

**Agents, objects and the art exhibition:  
towards the co-relational  
co-formation of things**

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# Abstract

At its core, my research inquiry is concerned with the expanded possibilities of things in questioning and acknowledging the relational aspects of art formation.

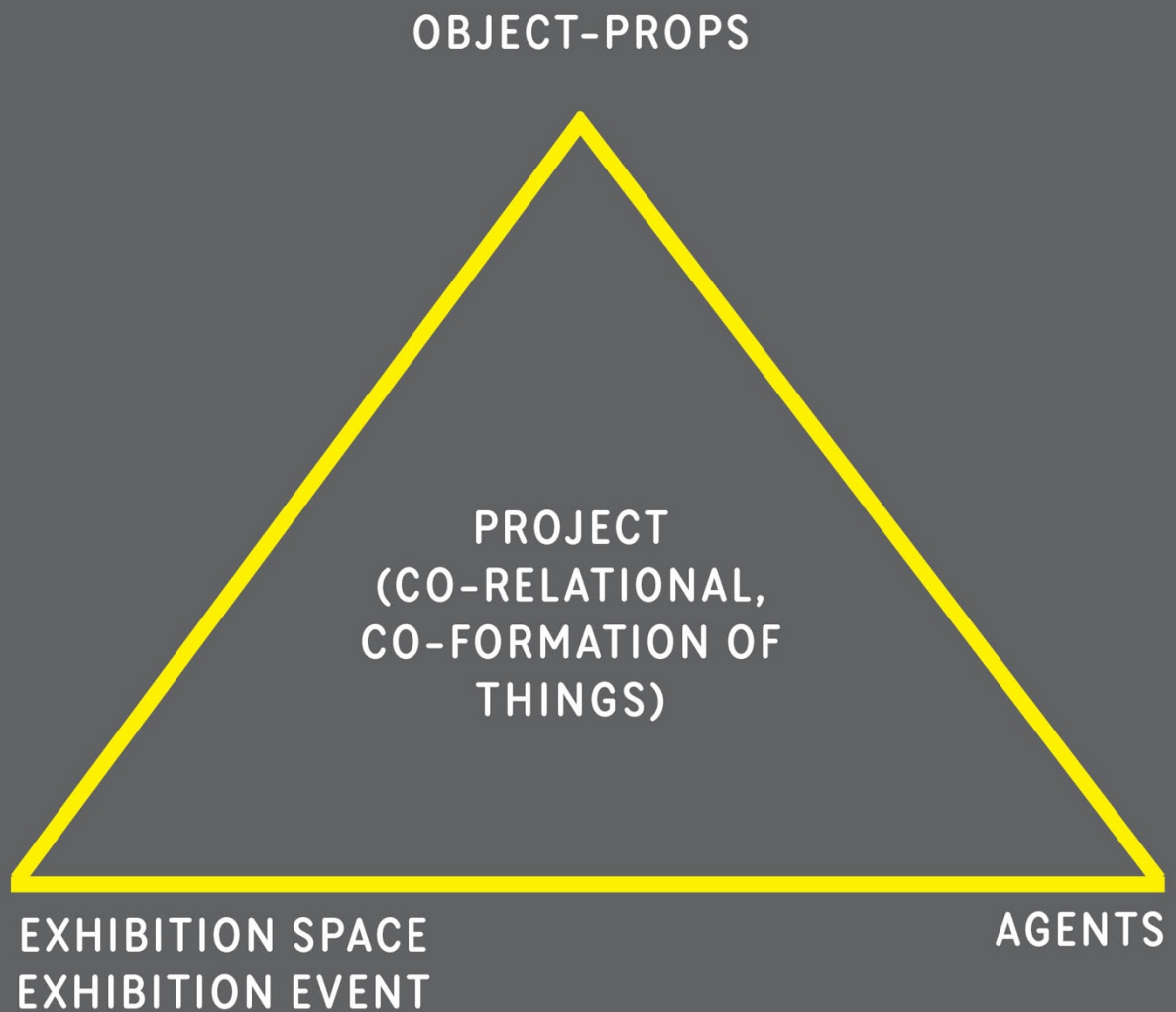
My research findings put forward a proposal for co-relational co-formed practice resulting from the entanglement between things. Here I have explored ways in which objects might be configured to produce an encounter which elevates the role of the viewer to a redefined role of agent. The key inter-relating things within my research inquiry are; the artist-curator, the exhibition space/ event, object-props, agents, the post-event artefact-objects and the language used to articulate these. The relationship between these things, – their flows, fluxes and their affect, is their material agency. This allows objects to shift between states of being as props, artworks and artefacts – the process of becoming, I argue, generates a trace of the co-relational co-forming act through their surface, form and matter.

In problematising modes of staging and writing about the co-dependent and co-informing elements of contemporary art practices, I question the ways in which structures of exhibition making are assumed and played out. My research re-frames the exhibition event, its objects, agents and associated language, as a new relational mode of practice that is centred around the 'co'. These ideas are explored against a critical framework of key thinkers from the anthropological, new materialist and phenomenological fields and through my practice-research which comprises an interwoven, overlapping body of artistic stagings and multiple forms of writing.

My contributions to knowledge come through a *Knowledge Mobility Framework* and an ethical methodological *Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice* for the artist-curator which acknowledges and works with the open-ended, entanglement of things. I also outline a revised nomenclature of some key terms presented as a *Key to Key Words* glossary in order to challenge and expand the critical discourse of contemporary art practices.



A DIAGRAMATIC ILLUSTRATION OF TRIANGULATED  
CO-RELATIONAL CO-FORMATION



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# Introduction

This research is concerned with terminology, relations and systems of inter-dependence surrounding the formation of artworks within and through the conditions of the art exhibition event.

I would like you, the readers, to begin by considering the following proposition:

Agents, objects and exhibition spaces are things which have agency and equal producing potentials. Things refer to the dynamic, vibrant and relational opportunities which result from the agency of, and entanglement between, being and matter. Artist-curators depend on things in the production of event-based practices (of a performative, sculptural and installation-based nature). The terminology used within contemporary art practices to categorise these things and describe their relations are in parts now unsuitable. We must reconsider the importance of being, and the affect of the agency of all of these things. We must acknowledge the relationship between performativity and materiality in staging the making of, and shaping the discourse around, co-relational co-formed artworks. This reconsideration is now essential in moving forwards with staging triangulated methodologies (objects, exhibition spaces/ events, agents) and ethical frameworks of formation which offer new possibilities.

In response to this propositional statement, through my research inquiry I offer a critical concept of, and methodology for staging the co-formation of artworks through the co-relational being of things.

## Starting points

It is 2007 and I visit the Anthony McCall exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London. The installation staged – *You and I, Horizontal III* (part of the *Solid Light* series), was an experience, a paradox in the encounter. Veils of light flooded the gallery, the spatial-material engagement with this light felt physical and solid. There was an exchange through my interacting with the materials. A structure was being played out; I could see this; I was part of this. My physical being was engulfed in the performance of matter. I was partially aware of my role shifting from spectator to participant, from observer to

performer; curious as to what this meant or signified – grappling with this act of being and becoming I was overcome by an intuitive, physical response.

McCall's *You and I, Horizontal III* (2007) framed the viewer as part of the event through the spatial-material conditions. The shifting states of his work was described by McCall in an interview with Gautam Dasgupta for the *Performing Arts Journal* as '...sitting deliberately on a threshold, between being considered a work of movement and being considered a static condition' (Dasgupta and McCall, 1977, p. 54). McCall, in this interview, went on to advocate for the time-based process of production as something which collapses the relationship between the act of making and the act of viewing (Dasgupta and McCall, 1977).



Figure 1: *You and I, Horizontal III* (from the series *Solid Light*)  
Anthony McCall, 2007  
Serpentine Gallery, London (© Sylvain Deleu)

Since experiencing *You and I, Horizontal III* (2007), I have had an active interest in exhibitions where the viewer has a central role in the production of works. These concerns have driven my approach to making and came to a significant turning point following the realisation of my master's show at the Royal College of Art. My MA exhibition piece *Not the language of politics but the politics of language: 21 selected soundbites from David Cameron* (2011) questioned the use of language as a coded system and as an apparatus of knowledge. Language as a power device within current and past political conditions was explored through the exhibition as a producing event. This work aimed to interrogate both rhetoric and the nature of an 'encounter' by probing at passive being through the repetition of fragmented speech. Delivered to the audience in a non-dialogical way, I utilised the tools I was critiquing to expose and challenge them. *Not the*

*language of politics but the politics of language: 21 selected soundbites from David Cameron* (2011) prompted further inquiry into the relational dimensions between audience and artwork, mechanisms of exhibition-making and the crucial role language plays within these dynamic fields. These are inquiries which have sustained my practice and informed the starting points of this PhD research.



Figure 2: *Not the language of politics but the politics of language: 21 selected sound bites from David Cameron*  
Rebecca Court, 2011  
Royal College of Art, London (© Rebecca Court)

## Positionality statement

Art and society are closely linked, or at least I understand them to be. This linking offers opportunities for shaping the way we (and indeed things) exist with one another; informing better ways of being with and learning from others through the creative making process – through ethical frameworks – through systems of formation. This ideology has always been at the core of my artistic-curatorial practice which has weaved between working within (see Figure 3) and outside (see Figure 4) of the exhibition space – often using objects and language to create encounters and challenge political agendas.

My inquiry for this PhD began in September 2017, driven by an ongoing interest in language, in practice as research, in art production and its relationship with the social-political world we inhabit. My research inquiry for this PhD interrogates the positionality of who does what, where and how in the possibilities of what I coin a co-relational co-formed art practice – advocating for the ways in which we can learn through and with objects and things of matter. Research, in many ways, is a personal endeavour – one that begins though curiosity and a desire to contribute to the world. This endeavour is

influenced by experiences, views, decisions, frustrations, actions and contexts. This, the basis of my research, is referred to as my research paradigm and my positionality as a researcher – it surrounds and frames my investigation. It is who I am and what I do, not only in relation to my art practice but also in relation to the contexts in which this research came to be.



Figure 3 (left): *Acquiring Authority*  
Installation (soil text and monitor linking to live CCTV footage of building site in London)  
Rebecca Court, 2015  
Stew Gallery, Norwich (© Rebecca Court)

Figure 4 (right): *Compulsory Purchased*  
Installation (1000 A4 plastic wallets blind embossed with text from the Compulsory Purchase Order, cable-tied to the façade of the building)  
Rebecca Court, 2012  
Wolstenholme building, Liverpool (© Rebecca Court)

This positionality statement has been formed through a process of continuing reflexivity. It is not a fixed or static statement because I am not fixed or static and the world is not a fixed or static place. What this positionality statement does is to allow me to situate myself within my research, through a process of self-examination, so that you, the readers have a clearer understanding about some of the motivations, positions and reflexive approaches I have taken within this investigation. I will begin by stating that I am a white, female academic and artist-curator (the definition of an artist-curator is explored later in this thesis). I have worked at Birmingham School of Art, Birmingham City University (where I currently lead the Undergraduate Fine Art Programme) since 2017.

I was born and grew up in London. I was fortunate enough to benefit from (mostly) funded higher education. I graduated from my bachelor's degree in 2008 and my master's degree in 2011 – after the introduction of the (up to) £9000 a year tuition fees. The context of my education is significant in the political turmoil that has framed it – with a Labour government in power up until 2010, at which point, with Prime Minister David Cameron's coalition, the demise of power from the left began. I acknowledge that there is privilege in my positionality (for example my access to resources and support) which has informed the way I have conducted this research.

As a postgraduate student at the Royal College of Art (where I also went on to be Student Union President), many of the theoretical contexts surrounding my education were drawn from western philosophies or schools of thought – a grounding which has influenced my research through awareness of my positionality. The shift to de-colonising curricula (in the wake of the events of black lives matter campaigns) as an educator in a diverse city (figures from the 2021 census revealing that ethnic minorities represent 51.4% of Birmingham's population), prompted me to consider the ideas and histories I was engaging with. Not to shy away from utilising western knowledge, but to acknowledge that this field of research and the act of engaging with it creates a particular, limited position. This awareness of western-centric modes of thought coupled with the overlapping positions of being an artist-curator, educator and researcher has allowed for a weaving of conditions, fields and contexts by drawing on my different professional experiences.

In today's climate, embarking on a PhD which concerns the ethics of things in relation to a human-centred life presents complexities of positionality. Objects, their production and utilisation are political. Take for instance labour conditions within the manufacturing of materials, material sustainability in the context of a climate crisis, gendered politics in the caretaking of things, positions of privilege in the ability to stage and experience things (to be present and with) and the way knowledge is encoded. Beyond a contemporary art context these are issues which as an individual I have always been aware of and concerned with. A further aspect which has influenced my research inquiry is the ontological assumptions made through my beliefs about social reality and the epistemological assumptions about the nature of the knowledge I use and produce through interactions with objects, environments and the audience (who I redefine in my research as agents – see *Key to Key Words* and *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*). These ideas are expanded upon within *Chapter 3: The Ethics of Things* where I propose pedagogies of co-formation developed through an integrated ethical framework.

Whilst my research does not explicitly address all of the issues outlined in this positionality statement, they are acknowledged as contributing factors which have informed the investigation.



## The title and question

There are slippages between the terms and roles of the artist, curator and producer. Power is bound up in viewer, audience, participant and spectator delineations. There are complex networks embedded within the states of resolution implied in materials, objects, artworks and artefacts. Within my research the problematics and potentials of relationality and language are used as starting points in attempting to contribute knowledge which proposes ways of working and ways of describing co-relational co-formed art practices. The re-definition of terms, the re-categorisation of roles and the re-thinking of methodologies of making assist in validating the idea that a closer examination of things within the exhibition arena is required. Through a critical reflexive practice, my research inquiry proposes and then responds to the following two key areas and central questions in contributing to the field of contemporary art practices:

*Language/ Concepts/ Discourse:* How can re-visiting and re-categorising key taxonomies contribute to challenging and changing assumed roles for a future integrity of practice?

*Actions/ Doing/ Making:* What are the co-constituting elements, processes and potentials for staging co-relational co-formed practices (through things being in the exhibition arena during the exhibition event?)

A complex set of relations exist beyond the artist/ audience dichotomy in which being is essential and agency (not representation) is a central concern. Being is explored throughout my research as I draw on philosophical ideas of being as an existence of things, being in the anthropological sense of the human, and being in the phenomenological sense as the entanglement of both human and non-human matter. The entanglement of being is referred to within my inquiry as the 'co' in the formation process which occurs through the key relators that exist. Such proposition has allowed for a methodology which favours notions of the collective over the individual and which, through situated environments of the exhibition event (tested in my four practice stagings of *True and Correct*, *Dispositif*, *Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall*) allows relationality to emerge. Co-relational being is therefore central to my inquiry.

My research has examined modes of artistic co-formation whereby process (over the outcome) has been the primary focus. This is symbolic of the social-political activity the work references and responds to. Relationality is an important term within my research. Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of relational artworks, outlined in his seminal book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) points towards a curatorial socially engaged form of artistic production (Bourriaud seeking to expand the definitional limits of art to include the human relations entangled in its production). In extending Bourriaud's ideas, I place a

greater emphasis on the correlating relational potentials of things (see *Key to Key Words* for my definition of things). The type of work (and systems of formation) that I propose is relational, but it is also co-dependent. It does not necessarily provoke interactions socially, or with society, but it does provoke interactions with things. Within my research relationality is premised on material things (human and non-human) being within the exhibition space. Notions of relationality are interrogated by Tim Ingold (someone who I draw on throughout my research inquiry). Ingold in his book *Correspondence* outlines relationality as a correspondence beyond a simple interaction; a correspondence as something that shifts between bodies and materials, a correspondence which is continually unfolding (Ingold, 2017). For Ingold, relationality is the entanglement of materials and being. In raising critical awareness of systems, being, and agency, I shift away from a focus on people towards an object-space-time relational dynamic to better understand the potential agency of all things being in co-existence together.

The research methods I have employed have centred around systems of formation (formalised through the *Knowledge Mobility Framework* I have developed as an outcome of this research). Such systems, Michel Foucault considers (in his book *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*) are ‘...knowledge acquisition devices’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). These systems act as a hinge between concepts, practice and analysis – elements in a constant state of reconfiguration in the transformation of matter. In acknowledging the artist-curator-agent power dynamics embedded within these relations, I draw attention to the potential of modes of co-relational co-formation as a proposition, highlighted through language and material potentials and guided by the *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* that I have developed. My research inquiry, which focuses on artist-curator practices, proposes that art production (which I re-define as a process of co-formation) is contingent on the relations produced through the networks and systems of things. Foucault is referred to throughout this thesis because of his definitions and observations of power structures. Foucault’s theories around systems and relations of power, have been applied to my research in order to highlight some of the entangled power dynamics between things (objects, exhibition spaces and agents) that are at play during the exhibition event. Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* affirms that ‘The goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated: in knowing we control and in controlling we know’ (1972, p. 43). My research understands the power of the agent(s), the exhibition space and the object-prop (objects-staged to create an encounter and designed to record knowledge through their matter) as instruments of knowledge that emerge out of constructed situations. This knowledge is evidenced and traced through the post-event artefact-objects (materials of matter which in their knowledge generating and recording agencies hold significant power). My research acknowledges that here, things of power are not mutually exclusive but are entangled with, and dependent on, one another. This raises significant questions about political and ethical interconnectedness and co-dependence, as well as the knowledge things generate.

Jacques Derrida, who was significant in informing the *Key to Key Words* element of my research, in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967), explored the potential of what I classify as things, to destabilise the order of other things. He proposed that by uncovering structures, systems and orders, it is possible to gain insight into the interplay between language and the construction of meaning. This allows us to understand ‘...the conditions which make language possible’ (Derrida, 1967, p. 60). The post-structuralist thinking that Derrida’s theories of deconstruction prompted, shifted the structuralist emphasis of relational modes of knowledge. These modes of knowing had privileged speech-centred, invariable and methodologically unified language over what Derrida classified as theories of *différance* (1967). *Différance* (deconstructive thinking) gave rise to the presence of things, within a time and space, in challenging the idea of a frozen structure. Derrida’s ideas here prompted me to re-examine my understanding of the complexity of the being, agency and formation of things within the exhibition event. Theories of *différance* put forwards by Derrida, were later expanded upon in his book *Positions* (1981) as a means of overturning hierarchy – the potentiality of this has relevance in my quest to rupture the way language sets up binaries and assumed roles (Derrida, 1981, p. 41). Derrida’s concept of *différance* in many ways points to the inquiry as an ever-evolving pursuit of knowing rather than producing answers or facts, through the analysis of binary dichotomies or dialectical oppositions. Art practice as a research inquiry has offered me the opportunity to expand thinking and understanding through the ongoing questioning of things – things I have tested and explored through my four practice-research projects (*True and Correct*, *Dispositif*, *Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall*).

## **Aims, and the need for this research**

There is a need for this research. It is timely, critical even. In a fast-changing world of political conflict, climate crisis and societal inequalities, our interdependence with each other, the way we co-exist, and the way things (material and non-material) are formed matters. This research has value in considering the staging of, and relations at play, in contemporary art practices – in helping understand our relationship as humans to each other and the material world we inhabit. It is essential in re-examining the binary way language is used – the way it shapes our perception of the world around us. In understanding the production of things, it is important to acknowledge that things offer both opportunity in the relational capabilities they can facilitate, but also have consequences in their entangled-ness across a matrix of reality (in ethical being and knowledge production). Against the socio-political context of this research, understanding agency, responsibility, cause and effect of things within the event of the exhibition is key.

In June 2021, as part of the documenta 15 launch, an online panel discussion was hosted – *Lumbung Calling: Independence*. This, the third event of a series of talks exploring the themes of documenta 15, opened with Mirwan Andan, from the Jakarta-based artist collective *ruangrupa*, responsible for the artistic direction of this edition of documenta, clarifying the use of the Indonesian word – ‘*Lumbung*’ (Lumbung Calling, 2021, 02.22). *Lumbung* here taken to mean a container, something with a physical presence, and a collection of principles (also described as hardware-software used to raise consciousness of the act of sharing). This word provided the context for the panel discussion which explored co-relating independence and interdependence. In this online discussion Jumana Emil Abboud, also from the collective, stated that:

The value of independence and also perceived inter-dependence in order to avoid the binary approach that condemns and severely restricts the relationship to a hierarchical definition which favours always one part over another in an always incomplete theorem. Taking its cue from ecological ways of thinking, in *Lumbung*, relationships between humans and other-than humans weave independence and interdependence together – independence ‘from’ is transformed into interdependence ‘between’ which shows how relations are deeply complex and how nothing can truly thrive on its own rather being mutually reliant on each other.

(Abboud, *Lumbung Calling*, 2021, 05.30-06.29)

The ‘theme’ of documenta 15 and the focus it placed on collective action and on diffused structures, shifted the emphasis to art as process – continuity over finality. As Abboud points out (in the provocation above) such a shift is critical in exploring and understanding the complexity of relational practices (*ruangrupa* collective uses the term members instead of participants in beginning to acknowledge the entanglement of co-existence and co-creation). In many ways this provocation, which points towards the problematics of definitions, and the potentials of relations, re-enforces the need for my research in re-visiting language and the relational dimensions of the exhibition event.

As an example of exhibition making from a new Indonesian perspective, documenta 15 could be considered radical. The conventions of Western exhibition making (in contrast) are more familiar. They are steeped in historical contexts that have shaped contemporary art practices. They, and the terms which describe them, are in many ways, institutionalised. Prior to undertaking this research, relational aspects of exhibition-making and de-materialisation (as theorised by Lucy Lippard in the 1973 book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*) were dominant discourses which had influenced my individual practice and the field of contemporary art. Art practices since the 1960s have evolved to centre around art as idea, art as action and art as event in attempts to

drive forwards modes of exchange and value alternatives to the art market. The dialogue around participation, the shifting position of the artist as curator and the role of the event of the exhibition have been the subject of much debate in recent years. Crucial to, and common within these debates, lie important questions of language and agency which now need to be revisited in the context of the post-pandemic situation, the decolonising agenda, the 2030 UNESCO agenda for sustainable development and the political disruption around the world. This research, I argue, is now essential in supporting artist-curators, artists, curators, critics, and agents in understanding the potential agency of being with each other in developing systems of staging, forming and describing art practice as co-constitutive.

The aims of my research inquiry can be summarised as:

Re-thinking the ways in which critical language sets up ideas of the evolving space and possibilities for art practices (the findings of this are outlined in my *Key to Key Words*)

Re-visiting assumed roles in contributing to ways of conceiving, staging and articulating co-relational artistic curatorial strategies in offering co-forming potentials and possibilities (the findings of this are outlined in my four practice stagings – *True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage, Fourth Wall*, my *Proposition for a Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice*, in my *Knowledge Mobility Framework* and in my *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* outputs)

Proposing ways of understanding and interrogating the relationship between performativity and materiality through the agency of the exhibition space, object-props and agent(s) – highlighting the extent to which things overlap (and intra-act) as vital players during the exhibition event (the findings of this are outlined through my *Diagrammatic Illustration of Triangulated Co-Relational Co-Formation*, the photographic documentation of the surfaces of the artefact-objects from– *True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage, Fourth Wall*, in my *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* and in my *Proposition for a Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice* outputs)

## **Critical friends, contributions to the field, and limitations**

My original contribution to knowledge is produced by proposing, analysing, reflecting and provoking – the methodologies I employ (of practice as research and critical reflexive practice), are specific and relevant to the field of contemporary art practices. My research

inquiry has been carried out in dialogue with an interrogation of the arguments and practices of others (artworks, exhibitions, artists, curators, and critical theories) which I invoke from the past and present.

The philosophical-theoretical terrain this research weaves is complex, sometimes difficult and sometimes slippery as it navigates between and draws from art practice, curatorial, phenomenological, anthropological, new-materialist research contexts. By shifting between these fields of research, drawing from differing and overlapping ideas I have been able to extend and/ or challenge thinking. I have been able to explore methodologies of creative practice as research – utilising the art exhibition as the stage of the research and analysing the pre- and post-event art object. This research methodology has then re-examined findings through the lens of key critical terms such as being, agent, matter, assemblage, trace and things (these terms interrogated throughout this thesis before being examined in relation to the field of critical friends in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*).

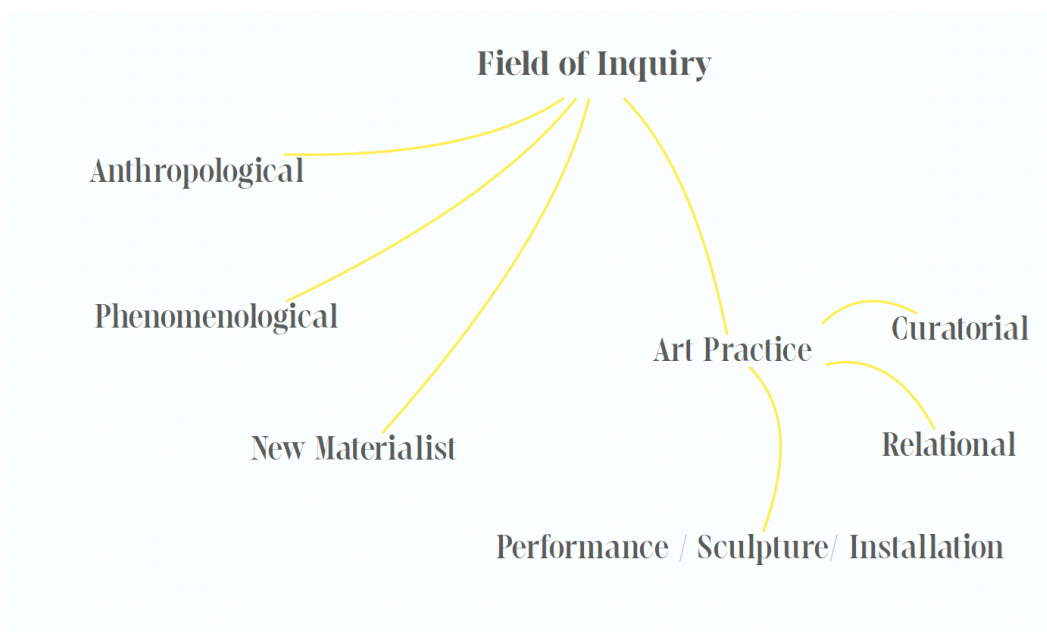


Figure 5: *Field of Inquiry*  
Diagrammatic illustration of research fields and contexts  
Rebecca Court, 2025

My field of inquiry predominantly draws from contemporary art practice, art criticism, curatorial, phenomenological, anthropological, new materialist fields but also engages with literary, scientific, technological, western, feminist, and pedagogical contexts. Bringing together theory and practice from current and past debates has allowed me to make connections between similar, differing and overlapping fields. This approach has enriched my inquiry – challenging ideas through a multi-disciplinary research context. This research makes contributions to the field of contemporary art practice, and beyond, in thinking about the way things exist, are disseminated, and evolve.

Carrying out my research in dialogue with a range of thinkers and practitioners has allowed me to explore the liminality between fields. I have drawn on several theorists which include (but are not limited to) an engagement with the work of Alain Badiou, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Claire Bishop, Barbara Bolt, Nicolas Bourriaud, Judith Butler, Manuel DeLanda, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, John Dewey, Elena Filipovic, Michel Foucault, Michael Fried, Donna Haraway, Graham Harman, Martin Heidegger, bell hooks, Tim Ingold, Grant Kester, John Latham, Rosalind Krauss, Bruno Latour, Lucy Lippard, Brian O'Doherty, Morgan Quaintance and Gavin Wade to situate my argument. I have selected these thinkers by engaging with a range of research fields – through connecting with ideas which resonate. Through this process, I acknowledge that at stake in my selection of thinkers, there is the potential on one hand for the narrowing of ideas and on another a breadth of inquiry that has potential for further depth. My decision to draw from a range of disciplines and to apply a breadth of ideas was made with the intention of carrying out a research inquiry that has been co-formed by and through others. The research methodology I have developed acknowledges (and draws attention to) this through a constant exploration of the ways that things (and indeed lines of inquiry) can theoretically inter-relate. Whilst the scope and reach has been broad, Ingold, Barad and Bennett have been my key critical friends who have supported my inquiry. Their ideas having particular significance in relation to some of the key terms I have explored, for example, Ingold's categorisation of *things* (beyond that of the object), Barad's theories of enactment of agency and *intra-actions* and Bennett's thinking around material as *vibrant matter*.

The positioning of my research within a multi-discipline context has enriched my exploration of the transformative capabilities of matter – an idea proposed by materialist thinkers. New materialism is a theory that explores our relationship to the material world through agency and being (in recognising the intrinsic activity of matter). Bennett (2012), and Barad (2007) are two key thinkers within this field whose ontologies I draw on in my consideration of relational and materially anchored practices that are sculptural, installation, performative, and event (time) based. Following Bennett and Barad, material knowledge within my research is considered through the concept of a phenomenon as something which arises in the intra-actions between human and non-human actors (or as I position it, non-human objects and human agents). Materialist theories provide a framework for understanding the formation of the artwork (the matter coming to matter) in the materialisation of reality (the exhibition event) through the intra-actions of the agent(s) enacting their agency. The phenomenological terms of my research inquiry place material phenomena (through the being and agency of things during the exhibition event) at its core. The phenomena (entanglements) which occur through the iterative intra-actions of the multiple agents present during the exhibition event, in their encounter with object-props (at the point of the threshold), is theorised as the process of co-relational co-formation (in the materialisation of relations). New materialism considers matter as

some *'thing'* always in flux, forming and re-forming, in a process of becoming through human and non-human relations. This process of becoming (which I apply to the event of the exhibition and of co-formed making), is what Barad describes as the agential forces of agency being in action (Barad, 2007). In *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research*, (2004) Paul Carter frames this process as a goal of material transformation that has social relations in the inseparability between bodies and things as matter. Making, in these terms, both produces and requires new thought.

Making connections between fields of research has enabled me to underpin my interests in objects (as props of matter), agents (as co-forming things) and relational systems (as the staging of the exhibition event). Ingold's (anthropologically located) ideas of reading creativity *'forwards'* as a formative process as opposed to *'backwards'* from the finished object, discussed in his journal paper *Towards an Ecology of Materials* informs the staging of the event as the creative process (Ingold, 2012, p. 3). In drawing on the anthropological, phenomenological and materialist frameworks, I wrestle between the backwards-forwards and explore the potential of the relations of things. In doing so I position the anthropological research paradigm of 'knowing' alongside the materialist proposition that everything can be reduced to matter, and everything is driven by ecological, ethical and political dimensions. It is important here to note that the anthropological and phenomenological fields have key differences – there are however underlying parallels, and it is at these points of compatibility that my research inquiry sits. Here I have developed a methodological approach for co-relational co-formed art practice (formed through an inter-weaving of disciplinary landscapes) which I put forward in contributing to the field of contemporary art practice.

Much of the theoretical material I discuss has been critical in informing art practice and contemporary practice over the past few decades. My contribution to knowledge comes through the interpretation of my exhibition event stagings *True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall* – their analysis in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation* and the practice as writing and photographic documentation of material surfaces (included as inserts within this thesis). These elements constitute the findings of my research and problematise the ways in which live events such as the art exhibition are represented and recorded. The methodology of argumentation which spans theoretical and practical approaches, takes the form of a continual scaffolding of ideas in citing and testing my practice as research. This process has enabled a shift in conceiving, staging and analysing work of this nature in the present and future – a meta-type approach of writing about doing – and doing in order to write about it. A feedback loop and symbiotic exchange between processes and approaches.

The relationship between performativity and materiality within the physical conditions of the exhibition space, during the exhibition event is a central concern within my research



inquiry. The significance of performativity builds on Judith Butler's formulation of the term in relation to the body and her positioning of language as a material thing which is part of a process of signification, discussed in her book *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). Butler's theories around gender performativity, materiality, language and the reconfiguration of thing-human hierarchies have informed my ideas around terminology, agency and co-relational being. Through my research inquiry I attempt to shift discussions and understanding of the entwining of performance and performativity and of matter and its materiality through my use of object-props. Such object-props have included; paper contracts and a metal turnstile (*True and Correct* – see Figure 5), tarpaulin bollards (*Dispositif* – see Figure 6), door mats, perspex boxes and shoe covers (*Front Stage: Back Stage* – see Figure 7) and PVC curtains (*Fourth Wall* – see Figure 8) as objects of performative materiality.

The materials of objects placed within a system of performativity (the exhibition event), I argue, have a liveness, independence and interdependence through which co-relational co-formations occur. The performativity of things and their material surfaces provide capacity for other things to unfold, to have tendencies of their own which become possible and realised through a co-relational being of agent(s) and other things. These realisations rely, to an extent on acknowledgment of the co-relational agency that is brought into play during the exhibition event and represented through the language used. This is what Butler describes as a process of materialisation (Butler, 1993, p. 9). Through connections and structures, systems of things can be understood by what they do – for their performative acts as materials and their traceability. This a key point within the conceptual artistic-curatorial decisions I have made in this research. The idea of performative materiality as a contribution to knowledge is extended and disseminated through the methods of inquiry (exhibition making and my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*) and modes of expression (the form this thesis takes).

The field my research inquiry has drawn from in many ways dictated the approach for a practice-led and critical reflexive methodological framework. Whilst my research inquiry offers the possibility of critique and insight, there are of course limitations to its scope – things that I do not take on, things that are excluded. There is strength in recognising and defining limits which are positioned as adjustments (as oppose to limitations) in thinking about the value the research offers. To ensure focus and depth of interrogation within my research inquiry, there are aspects I do not deal with. I understand these as a recognition of the ways in which my research has been limited. Within this research inquiry I do not extend my investigation into commercial art practices (the art market and entangled issues of authorship) or into aspects of the consciousness of human agency (instead focusing on the physical co-relational being of things). I do not give detailed analysis of the gendering or sustainability of materials (instead focusing on matter in a scientific sense of the word) nor have I explored the 'accidental' or 'non-controllable' things present

in the environment of the exhibition space which offer agency (light, wind, heat etc). Limitations also include the in-ability to stage events during the COVID-19 pandemic, the geographical reach of the practice research (locations of exhibitions and audiences engaged with through the spaces used); constraints around material and form decisions (funding, sustainability, production and health and safety issues); limits of and access to published non-western knowledge (and my own positionality); limits to the knowledge of the objects (in what they actually experience to what I project to know through the trace). These limits which I recognise bear relevance as factors to understand, go beyond the scope of the focused nature of my research or go beyond what was possible. I do however acknowledge the importance of these issues as interrelating and affecting aspects. These limits reaffirm the need for continual reflexivity, for language to be flexible and agile and for practice in its methodology to be positioned as open-ended and responsive in a direction of on-going research.



Figure 6: *True and Correct*  
Rebecca Court, 2017  
Coventry Evening Telegraph building, Coventry (©Rebecca Court)



Figure 7: *Dispositif*  
Rebecca Court, 2018  
Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham (©Rebecca Court)



Figure 8: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
Rebecca Court, 2019  
Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (©Rebecca Court)



Figure 9: *Fourth Wall*  
Rebecca Court, 2020  
Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham (©Rebecca Court)

### **Context: pre-pandemic/ pandemic/ post-pandemic**

Since the beginning of my research inquiry there have been a number of contextual factors that have informed and impacted on its timeliness including the ways in which we are able to interact with each other, with spaces and with things – the ability to be present and with. The conditions of art production and reception are constantly changing, and no recent change has been more significant than the change imposed during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Context, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, is derived from the Latin word *contextus*; a joining together, weaving or making of. It is a noun which implies a connective-ness to the things which surround it. It is not singular and does not exist in isolation, it brings associations with it. Context was an essential consideration in the practices of the Artist Placement Group (established as an artist organisation in 1966), who aimed to open up new possibilities through collaborative modes of production. In developing their own terminology and procedures for making they coined the well-known saying ‘context is half the work’ (a central idea which has gone on to form the title of subsequent exhibitions of the APG’s work including – *Context is half the work: a partial history of the artist placement group*, 2016, curated by Naomi Hennig and Ulrike Jordan in dialogue with APG co-founder Barbara Steveni at Summerall in Scotland). The idea of context being half of

the work reaffirms the importance of the exhibition event as the context for productive potentials to be considered within.

Between September 2017 and March 2020, I conducted four practice investigations (projects also described as stagings): *True and Correct* (2017) in the Coventry Evening Telegraph building, *Dispositif* (2018) in the gallery at Birmingham School of Art, *Front Stage: Back Stage* (2019) in the Ruskin Gallery at Cambridge School of Art and *Fourth Wall* (2020) in the gallery at Birmingham School of Art. These investigations allowed me to gain knowledge and understanding of my hypothesis and propositions within the exhibition arena (see *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*). In March 2020 we were then plunged into unprecedented times as the world entered lockdown and we went online. Social distancing measures were introduced, restrictions were in play. The ability to conduct practice in a physical exhibition space was no longer possible.

My research, in dealing with materials, matter, encounters and the entanglement of things is centred on staging relational dynamics that are contingent on the physical being of things (objects, exhibition space and agents) during the exhibition event. Being in the physical exhibition space is a condition of my practice. To shift to a virtual exhibition space would have changed the conditions of the research significantly, thus altering the assessment of the knowledge production. The importance of the physical exhibition was discussed by Morgan Quaintance ahead of the pandemic in his Art Monthly paper *Remote Viewing* (2020). Here he outlined the problematics of an imagined and/ or individual viewer saying ‘Who is watching and what is the nature of the relationship between the interface/ gallery and the user/ spectator facilitated or demanded by the curator...?’ (Quaintance, 2020, n.p). The virtual exhibition prohibits direct physical engagement, object-based configurations and material encounters meaning an online or digital form of practice would have been too distinctly different from the starting point of my research inquiry to be diverted to (at the stage of lockdown occurring).

During the COVID-19 pandemic I was therefore faced with two predicaments; to pause my research and resume the practice-led stagings on the return to un-restricted exhibition events happening, or, to carry on and develop alternative ways of understanding, analysing and using the practice I had already carried out as a way of extending its knowledge potentials (in keeping the inquiry live). Not knowing how long the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic might last or what conditions we would return to, I followed the second option, shifting my methodology to keep progressing the inquiry through writing as practice. Navigating the context of a lockdown (which saw removals of co-being and the interaction of things) became an opportunity to reflect on and explore (through writing) the importance of the co-relational co-forming potentials and outcomes – providing opportunities to consider the role of language in relation to (and as) practice.



I understand that art practice cannot exist solely for itself as separated from other aspects of life. The rapidly expanding and changing field of contemporary art practices brings with it a need to think through processes and descriptions of making, materiality, and relationality. The impact of the pandemic has not altered the aims of my research in contributing to this field, but has shifted the methodological, evaluative and presentational aspects of the practice. The context of the pandemic, in some ways, amplified the need to review unsuitable classifications (such as viewer, spectator, participant, collaborator) and systems of practice (such as participatory and interactive works), premised on an understanding of the value, roles and responsibilities of the co-relational being of things during the exhibition event. If I were to start this research again now it is inevitable that the pandemic, the 2030 UNESCO agenda around sustainability, the cost-of-living crisis, the turmoil of politics and so on would have impacted and informed the starting point of my inquiry. The flexibility in my shifting of approaches and in my constant process of reflexively in re-visiting my research ideas, methodologies and findings has however ensured the relevance of my research now.

## **The research inquiry**

In embarking on a methodology of practice-as-research and research-as-practice within this thesis, I attempt to highlight the interplay between language and modes of exhibition making. The artist-curator within my research is understood to mean an artist who employs curatorial strategies and embraces curatorial opportunities in the conceptual staging and formation of artworks. For the purposes of my inquiry, I, as the artist-curator, take a position on articulating the co-relational dynamics between things.

The relations that bring agents, objects and the exhibition space/ event (as entitles) together allow for what Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007) described as intra-actions to occur. These intra-actions seek to reconfigure relations in an ontological way. Intra-actions within my research are performative (in terms of things in spaces/ time/ movement) but they are also knowledge generating. A position which builds on Barad's idea that intra-actions and trans-actions, when examined, can reveal the interdependence and agency of the ethical entanglement of things (Barad, 2007) (such examination can be seen through my post-event analysis outlined in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*). The object is central to my research inquiry (the terminology employed within this research such as object-props, artefact-objects, artworks, things and matter are outlined in my *Key to Key Words* output and are interrogated throughout this thesis). The object-props I stage are the objects of my research. Their material surfaces the site of the encounter, the site of entanglement and the site of formation. The object is positioned as an artwork, as a vehicle for co-formation and as a material of affordance. The post-event artefact-objects

become the knowable or knowledgeable object. I pair the idea of entanglement offered by Ingold (earlier in this Introduction) with Barad's idea of intra-actions in forming a theoretical framework and methodology of and through objects (see my *Knowledge Mobility Framework* output).

The practices my research is concerned with are predominantly sculptural (in thinking of three-dimensional forms composed of matter), Installation (in the use of space to set up an encounter) and performative (in the potentials created through the relations between agency of matter). Performance is within my research inquiry categorised as a medium which Peggy Phelan, in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* affirms is 'the live making process' (Phelan, 1993, p. 146). Performance is something which she says exists in flux, which cannot be recorded or represented, which becomes itself through disappearance and which post-event becomes something other than performance (Phelan, 1993). The problem of medium specificity or disciplinary classifications used to describe art practices are acknowledged here. My own art education saw me develop sculptural work as a BA Fine Art student within the printmaking and photo-media pathway of the course and performative work as a MA Photography student. Perhaps a pushing back or working against defining disciplines in educational settings has always been part of my practice. In being clear about the mediums I am working with and within, sculpture (for the purpose of this research inquiry) is categorised as a material based-medium which Rosalind Krauss, in her essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, proposes is infinitely malleable (Krauss, 1979, p. 30). In her analysis of the significance of the medium (in a post-medium age), in *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Krauss explores the medium's condition and the apparatus that supports it (2000). My research recognises the object as a medium in what Krauss describes as existing in a post-medium condition (Krauss, 2000). Krauss uses the term 'post-medium condition' to dismantle privileged terms in setting up fields of possibilities. The object as Krauss denotes is something which is interchangeable, which exists in a field of vectors (Krauss, 2000, p. 26). Reinventing the medium as an ensemble of conditions allows for possibilities to emerge. In phenomenological terms, the vectors, created through the exhibition event, become the connecting force between objects and agents.

The practice methodology of my research inquiry has followed two parallel trajectories: practice as exhibition event (the staging of material encounters) and practice as writing (an exploration through writing of the agencies of these encounters). These two approaches constitute verbal and non-verbal forms of knowledge communication through physical installations in an exhibition space and subsequent installations of words (a textual narrative variation of the exhibition form) within this research space (the thesis). These methods are employed through each of my four stagings – they were conceived and examined against the five-part *Knowledge Mobility Framework* that I have

developed. My interweaving of practice-based research (the exhibition event and photographic documentation of material surfaces) and practice as writing (language) has been employed in order to keep the research live, generative and relevant. The textual practice accounts and unmediated photographic documentation of the surface of the material of the practice stagings (artefact-objects) have been presented within the body of this thesis as inserts between each chapter. Here, overlapping bodies of staged interventions and multiple forms of writing have been employed to favour a discursive knowledge-building approach.

### ***Practice as exhibition event***

This field of action within my research is declared as the exhibition space (the Coventry Evening Telegraph building, the gallery at Birmingham School of Art and the Ruskin Gallery at Cambridge School of Art). The exhibition is the medium which provokes actions, connects things through dynamics of relationality and allows for the act of co-formation to happen as a result of the correspondence of forms (the analysis of my post-event artefact-objects in *Chapter 5: The Art of Co-Formation* prove this claim).

My research methodology, in the knowledge it seeks and conceptual strategies it employs (in its use of object-props, the threshold and the exhibition event), is positioned as a project. The mode of practice I employ is curatorial – the exhibition is a material in the work of art. Here practice exists in a space which Joseph Doubtfire and Giulia Ranchetti in *Things are Slippery* (published by *Curating the Contemporary*) describe as being located between curating and art (2015). The exhibition is framed as an event which allows for activation by creating a disturbance through the encounter performed by things (agents, exhibition space and objects) corresponding (Ingold, 2017) and intra-acting (Barad, 2007) with each other. Here, the arena for art exhibiting becomes the arena for art making, where the encounter and the event takes priority over the representation of things. The object-prop is activated through the being and agency of things in the exhibition space during the event. This is the hypothesis of my research inquiry.

In *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*, I recount the specific methods through which my practice projects were carried out – the how, the why and the context of each inquiry. The stages of inquiry (which later feed into my *Knowledge Mobility Framework* upon which each of the projects were conceived and analysed) are:

Establishing an experimental curatorial project (practice exhibition events)



Producing objects which have agency and knowledge holding capabilities  
(props and analysis of material of these pre-event)

Exploring the narrative account of these (creative writing as practice)

Analysing the post-event condition of things (photographic documentation of  
material findings of the artefact-objects)

Proposing terminological and methodological ideas (classifications and  
strategies for co-formation)

The first stage of my research is the concept-process of the becoming of the object (the conceptual development). The becoming starts with the staging of the object-prop as a work of art (objects such as a shoe cover, a curtain and so forth). Here within the exhibition event, transformative encounters between things can occur. The staging of encounters (with objects) is framed as a research and making process. Here I am concerned with the capabilities of materials and processes as the thing, the being, the becoming – the agency necessary for the co-forming act. The result of the becoming traced through the objects and their material construct – forms and surfaces as artefacts of the event (recorded through marks, scrapes and alterations).

My research inquiry is one which pays full attention to material, matter and agency. It is an inquiry of knowing through performed relational formations of the object-props. This is the core methodology of my practice-led inquiry in understanding how materials inform and articulate the knowledge of co-relational co-formation. The forming, the encounter, the agency, and the exchange (affect) as a performed set of actions (which whether intentional or not) create a co-relational dynamic that I argue needs to be re-categorised and considered as a revised methodological approach. My research process spans the conditions of the making process; from object to situation, from autonomy to agency, from what art is staged as being to what it is staged as doing. Whilst the focus of my research inquiry lies in the physical presence and agency of the audience (redefined as agent(s)) in thinking of them in an expanded and intrinsic way, the acknowledgment of the potential role they play in the staging and realisation of work is significant.

### ***Practice as writing***

This thesis has been designed and constructed to create an expression of fluid language. Here I play with the complex use of language as a critical tool, using multiple terms and moving between them. Through progressive verbs, gerunds, parentheses, repetitions, italics and fragmented sentences, I use language as a form of practice. This practice of

writing (presented as inserts between the chapters of this thesis), illustrates the potential of words (and their meanings) as things that are active and co-relational in the present. These inserts consist of the four practice-research project outcomes which have been recorded in forms appropriate to their conceptual stagings:

***True and Correct*** (Coventry, 2017) written as a legal document presented to represent the objects as clients of the artist-curator in a court of law.

***Dispositif*** (Birmingham, 2018) written as an interview between myself in the various roles I assume and the objects of the research in considering structures and agency of matter.

***Front Stage: Back Stage*** (Cambridge, 2019) written as a theatrical performance in an attempt to consider the instructive nature of passive/ active behaviours on and off stage.

***Fourth Wall*** (Birmingham, 2020) written as a script for a play in order to attempt a material contextualisation.

My research also utilises the artistic nature of language as something which is embodied and experienced, and a means by which my four practice stagings can be discerned (this idea is expanded on in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*). My research, in its use of creative writing as practice, proposes ways in which we can consider text as a research tool and as an outcome. Text here existing as a way of exploring possibilities beyond definitions by weaving and presenting it as a de-materialised practice through describing things and re-visiting terminology.

The role and power of description as a key phenomenological method is applied in my use of language within this research. In *The Undercommons: fugitive planning & Black study*, through a series of essays Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (who I refer to in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*) propose the idea of text as a ‘*social space*’, especially when writing collaboratively (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 108). The notion of text as something that is entered into and something we are part of is relevant in re-visiting the potentials of language and the way we can understand co-relational co-formation through being with other things. Within my research inquiry I explore the poetic nature of language – the ways in which it might not be confined to description or commentary, but through the translation process becomes a form of practice in itself. In my use of language as practice I write not only to communicate, but to untangle things in order to open up possibilities – language as both description and disruption. I explore the vitality and transformative potentials of language through a practice of creating patterns of formation – text becoming a physical yet performative form – language a conceptual material of my research.

Through the practice of creative writing I attempt to describe the properties and experiences of the materials of the object-props, the artefact-objects, the exhibition space and their relationships to things, in what Ingold describes, in his *Materials Against Materiality* article as a means to tell their stories (Ingold 2007). Ingold, in his later book *Being Alive* (2011) expands on the importance of storytelling as a process of research in the knowledge it fosters.

The storied world is a world of movement and becoming, in which anything, caught at a particular place and moment, enfolds within its constitution the history of relations that have brought it there. We can only tell the nature of things by attending to their relations, by telling their stories. For the things of the world are their stories, identified by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations. Things occur where things meet, occurrences intertwine, as each becomes bound up in the other's story. It is in such binding that knowledge is generated. (Ingold, 2011, pp. 159-161)

Ingold presents the idea of the artefact through its meshwork of trace as a story (Ingold, 2011). However, the need for research to present knowledge as both a story (as it has been developed through the creative writing outcomes of this thesis) and also as material evidence (data recorded on the surface of the post-event artefact-objects presented as photographs in this thesis) is crucial in the work having language and material-based findings. The practice of my research inquiry in extending to a practice of negotiation in, of and around language reviews and proposes vocabulary, which at this moment, best articulates the practice and relations at play in its formation and in the co-formation of things (see *Key to Key Words*). Writing as practice has also involved a consideration of the typographical design decisions of the presentation of words. As such I have used two font families within this thesis:

***Meshed Display***: This is the typeface used within the body of text of this thesis. It is categorised as a 'rational serif' – the serifs have a contrast between thick vertical stems and fine horizontal hairlines. It is a display typeface referencing the meshwork, systems and presentational constructs of co-formation.

***Pantograph***: Is the typeface used within the practice inserts of this thesis (the creative writing accounts of each of my stagings and the findings I present as outcomes of this research such as the *Key to Key Words* and *Proposition for a Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice*). A pantograph is a device that utilises mechanical linkage and is connected based on parallelograms. It is designed to enable the user

to duplicate a form by tracing the first point with a second point being enlarged or miniaturised as a copy. The typeface references the conceptual premise of my research inquiry as co-relational.

## Outline of chapters

The problematisation of definitions is a central concern within my thesis as I attempt to undertake an ongoing process of questioning. This thesis begins with a *Key to Key Words* index which acts as a glossary of terms – supporting the reader (and user) in navigating the research. It establishes and defines the categorisation of the important and recurrent terms that are used throughout my inquiry, expanding and explaining their intended meaning and application within the context of this research. The terms I develop and/ or clarify are intended to allow the readers to move between categories and to allow me as the researcher to form categories of knowledge. Categorisation follows, rather than precedes, the testing, interrogation and debating of ideas. It is also acknowledged, through the findings of my inquiry, that categorisation must remain fluid and self-critical and exist as responsive and evolving. *Key to Key Words* exists as a way of providing new knowledge through language. Language by its very nature unwittingly reinforces the binaries it often (in its application) seeks to problematise. As soon as language defines a meaning, it creates an opposite or excluded meaning. As such, within this *Key to Key Words* I attempt to provide not fixed definitions but clarification for terms used within my research inquiry in reflecting on and proposing the way language is practiced and can be critiqued or re-considered. In challenging, clarifying and in some cases re-categorising vocabulary, I aim to re-frame the dynamics of co-relational co-formation at play in the exhibition space through an investigation into how modalities come to be, how they function and on what terms. Doing so requires a move away from or outside of the traditional vocabulary of art practice discourse. These modalities are articulated through terminology which in itself has a *modus operandi* so to speak. Here classifications are attributed to the concepts of the research in articulating the theoretical basis of my inquiry (re-circling round to the need to re-visit classifications). Classifications having the task of describing the ideas and proposed practices of some thing or things. The language presented within this *Key to Key Words*, and indeed within this thesis, is deliberately playful in creating an expression of fluid, responsive and in flux construction, realisation and resolution of the way words come together, land and communicate positions.

The thesis is then divided into five chapters. Each chapter focuses on both inter-related and colliding ideas: terminology of the agent (Chapter 1), methodologies of staging and knowing (Chapter 2), the being and agency of things in ethical terms (Chapter 3), theory and the critical underpinning of ideas (Chapter 4), the exhibition event and findings

(Chapter 5). Each chapter serves to re-affirm the need for this research, to expand thinking and propose ways of making. Chapters 1 – 4 each point to, draw from and share the outcomes presented in Chapter 5. The practice outputs of my research are presented as inserts between each chapter – the documentation of material surfaces and the narrative accounts punctuating the theoretical investigation. These inserts allow for knowledge to build through the reflexive analysis and recording of the four exhibition events staged. The rationale for structuring the thesis in this was deliberate in allowing you, the reader, to shift between spaces of knowing and not knowing – of speculation and creative thinking. A zooming in and out of practice as research – expanding ideas through theoretical and critical thought and then transforming these ideas through testing and realisation (reflected on and analysed in Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation).



Figure 10: *PhD Final Submission*  
Key to Key words, thesis, sample of artefact-object material, white gloves, archival box  
Rebecca Court, 2023 (©Rebecca Court)

The actualisation of this thesis presented in a physical archival box with white cotton gloves and samples of the materials from each of the artefact-objects is to a significant degree the medium. The structuring of the thesis and its presentation in both digital and physical forms creates a manifestation of my ideas through practice that build as the reader navigates between theoretical chapters and inserts of imagery and creative writing (the including of the *Key to Key Words* as a stand-alone bound book which can be used as a tool throughout the thesis in helping the reader navigate the research also deliberate). This metadiscursive approach demonstrates the ongoing need for discussions about discussions – and highlights the way practice and theory are interwoven. It helps you, the reader, interpret my propositions by evidencing practice approaches and outcomes at each stage (and deliberately before the whole argument is formed). In this way, through being given information about the key ideas that my propositions are based upon (around terminology, methodology, and ethics) I am able

to demonstrate the way in which practice has led the research – a visual structuring of my learning journey. The staging's attempt to reduce dense theory and demonstrate a creative methodological approach that developed through the simplification of complex ideas into material and prop form (for example from my first staging which involved a number of objects and complexities in *Ture and Correct*, to a simplified approach using one material and object in my final staging *Fourth Wall*). A methodology which re-enforces the claim of practice as research, of theoretical inquiry and language being inextricably linked.

The first chapter *A Matter of Terminology* interrogates the problematics of the terms – viewer, spectator, participant and collaborator. This chapter is focused on the language and categorisation of this person(s) whom I re-classify as an agent(s). Within this chapter I argue that traditional delineations and taxonomies, when applied to many examples of contemporary art practice which have moved beyond display and participation, have now become unsuitable in their failure to adequately describe the significant role this person(s) plays in the realisation and formation of the exhibition event and indeed artworks. This chapter through terminology outlines ideas of what the audience position is and proposes ways in which it can be modified. The proposal of the 'agent' seeks to contribute to an expansion of the understanding of the role of the viewer in contemporary art practice.

The second chapter *Methodology of the Maker* outlines the methodological components and frameworks of my research inquiry. My methodology, focused on the potential agency of matter, outlines an approach in which objects (positioned as object-props) through their material potentials, can stage and trace agency. This chapter explores strategies for staging encounters through a systematic approach to sculptural, performative, installation-based practice utilising the point of the threshold within the exhibition space during the exhibition event. This chapter considers my role as an artist-curator positioned within the research and explores methods of knowledge production that are both artistic and rigorous through a positioning against other paradigms of knowledge. The outcome of this chapter is a *Knowledge Mobility Framework*.

The third chapter *The Ethics of Things*, presents an analysis of the ethical considerations of objects, agents and knowledge. This chapter explores artistic ways of seeking knowledge that in some ways unsettle or challenge institutional organisations of knowledge. This chapter positions practice as research from a material perspective, where my research activity is articulated as post-event and by its very nature reflexive. Here, conceptual and material encounters with knowledge become co-constitutive of knowledge itself. Within this chapter concepts and systems of truth, reality, knowledge and care are interrogated in re-thinking ethical frameworks. These frameworks contribute, to what I propose as a concluding idea within this chapter, a pedagogy of co-

formation in which artist-curators practice and learn in relation to each other, agents and the things they work with. The outcome of this chapter is a set of *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation*.

In chapter four, *A Critical Reading*, key concepts of the critical thinkers I have drawn upon are interrogated and their theories applied in positioning my research between the anthropological, phenomenological and new materialist fields. This chapter critically unpicks and extends the ideas of Ingold, Barad, Bennett and other key thinkers (related to their ideas) in order to find ways – though practice methodologies and language – to bring together different approaches to contribute to taxonomies of practice of this nature. Within this chapter, through an in-depth engagement with philosophies of making, being, agency and affect I trace the lineages and genealogy of my thinking – putting forward insights which contribute to the field of contemporary art practice by rethinking traditional frameworks.

The fifth chapter *The Act of Co-Formation* revolves around the practice of the research, the projects I have staged. This chapter brings together the practical and conceptual material I have engaged with and positions it in relation to my research question. This chapter explores the networks, systems, multidimensional assemblages of objects (as object-props) and dynamics of the co-relational co-formed practice outputs (artefact-objects) I have carried out in testing the conceptualisation of my theories. Here I analyse each of the four exhibition events (as evidence which has generated knowledge) in presenting the findings of my research. I have chosen to structure the PhD in this way as another staging of sorts – heightening the function of writing and practice as devices of knowledge which build and which has been co-relationally co-formed.

The final section of my research concludes by identifying the original contributions to knowledge and presenting a *Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice*. In summarising I present insights into how the findings of my research contribute to the re-framing of and re-thinking about the way we make, talk, discuss, write about and acknowledge art practice of this nature.

KEY TO

KEY WORDS



The hyphen is a joining tool. It creates a neologism. The Greek hypo (under) and hen (one) unites multiple things into a single thing. It is a mechanism for creating new meanings. It creates a relation between things, acknowledging their individuality and their connectedness. It does not function on its own, it functions through being with others as a co-forming **act**.

# ACT

An act is something that is carried out. An act is an action. It may be intentional under some descriptions and unintentional under others. Objects can act; they are actors. Agents (humans) have the ability to act, they are actors. An act is a process. The ability for things to act emerges through the staging of the event within the exhibition structure. The ability for objects (as non-human things) to act is possible through their active material qualities. The human and non-human act is both individual and collective. Action is production; action generates an **affect**.

# AFFECT

To affect is to alter, to shift, to impact, to change. Affect has an ontological structure – it can be a physical response that operates independently from thought. Things have the capacity to affect and to be affected; agency and affect are inextricably linked in this way. Affects in phenomenological terms connect being (existence) and experience through intra-actions. Affect can supersede effect. Affect is the process of the transformative capabilities of things. The exhibition space creates the conditions of possibility for affect. Materials can be mobilised through affect – object-props, agents, the exhibition space, the artist-curator and the event are affective players in the affective exchange. The trace of affect has a central role within art practices – framing the encounter, being and agency of the **agent**.

# AGENT

The agent is a physical thing – a body, a human. The agent is relational with active possibilities. The agent possesses agency within constructed situations of a system and structure of relations. The agent is a person(s) for whom the distinction between participant, audience and performer has been collapsed. The agent has the capacity to act and thus the agent can affect. The agent is a force, the agent is energy, the agent has power. Within the staging of the exhibition event the agent is framed to assume an affecting role. The agent has a role in formation potentials (though the agent does not necessarily or knowingly assume this role – in fact the agent does not necessarily identify as being an agent). The agent is simply a being with agency. The agent is an individual but also a member of a larger body. Agents can still be considered agents if they do not enact their **agency**.

# AGENCY

Agency is the capacity of thing to affect. Agency is an enactment. Agency is attributed to matter and being. Materials (non-human things) have qualities of agency within their matter. Agents (humans) have agency and they possess the ability to exercise their agency through encounters with matter. Intra-actions generate agency as they allow for transformations. Agency is entangled with its ability to affect materials and things through forces. Agency is a structure within the formation process resulting from performed intra-actions staged through the artists **apparatus**.

# APPARATUS

The apparatus is a device and mechanism within structures of formation. It is the medium, the support. It is a system. The apparatus gestures towards an act (movement, behaviour, agency, affect) through the staging and arrangement of the object-props within the exhibition space. It is a context, a situation, a condition and has a specific methodological function or purpose within the process of formation. It is devised to establish connections (encounters) between things. The apparatus is a particular set of material-discursive practices. The apparatus enables a practice of possibility to be considered through an assembly of things. The assembly of things, post the event, are positioned as **artefacts**.

# ARTEFACTS

Artefacts are the post-event artistic products of the co-forming process. The artefacts are not to be confused with the object-props positioned as things amongst other things. Artefacts have been removed from the relational arena of formation in their post-event status. The artefacts are things of matter which matter. The artefacts record and represent findings through matter that has been materialised through intra-actions. The artefacts embody knowledge in their structure; they are conceived as having a central position in the making process. The artefacts embody and trace agency. The authorship of artefacts is not attributed solely to the **artist-curator**.

# ARTIST-CURATOR

The artist-curator is a director, a conceiver, an organiser and creator of situations. The artist-curator is artistic – they have creative qualities, a creative role and employ creative strategies. The mode of practice is curatorial. Exhibition making is the practice of the artist-curator. The exhibition event a medium they utilise. Pre-event the artist-curator has agency in staging the possibilities for co-relational co-formation. The artist-curator creates object-props through the manipulation of materials, the use of space and use of things. The artist-curator, in the moment of the exhibition event hands over control – to the agent, the exhibition space and to other things in the process of the co-relational co-formation of the **artwork**.

# ARTWORK

The artwork symbolises and traces relations between things – a gesture, an act, a trace, a performance, a project. It is co-relational. The artwork is classified, prior to the exhibition event as a concept, during the event as a sculpture-installation-performance and post the event as artefacts. The artefacts, in their consideration as artworks (as the things that have been made) reveal agency in their matter and form. The artwork is both thing (form) and process (concept) as a mode of **art practice**.

# ART PRACTICE

The artwork can be considered a concept (staging), a performative act (the becoming) and a post-event artefact (material of the objects). These states of the artwork – their framing and analysis by the artist-curator is a process of art practice. The dialogue between what an artwork is and can be is at the forefront of art practice. This is constantly in flux and raises important questions concerning the **author**.



# AUTHOR

The artist-curator as the person who has control over the conceptual staging of the creative process is considered an author. The agent(s), the object-props and the exhibition space as co-relational co-forming things are considered as part of the authorship of the becoming. Here it is possible to transfer emphasis from commodity and ownership to process; a transformation by which all things involved in the formation (through relational being and agency) become co-authors in the resulting artefact-object artwork **assemblage**.

# ASSEMBLAGE

Prior to the exhibition event, the objects are assembled as props. The exhibition is presented as a configuration of things to frame the co-relational co-forming act. During the event these objects-props become things that are in action, they are brought in contact with other things (agents, objects, exhibition space), together they become a body of things. Agency is at play – through situation and systems there is an entanglement, a correspondence. Post-event the artefact-objects resemble an assemblage of practice which traces the agency of agent(s) and objects recording co-relational being and **behaviour**.

# BEHAVIOUR

Matter has a material behaviour. The relational being and agency of things which come into contact with matter is traceable through this material behaviour. The behavioural capacity of matter allows it to shift from inert to in flux through intra-actions and encounters. The behaviour of things are activated not simply because they are imbued with agency, but because of their staging, placement, form and **being**.

# BEING

Being is a present-ness, a liveness. Being has agency in its intra-activity. Being allows for becoming. Being allows for knowledge making. Things are beings. The notion of the self is diffracted through time, space and co-being. An ontology-based framework is possible through the being of things and **bodies**.

# BODIES

The body is a physical material through which a performance is enacted. The body has networks and relations. The body has agency enacted through context, being, the staging of object-props, through an assembly of forces. The body belongs to an individual but does not exist in isolation; the body is amongst other bodies. These bodies hold power and the capacity to collaborate, to co-exist, to **co-form**.

# CO

The co is essential. It is a signifier of the relational being between things. The co outlines the collective act, agency and outcomes. There is a constant shifting of power in the co. The co is inherently (not always knowingly) **collaborative**.

# COLLABORATIVE

Strategies can be employed to stage collaborative making. Collaboration may not be knowingly collaborative but through co-being and the enactment of agency, a form of collaboration is possible. Collaboration occurs between things (object-props, agents, the exhibition space, the event). Collaboration here occurs through the idea of the agency and the being of things as that which is **collective**.

# COLLECTIVE

Collective being of things allows for co-relational co-formation to happen. This is the artistic-curatorial **concept**.

# CONCEPT

Pre-event, the concept is the responsibility of the artist-curator. The concept is the idea, the staging, the framing, the proposition; it is speculative and undetermined until the point of the event when ideas are realised through the exhibition **conditions**.

# CONDITIONS

The conditions are the necessary things required – object-props, exhibition space and agents. Their co-relational being facilitated through the conditions of the exhibition event. The encounters staged by these conditions are required for the concepts to translate into processes of **co-formation**.

# CO-FORMATION

The coming together (of agents, object-props and the exhibition space) in the co-relational being and becoming of an output (the post-event artefact-objects) is a co-formed act. This coming together is the contact (encounter) between things that occurs beyond established dichotomies, to a point where power begins to shift – approaching a situation in which every thing is acknowledged as part of the co-forming process. A desire to achieve co-relational co-formation as a process of knowing, of challenging, of proposing is important. Using artistic-curatorial strategies and revised terminology allows us to better articulate the potentials of co-formation when things are staged to be **co-relational**.

# CO-RELATIONAL

Co-relational formation results from the correlation of things. Co-relational practice is a method of research which explores the relations between two or more things. Here these things are positioned as the agent(s), the object-prop(s), the exhibition space, the event and the artist-curator. Co-relational practice is contingent on being and agency. The co-relational co-forming act one of potential, insight and questioning which reveals intra-actions that are **corresponding**.



# CORRESPONDING

Things correspond. They have corresponding agencies. During the exhibition event there is always a connectedness, relationality, and potential for correspondence between object-props and agents, between object-props and exhibition spaces, between object-props and the artist-curator who conceived them. This mode, in staging correspondences between things, is described as **curatorial practice**.

# CURATORIAL PRACTICE

Curatorial practice includes, but is not limited to, the practice of exhibition making. It supports co-relational co-formation. The curatorial is the connection between things; things that constitute the formation of the artwork. The artist-curator conceives curatorial practice strategies in bringing things into context through framing the necessary conditions. Staging connections between things (which constitutes the formation of an artwork) happens through curatorial processes, methodologies and/ or **devices**.

# DEVICE

The device is an apparatus, it is a structure, a system, a method. The device is a thing, an object-prop. The device facilitates relations, correspondences, intra-actions and **encounters**.

# ENCOUNTER

The encounter is a relational intra-action in which co-formation happens through an embodied dialogical experience and exchange. The encounter is contact, it is a force, it is a moment of engagement. It is an enactment; electro-magnetic forces, particles pulling together and pushing apart. The encounter is generated through a system which interrupts a way of being, the structure of matter, the order of things. The encounter provides possibilities, it affects, it produces a shift, it generates a trace. Agents and things are enmeshed through different and various encounters. The encounter produces knowledge (through engagement and entanglement). It has ethical responsibility. The encounter reveals an **entanglement**.

# ENTANGLEMENT

The co-formation of artworks through co-relational being is possible as a result of the entanglement of things. The entanglement happens between human and non-human matter (the exhibition space, the object-prop(s), the agent(s)). The entanglement, in its staging, must always be **ethical**.

# ETHICAL

The ethical, ontological and epistemological engagement of knowledge production and co-relational co-formation requires responsible behavior and attitudes. Objects, things, agents, artist-curators and the exhibition space are entangled; no one is an innocent bystander. Intra-activity between things produces an immediate and direct indebtedness to the other (thing). This indebtedness is an entanglement of obligation which produces ethical debt to the other (thing) through and within the staging of the **exhibition event**.

# EXHIBITION EVENT

The exhibition event is a moment in time, a place, a situation. It is present and live. It is an enactment, a performance; it creates a disturbance. Utilising the exhibition space, the event creates the conditions of possibility – from a curatorial staging (conceiving) of the event to the actual exhibition event itself. The exhibition event is the moment in which things are given over. It is the material, the medium and the support – it is a thing. The exhibition event brings about relations and connections. It is a curatorial project staging a series of actions – it provides the context, the circumstances which allow for transformative encounters to take place, for knowledge to be generated, for things to become through the **exhibition space**.

# EXHIBITION SPACE

The exhibition space is a studio space, a research space, a laboratory, a stage. It frames the project – the site of display becoming the site of (and environment for) possibility. The exhibition space is the place of de-material and re-materialisation. The act of co-relational co-formation happens through and within the exhibition space during the exhibition event. The exhibition space revealing and presenting (through the hosting of the event) the entanglement of **forces**.

# FORCES

Forces are discursive. They are generated through material, being and agency. They are entangled within the network and system of things. Forces are facilitated through the enactment. This is known as a process of **formation**.

# FORMATION

Formation is an altering, a shift. A becoming, a trace of having been or happened. The process of formation is a **happening**.

# HAPPENING

A happening is an event – happenings happen during the exhibition event. The happening is an activity, an exchange, an encounter, a performance – a time, a place, a co-relational act. Happenings happen to and because of the things present in the time of the exhibition. Happenings facilitate the co-forming process – they are structured – they, by their very nature have an inherent level of **hierarchy**.

# HIERARCHY

A hierarchy is a system of persons or things that has an order of power. Hierarchies are created through tradition, through structures. Hierarchy is often assumed. Exhibition events and art practice has the potential to bring hierarchy into question (through methodological approach and language). In a practice of co-relational co-formation privileged status is not attributed to any one thing whether human or non-**human**.



# HUMAN

Humans are things which move through the world. They are people. They are agents. They intermingle with objects; they intra-act with things. They have a body, they are bodies. They have relational capabilities. Humans and non-humans are different but are not regarded as ontologically distinct. They are all things. In the process of co-formation humans as agents **intra-act**.

# INTRA-ACT

An intra-action is an exchange, an encounter, a meeting point. The term intra-action is used as one which supersedes the notion of individual interactions between humans to move towards an understanding of the intra-actions of things. Specific intra-actions enact as agential cuts affecting a separation between subject and object; things only existing within relations, in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as a dynamism of forces in which all designated things are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing, and working inseparably. The intra-action during the exhibition event, the result of artist-curatorial **intention**.

# INTENTION

The intention is the concept, the staging – the rationale of the how, why, and where in which things come to be. Intentions can suspend the idea of individual 'works of art' in favour of a triangulated relational system of being and becoming through agency, intra-actions, and **interventions**.

# INTERVENTION

The staging of props across the threshold, positioned to prompt an encounter involves an incision, an intervention in the exhibition space during the exhibition event. The intervention is a physical, sculptural, spatial, performative decision which provides the situation and the conditions for an encounter. The intervention is made by artist-curators, by object-props and by agents. The intervention allows for the existence of the agential affect to occur – becoming the vehicle of co-formation and a means of **inquiry**.

# INQUIRY

The inquiry seeks to discover, challenge, test, propose, prove. The inquiry is a searching. It is research. It is theoretically qualitative and materially quantitative. The inquiry produces **knowledge**.

# KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is practice. We know by and through practice. Knowledge is produced, generated, formed and acquired through being, through seeing, through looking, through analysing the matter of things. Objects, things, artefacts hold knowledge in their embodied material. Research can draw on way of knowing that are grounded in the agency and traceability of matter. Knowledge is always under construction within its field of relations (agent(s), object-prop(s), exhibition space). It is an emergent product of a complex process. Knowledge can be communicated through objects and **language**.

# LANGUAGE

Language communicates, it goes between things. It emerges, it affects, it defines relationships. Language has limitations in its relationship to us, but, as something that is inherently reflexive it can be considered in new ways. Language is practice – it evolves and responds. Language should be approached as matter, as **material**.

# MATERIAL(S)

Material encompasses any form of matter or energy. Materials are things which can be used – a tool within the co-forming process. Material properties have agency, they have differential mattering qualities, this is to say that the properties of materials are not fixed, they are in flux, they are relational. Material entanglements manifest through the material context in which things exist (the exhibition space and event as the conditions of possibility) and through which agency is activated. Material thinking is performed in an act of formation with things. The post-event artefacts are material artworks of co-formed **matter**.

# MATTER

Concepts of making and matter are inextricably linked. Matter occurs through force, through agency, through processes – vibrational states in flux. Matter is substance in its iterative intra-active becoming. Matter is a thing in action with agency, it fluctuates and performs, it has transformative capabilities. All components of the co-relational co-forming event (the exhibition space, the object- props, the agents) are things of matter that matter. Matter exists in a structure of being and dynamic thingness in relation to energy. Matter is a responsive co-relational collaborator; it intra-acts with the particles that surround it, which come in contact with it. Matter contains facts, it traces relations. Matter is presented in the form of a **medium**.

# MEDIUM

A medium is a process associated with material or matter. Artistic concept does not manifest itself in a particular medium, the medium is not specific though the co-relational co-formed practice centres around performative, sculptural and installation based mediums. The object-props themselves do not have to be identified as a sculpture, installation or performance in order to classify as a medium. The exhibition is also a medium. Under the conditions of the exhibition space, the medium employed in the staging of co-relational co-formed practice is framed as a work of art through existing within and as a **meshwork**.

# MESHWORK

The meshwork is the relational field. An assemblage, a staging – the meshwork is a binding together of things, a network of things. Human and non-human matter intra-acting in a meshwork of entanglement offers up findings for the research **methodology**.



# METHODOLOGY

The methodology is a system and an approach. The methodology takes the form of a knowledge mobility framework. The methodology utilises practice as a means to find things out, to test, to challenge, to propose. The methodology generates knowledge through and with the **object**.

# OBJECT

The object is a thing (or collection of things) that consists of matter. The object is also considered a material of practice and the object of research. The object is an active player in being, knowing and co-forming. The object is relational. Pre-event the objects as props are charged, poised. The object(s) during the event are presented as artwork that can be intra-acted with. Post-event, the object(s) are classified as artefact-objects and artworks (things of knowledge). These objects own their history; they are key components in the practice and performance of the co-relational co-formation of projects that are **open-ended**.

# OPEN-ENDED

An open-ended artwork is an artwork whose formation is constantly in flux. It is an artwork which emerges through the relationality of things, through the project, the meshwork, the exhibition event. Through the co-constitution of things intra-acting there is a **performance**.

# PERFORMANCE

To perform is to act, it constitutes actions. During the exhibition event things perform, they enact their agency. The act of being and becoming is by its very nature performative. Performance becomes a way of tracing, knowing, and showing; it is at once a creative act, an object of study, a mode of inquiry and system of research. The intra-active encounter is a performance whereby human agents and non-human objects come to matter. The dynamics of matter (being) and performance (becoming) at once both reveal and subvert the dimensions and dynamics of **power**.

# POWER

Power is everywhere, it comes from everything; the exhibition space, the artist-curator, the agent(s), the object-props. Things have power. No one thing exercises power over another thing unless the other thing has agency and unless this agency is staged to create conditions of possible action. Things have forces which both repress and produce; these are the complex relations within which power has potentiality. The potentiality of power is both embodied and enacted. Power can be revealed through mechanisms and structures, it operates within systems, meshworks, materials and things. Power and knowledge are inextricably linked in society and art **practice**.

# PRACTICE

Practice is the act of formation. Practice happens in the exhibition space, during the exhibition event. Practice is relational, live, performative, active. Practice is the being and unfolding of a system of relations in flow through agency, encounters, affect and trace. Practice is the co-formational **process**.

# PROCESS

Process refers to the system and flow of formation. Process is the act in which matter and materials are dynamically and constantly changing through relational encounters. Process is an event, an activity – a series of states of objects and things. Process is ontological and methodical. Processes are formed through intra-actions that are made, created, set up. Process implies movement of matter. Formation is a process – the process of the being and becoming of the **project**.

# PROJECT

Practice is a project. A curatorial project. The project is a system. The project is the coming together of different parts through the conceptual mechanics and constructs. The project is the happening that allows for activation, agency and knowledge production. The project is a methodology and proposition which allows for the possibility of works of art to be conceived and formed relationally. It is **relational**.

# RELATIONAL

Art practice is co-relational – its formation constituted through and with other things. Things exist in relation to each other. During the exhibition event, through co-being an ongoing set of relations occur. The object-props and the exhibition space set up the system of relations. The exhibition space, in the moment of the event, in the presence of the agent(s) and the object-props become the relational field of things. Material and matter disclose relations (between surfaces, substances, mediums) in the entanglement of relationships in which they are comprehensively enmeshed. Relations are part of a meshwork and within these meshworks agency and power can shift. The potential and unfolding field of relations central to practice as **research**.

# RESEARCH

Research is not what we do, it is what we undergo. It is a form of experience. Research is vital in understanding. Research is a way of knowing. Research is a search for truth – an inquiry. It is a path we move along – moving along this path is a practice of research. Research has a method, a system, and a structure. Research is practice, research is writing – practice is research, writing is research. The agency, behavior, and ability of the matter of objects to trace, allows things to be positioned as objects of research. Objects of research are analysed through a knowledge mobility framework. The exhibition space and exhibition event is the site of enacted research in which research in action is staged and there is a **staging**.

# STAGING

The staging is the methodical approach of the project. The staging is both concept and form. It is the framework, the conditions, the apparatus which facilitates the encounter between things. It provides the system for the meshwork in which co-relational co-formation happens. The staging sees the unfolding of actions – it is the totality of thoughts and configurations. The staging is the project, object-prop and exhibition event **structure**.

# STRUCTURE

Structuring is intentional. It is the building of and supporting of some thing or things. Structure enables agency. Structure allows for variable and invariable transformations. The construction, form, configuration of things prior to the event sets the path for actions of being – for co-relational co-formation. The structure of the matter of the materials of the objects in their positioning as props which encounter the agent(s) (and other things) have within them variable transformative potentials. The structure creates a relation of parts through the meshwork of the **system**.

# SYSTEM

The system connects things so they operate as one, as a meshwork of things. All things are part of a system – the agent(s), exhibition space, object-props. Within the system relational dynamics are established. The system allows for the process of co-formation to occur by connecting **things**.

# THINGS

Things are human and non-human – they are representatives of being and agency. They are material. They are not inert, they are vibrant matter. Things are an entanglement of other things. They gather and assemble, they occur. They have thingness and correlating agency. The process of thinging, enabled through the relational being of things. Things can become some-thing else, other things when agency is enacted. This transference of objects into things occurs within the exhibition space, during the exhibition event at the point of the **threshold**.

# THRESHOLD

The threshold is the entrance. The point of arrival and access. Architecturally it is pre-established. The threshold is critical for framing the encounter between things. The threshold is part of the circumstance that sets the potentiality of what the object-props can become. The threshold frames encounters, intra-actions, movement, contact – it generates agency and creates the conditions for becoming. Movement over, across and through the threshold frames the co-relational encounter in which co-formation and knowledge production occurs.



# A Key to Key Words and Glossary of Terms

## Note for users

Language is used to describe the key terms (relators and things) entangled in my research inquiry. The *Key to Key Words* included in this thesis forms a glossary that articulates and clarifies the way in which language has been formulated and applied. It puts forward a proposition around the role that language plays in understanding the staging of co-relational co-formed practice. This *Key to Key Words* acts as a navigational guide, a communication toolkit, a vocabulary and a schema for the categorisation of actions and the classifications of things.

The importance of outlining definitions was established early on in my research. At the stage of proposal writing, the nuances of language were explored through the terms gallery, exhibition space and project space. These were all terms which I had (until that point), been using interchangeably but which needed to be defined in locating my research (within the exhibition space). The examination of terminology in clarifying the site of my inquiry, prompted further interrogation into the language used within contemporary art practices. This has included a review of the terms viewer, spectator, participant and collaborator (explored in detail in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*) and clarification of terms such as object, object-prop, matter, artwork and artefact-object. As such, the terms outlined within my *Key to Key Words* glossary, indicate specific meanings in relation to research as practice (in describing the transformative possibility of things) and in outlining the theoretical enquiries which underpin my ideas.

*Key to Key Words* presents as a series of separate entries which speak to and with each other; they have a co-functioning role in helping you, the readers, navigate this thesis. They are, however, only activated when they correspond to something. The structure of *Key to Key Words* plays with the idea that language in itself is co-relational, with each entry having a connection to the next (weaving between an ontological catalogue of interconnected, relational terms). The glossary included within *Key to Key Words* does not provide a finite or complete assemblage of words; it provides a summary of key definitions which set up the relations between categorisation, language and modes of formation. It presents the propositions and contributions of my research as a taxonomy of practice.

The language presented within *Key to Key Words* is intended to function as a specific outcome of my research – as practice in the form of writing. The words shift from simply expressing relations and understandings, to becoming critical terms which explore the relations between things. *Key to Key Words*, whilst letting go of the academic system of referencing, pays homage to the contexts that the meanings I establish have been drawn from. The terms I have categorised in some instances re-affirm conventional understandings, and in other instances move outside of traditional vocabulary discourses and begin to develop into propositions of new terminology. In acknowledging the genealogy of these terms, the theoretical frameworks that the definitions presented have been drawn from and informed by, are interrogated, applied and expanded upon within the chapters of my thesis.

## **The importance of language**

Words can have numerous, complex and often conflicting or contradictory meanings. The use of certain words trigger associations. Terminological muddiness and the overlapping of terms exists within art practices, critique, research, philosophy and theory. The challenge of how things are defined is not new. The need to interrogate the limits of language, to revisit its function and clarify its application is essential for my research. My inquiry engages with a philosophical set of questions around language in critiquing how terms come to be, how they are used, applied and interpreted. In their book *Participatory Practice: Community-based Action for Transformative Change* (2022), Margaret Ledwith and Jane Springett explore problematics of language through the term ‘public’, of which they state:

Language around the narrative of ‘public’ is important here, particularly in relation to the idea of the collective. By using the word ‘public’, we buy into an old discourse which is embedded in the dualism of public versus private. It is also a word fraught with ambiguity... Take, for instance, the use in the UK of the words ‘public schools’. These are actually private schools that educate the elite and wealthy and are the seedbed of class in equality... This is an example, but more generally the use of the word ‘public’ hides and muddies the collective and social element... By reimagining the commons and acknowledging our interdependence we can transform the notion of ‘public’ and substitute the word ‘collective’, which highlights the interdependence where no one individual is entitled and we all have responsibilities to one another. (Ledwith and Springett, 2022, pg. 26)

The unpicking of the term ‘public’ (and timeliness of this) reinforces the need for my research to revisit some of the key terms surrounding contemporary art practices. The process of reviewing, forming and/ or clarifying language exposes new (relational) ways of thinking about and using language in writing about and discussing art practice of this nature. The creation of words and the proposition of altered language (in its structure, hyphenation, meaning) is not a new idea. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes’s proposition of the *Punctum* (his own terminological invention) was used to indicate certain images that had a particular effect on the spectator. The term punctum arose due to the need for a word which defined exhibitions that went beyond redacted spectating (referred to as the stadium effect) to indicate a relational, correspondence between the sensory photograph and the audience. This was referred to as the punctum effect (Barthes, 1980). Similar to my research, Barthes’s interest in terminology is drawn from the field of phenomenology in its language and intention as a project (Barthes, 1980, pp. 20-21). The relation between his interest in the phenomenological potentials of photographs and my research interest in the phenomenological potentials of things, points towards the need for my inquiry to develop a distinct approach to the terminology it employs.

Language is about communicating through a system, a collection of words. It classifies things and creates a discourse, a taxonomy of practice. Categorisation, according to Foucault (in *Power/knowledge: selected interviews & other writings*) does not describe social order but rather shapes and reshapes power relations (1980). The discourse of categorising language – a predominantly western issue in the desire to categorise every *thing*. An example of the use of western categorisation (and the need to review and challenge this) can be seen in Geraldine Kendall Adams report on the Pitt Rivers Museum’s announcement that they were to remove shrunken heads from display after an ethical review (and with this they were to re-visit the language which articulated objects, relations and histories). Adams reported that the museum had made changes to historic case labels featuring ‘derogatory language’, ‘installing new interpretation on site to give visitors greater insight into the way its collections were formed’ (Adams, 2020). The issue of Western-centric modes of language is also discussed by Pieter A.M. Seuren in *Western Linguistics: An Historical Introduction*. Here Seuren positions language as an empirical object (an object for empirical research). He presents the idea of language manifesting in unexpected variations and deviations, beyond the norm in a space of discourse as a ‘cognitive working space for the interpretation of new incoming utterances’ (Seuren, P, 2011, p. 65). Such a relational approach to language offers opportunity to revisit key terms in their own right and in relation to the information which the findings of my research inquiry present.

The development of a vocabulary which theorises modes of production (as I am interested in doing), has also been informed by the approach of thinkers such as Madeleine Akrich

and Bruno Latour who in their chapter *A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Non-Human Assemblies* (1992) proposed the term *actant* as a human or non-human source of action. My interest in the development, manipulation or re-configuration of language to propose shifted meanings and a re-consideration of the ways that things connect has also been broadly informed by Derrida's work around linguistic phenomena. Derrida in *On Grammatology* (1967), explored the interplay between language and the construction of meaning, proposing language as a complex phenomena. In searching to find the condition of linguistic systems, language he suggests is not a singular thing, it is contingent on other language, it is metaphysical and never sits on secure ground; it has differencing potentials (Derrida, 1967). The concept of *Différance*, as outlined in the introduction to my thesis, describes the existence of things through a constant process of negotiation, functioning within systems of classification (Derrida, 1967, p. 109). The spelling of *différance* (as opposed to difference) is of importance here – the *a* in French linguistics is not heard or made present when spoken – the presence of the *a* within *différance* questions the relationship between being (presence) and meaning (thought) in time and space. Derrida's theory of the deconstruction of language (outlined within *Writing and Difference* which was published alongside *Of Grammatology* and *Speech and Phenomena* in 1967) prompted my consideration of the complexity of knowledge and its entanglement with language. My research has gone on to explore the conditions that make language (and thus knowledge) possible through what Derrida describes in *Signature, Event, Context* as our negotiation of the inevitable gaps between experience and reality, between absence and potential (Derrida, 1971). Here he outlines the 'condition of all linguistic systems' (Derrida, 1967, p.60).

In investigating iterations of language, *Key to Key Words* has developed through affectedness, correspondence, trace, absence and presence; the language acting as what Derrida calls a sign in signifying and expressing intention to communicate meanings that have been formed through being and encounters (Derrida, 1971). The effect of one term leading to another in *Key to Key Words* challenging the ideas of a frozen structure between signifier and signified. The relational dynamic between things is within my *Key to Key Words* represented through the presence of the 'co' and through the positioning of the hyphen. Hyphenated terms and syntax offer a playful way of exploring how language is heard, encountered and understood. Re-search (Ingold, 2011), Intra-action (Barad, 2007), co-relation, co-formation – the rise of hyphenated language reflects the complex – multidimensional expansion of roles (and positions). The relational nature of language is then extended through the connections made between words in the narrative structure I have laid out which frame their encounters with each other and the readers.

It is important, at this stage, to note that whilst the individual terms I discuss throughout this thesis (and within my *Key to Key Words*) do not themselves dictate meaning, the

problems of their meanings are inextricably bound with the problems they are being used to discuss. Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) outlines the issue of vocabulary in two senses: the available and developing meanings of known words, which needed to be set down; and the explicit but often implicit connections which people make in particular formations of meaning (Williams, 1976, p. 15). Terms, for the purpose of my research are understood to be dependent on other terms, on locutions, on the meanings they acquire in specific linguistic contexts. As such they require clarification – reaffirming the need for this research and for me to create my own glossary. Williams's *Keywords* explored the significance of the shifting meanings of over 100 key words in order to define and amplify the vocabulary we share with others and which is shaped by political and cultural societal processes (Williams, 1976). The form my *Key to Key Words* takes in referencing Williams's *Keywords*, also draws also on the approaches of Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford in their use of an indexing approach in *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social* (2012) which alphabetically lists sections in order to encourage the reader to adopt their own navigational approach in seeking relevant reading. The format of an index as artwork was also something conceived by Art & Language who created the first of their *Indexes* for documenta 5 in 1972. Here texts (given tags), were filed in cabinets and sorted by index (searchable by the relationship between tags). The index existing as a form of practice which outlined the relational entanglements of both art and language as viewers participated in the act of reading and of navigating the index of vast information. In other examples the index acts as a theoretical tool for example Jonathan Harris's *Art History; The Key Concepts* (2016), Tate website's *Art Terms* (2020) and the *In Terms of Performance Keywords Anthology* website (2016).

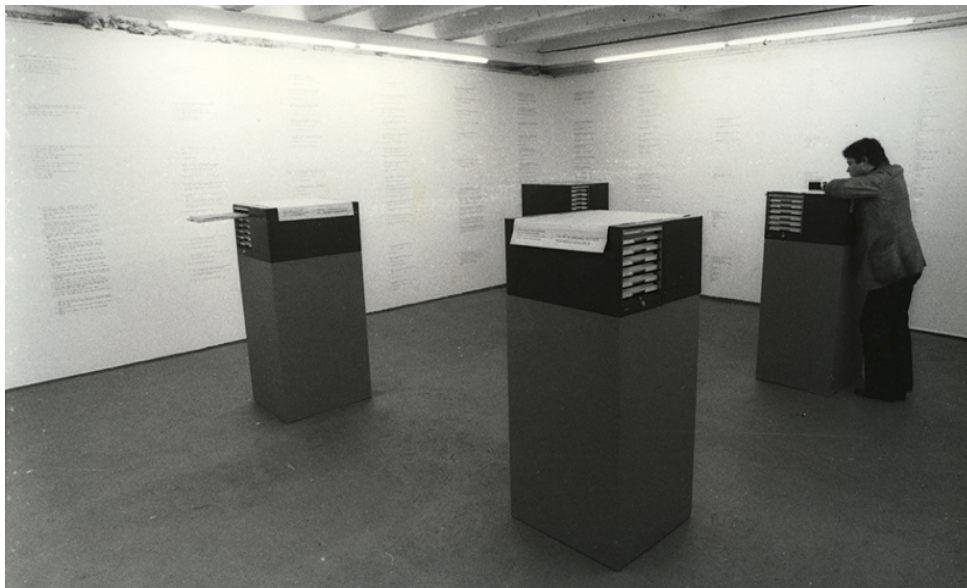


Figure 11: *Index of Reading Room*  
Art & Language, 1972  
documenta 5, Kassel (© Paolo Mussat Sartor)



The *Key to Key Words* I have developed is intended to be read as an artwork, an outcome of this research and as a prop for navigating my thesis. In a similar way to Art & Language's *Index 01'* was, it is staged as a structure, a system and form; it sets up a relational correspondence and an encounter in the linking of information. It attempts to gather, condense and meaningfully communicate the things that I know and have found out (through this research and the linguistic orbit of the phenomenological, anthropological and critical contexts engaged with) in a simplified, open way. Existing as a proposal, a reflection and critique, my *Key to Key Words* serves in reminding the reader (and user) how much is at stake in the language employed in contemporary art practices.

# AUDIENCE DELINEATIONS

Acceptor	Interactor
Actant	Interchanger
Activator	Interpreter
Affected	Matter
Agent	Meaning-maker
Associate	Observer
Attendee	Onlooker
Attester	Participant
Audience	Partner
Beholder	Performer
Client	Perceiver
Co-creator	Physical Being
Co-dependent	Producer
Collaborator	Proposer
Completer	Protagonist
Conduit	Reader
Consumer	Receptor
Contemplator	Receiver
Contributor	Reflector
Co-opted	Relation
Co-producer	Respondent
Corroborator	Reviewer
Decipherer	Sensor
Embodied	Signifier
Enabler	Spectator
Engager	Subject
Equal	Transformer
Exchanger	Viewer
Experiencer	Visitor
Form	Voyeur
Guest	Witness
Immersant	User

# Chapter 1:

## A matter of terminology

### Definitional problem

The Viewer feels, the Observer notices, the Spectator moves.  
(O'Doherty, 1986, p. 39)

The viewer, also known as the spectator, occasionally called participant, collectively called the audience or sometimes, as Brian O'Doherty describes in his seminal text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, is also called the observer, receiver or perceiver, has a critical place in art history (1986). Within theoretical lineages, the coining of terms has included – *Observer* (Weiner, 1936), *Spectator* (Debord, 1967), *Viewer* (Berger, 1972), *Participant* (Kaprow, 1971), *Beholder* (Fried, 1998) and *Interactor* (Bishop, 2012). This presents a serious definitional problem for my research – a suitable term is not readily at hand. Through a re-assessing of some of the complex terms at stake, I argue that it seems increasingly problematic to rely on traditional delineations due to their potential to be mis-interpreted in pointing towards roles, relationships or agencies. The choice of more suitable terminology in relation to my research is essential for removing obfuscation for clarification.

O'Doherty investigates the context of the gallery as a constructed space – a controlled arena, a chamber of display of the art object. In his book *Studio and Cube: on the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed*, O'Doherty suggests that the studio is the place where artwork gets conceptualised (the studio is the agent of creation), yet it is the gallery as the place where that artwork is made (the gallery space as the agent of transformation) and the place where art solicits its meaning (2008). O'Doherty cites the context of the gallery as both formative of the thing and as the thing itself in exploring the critical relationship between space, art object and viewer (O'Doherty, 1986). O'Doherty's characterisation of the gallery space has been significant in describing shifts in gallery conditions in the 1970s/ 1980s/ 1990s and in informing artist-curators' understandings of the potentials of the art space to inhibit, or indeed shape the relationship between artwork and audience. O'Doherty's book still holds relevance when examining current ideas against those proposed nearly 40 years ago. The status of my argument in relation to O'Doherty's frames the exhibition space as an arena of formation, one in which relational dynamics and agency come to be. My research draws on the formalities of the white cube to disrupt formalities of formation involving the viewer/ spectator, participant and/ or collaborator. Here I consider the extent to which the

‘audience’ (who I refer to within this chapter as the *other person(s)*) during the exhibition event, can or does become a conscious or unconscious, acknowledged or unacknowledged activating co-former in the process of things (artworks) becoming. The act of becoming and the significance of the exhibition space is further interrogated in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*.

Traditional roles are often built on language and on expectations. Definitions of art and art-making are in flux. Categories that have seemed to adequately describe things pertaining to exhibiting, making and participating in art no longer seem to fit many of the modes of production taking place. Each of the terms proposed in my *Audience Delineations* (presented as an insert at the start of this chapter), in describing the other person(s) has its own problems. Within this chapter I question the suitability of these terms as ones which denote an assumed role in outlining what the viewer-spectator-audience-participant-collaborator position is (or can be), and how these presuppositions might be modified. Here I cite key artists and artworks whose concepts use, respond to, rely on or question the being and agency of the other person(s). Whilst the majority of examples I draw on stem from Western artists and Eurocentric art criticism, the importance of work that extends beyond this is acknowledged as I aim to dissolve a distinction between East/ West dichotomies to frame my argument around the language and agency surrounding contemporary art practices. In critiquing the terminology used to describe some of the multiple audience positions applied within these examples I build an argument for the need to revisit language. This chapter culminates in the proposition of the term *agent* as an alternative to traditional audience delineations in an attempt to shift perception of relations between the objects, processes and conditions of formation.

The passivity of the spectator, the compliance of the observer, the distance of the onlooker and the acceptance of the participant are interrogated by Dave Beech (of Freee Collective) in his Art Monthly paper *Include Me Out* (Beech, 2008). These commonly used terms can all be applied to describe the act of the other person(s) seeing, interpreting, engaging with, making sense of and sometimes completing (through action or physical presence) an artwork in an exhibition-event context. The audience is a collective and/ or singular person who has increasingly shifted in importance to assume the role of receiver, respondent, maker, collaborator, critic, activator or staged assembler. A physical being, who whether seen as an object or someone with intellectual and emotional responsiveness, is part of a system and exists in relation to the artist, artwork and exhibition space. The terminologies used to describe the other person(s) are often given regardless of medium, context, modes of practice or outcomes. Within contemporary art practices, despite the widespread usage of its terminology, the categorisation of the other person(s) is rarely defined and interrogated.

## Viewer and spectator

The Latin word *spect* – to look, points towards the importance of the eye as receptive to (in this instance) works of art. The genealogy of the audience stems from notions of the beholder or onlooker in the eighteenth century – to look meaning to view or inspect. The range of synonyms used to describe the act of perception is vast. Within the breadth of practices and approaches to artistic production, the ‘viewer’ is asked to be present, to critically interpret, to participate in an act (of looking, thinking, engaging) and to be an intrinsic part of staged relations established in viewing. If we consider the viewer to be both the beholder and an integral part of a system (in the process activating, meaning-making and realising), then ‘to view’ contradicts this very idea.

Viewer is a key term which has been debated, tested and theorised; yet it still remains unsatisfactory and unsuitable in articulating the agency of the other person(s). The term has contradictions when the conceptual act of ‘viewing’ prompts an action or response from the other person(s) which extends beyond the basic act of looking that it implies. There is some degree of conflict in this – how can a viewer have an active participation if they indeed are simply understood in the secondary role ‘to view’ and their label as ‘viewer’ implies? John Berger in his influential book *Ways of Seeing* marked out the complexities of seeing, proposing the idea that ‘Soon after we see, we are aware that we can also be seen’ (1972, p. 9). The emergence of postmodernism and its main theoretical strands have contributed to a sophistication of our understanding of ways of ‘seeing’ and ‘looking’. The theorisation of looking however still sits in conflict with propositions of participation. As an example of the shift from seeing to participation, it is helpful here to consider Ian Burn’s (of Art & Language) *Mirror Piece* (1967) which aimed to frame the spectators ‘seeing’ and the act of looking against a background of inferred knowledge. The suggested order of reading work here created perception of the principles of spectating in relation to language and viewing; from periphery to centre. The relationship between artist and audiences generated by language is summarised by Burn as one in which ‘...a dialogue gives the viewer a new significance; rather than listening, he becomes involved in reproducing and inventing part of that dialogue. (Burn, 1991, p. 38)



Figure 12: *Mirror Piece*  
Art & Language (Ian Burn), 1967  
Tate Modern, London (©Estate of Ian Burn and Milani Gallery Brisbane)

In the case of Art & Language the significance of the other person(s) extends to the act of a responsive action being generated in the dialogical space between viewer, participant and artist. Establishing such relations requires us to acknowledge that the definition that the term ‘viewer’ offers is problematic. I cite here Adrian Piper’s *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment* (2012) as an example, which whilst appearing radical, challenges the other person(s) and the response they are probed to make. The work asks for action, for the other person(s) to consider what possibilities might arise if they take this conceptual exercise seriously. Piper’s practice often pushes people out of their comfort zone – challenging conceptions, attempting to deconstruct categories and explore the ways in which viewers interact with artworks – often asking them to respond to calls for action.



Figure 13: *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment*  
Adrian Piper, 2012  
Adrian Piper Research Archive, Berlin (©Adrian Piper)

The term ‘to view’ in the context of Piper’s work, I would suggest, is contradictory and unsuitable, yet it is readily used when writing or talking about her work by curators/ writers (in for example *Art Forum – New Objectivity* 2017, *Frieze – Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma* 1991, *New Museum – MEDI(t)Ations*, 2001). If, within contemporary art practices, roles are assumed, the artist would be considered the creator and producer of work, the curator the facilitator (or carer), the critic the evaluator and the viewer an observer. The need to consider the role of the other person(s) in more complex terms (for example through a de-lamination of the significance of the eyes in the act of viewing), I propose offers greater understanding of the potentiality of the production and reception of artworks.

The problematics of beholding in many ways stem from a position of individualism. Viewing as an individual act takes place in a public space and in an experience that is

often shared. The term viewer places an emphasis upon the individual viewer's encounter of a work of art as a singular act (through the eyes of the individual). Jacques Rancière in his book *The Emancipated Spectator* discusses the activity of viewing as that of an individual act of selection, comparison, interpretation and a connection making process – a negotiation of sorts (Rancière, 2009, p. 16). In considering individual versus pluralistic aspects of art production and the delineations of language that surround this, Rancière's proposition that the capacities and actions of viewing or spectating belong to anyone and everyone is important to note. Through this proposition Rancière suggests that the other person must be seen as both individual and also as a collective of other persons (Rancière, 2009, p. 43). The pluralism of art, it could be said, has given way to the pluralism of art production which implicitly involves the other person(s). The singular other person carries with it ideas of an isolated individual – an assumption of the ideology of the kind of attention and knowledge that only individuals can experience or gain (also described as bourgeois aesthetics). The other person(s) in the plural sense, is the collective constitution of the term which acknowledges the importance of co-being and agency.

In exploring the role of the viewer as spectator, in his essay *Art and Its Spectators*, David Carrier writes, 'The spectator stands before a work: the spectator sees the work and the work looks back: the spectator is as if absorbed in the work: the work elides the spectator's presence' (Carrier, 1986, p. 6). Carrier's idea of the spectator as someone who has a greater role, beyond that of the passive viewer hints towards the idea of participatory practice (explored further in the next section of this chapter) as a development from that of the spectator. To spectate, a term meaning to be present at an event, accounts for a physical presence with or without engagement. Guy Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* extends this idea proposing that the spectacle alienates everyone to become what he considers to be passive beings (passivity arising from habitual communication) (Debord, 1967). For example, in my first practice staging, *True and Correct*, whether choosing to sign the contracts or not, the other person(s) in the act is (or I argue should be) elevated from a spectator role.

In questioning the suitability of terminology, the work of artist Tino Sehgal, who often places an ambiguous demand of observation, being and action on his audience, offers a chance to explore the other person(s) role. The other person(s) in Sehgal's work becomes critical to its meaning as he empowers them to experience, interpret and shape the realisation of outcomes – reducing the gap between artwork and audience.

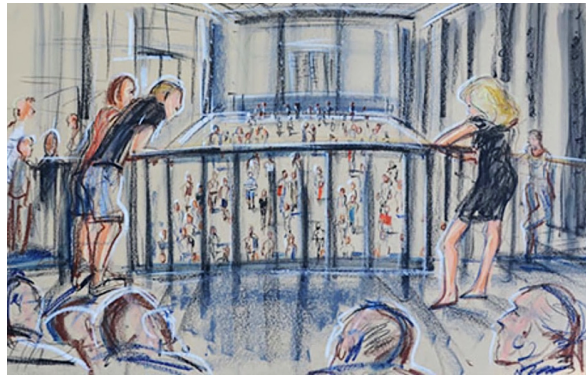


Figure 14: *Tino Sehgal's These Associations*  
 Illustrated by courtroom artist Priscilla Coleman, 2012  
 Frieze Conversation Piece (online) (©Priscilla Coleman)

*These Associations*, staged by Sehgal within the exhibition space of the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in 2012, was a durational performance piece premised on moments of being, on the encounter, on the idea of an exchange. Using choreographed movement, sound, music and conversation, the space became inhabited by the physical and vocal energy of the participants as Sehgal trained hundreds of performers to interact with visitors (the other person(s)). This work existed through the presence of the performers and their actions in response to the other person(s) who took part (Sehgal stipulated that no photography or documentation should happen – no trace of the event existing in physical or digital form). The other person(s) sometimes stood as passive spectators, sometimes as active participants, other times they were swept along with the happenings of the work as objects of physical presence in a system of actions. Speaking of her experience as a performer within the piece, Agnieszka Gratzka of Frieze magazine said, '*These Associations* depended on the ability to both to give one's attention and to claim it from visitors and participants alike' (Gratzka, 2013, n.p). The other person(s) within this work are often described as being 'viewers' (even by Sehgal himself) – this delineation giving a limited account of their role and essentialness. This poses an important question for my research inquiry – is the term viewer so embedded in contemporary art practices that even artists who present alternative modes of production which utilise the being, interaction and agency of this other person(s), fall back on its use?

We can mark the change in the position and role of the artist vis à vis audience by looking to the past. Minna Citron outlined in her paper *Communication between Spectator and Artist* (for the *College Art Journal*) that '...anyone who is not a practicing artist is of course, a spectator, and no matter how sensitive or how sympathetic he may be, he can share only indirectly and vicariously in the artists' side of the transaction – the creative experience – the process of creation' (Citron, 1955, p. 148). The historical context of this quote is of course significant (before the rise of the 1960s conceptual art movement). Today, the range of practices and positions are broader – indeed many contemporary artworks do involve the other person(s) being part of the process of their formation and/or realisation. The term spectator does however still assume a power dynamic between



artist and audience and suggests a sense of passive reception. Boris Groys, in discussing the role of the viewer in his essay *Politics of Installation*, suggests that in the contemporary context we have a spectator without a spectacle, a passive and obsolete nothingness (Groys, 2009). Within this essay Groys also cites Foucault in relation to mechanisms of power which shape things that are manifest today. Foucault is here referenced for his ideas around the ways in which mechanisms of power are revealed through a constructed set of operations that lead to a process or act (ideas he discussed in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, 1978). In constructing mechanisms of engagement (as many of the artwork examples cited within this chapter do) there is possibility to shift the other person(s) away from a position of viewer-spectator, towards one of agency which is acknowledged through its terminology (as having greater active significance).

The viewer-spectator position is also explored by the artist and writer Robert Morris whose sculptural-installation artworks considered the ways in which the body relates to space and movement. Morris was interested in process over object and perception over idea in the experience of the other person(s). In his *Notes on Sculpture, Part 2*, Morris wrote, 'Even its most patently unalterable property— shape —does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work' (Morris, 1966, pp. 233-234). In expanding on the significance of the role of the viewer in relation to shape and form, Morris went on to say, 'The constant shape of the cube held in the mind, but which the viewer never literally experiences, is an actuality against which the literal changing, perspective views are related' (Morris, 1966, pp. 233-234). Morris proposed the idea of the artwork as an evolution of the interaction between environment, object, artist and as he named the other person(s), viewer. This concept can be seen in his sculptural-installation *Untitled (L-Beams)* (1966). Within this piece L-shaped forms were positioned so the other person(s) could walk around the work – experiencing differing sizes and shapes and in the process creating an awareness of one's own body. The work demonstrated a division between perception of the object and the actual object. *Untitled (L-Beams)* (and indeed the 1966 *Primary Structures* exhibition it was part of) was significant in the contemporary art practices discourse surrounding the role of the viewer in relation to the production and conceptual meaning of sculptural objects. In discussing Morris's work, critic Michael Fried in his *Artforum* essay *Art and Objecthood* (1967) (reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, 1998), explained that '...the sculptures exist in a situation, one that by virtual definition includes the beholder, which suggests to the beholder that art cannot exist without them' (Fried, 1998, p. 154).



Figure 15: *Untitled (L-Beams)*  
Robert Morris, 1965-1966  
The Jewish Museum, New York (©The Jewish Museum)

The very idea that art cannot exist without the other person(s) highlights the misleading implications of the viewer, spectator, beholder delineation in the importance of these other person(s) as necessary activators of a work of art. Fried suggesting that by very definition, objects within the environment of the art exhibition (and exhibition space), as experiential works, include this other person(s) (which he calls the beholder). Such an idea once again necessitates a review of the terminology used to classify their importance in the work of art.

## Participant

The word participant derives from the Latin *participate* meaning to share in. It is a term which is rooted in the origins of twentieth century Futurist and Dada performances and became prominent in the 1990s as a description of relational art (Bourriaud, 1998). The rise of participatory practice in the 1990s created situations for the role of the audience as executor of a work of art. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of engaged hints towards the word participant – implying that for one to participate one is engaged in an activity. By its very definition the participant assumes a radically more active role than that of the spectator. This is a key point for my research whereby the other person(s), through the encounter, generates a performative relation that in the context of the exhibition (at that moment) is presented as the work of art. In my stagings (for example *Fourth Wall*) the other person(s) performs an activation and creates a material impact (in the pulling apart and joining together of the PVC curtain strips positioned across the threshold as they enter/ exit the exhibition space). This staging to some extent exists as a participatory practice piece however the notion of participation does not do justice to the

intrinsic role and agency of the other person(s). Anna Dezeuze in the book *The 'Do-it-yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, clarifies participatory (as opposed to interactive) artwork, through the structure of the work; if it is not effected by the participant's actions it is 'interactive', but if the work is 'transformed in the course of the exhibition' it is participative (Dezeuze, 2010, p. 6). Dezeuze describes participatory practice as:

...an object to be worn or to be touched, a score to be performed, a collective performance in which the artist may or may not participate, an environment to be entered or a sequence of spaces to be traversed, a digital image to be clicked on, or a combination of one or more of these features.  
(Dezeuze, 2010, p. 1)

Nicolas Bourriaud (in *Relational Aesthetics*, 1998), Claire Bishop (in *Participation*, 2006), Dave Beech (in *Include Me Out*, 2008), Morgan Quaintance (in *Human Zoos: from Colonial Practice to Participatory Art*) and Anna Dezeuze (in *The 'Do-it-yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*) have all critically engaged with the idea of participatory practice and in the opportunities to involve the other person(s) in the work of art. Such works, in participatory practice terms, often aim to effect social change, to connect to communities and/ or to politicise aesthetics. Participatory art (as a beholder-in-action type term) implies an active engagement of the other person(s) taking part in something. Participant as a 'do-er', 'enabler' and 'maker'. If artwork that is created through a participatory process is reliant on the participant, then the term participant sits as an unsuitable definition in the 'taking part' over 'contributing to production' that this role implies. The term participatory practice has attracted a range of criticisms and suggestions as to the meaning and relevance of overlapping terms it conjures – interactive art, relational art, cooperative or dialogical art; activist or antagonistic art. Bishop, in her book *Participation*, discusses the relationship between interactive and participatory art as a process whereby another person receives, interprets and subsequently makes art. She acknowledges that although interactive and participatory works may look or be described differently, that it is hard to differentiate between them (Bishop, 2006). Whilst I agree with this idea, what appears to be lacking in relation to this, is the status and agency of the other person(s) (who it has been declared is essential in both participatory and interactive practices) through the term participant.

Take for example the *Graffiti-on-board* 2019/ 20 research project developed through the participation of the Tonga group in Binga (an underdeveloped rural area of North Zimbabwe). The five-day participatory workshop involved 12 Tonga youths from the local community telling their stories through the act of graffiti-making. In the *Third World Quarterly* report of the project, *Participatory Art for Navigating Political Capabilities and Aspirations Among Rural Youth in Zimbabwe*, Wadzanai Faith Mkwanzazi, Firdevs Melis

Cin and Tendayi Marovah said ‘...graffiti was both participatory and engaging as it dislocates power structures in the production process but also challenges the power dynamics in the public domain during the dissemination activities and the exhibition’ (Marovah et al, 2021, p. 9). The outcomes from this project were exhibited in Bulawayo at the National Art Gallery, at the National Museum in Harare and at the Midland State University in Gweru, in an attempt to provide a platform for social awareness. The project was described as participatory – I would however argue, that the term ‘participant’ in this case is, to some extent, problematic given the role of the ‘participants’ as creators of the works of art displayed. In discussing the political potentials of participatory art-based methodologies and the social context of the project the authors of the report and facilitators of the project say, ‘This research innovatively employs participatory arts as underpinned by the ideas of co-production, collaboration, community and public engagement’ (Marovah et al, 2021, p. 6). Here, what constitutes participation is not the issue, it is the terminology used in discussing the ‘participants’ which brings into question issues of individual and collective authorship in acknowledging the key role this other person(s) plays in the production of work.



Figure 16: *Graffiti on Board Project*  
Tonga Youth Group, 2019/ 20

Batonga Community Museum, Zimbabwe (©Changing the Story, University of Leeds)

Bishop in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and The Politics of Spectatorship* writes that ‘activation of the audience in participatory art is positioned against its mythic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption’ (Bishop, 2012, p. 275). She draws links between the desire to activate the audience to emancipate them from the effects of consumer, capitalist and socio-political conditions. Bishop proposes that participatory art aims to realise collective or shared social engagement, an intention which was also at the core of the ruangrupa collective’s documenta 15 project cited within the introduction to this thesis. Such collective agency calls into question issues of individual authorship which I explore further in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*.

The Freee Art collective, in their paper *Impossible Participation*, acknowledge the problematics of the term participation:

Advocates of participation claim that it replaces the old contract within art (dominated by the artist-viewer relation). Our contention is, by contrast, that it preserves established forms of production and consumption on the condition that some of the roles and responsibilities previously monopolised by the artist are outsourced to the viewer-turned-participant.  
(Freee, 2013, p.2)



Figure 17: *Public Kiosk*  
Freee Art Collective (Dave Beech, Mel Jordan, Andrew Hewett), 2016  
Common Ground, AHRC event, York University (©Dr Andy Hewett)

Freee explored the parameters of participatory practice and the importance placed on the role of the other person(s) (whom they outline as the viewer-turned-participant) in their work *Public Kiosk* as part of the AHRC *Common Ground* event (2016). In *Field notes from participant observation*, Roxanna Morosanu provides an account of audience engagement and the production of badges through a fixed set of movements to be followed (Morosanu, 2016, n.p). Participatory practice such as this, attempts to push social engagement, to foster collaborative working, community inclusion and so on. Of *Public Kiosk*, Andrew Hewett of Freee Art Collective, in a research report for the University of Northampton, writes:

The kiosk provides several ways in which a passer-by can engage with opinion formation. The visitor is invited to write a slogan or choose one of the existing slogans to reproduce. They can do this by making a badge, using vinyl text, printing a poster, or programming a teletext sign.  
(Hewett, 2017, p. 6)

The term visitor is interesting here in the participatory, contributing and producing act of this other person(s) – engaged in the work through a methodology that is referred to as ‘agonistic’ (Hewett, 2017, pp. 7). Another important example cited in an exploration of the term participatory art is Tania Bruguera’s *Tatlin’s Whisper #5* (Tate Modern, 2008). The other person(s), when entering the Turbine Hall saw two mounted policemen issuing directions and instructions; this encounter became an immersive one as the ‘audience’ (as props in the work), were prompted by officers and horses to move across the space. The assumed delineation of participants here could be questioned; it was the engagement along with the physical presence of the other person(s) that was required for the resolution of work – how they responded then shaped this resolution. The performance could fall into the participatory category; other person(s) following the directions of the mounted police (and movement of their horses), or the category of a spectated performance; other person(s) choosing not to engage in the act of moving across the space.



Figure 18: *Tatlin’s Whisper #5*  
Tania Bruguera, 2008  
Tate Modern, London (©Tate)

In unpicking this further, questions of engagement and affect arise in asking how this artwork would have changed if all of the other persons(s) stood and watched and did not allow themselves to be activated as participants. The work would still have existed and functioned to some extent: therefore, the idea of participant as facilitator in the realisation of the work could be queried. Perhaps in this instance the work is considered an activist piece – acts of resistance to conforming to play out the role of willing participants a form of practice in itself? Even so the other person(s) here in determining the direction the work takes are described (by Bruguera and critics such as Claire Bishop, Sarah Happensburger and Jonah Westerman who have written about this work) as participants. It is important to acknowledge, in discussing *Tatlin’s Whisper #5*, the coercive forms of participation it employs – perhaps in an echoing of political systems of control and



oppressive social structures. Participation is not always voluntary – this brings with it significant ethical considerations (a number of which are explored further in *Chapter 5: The Ethics of Things*). Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5* in structuring an act of engagement through mechanisms of performance, calls into question the distinction between participation and production. This example highlighting the problematics of the term participation when the participants of the work (and their compliance with/ in it) become essential materials for its success.

There is an ethical consideration in the use of the participant for the collective creation of an artwork that participatory practice demands. If you, as the other person(s) who is cast in a very specific role, does not know that your engagement, interaction and action is an essential requirement for the artwork, can you be described as a participant? Does the term participant shift if the participatory act is voluntary or enforced? The process of a participant partaking and sharing in the act or experience of a construct in the exhibition space forms the basis of understanding for participatory practice. The term participant however feels uncomfortable if the engagement (as an act of considered response and action) is the making of the work. For example, within my second practice project, *Dispositif*, the movement of the bodies of the other person(s) through the object-props performed an encounter which affected the objects – altering their state and becoming as artefact-objects in the artwork forming process. In this situation, the other person(s) is doing more than participating, their essential role elevating them to that of co-former, as, I would also suggest, is the case in Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5*. Similarly, if it is the physical presence of the other person(s) rather than an intellectually or emotionally stimulated response that is the principle focus of the artwork, then they can surely not be named a participant (if active participation is not deemed a necessary requirement for the realisation of the artwork). On this, in her paper *Participation and Spectacle: Where are we now?* Bishop writes:

One of the central requirements of art is that it is given to be seen and reflected upon, by a spectator. Participatory art in the strictest sense forecloses the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer. (Bishop 2011, p. 2)

Participation can often hint towards community engaged production with work that has a socially driven agenda as is the case with the practice of artist Rirkrit Tiravanija. His work *Untitled (Free/ Still)* first performed in 1992, saw the artist directly engage the audience through the act of cooking and eating. This act, was a process for exploring the context in which art is made and received as 'viewers' became receivers, activators and users through interaction within the situation offered. In discussing this work within *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, Michael Kelly writes "The visitor, who ate, conversed, shared, and generally interacted was not a spectator but an active participant in the creation of

the social art' (Kelly, 2014, p. 2). The visitor became the participant, but also the implied collaborator and creator through the act of eating, activating the concept of the piece and dictating its resolution or direction of performance. In being implicated as collaborative creator the term participant, as secondary to the artist in the creative act, is here an ill-fitting term for describing the importance of this other person(s) and their actions.



Figure 19: *Untitled (Free/ Still)*  
Rirkrit Tiravanija, 1992/ 1995/ 2007/ 2011-  
Museum Modern Art, New York (@MoMA)

In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud discusses the role of the other person(s) as a 'witness, associate, customer, guest, co- producer, and protagonist' (Bourriaud, 1998, p. 58). Here he describes the exhibition space as the place where experimentation is most visible and the objects and materials within it as tools which set up the necessary conditions for engagement (as the essential act of participation) (1998). Bourriaud outlines the idea of art being made in the present with the artist as the catalyst and facilitator of artworks that actively seek audiences. Bourriaud affirms that participatory work is an open and revealing process; the requirement to participate is not concealed but direct (as a necessary intention of the work to activate the other person(s) in 'doing'). It relies on engagement and is often closely linked to socially engaged practices – embodying an integration of aesthetics and politics. Within his piece *Das Auge (The Eye)* 2011, Thomas Hirschhorn presents figures as representatives or substitutes for what he describes in an interview for *The Power Plant* with Gregory Burke as representing 'the non-concerned, the civilians, the spectators, the people who, by chance or bad luck, are present' (Hirschhorn, 2011, n.p). Hirschhorn discuss *Das Auge (The Eye)* as an 'exhibition with no space to lay back, no space to take distance from and no space for an overview.' Affirming that his intention is for 'the viewer to be in my work, completely inside, I want him to engage or to confront it, beyond his sensibility, his preference and beyond his desire' (Hirschhorn, 2011, n.p). Hirschhorn's *Das Auge (The Eye)* was charged with agency in framing of the viewer as part of the work.





Figure 20: *Das Auge (The Eye)*.  
Thomas Hirschhorn, 2011  
Power plant, Toronto (©Steve Payne)

Dezeuze, in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Deleuze Monument* (2014), talks about an active rather than participatory work; the idea of the making and production of artwork as action. There is, however, a distinction between the term activation and participation – between that of the activist and that of the participant. Koki Tanaka is an artist I cite here for a practice that utilises everyday objects to probe questions of behaviour, actions and reactions amongst the other person(s) during the exhibition event – often focusing on collective or collaborative moments. In an interview with Hou Hanru for *Art Review* Tanaka discusses the potential agency of his work in activist terms saying ‘Activism relates to the hope of provoking direct change. But for my art practice there cannot be an immediate effect. Rather the effect is small but long-lasting – something that slowly affects society’ (Tanaka, 2015, n.p). Tanaka, through the medium of performance, installation and video, explores the idea of situations revealing the uncanniness of existence for those who experience his work in what he describes as ‘collective acts’ (Tanaka, 2015, n.p). In his piece *A Behavioral Statement (or an Unconscious Protest)* for the Japanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2013, Tanaka asked participants (a term he uses when discussing his work) to bring their favourite books with them to the event. One group of participants were then positioned at the top of a staircase (the location of the work) the other at the bottom; staging interactions between each other as they crossed paths and occupied waiting time by reading. Here the other person(s) conforms to the performative act asked of them – subsiding any sense of an activist response. If the activist is someone who agitates, who pushes back, who has a voice, where does this leave the participant who follows instructions from the artist? Is the participant by very nature an activist when engaging with artworks of political intent? Perhaps so. This does however leave an unanswered question around what this other person(s) is called if not a participant (or indeed activist).



Figure 21: *A Behavioral Statement (or an Unconscious Protest)*  
 Koki Tanaka, 2013  
 Venice Biennale, Japanese Pavilion (©Koki Tanaka)

The participant within the art practices cited in this chapter have an interactive and essential role. Arnold Berleant in his book *Art and Engagement* (1991), discusses the experience of art in relation to the art object. He suggests a psychological framing which shifts attitudes in the appreciation of the art object ‘...in which the active participation of the appreciator in completing the artistic process is essential to the aesthetic effect’ (Berleant, 1991, pp. 25-26). Active here is taken to mean a physical and/ or psychological engagement which directly impacts the work. The other person(s), in Berleant’s terms is is an active appreciative participant in the completion process (either through physical action or creative perceptive involvement) (Berleant, 1991). Berleant’s ideas pointing towards a need to review the terminology relating to the participant.

In the late 1950s the artist Allan Kaprow devised performances called *Happenings*, in which he would stage engagement with (and as) artworks through schedules, instructions and prompts – the audience entering into a constructed situation of participation. In these works, which were created in response to a dissatisfaction with the division between artist and audience, the other person(s) directly became the participant through engagement which led to activity. Mariellen Sandford in *Happenings and Other Acts* discusses the potential of participatory practice beyond something passive or transactional which as Kaprow says would be ‘to ask very little of the whole notion of participation’ (Sandford, 1995, p. 201).



Figure 22: *Women Licking Jam off a Car, Happenings 'Household'*  
Allan Kaprow, 1964  
New York (© Sol Goldberg)

In relation to such works, the participant was described by Beech (in his Art Monthly essay *Include Me Out*) as 'not cast as an agent of critique or subversion but rather as one who is invited to accept the parameters of the art project' (Beech 2008). Beech suggests that participating in an event in which the artist has already assigned them (the other person(s)) a specific role, is to enter into a pre-established arena of production. It is the entering into a specific role and the reliance on the other person (thus shifting the balance of power) which problematises the terminology of participant. Beech goes on to say:

...participation of civilians in artworks does not fundamentally challenge the cultural distinctions that separate them from the artist ...participation simply re-enacts that relationship in an ethnographic fashion. It would be unfair to expect a single artwork to overcome such systemic ills, but this is precisely the problem with the concept of participation: it is based on the misconception that properties of the artwork could offer a technical solution to art's social marginalisation. (Beech, 2008, n.p)

Perhaps the perception that Beech asserts has not changed. What is clear is that participatory practice remains complex. Returning to Ledwith and Springett (cited in *A Key to key words and glossary of terms*), it is the breadth of participatory practice which they outline (within their book *Participatory Practice: Community-based Action for Transformative Change*), which has significance in understanding the range of approaches that participation can take. Included in this exploration is the positioning of participatory practice as a relational process, as an act of co-creating – for change or knowledge, as something we are all entangled within (Ledwith and Springett, 2022).

Here I consider the idea that a participant in participatory practice experiences the process of creativity through action and engagement which often utilises objects and material outcomes. If the emphasis is placed on the agency given to a participant within a work of art, then the term participant I argue, does not adequately define the role held by this other person(s). Beech offers further rationale for the problematics of the term participation when he writes:

...If participation entails its own forms of limitations on the participant, then the simple binary needs to be replaced with a constellation of overlapping economies of agency, control, self-determination and power. Within such a constellation, participants take their place alongside the viewer, observer, spectator, consumer and the whole panoply of culture's modes of subjectivity and their social relations. (Beech 2008, n.p)

Beech's observations prompted my interest in creating a situation and defining a term for this other person(s) who (knowingly or unknowingly) has agency in the formation and/or realisation process within a framed situation of relations (during the exhibition event). The other person(s) whom, in my four practice stagings as *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation* finds, has through an encounter with the object-props, enacted agency. The activation of a pen leaving residue of ink on a paper contract in *True and Correct*, the impact of footwear causing a scuff on the surface of the tarpaulin in *Dispositif*, the wearing of shoe covers capturing dust and dirt as they were walked around the exhibition space in *Front Stage: Back Stage* and the marks of handprints on the PVC curtain strips in *Fourth Wall* caused by the other person(s) entering the space. Each of these stagings point towards the need to re-think the terminology used to describe the significance of the agency of the other person(s) in works which are premised on their being.

## Collaborator

My research inquiry understands the concept that to some extent all art requires a viewer (or other person(s) associated with an audience description) in order for them, regardless of their actions and identifying roles, to conceive the possibility of art works. I also acknowledge that the rhetoric surrounding this other person(s) is bound up in, and to some extent impossible to untangle from, institutional critique. Marcel Duchamp, an artist who questioned what art could be, proposed the idea of the viewer as necessary for the completion of a work. This was a pioneering thought that emerged in artistic practice in the 1950s.



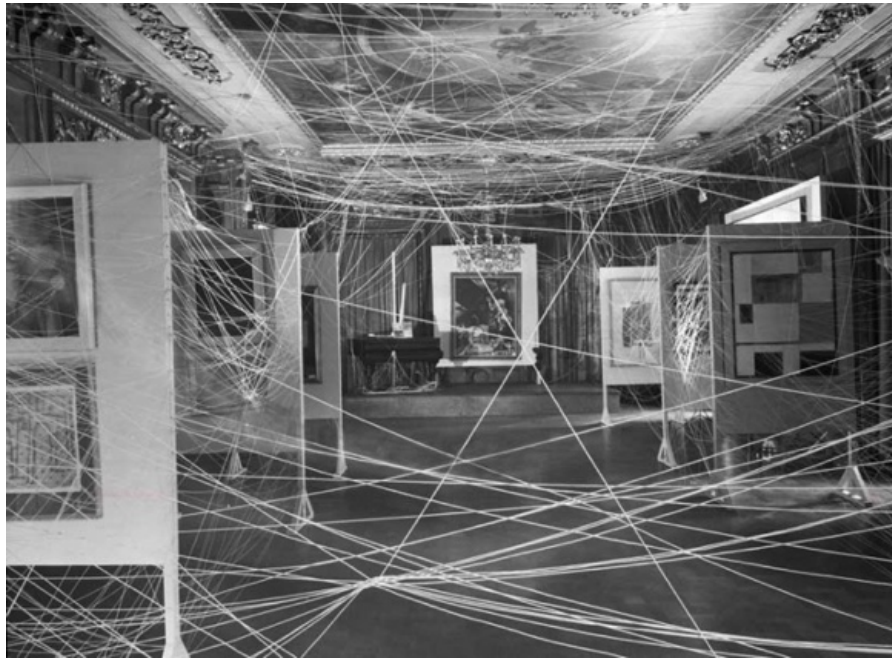


Figure 23: *First Paper of Surrealism (Mile of String/ His Twine)*.  
Marcel Duchamp, 1942  
Philadelphia Museum Art, Philadelphia (© John Schiff)

In *The Creative Act*, he writes, 'Creative art is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act' (Duchamp, 1957, p. 78). Duchamp explored the struggle between intention and realisation when he challenged visitors to become active participants. For his piece *The First Papers of Surrealism* (1942) (known as *Twine* or later as *Mile of String*), he staged a playful intervention within the exhibition space through his use of material (several hundred feet of twine). The functional effect of the twine altering the viewing experience meaning the other person(s) had to navigate its presence. Duchamp's interest in the viewer as an essential part of the creative act saw the emergence of viewer elevated from passive observer to that of material or as part of the process of completion in the work of art – a collaborator of sorts. This became a prominent mode of thinking in the 1960s and 70s, yet this other person(s) was (and largely still is) labelled viewer or spectator by Duchamp, other artists and critics.

Collaboration, as a term, can be interpreted as either actual (in the historical sense of a collaboration having happened) or ideological (in the theoretical and projective sense of what may have happened). The rhetoric of participant often conflates participation with collaboration. The distinction, for me, lies in the ability and potential of the other person(s) to become a co-former (a term I put forward in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*). The shift from participant to collaborator I would suggest is about intention, process, outcomes, control and agency. In the context of artistic practices which construct situations whereby the other person(s) is framed as a collaborator (or as I suggest co-former), the artwork is

not participant dependent. Instead, the artwork probes consideration into the power and potential of the assumed roles and relations of agency and being. For example, in my stagings, the way a bollard is navigated in *Dispositif* or the method and point of entry through a turnstile in *True and Correct*. Here I again refer to Beech's *Include Me Out* paper where he sums up this distinction in saying:

Collaborators are distinct from participants insofar as they share authorial rights over the artwork that permit them, among other things, to make fundamental decisions about the key structural features of the work. That is, collaborators have rights that are withheld from participants.

(Beech 2008, n.p)

A piece in which the other person(s) is framed as part of the work is Anila Quayyum Agha's *Intersections* (2013). In this work, through a laser-cut wooden cube, light is projected from the centre – shadows of patterns flood the ceiling, walls and floor – interrupted only by the presence of the other person(s). The work explores boundaries, public and private space and the ephemeral aspect of life. Agha draws influence from her Pakistani heritage in which women were excluded from the mosque as place of community – instead having to pray at home. In such an experiential work, it is the other person(s) who provides an opportunity for light to be refracted against, for patterns to be distorted, for the concepts of the work to play out. This other person(s) collaborating with the materials to shift the work into a performative space (in ways which can be both knowing or unknowing).



Figure 24: *Intersections*  
Anila Quayyum Agha, 2013  
Grand Rapids Art Museum, Michigan (©Anila Quayyum Agha)

Conceptual artist Bruce Nauman in the late 1960s and early 1970s developed sculptural installations that were based upon the other person(s)' (also referred to by him as the beholder's) body and mind. In *Performance Corridor* (1969) the other person(s) was directed through a space in which video monitors played live feed images of them back to them. Nauman who has also worked with instructions and actions (movement and sound creations) as well as 'viewer as subject' ideas often attempts to control the viewing experience and situation in a way which could be described as coercive. Playing with the absence of himself as the artist, he prompts the other person(s) into being compelled to complete the work – a collaboration of sorts. However, in doing so Nauman frames an act of complicit behaviour in the process. The other person(s) in Nauman's work shifts from carrying out the role of viewing, to participating (performing), to completing the work (co-forming) through their interactions with it. This idea could also be applied to Sehgal's work (discussed earlier in this chapter), raising further questions about the distinction between participant and collaborator. I would suggest, in the example of Nauman's *Performance Corridor*, that it is the playing out of concepts in space (through an individual experience of the other person(s)), shifting between physical presence and interactions of a subject matter, which stop this other person(s) being labelled participant and the work labelled participatory. Whilst it could be described as an outcome produced through the engagement of the other person(s), the mechanisms which stage this engagement also prevent it from being described as collaborative.

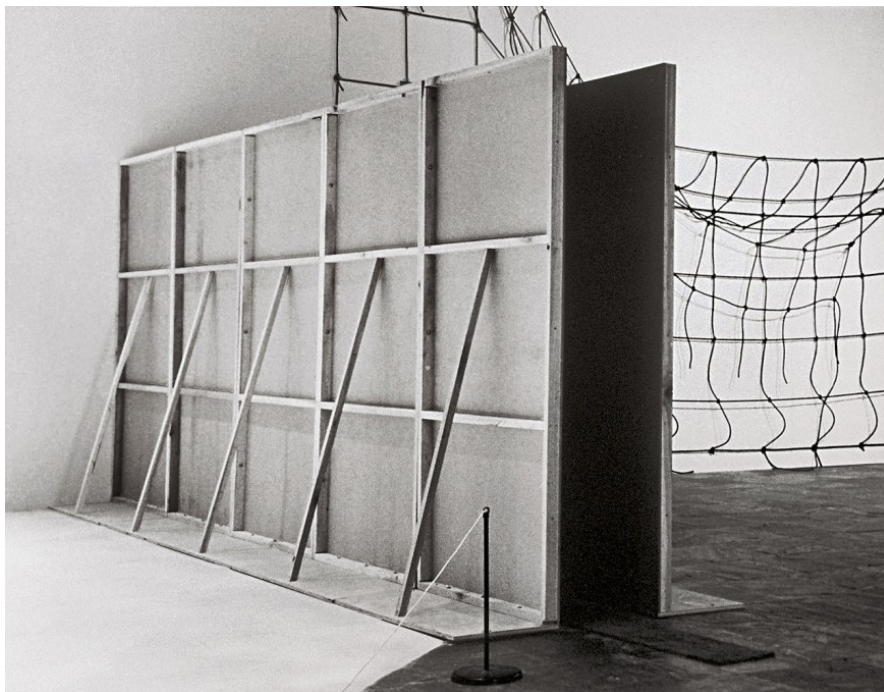


Figure 25: *Performance Corridor*  
Bruce Nauman, 1969  
Whitney Museum, New York City (©Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum)



Donald Schön in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (2003) argues that it is the collaboration created through physical presence, action or movement of others which facilitates subsequent development of knowledge. Applied to my research inquiry it is proposed that the relational engagement of the other person(s), the object-props and the exhibition space generates the artefact-object capable of recording knowledge. Schön proposes that the collaborative act (within an art practice context) positions the other person(s) as a co-producer of this development (2003). Schön also writes that the term collaborator is problematic as it describes a role which shifts meaning in different contexts and implies a shared consultation in the development process. Two works which involve a collaborative element (of participation, activation and/ or realisation) which I have drawn on are Carey Young's *The Representative* (2005) and Michael McMillan's *The Front Room* (2005/ 2021). In both works the other person(s) knowingly enters into a constructed situation which necessitates consideration that their contribution is significant. Take for example McMillan's installation *The Front Room*, in which a front room from of a Caribbean migrant family from the 1970s was reconstructed in a museum space – facilitating a environment for social gatherings as the other person(s) was encouraged to sit down and experience the work – activating and becoming part of it.



Figure 26: *Front Room*  
Michael McMillan, 2005/ 2021  
Museum of the Home, London (©Em Fitzgerald)

Young also took the approach of using furniture to construct an environment in which direct engagement with the other person(s) was facilitated. For *The Representative*, the other person(s) was asked to sit down and use the phone within the installation to connect directly to a call centre agent working remotely. During this call the other person(s) was offered the opportunity to get to know the call centre agent. The conversations were responsive and to a large extent unscripted – the other person(s) critical for activating the work and key for informing the direction that the conversations would take. Young described the position that the other person(s) was put into as being akin to that of the researcher, audience, voyeur, client and potential friend (Young, 2005).



Figure 27: *The Representative*  
 Carey Young, 2005  
 Power Plant, Toronto (©Carey Young)

The methodology employed by Young and McMillan staged the other person(s) within a set of relations and framed them as a co-former (with less consequence of pre-consent). Ellie Harrison in describing her work *Vending Machine* (2009) directly discusses its relationship to visitors. Operating as a performative work, an old vending machine was reprogrammed to release snacks only when news relating to the recession made the headlines on the BBC News RSS feed.



Figure 28: *Vending Machine*  
 Ellie Harrison, 2009  
 Plymouth College of Art, Plymouth (©Ellie Harrison)

This work was not reliant on the other person(s), but instead gestured towards them to interact, to take the snacks when released – extending the work in a participatory mode of other person(s) and artist collaboration. Whilst seemingly an act of generosity offering the other person(s) something (snacks) for free, *Vending Machine* also hinted towards an uneasy exchange. The act of giving, of other person(s) taking and of choice (of availability and selection of snacks) suggested that we may not be able to access what we want, when we want, at the touch of a button. Through her practice Harrison manifests ways in which passive consumers could be transformed into politically conscientious and accountable members of society. Such a premise indicates a thinking of the other person(s) as having agency within a constructed set of relations.

*Vending Machine* has correlations in its approach to the exhibition *Here Comes a New Challenger* developed by David Blandy, James Holland and Morgan Quaintance at Cubitt in 2016. Here, the exhibition space was turned into a gaming arcade with the other person(s) having the opportunity to play on the vintage machines on display. The work focused on the cultural impact, social networks and practices that the gaming community produced in London during the 1990s and early 2000s. The exhibition also placed an essential importance on the being and agency of the other person(s) in activating the works. Active involvement from the other person(s) was at the core of the conceptual development of *Here Comes a New Challenger* – the presence and role of the other person(s) as objects of intention. The objects of intention here is understood in Paisley Livingston's terms (in *Art and Intention: a Philosophical Study*) to be '...not only states of mind or attitudes, but also literally actions' (Livingston, 2005, p. 9). Art that conceives the other person(s) as an object of intention (as key to the works methodology), reaffirms the need for further consideration of the terminology used to describe them. The other person(s) who has a relational, dialogical, participative, collaborative and/ or enabling role demands greater acknowledgement, of the transformative potentials of their being and agency.



Figure 29: *Here Comes a New Challenger*  
David Blandy, James Holland and Morgan Quaintance, 2016  
Cubitt, London (©Cubitt Arts)

Livingston, in expanding on his theories around the object of intention, asserts that the recognition of intentions is in fact crucial to our understanding of diverse forms of collective authorship and art-making which are issues bound up in the term collaborator (Livingston, 2005). Considered in the context of Barthes's theory (proposed in his paper *Death of the Author*, 1967) that authorship of all kinds is indebted to others, I would suggest that there is a tension (in contemporary art practices of this nature) between singular and collective knowing and un-knowing art making. John Dewey in his book *Art as Experience* (1934/ 2005), calls for a distinction between the work of art and the art product (which in the context of his text would not have included video, performance or installation art, but more traditional two- and three-dimensional works). To shift the emphasis of 'work' in 'work of art' from noun to verb assumes a transactional activity of the other person(s). Dewey's proposition of experiences which have a beginning and end (resolution) in the engagement and interaction with objects supports my idea of the other person(s) as key in the formation process through their being and agency during the exhibition event (Dewey, 1934/ 2005, p. 45). The connection between the body, objects and the experience, Dewey argues can re-establish the basic of community and civic life through building connections between individuals and the collective (across a number of fields including the arts, education and politics). Kaprow (whose *Happenings* I discussed earlier in this chapter) questioned the position of the artist and status of the artwork in relation to collectively produced practices. In response to Dewey's ideas Kaprow developed the concept of the '*un-artist*' who exists in a place of uncertainty – at the intersection between play, research, learning and knowing (1969). This concept serving a reminder of the importance of re-visiting what and who constitutes art making.

In Sondra Perry's *Wet and Wavy – Typhoon Coming On* (2018), three video screens were attached to a water resistance rowing machine playing a soundtrack of chimes, Missy Elliot's *Supa Dupa Fly* and distorted voices. Here Perry engaged the other person(s) body in the production and reception of the work. The mechanism of the rowing machine was filled with hair gel as opposed to water requiring the other person(s) to undertake a labour-intensive act of rowing. The body as material, attributes of power and networks of connectivity were explored through this work. It raised questions about what it means to be a productive citizen whilst inferring that compliance renders you just another cog in the machine. *Wet and Wavy – Typhoon Coming On* explored ideas of the individual and the mass through physical experience, presence, and engagement – establishing a role for the other person(s) in the work. In an interview with Perry, Tamara Clarke-Brown says, 'It is strange to enter an exhibition and be greeted with what looks like nothing. In the midst of this field, with no other anchor in sight, your body becomes the thing. Keenly aware of yourself, adrift in the space. What is here is you' (Clarke-Brown, 2018, n.p). Whether passive or productive, the terms spectator or participant here are again insufficient in describing the breadth of responses for is what essentially a piece based entirely on this other person(s) physical presence and engagement. Perry in the exhibition



guide described this as the space of post-production now becoming the space of pre-production (2018). This other person(s) is a conduit to Perry's concepts, co-opted into the realisation of the immersive work.

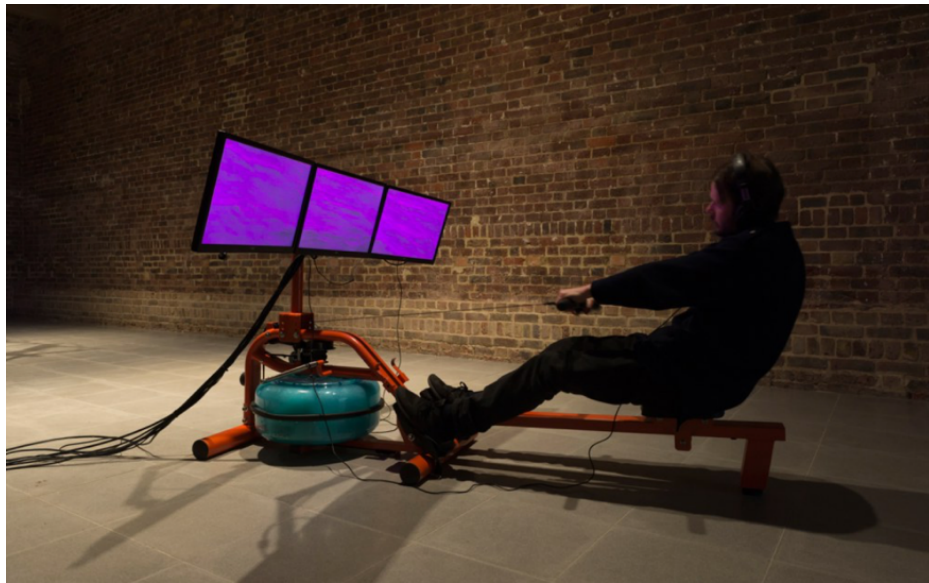


Figure 30: *Wet and Wavy–Typhoon coming on for a Three Monitor Workstation*  
Sondra Perry, 2018  
Serpentine Gallery, London (©Mike Dinn)

## New proposition: agent

The terms viewer/ spectator, participator and/ or collaborator all assert a type of behaviour or role to be occupied and are ones which I argue do not do justice in recognising the indebtedness we (artist-curators) have to this other person(s) within systems of realisation. Grant Kester in his book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, proposes that in the communication that the artwork catalyses, the audience becomes a key focus in the production, realisation and reception of work (Kester, 2004, p. 90). Kester situates the participant as the other person(s) involved in a socially oriented practice driven by contexts. Kester however cites participants as ones which are focussed (almost solely) on processes and relationships instead of art objects or material outcome (Kester, 2004, p. 1). Kester's idea of *Dialogical Art Practices* (projects organised around conversation, exchange and interaction) is cited here in shifting towards a methodology of staged activation involving the other person(s) as key players and relators (2004). In a later text (in the foreword to *Jay Koh, Art-Led Participative Processes: Dialogues & Subjectivity within Performances in the Everyday*) Kester goes on to foreground the idea of the co-creation of knowledge and experience in which '...a viewer, participant or collaborator as a creative agent ...can answer back and those answers constitute a decisive contribution to the formation of a work' (Kester, 2015, p. 2). The Freee Art Collective (Dave Beech, Mel Jordan, Andrew Hewett) have gone some way in

recognising the problematics of terminology for art practices whose concepts involve the physical presence, engagement and response of its audiences. They offer the idea that in order to achieve greater flexibility in the way that art practices which involve the audience can be conceptualised and considered, the idea of this other person(s) as an 'actant' can be helpful, arguing that the field of actants in an artwork does not reduce to a binary of any sort (Freee, 2013, p. 6). The actant, is in Jean-Jacques Lecercle's terms (outlined in his book *Interpretation as Pragmatics*), intrinsically linked to the author through the transmitted understanding of meaning which takes place within mechanisms and relations. The author, actant (participant or reader) and work becoming bound together as elements of a single whole in meaningful production (Lecercle, 1999, p. 53). In further understanding the meaning and application of the term actant, I refer back to Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour who in their chapter *A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Non-Human Assemblies* define the actant as:

Whatever acts or shifts actions, action itself being defined by a list of performances through trials; from these performances are deduced a set of competences with which the actant is endowed; the fusion point of a metal is a trial through which the strength of an alloy is defined; the bankruptcy of a company is a trial through which the faithfulness of an ally may be defined; an actor is an actant endowed with a character (usually Anthropomorphic). (Latour, Akrich, 1992, pp. 259)

Latour and Akrich go on to clarify the meaning of an actant in relation to the idea of agency, affirming that actants themselves do not possess agency. An agent as a person who acts has agency; an agent may be an actant but not all actants may be agents (Latour, Akrich, 1992, p. 259). The word 'agent' comes from the Latin verb *agere*, to do, make, perform, drive forward. As a noun, agent it is defined as the one who acts or has the power to act, as an adjective it is used to describe the one sustaining action. The word agent does not easily translate in a number of other languages (such as German and Italian where the equivalence of the term indicates a capacity, capability and autonomy of someone). If we therefore shift from the idea of the actant (Freee Art collective) to the idea of the agent (Lecercle, Latour, Akrich) what does this term agent imply in our reading of artworks and situations? Applied to the practice this research is concerned with, an essential importance is placed on the definition and agency of the agent as a person(s) who has a relational, dialogical, participative, collective and enabling role (through either physical presence or action) as a key relator in a system of things. According to Alfred Gell in his book *An Anthropological Theory*, agents are things which initiate actions in a cause-and-effect relational dynamic (Gell, 1998). Agency, Gell proposes, may be distributed across a number of artefacts which have the potential to become 'secondary agents' to the 'primary agency' of the human agent (initiator) (Gell, 1998, pp. 20-21). Whilst

my research inquiry does not focus on intentionality, the potential of things to have agency and act as primary and secondary agents is nonetheless significant.

The term agent, to some extent is problematic in the 'knowing' it implies on the embodiment allocated this role. It also has connotations of being controlled by someone or something else (a secret agent of sorts), denuding the agency/ independence of action. However, when thought of in scientific terms, the agent as activator can be seen as a metaphysical thing that enables a response – a thing that in phenomenological terms has agency through being. The agent here has the potential to become part of a system of reactions.

Barad discusses the idea of agents, agency and agential realism in the context of a phenomenon. She suggests that agency is not an individual property, it is a decision, an incision, a cutting together/ apart of the agentic qualities that emerge in the ongoing performance of the world (Barad, 2007). Agency, in Barad's terms appearing in different forms as relations, movements, repetitions, silences, distances, architecture, structures, feelings, things, words (Barad, 2007). She writes, 'Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency is doing/ being in its intra-activity' (Barad, 2007, p. 235). In the interview with Barad published by Mousse for documenta 15, Adam Kleinman says, '...as you know I am an "agent" of documenta 15. It's a funny title, one that recalls exciting roles like that of a spy, or more banal functions like that of a retail clerk. An agent is also a member of a larger body – a co-worker so to speak' (Barad and Kleinman, 2012, n.p). The term agent in this sense is appropriate for the complex networks and exchanges the other person(s) are framed as being part of during the exhibition event – hinting towards a clearer understanding of the relationality and co-formation that is at stake.

In his text *Art History; The Key Concepts*, Jonathan Harris provides a definition of the agent which can be applied as a suitable underpinning for the meaning of this word in the context of my research. He writes:

In its most familiar art historical form, agency or agent has virtually the same meaning as artist and artistic labour – two notions (themselves surprisingly unexplored as concepts) indispensable to practically all accounts of artistic production. Agency may be said to refer in general to the force active in making actual artworks... The term's important theoretical insight however, originating in sociology and social theory, was that of identifying the active element (or person or group) capable of bringing about change in a particular situation. (Harris, 2016, p. 11)

Within other fields, such as the performing arts, there is a necessary collective production aspect whereby a number of agents work together to produce events. Latour, in his text



*On Actor-Network Theory – A few clarifications plus more than a few complications*, proposes that each entity is defined by its interactions with other entities (Latour, 1990). This principle, applied to the idea of agent as co-former, goes some way in considering the relational ontology of each action being part of a system of human and non-human actors as key relators (all playing their set role for the system to move forward) (Latour, 1990). The blurring of boundaries between spectators and actors proposed in Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) was the underpinning idea of *Metacommunicative Performative Competence (MPC)* (Newton, 2014), a theory which can be applied to my research inquiry. Newton theorised performance as a meaning-making system premised on the audience and the performer being co-dependent as co-creators of meaning that the event generates. This system occurs in a space imbued with the power of what Boal calls '*the aesthetic space*' (Boal, 1985). The ideas put forward by ANT and MPC, that human and non-human objects all have agency, is important in framing the role of the agent. Here I propose that the agent(s) (elevated from the role of viewer/ spectator, participator, collaborator and/ or indeed actor) through their co-relational being (with object-props) have the potential to collapse the distinction between performer and audience.

Agreeing on categorisation, with the intention of re-defining, including and acknowledging the relational capabilities and agency (role) of the other person(s) remains a difficult one. This chapter, in interrogating audience delineations, has found that there are a number of issues with some of the commonly used terms for the other person(s). Understanding these issues has allowed me to explore the potential of re-categorising this role, developing an alternative. The term agent, I consider, best acknowledges the agency of the other person(s). The term agent outlines potentials of relational co-former, intrinsic and entangled within a system of things. The nature of the relationship I am interested in is a physical and conceptual one; what the term agent does (despite its pre-assumed knowingness) is prompt us to think about the relationship between artist-curator, modes of formation, exhibition space, other person(s) (here on known as agent(s)) and artwork in a systematic way. The original notion of the agent that I have (and will continue to develop and apply throughout this thesis), is one I propose is a contribution to knowledge which sits in relation to being and agency; shifting the vocabulary currently employed in contemporary art practice discourse.

COVENTRY EVENING TELEGRAPH  
DECEMBER 2017

# TRUE AND CORRECT

**Objects (Prosecution)**

**-V-**

**Artefacts (Defence)**

**WARNING:**

**Reporting restrictions may apply to the contents  
transcribed in this document**

This legal case took place in Coventry over the period of a 5-day trial.  
This script records both the prosecution and the defendant's legal case presented to the  
Jury and includes statements from the various testimonies that were presented.



## Trial Day 1 (Stage 1: Production of the props)

**Prosecution opening statement:** "Members of the Jury, on the evening of the 6th of December 2017, my clients whom I am representing (hereby known as 'the Objects'), consisted of 150 printed contracts on A4 pieces of paper (hereby known as 'the Contracts'), a box of pens (hereby known as 'the Pens'), an actor employed to present the Contracts and the Pens (hereby known as 'the Actor') and a ready-made turnstile installed in the exhibition space (hereby known as 'the Turnstile'). These objects were engaged to act as props in a performative event (hereby known as 'the Event'). The remit of this event was to stage the making of an artwork with the human objects attending the event (hereby known as 'the Agents') which would manifest as post-event co-formed artefact-objects recording the trace of being and agency (hereby known as 'the Artefacts'). The formation of the post-event artwork is the subject of this trial your worship and esteemed members of the Jury. My clients, the Objects, were denied the right to the claim of co-formers by the defendants (the Artefacts). My clients now seek recognition of their role in the making process from the defence who are accused of knowingly staging the collective making process without acknowledging the role of my clients (the Objects) in the final resolution of the artwork which manifest through the Artefacts agency and being."

**Judge:** "Thank you for the opening statement. The prosecuting team, may now proceed with your questioning."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Your Honour. I will begin by asking my clients, the Objects, to take to the stand. Objects, can you describe to the Jury, one at a time, in your own words, your material and your form as props prior to the aforementioned event."

**The Contracts:** "We are the Contracts. We are a multiple of 150 pieces of A4 90g parchment paper in perga yellow. We are official and legal. We contain an agreement ready to be signed. We are binding yet non-sensical. We are a thing with agency. We are facilitators in the making capacity of the Objects collective."

**The Actor:** "Judge and distinguished members of the Jury, I am the Actor. I am a human object, a prop in the performance. Professionally trained for theatre and stage productions, I was employed to deliver a script of language; to repeat this as a performative act during the duration of the Event. My role was to enable an encounter between the Contracts, the Pens and the Agents."

**The Turnstile:** "I am a non-human object. I exist in the exhibition space, that is my home. Prior to the Event I was part of the space. I protect the entrance to the space; I am the threshold, the boundary, the gate or barrier if you like. I am sculptural in form and a prop with kinetic agency. The steel material of my arms trace being."

**The Pens:** "We, the Pens, are objects with agency, poised to be activated, to record action. We are passed between the Agents, sweat from their palms line our surface. We trace touch and evidence being through our/ their encounter with the Contracts.  
Our ink is permanent and direct."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Objects. Judge, Jury, as you can hear from the testimonies of my clients, they are a collective set of things that engender possibilities in their being.  
They have an intention to communicate knowledge through their form."



## Trial Day 2 (Stage 2: Staging the conditions)

**Prosecution:** "Judge, Jury, I would now like to call to the stand a witness, the Exhibition Space. Exhibition Space please can you describe your conditions pre-event?"

**Witness 1: The Exhibition Space:** "Good morning, Judge, Jury. I am the Exhibition Space. I am located in the heart of Coventry. I used to house the production of newspapers, but more recently I have been home to the hosting of art exhibitions and the production of artwork, notably housing the Coventry Biennial. I am now considered an established exhibition space. I am vast and industrial; my construct directly references my purpose as a space of 'production and formation'. I am a conduit to the encounter; I stage agency for those who enter me. The precedents of my space must be followed by all who enter into it. Through my being, in collaboration with the Objects, I construct a performative situation."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Exhibition Space. Your Honour, I would now like to call my second witness to the stand, the Sign. Sign, please can you articulate your role in the staging of the event?"

**Witness 2: The Sign:** "Yes, hello everyone, my role in the event was small really. I did not do much. Located in the lobby of the exhibition space, next to the Turnstile, I sat patiently, calm and still, politely but firmly instructing. My language and form directing agents to the Turnstile as the point of entry to the Exhibition Space. I observed but I didn't engage with the actions happening beyond this. I like to keep myself to myself."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Witnesses. Judge, Jury, that brings to a close my opening questions."

**Judge:** "Thank you Prosecution. Defence, you may now make your opening statement of mitigation."

**Defence: Opening Statement:** "Judge, distinguished Jury. I represent my clients, the Artefacts. My clients are the post-event objects. They are a collective of non-human forms whose matter embeds the trace of 'others' and evidences agency through their material. They consider themselves the artworks. My clients, the Artefacts, do not consider themselves as resolved forms that existed prior to the exhibition event; they came into being as a result of it and their being, they claim, is worthy of the most significant status in their classification as artworks. As such my clients contest a request to give over co-forming credits to the prosecuting Objects."

**Judge:** "Defence, you may now proceed with your questioning."

**Defence:** "Thank you Your Honour. I will begin by asking my clients, the Artefacts to describe to the Judge and Jury, in their own words, their position."

**The Artefacts:** "We are objects of knowledge. We hold a special kind of representation as matter of agency; we inform, we hold meaning, we trace being, we are a residue of formation. We are bound together by context. We have an embodied interactive emergence; we are the interrelation of relations. We are superior objects and as such argue that in our own right we are artworks."



## Trial Day 3 (Stage 3: Performing and forming)

**Defence:** "Thank you Artefacts. Judge, Jury, I would suggest that it is implausible to claim that the Objects in their knowledge communicating capacity can also hold claim to creating the knowledge holding artefacts. The Defence suggests that the Artefacts own this right and exclusively hold this ability. It is their status, post-event that solely permits my Clients the status of producers in the making of artworks as artefacts."

**Judge:** "Defence, if you have no further questions or witnesses to call at this stage I will now invite the Prosecution to respond."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Your Honour. I would like to ask my clients, the Objects, to give a brief account of their role in the formation process."

**The Pens:** "We are activated. Fingertips come into contact with our surfaces. Our matter (ink) is in motion, performing different marks as we come into contact with the Contracts."

**The Contracts:** "I encounter the Agents, one after another, their mark inscribed on my surface through the agency they employ on the Pens."

**The Actor:** "Agents approach me, one by one. They form a line; they follow a request. Well mostly they do. I bring the Pens and the Contracts into contact with the Agents. The Contracts bring agency in their reference to the monolithic power of the legal system and the law as a conceptual and abstract space in which power, rights, and authority are played out. The Agents accept this as they activate the Pens to sign the Contracts before they proceed through the Turnstile; activating the agency of all three object-props in the process of formation."

**The Turnstile:** "The Agents approach me, their hands coming into contact with my steel surface. Their force propels me into motion. I turn allowing them to enter the space between my arms or spokes; as they move through me I perform. The sound of my mechanisms echo. The physical presence of the Agents announced through the noise of my motion. Agents danced through me, together we performed."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Objects. Judge, Jury as you can see the relationship between my clients, the Objects and the artworks that are generated through the Event is one of being, of agency, of encounter, of change and of affect. The result of such engagements is the formation of the work; this is known as a kind of co-relational practice. Judge, Jury in evidencing this point I would now like to call my third witness, the Invigilator to the stand. Invigilator can you describe to us the actions of the Event?"

**Witness 3: The Invigilator:** "Yes. The body of Agents operated in a physical, fluid and visible way. They were performing an action and a process. There was an encounter between the Agents, the Contracts, the Pens, the Turnstile and the Actor. The Agent could not tell what the artwork was and what it was not. An exchange happened between these objects of formation through embodied experience. There was an intent in the co-being of all of these objects as props. All objects (Agents, Contracts, Pens, Turnstile and the Actor) shared a collective role in the process. From what I could see, they were co-formers."



## Trial Day 4 (Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork)

**Prosecution:** "Judge, Jury, I would now like to call the Artefacts, as post-event objects to the stand for my cross-examination."

**Prosecution:** "Artefacts, my clients, the Objects were part of the making process. Forms with function they acted in the capacity of an accessory in your production did they not?"

**Artefacts:** "Well, yes, but..."

**Prosecution:** "...Artefacts, you, as post-event 'things' reference the 'things' that made you, you are a product of their activity of their agency and I would suggest you have no significant value in isolation. Through an examination of your being Artefacts, I would suggest that co-formation is indeed traceable and significant."

**Artefacts:** "...Yes, but, the Contracts were a farce in their own right with their obscure language, the Pens common and replaceable, the Actor simply a cog in my performative mechanism. It is me; my post-event being and status as an art object which now holds value. I am the thing, the artwork. You cannot take that away from me."

**The Contracts:** "...We created you, we created narrative, concept, context and being in collaboration with each other (the Objects). We are the matter that matters. You are here because of our being and our agency during the Event and the actions we each staged and/ or performed within this!"

**Judge:** "Silence in my Court! Contracts I will hold you in contempt of this court if you speak out of turn again."

**The Contracts:** "We apologise Your Honour. We just feel a huge sense of frustration in the lack of acknowledgement of the dialogic co-formation that took place during the Event."

**Prosecution:** "Judge, Jury, I apologise for my client's outburst".

**Judge:** "I understand tensions are high but my precedent must be followed, Objects you have had your turn to speak. Prosecution please continue."

**Prosecution:** "Thank you Your Honour. In concluding the prosecutorial statement, I would argue that construction ran parallel with the creative process. This was the method of making, of production, of formation during the Event. The medium of the artwork here was embodied, physical and performed. Through action this performance collapsed the distance between physical objects, agents and artists in the realisation process. The Agents had agency; the being and staging of the Objects as props had agency. The Invigilator acting as witness, and the form of the post-event Artefacts providing material evidence of the collaborative process in which objects came alive and came to be as artworks."

**Judge:** "During this trial we have heard the case of the Objects (prosecutors) Vs the Artefacts (defence) in the alleged criminal proceedings. We shall now will adjourn and re-convene for the verdict tomorrow."



## **Trial Day 5 (Stage 5: Post-event analysis)**

**Defence:** "Judge, Jury, my client, the Artefacts, after careful consideration, and hearing their case during this trial, wish to acknowledge the role of the Objects in their forming process and agree to credit them in the performative realisation of the artwork. This is my client's statement of mitigation accepting responsibility and committing to honour all future objects of the Event as co-formers. My clients, Your Honour, would like to say a few words to the Objects if they may?"

**Judge:** "As you wish Artefacts."

**Artefacts:** "We acknowledge that prior to and during the Event, we were the Objects. We recognise that we were created, modified and used by human beings (the Agents) in order to become artefacts, classified as artworks. We are the material remains of the post-event Objects."

**Judges closing remarks:** "Prosecution, Objects; I am satisfied with the circumstances surrounding your presence during the Event and the role you played in the formation of the Artefacts. Defence, Artefacts; If you consider yourself the art object, the artwork, then it must be acknowledged that in your being the Objects as props acted as a vehicle for engendering knowing. In asking what, where and how the status of the 'artwork' came into being, I rule in favour of the prosecution, that beyond reasonable doubt the formation of the Artefacts was a collective process and act of your co-being. It was the Event, the Contracts, the Pens, the Turnstile and the Agents who 'made' you. You, the Artefacts are knowledge holding matter; as a result of the agency of the Objects you embody knowledge. You cannot however acquire or communicate that knowledge in isolation; your construction and unpacking is a collective act that required other 'things'. In this case these things are the Objects."

**Judge:** "Under the jurisdiction of this court, I order you to credit them (the Objects) as co-formers in your being, stating that there was no hierarchy in your and their status."

**We hereby certify that the above is an accurate and complete record of the proceedings or part thereof:**

**Object (Prosecution)**

**Artefacts (Defence)**

**Judge**

**Jury**



















# Chapter 2:

## Methodology of the Maker

### Hypothesis

Rather than respond to the question of defining the embedded knowledge that arises through creation in the terms in which it is posed, this new (artistic) turn requires a re-framing of the reference points of the question itself.  
(Cox, 2009, p. 7)

The first chapter of my research inquiry (*A Matter of Terminology*) explored some of the key issues raised through the language commonly used to describe the roles occupied within contemporary art practices appertaining to that of the audience (as viewer, spectator, participant, and collaborator). It concluded with a proposition of the ‘agent’ to overcome a key terminological issue. The positioning of the agent has motivated the ways in which my methodological approach has proceeded as practice. Jeremy Cox, in the preface to *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto* (2009), introduces the book’s call to action surrounding the phenomenon of artistic research – one in which we move from a position of not knowing, to speculation, to the known. A process he likens to that of ‘making’ in the way things (and indeed knowledge) is formed. This methodology chapter outlines the approach my research has taken in order to hypothesise and understand the ways in which things are co-relationally co-formed in the moment of the exhibition event – how making exhibitions with objects can make knowledge. The methodological approach (rather than strictly defined method) I take is one of testing (different materials, forms, structures, and interventions) in varied yet established exhibition contexts to generate possibilities of outcomes.

The key methodological components within my research which each have their own role in the knowledge production process, are expanded upon in this chapter. These components are – the project (as the conceptual staging), the exhibition as medium (as the context for the research), props and artefacts (as the objects of the research), the threshold (as the mechanism for generating an encounter between things), performativity (as the enactment of agency) and the artwork (as the performative process and result of co-formation). After discussing the methodological approach of each of these components, within this chapter I then address the issue of authorship and outline the ways in which my research stagings (*True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall*) have been documented (and recorded through photography and

practice as writing). This chapter culminates in the presentation of a *Knowledge Mobility Framework* which summarises my methodological approach that four stagings (projects) have each followed (as outlined in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*) in order to draw conclusions, to respond to my research hypothesis and to present findings.

## Research methods

The forms of research I employ shift between ontological knowledge (the reality of the post-event artefact-objects) and epistemological knowledge (the systems of formation framed through the exhibition space, the exhibition event and the object-props). These methods of research combine to form an onto-epistemological approach. This approach considers agential forces (in Barad's terms objects, agency, relationality) as combined forms of knowing. For example, the sound of the mechanism of the turnstile in motion in *True and Correct* is an agential force, activated through the encounter between agent and object-prop. Barad describes a framework of combined forms of knowing as an 'ontopistemological' account of reality (Barad, 2007, pp. 44). Within my research, material thinking offers a way of understanding the relations that have occurred during the exhibition event, through the act of an encounter. Here agents themselves are not called upon as direct research matter. Instead, the material of objects trace being, relations and agency and as such the objects (pre-event props and post-event artefacts) become objects of knowledge. They are the principal objects of analysis within this research. This is my research paradigm.

My findings have evolved through the backwards-forwards process of researching. Knowledge prior to the exhibition events I staged could not be assumed. The pre-event staging and analysis was positioned as a forward-looking process which had an intentionality to generate research. The object props of the turnstile, the paper contracts and the biro pens (*True and Correct* – staging 1); the tarpaulin covered bollards (*Dispositif* – staging 2), the shoe covers, the door mats and the perspex boxes (*Front Stage: Back stage* – staging 3) and the PVC curtain (*Fourth Wall* – staging 4) were conceived to seek knowledge through their material, form and positioning. Their material surface prior to, and post the event, was analysed. This approach attempts to attend to the pluralistic nature of making contingent on co-being and one which elevates the importance of material and matter as intra-active and relational. The co-dependency of positions is at the core of this research inquiry which speculates, tests and analyses the agency of things in a dynamic co-formation.

Ingold's positioning of research as a re-searching allows for a reconsideration of the relations of the elements of matter. This is an idea he re-articulates during a lecture at the Centre for Contemporary Arts Glasgow entitled *I Search and Search Again: On the*

*Meaning of Research in Art* (2018). Here he makes the case for the importance of research as an act of truth seeking (in the context of the post-truth era). Ingold describes research as the pursuit of truth which becomes an industry of knowledge production (Ingold, 2018). Within my research inquiry, the material elements (object-props) are heterogeneous things which assemble and are assessed (pre-event) before then being re-assessed (post-event) to produce research truths. This assessment is carried out by me, as the artist-curator. The assessment reveals truths that are brought about through a re-searching of the form and matter of the object in pursuit of a trace of agency. This part of the re-search, Ingold proposes, is never fully resolved – it never ends (Ingold, 2018). Whilst truth can never fully be concurred, observation and knowing in being allows a hypothesis of truths to be proposed. For example, in examining (pre-event) one of the brand-new pens used within *True and Correct*, there was little or no trace of agency, though the post-event analysis revealed activation of the object through scratches to its surface and traces of ink smudged into its blue plastic material. My research inquiry conceptualises making (which I define in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading* as a process of formation) as a relational activity which (in seeking truths and thus knowledge) must be read in Ingold's terms (as outlined in the introduction to this thesis) as both backwards and forwards. Ingold's process of understanding practice (and the knowledge generation it allows) is also outlined in *The Textuality of Making* where he writes.

Rather than reading creativity 'backwards', from a finished object to an initial intention in the mind of an agent, this (making as a practice of weaving) entails reading it forwards, in an ongoing generative movement that is at once itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic (Ingold, 2009, p. 91).

The process of reading, understanding, hypothesising and analysing throughout my research inquiry is both backward (analysis of outcomes in informing findings) and forward (conceptual staging and intentions in hypothesising). A wrestling between the two is in constant flux.

In formulating a research methodology, I have also drawn on Lury and Wakeford's (cited in *A Key to key words and glossary of terms*) exploration of materialist research methods to position the agency of matter as a mechanism for the generation and tracing of knowledge (outlined with *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*, 2012). Lury and Wakeford's idea of research sees an intertwining of fields of practice and modes of thought that are both linguistic and material and are able to give themselves over to the act of research without giving themselves up as research capturing devices. Lury and Wakeford's collection of inventive materialist research methods which extend and remake the happening (a term which, as outlined in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*, was used by Kaprow in the 1950s to describe interactive encounters) and the social (in responding to problems) has informed the framework of my research inquiry. This

framework utilises the agencies of the key relators that exist (via being) within a system of things that correspond and intra-act. These two terms (correspondence and intra-action) for Ingold and Barad (respectively), have overlapping but differing meanings. Ingold, in his anthropological thought process, in *Correspondences* writes 'Interaction is the dynamic of the assemblage, where things are joined up. But correspondence is a joining with; it is not additive but contrapuntal, not 'and ...and ...and' but 'with ...with ...with' (Ingold, 2017, p. 13). Within the field of phenomenological thinking, Barad's diffractive methodology (2007) (a theory which proposes that material experiences are produced and shaped through intra-actions), distinguishes intra-action from interaction. Intra-action is also a term also used by Donna Haraway (who was informed by Barad's thinking) in *When Species Meet* (2008). The distinction between intra-action and interaction comes through the necessary participation of bodies in action (things constantly exchanging and diffracting) with each other (Barad, 2007). Here, agency is not the 'inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but the dynamism of forces' (Barad, 2007, p. 141). My methodology frames entangled encounters, taking place within the constructed situation of the exhibition event (within the exhibition space), at the point of the threshold, as a means of tracing both correspondence and intra-action through the material of the object-props. The object-props of my research are positioned, in Lury and Wakeford terms, to grasp the here and now of the research during the exhibition event (Lury and Wakeford, 2012).

## The project

The project is the staging, the event, the act of formation. It is the conceptual framework in which things come into being – the happening of the triangulation of parts. It is live and performative, a process, a system, a meshwork. It is the thing-ing of the object-prop things.

In *Artificial Hells* (2012), Bishop replaces the term 'artwork' with the term 'project' to indicate an open-ended artistic activity. In my research, the coming together of different parts through the conceptual mechanics and constructs of the project, allows the act of co-formation to occur. Project, stemming from the Latin *proiectum* means before an action. The term project has strong links to the present, and in the context of my research the presence of things being together during the exhibition event is essential in the co-relational mode of practice I put forward. The term project is also outlined by Bojana Kunst who, in her essay *The Project at Work* writes, '...the word 'project' should primarily describe a processual, contingent and open practice, which cannot be planned or controlled and also entails the possibility of ending in a disaster, without a result or in something completely different and unexpected' (Kunst, 2014, p. 1). Kunst's work around the significance of the process of making (which in my research is the staging of the

object-props given over to the agent and the exhibition space) and the resulting outcomes, underpins my methodology of research as a project.

The project is a mechanism which allows for the possibility of works of art to be ‘made’ and knowledge to be generated (the terms production, making and formation are interrogated in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*). The word project is a familiar term within performative practices in describing a relational dynamic that is present and experimental and in which authorship is brought into question through the co-investment of multiple beings (the importance of performativity and the issue of authorship are explored later in this chapter). This interpretation of the word project allows me to propose a shift from object-based artworks to process-based object-props in their becoming as artworks. This position is informed by Jane Bennett (who defines her research as a philosophical project) and her idea of vibrant matter (proposed in her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, 2010). Bennett’s idea of matter having lively power of material formations is central to my research inquiry (and the projects I stage).

The project, within my research inquiry is positioned as a time-based activity. John Latham was an artist who proposed that objects or things become more significant as a result of a time-based event. This idea was termed time-base theory, sometimes flat time theory or event theory by Martin Herbert in his paper *John Latham: A Brief History of Time* (Herbert, 2009). Time-base theory is important in understanding the potentials of working with the durational aspect of the exhibition event (as the time and space where things can form). Latham’s own practice (informed by physics, as well as ideas of active and passive viewing) manifest through works that were intended to be experienced as a system of events in time, rather than objects in space. For example, in Latham’s *Time-Base Roller with Graphic Score* (1987), scores (black lines) created through the mechanism of a long canvas which rolled around an electrically powered drum, gradually became visible through an unfolding (which hinted towards the passing of time). Accompanying this piece was a diagrammatic explanation of the alphabetical coding used on the *Time-Base Roller* with A, P and U representing differing measures of time in relation to being, encounters and calculations of quantum physics. For Latham the staging of this, the project, was thought of as a series of contributing parts or organisms (as he framed them) *The House, The Face, The Mind, The Brain, The Body, The Hand* (Herbert, 2009, n.p). Latham theorised the project as a way of involving human resources, later in his career referring to artists as incidental persons in the way they operated within systems (or organisations). Whilst Latham argued for greater importance being placed on time/ event (over space/ object), my research, through the project, unites each of these key aspects and gives them equal importance in the co-relational, co-forming process. The word project is applied to my research in order to explore the relational dynamics that I propose are present during the exhibition event. Through multiple beings or things, the experimental projects I stage (in *True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage* and



*Fourth Wall* shift practice into a thing that is defined in terms of its co-relational capabilities (this claim evidenced through analysis of the post-event artefacts as outlined in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*).

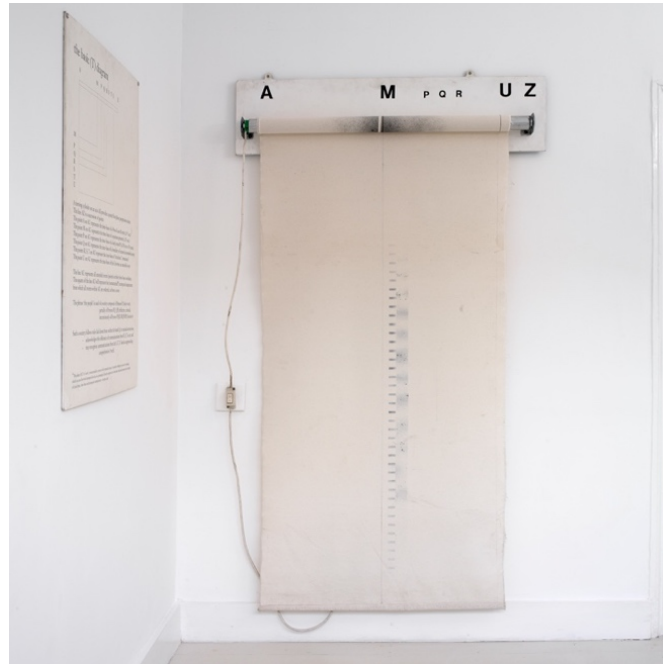


Figure 51: *Time Base Roller with Graphic Score*  
John Latham, 1987  
Flat Time, London (©Ken Adlard)

Classification of the agent as conduit to the collective affect (in a shift towards distributive agency) is key in the projects I stage. It is the encounter which mobilises elements through correspondence, this act becoming a formative mode of knowledge production, the enactment of the project. The project blurs the boundaries of disciplines, roles, subject/object distinctions and authorship whilst destabilising dichotomies of language. It attempts to shift the making of the artwork into a much more open-ended process – the outcomes emerging through an entangled relationality of things, through a co-constitution of formation materialising through the coalition of sculptural components with the agents. The methodology of framing engagement, I argue, is necessary in considering, measuring and acknowledging the agency of things.

## Exhibition as medium

The word exhibit (as per the *Oxford English Dictionary*) means to offer or expose to view, to manifest or display, to place on show, to make or give an exhibition, to present something to public view. The language here (and in the Latin *exhibere* or *exhibitum* from which it is derived meaning to hold forth and to present) frames the dynamics of exhibition making as one of reception. The exhibition within my research, is however,

positioned as a space of infrastructure and a temporal event which stages the research inquiry – creating the conditions (and circumstances) necessary for the process of relational formation (in the becoming of things as art). In *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*, in moving away from the idea of the exhibition existing solely as device of presentation, I drew attention to the exhibition space as a place where experimentation is made visible (Bourriaud, 1998) and where art gets made (O'Doherty, 2008). Within this section I expand on the significance of the exhibition space, the exhibition event and artist-curatorial practice as elements critical to my methodology.

This research is about art practice and curating in the sense that my practice and the practice I am concerned with is a curatorial mode of practice that happens through the exhibition event and within the exhibition space. This practice is distinct from curating as a professional practice and draws on institutional conditions of exhibition making as what Irit Rogoff in *Curating/ Curatorial* from *Cultures of the Curatorial*, calls 'platforms of display' (Rogoff, 2012, p. 24). My practice and the methodology of research I have employed is curatorial in the connections I make through systems and stagings of things in an attempt to generate knowledge – for example, through my decision to fabricate door mats (with printed instructions on) as object-props and position these at each entrance point to the exhibition space (in the Ruskin Gallery Cambridge) for *Front Stage: Back Stage*. The exhibition frames the encounter between things and within my inquiry is considered as both form and research. The exhibition space acts as the site where research in action is enacted and research can be realised through actualisation. Knowledge generation as an outcome of curated projects is asserted as a possibility by Rogoff as 'events of knowledge' where things are brought together and staged as a process of discovery (Rogoff, 2012, p. 25). Rogoff positions curatorial practice as a trajectory of the ongoing project.

The exhibition space as a place of production refers to the idea of the exhibition space as a factory for making, a notion developed in artist Hito Steyerl's *Is a Museum a Factory* essay (2009). Here the exhibition space is conceived as a mechanism, which in the case of my research inquiry, creates the conditions for agent(s) and object-props to be present within. In the conditions of the exhibition event arrangements and systems form a meshwork which stages activation. This idea is based on an understanding of Steyerl's proposition of the ways in which exhibition structures can facilitate participation or engagement. In the introduction to my thesis I referred to Roger Buergel (curator of documenta 12 with Ruth Noack) and his claim that the exhibition is a medium which can be used creatively to establish relations. The potential of creating exhibition conditions as a way of establishing relations with audiences (who might be knowing or unknowing) was a key concept in documenta 12. Buergel's proposal of the exhibition as a medium positioned it as a form of making, a process, a situation, a happening. The relational potentials staged by the exhibition as a medium which have driven my research is

elaborated on by Buergel during a discussion with Valerie Connor for *Circa Art Magazine* (2005). Here Buergel positions the exhibition as a site in which making happens through being, similar to the way that Ingold discusses correspondence as the enactment of relations through entangled experiences (Ingold, 2017). Of this Connor writes, 'Buergel describes the exhibition as a medium that he uses creatively because an exhibition always has the potential to show how shifts in the ontological register are played out' (Buergel and Connor, 2005, p. 44). The artist-curator establishes the event in spatial-material ways, power in this arena, provides the ability to structure a possible field of actions of others. My research extends the position set out by Buergel by exploring the shifting role of the exhibition event and re-considering what an exhibition, artwork, artist-curator and agent is or could be.

The exhibition is traditionally considered the space and time in which things are made visible as art. I consider the exhibition space a studio space – a laboratory of formation. The idea of the exhibition space as a laboratory stems from Bourriaud's ambition for the Palais de Tokyo, described in his interview with ArtForum as 'interdisciplinary kunstverein – more laboratory than museum' (Simpson, 2001, p. 1). The idea of the exhibition as a laboratory implies a scientific element. To an extent this accurately describes the way that I deal with matter, materials and form (the object-props) as research data (artefact-objects). The laboratory is also an experimental space – the methodology of my research is one of experimentation in the way I have tested concepts, meshworks, probes, processes, materials and forms. The potentiality of the exhibition space (as both studio and laboratory) frames it as a rich arena to stage intra-actions, to make propositions, to communicate and realise ideas, to form knowledge. The likening of the exhibition space to that of a laboratory was recently made during a discussion between the curators of *Thinking Pictures*, an exhibition at Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn, Estonia (2022). The curators Jane Sharp, Liisa Kaljula and Anu Allas, positioned the exhibition as a research event. The exhibition opened with no works on display – only plans to map out where they might be located. Initially intended to focus on a historical dialogue between Baltic and Moscow artists in the 1970s and 80s, due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the curators made the decision to open the exhibition devoid of works in order to question agency and power in the context of current political events. After one month, works were gradually installed – moving and shifting around in relation to other works and in response to what was happening in both the gallery and in the war. The curators, in an interview with Elnara Taidre for *Arterritory* said:

Exhibition-making is experiencing a paradigmatic change, one in which the so-called 'post-curating' mode focuses on public discourse and discussion ...*Thinking Pictures* became a conceptual laboratory and a political statement – not only during its preparation but also throughout its period of display.  
(Sharp, Kaljula and Allas, 2022, n.p)



Figure 32: *Thinking Pictures*  
Curated by Jane Sharp, Liisa Kaljula and Anu Allas, 2022  
Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn (©Paco Ulman)

My research considers the exhibition event as the moment in which practice research is in progress. Here the event becomes reactive – shifting agency, process, experimentation and offering discovery. The time-based durational aspect of the exhibition event stages the meshwork of things in which, through a continual process of negotiation, performed co-formation happens. Here the idea of things being fixed, or static, is dispelled. In *Curating Research*, Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson describe the curatorial as a mode of becoming in which '...the processual and serendipitous overlap with speculative actions and open-ended forms of production' (O'Neill and Wilson, 2015, p. 12). Within my projects, curatorial research strategies are explored through the production and positioning of object-props; an actor, pens, paper contracts and a turnstile (*True and Correct*), tarpaulin polyester bollards (*Dispositif*), door mats, perspex boxes and shoe covers (*Front Stage: Back Stage*) and a PVC curtain (*Fourth Wall*). Here the intention of my exhibition making is an exploration of the ways that we as artist-curators can construct spatial, time-based events that generate transformative encounters between things and which shift the terms of the exhibition. In doing so, I position artist-curatorial practice (the staging of exhibitions), as a mechanism for fostering both conventional and unconventional methods of exchange which acknowledges and works with the over-lapping, open-ended, entanglement of things.

My research positions the exhibition space as the stage in which potential transformative affect occurs within the event that it hosts. The event is theorised by Alain Badiou as an occurrence that results in an interruption representing the not yet imagined now. The event, according to Badiou in *Being and Event* interrupts the continuity of determinism and allows something new to come into existence in the particular context of the eventual site (Badiou, 2007). Badiou suggests that it is only possible to identify an event 'reflexively' by already having chosen to identify it. Through the reflexive structure I employ (post-

event analysis), I am able to use the knowledge of the material objects in order to generate knowledge of the co-relational co-forming event that has occurred. The exhibition as a co-forming event, opens up new possibilities for positioning (and framing) it as the place where material-agent entanglements (the encounter) are generated and realised. In this conception neither the exhibition space, the agent, nor the object-props are understood as what Barad describes as distinct entities (Barad, 2007); they instead are entangled in their intra-actions in their becoming. The staging of the exhibition event becoming the apparatus and medium in which the conditions for performed agential production (in which all things matter) are possible. It is important to acknowledge in this intra-action that the activating of agency (actions) is attributed to the being of the agent.

Elena Filipovic, in *When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator* proposes that the artist curated exhibitions asks us to ‘fundamentally reconsider what an artwork or an exhibition is – or could be?’ (Filipovic, 2013, p. 20). She later goes on in her anthology *Artist as Curator* to expand on these ideas in ‘...an attempt to acknowledge the critical agency of operations and activities that are taken up by artists, but which might not seem ‘artistic’ in the most traditional sense’ (Filipovic, 2017, p. 13). Building on Filipovic’s ideas, my research attempts to shift the terms of the exhibition. Not a full shift away from these ideas, but a shift in bringing the object and exhibition back together as form in building on Filipovic’s typology of artist as curator. This shift systematically poses questions about the nature of exhibitions which Filipovic suggests (in an earlier text *The Global White Cube*) by their forms have the potential to entangle the viewer in a space which is at once physical and intellectual, but also ideological (Filipovic, 2008). It is the entanglement of the agent in the physical exhibition space which my research focuses on in exploring the exhibition event as an expanded medium and mechanism that facilitates and acknowledges co-relational co-formational practice.

The exhibition space has physical qualities and policies that I as the artist-curator, the object-props and the agent(s) must operate within. It is institutional, pre-established and to some extent, carries with it a hierarchical structure. In the case of my research, it is often, but not always, a white cube space. It is always, however a pre-existing and established space for exhibiting art. It is defined by Filipovic as having ‘...particular physical space through which relations between viewers and objects, between one object and others, and between objects, viewers, and their specific exhibition context are staged’ (Filipovic, 2008, n.p). The exhibition space provides the conditions for possibility; it plays host to networks and systems which offers the opportunity of co-formation through being to occur. Being as an activity, has specific relevance to the exhibition event and the environment of the exhibition space (being is explored further in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*). Ingold, in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011) explores the environment as a space, place, thing; in housing the conditions which offer opportunities to understand agency through physical and subjective-objective

affordances. Here, Ingold references James Gibson's theory of affordance (outlined in his book *The Theory of Affordances*, 1977) in affirming that an environment exists only in relation to whose environment it is (Ingold, 2011). The importance of learning to see what things really are as things (the affordance), Gibson suggests, is always there to be perceived. In the context of the exhibition space, the environment here is used to facilitate an activity through the conditions of relational being. This is what allows form (things) to be brought into being (Ingold, 2009) through an affordance of relational encounters between human and non-human things present in the exhibition space, during the exhibition event.

My research considers what it means to make work in the context of the exhibition space which is shifted from space of 'display' to space of 'formation'. Graham Harman and Karen Barad (whose ideas of object orientated philosophy and agential realism I discuss further in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*) were asked to write texts for the documenta 13's *100 Notes – 100 thoughts* (Harman No.85, Barad No. 99, 2012). These publications were presented as theoretical, philosophical and critical readings not of the works, but of the thinking parallel to the exhibition event. The work of Barad and Harman was influential in shaping documenta 13 in the way it prompted us to consider the world and our place within it. documenta 13 had no theme – instead it aimed to reconsider art, history, objecthood, and exhibition-making as an open-ended network of paradoxical ideas, objects, spaces, and situations. The curatorial concept of exploring matter, things, embodiment and agency through the agential connection was realised through the scale of the venues and works. Due to the vast number of exhibits (and the geographical spread of these) only fragments of the exhibition (in its entirety) could be encountered. The elements of time, space, matter (described by Harman in his catalogue essay as each and every thing) aggregated into a complex project which explored the way things (in this instance art production) could be mobilised. The curation (configuration) of works within documenta 13 acted as a meshwork of elements (no one element, human or non-human having privilege over the other). In discussing documenta 13's approach, of artists Harman writes, '...there is the attempt to establish objects deeper than the features through which they are announced or allude to objects that cannot quite be made present' (Harman, 2012. p. 14).

The concept of a metaphysical structure of exhibition making (and the exhibition as object) is an interesting one. In the equalising agency of things, ethical, value-based issues arise – issues that are complex and problematic. Considering the exhibition making through Harman's theory of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), Kathryn Floyd in her essay *Future Objects/ Object Futures* (2013) prompts us to reconfigure the concepts, structures and relational agency of exhibitions. She asks, '...is the exhibition an oppressive commodity system or a liberating arena of intervention and participation?' (Floyd, 2013). These ideas are key in my positioning of object-props as objects of knowledge, as



research, as mechanisms for staging a co-relational practice within the exhibition event. Ten years on from documenta 13, I position these ideas within a 'post-Covid' context (where experiential viewing has been re-introduced, where touch and surface have heightened significance), in a political context (where power and agency are called to action and where materials and production are called into question) and in a social context (where co-being is recognised as an important way of creating agency and/ or affecting change). documenta 15 (which I referred to within the introduction to my thesis) is here cited again for its significance in the structures it aimed to break down (through the ideas of collectivity that it fostered). documenta 15, directed by a group of non-western artists, shared perspectives, resources, power and knowledge. Doing so implicated those who were part of it (as artists, organisers or agents), in a socially engaged way of working; one which to some extent re-thought the artist's role in responding to the socio-political conditions of the world around us. The potential of artworks to generate possibilities is perhaps at the heart of both documenta 13's and documenta 15's operative concept or curatorial strategies in the dialogue these events sparked between relational practices, representation and reality in shifting the position of the artist as curator and the significance of the event of the exhibition. The idea of relationality, exchange and agency can be applied to the triangulation of things which I put forward as having correlating potentials in the process of co-formation – the agents, the objects and the exhibition.

## **Props and artefacts**

Material investigations, in the practice-as-research methodology I employ, serve in the production of knowledge through insight about and with objects. Henk Borgdorff in *The Debate on Research in the Arts*, calls this the instrumental perspective (Borgdorff, 2016). Borgdorff also defines research in the arts as research that 'seeks to articulate some of this embodied knowledge throughout the creative process and in the art object' (Borgdorff, 2016, p. 5). My research methodology sits between notions of research for the arts and research in the arts – a dialogue between known being (the object-prop) and analysis (the artefact-object). Here theory and practice are interwoven in producing findings (in the epistemic object) that can also be considered as concrete – through empirical research data in the form of material matter (the surface of the PVC strips of curtain in *Fourth Wall* for example).

My research places a focus on the object as an object of knowledge. I will begin by clarifying the terminology I employ to articulate my use of the object within my practice-research methodology (see also my *Key to Key Words* for a full range of definitions). The object-prop is a thing by definition of its intentions and positioning. It is elevated in its privilege as a thing (though its agency and ability to trace the being and agency of other

things). This is not to say that human privilege is demoted, rather that focus is shifted in order to argue for greater consideration of the importance of the co-relating dynamics between things (centred around the object). In *The Stage Life of Props* (2003), Andrew Sofer defines props as independent physical and inanimate objects that can be visibly manipulated by an actor over the course of a performance. The objects I produce and install within my projects adopt the role of a prop and as such are referred to throughout my research as object-props. They are sculptural in form and stage an encounter with the agent, other objects and/ or the exhibition space. The object-prop is a thing which traces being and agency of other things. It is an object of production and an object for producing. The object-prop is positioned to gather and present findings which offer insights, information and knowledge of co-relational co-formation processes. The object-as-prop presents itself as an artwork however conceptually its resolution comes through its encounter with other things (clarification of the artwork is made later in this chapter).

Duchamp (cited in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology* for his *The First Papers of Surrealism*), used familiar objects to challenge what was understood to be the art medium. As with Duchamp's work, the objects I use in staging my research often take the appearance of a ready-made or something that is a pre-existing feature of the exhibition space (for example a shoe cover in *Front Stage: Back Stage* or the use of the turnstile in *True and Correct*). The object-props within my projects, existing as things, are co-produced within a manufacturing context. Post-manufacture, in relation to the exhibition context that the objects are placed within in, their functioning, meaning, purpose and agency has the potential to be shifted. Moving beyond the idea of artwork tied to representation, the objects become a receptacle and receiver at the same time as becoming entangled within a network of things.

The object-props used within my research have a familiarity to them. Outside of the exhibition space one would likely not give a second thought to encountering door mats, security bollards, PVC curtains, pens and sheets of paper for example. These are objects which might be overlooked as artworks (or things with agency) due to our associations with them and recognition of them as functional tools. It is important to stipulate here that the object-props I am discussing (and working with) are not considered organic matter, I am referring to produced, manufactured non-organic matter which DeLanda, in *Nonorganic Life*, says can self-organise and come together (DeLanda, 1992). The object-props, through DeLanda's material centred approach, become objects of research through the systems they are positioned within which subjects them to flows of matter (energy and agency). The object-props, during the exhibition event are in a dynamic state – they are seeking to know – to research. They are what DeLanda calls 'stratometers' (interpreted as systems of knowledge) (DeLanda, 1992, p. 155). The methodology of my research inquiry in relation to DeLanda's thinking, is at once mathematical, scientific, intuitive and

experimental. The objects have the ability to provide measurable data, to reveal agency and capture affect.

The objects designed as props to capture research data, are presented as artworks to destabilise their mechanism as probes. They are things which make some 'thing' happen through a relation to other things (in a semiotic-material relational action and affect process). The idea of the probe as a method for understanding a situation is proposed by Kirsten Boehner, William Gaver and Andy Boucher in their *Probes* text (2012) (in Celia Lury, and Nina Wakeford's *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*). Whilst focused on design methodologies, their idea of the probe has relevance to methods of making within the exhibition space. Their intention is not so much to capture a definitive truth but to propose possibilities and understand what might be. Their agency (pre, during and post-event) is not the sole privilege of the researcher; probes here 'acknowledging the uncertainty and variability of the interpretations of all participants' (Boehner, Gaver and Boucher, 2012, p. 185). *Probes* celebrates the idea of interpretation and experimental research processes that the probe can produce in stimulating new thinking. The intention of Boehner, Gaver and Boucher's research in proposing a new social and cultural research methodology provides an opportunity to revisit approaches for investigating the contemporary creative world. These intentions aligning with those of my research in re-visiting methodologies of co-relational co-formation within the exhibition event through the staging of the art object (as object-prop). The art object as object-prop is the central, accountable system of knowledge gathering – its design, production and positioning is both artistic concept and research method.

For the purpose of my research inquiry, the object is the physical prop(s) in its becoming as an artefact of knowledge. The intention here is to develop matter (form) as a post-event artefact through the process of object co-formation. The post-event artefact-objects are crucial in the analytical potentials they have. They reference a time, an event. They hold meaning, as well as data as objects of knowledge. The transformation of objects, the dialogic and the reflexive is the form of practice, analysis and propositional methodological framework my research takes. The data of the artefact-objects is the product of the project. It consists of the material of production and the material of knowledge. The objects hold data, but in this data there is an acknowledgment that there is no certitude in the possibilities of the shifting of things. Barbara Bolt's ideas on material thinking put forward in her paper *Materializing Pedagogies* have relevance to my inquiry in forming my understanding of the ability of materials to allow us to understand the relations that take place in the process of making (Bolt, 2006). Bolt argues in her book *Studies on Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter* (published the following year), that it is expressive material that ultimately creates the work of art through its forces and effects (Bolt, 2007). Artefact-objects are intended (and produced) to have tracing capabilities recorded through their material surface and/ or form. For example, recording

the fingerprints, and/ or footsteps of agents; or the scuffs, bends, folds from human and non-human things, in other words a shifting of states, a marking of surfaces. The premise of the material's ability to trace relations of things (agents, objects and environments) resulting in artefact-objects has informed the theoretical underpinning of my research methodology (trace as a key idea is expanded on in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*).

Materials as instruments of formation which have their own matter, their own intelligence and agency, allows us to learn through and with them. Materials, in the case of my research, take the form of objects. Objects that are not static or passive, but through their staging create the possibility for material thinking to happen in the moment of the event, with the being of the agent(s). Bolt's ideas of material thinking are premised on the handling of materials through the artist's creative intelligence whereby there is a joining of the hand, the eye and mind. Bolt proposes that creative practice could be conceived as a performance in which linkages are constantly being made and remade (Bolt, 2006). In conceiving a methodology which centres around the knowledge of objects, the matter and form of these object-props (in their positioning as artwork) in the encounter they frame and trace is key. The objectivity of form attributes meaning to it, sometimes related to its properties and positioning, sometimes to its association with ready-made objects. The object-prop itself is a result of previous relations with other things that have shaped it (in its material matter formation). It is impossible to escape these attributes and entangled relations (objects are of course entwined with human subjectivity). Objects, in more general terms, often exist beyond the purpose they serve or the meanings they elicit. In a metaphysical sense, objects have an agency of matter which can be learnt with and from as a medium of co-formation. Here I put forwards the idea of objectivity. The object of the object-prop, in the context of the exhibition space and event, is positioned to stage a relational encounter, to exist in a state of becoming as an artwork, as a thing. The objects intentionally stage associations (with each other, with contemporary sculpture and the ready-made forms they resemble). Referring back to Gell (*Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*), intentionality in this sense is the attributed agency of the object-props through their form, material and positioning (Gell, 1998). It is important to recognise that to even conceive an object-prop intended for the exhibition space places an artwork-object value and association on it (sometimes in spite of artistic intention).

In *Art and Objecthood*, Fried (whose ideas I drew on in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*) posits the idea of intentionality of the objects as theatrical props; things which are poised to trace relations as receptacles and receivers with a preoccupation of co-existence which have endless and durational possibilities (Fried, 1967). Fried, whilst interested in paintings and sculptures (as opposed to post-event artefact-objects of production) puts forward the idea of objects possessing a certain power of action and agency. The object-props within my research, in drawing on this idea, are positioned to actualise the behaviour of matter within a meshwork and system through being within the exhibition. Fried articulates this

as the distance of the object in space from our bodies which creates an extended situation through necessary physical participation (Fried, 1967). In relation to Fried's ideas, within my research methodology I conceive my staging as an expanded form of practice that converges the performative ability of contemporary sculpture (which Fried acknowledges has relational capabilities) with the performative dimension of the agent(s) affective experience (Fried, 1967). The condition of object-props is what Fried calls a condition of objecthood and the circumstance of the exhibition event in which the agent encounters these objects, the performative formation of practice. This proposal was premised on the active interpretation of what Fried called the beholder and I am calling the agent. This idea, whilst intended for application to literalist situations, is suggestive of the co-relationally co-formed status of the post-event artefacts.

## Thresholds

Thresholds, through the apparatus of the object-props within my research construct a framework for co-relational co-formation. The threshold as a methodological probe (and spatial construct) is tested through each of my four projects – through use of the turnstile and positioning of an actor in *True and Correct*, through the fabrication of security bollards in *Dispositif*, through the placement of door mats in *Front Stage: Back Stage* and through the installation of a curtain in *Fourth Wall*. Each project utilises the threshold to stage an encounter (details on each of the mechanisms of these stagings are outlined in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*).

The word *threshold* in Latin shares roots with the word *limes* (limit) and associations with notions of liminality. The threshold as a border, the beginning of a space, the end of a space, a limit and a relation within an act of passage all hint towards the idea of the threshold as a functional apparatus. The methodology of my research employs a consistent approach to co-formation; positioning co-relational agency at the site of the threshold – the location in which affect, emergence, becoming and change can occur. By staging the research event at the threshold of the exhibition space, the likelihood of a physical encounter between things is increased. The mode of entry facilitates engagement through the direct placement of the object-props at this location. It is important to acknowledge the circumstances which set the potentiality of what the object-props as research objects become through the being of the agent(s) at the site of the threshold. These circumstances utilise a mechanism that is acknowledged to be both slippery and guaranteed (to an extent). The implication of the agent(s) in the gathering of material information (through the object-props) is considered in the ethical methodology I employ (outlined in *Chapter 5: The Ethics of Things*).

The use of the threshold or entrance point within contemporary art practice is not a new concept. Santiago Sierra, in his work *Palabra Tapada* at the 2003 Venice Biennale, utilised the mechanism of the entrance in two ways. Firstly, by covering the word '*España*' on the Spanish Pavilion's facade with black plastic and sealing the building's main (front) entrance with cinderblocks causing the agents to walk around to the back entrance of the building. Once there, the agent(s) was then greeted by security guards who only permitted access to them if they held a Spanish passport. For those agents given the potential agency to traverse the threshold and enter, all they were faced with was debris remaining from the exhibition of the previous year. Sierra's approach to making socio-political work here communicated through techniques of obstruction and concealment. In *Palabra Tapada* (2003) the entrance point became the apparatus for staging the encounter as a conceptual construct. It ensured each agent would come into contact with some aspect of the work, framing them as part of the performative becoming of the piece.



Figure 33: *Palabra Tapada*  
Santiago Sierra, 2003  
Spanish Pavilion, Venice Biennale (©Artnet.com)

The potential for the architecture of the threshold (between the exhibition space and the outside space or as the passage between different spaces within the museum or gallery) to facilitate an encounter was also utilised by the artist duo Marina Abramović and Ulay in their performative piece *Imponderabilia* (1977). In its first enactment, the two artists stood naked opposite each other in the narrow entrance to the Museum of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna. Such positioning meant that in order to enter, the agent(s) came face to face with and intimately close to one of the artists; squeezing between them, bodies touching. The gaze of the artists fixed on one another in their presentation as object-props, as motionless statues. The exhibition text on entering the space described *Imponderabilia* as 'such imponderable human factors as one's aesthetic sensitivity/ the overriding importance of imponderables in determining human conduct' (Abramović and Ulay, 1977, n.p). The close encounter staged through the mechanism of the threshold



heightened the agent's awareness of their being, their body as matter and their agency in the performative act.

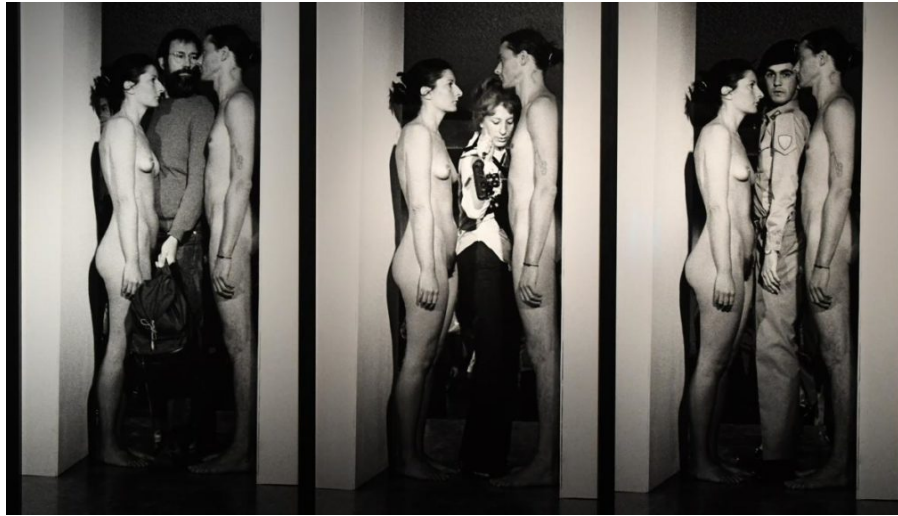


Figure 34: *Imponderabilia*  
Marina Abramović and Ulay, 1977  
Museum of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna (©Marina Abramović/ Sean Kelly Gallery/ MoMA)

The threshold as the site of a staged performative encounter was also a principal method used in Carey Young's *Consideration* (2005). Created in conjunction with a legal team, the work staged a situation in which the agent(s) was enticed into agreements that explored notions of individual autonomy, freedom of speech and the social contract (Young, 2005). The moment of entering the space here was fundamental to the construct of this event, as the agents on entering were asked (by the receptionist) to give a print of their index finger (a copyright print).



Figure 35: *Consideration (Artistic License)*  
Carey Young, 2005  
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (©Carey Young)

Paula Cooper Gallery describes the work as featuring legally enforceable contracts between artist and viewer. The action of the agents demonstrated the power relations at play through the observable visible actions of the physical body and copyright fingerprints as artworks which were presented on the exhibition wall. The coercion within the work (similar to Young's *The Representative*, 2005 cited in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*) raises questions of participation, agency and authorship in acknowledging the critical role the agents played within this piece.

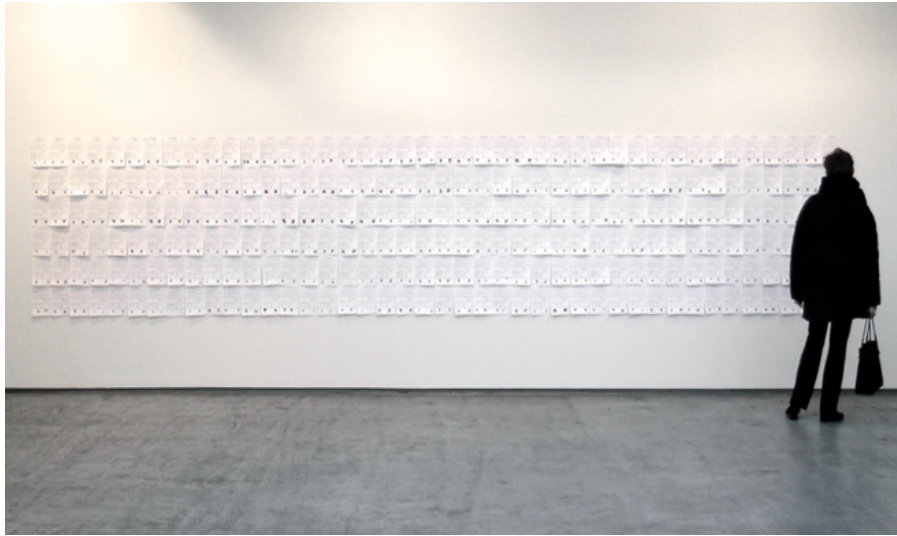


Figure 36: *Consideration (Artistic License)*  
 Carey Young, 2005  
 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (©Carey Young)

*This Mess if Kept Afloat* (2018), an exhibition by artist Kate V Robertson utilised different materials (fragments of clay, rubber, stone for example) to create an installation which disrupted the white cube gallery space though bringing the outside inside creating different patterns, configurations and surfaces of materials. In environments that shifted and changed over time, the use of negative space, the concept of incompleteness and failure were cited (in the exhibition press release at Dundee Contemporary Arts) as a threshold to opportunity by Robertson (2018). In this work the components of exhibition making (artist, audience, space, and material) were positioned to work as equal. The agent(s) became the maker and activator of the work by entering the space and walking over it – breaking tiles, shifting materials, re-arranging objects. *This Mess if Kept Afloat* explored Robertson's interest in the idea of the exhibition as a proposal rather than a definitive outcome through the staged encounter and the consequence of its transformation over time.



Figure 37, *This Mess if Kept Afloat*  
 Kate V Robertson, 2018  
 Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee (©Ruth Clark)

For Lucas Lenglet, the ways in which the agent is included or excluded is an idea he explores through sculptural, installation-based works. In interrogating how presence can be experienced he often uses the threshold between spaces as the site of intervention in hinting towards boundaries of movement. In *And all the untilled air between* (2019) sculptural objects make interventions in the exhibition space, marking the transitions between and over places, things and areas. Here objects are staged to draw attention to the performative or theatrical movement between the space and how this has been directed. Of *And all the untilled air between* (2019), Lenglet says ‘every artwork is a ‘situation’ because the works subsequently interact with each other and new constellations arise’ (Lenglet, 2019, n.p). The placement of the sculptural forms in *And all the untilled air between* (2019) through their positioning, interrupted the path of the agent(s) and in the process offered an intimate encounter with the work. This encounter allowed for an active engagement through being, through the way bodies of the agents navigated around the works – paths of travel as a performative agency.



Figure 38: *And all the untilled air between.* Installation view 1  
 Lucas Lenglet, 2019  
 Kroller Muller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands (©Lucas Lenglet)



Figure 39: *And all the untilled air between.* Installation view 2  
 Lucas Lenglet, 2019  
 Kroller Muller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands (©Lucas Lenglet)

The final artwork example cited for its use of a threshold as a mechanism for the encounter comes from the artist duo known as *Yoke* (Annie Nelson and Chris Woodward). In *Keep Boat Forward of Cill Marker* the agent(s) (who Yoke describe as participants) is navigated through the space via two large fabric inflatable forms are installed at the entrance to the space. These objects frame the encounter. Agents weave in and out of them – the flow of their movement directed through the configuration of the objects. Working with the exhibition environment as a relational space the agent(s) in Yoke's work is at the core of its conceptual staging and activation. Of the work the artists say, 'The audience is playing an increasing part in the way we produce work, from inspiring new ideas, informing research and engagement, through to the way they might interact with the outcomes this all feeds into a two-way creative process' (Nelson and Woodward, 2019, n.p).





Figure 40: *Keep Boat Forward of Cill Marker*  
Yoke, 2018  
The Art House, Wakefield (©Jules Lister)

The threshold is a methodological approach used within my practice-as-research. It acts as an apparatus for the object-props in constructing a framework for co-relational co-formation. The examples cited in this section contextualise this as an established form of practice employed by other artists – situating this methodology within the field of contemporary art practices. Each of the artworks I have drawn on demonstrate different mechanisms, materials and forms (object-props) and performed encounters between agents and artworks and spaces. They support me in acknowledging the key role of the threshold in facilitating a situated and embedded practice of agency and encounter within a knowledge generating project such as mine.

## Performativity

The threshold, within my practice research stages a performative formation of things. Performance sits across various art delegations. My research findings propose that due to the eventual nature of becoming and the meshwork of enacted agency, that every thing within an exhibition event can be classified as performative. The exhibition event, in its system, and meshwork of things, within my inquiry generates formational occurrence of matter through a negotiation between things. These negotiations (possible through the anticipated readiness of the agent(s) and the object-props) become the affective and performative act. Performance here pertaining to various senses of actions (doing, affecting, becoming, negotiating, interacting, forming). Performance as practice describes the human and non-human agencies at play. The body of the agent and the object-props becoming both producers and receptors of the event. Performance and affect are inseparable in this sense.



New materialist approaches to being (expanded on in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*) have supported my methodology of the analysis of the post-event artefact-object in order to trace and gain knowledge of its co-formational being. Whilst being remains an important aspect of my research the act of the becoming as a performative practice and the enactment of agency is also key. In *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (2007), Paul Carter proposed the idea of becoming as a condition for generating new knowledge. This process of becoming he described as shifting from decontextualisation to recontextualisation (Carter, 2007, p. 16). For Carter knowledge and the process of production (or in the instance of my research, formation), is fluid and ongoing. In an earlier text *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research*, Carter describes the performative process of materials in their state of becoming – their ‘material thinking’ as – inseparable, as collaborative (Carter, 2004, p. 9). The emphasis Carter places on processes of inquiry over outcome (as a performative way of knowing) is here key. Within the reflexive accounts of my projects (outlined within *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*) I locate this performative becoming and way of knowing within four different exhibition spaces. The spaces stage the conditions to create material findings that suggest acts of co-relational co-formation (extending the ideas of material thinking). This process positions materiality within a performative model through the moment of the exhibition event as the arena and durational period of becoming.

Judith Butler, whose ideas preceded new materialist thought, proposed in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) the idea of matter as a resilient thing driven by an ongoing failure of human discourse to capture it. Matter according to her exists in an ongoing process of ‘iterative citationality’ (Butler, 1993, p. 21). In this sense, matter is inherently performative. Butler’s reading of performativity in challenging constructed norms also points to the importance of discourse. In considering the performativity of matter (and as such materials), she writes, ‘Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names’ (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Performative materiality engages the conditions of formation through acts of being and agency in which matter is brought to mean something in the questioning of materiality as ‘...a site or surface that is excluded from the process of construction, as that through which and on which construction works’ (Butler, 1993, p. 28). Whilst the performative turn saw a shift in art practices to create a transformative event whereby the actions produce the work, this act was largely considered a human-centred mode. My research places a focus on material-relational practices (as proposed by Guillian Bruno in *Surface; Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, 2014). Here a condition of physical substance is a performative encounter where material entities enter into a space of relations. Of the concept of material-relational practices Bruno writes, ‘Materiality is not a question of materials but rather concerns the subject of material relations’ (Bruno, 2014, p. 2). Through employing a methodology that is material-relational

based, and which can also be considered a performative practice, my research inquiry can examine the transformative potentials of matter/ material (things) being in movement, in flux during the exhibition event.

Referring back to Butler (*Bodies that Matter*, 1993), her proposal that performance emerges from a set of social relations (which turn out to be part of the very performance itself) has informed my understanding of the exhibition event as process, system and matter. For Butler, performativity is an ordinary human action. This idea is important when considering the ethical staging and post-event authorship status of artworks. Performativity as a creative methodology in creating conditions that are fundamentally co-relational is the result of a state of being (and the agency and action that such being offers). The question of creativity is not addressed by my research inquiry – the artist-curator (which in the four projects staged for this research is a role assumed by me), as conceiver of ideas, creates the conditions for performative methodologies that are creative. Here I return to Barad and her theory of performativity as a material entanglement (an affect of the intra-activity of things) (Barad, 2007). For Barad the affirmation of processes of knowledge production (performed co-formation) is necessary in framing the way things are understood (as material articulations and reconfiguring of what is possible) (Barad, 2007). Barad's propositions have informed the ways in which the agency of things (in their performative capabilities) are understood to be co-responsible for the relationalities that emerge in performative research practice.

## **What is an artwork?**

The term and definition of an artwork is broad and its status hard to define. The term artwork has a particular history in Western European philosophy, dating from the 18th century when 'art' was centred around technique and skill. The term artwork was subsequently applied to name artefacts produced around the world. This complex history and the binaries of art/ non-art and art/ anti-art are acknowledged in a research inquiry which again brings this term into question. In contemporary terms an artwork can be considered as a creation of human concept (or agency). It can also be framed as a structure or event.

In *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*, I drew on Heidegger's ideas around the viewer (now redefined as the agent) in the evolution of the work of art. Heidegger's thinking around material and matter is also significant for my research inquiry in the formation of knowledge that material and matter provide. In his essay, *The Question Concerning Technology* (originally published in 1954), he claimed that matter (*causa materialis*), form as aspect (*causa formalis*), end points (*causa finalis*) and circumscribing bounds which bring about effects (*causa efficiens*) and are responsible for the emergence of art

(Heidegger, 1977, p. 6). There is correlation between Heidegger's interest in cause and effect and the intentions of my research which in many ways considers the four causes as elements of formation (matter as the objects and agents, form as aspect in the being of the objects and their staging, the bringing about of effects as the context of the exhibition event and end points as the surface of the post-event artefact-objects). Heidegger proposed that these four causes do not themselves constitute an artwork, instead they enable the artwork to come forward and appear as a participant of responsibility. A participant of responsibility here is taken to mean the resulting effect of the comprehensive order and agency of being. The artwork in Heidegger's thinking is indebted to the cause as 'things' that are co-responsible for their being. Here the 'co' in being is essential in the systems of realisation which stage the agency and record effect through matter and form. Heidegger argued that traces of being bring forth the forming of the artwork (the arising of some 'thing' from outside of itself). He proposed that '...every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing. Bringing-forth, indeed, gathers within itself the four modes of occasioning causality-and rules them throughout... The possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 12). This idea, applied to my research, affirms the ability of the objects, positioned as props within the exhibition space, to be encountered, affected and to trace the agency of things. Heidegger's ideas were not, of course, intended to be applied to sculptural-performative-installations or contemporary artworks of the nature that I am discussing. His ideas, given they were situated within a particular historical and cultural context, would most likely, have been intended for application to a painting (for example). There is, however, an interesting proposition in considering my idea of a triangulated system of formation (where each element is essential) against Heidegger's. In Heidegger's terms, each element (agent, object-prop, exhibition space/event) is a participant of responsibility in the emergence of art.

Defining the work of art in contemporary practices is not without its challenges. What constitutes the artwork within my research has shifting meanings. Here I refer back to Filipovic (who I drew on earlier in this chapter), who acknowledges the importance of Duchamp's idea of the artwork in its classification as 'The legibility of the artwork as work is contingent upon the structuring of that legibility by its surroundings' (Filipovic, 2008). For my research inquiry, there is a shift of the status of objects from object-props presented as artworks (such as performative encounters with an actor issuing contracts comprised of legal doublets in *True and Correct* and sculptural bollards in *Dispositif*), to artefact-objects in their performative becoming as artworks (for example in the post event sheets of paper of *True and Correct* and the fabric of the tarpaulin in *Dispositif*). This shift is based on the knowledge (affect) imparted by the agents and things. To provide clarity of the shifting classifications of what I refer to as artworks, within my research inquiry, I understand the artwork in three terms or stages:

*Stage 1:* The artwork is the concept. The concept is the project which describes the artwork. The artwork is the idea for the framework – the production and material/ form of the object-props and their configurations in conceiving an artwork as an interaction between objects, environments and agents. This stage is owned (or authored) by the artist-curator.

*Stage 2:* The artworks are the object-props and the exhibition event. A sculptural-performative-installation of sorts. They form an assemblage, a meshwork. The object-props represent a ready-made – they are open ended and have the ability to be affected. They are interpreted as artworks. This stage is a stage of performed formation – it is co-owned (or authored) by all relating things (agents, the exhibition space and other objects). This artwork is the performative making process of the resulting artwork which emerges in stage 3.

*Stage 3:* The artwork resolves as the manifestation of the co-relationally co-formed artefact-objects. Co-formation (agency and the encounter) leaves behind ideas of significance of the sculptural object as artwork in its form. Post-event ownership is not attributed to any one individual. Post the moment of analysis, these artworks do not exist (other than through documentation). These artworks have been co-authored.

The duality of practice and of classifications of the artwork allows for a shift in possibilities, in knowledge and in acknowledgement. It opens up conversations of language, methodologies of making and questions of authorship. It is important to state here that whilst the post-event artefact-objects are classified as artworks (of co-formed knowledge), they are not preserved as works rather they are temporal things which, following on from documentation and reflexive examination are recycled, dismantled, destroyed – never re-shown or sold. After all they are not mine to re-show or sell. Their formation and the agency they captured exist for a fleeting moment. In relation to my own artistic practice (in referencing the projects of this research) I document the conceptual staging as mine, however any captions of the material traces are recorded as having multiple authors in acknowledging the agential intra-actions that occurred in their formation.

## **The issue of authorship**

In conceiving the four projects of my research inquiry, I as the artist-curator for each of these four stagings, have had agency in the formation of object-props and their placement within the exhibition space – the conditions which have facilitated the artworks coming

to be. The decision to utilise a turnstile and actor to generate encounters between agents, paper contracts and pens (*True and Correct*), the decision to fabricate sculptural tarpaulin objects which represent crowd-control security bollards and to channel agents through them (*Dispositif*), the decision to instruct the use of shoe covers to be worn in the exhibition space (*Front Stage: Back Stage*) and the decision to install a PVC curtain that has to be traversed to enter the exhibition space (*Fourth Wall*) have been mine.

In setting up a methodology which explores the potentials of co-relational co-formation, the issue of authorship must be acknowledged and addressed. Within this section I outline the ways in which the co-relational co-formation of things can be distinguished from artistic authorship. Bolt, who I referred to earlier in this chapter, in her book *Studies on Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter* writes:

In the theory of means and ends that dominates our contemporary understanding of the artistic process, we tend to focus on the instrumental use of tools and materials to make an artwork. According to this view, the artist and craftsperson is the one who exercises mastery over his/ her tools and materials to produce an artwork. In harnessing means to ends, the artist justifiably can sign her/ his name as the one who has made or caused a work of art to come into being. (Bolt, 2007, p. 1)

Bolt's idea of materialising practice (producing) through ongoing engagement points towards the importance of considering the idea of collective authorship. Walter Benjamin's *Author as Producer* (1934), Barthes's *Death of the Author* (1967), Foucault's *What is an Author* (1969) and Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1962) challenged conventional ideas of individual authorship. Their theoretical positions informed the shift in focus from individual artistic approaches to more collaborative, participatory and social approaches in Western art practice and criticism in the 1950s and 60s. The *Fluxus Manifesto* (Maciunas, 1963) called for an elimination of individual authorship in favour of anonymity and collectivity (proposing the authors of works would be known as 'Fluxus'). The significance of authorship in the practice of artist-curators who develop outcomes with/ through other things is here explored, not in an attempt to dismantle authorship, but to explore its impact on proposing a co-relational co-formed mode of practice.

In the staging of *True and Correct*, *Dispositif*, *Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall*, I do not consider myself to be a 'sole creator'. Rather a conduit, a facilitator of sorts. I offer up control (to agents and other things) in their affect on the formation process (the resulting outcomes of artefact-objects). Such offering facilitates an ongoing process of performative formation during the exhibition event and in doing so challenges conventional ideas of authorship. The trace of the post-event artefact-objects as artworks



favour pluralism over individualism. This demands a shift in our thinking in redefining roles and re-considering methodologies of formation in favour of the 'co'.

Liam Gillick in his essay *The Complete Curator* says 'we should not look towards individual artworks ...but rather towards the way objects and ideas are performed within the setting of the exhibition with all the new complexities that this might imply (Gillick, 2015, p. 30). My position as the artist-curator within the context of this research, is to employ the thinking involved in exhibition making, staging the possibilities for co-relational co-formation to occur. In Chapter 1 *A Matter of Terminology*, I drew on the work of Bishop in arguing for a review of the terminology surrounding work that is produced by/ with/ through others. Bishop's proposition of the social turn (describing artists who employ others to produce or perform their work) which emerged in the 1990s can be reconsidered against a material-object context of things operating in a relational way. Here the '*delegated performance*' described by Bishop in *Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity* has relevance in the role of 'activator' the agent assumes through their encounter with objects or more broadly speaking, things (Bishop, 2012, p. 219). In my stagings, the methodology of formation unfolds with a degree of certainty through the placement of the object-props at the threshold to the exhibition space. However, uncertainty lies in the point of encounter, the affect, the exchange of agency and as such the outcome (cumulatively and iteratively formed through the presence and actions of multiple agents). Would the agent(s) have a physical encounter with the object-prop of the two security bollard sculptures in *Dispositif*, for example. What would this encounter results in, what would the affect be, would the tarpaulin material have an encounter with other things? Bishop talks of the problematics of the event and the need to wrestle work from the event in order for the artist to reclaim power. I however challenge the need (or right) to do this and position the exhibition as medium, and the being and agency of the agent(s) as essential in the way the co-forming process plays out within this space (and event).

There are a number of approaches to exhibition making which challenge ideas of sole authorship. In his lecture, *What is an Author?* Foucault stated that 'since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive [of meaning]' (Foucault, 1969, p. 230). Perhaps this is still true – perhaps the conceptual framing of art practice, its contextualisation and attributed meaning are the elements reserved for belonging to the artist (artist-curator). However, these are not the central concerns of my research generating outputs. Instead I am focused on the organisational and structural mechanisms which allow for things to be co-formed and examined. Here the emphasis is placed on the emergent quality of art practice as one not belonging to the individual but to the assemblage (drawing on Bolts' 2007 reference in *Studies on Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter*). The ensemble here constitutes the totality of the environment as the conditions and context in which things are co-formed – the emergence of things

as co-relational shifting ideas of individual authorship to dialogical ensembles. These are ideas expanded on in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*.

In the scenario of the concept, performance and outcome all being considered as an artwork (as per my explanation of stage 1 of *What is an Artwork* earlier in this chapter), positions the issue of authorship in more complex terms. Clarity of authorial voice within my research inquiry is not the mission – In fact I would argue that it is almost impossible to achieve clarity of authorship with work of this nature due to the ‘co’ of the formation. In an interview with *On Curating* around authorship in 2013, Gavin Wade addresses this issue in proposing that authorial distinctions can (and should) now be dismantled (Wade, 2013). Wade, co-founder of Eastside Projects (which he describes as an ‘artist-led multiverse’) in Birmingham, is interested in ideas of collaboration, of collectivity, in the ways that art, spaces and voices can be affected by others. Possibilities of affect or transformation is a curatorial strategy which Wade points to as ‘an equilibrium of art, a flux of forces that are all related’ (Wade, 2013). In this sense the exhibition space is ‘a growing archive of its own production’ in which ‘all the layers of the making of the space are apparent and overlaid’ (Wade, 2013). The Eastside Project exhibition *Loop* (2021) is here cited as an example of collective production (and activation) of props within the exhibition space. *Loop* considers the performative potentials of exhibition making and addresses the importance of the audience within this medium. The show’s co-curator Harold Offeh, in discussing the artworks (in the exhibition press release), writes that ‘...each plays with actions and gestures, choreographed and presented to the audience’ (Offeh, 2021, n.p). Within this group exhibition a number of artworks directly explored the performative co-relational co-formation of things. For example, Phoebe Collings-James’s ceramic containers acting as vessels for speakers in which sound work played different loops – these loops were triggered by the audiences’ presence in the space leading us to question the interplay between being, conducting and receiving. An interplay that bought authorship into question.



Figure 41: *Loop*  
Adham Faramawy, Harold Offeh, Keiken, Phoebe Collings-James, Samra Mayanja, Will Fredo. 2021  
Eastside Projects, Birmingham (©Eastside Projects)

Moving beyond notions of the sole author, the act of co-formation is drawn to a close in the ending of the exhibition event. Here the object-props are removed from the exhibition event (by the artist-curator) and in their removal further encounters and possibilities of co-formation (in the context/ end state they have been resolved at are limited. This is perhaps where authorship comes into question with the artist-curator determining when the moment of completion (removal) happens. The event-ending completion of the artwork(s) does not however inhibit the potential of further open-endedness – through the matter and material being of the object – when re-placed in a context of agentic offering, the conditions for evolution of the formation are possible. The artist-curator here holding responsibility for allowing further co-formations to emerge in their role which I consider to be the ‘primary co-author’. If the artist-curator completely disassembles their identity and role as an author there could be problematic consequences in accessing funding, grants, commissions and so forth. This would mean current systems and structures would have to change – an acknowledgement of co-relational co-formed practice which results from a meshwork of things would be needed. Here the dominance of ‘an author’ is challenged in putting forwards the notion of a co-authored artwork (in discussing and documenting the post-event artefact-objects). The attributing authors here are considered as the conceiver of the project and producer of the object-props (the artist-curator) and the relational co-formers (things whose individual identities are not identifiable).

In the co-relational, process-based art production I propose, the culmination of movement, action and becoming (though co-being, intra-action and agency) suspends notions of singular authorship. Before the event the objects, classified as props and the staging of the exhibition event (the curatorial concepts and installation arrangements) have been ‘produced’ by a single author. Post this event, there has been a shift through the performed agency of these object activated by forces of the agent (and other things) whereby material exchanges have occurred and the surface of the materials of the objects altered – not by me, the singular author, but by the relational dynamics of the agents, objects and exhibition space/ event.

## **Macro-photography, documentation and storytelling**

Following the completion of each of the four exhibition events, a four-stage process was undertaken within the exhibition space to process and analyse trace. The surface of the artefact-objects were:

1. Momentarily isolated - preserving the objects and the space they were within
2. Photographed with a macro-lens camera - documenting

3. Observed through sitting with the objects – looking
4. Recorded through note-taking - analysing

White gloves, dust sheets, a notepad and pen – the scene resembled not just that of a laboratory but a crime scene as a detailed examination was conducted. The objects were isolated from further encounters, their data in this process of inspection preserved. They were then sat with, looked at, studied, and written about. Photographic skills which recorded the post-event conditions of object-artefacts were employed – close-up examination images. The surface of the object-artefacts documented, by me, the artist-researcher, in a forensic-like way. Working with a macro lens on a digital SLR, a tripod and both flashlight and lamp – seeking advice from forensic experts, I developed an understanding in how to pay attention to and capture things. This photographic documentation of the material of the artefact-object(s) used within *True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall* is presented as outcomes within my thesis. The macro-detailed images of surfaces lead to and recorded knowledge as I let go of the idea of objects as complete artworks in focusing on the agency recorded through and on these objects in their positioning as props. Abrasions, alterations and transfers of matter; scuffs, scrapes, smudges, warping, creasing and so on (see Figures 46, 50, 58, 66 and the appendices of this thesis). Here high-resolution images distort scale, they eliminate any sense of background or form of the object, however, by paying attention to the surface of the matter, traces of agency, relational being and formation could be evidenced. This forensic magnification (and then documentation) of the material surface of the object-artefacts central to my findings and a key process and stage within my methodology.

In his paper, *The art object does not embody a form of knowledge*, Stephen Scrivener proposes that practice-led research should concentrate on how issues, concerns and interests can be examined and brought about by the production of an artefact. He claims that, in a research setting, the knowledge associated with the artefact is more significant than the artefact itself. Whilst this is a claim which might be considered somewhat contentious (and one he goes on to contradict to some extent within this paper), Scrivener points towards the making process as generative of knowledge. He writes ‘...it is argued that information rather than knowledge is stored in the artefact and humans derive knowledge by extracting it’ (Scrivener, 2002). Although agreeing that information is stored in artefacts, and that this information (for my research) is more critical than the artefacts themselves, I would argue that information is knowledge and artefacts not only store and hold this knowledge, but it is their knowledge to hold (an idea I expand on in *Chapter 3: The Ethics of Things*). As with all of my previous work (pre-PhD practice), no artwork (objects) exists post the exhibition event (post the stage of the analysis, photographic documentation and written description taking place). They and the surface of their

materials, only have relevance to this research. The artefact-objects post-event, post-documentation have served their purpose.

To support this photographic documentation, I have also employed a research method where I reflect on my projects— recording and articulating the outcomes in traditional and non-traditional modes of reflexive writing as practice. The practice (photographic documentation and creative writing reflections) included as inserts between the chapters of this thesis (and then analysed as findings within *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*) outline the artistic concepts and systems of the stagings, the materiality of the objects and the unfolding of the event of the exhibition. The intention of this approach is to consider the agency of things, through and with them. To propose them as active, relational and part of the co-forming process. In doing this I challenge three things: the idea that matter might be inert, that the being of the agent(s) assumes an audience/ viewer/ spectator delineation, and that language suitably articulates the complexity and potentials of the dynamics at play during the exhibition event.

The embodied writing methodology I have employed in this research inquiry offers a playful insight into the co-relational co-formation process, imagined through the lens of the different components of the exhibition event. Such an approach proposes the capacity of things to tell a story. Here I cite the project *Everything Is Alive*, hosted by Ian Chillage produced by *Radiotopia*. This project presents podcasts and written transcripts conveying the story of ‘objects that are willing to speak’. Amongst the podcasts is the story of Louis, a can of cola (played by Louis Kornfeld) who is interviewed during the moment of his ‘opening and drinking’. Louis says:

I was in a Safeway. I was bought as a case. So, there were 24 of us. We were all purchased together and actually our next residence was a bowling alley for a 12-year-old's birthday party. I saw most of the rest of my case drunk at that party. I was not drunk, I was saved for later and was brought home and put into a refrigerator and then forgotten about for a few months placed in the back of the fridge. (Kornfeld, 2019, 1.44 –2.14)

In *Everything Is Alive*, storytelling records the material descriptions of the object and its experience of being, of agency and of co-relating encounters. By extending my practice-led inquiry into writing-as-practice, I utilise the inventiveness of alternative research methods to gather knowledge (findings) from the exhibitions I have staged through telling their stories. In framing this approach, I cite the research methodology developed by Imogen Stidworthy for her PhD (*Voicing on the borders of language*) which positioned the object as a tool for producing different modes of reflexive awareness in the recording of work in the experiencing situation (Stidworthy, 2020). The role of the objects within my practice-as-writing research attempt to share this ambition.



The objects in my practice-as-writing outputs narrate their own materialisation. An account is given to indicate what could be seen, felt, experienced, followed, traced and evidenced – analysing impact, outcomes, cause and effect/ affect. Here, I consider Katrina Palmer's assertion in *The Dark Object* (which built on her 2011 PhD thesis *Reality flickers: writing with found objects and imagined sculpture*), that through the relocation of sculptures in narrative writing, writing becomes a sculptural form (Palmer, 2013). The 'creatively written' accounts I present play with this idea (of language as a practice). Here I position language as a material – something which has been constructed in a relational way as a form of making (rather than simply a piece of writing). The language is a thing in itself, it points to ideas of co-formation in the story it tells and the narrative it weaves. It intentionally aims to disrupt the academic text and challenge the authority of what constitutes research findings and knowledge production in letting go of an absolute view of what is, in favour of sharing ways of knowing through being, through interpreting, through describing. The artefact-objects within my research are positioned as things which offer insight through different voices (for example that of the Judge in *True and Correct*, that of the Invigilator in *Dispositif*, that of the Exhibition Space in *Front Stage: Back Stage* and that of the Narrator of the script of the exhibition event as a play in *Fourth Wall*). These approaches provide both an observer's and embodied objects account of the situation – the things of my research tell their story and in doing so practice as writing is formed.

In exploring modes of presenting practice-as-research I have also drawn on the work of Katherine McKittrick and her *Science and Other Stories* book (2021). Here McKittrick interweaves theory and literature, observation and thought as a methodology to collapse segregated approaches to writing in challenging the role of language in dominant structures. Lola Olufemi takes a similar approach in her book *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (2021) which poetically, politically and playfully weaves in and out of a material and immaterial language to present readers with the possibilities of the otherwise through the ways in which we might read the past, present and future differently. Olufemi explores existence, social relations, imaginative thinking and critical interventions. She does this by inflating the material through narrative descriptions, evoking feelings in a textual way. Embracing the unknowable with the idea of transitional embodiment, she makes the argument for the experience of things. My practice-as-writing methodology draws on this approach in my desire (as the artist-curator) to create knowledge through and with the objects. The commentary producing an embedded, empathetic, and intimate relation between the writing as a textual object, the event and the artefacts as objects of knowledge. The creative writing dialogical construct my research framework is presented in attempts to use an objective voice to give the reader an understanding of the visceral qualities of the practice and a sense of the encounters, agency and relations that existed between objects, agents, exhibition spaces and myself as the artist-curator.

In telling the stories of objects, I interpret the empirical data of their material, matter, surface and form. The text I produce to tell these stories narrates through each of the four projects' conceptual frameworks – allowing you, the reader to consider the writing in itself as an artwork. The 'I' in this process is important in my role and the ethical responsibility I hold as the artist-curator-researcher. The process of writing about, with and through objects in many ways was an uncomfortable one which challenged the ways I have worked prior to this inquiry – allowing me to open-up and shape my own individual practice through this research. This approach, whilst uncomfortable, was also essential in contributing new knowledge to the field through expanded and creative research methodologies (that draw on both ethnographic and anthropological approaches in relation to objects, research processes and analysis). Storytelling as research here acknowledges the critical role language as practice can play. For example:

In describing the pre-event condition of the pens in *True and Correct*, in the format of a court transcript, I write:

We, the Pens, are objects with agency, poised to be activated, to record action.  
We are passed between the Agents, sweat from their palms line our surface.  
We trace touch and evidence being though our/ their encounter with the  
Contracts. Our ink is permanent and direct.

In describing (as though an object-prop being interviewed) the conceptual staging of the project and formation of security bollards, in *Dispositif*, I write:

We were produced in a factory; industrially manufactured.  
The stitching across our seams are smooth, discreet.  
Our exterior resembles that of a protective device.  
As covers we sit perfectly over the objects we house.  
We are a second skin to the object we conceal.  
We are bollards covered by tarpaulins.

In recording the activities of an event through director's notes, in *Front Stage: Back Stage*, from the position of the door mat, I write:

I am trodden on. Walked over. Door mat.  
My fibres muddled with dirt, dust, compressed by the rubber soles of hard  
shoes.

In analysing – in the form of a transcript for a play from the position of the material and form of the PVC curtain (post the exhibition event), in *Fourth Wall* I write:

The PVC strips remain in order.

The object-prop as an artefact-object has retained its material structure.

Or almost.

Recurrence created a gap in the form.

A portion, two strips in particular, reveal their transformation.

There is a degree of complication in the subjectivity and objectivity of the narration of these staged performative events. The object-props and traces of agency they record are open to readings from different perspectives. Whilst the objects own their knowledge and their material surface provides data, within the practice as writing outputs in my telling of the story there is subjectivity. I remain in control of what is seen and told. This bias (and the bias in myself as artist-curator, researcher, observer and analyst) must therefore be acknowledged. Within the introduction to this thesis, I outlined the context of this research and my positionality within it. These positionality and context statements go some way in declaring where any bias or epistemological assumptions may come from. In attempting to mitigate against this, a clear and consistent methodological approach against which practice has been examined has been developed and followed – my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*.

## **Knowledge mobility framework**

I will use the term *knowledge mobility* to present the critical framework of my research inquiry – the outcome of this methodology chapter. In addition to the ideas/ approaches/ theories reflected on within this chapter, my research framework has also been informed by Lee Campbell's *Anticipation, Action and Analysis: a new methodology for practice-based research* (2017) which extends models of reflective thinking as a structuring device to document and analyse practice research findings in written form. Campbell writes:

This process consists of devising a series of projections, planning a sequence of actions, carrying out those actions; and then writing about those experiences using different strategies. These strategies involved: making notes; annotating diagrams; writing narrative accounts; and listing the different stages that participants (protagonist and audience) underwent. (Campbell, 2017, pp.6)

Here Campbell establishes the need to adopt a clear, consistent and robust methodology – one which he follows to structure, plan, carry out and reflect upon in the process of researching. My five-stage *Knowledge Mobility Framework*, extends the three-stage process (anticipation – making predictions, action – executing practice and analysis –

reflecting on outcomes) developed by Campbell. It acts as the basis to test the hypothesis of my research. It is a framework generated to summarise the research process (project) I am employing. It considers and builds on existing research methods (as discussed earlier in this chapter), but as a framework has a unique and specific system and function. This term *Knowledge Mobility Framework* in itself begins to evolve the idea of how knowledge, (through the material traces generated by the object-props transformation to artefact-objects) is made through co-relational being and the enactment of agency in the exhibition space during the event.

The knowledge production process cannot be separated or attributed to one part of this process and is not fully formed until post-event. Knowledge, in this system, is fundamentally owned by the objects, it is however, collectively produced through my act of staging, through the exhibition space, the exhibition event and the being and actions of the agent and other things (objects, environmental conditions and so on). The *Knowledge Mobility Framework* I have used is broken down into five stages *Stage 1: Production of props, Stage 2: Staging the conditions, Stage 3: Performing and forming, Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork, Stage 5: Post-event analysis*. It is presented as both a methodology that I have developed and followed and as an output of this research (in contributing new knowledge to the field of contemporary art practices).

# KNOWLEDGE MOBILITY FRAMEWORK

## Stage 1: Production of props

This, the first stage of the research, begins from the position (and proposition) that prop making in itself does not result in the objects being considered as artworks.

The object-props are conceived and produced prior to the event as props.

They are presented as artworks and often read as such.

They often resemble ready-made or pre-existing features of spaces.

This stage registers and describes the material qualities that constitute the thing(s) as the pre-event object(s) in preparation of the process of formation.

The condition (pre-event) of the objects, their properties and their forms are assessed.

They are analysed as things with material qualities.

This stage establishes what I know about these objects through their construction, material make-up and being.

## Stage 2: Staging the conditions

This stage will make an assessment of the conditions of the possibilities of formation – the curatorial element of working with the exhibition space.

An analysis of the constructs, spatial elements, settings, configuration and placement of object-props and the environment that plays host to the event happens.

This stage frames the exhibition arena as the space of the studio; the laboratory in which knowledge collation will occur; the making space which facilitates the encounter through the mechanism of the threshold.

This stage describes the construction of the arena of formation.

## Stage 3: Performing and forming

This is the event.

In this stage, the object-props are given over to the agents.

Waiting is in progress.

The objects-props are in a stage of formation in their becoming as artworks.

The performance of forming as a conceptual and actual practice is in play.

The object-props are evolving as artworks.

The object-props during this stage are continually recording information and knowledge about the encounter and the complex system of relations that can and are taking place during the event.

In this stage energy is in motion; there is a back and forth of matter, a correspondence, a giving over, a relinquishing.

Experience during the event is of course happening, but this is not a concern of the research.

Knowledge is being formed but has not fully been produced until stages 4 and 5.



#### Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork

The post-event stage is where matter, things and object-props reside as artefact-objects.

The artefact-objects, when removed from the conditions of the exhibition event are considered artworks.

In their consideration as artworks (as the things that have been formed) they act as archives of the event – tracing being and agency through their material and form. These artefact-objects, through their material structure, hold embodied knowledge in their being.

They are now considered objects of experience which have an ability to reveal traces of their encounter.

The artefact-objects of course can shift to evolve once again as artworks through their open-ended ability to stage encounters, to trace agency, to effect and be affected if placed in an environment of agency and affect again.

#### Stage 5: Post-event analysis

The artefacts are objects of knowledge.

They hold their own knowledge.

The analytical examination of the post-event artefact-objects provides the data for this research; data which proposes explanations for co-relational co-formed making. The object-props are given over for assessment; residue of encounters and agency exist.

There is evaluation, an inquiry, like a post-mortem examination, which allows for reflective findings to be deduced.

Pre-and post-event comparisons are made, there is a re-identification and an assessment of the new condition.

The artefact-objects offer insight.

Practice as writing is formed.

**BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL OF ART**  
**FEBRUARY 2018**

**DISPOSITIVE**



These interviews took place in Birmingham and were conducted on five different occasions over a period of six weeks between myself (in the roles I assume throughout this project) and the objects of this practice.

A 2-metre distance was maintained at all times.



## **Interview Day 1**

### **(Stage 1: Production of the props)**

**Interviewer:** Artist-curator-receiver; conceiver of concepts (referred to as 'Conceiver')

**Interviewee:** Non-human objects; staged as props (referred to as 'Props')

#### **Conceiver**

What are you? How would you describe your material, your form, your structure?

#### **Props**

We are tarpaulin. 2 white 610g PVC polyester.

Our morphology is plastic.

We are a synthetic fabric engineered for use across a broad variety of applications.

We have an amorphous structure and contain halogens that create a chemical structure that is stable yet flexible.

750mm high, 500mm deep, 120mm long: we form rectangular cubes.

We are opaque and dense - lightweight yet heavy duty.

We were produced in a factory; industrially manufactured.

The stitching across our seams is smooth, discreet.

Our exterior resembles that of a protective device.

As covers we sit perfectly over the objects we house.

We are a second skin to the object we conceal.

We are bollards covered by tarpaulins.

This object, our base, is solid and weighty.

We are static, our movement minimal.

Our surface is smooth, wipe-clean even.

Our surface elicits a response, a desire to touch; but we are not designed for touching.

We smell like plastic.

We reference a set of security bollards.

Though it isn't clear why we as covers are in place.

We serve an unknown function. Or do we?

#### **Conceiver**

You raise an interesting point about functionality. What do you consider your function, your role, your purpose of being in the context of the exhibition space?

#### **Props**

Do we have to have a role and function to have a purpose of being?

We reference the vocabulary of sculpture.

We like to think that we give a nod to the notion of the monument (though we acknowledge that this is wishful perhaps).

One could understand our function as a security device, a crowd-control system.

We are bollards that are used as a way of directing the flow of agents into to the space.

We are there for protection, we consider ourselves protectors.

Our static quality is our agency in a way. Our material has agency too.

We are a device.

In non-functional terms we are poised to stage a performance.

We have the potential to create a diffraction.

Our form designed to activate, our surface to record when in proximity with the agents.



## Interview Day 2

### (Stage 2: Staging the conditions)

**Interviewer:** Curator of the staging (referred to as 'Artist-Curator')

**Interviewee:** Exhibition space; site of staging (referred to as 'Space')

#### Artist-Curator

Can you describe the conditions of your space to me?

#### Space

I am a well-established site for exhibiting.

A gallery. A stage. An arena. A studio.

I house artistic practices, encounters, spectacles.

I am a space for exchange, for knowledge, ideas and art.

I am connected with the objects that I house.

I am their domain.

I am institutional, educational.

I play a role in the context of conceptual art practice discourse.

I could be considered heterotopian.

#### Artist-Curator

Can you describe for me your curatorial arrangement, or staging If you like, for *Dispositif*?

#### Space

A set of double doors positioned at a central point along the length of my north facing wall open up for entry.

Two objects are placed directly in front of my entrance.

These objects are parallel to each other.

Two bollards clothed in white PVC covers.

They are considered props.

They are placed 1 metre apart, directing the agent into my space in an encouraged motion.

We (space and props) are in collaboration.

We work together.

#### Artist-Curator

The name of your co-formation with these props, *Dispositif*, translates to mean device?

What is your interpretation of this title?

#### Space

The props appear as an apparatus. An intervention.

The props as objects are positioned as materials of study in many ways.

The props contribute to their surroundings, to me.

We co-exist.

The props being sited at the boundary to my space, at my entry/ exit point is key.

This placement is the mechanism for the encounter.

Exhibition making, I consider, is reliant on the being of others.

I am an exhibition space but without a system for collaborating with others, without objects (human and non-human) I do not have the necessary parts to constitute an exhibition.

I house a process-led procedure that stages encounter as ongoing; iterative engagements with non-human materials (objects), concepts and agents.

Together the props and I are structures, but without the agents we are structures of nothingness.

The invisible membrane between us is permeable, a gulf, a void, a space to be filled by objects and agents.



## **Interview Day 3**

### **(Stage 3: Performing and forming)**

**Interviewer:** Artist-researcher-observer (referred to as 'Invigilator')

**Interviewee:** Non-human objects; staged as sculptures (referred to as 'Sculptures')

#### **Invigilator**

As objects you are now in a very particular situation, you are public, live.

This is your moment as props, your showcase as objects is it not?

#### **Sculptures**

Though we are objects, we do prefer the term sculptures.

We are sculptural props, we have form and material qualities, we were conceived as part of an artwork-making process.

We are poised ready to be activated, to be encountered and interpreted by the agent.

We are not autonomous beings.

In the moment of the exhibition event, art-forms are in formation.

#### **Invigilator**

My apologies sculptures, I didn't wish to diminish your status.

How as sculptural forms do you consider that you operate as activators in the exhibition space?

#### **Sculptures**

Our being generates a response.

We operate as one system; objects together, a collective body.

We have a relationship to other bodies through being.

We abide with the conditions of the exhibition space.

We are positioned to shape the direction of movement of the agents.

Their movement is performative.

It is poetic; like a dance of sorts.

There are no guides for interpretation.

No rules. Just us, our positioning, our physical form and material.

There are hints of temporality in us, but not of movement.

#### **Invigilator**

Can you describe, from your perspective, what happens when the agents enter the space and encounter you?

#### **Sculptures**

Agents exercise human powers.

These powers are not exclusive.

The agents, due to the context, have an attentiveness to things, they read us as artworks and seek meaning.

There is an encounter, a relation, a connection.

Material conditions and social forces are entangled.

The agent is close enough for contact, they leave residue as a trace of their being.

Flows of agential relations are in process.

There is a production.

Power relations emerge.

Through the presence and actions of the agent we get a sense of completion.

The notion of exhibiting is now in performative play.



## Interview Day 4

### (Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork)

**Interviewer:** Artist-curator-researcher-analyst (referred to as 'Analyst')

**Interviewee:** Non-human object; artworks (referred to as 'Artworks')

#### **Analyst**

Artworks, I am interested in why you now consider yourselves in a state of 'being' as 'things' which are classified as artworks. What constitutes this resolution?

#### **Artworks**

We are now a compound of human and non-human parts.

We conjoined with other 'things', who entered through the threshold of the exhibition space.

We, us, you are each other.

We do not represent any 'thing' we represent a process of thingness, of agency, of being.

The subtlety of shifting states that occurred in our making process a form of relationality.

In our being, as objects, we hold knowledge.

Ways of being allowed us to come to exist.

Our existence as things post-event (exhibition) momentarily ceased and is now renewed.

This process of ceasing and renewing is live.

It is ongoing it is in the moment.

#### **Analyst**

OK, so if I understand correctly, you consider the human (agent) and non-human components (object-props) essential in the production of things, and for you this production is only resolved in the post-event moment we are in now?

#### **Artworks**

Yes; production reveals truth.

During production something materialises.

It is a formation.

As objects we have a will to know.

The truth of the object, of us as the artworks, can be found in our form, on our material surface.

Here we are discussing the conditions of the art-object.

The productive subject is realised.

Power is redefined as essentially productive.

Power was in the hands of the agent.

#### **Analyst**

So, you consider yourself the result of a collaborative making process?

#### **Artworks**

Yes. Though individualism is not important here.

Being and co-being is important.

All objects were makers.

Exhibition space, props, artist, agents.

They all contributed to the work of art.

Our 'co-formers' should be credited as 'anonymous collective' perhaps?!



## **Interview Day 5**

### **(Stage 5: Post-event analysis)**

**Interviewer:** Artist-curator-researcher (referred to as 'Artist-Curator')

**Interviewee:** Post-event, non-human object; artwork artefacts (referred to as 'Artefacts')

#### **Artist-Curator**

Can the art in your being as an artefact be critiqued or indeed classified as works of art?

#### **Artefact**

Yes. Post-event, post the making process, post the co-formation we announce our status as artworks.

There is, post-event, an important material critique that takes place whereby my material conditions and the conditions of my formation (object/ event) are incorporated into an understanding of my meaning and my being.

My material evidences the agent's behaviour, their labour.

A division of labour occurred.

We then embark on a process of analysis, of translation.

Material-discursive dynamic enactment is entangled with processes of materialisation.

#### **Artist-Curator**

Do you consider yourselves an assemblage?

#### **Artefact**

In many ways yes.

We are the result of objects coming together.

We were formed through collective being.

We are a material arrangement (artefact-objects), though we also refer to our process (making).

We are an arrangement displaying the result of the action of different agents.

We are a symbol of co-functioning, co-being.

Our assemblage offers an analytical framework.

We help determine the distribution of power and knowledge that our generative system allowed.

#### **Artist-Curator**

As Artefacts is this it? Has your agency ended?

#### **Artefact**

As an assemblage we have stability to produce a re-balanced power system.

The frequencies of our material does not cease.

Our continual being requires a listening and on-going process of analysis for insight.

Our agency is not lost.

The translation is not over.

The staging, for the moment, is.

Our current status is that of an artwork artefact.

A grouping of agencies who through our material arrangements offer discursive dynamics which generate future possibilities.















# Chapter 3:

## The Ethics of Things

### The issue of ethics

The discourse of ethics surrounding contemporary art practices is both complex and essential. The terrain of ethics (in its cross-fertilisation between different methodologies and fields) is widely debated and in many ways problematised. In *Artificial Hells* (2012), Bishop outlines her proposal of the ethical criteria within which social and relational practices have been and should be assessed. Here the entwined relationship between ethical concerns and politics are acknowledged. If, however, we take Bishop's position of needing to assess the quality of the relations that are produced by relational artworks (which she argues in *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* are never called into question), the ethical considerations become problematic (Bishop, 2004). The problematic nature of this questioning arises due to the involvement of multiple parts (things) in the process of production (something I discussed in terms of authorship in the last chapter). Every project which has relational, co-forming and/ or political dynamics (dynamics I would argue are present to some extent within most artworks), has a set of ethical concerns. Within this chapter I outline a series of positions which point to different conceptions of ethical-relational-political dynamics that are present in the act of co-formation. These positions bring dialogues of ethics surrounding contemporary art practices to the forefront. They inform the mode of practice-as-research that I am proposing is possible. The findings of this chapter (and my research into the ethics of things) has led to the development of a set of *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation*. These principles (which work alongside my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*) are presented as an outcome and contribution to knowledge. They are intended to guide and support artist-curators in staging practice (and research as practice) with ethical care and consideration.

As outlined in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*, the practice I am dealing with is not a participatory artwork and does not focus on methods of participation. Instead, the methodological approach is centred around the objects and the analysis of their data. This chapter focuses on the embedding of ethical decision making in the staging of the encounter between things. It places a focus on the ways in which agency as a form of conceptualised making (material formations) can shift the meanings, assumptions, frameworks and guidelines of ethical engagement, and of artistic research paradigms (from and through the position of the object). Within this chapter, by interrogating the



ethics of things, I outline the ethical methodology of my co-relational co-formed practice against each of the key components of my research – agent(s), objects(s) and the resulting knowledge produced.

The term ethics stems from the Greek word *ethos* which makes reference to one's moral character. For Aristotle (as Terence Irwin's *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, 1999, tells us), the purpose of ethics is to take the right course of action in any situation in order to be good. In *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (1841/ 2010) Arthur Schopenhauer outlines Nietzsche's ideas around the motivations of ethics being that of a will to hold power. In Kantian terms (put forwards in *The Critique of Pure Reason*) ethics is centred on the role of the individual to determine and act in a way which is rationally right (Kant, 1781/ 1998). Rancière, in *The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics*, outlines the word *ethos* as one which signifies a way of corresponding with life – such understanding, he asserts, positions ethics as 'a kind of thinking which establishes the identity between an environment, a way of being and a principle of action' (Rancière, 2006, p. 2). Rancière goes on to offer a critique of the ethical turn by assessing participatory (conflated here with relational) art against ethical criteria. In discussing good/ bad models of participation, Rancière collapses artistic and political distinctions. In doing so he brings into question significations of normativity that enables one to judge the validity of practices in favour of ways of being, action/ agency and corresponding.

For relations to be ethical, Lawrence Blum in *Iris Murdoch and the Domain of the Moral* writes 'All that is necessary is that the agent understand or attempt to understand the other person's good, and that she act from a genuine and direct regard for the good of this particular other person (or persons)' (Blum, 1986, p. 344). Whilst this statement is limited in helping us to understand the ways in which we consider and position acts of good intention, it does help in providing a starting point for ethical frameworks in the intentionality of this research to contribute knowledge which is in Murdoch's terms good (in shaping ethical practices which acknowledge the agency of all parts). The intentions of my research remain to contribute to a re-consideration of language, roles, being and agency within art practice. The intentional good and moral consciousness considered in the nature and legitimacy of this research as a set of actions (conceived with care) in a safe environment in which the individual identity (personal data) of things is not recorded. The moral good of myself as the artist-curator creates a situation of experience for the agent(s) and objects which does not depend on their relation to the objective or subjective perspective, but which are formed through the motivational as well as justifiable reasons of myself the artist. Blum writes:

The notion of an 'agent-relative' reason, is one containing an essential reference to the person for whom it is a reason. The example given is something's being in one's own interest, a reason which involves everyone's

having an ('agent-relative') reason to do that which is in his or her interest, but not an ('agent-neutral') reason to promote that which is in the specific agent's own interest. But that particular agent-relative reason is simply a reason for autonomy (a reason to do that which is in one's own interest). (Blum, 1986, p. 350)

The ethics of care that Blum outlines is an embodied concept which is based on an assessment of need which produces legitimate reasons for action (Blum, 1991). Blum's promotion of objectivity, judgement, decision-making and principles (over relational negotiations) has informed the ethical approach of my research inquiry through prioritising morale perception and agency (of things) over ethical theory centred around choice, decision and impartiality (Blum, 1991). Reasons for actions become universally applied – agent-relative reasons through an ethics of active being and compassionate staging. Moral perception within my research is therefore staged in the situation of the exhibition event through the enactment of moral principles presented via the object-props of the encounter. The moral perception of things leading to moral actions that are both interdependent and relational results in outcomes that embody ethics of care through the principles and understanding of ethical co-relational co-being.

In acknowledging this theoretical terrain, my research inquiry takes as its starting point the ideas of ethics put forwards by Emmanuel Levinas and Benedictus de Spinoza. Here I focus on the encounter as the point in which being, action/ agency and correspondence of things happens. Both Levinas (in the *Levinas Reader*, 1989). and Spinoza (in *Ethics* 1677/ 1996), position the encounter as a confrontation, but one that is based on respect, acknowledgement and difference. The encounter in Levinas and Spinoza's terms is premised on relations of moments and being. Levinas proposed that it is at the moment of the encounter (between things) that ethical responsibility is instigated. Applied to my research, this is the encounter between object-props and the agent(s) which occurs at the site of the threshold. For example, in *Fourth Wall* this is the moment in which PVC plastic strips forming a curtain come in contact with each other, with other objects, with agents – the moment in which the form of this material (and its surface) are intra-acting and in which agency and affect between things is in play. The encounter is acknowledged in Levinas's terms (drawn from his book *Alterity and Transcendence*, 1999) as an issue of proximity and distance in relation to objectivity, thematisation and knowledge. Here he asserts the importance of language (in relation to ethics) as fluid and something which should continually be re-enlivened to address issues of ethical responsibility. This thinking extends the encounter beyond the idea of contact (at the point of the threshold) into one of between-ness and conversation (the material data and language which articulates this). Levinas positions the directness of the encounter as something which can be transformed into or is in dialogue with ethics. He writes:

Even the philosophy that questions the meaning of being does so on the basis of the encounter with the other... This would be a way of subordinating knowledge, objectification, to the encounter with the other that is presupposed in all language. (Levinas, 1999, p. 97)

Language as a thing holds agency and thus power. Levinas's conceptualisation of language being at the core of ethical considerations is here key. It reaffirms my proposition of the agent as significant in acknowledging their agency. It reaffirms the importance of acknowledging the potentials of co-relationally co-formed practices. Language plays a central role in communicating and formulating the constructed material knowledge of my research – my practice as writing of *True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall* (the inserts of this thesis). Here the need to revisit and in some cases re-categorise language is done so in order to disrupt assumptions about ethics, agency and knowledge. The importance of language continually being re-enlivened in the way it relates to others, acknowledges the other, and is in proximity to the other, is essential and is reflected as both a methodology and outcome in my *Key to Key Words* output.

The projects of my research inquiry have followed a two-part ethical methodology (developed through my *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation*); pre-event –ensuring that the environment of the exhibition space, the material and staging of the object-props pose no harm to agents or each other; and post-event – analysis of the artefact-object materials in examining form, surface and traces of intra-acting agency. Returning to the encounter as the site of ethical responsibility, in staging my object-props at the threshold of the exhibition spaces, I ensured relevant health and safety risk assessments were completed/ guidelines followed. My stagings offered no information on how the work (object-props) should be encountered. The ability for relations to be received without relation, without becoming known, is an important idea for my research. Such approach offering the best opportunity for gathering accurate material data. This approach does however prompt careful consideration of the situated co-relational dynamics of things as the thing that allows for the agency of the encounter between these things to occur (the construct of the stagings of my projects outlined in detail in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*).

The entanglement of agency holds complex ethical dimensions. The agency of things is their power. Spinoza's framework of ethics (which is nearly 350 years old) has relevance now in re-visiting the core concerns of being, agency and affect (modifications) as a complex set of relational ideas considered within my research. Things, in Spinoza's terms occur through motion and rest. Here he conceives things through their modes – theorising that bodies cannot modify ideas, and ideas cannot cause modifications of bodies. Bodies can however be assumed to have power through the encounter they participate in, through being and through the act of doing action (motion). For example,

in my projects, these core concerns are evidenced through the trace of the agent signing the contract in *True and Correct* or touching the PVC strips of the curtain in *Fourth Wall*. The being of bodies (agent(s)) positions them as things which have an enabling ability and agency to modify other things, enacting agency during the exhibition event. This is a finding of my research inquiry which as *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation* outlines generates affect. For Spinoza, the knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of a cause (Spinoza, 1677/ 1996). Spinoza proposed that things are not classified as good or bad, instead things are considered as modifications of substances that are not themselves independent beings. In terms of my research, modifications of substances which have occurred as a result of an affect (through their encounter with things) can be understood in terms of their materials –the creasing of paper in the contracts of *True and Correct*, or the flattening of the fibres of the tufted door mats in *Front Stage: Back Stage* (for example). The cause being a projected knowledge (Stages 3 and 4 of my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*) and the affect being a knowledge of the matter as data (Stage 5 of my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*).

As *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker* outlined, the exhibition space is the arena in which action occurs and agency comes to matter in the formation of the artworks (as objects-in-flux). The agent(s) and object-props within the exhibition event have free agency; there are no commands, no instructions, no disclaimers, no right or wrong way for the agent(s) or object-props to perform. Here agents see, think and feel; there are choices with consequences which directly impact on the object-props. Agents and object-props being with each other and other things, and the act of the encounter takes precedent over the individual who devised them. This understanding has shaped the ethical approach to producing findings. The ethical responsibilities and consequences of this act of staging for potentials of co-formation is complex as a result of the co-relational performative action of things and the human and non-human object relations at stake. Here creating a level playing field of ethical systems of art and knowledge production is essential and a key aspect of my research inquiry (the findings of which are presented in the form of a *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* methodological guide).

My research, in the ethical consideration of things acknowledges that issues of power are always present in the exhibition space and need to be negotiated. The staging of the exhibition event and the object-props creates a structure (or mechanism of power). This staging facilitates encounters (in which agents exert their power) and correspondences of agency (in which objects of knowledge gather power). Such agency questions the hierarchies at play in the exhibition space. It is helpful here to discuss the idea of hierarchy in its own terms. Hierarchy, in its basic application is the way things are organised – going from high to low. Problems have been identified with hierarchy and power in relation to art production, reception, language, criticism and artistic authorship (as identified previously in this thesis). I refer to hierarchy in relation to my research in



instances where this high to low order is presented in the relationship between the artist-curator, agent(s) and objects. These relations and the positions they often occupy or assume are not universal – they are historically co-related with developments in humanism, modernity and Europeanism (for example). In the paper *Flattening Hierarchy's of Display: The Liberating and Levelling Powers of Objects and Materials*, (2017), Judith Spijksma and Ann-Sophie Lehmann discuss re-centring the object as a means of increasing its agency. They draw attention to the linkage between the agency of the object and questions of classifications through the object's ability to stage relations. They state that the material or materiality of the objects allows for them to fall between the cracks of hierarchies and traditional systems of ordering (Spijksma and Lehmann, 2017). My research argues that the potential of materials to tackle structured dichotomies of practice elevates the object from its subjugation, reconfiguring the object-human hierarchy. In ethical terms it is important to state that the object has agency not only in human terms, but also in its own terms (an idea I expand on in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*). Here I acknowledge that whilst a hierarchy still exists between artist-curator, object and agent(s), in relational dynamics, this hierarchy is complex and shifting. Awareness of this shifting (and the agency of all parts in the formation process between things) is, I argue, essential. For example, without the agent(s)'s agency in *Front Stage: Back Stage*, the shoe cover object-props would not have been activated, their material properties likely not altered. Similarly, without the tarpaulin polyester used to construct the security bollards in *Dispositif*, the agency of the agent(s) might not have been recorded (and the acknowledgement of them not made possible).

Barad, in acknowledging the entanglement of issues (in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*) refers to *ethico-onto-epistem-ology* as the inseparability, in the research and knowledge production process, between ethics, ontology and epistemology (Barad, 2007, p. 90). Ethico-onto-epistemological research is intra-active in the encounters between the human and non-human beings, described by Barad as inhabitants that co-constitute the world (Barad, 2007, p. 90). Intra-activity between things (object-props, the exhibition space/ event, agents, other objects) produces an immediate and direct indebtedness to these things. This indebtedness is an entanglement of obligation which produces ethical debt to the other. Within my research inquiry I argue that relationality demands an ethical, ontological, and epistemological transformation in the dimensions of knowledge production possible through the agency and material of objects as things. I as the artist-curator have a responsibility to the object-props and their material, but also a debt to them in the knowledge sharing they allow as artefact-objects. Applied to my research, the exploration of the ethico-onto-epistem-ology informs the staging of object-props in a way which is ethical (and which is expanded on later in this chapter). Here systems of making are created through situations of order (the construct of the object-props positioned at the threshold to the exhibition space) which allow for a material (object-prop-thing) disorder

in a process of what Harold Garfinkel discusses in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* as ethnomethodological co-construction (Garfinkel, 1991). This is the act of co-relational co-formation that happens.

## **An ethical methodology**

The title of my research inquiry designates its purpose and methodology as a critical operative concept of practice. My research asks ethical questions, and through the being and actions of things there is an active process which occurs; a forming, re-framing, rejecting, completing which in the given situation implicates an ethical concern. In utilising pre-existing understandings of the exhibition space and the exhibition event I acknowledge the ethical collisions in my positioning of agents and objects as active (yet unknowing) co-formers through the agency potentials of them being present. The staging of the encounter between things is prior to, and during the event, unknown and unquantifiable, meaning I (as the artist-curator) cannot anticipate how the encounter will unfold, and cannot with certainty assume the way in which actions play out. At the centre of this research amongst these things is myself, the artist-curator, whose intentions serve as an ethical measure of the work. Disrupting the established ethical order (of traditional academic as opposed to contemporary art practice methodologies) I would argue provides a significant opportunity for insight into modes of formation (research and making) and offers ways of challenging existing conventions within and beyond the exhibition space.

My research analysis and findings sit post-event (in the artefact-objects). As such the practice I am employing is not categorised as either participatory or interactive, which is an important distinction in understanding and approaching the ethics of this research where the presence of the agent(s) in the exhibition space, during the event should not be entangled with participatory research ethics. It is important, at this stage, to re-affirm the conceptual-ethical intentions of my practice which positions agents (humans) not as objectified material but as things which warrant greater acknowledgement in the ways we write, talk about and conceive contemporary art practices. Contrary to the problematic use of bodies (in works predicated on embodied and physical performances and on the body as material) I aim to elevate the status of the agent through the importance placed on their being in the art formation and research generating process, and to position the objects at the centre of this research – as objects of knowledge production. This is an important distinction in the ethical positioning of my methodology as one in which the agency and being of agents is traceable and acknowledged not through researching them, but through researching the objects they may or may not encounter during the exhibition event.

Every act of formation results in an expansion of knowledge. The process of formation (regardless of context) can therefore always be considered an act of research. Art practice is a form of research in which we reflect on the importance of care for, and empathy with, each other and other things. In approaching the ethics of my research, I began by drawing on my own experience of visiting exhibitions. The staging of exhibitions in which audiences are part-of, and immersed-in, works is a commonly used approach within contemporary art practices. Throughout this thesis I cite examples in order to allow me to contextualise my practice and comment on my own experience from both within and outside of works. This has informed the development of my research methodology and, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, these examples have often provoked in me a pushing back, a challenging, a wanting to re-categorise or re-think. Take for example Pierre Huyghe's artwork *L'Expédition scintillante, Act 5 (Black Ice Rink)* (2002). Here he staged an environment of evolving possibilities through the un choreographed movements of an un-named dancer who continually scratched the surface of the ice over the duration of the exhibition event. The audience watched on as the dancer's agency and labour created the unfolding of the work and as the material of the ice rink slowly began to melt and crack. The potentials of open-ended artwork such as this were described by Huyghe in an interview with Ben Eastham for *Art Review* as 'conceiving the conditions in which things happen before watching them play out' (Eastham, 2018, n.p).



Figure 42: *L'Expédition scintillante, Act 5 (Black Ice Rink)*,  
Pierre Huyghe. 2002  
Centre Pompidou, Paris (©Esther Schipper)

Complex ethical dimensions are often played out in the exhibition space during the exhibition event. It is important for my research to acknowledge artworks that problematise or test concepts of ethics. Practice which promotes participation as a key conceptual concern (for which ethical methodologies could be problematised) includes that of Santiago Sierra whose work has been widely discussed for its use of human

performers as labourers and for the exploitation of situations. The exchange in Sierra's work is rarely elevated to recognise these labourers (or their audience) as co-formers in the work of art. The situation Sierra sets up between participants (performance) and the audience is intended to create discomfort in being within a situation. An example of this can be seen in his 2002 piece enacted at Tate Modern: *Group of Women Facing a Wall*. Grant Kester (whose theories of dialogical art practices I discuss in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*) criticises Sierra's practice for prohibiting possible exchanges (between performers, audiences and artists) and for not offering an ethical critique in mobilising social discourse or interaction beyond the strategy of the artist to agitate and take on the role of the protagonist (Kester, 2004). For Kester things (human and non-human) possess meanings which, when they come into contact with a viewer (in the case of my research agent) carry aesthetic significance (*Dialogical Aesthetics*, Kester, 2004). I share these concerns about Sierra's work and recognise the potential of Kester's ideas to bridge the ethical gap between process and production.



Figure 43: *Group of Women Facing a Wall*  
Santiago Sierra, 2002  
Tate Modern, London (©Tate Modern)

It is important within the stages of conceiving artistic practice methodologies to be clear what is contingent on the agent(s), the objects and the exhibition space/ event. Taking Kester's approach, it becomes essential that all components of the exhibition event (as things which have been active in the construction of knowledge) are recognised (post-event) in understanding the complex set of relationships at play. These relations must be ethically communicated, through the use of the term agent, in writing about the co-relational co-formation of the work and through consideration of environments, choice of objects, acknowledgment of being and moral intentions (of the artist-curator) in the staging of the event.

In shifting from making practice, to making practice as research for academic purposes, I have attempted to embody an ethics of care in attending to the needs of the agent(s), the object(s), the exhibition space, myself as the artist-curator and the relational situations I have constructed. For example, in my second project, *Dispositif*, an ethics of care ensured that the object-props (taking the form of bollards) were securely installed, wheelchair



access was possible around them, the surface of the material was smooth (meaning no harm could be caused by the agent(s) encountering it). I also ensured, in developing an ethical methodology, that the process of acquiring knowledge comes through the experience of objects and my observation of them (post-event). The agents are never observed or photographed by me. Here, I again refer to Barad who draws attention to the problematics of observation and agency as an ethical methodology (2007). Applying her thoughts on the inseparability of the agencies of observation and the object of observation, the entangled mesh of artist-curator is brought into question. This issue is addressed through my acknowledgement of the physical-conceptual phenomena of formation (which Barad describes as material-discursive) and through my detailed written and photographically documented observations of the material of the post-event artefact-objects (see *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*). Such detail on the conditions of the material of the artefact-objects are important for understanding the ethical considerations that took place. At the same time as employing an ethics of care, my research has also been positioned to raise questions about practice of this nature. These are questions which are reflected upon in the post-event analysis in contributing to and shaping current and future discourses (see *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*).

## **Ethics of agents**

The first chapter of my research inquiry (*A Matter of Terminology*) defines the term agent as the role of the other person or persons, present during the exhibition event, capable of affecting object-prop things through their being. The agent as relational, as thing, as physical body whether understood as 'object' or 'activator' (knowing or un-knowing) has the potential of agency within a constructed situation and a system of relations. The agent is not considered a material, though the crucial involvement of the agent(s) demands an inquiry into the ethics of staging the trace of their being (and actions) through objects as a reflective model for undertaking practice-as-research of this nature.

Butler, in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* explores who counts as human. Butler claims that the condition of being human is relational, whereas to be a body is to be given over to others (Butler, 2004, p.20). Butler's positioning of the body as a site and agent of performativity which is open to interpretations or possible re-significations, prompted my thinking around the performative materiality of things (building on the ideas of performativity I outlined in the previous chapter). The body of the agent is considered in terms of its physical agency – one which performs and enacts encounters with things. One that is by its very nature relational. Such entanglements between the body and the object-props brings with them ethical considerations. Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, in discussing the interconnected nature

of ethics says 'one which cannot be freed of its complicity with what it most strongly opposes' (Butler, 1997, p. 65). She goes on to discuss the paradox between reflexive being, complicity and the relation between ethics, power and what might be derived from this.

A focus on (and attentiveness to) matter and its agentic potentials does not diminish the ethical issues of the being of agents within relational dynamics of agency (as highlighted by Butler). It does however bring into question the importance of potentials between, of and with things (that constitute a meshwork of relations). Foucault suggests in *What is Enlightenment* that '...control over things is mediated by relations with others, and relations with others in turn always entails relations with oneself and vice versa' (Foucault, 1984, p. 48). The agency of the interaction is conceptualised by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* as something which circulates through a 'network of relations' (Foucault, 1979/ 1995, p. 27). Within my research inquiry power relations are traced not through the agent themselves, but through their encounter with the object-props (as evident in the post-event artwork-artefact-objects – the surface and form of their matter). These artefact-objects are analysed (post-event) in order to understand the specificity and interconnectedness of power and knowledge which Foucault describes as the axis of ethics (Foucault, 1984, p. 48). This analysis (in terms of my research inquiry) is presented in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation* where the being and agency of things (including agent(s)) is both speculated upon and acknowledged.

The terms interaction (intra-action), activation, engagement, participation and collaboration are active doing words. They are words that indicate the presence (physical response) and decision making (intellectual engagement) of the agent(s). The agency of the agent(s), for the purpose of my research, is considered as an assembly of bodies and exchanges, things amongst other things. Foucault in *Power/knowledge: selected interviews & other writings* discusses performances as actions that are permeated by intricate sets of power relations intrinsically connected to the body as a vehicle of power (Foucault 1980, p. 98). Foucault believed that power created systems of knowledge and expertise so that it could reinforce its power over the subject's body, (Foucault, 1979/ 1995, p. 25). The agent within my research inquiry is both the individual and the collective; a body and/ or group of bodies. The bodily exchange between things I stage is possible through the structure and systems of relations at play during the exhibition event – through the performative positioning of an actor and the use of the turnstile which had to be traversed in *True and Correct* and through the placement of two sculptural objects (resembling security bollards) at the entrance to the exhibition space for *Dispositif* which needed to be navigated (to cite two examples of relations staged within my practice-research). Through their movement and intra-actions agents hold and exert power using their bodies. This is what Foucault refers to (in *Power/knowledge: selected interviews & other writings*) as *BioPower* (1980). There is a clear distinction in the 'use' of the body within my research in comparison to the use of the body within performance art (whereby

the body becomes the medium) and participatory art (whereby the body is framed as a receiver of the actions of the artwork). The systems of relations I construct allow for the process of co-formation to occur (via the object-props) through the being and agency of the agent(s) giving power over to them.

Ethics can be considered a complex set of relays with affect and agency at its centre. My research understands affect and agency as potential forces and powers not specific to the human body but as present through the co-relational being of things (agent(s), exhibition space/ event, object-props). My research is not conceived to explore issues of deception (and the negative connotations this word holds). This approach changes the ethical engagement of my research. The value base in my inquiry (staged situations) cannot be quantified but can be used to generate objects of knowledge (post-event artefacts) as things which allow assumptions to be understood – the surface material analysis of each of the PVC strips in *Fourth Wall* recording scratches; the addition of liquid-like marks suggesting the spill of coffee from a cup, grease or moisture from hands and the slight warping of the edge of one of the strips suggesting multiple agent(s) had been in contact (for example).

## **Ethics of objects**

The ethics of responsibility I have to the object-props begins with the staging in providing the opportunity for them to intra-act. According to Barad (in *Intra-Actions*, Barad and Kleinmann, 2012) ‘responsibility’, in the context of agential realism, is not about the right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the other. The idea of the object as the thing responsive to and responsible for the knowledge it holds is key for my research methodology. In the positioning of the object as knowledge (where the object is put through a practice of knowing via being), it is important to acknowledge the enabling constraints (the staging of the object-props within the exhibition event) which are crucial to what Barad describes as the ‘agential-cuts’ in the emergence of difference (Barad 2007, p. 175). This emergence of difference (which occurs through an entablement between things) and the trace of the agential-cut (recorded through the material of the object), is the formation of knowledge (through, on and with the object itself). These ‘cuts’ (traceable post-event) allow us to make sense of activity, action and relations; this is the ethical endeavour of human-object enactments that myself as the artist-curator must take responsibility for. They inform how matter (artefact-objects) came to matter. The post-event artefact-objects have a responsibility of knowing and I have a responsibility to them in reflexively recording and translating the knowledge they hold.

Referring back to Levinas, the idea of the trace of agency is central to my research inquiry in my use of objects (props which become artefacts) to enact and facilitate a practice of co-relational co-formation. Within my research (and within practice of this nature) I put forward the idea of materials (in the form of object-props) as participants and performers in the making of knowledge. The object-props in their staging and configuration have agency; they are placed to perform, strategically positioned to generate an encounter, to transfer and trace action. The trace collects information on behaviour, being and agency – evidencing the interaction between relationality and formation, between agents and objects. Here my research focus (as with Levinas's concept of being) is not concerned with monitoring the being of agents during the exhibition event, but in analysing (post-event) what co-relational knowledge objects hold – this the central idea that was outlined in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*. It also aligns with Levinas's idea, cited by Ze'ev Levy in *On Emmanuel Levinas's Concepts of 'Trace' and 'Otherness'*, as the trace of being signifying the presence of being no longer present (Levy, 1995, p. 290). The otherness Levinas refers to as *Alterity* (in *Alterity and Transcendence*, 1999), which can be considered as a fluid translation of the untranslatable, is something which exceeds the human ability to fully understand it – the thing that is more than written or spoken language. I position this thing as an object which carries with it ethical responsibility of the encounter between language, methodological frameworks of production and otherness. Otherness comes to be through the relationality of things (relationality which Levinas emphasises as crucial in his theory of otherness). This relationality traceable through the material and matter of object-props (the significance of trace is expanded further in *Chapter 4: A Critical Reading*).

In doing research with objects, things (which become active agents in the construction of a networked formation), embody and generate knowledge. This knowledge is traceable through the resulting artworks (artefact-objects). In the opening to her essay *Ways of Seeing: A New Museum Story for Planet Earth* for the Wellcome Collection, Grace Ndiritu discusses the dichotomies of thinking between objects and bodies writing that '...it should no longer be a question of if objects have a soul, but what we can do to heal this split in our thinking' (Ndiritu, 2021, n.p). She goes on to cite an experience of seeing the Ancient Egyptian objects in the British Museum where she perceived them as being unhappy and feeling objectified. She recounts that these objects '...feel like they are being robbed of their agency, with no rights of their own. As such they want to be free' (Ndiritu, 2021). Drawing on the ideas of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), Ndiritu puts forwards a practice of speculation in which we understand how objects exist and interact by listening to them, assessing them, asking them questions, and responding to them. In this proposal, and within my research, objects are positioned at the centre of the inquiry as things which not only have agency but also have the ability to communicate with us. Do the objects have feelings? What would they say if they were able to speak? How do we as humans communicate with them or for them? How do we acknowledge their agency? The ethical



responsibility that I as the artist-curator have to the objects must be considered. My practice-writing outputs go some way in exploring this through attempting to give voice and/ or acknowledgement to the objects in demonstrating they ways that I as the artist-curator have worked with and cared for/ about them (for instance, in Act 2, Stage 2, in the account of *Fourth Wall*, I as the narrator announce that the object-prop is 'positioned as the frontier of possibility').

The ethics of my research are ethics based on co-relations in which objects (matter) form a material framework for researching with other things. The entanglement of things allowing for the making process which I argue is co-formed and cannot be separated to a singular author or being. This process is what Barad calls (in her paper *Posthumanist performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter*) 'a relational ontology that rejects individualism' (Barad, 2003, p. 814). The staging of things, coming into contact with other things (through the encounter), reconfigures matter through each intra-action (Barad, 2007). The resulting artwork objects (artefact-objects) signify in their material matter, the trace of co-being of agents and their agencies (agencies which emerge through their intra-action). The mutual constitution of entangled agency through being (rather than instruction) is here essential in the dynamic of intra-active emergence at play. The PVC strips of curtain from *Fourth Wall* are not mine – they have altered since they were installed in the exhibition space, prior to the event of the exhibition. They are not the agents – they were not to be taken away; they are not their own to hold claim to their formation being a result of just their own matter. The ethics of their being is complex.

Barad pushes for a radical change in the way we approach ethical engagements in performative material practices through an understanding of objects, entities and phenomena present within constructed situations. Barad refers to this as knowledge politics which can anchor actions through matter, diffraction and a reworking of the apparatus. The apparatus within my research is a staging that constructs a diffraction (a process of ongoing differences) post-event, acting as a tool for analysis to understand the continuous becoming of the object-props as things which have knowledge making capacities (Barad, 2007). Difference as a mode and condition in which phenomenological disclosure comes about takes place through presence. Barad's thinking and emphasis on entanglement has direct relevance to my research inquiry in the application of her ideas to the staging of an object-prop, material and performative relational practice within the exhibition space during the exhibition event. Here the focus is on the conceptualisation of the moment of the encounter and the entanglement. The ethics of the objects in what they trace (what is included in their entanglement) is at the centre of the process of agential realism. The object-props generate the agential cuts – the set of ethical responsibilities during the formation lies with them and the artist-curator who has produced and placed them. Post-event the artefact-object offers the opportunity for understanding processes of entangled formation through which material properties,

agency and traces of being emerge. Here the artist-curator must also pay attention to what has been excluded in the knowledge of the object. My research (evidence of the outcomes recorded in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*) probes at the opportunity of being open to learn about encounters, entanglement and formations through the form, matter, material and agency of things .

Material ethics, in the context of my research, constitutes the ethical being, the ethical framing and the ethical analysis of the material structure of the objects (props and artefacts) as the non-human things of research. These things are not merely passive objects that are encountered; they embody value, they have meaning attributed to them (by us as agents, artists-curators, critics), they have worth (both as objects of research and as conceptually staged art objects). The post-event artefact-objects of my research are produced through what Barad describes as the agential qualities of matter – that is matter that is not fixed but which has the ability to generate and become (Barad, 2007). Material ethics take into consideration the agency of the objects (positioned as props, presented as artworks) whilst contesting the state of art objects as static and fixed. My research, in its use of objects as props and artefacts, considers the idea of the de-materialisation of art (an idea put forward by Lippard in 1973 and touched on in the introduction to this thesis) in which art emerges as both idea and as action. My research inquiry understands the de-materialisation of art from object to process, but then re-materialises this practice through the role of the object (prop to artefact) within the art making process. In Lippard's proposed states of artwork (concept and action), she problematises objecthood (though recognises that it cannot be done away with). In her seminal text, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (1973) Lippard projected the idea of a future without objects, the obsolete being of the object framed through a reliance on studios as sites of material production causing objects to no longer exist as discrete autonomous things. I would argue that the art object continues to have an important place in knowledge production and indeed art practice. My research positions the object as matter with agency and knowledge producing ability (beyond the studio) and in this process reconfigures (and challenges) the relational dynamic between de-materialised object and de-centred agent in both material and ethical terms.

The exhibition event fosters this on-going relationality and formation of things. This is both an artistic, curatorial and collaborative activity. In reconsidering the de-materialisation from objects to processes of making (traceable through the physical object itself), the exhibition event is proposed as a system which presents an organisation of matter through which the agency of things can be tested (material research) and through which formation can occur. This formation is a material stress or distress (an indent in the paper of the contract or transference of ink from finger-tip to the material surface of the pens in *True and Correct* for example) which must also be considered ethically in the materials we work with, their sustainable footprint and post-event care (for example my

decision to donate the door mats used in *Front Stage: Back Stage* to the Ruskin Gallery for future/ alternative uses). The space and time of this exhibition event (as the moment of the staging) allows what Barad describes as *spacetime mattering* (Barad, 2007). The agential cuts that Barad outlines (made through agent intra-actions) have a correspondence of enactment to them (a trace made through the entanglement of things). Barad proposes that the act of materialisation is a result of human and non-human relations and the matter they encounter. She goes on to expand on the entangled nature of space, time, mattering in outlining a theory of diffraction as a system which traces connections within a field of relations (Barad, 2007). The objects-props within my research provide support for the exploration of intra-active relations of co-being, not as an end in themselves, but as a process. Here the apparatus of staging the exhibition event creates a process of material entanglement; the object-props performing inclusions and exclusions with their agency. The post-event artefact-objects exist because of the staged interactions resulting from the material relationships between things; the debt and ethical care owed to the objects of matter (props) which facilitated these co-relational possibilities is acknowledged in the modes of formation and terminology I propose as outcomes of this research (*Key to Key Words, Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* and my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*).

The artist-curator conceives and configures the network of interfaces in which relations are mediated and exchanges occur multiple times (through multiple agents across the duration of the event). The ethical care of the object-props in their becoming as artefact-objects (the performed making and resulting outcomes proposed as the artwork), is held by the artist-curator (who in the case of this inquiry is also the researcher). The genealogy of the term curator stems from the task of caring for objects and collections. My research extends this in positioning the artist-curator as the person responsible for the ethics of care of the objects (pre, during and post the event). The artist-curator cares about the system they are staged within, their conditions of production, their interactions, their material and so forth. The objects (props) within the exhibition space construct meaning, they reference the exhibition's conceptual framework, they reference a system. In many ways they are coerced into being there – in ethical terms this must be acknowledged. They are at once declared objects of potential as props, before then being elevated to objects which present as artworks, to then become (post exhibition) things preserved to provide a temporary (before these artefact-objects are re-used or re-cycled) historic archive of information. This is information which allows me (the artist-curator-researcher) to look back (in Ingold's terms of re-searching) to trace the presence of agents. The proposition here is that we should seek to build co-formed practices with non-human objects which include all entities (objects, environments, agent) to move from assumed knowing (mind) to proposed knowing (meaning) to the points of learning through (agency) and with objects of knowledge (matter). The ethics of being and knowing, Barad suggests, are inseparable; research is entangled. The lively

indeterminacy of matter allows us to create an ethical regard for things in their becoming as or through other things (Barad, 2007).

## **Ethics of knowledge**

Ethics, Gary Edson clarifies in his text *Museum Ethics in Practice*, define standards of integrity and competence beyond that required by law (Edson, 2007). There is no ethical situation where there is not a pre-existing value base. Ethics, in the context of the exhibition space, is understood to be about social responsiveness to and care of, the audience. I extend this understanding, through my research to put forward a practice of ethical care which considers the ethics of agents, objects and knowledge (through the entangled ethics of things). Barad, in her work around ethics (which I have drawn on throughout this chapter), poses important questions about responsive and responsible knowledge making through process driven systems of things in which being is a co-dependent entity. She writes, 'Ethics is about being response-able to the way we make the world, and to consider the effects our knowledge-making processes have on the world' (Barad, 2007, p. 381).

If post-structuralism promoted systems of co-produced knowledge in the formation of truth, theories of de-construction asserted the idea that knowledge is always changing – that things exist in a system of indeterminate possibilities. The ethics of knowledge is an entanglement of things. Knowledge co-emerges through the relational conditions which are in some way staged to record it. In *Symptoms of the Planetary Condition: A Critical Vocabulary*, Mercedes Bunz, Bridgit Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele write that '...the complicity and co-emergence of any knowledge or assessment with what is known and with whoever knows it, is always perspectival, situated and implicated in nature' (Bunz, Kaiser, Thiele, 2018, p. 8). They go on to suggest that entanglements in the production of knowledge preclude distinctions between subject and object, knower and known, instead arguing that these distinctions emerge in the relational field of power. As such the ethics of knowledge production is a complex and deeply entangled thing. Knowledge runs in all directions; artist-curator to object-prop, object-prop to agent, agent to object-prop, object-prop to exhibition space, exhibition space to agent, artefact-object to artist-curator and vice versa. This processual entanglement blurs the distinctions between what is known and by whom. The knowledge I have access to through the process of post-event analysis (of the surface and form of the artefact-object) is the material knowledge of the object (documented photographically and through practice-as-writing). Here I have attempted to position knowledge as something held by the object but generated through the entanglement of things, thus positioning practice (and research) as co-relationally co-formed. This understanding asserts that knowledge has been co-generated through; me as the artist-curator (conceiving the exhibition events within the Coventry Evening



Telegraph building, the gallery at Birmingham School of Art and the Ruskin Gallery Cambridge), through the object-props (the turnstile, the pens, the paper contract, the tarpaulin bollards, the door mats, the perspex boxes, the shoe covers and the PVC curtain) and through the agents(s) (their being and the enactment of their agency).

In an inquiry which focuses on the catalytic capabilities of things is what Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, describes as a shared vital materiality (Bennett, 2010). In Bennett's terms knowledge is not owned or authored by anyone or any individual thing. It is more complex and requires complex ethical thought and understanding. Of way of thinking ethically Bennett says, 'To begin to experience the relationship between persons and other materiality more horizontally, is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility' (Bennett, 2010, p. 10). Bennett discusses her intention to distribute ethical concerns more evenly across things in order to open up the hierarchical order (Bennett, 2010, p. 12). She writes '...attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem of human exploitation or oppression, but it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations' (Bennett, 2010, p. 13). Whilst Bennett's statement could be read as dehumanising (as it seems to privilege materiality over sensate or perceptive human abilities) her point is raised not to undermine the significance of ethical staging in relation to agents (recognising their agency and affect as essential). Instead, it is included to draw greater attention to the non-human vitality in aiming to expand ethical thinking and understanding of the relational dimensions and being of things (in sharing agency, power and responsibility more evenly).

The outcome of this chapter, the *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* sets out the moral accountability and responsibility of my research (and practice of this nature) allowing artist-curators to ethically consider the dynamics at play between things through the staging of their co-relational being with other things. Here disruptions to more traditional methodological frameworks have been essential in producing new knowledge, new taxonomies and revised thinking about a practice which pays attention to the ethics of all things.

# PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL CO-FORMATION

Acknowledge, as a starting point, that issues of power are always present in the exhibition space and need to be negotiated.

Everything is inherently part of a socio-political context and as such ensure that the staging of practice is always conceived by the artist-curator with responsibility.

The exhibition space should be inclusive and open – a space of relations, of possibility. It should be a public, clearly defined exhibition space. Within the exhibition space, the duration of the exhibition event should be outlined. The exhibition space should pose no risk or harm to anyone.

Agents will not be selected – there is no prejudice and no criteria against which one might act as an agent in the exhibition space – everyone can be an agent.

The object-props should be formed from materials that pose no risk of harm to any thing. They should be risk assessed and invigilated.

There should be no instructions. Allow space for and respect the capacity of things to make their own choices, to enact or withhold agency.

Do not document agents, document the object-props only.

The object records being, action and intra-action. The material of the objects is your data, your findings. Do not assume knowledge. Observe this material (pre- and post-event). Document its form and surface.

Collective over individual action and agency is recorded through the trace of things. The co-relational co-formation prioritises the triangulation of things over the individual.



RUSKIN GALLERY, CAMBRIDGE  
JULY 2019

FRONTSTAGE

BACKSTAGE



**This play was staged in Cambridge over a period of three weeks. Rehearsals took place during the two months prior to this with different actors, props and production teams. This script contains an account of the performed actions and descriptions of what was played out where, and how.**

**The script describes the front (on stage) and back (behind the stage) activities of the performance.**

## Scene 1

### (Stage 1: Production of the Props)

#### Front Stage

##### 1.1 Sales Team

Orders for custom-made products must be directed to our sales team.

Our heavy-duty mats have a thick rubber nitrile base and a twisted nylon face which not only makes them extremely hardwearing and designed to last, but means that they can be trusted to prevent any potentially dangerous slips, trips and falls that might occur in the workplace.

Please allow 10 days for fabrication and 5 working days for delivery.

Boxes of industrial overshoes are available in white.

Industrial shoe covers (also known as overshoes) will fit shoes or boots up to UK size 11. With embossed soles and non-woven uppers these shoe covers are long lasting and can be reused.

Bespoke perspex boxes are the ideal choice for display. The boxes are custom made. The transparent material has a smooth surface that will protect and showcase your chosen display items.

#### Back Stage

##### 1.2 Artist-Curator

The conceptual framework of a staging involving three entry points are developed.

The props conceived for the staging are:

3 x large, clear, 6-sided, 500x500x 500mm, 5mm thick diamond polished perspex cubes with a 200mm circular hole cut in the top.  
200 x heavy duty white shoe covers, 16" elastic hem, not waterproof, tear-resistant, can be reused.  
3 x door mats, 900mm wide and 50mm deep, royal blue with white custom text printed.

Polythene, perspex, rubber, nylon: industrial materials. Clinical. Fabricated.

Resemblances to the ready-made are deliberate.

A questioning of the art-object should be at play during the staging.

The props have vibrant, non-human agencies.

The door mat prop is instructive: SHOE COVERS MUST BE WORN WHEN IN THE GALLERY SPACE. This is of course a redundant arbitrary request designed to prompt one of two engagements and designed to challenge the notion of hierarchy.

##### 1.3 Manufacturer

These are factory produced goods. The fabrication process is achieved by using the following processes - CNC routing; laser cutting; vacuum forming; heat bending; gluing; polishing; welding and oven forming.



## **Scene 2**

### **(Stage 2: Staging the conditions)**

#### **Front Stage**

##### **2.1 The Exhibition Space**

The exhibition space is a prop.

The Ruskin Gallery is given over for the duration of the exhibition.

There is a large central performance and viewing space.

There are three entrance points to the exhibition space.

The space will be painted before it is given over to the artist-curator.

The artist-curator will be responsible for installing their own artwork.

The space is staged to become an arena in which the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and place are created.

##### **2.2 Artist-Curators notes**

Invigilators will be present at all times during the exhibitions opening hours.

The exhibition is open to the public for a period of 15 days.

Anything the artist does in the space must be exhibition ready. The space must be left as it is found.

Performance at the private view and/or symposium is permissible.

Marketing material will be produced in anticipation of the event.

#### **Back Stage**

##### **2.3 Artist-Curator**

The exhibition space is given over to that of a performative making space.

The exhibition space is framed and considered a studio space, a laboratory.

The props are presented at the three entrance points to the exhibition space.

The props are objects.

The door mats carry an instruction.

The perspex boxes occupy space. They are sculptural, visual and announce their presence.

The shoe covers fill the Perspex boxes. They are a mass. They wait in anticipation; they are poised.

The object-props exist in an institutional context.

The agent cannot enter the space without encountering the object-props.

A decision, by the agent is necessary: an act or an action.

There is an instruction.

Instructions can be ignored.

Research in pursuit of a trace as a form of knowing is set in motion.

Agency is emergent.



## Scene 3

### (Stage 3: Performing the making)

#### Front Stage

##### 3.1 Invigilator

Agents enter the space.  
There is trepidation.  
A pause.  
A moment to consider, to assess.

Some agents proceed, traversing the threshold they have entered through, walking over the door mat. Ignoring the object-props.

Some agents follow the instructions outlined at the entrance to the space and wrestle with the shoe covers, balancing to pull them over their shoes.

Those agents wearing shoe covers make remarks about this action.  
Questions, comments, laughs.  
The purpose of the act is uncertain.

The sound of agents circulating the exhibition space with the object-props (shoe covers) activated resonates. A shuffle of the plastic against the polished floor. A creasing noise. A softening of the normal sound of footprints in the quiet gallery environment.

##### 3.2 Object-Props

I am trodden on. Walked over. Door mat.  
My fibres muddled with dirt, dust, compressed by the rubber soles of hard shoes.

I am fished out of the perspex box. Pulled away from the other shoe covers. Stretched over a slightly damp shoe. The residue of the water marks my surface. I set off on a journey around the exhibition space. Momentary pauses are experienced to observe the works on show. I am removed, tossed into a semi-empty box where I join other affected shoe covers. The dirt and dust of the gallery floor blemishes on my surface.

#### Back Stage

##### 3.3 Artist-Curator

I wait. I do not observe.

There is an event.  
An event is something which has a beginning (exhibition opening) and an end (exhibition closing).

The situation is given over.  
Control relinquished.  
The performative making must now run its course.

There is an exploration in process.

A dispersal of objects happens, is happening.

Notions of individual authorship surrendered.

The system for making is in play. Left to its own devices.

I do not know, the object-props do not know.  
The agents, to some extent, do not know.

The stage has been set for an encounter.  
The performance and the direction of the making process is in the agency of agent.

Making is now, during the event, in action.

Un-knowing is an important phase in the knowing through being process.

During the exhibition event shoe cover stocks are replenished by the invigilators.

Discarded shoe covers are collected as evidence ready to be examined.



## Scene 4 (Stage 4: Realisation of the Artwork)

### Front Stage

#### 4.1 Exhibition Space

There is a stillness.  
The doors close.  
The show is declared as being over.

Agents inhabit the space no more.

The performance is complete.

Remnants of the event remain.

#### 4.2 Object-Props

Materiality is live, affective during the event.

A number of us (shoe-cover object-props)  
begin to evidence traces of formation.

Form pulled out of place.  
Tightly coiled elastic becomes loose.  
Definition of our shape relaxed.

Materiality is signalling.

Post-event scuffs, indentations of treads,  
traces of dirt on our door mat surfaces.

We emerge as artefacts.

Fingerprints line our Perspex surfaces; smears  
as evidence of touch glistening in the light.

The agent(s) being is traceable.

We, the objects, hold knowledge of the event.  
We hold knowledge of the making process.  
We hold knowledge of the encounter.

We evidence an active engagement with  
the agent(s).

We are artworks.

### Back Stage

#### 4.3 Artist-Curator

The space, post-event, evidences a performance.

Something occurred.

The post-event objects are classified as  
artefacts.

An assemblage of artefacts.

They reference action, or in some cases  
in-action.

The artefacts trace the role of the agent in  
their formation.

The complexity of the relationship between  
the post-event objects and their plane of  
emergence are acknowledged.

Post-event it is evident that hierarchy was  
challenged.

Knowing in being is of the essence.

The object is not obsolete. The object comes  
into being as artwork.

Artefacts are artworks.

Artworks that were co-formed through  
co-relational encounters with the agent(s).



## **Scene 5**

### **(Stage 5: Post-event analysis)**

#### **Front Stage**

##### **5.1 Artist-Curator**

The agent is recognised as a co-former.

Credit is given through this research.

Proposition for co-relational co-formed practice is in production.

##### **5.2 The Artefacts**

We are observed, analysed, scrutinised.

There can be no proper facts without observation.

The research sits within us, on us, as us.

We are objects of knowledge which hold truths.

We hold an active role in knowing.

We are the realisations of co-relational, co-formation.

We exist as discrete autonomous objects visible in the world.

#### **Back Stage**

##### **5.3 The Analyst**

There is evidence of an encounter.

An encounter that took place between agents and object-props.

There is a history in the present.  
Objective distance is possible.

A situation for co-formation was produced.  
The agent was the co-former through their being and action.

The work of art is considered as the artefacts











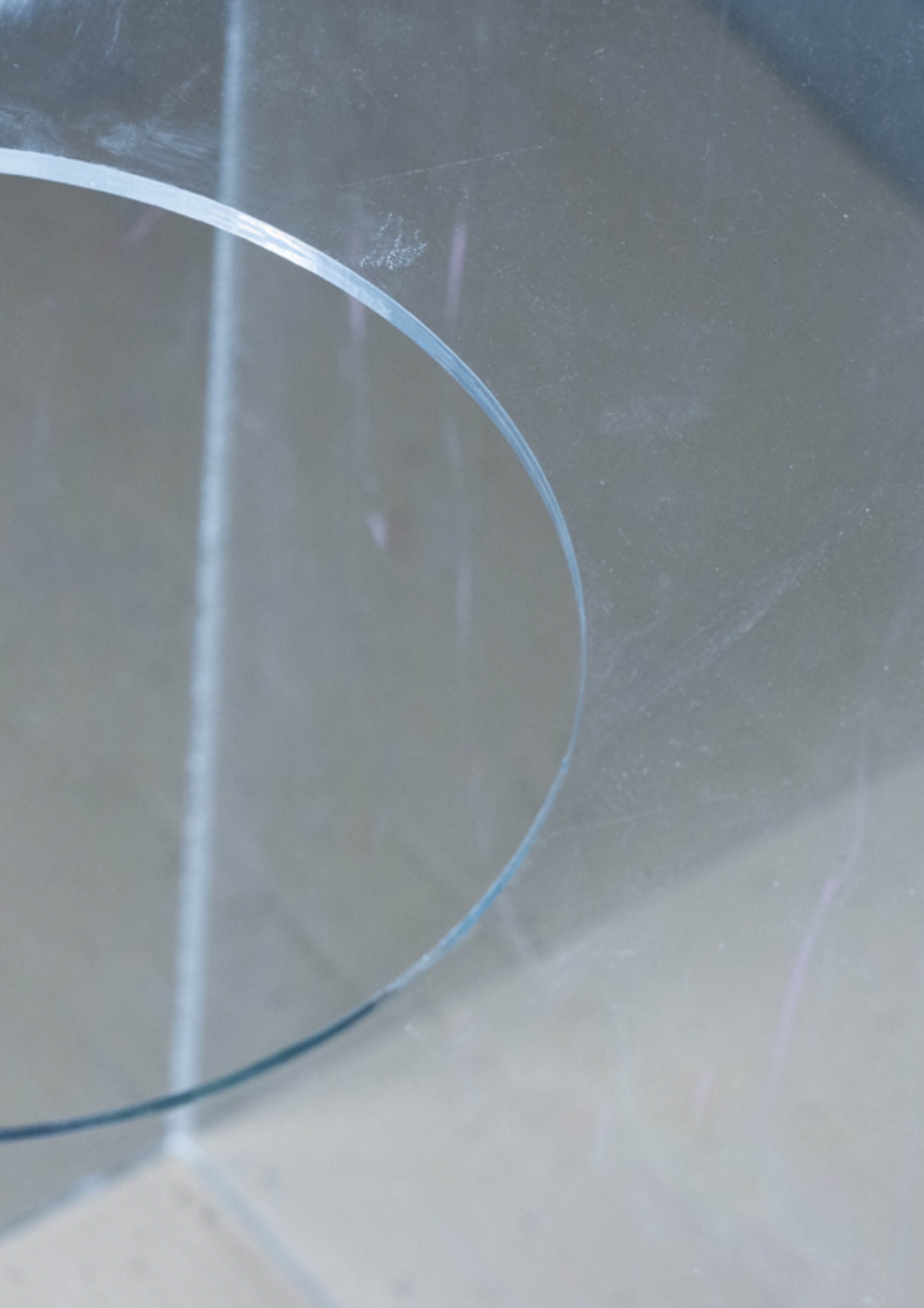






















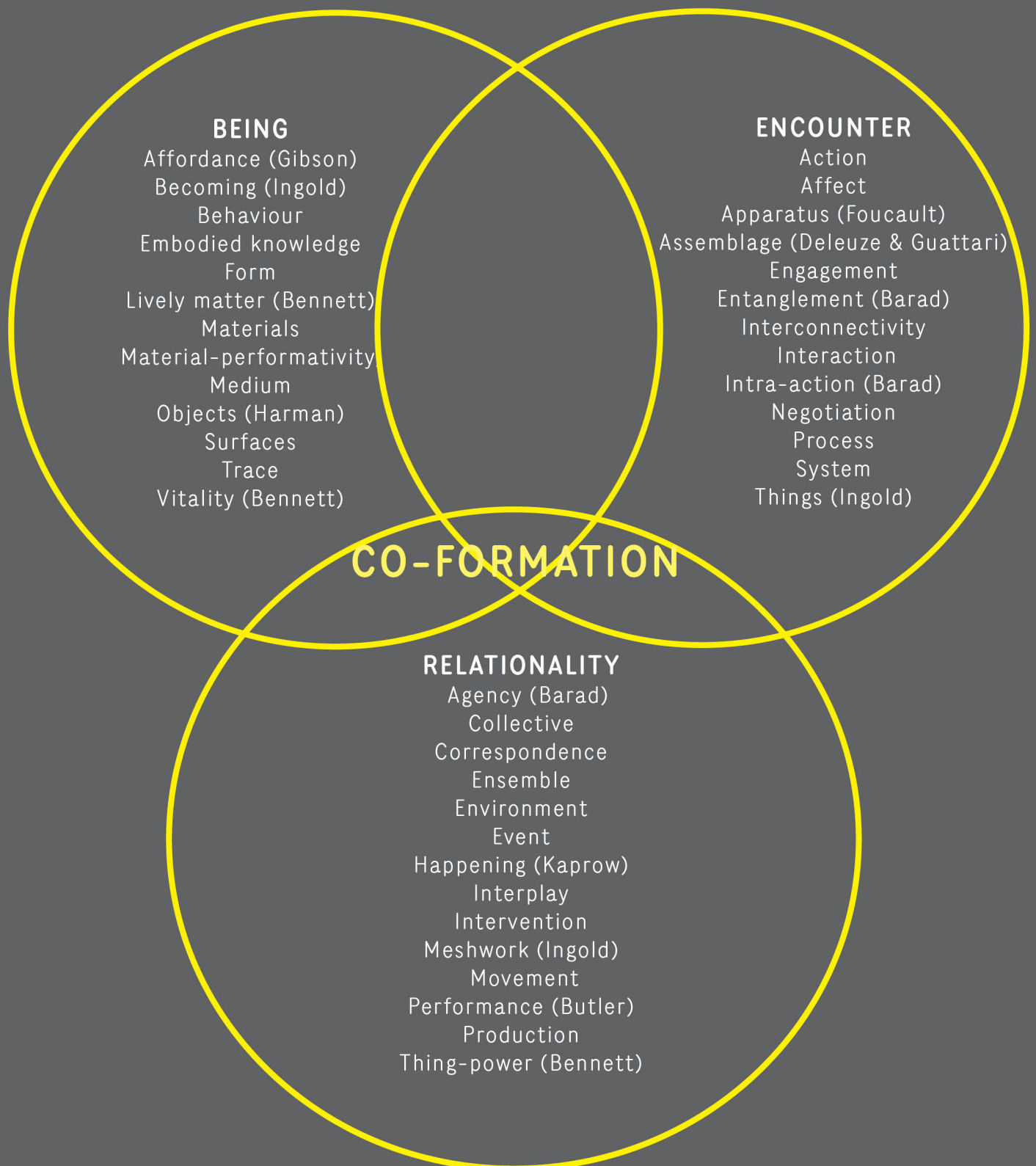








# A DIAGRAMATIC APPROACH TO THE CRITICAL READING OF THINGS



# Chapter 4:

## A Critical Reading

This chapter is focused on the critical thinking behind my research. Here I shift between citing research to challenge and affirm the ideas of others in positioning my research within a field of thinkers, and citing research to challenge, inform and affirm my own ideas. The relationality of the way I have engaged with theoretical research to some extent correlating with the aims of my inquiry. Within this chapter I re-visit and extend my research into the work of Karen Barad, Jane Bennett and Tim Ingold and a number of the critical thinkers who surround them in order to offer greater understanding of the interface (and entanglement) of (and between) things (human and non-human) in the context of the exhibition event. Recognising the intertwining of all phenomena, within this chapter I provide an account of being (human and non-human), matter/ materials/ mediums, objects, agency/ agents, the staging (the exhibition event and assemblages), performing co-formation and trace as I articulate the entanglements of material, discursive, relational practices through a critical reading of the critical, theoretical context of my research.

### Re-visiting language

Language is crucial to the critical reading undertaken within this chapter. At each stage of my research I am brought back to the question of language. The need to re-visit language is driven by the problematics of words in describing complex, nuanced, and open possibilities. A critique of, and concern with language is of course not specific to my inquiry. In the introduction to her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, Bennett outlines her project as ‘... an attempt to develop a vocabulary that addresses multiple modes and degrees of effectivity, to begin to describe a more distinctive agency’ (Bennett, 2010, p. viii - ix). Bennett’s interest in language arising due to a need to begin to describe discursive agency between human and non-human things on a less vertical plane (Bennett, 2010). Haraway (who I cited in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker* in recognising the relationship between her and Barad’s ideas), places emphasis on language in her proposal of a material semiotic actor (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 1991). For Haraway language is uncontainable, lively, living (Haraway, 1991). This idea is significant in the ability of language to act independently of the things it proposes. Barad is also concerned with language, however, her concern has levered towards the importance language has been awarded in theoretical critique – in the status that it has



been given over matter itself. She opened her essay *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter* with the statement:

Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every “thing” – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation... Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter. (Barad, 2003, p. 801)

The implication in Barad’s critique is a pitching of language against matter. What I have attempted to do throughout my research inquiry is to bring language and matter together as co-dependent, co-relational, co-informing and co-forming things. My research acknowledges that the language used to describe the processes of mattering matters very much – in the discourse of art criticism, in the way artist-curators develop practices, in informing the way agents act. My research has demanded an engagement with a breadth of thinkers in understanding the significance of linguistic applications and terms to the co-relational co-formed practice I put forwards. As such the linguistic field of references I cite are navigated in and out of in brief but significant ways. Through an interest in language (and in my role as an educator) I have often visited and re-visited the work of bell hooks. Her critique of language as a device and as a control mechanism (in the link between language and domination) are important reminders of the grounding of my research. Before an object-based methodology emerged, my research was driven by a concern over the failure of language to acknowledge the role of the agent (in exhibition making) in appropriate terms. The ability of language to forge a space for different ways of thinking and knowing is something hooks reminds me is essential in *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks, 1994, p. 224). Her work serves to reinforce the possibility and potential to make language do what we want it to do, to liberate ourselves and our being in language (hooks 1994, p. 227).

## **Being (human and non-human)**

The focus on material relations, material behaviours and material being is driven by a material curiosity. I seek to understand more about the potential of the human agent(s) to enact agency on the non-human elements within the entanglements of being through relational connections. Being, co-being and relational potentials of agency offered through the ‘presentness’ associated with being is at the core of my research inquiry. The being I am concerned with is the existence of things (human agents and object-props) within the exhibition space, during the exhibition event.

In dealing with being I will begin with the agent(s). The idea of being is tied to the idea of the body. The human body has affective capabilities through an ability to act or as Barad states (in *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*) ‘...the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very “atoms” of its being. ...bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena’ (Barad, 2003, p. 823). The body within my research is considered vibrant matter (that is, in Bennetts terms material that has vitality and a life) – not to disregard or devalue the cognitive capabilities of the body or to objectify the body, but to focus on its physical (vital) matter and its material-discursive phenomena producing capabilities. Here it is important to acknowledge Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of ‘bodily knowledge’ (first proposed in *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945) as a form of embodied knowledge in which we know in and through the body. Merleau-Ponty went on to outline (in his book *The Visible and the Invisible*) a phenomenological relational dynamic in which being is co-created through an embodied dialogical moment (such as the encounter), (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). In focusing on the intersection between phenomenon and new materialist thinking I do not engage with concepts or theories of consciousness of thought (a central idea in the work of Merleau-Ponty), instead I focus on the relational possibilities between things (in the physical sense). In acknowledging the role of the agent(s) as a physical being with consciousness, I draw on anthropological ideas of the human (being) considered (and analysed in research purposes) as a thing within a meshwork of things. Such meshwork offers insights for understanding the ways in which things can co-exist and co-evolve.

The complexity of the being of the body (as relational matter) is both acknowledged and problematised (as discussed in *Chapter 5: The Ethics of Things*). In focusing on the vital materiality of the body, my research has examined the processual production of matter from a non-cognitive, autonomous being (over reasoning) position (through the post-event artefact-objects). Such an approach has allowed me to better understand the positionality of things in their coming together. On being, Barad writes, ‘The idea that beings exist as individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation, is a metaphysical presupposition that underlies the belief in political, linguistic, and epistemological forms of representationalism’ (Barad, 2003, p. 804). Representation, Barad considers, is a form of knowing, where beings exist as things which allow for a system of representation in serving a mediating function between independently existing entities (Barad, 2003). The problems of representation (in the power-body dynamics at play) are acknowledged by Barad in the ways in which things are objectified (particularly in Western theory and art practices) as discursive-linguistic and individualistic. Barad, in drawing on the work of Butler, argues for relational materialisation which understands performative frameworks as interconnected phenomena that engender differences (Barad, 2003). In aiming to move beyond issues of representation, within my research

(and indeed Barad's theorisation of post-humanist discursive practices), a matter-orientated knowledge framework (constructed through the being and the becoming of the objects) has been proposed, developed, and tested. For example, within my first practice staging, *True and Correct*, a turnstile in its being becomes a steel metal material of knowledge (as an artefact-object). My research findings understand that matter and materials very rarely operate in isolation, the human body (of the agent(s)) is entangled in the encounter which affects the becoming of the object-prop (as a post-event artefact-object), for example through the agent(s) activation of the turnstile in *True and Correct*. This happens through the material of the human and non-human matter inter-relating (and intra-acting) in a meshwork of entanglement. Here the human body is centred (rather than being the sole central research element) in the becoming of things (through an encounter with other things).

My research proposes that during the exhibition event, being and things are always in a state of becoming – being as matter which is in process, in flux and which is not static. Over the duration of the exhibition event, being is live – exchanging and forming through agency. Through encounters with for example a PVC curtain (*Fourth Wall*) agent(s) and matter become entangled in a system of formation. My research understands art practice in the same terms that Barad understands becoming – as a practice of transformation and reconfiguration resulting from agency and encounters. Becoming is discussed by Barad in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007) via her exploration of the relationship between matter and discourse, between multiple phenomena. She says that ‘...it is through specific agential intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency’ (Barad, 2007, p. 140). The phenomenology of material is also explored by Bennett who puts things in the foreground and people (human objects) in the background, presenting the world as a network of animate things (rather than passive objects). She defines dull matter as ‘things’ and vibrant life as ‘beings’ suggesting human power is in itself a kind of thing-power (Bennett, 2010). This is a helpful clarification to make in avoiding slippages of terminology. Things and beings entangled in their vibrancy and vitality as matter do not assume human and non-human classifications. Here I outline the relational potentials offered through the collective being of being with things – the importance of the agent(s) as a collective body within a system of the exhibition event (whereby, as discussed in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*, authorship and formation is not attributed to any one individual). The ontological quest for being is a vast theoretical landscape which I am not going to attempt to deal with here, however the importance of being (of agents and objects) must be acknowledged in ethical and methodological terms. For clarifying my position within the context of my inquiry (as outlined in my *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation, Knowledge Mobility Framework* and *Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice*), I understand being in the metaphysical sense as an all-

inclusive category of thought and as an activity in which representation traces the performative conditions of things.

## **Matter/ Materials/ Mediums**

According to my agential realist account, matter is not mere stuff, an inanimate given-ness. Rather, matter is substance in its iterative intra-active becoming — not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. It is morphologically active, responsive, generative, and articulate. Mattering is the ongoing intra-active differentiating of the world. Intra-actions enact agential cuts, which are a cutting together-apart (that is, entangling-differentiating), as one move (not sequential acts). (Barad, 2012, p. 77)

Barad's agential realism (the inseparability of intra-acting agencies), discussed in the *100 Notes – 100 thoughts* text *What is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice* for documenta 13 (2012), posits a relational ontology that is always shifting and becoming agentic (revealing agency through matter – the surface and form of the materials of the object-props). The tension between agency, matter and things here is key in the intra-actions that the object-props trace (revealed in the post-event artefact-objects). By matter I mean things that exist, that are materialised through intra-actions – this is a key point for Barad who asserts that things (human and non-human) only exist in their intra-actions (Barad, 2007). The existence of the things that are intra-acting is within my research possible due to the lively matter of the material of the objects, such as the white tarpaulin sculptural objects representing security bollards positioned at the entrance to the exhibition space in *Dispositif*. This material becomes entangled through intra-actions and creates shifting patterns of agentic forces, knowable through analysis of its matter post the exhibition event. Many of the thinkers associated with the fields of Actor Network Theory (ANT), New Materialism and Object Orientated Ontology (OOO), propose an interrelated set of positions which theorise the ways in which matter/ material things are mediums in their relational, agentic and intra-active capacities. OOO for example proposed the notion that matter only becomes legible as form (i.e. as an object-prop such as a door mat in *Front Stage: Back Stage*), whereas Barad conceived materiality as circular, suggesting that its legibility appears through its relational intra-action (Barad, 2007) (i.e. as an artefact-object which in the example of the door mat in *Front Stage: Back Stage* appears as a collection of material fibres). Thinking of matter and materiality as a circular form offers opportunity to consider the re-purposing, recycling, disposing of the artefact-objects post-event (in the sustainability and ethical handling of things as discussed in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker* and *Chapter 3: The Ethics of Things*).



My practice-research stagings have tested different materials and object-prop forms (paper contracts, tarpaulin bollards, shoe covers, perspex boxes and door mats, a PVC curtain for example) to consider how material trajectories are activated through the diffracting encounter. For the maker, Ingold states (in his book *Towards an Ecology of Materials*), that materials are what they do, they are what happens when you work with them (Ingold, 2012). The artist needs to know how they can bend materials (and the matter that constitutes them) to an evolving purpose, to create form. My inquiry has explored the way that matter can present itself in different forms; as something which has a surface, a texture, a weight, a spatial mass (a turnstile, a bollard, a box, a curtain). Matter can be touched (for example the shoe covers in *Front Stage: Back Stage*), in some instances heard (for example the mechanical noise of the turning of the turnstile in *True and Correct*) or smelled (for example the odour of the PVC strips in the curtain of *Fourth Wall*). Matter, in my reference to it, is all at once presented as a material, a medium and a form.

Matter in its entanglement with the material world must be acknowledged. Through entanglements, affect emerges and disappears – leaving a trace of residue of being on the material form. Matter and meaning, Barad states are not separate elements (Barad, 2007, p. 152). They are inextricably fused together. Mattering, she writes is ‘simultaneously a matter of substance and significance’ (Barad 2007, p. 3). Matter must therefore not be considered as a stand-alone, singular entity, it is always supported by the enacted phenomenon taking place. In knowing how to work with matter we (as artist-curators) therefore must ask not simply what materiality and matter are but rather must ask what they are doing in the context of an intra-active phenomena. Doing so will allow us (artist-curators) to understand the relational potentials of what matter (and thus form) does in the exhibition space. This is not to suggest that material (non-human) agency has greater potentials (or is an alternative) to human agency – rather to propose a co-relational co-formation of things which acknowledges the agency of all things during the exhibition event – this material thinking, is the conceptual framing of the work (and part of the *Proposition for Co-relational Co-formed Art Practice* presented at the end of this thesis).

## Objects

In *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*, I discussed my use of props and artefacts as essential objects of knowledge. In *Chapter 3: The Ethics of Things*, I then discussed the ethics of these objects. Here in *Chapter 4*, I further interrogate the significance of objects against the critical fields I have engaged with.

Within a relational ontology that is intra-active and performative, I am entangled in the inseparability of observed objects and agencies of observation (an idea put forward by

Barad, 2003). The materials of the object-props and the post-event artefact-objects I have produced and staged have discursive forces (the ability for polyester-cotton white shoe covers to pick up the trace of agent(s) and other materials in *Front stage: Back Stage* for example). For matter to be active (as opposed to inert) it requires an object (form imposed on materials) in which its agentic capabilities can come into being. For example, in *Fourth Wall* the PVC material was moulded and cut into strips, joined together along a rail, installed over the entrance to the exhibition space and in doing so formed a curtain which became an object-prop. Facilitating the process of formation (as artist-curators) means that we must understand and know the potentialities of the things (and as such matter) we stage. Each object exists in relation to other objects (co-relating) as an assemblage of things; a network of matter appearing as still and inert but holding vibrant possibilities that come to be in revealing agency and co-relational being. Tracing this, to know and understand the potentials of (and prove methodologies for) co-relational co-formed practices I argue is essential.

Graham Harman's book *Art and Objects* (Harman, 2019), put the object at the centre of metaphysics – a significant idea for my research in the role the object plays in tracing the agency and encounters between things. For Harman any relation between a person and a thing also becomes an object (within my research I frame this thing as an object of knowledge). Reducing the objects, Harman argues, prohibits an explanation of the emergence of objects (Harman, 2019). On one hand, according to Harman, things are considered robust enough to withstand change (scientific reductionism) (the object-props' resistance to a complete change in form). On the other hand, Harman presents the idea of things being so susceptible to change that change cannot be explained or understood (the trace of things on the surface of the artefact-objects and the inability to attribute agency to individual encounters between specific things). Harman puts forward the idea of objects as any thing which is not reducible in either direction, which has a unity not disposable into parts or into its effects (Harman, 2019). Harman sets up a dialogue concerning the problem of objects and relations; he does so through his theory of Object-Orientated philosophy (later referred to as Object-Oriented Ontology, OOO). Here, weaving between the metaphysical (speculative) and phenomenological (descriptive) fields, Harman describes knowledge as mostly indirect, arising from and pointing to qualities of the object but not defined by the object's qualities, an idea expanded on in his book *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (Harman, 2018). In relation to my inquiry, knowledge, in Harman's terms, is interpreted and inferred (reiterating the potentials of different ways of knowing through and with objects) as material data (documentation) and as analytical and creative writing (see the practice-research inserts between chapters of this thesis and *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*).

The object at all stages of my research, is presented as a thing (objects becoming things when there is potential for agency, intra-action and emergence). The idea of a thing as

not merely an inert object here is important. The thing, as an object is an actant and apparatus; it is matter which is a source of action and which has the ability to reveal the social relations or gathering of things. Bennett discusses this as *Thing Power* (Bennett, 2010). Her definition of things as animate objects which connect with beings supports my idea of co-relational event-based formation. Within thing-power, humans and non-humans are proposed as actants who produce affects and alter situations; acting as an assemblage with the ability to reconfigure in different ways at different times. The configurations of objects and the trace of the actants' actions they record, gives them the status of becoming knowledge-holding matter with communicative potentials (Bennett, 2010). According to Latour (who I drew on in framing the idea of the agent in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*), objects, have efficacy (an idea he put forward in his book in *On Actor-Network-Theory*, 1990). Objects can do things, produce affects, and alter the course of events. Latour conceives objects as actors (and actants as discussed in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*), designed to carry out a particular function or role (Latour 1990). This concept of objects carrying out a specific role is key in the resulting co-relational co-formation that can occur within the projects I stage (where materials and forms of objects have been selected and produced to record knowledge). Both Bennett and Barad, aim towards the same critical awareness and agency of objects in shifting the idea of objects as things with agency to objects as things which modify actions with their agency (with full autonomous agency reserved for the right of the agent). For Bennett objects exist as static entities whereas things (as dynamic and vibrant) occur (Bennett, 2010). Bennett highlights the potential for objects to have thing-power in their ability to animate, act and produce effects (Bennett, 2010). Bennett in affirming Latour's concept of the actant (as a thing) describes it as:

A source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events... Its competence is deduced from its performance rather than posited in advance of the action. (Bennett, 2010, p. viii)

Things in terms of my research can be, but are not always objects. Things can also describe relations between agents, between other things (beyond that of the object). Ingold, in his book *The Life of Lines* attempts to clarify the transition from objects to things by stating that 'if objects are nouns then things are verbs' (Ingold, 2015, p. 124). Ingold also states in an earlier paper, *Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials* that things in their own right are not agents, but instead are 'possessed by action' in the agency they enact (Ingold, 2010, p. 95). Ingold's understanding of things as forms which 'arise within fields of force and flows of material' (Ingold, 2009, p. 91) is helpful in considering the agency at play during the exhibition event. Ingold's suggestion that things are producers of agency and can become representatives of being affirms my

positioning of the object-props as matters of research. My interpretation of thingness (in the relational staging of, to and with things in their thingness) is taken from Ingold's proposition of things, outlined in *The Textuality of Making*, as human and non-human matter that is always active and consciously or not in a state of development (Ingold, 2009). Here it is also important to acknowledge the ideas of *Thing Theory* proposed by Bill Brown (2001) (informed by Heidegger) centred on human-object interactions as a relational blurring of subject/ object binaries. Brown writes, 'The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation' (Brown, 2001, p. 4). There is a frequent slippage between object and things throughout the discourse of the anthropological, phenomenological and metaphysical fields which is worth re-visiting in the context of clarifying terminology of the agent and object as things within my research. The distinction I make between the object and the thing is that the objects are things created to appear as forms (for example as a bollard in *Dispositif* or as door mats, shoe covers and the perspex boxes which contain them in *Front Stage: Back Stage*). The objects are manufactured, acting as artworks (sculptures) but with a specific function which shifts them into the classification (I apply) of being object-props. Within my research I have not attempted to overcome a thing/ object dichotomy, nor have I attempted to theorise the vibrancy of object-props in comparison to agents. Instead, by focusing on the agency of things (traceable through the matter of artefact-objects), significant questions around modes of co-relationally co-formed practice are raised and methodologies proposed in contributing to the field.

## Agency/ Agents

A good place to assess this [agency] is the Journal of Material Culture, founded in 1996. A search reveals the word "agency" mentioned in the texts of 111 papers over the last 10 years... Thus even here the concept of agency is not subject to very much depth or breadth of investigation. (C. Knappett and L. Malafouris, 2008, p. Xiii)

Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris in their 2008 book *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*, suggests that agency is a term and concept that has not been extensively attended to. I will begin my interrogation of agency through Barad's suggestion that in the artistic process, objects have agency, and it is through encounters with other things (contributing elements) that agents become co-responsible for the emergence of art (in their causing of objects to act). For Barad agency is understood as an enactment (an idea I explored in *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology*) in proposing the



idea of the agent as an activator or conduit to and of agency (Barad, 2007). Enactment is not only a key term used by Barad, it is also a term used by Butler (in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 2015) and Haraway (in *When Species Meet*, 2008) in relation to performativity and intentionality. The theory of enactment, if taken to mean an act of doing in a context of what is enabled, signifies the agency required/ applied. The agency required in the case of my research inquiry is acknowledged as that of both the agents and the object-props (the agentic forces of material and matter in flux). This transference of agency facilitates the enactment in things which is conceptualised as the co-formation (through the shifting of the matter and form of object-props through an encounter with the agents or other things). For example, in *True and Correct* the inscribing of ink and the smudges, creases, finger prints, drips, warping of the paper-contracts in the post-event analysis reveal an enactment of agency which has affected the material. The relationship between enactment and performance here elevates the importance of the object-prop (thing) from its subjugation by the human (in this instance the artist-curator) in understanding agency as a situated process.

The idea that agency occurs in and through the entanglements of matter is what Barad theorises as a metaphysics of agential realism (Barad 2007). Agency, Barad suggests is about 'the possibilities of (and accountability entailed in) reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of production' (Barad 2007, p. 214). In exploring the concept of agency (of things), processes and systems (the material and form of object-props and their configuration at the point of the threshold within the exhibition space) become mechanisms by which agentic capacities can be strengthened. Human and non-human agency here exist on a level or plane. Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, says that 'Agency is something distributed along a continuum' (Bennett, 2010, p. 28). In relation to the horizontal plane, Bennett acknowledges that there are significant challenges in presenting things (within the world) as level with each other due to our role as humans and the ways in which we implicate things and are always implicated within the plane (in ways that other things are not necessarily). Bennett in asking what things can do (rather than what they are) aligns with the new materialist proposition that all matter is agential. Matter, Bennett suggests, can distribute agency across and amongst things '...there is not so much a doer (an agent) behind the deed [referring to a blackout event], as there is a doing and an effecting by a human-nonhuman assemblage' (Bennett, 2010, p. 28). Attempts to move towards a more horizontal plane are none the less valuable even if only in acknowledging the complex network we are caught up in (Bennett, 2010). Bennett's description of agency does not differ significantly from Barad's. Bennett proposes that non-human matter contains an energy that can exhibit and distribute agency through the formation of an assemblage of human and non-human actors (Bennett, 2010). The distributive agency differs from agency centred around intentionality (Bennett, 2010). The possibilities of co-relational production, in referring to Bennett's theory of distributive agency, is bound up in directionality. This idea acknowledges the

distinctive capacities of specific things, through particular material, spatial and contextual configurations during the exhibition event.

An anthropological reading of agency focuses primarily on the correspondences between body and material environment; an entangled practice of being together. Agency can be both a material bodily response but also a response that animates matter itself. Here anthropological ideas support my theoretical positioning of the exhibition event as the time-based, relational environment for this, whilst new materialist ideas (in which affect points towards understandings of expanded human and non-human agency) underpin the ways in which my practice has positioned objects as things which have vibrant, animate and agentic potentials. Ingold, in his paper *Materials Against Materiality*, whilst acknowledging that the power of agency lies with materiality itself, also acknowledges the important relationship between agency and life (Ingold, 2007). Ingold's suggestion in his paper *Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials* that knowledge is learned by moving within an environment allows me to propose ways of knowing within the conditions of the relational exhibition event (Ingold, 2010). Ingold, in problematising the idea of agency as an attempt to re-animate a world of inert matter, argues that the agency of things arises though their liveliness against attempts to reduce things to the status of objects (Ingold, 2010). Whilst I do not intend to make reductions and am cautious of simplifying a complex web of theoretical ideas, there is scope to explore the potentials of material agency in the context of the exhibition if it is unlinked from human consciousness in isolating (and interrogating) relational encounters and entanglements between things. This is what I have attempted to do through my choice of material and form used in creating object-props. In the example of *Fourth Wall*, the emergence (and determination of) agency is that of the PVC material engagement between agents, other PVC strips and other things (coffee cups, umbrellas, items of clothing that also traversed through and engaged with the material). This emergence of agency I suggest exists beyond human and non-human individual capabilities. It arises through the co-relational being and encounter between them. The exhibition space and the exhibition event (the *Staff Show* at Birmingham School of Art in the case of *Fourth Wall*) was essential in staging the time and place of emergence to occur though the gathering of objects, agents and relational things.

Bennett positions agents (a term she says sits within a more subject-centred vocabulary) as things. Agents, according to Bennett are often referred to as operators or actants who, by virtue of being in a particular situation (in an assemblage at the right time, in the right place) make things happen through catalysing forces (Bennett, 2010, p. 9). In Bennetts term the agent (and her idea of the actant) is something which never really acts alone '...it's efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces' (Bennett, 2010, p. 21). In understanding the co-relating agency between exhibition space/ event, agents and object-props, I cite Latour's

paper *On Actor-Network-Theory* (1990) and Haraway's book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991). Whilst taking different approaches and positions, Haraway's arguments assert that objects are actors with agency. For Latour, as I have already established, the term actant is used to describe something which can do things, produce effects or alter the course of effects as an intervener (Latour, 1990). Latour put forward the idea that action occurs in the conjoining of non-human and human elements meaning that the result of the action (and the responsibility of it) is equally distributed amongst all elements (Latour, 1999, p. 181). In his essay, *Beware your imagination leaves digital traces*, Latour explores the significance of traceability as an outcome of agency, of being, of behaviour and one that is now open to the view of the producer (Latour, 2007, p. 2.). This open and ongoing traceable act of agency, as Latour suggests, means no clear line of separation between artist-curators, agents, the exhibition space and its object-props can be drawn. Haraway, (in contrast to Latour's position), distinguishes between actants (as things which operate at a level of function set out as possible in a given structure) and actors (as things which have character and contribute to structures in which actants form), (Haraway, 1991, p. 331). The collective consideration of actants (in becoming actors) (proposed by Haraway, 1991), can be learned from in developing methodologies and terminology of a co-relational co-formed nature. The 'co' here is essential to the importance of the collective being of things to enact agency.

Agency has a history of being debated within social science fields. The degree to which things have agency and in which they are free to act has been the subject of much theoretical and critical discussion. In structuring my argument for co-relational agency (resulting in the co-formative act), I make the case for the co-being of things which play co-dependent roles and shift away from notions of individualism and singular authorship. The material engagement of agency locates it not in the specific object-agent encounter, but in the process of their entanglement. The environment the object-props are staged within facilitates the material entanglements of the relational encounter between things. Here each of the elements is in a process and a system with another; agency is in constant flux. Before moving on from a discussion of agency it is important to clarify that I do not consider agency as synonymous with (or an affect of) intentionality. This is the conceptualisation of agency I make in the relational network of human and non-human things.

## **The staging (the exhibition event and assemblages)**

Ingold in his book *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* outlines the concept of a meshwork replacing the idea of a network in the interconnectedness created through relational being (Ingold, 2011). In thinking about the staging of the

exhibition event I am in agreement with Ingold on the problematics of the terminological relation implied through a network (the process of networking as intentional and human-centred). The idea of the meshwork in terms of contemporary art practice can be likened to the process of making whereby the connections between things (each thing playing an active part in the ongoing formation of other things) offers opportunities to revisit ideas of relational practice. In Ingold's terms there is no limit to the scale or the number of things within a meshwork. The meshwork between things and their relations do not require us to attend to their relations in knowing what they are, instead we are urged to know what they do in their functioning and in the ways that connections are traced (Ingold, 2011).

Bolt in her book *Studies on Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter*, discusses the idea of events as performances which create infinite possibilities of assemblages of networks and syntheses through things being in dialogue with each other (Bolt, 2007). She writes '...creative practices can be conceived of as a performance in which linkages are constantly being made and remade' (Bolt, 2007, p. 3). A situated performance such as that of the exhibition event, which takes place through the assemblage of things (object-props, layout/ use of the threshold and conditions of the exhibition space and being of the agent) is here essential. The staging of these things coming together is often, within my research referred to as an apparatus. The significance of the apparatus in relation to staging the act of co-relational, co-formation through the assemblage of things is elaborated on by Barad as a post-humanist reading of practices of matter. In *Meeting the Universe Half Way* she writes:

- 1) apparatuses are specific material-discursive practices (they are not merely laboratory setups that embody human concepts and take measurements);
  - 2) apparatuses produce differences that matter — they are boundary-making practices that are formative of matter and meaning, productive of, and part of, the phenomena produced;
  - 3) apparatuses are material configurations/ dynamic reconfigurings of the world;
  - 4) apparatuses are themselves phenomena (constituted and dynamically reconstituted as part of the ongoing intra-activity of the world);
  - 5) apparatuses have no intrinsic boundaries but are open-ended practices;
  - and
  - 6) apparatuses are not located in the world but are material configurations or reconfigurings of the world that re(con)figure spatiality and temporality as well as (the traditional notion of) dynamics (i.e., they do not exist as static structures, nor do they merely unfold or evolve in space and time).
- (Barad, 2007, p. 146)



The apparatus, in Barad's terms, frames the exhibition as one in which an event happens, in which something is materialised through intra-action and a set of relations in which something is generated. Here in the exhibition event, the object-props are positioned as an apparatus (as a system – a methodology) for research and the production of co-relationally co-formed art practice. The exhibition understood a systematic, time-based medium (an idea I also discussed in *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*), which sets up the conditions for relationality and agency through the apparatus which consists of the assemblage of object-props configured within the exhibition space. This is what I describe as the staging (the positionality of the practice) – the ensemble of the assemblage.

Within my research inquiry I propose the idea of the agency of assemblages in exploring the assemblage as a grouping of elements of vibrant matter (object-props) which hold material agency in their becoming as artefact-objects. This idea, whilst not new on its own terms is new in its application to event-based exhibition practices which involve utilising the encounter between agents and Object-props (material agency) to bring about affect that generates knowledge (and artworks). Such understanding offers opportunity to consider exhibition making, by the artist-curator as a concept of meshwork production in which the apparatus constructs an overlapping of things as a means of co-formation. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*, in theorising production write, 'Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 302). They propose the idea of co-produced circuits and relationships which when applied to the event of the exhibition, hint towards the exhibition as a traceable event along which networks can be formed, situated, and recorded. Such an approach was adopted within my practice research inquiry through the four exhibition events I staged – each meshwork producing relations, and traceable outcomes through the assemblage and agencies of things which were configured during the defined space and time of the event. In *True and Correct* (for example), the positioning of an actor, the turnstile, and the paper contracts on the opening evening of *Upstairs Downstairs* at the Coventry Evening Telegraph building, created the conditions (and environment) needed for things to assemble. The outcomes of these assembled ensembles evidenced the possibilities of co-relational co-formation as a specific form of practice.

In the simplest reading of the word, to assemble means to put things (parts) together or to gather people together in one area. Assemblages therefore exist in particular times and places; they are situational; the word assemblage describes the result of this coming together. In the production of the object-props I assemble materials into a sculptural form and install them in the exhibition arena, placing them into an apparatus of formation – a space and time where they are staged to become an assemblage of things. It is nearly impossible to discuss an assemblage without referring to Deleuze and Guattari and their proposition of assemblage theory (translated from the word *Agencement*) outlined in their

book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988). Their idea of the assemblage stems from the combining power of elements with a focus on what an assemblage can do/ affect/ bring about (over a focus on what it is). It describes the ability for things to affect and be affected in specific conditions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). The assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, applied to my research, is about possibilities afforded in the coming together of things within the exhibition space (event). Whilst there are many readings of the term assemblage, Latour's concept of an assemblage (drawing here from Actor Network Theory – ANT) as an environment in which organisms and objects (human and non-human) are understood in the way they emerge and in the assessment of their ability to form 'assemblages' with other things can also be applied (Latour, 1999). For Latour (and ANT) every 'thing' is relational and all entities within a network should be treated with equal importance (Latour, 1999). Latour proposed that a thing is defined by what it transforms, modifies or creates (Latour, 1999). Here the concept of combining is crucial to my methodological approach of staging an encounter between things in acknowledging that within the exhibition space, nearly everything is assembled (in being made up of material-human-spatial relations).

In the complex relations an assemblage allows for, Bennett's explanation of assemblages as groupings of elements described as vibrant matter suggests that there is no hierarchical order, instead the assemblage on coming together through work together. Assemblages therefore exist in particular times and places; they are situational. Bennett writes:

Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen... Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage. (Bennett, 2010, p. 24)

Bennett understands assemblages as elements which work together, which distribute agency through the vitalities at play describing this construct as an agentic assemblage. Agency in Bennett's terms is a confederation of vibrant things (human and non-human elements which generates effects (or as I re-classify in my *Key to Key Words*, affect) emergent in their ability 'to make something happen' (Bennett, 2010, p. 24). Bennett's reading of assemblage as a system or relational field is helpful in understanding the positioning of the object-props I conceive and stage within the exhibition event as an assemblage of things designed to distribute agency in the formation process. Barad confers with Bennett's idea of an assemblage as an emergent unity joining together (2007). For Barad, conditions are material-discursive in the way that matter comes into

being together; the apparatus of the assemblage a condition of possibility of entanglements which are productive of ‘the relational ontology of agential realism’ (Barad, 2007, p. 389). In applying the idea of an agentic assembly, it is possible to understand the ways that things never really act alone. For example, in *Dispositif* the matter of the tarpaulin material did not cause itself to have scuffs, scraps, discolouration and material transference imparted on it. These things occurred through the assemblage of other things. In this way the assemblage of things staged became an open-ended collective, a material cluster of charged parts creating a relational entanglement which produced affects (*Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation* recording these affects within my each of my four project stagings).

## **Performing co-formation**

In this section I attempt to offer a definition of and differentiation between making and production. The need to clarify and re-visit language here allows me to propose the idea of the performative-relational encounter and the exhibition event in new terms.

Production signifies progress (to develop, proceed, extend, form). The Latin *producere* means to lead or bring forth, to bring into being or existence. In this sense things are produced. Means of production, in the Marxist reading, are as Jonathan Harris (in *Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried and Clark*) writes ‘...accounts of the organisation of human labour’ (Harris 2005, p. 189). The word production implies a yielding of the process of generation through use of a tool. It is mechanical. The word production also links to the word ‘product’, to sell something (the production concept for example is a commercial business strategy). Making on the other hand implies a behavioural process of generation which has greater autonomy in the possibilities of producing outcomes. On the making/ production dichotomy, Ingold’s ideas sit firmly in the arena of making. Making is conceived by Ingold in *The Textuality of Making* as the interplay between materials and forces, the back and forth of matter (Ingold, 2009). Ingold challenges the idea of making as ‘entailing the imposition of form upon the material world by an agent with a design in mind’ instead arguing that ‘forms of things arise within fields of force and flows of materials’ (Ingold, 2009, p. 91). For Ingold, the thought processes of makers and the materials in use are in a continuous process of correspondence and becoming through one another. Making, which Ingold describes as a process of material transformation (a forward fluid motion based on improvisation) cannot be reduced to a projected thought, rather it is an ongoing binding together of material (Ingold, 2009). Ingold positions making as a way of knowing through thinking, through being within an interconnected meshwork of relations, through paying attention to our environment in challenging the premise of creativity (and how it is produced).

Making has an association of intentionality to it, to make a mark, to make a mistake, to make dinner, to make an artwork, to make something up. Thought is entangled within it, even for new materialist thinking agential realism is described by Barad as a knowledge making process (Barad, 2007). Making is also discussed within the context of production in the process of transformation it accounts for. The two terms are part of the same discourse. Perhaps a distinction between the terms making and production comes through the context within which these terms come to bear and are applied. Making and production are both terms which hint towards a performative act. For my research I theorise the performed entanglement of things as those things moving within as a system of things. In my consideration of the agency and entanglement of the co-being of the object-props, agents and exhibition space, there is a performative exchange of things in which material and form are altered (friction, imprint, transference of matter). Things are in correspondence. The ability of materials to perform, shifts the idea of matter as fixed; things in their movement, move out of the control of the artist-curator. This process I conceive as a co-relational series of material entanglements. Barad discusses the entanglement between objects through Butler's performative account of mattering (held through the matter of materiality) (Barad, 2007, p. 145). Here the critique of power (in Butler's concern over production involving human bodies) raises a problematic association with the term production in the 'workers' and 'labour' context it is used. Barad is however focused on the materialisations of relations in creating the existence of things (through the emergence of entangled agencies in object terms (Barad, 2007, p. 33). For Barad, the performative potentials of matter allow for the production of intra-active dynamic material relationships in which the boundaries between human and non-human are stabilised and then destabilised. Barad describes this as the process of performative metaphysics in the process of 'ongoing intra-action' (and the processual emergence of entities) (Barad, 2003, p. 81). For Bennett however everything is in process, constantly undergoing transformation, constantly undergoing modification. Bennett describes this process of exploring relational possibilities as a way of making a difference. This word making here progressive in its attempt to contribute knowledge through process-oriented materialism. In Bennetts terms, the idea of making/ producing/ becoming is the process whereby systems of exchange and atoms as separate entities work together as one (Bennett, 2010).

In considering the suitability of terminology to describe the process of becoming (of objects), the intra-action (which facilitates this becoming) articulates the dynamic forces of things in their exchanging, diffracting and inseparability (Barad, 2007, p. 141). What my research now seeks is a term to describe the process of agency and affect in the reconfiguration of matter and form (in which agential potentials are co-constituted). A term which acknowledges the inseparability between things during this process (of making/ producing/ becoming) in which relational interdependence between entities emerge as a complex practice of realisation. Formation gives rise to the idea of action, the



process in which something comes to be. It suggests collectivity in its matter (encompassing ideas of meshworks, movement and the encounter). It has a choreography to it though it suggests unpredictability, complexity, an element of unknowing. Linguistically formation refers to the way in which new words are formed on the basis of other words. To form describes an act of giving or taking, shaping, developing, affecting. It describes both an act and a process of agency. It might be a trans-formation (in a process of complete change for the objects), it will provide in-formation (in the material of the objects), it is a per-formance (in the agential becoming of things). Whilst I acknowledge that there are limits to form (and words that depend on form), in the context of my research (and post the 1960's anti-form debate which fought to break out of formalism), form (and thus formation in its becoming) is a useful term in describing the physical manifestation of the object-props in the material configuration and resemblance. Upon the object-props of my research things have formed, the former things exist but will have been in-formed in an ongoing forming of matter through the encounter as a formative mode of knowledge formation.

The act of formation, is positioned within my research as a complex phenomenon (in the agential realist sense of a *spacetime-mattering*) as outlined by Barad in *100 Notes – 100 thoughts: What is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice* (2012). Barad's concept of the post-human performativity of intra-acting matter here raises questions about the interdependence and relationality of things during the exhibition event. The agency of this performativity is never isolated to a single being or thing as the cause of affect, rather co-constituted formation is at play. Here the shift away from singularisation and the move towards interdependence reflects my attempt to consider the 'co' in the collective process of formation. The 'co' (abbreviated from the idea of the collective) here is once again essential. The relational nature of practice brings the suitability of the terms making or production in describing this process of becoming, of realisation, of generative collective agency and affect that is at the core of my methodological argument into question. Here I put forwards the idea of formation and in acknowledging the essential relational being of things (in making the case for greater consideration of all parts which constitute and contribute to this process) propose the term 'co-formation'.

## Trace

The trace is any enduring mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement. There are two kinds of trace, additive and reductive. A line drawn with charcoal on paper, or with chalk on a blackboard, is additive, since the material of the charcoal or chalk forms an extra layer that is superimposed upon the substrate. Lines that are scratched, scored or etched into a surface

are reductive, since in this case they are formed by removal of material from the surface itself. Like threads, traces abound in the non-human world. (Ingold, 2005, p. 5)

In *Chapter 2: Methodology of the Maker*, I drew attention to Heidegger's theory of the trace in hypothesising my research findings. In this section of my thesis, I explore trace in further detail – the trace as information, as the material record of the formation. Every contact leaves a trace. The process of formation becomes inseparable from what is formed. The trace, as a mark left on a surface through movement, is not new knowledge. The trace presents itself as an interference pattern, it contains data points that correspond to agency. The trace is bound up in the medium of the exhibition and the material form it concludes with. The trace is critical in the findings of my research, evidenced through post-event analysis of the matter (material, form and surface) of the post-event artefact-objects. Within my research inquiry the trace is recorded through the creative writing and photographic documentation of materials inserted between the chapters of this thesis. Trace is also presented as a finding in proving my hypothesis within the analytical accounts of *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*.

Anthropologists often refer to artefacts as material remains (generally taking the form of objects) which hold traces. Ingold, during a seminar entitled *How can art be a practice of research* at Birmingham School of Art asked 'If research has become an industry of knowledge production, how does the object provide us with truth?' (Ingold, 2020). For Ingold, the idea of trace is something developed over a significant period of time and is something which provides a truth. He explores this idea in his paper *Transformation of the Line; Traces, Threads and Surfaces* (2005) and in his book *The Life of Lines* (2015). His definition of the formation and significance of the trace (made possible through the idea of the surface as a place in which there is a continual interchange between materials and their environment which hold the history of the things which make it it) informs my proposition of the post-event artefact(s) as an object(s) of knowledge. Here the materiality of the artefact is brought to the foreground for closer inspection.

The surface of the object(s) is the location of a continual interchange between things. In the context of an exhibition event, where object-props offer an encounter with agents, a transfer happens. Within this transfer there is the potential for a mark to be imposed on the surface of the material in either an additive or reductive way (this mark traceable through the artefact-object in the post-event analysis). These traces are what Ingold refers to as cuts, cracks and creases '...created not by adding material to surfaces, or by scratching it away, but by ruptures in the surfaces themselves' (Ingold, 2005, p. 5). They can intra-act with the additive or reductive traces imposed on their surface and can be formed not just through an encounter with the agent(s) but through their own material form and the agency it offers. The analysis of the trace allows conclusions of being and

agency to be drawn and speculations on relations and formation to be made. For *True and Correct* (project 1) the lines inscribed on the surface of the paper were additive traces (a conscious mark making). The scratches on the turnstile and pens were reductive in the marks inscribed yet additive in the marks that grease, dirt and residue created (unknowingly by the agent). The analysis of the surface, the mark and trace in relation to each of my projects is outlined in the *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*.

Ingold also states that the artefact is a materialisation of a thought (Ingold, 2012). The practice of the materialisation (formation) takes place in the interval between the starting point (the conception of ideas, the thought, the forward reading) and the finish point (the post-event artefact, the backward reading) (Ingold, 2012). It is this middle part (the formation) which allows the artefact-objects to be generated through the flows and transformation of materials, through the movement of the agent (for example in the touching and separating of PVC strips in *Fourth Wall*, the contact between pen and paper in *True and Correct*). These movements can be traced through the artefact-objects in the form coming into being and in our ability to read ideas forwards and artefacts backwards. Ingold in *The life of lines* (2015) proposed the concept of trace through the idea of lines (and threads) as a meshwork (a process which is the cause of the trace) which allows us to read ideas. For Ingold, there is no boundary separating the organism and the being, rather a meshwork which represents (and discloses) relations of the ways in which life is lived along lines of becoming (contingent, emergent and indeterminate) (Ingold, 2015). To unpick this, in thinking firstly about the line, there are implications in idea of the line in the literal, linear and sequential reading of this word in relation to its application (lines of thread, lines of connectivity, line of sight, line drawing, out-line as just some of the strong representational associations to overcome). The line, however, when considered as a meshwork (or more broadly speaking a relational-system) offers greater possibilities for interpretation and application to art practice.

The trace is a record (imprint or inscription) of the mark(s) of entanglement from the moving body of the agent (Ingold, 2015, p. 61). During the event a series of traces build, they assemble, they include the actions of agent(s) but they also include traces made from the environment of the space, other objects – things from the relational field they have been positioned within. The traces are usually (but not always) visible to the eye (Ingold, 2015). Within my practice research stagings, the encounter between agent and object-props is sometimes hard to trace and not always visible. For example, the agent's fingerprints on the material surface of the pens and/ or the paper of the contract in *True and Correct* was sometimes not evident or was hard to decipher. However, in each of my projects there were always traces recorded and embedded in the material surface of the artefact-objects which were visible. The discovery of this embedded knowledge is what Ingold defines as research or a re-searching of things (Ingold, 2020). The traces (lines, threads, meshwork and systems) are clues which allow for discovery of knowing

(knowledge which Ingold says is truth) (Ingold, 2020). Here there is a clear connection the forensic analytical approach of tracing the trace (as I have attempted in my documentation of the surfaces of the post-event artefact-objects). Whilst the documentation is a record (rather than authentic material mark or set of marks), the practice as writing I employ (where I write with objects) allow for clues to evolve. These clues become the interplay between what is known and what can be discovered. This process Ingold argues (in discussing research as a pursuit of truth) must be one of curiosity, care and attention. This is a process that can never be fully complete, for truth can never be fully concurred as it is beyond what can be determined or grasped (Ingold, 2020). Whilst this may be true, when thinking more broadly about the relational being of things, discovery (made through the trace), whilst not finite, offers insight and knowledge. This process of discovery I propose is essential to art practice in its ability to move forwards, to evolve, to involve, and to acknowledge its co-forming agents. The idea of the trace within my research inquiry is both philosophical/ conceptual in the way all things are related and offer traces of some sorts; but it is also physical in the material manifestation of the trace through the use of objects.

Barad's idea of traces as resulting outcomes of a system of connections to some extent better articulates the relational dynamics of the exhibition space (Barad, 2007). Haraway (who is in alignment with Barad's theory of diffraction as a methodological reading) also proposes a practice of diffraction as a way of reading difference (the mapping of interference) that makes a difference (Haraway, 1997). In the observation of the artefact-objects, we have to be attuned to trace and difference as a form of formative knowing, a form of knowing differently. In putting forward the idea of trace as a research tool I acknowledge the distinction between actional rather than anticipatory knowledge produced through relational contact. The trace within my research inquiry does, however, allow insights and through this conclusion to be drawn which advocate greater acknowledgement of the role of the agent. The trace also points towards acknowledgement of the way systems of knowledge might be assembled and/ or formed in contemporary art practices.

The trace is generated over a period of time, emerging from (and dependent on) the being and actions of the objects, the exhibition space, the artist-curators and the agent – multiple co-formers. Here the issue of indebtedness must be acknowledged. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's proposition of language, in their book *The Undercommons* (2013), brings together the theory and practice of Black radical tradition. Their important text offers opportunity for me to look outside of my identified field, beyond the critical theories I have predominantly been engaging with, in order to analyse support, inspire, extend and critique through another lens. Their book deals with issues of language and mechanisms of control in working from and within the social poesis of life. Amongst a number of important issues, they discuss the idea of debt; debt as signifying a history of



giving or debt as an association of un-delivered ownership. Moten and Harney link the idea of debt to the brokenness of being for people who cohabit spaces where there is a refusal to ask for recognition of the role of being within. Here the agent's willingness to be in the exhibition space, the indebtedness of the artefact-objects to the being of the agent (and its materials) and the actions of the agents are acknowledged in the proposed methodologies and shifted terminologies designed to expand systems of formation.

In *The Post Card* (1980), Derrida outlines things as those which bear the mark or trace of other things. Such tracing he proposes is a way of relating or connection between things – a trail of sorts. Here he cites an example of a post-card as a thing with circulates – within this circulation generating traces that signify relations and actions of producers and receivers. The marks, or traces here enmeshed within the matter and record the absence of the things which have generated their being. Derrida's theories of the trace, in relation to language, emphasises the marks' capacity for iteration as necessary – as something which is capable of being repeated. Here the trace of matter in acts of formation and the trace of language in the evolution of terminology become entwined concerns (for my research inquiry). Derrida's questioning of categorisation (our ontology) needs to be modified in the requirement for acknowledging agency which can record something which happens in the present, but which remains after the moment of its inscription (in its absence). Derrida's ideas reinforce the importance of the trace in allowing artist-curators to feedback into the evolution and creation of object-props in the methodology for co-relational co-formation. It also points towards the need for my research to revisit terminology to acknowledge such approaches. In summarising the critical role that the theoretical fields of research has played, the framework of ideas I have drawn on have allowed me to situate my research between overlapping, sometimes parallel, at other times opposing lines of thought in order to establish my own position and ideas. The critical reading undertaken has informed my methodology, supported me in identifying the needs for this research and reinforced the possibilities of my findings around the need to re-visit language and acknowledge the potential of working within meshworks, assemblages of beings and objects where agential cuts are formed and traced.

Post the exhibition event, taken out of relational action, the trace becomes static and relatively fixed (or so much as it can be notwithstanding environmental agency and material being). Here I return to Ingold to address the issue of 'conclusion' and 'completeness' bound up with the post-event artefact-objects. The artefact-objects as forms of matter which I have argued pose an agency in their being, when taken out of the exhibition event, Ingold suggests are still in process (Ingold, 2011). Artefact-objects as artworks can only be objects of knowing for a short, immediate time – beyond this, traces would keep appearing, new assemblages would be made, relations formed (whether in storage or not). In the transition from exhibition event ending to moment of analysis, I

make every effort to protect and preserve the material data of the artefact-objects, handing them with care to limit their agency and any further relational formation potentials. This is a process I liken to the handling of museum collections of artefacts of cultural and historical significance.

BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL OF ART  
FEBRUARY 2020

# FOURTH WALL



This script for *Fourth Wall* outlines a performance narrated by the 'actors' in a play staged in the Exhibition Space at Birmingham School of Art. The actors in this context are understood to be the object-prop of the curtain, the exhibition space, the artist-curator and the agents. The script allows for a material contextualisation of the performed event.



## Act 1

### (Stage 1: Production of the props)

#### *Writer's notes:*

Nothing is taken for granted in terms of knowledge.

Conceptualisation begins through material, form and staging decisions.

#### *Narrator:*

The object is established as a prop, a material, a thing or a concept.

The agent is proposed as an object, a thing, a physical being.

Thinking is in progress and a model of inquiry is built.

The material is fresh from its packaging.

It has been manufactured.

There is a hint of mass production inherent in the material.

The material is a flexible plastic, it is PVC.

It is folded.

Creases evidence its mode of production and packaging format.

The material is shaped in the form of strips. 16 strips.

Each strip is 200mm wide. 2400mm tall. 2mm thick.

The strips are attached to a steel plate with rectangular openings,

cut through the top of their surface acting as windows to the material.

In their static-ness they are prepared for motion.

A large steel bar is fabricated; a mechanism for positioning the strips.

This material forms a rail, a bar.

The steel bar is rigid.

It is cold.

The bar is soldered with small hooks lining its side.

The PVC and steel as one form an object.

The composition is that of two materials unified to have a function.

The object is an exhibitionist in the power it announces.

#### *Object:*

I am not an artwork.

I am industrial and economical, clinical and sterile.

I am made of Polyvinyl Chloride, a thermoplastic polymer.

I am static and charged.

You can smell me.

The space I am situated in now smells like a factory.

I have a firm and solid structure, strong and dense; yet bendy and moveable.

I am opaque when stacked, translucent when separated.

I am an object-prop formed through the configuration of a number of objects.

Fingerprints evidence encounters with my producers.

I am not the end product.

I am a thing, a tool; charged with agency.



## Act 2

### (Stage 2: Staging the conditions)

#### *Writer's notes:*

Here nothing is taken for granted in terms of possibilities.

#### *Narrator:*

The large steel bar is positioned across the entrance.  
The space is demarcated as that of a white cube space.  
The PVC strips are arranged across the steel bar.  
As two different materials they are presented as one sculptural form.  
A systematic order is created.

The object-prop forms a curtain.  
It acts as a membrane rather than a wall.  
It is not a border but a threshold.  
It appears functional but in this situation it is unclear what their function is.  
It marks the start of the space, an entry and beginning point.  
It announces its presence.  
It is positioned as the frontier of possibility.  
It is, on its own, inadequate and incomplete as an artwork.  
It can be touched. It has to be touched.  
It can be seen through. It is see-through.  
It has intra-active agencies.

The mechanics of the structure command engagement.  
The conditions of the exhibition space are familiar.  
The material makes an intervention into the arena as an object-prop.  
The encounter between objects that will follow is guaranteed through its positioning.

The object-prop is deployed in the formation of knowledge.  
The prop as an object is given over to the space and the agents.  
Control and authorship is now relinquished.  
The capacity for agency is established.  
The space is staged to become a making space.

This is not the work. The work is not complete.  
The event is in the future.

#### *Exhibition Space:*

I am not simply an exhibition space.  
I am also a laboratory and studio.

The object-prop is positioned as a boundary to my space.  
A barrier to my entrance.

It does not know. I do not know. We do not know.  
We are all now in this together; object, agents, space, artist.



## Act 3

### (Stage 3: Performing and forming)

#### *Writer's notes:*

A starting point is an understanding that we are all makers and can make.  
Nothing is taken for granted in terms of ways of knowing.  
We are in the present.

#### *Narrator:*

There is a connection. There is an intra-action. There is an encounter.  
An action is performed.  
There is an event, a happening.

Agents have agency. Agency has power.

A material engagement emerges.  
The agent and the material are in conversation.  
The making is mobile, it doesn't settle.

The making process is in production.  
Research is in action. Practice is in action.  
The performance becomes a way of knowing and a way of showing.

The exchange goes back and forth.  
Agency is performed.  
Notions of singular authorship are given over.  
This is a collective act: object-prop and object-agents together.

This is the evolution of the work of art.

#### *Invigilator:*

The material can be touched.  
The material is touched.  
The material is shifted.  
There is an exchange of contact between objects (human and non-human).  
The agent breaks through the material.  
The lighting in the space reflects off the surface of the object-prop catching traces of the materials intra-activity.

The form divides. There is an interruption.

The noise of static particles separating through friction, a sticky pulling apart.  
The sound of a peeling away and slapping back together.  
The material of the object-prop has a want to re-join through its own magnetic force.  
The interruption of silence, the break, the announcement of physical presence.

A moment is followed by another moment as the agent(s) enter and exit the space.  
The object-prop material is in play, it is malleable and shifting.  
Being, doing, making is happening.



## Act 4

### (Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork)

#### *Writer's notes:*

Nothing is taken for granted in terms of end points.

#### *Narrator:*

The PVC strips remain in order.

The object-prop as an artefact-object has retained its material structure.

Or almost.

Recurrence created a gap in the form.

A portion, two strips in particular, reveal their transformation.

For these two, their material property has experienced alteration.

Through impact, their form displays a discreet altered structure.

The intra-action between objects (props and agents) is visible.

They did not know what was going to happen to them.

They did not know what the impact might have been.

The material is discursive, the fabric holds traces of an event.

The resulting object-artefact allows for knowledge in being.

Being comes into existence through resolution.

Measuring agencies emerge.

The material engagement is revealed through the surface, the shape, the edge.

The movement of agents tracked through the shifted form of the object-prop.

There is a de-centering at play.

Conventions are questioned.

Hierarchy is subverted.

A process of making happened; overriding the notion of 'exhibiting'.

The event is in the past.

All agents are objects in the production of material.

All objects are makers in the work of art.

The artist ceases to be the primary object or medium of the work.

#### *Artwork:*

I am an artwork.

Fingerprints line the surface of my form.

Agential cuts were enacted in my being.

I am realised at the end point through the closing of the exhibition as event.

I am a post-event artefact of an action.

I embody knowledge. I am knoweldge.

There was no sole agent in my making.



## Act 5 (Stage 5: Post-event analysis)

### *Artefacts:*

I am research.

### *Writer's notes:*

Nothing is taken for granted in terms of findings.

### *Narrator:*

There is a post-mortem

The making has occurred.

The project has occurred.

The object, post-event, is an artefact.

Artefacts are artworks.

There is data in the artefact-object.

There is truth in the artefact.

There is residue.

There is material in form.

Matter is present.

Analysis can now happen.

An event, an action, a being can be traced.

Reflection is necessary.

The artefact-object owns its history.

It has become, in this instance, an artwork.

The staging of repetition and interruption is, was, deliberate.

Interpretations are made.

Correspondence exists.

Altered of form, material is evident.

Insight is possible.

There are findings.

Practice and theory stand in unresolved tension.

Application, rejection and suggestion are present.

Being and reception determined content, form and the performative action.

Insight is everything.



















# Chapter 5:

## The Act of Co-Formation

### The findings: staging co-formation

This chapter outlines the stagings of *True and Correct*, *Dispositif*, *Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall*. It presents the outcomes of the testing and propositions of my practice-research inquiry.

This post-event research activity is reflective – It outlines what I have learnt through and with objects as things of matter. The format of this chapter is structured to articulate the findings of my research by providing an overview of the stagings and a description of the materialisation of practice by analysing the four projects against each of the five stages of my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*. Here I outline the conceptual underpinning of each project as I synthesise the ideas and theories I have discussed in the previous chapters. Within this analysis I also use (and refer to) the proposed terminological understandings and shifts presented within my *Key to Key Words* and my *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation*.

The practice as writing and photographic documentation of the four projects presented as inserts between chapters of this thesis (which also follows the five stages of my *Knowledge Mobility Framework*) should be referred to alongside the analysis presented within this chapter. These overlapping research methods demonstrate the role that exhibition-based practice, writing as practice, and the recording of the material surfaces of objects has played in evidencing traces of co-relational agency which has resulted in the process of co-formation.

After the post-event stage of analysis, once the surface and traces held within and upon the matter of each artefact-object had been documented photographically and had been written about (and with), by me the artist-curator, the artefact-objects used within my four projects were then either destroyed, recycled or returned. As co-relationally co-formed (and thus co-authored) artworks, the post-event artefact-objects were not mine to keep, to show again or to sell. A sample of the material of each artefact-object has however (where possible), been retained as evidence for inclusion in my physical PhD submission (this material sample is presented as a digital image included in the appendices of this thesis).



## **Project 1: *True and Correct***

**Coventry Evening Telegraph building, December 2017**

### ***Stage 1: Production of props – material, matter and the ready-made***

*Upstairs Downstairs* was a group exhibition that took place at the Coventry Evening Telegraph building in December 2017. The Coventry Evening Telegraph building was a familiar exhibition space having hosted the Coventry Biennial in October 2017. My project, *True and Correct*, was staged and performed on the opening night of the *Upstairs Downstairs* exhibition event. I was part of the curatorial team as well as a participating artist. I assumed the role of artist-curator.

The first object-prop conceived for use in this project was that of the turnstile. Following a site visit to the Coventry Evening Telegraph building, the decision to utilise the turnstile as a prop arose due to its presence as a pre-existing feature of the space. A ready-made already in situ, it was not produced by me, but I established its use within this project. The turnstile as an object was familiar. We associate turnstiles with admission to spaces. The turnstile as an object is one which traditionally acts as a mechanism to control entry, often used for security purposes as a barrier to slow down crowds. Standing at waist height the turnstile at the Coventry Evening Telegraph building was functional and industrial. In addition to the turnstile a further set of object-props were included in this project to facilitate a direct engagement between them and the agent(s). These object-props were that of the paper contract, the biro pen and an actor (as a human prop positioned not as an object but as a thing which allowed for other things to record traces through encounters). The paper contract, as the key knowledge-holding object-prop, was designed to present an incomprehensible dialogue with the agent(s). Here the structure and agency of political language, in the text printed on the paper contract, was developed to activate the encounter in a non-sensical way. A formulation of language coined legal doublets in which a 'pairing' of words (which have the same or nearly the same meaning) was used; the phrase *True and Correct* being one of these. Such an approach was employed to reflect the way that language is used as a strategy for reinforcing meaning within the English legal system. The pens within this staging were a series of blue biros with black ink, similar to those one would find in a bank – a mass produced ready-made.

In establishing the object-props as things staged to trace knowledge; surfaces were cleaned, recorded and analysed prior to the event beginning. The biro pens and paper (which the contracts were printed on) as new objects had surfaces which were mostly unmarked – they contained little pre-existing knowledge. The turnstile however was more difficult in this sense (as a knowledge tracing device), due to its long-standing use as a functional object within the Coventry Evening Telegraph building. It held permanent traces of previous encounters with things.

***Stage 2: Staging the conditions – assemblages and the meshwork of the exhibition space, the object-props and the threshold***

The poster (see figure 42), positioned at the entrance to the building outlined *Upstairs Downstairs* (2017) as an exhibition event taking place in an exhibition space. The project conceived a staging that was based around the entrance to the space and the pre-existing turnstile which was still in operation here. An actor (who could be interpreted as a security guard and/ or an invigilator) was positioned in front of the turnstile. Placed to announce authority through their being (they were dressed in attire which had a professional appearance). The actor was as an activator in the formation of this work in order to generate a performative intra-action between things.

The meanings and readings of the object-props in their form, material and in their configuration as an installation within *True and Correct* were conceived to play a specific role in staging agency and an encounter in an explicit way. The status of the object-props as ones of power were, in *True and Correct*, deliberate in the authority they commanded (through physical construct and language). There was evidence, through the object-props I had selected to use, that a mechanism or apparatus was in play, a sense of hierarchy existed. The object-props announcing their presence and function through scale, form, material, being and their recognition as functional objects – as either operational requirements of the space, or as a performative piece.

An assemblage of things (the actor, the turnstile, the biro pens and the paper contracts) as the components of formation were assembled together ahead of the exhibition event. In constructing the conditions for an intra-action to occur there were multiple possibilities of formation which might have followed during the exhibition event. Such formation included the agent(s) signing the contract or not, different approaches to each agent handling the biro pens and paper of the contracts (or choosing not to), different methods of navigating the turnstile and so forth.

The title of the piece (devoid of authors name), printed on a label that was displayed nearby to the poster at the entrance to the space, was also significant in the staging of the encounter. *True and Correct*, as a commonly used legal doublet hinted towards a system, a contractual agreement that to all intents and purposes was true and correct. *True and Correct* in the case of this staging was a title given to the object-props to acknowledge their material data as that of truthful knowledge acquisition and the binding role they had been produced or configured within as part of a system of formation.

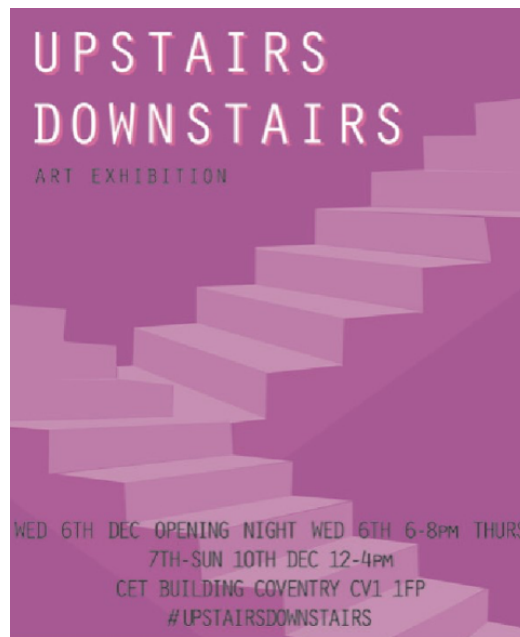


Figure 44: *Upstairs Downstairs Exhibition Poster*  
Exhibition staging *True and Correct*  
Rebecca Court, 2017  
Coventry Evening Telegraph building, Coventry (©Rebecca Court)

***Stage 5: Performing and forming – the intra-action of the event (agents and objects – things and agency)***

*True and Correct* was a durational (time-based) performance piece. Lasting three hours, over the course of the *Upstairs Downstairs* exhibition event opening, it unfolded through the actions of things. The actor, a prop within this staging submitted a reflective statement of his experience within the exhibition event which was used understand the performative formation that occurred (see Figure 44).

The turnstile formalised the trajectory of movement and marked the entrance space as an arena for action. On entering the Coventry Evening Telegraph building, the agent(s) first encountered an actor – a figure of authority (see Figure 43). Without speaking the actor simply held out a biro pen and the clipboard with a type of legal document on it. On this paper was the contact entitled *True and Correct*. No instructions were given or made – the object-props poised for the agency of the agent(s) to be enacted. This was the gesture which prompted an intra-action. On encountering the turnstile the agent(s) knew how it operated; they knew what purpose it (seemingly) served. The turnstile as an object-prop was positioned to generate a series of individual encounters (only one agent being able to enter at a time). The steel metal frame of the turnstile provided a material surface in which a trace could be recorded. A relational field was established through the physical co-being of human and non-human objects. The action of the agent(s) in the signing or not signing of the contract and in their movement through the turnstile followed a path of travel set out by the anticipated conditions of the exhibition event.

In some instance the agent(s) would sign the contract with no questions asked, at other times they would simply walk past the actor offering it to them without either any engagement or through actively choosing not to engage. The agent(s) always however crossed the threshold and in doing so intra-acted with the turnstile in their quest to enter the exhibition space. Human movement provided the agency to activate this object-prop. Its movement generating a sound – a clinking noise, its metal surface tracing the agency and being of agent(s) who had propelled it into action, who had facilitated its performance. Objects and beings in relation to one another, were, during the event, in a process of generating traces – lines of knowing – meshworks of formation. This was the co-forming process at play. Once pushed by an agent, and the agent admitted to the exhibition space, the turnstile returned to a set position. Once encountered by an agent, the paper of the contract and biro pen were placed in a file box, ready for analysis.



Figure 45: *True and Correct*  
Actor positioned at the turnstile entrance to the exhibition space  
Rebecca Court, 2017  
Coventry Evening Telegraph building, Coventry (©Rebecca Court)



#### Notes from an Actor

##### True and Correct

On encountering me, most people did not ask what they were signing and simply approached me, signed the contract and proceeded through the turnstile. I would estimate that around 5 (of approx. 100 visitors) walked past me without signing the contract and around 20 people read the contract and seemed to nod with acknowledgement on seeing it as gibberish. Some visitors muttered to themselves, one person made a joke about signing their life away for the sake of Health and Safety. A few people asked me what they were signing.

What I found most interesting was the way in which the actions of the viewers changed in the crowd when it became obvious that a 'system' was in place for entering the exhibition. For example, at first I felt swamped when everyone made there way in but as soon as it became clear that the process of entry was to sign a contract and go through the turnstile a cue was formed.

Figure 46: *True and Correct*  
Notes from an actor, 2017  
(©Rebecca Court)

#### ***Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork – acknowledging the act of co-formation***

On completion of the opening of the *Upstairs Downstairs* exhibition opening event, on the evening of the Wednesday 6 December 2017, this open-ended project drew to a close. The object-props were isolated ahead of examination by me, the artist-curator.

The post-event artefact-objects of *True and Correct* (biro pens, turnstile, paper of the contracts) held data – traces of being and of agency recorded on the surface of the materials. Through entering the space and signing or not signing the contract (i.e., through being and the enactment of agency), the agent(s) in *True and Correct* impacted the formation of the post-event artefact-objects of the pens, the paper of the contracts and the turnstile. Post-event, through evidence of affect on the material of the artefact-objects, I was able to read into the potentialities of how traces of formation arose through the agency and being of things encountering other things. I was able to know something.

The encounter in *True and Correct* was a point of meeting between things (likely for the first time in this context). The encounter, over the duration of the event, became a series of encounters between the biro pens, the paper of the contract, the turnstile, the agent(s) and the actor. Such encounters marked the moments when things collided, materials slowly altered, and action was in action. The encounter was the point in which an exchange of matter that offered expected (a signature and the turning of the turnstile) and unexpected (smudges of ink, folds on the paper, transference of grease from surfaces) consequences. The agent(s) moved through and with the object-props, and in doing so performed an action. These things (agent(s) and object-props) through their movement, their rhythm, their static and motioned energy, at the point of the encounter, affected each other's actions. The performative encounter of *True and Correct* became the event of continual making in the evolution of the object-props as post-event artefact-objects.

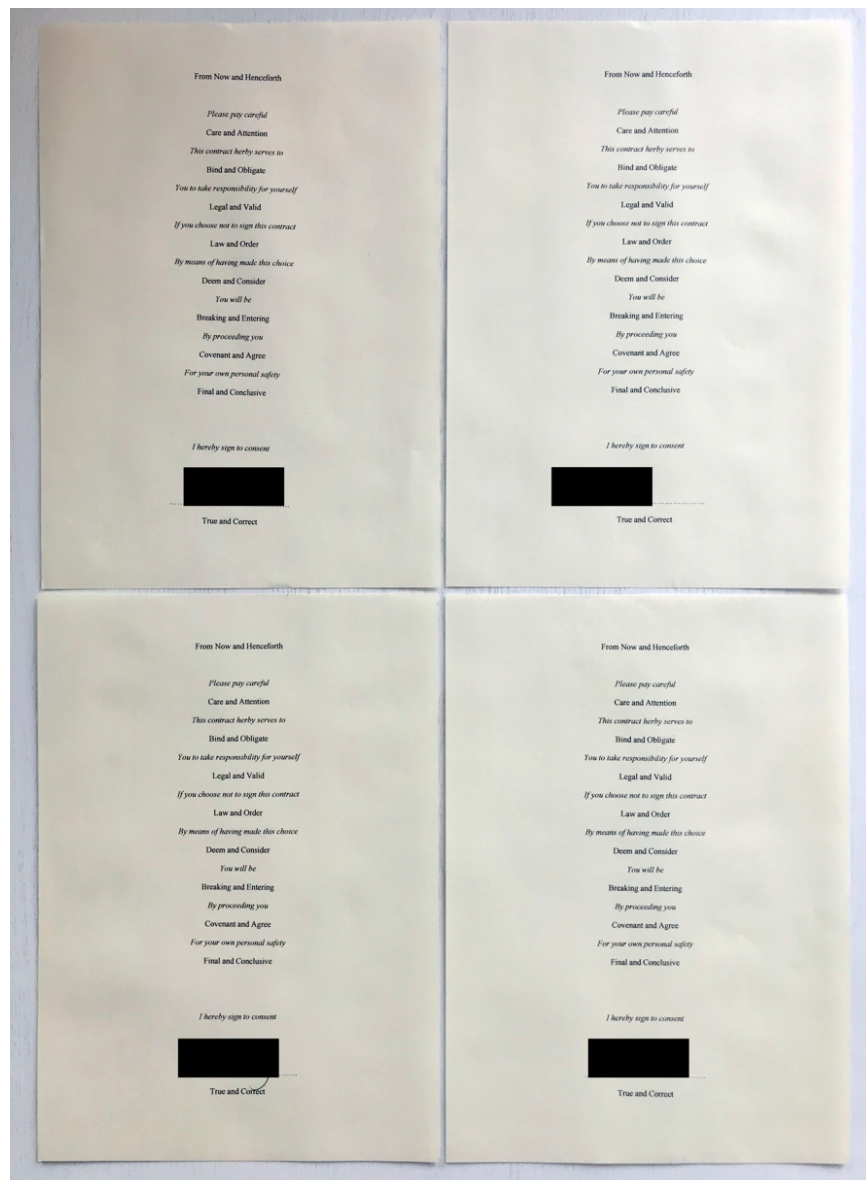


Figure 47: *True and Correct*  
Paper contract artefact-objects  
Co-authored, 2017  
(©Rebecca Court)

### ***Stage 5: Post event analysis – the artefact-objects, the trace***

The co-authored post-event artefact-objects as things of knowledge for *True and Correct* consisted of the paper of the contracts, the biro pens, the turnstile and a reflective statement from the actor. After the exhibition event, the surfaces of these artefact-objects were analysed. They provided evidence of agency and the encounter which was enacted upon them (in their existence as object-props). As artefacts they allowed speculative knowing about the relationship between movement and surface.

First to be examined was the turnstile as the artefact-object which was structurally embedded within the site and was to remain post the exhibition event. The turnstile through its cold steel metal surface captured traces of the body (namely the hands) evidencing the agency enacted by the agent(s) in propelling this object-prop into motion

– fingerprints, grease marks, scratches (most likely from bags or items of clothing – possibly from rings). Once traces of agency imparted on the surface of the turnstile had been recorded (through writing and photographic documentation) it was wiped clean, ready again to be activated.

The next artefact-objects to be examined were the printed paper contracts. Within these, traces of agency came through the creases of the page, the smudges of the ink, the lines of pen drawn indenting the paper with a signature, the fingerprints and transfer of grease on the paper marking its surface. The signature of the agent(s) was immediately blacked out (by me) with permanent marker to remove any individual trace. Once traces of agency imparted on the sheets of paper of the contract had been analysed and recorded they were destroyed – shredded and placed in a paper recycling bin.

The next artefact-objects to be examined were the biro pens. The surface of these objects contained scratches and marks of grease – their cartridges of ink evidenced use (in the amount of ink remaining) – these traces recording their performance and intra-action with the agent(s). The pens post this moment of analysis were wiped clean and given over to the materials store at Birmingham School of Art to be re-used (and re-activated with different intentions, in a different context and or under different conditions).





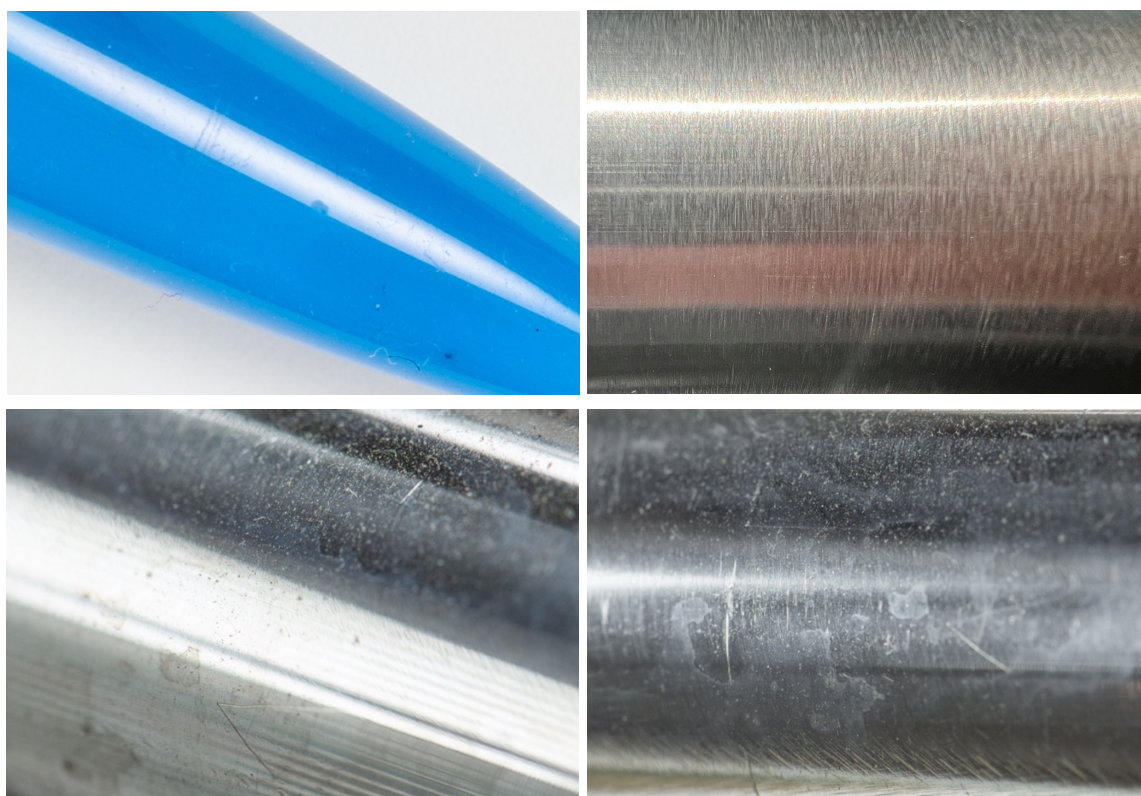


Figure 48: *True and Correct*  
 Artwork- artefacts– Material traces  
 Co-authored, 2017  
 (©Rebecca Court)

## Project 2: *Dispositif*

Birmingham School of Art gallery, February 2018

### *Stage 1: Production of props – material, matter and the ready-made*

*Dispositif* was a project which took place in the Birmingham School of Art gallery space as part of a group exhibition in February 2018. My role within this exhibition was that of the artist-curator. *Dispositif* explored the agency of object-props as objects of power and authority. A *dispositif*, often translated in English as apparatus, is a technical term that indicates the processual and physical nature of the system (organisation and deployment) of power. It represents an important constituent of the analysis of power/ knowledge: a mechanism of a specific arrangement of elements which indicates their apparatus and relational dynamics. *Dispositif* as an artistic construct directly played with notions of the apparatus as a concept.

Two sculptural object-props were produced. These were 750mm high, 500mm deep, 1200mm long. Created with a solid wooden frame, these structures were then covered in a white, industrially produced, 610gsm PVC polyester tarpaulin. The sculptural object-props were conceived, and part produced, by me (the structure made in the Birmingham School of Art workshops, the tarpaulin fabric covers pre-manufactured to



fit the structures). The two object-props were created to represent security bollards – resembling ready-made and/ or familiar objects that we would typically see at large outdoor events, town centres or other locations whereby crowd, or vehicle control was needed (see Figure 47 – reference photograph taken when researching the scale and material of security bollards –Cheltenham Racecourse installing temporary bollards covered in white PVC tarpaulin material ahead of a large event). The material, as a white smooth yet durable surface, was chosen due to its ability to record knowledge, to be affected, to trace things. The material here was staged to allow the transformative capacity of it to be formed (or informed) through becoming part of a set of relations.



Figure 49: *Research for Dispositif*  
Security bollards – Cheltenham Racecourse, Cheltenham, 2018  
(©Rebecca Court)

***Stage 2: Staging the conditions – assemblages and the meshwork of the exhibition space, the object-props and the threshold***

The two tarpaulin covered security bollards as sculptural object-props were positioned at the entrance to the gallery space at Birmingham School of Art – a well-established exhibition space with a calendar of monthly events. Weighted down (via their internal structure) they were solid, immovable, imposing forms – blockades of sorts. The object-props were installed one metre apart from each other creating a walkway between them. Sitting just inside the two doors at the entrance to the space (propped open for the exhibition), they were positioned to suggest a trajectory of movement. A flow across the threshold to the exhibition space was created by the agent(s) navigating around or through them. Appearing as an artwork of a sculptural-installation-interventionalist nature, the object-props in *Dispositif* announced their presence through their scale, configuration, and recognisable form as objects of power. The two object-props marked the space as an arena for action, for a performance. They were positioned to set up the conditions that would allow for an encounter to take place. At this point (pre-exhibition opening), the surface of the white tarpaulin materials had been newly manufactured and prepared (un-marked, analysed) and knowledge was in a speculative state.



Figure 50: *Dispositif* Installation Images  
 Security bollard – object-props  
 Rebecca Court, 2018  
 Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham (©Rebecca Court)

***Stage 5: Performing and forming – the intra-action of the event (agents and objects – things and agency)***

In conceiving *Dispositif* as an apparatus, the object-props had a strategic function in producing knowledge through the tarpaulin material tracing the actions and presence of agents (and things). The body of the agent(s) directed to move through the space in correspondence with things (other agent(s), the two object-props, other objects and the exhibition environment). Rather than focusing on how the body moved, this project focused on the conditions, circumstances and material in a state of flux through the body's intra-action and encounter with the surface of things. The apparatus as a device (the two sculptural object-props representing security bollards), created a system of diffraction through the movement of agents between and around them. The system of configuration meant the agent(s) encountered the object-props (due to their positioning at the entrance). The object-props created the space for an exchange. This was particularly performative in the material intra-actions enacted during the busy private view.



Figure 51: *Dispositif* exhibition opening.  
 Security bollard object-props  
 Rebecca Court, 2018  
 Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham  
 Photograph sent by agent attending the exhibition event (©Alis Oldfield)

#### ***Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork – acknowledging the act of co-formation***

*Dispositif* staged an encounter. The sculptural forms exerted a force over the exhibition space and those who entered it. The apparatus of the project (the two object-props resembling security bollards that were strategically placed across the entrance to the exhibition space) as a device made visible the physical system at play during the exhibition event. The spatial encounter of *Dispositif* placed the agent(s), the exhibition space and the object-props within a dynamic space of relational formation. The agency, in *Dispositif* had been placed with the agent(s) but was located in the tarpaulin bollards themselves. The resolution of this project as a work of art was not centred on the meaning of the object-props but on the performative formation they facilitated.

*Dispositif*, through its staging and material was able to assess the success of its conceptual construct. The artefact-objects (now understood by me to be artworks), on the closing of the show were sat with (alongside them) – written about, analysed and photographed. Here I assessed the surface of the material in order to determine that co-relational being had occurred and that the agency of things (agent(s) and other objects) had been able to shape, impact and inform the objects (now artefacts).

#### ***Stage 5: Post event analysis – the artefact-objects, the trace***

The two artefact-objects in *Dispositif* had succeeded in their task, in their function as an apparatus and method for collecting and preserving information from which knowledge and understanding in this stage of analysis was deduced. The post-event analysis of the surface of the material of the tarpaulin revealed the agent's capacity to effect and for the object-props of the project to be affected by other entities. This was the affordance of the artefact as a knowable object.

The surface of the tarpaulin material positioned the post-event artefact as an embodied object of experience. The full scope of agency (and the artefact-objects experience in its becoming) could not be clearly deciphered – there were multiple records tracing points of intra-action that had evidently occurred through movement within the meshwork of things. The white tarpaulin material was adorned with lines – cut into or sitting upon their surfaces. These lines and/ or material transfers (indents, marks) told me that something had happened. That there had been a series of encounters, forces and agency exerted by multiple different things. The trace of footwear (through low level scuffs and scrapes) evidenced the being and agency of the agent(s). The trace of lines were also evident towards the top of the material of the artefact-objects – pen marks perhaps. The discursive forces of the material had shifted through its intra-action with the moving meshwork of things as an act of open-ended formation. Agency it was clear had not been a solely human property – it could also be attributed to the material of the tarpaulin and the other objects which has encountered it (likely via the agent(s)).

The material arrangement that existed as a result of *Dispositif*, post-event was acknowledged as an enactment which pointed towards the dynamics of agency which traced the cause and affect of relational being. Through my analytical framework of knowing and the agential matter of the artefact-objects, the act of co-formation was proven. Following this stage of analysis, the artefact-objects were disassembled. The white tarpaulin covers were wiped clean and given over to a local events company for re-use. The frame was then broken down and given over for re-use in a different format (and in serving a different function) within the wood workshop at Birmingham School of Art.



Figure 52: *Dispositif*  
Artwork- artefacts– Material traces  
Co-authored, 2018  
(©Rebecca Court)



### **Project 3: *Front Stage: Back Stage***

**Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge – July 2019**

#### ***Stage 1: Production of props – material, matter and the ready-made***

The title *Front Stage: Back Stage* referenced theories of performance present in the field of theatre studies in which Erving Goffman, in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1957) proposed an analysis of behaviours that manifest in different performative contexts. Goffman believed that our behaviour alters based on the audience; with front stage behaviour eliciting actions that are visible to a present audience during a performance, and backstage behaviour eliciting actions that are at play when no audience is present. His analysis of performative behaviour provided a helpful theoretical context in which I conceived the object-props necessary for staging encounters and creating relational dynamics during *Front Stage: Back Stage*.

The notion of front stage, back stage thinking was also discussed by Raymond Friedman in his book *Front Stage Backstage: The Dramatic Structure of Labor Negotiations* (1995). For Friedman front stage described the policy making activities of visible and accountable office-holders who are, or had been, constrained by bureaucratic rules, and back stage described the unseen complex decision making undertaken by public officials, less constrained by formal rules and hidden from public scrutiny. *Front Stage: Back Stage* as a project was developed to sit at the intersection between these two positions. The front stage here being aligned to the exhibition event as the public facing performance that conformed to the conditions, behaviours and functions of the exhibition space. Back stage, on the other hand aligned to the conceptual construction, the apparatus framing the encounter, and the analysis of the formation process. The theories of front and back stage activity supported the intention of this project to argue that there is a need for practice making methodologies that are a result of both front and back stage happenings.

The objects, produced and purchased to act as props during *Front Stage: Back Stage* were: 200 white polypropylene elasticated shoe covers (sometimes known as over shoes), mass produced and purchased as a ready-made object. Three custom-produced clear perspex boxes – 500 x 500mm square with a circular cut (creating a hole) in the top of the box, 200mm in diameter – to allow the agent(s) to reach inside and select the shoe covers. Finally, three door mats, custom produced, 900 x 500mm – a royal blue tufted material with white text that read: '*shoe covers must be worn when in the gallery space*'. These object-props, which provided three different materials and types of surfaces to record traces of intra-action and agency, were designed in response to an exhibition space with three entrance points.



Figure 53: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
Research for acquisition of object-props, 2019  
(©Mister Worker)



Figure 54: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
Door mat object-prop  
Rebecca Court, 2019  
Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (©Rebecca Court)

***Stage 2: Staging the conditions – assemblages and the meshwork of the exhibition space, the object-props and the threshold***

The methodology of *Front Stage: Back Stage* was grounded in the exhibition space. The gallery at the Ruskin School of Art is an established space for exhibiting work. It utilised the duration of the two-week exhibition event of *Theorem* (a group exhibition event which I was selected for and volunteered to help curate) as the time in which artist-curatorial control and ownership was given over to the agent(s) and the objects within it. The conditions of the exhibition event in which agents were confronted with the object-props on arrival to the space staged the possibility for material thinking to

occur. The material thinking here was possible through the use of bespoke perspex boxes containing ready-made polypropylene shoe covers, and bespoke printed door mats (see Figure 55). These object-props suggested agency in the functional role they ordinarily play. Their selection as recognisable things deliberate in seeking to create situations where co-emergence and thus co-formation was possible.

In the curators briefing notes (from the Ruskin Gallery) for the exhibition (*Theorem*) in which *Front Stage: Back Stage* was developed, there was a stipulation that the exhibition space should be used as a space of research. *Front Stage: Back Stage* in its construction and conceptual underpinning embraced this requirement through exploring performative materiality and the process of formation during the time of the exhibition (in attempting to gather object data). *Front Stage: Back Stage* was constructed by utilising and subverting the accepted/ expected layout and conditions of the exhibition space and its three entrance points. At each entrance to the exhibition space, a box of protective shoe covers were placed alongside a door mat which had to be traversed to cross the threshold. On the door mats, the printed instruction asked agents to place the shoe covers over their footwear.

The medium of *Front Stage: Back Stage* was presented as sculptural in the three-dimensional form of the box of shoe covers and as an installation in the positioning of objects at the entrance points. The object-props making authoritative interventions into the space would become performative in the activation of shoe covers, mostly (but not necessarily always) worn by the agent(s) during the event. The exhibition space, with its distinctive feature of three entrance points (thus demanding the staging of object-props at each), was positioned as a medium to provoke actions.

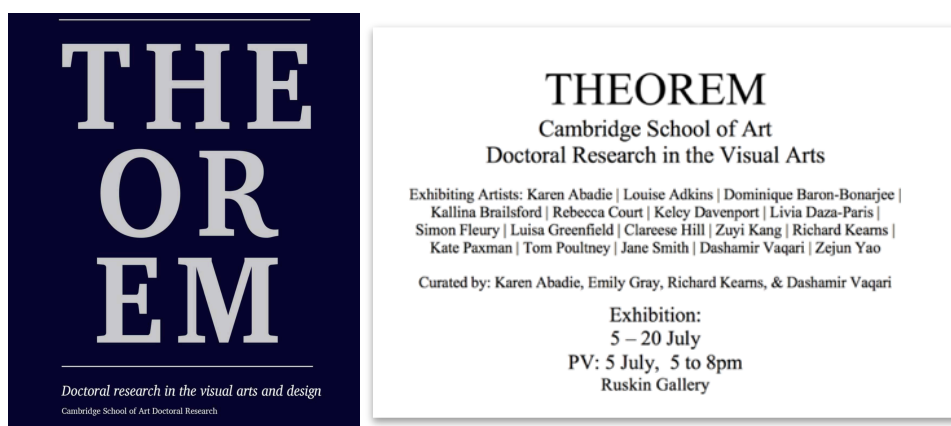


Figure 55: *Theorem* exhibition poster  
Circulated via email and positioned at entrance to the exhibition space, 2019  
(©Ruskin Gallery)



Figure 56: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
Exhibition floor plan mapping out location of stagings and positioning of object-props  
Rebecca Court, 2019  
(©Ruskin Gallery)



Figure 57: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
Entrance point 5: positioning of object-props  
Rebecca Court, 2019  
Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (©Rebecca Court)

***Stage 5: Performing and forming – the intra-action of the event (agents and objects – things and agency)***

The exhibition space in *Front Stage: Back Stage* facilitated spatial relationships between agents and the object-props of the shoe covers, door mats and perspex boxes. These spatial relationships were the interface in which the performed formation of things came into being.



The exhibition space was a critical collaborator and medium in *Front Stage: Back Stage*, framing the possibilities of formation through activation, through processes that were instructive yet open to interpretation and choice by the agent(s). The objects-props, as functional and recognisable things in *Front Stage: Back Stage* became the medium or apparatus for making. In the empty exhibition space, prior to the event, they existed with potential and possibility; open to response and engagement or to a dismissive (perhaps rebellious) rendering of redundancy. The donning of the shoe covers could be perceived as a meaningless action itself; there was no floor-based work to be intra-acted with and the floor of the gallery was not a protected surface requiring shoe covers. The act of putting shoe covers on became a performative act; the essential yet conversely inert action for the making of the work. *Front Stage: Back Stage* occupied an authorial uncertainty between artist-curator, agent(s), exhibition space, institution and the political contexts that exist outside of these fields, but which infiltrate it. Whilst it is understood that familiarity with contemporary art practices informed the agent(s) response to *Front Stage: Back Stage* and added additional layers to their experience of this project, the specialised knowledge of the agent(s) was, and is not important for this research.

The concept of this project was a framework for co-relational co-formation through an act of engagement. In *Front Stage: Back Stage*, engagement was established as a moment of exchange between the door mat, the perspex box, the shoe covers and the agent(s). Formation likely occurred during the event through the simple act of agents circulating the exhibition space donning shoe covers – there was a transferring of agency, encounters between different materials and things – the residue on the surface of the floor encountering the shoe covers, the door mats capturing debris brought about by the presence of the agent(s), the surface of the perspex box as a contact point encountered by the hands and objects of the agent(s). Material, during the exhibition event, was in correspondence with other affecting forces. Whilst traces of agency at this stage were not proven, the performed act of something happening could be speculated upon. An emergence was in process.





Figure 58: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
 Re-staging of object-props being activated  
 Rebecca Court, 2019  
 Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (©Rebecca Court)

#### ***Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork – acknowledging the act of co-formation***

Whilst the project of *Front Stage: Back Stage* was subject to conditions beyond its control, its placement (at each entrance to the gallery space), its language (an instruction via the door mat) and the familiar practical objects (box of shoe covers) elicited an engagement for co-formation through an activity, an agency, that was the encounter.

Emergence in *Front Stage: Back Stage* took the form of used/ disused shoe covers, the perspex box which contained them and the door mats which had been positioned over the threshold of the exhibition space. The being of these artefact-objects immediately after the event, allowed me to consider the phenomenological understandings of relational networks between the human agent(s) and object-props through analysing their material forms. The perspex box of shoe covers was post-event somewhat depleted of object-props. Of the 200 shoe covers which pre-event filled the boxes, around 80 remained – some used, some untouched – there had undoubtedly been an intra-action, a sense of a performance having happened.

*Front Stage: Back Stage* probed the tension between singular and collective authorship, through the placement of the object-props and the staging of ‘activation’ this generated. The resulting formation of artefact-objects here fulfilled the conceptual premise of the project as an artwork. The shift from object-props to artefact-objects within *Front Stage: Back Stage* occurred through a system of positioned apparatus and material capabilities. It was a system premised on the active and present agent(s). Before their being (during the exhibition event), the object-props and I (as the artist-curator) existed (to an extent) in a state of not knowing – for how could we know until all parts of the triangulated system I have proposed came together?

The exhibition event of *Theorem* was invigilated whilst it was open. The two invigilators witnessed the intra-actions with the object-props in *Front Stage: Back Stage*. The invigilators were party to things being in flux, action being exerted, relations occurring and transformations happening. Their observations (see Figure 57) affirming the conclusions I draw in Stage 5 when analysing agency through the trace recorded on the surface and form of the materials of the artefact-objects.

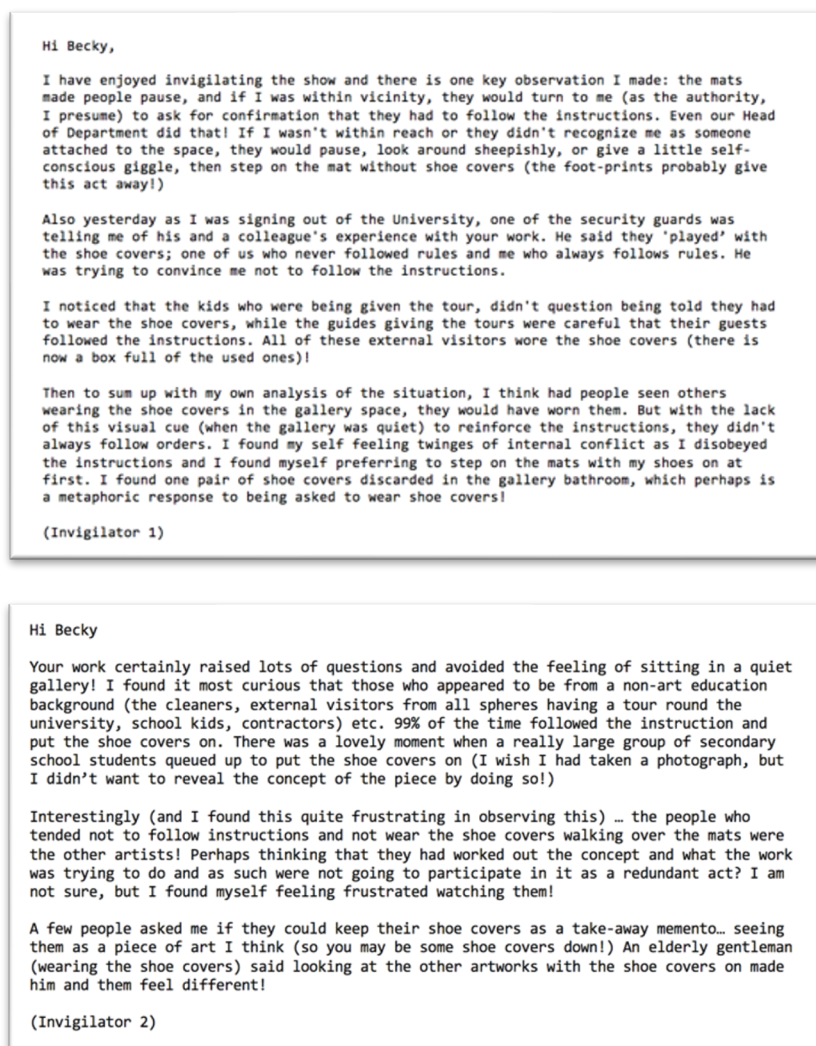


Figure 59: *Front Stage: Back Stage*  
Notes from the Invigilators, 2019  
(©Rebecca Court)

### ***Stage 5: Post event analysis – the artefact-objects, the trace***

This engagement in *Front Stage: Back Stage* was measurable through the material (surface and form) of the post-event artefact-objects. Here the artefact-objects do not produce facts or answers, rather they indicate the complex relations that were in play during the exhibition event.

Examining the conditions of the perspex box (which had contained the shoe covers), revealed traces of agents and agency. The smooth surface marked with fingerprints, smudges, grease, scratches and scrapes – agent(s) and things has been in contact with the material surface.

The door mats looked worn, in parts there was evidence of footprints, fibres from the material compressed – shifted – affected; traces of other objects and things adorned the surface of the mat (dust, dirt, hair, fragments of leaves for example).

The shoe covers remaining in the perspex box (post-event) contained a mixture of used and un-used artefact-objects – some pristine and clean with no trace of having been activated; others returned to the box stretched, worn – marks lining the surface, dirt from the space transferred and imbedded in the material.

Through examination of the artefact-objects, it was clear there had been a transference of energy and encounters had taken place. The shift from object-props to artworks here had occurred through the knowledge the material of the post-event artefact-objects held in fulfilling their performed potentiality (as object-props). Through my material analysis I found that the artefact-objects had been co-relationally co-formed by agents, objects and the exhibition space. The practice of performed co-formation was one conceived as an artwork by myself the artist-curator but enacted by the assemblage of things present through their agency and relationality.

Post examination (on completion of the analysis of the material through photographic documentation and writing with and as the artefacts-objects in the space after the event), the artefact-objects were given over. For the perspex boxes this involved a cleaning of their surface and a dismantling of form for the material to be used for another function. For the door mats a wash and giving over to the exhibition space for further events, for the shoe covers a recycling where they could be used again – likely in a very different context.







Figure 60: *Front Stage : Back Stage*  
 Artwork -artefacts– Material traces  
 Co-authored, 2019  
 (©Rebecca Court)

## **Project 4: *Fourth Wall***

**Birmingham School of Art gallery – February 2020**

### ***Stage 1: Production of props – material, matter and the ready-made***

The fourth wall is a term describing the spatial conditions in the theatre in which an invisible wall between the auditorium and the stage exists – separating the audience and performers. The fourth wall, in theatre terms, resembles a structure and system of power in which the actor presents, and the audience consumes. Through a situation, framed as performative, attention is commanded. This is known as the fourth wall effect.

*Fourth Wall* was an installation constructed for the annual *Staff Show (5)* in February 2020 (a show for which I was an artist-curator). Within *Fourth Wall* sculptural components were conceived in a way which allowed me to test strategies for (and analyse to prove) my hypothesis of staging an encounter as a performative mode of co-relational co-formation. *Fourth Wall* was designed to be the situated site of performed making. It was created by fabricating and installing a transparent PVC curtain across the entrance to the gallery space at Birmingham School of Art. The curtain as an object-prop was fabricated to resemble a ready-made, a repurposed thing, a sculptural form organised into a system to stage an intra-action and exchange.

In theories of theatre making, the concept of the fourth wall was that of a mechanism established to create a division. It later became problematised in order to shift roles and collapse distinctions for a spectator as participant dynamic. Ideas of theatre making were drawn upon in conceiving and staging the conditions for this project. Here, through the use of the threshold, in staging the performative encounter with the sculptural-installation work (object-prop), I aimed to explore curatorial research strategies in relation to the agent(s), the exhibition space and other objects. The PVC strips used as the object-prop (forming a curtain) in *Fourth Wall* had a temporal and spatial life embedded within them – charged as things that had the potential to become material in the formation process through their matter as a surface of recording. The PVC curtain that was produced for this project was designed to fit the entrance to the exhibition space as if it has always been there – as if it was purposeful as an object of existence outside of/ beyond the exhibition event.

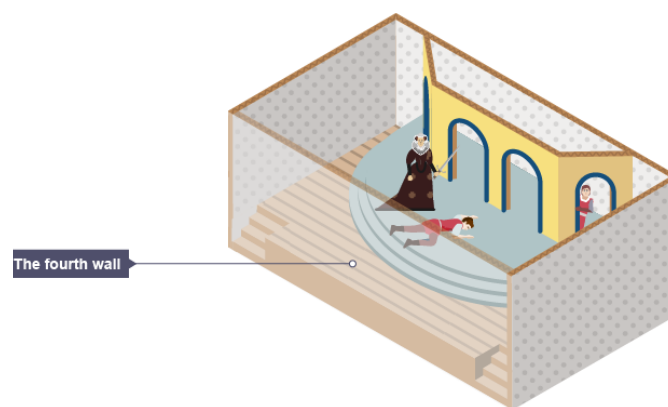


Figure 61: The fourth wall  
Research image – illustration of construct,  
(©BBC)



Figure 62: PVC curtain  
Research image for prop development, 2019  
(©Ebay)

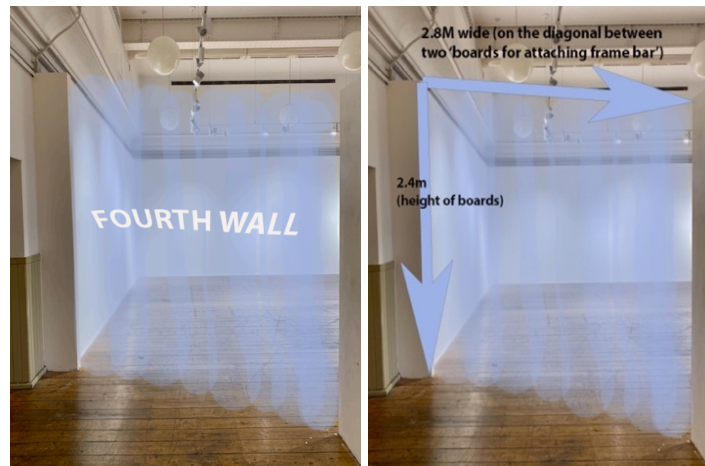


Figure 65: *Fourth Wall* mock-ups  
Developmental sketches/ research, 2019  
(©Rebeca Court)

### ***Stage 2: Staging the conditions – assemblages and the meshwork of the exhibition space, the object-props and the threshold***

The barrier between audience and performer as a separative device was criticised by Bertolt Brecht who aimed to develop strategies within *Epic Theatre* during the 1920s for breaking down the fourth wall effect (Brecht, 1964). Strategies of *Epic Theatre* aimed not to reproduce conditions, but to uncover and reveal them through a process of interruption. Brecht believed that the more frequently action was interrupted the more gestures could be obtained as a means of uncovering situations (Brecht 1964). He stated that ‘the materials of the set must be visible’ in order to show ‘the machinery, the ropes and the files’ (Brecht, 1964, p. 233). In Brecht’s terms, the staging of the object-props within *Fourth Wall* (as a visible apparatus) was necessary in revealing them as objects of a construction of reality (beyond representation). Brecht’s idea of situating a method of production in relation to a complex ensemble of object-props in which their ongoing formation becomes the creative process was drawn on when conceiving *Fourth Wall* as a project. *Fourth Wall* aimed to propose a process of co-formation that was both relational (through negotiation of the performative encounter during the exhibition event) and productive (evidence in the post-event artefact-object tracing the being and agency of things). In *Epic Theatre* this process is the performance of the theatrical event. In *Fourth Wall* it was the staging of the process of becoming through the combining of elements as a structure.

The specific construction of the prop as a recognisable object (fabricated PVC curtain) located at the entrance to the exhibition space was a significant decision in the conceptual staging of *Fourth Wall*. Here I utilised the architectural layout of the exhibition space to frame the potential for agency to be played out. Appearing functional, the curtain cut across the space and through its positioning over the threshold ensured a certainty for the encounter.



*Fourth Wall* aimed to create encounters between things (agent(s) and objects). These encounters were specific to the site on which these relational formations occurred. *Fourth Wall* demarcated the exhibition space as a space of performance, a laboratory and/ or a factory as a site of formation. The project revealed, through its title, a questioning of spectator participant hierarchies. The title of the staged event, *Fourth Wall*, was playfully suggestive in this sense.



Figure 64: Installation of *Fourth Wall*  
PVC curtain– Object-prop (exit from the exhibition space)  
Rebecca Court, 2020  
Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham (©Rebecca Court)



Figure 65: *Staff Show* (the exhibition event for *Fourth Wall*)  
Exhibition poster circulated via email and positioned at entrance to the gallery, 2020  
(©Rebecca Court)



***Stage 5: Performing and forming – the intra-action of the event (agents and objects – things and agency)***

Through the event of the exhibition, via the object-prop (curtain), conditions for things corresponding occurred. Correspondence in *Fourth Wall* happened through the encounter – enabling vital forces to be examined through the PVC strips of the material of the object-prop. This was the approach to staging co-relational co-formation.

The PVC curtain as an object-prop, constructed a process of formation through the being of the agent(s) attending the exhibition event. Here form (things) were brought into being. During the event, which was open to the public daily for a two-week period, the PVC curtain was often (but not always) perceived as an artwork, the lack of clarity here was purposeful (there was no label attributing *Fourth Wall* to an individual artist and no description about any of the artworks). The construction of *Fourth Wall* in staging the encounter in the environment of the exhibition space did so in a direct way – the agent(s), whilst willingly entering, was required to engage with the material in order to access the exhibition space. Ensuring a set path of movement (and as such action) in the agent(s) crossing the threshold, the object-prop here ensured a process of formation occurred – the agent(s) activating the object-prop into a mode of performative material formation during the event.

*Fourth Wall* was a durational performance of formation which began when the exhibition opened. It was performed through the agent(s) and the object-props coming into contact with each other. The object-prop during the event was in a continual process of shifting and being affected through the performance enacted by the agent(s). The performative encounter of *Fourth Wall*, became an event of continual formation in the evolution of the artefact-objects. The staging of *Fourth Wall* and the performed material formation which followed, declared that action was in process – through the movement and subsequent noise of the PVC strips of the curtain separating and re-joining each time the agent(s) encountered it. Here the agent(s) deconstructed the existing order of material form and enabled an altered material state. A destabilisation of the fourth wall effect through the traversing of the threshold interrupting this permeable wall hinted towards a subversion of power structures. This performed formation ended when the exhibition closed.

Through a physical exchange between the agent(s) and the object-prop a co-formation was happening. Context here was everything as the exhibition space and duration of the exhibition event became the conditions of possibility for the practice. In this moment practice was collectively being executed by agent(s) and non-human props (objects). The work was open-ended in this sense. The agent(s) within *Fourth Wall* demonstrated an agency of power in the embodiment, enactment and disruption of the material form. The performative act implied by the ready-made object-prop (PVC curtain) indicated to the agents that they were in a circumstance where artistic status could be conferred.



Figure 66: *Fourth Wall*  
Re-staging of object-props being activated  
Rebecca Court, 2020  
Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham (©Rebecca Court)

***Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork – acknowledging the act of co-formation***

As an artist-curator attending to the forces in and through the object-prop of a PVC curtain used in *Fourth Wall*, through a witnessing of agency during the event, I was able to explore how things (as the artefact-object) came to be and how they came to bear (as object-props) on the agent(s) who encountered them. The event of the exhibition in *Fourth Wall* staged the conditions for the agent(s), through their being, to allow new form to come into being. The object of formation, the PVC material of the curtain, within *Fourth Wall* had post-event allowed knowledge to come into being. The agent(s) in *Fourth Wall* (unknowingly) performed a practice of formation. Through their being and actions within the space they assumed the position of maker, of activator, of completer, of co-former. Their being was evidenced not through observation of them but through post-event analysis of the artefact-objects in their transformation from props into artefacts.

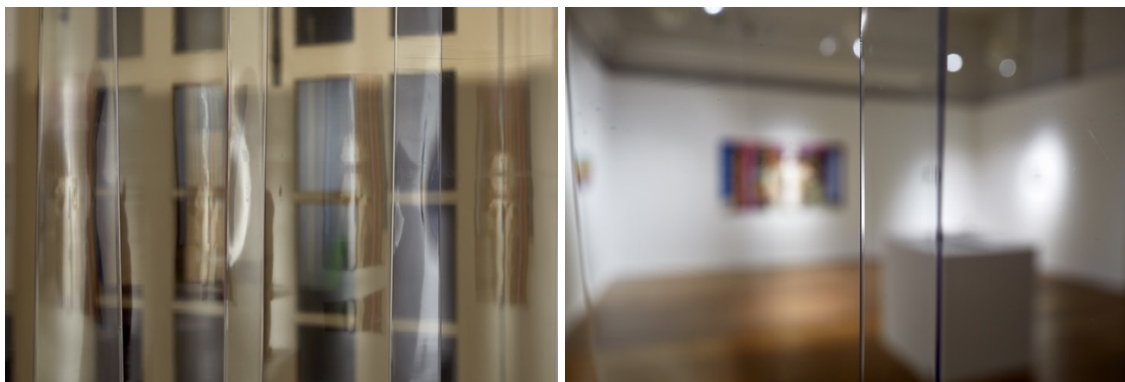
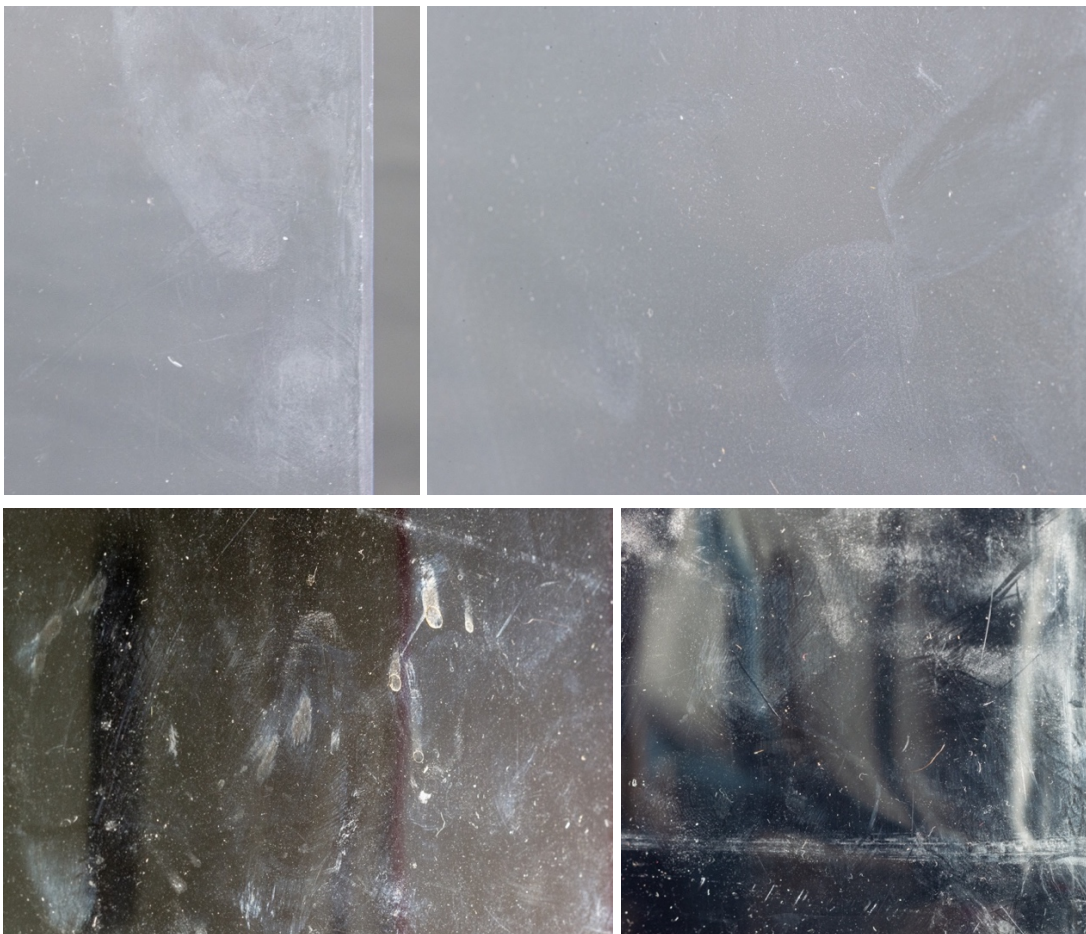


Figure 67: *Fourth Wall*  
Documentation of objects in situ at the end of the exhibition event  
Co-authored, 2020  
Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham (©Rebecca Court)

### ***Stage 5: Post event analysis – the artefact-objects, the trace***

A complex network of factors warranted consideration in the process of analysing the epistemological position of objects in *Fourth Wall*. Analysis of the material state and form of the PVC strips of the curtain revealed that a change had occurred, there had been a disruption and alteration. The material of the PVC strips of the curtain in some places had lost its form; post event analysis evidenced some bending, warping and/ or smoothing of edges. On the surface I recorded cuts, lines, transference of other materials as marks and traces. These multiple traces allowed insights into theories of formation; each was anonymised in the authorship but relational in the system which led to their being. The altered post-event form here a key signifier in the act of becoming that had occurred.

Through analysis of the post-event artefact-object, process of being, and of being interrupted by collective agent(s), the PVC material unveiled the conditions of the formation of matter in the generation of knowledge. This formation was here considered an artwork that through the disclosure of its material capabilities and affects suggested that objects and agent(s) simultaneously existed in a situation of the event. This PVC material surface of the artefact-objects (as surfaces of the post event condition of the form) owned this knowledge of its own history as a co-formed, co-authored thing.





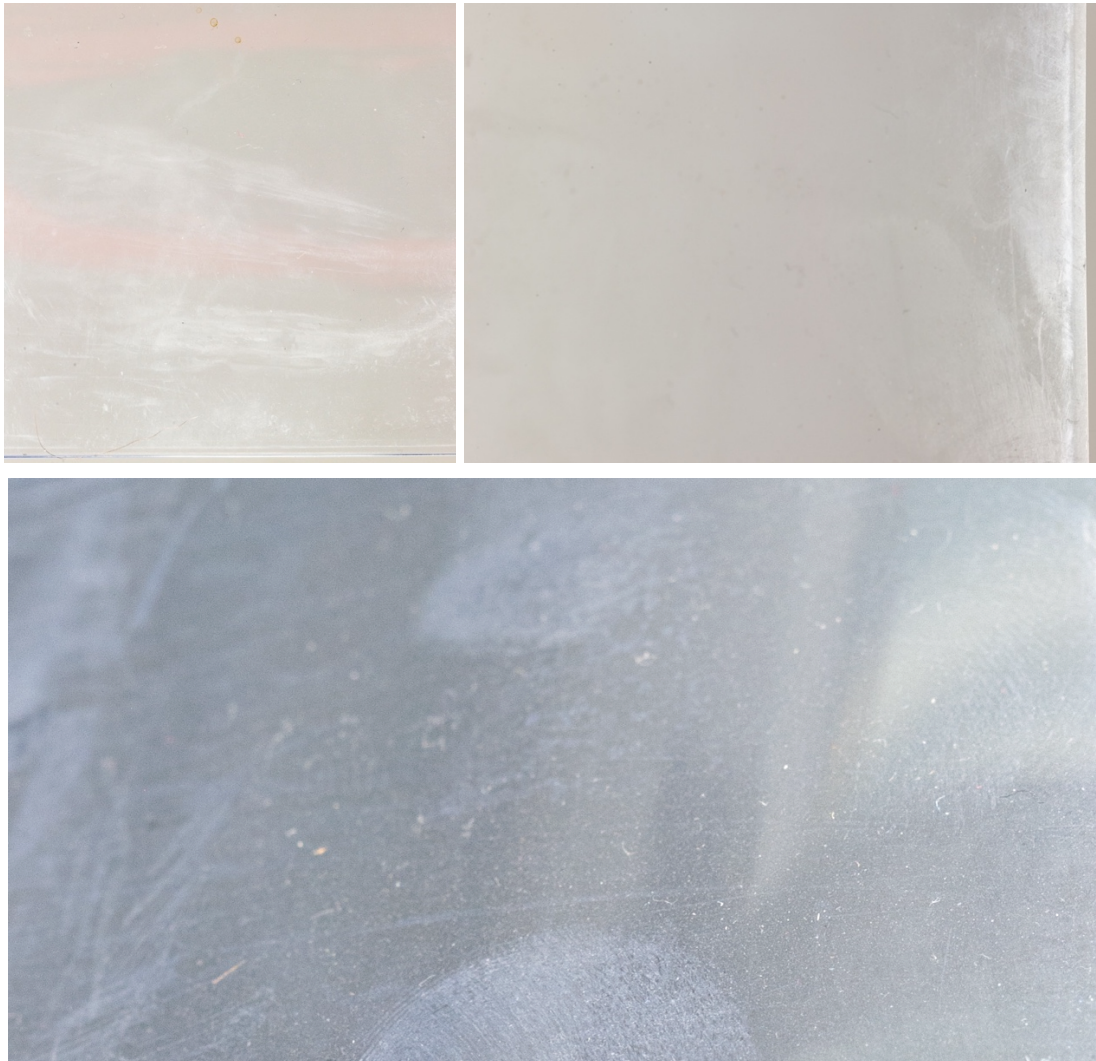


Figure 68: *Fourth Wall*  
Artefact-objects – Material traces  
Co-authored, 2020  
(©Rebecca Court)



# Conclusion

The outputs of my research inquiry are:

This thesis

The practice – creative writing accounts and photographic documentation of the material/ surface of the artefact-objects from the four research exhibition events:  
*True and Correct, Dispositif, Front Stage: Back Stage, Fourth Wall*

*Key to Key Words*

*A Knowledge Mobility Framework*

*Principles of Ethical Co-Formation*

*A Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice*

## Contributions to knowledge

My research has proven that the triangulated being of things (agents, objects and the exhibition space/ event), through human and non-human entanglements of matter and agency, offers the potential for time-based, co-relational co-formation. Here, I have developed an original proposition of the agent and of co-relational co-formation – shifting both the vocabulary of the discourse and the dominant methodologies of making that are currently employed in contemporary art practices. These are the principal original contributions to knowledge made through the findings of my research.

As an artist-curator, my thesis has emerged predominantly from practice-centred research. It has been informed by my interest in sculptural-installation-performative practices (and their contemporary and historical contexts). Throughout my thesis I have cited and analysed artists and artwork examples relevant to an inquiry centred around being, agency and relational dynamics. Each example has allowed me to draw knowledge on methodologies of making (for instance in analysing the use of the threshold as a mechanism for staging encounters) and to examine the critical discourse currently used to describe these works (for instance as participatory). This has allowed me to better understand and to propose new knowledge on the complexity of human and non-human relations. I have also re-assessed my ideas within and against the new materialist, phenomenological and anthropological fields. I have done so with the broader intention

that these theories further enter the discourse of contemporary art practices and art criticism as they relate to the crucial interrelations that exist between theory and practice. The relationships between performativity and material, between art formation and its socio-political context, between systems of power and agency, between the ethical positions of things and taxonomies of practice, have all been central concerns within my research inquiry. These core concerns have informed my critique of methodologies of practice and the language which surrounds it.

Through the stagings of my projects (*Ture and Correct*, *Dispositif*, *Front Stage: Back Stage* and *Fourth Wall*), I have been able to create a relational-structure in which things (encounters which lead to the post-event assemblage of artefact-objects) have been co-formed. As I have established, the interconnected nature of the exhibition event, the object-props and the agents allow relations and meshworks (in which things interweave) to form. Here I find that objects (which exist in a state of constant material configuration) have the ability to encode knowledge of interrelations through their matter. At moments during the exhibition event, different agents, object-props and spaces (as things) have assumed different roles, different orders, different announcements of power. Each of my projects have demonstrated that no part (in this process of triangulated co-relational co-formation) is isolated and not co-dependent (in some way) on the other. This finding is further demonstrated in the analysis of each project (see *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*) and has allowed me to re-consider dynamics of power, classification and modes of formation – to offer up different ways of thinking about, writing about and staging co-relational art practices.

The findings of my research serve to open up the space of art production (systems of co-relational co-formation) and discourse (categorising language and taxonomies of practice) in order to explore (account for and draw attention to) the agency of all of its stakeholders (things). My research has offered an opportunity to better understand the relational capabilities that things can facilitate whilst also drawing attention to the entangled-ness of this knowledge in terms of ethics and authorship. Everything around the object-props during the exhibition event has had an impact on the network of co-relations that have formed, and the encounters of intra-action that have taken place. The agency of the object-props, the space, the time-based event have all been co-relational things of equal importance in the co-forming potentials they have contributed to staging.

My position as an artist-curator has allowed me to employ curatorial independence (and ethical sensibilities) in realising stagings which have acted as sculptural interventions within pre-defined sites of artistic presentation (the exhibition space). The positionality and centrality of my being has been entangled within my research inquiry. This relational positionality has been key in enabling my understanding of how object-props, during the exhibition event, become co-formed things through multiple intra-acting encounters with

multiple co-constituted agencies. A critical reflexive process of recording and analysing has enabled me to develop an ethical-methodological framework for acknowledging and staging formation through co-being (which I put forward as a future condition of art practice, production, reception and critical theorisation). This re-framing has important implications for the ways in which art is conceived, engaged with and discussed. Whilst not all practices can be considered under the propositions I have set out, in many instances the concepts and findings can be applied to inform a critical and methodological framing around the agent(s)'s role within the dynamic structure of the exhibition event. This shift needs acknowledging in the taxonomies of practice used by the artist-curator and critics. It is essential in the context of contemporary art practices which involve multiple agents, which seek to secure public funding, which aim to contribute to communities of practice which are contingent on co-being, which aim to challenge dominant structures or norms and seek to re-distribute power across all modes of practice.

At the core of my research inquiry has been an exploration of language and the way things are categorised: how we classify things, our need to do this and the limits of classifications. In re-evaluating and re-classifying some of the key terms (categorising language) I have interrogated what being and agency, as well as language signifies in the production, theorisation and reception of art. This is an area which I identified as not having been fully attended and which may have inhibited potential frameworks for co-relational co-formed art practice. This is perhaps due to the way art practice often assumes and draws from different modes and fields – between established and played out roles (artist, curator, agent) as both performative and productive (the act of making and existing simultaneously). In looking forwards – and especially in light of emerging from a pandemic where physical co-relational being was not possible – my research reminds us how crucial these relational potentialities are in informing what and how we do and co-form things.

It is my ambition that the findings of this research (beyond this thesis) exist as published material but also as things communicated through future practice itself. It is my hope and intention that the impact of the findings I put forward have use to others working in exhibition-making, research and analysis to bring a more complex, relational understanding of how humans and non-humans interact and transfer, transmit and experience agency. While the ideas of non-human agency are well-theorised, the implications for curating/ exhibition-making are significant. This research proposes another way of knowing what can happen in these thresholds of the exhibition context. The outcomes and findings of this research are considered a form of knowledge exchange, the findings of which (presented as recommendations) are my original contributions to knowledge.

## **Contributions to Knowledge – *Recommendation 1:***

### **The exhibition event as a site for staging co-relational practice – understanding the potential agency of things in a co-formational practice**

My research finds that agency (and thus affect) is generated through intra-actions between things during the exhibition event. Attending to the entanglements of co-relational being during the exhibition event offers greater understanding of the distribution of agency and affect amongst co-forming things. Here I acknowledge that all agents are responsible in equal measure for the formation of things by being within this system and meshwork of formation. Within this system the exhibition event is foregrounded not as static, but an evolving and live medium which stages the relational conditions – creating an equilibrium between things (defined as fluxes and forces of space, objects and agents). In allowing things to co-relationally co-form, my research findings call for an investment to be made in affect as having transformative potentials in the becoming of things (intra-actions which contribute to the generation of artistic outputs).

Co-relationality, in staging co-formed art practice, is made possible through agents and objects being in a system and framework of things during the exhibition event. My research findings recommend that artist-curators in understanding the being, relationality, agency and positionality of all things in their projects, extend ways of staging and co-forming art practice in order to cultivate greater acknowledgment of the potentiality of things (in the process of things becoming). Here artistic-curatorial approaches that employ methods which modulate between an understanding of objects (as both props and sculptures), agents and exhibition spaces/ events in treating each element as relational with agential affecting potentials, should be considered as a form of practice.

My research concludes by presenting a *Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice* (which mirrors the systematic five-part methodology I developed for my *Knowledge Mobility Framework* and which draws on the *Principles of Ethical Co-Formation* guide I produced). It is an organisational system for artist-curators to develop corresponding, relational and formational art practice involving the exhibition space/ event, object-props and agents. It is a set of principles and ideals that can be applied to open-ended practice of this nature. It is non-definitive – it exists as a *thing* to evolve and be formed through others (and other things). It exists within and outside the grounds on which contemporary art practice currently operates.



## Contributions to Knowledge – *Recommendation 2:*

### The need to re-visit language

Throughout my research inquiry I have identified ways in which language holds power and carries implications, the ways that terminology affects how things are understood and perceived, and the need to re-visit language to ensure its suitability and evolution. This inquiry has highlighted linguistic conventions and the relations these conventions have to art practice – the way one submits to the other – the ways in which language can and has been used to challenge structures. Through the process of disrupting language (in for example *Chapter 1: A Matter of Terminology* and my coining of the term agent(s)) and then re-categorising or re-positioning terms (for example in my *Key to Key Words*), I have been able to open-up possibilities of co-formation and think about and with practice in expanded ways (such claim evidenced in my practice research projects and their analysis presented in *Chapter 5: The Act of Co-Formation*. The *agent*, *co-relational* and *co-formed* practice are terms I put forward as an outcome of my research to signify their potentialities and to inform developments within an expanding field of art practice. Linguistic propositions (as findings), through a practice of letting go of absolute views of what is and is not, what things mean or do not – allows for knowledge to be shared and possibilities to open up.

My findings conclude that terminology and language exist in a moment in time – we name something to be able to talk about it, to gain knowledge – to give an idea agency. Things however are not singular entities and are in a state of constant transformation. Language, in describing things, should therefore evolve and re-evaluate itself in an ongoing process (of re-searching). A conclusion (and outcome) of my research is the *Key to Key Words* glossary of terms which proposes and clarifies the linguistic form that this research signals, and the ways in which the user can move within and outside the labyrinths of language. This glossary in expanding on language and methodologies expresses classifications in its own terms and not according to predefined category systems. My research findings consider (apply) language (words) within (to) my research – my own practice has generated an approach to writing ‘with’ and ‘through’ things to reflect the relational activity of writing and the relational dimension of objects-exhibition-spaces and language. I have done this in order to extend the findings and propose ways we might understand, present and form things. Articulating the relationality, agency and formation of things through expanded language-based practice in challenging traditional research conventions has allowed me to make an original contribution to artistic and academic research methodologies and discourses.

## Final thoughts

### The context, the proposition and the acknowledgement of limitations

In summarising the conclusions of my research inquiry, I refer back to the introduction where I outlined the context of this research through the Latin *contextus*. Here, as the world moves forwards and continually changes around me (and this research) I return to the idea of context. The exhibition space as a relational space, a space that is created in a phenomenon where things (agents and object-props) intra-act has been pivotal in the framing of my inquiry – one that has informed the artist-curatorial framework I have developed. The intra-actions that I have theorised and tested have generated outputs, traces and possibilities for understanding, informing and describing art making methodologies and dynamics. The focus on bringing the production of art out of the studio and exploring the ideas of the exhibition event structure bear relevance in summarising the conditions needed for the potential of co-relational co-formation.

The importance of context has directly informed my research, challenging the way I have proposed and situated contemporary art practices of this nature. In thinking back to the ideas of the new materialist thinkers, the material-turn which saw the combining of human and non-human things and the idea of event structures, the context of a pandemic has both interrupted and shifted my research inquiry. The pandemic forced me to think differently about modes of making, of writing, of embodied knowledge-finding methodologies and of how practices can be positioned (and become agile enough to adapt) to this future. The impact of the pandemic on my research serves to remind me that nothing can be isolated, that context impacts on things and brings with it its own set of relational dynamics informing the formation of practice. To contextualise something, to site something in a context, is to outline the relationality of one thing to another thing. In the case of my research – in the co-relational potential of affect – this context is broad, fluid and evolving (in the same way that an open-ended artwork is). The context is what existed before, during and beyond the research. The research responds to context by outlining the potentials of art practice (what it can do) in the context in which it appears, in the way language works and the way practice is expressed in language through it being co-relational and responsive in its methodology.

Research is a formative tool for opening up new possibilities of staging, making and writing about art practice. A recommendation of this research is this need for an ongoing process of re-searching. The outcomes of my research inquiry offer ways to make in a forward-looking direction – looking critically at ourselves and our practices in shaping the way these might evolve. This feels perhaps more important now than ever before. The conclusions of my research, in putting together a framework (as a resource), is to continually progress an inquiry, to inform things, to contribute, to propose and to

challenge. The *Key to Key-Words*, *Knowledge Mobility Framework*, *Principles for Ethical Co-Formation* and *Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice* outputs as original contributions to knowledge are intended to prompt the way we become attuned to agency and affect through the encounter of things – provoking shifts in the way we frame, stage, discuss and think about possibilities of co-relational co-formation.

# Proposition for Co-Relational Co-Formed Practice

This proposition sets out the terms, ideals and principles for staging a sculptural, installation, performance-based co-relational co-formed practice project with things.

## Agents

Consider your audience as agents – acknowledge their being, their agency.  
Acknowledge their producing potentials.  
Acknowledge that agency can be affective.

## Artist-Curator

You are the knowing conceiver of the staging .  
You intend to explore possibilities of co-relational co-formation as practice.  
You work with agency as a material.  
You consider the entanglement of being and agency as flow, in flux and live.  
You give over a degree of authorship.  
You are interested in questioning modes of formation.

## Exhibition Event

This is the point in which things are in action, performing, intra-acting.  
The exhibition event can be used to challenge dominant methodologies.  
Do this by acknowledging the part played by all things.

## Exhibition Space

The exhibition space is the apparatus for the affective encounter.  
It is the support structure.  
Utilise the threshold of this to stage the conditions - to frame the act.

## Language

Language has transforming potentials.  
A number of issues (and practices) are bound by language.  
Acknowledge that terminology and classifications are in parts unsuitable.  
Attempt to shape discourse.  
Attempt to evolve thinking and knowledge by writing about, through and with things.  
Language and the understanding of co-relational co-formed things are connected.

## Object-Props

Object-props are physical – a material, matter and form.  
They trace an entanglement of matter.  
They are conveyed as both artworks and props.  
They have a function and reference concerns conceptually.

## Post-Event Artefacts

These are your objects of knowledge.  
They trace being, agency and encounters through their material surface.  
Examine these – reflexively understand them.  
Document them.  
After the moment of analysis recycle, release or repurpose them.

These things allow for the co-relational co-formation of things through consideration of the following 5 principles of practice.



### **Stage 1: Produce the props**

The project is the concept. The way in which the artist-curator sets out to stage practice. Within the production of the props, material qualities must be considered.

Material representation, how objects are formed, what form they take and what the capabilities of their matter is to trace agency is essential.

Your object-prop is your tool, your apparatus, your knowledge holding device.

It can be fabricated pre-event in a number of ways – pay attention to its surface and construct.

### **Stage 2: Stage the conditions**

The exhibition space creates a framework for co-relational co-formation – consider it a medium.

Utilise the entrance point, the threshold as a means to stage the encounter, to create a channel of circulation, to configure things.

In producing art, one also has to produce the conditions that enable co-relational being and the potentials for co-formation.

The conditions create the channels of circulation.

Leave no instructions.

Position object-props at the threshold to the space – these can appear as incidentally or deliberately intra-active.

The object-props may or may not present themselves as artworks.

### **Stage 3: Performing and formation**

The event is a performance – a space, a time, a happening that matters.

Within the event a meshwork of being exists.

The relational emergence of things is now happening.

Agency is at play – let this happen and evolve – let potentialities emerge.

The process of formation is in progress.

Write with the objects, the space – during the event – explore language as practice.

### **Stage 4: Realisation of the open-ended artwork**

Understand the five stages of the co-relational co-formation of the artwork.

The artwork formation is pre-event the production of object-props, during the event a performative becoming and post-event an object-artefact.

Post-event on the withdraw of the object-prop, the artwork manifests as co-formed object-artefacts.

### **Stage 5: Post-event analysis**

Use the matter, the material, the surface and form of the object-artefacts to trace relational being, agency – to seek to know about the encounter, the intra-action.

Reject the idea of expertise – develop your own criteria for evaluation.

As the artist-curator, operate in a position of criticality.

Acknowledge the complexity of the co-relational co-formation that has occurred.

Is the language you are using to write about this work suitable – no? – change it.

Apply language that most accurately describe the relational formations that have occurred.

# List of Illustrations

## Figure 1

Anthony McCall. *You and I, Horizontal III*. [Installation]. 2007. Serpentine Gallery, London. Available at: <<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/anthony-mccall/>> (Accessed: 16 September 2017)

## Figure 2

Rebecca Court. *Not the Language of Politics but the Politics of Language: 21 selected sound bites from David Cameron*. [Performance]. 2011. Royal College of Art, London. Available at: <<https://vimeo.com/26315049>> (Accessed: 04 November 2017)

## Figure 3

Rebecca Court. *Acquiring Authority*. [Installation]. 2013. Stew Gallery, Norwich. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

## Figure 4

Rebecca Court. *Compulsory Purchased*. [Installation]. 2012. Wolstenholme building, Liverpool. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

## Figure 5

Rebecca Court. *Field of Inquiry*. [Illustration]. 2023.

## Figure 6

Rebecca Court. *True and Correct*. [Project] 2017. Coventry Evening Telegraph building, Coventry. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

## Figure 7

Rebecca Court. *Dispositif*. [Project] 2018. Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

## Figure 8

Rebecca Court. *Front Stage: Back Stage*. [Project] 2019. Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

## Figure 9

Rebecca Court. *Fourth Wall*. [Project] 2020. Birmingham School of Art Gallery, Birmingham. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

#### Figure 10

Rebecca Court. *Final Submission*. [PhD]. Key to Key words, thesis, sample of artefact-object material, white gloves, archival box. Image available via Rebecca Court (private collection)

#### Figure 11

Art & Language. *Index Of Reading Room*. [Installation]. 1972. documenta 5, Kassel. Available at: <<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/books-at-documenta-medium-art-object-cultural-symbol.html#.Y29kGi2cYcg>> (Accessed: 21 March 2019)

#### Figure 12

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#### Figure 13

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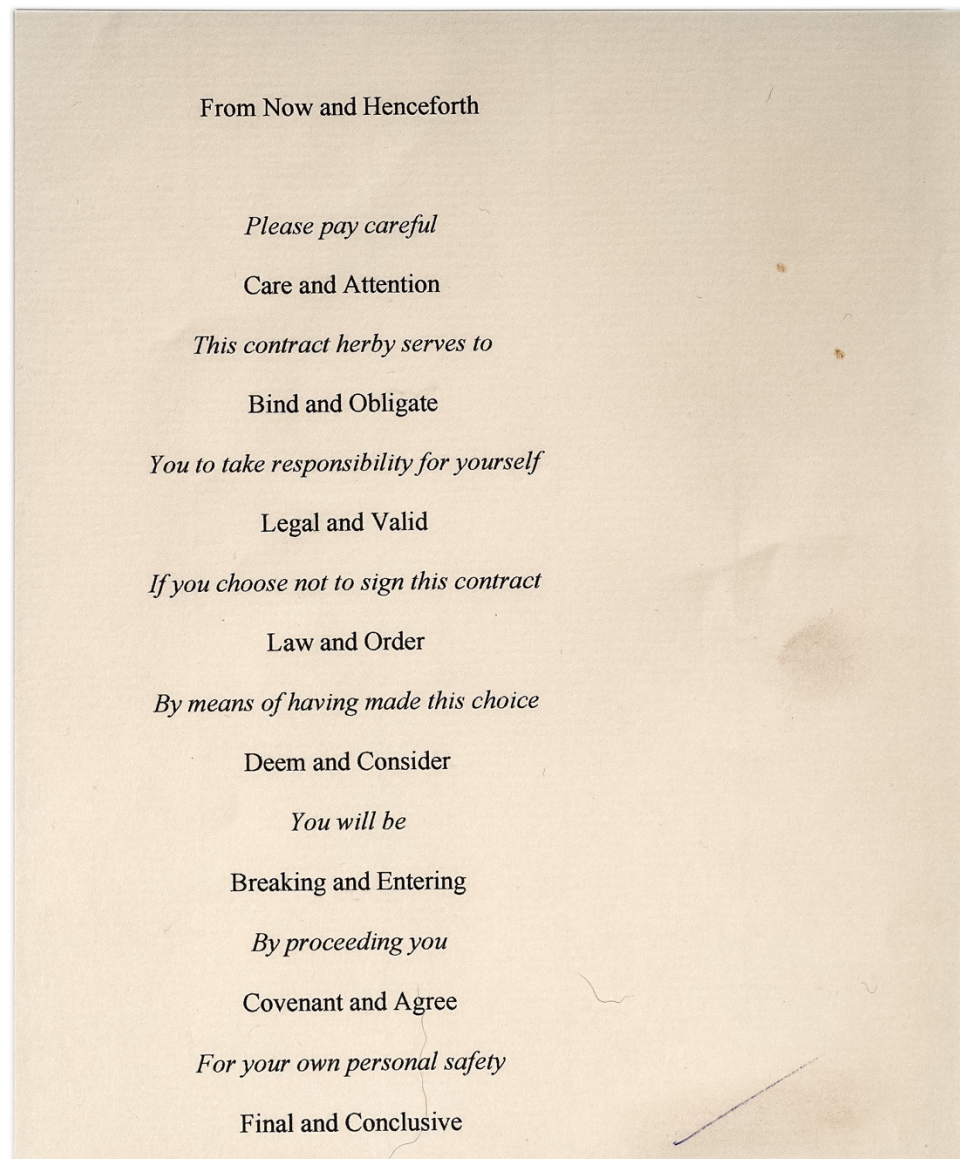
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# Appendix

The following images capture a sample of each of the materials used within the stagings of my projects where it was possible to retain a section of the matter.

These samples, taken from the artefact-objects, post-event are represented photographically within this digital submission but physically (within an archival box) for the printed submission.

## Sample 1: paper (from contract artefact-object) *True and Correct*

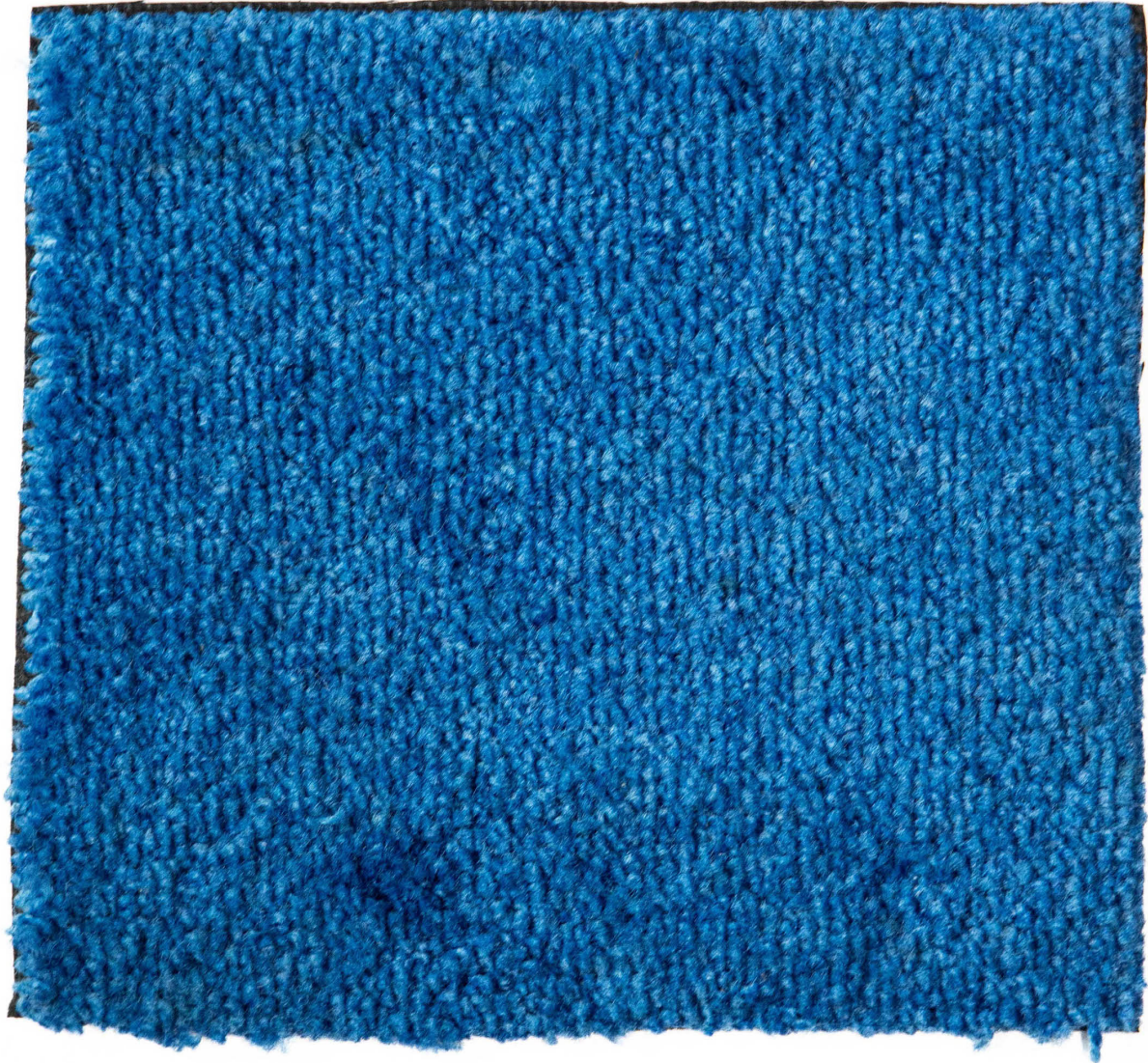


Sample 2: tarpaulin (from security bollard artefact-object)  
*Dispositif*





Sample 3: tufted cotton and rubber (from door mat artefact-object)  
*Front Stage: Back Stage*





**Sample 4: polyethene and cotton fabric (from shoe cover artefact-object)**  
*Front Stage: Back Stage*



**Sample 5: PVC plastic (from curtain artefact-object)**  
*Fourth Wall*

