bishop’s use of agonism as a framework for evaluating collaborative practices:

the State apparatus’ (2004:565). There is a constant balance in their relationship between order and chaos, interior and exterior, *polis* and *nomos*. For Deleuze, to rid ourselves of all the interiority of the sovereign would be a suicidal act. Rather than eliminating one for the other, it is better to use a, ‘very fine file to open up the political body to new possibilities than to wield a sledgehammer to obliterate its contours’ (2009:391).

Swarm

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

In *Multitude* (2005), Hardt and Negri describe the moment that a multitude or a distributed network chooses to ‘attack’ as a ‘swarm’. It can appear as a structureless entity as it has no central form of power. They argue, however, that just as in animal societies, the multitude produces a ‘swarm intelligence’, an intelligence much higher than that of each individual. This could be compared to Freud’s discussion of the ‘mass’ and their ability to reach both lower and heightened forms of ‘ethical behaviour’ (Freud’s term). Rather than a marauding mass, dumbed down by their gathering, Hardt and Negri point to, firstly, the intelligence created by the swarm and secondly, as with the multitude, they emphasise that this entity does not dilute a sense of singularity. They give the example of termites building large structures without a central command and say that the key to the

The concept of agonistic **democracy** relies on a particular understanding of how we go about engaging with difference... why would you assume that the human tendency cultivated by this endless self-assertion would necessarily remain democratic? What is being *practiced* here is the will toward conflict, rather than a capacity for reconciliation' (Kester, 2007:114-5).

I agree with Kester that a different approach must be taken to evaluate this type of activity, one that takes time and embeds itself rather than relying on documentation or the aftermath of activity. However, I would argue that applying the term 'conflictual' is not tantamount to suggesting that **democracy** requires all out conflict and that Mouffe does go to lengths to differentiate agonism from antagonism. Conflictual differences are important to recognise so as not to hide difference within **social** composition. An agonistic relation can work when both sides are mutually engaged in carrying out the same task, yet always accounts for multiple perspectives which do not necessarily have to be agreed upon, making Mouffe's '**public**' a more complex entity than that of Dewey (1927). However, does this concept of the 'friendly-enemy' depend too much on good will, on an assumption of a high degree of **social** and emotional capabilities between all participants (human or non-human in the case of an expanded **collective**)? How can we perceive the need for balanced, measured interactions, despite Mouffe's call for the ignition of a passionate politics? What if the task itself, cannot be agreed on in the first place? Then, in this case, a **public** is not called into action. However disparate the views of those entering into this relation, all participants must agree on

swarm is communication.



Typology

A note on Typology

I have used the term 'Typology' for this collection of terms which runs alongside my formal thesis. Typology for me, rather than closing down possibility by defining, seeks to think in terms of 'types' of gathering and the history of thought that has led to current understandings within the social imaginary for each term.

Simon Sheikh

Sheikh calls for a 'typology of exhibitions' in his text *Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator* (2007) in order to pluralise exhibitionary practice. This, he argues, will also allow us to consider in more depth who is being addressed by such practices. Increased diversity of curatorial practice, Sheikh hopes, will serve to agitate rigid or market-led models of exhibitionary address.

certain set principles. Chantal Mouffe gives **democracy** and the desire for ‘freedom’ as an example. An antagonistic relation would include differing perspectives on what **democracy** and freedom might mean, but would have to begin with an agreed want for these shared notions. With Mouffe, agonism is limited to those who agree on ‘**democracy**’ as a principal, leaving no alternative for communication and **group** formation with those who not to have this same starting point.

In contrast to this, we found a seemingly disappointing lack of tension in the *Assembling exhibition*. During the ‘incubation period’ of *Assembling*, participants were working together in the Cookhouse Gallery to find an issue to take forward from a political hustings held at the college by the Artists’ Union. In this period, we discussed a comment made by a curator who often works with Maurice. She suggested that there seemed to be little representation of tension within the grouping, that *Assembling* seemed too cohesive as a process to be productive as an exploration of ways of organising. This first led us to think through whether there could be a way to create or actively construct more conflict and make visible these rifts as a strategy to avoid a sense of the ‘post-political’. Ideas we considered included making placards with varying opinions, inviting their destruction if not agreed upon. It was during this time that we also attempted to stimulate debate through Loomio, asking participants to ‘improve’ on others’ artwork. I wondered whether the format of the **exhibition** and activity taking place within it had become so flexible that



Vocabulary

Raymond Williams

Raymond Williams’ 1976 text, examined in the introduction to this thesis, is often referred to simply as *Keywords*, but its full title is actually, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Just as I am looking at ‘types’ of association rather than providing definitions, so Williams drew together a ‘vocabulary’, asking us to pause and pull apart words we so commonly use, but which he felt were problematic and required evaluation. He writes:

It is [...] the record of an inquiry into a *vocabulary*: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions... of the practices and institutions we groups as *culture* and *society* (2010:13).

We can see these words as objects which have been tied together to make them apparent (see: social ties), not just a ‘tool’ which recedes into the background, but a performed, mutable assemblage.

there was almost a ‘tyranny of acceptance’, an aggressive tolerance that did not allow tensions to surface. In discussing this issue further, we decided that it would give a false representation to try to manufacture relations and that actually, with Katie’s workshop for the *Assembling manifesto* in the Islington Mill residency (p.41 *Assembling* portfolio), in which we discussed the ways in which we wanted to work and communicate together, we had already carried out a lot of ground work beforehand and that this was sincere. In this way we could accommodate one another differently, for example, rather than adapting or destroying parts of Julika’s construction (p.78 *Assembling* portfolio), as it was not a necessity to use this space, we worked to tend and expand it.

The whole *Assembling* process was not completely free of conflict. The space of tension seemed to appear in differences in creative processes between artworks. Most of the work taking place in *Assembling* was procedural in some way, so that it developed over time, often existing in different iterations throughout the **exhibition**. For example, Maurice’s work (p.82 *Assembling* portfolio) which encompassed multiple viewings by potential ‘hosts’ as well as a disassembling event, or Karem’s work (p.79 *Assembling* portfolio) in which he put on the dinner to think through sustainable art practice, including building the table from found materials and performing cooking within the gallery. Although, there was a difference between both of these artists’ approach, with Maurice interested in spaces of over-production



Web

Marcel Duchamp

More than thirty artists participated in *First Papers of Surrealism* (1942) organised by Andre Breton, which took place at the Whitelaw Reid mansion in New York. Surrealist painting hung on partitions within the grand Italianate setting of the mansion, perhaps already a confusing pairing, to which Duchamp added his own distinctive intervention. The artist had been asked to consider the design of the exhibition and invited friends to help thread a sixteen mile long ball of string through the space to form a web-like mesh. Although only a mile of the string was used in this ambitious scheme, this was enough length to obscure much of the work, to the disappointment of some of the participating artists (Filipovic, 2009). Duchamp increased this disruption during the opening night by inviting a group of children to play hopscotch, skipping and ball in the space and that if questioned, they should answer that it was the artist who had invited them to do so. Academic David Hopkins writes that, ‘Duchamp scholars have tended to see the “mile of string” installation as alluding to the displacement and disorientation

and Karem largely abandoning the production of objects. Katie's work, *Dinner for West Princes Street* (2014) and *Work Hands 1, Work Hands 4, Work Hands 5* (2014) (p.83 *Assembling* portfolio) was installed with her arrival towards the middle of the **exhibition**. Both were complete once installed and did not require a temporal element once made. In this way, Katie felt perhaps more uneasy with engaging in activity we had built up during the incubation period between Karem, Maurice, Scott and I as this understandably felt separate from her work, a space which she arrived into once already set into motion. I am not privileging one way of working over the other, but actually I am pointing to the necessity of this rift, one that provided difference and a chance to question ways of working. Perhaps this was not immediately evident to those visiting the **exhibition**, but maybe could be perceived in the crafted, complete feeling of Katie's work over the others. Throughout the **exhibition**, negotiation between all of these elements needed to be assessed constantly; where objects would be placed or conversations held, which new objects would be introduced or expanded on and to what effect; which activity should be prioritised, which issues were important to us, who would carry out which tasks, how we wanted to spend our time, who was prepared to engage and to what extent. In the conclusion I assess whether compositions found in the expanded **collective** of the *Assembling exhibition* were positioned in relation to open, collaborative methodology, or whether different **assemblages** were formed by curatorial practice.

of the surrealist group at this time' (Hopkins, 2014). But it also seems key to see the work as a comment on the space of exhibition, how the body traverses through this space and how we engage with the work found there. The intervention is relevant for this Typology, through its similarity to my own experiment with 'social ties', which is explained here under the term 'social'. Like the wool of social ties making the objects in the space apparent, Duchamp's string both obscures and makes clear at the same time. While the string obviously prevents an unrestricted viewing of the surrealist paintings, it also highlights the exhibition as a space, the objects within it and the behaviour which is expected, or has become customary, there. In this way, it draws all of these elements together, demonstrating them as an assemblage.

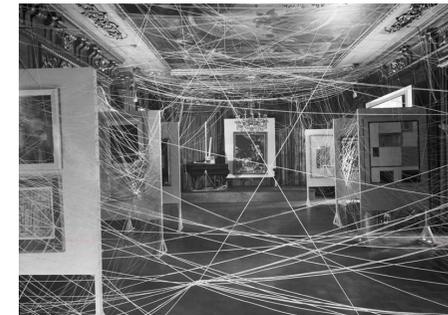


fig. 4.48. Marcel Duchamp, *First Papers of Surrealism*, Installation view, 1942.

Lygia Pape

Weaving and forming webs is an important aspect of Lygia Pape's work, whether in her



Conclusion: Foam

Throughout this thesis I have been seeking to re-conceive the ‘**social**’ as a mutable substance of a spatial, as well as relational, quality. These **social** spaces become part of the active process of composition rather than passively existing as vacant sites. Much of the practice within this research whether through *Assembling* or by participating in Critical Practice, deals with experimentation and the evaluation of ways of self-organising, of forming structures in which **collectives** of **people** are conscious of and work through how these forms function and why. I hope it is clear however, that the overall direction of the research reaches towards another course, into the expanded collectivities of the **social**. Thinking through how **social** spaces have been imagined and how they are composed gives rise to a wider set of concerns about representation, of the performance or composition of the relational **social**. Through a reading of Latour and Rancière and by thinking in terms of

wood block images which she calls *Tecelar* (to weave), her golden thread *Tléia* (web) sculptures, or her investigation into the weaving of social, urban space in the film *Espaços Imantados* (Magnitised Spaces). Pape was drawn to the activity and energy of the street, to areas where people seemed to gather spontaneously in micro-communities (Camillo Osorio, 2006). She wrote:

I became aware of a new type of relationship with urban space as if I were a spider of sorts, weaving space... it was as if... the city was like a enormous cobweb, a huge entanglement. I called them magnetised spaces as the whole thing seems alive, and I moved inside it, pulling up a thread to be woven round into an endless skein’ (Pape 2011:285).

Pape also experimented with forming webs through collective movement. Firstly an area would be designated in either the south side of Rio de Janeiro or a northern area known as Baixada Fluminense. Participant weavers experienced these spaces through walks and by using their senses. The second stage would be to take coloured yarn, occupying the space, ‘in such a way that gradually they will intersect and form primary structures such as an incipient *Teia*’ (Pape, 1979; 2011: 370). Similarly to ‘social ties’ and Duchamp’s intervention, Pape draws together experience, bodily movement and objects into her concept of a magnetised social space.

assemblage, we can view all matter as existing on an interconnected equal field. It is the compositional production of this matter into **assemblages** that gives rise to representation. As the *Typology of Association* demonstrates, **social associations** form multiple types of **assemblage** such as texts, artworks, political formations and ideas. This compositional activity is of great concern for contemporary curation as the act of curation means to care, to make visible and to assemble artists, objects, conversations, movements etc. However, the curator can never interact with this social space in an objective way, as they too are in a part of multiple assemblages with any ‘thing’ that they come into contact with. This makes the task of taking care to trial self-organisational practices and to trace, acknowledge and make apparent decision-making processes all the more crucial.

In my introduction, I give primacy to the concept of text as a form of **assemblage** which is part of compositional space. The thesis can be read through its placement of images, the scattered bold words on the page, the choice of layout, its weight, its size as well as its theoretical documentation and chronological form. It is worth re-quoting Deleuze and Guattari here:

We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed (2004:4).

Text as **assemblage** is found throughout this research. It can be seen in my



fig. 4.48 Lygia Pape, *Espaços Imantados*, [film] 1968.

investigation of the **manifesto**, the transformation of the *Typology* into large poster-like book pages during *Assembling*, my use of these learnt book-making skills to construct **exhibition** portfolios in single-leaf bound texts and the form that this thesis itself takes. Understood knowledge of the **social** imaginary is constructed by *doing*. In this case, both the *Typology of Association* and the form of this thesis are efforts to construct a fragile, temporary knowledge of what the **social** might be and a loosely produced **assemblage** as an act of initiating a **social** form.

In the introduction I suggested that all art could be said to be ‘**social**’ in two ways. Firstly there is the influence of personal relationships as well as of the multiple **people** and decisions required for the construction of many artworks and **exhibitions**. Secondly, because an artwork does not appear in a vacuum, all art is positioned within that which has gone before, that which has been designated and collectively perceived of as art at any given moment. Throughout this thesis, within the *Typology of Association* and through the curation and evaluation of *Assembling*, I have shifted between personal dialogue and small **group** relations to the globalised movements of current hegemonic systems, traveling between Cuba and UK. Rather than a mere restlessness, this slipping and sliding between different scales of the **social** has been intentional. It is an attempt to reveal this space as one interconnected composition rather than ‘what happens tangibly between us’ and ‘what happens out there that is unreachable’ in order to demonstrate the different qualities and consistencies within these scales.

In chapter 1, I have demonstrated that in Cuba more recent **group** practices between artists have been performing the **social** by carving out instances of shared, **collective** experience in order to produce alternative narratives to that of the dominant, solid, political one. In the West the **social** in art since the 90s has often been considered in terms of relationality; transactions, interactions, conversations, **networks**, interfaces, itinerancy, a transition into the fluid and away from the fetishisation of object/subject. In choosing to research artists’ **group** practices and collectivism in such a way, by beginning through the lens of Cuba from a UK context, I could be criticised for producing a sense of longing or nostalgia by attempting to reconfigure a socialist, collectivist imagining of art’s potential. If we go back to chapter 2

and Bishop's statement that the **social** drive in art appears in relation to the historical movements of avant-garde, neo-avant-garde and a post 1989 politics and that these moments, 'form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of history' (2013:3), we remind ourselves that **social** drives in art have been aligned precisely within this nostalgic framework. Simon Sheikh in *The End of an Era* (2008) writes that art has a place in confronting the crisis of a collectivist history and the failure to see alternatives or have new ideas in relation to our current political state of global capitalism. Art can act as a way to examine and re-configure the **social** imaginary, the ways in which we collectively produce a conception of the world around us' (Sheikh, 2008:67). However, researching concurrently within Cuba and the UK actually highlights that there has never been an 'end' to this project of **collective** history neither perhaps, a neat beginning. While Bishop contributes the **social** drive to shifts within a modern, historical framework, the way in which the **social** has been conceived within this thesis cannot be found within containers such as these. With the risk of quoting Latour one too many times, I will turn here to *We have Never been Modern* (1991) in which he writes, '[d]isappointed rationalists... indeed sense that modernism is done for, but they continue to accept its way of dividing up time; thus they can divide up eras only in terms of successive revolutions. They feel that they come 'after' the moderns, but with the disagreeable sentiment that there is no more 'after'. 'No future': this is the motto added to the moderns' motto 'No past' (1993: 46).

Latour's claim that modernity has never existed relates to Jean Luc Nancy's assertion, as found in the *Typology*, that, '**Community** has never taken place.... **Society** was not built on the ruins of a **community**...Nothing, therefore, has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost... Entangled in its meshes, we have wrung for ourselves the phantasm of the lost **community**' ([1986] 2006:62). In this way we have been 'forced out' of two interrelated frameworks, a temporal, historical notion of both politics and art in terms of 'modernist avant-gardisms', as well as a nostalgic, politicised notion of collectivity and communitarianism that provides a united future based on the conception of a missed past. This in turn, draws us back to Derrida's disjointed temporality in terms of Marx. His suggested haunting clearly relates to Nancy's phantasm, both are the (non)presence of something that has been envisaged in the past. So the issue becomes how to avoid replacing wistful

historical projections of utopian futures by creating yet another hegemonic future as a united **collective** unity. Attempting to move away from solid or fluid hegemonic constructs within this research has therefore seen a rejection of a temporal sense of **social**. Latour finishes the statement quoted previously regarding modernity's non-existence with the question, 'What remains?' (1993:46). As with Rancière described in chapter 2, instead of temporal movements, what *is* left is something *spatial*. **Collective** here, is collecting together as practice to produce a **social** consistency, a seething, amassing **foam**.

This is where the concept of Peter Sloterdijk's '**foam**' can finally be fully introduced to complement Latour and Rancière's vision of the **social** being actively produced in amassing, tangible space. Peter Sloterdijk has been a controversial figure, whether for his lecture on 'the Human Zoo', heavily criticised for using terminology rife in Nazism such as 'selection' and 'breeding', or for his suggestion that the welfare **state** takes from the most productive in **society** (Elden, 2012:14). However, despite his political awkwardness, Sloterdijk's imagery has been incredibly useful for my thinking. The **social**, for Sloterdijk, is not like the interactions of a **network** as this is too flat, or in my language, too fluid, 'Sociologists and **network** theorists prefer, as it were, an anorectic terminology. The bodiless, there are just points and lines between them. I ask the question, where are the volumes? The *volumina*? As soon as human presence comes into question, you have to shift the accent of attention from lines and points and interfaces, to shared spaces' (Sloterdijk, 2012). Instead of the **network**, or Bauman's 'liquid' which represents the flow of time over spatial form, Sloterdijk deploys the voluminous sphere, developing his own theory of 'spherology' which he uses to re-conceptualise globalisation as a conception of contemporary existence. This spherology consists of *Bubbles*, an exploration of intimate space, *Globes* which considers the global space of empire and **Foam**, which examines contemporary plurality, predominantly within urban space. In *Neither Sun Nor Death* (2011) Sloterdijk writes:

In placing the image of the bubble at the centre of my reflections, I wish to underline my serious intention to further the revision of substance fetishism and metaphysical individualism. This means beginning with the most fragile, which what we have in **common**; that is, beginning with the breathiest space, in a thin-walled structure, which, owing to its fragile form and transparent appearance, already gives us to understand that we are supported neither by the security in foundation and less still by an *inconcussum* or some other rocky base... (Sloterdijk, 2011:148).

fig. 5.1. 'Place Names' for sustainable practices dinner wish list, 2015.



Rather than denoting 'shared **common**' through language such as the **multitude** describes, the **common** here is so fragile and temporary that it could adapt and change with slight influence or interference. It finds form, yet the form shifts in relation to everything with which it comes into contact.

II

Sloterdijk describes **foam** as 'co-isolated **associations**' or 'connected isolations', centre-less forms which mass on top of one another while remaining separated in individuated bubbles, creating a fragmented space. However, **foam** to me is also full of possibility. It reminds me of Deleuze's description of the **multitude** as, 'constellations of singularities', yet with shape, physical form. Sloterdijk's multitudinal interaction creates very subtle, evocative and provocative imagery. Hélène Frichot writing on his work wonderfully depicts this delicate nature of **foam**, writing, '...when bubbles, individuals, or beings, human and non-human, amass and cohere, their influence on one another creates all manner of formal distortion' (2009:1). **Assemblages cluster** together through multiple, fragile linkages, forming delicate, temporary structures each of which subtly contort that which has gone before.

Sloterdijk describes these bubbles as self-contained units of self-care. Is isolated space necessarily a negative thing? As described in this work, artists' **group** practices are often attempts to form distinctive or contradicting **collective** space. Within *Assembling* as well, there existed apparent exclusive spaces, which I argue are key for a subtle foamy form of **assemblage**. For example, I actively sought out and invited participants for the 'communities of practice' discussions, thinking through differing practices which shared concerns with *Assembling* artists, albeit these were open to serendipitous adaptation, such as when we invited BA students, who happened to be in the college late on a Friday, because no one had arrived for a discussion. However, these groupings were not openly advertised to others. The same is the case with the sustainable practice dinner, to which we invited specific guests. The reason behind this strategy was to be cohesive with our sense of forming **social** space as an ongoing practice which we ourselves activate rather than passively waiting for it to appear and as a continuation of our desire to form a specific **public** around an issue. It also reflects a desire to be open to re-forming dependent on circumstance, so that if

one attempt at **assembling** fails, another can be adopted.

In *Assembling*, the need for textured **foam**, for spaces concurrently offering openness and exclusivity, links back to activity on Loomio and the need for ‘safe’ closed spaces, as well as open ones in order to nurture collaborative making and ideas. Another important aspect of this foamy space of fragile borders and boundaries is *refusal*. Participation is about inclusion, but what if the participants do not want to be included? The choice not to participate has an important function. In Dave Eggers novel *The Circle*, which parodies mammoth, domineering online organisations such as Google and Paypal, The Circle founders call for, ‘100 percent participation. One hundred percent **democracy**’ (2013:386), when in fact a hegemonic complete participation leads not to **democracy** but post-politicality without, in Mouffee’s terminology, the agonistic political site of tension. We also come across this ‘total’ scale, in the writing of Guy Debord discussed in chapter 2, who calls for ‘total participation’ as the only way to disrupt an all-pervasive capitalism. This totality as **association** is opposed to a foamy logic. Here it is important to return to Nathaniel Tkacz, who outlines the necessity of *closed spaces* or the potential for closures to occur within open, flexible structures. He writes that:

How is it that *specific* sets of practices called ‘**democracy**’ are part of the open and yet in the future might not be? One response is that the democratic practices might be succeeded by something that is even more democratic and thus even more open. Another possible response is that these practices have *become* closed, that somehow, through time, this mode of governance loses its character of openness. Both of these responses, however, suggest that forms of *closure* exist *within* open societies...’ (Tkacz, 2015:36).

Although, it is important to remember that closing does not mean evaporating. Rather than opening and closing, perhaps it is more useful to imagine shuffling and re-shuffling, shifting, making apparent and blocking out. The bubble does not burst into thin air, but either merges with another, loses its architecture and becomes liquid or changes shape as other bubbles cohere on its surface.

III

In chapter 2, I considered the **social** in terms of space, consistency, placement and scale. Spherology, like the work of Latour, Rancière

or Deleuze's **assemblages**, relocates grand **social** narratives into amassing, tangible, spatial compositions. Sloterdijk's work draws on Heidegger's theory and his negation of the subject/object split in favour of *being-in-the-world* (*Dasein*), the production of being in constant relation to everything else we come into contact with, whether human or non-human, which provides us with a more in-depth understanding of **foam**. In the introduction to this thesis and in the description of '**social** ties' in the *Typology*, I examine Heidegger's 'tool analysis' in which tools that we use on a regular basis withdraw in their particularity, they become extensions of actions rather than retaining their own 'objectness'. This directly relates to the concept of 'being-in-the-world' in which we are not separate entities but experience the world as known, not through the precise qualities of things, i.e. the exact measurements and material of a room, but through a whole **web** of everyday information, through living it from the inside. Within a room, for example this might be whether a wardrobe would fit or not, that it reminds me of a bedroom from my childhood that felt secure, that an oak tree outside is blocking light making the environment unsuitable for writing, that I had an argument the first time I entered, that you can see out to the bus which leads directly to a friend's house etc. In *Sloterdijk Now* (2012), Elden writes that, '[f]or Sloterdijk, in distinction to Heidegger, the key concern is not so much being, *Dasein*, but rather being-with or being together, *Mit-sein*... Sloterdijk takes the Heideggerian idea of being-in-the-world and analyses the 'in', the way Heidegger expressly denied, as a spatial term, as a question of location, of where we are' (2012:6). Heidegger focused more on the relations of things, how they are used, and the way in which these interrelate to make them 'be'. Sloterdijk takes this further when he says that it is not only 'being' or 'things' that are formed in this way, but space as well. So, as we have seen, collectivity and forms of **gathering** should not only be understood in terms of an interconnected relational **web**, but more in terms of spatial composition and the consequences of these **assemblages** on the representation of things, matters, issues and states of being. In *Spheres and Networks* Latour aligns his Actor-**Network**-Theory with Sloterdijk's Spherology asking, 'Is space that *inside which* objects and subjects reside? Or is space *one* of the many connections made by objects and subjects?' (2009:142)

My intention here is not to introduce a new theory at this stage of my thesis, but hope that this might enrich the readers' imagining of

concepts that have been discussed already. We can relate this negation of the subject/object split through the construction of space directly with Latour and his 'parliament of things' - in other words, his call to compose the human and non-human to form **social** space and in doing so, to represent issues that need to be given voice at any given time. I propose that we can ask the same of the space of the **exhibition**. Is it the space in which objects and subjects reside or is it activated? How are we to compose space into an **assemblage** within an **exhibition** setting? Living with space and producing space, rather than allowing it to present itself as another container, re-localises the **social** to make it into an amassing large entity formed of multiple, ever-shifting tangible parts. By tangible here, I do not mean this space is activated only through the materiality of objects, but that sounds, thoughts, heat etc. are all reachable elements humans and non-humans are constantly knocking up against and which cohere to construct what has hitherto been regarded as large-scale abstraction.

This re-localisation leads to the concept of object-orientated philosophy which is currently gaining ground, particularly with theorists such as Graham Harman (2011). This theory attempts to realign our perception of what I have called '**social** space' to make room for objects, emphasising that there are not only **collectives** made of humans and non-humans, but **collectives** in which humans do not feature at all. Harman, who also draws on Heidegger, asserts that it is not just human experience of 'being in the world' that give rise to complex relations, but that objects 'experience' each other differently too. They cannot do so with the same consciousness of course, but it is argued that for example, fire experiences the qualities of cotton through its flammability, the desk I am sitting at experiences my computer through its weight, and so on (Harman, 2011). In *The Democracy of Objects*, Levi Bryant explores this space as a 'flat ontology', writing that this concept, 'is not the thesis that all objects contribute equally, but that all objects equally exist' (2011:290). He continues to develop this idea saying that a flat ontology of objects, 'democratizes being, asserting not one primary gap between subjects and objects, humans and world, mind and reality, but rather an infinity of gaps or vacuums between objects regardless of whether humans are involved' (2011:290). Similar concepts are found in Rancière's concept of equality in which **social** space exists on the same plane, while the politics of distributing this space means that all of its elements are never equally in contact, or made visible, providing them with a different weight. Curation sets up different practices and

interactions that have an impact on the composing of **assemblages** from the ‘equality’ or ‘flat ontology’ of **social** space around us which is in fact never equal.

These ideas refer us back to chapter 1 in which I discuss Rancière’s depiction of the blank page which is never simply empty and uncharged, as the page is a constructed form in itself, it is not merely an ‘open platform’ but a fabricated ‘thing’ with specific coordinates for how we understand it; a space of learning and knowledge which may be exciting or threatening, or as a material made from wood pulp derived from specific methods and sold via a circulating market, etc. As he puts it, ‘the equality of all subject matter is the negation of any relationship of necessity between a determined form and a determined content’ (2000:14). This is why, for me, **Group Material’s Democracy** has been such a relevant **exhibition** for this research. It demonstrates an attempt to negotiate these hierarchies of composition by recognising; firstly, the need to gather the right **people** to form a discussion which will directly effect the **exhibition’s** composition; secondly, to gather and expose art and non-art objects as hierarchical; and thirdly within the way that *Democracy* demonstrates the position of the **exhibition** in a wider **social**, i.e. it views the **exhibition** not just as space for representing an issue, but recognises the **exhibition** as a ‘thing’ in itself, whose coordinates are effected by a continually changing imaginary. **Group Material** write, ‘What politics inform accepted understandings of art and culture? Whose interests are served by such cultural conventions? How is culture made and for whom is it made?’ (1990:1). As with *Assembling*, which has tried to give form to **exhibition** through non-hierarchical methodologies of **gathering**, **Group Material** state that a key concern in this process is that of ‘inclusion’. I will develop this idea further now to form my conception of a foamy space, a bubble-like **assemblage** which requires the acknowledgement of texture, of inclusion and refusal, of open and more intimate, private spaces within which to test, be uncertain, nurture and care.

IV

There was a high level of flexibility and a constantly changing nature to the *Assembling* exhibitionary activity, whether this consisted in working on individual practice, shared time, private conversation, alternating spaces of work and show within the **exhibition**, or artists

being present at different times, which all drew together principally around our shared concern of how to work together. The suggestion, as discussed at the end of chapter 3, by a visiting curator that there was a ‘lack of conflict’ draws us back to the writing of Bishop and of Mouffe who both suggest that a **democracy** without tension is not democratic. Again, although not overtly conflictual, the role of *refusal* seems key within this process, whether through other commitments (Julika), inability to engage (Luis) or difference of approach (Katie). This flexibility and the ever-changing platforms that *Assembling* undertook may at first seem like an inconsistency or a restlessness, but I think this willingness to shift, recompose, open and close strategy has been an important part of forming a foamy consistency. The ‘democratic’ consistency of a **foam** does not necessarily always appear as moments of overt tension or conflict, as suggested by Bishop and Mouffe. Key for this conception of a foamy practice is that space is given for a plurality of approaches, ways of thinking and making, which may coexist through the shared form of a shared task, as earlier explored through operative **groups** in chapter 3, or by finding an issue around which to form as with Latour’s **collective**. In other words, **foam** does not require unification, so does not fall into the trap of a neutral post-politicality, but instead coheres through a shared understanding and/or drive that re-assembles itself regularly through the acknowledgement of the fragility of its structure. However, as introduced in Chapter 1 in a discussion about this process in relation to the ‘**collective**’, these foamy practices can lack clear purpose, they do take time and are organisationally focused. More research would be required to know whether this approach would be capable of sustaining itself for a longer period of time, for taking shared ideas further in a way that could take forward a shared aesthetic approach, why of working together and sense of political drive.

In evaluating the concept of **foam**, we must go back to Bishop’s comment explored in chapter 2 and re-examine her view of collaborative practice through the ‘quality of relationships’ being formed. There is a well-known debate within the field of collaborative art practice between Bishop and Grant Kester, as pointed to at the end of chapter 3, in which the latter argues that framing these practices in the language of judgement such as ‘aestheticism’ and ‘quality’, merely acts to maintain the importance of the position of the critic and their ability to make valorisations (Kester, 2006). Bishop’s use of ‘quality’ does not take into account how this judgement is made, how the

composition of elements adhere to mean that something is considered of ‘quality’. Yet of course judgements *are* made, what is known in the **social** imaginary filters through a myriad of decisions about what is considered important, valuable, worthy, striking etc., enough to include, be seen, or talked about. It is crucial to remember this, to take care and realise who is forming these judgements, where are they being made and to what end. A **foam** is not only relational, rather than the ‘quality of relations’ it is consistency, composition and the visibility within these **assemblages** that becomes important.

As I have just suggested, this very act of composing denotes exclusivity. Sloterdijk associates bubble-formation with self-preservation and self-immunity divorced from other bubbles. But there are no airtight vacuum chambers or bell jar-like containers in my conception of **foam**. Instead, fragile linkages that allow for opening and closing off and the realisation of this possibility, while maintaining a compositional form, produces a more subtle **foam**-like quality. There is an adaptability and a willingness to open and close spaces to allow for a continued tentative exploration knowing that a complete cohesion will never be possible. The grouping of artists, the act of **exhibition**, forming a **public** through the re-localisation of the **social** are endeavours to form bubbles of small-**group**, or small-**assemblage** ‘**democracy**’. The curatorial role has been evidenced here, by thinking through ways of doing and making; the effort to re-think the format of **exhibition** and **exhibition**-making by **assembling social**, foaming space.

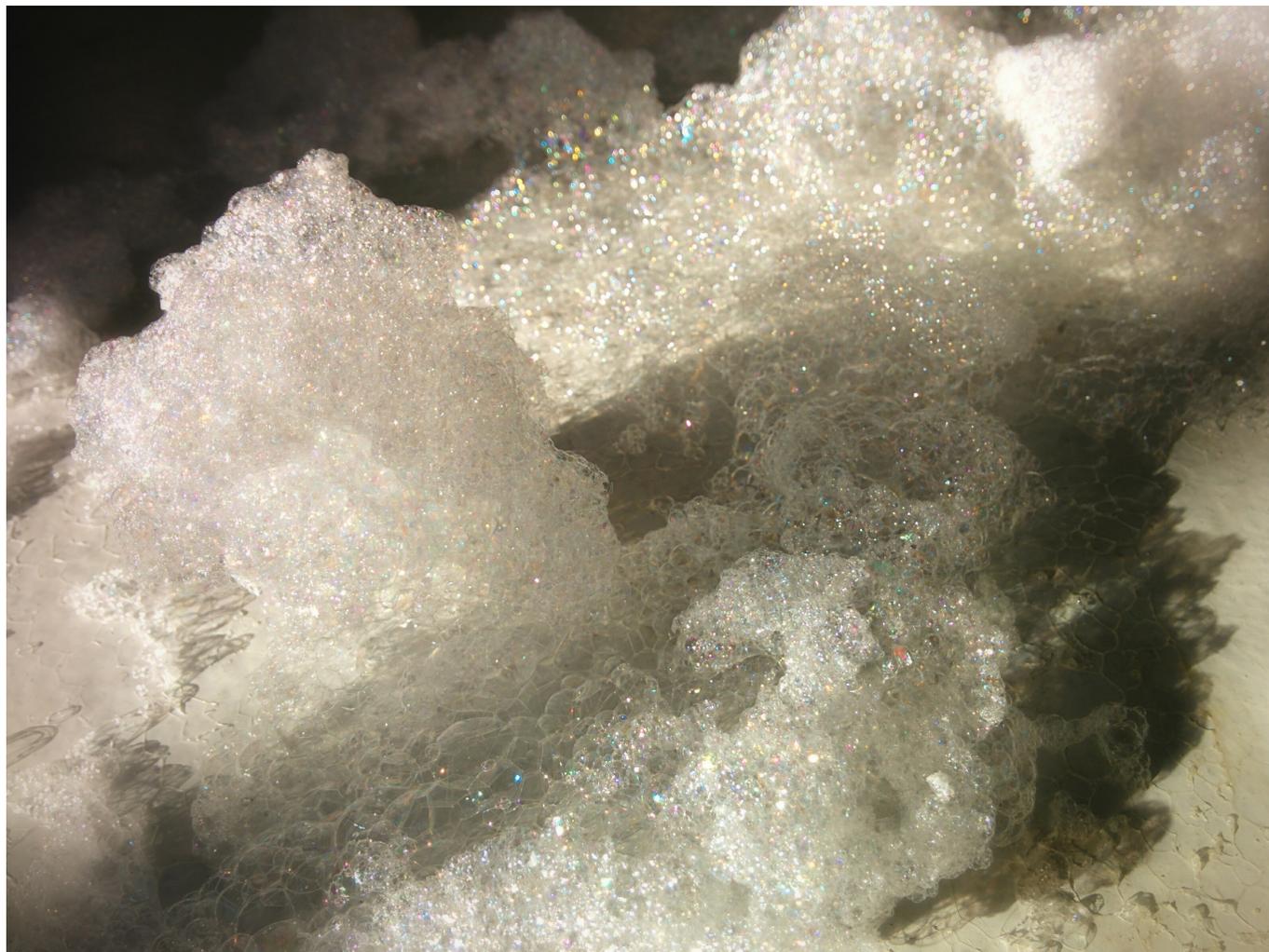
V

I could stop here, but in order to round off this conclusion, I would like to return to the states of matter that run throughout this written text. Although the language embedded within this thesis of solid, fluid and foamy **associations** seemed to me to be intuitive, they are of course terms that came to me from within the **social** imaginary, that which has been visible and audible to me throughout this period of research and no doubt beforehand too. The description of socio-political relations in terms of ‘solid’ and ‘fluid’, or more usually ‘liquid’, have been repeated and refashioned at least all the way back to Marx. Towards the end of writing, before fully realising this connection, I placed

a quotation of Marx, ‘All that is solid melts into air’ (Marx, 1848) at the beginning of chapter 1. This aphorism appears like a *momento mori*, or a Buddhist mandala, within the first chapter of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* to express the duality of drive and waste, of development and progress with destruction and temporality, which is produced by a ‘bourgeois capitalism’. The text *Liquid Modernity* (2000) by Bauman discussed in chapter 2, owes much to Marshall Berman’s writing which also borrows Marx’s phrase, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982). As with Bauman, modernity and the flow of capital are described as a force of dissipation and disintegration, of constant movement and shift. Berman spends time evaluating Marx, pointing to his praise of the energy and drive of the bourgeoisie, this active, ‘working, moving, cultivating, communicating, organising and reorganising nature and themselves—the new and endlessly renewed modes of activity that the bourgeoisie bring into being’ (1982:93). And yet, explains Berman, according to Marx, this ingenuity is all focused and positioned towards making money and accumulating capital. The rapacious drive of capital necessitates continual development and self-development, the desire for change and for momentum. Berman considers the irony of the modernist longing for order and control, perhaps too here we could add cohesive **community**, when he writes, ‘solid stability... In this world, stability can only mean entropy, slow death, while our sense of progress and growth is our only way of knowing for sure that we are alive. To say that our **society** is falling apart is only to say that it is alive and well’ (1982:95). ‘Bourgeois **society**’ is meant to be about law and order, stability, and yet everything built or developed is made to be ripped down, destroyed, re-built, re-fashioned, re-sold. The more we colonise, the wider our selling **networks** become, the more we destroy.

Within a hegemonic fluid system, how is it that we should perceive my insistence on framing **social** space as the constant **assembling** and re-assembling of compositional distribution? How can I justify the compositional language of shifting and re-arranging in relation to Berman’s assessment of the destructive liquid quality of capitalism? Is the next state within a **foam** inevitably air? To some attentive readers, the task at hand in this research, that of reviewing the imaginary of **social** space might appear contradictory. On the one side, through an exploration of exhibitionary practice, I have been calling for a textured space of exclusivity and inclusivity, of opening and closing, pointing

fig. 5.2. Foam at *Assembling* private view, 2015.



to this as a positive attribute. However, at the same time, I have described how a textured global space is made up of opposing bordered, closed spaces for some and open for others, in a complete inequality of movement. This is the tension that **foam** holds, it is equal, in that it all exists in one space, but not in the sense that it is inherently equal. This tension aims to recognise the complexity of composition, the temporal, imagined nature of closed spaces, while also exposing the form, shape and consequences of these spaces as they hold. As well as providing nurturing spaces, a **foam** may equally be distorted with restrictive effects, as Sloterdijk states in an interview, **foam**, '[f]rom a physical perspective... describes multi-chamber systems consisting of spaces formed by gas pressure and surface tensions, which restrict and deform one another according to fairly strict geometric laws' (2005). Perceiving **social** space as **foam** demands an attention and a subtlety of understanding about its composition to recognise these ongoing, composite interactions, tensions and coherences.

The role of the curator within this state of matter is not to show and describe what is there, but rather to tentatively examine, navigate, adapt and shift the compositional quality of **social** space that decides what and who is represented through its distribution. What I have learnt from *Assembling* is that there are no 'flat spaces' without hierarchy, however subtle. Even within the most seemingly distributed space, decision-making and protocol may disperse, yet rather than disappearing they are instead remediated, as of course some elements are still present over others, the **assemblage** is cohering under certain conditions. Within fragile, foamy curatorial structures, it is the role of the curator to act as the 'caretaker' of shared issues that arise through **collaboration** and to continue to develop ways of working together that were successful amongst failed attempts. Instead of issues dissipating with the end of the project, the caretaker curator continues to see through the life of an idea, producing a sense of continuity, reassembling from one project to the next. As Sloterdijk writes, one of the challenges of contemporary collectivity is, 'creating spatial conditions that enable both the isolation of individuals, and the concentration of isolated entities into **collective** ensembles of **cooperation** and contemplation' (2007:65).



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Conclusion

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