# Artist-Run Initiatives:
## A Study of Cultural Construction

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# Abstract

This thesis presents research carried out at three artist-run initiatives (ARIs), all based in the United Kingdom: 85A in Glasgow, Empty Shop in Durham and The Mutual in Glasgow. In each instance, it is argued that members of these ARIs actively produced distinct 'cultures', understood here as 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10), that in constructing reality in certain ways further acted to legitimate certain kinds of 'art' and certain kinds of 'artist' for those involved.

To conduct this enquiry, the thesis brings into contact a number of disciplines that do not often meet, including the analytic philosophy of art, the sociology of art, identity theory and educational research, and employs three mains lenses for enquiry: membership, identity and 'learning'. The thesis argues that members in each of the three ARIs, through their 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) of membership, constructed and navigated distinct cultures so as to 'frame' (Goffman 1974) particular artistic practices and artworks as salient, and to construct places in the world where they might 'matter' (Guibernau 2013: 28). Members further self-identified in relation to these cultures (Jenkins 2008), producing narratives (Ricoeur 1991) that would allow them to be heard as meaningful, and which at times allowed for a transformation of the self, whereby members were able to validate desired artistic identities, or to re-position themselves as increasingly confident and able. Further, although members did not necessarily indicate that they had joined the ARI in order to learn, they invariably suggested particular forms of learning that 'pushed' them to develop, to work in new ways, and to become artists of certain kinds. Here then, the everyday nature of meaning-making is writ large, for even the most 'ordinary' of tasks was nevertheless imbued with cultural and political ideals of the artist, and was frequently suggested to have resulted in artworks that would not, or could not, have been made in the same way elsewhere. However, while some members were able to draw upon the culture constructed within the ARI to significantly transform themselves, by no means were all members able to do likewise. As such, the thesis presents instances of cultural construction, and understandings of the categories of 'art' and 'artists', that were profoundly local, complex, unequal and at times, fraught.

The thesis concludes by calling for more critical research into ARIs as key sites in the production of culture, and for an approach that takes seriously the 'potent emotional content' of identity-work, belonging and membership (Guibernau 2013: 2) within ARIs. It further considers the wider ramifications of such instances of cultural construction, both for understandings of 'art' and 'artist' more generally, and as a methodology for the study of artistic and non-artistic cultures that is 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004) for those similarly seeking to discover who can do what in the world, who can be what, and how.

# Acknowledgements

While responsibility for the arguments and errors contained within this thesis are mine alone, there are a number of people to whom I owe particular thanks.

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# Chapter One

## Artist-run Initiatives and the construction of culture[s]: key questions, boundaries and positions

> It takes a lot of people to make an artwork, not just the one usually credited with the result (Becker, Faulkner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 2).

This thesis focuses on the cultures produced and navigated within artist-run initiatives, or ARIs, broadly held to be anything run by and for artists (e.g. artists' collectives, co-operatives, alternative galleries, grassroots and DIY art studios, independent art spaces, and/or self-organised art initiatives). It contends that these cultures, understood not as 'simply and evidently 'there'' (Gubrium and Holstein 2007: 3) but as constructions of reality that are continually and actively made and remade by those involved, allow individuals involved in ARIs to bring into being selective ways of thinking and doing, and to construct as legitimate certain objects, processes, relationships and positions while rejecting or avoiding others. In other words, this thesis argues that cultures constructed within ARIs have a bearing upon the objects that come to be understood as 'art', the persons who can claim the position of 'artist', and the values and meanings attached or denied to both. Moreover, it is precisely because cultures are not simply 'there' to be adopted that there is a need to explore *how* the construction of cultures takes place within ARIs, and in what ways cultural production in one ARI might differ to that in ARIs elsewhere.

The thesis specifically focuses on ARIs, one particular 'site' or technology in the far wider field of art production. The reasons for this, as will shortly be laid out in more detail, are twofold. First, ARIs are increasingly recognised and positioned as culturally powerful, and as having a profound impact upon wider discourses and histories of art. Bedoya (1993: 5), for example, has claimed that,

> When the history of art making in the latter half of the twentieth century is written, artist-run spaces will be accorded equal importance with other art movements of this period.

Whether or not ARIs constitute a unified 'movement' is a matter debated in Chapter Two, but it might be noted here that ARIs are globally prolific, and that involvement is strongly advocated as 'the norm' for arts graduates in the United Kingdom (a-n 2008). Second, and despite this recognition of value, ARIs are almost entirely absent from critical and empirical research, and there exist very few studies of practice. Although this is arguably beginning to change (e.g. of the seven journal articles located, four were written in the past two years), I would propose, and will later demonstrate, that ARIs can function as key sites in the production of art and artists, and warrant further critical attention. This is certainly not to say that *all* ARIs act as key sites for the production of art and artists, or that they do so within fixed boundaries and in isolation from the field of art. Rather, it is to propose a concentrated focus upon ARIs as one possible 'site' amongst many in the broader field of art, in the hope that this will

allow for sufficient engagement with organisations that are expected to be complex, and where this very complexity is part and parcel of the situated nature of artist-run practice.

In order to carry out this kind of in-depth engagement with complex ideas, three ARIs were selected, and agreed to participate in research - 85A in Glasgow, Empty Shop in Durham and The Mutual in Glasgow – and the data collected included, in total, a range of texts (published and unpublished) as produced by or related to those in each ARI, 36 semi-structured interviews, 20 'timelines', 13 drawings of the ARIs, and three days of observation at specific events.

However, while this thesis primarily concentrates upon the production of art and artists within ARIs, it poses questions that have far broader ramifications. For example, at its most basic the thesis asks: what is art? Can anything be art? How is art made? Who makes art? Can anyone make art? These questions, in touching upon the categories of art and artist (categories invested with prestige (Shiner 2001), and privilege (Bourdieu 1993)), have been contested for hundreds of years, with varying lines drawn in the sand to distinguish between that which is art, that which is not, and how both sets of objects, authors and ideas might be treated and valued. Indeed, the question, 'but is it art?' can still provoke outrage, with 'false claimants' perceived not just as 'inauthentic but dishonest', or even as 'deliberate insults' (Carey 2005: xi). Moreover, these are questions that seek to discover who can do what in the world, who can be what, and how. As such, they require engagement with the cultural, social, historical and political structure of society, and with the means by which individuals might navigate this terrain to find, or create, a place for themselves. It is in this sense that I later argue for the wider implications of this study in relation to ARIs, the field of art, and the production of both artistic and non-artistic cultures.

Later chapters also set out, and argue for, the specific approaches taken throughout the period of research. However, it might be noted here that the thesis brings into contact varying disciplines that do not often meet (by exploring the analytic philosophy of art as well as the sociology of art, for example, or cultural sociology and educational research) and employs three main lenses by which to investigate the production of cultures within ARIs: notions of membership, identity and 'learning'. These lenses are not intended to together form any complete mechanism for the study of cultures, but instead are used to offer varying perspectives on practice that might illuminate the meaning-making processes that members engaged in. Following critical analysis in each area, it is argued that:

- Members in each ARI produced cultures that were fundamentally distinct, even when in geographic proximity to each other, and which legitimated very different kinds of art, ways in which to make art, and individuals who might claim the title of artist;
- Members did not simplistically act within accepted boundaries, but navigated and actively re-worked these, so as to both 'frame' (Goffman 1974) certain activities and certain kinds of artwork as legitimate, and to construct places in the world where they might 'matter' (Guibernau 2013: 28), whereby members commonly invested membership with emotional

significance and value. In other words, it is argued that 'membership' was not merely procedural, but constructive of particular kinds of artistic practice as carried out by certain kinds of artists, as well as notions of friendship, loyalty and belonging;

- Members further drew upon the cultures constructed so as to identify themselves legibly and meaningfully, managing multiple identities through narrative (Ricoeur 1991) and identification (understood here as an entanglement between the individual and the social (Jenkins 2008)), and at times articulating a transformation of the self, so that members suggested they were able to produce themselves as 'valid' artists, as recognised and legitimate members, and/or to re-work understandings of the self as increasingly confident and able;

- Although members did not all join the ARIs in question in order to learn, their 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) of membership invariably included certain, selective, forms of learning, which, through everyday interaction, pushed members to develop new work, to try new ways of working, and to become artists of certain kinds who worked in certain ways. Here again then, we can see the ways in which even 'obvious' actions and processes are nevertheless imbued with cultural and political ideals concerning who, and what, is possible.

- Finally, it is demonstrated that while some members were able to draw upon these distinct cultures to transform themselves, not all identities were equally acceptable everywhere, not all members were 'subsumed' (Hager 2008: 683) equally, or positioned with equal power, and not all ways of working were acceptable. Indeed, as is highlighted in Chapter Eight, in producing distinct cultures with, at times, potentially irreconcilable differences, there is no guarantee that what was considered legitimate art as produced by legitimate artists in one ARI would be accepted as such elsewhere.

In summary then, what follows is an account of the local, messy, uneven and unequal production of meaning and value as produced within three particular ARIs, and the ways in which members attempted, through everyday interaction, to navigate and chart a position for themselves in the world. The final chapter further considers the implications of this localised construction of meaning for understandings of 'art', 'artists' and the theory of the production of cultures, and argues for a renewed critical focus on ARIs as distinctive (rather than as belonging to one unified movement, for example), for an approach to arts production that takes seriously the 'potent emotional content' of identity-work, belonging and membership (Guibernau 2013: 2), and for a study of cultures that is 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004) for explorations of both artistic and non-artistic cultures.

## 1. 1 What is an Artist-run Initiative (ARI)?

Chapter Two provides a detailed account of ARIs, but it is worth making a few introductory points now so as to contextualise the following discussion. For example, ARIs are generally held to be distinct from art museums or galleries, although they at times share particular functions such as the provision of spaces in which to display works of art, and some organisations recognised as ARIs use the term 'museum' in their title e.g. Nylistasafnid, or The Living Art Museum, in Reykjavik. This distinction tends to rest on the relative positioning of ARIs (e.g. as 'grassroots' initiatives rather than 'established' institutions), the involvement of voluntary 'members' (rather than paid staff) and, in some cases, a call for action as directly prompted by disaffection with the practices adopted by art museums and galleries. I will later argue that each of these claims is subject to challenge, however, it is noticeable that despite considerable discussion and critique concerning the precise terms on which ARIs might, or should, be defined, debates rarely (if ever) call for a revision of this boundary.

ARIs are also operative in countries all over the world, and not just those considered 'western'. To take just a few examples, *Institutions by Artists* (Khonsary and Podesva 2012) includes chapters on artist-run practice based in Canada, Italy, Mexico, Kuwait, Spain, Australia, Uruguay, Romania, Switzerland, Jordan and Japan, and includes a supplement in French. Detterer and Nannucci's (2012) *Artist-Run Spaces* includes chapters written from Toronto, Budapest, Geneva, New York and Florence. In 2012, the 'Institutions by Artists' conference described itself as 'convening a world congress of artists, curators, critics and academics' from nineteen nations, including representatives from Lebanon, Thailand, China, Trinidad, Lithuania, Brazil, South Africa and Denmark, with the program made available in both English and French. Moreover, many ARIs throughout the world have been in existence for considerable periods of time: Art Metropole (Toronto) was founded in 1974, Printed Matter (New York) in 1976, Nylistasafnid in 1978 (Reykjavik), and Transmission (Glasgow) in 1983. All are operative today.

ARIs are also prolific: many countries, or even cities, have an extensive range and history of artist-run activity. For instance, Griffiths (2006: 79) lists 36 artist-run spaces operative in Berlin in 2006 alone, and adds that there were 'at least fifty other spaces I could have included, but didn't have time'. Rosati and Staniszewski (2012) document more than 140 'alternative spaces and projects' all of which ran in New York between 1960-2010, while Wallis (2002: 165) remarks that 'by 1998, more than seven hundred identifiable alternative spaces existed throughout the United States'.

This was not always the case. Indeed, while many artists and writers trace precedents back to the *Salon des Réfusés* (1893) and the *Salon des Indépendants* held in France by those who went on to become know as the Impressionists (e.g. Sharon 1979) or to the 'events and projects established with much energy and resourcefulness in the war years of the 1940s' in Scotland (Thompson 2005), more contemporary 'starting points' are often selected for particular locations: Staniszewski (2012: 11) begins her collection of 'alternative spaces' in New York, with 'references to key precursors' in the

1960s. Sharon (1979: 3-4) dates the then 'contemporary phenomenon' of artist-run galleries in California to the 1970s, describing it as 'one of the most significant changes in the contemporary social organisation of art'. More recently, Tan (2006: 21) has noted that,

> While artist-run spaces and artists' collectives have long made significant contributions to art centres such as Berlin, London, or New York, artist-run culture has recently raised its head in Istanbul.

Although the precursors and starting points for artist-run practice thus remain open to debate and are geographically differentiated, it has been argued that ARIs are now commonplace in the UK: *Artists' Newsletter* (2008), a leading publication for artists in the in the United Kingdom, for example, has described this ''self-defined approach to working' as 'prevalent particularly among emerging contemporary artists', where it is 'accepted as the 'norm'''.

Two final points: first, the form and structure taken by ARIs vary considerably. For example, the nine organisations documented in *Artist-run Spaces* (Detterer and Nannucci 2012) include between them a press, numerous archives, a radio station, a couple of magazines, a publisher, consulting services, artists' networking and live art on the internet, as well as numerous galleries and spaces for contemporary, performance, installation, site-specific, experimental, media, video art, new music, radical architecture and 'body and sound sculptures' (*ibid*: 183). Second, many of the groups, structures and activities run by and for artists self-identify not as ARIs, but as 'oppositional', 'marginal', 'alternative', 'independent', 'DIY', 'not-for-profit', 'parallel', 'cooperative' or 'grassroots' galleries or spaces, or as 'artist-run centres', 'institutions by artists', 'collectives', 'self-organised' or 'counter-cultures'.

There is thus some need to be careful when making general claims about the chronology and nature of ARIs, a point I return to in Chapter Two. Yet, given the arguments above, I would suggest that one such claim might be reasonably and appropriately made: ARIs constitute a significant, if complex, area of practice, and the ways in which art is made, displayed, thought about and utilised via ARIs worldwide merits serious consideration. Yet despite this, there is very little critical research concerning ARIs. For example, this thesis found only seven journal articles, four of which were published by the same authors, and in the last two years. Similarly, it might be noted that the collections referred to above (e.g. Detterer and Nannucci 2012, Rosati and Staniszewski 2012 and Khonsary and Podesva 2012) as well as Hebert and Szefer Karlsen (2013) were all published in the last two years, and are generally offered as critical reflections on past practice, with empirical research largely focusing upon source material produced contemporaneously (e.g. manifestos and pamphlets). This then, is a gap that the thesis hopes to address.

## 1.2 Research questions

The research project set out to answer the question: how do artist-run initiatives construct culture[s]?

It has five main aims and objectives:

**Aim One**: Critically review theories concerning the construction of 'cultures' as potentially applicable to ARIs.

Objective 1: Identify key areas of research concerning notions of 'culture';

Objective 2: Define 'culture' as a working concept;

Objective 3: Investigate the social, historical, political and geographic contexts in which ARIs operate;

Objective 4: Identify possible precedents for the ARIs selected as case studies;

Objective 5: Critically review theories of art production;

Objective 6: Propose key mechanisms by which 'cultures' may be constructed by members.

**Aim Two**: Critically analyse the cultural construction of 'membership'.

Objective 1: Identify how members perceived the ARI in question;

Objective 2: Explore the (multiple) forms of 'membership' suggested by members and any associated behaviours and/or understandings;

Objective 3: Investigate any requirements for, and boundaries surrounding, membership;

Objective 4: Investigate the social ties suggested between members and the relative positioning of members;

Objective 5: Investigate any emotional attachments suggested by members as connected to 'membership'.

**Aim Three**: Critically analyse the cultural construction of artistic 'identities'.

Objective 1: Identify the (multiple) identities articulated by members;

Objective 2: Explore the narration of artistic 'identities' and any associated behaviours and/or understandings;

Objective 3: Investigate the 'management' and/or 'performance' of artistic identities as suggested by members;

Objective 4: Investigate any instances of identification with pre-existing categories of being as suggested by members;

Objective 5: Investigate any occasions where artistic identities are suggested to be 'achieved', negotiated or 'rejected'.

**Aim Four**: Critically analyse the cultural construction of 'learning' (or related terms).

      Objective 1: Identify implicit and explicit forms of 'learning' as suggested by members;

      Objective 2: Identify the 'metaphors' for learning implied and/or adopted in each

            instance

      Objective 3: Explore any associated practices and/or understandings

      Objective 4: Investigate instances where members suggest knowledge was

      'transferred', 'transmitted' or otherwise 'shared';

      Objective 5: Investigate notions of 'apprenticeship', or points at which members

            'learned' to participate.

**Aim Five**: Evaluate how key findings concerning the construction of culture relate to existing theoretical frameworks and artistic practice.

      Objective 1: Identify key findings relating to the construction of culture with regards the participating ARIs;

      Objective 2: Address the relationships and areas of tension posed between key findings;

      Objective 3: Identify the limitations to research;

      Objective 4: Review existing approaches and theoretical frameworks relating to the production of 'cultures';

      Objective 5: Propose refined theories concerning the production of 'cultures';

      Objective 6: Evaluate the implications of the research in relation to current practice and future research

## 1.3 Background to the research project

The research question and associated aims and objectives presented above differ significantly from those originally proposed, which set out to investigate 'the extent to which understandings of learning, as held by practitioners [in ARIs], are influenced by 'cultures' of learning' (Coffield [Research Proposal], 2010), later amended to:

> How do members of artist-run initiatives construct and apply theories of 'learning'? (Coffield [Research Proposal], 2011a)

What then began as a study into theories and 'cultures of learning' within ARIs, developed into a research project with far wider parameters. This is a serious revision, and I would like to here detail and reflect upon the decisions made that led to this revision, including my own 'route' into the project, and the actions and preliminary findings that made such changes feasible.

I became interested in the possibility of research when working, after my MA in Art Museum and Gallery Education at the International Centre for Culture and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle

University, as a 'learning intern' for a number of art galleries, festivals and arts organisations in Glasgow. As I moved from one role to the other, at times during the same day, I noticed that the 'languages' used were also changing: conversations about 'learning' in one venue would be framed around notions of 'access' or even 'critical mass' in another. This was more than the substitution of one term for another, similar term, for the suggested audience, methods, practices and intended results also changed. Thus I found myself proposing and/or working on 'learning' projects in one venue that would be rejected outright by another. Fundamentally different understandings seemed to be at work within different organisational boundaries.

One project in particular, which involved citywide collaboration between colleagues from various arts galleries, museums, ARIs and other arts organisations, seemed to exemplify this confusion. After meeting for several weeks without much progress, I slowly realised that partners had interpreted key terms, like 'learning', in very different ways, and as a result had very different expectations concerning their potential contribution. Resolving these differences was at times fraught and some partners, frustrated by the lack of consensus or perceiving their input to have little value, dropped out of the project altogether. While the remaining partners put together a successful event, it seemed to me that an opportunity for broader, and more innovative, collaborative working had been lost, at least partly because those involved spoke different languages, and as a consequence had, in this case, assumed similar working methods and aims where little agreement existed.

Frustrated and intrigued as to how such situations could have come about, I proposed the original research project and set out to investigate understandings of 'learning' within ARIs. My aims here were twofold. First, I selected ARIs as the focus of the study as they were rarely, if ever, discussed in the literature concerning art museums and galleries. I therefore hypothesized that they might allow for significantly changed understandings e.g. those involved in ARIs whom I had encountered appeared to be more concerned with notions of 'membership', rather with attracting occasional, or even regular 'visitors', and I thought this might impact upon the forms of 'learning' involved and the ways in which these understandings came into being. Second, I hoped to use these findings to contribute to, and potentially highlight the variations and normative assumptions of, learning practice more broadly, including the practices and understandings I had encountered in more 'established' art museums and galleries.

As the research progressed however, the research question seemed less and less adequate. Data collected from a pilot study with The NewBridge Project in Newcastle upon Tyne, for example, suggested that understandings of learning were constructed within organisational boundaries, but in relation to notions of community, trust, friendship and identity, with potentially significant implications for, say, theories of 'belonging'. Yet I prematurely closed down these seemingly fruitful areas of investigation so as to 'get at' understandings of learning, and in doing so, provided neither a theoretical introduction to newer areas, nor attempted to situate findings more broadly. Recognising that the research question had become unhelpfully restrictive, my supervisors encouraged me to re-think the

boundaries and scope of the project, and to broaden my original question in favour of the new directions encountered. With their support, I adapted the question to focus on the construction of 'cultures' within ARIs. In doing so, I hoped to allow for a more sophisticated and nuanced treatment of the data collected, and to greatly increase the potential impact and value of the research findings.

## 1.4 Positioning the thesis

From the discussions and questions posed above it may already be obvious that this thesis is written from a number of particular perspectives. In this section, I would like to make these positions explicit, both to acknowledge and make public the vantage point from which I conducted research, and, in doing so, to remain alert to the assumptions, boundaries and possibilities offered up, and closed down, by my own thinking.

First, as is noted above, I graduated with an MA in Art Museum and Gallery Education from ICCHS at Newcastle University. My original training, however, was in arts practice: I hold both a Foundation Diploma in Fine Art and Design from Newcastle College, and a BA (Hons) in Painting and Printmaking from the Glasgow School of Art, although I went on to teach English after graduation, and did not continue my practice. I want to make this clear because a) I am neither a sociologist nor art historian by training, nor do I make any claim to be an artist, although at times I adopt (and adapt) methods and concepts associated with all three fields of research, and b) although I have never joined an ARI, I cannot consider myself impartial. A number of my peers have created, been involved with, and excluded from, various ARIs over the years. In addition, although I consider ARIs a vital area of research for those interested in the production of culture, I take issue with their portrayal as a universal and guaranteed 'good thing' for all. As I argue in Chapter Two, generalisations of this kind are unsuitable and misleading, and fail to engage with far more complex, and ever changing, processes, understandings and products.

Second, I write from a position of moderate social constructionism, and I discuss this position and its implications for research in some detail in Chapter Three. I would like to stress here however that to suggest something is socially constructed is not to say that it is somehow invented, imagined, or 'false'. Rather, social constructions are social realities, experienced and 'lived' as reality and with very real implications and limitations. As such, I believe that those who have a role in the construction and presentation of these realities, in this case those who make decisions concerning 'art', 'artists' and ways of producing, knowing and utilising 'art', have a responsibility to consider who and what they include, who and what they exclude, and under what auspices.

Third, I would like to here address the charge of 'sociological imperialism' (Strong 1979), as this illuminates a point I consider to be of some importance. 'Sociological imperialism' is summed up by Inglis (2005a: 105-8) as a recognition that the 'sociological gaze' is itself a product 'of history and social contingency', and as such cannot lay claim to any detached or disinterested commentary, but

rather serves the vested interests of sociologists, and their standing within the academic community. Inglis further points out that 'demonstrating the 'delusions' by which others live [has thus far been] the key to a successful career in sociology', and that sociologists are 'trained to think in ways that make them doubt the claims of other […] groups' (*ibid*). While I lean towards sociological methods, I do not consider the 'sociological gaze' a 'truth' in and of itself. Perhaps more importantly, I do not at any point regard or treat the beliefs, knowledges and ways of being articulated by participants and discussed in the following chapters as 'delusions' (*ibid*), and have no wish to 'empty out' these positions of their significance or to demean or distrust the perceptions of practice shared with me. As stated above, I believe ways of knowing and being to be social realities complete with very real and lived emotional entanglements, practical obstacles, and actions that engender certain consequences and results, and not 'delusions' that might be disrupted, disproved or 'revealed' by the researcher.

Fourth, this thesis is concerned with those ARIs that self-identify as involved in the production and display of contemporary visual art. This category is open to interpretation and debate, and, in the examples of the three ARIs selected, involves those who identify themselves as musicians, film-makers, script writers, designers, and volunteers as well as those who identify as artists, and artworks identified as being 'sound art' rather than, or as well as, 'visual art'. However, to pose somewhat fluid and open boundaries does not negate the selection of one category over another, and so the ways in which my assumptions have guided selection requires explanation. Thus it might first be stated that while this thesis is concerned with contemporary visual art, it is further understood that there are groups that have been discounted from this research project (e.g. watercolour classes as organised and run by one of the members, or memberships that share listings and open days). This is not to suggest that one 'kind' of ARI is more valuable than another, and it is hoped to return to and expand upon the examples selected in this research project at a later date. It is instead to start with what was best known, and where I thought a valuable contribution to research might be made. To this it might be added that ARIs involved in the production and display of 'contemporary visual art' were understood, somewhat loosely, as producing art by destination (Malraux 1967), in that 'their production took place in relation to modern discourses of art, with a view to display' (Whitehead 2012: 6) in a setting also relating to modern discourses of art (e.g. a gallery space, or 'offsite' location). Moreover, I would add here that although the 'dividing line' between historical art and contemporary art is by no means 'universally clear', it is perhaps most usefully viewed as a constructed difference (*ibid*: 41) whereby contemporary artworks are those created with this kind of contemporary 'exhibitability' (Baxandall 1991) in mind. This does not account for all objects displayed in art museums and galleries by any means (e.g. Malraux (1967) notes that objects can also become art by metamorphosis), but it does provide some guidelines for thought, which later chapters expand upon in relation to the data collected.

## 1.5 'Culture': some key uses

Having thus far established the main arguments and position of the thesis, this section turns to the central area of enquiry, the construction of cultures, in order to provide an introduction to the multiple,

and often particularly fraught and nuanced, uses of the term 'culture' and to argue for the path taken within research. In doing so, it is hoped to allay some of the confusion that might be encountered when dealing with the construction of 'cultures', which produce and engage with material objects, ideals and values also commonly referred to as 'culture' or as being 'cultural'. Indeed, the term 'culture' was famously described by Raymond Williams (1983 [1958]: 87) as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language', and the study of 'cultures' embraces a 'range of topics, processes, differences and even paradoxes, many of which cannot be resolved' (Jenks 2003: 1). Moreover, the thesis encounters a number of additional terms and understandings, including 'artist-run culture', 'DIY culture', 'counterculture', 'visual culture', 'knowledge cultures', 'organisational cultures', 'high', 'low', 'popular' and 'mass' culture, and 'material culture'. There is thus some pressing need to clarify the ideas proposed, and used, throughout the thesis.

With this in mind, it seems useful to ask: what does this thesis mean by the term 'cultures', and what relationship do these 'cultures' have with ARIs?

What follows below, in an attempt to answer these questions, is therefore a somewhat extended discussion that introduces the main ideas and concepts drawn upon, as located within cultural studies, anthropology, cultural sociology, organisational studies, social constructionism, the theory of 'actants', and the sociology of art. In each case, the arguments and ideas presented are intended neither as a comprehensive overview, nor as 'bound' to any one discipline (for much of what follows overlaps, or is claimed by those working in multiple fields) but as suggestive of the way that the thesis approached and applied understandings of 'culture'.

In summary, it is argued below that the term 'cultures' refers to the 'maps of meaning' and value (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10) actively re-constructed by members in ARIs through everyday life, and which 'bring into being' particular and bounded ways of acting and thinking, as well as a number of objects, processes, relationships and persons. The metaphor of the 'map' is employed here, as this is thought to usefully suggest both the structuring between certain kinds of knowledges, objects, actions, meanings and values, as articulates via set 'paths' or 'routes', and also the possibility that this map might be 'misread'. For example, as is discussed in Chapter Five, members of The Mutual tended to connect 'membership' with the possibility of exhibiting work, and of exhibiting work in prestigious galleries. However, 'prestigious galleries' are, arguably, only conceived of as such by those who wish to work within a given system (e.g. as 'professional' artists). Those who wish to work in opposition to the cultural 'mainstream', for instance, may not link together the gallery, the exhibition, membership, and/or notions of prestige in the same way. Indeed, they might consider a prestigious exhibition to be one that takes place outside of such institutional confines. Here then, we might say that two distinct, although overlapping, 'maps of meaning' are in operation. Moreover, as is again demonstrated in Chapter Five, members might always interpret any given 'path' differently, and find value in something that other members of a culture do not, or in ways that are considered to be surprising. In

other words, it is held that cultures construct and render the world intelligible and meaningful for members.

However, while this working definition is largely inclusive of related ideas of the social and the material, 'cultures' are neither reducible to, nor entirely subsume, either of these areas. ARIs are not 'cultures': ARIs are, as I shortly argue, 'bundles' (Law 2003, Bennett 2007) of practices, objects, persons and understandings that include 'cultures', and from time to time the 'cultures' in ARIs draw upon these practices, objects, persons and understandings in ways that are not always easily distinguishable, but mutually influential and intersecting. Moreover, 'cultures' are neither uniform, equally positioned, nor isolated, but complex, nuanced and layered. Finally, because 'cultures' significantly impact upon the people and objects produced, and the ways in which both are understood, they are likely to have a significant bearing upon objects that come to be understood as 'art', persons who come to be understood as 'artists', and the particular values and meanings attached or denied to both within ARIs.

## 1.5.1 Rejected and secondary considerations

We might at this point take a step back from the above and return to the central question: what does this thesis mean by the term 'cultures'? Here, we might first consider the definitions offered by Raymond Williams (1983 [1958]: xvi):

1    Culture as a cognitive category or 'state of mind' that has 'close relations with the idea of human perfection';
2    Culture as 'the general state of intellectual development';
3    Culture as the 'general body of arts', and;
4    Culture as a 'whole way of life of a people'.

While members of ARIs may call upon any and/or all of these understandings, the research question posed does not set out to explore the superiority of human kind. Nor does it propose to study 'culture' as a means to understand intellectual or moral development in society (or its opposite: degeneration). As such, we might here reject Williams' first and second categories as unsuitable lines of enquiry within this project. Williams' third category is more promising, for it seems likely that those involved in ARIs would produce objects that belong to a 'body of the arts'. However, this research project is primarily concerned with *how* such materials and knowledges come into being, and are labelled and understood as 'art', and so it is the fourth category, where culture is understood to concern a whole way of life, that will henceforth be considered the primary line of enquiry.

## 1.5.2 'Culture' is ordinary: cultural studies and the Birmingham School

The idea of culture as a 'way of life' is often associated with the work of literary critics Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, and with British cultural studies in the 1950-60s more generally. Of specific interest are the landmark texts written by Williams, who argued in *Culture and Society* (1983 [1958]: xvi) that the term 'culture' 'was changed in the nineteenth century' so that it no longer meant the 'tending of natural growth' but became 'a thing in itself', meaning, among other things, 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual'. Williams continued this investigation in 'Culture is Ordinary' (2002 [1958]) and *The Long Revolution* (2001 [1961]), where he insisted that culture was 'ordinary' and related to 'common meanings' which could not be 'prescribed' but were instead 'made by living, made and remade, in ways we cannot know in advance' (*ibid*: 96). In other words, Williams asked questions that were at once 'about our general and common purposes' and 'about deep personal meanings' (*ibid*: 93), and is therefore held to have advocated an understanding of 'culture' as something produced, transmitted and reproduced as 'part of the everyday activities of human life' (Inglis 2009: 381). Alongside other 'culturalist' thinkers, such as E. P. Thompson, Williams thus contended that people were 'creative and active in making their own lives' (*ibid*: 379), and disputed the then dominant understandings of 'culture' as referring only to the highest forms of art and literature.

The later Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, established in the 1960s and originally directed by Hoggart, built upon this work so productively that it has been described as 'constituting a sort of classical period for British Cultural Studies' (Smith 2001: 154). Involving prominent cultural studies theorists, such as Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Dick Hebdige and Paul Willis, and drawing upon semiotics and Marxism in particular, the Birmingham School produced a number of 'celebrated studies of youth subcultures' (*ibid*: 158), where, for instance, 'culture' was described as,

> The peculiar and distinctive 'way of life' of the group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life. Culture is the distinctive shapes in which this material and social organisation of life expresses itself (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10).

Clarke et al. add to this that 'a culture includes the 'maps of meaning' which make things intelligible to its members', and note both that there are 'existing cultural patterns' that groups can 'take up, transform [and] develop' and that 'cultures' are 'unequally ranked in relation to one another' (*ibid*: 10-11). These final two points (that cultures pre-exist individuals and involve unequal power relationships and positions) are of particular importance, and are returned to below. However, it is, roughly speaking, the above working definition of 'culture' that this thesis adopts.

This is not to suggest that the ideas presented above are adopted wholesale or uncritically. For instance, while the work of the Birmingham School tended towards groups characterised as 'subordinate' or 'oppressed' as part of a wider investigation into forms of power, I remain wary of any such

characterisation concerning ARIs, some of which, as argued above, are themselves sites of considerable power and influence. Moreover, following Bennett (1998: 22-27), it is noted that although Williams' concept of culture as 'a way of life' has come to be 'more or less routinely invoked' in cultural studies, it is often used as a 'convenient shorthand […] significantly detached from the semantic horizons […] embedded in Williams' own writing', which anticipated 'the restoration of a lost cultural wholeness in which hierarchising and divisive forms of cultural difference will have been overcome'. Thus while Clarke et al. (1993 [1976]) also argue for culture as a 'way of life', they do so in a manner that differs significantly from Williams, for Clarke et al. talk of culture as (continually) structured by 'relations of cultural division and subordination'. This is important, for Bennett's (1998) argument highlights divisions of thought and practice within cultural studies that often result from the very range of materials and theories here drawn upon. Thus while Bennett argues for a pluralistic understanding of cultural studies on the basis that it 'supplies an intellectual field in which perspectives from different disciplines might (selectively) be drawn upon' (*ibid*), there is need to be attentive to the varying assumptions, accounts, aims and definitions imported into research through this very practice, so as not to overlook the contradictions and differences that divide certain theories and frameworks, and hold them in tension. Consequently, the sections below concentrate on the uses and understandings of 'culture' as located in many of the fields adopted or drawn into cultural studies, in order to refine and expand upon the working definition given above.

### 1.5.3 Cultures as 'a way of life' or cultures as 'claim'? Anthropological approaches

Those involved in British cultural studies were by no means the first, or the only, researchers working with notions of 'culture'. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973: 4), for example, attributes the formation of the 'whole discipline of anthropology' to the concept of culture, although here, as in other fields, there are a number of possible approaches, distinctions and tensions. Some of these approaches, in their attempt to readdress and define 'culture', have particular bearing upon the research project.

To sketch these arguments very briefly: in the nineteenth century 'culture' was, following the anthropologist E. B. Tylor, largely thought of as a 'complex whole' possessed only by humankind and which included 'knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities in habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Billington 1991: 2). This early, and extremely broad, conception of culture was later rejected by Geertz (1973: 4-5) as 'obscuring a great deal more than it reveals', and, through its very inclusiveness, leading researchers to a 'conceptual morass'. Instead, Geertz believed, alongside the sociologist and philosopher Max Weber, 'that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun' and as such took 'culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretative one in search of meaning' (*ibid*). More specifically, Geertz considered 'the culture of people' to be 'an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read' (*ibid*: 452), so that 'societies […] contain their own interpretations' (*ibid*: 453). Importantly, Geertz here defines culture as

a system of meaning with multiple applications, so that multiple 'cultures' might be 'compared' and their 'character' defined 'in reciprocal relief' (*ibid*). More recently, anthropologists have suggested that it is necessary to move away from this kind of ''people and cultures' vision of the world' (Guta and Ferguson 2009: 2) so as to combat underlying assumptions of 'separateness' and to consider 'the many different 'voices' present' within a single culture, rather than assume coherence (*ibid*: 2-3). Indeed, Fox and King (2002: 2-19) have suggested that 'it is time to move beyond the attachment to the culture concept', highlighting concerns about the 'wide (and vapid) usage' of the term in the public sphere, and the historical lack of any 'universally applicable' definition that might be shared by all anthropologists. However, while Fox and King recommend 'eschewing 'global' prescriptions in favour of indicating what works 'locally'' and thus putting the 'definitional exercise […] on hold' in order to 'get on with doing anthropology' (*ibid*), the anthropologist George E Marcus (2008: 3) argues that the concept of culture, on account of its appropriation 'everywhere and by everybody […] is no longer viable analytically'. Thus Lizardo (2011: 28) identifies a strand of thinking in anthropology as 'post-cultural', although the geographer Mitch Rose (2013) has suggested that the anthropological 'question of culture' might be productively reframed away from 'concepts of cultural difference' (i.e. as a difference the subject 'has' and which can be 'viewed', both of which Rose argues are problematic) and towards an understanding of culture as the claim of difference, through which subjects actively present themselves.

Rose's 'first order question' however, in positioning 'culture claims' as driven by a 'mechanism' *within* the subject, are not within the scope of this thesis. However, we might take from the above discussions three important points: a wariness of 'total' or 'unitary' cultures conceived of as fundamentally 'separate'; a need to make clear the analytic scope and value of the concept of culture (to which end the current discussion hopes to contribute); and an interest in Rose's 'second order' of questions, concerning what claims are made by individuals and how.

## 1.5.4 Society and the everyday: sociological approaches

As with anthropology, the field of sociology offers a wide range of perspectives and theories concerning 'culture', and draws upon further perspectives and theories from a number of related fields. Within this complex body of work, we might identify two particular areas of interest: the relationship of 'culture' to 'society' and the study of the everyday.

The relationship(s) posed between concepts of 'culture' and 'society' in sociology are of particular value here, for discussions of this kind call attention to the boundaries drawn between the two, and consequently provide some basis upon which to further refine the working definition provided above. To explore these relationships, we might first distinguish between traditional or 'classical' sociological understandings, and those produced after the 'cultural turn' in sociology in the 1980-90s and as aligned with the more contemporary field of cultural sociology. This is, as Inglis and Hughson (2003: 11) point out, a somewhat fraught task, for sociologists have from the very beginning been interested in both social and cultural life. However, there is arguably an inclination in the work of traditional sociologists

to distinguish between 'society' (largely understood as referring to social structures, actions and categories) and 'culture' (largely understood as referring to sets of meanings and values), and to treat both as relatively autonomous, although the precise nature of the distinctions offered varied considerably. Sociologists in this early tradition thus studied social structures (e.g. race, class and gender) as 'distinct from cultural dimensions' (Billington et al. 1991: 173). While this was initially thought to 'refine the theoretical usefulness of the concept of culture' (*ibid*: 172), following the 'cultural turn' in sociology (or via a return to and deepening of 'emphases and orientations that were always 'already there'' (Inglis et al. 2007: 6)) cultural sociologists approached such distinctions anew, and began to 'consider culture as something more than a reflection or by-product of socio-economic circumstances' and to challenge the work of theorists in culture studies (discussed above) on account of their use of such 'pre-assumed categories of class, race and gender' (Back et al. 2012: 19-20). While disputes about the precise relationship between 'culture' and 'society' continue within this newer field (Inglis et al. 2007: 14), there is thus a marked shift towards understandings of 'culture' as 'a dynamic process characterised by an interrelationship between structure and agency' (Back et al. 2012: 20).

The position taken within this thesis thus broadly corresponds to the position defined within cultural sociology, for 'culture' and 'society' are neither understood as fully independent of each other, nor as reducible to each other. In other words, I do not think it helpful to conceive of 'cultures' as particular sets of meanings and 'the social' as actions taken on account of those meanings, for this presupposes a linear relationship. Instead, the two are thought of as mutually influential and as resisting easy categorisation: as 'intimately bound up with each other' (Inglis 2005b: 7). For instance, and as is argued at length in Chapter Six, it would appear that the identities claimed by members in each ARI studied were at once culturally bound and socially legitimated, 'achieved' or rejected. Moreover, it would appear that members navigated both the social and the cultural simultaneously, so that working out which was the more important, or primary influence, is I would suggest, unproductive. Rather, it is perhaps more useful to consider how the social and the cultural intersect (or not) with each other in practice. While I accept that this is too vague for some theorists (e.g. Bennett 2007), it is not the purpose of this thesis to distinguish between the social and the cultural. As such, although the thesis focuses on the construction of 'cultures', it holds that these cultures have consequences for, and draw upon, features often characterised as belonging to the study of society.

The second area of interest concerns notions of the 'everyday'. In one respect, this is a less contentious issue: cultural sociologists agree with those in cultural studies that 'culture' does not just refer to 'high culture', but also to 'a broad range of everyday sociological practices and conventions, from the spectacular to the mundane' (Back et al. 2012: 20). The difficulty here then is that the participating ARIs and their members are all involved in the production and display of contemporary art, widely recognised as a form of 'high culture', yet it is the contention of this thesis that those involved in ARIs operate within cultures that are for them 'everyday'. Indeed, the notion of the 'everyday' is itself contested (Jacobsen 2009: 9-15) and requires attention, not least with regards the replication of the very

hierarchical spectrum Back et al. (2012) are arguing against (i.e. in suggesting that 'culture' ranges from the 'spectacular' to the 'mundane').

Posing some questions makes this tension clearer, for example, does the 'everyday' include or exclude the extraordinary? Must it only involve routine actions and meanings? Does everyone experience the everyday in the same way, or might individuals interpret and respond to events differently?

These are difficult questions, but drawing upon William's (2001 [1961]: 96) concept of culture as something 'made by living', it might be suggested that the term 'everyday' be used within this thesis to indicate meanings, values, ideas and actions conceived of as 'familiar, taken-for-granted, common sense and trivial' (*ibid:* 2) *as well as* those that are conceived of as more 'spectacular' or extraordinary. In other words, I am looking at the 'life worlds' (Husserl 1970) constructed and experienced by members of ARIs, and wish to allow for the routine, the mundane and the 'ordinary' as well as include the transient, extraordinary or particularly significant *as part of a life lived* within, in this instance, in relation to the ARI that they are members of. The point in using the term 'everyday' is not then to suggest that the experiences of members are necessarily 'mundane', or necessarily 'spectacular', or are made meaningful by everyone equally and uniformly, but to posit membership as familiar, at least in part, to those involved.

## 1.5.5 Cultures as distinct and shared, or as copied and fragmented? Approaches in organisational studies

In proposing an investigation into the construction of cultures within ARIs, the thesis, at least to some extent, defines cultures via, and within, organisational boundaries. As such, this section briefly turns to organisational studies with regard to two particular points: concerns over the 'bracketing off' of cultures via organisational boundaries, and the role of 'sub-cultures' in the construction of meaning.

Before doing so it seems necessary to briefly argue for the value of such an approach for the aim and nature of some organisational research is at odds with the research question posed above. Moreover, Detterer and Nannucci (2012: 25-6) have argued that the term 'artists' organisation' is an 'unsuitable designation' for artist-run spaces on account of it being only partially accurate and implying features (such as pay and management bodies) that are 'only to some extent applicable'. It should therefore be stated clearly that the motivation for turning to organisational studies was not prompted by the possible treatment of ARIs as profit-making businesses, or as organisations that might be rendered 'more efficient' (although it is recognised that the term 'efficiency' need not always work within capitalist discourses, but might, within an ARI, be used to mark out a desire to make the best use of time or resources). Rather, it was hoped that research attending to the complexities of cultural construction within concrete boundaries might be located as a kind of counterbalance to 'grand' theories of culture.

However, within organisational studies material is regularly separated into two categories: one where culture is considered to be something an organisation *has*, and the other where culture is considered to be something an organisation *is* (Smircich 1983: 347). Both understandings are problematic. For example, the former generally involves a quantitative attempt to 'manage' culture as a variable, and so was rejected as an unsuitable line of enquiry for the reasons stated above. However, the latter subsumes the social, the material, the economic etc. into understandings of the cultural, and so would produce ARIs, in this case, *as* cultures. As was argued above with regard to notions of the social, while there are no easy distinctions to be made here, it seems that everything cannot be so easily 'swept up' into one understanding either. Consequently, while opting for material produced in the latter category, there was some need to remain cautious.

Where organisational theory was helpful was in first reworking notions of culture within particular boundaries, and then challenging the nature of those boundaries. For example, Schneider et al. (2013: 362) define organisational culture as,

> The shared basic assumptions, values and beliefs that characterise a setting and are taught to newcomers as the proper way to think and feel, communicated by myths and stories people tell about how the organisation came to be the way it is.

Here then, is an understanding of culture similar to those proposed above, as applied to one concrete example (although we might pose further questions here concerning, for instance, the difference between 'myths' and 'stories'). Yet Pederson and Dobbin (2006: 897-8) have cautioned against the making of simplistic divisions between organisations, and between organisations and institutions, where organisations (as in the above) are divorced from wider discourses and spheres of activity and treated as distinct and isolated entities with 'unique practices' and characteristics. While the authors do not deny that meaning is created within organisational cultures anew, their point is that members are equally likely to 'copy' or 'import' practices observed 'in the environment', and that consequently meaning is also constructed '*among* large numbers of organisations'.

Moreover, differentiationist organisational theorists in particular have rejected 'homogenous model[s]' of organisational culture as premised on 'shared meanings'' in favour of a number of 'sub-cultures' (Prasad and Prasad 2009: 131) each operating within the organisation. As we have already seen, they are by no means the only theorists to do so: contemporary anthropologists (and museologists), for example, recognise multiple possible 'voices'. Yet the differentiationist perspective offers a number of nuanced models. For example, Martin and Siehl (1983: 53-54) relationally position a number of possible sub-cultures, where members of an 'enhancing' sub-culture adhere to the core values of a dominant culture, members of an 'orthogonal' sub-culture simultaneously accept core values while holding others particular to themselves, and 'countercultural' members directly challenge dominant values. Martin (1992: 4-5) has further argued for a 'multi-perspective approach', so that within a single ARI 'some things will be consistent, clear, and generate organisation-wide consensus', while others

'will coalesce within sub-cultural boundaries' and 'still other elements of the culture will be fragmented, in a state of constant flux, and infused with confusion, doubt, and paradox'. Both of the above points bear directly upon the ways in which 'culture' might be constructed and experienced within the participating ARIs, and so will be returned to in later chapters.

## 1.5.6 'Bringing into being': the making of cultures

If we take from the above that cultures are actively constructed, and that members need not 'share' all meanings, values and beliefs, we might here ask: by what mechanics are cultures constructed? How is meaning made, remade and contested within groups, or even at all? These are complex questions concerning the nature of knowledge and our ability to know it, which Chapter Three explores at more length. Moreover, it is the purpose of this thesis to explore how meaning is made, negotiated, rejected and/or re-made within ARIs in practice, and as such Chapters Five, Six and Seven all address these questions. However, it seems important to here establish some basic outlines, particularly in relation to the pre-existing nature of cultures, notions of power and inequality and the ability of cultures to bring certain categories and forms of understanding 'into being'.

As mentioned earlier, I write from the position of a moderate social constructionist i.e. I believe, some 'brute facts' notwithstanding, that people construct knowledge between them through interaction (Burr 2003). Moreover, I believe that people do not start this process from scratch, but are 'born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used […] already exist' (*ibid*: 7). However, while 'cultures' into which we are born 'fix' meaning in certain ways (e.g. by promoting certain ways of thinking and being as 'normal' while restricting others) individuals are both situated within multiple possible cultures operating on multiple 'scales' or levels (e.g. as simultaneously Scottish, British, a gardener, female, and a cat owner) and are active producers of meaning. Thus, and to return to Clarke et al.'s (1993 [1976]: 11) earlier definition, there are 'existing cultural patterns' that groups can 'take up, transform [and] develop' as well as those that might operate implicitly. This is not to argue that all meanings (and cultures) are equally positioned and equally able to 'work'. As Fairclough (2010: 5) puts it, there is a difference between an ability to 'construct' the world, and an ability to 'construe' it, for 'the world is such that some transformations are possible and others are not'. Furthermore, it would seem that the world is such that some transformations are only possible at certain moments in time, or in certain locations. Thus we might expand upon Clarke et al.'s (1993 [1976]: 10) suggestion that 'cultures' are 'unequally ranked in relation to one another' by adding that those involved in any given culture, and the meanings and values constructed here, are also likely to be unequally positioned.

Finally, one of the central tenets in social constructionism is that objects, persons and understandings are not neutrally 'recognised' on account of any central 'essence', but are instead 'brought into being' in specific, qualified and bounded ways. This idea is further explored in the sections below.

## 1.5.7 Actants and 'bundles': the role of non-human actants in the construction of cultures

Before turning to consider a number of prominent frameworks for understanding the ways in which artworks, artists and ways of understanding art, specifically, have been 'brought into being', it seems useful to first briefly return to Clarke et al.'s (1993 [1976]: 10) definition with regards the idea that cultures are: 'meanings, values and ideas as embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life'. Indeed, one of the ideas implicit in this statement has already been challenged above, namely that 'cultural' 'meanings, values and ideas' are embodied in institutions, social relationships and customs, without any reciprocal action on the part of 'social' institutions and practices. Instead, it was argued that the social and the cultural can be viewed as mutually influential, so that values might be embodied in social relations, and existing social relations might also constrain or encourage certain values.

In this section, a related challenge is made along similar lines of enquiry: that 'cultural' meanings, values and ideas' are proposed by Clarke et al (*ibid*) be embodied in 'the uses of objects and material life' without any reciprocal action on the part of those objects. This is not to argue the point that objects are embodied with meaning very differently within different cultures, and consequently come to 'mean' and be used very differently too, but to question the implication that objects are themselves incapable of agency. For instance, Becker et al. (2006: 3-4) argue that 'the artwork is one of the actors involved in the drama of its own making' and, following Bruno Latour, suggest that artworks might be conceived of as 'actants', so that 'like any other participant in the process of making art, [art] imposes constraints on what others, including the artist or artists who are constructing it, can do'. To be clear, neither Becker et al. nor Latour here suggest that objects act intentionally, just that they have the capacity, as 'real' things in the world, to influence action and understanding and to contribute to the construction of particular knowledges and social relations.

To extend this argument, we might suggest that a variety of objects participate in the process of making 'culture' within ARIs. To take perhaps the most obvious example, physical premises may impose constraints upon (or 'regulate by circumstance' Whitehead 2009: 40) the number of people that can enter an exhibition, the type of artworks displayed (e.g. exhibits that can fit through the door) or where they are positioned (e.g. depending on the size and shape of the room, or the availability of power sockets). The inclusion of a 'meeting' or communal space might allow for, or encourage, certain behaviours (e.g. shared lunch breaks), rituals (e.g. monthly meetings or critiques of work in progress) or cultural values (e.g. the positioning of 'sharing' as valuable and important). It might equally act to curtail certain actions (e.g. having lunch elsewhere) or to discourage members (e.g. those who prefer to work alone). For this reason, I believe it is useful to conceive of ARIs as, to bend a phrase used by Bennett (2007) and Law (2004: 94) 'bundle[s] of relations and entities', and to conceive of 'cultures' as engaged with, and enabled and regulated by, 'social' and 'material' actants, and all the messy and multiple possibilities thus suggested and encountered. This, once more, is not to suggest that cultures

are collapsible to the material, or that all materials are subsumed and 'active' within the cultural, but to argue for a more complex relationship between the two.

## 1.5.8 Becker, Bourdieu and museum studies: the sociology of art

Finally, while the above sections deal with culture as 'part of a broader sociological canvas' (Bennett 2007: 32), we might here turn to a related, but distinct, field of interest: the sociology of art (also referred to as the sociology of culture or the 'production of culture approach', although henceforth 'the sociology of art' is used here for clarity) characterised by 'the study of arts organisations and institutions' (Wolff 2005: 90). Given the clear applicability of these ideas, this field is returned to in Chapter Four, however it is worth here setting out some of the main approaches, so as to locate this work in relation to earlier working definitions of 'culture'.

A central distinction within the sociology of art is drawn via the differing epistemological stances adopted in two of its most prominent concepts: Bourdieu's 'structural' field of cultural production and Becker's 'interactionist' art worlds (Santoro 2011: 18). To briefly outline the former, in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) Bourdieu argues that artworks and 'their respective producers do not exist independently of a complex institutional framework which authorises, enables, empowers and legitimises them' (Johnson 1993: 10), and that consequently it would be,

> An unjustifiable abstraction […] to seek the source of the understanding of cultural productions in these productions themselves, taken in isolation and divorced from the contexts of their production and utilisation (Bourdieu, 1988: xvii).

In other words, Bourdieu argues that a work of art is 'neither the solitary expression of an artistic genius nor the simple reflection of that artist's social origins' (Lane 2005: 37) but rather only exists as a work of art if it is 'known and recognised, that is, socially instituted as [a] work of art' (Bourdieu 1993: 37). Bourdieu analyses this 'complex framework' by mapping 'concrete, named individuals' (Bottero and Crossley 2011: 100) within a number of intersecting 'fields', or 'theoretical space[s] of 'objective' relations' which rank and position individuals (*ibid*: 101) in accordance with a particular 'logic' and in relation to unequally available 'capital', so that practice occurs within 'structured arenas of conflict' (Swartz 1997: 9). Again, these are complex discussions that will be returned to in later chapters, but the central points here are that Bourdieu believes artworks are socially constituted as such, and that 'the artistic field is not reducible to a population, i.e. a sum of individual agents, linked by simple relations of interaction' (1993: 35). Rather, Bourdieu's 'objective relations' are 'underlying forces […] which generate empirical social relationships' (Bottero and Crossley 2011: 101), and which can therefore 'exist and produce effects independently, and even in spite of, concrete interactions' (Santoro 2011: 18).

An opposing position is offered by the sociologist Howard Becker (2008 [1982]: xii-xxiv), who argues in *Art Worlds* that art is a form of collective, and cooperative, action and that artworks result from a process to which many people (some of whom may never meet) contribute, as organised via their 'joint knowledge of [the] conventional means of doing things'. In other words, while Becker also suggests that artworks are not 'the products of individual makers, 'artists' who possess a rare and special gift' (*ibid*: 35), but rather are produced as 'artworks' by those working within certain 'worlds', he distinguishes his approach from that taken by Bourdieu by arguing that,

> People do not respond automatically to mysterious external forces surrounding them. Instead, they develop their lines of activity gradually, seeing how others respond to what they do and adjusting what they will do next in a way that meshes with what others have done and will probably do next (*ibid*: 375).

In other words, Becker proposes an 'interactionist' account that 'gives pride of place to interpersonal ties' (Bottero and Crossley 2011: 104) and which focuses on 'real people who are trying to get things done' (Becker 2008 [1982]: 377) as 'observable in social life' (*ibid*: 379). The two approaches are not always held to be mutually exclusive. For example, Santoro (2011: 14) suggests 'situation', as aligned with the work of Erving Goffman, as a 'mediating term' in Bourdieu's framework to account for the ways in which people act not in 'fields' but in 'field-specific situations, or in situations embedded at the intersection of (usually many) fields', a suggestion discussed in Chapter Four.

Of particular note however, is the singling out by both Bourdieu and Becker of the art museum and gallery as a site (or 'situation') of special interest. For example, Bourdieu states that 'for something to be considered a 'work of art', it needs to have a place in the art world' (Grenfell and Hardy 2007: 43), while Becker (2008 [1982]: 117) argues that 'when a museum shows and purchases a work, it gives it the highest kind of institutional approval available in the contemporary visual arts world'. As such, both position art museums and galleries not as 'neutral' spaces, but as technologies engaged in the production of art. Bourdieu and Becker are by no means the only theorists to make such claims: the art philosophers Arthur Danto (1964) and George Dickie (2001), for instance, have both proposed (albeit in differing ways) definitions of art that rely on the cultural contexts of artworks (both definitions are considered in more detail in Chapter Four), while museologists such as Duncan (2005: 79) have argued for an understanding of art museums and galleries as powerful 'microcosms' in which 'beliefs about the order of the world' are publicly represented, defined and constituted. Indeed, it is along this particular line of enquiry that museologists, often adopting comparable approaches to those outlined above, have explored the construction of 'art' within organisational boundaries. For instance, Whitehead (2012: xvi) has argued that art interpretation in museums and galleries constructs and frames 'art as a category of material culture' and form of experience, although in varying possible ways, and with political and ethical consequences for both visitors and those tasked with the production of art interpretation. While ARIs are not synonymous with art museums and galleries (and as the next chapter demonstrates, have at times worked to subvert, challenge and offer an alternative to art

museums and galleries), it is my contention that they too work to construct categories and understandings of 'art' and 'artists' (or to bring both 'into being'), and that the study of 'cultures' might here provide some useful vantage point by which to consider such processes in action.

## 1.5.9 'Culture' within this thesis

Despite its obvious relevance to the research question, I have introduced the sociology of art last in the above discussion for it raises a question I would like to explicitly address: is this thesis a sociological study of art, or is it written from within cultural sociology (or cultural studies, museology or organisational studies)? The answer, I think, is both none and all of the above for while I explore the construction of 'artworks', 'artists' and ways of thinking about and understanding 'art', I am further concerned with notions of belonging and friendship, multiple possible identities, and the ways in which members learn to 'join in', contribute and 'become'. In other words, I understand the study of 'cultures', in the specific case of ARIs, to include the sociology of art, and not as being bound by it. The sociology of art is thus part of a broader investigation that here concerns, loosely speaking, a 'way of life', as engaged in within organisational boundaries. It is in this sense that I use the term 'culture[s]' throughout this thesis, to indicate these multiple understandings.

The positioning of the thesis thus poses a certain disciplinary awkwardness, but I do not believe this to be a cause for concern. As Inglis (2014), Bennett (2007) and Tanner (2003) have pointed out, the above fields (and associated ways of thinking and producing research) are themselves formulations or 'historically situated form[s] of knowledge production' (Inglis 2014: 99), and there is neither any requirement to produce work that falls neatly into any one category nor do the boundaries posed by any of the above fields relate to 'natural' divisions in the world, which might then account for 'better' research. However, there is a need to make clear what particular understandings and assumptions are made and drawn upon, particularly when positioning research within so many overlapping fields with potentially conflicting theories and frameworks available in each.

To briefly sum up the approach taken then: this thesis explores the construction of cultures within ARIs, and uses the term 'cultures' to refer, by and large, to the 'values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10). It is also suggested that members construct cultures as part of their everyday lives, and that cultures are inclusive of (although in no way reducible to or subsuming) areas commonly aligned with the social and the material. Furthermore, it is thought that:

- Cultures work to bring certain peoples, objects and understandings into being in specific and bounded ways, and as such have 'real' consequences for the ways in which 'artists' and 'artworks' are produced and understood, as well as for notions of belonging, friendship and for understandings of the self more generally;

- Meaning-making is active and complex. Thus, although cultures are in some respects distinct 'patterns of ideas, values and beliefs' (Inglis 2005b: 5), meanings might not always be shared and members may 'routinely live with ambiguities' (Meyerson 1991: 131), or share 'certain key tendencies, while differing profoundly on a number of others at the same time' (Prasad and Prasad 2009: 136);

- Cultures are not isolated or somehow 'separate'. Rather, organisational boundaries are likely to be porous, and members are likely to be members of multiple cultures.

- Cultures are not positioned equally, and neither are their members, or ARIs more generally. Not all members, cultures and ARIs have the power to transform the world equally.

As such, the thesis draws upon a range of literature from a number of disciplines, some of which do not often come into contact. Indeed, three further areas are added in later chapters. In Chapters Four and Five, I argue for membership not just as procedural, or concerned with artistic practice, but as emotionally invested in so that (some) members consider themselves to 'belong' (Guibernau 2013: 28). In Chapters Four and Six I focus on the construction of 'artistic' identities (i.e. any identity suggested by members to have some relationship to 'art', including, for example, 'artists', 'not-artists', painters, , designers, filmmakers, musicians etc) and to aid in this enquiry I adopt theories found in the sociological study of identity. Likewise, in Chapters Four and Seven, I explore the ways in which members 'learn', and do so in relation to theories from educational research.

It is in light of this particular framework that it is hoped the thesis might have some further application, as 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004) for the study of cultures more widely, e.g. for those exploring independent publishers, theatre companies, music labels and writing groups.

## 1.6 Limitations

The above two points serve a further purpose, in that they highlight areas and fields not considered within the thesis, and thus point to some important limitations. For example, at no point in this thesis are artworks or artists 'tracked' across multiple locations, and no attempt is made to 'map out' all the possible connections within a given network, or to situate involvement in ARIs within 'full life histories' for the members concerned. Nor does this thesis focus specifically on the use of technology, the availability of materials, the politics or poetics of display employed in exhibitions and events, or the experiences and opportunities that ARIs might afford their 'visitors' (i.e. non-members). Only one 'situation' was selected for research (ARIs), and research took place at specific and limited points of time and with ARIs based in the UK. Consequently, no historical, long-term, global or even international, account of the construction of culture[s] within ARIs is attempted, and it must be recognised that ARIs are only one technology within a complex landscape within which artists and artworks 'work', including art museums, galleries, institutions and art centres as well as art schools and universities, the arts press, critics, gallery dealers, buyers and audiences and a number of pubs, cafes, houses, flats and studios.

Three further areas largely absent from this thesis include the cognitive construction of cultures, understandings of place and anthropological studies of art. Consequently there is no discussion that addresses psychoanalysis, psychology or any 'inner mechanism' by which cultures might be cognitively constructed, although this could have significantly extended debates concerning the ways in which individuals 'learn' cultures, or enquired, as Lawler (2008: 78) does, into the role of 'unconscious selves' in identity-work. There is also no specific consideration of place within this thesis, yet as argued above (and again in Chapter Two) place is significant in enabling or disabling productions of culture: Beck (2002) and Faguet (2012) point out that what constituted 'authentically' alternative artist-run practice in New York in the 1970s was very different to that labelled 'authentic' a few years later, and to that produced in different geographical contexts. Finally, while a number of important anthropological approaches to the study of art were noted (e.g. Gell 1998, Marcus and Meyers 1995, Maquet 1986), this thesis does not approach ARIs via the perspectives and methods commonly employed within anthropology.

As such, this thesis is in no way intended to represent any 'complete' understanding of ARIs, cultures, or the ARIs in question, even if any such aim were possible. The areas discussed and explored in following chapters are likewise neither 'complete' nor exhaustive accounts, but were driven by my own interests, prior training, and the theories, materials and time periods made available to me during the period of research. Moreover, the lines of enquiry listed above are not rejected on account of their presumed 'lesser value' to research, but remain areas of interest to which this thesis could not stretch, and to which I hope to return in the future. Finally, although I have made every effort not to 'detach' (Wolf 2005: 92) the three participating ARIs and their members from far the broader and multiple contexts in which life is lived, I have concerned myself with this particular site in the hope that in narrowing my focus here, I might attend with sufficient complexity to the data gathered.

## 1.7 Thesis synopsis

The thesis is arranged into three main sections: introduction, context and methods; hypotheses for research and key findings; and conclusions and implications for future research.

Chapter Two critically reviews the literature concerning ARIs as part of a broader contextual introduction to the field. It is argued here that the term 'ARI' is often used as a kind of 'super-category' encompassing multiple and varied forms of practice and thus works to obscure potential differences, sharp divisions in working methods and aims, and obfuscates multiple possible contexts and relationships. While all classificatory systems are authored selections, it is suggested that it is necessary to remain alive to the tensions and boundaries that animate and situate practice, and so three 'key strands', as located under the umbrella term 'ARI', are presented. Finally, the two dominant perspectives (ideological critique, and a 'factual' overview of practice) employed within the existing literature are highlighted, neither of which address the everyday experiences of members.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach to the research project, and adopts a reflexive approach so as to discuss openly a number of assumptions and developments. It first considers the theoretical relationships set up through the perspective of moderate social constructionism, particularly with regards the status of knowledge, the use of qualitative questions, empirical standards in research and notions of 'generalisation'. The relevance of the methods adopted with regards to the construction of cultures within ARIs is also argued for here, with reference to the conditions and considerations thought likely to be encountered. The chapter then details the qualitative 'mixed-methods' research design employed, including a discussion concerning the influence of an early pilot study on this framework, justifies the selection and recruitment of case studies and the types and amounts of data collected and analysed. The chapter ends with a consideration of the ethical standards adopted, and accounts for two areas of concern that arose during research, and the action taken subsequently.

Chapter Four introduces the three ARIs selected as case studies via a number of published and internal texts, including manifestos, membership forms and exhibition flyers. It then identifies a central tension between those texts, namely that members in each ARI appear to qualify 'artists' and 'artworks' very differently. In order to address this tension, the chapter turns to a number of definitions for art (where the term definition signals a 'factual explanation' or what something 'is') and theories of art (as sets of suggested or proposed ideas intended to explain) including those located in analytic philosophy and the sociology of art. It is argued here that the distinct ways of knowing suggested by each ARI cannot be accounted for via any universally 'true' definition and that members instead bring 'artists' and 'artworks' into being via distinctive cultures. The chapter then draws upon this material to propose, and expand upon, three areas of particular interest: membership, identity, and 'learning'. As such, this chapter suggests a framework for research picked up on by each of the following three discussion chapters.

Chapter Five presents research findings in relation to notions of 'membership', understood as potentially constructing and 'framing' (Goffman 1974) shared understandings of art, including the processes by which art might be made and exhibited, and by whom. It is argued here that members suggest multiple, fluid and complex forms of membership that vary markedly, and which consequently construct 'legitimate' art and the ways in which this 'legitimate' art might be produced and by whom very differently. I further argue that membership often (although by no means always) involves strong and emotionally held understandings of friendship, loyalty, solidarity and 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013), that cannot be fully explained by Bourdieu's (1993) competitive 'field rules', although these social ties are at times interpreted by individual members in surprising and unpredictable ways.

Chapter Six builds upon this enquiry, and in particular the relational positioning suggested, to explore how individual members perceive themselves. It is demonstrated here that members neither adopt singular and unchanging identities, nor simplistically 'act out' the positions culturally encouraged and made available. Instead, members in each of the three ARIs appear to construct multiple, fluid and

complex identities, in part through the generation of narratives of the self (Ricoeur 1991) that identified with, and at times recombined, existing understandings of the 'artist' (Jenkins 2008). However, not all members were able to perform this kind of identity-work with equal ease, and certain identities acted to curtail practice, limit opportunity and presented a significant barrier to notions of ontological security and coherence (Giddens 1991). As such, the final discussion section considers the distinctive selves articulated in each ARI, the importance of the social and the material in identity-work, and further investigates enduring notions of the artist as charismatic genius.

Chapter Seven explores the ways in which members articulate forms of 'learning'. It is argued that although members by no means all suggested they had joined the ARIs in question in order to learn, they nevertheless indicate an engagement in processes that might be viewed as learning, e.g. skill sharing, soliciting and giving advice, gaining 'experience' and attempting to 'grow' as artists. Members further suggested that they had learned, through their 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) of membership cultural values and meanings, and had at times explicitly attempted to do so, so as to 'participate' in activities. Moreover, the forms of learning engaged in were both distinct in each ARI, and imbued with cultural and political ideals concerning the artist. As such, this chapter considers how 'obvious', everyday interaction nevertheless worked to construct meaning and value within certain boundaries, although it is demonstrated that while some members were able to draw upon these cultural forms of learning to transform their lives and understanding of themselves, others were unable to do so. The final discussion thus turns to the opportunities made available for interaction, and to the enduring understanding of skills and experience as intrinsic and transferable.

Chapter Eight draws the findings of previous chapters together and reviews the thesis with regards to the research question and aims and objectives posed, detailing key findings. It then considers the overlaps and relationships suggested by the previous discussion chapters, and goes on to addresses the limitations of the research findings before summarising the research project and turning to possible areas of contribution. It is argued here that the fundamentally local, complex, unequal processes involved in the production of cultures have a fundamental impact upon the objects construed as 'art', the members able or willing to identify as 'artists' and the distinctive ways both are 'brought into being'. The chapter concludes by calling for a more critical and nuanced focus on ARIs as key sites in the field of art, for an approach to arts production that takes seriously the 'potent emotional content' of identity-work, belonging and membership (Guibernau 2013: 2), for a study of cultures that is 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004) more broadly, and highlights a number of areas for future research.

## Chapter Two

## Artist-run Initiatives: Arguing against a 'culture' in common

This thesis is concerned with the construction of cultures within ARIs. Before turning to methodological considerations and proposing a framework for research, I would like to first take the concerns posed by Pederson and Dobbin (2006) and the sociologist of art Janet Wolff (2005: 92) seriously, and in this chapter provide a more detailed contextual introduction to ARIs than that offered in Chapter One. In doing so, it is hoped not to 'detach' ARIs in general, and the ARIs that agreed to participate in this research project in particular, from their far broader social, historical, political and geographic contexts. Moreover, it is argued that the three key 'strands' of activity identified here continue to work in the world as a set of precedents, sanctioned movements and distinct value systems, although the exact ways in which they may be drawn upon and/or co-opted by those working in ARIs today requires research, and will be debated in later chapters.

Furthermore, this chapter critically reviews and expands upon the term 'ARI', for, as is shortly demonstrated, the term is at times a problematic one that requires some discussion. Indeed, it is my contention that the practice of 'naming' ARIs as such has brought into being a 'super-category', which often overrides multiple ways of knowing about artist-run practice, and so consolidates activity into an ostensibly single and universally shared experience. This is important, for in simplifying understandings of ARIs, sharp differences in practice and ideology are frequently blurred and divisions of power and authority are obscured. Although no classificatory scheme is unproblematic - for as Foucault (2002: 172) argued so influentially they are all culturally contingent, authored selections of one kind or another that arrange and order 'the knowledge of beings so as to make it possible to represent them in a system of names' - there is need to remain alive to multiple terms and categories and the complexities these pose. In order to do this, the chapter has been broken into two main sections. The first considers the dominant portrayal of ARIs, and the artists involved, as belonging to a singular 'culture'. I argue here that there is no common denominator for such an assumption, and point to some of the problematic consequences stemming from this uncritical application of terminology.

The second section assesses alternative typologies for artist-run practice, and, finding these unhelpful, instead presents three 'key strands' of activity. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarising research concerning ARIs, which I argue predominantly falls into one of two categories: ideological critique or 'factual' overviews of practice, neither of which explore the everyday experiences of members, or the potential impact of this.

## 2.1 A 'culture' in common?
### 2.1.1 Portraying commonality

As noted in Chapter One, ARIs are globally operative and activities can take an extremely wide variety of structures, labels and practices and work in a number of international contexts and within particular geographical boundaries. Yet many of the key collections, anthologies and published materials concerning artist-run practice gather together under a single designation (e.g. 'alternative' or 'artist-run spaces') multiple organisations and groups, and then present all those collected as somehow 'united' or as having 'shared' concerns and characteristics, although they achieve this in a number of different ways. For example, in her essay concerning the 140 plus 'alternative' art spaces in New York between 1960-2010 following the *Alternative Histories* exhibition at Exit Art, New York (2010), Staniszewski (2012: 11) first highlights some structural differences, listing 'galleries, publications, bookstores, projects, performance venues, and, most importantly, communities' as exemplars of the kind of material to follow in the book. She then continues,

> However wildly diverse these alternative spaces may be, they are affiliated in their organisational innovation, creative experimentation, and attempts to remedy systematic deficiencies that range from expanding aesthetic possibilities to taking direct political action. With these shared characteristics and goals, these vibrant enterprises can be seen as an ever-transforming social movement.

In other words, although Staniszewski recognises a particular kind of 'difference', she overrides this by positioning all of the above 'alternative spaces' within a single 'social movement' comprising shared characteristics, working methods and purpose, albeit one where the methods and purpose are suggested to be open-ended and dynamic. Ault (2002) does something similar in her chapter concerning artist-run spaces in New York between 1965 and 1985, which followed the *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC* exhibition at the Drawing Center, New York (1996). In this chapter, Ault (2002: 4-13) describes the spaces as embodying a 'cultural, political, and artistic movement', although she notes that fellow contributors to the volume take issue with her concept of a 'movement', and suggests both that this was 'perhaps not as clear cut or as unified as one might wish', and that the 'alternative art sphere' may have since 'disintegrated', or even become 'obsolete' (a point to which I return below). Nevertheless, Ault contends that the 'entities' included in the exhibition and published volume 'form the contours of an 'alternative arts movement'', which she defines as involving,

> Shared concerns and overlapping agendas […] communication and degrees of collaboration between individuals [a] migration of ideas and models, generative social processes […] One feature of a movement is interdependency of individuals, groups, organisations, and venues. Another is interconnectedness of principles, agendas, and practices.

Those involved in the *Life / Live* exhibition (1996) held at the Museé d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris make similar claims, but for 50 artist-run spaces located within the UK. For example, Pagé (1996: 8), the Director for *Life / Live,* in her introduction to the two-book publication that accompanied the exhibition, remarks upon the 'highly specific rules and issues that animate this scene' and the 'characteristic mode of operation that accounts for the unique dynamic they [the artist-run spaces] have today'. Bosse and Obrist (1996: 12-13), who led the project, likewise posit that while 'each one is unique, these artist-run spaces share a number of common features' including participation, collaboration, the overturning of hierarchy, open and adaptable structures and multiple roles (e.g. 'curator, publisher, publicist'). Claims for similarity within geographically imposed boundaries are also made by Tan (2006: 21), who notes that while the artist-run spaces and artists' collectives in Istanbul have fostered a 'surprisingly wide range of art, cultural and civic practices', they are 'unwilling to co-operate or engage with the state in any way' for 'artist-run spaces seek to usher in critical, independent practice'. In one of the few pieces of academic research on the subject of ARIs, Blessi et al. (2011: 158) do something similar, first arguing for the Canadian artist-run centres involved in research as 'unique' so that it was 'not possible to define a common model', and then remarking upon 'a number of common traits', including 'idiosyncratic organisational culture, motivational orientation and commitment to the production and dissemination of experimental visual art'.

For others however, these geographic parameters are considerably expanded. For example, in *Artist-run Spaces*, Detterer (2012: 21) presents nine case studies, based in Canada, the USA, Hungary, Switzerland and Italy, and argues,

> In spite of following very different programs and having very different organisational structures, artist-run spaces are united by a common culture. The concept of 'culture' embraces ethical values, convictions and attitudes, goals and strategies that influence the self-understanding and self-image of all associations and their members.

Detterer goes on to note a number of additional 'characteristic feature[s]' (*ibid*: 22) including 'internal self-organisation' and the ''specific visual forms of communication' she considers 'essential for the culture of artist-run spaces' (ibid). Later again, and despite highlighting 'characteristics of North American and European artist-run spaces' (*ibid*: 45), Detterer concludes that,

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

Detterer's concept of 'culture' thus has some similarity to that posed in Chapter One, e.g. Detterer too highlights shared meanings, beliefs and practices; indeed, she lists some quite specific shared meanings in the above. The scale and uniformity of her argument, however, differs significantly, for Detterer not

only places the nine case studies featured in the book within this shared, global culture, but argues for certain values and actions as held in common by *all* artist-run spaces and *all* those involved with them. This results in a number of particularly general statements. For example, Detterer states, without any qualifying remarks, that 'the artist committing himself to an artist-run space cooperates and shares, without making self interest the prime consideration' (*ibid*: 22). Yet the very scale of Detterer's argument renders her comments somewhat implausible: do all artists in artist-run spaces commit themselves in this exact way? Likewise, do all artists in all artist-run spaces reciprocally encourage each other? Do they all implement avant-garde practices, and if so, in what way do these practices retain the claim to being avant-garde?

Detterer is by no means the only author to suggest similarity on this kind of 'grand' scale however: eight of the 14 chapters in *Institutions by Artists* (2012) at some point comment upon artist-run activity as a global 'movement', or as comprising internationally shared ideals, premises and tendencies. Similarly, the conference 'Institutions by Artists' (2012) stated its purpose as being to 'deliberate, explore, and advance the common interests of artist-run centers, collectives, and cultures'. Indeed, a number of international curators, art critics, researchers and artists at a workstation at the Gwangju Biennale (2012), South Korea, proposed that self-organisation in the arts be 'seen as an ethic' adopted internationally, and not 'merely as a format of collective action and revolution'.

The portrayal of ARIs as somehow the same, either everywhere, over time or within more specific geographic boundaries, is ubiquitous in arts writing and journalism more generally. To present just a few examples, in a roundtable discussion printed for *MAP Magazine* (2009) the Glasgow-based participants comment: 'it's fair to say there are common agendas in artist-run galleries', and, more specifically,

> There's this idea that you go to Glasgow, go to art school, and set up your own exhibition. I wouldn't call it a cliché, but there is an expectation that this is something you just 'do''.

Similarly, Koszerek (2010), writing for *a-n* about artist-led activity throughout the United Kingdom, suggests that 'artist-led initiatives are a way for active and engaged art students to make the transition from Higher Education to life as a practising artist', that ARIs are 'viable businesses' and that they have 'played an increasingly pivotal role' in developing 'an ethos of support and community in the creative sector'. Elsewhere in *a-n*, (2008) it is suggested that 'artist-led activity is characterised by the desire to control one's artistic career' and that this 'trend over the last decade' has 'empower[ed] those who seek an alternative to handing over control of promotion and presentation of their work'. Similarly, in *The Guardian*, Higgins (2011: 22) remarks that those running a recently opened ARI 'seem to have much of the spirit of their predecessors', while those interviewed by Westbury for the three-part Australian TV series 'Not Quite Art' (ABC Television) often comment upon 'stuff like this, creative places for youth […] and for alternative thinking'.

By no mean all of the literature collected made such claims. For example, the second iteration of *No Soul For Sale: A Festival of Independents* (2010) held at the Tate Modern, London differed from its predecessor of the same name at X, New York (2009) by conspicuously avoiding any phrasing that might suggest a singular aim or working practice. Thus, while the first show stated that the 40 'independents' brought together all 'contribute[d] to the international art scene by inventing new strategies for the distribution of information and by supporting a diverse cultural program' (X, 2009), the second was described as,

> Inviting 70 independent art spaces from Shanghai to Rio de Janeiro to take over the Turbine Hall in order to present themselves, their activities and the artists they support (Tate Modern 2010).

Indeed, both versions of *No Soul For Sale* broke down the term 'independents' to include, in the case of the Tate Modern, 'non-profit centres, alternative institutions, artists' collectives and underground enterprises' (*ibid*), thus arguably allowing for, and making visible, differing practices and structures. More critical voices also include Dickson (1998: 80-2), who argues against the 'mythology of the artist-run space' and points out that while 'short-lived grouping of artists' have emerged in Glasgow 'since the late 1980s', this practice has 'fractured and mutated' so that,

> The idea of a critical mass of Glasgow artists debating hot issues late into the night, rotating around each other's tenement flats and planning the next intervention into 'public space' is as unconvincing now as the phenomenon of alien abduction.

Likewise, Thompson (2005) takes issue with the presentation of Scotland in the 'international art press as a utopian fairyland of artist-run initiatives (ARIs), co-operatives and collectives', while Goldbard (2002: 184) has argued against the 'temptation' to 'scoop them all [artist-run spaces in New York in the 1970s and 1980s] together', because 'treating an assortment of different impulses as if it were a coherent movement is a kind of inflation, ballooning expectations like overrisen dough'. Although their arguments are compelling, it might be noted, as argued above, that the temptation to 'scoop up' ARIs continues: the most recent collections (e.g. Detterer, 2012, Khonsary and Podesva 2012, and Rosati and Staniszewski 2012) all do just this.

## 2.1.2 Classifying technologies, generalisation and the occlusion of multiple ways of 'knowing' ARIs

The dominant portrayal of ARIs as somehow alike is significant, for the texts above, in gathering together multiple forms of practice under one term (whichever one is chosen) or 'movement', and in then citing shared aims and methods, do more than simply suggest commonality; they impose a classifying technology that overrides the (at times very different) terms, aims and methods selected by the artists involved. Thus Rosati and Staniszewski (2012: 9-11) collate as 'alternative art spaces', via

an admittedly 'broad definition', groups self-identifying as cooperatives, coalitions, film archives, galleries, institutes, museums, projects and foundations, and claim a particular, and uniting, 'affiliation' between these groups that is often not remarked upon in the chapters that follow. In doing so, the editors seemingly acknowledge that theirs not an impartial account, but rather that they have 'construct[ed] a narrative' in order to tell a particular 'story of pioneering spaces'. In other words, in making a number of selections including the geographical location, time frame, and decisions as to what material is included in (and presumably excluded from) the volume, and then identifying particular 'characteristics and goals' as 'shared', Rosati and Staniszewski do not comment upon an existing category of practice, but, arguably, work to bring one into being via an account that can be viewed as a manifesto for practice. Similarly, Detterer (2012: 25) rejects the term 'organisation' as 'an unsuitable designation for collectively run art spaces', despite four of the nine 'artist-run spaces' presented in the volume using it to describe themselves on a 'summary' page preceding each chapter, while two more opt for 'non-profit artistic collective' and 'non-profit institution'. Yet in titling the book 'artist-run spaces', all those included are arguably named and primarily understood as such, and are brought together as 'similar'.

This is not to suggest that there exists an entirely infallible approach that might be adopted instead: there are consequences to all systems of classification and the selection of any term, idea or boundary necessarily results in the legitimisation of some practices and structures and the exclusion of others. For example, this thesis employs the term 'ARI', and recognises as such any practice, group or organisation run by and for artists. It further focuses specifically on ARIs identified as involved in the production and display of contemporary visual art. As such, the use of terms here too constructs a boundary between forms of practice (e.g. by excluding the watercolour groups discussed in Chapter One), and, despite hoping to be inclusive in other respects (e.g. the term 'ARI' neither calls for a particular function, as 'artist-run *gallery'* does, nor implies an underlying ideology, as mobilised by the term 'co-operative') nevertheless amounts to a classifying technology. Moreover, the use of terms here not only works to construct a parameter, but problematically suggests an acceptance of certain labels (e.g. 'artist' or 'contemporary art') that it is later argued are bestowed, claimed and/or rejected by those involved, thus creating a potentially circular definition that requires caution, and which is returned to and explored throughout the thesis.

The point then is not that the classifications and categories constructed in the above texts are 'false', for as stated all classifications and categories are authored selections or one kind or another. Rather, it is that in portraying ARIs as fundamentally 'similar' and as belonging to and drawing upon a singular artist-run 'culture' or 'community' of some kind, this dominant mode of understanding a) fails to account usefully for practice, for the 'similarities' discussed above often differ markedly, and b) overrides a number of potentially animating differences and divisions between multiple forms of practice.

To consider the former: many of the texts above have made claims for 'similarity', which often rely upon, to use Detterer's term, a 'common denominator' (2012: 45). Yet as may already be evident, the 'characteristics' and 'shared' goals suggested often differ, and are at times directly contested. For example, Detterer (*ibid*) argues that 'equality of status' is a common feature. Bosse and Obrist (1996: 12-13) likewise suggest 'the overturning of hierarchy'. Yet of the 50 'artist-run projects' Bosse and Obrist document, 17 note positions of relative power including committees, directors, a board of trustees and a number of instances in which the 'founders' are named, while the 'members' or 'artists' involved remain anonymous. In another example, Koszerek (2010) suggests that ARIs are 'viable businesses', yet the Leeds-based collective Black Dogs (2014) describe themselves as a '(non) business' with 'non-capitalist values'. Similarly, Detterer (2012: 45) argues for 'the acknowledgement of individual art creation' as an 'ethical value' shared by artist-run spaces, but members of the Bernadette Corporation in New York and Paris, Critical Art Ensemble in Florida and Ganghut In Dundee largely (although not always) work anonymously and collectively, and so works are in the main jointly attributed to the group as a whole rather than to individual 'creators'.

Even more tacit assumptions can find an exception. For example, many ARIs noted above utilise voluntary labour, but The Living Art Museum in Reykjavik, Art Metropole in Toronto and Curtain Road Arts in London have all at some point hired paid members of staff. Indeed, Thompson (2005) has challenged the idea that all ARIs are run either by or for artists, understood as those who continue to practise, as opposed to those trained as artists and now working elsewhere, as follows:

> Even organisations that have only the most tenuous or peripheral relationship to visual art (cafes, for example) are cited in the press as ARIs purely because they have been established by arts graduates (who have often long since ceased to be practitioners).

This is not to suggest that ARIs with committees cannot function non-hierarchically, that 'non-artists' cannot run ARIs, or to imply that exceptions in practice somehow 'cancel out' widely held notions of commonality. Rather, the above is intended to demonstrate only that there is no universally acknowledged qualification or criterion that might distinguish and unite all ARIs, and that as such, any supposedly 'common feature' is open to interpretation and debate.

Arguments of this kind become all the more important when considering the latter point raised above, namely that accounts of ARIs as 'similar' overlook possible differences and tensions and as such risk simplification and confusion. For example, in his chapter in *Alternative Histories*, Colo (2012: 15) states that,

> Museums are hungry creatures that use their influence, compete, and swallow small places like alternative spaces.

Colo here is seemingly positioning 'alternative spaces' in such a way as to draw attention to wider dynamics of control, power and competition. However, his characterisation of alternative spaces as 'small' is incongruous; elsewhere in the same volume it is noted that Printed Matter is the 'world's largest non-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion, appreciation and distribution of artists' publications' with access to over '20,000 titles by 6,000 international artists' (Rosati and Staniszewski 2012: 172); that 'hundreds' of people attended the Artist Workers' Coalition 'Open Public hearing' in New York in 1969 (*ibid*: 118); and that P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center moved in 1976 to a '150,000-square-foot abandoned public school' (*ibid*: 174). 'Alternative spaces' are not necessarily 'small'. This is important for reasons beyond pedantry, for Colo's positioning of 'alternative spaces' is more than simply unhelpful or confusing when applied to practice, rather it portrays 'alternative spaces', in general, as lacking influence and cultural authority, and as pitted against, and thus providing an 'alternative' to, a dominant 'other', in this case 'museums'. This particular drawing of boundaries is not only contested (a point developed below) but, in assuming certain relationships and powers, also works to obscure 'other' potential relationships and powers. For example, while Colo is writing specifically about New York, the context he describes is not necessarily translatable: Magnúsdtóttir (2010: 7) argues that although the art world in 'most countries in Western Europe' is 'structured like a pyramid', with grassroots activity at the bottom and 'revered contemporary art institutions' at the top, in Iceland 'the situation is reversed' so that,

> With few exceptions, the most important art connections, both international and domestic, are made in the grassroots, among the artists themselves or at their initiative.

Indeed, it might be similarly argued that in describing, for example, Glasgow's art scene as a 'multi-tiered system' (Biddles 2012) with ARIs comprising a either 'starting point' that might lead 'to exhibitions in bigger spaces', or a space in which to host 'experimental arts events', ARIs are again pushed into what Jelinek (2013: 65) describes as the 'binary model' of power in the arts, which 'does not recognise […] subtleties and nuances' and is therefore 'simplistic and offensive […] limiting and disabling'. It is perhaps in this same sense that Thompson (2005) argues against the 'perpetuation of 'givens' surrounding self-determinist practice', pointing out that they 'may be problematic in broader critical terms'.

In summary then, to 'know' ARIs as having 'things is common' is not just to invite confusion and inaccuracy, but to risk the simplification, even occlusion, of certain tensions and the multiple ways of being and thinking that animate artist-run practice. Accordingly, if ARIs cannot be said to inhabit a shared reality, we require a more nuanced framework for 'knowing' them.

## 2.2 'Knowing' ARIs

## 2.2.1 Existing typologies

Three key existing typologies attempt to create this framework: Sharon's 'six major modes of artist-managed exposure' (1979: 5), Graham and Cook's eight 'categories' (2010: 248) and Blessi et al.'s two overlapping 'spheres' (2011: 146).

To consider each in turn: Sharon's (1979: 5-6) pioneering work concerning artist-run galleries in California in the 1970s suggests 'six major modes', primarily organised around notions of form i.e. Sharon distinguishes between 'rented spaces', 'community-orientated centres', 'open studios', and 'individual artists who own and manage galleries'. This typology, based on the then 'new types of exhibition spaces […] [then] currently in San Francisco and the Bay Area' is, on account of its particularity, now largely out-dated, for none of the six categories caters for, for instance, nomadic or web-based ARIs. Moreover, the division via physical form places emphasis and critical attention on structure rather than intention or ideology, and as such produces questionable assumptions, e.g. that all ARIs occupying 'rented spaces' might be grouped and considered together as a set.

Similar difficulties are found in the work of Graham and Cook (2010: 248) who also arrange 'artist-led spaces and places' around eight understandings concerning form, e.g. 'collectives' are held to differ from 'studio collectives', 'cooperatives', 'artist-run organisations' and 'organisations run by an artist where an artist is the director'. Notably, Graham and Cook often include ideas of ownership, power and legality, pointing out, for example, that a cooperative is a 'legal entity […] owned and controlled by members' and that community interest companies 'in legal and financial terms' sit 'between a profit-making company and a not-for-profit charity'. However, despite this attention to detail, the typology again results in some questionable divisions in practice, where structural and legal formats are assumed to result in appropriate groupings of practice. Indeed, the authors appear to acknowledge this when they state that,

> In the end, it may be an organisation's political outlook or focus on experimentation or its physical manifestation […] or its financial backing that distinguishes it from the more traditional museum or gallery.

Furthermore, it may be that these categories are harder to apply and identify than Graham and Cooke suggest: research by Byrne et al (2006) in Ireland found that almost all the artists' 'cooperatives' involved had failed to formally register as such.

Finally, in their analysis of artist-run centres in Montreal, Canada, Blessi et al. (2011: 146-160) 'distinguish between two different though often overlapping spheres', one 'market-orientated', the other 'alternative', both of which are held to 'respond to a clear economic rationale'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the artist-run centres that are the focus of the study are located in the latter 'sphere',

where 'emphasis is more on the dynamics of artistic creation and […] emphasis on recognition and professional success is relatively minor', although the authors note 'links' and 'consistent flows' between the two. As a result, Blessi et al. principally define artist-run centres in relation to an 'art mainstream' that is 'relatively exclusive'. In other words, the authors position artist-run centres in accordance with assumed 'similarities' of the exact kind rejected earlier in this chapter as unhelpfully constructing the notion of 'typical' practice. Moreover, the underlying 'economic rationale' used in Blessi et al.'s framework later results in the analysis of the 17 artist-run centres who participated in the research project via their ability or willingness to act in accordance with 'market standards', where managerial discourses of 'effectiveness', 'contribution' and 'accountability' are given high priority. In contrast, artists' concerns over the perceived 'contamination' of 'their alternative culture [by] the for-profit sphere' are noted, and then dismissed as 'superficial'. In this case, it would appear that certain ways of understanding practice, as perceived and articulated by the artists involved, are actively removed from consideration.

Each of the above typologies thus involves questionable divisions of practice, and allocates priority to structural features or discourses that are not the subject or aim of this research project. As no further typologies were identified, the following section considers and then develops an alternative approach.

## 2.2.2 Identifying 'strands' of meaning

Given the lack of any available and appropriate typology that might move beyond generalisation to consider some of the distinctive and generative boundaries, divisions and differences in artist-run practice, the remainder of this chapter very briefly outlines three key 'strands' of activity as identified in the literature: 'alternatives'; 'DIY' and 'grassroots' practice; and 'collectivity' and 'cooperatives'. Each strand is presented below as operational under the umbrella designation 'ARI', and as involving (and reacting to) specific arguments, aims and practices constructed within particular boundaries and within particular geographic, cultural and political contexts. As such, each 'strand' is a brief attempt to 'map' complex, and at times overlapping, discourses through time and space, and is put forward as an authored 'first step' towards debate, rather than an exhaustive account or representative typology. As such, there will be ARIs whose practice can be perceived in relation to more than one strand discussed, and others who self-identify in very different ways again. No attempt is made here to suggest any 'common' feature, characteristic or form.

As mentioned earlier, there are two main reasons for this approach. First, it is hoped that the following discussion, although necessarily limited and the result of selection from available materials (and as such in no way comprehensive) will provide a more nuanced context for the ARIs presented and analysed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, and for the research findings discussed in Chapter Eight. Second, it is understood that no activity takes place in a vacuum and that artists do not generate meaning autonomously. The examples and discussions presented below are thus held to 'work in the world' beyond their original boundaries and contexts as precedents, sanctioned ways of acting and

thinking, and as comprising value systems that may be replicated, adapted or resisted by participants, although the exact ways in which they might do so will be explored in later chapters.

## 2.2.3 Are ARIs alternative?

One of the more enduring ways of presenting artist-run activities is that constructed under the banner of 'alternative' practice, as often affiliated with the 'alternative' spaces founded in 1960s New York. For Apple (2012: 17), who was 'involved in the founding of two artist-run spaces' during this period (Apple and Franklin Furnace) the 'origins and history' of this 'alternative movement' can be viewed as:

> A series of cycles in which each generation declares its independence from market-based institutions; demands that artists' rights be addressed; takes political positions in opposition to racism, sexism, imperialism, capitalism and other forms of oppression; and challenges the prevailing cultural values of its time.

Apple's definition is useful in that it highlights two central points, namely the fundamentally relational quality to 'alternative' practices (e.g. as constituted with regards a perceived lack, injustice and/or concern) and the range of possible agendas. Yet while Apple implies that the 'movement' is ongoing, with 'each generation' seemingly taking up the fight anew, others challenge the viability of any so-called 'alternative'. For example, in her study of ARIs in California in the 1970s, Sharon (1979: 4-25) argues that artist-run spaces are only 'alternative' if they constitute a sufficient difference from, in this case, 'the existing system of dealer-managed exposure'. Even at this early point in time, Sharon concludes that ARIs rarely produced viable 'alternatives' committed to the discovery of 'new directions in art and artistic production', but more commonly resulted in 'an institutional pattern [operating] jointly with the existing commercial system'.

Ault (2002: 4-9) similarly draws attention to the 'problematic' nature of terms such as alternative, marginal and oppositional, noting that they 'inscribe and promote a hierarchical understanding of the art field as system', and thus, in her book, takes care to associate the term 'alternative' only with 'then-existing institutions and practices'. Indeed Ault argues that the term 'alternative', in 2002, had 'little currency' and asks: 'where have all the alternatives gone? What forms have they taken? Is the concept of the alternative any longer viable or desired?' Similarly, Beck (2002: 260-262) critiques the viability of an alternative 'materiality' in light of the rapid pace of change during this 'movement', and argues that,

> While in 1970 exhibiting in a raw space constituted an alternative position to the arts establishment, just a few years later, the immediate association […] was no longer valid […] 'voluntary shabbiness' […] was just another style.

Beck then goes on to notes multiple possible agendas, pointing out, for instance, that 'for women artists in the 1970s, fantasies about a space that was an alternative to the gallery system centred on the possibility of showing their work at all'. It is on account of this same multiplicity (or 'the assortment of different impulses') that Goldbard (2002: 184-5) has rejected the concept of an 'alternative movement', pointing out that the term 'lumps artists who'd have settled for nothing less than total revolution together with artists who'd have been happy simply to have a show in a good gallery'. Goldbard further points out that many of the ARIs that 'survived the 1980s' were those that fed 'into the mainstream' rather than acted in opposition to it, although she adds that groups could be ''discovered' without necessarily being co-opted' (*ibid*: 186).

Commentators elsewhere are not always so sure: Thompson (2005) argues that ARIs in Scotland often function as a 'complicit feeder-system' into the established art world which they are purported to be an alternative to, while Claxton (2005) heavily criticises 'alternative' spaces in the UK as generic white cubes 'mimicking the structures and organisation of the institution'. Faguet (2012: 95), noting that 'alternative' practice is now a global phenomenon, argues for a more situated approach, whereby 'what is an alternative way of working in one context might be a necessary manner of operating in another'. Faguet's remark thus cautions against any 'easy' comparison (e.g. such as might be suggested between New York 'alternatives', Canadian 'oppositional' galleries, or Scottish 'counter-cultures') and highlights the very different structures, inherited histories and normative practices found globally.

## 2.2.4 'DIY' and 'Grassroots' practice

Two further, and frequently used, descriptors for ARIs – 'D.I.Y.' and 'grassroots' – tend to indicate self-initiated practice, although they achieve this in slightly different ways. The term 'D.I.Y.' (or 'do-it-yourself'), for instance, is used by Daniels (2014: 7) to describe 'an ethos or a style […] sometimes both' that spans the visual arts, theatre and performance, and which despite 'a fair few contradictions and inconsistencies' generally means 'exactly what it describes and labels: to be independent, or at least 'self-reliant''. Thus we might view Westbury's (2007) use of the term in reference to 'a group of artists […] just getting in there, taking over and making things happen', or Joffe's (2010) exhortation that artists 'do anything [they] like' without waiting 'to be asked', as indicative of just such a D.I.Y. 'ethos', and Grams (2007) remark that 'any remodelling, building, painting and general handy-work is done in-house' as referring to a kind of 'style'. Indeed, for Grams this is a style adopted as a consequence of the both the aforementioned 'ethos' and a lack of economic means: here then, is Daniels (2014) dual meaning in action.

However, we might add to this that for Daniels (*ibid*: 7-8), not all forms of D.I.Y. are equal. For instance, Daniels goes on to divide 'the practice of D.I.Y.' into three 'camps':

> Those that covet and employ rudimentary […] technologies, those that purposely do it
> 'badly' or without care for quality, and those that consider dilettantism, auto-didacticism and

working with anything they have in frugal ways as a political and philosophical modus operandi.

Daniels thus indicates particular parameters for 'legitimate' D.I.Y. practice, dismissing those who make poor quality or 'lo-fi' work not 'because they have to', but 'deliberately […] as if it's a trend'. In other words, Daniels suggests that although the term 'D.I.Y.' can be applied to ARIs that 'purposely' make poor quality work, it has a more potent significance as a designator of a 'political and philosophical modus operandi', which both relates to a broader 'social-political movement' and denotes an 'independent' practice positioned relationally with regard to a cultural mainstream. Indeed, Holmes (2007: 275) has linked D.I.Y. arts practice in the 1990s with a 'social antagonism' that 'pushed aesthetic producers […] into an overtly political confrontation with norms and authorities' and into 'the construction of subversive situations on a global scale'. Yet by no means all D.I.Y. practices operate on this global scale, and many feed back into, or work alongside, a cultural mainstream. For example, Joffe's (2010) lecture, 'DIY as Artistic Practice, Not Aesthetic' not only took place at The Royal College of Art, an institution perhaps not entirely aligned with Holmes (2007) suggestion of a 'subversive situation', but in it Joffe instructs students as to how to design press releases that will attract attention from arts journalists. As with the 'alternatives' then, it would seem there are multiple possible boundaries for practice, which might enable or curtail activities in varying ways.

Notions of relational positioning and scale are also at play with regards to 'grassroots' ARIs, for the very term 'grassroots' implies a 'ground-up' action or movement, designated as such in relation to a 'top-down' other. For example, the description of Edinburgh's Annuale Festival as 'a collection of 'independent and grassroots artistic activity' (Annuale 2012) arguably both describes a number of 'not-for-profit' ARIs, and works to distinguish this festival from the Edinburgh Arts Festival, which takes place across a number of largely established museums and galleries in the city. In other words, the term 'grassroots' is seemingly used here to indicate a local and 'emerging' artistic practice, rather than an already institutionally established one.

This is not to argue that one 'level' of practice is necessarily more powerful than another. Indeed, Hanru (2009), drawing upon Appadurai's notion of a 'grassroots globalisation', argues for ARIs as 'the core of the art scene today', as a 'more democratic structure for art practices and their social functions', and as capable of constructing 'a new, bottom-up and more just world'. However, and despite Hanru's apparent intention, it would appear that this particular understanding of grassroots artistic practice as focused on a 'more just world' might also, under certain circumstances, be restrictive. For instance, Kholeif (2012), argues that 'grassroots artist-led initiatives' in a post-Arab Spring Egypt have value precisely because they function independently of both the art market and the expectation that Arab artists should 'comment upon the political situation' and 'engage with the theme of revolution'. Here then, those involved in ARIs are suggested not to be liberated by grassroots democratic practice, but as bound by an assumption that this is their primary focus. Furthermore, Kholeif suggests that Arab artists are often only able to find work internationally if they 'engage with the theme of revolution', with the

problematic consequence that global artistic programming imposes national and cultural categories of the 'other'. Here again then, we see the very different implications for ideas as worked out within particular geographic, political and cultural contexts.

## 2.2.5 'Collectivity' and 'Co-operatives'

Two final understandings might be explored via the terms 'collective' and 'co-operative'. The term 'collective', for example, is often used to denote ARIs that produce jointly authored artworks, where the artists involved often, although as is discussed below by no means always, remain anonymous. For example, Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) (1998: 73) describe themselves as 'a collective of five new-genre artists formed in 1987', and then go on to add:

> Since that time, the group has produced artworks, events, and theory that explore and critique models of representation used in the capitalist political economy […] CAE also has a sustained interest in the variety of organisational possibilities from which artistic practice can emerge.

Here then, collective action is described not just as a particular structure by which to make artwork, but a 'mode of organisation' employed as a 'strategy' (Moore 2007: 216), in this instance, so as to challenge both 'the beloved notion of the individual artist', and a system in which the 'individual's signature' still acts as 'the prime collectable' (CAE 1998: 73). Similarly, Bishop (2006: 178-9), who also notes that collectively authored artworks are 'more difficult to market than works by individual artists', highlights the very different kinds of artworks produced via collective activity, noting that they are 'less likely to be 'works' than social events, publications, workshops or performances'. However, Bishop goes on to argue that the 'urgency' aligned with 'socially engaged practices' of this kind has led to a situation whereby all such practices are 'automatically perceived to be […] important artistic gestures of resistance', so that there 'can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art (ibid: 180). Moreover, we might note that while some artist-run collectives work anonymously and as a political and cultural strategy, others commonly name the individuals involved (e.g. as Limousine Bull Artists' Collective do), and/or exhibit work in 'mainstream' art museums and galleries (e.g. as the Raqs Media Collective do).

The term 'co-operative' is similarly underwritten with ideals concerning shared artistic practice, and is similarly adopted, co-opted and interpreted in varying ways. For example, Thompson (2005) argues that in their 'desire for greater control and autonomy', ARIs in Scotland link to a 'leftist agenda', and to,

> A specifically British history of co-operatives going back to the Rochdale Pioneers in 1840s Lancaster (i.e. the idea of the cooperative founded for the purpose of mutual benefit, progress and improvement of conditions).

Likewise, Jeffri (1980: 86) suggests that in New York in the 1950s and 1970s, the 'proliferation' of co-operative galleries 'reflected a true community of artists working together both against the normal procedures of the commercial gallery and towards greater control of their work', noting that 'the spirit that permeates most of [the then existing] co-operatives galleries is decidedly one of co-operation, direct co-operation, artist-to-artist'. However, Jeffri later adds that although artists co-operatives had taken 'a daring step and important step in introducing new and unknown artists to a similarly unknown audience', the 'inbred choosing of artist-members […] smacks of a vanity operation' (*ibid*: 100). Similarly, Thompson cautions that while contemporary ARIs often place 'emphasis' on a certain kind of terminology (e.g. by using 'phrases such as 'support', 'encourage' [and] […] 'mutual benefit'), in practice, 'the objectives of some ARIs seems to work in direct contrast to the ideological criteria' so that while some ARIs 'remain well-intentioned and critically engaged', others 'are today set up for entirely different reasons to the political and ideological motivations of the predecessors they cite as role models'. However, Byrne et al. (2006: 34), in their study of artists' co-operatives in Ireland, highlight the 'valiant nature of these organisations – trying to carve out a place for themselves in a very rigid art world'.

In summary, in each of the three strands (and five terms) discussed, it would appear that artist-run practice is constructed within, or in opposition or relation to, specific boundaries of understanding, 'ideological criteria' (Thompson 2005) or 'ethoses' (Daniels 2014: 7), that both construct artist-run practice very differently (i.e. as politically 'important' (Bishop 2006: 180), or as a vital 'social antagonism' (Holmes 2007: 275)) and which can have significant consequences for those involved, even unintentionally (i.e. as Kholeif's (2012) account makes clear). Moreover, it would seem that these boundaries both shift over time, and remain widely open to reinterpretation (and misinterpretation). In other words, the value and significance of varying forms of artist-run practice is not stable, nor is it fixed or automatically applicable everywhere. Rather, it might be suggested, following Thompson (2005) that the above examples work as a kind of 'role model' for current and future practice, or as a number of precedents, sanctioned movements and distinct value systems already in operation within the field of art. How members of ARI might then draw upon these precedents in practice, however, remains an enquiry that later chapters address.

## 2.3 Summary: limitations in the literature

In this chapter, it has been argued that dominant portrayals of artist-run activity as belonging to a singular and globally shared 'culture' require critical attention, for this construction of 'typical' practice often obscures the multiple understandings, sharp differences in practice and historical, geographical and cultural boundaries produced and negotiated by those involved. With this in mind, the term 'ARI' is used within this thesis as an umbrella designation only, and the research hopes to remains alive to a number of possible tensions and differences.

Moreover, while the materials discussed in this chapter are of considerable interest, it should be emphasized that they largely fall into one of two camps: a critique of particular, and often global, discourses (e.g. whether something can, or should be, labelled as an 'alternative'); and 'factual' overviews of practice, often located within national, city-wide geographical or organisational boundaries (e.g. with priority given to the chronological listing of exhibitions and exhibitors etc.). While the former often adopts a critical approach and draws upon empirical evidence, this is largely source material (e.g. ephemera produced at the time), and academic research is extremely rare. For example, this review found seven journal articles, three of which are discussed above (Blessi et al. 2011, Byrne et al. 2006 and Sharon 1979). The other four all concern the artists' collective Amber, in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK (Vail and Hollands 2012, 2013a and 2013b and Hollands and Vail 2012) some of which are discussed in subsequent chapters for they open up productive and potentially useful methods by which ARIs might be explored (e.g. they suggest the importance of 'framing' as a technique by which members might seek to legitimate activities (Hollands and Vail 2012)). However, these four articles primarily aim to contribute towards social movement theory, and as such focus on 'early cultural formation' (Hollands and Vail 2012); 'forms of cultural work' including 'paid labour, collective labour, gift labour and creative labour (Vail and Hollands 2012); and notions of 'social skill' (Vail and Hollands 2013a); and 'creative democracy' (Vail and Hollands 2013b). Consequently, a number of important questions remain largely unexplored. For example, what do members draw upon in order to construct, or reconstruct, the meanings shared by the group? Do all members always agree? What impact might membership have upon individual understandings of the self? How might shared meanings bring into being certain objects and materials, and under what conditions? How do new members 'pick up' or learn existing meanings?

In other words, while the literature discussed in this chapter is helpful in setting out a number of contexts and boundaries, it rarely enquires as to the everyday experiences of participation and involvement, or the consequences this involvement may have for those involved and the artworks, exhibitions and events produced. If artist-run practice is now 'the norm' (a-n 2008) for artists and curators working in the UK, then these are serious questions that the remainder of the thesis will attempt to address. The next chapter continues in this task by turning to the research methodology selected and employed.

# Chapter Three:

## Research Methodology

This chapter details the rationale informing the research design. It sets out the models and methods selected and combined, the types and amounts of data collected and analysed and addresses the ethical and practical concerns encountered. It also adopts a reflexive approach so as to make available for discussion a number of assumptions, developments and changes that informed the research design, as well as a number of possible, but rejected, positions, methods and processes that would have made 'the world visible in a different way' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 5). As such, the chapter argues for a decidedly qualitative slant to research, and details and justifies the decisions taken.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first sets out an overview of the project structure, discusses the underlying qualitative assumptions and pays particular attention to the theoretical relationships and responsibilities set up through the application of social construction. The second provides a detailed account of the research design including the influence of literature reviews, the types and amounts of data collected in each ARI and the theories and frameworks used to analyse data. It also discusses the ethical considerations of the project, and explores some of the key concerns and difficulties encountered. Both sections draw upon previous arguments concerning the construction of cultures and ways of knowing ARIs.

## 3.1 Project overview and theoretical relationships
## 3.1.1 Project overview

As indicated in Chapter One, the research project was informed by a number of prior assumptions and experiences, and the support and advice provided by (amongst others) my supervisory team and colleagues at ICCHS at Newcastle University. The resulting structure can be summarised as follows:
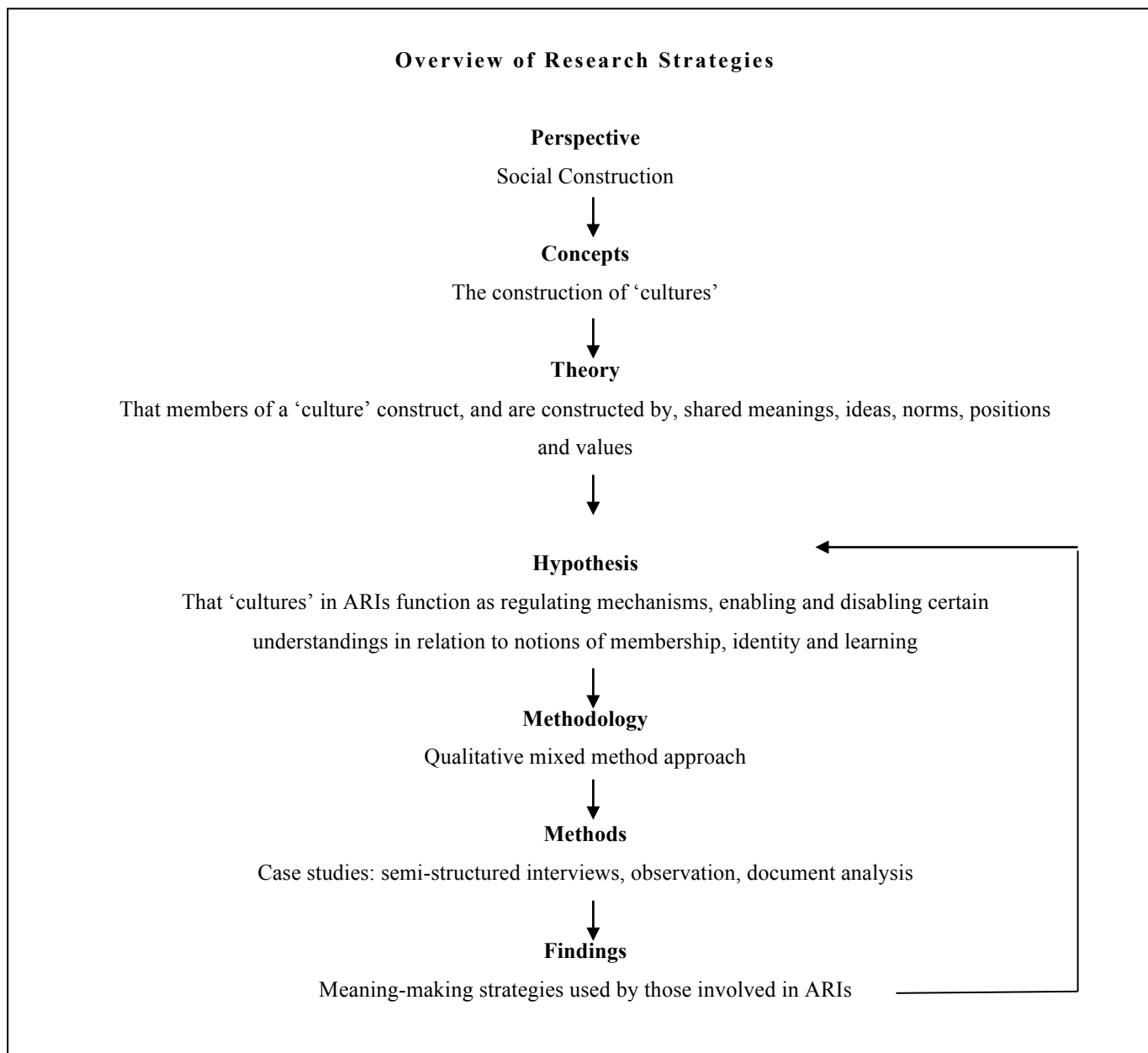
**Figure One**. Overview of Research Strategies, adapted from Silverman's model (2010: 111).

This chapter uses the 'stages' suggested by Figure One as a means by which to order and present the choices made and processes employed in the following sections. However, these 'stages' are felt to be both interdependent and overlapping, and are not intended to represent a linear process. Rather, it is recognised that,

> [The] choice of method is conditioned by (sometimes tacit) theory, method itself is (often implicit) theory, and the development of theory can be conditioned by the choice of method, which in turn influences the nature and scope of the data gathered (Buchanan and Bryman 2009: xxvii).

Figure One is therefore intended as a summary of a number of choices made 'out of sequence' and over time, and as a strategy by which to present and discuss the research methodology, and should not be viewed as suggesting a process by which 'predetermined methods and procedures are followed and 'results' are the inevitable conclusion' (Walford 2001: 1).

However, in working holistically and opting for methods and theories considered to 'fit well together' in this manner, there is a danger that research becomes self-confirming i.e. that in looking in certain ways, the project produces the results it intended to find. This is a serious point, and, while there exists no 'value-free' schema for any type of research, the reflexive approach adopted in this chapter hopes to address such concerns by allowing for a discussion of the methods and theories selected, and for arguments concerning their inclusion (at the expense of other ways of working) to be put forward.

## 3.1.2 Qualitative assumptions

The research projects adopts a decidedly qualitative approach, for while it is recognised that there is 'no simple distinction between 'qualitative' and quantitative' research' (Silverman 2010: 5), the research question is fundamentally orientated so as to examine the ways in which experiences are 'created and given meaning' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 13); a distinctly qualitative concern. Indeed, all of my enquiries, from the original research question proposed at the start of research to the final version presented in this thesis, have been qualitative in slant. As such, to suggest that the question requires similarly qualitative approaches and methods (as I do below) is a misnomer of sorts, or self-confirming circle, that requires careful explanation.

The formulation of research questions relied, in part, on my prior experiences in the field and my training in both the arts and museum studies, all of which primarily focused on the exploration of complex and shifting understandings, whether that be with regards the creation or study of art objects, and the practices, persons and methods of display associated with both. In other words, my personal experiences informed the kinds of questions I asked, and was able to 'see'. Moreover, as I put together proposals and began research, I drew upon texts concerning ARIs (as discussed in Chapter Two) and 'cultures' (Chapter One) that overwhelmingly employed qualitative methods and techniques.

While I endeavoured at every stage to make sure the research project was open to new possibilities and ways of working (as suggested by my supervisory team and colleagues, through the training offered by Newcastle University and extensive literature reviews), and often adapted the project to include these ways of working and thinking, the approaches offered by quantitative studies (e.g. measurement, systematic comparison or statistical analysis) remained, for me, inadequate 'tools' with which to work. For example, I felt that any attempt to generate a large sample size would result, owing to the hybrid and varied format and aims of ARIs, not in a controlled comparison but in a never-ending list of

potential variables, distracting from and displacing the research question rather than attempting to appropriately address it.

### 3.1.3 Social Constructionism

The theoretical perspective chosen, social constructionism, also underpins the research project and, as 'a distinctive way of seeing and questioning the social world' (Gubrium and Holstein 2007: 5), it too requires some discussion with regards the limitations and advantages suggested.

To briefly outline social constructionism: Strong and Lock (2010), Burr (2003) and Gubrium and Holstein (2007) argue that social constructionism is best viewed as a useful perspective or 'frame of understanding' (*ibid*: 4) rather than as a singular theory. Burr (2003: 3-5) suggests the following central characteristics:

1.  **A critical stance towards taken-for granted knowledge**: social constructionists hold that there is no essential truth that can be discovered via observation of the world, and thus that 'the categories with which we as human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions';
2.  **Historical and cultural specificity**: as 'all ways of understanding' can be seen as 'products' of particular times and places, no one understanding is 'better, in terms of being nearer the 'truth' than any other;
3.  **Knowledge is sustained by social processes**: rather than perceiving knowledge as something to be found in the world, social constructionists argue that knowledge is constructed 'between people in the course of social life';
4.  **Knowledge and social action go together**: 'constructions' are not simply descriptions of practice but invite particular forms of action and limit what can be thought, and as such are 'bound up with power relations because they have implications for what it is permissible for different people to do'.

Thus while realist and positivist approaches suggest that data corresponds to a 'factual reality', located via the use of unbiased and precise research methods (Silverman 2001: 87-93), and emotionalist 'accounts of subjective experience' (*ibid*: 90) rely on an authentic inner 'self', social constructionists believe there to be 'no essences inside things or people that make them what they are' (Burr 2003: 5). As a result, there can be no singular (external or internal) reality from which 'facts' may be drawn.

Yet while the above statements infer a singular position, Gubrium and Holstein (2007: 1-4) talk of 'the constructionist mosaic' where constructionism 'belongs to everyone and to no one', and suggest a number of more particular stances. For example, Elder-Vass (2012: 5-6) distinguishes between 'trivial', 'moderate' and 'extreme' constructionisms, while Holstein and Miller (2007: 5) refer to 'contextual' and 'strict' perspectives. Each entails a more specific contention about the material world, and our

ability to know it (or otherwise). The position adopted in this thesis is that of moderate social constructionism, which allows for the presence of a 'real' world, existing independently of our thoughts and actions, but which argues that our perception and organisation of this 'real' world are constructed in profound and significant ways. Thus while I acknowledge a number of 'brute facts' (the physical existence of other people, for example) I do not think that the divisions and categories by which we commonly 'apprehend the world […] necessarily refer to real divisions' or 'naturally occurring […] types' (Burr 2003: 3) and as such, have the potential to be made and understood differently.

This is not to argue, as relativists might, that all such constructed meanings are equally valid and that no moral or political standpoints are possible. Rather, it is my suggestion that speakers need to be 'heard as meaningful' (Ball 1990: 3) within any given society, and, as argued in Chapters One and Two, that knowledges, persons and cultures are not equally powerful, or able to construct, rather than construe, the world (Fairclough 2010), and that dominant understandings can occlude 'other' ways of thinking and being. Thus it is possible to distinguish between constructed meanings without calling upon any essential truth, to debate and critically assess the resulting boundaries and consequences, and to argue for more helpful, inclusive and/or accessible ways of understanding where appropriate.

### 3.1.4 Social Constructionism: selecting a 'better' model?

The above not withstanding, social constructionists are often held to be trapped in a paradox, whereby they argue on one hand that no 'truth claim' is necessarily any 'better' or 'truer' than any other, and on the other adopt this particular model *in preference* to available others e.g. positivism. This is important, for in putting together this thesis I too have chosen one model at the expense of many possible others, and would like to here argue for this choice.

It perhaps important to first state then that my selection of moderate social constructionism was not intended to represent a 'better', or even the 'best' choice. Rather, and as with the qualitative slant discussed above, social constructionism was already familiar to me on account of my previous studies, and strongly informed both the generation and proposal of research questions, and, later on, the methods and practices that would be used to address them. To put it a different way, I already thought 'as' a moderate social constructionist, and so was concerned with 'the everyday methods, rules, and strategies by which reality is put together' (Gubrium and Holstein 2007: 6). Consequently, when beginning research, I did not consider ARIs to be 'simply and evidently 'there''(*ibid*: 3), but to have been produced (and re-produced) by those involved.

The methodology put together thus drew both on my own experiences and assumptions, and research undertaken in related fields (as discussed in Chapters One and Two), resulting in particular kinds of questions. For example, rather than consider artistic identity to be a fixed and 'natural' category, I thought to explore complex, fluid and multiple identities as articulated by members of the ARIs,

without removing data that might have been considered 'inaccurate', 'confused' or 'contradictory' under positivist research models. I was also able to enquire about the understandings employed within each ARI thought to be 'obvious', and those rejected as 'false', and as such, to ask: what constitutes an artwork, or an artist and how? Are 'good' artworks and artists separated from 'bad' ones, and if so, how? Who has the right to speak within the ARI? Who is denied access?

Again, alternative ways of working were available, and would doubtless have resulted in questions, methods and findings very different to those presented here. However, I believed that the above questions were important ones, and that they had the potential to significantly contribute to existing understandings in research, and towards understandings of ARIs and the construction of cultures more generally.

## 3.1.5 Social Constructionism: consequences for 'standards' in research

Having decided upon social constructionism, I must here address a number of specific consequences for research conducted within such a model. For example, if there is no universal 'truth' and knowledge is historically and culturally bounded, then notions of 'truth', and more specifically 'authenticity', 'accuracy', 'reliability' and 'objectivity' become problematic, for there is no longer any mechanism by which to test for, or 'prove', any of the above. Accordingly, it should thus be noted that this thesis does not hope to arrive at any 'complete' or 'total' solution, nor will it attempt to locate 'authentic' data (in the sense of 'true' or 'genuine' data) or strive for 'accuracy' (understood as being 'more truthful') for there can be no singular, privileged account against which to 'measure' results. Similarly, research findings are not presented as 'reliable' (understood as 'consistency' in repeated research findings) or as 'objective' or 'impartial', for findings do not have to be repeated and 'no human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all' (Burr 2003: 152). In other words, to apply understandings that assume a positivist and/or essentialist understanding of the research process would be contradictory given the model selected.

While the above mechanisms are 'inappropriate for judging the quality of social constructionist work' (*ibid:* 158), there are a number of more compatible methods and standards, which this thesis adopts (the methods used to ensure the systematic and rigorous collection and analysis of data are discussed in some detail below). Care is also taken to present arguments clearly and with as much supporting data as is feasible, so as to render the progression of ideas legible and open to further debate. It is further hoped that the reflexive accounts provided, in explicitly addressing the choices made, accounting for decisions taken and presenting difficulties encountered, allow for notions of 'suitability' and 'coherence' to be raised and discussed.

A further consequence of social constructionism concerns generalisation, for if knowledge is bound in time and place, how might findings pertain beyond the specific cases studied? This is an important point, for it not only addresses the potential contribution to be made, but also raises key questions

concerning the value of the project. Two arguments can be made in response. First, I would argue that the ARIs selected are of value in and of themselves. For example, and as later demonstrated in Chapter Four, each is recognised nationally, and at times internationally, as 'significant', albeit in differing ways ranging from the critically acclaimed production of artworks and exhibitions to notable contributions to specific art 'scenes'. Moreover, as no research has, to the best of my knowledge, considered the construction of cultures within ARIs, this thesis is arguably an important first step towards understandings of contemporary arts production, regardless of its ability to generalise.

Second, while any attempt to randomly generalise between ARIs is likely to be fraught with difficulties given the hybrid and varied nature of the groups included in this designation, it is hoped that this thesis can use the data collected to refine 'grand' theories concerning the construction of cultures in relation to specific examples of practice, and as such contribute to current understandings as drawn upon by a number of related fields of research. It is in this sense that conclusions are hoped to be 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004), i.e. in clearly identifying the contexts and boundaries within which the three ARIs operate, and the specific formats, working methods and aims adopted by each, it is hoped that findings may be sensitively and helpfully employed, debated and adapted by others, without suggesting any notion of 'typical' practice.

## 3.2 Research design: methods, analysis and ethical concerns

This section covers the research design, including the methods, types and amounts of data collected, the forms of analysis adopted and the ethical considerations encountered. It begins, however, with a short discussion of two forms of preparatory work that influenced this later selection of methods: existing research concerning cultures, and a pilot study.

## 3.2.1. Research concerning cultures

When considering the methods that might be employed within the research project, particularly with regard to previous research on cultures, it was noted that certain methods, and particularly 'ethnography' and 'participant observation', were suggested to comprise the 'oldest and best-known methods for getting a handle on 'culture' (Edles 2002: 141). However, there were two major difficulties with this approach. First, 'naturalistic' ethnography of this kind is often held to rely 'on an assumption of realism, i.e. the notion that there is a concrete 'reality' out there waiting to be 'uncovered' (*ibid*: 142), a notion that thus conflicted with the moderate social constructionist perspective taken. Second, there were a number of practical difficulties with the idea that extended periods of time might be spent within these 'natural' environments (*ibid*), for research had to be carried out within the limits set by the PhD, and not all ARIs operate within any given premises, or in relation to any given timetable.

As such, and rather than curtail the use of certain ARIs, I instead sought methods I felt were practically achievable and appropriate, and which adopted an approach similar to that taken in ethnomethodology, in that 'immersion' (*ibid*: 167) in a culture was not required, but rather, methods were selected that might allow for the 'study of people's methods of constructing reality in everyday life' (Silverman 2010: 106-7). However, while the ethnomethodological tendency to bracket meaning (e.g. 'culture') was adopted to signal that a concept that might be constructed in numerous ways, I did not wish to lose, in this instance, the significance of 'culture' more broadly. I also thought it unfeasible to suggest that I observe the 'micro-level interaction' (Edles 2002: 167) occurring in everyday practice, for, as mentioned above, not all ARIs work within a given premises or timeframe, making this approach particularly haphazard. I thus turned, following recent studies of ARIs as carried out by Hollands and Vail (2012) and Vail and Hollands (2012, 2013a, 2013b) to the use of case studies, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. More detail about each method is given below.

## 3.2.2 The pilot study

In order to test out the above approach, a pilot study was carried out between April and May 2011 at The NewBridge Project (henceforth referred to as 'NewBridge') in Newcastle upon Tyne. At the time of research, NewBridge had been open for just under a year, was under the control of two founding directors, and housed around 50 artist studios alongside multiple additional spaces including a gallery, several communal areas and a darkroom.

The data collected from the pilot study is summarised in Table One.

**Table One**. Data Collection at NewBridge.

| | Data type | Material collected |
|---|---|---|
| The NewBridge Project | Document analysis | Published texts: mission statements, newspaper interviews, blog posts<br><br>Internal documents: business plans and annual reports, plus draft versions of the above |
| | Interviews | 5 semi-structured interviews with members of each identified 'social group' i.e. 1 member of the advisory panel, 2 directors, 1 committee member and 1 studio holder who was not a member of any committee |

The pilot study was based around a qualitative 'mixed-methods' research design that adopted a case study approach, and combined document analysis with a purposive sample of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes long. Transcriptions were made available to each participant and while information could not be changed, participants were made aware that they could add to the transcript if they wished to do so. No additions were made. Three further interviews and the observation of a committee meeting could not be arranged due to timing restrictions.

At this point, the research question concerned understandings of 'learning' only, and so data analysis focused on the 'organising metaphors' (Hansen and S¢rensen 2005: 96) put forward by the members of NewBridge interviewed (e.g. ''development' or 'engagement'), which were then 'mapped' in order to gather together clusters of meaning for discussion. However, it was at this point that the original boundaries of the project came into question, for the members of NewBridge interviewed frequently suggested understandings of identity, 'community' and belonging, all of which I was struggling to adequately respond to and include. Following a draft essay concerning the pilot study in which such issues arose, and the feedback from my supervisory team, the nature and scope of the project were reconsidered.

## 3.2.3 Research design: Case Studies

Partly on account of the unit of analysis suggested (the ARI) and the nature of the research question (which sought to understand how members negotiated a particular culture) this research adopted a case study approach to data collection in accordance with Yin's (2009: 2) criteria for case study research, namely that:

1. 'How' and 'why' questions were posed;
2. The researcher had 'little control over' the events concerned, and;
3. Research focused on a 'contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context'

It was further felt that any attempt to compile, say, a large-scale survey of members of ARIs throughout the UK would not allow for the kind of detailed and complex data analysis required to answer the research question, for it would fragment data across multiple sites.

## 3.2.3.1 Case study selection

In order to select three case studies, a database of ARIs then operational in Glasgow, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne was compiled (Appendix 1). This drew upon multiple sources, including magazines with arts listings (e.g. *The List*, *The Skinny, MAP,* and *The Crack*), regional directories of arts activity (*GRID*) and webpages and mailing lists published by arts organisations (e.g. Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, The Glasgow School of Art). It is likely, however, that further ARIs have

been accidentally excluded, for there exists no comprehensive directory for ARIs in the UK to which I might have referred, listings quickly become obsolete, and some ARIs do not attract, solicit or desire press coverage. The database thus represents to my fullest knowledge the ARIs potentially available for research at the time of compilation, and within geographical proximity.

A number of criteria, developed in relation to the aims and objectives of the project, were then applied so as to carry out research within appropriate boundaries. These stated that any potential case study must:

- Self-identify as an 'ARI' (as defined in Chapter One);
- Self-identify as concerned with the production and display of contemporary visual art;
- Involve some form of 'membership' (loosely defined as a number of individuals 'connected' to the ARI so as to allow for the possible construction of cultures through everyday interaction, although the exact nature and requirements of this 'membership' were left open to interpretation).

Funding sources, minimum periods of operation, and a consistent or physical 'base' (e.g. a set of studios / a permanent gallery space etc.) were not included in the above as doing so may have closed down interesting avenues for the research (e.g. the inclusion of nomadic ARIs). The remaining ARIs were then purposively sampled so as to result in a range of practices (e.g. to include an ARI identifying as a 'collective', and another identifying as a 'cooperative') to expand the scope and potential contribution of research findings. This process was not straightforward, and as a result of the complexity involved it was several months before a decision was made. Three possible ARIs were identified: The Mutual, Empty Shop and 85A.

### 3.2.3.2. Case study recruitment

Having identified possible case study ARIs, the following steps (adapted from Walford 2001: 34-50) were followed to initiate contact and 'recruit' them for research:

1. Qualified 'gatekeepers' were identified for each ARI, understood as those able to 'grant access to the research site' (*ibid*: 38);
2. Gatekeepers were emailed with a request to meet and a brief description of the research project;
3. If there was no reply within a week, another, shorter email was sent to make the same request;
4. Meetings were arranged at a time and place of the gatekeepers convenience;
5. During the meeting gatekeepers were provided with a summary of the research aims and methods, and encouraged to ask questions. The specific contribution the ARI in question might bring to the research was outlined.

6. Gatekeepers were encouraged to raise any doubts or worries, and the ways in which data would be collected, stored and used, in line with ethical procedures and norms, were set out and discussed.

However, research took place in 'the real world' (Robson 2002) and at times considerable adjustments to the above were required in order to meet the circumstances and needs of those involved. For example, whereas identifying gatekeepers for The Mutual and Empty Shop was reasonably straightforward (current directors were named on the webpage for each organisation) 85A had no such named person(s) in positions of relative authority. I therefore contacted an acquaintance, and was consequently referred to two current members who later confirmed access on behalf of the group as a whole. The time taken to arrange meetings also varied considerably, from a couple of days to a number of weeks, as those involved often had numerous paid and unpaid jobs and/or further commitments, and often wished to involve multiple representatives.

Upon reaching agreement with each set of gatekeepers, I requested that we all sign a 'research agreement' (Appendix 2) that confirmed the parameters of the research project. However, access was considered to be 'a process and not a once-only decision' (Walford 2001: 31) and so it was made clear that all participants, including the gatekeepers, could withdraw at any time.

## 3.2.4 Research methods

The research adopted a qualitative 'mixed-methods' design that collected both primary and secondary forms of data via document analysis, semi-structured interviews and observation. The data collected is summarised in Table Two.

**Table Two**. Data Collected.

| Case study | Data collected |
|---|---|
| The Mutual | Eighteen interviews<br>Nine 'timelines' and one drawing of The Mutual collected following interviews<br>Observation of one committee meeting and one 'email meeting' exchange<br>Self-published materials including exhibition flyers, a publication and manifestos from 2009, 2012(a) and 2012(b)<br>Internal documents including notes, the original business plans and application forms for both 'members' and 'interns' |
| 85A | Nine interviews<br>Three 'timelines' and five drawings of 85A collected following interviews<br>Observation of the Chernozem film screening<br>Self-published materials including flyers, tickets and manifestos |

| | |
|---|---|
| Empty Shop | Nine interviews<br>Eight 'timelines' and seven drawings of Empty Shop collected following interviews<br>Observation of the 'Annual Open' exhibition<br>Self-published materials including flyers and current manifesto<br>Internal documents including an early (discarded) business plan, the FreeBirds Agreement forms and press releases |

The three methods selected are discussed in detail below, however it is important to note that the selection of *three* was in no way an attempt to employ Patton's 'triangulation' system, or any similar process whereby conclusions are derived from more than one set of data, from more than one collection method and using more than one theory (Flowerdew 2002: 237), for this implies a 'validation' process inconsistent with social constructionism.

## 3.2.4.1 Document analysis

After obtaining permission to begin research, I asked gatekeepers if they might make available to me any 'texts' (published or internal) used within the ARI. The term 'text' is used here to signify any 'readable' material, and so would include group photos, logos and/or tickets for events as well as those materials perhaps more classically identified as 'texts', such as business plans and mission statements. Particular emphasis was placed upon 'naturally occurring' texts, in the sense of materials 'produced for some other purpose' than this research project (Robson 2002: 349), and those most likely to function as the 'rules of the game' e.g. manifestos, membership forms, and texts perceived by members as being particularly representative of either the ARI or themselves. The central reason for this method of data collection was the capture of data that might signpost 'social roles, goals, relevant social knowledge, norms and values' (Barker and Galasiñski 2001: 63). However, it was recognised that texts are liable to translation (and thus open to misinterpretation on my part), are layered and often address multiple functions simultaneously, and do not therefore necessarily 'communicate' desired or wished for meanings.

## 3.2.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected in order to collect data relating to the opinions, experiences and expectations of individual members, and provided a chance to ask 'particular questions […] that cannot be asked in any other situation' (Silverman 2010: 92). A sample interview schedule is provided in Appendix 3.

The specific choice of format (semi-structured as opposed to structured or unstructured) was largely dependent on notions of depth and control, for I judged that in order to answer the research question appropriately I would need to collect data that addressed some key and predetermined questions, but

which simultaneously allowed interviewees to respond in a manner they felt suitable, and in some detail, and for further spontaneous questions to be posed in relation to this information.

I was wary, however, of suggestions that any one interview format was more 'likely to produce the information required' than any other (Bell 1992: 71), for this thinking positions interviewees as passive receptacles from which 'valid' or 'true' answers may be extracted. Rather, I followed Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 4) in considering 'both parties to the interview [as] necessarily and undeniably *active*, and the interview as 'an arena in which both the interviewer and the interviewee are actively constructing and interpreting the process' (Cassell 2009: 506). This approach is often associated with 'identity-work' (*ibid*), and thus I hypothesised that interviewees may use the interview as an opportunity to engage in the production of personal narratives in collaboration with those 'framing devices' (e.g. questions with implied directions and boundaries) provided by myself, and by linking experiences together to form 'coherent' accounts (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 28-9).

I further hypothesised that interviewees, as 'knowing subjects' well aware of the expectations placed upon them in this context (Koro-Ljungberg 2007) might well adopt roles specifically for my benefit, or move between a 'repertoire' of such positions brought into play by the interview itself (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 17). Thus I did not anticipate 'authentic', 'genuine' or 'comprehensive' accounts, but hoped to 'activate applicable ways of knowing […] contradictory as they may be' (ibid: 37).

The interviews carried out are summarised below in Table Three:

**Table Three**. Summary of Interview Data.

| Case Study | Total number of 'members' identified | Number of face-to-face interviews | Number of Skype interviews | Number of phone interviews | Total number of interviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Mutual | 124 | 10 | 8 | 0 | 18 |
| 85A | 14 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Empty Shop | 21 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 9 |

Gatekeepers in each ARI were asked for contact information for all those they considered to be 'members'. They were further asked to organise this information with regards the 'positions' those members held. Both statements were deliberately left open to interpretation. This resulted in several categories, from which I randomly sampled potential interviewees, making sure to include,

- Those in a position of relative power e.g. directors, 'core' members;
- Those in a relatively 'average' position e.g. 'regular' members;

- Those in relatively peripheral position e.g. volunteers, 'marginal' members.

Potential interviewees were sent an email inviting them to participate in the research and a shorter, follow-up email if they did not reply. Both emails contained a brief project description, contact information for myself, my principle supervisor, and named the gatekeepers who had provided access, as requested by the gatekeepers in each case. If potential interviewees declined, did not reply or a suitable meeting could not be arranged, I went back to the contact information provided and randomly selected another potential interviewee until the category, or the time in which to conduct research, were exhausted.

Face-to-face interviews took place at time and (public) location of the interviewees' choosing (e.g. artists' studios, cafes and libraries), as far as possible. All interviewees were asked to read an 'Individual Agreement Form' (Appendix 4), which detailed my obligations as follows:

The researcher
- Has gained project approval from the HaSS Ethics Committee at Newcastle; University and will abide by these standards;
- Will keep all data securely and use it for the purposes of academic research only;
- Will ensure that all participants have the right to withdraw at any time, although data provided up to that point may be kept and used within the research;
- Is willing to provide a full transcript for the relating participant(s), plus the ability to add further comments, although participants will not be able to delete information;
- Will not refer to any participant by name;

It also provided the interviewee with three statements:

| | |
|---|---|
| I agree to participate in the research, as described above | Yes / No |
| I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time | Yes / No |
| I would like to receive a transcript of the interview | Yes / No |

Interviewees were encouraged to ask questions, and urged to sign the document only if they agreed to participate. Permission to record the interview was then sought. Interviewees were encouraged to request a transcript of the interview.

In order to include interviewees working further afield or who were unable to meet in person, I conducted 10 interviews via the online communication service Skype and another one by phone. While I had initially hoped to maintain a proportional balance in terms of the quantity of interviews carried out and the number of 'members' identified, practical considerations gave rise to an imbalance. For example, potential interviewees at 85A replied so quickly that I was able to carry out additional interviews in the given time frame, while a delay in obtaining contact information at Empty Shop and a

number of last-minute cancellations resulted in fewer interviews taking place than hoped for. Interviews varied considerably in length, ranging between 24 to 103 minutes long.

## 3.2.4.3 Observation

I suggested above that 'naturally-occurring' data collected using long-term observational methods was not practically suitable. However, there were several opportunities to observe one-off events, which I took advantage of. For example, I was able to observe a committee meeting with The Mutual, Empty Shop's 'Annual Open V' exhibition and 85A's screening of their feature film *Chernozem*.

These 'moments' were of use to the research project, for they provided me with an opportunity to observe members in action. This is not to suggest, however, that the material collected via observational methods was thought to be more 'genuine' than that collected via alternative methods, or that I hoped individuals might, 'as trust builds, reveal more details of their lives' (Walford 2001: 9), for both statements assume access to a 'genuine' or more 'authentic' self. Rather, I hoped to observe the ways in which members 'performed' in situ and in relation to each other.

Given that events might take place at any time, or not at all, this phase was never intended as obligatory, but as a flexible option available if and when an occasion presented itself. The length of time allocated to observation was likewise dictated by the event in question (from a couple of hours to a full day), and I moved between participant and non-participant observation depending on the specific context e.g. while I felt it would be inappropriate to contribute to a committee meeting, I accepted the invitation to work as a volunteer during Empty Shop's exhibition opening, so as to observe more of exhibition process.

## 3.2.4.4 'Timelines' and diagrams

Two methods of data collection were added as research progressed: I began asking interviewees at the first ARI, during face-to-face interviews, to draw 'timelines' during the first case study, and to draw the ARI in question during the second.

The idea to ask for 'timelines' occurred to me during the first interview carried out, when an interviewee inferred that a number of past experiences and roles impacted upon her decision-making as a member of The Mutual. Seeing potential value in this data, I asked the interviewee to draw a 'timeline' of these activities, and later incorporated this question into the interview schedule for all face-to-face interviews. When later discussing this development with my supervisory team, it was suggested that interviewees were further requested to draw the ARI, in order to obtain data specifically relating to the perceived positioning of members. This question was adopted for all remaining face-to-face interviews. Although it was not feasible to contact all eighteen interviewees from the first case

study to request this additional information, a chance opportunity meant that I could ask one of the original interviewees.

In both cases, interviewees were made aware that the question was not mandatory, and that they were not in any way required to produce information. During interviews, priority was given to those questions asked of all interviewees, and so a number of interviewees who exceeded the time limit set, plus those whose interview took place via Skype or phone, were not asked either of the above questions. Table Four summarises the data collected via these methods:

**Table Four**. Data Collection: 'Timelines' and Organisational Drawings.

| Case Study | Number of face-to-face interviews | Number of 'timelines' completed | Number of drawings completed |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Mutual | 10 | 9 | 1 |
| 85A | 7 | 3 | 5 |
| Empty Shop | 8 | 8 | 7 |

## 3.2.5 Data Analysis
### 3.2.5.1 Transcription of interview data

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and without punctuation. While I had intended to use the notations offered by Silverman (2010) this process proved too time consuming to be feasible. Once completed, transcripts were made available to interviewees who had requested a copy. Interviewees were encouraged to 'flag up' any comments that struck them as potentially harmful (e.g. negative comments about funding bodies), or which caused them concern, so that I might be made aware of potential sensitivities. The vast majority of interviewees stated that they were happy for the transcript to be used as it stood. Some pointed out small errors (e.g. the spelling of names). Three interviewees requested that information be removed. One interviewee asked for extra information to be included, which I did.

### 3.2.5.2 Coding software

Software for the coding of data (NVIVO) was trialled during the pilot study. However, I found the programme to be restrictive and decided against its further use. For example, I found that when coding data in relation to the construction of identity, interviewees would use multiple terms, which resulted in either reams of data, or data divorced from the contexts that rendered it meaningful. As a result, all data was coded was carried out either manually, or employed everyday software (e.g. Microsoft Word). The processes of analysis began as soon as data was gathered, as suggested by Silverman (2010: 221), and data was coded iteratively as the research progressed.

### 3.2.5.3 Data analysis

When coding and analysing data, attention was paid to the identification of certain key terms or 'organising metaphors' (Hansen and S¢rensen 2005), an approach commonly employed in educational research (as, for example, Sfard (1998), Hager (2008), and Hager and Hodkinson (2009) all do in their work concerning the metaphors of 'acquisition', 'participation', 'transfer' and 'becoming'). In this initial stage, or 'first-level' of coding (Robson 2002: 476), I attempted to collect together 'all instances of a particular kind' (*ibid*), in relation to the aims and objectives of the research project. Information suggested by participants to be related to, or associated with (even negatively) these key terms was then noted, a process resulting in constellations of linked practices, understandings, ideas, objects and persons, or 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10). I also continually compared the 'maps' produced via this kind of analysis with those produced for other participants, and for other case studies, in order to identify broader possible similarities, differences and patterns (Robson 2002: 476).

For instance, particular focus was paid on the use (or avoidance) of the term 'artist', in both the 'naturally occurring data' collected, and by participants during interviews. This allowed me to track the application of this term, that is, when, where and for whom it was thought appropriate, and any 'evidence', expectations, behaviours or values associated. I thus sought to analyse each instance of the use of the term 'artist' within the particular context or 'episode' (Ricoeur 1991) suggested, an approach crucial for any analysis based upon social constructionism (Silverman 2010: 225). I further analysed interview data to see if and how such 'episodes' were articulated (i.e. to see if earlier 'episodes' were suggested to 'build' upon previous experiences, or to break with them), an approach consistent with the interview as 'narrative', and to identify points at which participants 'shifted' in role (e.g. via phrases such as 'speaking as an 'x' now'), as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) have suggested. Analysis also drew strongly upon notions of 'framing' (Goffman 1974), understood as the active selective of certain salient features above possible others (Entmann 1993: 52), whereby 'naturally occurring' data, interview data and visual data collected was analysed in relation to areas of emphasis or exclusion. For instance, attention was focused on instances highlighted as being somehow 'special', discounted as 'not useful', or which noted a boundary of some kind (e.g. between those included and excluded from particular activities).

Furthermore, analysis of the 'timelines' and drawings took a 'critical' approach, as suggested by Rose (2013: 16-17), and thus included careful, and reflexive, consideration of the data as representations 'capable of having their own effects'. In other words, the visual data produced during the interview was not regarded as illustrative of key points generated through interview transcripts, or as a supplementary 'extra'. However, it was further noted that the 'timelines' and drawings produced were neither 'naturally occurring' (as the flyers, posters and pamphlets collected were), nor were they produced in isolation. Rather, their production within the context of the interview resulted in the interweaving of visual and other types of data, for as participants drew they often continued to talk, offering verbal

'accounts' that suggested particular readings, or intended symbolisms (i.e. participants would point out the 'reasons' for the inclusion of a certain shape). As such, a 'hybrid mode' of visual analysis (Vince and Warren 2012: 289) was adopted, whereby analysis concentrated both upon spatial and visual content (i.e. the representation of positions, boundaries, and/or periods of time), and the sequencing and arrangement of this information via multiple means (e.g. what was drawn first, what was added later in relation to certain questions, the 'accounts' of the drawings offered). It was hoped that this approach would retain the distinctiveness of each form of data, while allowing each to contribute to the generation of key terms, patterns, and, later, theories.

In this sense, the analysis of all data strongly resembled that of 'grounded theory', as expounded by Glaser and Strauss (1967), in that there was an initial attempt to develop certain, selective, categories, which were then 'saturated' to 'demonstrate their relevance', and later developed into 'more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting' (Silverman 2010: 235). However, there was a concerted effort to 'test' as well as 'saturate' categories (i.e. extensive searching to identify 'deviant' cases (*ibid*: 242), or cases that did not 'fit' with the patterns originally identified), to root out implicit theories, and to be cautious about any attempt at generalisation. Thus the coding of data also had much in common with those methods employed in ethnographies, where 'developing a theory is often not so much an event as a process' (Walford 2001: 10), and data is tested and re-tested in order to generate new hypotheses and refine those already constructed. Indeed, as was noted above in the case of the pilot study, the continual generation and testing of hypotheses in this manner led to a 'progressive focusing' (Robson 2002: 488) of the research aims and objectives, so as to 'develop and clarify' these in relation to the data.

Care was taken throughout this process to analyse all data as produced and arranged as part of the particular 'communicative situation' (Barker and Galasiñski 2001: 65) of the interview, and thus to treat data as one possible, and selective, 'reality' marked by the (active) presence of the researcher. Similarly, there were no attempts to eliminate bias, or to ensure greater 'validity' by cross-referencing documents, as this approach is inconsistent with social constructionism.

## 3.2.6 Ethical considerations

Throughout the research, consideration was given to the ethical concerns raised and to the potential impact upon participants and ARIs studied. It was therefore recognised that there was 'an implicit, if not explicit, assumption that the researcher will not directly attempt to [do] harm' (Walford 2001: 79) and a number of measures and standards for the protection all of those involved were implemented.

### 3.2.5.1 Ethical approval

All social science students at Newcastle University are required to gain project approval from the HaSS Ethics Committee to ensure that projects are valid, appropriate and incorporate the highest ethical standards. I submitted this form, complete with an overview of the research, and noted that the research project involved human subjects, and that I would require the co-operation of a gatekeeper to recruit participants. It was further noted that children and/or vulnerable adults may be members of those ARIs selected, and that I would consult with gatekeepers in this case, offering to either remove those identified as vulnerable from the sample, or to re-apply to the HaSS Ethics Committee for full ethical clearance. Under these conditions, the project was approved on the 9th June 2011.

During initial meetings with 'gatekeepers', these particulars were made clear, and as a result four adults in two of the three ARIs were identified as 'vulnerable' and their contact information was removed from the sample. No children were identified. As such, full ethical clearance was not required.

### 3.2.5.2 Data storage

All recordings were uploaded onto a password-protected laptop, and both the recorder and the laptop were kept securely. Other forms of data, such as notes taken during observation, hard copies of transcripts and those 'texts', organisational drawings and 'timelines' collected, were stored in files along with the completed consent forms.

### 3.2.5.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

To assist with confidentiality, all participants were given a codename and any information I considered specific enough to identify the individual concerned was removed. However, I felt that I could not completely guarantee participants' anonymity, for the ARIs were named, and as such the identification of members was possible. Indeed, the sampling of possible interviewees into relative categories and the provision of codenames based upon these categories unintentionally made identification more likely. Moreover, I was aware that data I considered to be unidentifiable might not be so for others, and particularly others involved in the ARI in question.

To some degree this is inevitable in all research, for those involved in a study are often 'well aware' they are being discussed and are able to identify other individuals (Walford 2001: 145). I did, however, take a number of steps in relation to these concerns:

1. I discussed the issue of anonymity with gatekeepers and suggested two options: I could attempt to keep the ARI anonymous by removing certain identifying features and methods (e.g. the name of the ARI, exhibition posters etc), but could not guarantee that it might not later be 'discovered'; or I could name the ARI openly, as is common in social science

research, include those identifying features and methods in the research, and strive to make all participants aware of the implications of this decision. After discussion, all gatekeepers gave me permission to 'name' the ARIs;

2. I endeavoured at every stage to make participants aware of the terminology I was using and the possible implications, in order to gain their informed consent to continue;

3. I encouraged interviewees to request a transcript, and to highlight potentially sensitive or identifying information;

4. To the best of my ability, I attempted to remove data that may have rendered individuals recognisable to others.

Thus while I felt that to promise anonymity would have been false on my part, I attempted at every stage to keep participants' data and identities confidential.

## 3.2.7 A reflexive account of the research process

Despite my efforts to put in place suitable measures and standards, two areas of difficulty were encountered during the research. First, my original assumptions as to the type of data that questions might elicit was in many respects naïve. For example, in an earlier draft of this chapter, completed before the research began, I stated that,

> The research project concentrates upon perceptions of identity, community and learning. It does not focus on issues of gender, race, sexuality or religion. It is not […] interested in funding (either the uses of or applications for) […] As such, it is broadly anticipated that the topics and issues raised through data collection will remain relatively uncontentious.
>
> (Draft chapter, 2011b)

While I did add that 'the mechanics binding cultures together are themselves instruments of inclusion and exclusion' and so attempted to give some consideration to the elicitation of sensitive data, this was primarily in reference to notions of organisational reputation, and as such seriously misrecognised the ways in which participation in an ARI does not take place in isolation, but as part of a far richer 'life lived'. Consequently, when asking interviewees to explain past choices (e.g. why did you join 'x'?) answers included feelings of helplessness, 'lack' and/or inadequacy, and at times touched on personal or traumatic relationships and experiences and/or significant changes in circumstance. Unsurprisingly, interviewees occasionally had strong emotional reactions when replying to such questions, and one, perhaps misunderstanding my role as one that benefited from some kind of confidential privilege, revealed details of past illegal activity. When interviewees reacted in this way, I urged them to pause, reminded them that they could withdraw at any time and offered to re-arrange the interview. All interviewees chose to continue. In many cases, interviewees suggested the sensitive information was an integral part of their 'story', and as such, I felt it appropriate to let them continue if they wished to do so. With regards the account of illegal activity, I consulted with my supervisory team, and we together

decided that no further action on my part was required, as full details were already in the public domain. I subsequently took more care to highlight my exact role and responsibilities with regards illegal activities in later interviews.

A further consequence of this misunderstanding on my part, however, concerned the interview transcripts. For example, following three requests for information to be deleted (one owing to use of a potentially embarrassing term, and two more with regard to an unease with the verbatim script) I became concerned about a) the very personal nature of much of the data gathered and b) that interviewees were acting to protect themselves. I consulted with the two interviewees expressing a desire for replies to be 'more eloquent', stating emphatically that the verbatim script was a stage in analysis only, and that the offending fillers (e.g. 'ers' and erms') would only be included in the thesis if they related to certain key points, and would be replaced by an ellipsis in other cases. Following consultation, both interviewees were happy not to make the changes. However, the requests prompted me to re-consider the nature of the data collected through interview, for while I had originally intended to 'black out' identifying or personal information, in most cases this resulted in such widespread deletion that the remaining data was seriously fragmented. To repeat the point made above: interviewees, in telling me about their experiences of the ARI, combined and interspliced this information with personal and often highly emotional accounts of lives lived, with remarks about others that were potentially embarrassing or which might otherwise have consequences for existing friendships as well as professional connections, and which were *fundamentally authored and identifiable*.

Deeply concerned that 'those whose lives and expressions are portrayed risk exposure and embarrassment, as well as a loss of standing, employment and self esteem (Stake 2004: 154), I took the decision to retain all transcripts, bar the inclusion of one 'sample' transcript (provided in Appendix 5). This was a difficult decision, but I felt, given the nature of the data and my ethical responsibility to those who had participated in the project, that it was a justifiable one. As such, the only data made available from the transcripts is that included within this thesis.

Having thus outlined the methodological perspectives and approaches employed within the project, the thesis next turns to the three case study ARIs who participated in the research project, in order to provide more contextual information for each.

Chapter Four

**Bringing into being? Considering the construction of cultures within ARIs**

This chapter first introduces the three ARIs who participated in research, 85A, Empty Shop and The Mutual, and draws upon a variety of texts to identify agendas, structures and positions for each. Then, in the second section, it identifies a central distinction: the objects and peoples named in as 'art' and 'artists' in the texts published by one ARI are positioned and described very differently by texts published in each of the others. This distinction is discussed with recourse to some of the main theories of art found in analytic philosophy, as well as art history and the sociology of art. It is argued here that multiple understandings of 'art' and 'artists' do not result from any misunderstanding of 'essential' features, but are instead socially and institutionally constructed. However, the 'macro' scale of many of the arguments proposed here does not fully account for the 'micro' differences suggested by the three ARIs in question. As such the third section considers the mechanisms by which distinct cultures may act to construct meaning and value, and, drawing upon further material located in identity theory and educational research, selects three principle areas for consideration: membership within specific 'situations'; identity-work; and learning. The chapter concludes by proposing a number of hypotheses for research, which are interrogated and re-worked in the following three discussion chapters in relation to data collected through interviews.

## 4.1 An introduction to the three ARIs
### 4.1.1 85A
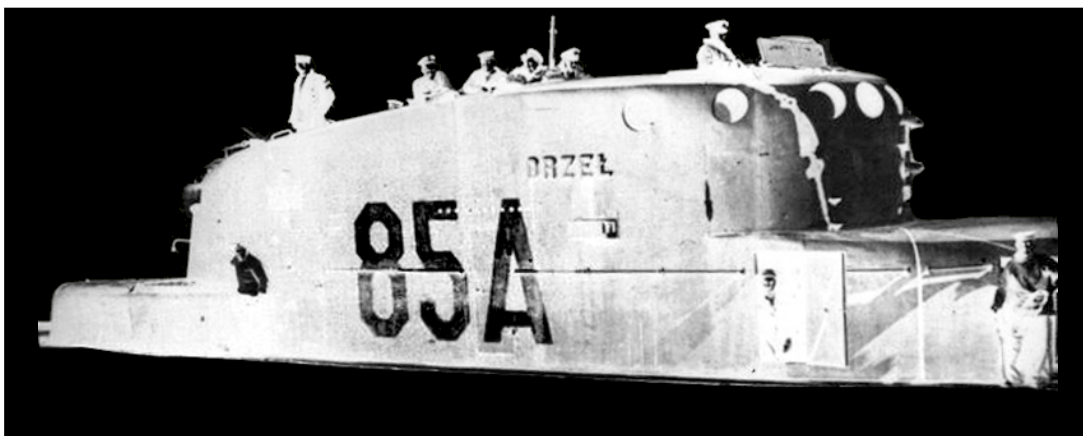


**Figure Two.** 'The Orzel'.

The earliest event listed on webpage for The 85A Collective, as they were originally known, is *Der Student von Prag,* a 'score composition and live performance' (85A 2013a) set to Stellan Rye's silent

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film of the same name on the 8th and 9th November 2008 at The Now Museum in Glasgow. This was described at the time as,

> A collaborative project involving over 25 international artists, the majority of whom are based in Glasgow, in response to a strong dissatisfaction with the supporting elements of the film's current available releases - primarily the musical score and intertitles (85A 2013b).

However, the collective took their name from the second project listed: an 'expanded cinema experience' (2013c) entitled *The Orzel*. *The Orzel* related the true story of a Polish submarine, known by its pennant, or classification number, 85A, (Figure Two) which escaped from 'internment in Estonia during the outbreak of WWII' to 'the shore of Rosyth, Scotland' (*ibid*). The collective extensively re-cut an 'extremely rare' Polish film version of *The Orzel* (1958), and screened this within a 'submarine set-piece' (85A 2013c), or set that mimicked the claustrophobic spaces of a submarine, alongside a live musical performance and members acting as the submarine crew and captain.

Initially describing this 'new venture' as 'a collaborative synthesis of 13 Glasgow-based artists and musicians, which grew out of […] *The Student of Prague* performance' (Lowsalt 2009), the collective described themselves shortly afterwards as,

> An emerging, loose-knit brood of Glasgow based multidisciplinary artists that in recent years have been working alongside and/or supporting one another in various provocative shows and collaborations, the result of which being the said formation. Though not all entirely within its radius, many of this progeny are affiliated to the independent gallery Lowsalt who have been integral to a number of the collective's initial projects (85A 2010a).

Indeed, *The Orzel* had been produced 'in association with Lowsalt Gallery' (Lowsalt 2009), a 'non-profit organisation and artist-run gallery' (*ibid*) set up in 2006 and 'positioned at the crossing of DIY gallery culture and institutional networks in Glasgow' (*ibid*). While The 85A Collective thus offered a number of possible origin stories, by 2010 its members were,

> Consolidated in their belief that work ought to reveal itself by non-conformist means: An ongoing theme being the exploration of presenting art projects in disused buildings, forgotten spaces, and the 'sideways' of man's environment… allowing the viewer to be confronted by an alternative, hidden pathway leading through the glistening alleys of experimental-experience. (85A 2010a)

A number of projects followed *The Orzel* in 2010, including 'Sonic Soak', a two-day music festival held in the disused Edwardian Baths at Govanhill, *Herbaceous Barbershop*, a punk hairdressers, 'Buzz or Howl'*,* a gallery show in London and a New Year party. 2011 saw four projects: *Idimov and the*

*Dancing Girl*, a 'mechanical opera' (85A 2013a), *Fesco the Giant*, a puppet show, a Halloween Ball and *A Phestive Phantomime*, a 'panto-styled music festival' (ibid).



**Figure Three.** Posters for *Der Student von Prag* (2008) and *85A Presents: Jan Svankmajer* (2012).

These were followed in 2012 by *85A Presents: Jan Svankmajer*, a multi-screen installation work, which then transformed into a discotheque for the Glasgow Film Festival (Figure Three), *Voltage + Vitalism*, an 'electric vaudevillian stage show' (*ibid*) performed at The Kelvingrove Museum, *The Crusher*, and *Chernozem: Kino*, 85A's 'first self-produced film' (*ibid*) which later premiered at the Glasgow Film Theatre in March 2013.

The webpage created by 85A for the premiere of *Chernozem*, a 'horror tale of a man with a factory for a head [who] struggles for survival in a post-apocalyptic world' (85A 2013d), is somewhat unusual, for it is a rare instance where a member of 85A is identified as the primary 'author', or 'creator' of the work. There are only two other such occasions: in the text for *Sonic Soak* a number of musicians, artist and film-makers are listed by name (85A 2010b) and one member is referred to in *Burst Leatherette*, but is identified by their last name only (85A 2010c). In all other cases, the members of 85A refer to themselves in the third person e.g. '85A propose to eat sawdust […]' (85A 2013a), or '85A will be transforming the venue' (*ibid*).

Similarly, while group photographs published on the webpage would suggest between 13-19 members of some kind (Figure Four), no information is provided as to the collective's organisational structure and the collective provide no information for prospective members; an email address printed just below the 'info' text is the only mechanism by which to establish contact. This seems in keeping with the 85A mission, re-worded in 2013 (from the 2010 description provided above) to state that,

> 85A are a tight-knit brood of multidisciplinary artists. With their own crossover brand of visual art, music and performance, and with 15 provocative shows since 2008, they have been establishing themselves as Glasgow's most irreverent cultural agitators. They are consolidated in their belief that work ought to reveal itself by non-conformist means: an ongoing theme being the presentation of art projects in disused buildings, forgotten spaces, and the 'sideways' of man's environment… allowing the viewer to be confronted by an alternative, hidden pathway leading through the glistening alleys of experimental-experience. (85A 2013e)

As research began in 2012 the collective had just finished a sold-out run with *Chernozem: Kino*, and had been named in *The List* as one of the '8 Scottish-based artists to watch' (2012) and, shortly afterwards, as one of the top 'ten emerging artists from Scotland' (Kotzé 2012).

## 4.1.2 Empty Shop

Empty Shop was founded in December 2008 when two long-term friends returned to their hometown of Durham City. One of the pair, then working as a freelance photographer, was using an old wine shop in nearby Gilesgate as a photography studio while his father tried to sell the lease on the building. Convincing him 'to let us use it as a makeshift gallery' (as quoted in Groves 2013) instead, in January 2009 the pair held the,

> First Annual Empty Shop Open, an exhibition of artwork with no theme and no restriction on medium or content but which fits the simple criteria [sic] of being art that we like (Empty Shop 2009a).

Sixteen artists contributed work, and when '150 people turned up to the preview' (as quoted in Groves 2013), the two co-directors set up a website, on which they described Empty Shop as,

> The North East's newest contemporary arts group, dedicated to giving artists in the region a much needed platform to produce and exhibit their work. [...] Founded with the intention of taking on unused and semi derelict buildings to develop creative spaces we have recently acquired our first venue. [...] As well as having a space available for hire for exhibition and studio use we are also running a programme of contemporary work, presenting art we consider to be worthy of your attention. Hopefully you'll agree with us but either way we want you to feel that Empty Shop is a space for you (Empty Shop 2009a).

This first venue, known later as Empty Shop 1 (Figure Five), 'hosted numerous exhibitions, events and other creative uses [sic]' (Empty Shop 2013a) over a six-month period, before being let. The founders saw this sale as a success for their 'business model' (*ibid*), which, in essence, hoped to prove that ''a shop [could] be viably occupied' (Empty Shop 2010a). For example, the co-directors thought that the 'blank canvas effect' of conversion into an art space (*ibid*) would stimulate the eventual sale of the building. When this happened, the pair proposed to move on to a new venue and begin the process again, which they were later able to do, opening Empty Shop 2 in June 2009 (Figure Six).



**Figure Six.** Empty Shop 2 on Framwellgate Bridge, Durham. Photo credit: Empty Shop

In the four months Empty Shop 2 was open it held nine exhibitions and 'saw over 10,000 visitors' (Empty Shop 2013b). However, when this space also sold, the co-directors 'recognised the need for some continuity' (Empty Shop 2010a) and, after re-forming as a Community Interest Company (or CIC), they opened Empty Shop 'HQ' on the 19th February 2010. This permanent venue included a gallery space, studio spaces for up to ten artists, and an office which the founders used to co-ordinate their ongoing work with temporary, unused buildings in the surrounding area. For example, in 2013 the pair temporarily took on 17 Claypath, a former council office, for the launch of the 'Fifth Annual Empty Shop Open' amongst other exhibitions, opened a pop up restaurant for Bishop Auckland Food Festival, added a licensed bar and started a film club in addition to their more 'regular nights', which included *The Wednesday Night Social*, *Drink and Draw* and a variety of live music performances (Figure Seven).
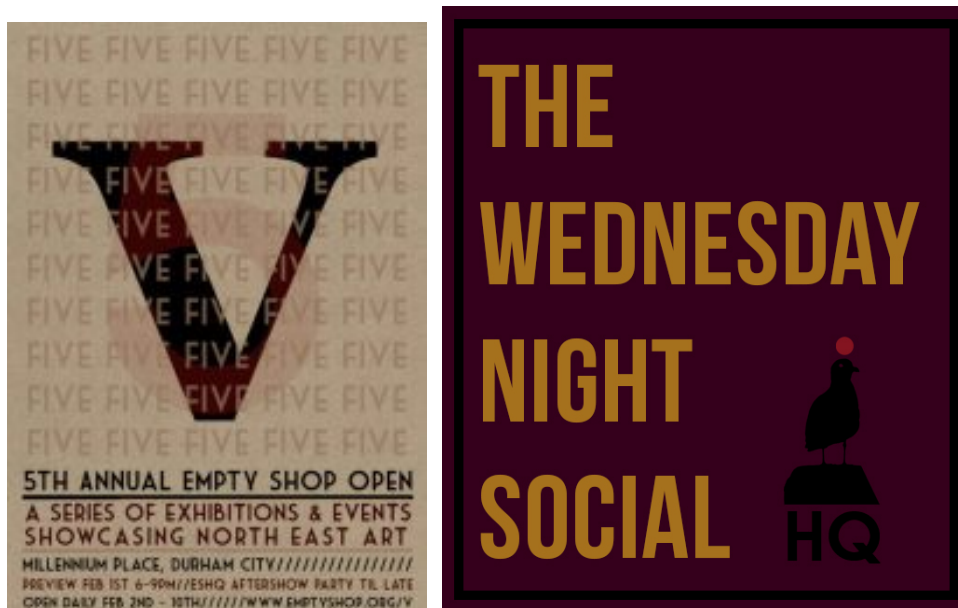
**Figure Seven.** Posters for the *Fifth Annual Empty Shop Open and The Wednesday Night Social.*

Despite the scale of this work, the co-directors never sought funding. In 2009, describing Empty Shop as 'currently unfunded and actively seek[ing] new opportunities to raise revenue' (Empty Shop 2009d), they had considered applying to a well-known foundation for support, going as far as to draft an application. However, this application was abandoned, and by 2013 Empty Shop was described as,

> Completely independent and unfunded by choice […] We are completely self sufficient and sustainable at every level, Empty Shop exists in it's [sic] own right. We value this above all else (Empty Shop 2013c).

To sustain its activities, the co-directors instead charged 'a fee appropriate to the costs we incur in operating a venue' (*ibid*). However, both envisaged Empty Shop as an accessible art space, whereby 'anyone can use the space for the arts, and it can be arts of any nature' (Empty Shop 2009c), and so noted that costs could vary, from £7 to £50 per day (Empty Shop 2013c). Indeed, the pair have, over time, described Empty Shop as 'super inclusive', 'accessible at every level' (Empty Shop 2010b) and 'welcoming […] to people of all levels of ability, backgrounds and ages' (interview with the BBC 2010), stressing that 'there [were] no panels to please, no cliques to get involved with first' (Empty Shop 2009a).

**Figure Eight**. The Empty Shop Logo.

Similarly, the founders emphasised that 'collaboration underpins everything that we do' (see Figure Eight) adding 'we're not looking to promote or sell anything, just encourage growth' (as quoted in Groves 2013). In 2013, as research began, the 'About' section of Empty Shop's webpage read:

> **Empty Shop CIC** is a non-profit arts organisation in the North East of England and based in Durham City. We formed in 2008 with the idea to provide a much needed and accessible platform for artists of all levels and backgrounds to produce, exhibit and engage with art. As the organisation has grown we have developed into a well-rounded permanent fixture in the North East art scene.
>
> Today Empty Shop still provides those opportunities and resources that were so few and important back then but our reach now also expands into a whole cross section of areas and expertise (Empty Shop 2013c).

## 4.1.3 The Mutual

In 2009, four Glasgow School of Art students 'seiz[ed] an […] opportunity to avoid […] the post degree show slump' (The Mutual 2009a) and organised three exhibitions as part of an eight-week-long residency at the nearby Southside Studios, each 'thematically curated [and] comprising work from a pool of self-elected Fine Art Glasgow School of Art graduates' (*ibid*) (Figure Nine, left).

**Figure Nine.** Posters for 'Descent into the Maelström', The Mutual's first exhibition in July 2009, and 'The Mutual Members' Show' in December 2010 (poster credits Juliet Fellows-Smith and Bart Manders respectively).

Going under the name 'GSA Mutual', the four founders initially articulated their 'idealistic, perhaps naïve' (ibid) aims as being,

> To support and sustain fresh art practice in Glasgow, and to act as a bridge for ourselves and the others involved between institutionalised art making and the first foray into exhibiting professionally (*ibid*).

These aims were later recalled, in a short summary document, as an attempt to 'thwart post-graduate hopelessness' (The Mutual 2012a), for, having attended a series of 'professional practice' talks as part of their degree, the founding members were given an 'overwhelming impression […] of impending doom' (*ibid*) and 'decided that if there was no hope after art school, we would have to make some' (*ibid*). A series of smaller events followed the initial residency in 2009, and in 2010 'The Mutual' re-launched as open to 'all early stage career, Glasgow-based visual artists, filmmakers, writers and musicians' (*ibid*). With no permanent premises, The Mutual capitalised 'upon the opportunities of the city of Glasgow itself, sourcing spaces in which to exhibit, filing vacant plots and established art spaces' (*ibid*) and held exhibitions and events at The Duchy, The Center for Contemporary Art (CCA), Glasgow Short Film Festival and collaborated with IRONBBRATZ at The Market Gallery. December 2010 'saw the Mutual's […] most ambitious project to date' (*ibid*): a Members' Show that brought together more than 60 artists during a month-long residency at The Glue Factory (Figure Nine, right).

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In 2011 The Mutual moved to a space on Miller Street, holding their first solo show, Oliver Braid's 'Love Made Easy'. A number of exhibitions, events and projects followed, including an 'artists' showcase' (ibid) for The Glasgow Film Festival and an ' idealistic exploration of cultural commerce and non-monetary exchange' (The Mutual 2011b) for VAULT, a contemporary art fair.



**Figure Ten.** The Mutual Logo in 2010 (left) and again in 2012 (right).

In early 2012 The Mutual re-launched once again, relinquishing the space on Miller St, adopting a new, less ornate, insignia (Figure Ten) and describing itself as,

> An artists' co-operative […] created to bypass the economic restraints typically encountered by emerging artists […] The Mutual offers its members access to an ever growing creative community of support, resources and skills. (The Mutual 2012b)

The 'membership' referred to above had, by and large, been in place all along: a flyer produced in 2009 had invited people to email 'for an application form and to be added to our mailing list' (The Mutual 2009b). Membership was free of charge, with specific terms 'negotiated on an individual basis' depending on the 'skills and time' available to applicants (The Mutual 2012a) and, once accepted, members were encouraged 'to submit proposals and work to open calls for the upcoming exhibition programme' and to 'get involved with installation, invigilation and participation' (*ibid*).

With over 150 such members in March 2012, The Mutual embarked on 'The Mutual Charter': 14 'simultaneous visual art projects, each an example of an international collaboration' (The Mutual 2012c) for The Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art (GI) (Figure Eleven).

**Figure Eleven.** Posters for 'You Took the Part That Once Was My Heart', 'Between Two Worlds' and 'Eastern Surf', three of the 14 projects organised by The Mutual for G1 2012.

Including 45 artists, recordings broadcast on Subcity Radio, a publication launched via a city centre procession and four 'muster points' staffed by volunteers to 'help with tickets, directions and information' (*ibid*), 'The Mutual Charter' aimed to explore 'the possibility of collaboration over continents' (*ibid*). The mission statement was also rephrased, so that by April 2012 it read,

> All Mutual projects, events and exhibitions are developed from member artists' responses to an open brief. The Mutual committee manages this unusual egalitarian open call method by sourcing various venues and generating thematic briefs that are singular responses to the location and its context. The Mutual harnesses the time, talent and resources of its multi disciplinary membership to realise the otherwise unreachable ideas of its membership of young artists (The Mutual 2012d).

The 'committee' mentioned above no longer comprised of the four original founding members, for two had left in 2010 to take up positions and training elsewhere. The remaining two, now described as 'co-directors', had as a result advertised for 'new members to form a committee' in June of that year (The Mutual 2010a), and appointed four 'interns' (*ibid*) later referred to as 'committee members' in July (The Mutual 2012d). When these four committee members also left, the two co-directors advertised again, and appointed another committee member in December 2011.

In September 2012, shortly after 'The Mutual Charter'*,* this final committee emailed all members to explain that they were 'currently in a series of discussions considering the future format and organisational structure' of The Mutual, and invited members to let them know of any 'ideas and input regarding the future leadership of The Mutual', particularly, 'if you have any interest in developing your participation from membership into leadership' (The Mutual 2012e).

## 4.2 Identifying 'art' and 'artists'

In each of ARIs outlined above, two particular claims are made: that the ARI in question involves 'artists' and that these 'artists' produce 'artworks' or 'art projects'. Significantly however, these claims also appear to mark out art and artists in subtly differing ways. For example, while those involved in both 85A and The Mutual are described as 'multidisciplinary artists' (85A 2013e, The Mutual 2011c), suggesting that individual members have multiple or interdisciplinary artistic practices, earlier texts produced by The Mutual often list a number of 'diverse' practices (The Mutual 2009a, 2010a, 2012a). For example, the membership is described as inclusive of 'sculptors, painters, filmmakers, photographers, writers and musicians' (The Mutual 2012a). This additive listing of distinct positions thus suggests it is membership *as a whole*, at least at an early point in time, which is conceived of as 'multidisciplinary', rather than individual members. Indeed, while events run by The Mutual are often described as 'multidisciplinary' (The Mutual 2011c, 2012b, 2012f), only one text uses the term in reference to individual members (The Mutual 2011c), who are more commonly qualified as being 'emergent' (The Mutual 2009a, 2009b, 2011c, 2012b, 2012d). The artists involved in Empty Shop, in contrast, are largely held to be 'of all levels and backgrounds' (Empty Shop 2013c) working within geographical proximity e.g. to be artists 'in the region' (Empty Shop 2009a). It would appear then that there is little, if any, agreement as to who might qualify as an 'artist' and how, for each ARI suggests understandings that do not seem to be the same as, or reducible to, those employed in either of the others.

Similar differences are suggested with regards 'art', where descriptions range from that which 'fits the simple criteria [sic] of being art that we like' (Empty Shop 2009a), to ideas proposed and developed by members in response to a 'thematic brief' (The Mutual 2012d), to 85A's belief that 'work ought to reveal itself by non-conformist means' (85A 2013e). Indeed, 85A make a point of describing their '15 provocative shows' as produced within '*their own* crossover brand of visual art, music and performance' (85A 2013e my italics). Clearly this does not prevent members of Empty Shop or The Mutual producing work that is a combination of visual art, music and performance. However, it does suggest that no unified entity that is unquestionably 'art', and no single comprehensive understanding with regards the role of 'artist', is at work across all three ARIs. Rather, ways of knowing about and identifying 'art' and 'artists' appear to be significantly altered in each.

This prompts a number of questions. For example, is it simply the case, to borrow and extend a phrase from Shiner (2001: 3), that members in each ARI are calling virtually anything 'art' and anyone an 'artist' and getting away with it? Or, might at least two, and potentially all, of the ARIs have mistakenly (or otherwise) put forward 'non-art' and 'non-artists'? Alternatively again, might 'art' and 'artist' function as contested terms, meaning different things to different people? In which case, how do certain objects, practices, performances, activities and/or ideas come to be understood as 'art'? How do

certain individuals come to be understood as 'artists'? Who can make claims for 'art', and how do they do so? Can those involved in the ARIs construct something as art? How might they do so?

## 4.2.1 The value of art: multiple and contested claims

The questions posed above are important ones in which a great deal is at stake, for 'artworks' and 'artists' are often valued, and treated, very differently from 'non-artworks' and 'non-artists'. For example, Dickie notes that the phrase 'a work of art' is frequently used to signal something out 'for the highest praise and to mark it off from […] more typical fare' (2001: 101). Shiner similarly remarks that when we ask, 'is something art?' we often mean, 'does it belong in the prestigious category of (fine) art?" (2001: 5), while the art critic and academic John Carey (2005: xi) remarks on 'the sacred aura that surround art objects' in the West and the capacity of art forms such as video and performance art to,

> Arouse fury in many because they seem […] to be deliberate insults […] not just inauthentic but dishonest, false claimants seeking to enter the sacred portals of true art.

Whatever the cause, it would appear that the boundary marking out 'artworks' from 'false claimants' has been fiercely contested. The art critic R .G. Collingwood (1958: 275), for instance, argued for an 'art proper' which expressed certain emotions, and labelled anything else 'art falsely so called', while more recently the art historian James Elkins (1995, 1999) has declared that 'most images are not art' (1995: 553). Indeed, discussions of this nature have become legal disputes: James Whistler took the art critic John Ruskin to court after Ruskin derided his 1875 painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*, as 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face' (Merrill 1992); in 1990 the Contemporary Art Centre in Cincinnati was tried for indecency for exhibiting photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe; and more recently, Aaron Barschak was jailed for criminal damage for throwing red paint over an artwork by the Chapman brothers at the Modern Art Gallery in Oxford, an act Barschak claimed was the creation of a new artwork (Carey 2005: 6). In each example, the status of an object or action as 'art' was contested, and for at least some of those involved, it was not acceptable for 'art' to be anything at all.

While the above examples are somewhat extreme, Carroll (1999: 207) has noted more generally applicable consequences resulting from the application of the term 'art', including eligibility for government awards, and whether the an objects 'sale or import should be taxed', while Jelinek (2013: 53) highlights an instance in which the Arts Council of England withheld funding for the Artists Placement Group in the 1990s 'on the grounds that they did not make art'. Similar arguments have been made with regards the status and role of the 'artist', where, for example, Inglis (2005c: 15) has noted that the term 'brings, in our [Western] society, certain advantages […] such as a certain type of power, status and, possibly, wealth'. In other words, deciding what is art (and what is not), and who is an artist (and who is not) on what grounds and for whom is neither a pedantic nor obvious enquiry, but one loaded with cultural, social, financial, political and even legal significance. At this point we might

return to the distinction noted between the three ARIs and ask: how then might members have identified artworks and artists, and why do they seemingly make these decisions on varying grounds?

## 4.2.2 How is art identified (or defined)?

In attempting to locate a method for the identification of art (and artists) that may be employed by those within the ARIs in question, multiple possible theories, ideas and frameworks, all of which are subject to heated debate, might be put forward and explored. In an attempt to make some headway through these multiple possibilities, the remainder of this section is broken into four sub-sections, each of which considers a different, and at times contradictory, approach to the question: natural-kind theories of art; anti-essentialist or 'open concept' theories of art; and two versions of an institutional theory of art. As such, this section turns to work in a number of fields, including the analytic philosophy of art, art history, museum studies and the sociology of art, to try and think through the distinction noted between the three ARIs. In doing so, it includes and considers a number of theories that are essentialist (i.e. that consider there to be 'inner' qualities that would unquestionably and timelessly render an object art) at odds with the sociological approach to research. These theories are discussed (and contested) here for although it will shortly be argued that no 'essential' theory of art works universally, these theories continue to be highly influential and to work in the world as historically produced ways of knowing about, and identifying, art, and are therefore relevant to the current enquiry. The section concludes by arguing for a more sociological approach, whereby members of ARIs are thought to bring artworks and artists into being as such (rather than neutrally identifying either), a proposal that is then explored further in the final section of the chapter with regards three key areas for research.

## 4.2.2.1 Defining art: natural-kind theories in the analytic tradition

The analytic philosophy of art is described by Carroll (1999: 5-9) as adopting a 'standard approach', whereby various possible theories of art are analysed in terms of *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions in an attempt to 'get at the essential features' of art, rather than 'track how people commonly use the concept'. Thus analytic philosophers ask: are there characteristics that are a) necessarily possessed by all artworks, and b) sufficient to differentiate all these objects from those held to be 'non-art'? Within this tradition, the art philosopher George Dickie (2001: 3-5) has grouped together a number of theories as 'natural-kind', that is, theories where 'the basic nature of art derives directly from distinctive innate mechanisms embedded in human nature'. In other words, Dickie contends that what these theories have in common is their proposition that human beings have 'hard-wired natures', and that these 'innate features' or 'psychological mechanisms' sufficiently explain why we make art and how we know it as such.

Dickie locates three particular theories within this group: the imitation theory, expression theory and aesthetic experience. To outline each in turn very briefly: the imitation theory is often held to originate

in 'ancient discussions of tragedy' involving Plato and Aristotle (Freeland 2003: 20) where artists were held to be concerned with the production of a 'convincing 'copy' of nature' that attempted to 'look like' a 'favourite scene or object' existing in the world (*ibid*: 23). Here then, 'x is an artwork only if it is an imitation'. (Carroll 1999: 19-21). Yet this potential 'necessary condition' is largely considered to have been rendered 'obsolete' following the development of non-representational art in the nineteenth and twentieth century (*ibid*: 55-56). Indeed, it is often depicted as having been 'replaced' by the expression theory (Dickie 2001: 4), so that, in line with the Romantic movement, 'artists became less preoccupied with capturing the appearance of nature [and more interested in] exploring their own subjective experiences' (Carroll 1999: 59). Here, for instance, the poet William Wordsworth (2000: 598) argued that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' while the writer Leo Tolstoy (1996 [1898]: 156) posited that the central purpose of art was to intentionally transmit to audiences 'a true feeling experienced by the artist'. This is not to say that artworks might express any 'experienced' emotion: the art critic R. G. Collingwood (1958: 108) proposed that the expression of emotion should neither include description or arousal, nor be 'pleasant' (*ibid*: 277) or for 'amusement' (*ibid*: 79).

In this second theory then, the necessary condition proposed is that art 'expresses' certain emotions. However, this too proved problematic, not least with regards to the exact manner in which artworks might 'express' emotion, and how this might be sufficient to distinguish between artworks and other material also held to 'transmit' an intended emotion such as greetings cards (Carroll 1999). A third possible theory, that of aesthetic experience, is accredited by Dickie (2001) to Monroe Beardsley's statement (1979: 729) that an artwork is 'an intentional arrangement of conditions for affording experiences marked with aesthetic character'. Both Dickie (2001: 5) and Carroll (1999: 160-171) break this statement down into two components: the artist's *intention* to produce an aesthetic experience, and the *function* of the object, or its ability to produce a 'distinctive […] contemplative state'. Again however, there are difficulties, not least in that the aesthetic experience is often linked to ideas of disinterestedness (or 'interest without ulterior purposes' (Carroll 1999: 171)) while many artworks are 'produced with religious and political purposes in mind' (*ibid*: 177).

Indeed, it is arguably the case that no theory in the analytic tradition offers both necessary and sufficient conditions capable of defining art, for all 'universal' theories of art can be discredited by locating an object accepted as 'art' that breaks with the given set of conditions, or a 'non-art' object that fits within them (as Weitz 1956 and Carroll 1999 have done). As such, the above theories offer no 'value-free' and universal criteria for the definition of art that might be applied by members of each ARI. Indeed, not only do all three ARIs appear to define art very differently (thus again breaking the notion of universal criteria) but the co-directors of Empty Shop (Empty Shop 2009a) also explicitly described the 'First Annual Empty Shop Open' as an exhibition with 'no restriction on medium or content', thus at least potentially allowing for anything to be art.

However, this does not mean that the theories discussed above are redundant. On the contrary, each is helpful so long as it is detached from its 'universal' purpose, and viewed instead as a way by which to comprehend 'people's personal understandings of art' (Whitehead 2012: 6). For example, the imitation theory is credited as 'one of the most persistent of all theories of art' (Freeland 2003: 20), continuing as 'conventional wisdom for some two thousand years' (Dickie 2001: 3), and, as Newman et al. (2013) and Whitehead (2012) point out, individuals continue to identify 'art' via mimetic or representational qualities perceived as requiring skill and effort, and to reject as 'not-art' those that fail to meet these criteria. Similarly, Carroll (1999: 60-66) notes that the 'image of the artist in popular culture today remains the emotionally urgent author […] trying to get in touch with his or her feelings', while Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990: 27), when interviewing museum professionals, highlight the 'recurring and central aspects of the aesthetic experience' recounted. Moreover, definitions of art can have more tangible impacts, as Duncan (2005: 84-5) argues:

> Nowhere does the triumph of the aesthetic museum reveal itself more dramatically than in the history of art gallery design [which] has consistently and increasingly sought to isolate objects for the concentrated gaze of the aesthetic adept and to suppress as irrelevant other meanings the objects might have.

In other words, natural-kind theories continue to work in the world in profound and significant ways, encouraging certain understandings, values and ways of being and acting at the expense of possible others (e.g. by suppressing as irrelevant other possible meanings). However, what is arguably missing from the above is a discussion concerning how individuals might 'pick up' or select certain theories over others, and what role (if any), ARIs might play in this, points to which this chapter returns below.

## 4.2.2.2 Defining art: art as an open concept

A second group of theories concerns the work of 'a significant group of philosophers' in the 1950s and 1960s (Carroll 1999: 208-9) who 'grew suspicious' of theories like those outlined above, noting that 'every attempt to define art' had thus far failed (*ibid*). Here, for example, the American aesthetician Morris Weitz (1956: 31-35), drawing upon the work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, argued that there could be 'no common properties' in artworks, 'only strands of similarities' for the 'very expansive, adventurous character of art […] [made] it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties'. Weitz (1956) thus proposed that art was 'an open concept' and that all so-called 'essential' theories of art were actually 'honorific definitions' in that they taught individuals 'what to look for and how to look at it'. Weitz then adopted Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance' and suggested that artworks could be defined by means of some 'similarity' to other artworks.

This is useful, not least in that Weitz's (1956) 'honorific' definitions propose ideas along the lines of those argued for above and thus 'offer an account of how we succeed in identifying art' in practice (Carroll 1999: 214-5). However, the very openness of Weitz's anti-essentialist argument is

problematic, for it suggests that the field of art is, at least potentially, open 'to all comers' (Whitehead 2012: 9), for employing the 'concept of resemblance without qualification […] results in the conclusion that everything is art' (Carroll 1999: 224). Two difficulties stemming from this approach might be noted here. First, and to take the example of 85A, artworks are suggested to be only those that reveal themselves 'by non-conformist means' (2013e). As such it would appear, to borrow a phrase from Davies (2006: 27), that 'even if everything could become art, not everything is art at any given time', yet Weitz suggests no mechanism which might explain this distinction. Second, while it was noted above that the 'First Annual Empty Shop Open' was described as having 'no restriction on medium or content', thus potentially allowing for anything to be considered art, this is not the same as suggesting that those in Empty Shop are able to construct exhibits in any universal or generally agreed upon way, something the co-directors appear to acknowledge when they add, 'hopefully you'll agree with us but either way we want you to feel that Empty Shop is a space for you' (Empty Shop 2009a), a point returned to below.

## 4.2.2.3 Defining art: institutional definitions

In the 1970 and 1980s, two further theories were proposed, both of which attempted to define art primarily 'in terms of the artworks' cultural contexts' (Dickie 2001: 6). The first, suggested by the art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto (1964: 580) compared the Brillo boxes exhibited by Andy Warhol, and those made by the Brillo company, and asked: 'why the Brillo people cannot manufacture art, and why Warhol cannot but make artworks'? Noting that there 'were no visible differences' Danto proposed that there must be 'invisible differences' (2013: 37) and argued that this invisible difference was 'a certain theory of art' that took Warhol's Brillo box 'up into the world of art' (1964: 581). Thus Danto proposed that without a theory of art, 'one is unlikely to see [an object] as art' (*ibid*). Moreover, he suggested that these theories had changed over time, so that art was 'essentially art historical' (2013: 134). In later years, faced with the 'radical pluralism' in contemporary art, Danto announced the end of master narratives (e.g. widespread theories of art) and instead proposed that art was (a) 'about' something and that (b) that those meanings were 'embodied in the object' (*ibid*: 37). This second theory encountered difficulties however, for Danto makes clear that 'anything can not be art' (*ibid*: xii), but, arguably, all objects could be said to be 'about' something and many take a form appropriate to their meaning (and the form of an object may further dictate meaning and use, complicating the matter further).

A second theory, Dickie's 'institutional definition of art', was re-worked four times. The first attempt, in 1969 specified that,

> A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artefact (2) upon which some society or some sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation (in Dickie 2001: 52-3).

Dickie later conceded that certain terms in this definition 'gave the wrong impression', for rather than suppose groups of people 'meet and jointly act to confer status on certain objects', as suggested by the 'misleading' terms 'society' and 'sub-group', he had meant to focus on 'the actions of artists when they create art' (*ibid*). Despite formulating two revisions, Dickie later 'dropped the formal language' altogether, and in *The Art Circle* (1997: 80-82) proposed the following account:

> An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.
> A work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
> A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.
> The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.
> An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.

Dickie therefore argues that 'no artwork, no matter how unusual, can escape its relation to its cultural context' (2001: 57), and this cultural relation is both necessary and sufficient to universally define 'art'. This final point is important, for both Danto and Dickie explicitly position themselves as essentialists, and work within the analytic tradition. Moreover, in response to criticism that he had not provided a 'real' definition (e.g. that he not 'really said anything specific about art' in his five inflected statements, which might be adapted so as to concern just about any 'co-ordinated, communicative' practice (Carroll 1993: 12-13)), Dickie (2001: 43) retorted:

> I never conceived of [any] art theory as a means for identifying artworks […] it seems perfectly reasonable to me that even if one had a completely adequate definition of 'art' that it would still be possible that one might not be able to tell whether a given object is a work of art.

In other words, both Dickie and Danto are concerned with the ontological status of artworks, or defining objects that 'are' art, rather than epistemological concerns, or 'knowing whether something is art' (Danto 2013: 5). This poses a central difficulty, for members in each ARI *have* identified certain objects as art and certain people as artists, and if the institutional theories of art outlined above are interested in definition and not identification, then they do not aid in an enquiry that attempts to work out how members have done so.

## 4.2.2.4 Defining art: sociological and institutional theories of art

Although the institutional theories discussed above do not account for the ways in which members in each ARI might distinguish between artworks and non-artworks in practice, there is a further set of understandings that also take the cultural context of the artwork as a prime factor in its definition, but which mark out complex systems of production, distribution and consumption within which the

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categories of 'art' and 'artist' are socially and institutionally constructed and legitimated, rather than suggest the context itself to be a universal 'essence'. Indeed, many of these theories refute the notion that art is timeless and unchanging.

For example, the art historian Michael Baxandall (1972: 1-3), argues that fifteenth-century painting was not the product of a lone genius but 'the deposit of a social relationship', for paintings were commissioned, funded, made and used through processes involving a number of people working 'within institutions and conventions' that 'influenced the forms of what they together made'. Indeed, Baxandall points out that works by early-Renaissance painters (e.g. Botticelli and Fra Angelico) were created within strict guidelines where, for instance, clients might pay by the square foot and often stipulated the design in advance, for 'fifteenth-century painting was still too important to be left to the painters'. Similarly, in *The Invention of Art* (2001: 3-5) the art historian Larry Shiner comprehensively demonstrates that the notion of art as 'universal and eternal', or as dating 'at least' back to ancient Greece, is an 'illusion', for art as we understand it today is 'a European invention barely two hundred years old', fundamentally different from ancient Greek understandings of 'techne', which included 'carpentry and poetry, shoemaking and medicine, sculpture and horse breaking', and from Renaissance understandings of 'invention', which then referred to the 'discovery, selection and arrangement of content' (*ibid*: 46) and not imaginative creation by an autonomous genius. Shiner therefore argues that, 'art is not an 'idea', but is, instead, a system of ideals, practices and institutions' (*ibid*: 8).

The work of Baxandall and Shiner thus has much in common with approaches associated with the sociology of art, a field that Inglis (2005c: 11) has suggested has four points of broad alignment: a critical understanding of art that moves beyond notions of art as 'neutral' or timeless; a similarly critical understanding of the term 'artist'; an examination of the relationship between art and society; and inquiry into the dynamics and boundaries of the 'art world(s)' in which artworks and artists operate. In other words, sociologists of art (and some art historians) tend to consider 'art' and 'artists' as socially constructed, so that the question ''what is art?' is centrally a question about what is taken to be art by society, or by certain of its key members' (Wolff 1983:12) and where the 'analysis of this construction is itself part of the sociological project' (Zolberg 1990: 9).

It is this kind of understanding of 'art' and 'artists', and this kind of sociological project, that this thesis takes up. However, to position artworks back within the 'system of social relations that sustains them' (Johnson 1993: 11) is not to argue that artworks 'reflect', or can be explained by, their social origins. This is an important point, so we might here turn to a central figure in the sociology of art (Inglis 2005a: 3), Pierre Bourdieu, whose three key concepts, 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital' are held to counter this 'short circuit' effect (Johnson 1993: 14), and which further address some of the points raised above.

To very briefly outline these central concepts: 'field' is the 'central spatial metaphor' in Bourdieu's work (Whitehead 2009: 69), and is a 'structured space […] with its own laws of functioning […]

determined by the relations between positions agents occupy' (Johnson 1993: 6). In other words, a field is both an account of ''concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations' and a 'dynamic concept in that a change in agents positions necessarily entails a change in the fields structure' (*ibid*). Fields are further constituted via a particular 'logic', which 'positions who and what is to be found within it' (Grenfell and Hardy 2007: 29), thus allowing for relatively dominant and subordinate positions to which varying strategies of action are allocated (Swartz 1997). However, as this 'logic' changes depending on the field in question, the same practices may receive opposite meanings and values in different fields […] or in opposing sectors of the same field' (Bourdieu 1994: 94). Furthermore, in any field, resources, positions and interests are unequally available, so that 'fields are essentially competitive systems' (Whitehead 2009: 70), although this competition between agents need not be explicit. 'Habitus', devised so as not to 'reduce the agent to a mere 'bearer'' of knowledge acting in accordance with inviolate 'rules' (Johnson 1993: 4), indicates a 'durable' set of dispositions which generate and organise practices and representations; also known as a 'feel for the game' (*ibid*: 5). Thus individuals are inclined, 'to act and react in specific circumstances in a manner that is not always calculated [but] the result of a long period of inculcation […] which becomes […] second nature' (*ibid*). Three basic forms of 'capital' - cultural, social and economic - act within this system as 'the medium through which the processes of the field operate' (Grenfell and Hardy 2007: 30), and are a) 'mutually convertible under certain circumstances' (Johnson 1993: 7) and b) unequally distributed throughout the field, so that they each derive a 'scarcity value' within the field that 'yields profits of distinction for its owner' (Bourdieu 1986: 49).

Bourdieu's work is complex, and is returned to (and critiqued) throughout the thesis, particularly with regards the idea that the artistic field is *necessarily* a 'field of struggles' in which occupants attempt to 'defend or improve their positions' (*ibid*: 30) and for stressing 'objective relations' over concrete interaction between individuals (discussed below). However, as a tool for 'thinking through the socially mediated nature of artistic endeavours' (Inglis and Hughson 2005: 4) Bourdieu's key concepts are of great use, not least in that the unequal positions, capital and resources made available to individuals can be used to explain why 'not all actors have the same or similar power to achieve objectives like transforming a found object into art' (Whitehead 2012: 11), or, in this case, why all entries to the 'Annual Empty Shop Open' might not be equally and instantly transformed into art via their inclusion. Here then, Bourdieu draws attention to artworks as 'the product of a vast operation of *social alchemy* jointly conducted' (1993: 81), rather than the work of any one individual, or any one ARI.

However, although artworks cannot be construed as such 'in one stroke by one institutional action' (Whitehead 2012: 13), the art museum or gallery is generally thought to be active and powerfully placed in this process. Bourdieu, for example, argued for a 'common definition of art' that relied upon an artwork's 'place in the artworld' (Grenfell and Hardy 2007: 42), while Shiner repeatedly notes that 'institutions such as the museum […] have been central to constituting things as art'. Similarly, Duncan (2005), Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and O'Docherty (1999), for instance, have all argued that meaning and value are not inherent in artworks, but that objects and practices instead 'become art' (*ibid*: 14)

through the techniques and mechanisms employed by the art museum and gallery, so that museums are 'a suggested way of seeing the world' (Macdonald 1996: 14) rather than a 'reflection' of society or a 'simple container in which to represent truth' (Whitehead 2012: 23). Indeed, Whitehead (*ibid*: 21) argues that interpretation within the art museum actively 'frames' artworks in varying ways, and so acts as 'a key agent in determining what can count as art' and under what conditions. As was argued in Chapter one, ARIs are not synonymous with museums and galleries. However, they are not necessarily without power and influence, and they too may act to determine what counts as art, who counts as an artist, and under what conditions.

These are points that are further explored below (and throughout this thesis), but it is worth returning at this stage to the very different ways in which members in each of the three ARIs appear to have identified 'art' and 'artists' so as to address the questions posed at the beginning of this section before moving on. Following the above discussion, we might here propose that none of the three ARIs has mistakenly put forward 'non-art' and 'non-artists', for those categories rely upon an 'art-proper' against which they might be reciprocally defined, and, arguably, the conditions for such a category have not yet been discovered. Nor does it seem that members might call virtually anything 'art' and anyone an artist' and 'get away with it' (Shiner 2001: 3), for the three ARIs and their members appear to operate within complex, bounded and unequal cultural contexts, and are therefore unlikely to be able to construe as legitimate anything and anyone they choose. Instead, we might suggest that members in each ARI work to bring 'art' and 'artists' into being under certain conditions and within certain boundaries. However, it remains to be seen how members might achieve this (or otherwise) in practice, a question the final section begins to address.

## 4.3 The art world, cultures and the ARIs: Bringing into being

Having rejected a number of art theories from the analytic tradition (insofar as they are bound to 'essential' characteristics and universal purposes) we might in this final section further explore the sociological approaches noted above. This is important, for while these theories position members of each ARI (at least potentially) as actively involved in the construction of art and open up lines of investigation closed down in the analytic tradition (such as discussions concerning the role and status of the 'artist', as is argued in Section 4.3.2 below), the scale of many of these arguments and concepts, as well as the disciplinary boundaries encountered, can also prove unhelpful when applied to the specific example of the three ARIs discussed above.

As such, the remainder of this chapter sets out three specific areas for investigation: the construction of 'membership'; the construction of artistic identities; and the 'learning' within ARIs. Each area draws upon work in multiple fields, as well as the definition of 'culture' proposed in Chapter One, in order to arrive at a series of revised hypotheses for research, which will then be further re-worked in relation to data collected via interview in the following three chapters.

### 4.3.1 Group preference: interaction, membership and belonging

It was argued above that multiple possible theories for art continue to work in the world, as exemplified both by the very different understandings suggested in the texts for each ARI and the continued influence of 'natural-kind' theories (as argued in Section 4.2.2.1). However, at this early point in the discussion it was also noted that theories in the analytic tradition did not account for either this multiplicity, or the ways by which individuals and groups select (or otherwise) between varying, and at times contradictory, accounts.

Sociological approaches offer some way forward here, for they tend to consider all definitions of art to be socially constructed, and potentially legitimated, through complex systems in which individuals and groups may be more or less powerfully placed to generate and determine what and who 'counts'. Thus, for example, Becker (2008 [1982]: xxiv) suggests that those within a given art world together 'devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and what isn't art, what it and what isn't their kind of art, and who is and who isn't an artist'. Indeed, Becker later argued that people could always 'move somewhere else and start their own field [...] even if more powerful people [...] don't approve' (*ibid*: 378). Similar, although notably more restricted, understandings are put forward by Inglis (2005c: 14), who suggests that,

> What counts at any one time as 'art' in general, let alone 'good art', is historically contingent, and rooted in the life conditions of the group to which the people making the classification belong [...] definitions of what is 'art' and what is not are thoroughly bound up in a process of struggle and conflict between social groups.

As such, Inglis argues that ideas about art are both 'expressive of the preferences of the group to which they belong' and 'expressive of the preferences of dominant social groups in that society'. While Inglis's point here is that each group is attempting, even if it does so unintentionally, to 'define cultural reality in such a way as to suit its best interests', it is his statement with regards the preferences and struggles of social groups that is of interest here, for this suggests that understandings of art are generated actively, collectively and in relation to already existing and powerful ideas.

However, sociologists offer markedly differing theories by which to account for *how* these group preferences might come into being. To take two prominent examples, Becker (2008 [1982]: xxiv) suggests that group consensus arises from 'joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things', so that people, rather than deciding 'everything afresh on each occasion [...] instead rely on earlier agreements now become customary' (*ibid*: 29), thus allowing for the 'easy and efficient coordination of activity' (*ibid*: 30). Becker further notes that these conventions are 'seldom rigid and unchanging' and do not 'refer to an inviolate set of rules' (*ibid*: 31) but leave much to interpretation and can be changed. However, conventions, as 'standard' and 'taken for granted' ways of knowing and working 'embodied

in permanent equipment' (ibid: 57), render change 'costly and difficult' (*ibid*: 35). Becker's artworlds then are 'neatly meshed packages of mutually adjusted activities, materials, and places' (*ibid*: 135) in which people see 'how others respond to what they do and adjust what they will do next in a way that meshes with what others have done and will probably do next' (*ibid*: 375). Thus Becker proposes an 'interactionist' account that 'gives pride of place to interpersonal ties' (Bottero and Crossley 2011: 104) and which focuses on 'real people who are trying to get things done' (Becker 2008 [1982]: 377) as 'observable in social life' (*ibid*: 379), but which is critiqued as 'impressionistic', and for its failure to provide a fuller structural analysis (Bottero and Crossely 2011: 100).

For Bourdieu, 'the artistic field is not reducible to a population, i.e. a sum of individual agents, linked by simple relations of interaction' (1993: 35). Thus while the concept of 'field' also offers an account of 'concrete social situations', fields are governed not by interaction, but by 'a set of objective social relations' (Johnson 1993: 6) which, as ranked and distributed in relation to each other, 'structure manifest social relationships' (Bottero and Crossley 2011: 100). Here then, Bourdieu's 'objective relations' are put forward as seemingly 'deeper and stronger structures […] which exist and produce effects independently, and even in spite of, concrete interactions' (Santoro 2011: 18) so that people are thought to occupy the same 'social space' not because of their relationships with each other, but because they share similar 'structural relations' (Bottero and Crossely 2011: 101-3).

For Bottero and Crossely however, this holding apart of 'objective relations' and empirical 'social relationships' does not fully explore 'shared habitus' within groups, which they suggest can 'only be explained by reference to interacting agents who become alike by means of a process of mutual influence and […] interaction'. Santoro (2011: 14-18) also argues against 'objective relations' on the grounds that 'it is not always clear what Bourdieu means by this term', and suggests that a 'mediating term' is needed between the concepts of 'field' and 'habitus', for 'people never act directly in fields, but always in field-specific situations'. Santoro here uses the term 'situation' with specific reference to the work of Erving Goffman. While Goffman's use of this term shifted over time (Jacobsen 2010: 19) and thus requires some caution, Kristiansen (2009: 215) sums up Goffman's notion of 'situation' as referring to face-to-face interactions in which the crucial task is to 'express and maintain a 'definition of the situation', so that 'those present each make their own contribution to a common definition […] which also comprises an agreement' so that participants 'know what norms are in effect and thus how to behave accordingly'. Kristiansen then goes on to note that Goffman later employed the term 'frame' to refer to 'a similar line of thought', whereby social situations were interpreted via 'significance-providing frames' that would suggest particular definitions and understandings, as well as 'the identities of those taking part'.

Goffman's work is thus useful within the current enquiry on a number of counts. For example, we might (at Santoro's suggestion) adopt 'situation' as a mediating term, so as to explore the micro-interaction of individuals within the ARIs without losing the structural analysis proposed by Bourdieu. This is not to say that the ARIs are, or are collapsible to, 'situations', but that members are likely to

actively contribute to a 'common definition' or 'frame' for their activity that renders these 'events or occurrences meaningful' and which functions 'to organise experience and guide action' (Snow et al. 1986: 464). Indeed, the notion of 'framing', suggested by Entmann to include selecting 'some aspects of a perceived reality' and making them 'more salient' (1993: 52), is one employed both by Whitehead (2012: 54) in relation to the 'myriad' frames for art interpretation in museums and galleries, 'wherein certain perspectives are enabled and others disabled'; and Hollands and Vail (2012) with regards the Amber Collective, an ARI in the North-East of England, where the authors explore 'how framing ideology works to define group norms'.

As might already be apparent, 'framing-work' of this kind appears to offer one possible lens by which to explore the active and collaborative construction of cultures within the three ARIs, in that it offers an account of the ways in which certain understandings, events, and objects come to be rendered meaningful via processes of selection and the collective construction of group norms and agreements. Moreover, Goffman hints at a further benefit when he talks of 'situations' in which 'an entering person *becomes a member* of the gathering that is (or does then become) present' (1963: 18 italics added). It is the idea of 'membership', as prompted by the spatial metaphor of 'situation' and as seemingly necessary for any situation to 'become present', which is interesting here, for this suggests a focus on 'who' and well as 'what' is framed as meaningful, and under what conditions, areas of concern within this thesis. Indeed, the very term 'member', as Vail and Hollands (2012: 36) argue, implies that individuals have identified with and shared in key frames.

From this vantage point, we might finally point to the work of Guibernau (2013: 1-3) who notes that as individuals self-identify with a given community 'a sentiment of solidarity can emerge', and that the 'security and warmth associated with group membership […] holds a potent emotional content'. However, Guibernau continues to note that there is a 'price to be paid in exchange for being accepted as a member of a particular group or community', including the giving up of a 'substantial degree of personal freedom'. It is this broader concept of 'membership' then that Chapter Five discusses in some depth, as a means by which to explore the construction of culture in relation to both group preferences and norms concerning 'art' and 'artists', and the emotional attachments possibly formed by members as part of a wider and more complex 'life lived'.

## 4.3.2 The social construction of artists: identity-work within the ARIs

A second area of interest picks up on the notions of 'identity' that recur in the above, and expands these into an additional (although overlapping and interconnected) line of enquiry. Before outlining the direction taken by this enquiry however, it is worth briefly returning to work in the analytic philosophy of art, and to the literature discussed in Chapter Two, so as to make an argument for this focus as an important one capable of valuable contribution to work in the field. Thus, for example, it might be highlighted that the category of 'artist' is generally held to be unproblematic in the analytic tradition, so that for Dickie (2001: 55) an 'artist' is a 'person who participates with understanding in the making of

a work of art'. Indeed, Dickie adds that this definition corresponds to the way 'everyone ordinarily understands artists', that is, as those who 'create art'. It is perhaps on account of this 'common-sense' understanding that Ault (2002), Apple (2012), Staniszweski (2012) and Detterer (2012) all use the term 'artist' without definition or qualification, and to indicate a singular category of being to which all artists involved in ARIs are suggested to belong. Hence, Staniszweski talks of artists in ARIs as having 'shared characteristics and goals' (2012: 11) and Ault of 'shared concerns' (2002: 4), while Detterer (2010: 22) comments upon 'the artist's self image' in the singular.

This is not an entirely uncontested position: Goldbard (2002: 190-191), for instance, also writing about alternative art spaces in New York, argues that 'artists, like other categories of people, are all over the map', and refutes the idea that artists have 'special sensitivities and powers that set them apart from other people'. In other words, just as it was argued that art has no 'essential' or 'inner' quality that makes it such, Goldbard argues that artists too have no shared 'natural' qualities. Her approach could thus be viewed as a sociological one, for Goldbard appears to take issue with the term 'artist' and to argue against generalisation, a stance identified by Inglis (2005c: 11-15) as a 'point of convergence' in the sociology of art, where notions of the 'artist' as a timeless and unchanging figure with 'special powers' are challenged.

Shiner's (2001: 22) work is again a particularly useful example of this line of thinking, for he argues that during the course of the eighteenth century a once combined artist/artisan figure was 'pulled apart', with the result that,

> All the 'poetic' attributes – such as inspiration, imagination, freedom, and genius – were ascribed to the artist and all the 'mechanical' attributes – such as skill, rules, imitation, and service – went to the artisan (*ibid*: 111)

Thus Shiner contends that notions of the 'routine craftsperson' and the 'free, creative artist' (*ibid*), or even of the artist as having a 'sacred calling' (*ibid*: 197), are neither 'natural' nor 'predestined' but historical constructs (*ibid:* 112). Similarly both Williams (1983 [1958]) and Wolff (1993: 11) attribute ideas of the artist as 'social outcast, starving in a garret' to the 'nineteenth-century Romantic notion of the artist', while Zolberg (1990) and Tanner (2003: 105) suggest that the 'conception of the artist [as] a historical and culturally specific phenomenon' has 'long been recognised'.

Furthermore, we might contend Dickie's (1997) 'ordinary' understanding of an artist as the person who makes art with reference to collective ARIs who share authorship and Becker's (2008 [1982]: 35) artworlds, whereby artworks are 'joint products of all the people who cooperate […] to bring works like that into existence'. Although Becker goes on to distinguish between 'artists' who perform 'core tasks' and support personnel who do all the rest (*ibid*: 24-5), both examples raise difficulties in working out exactly who is, or should be, labelled an artist and under what conditions. Indeed, more recently Petry (2012: 11) has highlighted 115 contemporary artists, including Ai Weiwei, Daniel Buren and

Kiki Smith, who all employ people to make artworks for them. Petry thus concludes that 'art lies not in the making of an object, but in naming of it as art', in which case artists are those with the authority to confer status, an idea strongly contested by Dickie (2001).

The above arguments are important ones not just for reasons of historical accuracy, but because, as with theories of art, understandings of the 'artist' continue to work in the world, and at times in influential and powerful ways. For example, Heinich (1996 [2003]: 123-6) argues that,

> The legend of van Gogh has become the founding myth of the accurst artist […] through him it has become an obligatory image, a myth, a stereotype […] the properties attributed to him are transferred onto other artists, and not just those who came after him.

Something similar is suggested by Becker (2008 [1982]: 352) through the notion of 'reputation', whereby reputations, created by 'a variety of interwoven activities' within artworlds, 'single out […] a few works and a few makers of works of special worth' that are then rewarded, and thus allow for certain people and things to be treated 'differently from others'. In other words, what Heinich and Becker seem to move towards here is an understanding of identity as socially, as well as historically, constructed. However, work in the sociology of art tends to focus on the changing 'role' and 'status' of artists over time (Tanner 2003: 107) rather than any application of the term in practice.

We might therefore turn to sociological perspectives of identity, where Lawler (2008: 1-15), for example, has argued that there is no 'stable, coherent self', but rather that identities are socially produced, or 'achieved'. Importantly for this enquiry, Lawler further argues that 'no-one has only one identity', but that individuals identify with a number of categories (e.g. as an 'artist', 'woman' and 'mother') and that these multiple identities then require management, for some are held to be mutually constitutive while others 'are understood to be mutually exclusive' or as existing in tension. Further, Jenkins (2008: 37-8) has argued both that this identification 'with' certain pre-existing categories means that the 'individual and the collective are routinely entangled with each other', and that it is not just a case of identifying *with*: individuals can be labelled *by* others, whether or not those labels 'stick', or are 'internalised' (*ibid*: 43). As such, identity might be viewed not as something ''within' the individual, but as produced between persons and social relations […] [as] worked out in people's everyday social lives' Lawler 2008: 8). Lawler further draws upon the work of Ricoeur (1991) to highlight the importance of narrative in this production of the self, positing three crucial narrative components - characters, action and plot - through which potentially 'disparate events' are brought together in a way that simultaneously interprets and constitutes the self. However, Lawler notes that these stories and identifications may be rejected as fraudulent, and that as such, 'people cannot simply claim to be whatever and whoever they want' (2008: 29).

The above thus offers several starting points for research, including the ways in which members of the three ARIs might manage multiple identities, tell stories about themselves (within certain boundaries)

and the categories they are identified by or choose to identify with. This last point is explored by Røyseng et al. (2007: 1-4) specifically with regards the 'charismatic myth of the artist', taken to refer to 'socially marginal' persons with a 'divine calling' and 'skills independent of 'socialisation or training' who create artworks which evidence 'authenticity and originality', and whose inner talent might be 'damaged' by either 'educational systems' or payment. Questioning if and how young Norwegian artists identified with this pre-existing category of being, Røyseng et al. concluded that despite considerable contextual change, the 'charismatic myth' remained a 'core idea […] crucial to the perception of the artist as an occupational category'. Moreover, we might suggest that members may further identify with, or hold themselves to 'belong to', the ARI in question, a process Guibernau (2013: 48-9) suggests is undertaken as 'a shield from what people fear and doubt'. Guibernau here recalls Giddens' (1991: 37-55) concept of 'ontological security', whereby individuals avoid 'being overwhelmed by anxieties' and the 'chaos that threatens' by relying upon shared 'frameworks' for reality, or 'ordinary conventions of day-to-day life', so that they can securely 'weather major tensions or transitions' in the social environment and actively maintain a sense of self. An important point here then is that Giddens, who posits an 'authentic' self, nevertheless views this self as actively constructed; the area of his argument applied within the thesis. What both theories posit is a way by which members might construct and 'anchor' their identities to the ARI so as to be produced as meaningful, coherent and socially recognisable. However, I will later argue (in Section 8.2.2) that concepts of belonging and identity, while interlinked, are more useful when they remain conceptually distinct, rather than attempting to subsume one into the other (e.g. as Anthias 2002 suggests).

Finally, while Giddens' (1991: 37-55) concept of self-identity relies upon an 'on-going' story told about the self as 'routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual', we might briefly return to the work of Goffman (1969: vix-2), who argues that individuals present themselves within situations so as to 'guide and control the impressions they form'. In other words, Goffman argues that individuals are always socially 'performing' identity. There is some need for caution here, for Goffman also on occasion implies that 'true' or 'real' identities can be ascertained (a suggestion rejected by Lawler (2008: 108) as working against Goffman's more explicit statements that refute an essentialist understanding of the self). However, this point aside, Goffman's work is held to usefully challenge the distinction between 'authentic' understandings of identity as being and 'inauthentic' understandings of identity as doing (or performing), by highlighting that identity is always done (Lawler 2008: 104). Chapter Six thus returns to the above discussions as a starting point for explorations into identity-work as articulated by members in each ARI, with particular reference to the production of narratives, notions of belonging, and on-going and socially constructed practices of identification with both existing categories of being and the particular cultures constructed.

### 4.3.3 Learning cultures and cultural learning

The final area of enquiry first became apparent when, in looking at how cultures might replicate, a possible tension was identified: members of a given culture were suggested to be either passive receivers of 'transmitted' cultural values; or active producers of meaning; or, somehow, both.

For example, in one of the earliest texts on social construction, Luckmann and Berger (1966: 56) argue that a 'social stock of knowledge' is accumulated and constituted by members of a given society (and distributed between certain members of this society), and then 'transmitted from generation to generation' through socialisation, with the result that certain ways of knowing and being are endlessly replicated, and come to be regarded as 'generally valid truths' (*ibid*: 83). Something similar is suggested by Bourdieu, who, although he arguably presents no coherent concept of 'culture' (as has been argued by Lizardo 2011), contends that the 'cultural codes' required to decipher any work of art, without which the work would have no meaning or value, are 'transmitted by a process of unconscious training' (1993: 234). Notions of 'transmission' are also employed by, among others, the anthropologists Fox and King (2008: 8) who question whether non-human primates might transmit culture 'similarly or differently to the way humans transmit it'.

Implicit in the above is the idea of knowledge in general, and particular 'codes' and/or cultures more specifically, as 'stable' and 'solid', and as moved intact from person to person, so that, for instance, the culture of one generation is transmitted 'whole' to the next. Confusingly, this is often offset, or presented alongside, more contextualised understandings of socialisation (e.g. as in Luckmann and Berger 1966), which in contrast to the passive implications of 'transmission' suggest the active and continual construction of meaning. Here then, Inglis (2005c: 10), argues that,

> Culture is transmitted from one generation of people to the next generation. This learning process means that individuals internalise the ideas, values and beliefs of the group. These become habitual and taken for granted, and are generally experienced as 'natural' rather than learned.

Similarly, Clarke et al. (1993 [1976]: 11) argue that culture is 'transmitted' but that 'groups take up, transform [and] develop' pre-constituted meanings, and thus continually 'make' culture anew from a 'reservoir' of already existing possibilities, while Williams (2002 [1958]: 93) suggests that individuals first learn 'shapes, purposes and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible' and then test these 'in experience', resulting in 'new observations, comparisons and meanings'. Here then, the 'transmission' of culture is a first step, and once acquired, is actively re-worked into something 'new'. However, in associating 'transmission' with socialisation Luckmann and Berger (1966) and Inglis (2005: 10) seem to highlight both an on-going 'learning process', and one that nevertheless 'transmits' a reasonably stable culture.

Viewing the above as varying conceptualisations of 'learning' offers a way forward here, for educational researchers caution that metaphors such as 'transmission' can mislead 'if too much is read into the supposed likeness' (Hager 2008: 679). Indeed, although researchers in this field tend to agree that there is 'no external and reified entity that is 'learning'' (Saljö 2003: 621) and that as such 'all thought and talk about learning involves metaphors' (Hager 2008: 679), Sfard usefully points out that metaphors can,

> bar fresh insights, undermine the usefulness of the resulting conceptual system and – above
> all – perpetuate beliefs and values that have never been submitted to critical investigation
> (Sfard 1998: 5).

This is particularly important within the current discussion, for the 'acquisition metaphor' and associated understandings of 'transmission', despite their 'common-sense' appeal (Hager 2008: 679) are critiqued in recent educational research for their portrayal of learning as the passive gaining and permanent 'having' of fixed knowledge as 'transferred' or 'transmitted' from one person to another (*ibid*: 5-6), for focusing on minds and not bodies (*ibid*) for separating out 'the learner, the process of learning and the content of what is learned' (Biesta et al. 2011:18). The acquisition metaphor is further associated with the concept of knowledge 'transfer', where 'fixed' knowledge is acquired and then applied to a new situation, a concept Hager and Hodkinson (2009: 619-621) have argued that the leads to a 'continuing misunderstanding of the processes it stands for', for knowledge is at once retained, and 'transferred'.

The point, however, is not to reject the acquisition metaphor, but to draw upon the conceptual framework offered through the identification of multiple metaphors (as is common in educational research) so as to protect 'against theoretical excesses' (Sfard 1998: 10) and broaden enquiry. For example, Sfard distinguishes between the 'acquisition metaphor' and the 'participation metaphor', where the latter focuses on the 'constant flux of doing', posits an active learner where learning is further contextualised, and often concentrates upon the processes by which individuals become members of certain communities. Further metaphors for learning commonly cited in educational research include the 'construction metaphor', where knowledge is 'built' or 'scaffolded' in the minds of individuals so that learners are no longer assumed to through identical processes with identical results (Biesta et al. 2011), and 'becoming', which acts as a kind of 'super-metaphor' covering much of the above as part of 'a holistic way of understanding learning as a process' (Hager and Hodkinson 2009: 633). In other words, although no metaphor can be proposed as somehow 'neutral', for all occlude certain ways of thinking, and import certain agendas (Biesta 2005) or particular values (Hodkinson et al. 2008), we might here note the difficulties that 'arise from taking [the metaphors of] transfer and acquisition too literally' in the case of culture, and consider instead multiple possible understandings.

Two models have particular relevance here. The first is Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'community of practice', described by Wenger (1998: 3) as placing learning 'in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world' so that 'learning - whatever form it takes - changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning' (*ibid*: 226). Here, individuals are held to simultaneously belong to a number of 'communities of practice', including those found at home, work, school and through hobbies, as 'an integral part' of daily life (Wenger 1998: 6-7), and to be gradually and actively 'subsumed into the complex social construction that is an evolving set of practices' (Hager 2008: 682). As such, the 'communities of practice' model suggests that learners move from peripheral positions (as novices) to full participants (as 'proficient performers') (*ibid*), through their 'lived participation' (1998: 3) - ideas with possible application in relation to notions of membership. The second is Hodkinson et al.'s (2008: 37) theory of 'learning cultures' where 'individuals influence and are part of learning cultures just as learning cultures influence and are part of individuals'. This second theory is suggested to be an attempt to 'overcome the dualism between social and individual views of learning', encompasses notions of embodied learning, wider social and institutional structures and influences, and argues for an investigation that focuses on 'power inequalities and relations' (ibid: 32) not similarly emphasised in 'communities of practice'.

Hodkinson et al.'s theory thus suggests a possible accord with the theories of culture set out above, particularly with regards to cultures and individuals as mutually constitutive. However, one final, related point, and an important one, might be first added to this, for 'learning', like notions of membership and identity, is not an 'external […] entity' (Saljö 2003: 621) but a constructed understanding that might be understood very differently by different individuals, or groups, or members of the ARIs. Indeed, it would appear to have been constructed, in relation to the figure of the artist, very differently over time.

For example, Vasari (2006 [1896]) 31-33) describes a young Giotto who displayed a 'vivacity and readiness of intelligence much out of the ordinary', and who had a 'natural inclination' to draw 'anything that came into his fancy […] without having learned any method of doing this from others, but only from nature'. Giotto is then discovered, drawing, by Cimabue, who takes him to Florence where, 'assisted by nature and taught by Cimabue, the child not only equalled the manner of his master, but became so good an imitator of nature' that he later 'revived the modern and good art of painting'. We might contrast this account with Heinich's (1996 [2003]: 23-25) of van Gogh, where there is no mention of any 'teaching' or period of training, but rather, extended periods of 'adversity', where van Gogh 'cut himself off' from artistic tradition and society, and an accompanying general failure (from anyone other than a 'circle of the elect') to comprehend the resulting works of genius that broke 'with the traditional standards of artistic excellence'. Indeed, we might turn to a much more recent discussion, and note Madoff's (2009: ix-xi) remark that the 'evolved profile of contemporary artistic practice', now,

Rides across all materials means – photography, video, painting, drawing, sculpture […] philosophy, research, manual training, technological training and marketing […] [and] has pressed the art school as a pedagogical concept to […] to address what an artist is now and what the critical criteria and physical requirements are for teaching one – or should I say educating tens of thousands.

Here then, Madoff indicates a discipline in crisis, where 'new contentions emerge everyday'. He also relates this crisis to the shifting and varied concept of the artist, a point that is worth repeating, for in each of the examples noted above we might note that the forms of 'learning' engaged in (or not) relate to the construction of a particular artistic self, whether as a naturally gifted artisan who through training could excel the skill of his master, as an untaught genius, or the tens of thousands attending art schools at a moment where the 'pedagogical concept' of this institution is unclear. It would seem then, that 'learning' is not just a concept by which to grasp the 'transmission' (or otherwise) of culture, but to explore how individuals, in a very localised and embodied fashion, enfold political, cultural and historical ideals of the 'artist' and 'art' into everyday processes of meaning-making.

## 4.4 Summary: hypotheses for research

Drawing together all of the above, we might then hypothesise that,

- Members in each ARI actively produce distinct 'cultures' as part of their everyday lives, in which specific ideas, values, objects, understandings, actions, group norms, preferences and people are brought into being as meaningful and valuable in particular and bounded ways;
- These distinct cultures are thus likely to regulate the ways in which 'art' is understood, produced and displayed and who can claim the title of 'artist' and under what conditions.
- Meaning-making is complex and layered however, and as such certain meanings may not be shared by all members, and members are likely to be unequally and relatively positioned;
- Cultures are also likely to draw upon pre-existing discourses, theories, identities and ways of being, or 'cultural patterns' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11) as available and 'working' in the world (including certain theories of art and artists, traditions and precursors), as well as social and material actants, which are again unequally available and positioned;
- The framing of 'membership' may allow for investigation into this kind of cultural construction, as relating both to group preferences and norms concerning 'art' and 'artists' and to emotional attachments and feelings of 'belonging';
- Exploration into 'identity-work' as performed and articulated by members also seems to be a valuable line of enquiry, for members are hypothesised to draw upon the ARI in support of (multiple) identities through socially constructed practices of identification and narrative.
- Finally, a focus on 'learning' (via organising metaphor) seems to be of potential value for this may allow for exploration into the ways in which individuals 'pick up' or subsume themselves

within 'cultures', and the ways in which they perceive on-going practices relating to the construction of knowledge and meaning.

The final three points outlined above are addressed, in turn, in the following three discussion chapters in relation to the data collected, starting with the first key lens: membership.

# Chapter Five

## Framing 'membership': group preference, belonging and competition

This chapter explores notions of 'membership', as articulated and 'framed' (Goffman 1974) by members of the participating ARIs, as a means by which to investigate the construction and organisation of shared 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11). The three ARIs are presented in turn (85A, Empty Shop, and then The Mutual), and in each case a range of texts (e.g. flyers, images, webtexts, mission statements etc.) are first reviewed so as to provide a possible indication of the requirements for membership (if stated) or lack thereof. The sections then turn to data collected through interviews to ask: how do members perceive the ARI? Do they articulate notions of 'membership', and if so, how? What understandings concerning art and artists are suggested? Are understandings presented as shared? Are particular boundaries for membership indicated? Are some understandings put forward as more meaningful, or 'legitimate'? Are others sidelined? Who has the power to do so? How are members positioned within the membership, and with what perceived impact?

Throughout the chapter it is argued that 'membership' in each ARI is selectively 'framed' (Entmann 1993) so as to construct understandings of art and artists in markedly different ways, ranging from art as 'democratically' and collectively produced; to art as individually authored but 'open' and 'accessible' to 'anyone'; to the production of art as a fraught and isolating experience requiring support. It is further demonstrated that members negotiated the boundaries surrounding membership in varying and at times surprising ways, so that, for example, those 'included' did not always feel strongly attached while those 'excluded' or positioned peripherally did not always articulate rejection, panic or distance themselves from the central tenets of membership. It is therefore argued that membership is not simply procedural, but works to construct 'legitimate' activities as undertaken by 'legitimate' members towards 'legitimate' ends. Furthermore, membership was frequently suggested to involve a 'potent emotional content' (Guibernau 2013: 2) and members often suggested that they had acted in co-operation with, or for the benefit of, others regarded as friends. As such, in the final discussion section, I return to Guibernau's (*ibid*) work on 'belonging', and further consider the suitability of Bourdieu's (1993) competitive 'field rules'.

## 5.1 85A

Over a range of published texts, members of 85A are portrayed as working collectively, with unified aims and objectives and increasingly close social ties. For example, in the texts for two of 85A's earliest projects, *Der Student von Prag* (2008) and *The Orzel* (2009), members are described as working first on a 'collaborative project' (2013b, originally published in 2008) and then as a

'collaborative synthesis of 13 Glasgow based artists and musicians' (Lowsalt 2009). Individual authorship is rare, and members are largely anonymous. The vast majority of projects are thus attributed to the group as a whole, either through use of the pronoun 'we' (e.g. 'we began' (2013b) and 'we have put together' (2010b)), or, later on, as stated in Chapter Four, by referring to the collective in the third person (e.g. '85A will be transforming the venue' (*ibid*)). In more recent texts, members of 85A are portrayed as increasingly close and unified in their endeavours. For instance, mission statements published since 2010 describe members as 'consolidated in their belief that work ought to reveal itself by non-conformist means (2010a, 2013e), and amend the first line of this statement so that rather than describe themselves as 'an emerging, loose-knit brood' (2010a) members are now conceived of as a 'tight-knit brood' (2013e) or 'gang' (2013d). No published information is suggestive of any particular hierarchy, or roles or positions of power, and no conditions or procedures for membership are referred to.

However, when gatekeepers were asked for contact information, they divided members between two categories: 'core members' and 'extended family'. Members positioned within the 'core' are henceforth referred to as 85A*C*, and members of the 'extended family' as 85A*E*. The number that follows indicates the order in which the interviews took place, and is not intended to represent any hierarchy or position within the collective.

## 5.1.1 Describing 85A

When asked to describe 85A, or at a later point in the interview when talking about 85A, all nine members interviewed used the word 'collective'. In addition, 85AE1, 85AC2, 85AC3, 85AE2, 85AC7 suggested that 85A was comprised of a 'loose' group of people, and 85AE1, 85AC1, 85AC2, 85AC3, 85AE2, 85AC6, 85AC7 remarked that it was a group of 'friends'. One further term was brought up by a number of members, but then dismissed by each: 85AC2, 85AC4 and 85AC5 each mentioned that 85A was in the process of becoming a Community Interest Company (or CIC), but 85AC4 quickly added that this was 'just a format' that would allow them to 'keep being who we are and doing what we do'. 85AC4 similarly remarked:

> Next year we'll be a CIC but […] I don't see it as an interesting or useful or accurate
> representation of the structure of 85A or anything, it's just purely pragmatic.

When members were asked what they meant by the, seemingly preferred, term 'collective', they invariably suggested that it indicated joint action towards a shared goal. For example, three members replied:

> As far as I understand it [laughs] it would just be a [pause] group of artists who work together
> towards a common goal and each person has their own kind of talents and expertise to bring
> to the table [85AE1].

I think it's […] core individuals striving towards the creation of and realisation of rad ideas [85AC1].

I guess [it's] a collection of people […] with a single goal [pause] or with a unified goal [85AC3].

Throughout the interviews, members articulated similar, and strongly shared, understandings. For example, members were asked to draw 85A, and although the majority stated they would rather not do so, or were unable to do so (e.g. if the interview took place over the phone or via Skype), 85AC1 and 85AE1 drew the following:
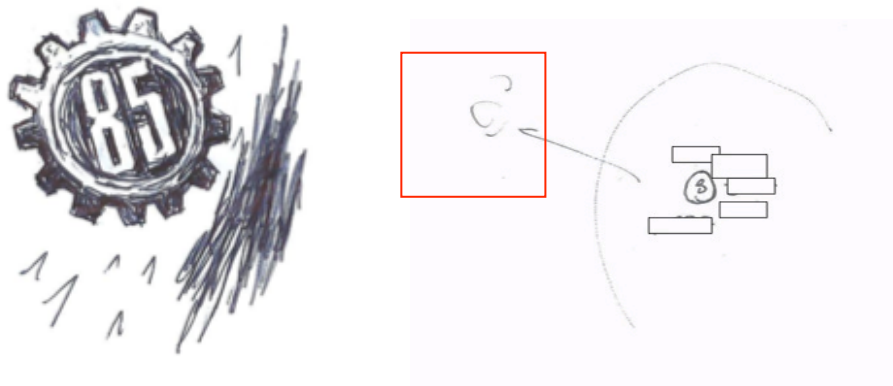


**Figure Twelve**. Drawings of 85A by 85AC1 (left) and 85AE1 (right, with names of individuals removed and his own position highlighted).

85AC1 went on to explain:

The reason I drew a cog […] right away it sums up sort of themes and ideologies […] 85A is like […] the beating hearts of everyone in the collective, it's not like we just, you know, hire people […] we're in this, we're all tight […] we're all like in the circle […] and the cog it's whole function is, you know, to perform a task.

Other members reiterated this idea of the group as positioned within a circle. For example, 85AC2 explained that he would rather not draw 85A as 'all I'd be inclined to do would just be to draw a circle', and later added, 'once you become part of it […] within the circle […] it's just a shared experience the whole way through'. Other members similarly emphasised the shared aims, working methods and ideologies held by members of the group:

We tend to share a certain amount of aesthetic and a work philosophy maybe […] working together for one goal [85AE2].

We're not changing our views [85AC6].

We've kind of got like a shared sense of what we want to do [85AC7].

While 85AC7 went on to add that there wasn't 'one specific thing that defines us' because it was important that they were able to 'combine different influences and take on different projects', these projects were largely held to be 'totally DIY' [85AC1]. Indeed, they were often presented as positioned outside of 'a kind of mainstream' [85AC3], or as 'on the outskirts' and avoiding 'confinements' and 'generalised […] routes and paths', so as to 'stand out' and be able to produce 'insane and crazy' [85AC3] or 'experimental' [85AC3] work.

Yet as can be seen from the drawing produced by 85AE1 (Figure Twelve), not everyone felt that they were within the circle: 85AE1 first drew and named the 'eight to ten people' who formed a 'core group', notably positioning them within a half-completed circle. When asked where he was on the drawing however, 85AE1 gestured to an area outside this circle and remarked 'out here'.

## 5.1.2 Boundaries, hierarchy and the 'core' group

85AE1 was not the only one to indicate more complex boundaries than a simple 'circle' enclosing all members. 85AC3 and 85AC6, for example, drew the following:
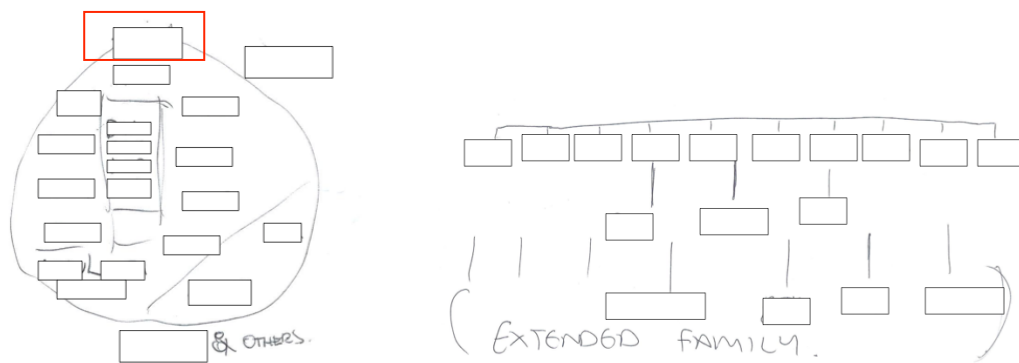


**Figure Thirteen**. Drawings of 85A by 85AC3 (left, highlighting position of 'boundary' member) and 85AC6 (right), with names of individuals removed.

In both of the above examples, 85AC3 and 85AC6 listed a 'core group' by name and went on to relationally position additional members, at times adding extra lines, or the phrase 'and others' to indicate those whose names they could not remember. Indeed, while there was some minor fluctuation between the accounts given by various members interviewed, almost all singled out four individuals, as a kind of 'core within the core', and all appeared to recognise the division between 'core' members and those 'outside'. At times, this division was indicated through the choice of pronoun: members within

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the core tended to use 'we' (see above), while the two members interviewed as part of the 'extended family' tended to use 'they' e.g. 'they all work […] they're constantly working' [85AE1] although 85AE2 in particular would swap to 'we' when talking about specific projects she had contributed to.

Many members went on to explain this division. 85AC3, for example, pointed out that the 'core of about 10 plus' were 'definitely […] in it for the long haul', while 85AC2 suggested that 'core members […] all have a shared interest in creating […] everybody brings just something different to the table'. Similarly, 85AE1 repeatedly pointed out that,

> They [the core members] come up with the idea, they plan it [and] do all the pre-production and everything […] a lot of them are tech people […] like the stuff that kind of makes it happen, they have the expertise basically […] everyone else comes in as like hands, you know.

As such, the 'core group' was generally understood to contain both the cultural authors (i.e. those responsible for the main ideas) and technical producers (i.e. those who could practically realise those ideas). Individuals within the core were further held to have different specialisms and were commonly thought to bring something 'different to the table', but pooled this expertise in the pursuit of a singular goal, to which they demonstrated commitment over time. Members of the 'extended family', in contrast, were generally understood to provide extra support as and when needed, often as a consequence of the large-scale work proposed, and assisted with projects already creatively and technically 'worked out'. Thus, for example, 85AC6 remarked that 'this lot are extended family […] we need help […] and so we call on our friends', while 85AE1 noted that for one project, 'there must have been close to 40 people in all actually […] I couldn't even possibly remember their names, they wouldn't remember mine'.

Members of the 'extended family' were thus suggested to be transient and as belonging to wider networks and friendship groups that could be personally 'called upon' by individuals in 85A, and were neither expected to contribute 'creatively', nor to demonstrate commitment over time. As such, it would appear that two interrelated forms of membership as constructed within differing boundaries were in operation, and that specific understandings, actions and expectations were attributed to those within each.

Despite forms of power being implicit in this kind of distinction, members did not generally perceive 85A as hierarchically organised:

> There's no sort of hierarchy or anything like that [85AC1].

> It's a really democratic environment [we want to] avoid any sort of any potential conflict or understanding of hierarchy within the group [85AC2].

I wouldn't say like 85A [...] has a static hierarchy you know [85AC4].

Moreover, it would appear that the boundary line distinguishing types of membership was not inviolable. For example, when drawing 85A (Figure Thirteen), 85AC3 commented

I'm going to put [x] right on the line here […] he's never been called upon to build or anything […] but he's definitely part of the family.

This negotiation is particularly useful, in that it implies that the boundaries identified above are not 'fixed' and that exceptions and can be made. Moreover, 85AC3 here indicates that the two forms of membership outlined rely not just on certain recognised actions and behaviours (e.g. building the sets and commitment over time), but also on certain emotional attachments and relationships (e.g. being a 'part of the family'), both of which must be held by 'core' members. Thus [x], recognised as having only one kind of membership, is positioned on the boundary.

## 5.1.3 Becoming, 'joining' and contributing to 85A

In order to further explore the boundaries of both potential forms of membership, we might here turn to the ways in which members articulated the process of obtaining membership. For example, when talking about their early experiences in 85A, many members remarked on the personal connections that had led to their involvement, often mentioning by name a friend who had introduced them to the rest of the group. Thus, 85AC5 noted that he had 'joined forces' with another member, as a 'joining of minds kind of thing', and later added,

We kind of quickly found a whole team of people that wanted to do the same thing […] we knew that we didn't want to work with anybody else than that gang.

Other members similarly commented upon the informal and personal nature of their early involvement: 85AC1, for example, noted that in the first few projects ''we weren't even a collective then we were just like, you know, a bunch of people' while 85AC7 pointed out that 'it just seemed like kind of really natural at the time'. 85AC4 was more specific:

I didn't even think I was getting involved […] I didn't make a conscious choice and like, you know, sign up and then think 'oh cool I wonder what we'll end up doing' it was just like, [x] would phone and be like 'can you come and help us move this piano?'

While a number of members, perhaps as a consequence of this informality, suggested they were unable to recall any initial meeting, 85AC5 and 85AC3 respectively highlighted the *Secret Agent* and the

*Orzel* projects (from which the name '85A' was taken) as a turning point of sorts, commenting, for instance:

> When Orzel was […] such a success […] we were thinking […] get a group together [to] make this show again or tour this show or something, this is how we kind of came [up] with the 85A.

> Orzel always felt like that was when we became 85A, we didn't join it we became it.

Yet not all of those interviewed were involved in these early projects, or indicated that they were part of any process of 'becoming'. 85AE2, for example, commented that after she found out about the group she thought 'ok, I can contribute to this', adding later that she 'almost nagged them […] to let me on', suggesting that permission of some kind, and from someone, was required.

Other members perceived things very differently. For both 85AC4 and 85AC6, it was not permission that resulted in 'membership', but individual choice and action. For example, over the course of the interview 85AC4 commented:

> I think if anyone showed up and were like 'I've got this idea, I'll make this thing, what do you guys think?' […] if it was cool, people would like it and do it […] power is open to whoever like wants it most of time […] It's not like there's an original nucleus around which things have gathered and expanded out […] it's just whoever shows up.

Likewise, 85AC6 remarked when drawing (Figure Thirteen) that the difference between the 'core' and the 'extended family' depended on 'what you bring', adding that 'if you want to be involved more […] you jump up here', pointing to the core group. Indeed, both 85AC6 and 85AC2 joined 85A after the Orzel project, yet both were consistently recognised by others as part of the 'core group'. In this respect, notions of 'contribution' often appeared to function as a socially recognised indication of 'core' membership, whereby certain forms of action (particularly having 'ideas', wanting to be involved or 'making' things) were often carefully marked out and attributed to individuals. Thus, for instance, members would regularly pause to note the 'contribution' made by specific members, remarking, for example that, '[x] had this idea' [85AC1], so The Secret Agent was a project that [x] and myself and [x] and [x]' [85AC1] or 'me and [x] were mostly in charge of [that]' [85AC4].

As such, while early forms of membership were held to have resulted from pre-existing friendships, it would appear that these relationships were maintained (and that later members were able to signal their membership) via notions of individual choice and a willingness to contribute, and that this awareness of certain valued forms of 'contribution' necessitated a reciprocal awareness of individual authorship.

## 5.1.4 Friends as family: belonging and solidarity

If particular kinds of action comprised one form of 'membership', a second, seemingly more emotionally involved form of membership was often invoked through notions of 'family'. For example, three members remarked:

> I love the people they are like a family [85AC6].

> It does actually feel like a very tight family [85AC3].

> There's sort of the 85A, you know, like extended family [85AC1].

In these examples, the notion of 'family' is both a simile used to describe something 85A is 'like', and a concept applied across group boundaries to include all members. This second point is important, for it suggests that the two forms of membership identified are not distinguished via a single boundary, but significantly overlap.

In addition, four members of 85A remarked:

> [X] is like all things at once […] cheerleader, organiser […] captain of the team […] so she's almost like a motherly figure [85AE1].

> Almost like Mum and Dad [I'm] probably not the only person in the world who's said 'Dad' to [x] at one point and gone 'whoops' [85AC3].

> I'm kind of the granddaddy of 85A [85AC5].

> [x] and [x] […] they are the babies [85AC1].

Here, familial positions are attributed to specific individuals, who were by and large recognised as such throughout the ARI i.e. the same individual was consistently held to be 'like Mum'. Indeed, the final three remarks no longer take the form of similes, but instead suggest that this is something individuals 'are', 85AC3 in particular recalling an example where the attributed position was used, albeit mistakenly, in place of a member's preferred name.

While familial positions often appeared to be attributed, or claimed, on the basis of age (many members went on to provide this information) or pre-existing relationships (the individuals commonly referred to as 'Mum' and 'Dad' were married to one another), they often appeared to be used to indicate close social ties, and a related sense of belonging and security. For instance:

It's the first time I think I have actually been in a solid gang [85AC1].

I think for the first time I've felt I've belonged to a group […] made amazing mates been making amazing work [85AC6].

It's been totally amazing to be a part of [I] just like feel really proud of like the work that you're making and as like a group and with your friends [85AC7].

In each case, members attach themselves to 85A emotionally, and mark the collective out, as a whole, as valuable and of high personal significance. 85AC4 similarly remarked:

I'm really surprised at how selfless and dedicated people have been […] and every time we meet […] reaffirming that we want to keep going with it and we want to make the right decisions […] and everyone is really dedicated and […] people are just like, [they] really love each other and just loving 85A.

Here again, the experience of belonging to 85A is set apart as something exceptional and as involving particularly strong emotional ties between members. Interestingly, this sense of belonging and value was also expressed by 85AE1, who commented:

They're my friends now and every experience I've had with them has been kind of unparalleled by anything I've ever done before […] it's just such a joy […] you feel kind of proud, proud of the people who really did the main bit of the work you know, as your friends, as people you admire as artists.

It would seem then that forms of membership marked out via emotional attachments were inclusive of all members, not just those in the core, and that as such, those in the 'extended family' were able to construct friendships, and to partake in a sense of shared endeavour, enjoyment and pride.

## 5.1.5 Summary: 85A

The members of 85A interviewed thus indicated multiple, overlapping forms of membership as re-negotiated over time rather than any single boundary simplistically separating 'members' from 'non-members'. Moreover, these varying forms of membership were suggested to take at least two forms, so that members might simultaneously be 'included' within the 'family', but 'excluded' from 'core' activities such as set building.

Considering these forms of membership, we might note the active selection of certain salient features, as suggested by Entmann (1993: 52). For instance, members rejected or ignored potentially available legal descriptors (e.g. Community Interest Company) in favour of descriptive terms that implied certain

social relationships, such as equality (e.g. a 'circle'), or which prioritised emotional attachments and downplayed notions of hierarchy (e.g. through the metaphor of 'family'). Similarly, potential differences (e.g. in disciplinary specialism or individual 'contribution') were subsumed into more dominant notions of artistic practice as a shared endeavour towards a common goal. Furthermore, in positioning all activity outside, or in opposition to, a cultural 'mainstream', we might argue here that members worked in relation to an 'independence' frame (as employed by Vail and Hollands 2012 in relation to The Amber Collective) that in distinguishing 85A as 'non-mainstream' allows it to 'stand out' [85AC6] and validates resulting projects as 'authentically' experimental and innovative. It would seem then that members drew upon shared, 'framed' understandings, in order to produce their collaborative artistic practice meaningful, as well as to organise and guide action (Snow et al. 1986: 464). Moreover, it would seem that these understandings mutually reinforced one another, so that collectively authored works 'more difficult to market than works by individual artists' (Bishop 2006: 178-9) when in the mainstream, were instead framed as 'subversive' via an independence from this mainstream, and members, rather than hoping for financial return, instead constructed the projects as a selfless endeavour done 'for the love […] of creating something' [85AC1].

However, the concept of 'framing' arguably does not fully account for the exceptionally close social ties suggested, or the strong feelings of belonging, solidarity and value articulated, arguments picked up in Section 5.4.


## 5.2 Empty Shop

Although Empty Shop was originally described as 'the North East's newest collective' (2009a), the term 'collective' was quickly dropped, seemingly in favour of the second descriptive phrase used: Empty Shop as 'a much needed platform' (2009a). From this point onwards, all mission statements describe Empty Shop as a 'platform' for 'artists' (2009f, 2010a), the most recent re-wording proposing that Empty Shop is an 'accessible platform for arts of all levels and backgrounds' (2013c). Perhaps on account of this desire to be 'accessible' (2013c) or even 'super inclusive' (2010a), the terminology used to describe those involved remains for the most part vague: published texts tend to refer to 'artists' (2009b, 2010a, 2013c) or 'people' (2010b) in general, rather than to any specific or 'named' group or individual. However, it is repeatedly noted that 'anyone can use the space for the arts, and it can be arts of any nature' (2009c), and that there are 'no panels to please, no cliques to get involved with first' (2009a). One possible exception to this concerns the studio holders, or FreeBirds, who were, at least initially, asked to sign a 'Freebird Agreement' (2010c) that encourages FreeBirds to adopt the Empty Shop 'ethos' of 'community, conversation and skill sharing' and to actively use the studios and 'be involved in the day to day goings on'.

When asked to provide contact information, the two gatekeepers provided a detailed document entitled 'My Family' (Figure Fourteen).
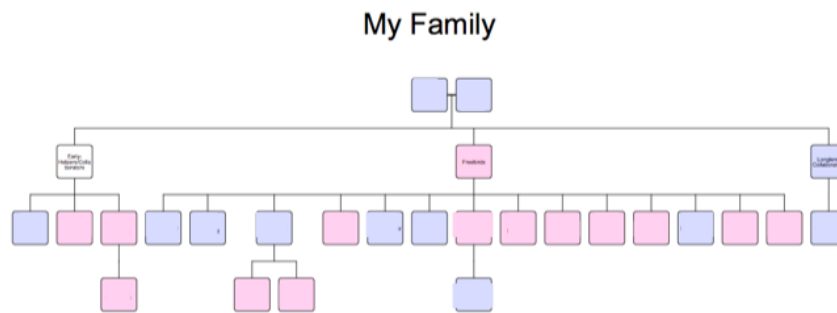
**Figure Fourteen**. 'My Family' document created by gatekeepers at Empty Shop, with the names of individuals removed.

This lists, and seemingly hierarchically positions, members via four categories arranged over three levels, with information for two volunteers added at a later point. The distinction made with regards to gender (blue boxes for men and pink boxes for women) appears to be the default setting of the online program used to compile the document, as does the title. Following this diagram, co-directors at Empty Shop are henceforth referred to as ES*D*, 'Freebirds' as ES*F*, long-term collaborators as ES*LT*, those positioned at the third level of the diagram as ES*3* and volunteers as ES*V*. No 'early helper' was available for interview. The number at the end of the codenames again relates only to the order in which interviews took place.

## 5.2.1 Describing Empty Shop

When describing Empty Shop, members used a wide array of terms, very few of which overlapped. For example, only ESD2 ever described Empty Shop as a 'platform'. Other suggestions included 'a family' [ESF2], 'network' [ESF1, ESF3, ESLT1] and 'organisation' [ESV2, ESD1, ES31], although in this final example it is not clear whether members used the term in a similar fashion, as they referred in turn to 'a completely free organisation' [ESV2], 'an independent arts organisation' [ESD1], and 'a non-profit organisation' [ES31]. While each phrase may be perceived as pertaining to notions of financial independence, the members concerned did not make this link explicit, and so may have equally meant, for example, that Empty Shop had no entry fee, or that it was independent of a particular arts scene.

In addition, three members suggested that Empty Shop had constructed, or was, 'a community': ESLT1 noted that 'Empty Shop engineers […] a community', ES31 remarked that she missed 'being a part of the community', while ESD2 commented, 'we did our best to make sure that the studio holders […] felt they were a community'. When asked, ESV1 also agreed that Empty Shop was a 'community', noting that there was 'some bond between the people', who had been 'brought together […] geographically or by an interest in art'. Once again however, it is not clear whether the four members had the same kind of 'community' in mind, for each used the term in significantly different ways. For

instance, ESLT1 went on to suggest that 'community' referred to those who 'aren't actively […] making work', while ESD2 referred only the studio holders, who were arts practitioners and thus were, presumably, actively making work. Similarly, while ES31 uses the term seemingly to indicate a prior sense of belonging, as emotionally held, ESV1 posits bonds reliant on geography and shared interests only. ESF2, ESF3, ESV2, and, at a later point in the interview, ESD2, in contrast, all suggested that 'community' referred to a geographically proximate group existing 'outside' Empty Shop. For example:

> Empty Shop has been a blessing for the community of Durham as a whole [ESF2].

> [Community is] everyone in the region and […] the geographical area [ESF3].

> Their target is the community of Durham [ESV2].

There was similarly little consensus when it came to defining particular groups or sub-groups within the ARI. For example, only very rarely were the FreeBirds referred to, and then only by those directly involved in either their selection [ESD1 and ESD2] or activities [ESF1, ESF2 and ESF3]. ESV1, ESV2, and ES31 made no mention of the FreeBirds, and while ESLT1 noted that he was 'aware of the studio network', he restricted his comments to the size of the studio spaces available. Similarly, only the two volunteers, ESV1 and ESV2, ever made reference to this potential sub-group within the wider membership, with the exception of a single comment from ESD1 who noted that increased funding for a project had meant 'we [could] give expenses to volunteers'.

Indeed, although members often suggested that Empty Shop included a number of 'artists', these individuals were also identified via very different means. ESF2, for instance, tended to use the term 'artist' only in reference to the FreeBirds and repeatedly stressed that this term encompassed varying forms of artistic practice (e.g. by referring to the group as an 'eclectic mix'). By contrast, ESD2 and ESV1 identified artists as those 'exhibiting' or 'doing the exhibitions' respectively, who need not have been FreeBirds and without distinguishing between forms of practice, while ESF1 remarked:

> It's not always just artists […] there's things like the Annual Open where you get people who […] they're not in the whole cool art scene or the, you know, they can do other things and you know some of the work they do is just as valid.

Unlike ESD2 and ESV1 then, ESF2 maintains a distinction between 'artists' and 'people' even when both exhibit 'valid' artworks e.g. he does not suggest that 'people' become 'artists' by exhibiting their work. As such, the members of Empty Shop interviewed appeared to perceive Empty Shop in multiple, and at times very different, ways.

## 5.2.2 'People' and the Empty Shop 'ethos'

There was one term that was used repeatedly however: when talking about who Empty Shop was for (with the exception of the co-directors, who will be discussed in Section 5.2.3), every member except one used the term 'people' e.g. 'we encourage people' [ESD1], 'the network of people' [ESF1], 'so many people have exhibited here' [ESF2], 'people that you work with' [ESV1], 'people who want to engage in art' [ESD2], 'working with people' [ESF3], 'invited people to come along' [ES31], and 'people that come to their events' [ESV2]. ESD1 elaborated:

> The more people you throw into the mix the better […] the more people you have with different kind of links and visions and stuff […] the more exciting it gets.

When directly asked, ESD1 went on to define 'people' as, 'anybody, it's anybody and everybody'. Similarly, ESF2 remarked that the shows had been 'fantastic for people of all ages, all backgrounds', while ESV1 noted,

> They invite everyone down to their things […] you don't have to be a professional artist to come […] it's just really accessible.

The term 'people' thus appeared to be used as a non-specific marker for a flexible and porous category i.e. it denoted a membership seemingly without limit or entry criteria where 'anyone' might belong. Indeed, it may be that the lack of any wider consensus regarding those involved with Empty Shop (as discussed above) stems from this inclusiveness in practice: members did not need to be aware of membership 'types' because membership was open to 'everybody'.

It was perhaps also on account of this notion of Empty Shop as accessible to 'anyone' that the wider membership was largely described as being 'diverse'. For instance, ESD1 states in the above that the 'people' involved are likely to differ in some way. Furthermore, he portrays this difference as both positive and generative, suggesting that increased numbers of 'different people' result in 'more exciting' projects. Other members made similar remarks:

> It had a very diverse mix of participants and audience […] everyone in the room seemed to get what they were doing and there was lots of goodwill […] it felt like everybody was behind it [ESF3].

> [There were] so many people volunteering and helping and [I was] just meeting so many different artists and musicians and poets and all sorts of random people, which is absolutely fantastic [ESF2].

Everyone I've worked with has been like really interesting [….] lots of different characters […] really varied so that's been good [ESV1].

In the above, membership is constructed as comprising various kinds of people (e.g. by noting differences in role, artistic practice or personality), and this difference is posited as beneficial. Indeed, by including a final 'random' category ESF2, like ESD1, seems to keep membership as open and fluid as possible, by allowing for members who 'fit' none of his aforementioned categories.

While no criteria for membership are made explicit in the above, two factors might be discerned. First, ESF3, ESF2 and ESV1 all imply that membership involves action undertaken through choice e.g. members elect to support Empty Shop, attend events, and help, volunteer and/or work on projects. Second, ESF2 and ESF3 both suggest a commonality between members via their labour towards a shared goal. Other members similarly remarked upon a number of shared understandings, referred to by ESLT1 as a 'philosophy' and by ESD1 and ESF3 as the Empty Shop 'ethos', which appeared to hinge around notions of democracy, accessibility, and collaboration. For example:

We thought we'd just create something really accessible, really democratic […] we still kind of stick true to that […] ethos if you like, opportunity, collaboration, that was always really important [ESD1].

We try to be as accessible as possible in terms of the way it looks and feels when you walk past […] we leave doors open [ESD2].

It's a very generous, very kind of selfless environment […] they're not really prescriptive […] I'm sure that I could pick up the phone from them tomorrow and say, 'I've got this idea, it's not art but I want to unroll as many sausage rolls as possible and make a carpet out of pastry' [and] they'd be like, 'brilliant, come and do it' [ESLT1].

They're open to anything from anyone […] they had a really […] interesting democratic approach [ESF3].

[Other arts organisations] were all about the money […] whereas in here it was just about making great art and pushing yourself as artists [ESF2].

In each case, members describe, or indicate recognition of, a set of shared understandings and related behaviours and values. Moreover, this 'ethos' appears to both reinforce the 'diverse' membership and is validated, or 'evidenced', by it. In other words, shared understandings concerning accessibility, democracy and collaboration and a 'diverse' membership are mutually constitutive: they at once allow for certain peoples and practices to access Empty Shop, and posit these same people and practices as 'proof' of that ethos in practice.

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### 5.2.3 Boundaries of control: joining and contributing to Empty Shop

While membership was thus largely held to be 'open' to 'anyone' who volunteered to actively contribute 'anything' in line with a set of shared understandings, there did appear to be one particular requirement: members often suggested that they had gained permission, however informally, from the co-directors. For instance, a number of members remarked:

> I was just hanging out at the bar […] I said to [x] 'do you need anyone to help?' […] and he was like, 'oh actually yeah' [ESV1].

> [It] just seemed really friendly and open […] fun and free […] it was sort of like give us an email, great, let's have a cup of tea [ES31].

> It was sort of by emailing and asking to be involved […] [You didn't have to] pass a test […] they were just happy that people wanted to work there, join in […] you were just instantly involved in it [ESV2].

In each case, membership is held to result from free choice (e.g. potential members volunteer themselves, or initiate contact), and appears to involve little ceremony (e.g. no 'tests' or applications are required, and members do not indicate an awareness of any vetting procedure). However, each member describes a point at which they obtained personal consent from one or both of the co-directors. Indeed, several members gave the impression of having asked for, or being granted, permission by the co-directors over the course of their involvement. For instance, four members commented:

> I had an idea which I submitted to [x] and [x] [ESF3].

> They'll give you the opportunity [ESF1].

> They told us straight away the studio holders are going to have a big say [ESF2].

> They were like 'oh, you can stick your ipods on the speakers if you want to' [ESV1].

Implicit in every statement above is the notion of power as hierarchically located and conceded: members seek approval, are 'given' opportunities and are seemingly 'allowed' to contribute or perform certain actions. In each case then, the co-directors are indicated to have, and retain, ownership of Empty Shop.

This distinction between the wider membership and the co-directors was further suggested through the use of certain pronouns: ESF1, ESF2, ESV1, ESF3, ESLT1, ES31 and ESV2 all for the most part used the term 'they' when referring to Empty Shop or the co-directors, and 'we' when talking about specific, and often pre-existing, friendship groups and/or projects that they had worked on. Indeed, it was seemingly reinforced in the drawings of Empty Shop produced by members, which often rendered the co-directors identifiable, but only very occasionally and generally indicated forms of wider membership. For example, ES31 and ESF3 respectively drew the following (Figure Fifteen):
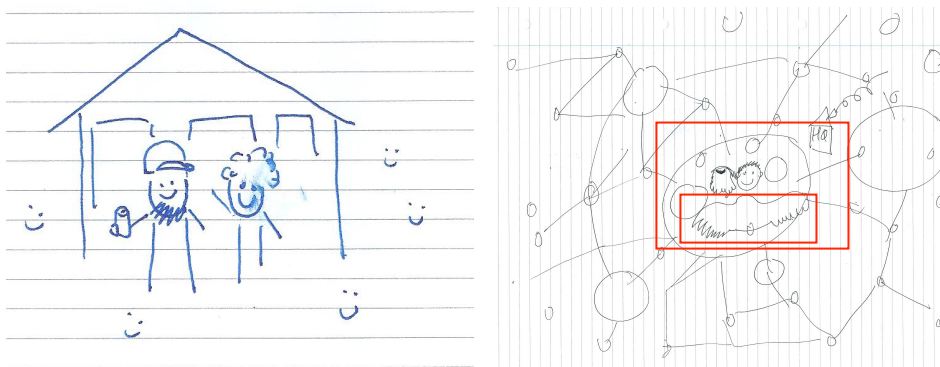


**Figure Fifteen**. Drawings of Empty Shop produced by ES31 (left) and ESF3 (right) with the 'FreeBird' character and central circle highlighted.

In both examples, the co-directors are individually represented (e.g. personal features are included for each) while the wider membership remains anonymous (e.g. indicated via smiling faces or 'dots') and is held at some remove (e.g. the smiling faces are positioned 'outside' the house, while ESF3 locates only four of the 37 'dots' inside the central circle). Indeed, ESF3 was the only member to include the FreeBirds (the bird within the central circle). Besides this single reference, no member included any specific group, sub-group or individual in the drawings of Empty Shop. The two co-directors did likewise: ESD1 produced a Venn Diagram that named himself, ESD2, and 'people' as the authors of the 'stuff' produced, while ESD2 proposed an existing drawing of the two (Figure Sixteen).
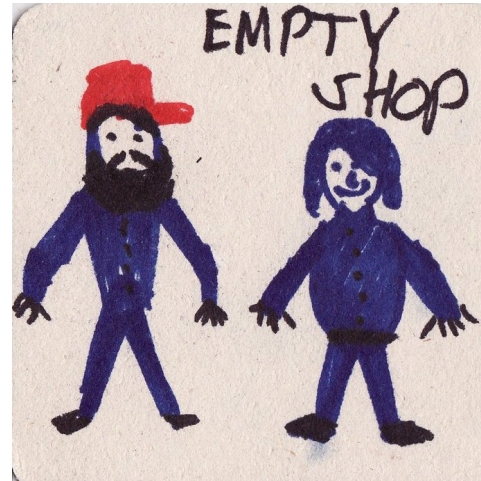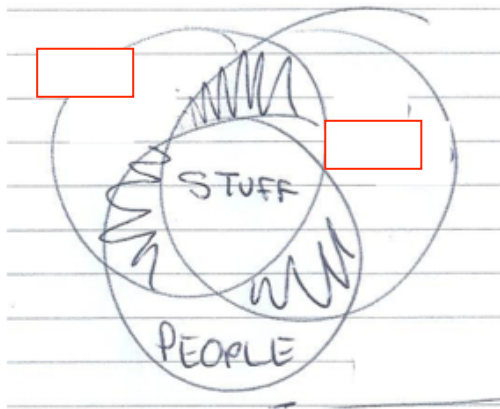
**Figure Sixteen.** Drawing of Empty Shop produced by ESD1 with the names of the co-directors removed (left) and an existing drawing suggested by ESD2 (right).

As such, it would appear that the co-directors were strongly associated with, and at times appeared to 'stand for', Empty Shop. Furthermore, the boundary between the co-directors and the wider membership was a) the only distinction to be consistently recognised and upheld by members and b) repeatedly suggested to be both fixed and inviolable for no other member was ever suggested to have a comparable position, or stake, within the organisation, and the position of 'co-director' was never suggested to be attainable. As such, Empty Shop was presented as fundamentally 'bound' to the co-directors, as exemplified in ESF3 concerns for the future of the organisation:

> If [x] had to move away or if [x] had to get a full-time job and [x] had to do something else […] the sort of key drivers would go […] that's a risk.

### 5.2.4 Power in practice: contribution and belonging in Empty Shop

However, the need to obtain consent did not seem to dissuade those interviewed from applying for membership, nor did it prevent them from feeling 'involved'. On the contrary, ESV2 remarked:

> When you get involved with Empty Shop you feel really welcome […] you're a valid member of it.

This idea of Empty Shop as 'welcoming' was similarly noted by ESF2, who remarked that 'all feel welcome' and ESD2, who commented that the co-directors had 'made [an artist] feel welcome'. It would appear then that the point of admittance, while widely acknowledged, was not viewed as an obstacle to membership but as a direct and personal opportunity to 'greet' new members. Indeed, it often appeared to act to 'validate' individual contribution, and to construct a sense of belonging and membership i.e. from this point on, members suggested they were included and 'involved'.

Similarly, ESF3 AND ESF1 respectively remarked:

> I just feel that my contribution is valid and what I mean by that is that it feels like […] they listen and they can act [pause] you can have an input into what they do.

> I'm really proud to say I'm part of what I have been a part of, what they've done.

Again, while ESF3 and ESF1 uphold the distinction between their own (relatively long-term) involvement and that of the co-directors, there is little suggestion that this distinction is perceived as a barrier to belonging. On the contrary, ESF3 and ESF1 both suggest inclusion and present their 'input' [ESF3] or 'part' [ESF1] within Empty Shop as meaningful, of high personal value and, in ESF1's case in particular, as involving an emotional attachment. As such, it would appear that members did not require ownership of, or a powerful role within, Empty Shop to consider themselves 'valid' members, but rather opportunities to act and contribute. Perhaps crucially then, all members interviewed portrayed Empty Shop as accessible and 'open' to suggestion. For example, two members remarked:

> Empty Shop would probably let you do anything within the realm of reason [ES31].

> Empty Shop just seems like there's no egos involved […] it just feels so open […] I've never experienced somebody in that position to […] be so accessible and so approachable and so open to everything [ESLT1].

In both examples, rather than focus on the need to obtain permission of some kind, ES31 and ESLT1 describe power as fundamentally shared in practice, that is, they suggest that while permission is required, it will almost certainly be granted. ESD2 similarly commented:

> We have a policy of never refusing a piece of work for a show […] everybody should feel they can be involved in what Empty Shop does.

It would therefore seem then that while the 'boundary' between the co-directors and the wider membership was upheld (e.g. in the above the co-directors, or 'they', allow action, are open to ideas and include work) it was also overridden by both the Empty Shop 'ethos' of accessibility and the practice of power as demonstrated by the co-directors. As ESD2 put it, 'we mean what we say […] for most people it's rhetoric, for us it's genuine'.

Moreover, it appeared that members often worked to maintain the boundary not on account of hierarchical relationships of power, but as part of a careful marking out of (continued) authorship and a way of attributing credit. For example, ESF1 and ESF3 respectively remarked:

It [Empty Shop] wouldn't be here […] it wouldn't be what it is without these two […] they are the reason that it is here.

I think they're a superb example of how an arts collective can operate […] [it] will continue and that's totally because of the merits of those two people.

Thus while members generally recognised, and worked to maintain, the distinction between the co-directors and the wider membership, this boundary was held to work positively and generatively e.g. to 'welcome' and validate membership, and to commend exceptional work.

## 5.2.5 Summary: Empty Shop

Although arguments concerning membership as 'free choice' and as involving cooperative action are returned to and explored in more detail in Section 5.4, it is worth briefly summarising a few key points here. For example, the members of Empty Shop interviewed again indicate no simplistic boundary distinguishing 'members' from 'non-members', but here suggest a porous and 'open' category in which notions of difference are positively held to be exciting and generative. Indeed, it would seem that while members 'routinely live with ambiguities' (Meyerson 1991: 131) in that descriptors for Empty Shop and the identification of membership sub-groups and/or the forms of difference suggested between members varied greatly, this ambiguity itself worked within the key frame of 'access', as argued above.

Moreover, the Empty Shop 'ethos' both actively and selectively framed membership in the manner suggested by Entmann (1993), and acted to unite members working on largely individual projects to a common cause. For example, members frequently commented that Empty Shop was open to anyone, and that anyone could do anything, thus constructing a shared and equal experience in which it was implied that 'art' could be made by 'anyone' and take 'any' form. However, two members did propose boundaries: ESF1 by noting that not all works exhibited were created by 'artists', ESF2 by suggesting that while at Empty Shop it was 'about making great art and pushing yourself as artists', this was preferable to approaches taken elsewhere which were 'all about the money'.

Indeed, it would seem that members at times had to work hard to overcome potential disjunctions, and to suit practical necessities. For example, although the seeking of permission and the permanent role of the 'co-directors' is potentially incongruous within an organisation framed as 'democratic', this possible contradiction was actively avoided by members who overwhelmingly presented the title as one justifiable in light of the co-directors extraordinary commitment and achievement, and power as effectively, if not formally, shared. While the position of co-director was arguably necessary to keep Empty Shop as a physical building with multiple functions and projects, open and running, and was suggested to positively allow for the 'welcoming' of new members as an important 'point' in membership, we see here the potential 'messiness' of meaning-making in practice, and the effort that is required to align certain features that do not neatly 'fit' within the given frame.

## 5.3 The Mutual

Three potential membership 'types' are identifiable within the texts published by The Mutual. First, there are those initially described as 'founding members' (2010a), 'the Board of Directors' (2010a), 'Co-Directors' (2010a), or 'we' (2009a, 2009b, 2010b). Later on, this group are described as a 'committee' (2012a, 2012d). Second, the wider membership is largely conceived of as 'self-elected Fine Art Glasgow School of Art graduates' (2009a) or artists at an 'early stage' in their career (2010a, 2010b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b) who comprise a 'multidisciplinary membership' (2012d). Third, in 2010 (and points thereafter) new members were sought 'to form a Committee made up of […] graduates as internees' (2010a, 2010b) who are later subsumed into the same 'committee' as the founding members (2012a, 2012d). Both committee members and more general members are encouraged to complete forms to apply for these positions, via, respectively, 'application' (2010b) and an 'open membership scheme' (2010b). All members are thus held to be united via a common 'life-stage' and are suggested to face similar difficulties, to which The Mutual addresses its activities. For example, The Mutual is twice described as 'a bridge […] between institutionalised art making and the first foray into' either 'exhibiting professionally' (2009a) or 'the professional realm' (2010c), both of which suggest a common route and aim (e.g. 'professional' exhibitions) for a certain group of people (e.g. arts graduates). One text notes an 'egalitarian ideology', which is described as applying to 'all aspects of our day to day running and long term vision' (2012a).

When asked, gatekeepers provided contact information for 124 members who had been grouped into six categories as follows (with applicable code in brackets): committee members (TM*C*), past committee members (TM*P*), involved members (TM*I*), exhibition plus members (described as those who had done more than exhibit, but who were not held to be 'involved') (TM*E*+), exhibition members (TM*E*) and dormant members (TM*D*). Again, the number at the end of these codenames relates to the order in which interviews took place only.

## 5.3.1 Describing The Mutual

When describing The Mutual, members opted for a number of different terms. TME1, TME2, TMI2, TME+1, TMD2, and TMP3 suggested 'collective', TMC1, TMC2, TMC3, and TMI3 used 'network', TMC3, TME1, TME+3, and TME+4 'platform', while TMP2 and TMC2 referred to The Mutual as a 'cooperative'. Other terms included 'membership organisation' [TMC1], 'initiative' [TME+4] and 'artist-run organisation' [TMP2].

This range in terminology, for some members, was suggested to stem from significant change. For example, while TME1, TMC2, TM+4 and TMP2 (above) used multiple terms over the course of the interview without qualification (e.g. each term was suggested to apply simultaneously), three members noted multiple versions of The Mutual:

The Mutual then […] they are different now […] different people doing things [TME+2].

Obviously there is a degree of ambiguity because what The Mutual has been has changed a little bit from project to project [TMC1].

It's changed […] I don't know if I could make a […] comparative description […] The Mutual is always what it needs to be for whatever we're doing at the time [TMC3].

In each case, members went on to arrange multiple terms into a narrative account of The Mutual, which noted key changes in form, action and/or those involved. Indeed, it seems that many members (although by no means all) opted for the descriptor contemporaneous with the period of their membership e.g. TMP3, TMD2, TME1 and TME+1 all described The Mutual as a 'collective' and all joined when The Mutual was largely held to be such.

However, when members offered, or were asked to provide definitions for key terms such as 'collective' or 'community', the consensus initially suggested splintered. To take perhaps the most complex example: four members described The Mutual as a 'community' and four more agreed that it might be described as such when asked. Three members connected this term to notions of shared behaviours and social ties but each did so differently, suggesting, alternatively, elements of 'friendship' and 'skill exchange' [TMC2], a 'support network' [TME1] and continued working relationships [TMI3]. Two members used the term 'community' only in reference to The Mutual as a whole [TME3 and TMD1], two noted a 'community' of artists in Glasgow [TMP3 and TMC2], two more located The Mutual, as a 'community', within this 'larger' artistic community [TMC1 and TMD2], while TMC2 in addition noted 'little communities within [The Mutual]'. Indeed, TMC2, TMP3 and TME1 all arguably fell short of describing The Mutual as a 'community', suggesting instead that 'elements' [TMC2] or 'aspects' [TMP3] of 'community' applied, or indicating doubt (e.g. TME1 remarked, 'that is probably how The Mutual works'). Those who did not conceive of The Mutual as a community offered different understandings again: TME2 defined the term as indicating 'the community of artists in Scotland', while TMP2 distinguished between a 'community art project and a community', adding, 'The Mutual could have hosted a community art project'.

Furthermore, members at times seemed to employ different terms to indicate similar understandings. For example, TMI2 suggested that The Mutual was a 'collective', where the term 'collective' referred to a group 'working together towards a final end', and thus differed from a 'community' where members 'might be all doing separate individual things but not necessarily coming together to make something else happen'. While TMD2 also talked of The Mutual as 'a group of people who've more in common in terms of their interests and goals and with more of a specific aim and objective', he here used the term 'community'. This lack of consensus is important, not because any one understanding might be somehow revealed as 'true', but because members in the above suggest neither a consistent application of key terms, nor any shared understanding of the scale, boundary or particular idea or

action associated with these terms, regardless of whether they thought they applied to The Mutual or not.

## 5.3.2 Constructing membership: purpose and use

Bearing this in mind, two particular areas of consensus might be cautiously pointed out, for although members rarely described The Mutual in the same way, they did largely seem to agree who it was for, and how it worked (albeit at times using very different terms to signal these understandings). For example, TMC1, TMP1, TMP2, TMC2, TMI1, TME1, TME2, TMI2, TME+1, TMD2, TMP3, TME+2, TME+3, TME+4 and TME3 all stated that The Mutual involved 'artists'. In addition, when asked to describe The Mutual, TMC1 suggested it was for 'early career creative practitioners', TMP2 referred to 'young early stage artists', TMC2 talked of 'emerging artists', TME+2 'new graduates', TME1 'emerging artists […] young artists', TMD1 'graduates in art or music', and TME+3 noted that it was for 'people who were just emerging from art school'. TME+1 and TMP1 further noted that their own involvement had started, respectively, 'when I first got out of art school', and after '[I] had graduated [from art school]'. Only very rarely were potential notions of difference (e.g. between forms of artistic practice) alluded to. It would seem then that membership was largely constructed as being 'for' a particular type of person at a particular life stage (i.e. practicing artists at the 'beginning' of their career).

It would also seem that members largely agreed on the purpose of The Mutual. For example, five members remarked:

> The idea behind it is basically to create a network or create opportunities for […] emerging artists [TMC2].

> It would be a tool for graduates […] this idea of the first step on the ladder [TMC3].

> They create a framework […] that makes it easy for you to keep on exhibiting or making work […] or talking about your own work [TMP3].

> [It is] a helpful structure for giving people shows [TMP1].

> [It is] a vehicle for the interests of the people [TMC1].

In each example, although the terminology varies markedly, The Mutual is portrayed as a 'facility', generating outcomes that are 'given' to, or used by, members. Moreover, TMC2, TMC3 and TMP3 suggest that this purpose is inextricable from understandings with regards the membership: the opportunities provided are created specifically for arts graduates. Several members expanded upon this idea, commenting for example:

[It] give[s] young early stage artists a […] fighting chance [TMP2].

As a collective they can apply for more prominent exhibitions […] a young artist just fresh out of art school wouldn't be able to go up to Glasgow Film Festival and say, 'I want an exhibition' [TME1].

You need institutions like that [The Mutual] in order to get your foot in the door for other things [TMP3].

When I graduated they […] were very supportive […] very inclusive […] when you graduate you're just kind of grabbing onto anything […] it's so isolating sometimes. [TME+1].

You are very much left to your own devices having graduated […] they were kind of holding people up and supporting them [TME+3].

[We] came up with The Mutual in art school for after art school […] it's most useful for people straight out of art school […] although it has done good things for people who never went to art school or who've been out of art school for a long time [TMC1].

Members in the above are consistently construed as 'lacking'; that is, they are suggested to 'need' something (e.g. a chance, an exhibition, further opportunities, support) that they are unable to generate themselves, and that The Mutual can provide. Indeed, in each case this 'lack' is implied to be a shared experience, attributable to a common situation rather than any particular individual.

Furthermore, members regularly suggested that emphasis was placed on the 'open' generation of opportunities in general, rather than on any specific 'artistic' criteria. For example, TME+2 noted that there was 'no selection policy', TMI1 remarked that 'The Mutual as a vehicle isn't about having an aesthetic or perhaps even a conceptual agenda', while TMP1 commented, 'they were just showing anything'. TMP3 similarly stated,

I don't think that they consider themselves to have a better or grander opinion about what constitutes good or bad art […] they're more interested in seeing what works together and they're also really approachable and open to ideas.

Indeed, TME1, TMD2 and TMP1 also described The Mutual as 'open', while TME+1 suggested 'they were very inclusive', TMI1 that they got 'as many people involved as possible', TME+4 that 'they always tried to accommodate people', while TME+2, when asked to describe The Mutual, remarked that they were 'generous'.

### 5.3.3 Attachment, belonging and contribution: The committee members

A further possible area of consensus is implicit in much of the above: namely, in portraying The Mutual as generating opportunities then 'given' to members, a distinction is upheld between those who provide, and those who receive. This attribution of labour was, at times, more explicitly commented upon. For example, TMI3 and TME+1 respectively remarked,

> There was something like 60 different artists working with them, with the girls that ran it.

> They work so hard to make The Mutual what it is […] and I'm talking about […] the actual group who work for The Mutual […] at that point it was [x] so she's obviously one of the founders.

In each case, those involved in activities (e.g. 'artists' or general members) are separated out from those occupying positions of relative power (e.g. the 'girls', or 'actual members' who 'run' or 'work for' The Mutual). A similar distinction was often inferred via the use of pronouns. For instance, while non-committee members commonly used 'we' for projects they had been involved with, or commitments elsewhere, TMI3, TME3, TME+3, TME+2, TME+1, TM12, TME1, TMI1 all swapped to 'they' or 'them' when referring, seemingly, to committee members e.g. 'I've got emails from them' [TME3], or 'they put a call out' [TME+M2].

However, while committee members generally and indistinctly were associated with positions of power and responsibility, the founding members were often (as TME+1 does above) specifically highlighted. Indeed, while four non-committee members named one or all four of the foundering members at some point during the interview, only TMI1 named a committee member who had joined at a later stage. The founding members interviewed also indicated an awareness of this distinction, remarking for example:

> [Founding member] and I particularly are very associated with The Mutual in peoples' minds [TMC1].

> I was talking to [founding member] the other day […] she said even members still say, 'oh what's The Mutual doing next?' and she's like, 'no, I haven't been on the committee for two years' […] when you know someone is involved in something […] they become that to you [TMC3].

It would seem then that committee members and the founders were recognised in subtly differing ways, where only the later group were held to have a particular 'association' or attachment to The Mutual. Indeed, while committee members were largely portrayed as transient, TMC3 above notes that the involvement of the founding members had led to their being physically recognised 'as' The Mutual, regardless of their current role. Perhaps similarly, TMC1 remarked at varying points:

> The Mutual comes out of our own interest […] one of the reasons we have an archive is that [x] is interested in and understands archiving […] the reason that we had an involvement with music was that [x] had those connections.

> Our own […] values go into it.

> It has always been such a manifestation of our own ideas and personalities.

The impression here is of The Mutual as fundamentally authored by, even built in the image of, the founding members. In addition, TMC1 and TMC3 detailed strong emotional connections, remarking, for example, 'we just have this real sense of responsibility to it and to each other […] it's quite personal' [TMC1] and 'it's been an incredibly personal time […] you always feel an attachment to something that you've made' [TMC3].

Despite this, TMC1 and TMC3 stressed that The Mutual was not static and that involvement was, as TMC3 put it, 'a team effort', although over time 'the team changed'. Likewise, TMC1 pointed out:

> We wanted to designate certain areas that belonged to [committee member], certain areas that belonged to me, certain areas that belonged to [founding member].

Committee members appeared to perceive this (potential) division of authorship very differently however. For example, TMP1 distanced himself, suggesting limited possibilities for contribution (e.g. that he 'hadn't really offered The Mutual very much' and that he was 'only an Operational Committee member'), that he didn't 'really like being associated with other people's ideas' and remarking:

> There was definitely like a trident of individuals who were The Mutual and it was theirs and everyone else was just sort of satellites around that.

In contrast, TMP3 and TMC2, while upholding similar notions of authorship, suggested inclusion, significant contribution and personal value, stating, for instance:

> We just helped them […] it was really kind of their operation so to speak […] where we could [we] gave them input, ideas […] it was really nice working with [a] non-hierarchical artists' community [TMP3].
> .
> I opted to stay on and work with them […] and see what happens in the future [...] I am really curious to see […] whether I can play a part in that [TMC2].

Finally, TMC2 noted that 'we were just all working together kind of equally', that he was 'part of' the 'leadership team', and that his involvement was 'a really golden opportunity'. Once again, the point here is not that any one perspective is 'correct' (for each might be experienced in parallel) but that membership, and the boundaries marking multiple forms of membership out, were perceived in multiple, and seemingly unpredictable ways.

## 5.3.4 Joining, contributing and belonging: the wider membership

More general members (i.e. non-committee or founding members) similarly articulated complex and at times surprising understandings of attachment and belonging, despite a general consensus concerning the intended purpose of membership. To consider this first: almost all general members suggested that they had joined The Mutual in order to exhibit either a specific piece of work, or to increase the chances of their exhibiting work. For example,

> To exhibit I had to first become a member, that was my reason [TME1].

> They were doing an exhibition […] if you wanted to join in [you needed] to write a proposal […] that's how I first got involved [TMI3].

> We submitted this work […] I think I just became a member [TME+4].

> They had an open submission so I submitted and I became a member [TME+1].

> I was just really looking for ways to exhibit my work […] I just joined everything that I possibly could […] so I joined The Mutual [TMI1].

> I was […] looking for ways to get involved with the arts scene […] I was becoming a member of lots of different things, I was actively looking stuff out […] that's how I became a member [TMD2].

TMI1, TMI2, TMI3, TMD1, TMD2, and TME+1, in addition, all suggested that 'membership' had resulted from a particular process; that is, they had all either 'applied' to join, via the completion of a membership form, 'proposed' or 'submitted' ideas for work, or sent their 'details in' [TMD1]. This was not suggested to be the case for those involved in the first exhibitions however, who noted that 'there was no sort of application […] if you wanted to get involved you could' [TME3] and that 'you didn't need to apply to them in any way […] by right of being an artist you were allowed' [TME+3]. Indeed, the introduction of the membership application form seemed to cause confusion at times: TME+2 initially suggested that he was not a member, and then later in the interview commented:

The only reason I said I wasn't a member is because I know they have like an actual membership thing […] I never kind of did that.

Similarly, TME+3 noted that he 'did become a member in the end', and thus dated his membership to a point *after* his involvement in a number of the early exhibitions. 'Membership' thus appeared to be centrally constructed through notions of 'application' (and admission). However, although membership was further suggested to involve certain understandings, including notions of mutual support, these understandings were not suggested to be of equal importance for all members. For example, TME+1 and TME+3 respectively articulated a concern with reciprocity, commenting:

They will email and ask for help or support […] so you can give them back something so it's […] on a mutual level.

I was happy to get on board with it because they'd helped me out […] I […] very much supported it […] I was glad to be a part of it and I think I always will be.

Both members here suggest a contribution in kind by 'giving back'. Indeed, TME+1, like TME+3, went on to express strong, and emotionally held, feelings of inclusion and belonging e.g. by noting that 'it did feel like you were part of something larger' and that membership involved 'a kind of togetherness which is very, very comforting, very, very encouraging […] it's invaluable'. However, two further members remarked upon their own lack of reciprocal contribution over time:

I didn't consider it as if like I was a part of The Mutual […] to be honest maybe I just looked at it as something I, no that's not true, I was going to say something that I could take from […] it almost seemed that way sometimes. (TME+2)

I did feel bad about that because it seemed like […] I'd come down and done one thing and then sort of disappeared. (TMI2)

Both TME+2 and TMI2 here appear to construct their lack of reciprocity as 'deviant' from an expected norm, and thus something they might feel 'bad about'. However, neither member suggested that any kind of sanction had been levied on this account, and both articulated feelings of belonging and value, commenting respectively, 'I was part of […] a bigger thing' and 'it meant a lot to me'.

Indeed, and perhaps surprisingly, two members who noted 'minimal' or non-active involvement [TME1 and TME+4], and two members who had never been involved at all [TMD1 and TMD2], also explicitly portrayed membership as positive, noting, for example, that it was 'refreshing' to 'realise that there [are] collectives out there […] truly open to showing other people' [TME1], while TMD2 expressed a strong sense of belonging and value, remarking:

> Even though I'm not actively a member it does feel good to be a member […] you're part of something […] it does make you feel valued […] […] and it's a two way thing so if there's any opportunity they want to ask for my help or, that's how I imagine it anyway.

In other words, while members commonly agreed on some respects of membership (e.g. that it involved some kind of 'application'), others (such as contribution and emotional attachment) were seemingly interpreted and applied and complex and unpredictable ways, irreducible to relative position or notions of involvement.

## 5.3.5 Summary: The Mutual

One of the central points raised in the above, that of membership as resulting from a fear of isolation and/or 'lack', is discussed in Section 5.4. Before turning to that point however, we might first note that the members of The Mutual interviewed again suggested no straightforward division between 'members' and 'non-members', but instead indicated changing and at times uneven understandings of membership that even when formalised via an official application process continued to be interpreted and 'lived out' by members very differently.

What members did appear to agree upon was a dominant 'professional opportunity' frame, whereby membership was for arts graduates seeking opportunities to exhibit within a 'professional' art world. As with the frames discussed in relation to 85A and Empty Shop, this 'professional opportunity' frame can also be viewed as, and indeed was suggested by members to be, selective, privileging the apparently more salient notions (Entmann 1993) of openness and accessibility over and above any 'artistic criteria' governing the selection of work to be exhibited. Indeed, some members appeared to suggest that their membership only came into being when such an opportunity presented itself. However, a second 'mutual support' frame was strongly identified with by some members while others navigated around it, and thus did not, in Entmann's terms, always result in the kind of action 'prescribed' (*ibid*: 52). Similarly, although a number of members indicated emotional attachments, these were not presented as an integral part of membership (e.g. as being a part of the 'family' was in 85A) and worked without clear boundaries. Indeed, the attachments articulated were somewhat unpredictable, with members of the committee at times suggesting limited or no emotional involvement, while members who had little or even no experience (beyond the acceptance of their application) interpreted the resulting membership as indicative of value and belonging. Again then, we encounter the messiness and ambiguity involved in the construction and framing of membership in practice.

## 5.4 Constructing membership

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that members in each ARI actively, selectively and distinctively framed notions of membership, so that in 85A the production of art projects was held to be

a collective and united endeavour necessarily located outside of any cultural 'mainstream', in Empty Shop the production and exhibition of artworks was largely conceived of as 'open' to anyone and anything, and in The Mutual membership was constructed as providing access to 'professional' opportunities for recent arts graduates. In each case then, it would seem that concepts of membership, and the associated boundaries imposed, worked to distinctively construct certain artistic practices, certain members, and certain kinds of artworks as 'legitimate' and valued, while selectively omitting possible others.

Further, no member in any ARI suggested membership to correspond to a 'common culture' uniting all ARIs, as Detterer (2012) suggests. However, members did appear to navigate within, and in relation to, particular examples of practice and boundaries of action and understanding suggested to be more generally applicable and understood. For example, 85A was held to be located 'on the outskirts' of the 'mainstream', a positioning that then allowed it to 'stand out' as exciting and experimental [85AC6]. Likewise, ESD2 suggested that, in relation to a nearby ARI and 'funding […] arms races' in the arts more generally, Empty Shop, as a financially independent organisation, was 'absolutely its own thing' with 'its own merit [and] its own value', while TME+3 suggested that in working for 'everyone' rather than a 'coterie of people' The Mutual was 'original' but that it nevertheless functioned as a portal to 'Glasgow's kind of art […] world'. As such, the framing of membership, and related notions of purpose, action and understanding, appeared to draw on social processes of both polymorphism (membership as 'unique') *and* isomorphism (membership as drawing on, or located in relation to, a reservoir of recognised logics and parameters), social processes of construction that Pedersen and Dobbin (2006: 898) argue 'depict two sides of the same coin', so that the distinctions claimed must themselves be recognisable as relevant within a particular field.

This complex navigation of 'existing cultural patterns' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11) by members of the ARIs is further developed in the following two discussion chapters and again in Chapter Eight. However, we might note here that despite this complex 'framing' and bounding of membership, the chapter has further highlighted the ways in which members might individually or collectively negotiate and interpret shared understandings anew (either those existing in the world, or those in operation within each ARI), or work to 'fit' certain potentially discrepant features within a given frame. Here then, the 'messiness' and complexity involved in meaning-making in practice was demonstrated, so that, in Empty Shop and The Mutual in particular, ambiguity concerning key terms, sub-groups and descriptors was common, and in all three emotional attachments were indicated seemingly regardless of relative position or involvement in central activities (e.g. set building in 85A, or exhibitions in The Mutual). Two final points of particular interest stemming from this are discussed in more detail below: membership as 'belonging', and the application of Bourdieu's (1993) competitive 'field rules' (1993).

## 5.4.1 Membership and belonging

It was suggested in Chapter Four that the concept of membership was a useful one, for it not only offered an opportunity to explore the construction of shared 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10) with regard 'art' and 'artists', but also, in proposing a boundary between those considered to be 'members' and 'non-members' (however complicated and nuanced in practice), offered a further opportunity to explore the possible 'potent emotional content' associated with group membership (Guibernau 2013: 1-6). In this section, Guibernau's work on 'belonging' is returned to and discussed in more detail, for members in each ARI suggested notions of 'solidarity', loyalty to the norms generated by the group, and the emotional appeal of membership; attachments that indicate, for Guibernau (*ibid*) a sense of 'belonging', although we might immediately caution that this was by no means the case for all members.

Two of Guibernau's concepts in particular seem to be of use: 'belonging by choice', and belonging as 'constraint'. 'Belonging by choice', or belonging as an act of free will and selection, is suggested by Guibernau to entail a 'personal decision and a personal commitment […] acknowledged by other members of the group' (*ibid*: 26-27). Guibernau argues that boundaries, even fluid and permeable ones, have an important role in this process, for they work to construct and acknowledge legitimate membership in relation to an excluded 'other' (*ibid*: 24). Here, for instance, we might recall the self-elected nature of membership in each ARI, and the importance of being personally 'welcomed' by the co-directors at Empty Shop, the use of familial terms in 85A to indicate a relationship to the wider 'family', or the 'acceptance' of membership applications at The Mutual, all of which could be argued to legitimate and distinguish members who have chosen to belong. Moreover, Guibernau argues that members choose to belong in this manner so as to assuage feelings of 'isolation […] anxiety and powerlessness' (*ibid*: 59), and to seek the 'security and warmth' (*ibid*: 2) offered by group membership, as well as certain 'perks', including companionship, status, identity, prestige and power' (*ibid*: 65). This seems reminiscent of remarks made by members of The Mutual in particular, who frequently suggested that a central purpose of The Mutual was to combat such feelings. For example, TMC1 noted that the founders were 'leaving art school and we were terrified […] we came together to sort of find a way', while TME+1 remarked that art practice post-graduation could be 'so isolating sometimes' and TMP3 and TME1 suggested that The Mutual, as a collective, could offer opportunities unavailable to individuals. Indeed, while members of 85A did not generally suggest powerlessness in this manner, they did commonly position the group attachment as unusual: both 85AC1 and 85AC6, for instance, noted that it was the 'first time' they had felt included in a 'solid gang' or 'belonged to a group' respectively. These are sentiments that arguably chime with Guibernau's comments with regard to group 'warmth' and 'companionship', whereby individuals 'no longer feel alone because they have fused themselves with the group and they speak and act as group members' (*ibid*: 63).

However, Guibernau points out that this very 'warmth' can compel members to accept group norms, practices and values as a condition of their belonging. Indeed, Guibernau suggests 'reciprocal

commitment' (*ibid*: 32) as one such proviso, although she notes that groups vary, so that some 'accept free access and exert a more or less limited influence' while others 'demand a longer, perhaps even life-long commitment' (*ibid*: 29). Thus we might suggest that The Mutual, in largely expecting no long-term or consistent involvement and in mustering no penalty for members failing to provide 'mutual support', offers members relatively 'free access'. In contrast, we might view membership in 85A as an 'overriding identity' permeating 'all aspects of the individual's life' (*ibid*), as when 85AC6 remarked: 'this isn't a job, this is our life, this is who we are'. This kind of 'active engagement' in the construction of self-identity (*ibid*) is explored further in the following chapter, but it is worth highlighting again that in practice, the active construction of membership as an identity did not always tally with a corresponding 'active engagement' in core activities, as was demonstrated by TMD2, who related strong feelings of 'belonging' despite having been involved in no events or activities. As such, it seems that membership is perhaps more open to interpretation and negotiation than Guibernau allows.

However, Guibernau's concept of 'belonging' remains of particular use, for it allows for an extension of enquiry so that the ARI are not simply 'sites' in which art and artists are constructed, produced and displayed within set norms or boundaries, but environments in which members might 'matter' (*ibid*: 28). This is not to suggest that all members mattered equally, or that all individuals were equally positioned and able to join all three ARIs, for, as Guibernau points out, notions of belonging are far from free of constraint and limitation, nor is belonging automatically 'enabling' (*ibid*: 70). However, it is to argue for a more holistic understanding of the construction of art and artists, as at least potentially involving emotionally held attachments and a sense of 'belonging' that in turn can construe the ARIs, and their members, as 'valuable, important [and] worth sacrificing for' (*ibid*: 65).

## 5.4.2 Membership, interaction and competitive field strategies

The final point raised in this chapter concerns Bourdieu's (1993: 30) characterisation of the artistic field as a 'field of struggles' in which occupants attempt to 'defend or improve their positions'. To re-cap this idea briefly: Bourdieu believed that the artistic field was not 'reducible to a population […] linked by simple relations of interaction' (1993: 35), but was instead governed by 'a set of objective social relations' (Johnson 1993: 6). These objective relations were themselves unequally ranked and distributed, and as such 'impose[d] upon actors specific forms of struggle' (Swartz 1997: 125) including,

> Conservation strategies […] pursued by established agents who hold dominant positions […] strategies of succession, where relatively new entrants to the field seek to gain dominant positions […] and subversive strategies […] pursued by those who have little to gain or to lose in relation to dominant groups, and can propose radical ruptures to existing knowledge relations (Whitehead 2009: 72-3).

Moreover, Johnson (1993: 8) argues that to enter a field an individual must 'possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge, or skill, or 'talent' to be accepted as a legitimate player'.

As was argued in Chapter Four, 'people never act directly in fields, but always in field-specific situations, or in situations embedded at the intersection of (usually many) fields' (Santoro 2011: 14), and as such, the ARIs should not be viewed as 'fields' in and of themselves. Instead, the ARIs bear relation to Bourdieu's (1986: 51-2) description of membership to a group, whereby he contends that even if not 'consciously pursued as such', the solidarity of membership accrues 'profits' to which the group are entitled, and are thus 'deliberately organised […] so as to derive full benefit from the multiplier effect' of group membership including 'material profits' such as 'services accruing from useful relationships' and 'symbolic profits' such as prestige. Moreover, Bourdieu here argues that each member of the group is 'instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group' so as to permit only 'legitimate exchange'.

It might initially be stated that certain actions potentially viewed as 'breaking' these competitive field rules might equally be viewed as working within them. We might consider the following remarks as examples of this:

> So we went down […] and it was […] a group of the friendliest people you've ever met […] it didn't matter where you were coming from […] it was just like 'oh you're here to help, that's fine' [85AE1].

> We just let anybody have an exhibition if they wanted it […] we didn't say 'let us see your work first', we didn't judge the artwork […] I think we had a tagline which was 'the answer's already yes' [ESD1].

> The egalitarian concept of The Mutual [was] that it didn't matter if you didn't go to the right parties [TMC3].

In each example, members suggest a certain 'break' with the strategies and tactics outlined above, by accepting members as 'legitimate players' on the spot, for instance, or in extending membership to all-comers without judgement, or 'proof' of legitimacy. Indeed, members in 85A related instances in which they would pay each other's bills when members were 'tied into other jobs' [85AC5] or lacked the finances that would allow them to contribute. However, while each example above might be viewed as suggesting that members did not always behave competitively, they might equally be viewed as examples in which members used the resources available to them (as a group) so as to allow for continued contribution in line with a particular 'field' logic (i.e. collective action), and thus worked to maintain their position in the field (i.e. through the presentation of projects completed on time and to a high standard). Likewise, it might be suggested that ESD2 could 'let anybody have an exhibition'

because this again works within a particular logic (one of democratic access) and thus no matter what is exhibited or by whom, Empty Shop is (arguably) distinguished in the field.

What is problematic however, is that such understandings a) take no account of instances of suggested 'interaction' between members during the course of their membership, and b) reduce understandings of membership, articulated as involving lasting friendships and strong democratic and collaborative ideals, to competitive strategies only, and as such risk 'emptying out' membership of its constructed significance. Thus we might note that for 85AC6, for instance, membership was held to entail a 'friend collective crossover', and for ESF1 had two 'stands', one of which was primarily constructed as 'friendship' with other members. Indeed, membership for 85A was argued above to be partly constructed in relation to notions of the 'family', Empty Shop's 'ethos' was widely accepted by members as a democratic championing of access that allowed them to do 'anything', while The Mutual's 'egalitarian concept' worked to support individuals unable to access resources individually, and continued to do so despite at times receiving little in return. To reduce these actions to notions of competition seems to belittle the commitment and generosity *constructed as valuable and meaningful by those in the ARIs*. We might then argue for the importance of notions of belonging, the likely interaction between members (further explored in Chapter Seven) and for a field analysis that works to consider relational positioning and field logics without losing the significance generated and attached to membership by those involved.

Bearing these points in mind, we might now turn to the second lens employed within the thesis, and consider the cultural construction of identity within the ARIs.

# Chapter Six

## Constructing 'artistic' identities: multiple selves, identity-work, and the legacy of the 'Romantic artist'

This chapter turns from the construction of 'membership' to consider the production of identities, or identity-work, as articulated by members in each ARI. Drawing upon sociological understandings of identity as multiple and as achieved through narrative (Ricoeur 1991), performance (Goffman 1969), and via identification both with pre-existing categories, and as labels applied by others (Jenkins 2008), the chapter asks: how do members self-identify? What stories do they tell about themselves? What, if any, pre-existing understandings, cultural norms, relationships, structures and/or actants are called upon in support of these identities? Do members identify any constraints or opportunities (cultural or otherwise) for identity construction? The chapter thus builds upon the relational positioning of members and ideas of belonging discussed previously, and as such overlaps in some significant respects with this (and, as is shortly demonstrated, the following) chapter. These overlaps and relationships are explored in detail in Chapter Eight.

This chapter is broken into four sections. The first three consider each ARI in turn, initially considering the identities suggested in published and internal texts and then moving on to analyse data collected through interviews. It is argued throughout these sections that members rarely adopt a singular identity. Nor do they simplistically 'act out' or perform culturally suggested and encouraged identities. Rather, members in each ARI adopt multiple, fluid and complex identities that at times combine pre-existing narratives in order to enable action and seize upon opportunity. However, not all understandings of identity are equally placed and able to work in the world, and, as is argued in the final discussion section, understandings of artistic identity can also curtail practice, shut down opportunity and present a significant barrier to identification. As such, this final discussion addresses the ways in which members draw upon cultural understandings, practices and actants to identify and position themselves, and explores the continued legacy of the 'romantic' artist. It might be added here that although in this chapter the overlaps between concepts of 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013) and identity become clear, these concepts are not considered to be interchangeable, for as a shortly demonstrated, members claimed certain identities, without indicating a sense of belonging', and vice versa, a point discussed in Section 8.2.2.

## 6.1 85A

Over a range of published texts, members of 85A are regularly identified as 'artists' (2010a, 2013b, 2013e), although some of the qualifiers used in relation to this central term are adapted over time, and a number of 'sub-identities' or additional positions are also noted. For example, in one of the earliest available texts originally published in 2008, members of 85A are described as 'international artists, the

majority of whom are based in Glasgow' (2013b). While the term 'international' does not appear again, members are repeatedly described as 'Glasgow's most irreverent cultural agitators' (2010a, 2013e), and thus continue to be bound to a particular location. Moreover, through descriptors such as 'provocative', 'irreverent cultural agitators' and 85A's stated 'belief that work ought to reveal itself by non-conformist means' (2010a, 2013e), texts consistently position members outside a cultural 'mainstream'. A similarly enduring qualifier is found in the term 'multidisciplinary' (2010a, 2013e), used on both versions of the central mission statement alongside the phrase 'with their own crossover brand of visual art, music and performance', thus suggesting that the aforementioned 'multidisciplinary artists' work across all three stated disciplines.

Individuals are usually anonymous, and very little information that may identify particular members is made available. One main exception to this appears to be the 'naming' of, for example, DJs or musicians for events, the implication here being that those named are 'guests' and not 'members'. Additional positions are listed for specific projects. For example, the information for *Sonic Soak* (2010b) lists 'musicians, sound artists, orators, costumed performers, sculptures [sic] and local filmmakers'. However, a few texts seem to avoid reference to any particular classification, and instead use the third person e.g. '85A have created' (2013c) or '85A […] have been bunkered down in […]' (2013f). As stated in the previous chapter, no positions or roles of relative power or responsibility are indicated in these texts.

## 6.1.1 Multiple identities and 'tracking' narratives

When asked the question: 'can you tell me a little bit about yourself?', and throughout the interview more generally, the nine members of 85A interviewed each suggested multiple identity positions and roles, only some of which corresponded to those outlined above. For example, 85AC2 replied:

> I've only been in Glasgow a year […] I did anthropology and sociology at [name of university] [pause] always been a musician and kind of artist […] particularly on the writing side of things and composition […] I've been a member with them [85A] for about eight months […] I work a lot in social enterprise […] organising workshops and classes.

Similarly, 85AE2 replied:

> I studied at [name of university] […] and I graduated about three years ago […] I travel between [European country] and Glasgow occasionally to do work either as a freelance jeweller or well whatever work I can find at the moment […] I'm working as a stage technician at the district theatre here.

Both members thus identify themselves in multiple ways, and appear to tell particular stories about themselves, or narratives, as suggested in Chapter Four, although they do so in very different ways. For

example, 85AC2 first geographically positions himself, and then presents a 'back story' that begins at university and continues chronologically to the present day. In doing so, 85AC2 reinforces certain identities, i.e. by suggesting that he has 'always been' a musician and artist. Moreover, 85AC2 went on to remark that 'most of the work' he did was driven by a particular set of 'social values', thus pulling multiple, and potentially disparate roles into a coherent account of the self. 85AE2, on the other hand, chronologically lists positions as something 'done', rather than as something she 'is' or 'was', but rationalises this selection by drawing attention to broader circumstances, i.e. that she needs to take on 'whatever work' she can find.

Notably, both members draw upon particular places and time periods as part of these narratives, or select certain 'episodes' (Lawler 2008: 15), including the period of time spent studying (and where), and the current geographical location. Indeed, in both cases the second location was different, thus suggesting a 'journey' of some kind, and both members appeared to select certain salient episodes while leaving out others, for example, accounts of childhood. The remaining members interviewed offered roughly similar accounts in this respect, although some of them began at much earlier points in time. For example, a number of members (here referred to without codenames so as to protect anonymity) remarked:

> I'm a Torontonian by birth and I moved over here in 2003.

> I'm from Airdrie originally.

> I moved to Scotland like in 1991 from France.

> [I've] been living in Glasgow for about seven or eight years.

> I grew up in Canada and my father's Scottish so I sort of have British citizenship […] I came for university to Glasgow.

In each case, geographical information is interwoven with key periods or points in time e.g. graduation, specific dates of residence or key decisions. It would seem then that many members of 85A organised narratives of the self in relation to chronological and geographical changes: they 'tracked' themselves through time and space.

This 'tracking' narrative further tended to imply a re-invention of the self over time. For example, 85AC4 replied:

> I went to uni […] which was fucking crap, dropped out in second year, joined a band, moved to France briefly, came back, finished my degree […] took up writing […] wrote a novella, got into philosophy […] taught a Modern Philosophy course.

In this particularly striking case, 85AC4 moves between several positions and makes almost no attempt to conceptually or thematically 'bind' positions to a singular or consistent 'self', although when asked about this later on 85AC4 noted that there was 'overlap in everything'. However, 85AC4 further added that there was no 'golden point on the horizon that I'm aiming for', indicating a seemingly flexible attitude towards the future.

## 6.1.2 Re-invention and the 'creative' self

85AC4 was not alone in indicating periods of re-invention, or in pointing out that the future was uncertain. 85AC6, for example, commented:

> Throughout my life I think I'll always […] get to points and I'll do something […] and be like 'what am I now?' you know, what am I going to do now and I think that's maybe a part of being creative.

Similarly, 85AC5 remarked:

> I guess the way I see it is it's part of someone's natural creative development […] you know just developing a personality […] finding things they're really in to and copying someone's style, coming up with your own style, changing styles and I think people need to go through all those cycles to kind of fulfil themselves.

For both 85AC6 and 85AC5, changes in self-identity are not incoherent, or suggestive of a 'false' identity then, but are held to be consistent with, and indicative of, a 'creative' self. 85AC4 thus frames periods of reflection and uncertainty not as a time of crisis, but as a consequence of something she 'is'. Likewise, 85AC5 suggests that actions of this kind are 'natural' for creative people and, in emphasising notions of 'development', locates such changes as of central importance and significance for creative 'fulfilment'.

This notion of a 'creative self' was further developed and expanded upon by other members. For example, over the course of the interview 85AC1 commented:

> I just knew I had to concentrate on my artwork […] I just sat in this tiny little room […] and I just fucking drew and drew and drew.

> [We did it] just for the love of [laughs] kind of creating something.

> It was something I always wanted to do.

85AC1 thus appears to identify with Romantic understandings of the artist, that is, working intensely and at some remove from society for the 'pure' pleasure of creation and in accordance with a 'natural' or 'given' vocation. Similarly, 85AC3 suggested that the projects didn't 'make any money but you're in it for the love of doing it', while 85AE1 noted that work on the collaborative projects was 'like endeavour for the sake of it' and described art school as a 'sort of breeding ground for […] people who aren't necessarily focused on careers'.

However, these identifications were often mixed in with those associated with the craftsperson, and again with what might be termed more 'professional', or 'art world conscious', understandings. For instance, when telling a story about another artist, who had produced work the quality of which 85AC1 was unsure of, he remarked:

> I thought it was hilarious when I heard [about] it but then […] it was just like oh come on […] where's your graft? […] Where's like, you know, months freezing your balls off in a studio because that's all you can afford? […] Where's your craftsmanship?

Although the freezing studio is again strongly associated with the Romantic figure of the artist, notions of effort and skilled labour are arguably indicative of what Shiner termed 'mechanical' attributes, associated not with the artist, but the artisan (2002: 111). Later on again, 85AC1 spoke of 'trying to make a name for [myself]', and described a particular role as 'an opportunity for myself as well', suggesting an awareness of the more social aspects of identity conferral and the accruing of reputation (Becker 2008 [1982]). It would seem then that while members largely identified with a 'creative self', this did not foreclose upon additional understandings.

## 6.1.3 Rejecting and attributing the label of 'artist'

Despite this strong tendency to identify as 'creative' however, six of the seven members who described themselves as 'artists' went on to express doubt, while 85AE1 additionally rejected the position outright, remarking:

> Yeah well I'm not [an artist] […] I don't contribute to anything […] of artistic merit […] I would never claim to be responsible for any of the ideas […] I wouldn't take credit for anything that 85A has done.

Here, the identity of 'artist' is rejected seemingly on the grounds that 85AE1 had made no contribution that would be deemed 'artistic' and, because others *had* made such a contribution, that any attempt to claim the title of 'artist' would not only be false, but dishonest. Yet 85AE1 was the central protagonist in a major piece of work authored by 85A. Acting, it would appear, was not valued by 85AE1 as something warranting 'artistic' status.

Similarly, 85AC1, despite identifying strongly with the Romantic artist, only ever referred to himself as an artist in the third person e.g. 'to […] push oneself as an individual artist' or 'he's [85AC1's father] like 'my son might actually be, he's an artist''. When asked about this, 85AC1 replied:

> Once I get [current project] finished, then I'll be able to call myself a filmmaker […] until that point I don't think I can justify it to myself.

When asked if 'filmmaker' was different from 'artist', 85AC1 replied that it depended on who was 'paying your bills' and 'how much artistic control' was allowed, before remarking:

> David Lynch - he's an artist […] Psykovsky - he's an artist but they're all filmmakers I think you can wear both hats at the same time […] I think it just depends on if you allow yourself to […] become mainstream.

Thus certain criteria are put forward here as necessary to support any claim to being an 'artist', including the production of certain kinds of work. 85AC1 further suggests that the positions of 'artist' and 'filmmaker' are not collapsible: he points out that it is possible to be 'both', but does not suggest that the terms are equivalent or that they might form a singular, hybrid identity e.g. artist-filmmaker. Other members also picked up on the need for completed work as a pre-condition for any identity claim. For example, 85AC3 remarked:

> I don't really see myself as an artist a lot of the time I guess because I've not produced anything myself this year.

Similarly, 85AC7 commented:

> It kind of feels as though I've still got something to prove […] I just do so many other jobs […] you don't have to […] be like making all your money out of art to be an artist, anybody can be an artist, but […] I don't know I just don't want to sound pretentious.

In this final example, 85AC7 articulates seemingly conflicting understandings: the position of 'artist' is at once suggested to be 'pretentious', and something he desires to 'prove' himself as, and while he points out that 'you don't have to' make money solely from art to be an artist, 85AC7 simultaneously puts forward his 'other jobs' as evidence for his still having something to prove. It would seem that not everyone could 'pick and choose' from, or untangle, multiple narratives with ease.

Yet while many members appeared reluctant to self-identify as an artist, the term was frequently used to describe others in the collective. For example:

> It's a group of artists [85AC1]

We're a group of various multidiscipline artists, designers, creative people basically [85AC6]

[There are an] awful lot of talented artists within our collective [85AC3]

[…] people you admire as artists […] [85AE1]

The term 'artist' in the final three examples is associated with creativity, talent, and admiration, and appears in the last two examples to act as a token of esteem. It is perhaps on account of this idea of the term as somehow 'special' and as indicative of prestige and value that members largely shied away from self-identification as an 'artist', and claimed roles and positions arguably less invested with historical significance e.g. 'jeweller' (85AE2) or 'musician music experimenter' (85AC3). Here then, we see Jenkins' (2008: 43) point that labelling, even when it is not 'internalised', can still work 'positively', or, in this case, to seemingly accredit praise.

## 6.1.4 Performing identity

While members were often reluctant to identify themselves as 'artists', there were a number of circumstances in which some members did feel prepared to do so. For example, 85AC4 remarked:

I was in a taxi today […] and the guy asked me what I did and I probably wasn't like 'ah I'm an artist' you know but in the context of talking to other artists […] then yeah I'd probably bring it up […] it maybe just depends if I feel like it's relevant […] maybe it's pragmatic […] I'd maybe describe myself as an artist when it's useful to describe myself as an artist.

Here, 85AC4 articulates a conscious decision-making process, reliant on context, the identities of those around him and on the potential 'use-value' of the selected identity. In other words, 85AC4 suggests that he 'performs' an artistic identity when pragmatically useful. This is not to argue that 85AC4, or the artistic identity he adopts, are false. Rather, 85AC4 here suggests that he 'does' identity-work (in the manner suggested by Goffman 1969), in that he moves between multiple possible identities to position himself meaningfully in changing situations and in relation to different groups of people.

Two further members of 85A also suggested identity as something to be continuously done and adjusted, although they did so very differently. 85AC2, for example, when asked if he would call himself as an artist replied:

I'd be reluctant to […] although I've had to invoice people as an artist […] I've had to write 'I am an artist' on an invoice.

Here, 85AC2 signals his general 'reluctance' to identify as an artist (although the reasons for this are unclear) yet notes a particular situation in which this reluctance was overcome, i.e. when no other term was deemed suitable.

 In contrast, 85AC5 commented:

> I make my money as a designer […] it's kind of like being an artist for a decent wage […] I've had my fun as an artist I've done loads of stuff […] [now] I get to have my fun and my kind of personal practice as an artist […] it's just I don't need to call it that […] if I choose to call it that it kind of almost devalues what I can charge as a designer […] say you're an artist and people just go 'great they'll do that just for nothing'.

In this final example, the identity of 'artist' is repeatedly assigned to the past, or as something 85AC5 'was'. Despite this, 85AC5 suggests that certain ways of working, and those he associates with being an 'artist', continue to operate but under another title - that of 'designer'. Again, this is not to suggest that either identity is false or misleading. Rather, it would appear that 85AC5, like 85AC4, is engaged in sophisticated identity-work that allows him to retain the creative freedom and enjoyment he found in artistic practice *and* charge for his labour (i.e. without working for free as 'artists' might be expected to).

## 6.1.5 Summary: 85A

In summary then, it would seem that members of 85A did not 'obviously' self-identify as artists, nor did they simplistically enact what might have been considered a culturally encouraged identity of 'artist': the only position outlined in 85A's published texts. Indeed, members on the whole expressed their reluctance to self-identify as 'artists' and instead seemed to use the term to mark out fellow members, or the collective as a whole, as deserving of esteem.

All members did, however, tell selective and seemingly 'ongoing' stories about themselves, which in including Ricoeur's three central elements of 'character, actions and plot' (Lawler 2008: 11) we might view as narratives, tracking an understanding of the self over time and place, and linking together potentially random episodes and events so as to justify and render meaningful current positions and identities. In doing so, members in 85A further indicate what Giddens (1991: 53) termed a 'reflexive' understanding of the past, as actively managed to form and sustain a coherent account of self. However, for Giddens an individual who comprehended time as a 'series of discrete moments' (*ibid*), as 85AC4, 85AC5 and 85AC6 arguably did, would be unable to sustain this continuous narrative. We might then contend this point, for despite organising the past into a series of 'discrete moments', which in the example of 85AC4 were presented seemingly without any overriding synthesis or 'enplotment' (Ricoeur 1991: 21), members posited a 'creative' self whereby radical change and re-invention was not only 'natural', but in itself provided such a constant. Moreover, we might add that the 'creative' self

posited appeared to draw upon identification with a number of pre-existing understandings, including the artist as 'craftsperson', 'Romantic' and 'professional', and a number of members (most notably 85AC1, 85AC2, 85AC4 and 85AC5) seemed able to move between and re-combine these understandings. However, as was argued above, not all members seemed equally able to engage in this kind of work.

Finally, although members in no way articulated uniform understandings, we might cautiously point to a number of similarities in the above, including a tendency to refute the term 'artist' and to self-identify as 'creative', a point that is returned to in Section 6.4.

## 6.2 Empty Shop

A variety of internal and published texts suggest three central identity positions associated with Empty Shop: 'artists' (2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009f, 2010a, 2010b, 2013c), FreeBirds (2010c), and those with an undefined involvement (2009a, 2009f, 2010a, 2010b).

The term 'artist' is repeatedly stated to encompasses those 'of all levels and backgrounds' (2009b, 2010a, 2013c), so that 'anyone is as valid as anyone else […] it doesn't matter if you are a professional artist or someone who just wants to dabble' (BBC interview 2010). Despite this consistent awareness of potential difference, the founding members at times use the term to indicate shared, and 'Romantic' characteristics, remarking early on, for instance, that Empty Shop would benefit 'both existing and as yet undiscovered' artists (2009e), and later commenting that 'if any group of people have the right skill set to work around a problem, it's artists' (in Groves 2013). However, the founding members also remark in an unfinished funding proposal (2009c) that they 'provided an opportunity for people to exhibit work who haven't previously considered themselves artists but who do now', suggesting an awareness of their own role in (potentially) legitimising certain identities and positions. It might also be noted that 'artists' in early texts were geographically bound (e.g. as 'artists in the region' (2009a, 2009f), 'the community of artists and art fans […] based in the County Durham area of Great Britain' (2009e), 'local artists' (2010a), and 'people in the region' (2010b)) but that more recent texts locate Empty Shop, as a physical premises, 'in the North East of England' (2013c), rather than those involved.

While 'FreeBirds' are also 'artists', they are distinguished from the former via their occupancy of studio spaces within the building. Furthermore, FreeBirds are asked to conform to a number of specific criteria as set out in the 'FreeBird Agreement', which includes valuing and sharing certain approaches (e.g. 'community, conversation and skill sharing') and actively using the studio spaces so as to be 'involved in the day to day goings on' (2010c). Despite the potentially significant commitment required of FreeBirds, this group were only infrequently mentioned in mission statements.

A third category of involvement is suggested, but remains largely ambiguous. For example, while Empty Shop is held to provide 'a platform for producing, exhibiting and viewing art' (2010a), those 'viewing art' are only very rarely referred to as 'visitors'. Instead, a number of arguably more 'open' terms are employed, such as 'people' (2009a, 2010b) or 'anyone' (2010b), or through indeterminate categories e.g. 'if you don't fit into these categories' (2009a) or 'you' (2009a, 2009f).

## 6.2.1 Managing multiple identities

As with members of 85A, all eight members of Empty Shop interviewed identified themselves in multiple ways, and indicated a range of possible positions only some of which corresponded to the three categories outlined above. Indeed, while all members claimed more than one identity and/or role, a few presented themselves almost kaleidoscopically. For example, ESF1 remarked:

> I'm an artist and I'm thinking of becoming a freelance[r], well, I need to be a sole trader at the moment as I've no employment […] apart from doing little bits of freelance installation work for galleries and helping artists […] and teaching yeah I do that.

Likewise, ESF3 initially presented himself as follows:

> My name is [x] and I'm an arts professional and artist slash designer.

ESF3 then went on to add 'FreeBird', 'studio holder', 'ambassador', 'creative type', 'freelancer', 'a County Durham person', 'co-director' and 'father'. Yet rather than list these identities additively, ESF3 appeared to actively manage them, in part by holding positions within a particular 'constellation': the 'professional' identity was consistently placed ahead of a hybrid term (either 'artist/designer' or 'designer/artist') for instance, and this 'core' understanding was then 'supplemented' by further positions as and when required throughout the interview. Other members, who indicated notably fewer identities, appeared to do likewise. ESV2 for example first identified herself as a student, and, through repetition and the provision of related information (e.g. about her course) established this identity as the primary understanding to which additional, and relatively minor roles were added, in this case a position within an arts society.

ESF1 (above) however, appeared to manage multiple identities in part by distancing himself from certain, theoretically 'available' positions. For example, ESF1 states that he is an 'artist' and will be a 'freelancer' and 'sole trader'. In contrast, three roles he has already undertaken ('installation work', 'helping artists' and 'teaching') are described as something ESF1 does. In rejecting available identities (e.g. that of 'teacher'), while giving as yet unattained identities priority, ESF1 appears to construct a sense of self that is neither bound to current circumstances, nor to an 'inner self', but which is both adaptable and worked upon over time. Indeed, ESF1 highlights the possible 'real world' results that

might accrue from this kind of advantageous positioning: he needs to 'become' a 'sole trader' to find employment of the kind desired.

Moreover, it might be noted in the above that ESF1 avoided identifying himself as a 'FreeBird', despite being identified as a past member of this group by the gatekeepers. Instead, ESF1 used the term in passing on only one occasion during the interview, explaining that, 'the Freebirds is what they call the studio holders'. In contrast, both ESF2 and ESF3 strongly identified either with or as 'FreeBirds'. For example, ESF2 repeatedly noted that he 'loved' the idea that FreeBirds would 'help and support' each other, while ESF3, who had long since left the studios, remarked at varying points:

> I […] still consider myself a Freebird […] I've just flown the nest.

> As a Freebird it's sort of […] my social responsibility to see if I can contribute to the development of anything that might be useful to them and their audience, their artists.

> As someone who's been a Freebird […]

In this final example then, ESF3 strongly identifies himself with the FreeBirds, and articulates a seemingly on-going identification with this category of being three and a half years after having 'flown the nest'.

## 6.2.2 'Creative' narratives

Five members of Empty Shop further produced narrative accounts that tallied with features associated with the figure of the Romantic artist, although the exact features and 'episodes' recounted in these narratives differed significantly from those presented by members of 85A. For example, when asked to draw a timeline of key involvements (Figure Seventeen) ESLT1 remarked, 'so the earliest thing I remember is being aged six […] doing my first drawing'.
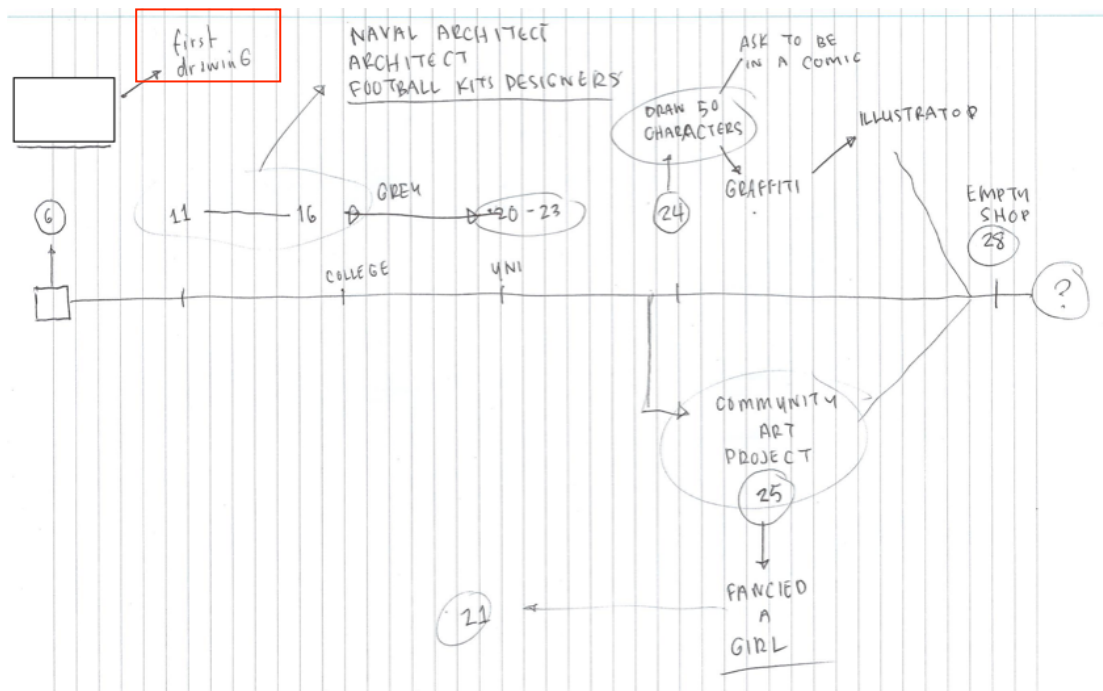
**Figure Seventeen**. Timeline drawn by ESLT1 with 'first drawing' marked.

Similarly, ESF3 began his timeline (Figure Eighteen) with 'school', and included the names of 'two amazing art teachers [who] had a massive impact on me in being really interested in art and developing your art skills as a kid'.
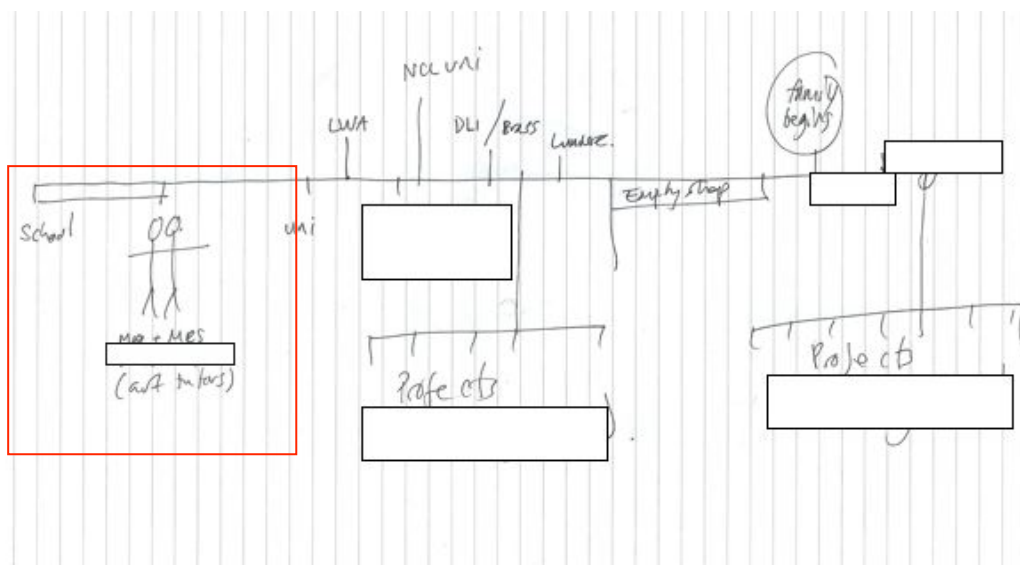


**Figure Eighteen**. Timeline drawn by ESF3 with 'school' and two teachers marked.

As such, both ESLT1 and ESF3 began their accounts of the self with childhood, marking out particular moments connected with either the production or development of drawings and 'art skills'. Moreover, both appear to do so in order to produce themselves as 'naturally' gifted. For example, while many

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children draw, ESLT1 selects and highlights his first drawing and in so doing, arguably positions himself as someone possessing 'natural' talent. Likewise, by accrediting teachers with the 'development' of his art skills, ESF3 implies that these skills were already apparent, and is also able to position himself as an authentic 'creative type'. Indeed, both ESLT1 and ESF3 here recall Vasari's (2006 [1896]: 31-33) description of Giotto as naturally inclined, as a child, to draw 'anything that came into his fancy […] without having learned any method of doing this from others'. Again, this is not to suggest that in assembling and emphasising certain events either ESLT1 or ESF3 produce 'false' accounts of the self, but to argue that it is through such narratives and tropes that both understand and construct their own histories and present sense of identity.

Additional members similarly appeared to identify with the figure of the Romantic artist. For example, ESD1 stated:

> I've always been arty and been able to draw and [be] creative […] I've always just splurged out drawings […] I've always been a […] naturally creative person.

The repeated use of the term 'always' in the above marks out understandings of a consistent self, and one that is evidenced as 'authentic' through certain objects (e.g. the 'splurged' drawings) and qualities (e.g. being creative). Later in the interview, ESD1 remarked,

> There was never a clear moment where I thought 'I'm going to be an artist' […] I just considered myself to be one […] and the uni and […] college and stuff was just an obvious educational choice because it was where my interests lay.

> Being the type of people we thought, yeah, just do it [found Empty Shop], let's just give it a go.

In both examples, ESD1 justifies decisions likely to involve considerable time, effort and, in some cases, money on account of a certain understanding of the self, so that related choices are perceived as 'obvious'. Indeed, not only does the identity of 'artist' here provide a coherent frame through which certain actions and decisions can be produced as meaningful in retrospect, but it also appears to provide a sense of stability and confidence drawn upon when deciding how to act. In other words, the identity of 'artist' suggested by ESD1 seems to provide a kind of 'ontological security', allowing for the bracketing out of anxieties, and so carries 'the individual through transitions, crises and circumstances of high risk' (Giddens 1991: 38).

## 6.2.3 'Mixed' and 'non-artist' narratives

However, while a number of members of Empty Shop drew upon the figure of the 'Romantic' artist to form a coherent sense of self, others appeared to combine this category with additional understandings, and others again identified themselves very differently. For example, ESF1 moved between varying accounts of the self, at points talking of 'discovering' his identity and finding his 'own voice', attributes associated with the authentic creative self discussed above, and at others remarking:

> I put a piece of work in [an exhibition at another ARI] and that was the first time I had ever shown my work […] but I remember the [curator] saying 'oh, you know, this is one of the other artists', or whatever, and then thinking, oh wow, I'm an artist.

In this final example, ESF1 invokes an occasion on which the identity of 'artist' was literally conferred, or bestowed, upon him. Later on in the interview in response to a question about 'support', ESF1 additionally commented:

> They […] believed in what I was doing, enough to let me use their space, but also […] introducing me to people.

In this brief statement, ESF1 moves from a charismatic-like 'belief' displayed by other members of Empty Shop in him and his work to an awareness of the social nature of identity: in this case the importance of being introduced to others and being accepted as legitimate by them. ESF1 thus appears to draw upon multiple understandings of the self, and combines these so as to be complimentary i.e. to position himself as an authentic artist who might be encouraged or supported through the actions and endorsements of others.

Not everyone at Empty Shop self-identified as an artist however. For example, ESV1 initially described himself as follows:

> I am in my third year at [University] I'm doing [course] […] and I've been doing History of Art for five years now because I did it at A Level and then I did it at uni as well.

He then later remarked:

> I wouldn't describe myself as a photographer because I don't feel I'm good enough really [to have the] status of a photographer […] I don't really like labelling myself […] I don't want to get categorised.

In these examples, and throughout the interview, ESV1 avoided or rejected a number of possible identities, including that of 'artist'. However, he carefully linked his studies and various involvements,

including those undertaken at Empty Shop, with respect to his occupational ambition: to work in the arts. Thus ESV1 at one point commented, 'after uni I'd like to do something related to that'. As such, ESV1 formed a coherent and meaningful narrative appropriate to his ambitions that arguably flexibly left open to possibility the exact position desired. There was one identity that ESV1 did accept however: when asked if he was a 'student', ESV1 replied that it was 'undeniable […] there's no way I could be more of a student than I am'.

ESV2 also self-identified as a student and rejected the term 'artist', remarking:

> I'm a student […] I draw and paint in my spare time and everything but […] I haven't got any plans to make a career out of it or anything like that […] I'd just say I'm somebody who likes art.

Here again, an alternative career to that associated with the artist is desired, and the identity of artist is thus rejected as inappropriate. However, we might note that for both ESV1 and ESV2, an involvement in Empty Shop is nevertheless drawn upon to constitute the desired identity: that of person wanting to work in the arts, or 'somebody who likes art'.

## 6.2.4 Struggle and rejection

While many of the above members of Empty Shop were thus able to put together coherent and largely recognised and accepted identities, three members in particular articulated some kind of struggle. For example, ESF2 commented:

> I got no support, my family didn't do any art but I just loved it, I don't know where it all came from […] but you couldn't go to your mates in [location] and say 'I'm going to be an artist', they would laugh at you, you know […] it's ok over here […] I'd always wanted or always had something like this in mind.

ESF2 here establishes an 'authentic' artistic identity, but notes that it can only be claimed without ridicule in particular places. ESF2 thus seems aware of the limits to which he can borrow from the narrative of the 'romantic artist', and suggests that in certain locations and to certain significant others (i.e. ESF2's 'mates') this identity will be rejected as fraudulent.

While ESF2's dilemma suggested that he had resolved this situation by changing location, for others the situation was articulated as on-going. For example, ESLT1 commented:

> I never really found a name for what I did […] I can't subscribe to one tribe […] I've never had that desire to call myself a certain thing […] I didn't want to be an illustrator, I drew but […] I wouldn't make that my whole world […] it's a bit of a pain in the arse because you've

got to be able to do that to make any money […] you meet your mother-in-law and you need to say you've got a thing.

Throughout the interview, ESLT1 appeared to 'sample' various narratives, including that of the 'Romantic artist' (via the drawing in childhood, for example), but explicitly rejected wholehearted subscription to any one. Moreover, ESLT1 presented the narratives that he drew from as ultimately conflicting, so that his 'passions' lay in 'community-based […] less tangible work' that was 'non-sustainable', while illustration work, for which he might potentially be rewarded, was considered non-creative and 'perfectly average'. Unable to resolve these tensions, and reluctant to identify with any one pre-existing understanding, ESLT1 directly connected his lack of 'a thing' to call himself to an inability to make money, participate in certain events, or introduce himself coherently. It would seem then that identity-production for ESLT1 was fraught: his inability to tell a particular kind of story resulting in certain 'real life' consequences.

For one final member, the struggle to identify appeared to have more to do with social legitimacy than the lack of a suitable 'name'. Over the course of the interview, ES31 commented:

> I think you need a lot of self-confidence to say 'oh I'm an artist' […] I think in the future I'll say something along the lines of 'I'm a part-time so and so and a part-time artist' […] because you need to show that you're serious about it but it's quite hard to have the confidence when you work in Primark […] painter sounds more down to earth […] for a while I thought I'd try and call myself an illustrator but it was completely inaccurate.

ES31 thus suggested at least three barriers to identification. First, the figure of the artist is suggested to be one that involves 'speaking grandly about yourself', or claiming a privileged position in relation to other 'down to earth' occupations. Second, ES31 notes that the position requires 'serious' commitment, which her job in retail both detracts from and undermines. Third, ES31 recounted that on various occasions, when testing out the desired identity of 'artist', she was rejected as fraudulent. For example, after introducing herself as an artist at a party, ES31 was asked 'have you made millions?' When she replied that she had not,

> They were like, 'well you can't call yourself an artist […] you're an art student' and it's like that sort of, oh well, I guess I'm just an art student then.

Rejected by her peers, ES31 proceeded to 'try' out 'illustrator' and 'graphic artist', identities she noted 'don't get any flak'. These proved 'inaccurate' however, and the only identity still available, art student, would also shortly prove inaccurate for ES31 was approaching graduation. Thus a hybrid future self is proposed, with 'artist' located after an as yet undecided upon position.

## 6.2.5 Summary: Empty Shop

To sum up a few key points briefly: it would seem that the members of Empty Shop once more did not simplistically enact the identities proposed in published and internal texts, but actively managed and combined multiple identities. It was further demonstrated above that for some members, this management was suggested to rely upon a stable understanding of a 'natural' creative self, which constructed a sense of 'continuity across time and space' (Giddens 1991: 53), and which in the case of ESF1, for instance, acted as no barrier to additional roles and identities, which might also be positioned as a consequence of this 'inner' and 'authentic' creativity. Moreover, for ESD1 in particular, this stable sense of self was implied to act in a manner akin to Giddens' notion of 'ontological security' (*ibid*: 36), providing an 'emotive anchor' that allowed for potentially risky decisions to be 'weathered' (*ibid*: 55), or in ESD1's case, for actions to be naturalised as behaviour 'normal' for someone 'like' him. We might further note that this 'creative' self differs greatly from the 'creative self' suggested in 85A, so that while members in Empty Shop drew upon 'episodes' located in childhood and notions of stability, members in 85A largely omitted events or circumstances pertaining to childhood, and envisaged the 'creative self' as undergoing continuous change and revision.

Yet as was demonstrated above, not all members seemed equally able to position and identify themselves. For example, ESLT1 indicated, in Giddens' terms (*ibid*: 53) a 'paralysis', but one that was suggested to result from the lack of a socially recognised 'name' for his activities, rather than any lack of a continuous narrative. Indeed, ESLT1 remarked, 'I've just played ever since [pause] well, I've just played always and I never stopped', thus arguably constructing an 'ongoing story', but one, crucially in this case, held to be detached from any recognisably 'artistic' identity. ES31 on the other hand, articulated a consistent self, but one that was socially rejected as 'fraudulent' (Lawler 2008: 29), or as making an undue claim to a position recognised as having special value. Similarly, in ESF2's account of self we again see the limitations at play in identity-work, for as ESF2 made clear, he was not able to self-identify in any way he liked, wherever he liked.

However, ESF2 articulated this struggle as resolved, as least partly on account of his membership at Empty Shop, and emphasised certain 'episodes' and characteristics similarly emphasised by other members of Empty Shop (e.g. ESF2 identified himself as 'naturally' gifted and suggested a coherent and stable self that 'explained' prior non-artistic identities as the result of circumstance and context). Likewise, ESF3 strongly identified himself as a FreeBird, a category of being only available through membership of Empty Shop, while ESV1 and ESV2 also suggested they were able to support and validate identities, such as might be advantageous in their future careers or which related to non-occupational understandings of the self, through membership. It would seem then, that some, although by no means all, members were able to produce themselves as meaningful by drawing upon the resources made available to them, and by identifying themselves in relation to, and within the boundaries posed by, cultural understandings.

## 6.3 The Mutual

Over a range of published and internal texts, two broad identities are outlined: 'member artists' and titles that denote increased involvement and responsibility e.g. 'co-director' or 'committee member'.

The phrase 'member artists' is used on a variety of texts, including mission statements (2010d, 2011a, 2011c, 2012a, 1012b, 2012d) alongside a number of more specific descriptors. For example, members are also described as 'emergent' (2009b, 2011c, 2012b), 'early stage career artists' (2010a, 2012a), 'graduates' (2009a, 2010c, 2011c), 'developing' (2011c) and/or 'young' (2012a, 2012d), thus positioning members at a particular career point i.e. after graduation but before they might be termed 'established'. A number of fluctuating sub-identities are also suggested, first 'spanning painting, photography, sculpture and film' (2009a), then including 'sculptors, painters, filmmakers, photographers, writers and musicians' (2010a), and later still replaced by the term 'multi disciplinary' (2011c, 2012d). Members are also often geographically located e.g. as 'artists in Glasgow' (2009a, 2009b) or 'Glasgow-based creative practitioners' (2012c) and on occasion, particular behaviours, motivations and values are suggested. For example, The Mutual is described as 'a bridge for ourselves and the others involved between institutionalised art making and the first foray into exhibiting professionally' (2009a), thus assuming a shared career trajectory, while a later text describes members as 'comprising 'a group of exciting and ambitious artists' (2010a).

A number of positions of relative power are further outlined. For example, although the four co-founders initially referred to themselves by name, the later 'role description' form distinguishes between 'co-directors', 'internees' (later again referred to as 'committee members') and 'member artists' (2010a). 'Internees' are at this point hoped to be 'dedicated' with a 'passionate interest in the arts and art administration', a 'flexible approach to work', a 'helpful and positive disposition', the 'ability to work in a team and independently', 'effective time management skills' and 'resourcefulness, imagination and ingenuity' (*ibid*). By 2012 however, the distinction between 'co-director' and 'committee member' is no longer upheld, and both categories are subsumed into either a 'current committee', or a list of 'committee members since 2009' (2012d).

## 6.3.1 Multiple identities and narrative repertoires

As in 85A and Empty Shop, members of The Mutual indicated multiple identities and positions. For example, three members commented:

> I was working with [gallery] […] at the same time as I started working at The Mutual and then I was also working at [gallery] four days a week, that was a paid job [the other two] were volunteer […] oh, and then I was working in [gallery] […] and I was trying to make my own work [TMC3].

It's just like dividing up your time […] not just between The Mutual and your personal practice, but also […] work for money and all the nitty gritty stuff as well [TMC2].

When we were doing something for the Film Festival we were, you know, film critics […] we've been agents for artists […] we've sourced things for members […] we've organised music events, symposiums […] we've done an art fair [TMC3].

In each case, members appear to manage multiple identities and roles, although they do so in very different ways. For example, TMC3 chronologically lists positions and holds each at a certain remove by articulating them as 'work done' in the past, rather than as something she 'was' or 'is'. While TMC2 in the second example also suggests multiple roles, these appear to be actively and continuously managed, with membership and professional practice taking precedence over unspecified paid work. In contrast, TMC3 appears to adopt (and then presumably 'drops', given the use of the past perfect) a range of identities that stem from the current work undertaken, and thus flexibly re-positions herself over time in ways that are continually (if not enduringly) relevant and meaningful.

Members also appeared to move between multiple, and at times seemingly pre-formed narratives. For example, TMC1 noted at one point, 'I can do shorter answers, I can do lots of answers', and swapped between 'personal' and 'official' accounts throughout the interview, prefacing replies with comments such as, 'personally, as one of the four people who set it up […]', or, 'well, officially […]'. Similarly, TMI1 offered a range of possible starting points, commenting:

I can begin in 2005 with my own contribution […] to the world of the artist-led space […] I tell you what I would love to talk about [...] so I was 13 in 1997 […]

While TMC1 appeared to speak from varying simultaneously held positions then, TMI1 re-interpreted and re-assembled particular 'episodes' and events so as to introduce particular stances or actions in response to the questions asked, and to be heard as meaningful in each case.

Yet despite this often nuanced articulation of self (as evidenced by many other members), thirteen of the eighteen members interviewed self-identified at some point as an 'artist' with very little, if any, supporting evidence or comment. For example, six members at some point in the interview commented:

I'd just worked on a piece with another artist […] and we submitted this work [TME+4]

I've just taken part as an artist [TMI3]

[I took part] just as an artist [TME+4]

I'm an artist, like, you know, everyone there is an artist [TMC2]

[…] and as an artist […] [TMC2]

Most artists, erm, me anyway […] [TME+2]

In each case, the identity of 'artist' is presented without any suggestion of its having a particular value or status. Rather, members seem to self-identify as artists matter-of-factly, and without indicating any need for this identity to be somehow 'proved' or supported. Indeed, only one member (TMI1 above) talked of childhood, and no mention was made of early moments of creativity.

## 6.3.2 The 'professional' artist

Yet while members in The Mutual identifying as 'artists' did not often provide 'evidence' for this position, a number did imply particular criteria, or indicated certain boundaries and/or strategies employed. For example, the nine members of The Mutual who drew timelines all began these with 'episodes' of study (and events or exhibitions produced during this time), or at the point of graduation, as demonstrated in the timeline produced by TME+2 (Figure Nineteen). No member noted a date of birth, or any decision, event or period of time before this period of study.
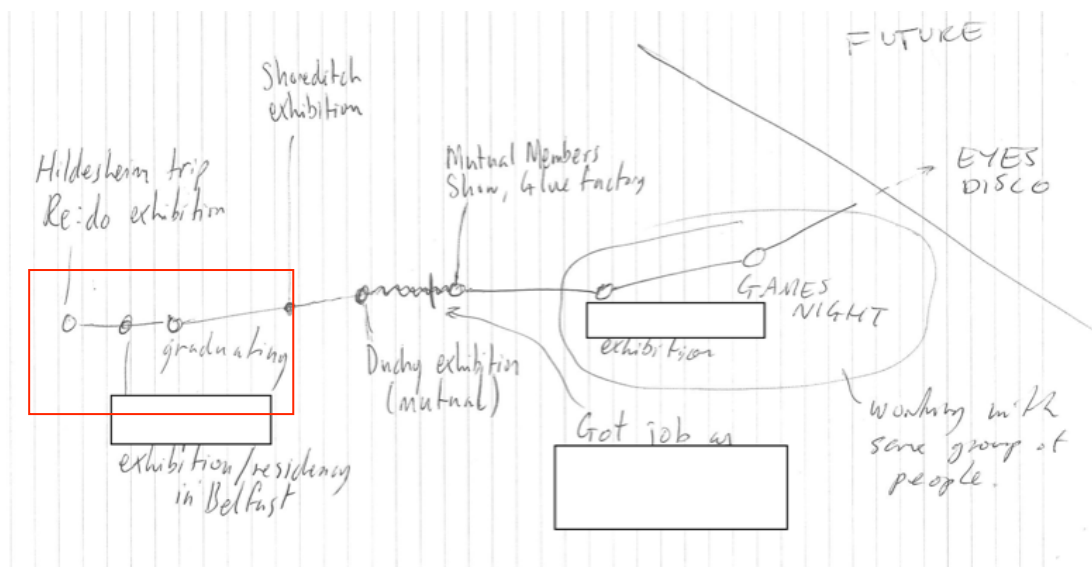


**Figure Nineteen**. Timeline drawn by TME+2 with student exhibitions and graduation marked.

TME+3 also remarked upon this specific point in time, when he commented:

There's a kind of invisible barrier between being at art school and […] after art school […] it's only at the point of graduation that you're kind of admissible [to the wider network […] you can't really get involved with that much as a student.

In this statement, TME+3 suggests a social understanding of identity as produced (rather than as something held 'internally'), and, crucially, as produced between people within unequal power relationships (e.g. one party 'admits' the other) in respect to certain criteria (e.g. you must have graduated). Thus TME+3 indicates that the identity of 'student' works to curtail opportunity in preventing access to 'the wider network', later described as 'Glasgow's kind of […] art world'. However, given that the members who drew timelines included the name of the university they studied at, and often the year they left, it would seem that graduation acted as a marker for those wishing to be 'admitted'.

Several additional members also indicated an awareness of either 'admission criteria' or the importance of recognition by those within a recognised 'art world'. For example, TME1 commented:

I mean so much about art is […] just having your work seen isn't it and being known, people have to know who you are.

TME1 thus suggests that it is not enough to create artworks: artworks need to be 'seen' and the producer needs to be 'known' in order to fully validate the identity of 'artist. In which case, opportunities to make and exhibit work (and potentially be seen and known) are of consequence. We might then note that TME1 earlier remarked:

To exhibit I had to first become a member […] I don't even know if I'm still a member or not I've got no idea.

It would seem then that TME1 knowingly drew upon membership in recognition of the value of social acceptance that might accrue from the exhibition opportunities provided. Other members similarly appeared to draw upon membership as an opportunity for identity-work, but forged social and emotional ties to the group through their involvement. For example, TMI1 first remarked that he wasn't,

Just doing it [making work] for the pure pleasure of being an artist because actually I live in a world where there's other contexts so I have to play those games a bit, or at least try and be conscious of them.

TMI1 here similarly articulates membership as a strategy, or 'game-play', that opens up opportunities for him to be known, or, as he later phrased it, 'noticed'. However, when asked if he would consider

leaving The Mutual, TMI1 replied that even though membership was no longer 'doing anything' for him, he 'wouldn't do it because I really like [x] and [x] and I would never do that to them'.

For other members again, the social ties formed through membership offered more than the chance to be recognised and validated. For example, TME+2 remarked:

> You can't be an artist without, you know, a community essentially […] you do need to be bouncing ideas off people and […] people to see your work and you to see their work, that stuff is important […] maybe you can do the occasional beautiful object or something, but I don't know, it just doesn't seem to work like that [TME+M2].

In this example, TME+2 again draws upon the social connections offered through membership, but suggests reciprocal and equal relationships linked to notions of development and exchange as central to being an 'artist', rather than the conferral of identity from a position of relative power.

## 6.3.3 The legacy of the 'romantic' artist

However, while TME+2 rejected all but the 'occasional beautiful object', thus arguably signalling a distance from more 'Romantic' understandings of the artist, these understandings were not entirely absent. For example, in addition to positioning himself in relation to this idea, TME+2 later remarked when drawing a timeline:

> I'm going to leave that out […] that job wasn't really that important in terms of, like, you know, it's just, just money.

Similarly, TMP2 commented:

> I had a part-time job in [x] but you don't have to quote me on that one […] always part-time, always part-time.

In both examples, members appear to distance themselves from certain forms of paid employment, and to demote these positions in relation to the desired 'artistic' identity, in what Bourdieu (1993) might term a disavowal of the economy, and which Røyseng et al. (2007) associate with the myth of the charismatic artist. TMC3 was more explicit:

> We had left art school thinking 'oh well being a professional isn't really important' [and] 'making money is selling out', all those sorts of clichés and they're true and they're still kind of persuasive.

It would appear then that understandings associated with the 'romantic artist' continued to promote certain behaviours and attitudes, even when these understandings were simultaneously referred to as 'clichés'. Moreover, while members often self-identified as 'artists' seemingly straightforwardly, two members dissociated from this identity in a manner that implied recognition of its high social value. For example, TMC1 remarked during a committee meeting:

> At the moment I am not an artist, I don't know if I'll ever be an artist ever again […] I just don't want, I just don't want to be dishonest […] I don't want to have to pretend.

A parallel might here be drawn with TMP1, who when drawing a timeline for himself drew a cross and stated, 'I stopped being an artist there' (Figure Twenty). When asked, TMP1 suggested that he would still consider himself an artist, but wished to point out that he hadn't 'exhibited since then'.
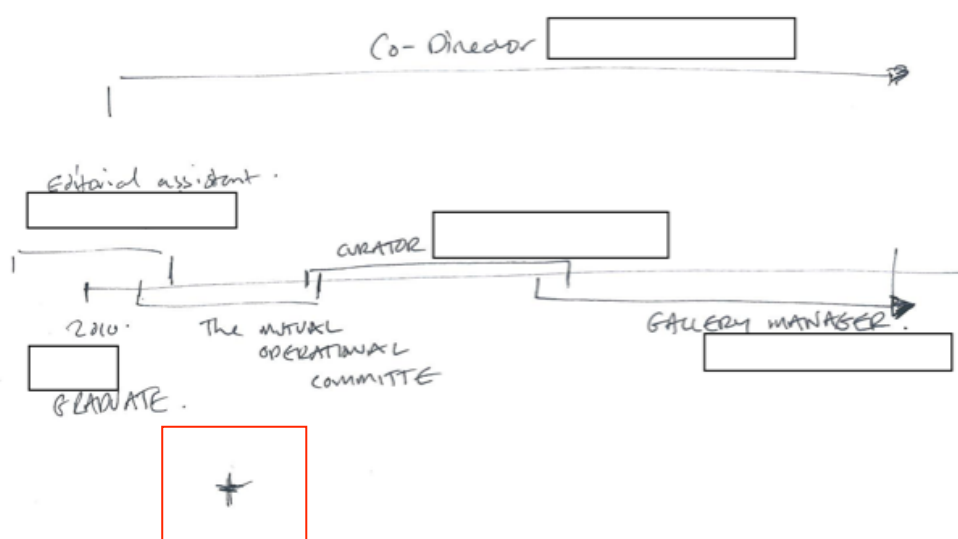


**Figure Twenty**. Timeline drawn by TMP1 with 'x' marked.

In both examples, TMC1 and TMP1 express unease with an identity claimed in the past, and both take care to demarcate an end point after which the identity is either no longer valid (e.g. a pretence) or put on hold. Yet other 'past' identities (e.g. that of 'student') are not likewise presented as troublesome, or as requiring a counter-statement so as to avoid accusations of 'dishonesty'. It is arguably in this concern to distance themselves that TMC1 and TMP1 indicate they perceive the identity of 'artist' as having some special value.

Furthermore, although four members interviewed articulated some kind of identity-struggle, two of these four members appeared to have encountered these difficulties because they *did* identify with more 'romantic' understandings of the artist. For example, TME1, commented:

A lot of questions came up in my mind about art and about why I was doing it and about where it was taking me […] I enjoyed the process of creativity [but] moving my work from one place to another and another place to another without any kind of real sense that it was doing something positive for the world was a little bit of a struggle for me […] I never fitted into that sphere of intellectualised stuff […] I would open up the odd art magazine and start reading and just thought this isn't really for me.

Similarly, TME3 remarked:

I suppose you could say I'm having a bit of a mid-twenties life crisis and I don't know quite what I'm doing and I don't know where my art practice fits in […] I think I'm a little bit suspicious of [the art world] because sometimes it doesn't seem genuine […] I loved making […] it's a way of life […] I want to figure out what I'm naturally better suited to […] I haven't found something that makes me able to make a living and also feels absolutely right.

Both TME1 and TME3 thus express a discomfort with the practices and values promoted within a 'professional' art world (e.g. moving between multiple exhibitions, employing 'intellectualised' languages, or the 'non-genuine' forming of relationships) and mark out a disjunction between this world and a 'genuine', 'natural' and 'creative' self. Accordingly, both members position themselves as unable to participate fully in the 'art world' identified, and so withdrew from it, searching for more suitable and appropriate roles that would better match their inner selves, that is, something 'that felt right'.

## 6.3.4 Identity-work

While the majority of members matter-of-factly self-identified as 'artists', or attempted to negotiate the specific boundaries and implications of this claim then, a further number appeared to use membership to The Mutual as an opportunity to 'test out' certain identities and positions, or suggested that they had done so in the past. For example, when asked where she would like to work in the future, TMC2 replied:

I don't know yet, I think I'm still kind of figuring that out […] which is why I'm so conscious of trying to get involved in everything at the moment so I can learn what it is that I want to do.

Likewise, TMP3 remarked:

[My time as a committee member] made me realise that I didn't want to be involved in programming or curating, but it was really good to immerse myself for a while […] to come

to that decision […] it confirmed that I wanted to go on and do this course [an MA in Art Writing].

In both cases, members suggest a sense of self as worked upon and explored through a variety of experiences and opportunities, as sought out and capitalised upon through membership. Thus, for example, TMC2 remarked that she wanted to 'build up some experience' in the hope of later attaining a 'paid job' in the arts, envisaged as comprising 'personal practice' and 'acting almost like a facilitator'. Similarly, TMP3 stated that, through her previous experiences (as made available through membership), she was able to test out certain areas and identify one as of particular interest.

Additional members spoke of the opportunity to exhibit in a similar fashion. For example, TMC3 commented:

> We were working in non art related jobs and we needed to hang on, to hang on to art […] it was a chance to thrash out […] is this what I want to do? […] The shows that we had in the summer were a reason to keep making work.

TMC3 here suggests that the early exhibitions held by The Mutual acted as an incentive: an opportunity to 'thrash out' the role of the artist (and related ways of working and the benefits or drawbacks associated and encountered here). Likewise, two members who did identify themselves as 'artists' remarked:

> [The Mutual] were kind of instrumental in more than half of the work that I actually put out after graduating […] usually it takes longer to get yourself into a position […] [it] can be difficult and time consuming [TME+3].

> I mean it was quite a big deal for me at the time […] it was the first time I had done a sort of proper exhibition out of art school […] it meant a lot to me [TME+2].

TME+3 and TME+2 thus align themselves with a 'professional', or art world conscious, approach to arts practice, distinguishing, for example, between 'proper' (and presumably 'non-proper') exhibitions and recognising the need for a particular, socially validated, 'position'. However, both also remarked upon earlier exhibitions as accepting either work produced at the last minute, or work the quality of which they now considered dubious. As such, both TME+3 and TME+2 appeared to indicate an 'episode' of experimentation and exploration, involving a 'testing out' of the practices and identities associated with being an 'artist', and the boundaries at which these operated.

### 6.3.5 Summary: The Mutual

As in 85A and Empty Shop, the members of The Mutual interviewed did not articulate singular understandings of the self, but instead combined and managed multiple identities, although there was arguably a stronger correspondence between the 'artists' described in published texts as 'emergent' (2009b, 2011c, 2012b) or 'early stage career' (2010a, 2012a), and the self-identifications offered by members, thirteen of whom described themselves as 'artists', and a further nine who either positioned themselves, or held The Mutual to be for, 'early career creative practitioners' [TMC1] or 'graduates' of some kind (as also discussed in Section 5.3.2).

Members of The Mutual further appeared to offer narrative accounts of the self, at times re-combining and re-positioning 'episodes' so as to speak meaningfully on a variety of points and/or from a variety of positions. However, while members of 85A and Empty Shop tended to strongly identify with a 'creative' self (of some kind), and to 'evidence' this self via the arrangement of events or actions from the past, the majority of members matter-of-factly self-identified as artists without providing any such justification. In this, the position of 'artist' is arguably constructed not as a 'special kind of person' in William's (1983 [1958]: xv) sense of 'exalted ability', nor did members commonly attempt to demonstrate features associated with Røyseng et al.'s (2007) 'charismatic myth'. However, members arguably also stopped short of identification with Becker's (2008 [1982]: xxiv) notion of the artist as a worker 'not so very different from other kind of workers', for artistic practice and membership were largely held apart from paid work (e.g. TMC2 describes 'work for money' as the 'nitty gritty' stuff done 'as well') and almost all of those interviewed retained authorship of artworks rather than positioning themselves as any kind of 'team player' (Zolberg 1990: 108). Indeed, as was argued above, while members of The Mutual did not overtly signal 'Romantic' understandings of the artist and tended to adopt what are here termed 'professional' understandings of this position, conscious of opportunities by which to accrue reputation and thus distinguish themselves from others (Becker 2008 [1982]), it would seem that certain aspects commonly associated with the 'Romantic' artist, particularly with regards to finance, endured. Finally, we might return to Lawler's assertion, drawing on Goffman's 'dramaturgical' understanding of identity as performed (1969), that identity is 'always something that is done' (Lawler 1008: 105) or worked upon, and note that for many members, The Mutual appeared to work as a space in which to test and explore possible identities and understandings of the self, or as a space in which to perform 'identity-work'.

### 6.4 Multiple selves in distinct, complex and bounded cultures

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that members in each ARI adopted, managed and claimed (albeit at times unsuccessfully) multiple identities, and neither 'obviously' nor uniformly identified themselves in that no single understanding worked across all three ARIs, or within any one. Rather, practices of identification and the specific understandings engaged with appeared to be actively managed, (re)produced and (re)combined, and were at times suggested to be emotionally fraught: not

everyone was able or willing to position themselves in certain ways, and, indeed, not everyone involved in the ARIs wished to identify themselves as an 'artist'. As such, we might take issue with notions of the 'artist' as unproblematic or as belonging to a single, universally applicable, category of being, as suggested, for example, by the art philosopher George Dickie who argued that an artist was simply a 'person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art' in a manner ordinarily understood by 'everyone' (2001: 55), and by a number of authors writing more recently about ARIs, as discussed in Chapter Two (e.g. Ault 2002, Apple 2012, Staniszweski 2012 and Detterer 2012).

The complexities in identity-work discussed above are perhaps unsurprising however, for those interviewed were not only involved in the ARIs in question, but also positioned themselves as, for instance, 'County Durham people' and 'fathers' [ESF3], 'cyclists' [TMP1] and brewers [85AC4]. In other words, members were understood throughout the research project as, and at times during the interviews called upon, multifarious lives that only partly played out within the boundaries posed by the ARI. There is thus some need for caution with regards the research findings, so as to avoid presenting the ARIs and those involved as somehow 'detached' from wider contexts and lives lived elsewhere (Pederson and Dobbin 2006, Wolff 2005) or as constructing a sense of self that draws upon the ARI only.

However, while bearing this in mind, we might point to distinctions noted throughout the chapter, namely that members in each ARI tended to identify themselves in ways not suggested by members in either of the others. Thus, for example, although members in both 85A and Empty Shop talked of 'creative' selves, members in Empty Shop largely positioned these selves as stable while members in 85A tended to emphasise reinvention. Similarly, although members in 85A indicated that certain criteria or 'proofs' were required to justify the title of 'artist' or 'filmmaker', members of The Mutual regularly put forward these identities without any such justification, and in Empty Shop, members tended to select 'episodes' relating to childhood, yet all members who drew timelines in The Mutual began with either a period of study or at the point of graduation.

In other words, it would appear that in working to 'keep a particular narrative going' (Giddens 1991: 54) some, although by no means all, members in each ARI identified themselves (at least in part) in relation to *selective* and seemingly shared understandings, and within the parameters implied by these understandings, so as to tell recognisable stories about the self that would render that self 'intelligible' to others (Moore 1994: 118). Thus we might view the identities discussed above not as 'achieved in isolation' but as achieved culturally and socially, and within certain constraints and contexts (Lawler 2008: 104). Indeed, members who were either unwilling or unable to draw upon such 'core' understandings tended to articulate an awareness of their being 'out of place' (e.g. as was discussed in relation to TME1 and TME3 in Section 6.3.3) or incoherent (e.g. as suggested by ESLT1 in Section 6.2.4).

We might further add here that members may have adopted roles specifically for my benefit during the interview, or have refrained from claiming certain positions on account of my position as a researcher (or as a woman of a certain age, or past practitioner), who was likely to later transcribe and analyse results, and to publish information containing this data. In other words, we might repeat here that the interview was likely to bring identities into play, and that both the members interviewed and I were active in this process (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 17).

None of the above is to argue that any of the members interviewed were 'false' or engaged in deception, were equally able to position themselves or did so in identical ways, or that members simplistically 'acted out' culturally encouraged identities; suggestions that are rejected in the above. Rather, it is to draw attention to the complex and potentially significant processes and boundaries involved in identity-work, to the active and nuanced accounts of the self articulated by members, and to engage with the limits and possibilities offered up and closed down to members in each ARI. It is in this sense that two further points are elaborated below: the role of the social and material in identity work, and the continued legacy of the 'Romantic artist'.

## 6.4.1 The cultural, social and material in identity-work

It was suggested in Chapter One that cultures, as lived 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10) were 'intimately bound up' with the social (Inglis 2005a: 7) and the material. Although this is arguably the case with regard to all of the processes of meaning-making discussed in this thesis, it is perhaps in relation to notions of identity-work that these relationships can be seen most clearly, for members appeared to draw not only on cultural 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10), but also social relationships and a number of material resources and 'actants' (Latour 1987), all of which were made available through membership.

For example, the importance of social recognition in identity-work has been much discussed above, with TME+3, TME1, TMI1, TME+2, ESF2, ES31 all explicitly indicating the need for certain identities (in these cases that of 'artist') to be recognised and validated by certain significant others, whether those others were involved in an art world to which members hoped to be admitted [TME+3], 'mates' [ESF2], or people encountered at parties [ES31]. Indeed, ESD2 at one point remarked:

> It's all the things that you get by being able to say I had a solo exhibition […] we legitimise [x] as an artist.

It would appear then that some members, even if they articulated ideas of the artist as a 'natural' identity (or something someone 'was'), were nevertheless aware of the value and significance of social recognition. Moreover, in the example above it might be argued that ESD2 brings to bear his (relatively powerful) position in Empty Shop, as well as the cultural standing, or reputation, of Empty Shop to 'speak and act' in the name of the group (Bourdieu 1986: 53) and thus legitimates [x] as an artist not as

an individual, but on behalf of Empty Shop, something perhaps indicated by ESD2 when he states that 'we legitimise [x], rather than 'I' legitimise [x]. Here then, we encounter issues of relative power and authority (themes returned to in Chapter Eight) as both socially and culturally constructed. However, while it would appear that some members (e.g. the co-directors at Empty Shop, 'core' members in 85A and committee members at The Mutual) were arguably better placed to 'confer' status and identity than others, in that they could decide what was made and shown and by whom, some caution is needed, for in the case of ESF2 and ES31 those rejecting desired identities as 'fraudulent' were positioned not as highly ranked keepers of an art world, but as friends and acquaintances from other spheres of life. We might further note that while members of 85A often 'conferred' artistic status on the group as a whole or upon fellow members, they continued to struggle with the title in application to themselves. It would therefore appear that the construction of identity, while potentially enabled by powerful groups, individuals, and relationships such as those located within each ARI, was neither simplistic nor permanent, and could equally be 'undone' (or, presumably, confirmed) by connections to groups, individuals, and relationships held or encountered elsewhere.

We might further suggest that much of the above cultural and social identity-work relies, at least in part, on the material: on exhibitions, artworks, art projects and physical spaces (of some kind) in which to exhibit or make works. Indeed, Zolberg (1990: 111) points to a 'trend in thought' in which the understanding of the artist is 'inseparable […] from his or her creation' that brings to mind 85AC1 and 85AC3 remarks whereby recently produced and completed works were required before either could claim, or 'justify', certain identities (filmmaker and artist respectively). Moreover, we might note that in the above discussions exhibitions were repeatedly highlighted as an opportunity to accrue an artistic reputation, and that certain objects (e.g. ESLT1's childhood drawing) were regularly reified as 'evidence' within narrative accounts in support of the identity (or identities) claimed. Furthermore, some members appeared to draw upon artworks not as 'proof', but as actants (Latour 1987) in identity-work. For example, ESD1 remarked:

> I normally describe myself as an artist, yeah, I am an artist, the photography I did was fine art photography.

Here, ESD1 appears to consult with the objects he has produced, to see what they might tell him about his own identity. In other words, the photography produced by ESD1 is positioned as capable of either endorsing or limiting understandings of the self.

It might further be noted that members in each example draw upon *select* relationships and materials only, that is, those suggested to have a particular cultural value, rather than any object or person known to them. In other words, members appeared to draw upon mutually constitutive and interlocking relationships between the cultural, social and material. For instance, TME+3 highlighted the importance of exhibitions in 'impressive' [TME+3] galleries when consolidating a 'professional' artistic identity, a statement that appears to combine the cultural, social and material in a manner

arguably only of value for those working within 'professional' art world norms, and not those Becker (2008 [1982]: 233-258) might term 'mavericks', 'folk artists' or 'naïve' artists, who largely work 'outside' this gallery system. This is not to argue that all members were equally able to draw upon interlocking relationships, or to claim that they did so in the same manner. Nor is it to attempt any definitive 'unpicking' of the social, material and cultural: the example of the 'impressive gallery' perhaps demonstrates how difficult, if not impossible, such a task would be. Instead, it is to highlight multiple, complex, overlapping and intersecting relationships so as to recognise that while this thesis approaches identity, and the ARIs more generally, through the lens of culture, care must be taken not to overstate this case, or to position as 'secondary' understandings of the social and material.

Moreover, the social, cultural and material do not together represent any 'complete' understanding of identity. For instance, we might briefly add that ESD1, when observed walking down the street to buy milk, was continually stopped and asked about current activities at Empty Shop in a manner similar to that recounted by TMC1 and TMC3, for in each instance members were physically recognised, out of context, as a 'person entitled to speak on behalf of the […] group' (Bourdieu 1986: 53). It would therefore seem that even if the self is always 'embodied' (Giddens 1999: 56), some bodies come to represent, and are physically recognised 'as', certain roles, identities, and potentially 'as' whole ARIs. Although this thesis has not the space in which to do further understandings such as this justice, it is nevertheless important to highlight additional avenues of exploration, and to underline that the concepts and discussions presented here are necessarily partial.

## 6.4.2 The legacy of the 'Romantic' artist

The final section in this chapter takes one pre-existing understanding concerning artistic identity, that of the 'Romantic artist' or what Røyseng et al. (2007) term the 'charismatic myth', and further investigates the articulated application and impact of this across the three ARIs so as to explore the ways in which members constructed distinct cultures 'under conditions and with 'raw materials'' not wholly of their own making (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11). Although this exploration could equally have focused upon understandings of the artist as 'craftsperson' or 'professional', the artist as 'Romantic' is selected here for it arguably remains both a dominant understanding in general (as Carroll 1999 has argued). Indeed, and importantly for this thesis, it remains an understanding that is held to reinforce essentialist notions of the artist, as encountered in much of the literature concerning ARIs, whereby,

> Part of the fuel for the exalted ambitions of the alternative art groups was the almost mystical belief that artists are endowed with special sensitivities and powers that set them apart from other people' (Goldbard 2002).

Similarly, as noted in Chapter Four, Røyseng et al. (2007: 1) have argued that the charismatic myth remains a 'core idea […] crucial to the perception of the artist as an occupational category'.

Yet although notions of the 'Romantic' or 'charismatic' artist were suggested in each ARI, we might immediately temper Royseng et al.'s (ibid) statement, for the 'Romantic' artist by no means always constituted a central or core idea. Rather, members of The Mutual appeared to call upon associated characteristics infrequently and tangentially, while members of Empty Shop and 85A split apart the characteristics noted by Royseng et al., so that only members of Empty Shop generated narratives of the self that began with moments of creativity in childhood (as held to demonstrate 'authentic' creativity and inborn talent), and only those in 85A positioned themselves outside of a cultural 'mainstream' (and thus as innovating on the margins). Moreover, no member in any ARI identified themselves as a genius, as having a sacred or divine calling, or suggested they had been 'wrecked by poverty and alcohol [or] madness' (Heinrich 1996 [2003]: 123). To return to Clarke et al. (1993 [1976]: 11), it would therefore seem that members in each ARI were at least partly able to select from a 'historical reservoir [of] existing cultural patterns'.

However, not all 'existing cultural patterns' were so easily rejected, and members were not all equally accepted as 'legitimate' everywhere. For instance, we might note that members who articulated 'Romantic' understandings of the self positioned themselves very differently in each ARI. ESF2, for example, suggested he was welcomed at Empty Shop as an 'authentic' artist and was thus able to resolve a previous struggle to self-identify, while TME1 and TME3, who articulated similar understandings of a 'natural' and 'genuine' creative self, perceived themselves as 'out of place' within a strategic and 'non-genuine' art world and struggled to self-identify in a manner both accepted and acceptable, resulting in periods of crisis. Indeed, despite considerable early success in her artistic career, TME1 had largely gone on to withdraw from this art world and to seek employment in other fields. Similarly, while the 'special status' of the artist in 85A often functioned as a token of esteem, for others this kind of 'grand speaking' about the self formed a significant barrier to the construction of a socially legitimate identity (e.g. ES31), or appeared to prompt concern with potential accusations of fraudulence (e.g. TMC1, TMP1).

The above again serves as a reminder not to overstate the importance of any one given culture, for TME1 and TME3 positioned themselves as 'out of place' with regards to a larger art world, rather than the culture of a single ARI, which both suggested to have been a generally positive experience, and indicated understandings of the self as formed prior to membership. There are thus interesting questions posed here that the next chapter will pick up on, including if and how cultures may be 'learned' by members, and under what conditions. However, we might cautiously note that members who suggested strong social ties tended to articulate largely 'resolved' understandings of the self, while those who positioned themselves at a remove from membership were more likely to struggle to identify. For instance, ES31 talked of her membership predominantly in the past tense and was located at some geographical distance, while both TME1 and TME3 had participated in events with The Mutual as one-off and sporadic involvements. Yet as Chapter Five noted, understandings of

'belonging' and membership were themselves unpredictable and open to interpretation. These are then complex discussions to which the thesis returns in Chapter Eight.

However, we might add here that there was one particular kind of positioning that acted across all three ARIs: 85AC1, 85AC3, 85AE1, 85AC7, ESLT1, ES31, TMC3, TMC2, TME+2, TMP2, TMC3 in the above (and many more besides) all took care to distance themselves from certain forms of paid employment. For many, the issue of payment was explicitly articulated as problematic, and as requiring explanation. For example ESF3 paused at one point to comment:

> I keep mentioning money and payment all the time but that's not honestly how I operate, I'm not just a money grabber […] I have a business-like approach to how I sustain a creative practice, so that's why, I'd just like to clear that up.

85AC6 similarly indicated a tension, albeit a different one, between the identity of 'artist' and payment when she remarked the 'freedom associated [with] being an artist, being creative, that is under jeopardy when money is brought […] into things'. For some this tension appeared to necessitate a choice: TME1 for example remarked that 'at some point you have to prioritise', although she went on to state that she was still attempting to 'find a balance' between her creative practice and her other roles. Others, including TME+3, TME1, TME3, TMD2, ESF3 and ESLT1 all articulated a 'struggle' between continued artistic practice and a need to provide for themselves. Thus, for example, TME+3 was unable to take up internships and residencies, even though these were marked out as potentially valuable, because they 'rarely paid very well' and he needed to have a job. TMD2 similarly remarked that he had been unable to make art in the last couple of years as he had neither the time nor the money to do so, while ESF3 noted that his 'different hats' were 'directed by a need to make money, to survive, to save up […] to provide for my family'. For others again, identity-work offered a means by which to circumvent wider cultural expectations of this kind: 85AC5 identified himself as a designer so as to be adequately paid for his labour.

As such, members of the ARIs neither suggest that they were uniformly and permanently caught within the boundaries posed by certain cultural understandings, nor that they were able to make themselves up in any way that they liked. Rather, the above discussion demonstrates the complex, active and at times uneven nature of identity work within and upon pre-existing 'cultural patterns', and the significant 'real life' implications for all of those involved.

The thesis now turns to the final lens employed within the thesis, to consider the cultural construction of 'learning' within the ARIs, which also, as will be demonstrated, had significant implications for those involved.

# Chapter Seven

## Learning cultures: lived participation, interaction and 'intrinsic' experience

This final discussion chapter picks up on points made in both of the previous chapters to investigate perceptions of 'learning' as articulated by members. The chapter again first considers a range of texts for each ARI, and then returns to interview data to ask: what forms of 'learning', if any, are posited throughout membership, and what outcomes are described, or hoped for? Do members note any barriers to learning, or any enabling factors? Is membership held to entail the 'taking up' of certain meanings and values and if so, what do members suggest they had to learn to do or be, and how?

It is argued throughout the chapter that although members by no means always suggested that they formed or joined the ARIs in question in order to learn, when describing their involvement they commonly used terms and put forward understandings that might be recognised as (and were at times explicitly highlighted as examples of) 'learning', that is, as involving the gaining and sharing skills, soliciting and giving of advice, developing or 'growing' as artists, participating in open-ended and experimental practices, solving problems and gaining experience. Moreover, in each ARI these processes and understandings were suggested to be fundamentally social and contextualised, and were again notably distinct across the three sites, suggesting that 'learning', like notions of identity and membership, was culturally bound. Indeed, members not only indicated that they had not only 'learned' new skills, specific practices, and group norms and values through their 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) of membership, but appeared to do so in relation to particular cultural and political ideals of the artist and of art, so that for some members the sharing of intrinsic skills constituted a 'legitimate' form of collective action, whereas others accrued certain 'experiences', in the hope that they might be later exchanged in return for a 'bigger' show, or paid position. In other words, it would seem that the ways in which members 'learned', through everyday interaction, worked to construct a specific artistic self, and one that worked in certain ways, to produce certain objects.

However, while some members were able to draw upon these practices and processes to significantly re-position themselves, and even transform understandings of the self, not all members were equally able to do likewise. As such, the final discussion section considers the possibilities for interaction, and further explores the pervasive understanding of 'skills' and 'experience' as something members 'have' and can 'transfer'.

## 7.1 85A

The website for 85A chronologically lists a number of projects, or 'provocative shows' (85A 2013e), and each show is described, usually in the past tense, as an already 'complete' and seemingly finalised piece of work. As such, there is little indication of the ways in which these projects came into being,

that is, of the working methods, techniques, processes or skills potentially involved or applied. Similarly, 85A describe themselves as 'tight-knit' and 'consolidated in their belief that work ought to reveal itself by non-conformist means' (2013e), thus suggesting an already agreed upon and established ethos. Indeed, as membership is neither outlined nor advertised, possible opportunities to 'learn' through involvement in the projects (e.g. to gain experience, share skills or develop ideas) are never highlighted or made explicit and terms such as 'learning', development', 'progress', 'participation', 'change', 'training' are all absent from published texts.

## 7.1.1 Participation and 'getting involved': forming and joining 85A

As discussed in previous chapters, when asked about their initial experiences of, and reasons for joining (if applicable) 85A, the majority of members pointed to pre-existing personal connections, friendships, working relationships and a desire to work together, so that the collective was suggested to have come together informally and 'naturally' [85AC7] over a period of time. Only very rarely was membership described as an opportunity to 'learn'. For example, 85AC3 noted that during *The Orzel,* the group 'started to realise […] we'd a good thing going […] we were kind of realising that something's happening', and that at this point the collective 'became' 85A. As such, he 85AC3 did not suggest that he had, at any point, 'joined' the collective. Similarly, 85AC5 noted that without intending to, he had found a 'gang' that 'wanted to do the same thing', with the result that he no longer wanted to work with anyone else, while 85AC1 remarked that having met some 'amazing' people it was 'natural to want to create together' and that early projects such as *The Secret Agent* had 'set the precedent for throwing, like, all your energy and strength and money into something' because 'you want it to be [the] best as it possibly can [be]'. In each case then, while members suggested processes that arguably involved 'learning' (e.g. in coming to 'realise' a change, or in figuring out collective practices), these processes were not presented as such, but were instead primarily articulated as a 'dedication' [85AC5] to the projects, and to each other.

Members who 'joined', however informally, after this early stage similarly highlighted pre-existing friendships and/or a desire to work with the collective as reasons for their having done so. 85AC4, for instance, commented that he didn't remember making a 'conscious choice', or deciding to 'sign up', but had instead been directly asked to help by a friend and then 'yeah, it just all happened', while 85AE2 noted that she had 'nagged' members, who she knew from her previous studies, to 'let me on when they were doing things', because she had 'really wanted to get involved'. Similarly, although 85AC2 indicated no pre-existing social ties, he recalled thinking that he 'had to get involved' after seeing a show that he had 'loved', later emailing to volunteer. 85AC2 then added that he had within a few months 'cemented' his place in the collective when he 'ended up moving in with a couple of the guys'.

85AE1 also volunteered after attending an event that he described as 'right up my alley', further noting he was at this point hoping 'to get […] some hands-on experience' – the only instance in which any

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member explicitly highlighted membership as an opportunity to 'learn' something. 85AE1 then went on to describe work on his first project as,

> A lot of fun it was, like, two weeks of […] meeting new people […] learning about the different works of art […] it was just learning about all these kinds of different practices and stuff.

When later asked about this, 85E1 added:

> I guess what I meant by that was I was […] more intentionally trying, it was the first time I had met any of them, so I was learning about all these people […] after that point it became more about the experience […] just the experience of doing it and seeing it completed.

Here then, and unlike 85AC4, 85AE2 and 85AC2 who all suggest 'natural' assimilation into the collective, 85AE1 remarks upon an 'intentional' attempt to 'learn about' existing members, practices and routines, implying that such an attempt was necessary (i.e. that members and practices were not obviously and immediately meaningful) and outlining a period of what might be termed 'apprenticeship' or 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991). Similarly, 85AC6, who attributed her involvement to pre-existing personal relationships, also indicated that the group dynamics she initially encountered were neither immediately nor straightforwardly meaningful, but that work on her first project had been 'petrifying', adding:

> They were like this is what *Sonic Soak* is, this is what we're doing, here's some […] ideas what we were thinking off you go and do something […] I remember just being like 'what should I do? You need to brief me'.

Attributing this difference to her training as a designer (e.g. by noting that designers were 'briefed, you go off and explore, and there's sort of tick boxes', but that 'they work very differently at art school') 85AC6 talked of her membership as involving a 'learning curve' that stretched over an extended period of time, in which she attempted to figure out group norms and her position and value within the collective. This is a point returned to below.

As such, members appeared to join 85A in varying ways (e.g. through pre-existing social ties, invitation or by requesting permission), but they predominantly suggested they had done so in order to 'create' [85AC1] with a particular 'gang' [85AC5] and/or to 'get involved' with the projects [85AC2]. In other words, members strongly suggested a desire to 'participate', or to actively contribute to ongoing activities and to become members 'of a certain community' (Sfard 1998: 6), with only 85AE1 linking this (potential) participation to the gaining of 'experience', and suggesting this as an initial factor in membership. Moreover, the accounts of early involvement discussed above suggest that not all 'new' members were 'subsumed' (Hager 2008: 683) into the collective equally. For instance,

although 85AC2 quickly established himself, 85AE1, who joined at an approximately similar time, remained, at the point of interview, a member of the extended family. Furthermore, some 'new' members struggled to negotiate or 'de-code' group norms and practices, at times for extended periods.

## 7.1.2 Pooling skills in the pursuit of the unknown

When talking about their involvement in 85A more generally, members likewise did not often use the term 'learning'. However, they did consistently describe open-ended projects involving continual change and discovery, which necessitated the sharing or pooling of experience and skills. For example, a number of members remarked:

> There's no real set path [85AC2].

> We're multidisciplinary, we'll just kind of move […] our interests will move from one area to another area [85AC5].

> It's always been kind of like a progression […] it's just like expanded and expanded […] no two projects have been the same […] when we have a meeting and go 'shall we take this same thing to another venue' it's always like 'no, we could make something new' […] I don't think anybody wants to repeat things […] and it seems to get bigger and weirder [85AC7].

When asked about this final remark, 85AC7 added:

> I don't necessarily mean it progressed in terms of like one project is better than another […] they're all different […] you still kind of get a kick out of doing them because […] it feels pretty new and interesting and it's almost like […] foraying a bit further into a territory.

In these examples, the lack of any 'set path' is repeatedly suggested to be a deliberate choice strongly connected to notions of 'discovery', so that the collective keeps 'moving', 'expanding' and 'foraying' into unfamiliar areas and territories, and where the 'new' is positively contrasted against repetition. Indeed, while 85AC3 noted that this way of working meant that 'each new build brings up new problems', and that this could be 'infuriating', he added that 'you kind of work your way around them [the problems]' and that this was 'really good fun' and 'gives you a lot of confidence'. Similarly, 85AC1, 85AC3 and 85AC7 all made a link between the open-ended working methods adopted, and a sense of continuing excitement (e.g. getting 'a kick' from the projects).

Furthermore, the 'new' often appeared to correlate with the 'unknown'. For example, 85AC1 told of an occasion on which he and a fellow member stopped watching a film halfway through because 'the

music was atrocious and the intertitles looked like someone had just done it on their laptop', both of which were suggested to be 'ruining the experience of this wonderful footage'. 85AC1 continued:

> During that cigarette break we're just like […] we should just do this ourselves right? And I think it was almost literally the next day [x] had, like, 13 musicians lined up […] it started formulating around then.

In this example, as with many of the other accounts related, 'core' members suggest a 'path' of action that is largely indeterminate at the point of initiation, and which involves work that is suggested to be 'new' to some, if not all, of the members (e.g. in the above example, despite deciding to re-score and title the film, it is never made clear that either member had experience of doing so previously). As such, all projects were held to have required contribution from a number of members, and all members noted points at which they had 'helped' or contributed, sharing professional contacts (as with the 'lining up' of musicians above), their time and labour, and/or their 'experience' as part of a joint endeavour, e.g. 'I helped him' [85AC1], 'helping out' [85AC2], 'they needed a hand' [85AE2], 'I helped edit' [85AC4] and 'helped them' [85AC5]. 85AC7 remarked upon this in more detail:

> Everybody's got different skills […] so there's a lot in terms of sharing and teaching each other […] [If] you've got more experience […] you want to share that and kind of help make […] the whole thing run a bit smoother […] that […] just makes things possible […] we need to have somebody that can operate this or […] somebody […] with more experience […] to train each other.

In the above examples then, an open-ended and collaborative practice that involves members in situated and fundamentally social processes of 'learning' is suggested to be complimented by, and to rely upon, the sharing of 'skills' and 'experiences' that are perceived as something members 'have' and which can be accrued and shared (or taught) while remaining intact. Thus, for instance, one member with 'experience' might train all the others how to operate a machine, where the knowledge or 'experience' imparted would be exactly the same for all members. In other words, members suggest, and combine, both 'participation' and 'acquisition' metaphors for 'learning' (Sfard 1998).

## 7.1.3 'Natural' roles and recognised abilities

The perception of 'experience' and 'skills' as something members 'had', and might share or contribute, was further linked to the roles and positions taken up by, or expected of, members. For example, three members commented:

> I think the primary roles that were required people just came by them naturally […] 'I'm good at this', 'why don't I take care of that' [85AC1].

It all filters down to who has got what skills […] I'm always going to be there for the build 100 per cent [85AC3].

I've been coming in in the building stage and building props […] I had different parts in the short movies […] using my skills where I can [85AE2].

In each case, it is suggested that the skills members perceive themselves to 'have' results in their 'natural' positioning within the group, so that, for instance, 85AE2 points to her experience building props as the prime reason for her taking on this role, while 85AC1 likewise positions himself as 'there for the build' on account of the skills he 'has'. 85AE2 later elaborated on this idea, remarking:

We all have from our disciplines what we call transferable key skills […] there's certain things you can do that you can transfer into a new situation although you might have to learn how to use a new set of tools.

Here, 85AE2 not only indicates that members 'have' certain skills, but suggests a) that the skills held by members are different, b) that these skills were accrued by, or imparted to, members during their training within varying disciplines, and c) that these skills can be usefully 'transferred' to 'new situations', or projects in 85A, even if some adjustment is required. A similar understanding was offered by 85AC5, who remarked that members' individual artistic practices and explorations outside the collective would then 'develop the skills [and] the knowledge [in 85A], this eventually all comes back to 85A'.

Moreover, for a number of members it was seemingly on account of these differing skills that each member of the collective was though able to make a valuable contribution. 85AE1 commented, for instance, that 'each person has their own talents and expertise to bring to the table', while 85AC2 similarly remarked that 'everybody brings just something different'.

Indeed, members often indicated that the skills possessed by each member were socially 'known', or recognised. For instance, three members remarked:

If [x] needed done, it would be assumed that it would be me that would be making it […] everyone's eyes look at you [85AC6].

He's also really literary so he's kind of the go-to guy for anything that's like scripting, like writing stuff or even doing formal proposals […] because he's got that literary bent [85AE1].

It almost, it doesn't really need to be said […] if an idea for a job comes up or a show comes up you know pretty much who's going to be doing what, almost without saying it [85AC2].

In the above examples then, particular members are singled out as having certain areas of expertise, as perhaps previously demonstrated (e.g. it is implied that [x] has already been involved with scripting, writing and formal proposals), and as such are expected, or 'assumed', to take on similar kinds of work or roles. Moreover, this expectation appears to have solidified into an operational system, so that 'who does what' can now be taken for granted.

This operational system was not suggested to be inviolable however, at least for certain members and in relation to certain areas of activity. For example, 85AC4 appeared to deliberately counter group expectations, noting that 'it would obviously make sense for me to do that kind of work but I don't always do it', while 85AC2 remarked that 'anybody can kind of pitch in' to set building. Similarly, 85AC1 first noted that members tended to 'automatically assume' who was doing what, but that,

> There's a few times too where […] people would be like, well, you know what, I'm going to try this because I've never worked in this medium before, but here's a possibility to […] and no-one would say no.

It would seem then that there was a certain degree of flexibility, and that members could volunteer to try new things, or to seize a 'chance […] to explore' [85AC1] with the support of the collective, as the section below further attests. However, it is worth briefly noting that not all skills and roles were so easily shared or taken up: although 85AC2 and 85AC7 pointed to set building as an opportunity for 'anybody' to pitch in, 85AC6 was the only member to work in a specific area, which she described as 'something I hold quite close', noting her reluctance to 'let go' or 'let other people come in'.

## 7.1.4 Personal development through group support

The perception of involvement as a chance to 'explore' [85AC1] was strongly suggested, with almost all members stating that they had learned something 'new', that the skills and experiences they 'had' had been improved or challenged through practice, and that they had been encouraged and supported by fellow members to 'develop'. For example, 85AE2 remarked:

> I asked 'what can I do?' and [was asked] can you assemble this massive robot arm? [Laughs] and I was a bit worried […] not worried but ok, there's a lot of power tools […] it's quite big, will I be able to do this? And then one of my fellow artists said, 'well, remember […] you can do this on a small scale, no problems, so you can probably do it on a big scale as well', and I thought yeah why not? […] I didn't know I could do this, but completed the thing and you gain confidence […] learning a lot about yourself and learning a lot of new skills when you're working in an environment like that.

A similar account was offered by 85AC3, who commented,

He'll be like […] 'What do you mean you cannae [can't] do that?' And you're like, should I be able to do that? And he's like, 'aye' and then you kind of think well why can't I do that? It's just a case of getting stuck in and trying it […] you learn like, oh right, that's a better way […] you each share this information without deliberately saying […] 'you do it like that' […] it's just a kind of natural exchange.

In both instances, 85AE2 and 85AC3 suggest that they were challenged, and then encouraged, to take up new techniques or to develop existing ones, with the result that both members suggested they had achieved something they had not previously considered themselves to be capable of. Indeed, both members connected this experience, overall, with increased confidence, although 85AC3 added that these attempts to work in new ways could be emotionally demanding. For instance, he at one point remarked:

Sometimes […] I'll find myself in the toilets […] with my feet up on the door about to burst into tears when it's all become a bit too much, but then that goes and you're right back to it.

Indeed, although neither 85AE2 nor 85AC3 originally marked out membership as an explicit opportunity to 'learn', both described their membership, on reflection, as having a significant impact. For example, 85AC3 noted that members had encouraged him to go to university to study photography, that the 'energy' of the group had 'pushed him' to 'deal' with his own practice, and that work on the projects provided an opportunity for him 'to [prove to] myself that I can do things'. Similarly, 85AE2 remarked:

When you work on a project like this and you finish, it feels amazing […] [it] gives you energy and creative input and makes you want to work even more on your own […] you get new challenges, you work in different locations, you meet new people, you get to be involved.

Indeed, 85AC6, who, as noted above, initially struggled to 'de-code' group norms and tended to work on a particular area alone (i.e. without the opportunity to 'naturally exchange' skills with other members) also described membership as having a profound impact upon her sense of self, remarking at various points:

I found it so intimidating to start with [pause] yeah massively intimidating […] all these cool people in front of you that make really cool artwork […] I used to beat myself up about a lot of things that I wasn't good at […] and then it changed […] you focus more on your position within the group […] the whole point is we bring our different expertise and experiences and skills to it […] I spent quite a while sort of building up confidence […] that's much more about developing as a person […] yeah you need to push yourself, but there's no point in me trying to be like [x].

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Throughout the interview then, 85AC6 contrasts a past self intimidated by the abilities of fellow members, with a confident and secure present self who had 'learned' to navigate cultural practices, and thus establishes a valid and meaningful position for her herself within the collective. In other words, 85AC6 seems to chart a change from 'novice' to 'core' or 'full member' (Wenger 1998: 152) so that she was, at the time of interview, recognised, both by others and herself, as competent and capable of making a valuable contribution to collective practice. Moreover, 85AC6 attributes this 'personal development' not to the gaining of any 'new' skills or techniques, or by becoming more 'like' existing members, but though an increased ability to 'focus' on her own 'expertise, experiences and skills', something she suggests is 'the point' of collective practice. It would seem then that membership offered not just the opportunity to develop new skills through practice (and thus potentially take up 'new' roles, explore 'new' areas and 'push' both individual and collective artistic practices), but to develop, re-position, even transform understandings of the self through the navigation of cultural norms and boundaries.

## 7.1.5 Summary: 85A

The above discussion touches upon a number of areas addressed in previous chapters, particularly with regard to notions of identity, and there is thus some need to return to the findings of all three chapters to further discuss the overlaps and relationships suggested, a concern that Chapter Eight takes up shortly. However, a number of key points might be briefly summarised here. For example, although members predominantly indicated that they had not formed or joined 85A in order to 'learn', members' 'lived experience[s] of participation' (Wenger 1998: 3) were strongly suggested to involve active involvement in open-ended projects that were necessarily social and contextualised, and which were held to require 'natural' and informal skill exchange between members, where 'skills' and 'experiences' were acquired elsewhere and then shared within the group. Moreover, members here suggest a particular, and selective, 'map of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10), (e.g. 85AC6's 'tick boxes' were not suggested to be valuable forms of 'learning'), which draw upon notions of artistic collective practice more generally. For example, in contributing skills accrued elsewhere to a jointly authored project, members were able to collectively and continually 'renew' a stock of knowledge that might allow for further 'forays' [85AC7], and which allowed members to 'become 'more than the sum of our parts' [85AC2]. In other words, it would seem that everyday interaction and involvement was nevertheless imbued with 'a belief in the empowering creativity of collective action and shared ideas' (Bishop 200: 178-9).

Yet, as was discussed above, while some members were able to draw upon this experience of participation to 'develop' new skills, areas of expertise and/or confidence, not all members were equally 'subsumed' (Hager 2005: 683). For instance, although 85AC2 quickly 'cemented' his place in the 'core' and could thus contribute to the direction and content of projects, 85AC6 noted a period of struggle to achieve this, while 85AE1 outlined an extended period of membership on the 'periphery'

with no suggestion that he might become a 'full member' (Wenger 1998). However, we might caution here against viewing the 'periphery' as necessarily restrictive: for 85AE2 this kind of 'boundary' membership was held to both allow for and encourage her individual practice and other roles.

## 7.2 Empty Shop

The texts published by Empty Shop, as with those reviewed for 85A, do not use the term 'learning'. They do, however, employ a range of arguably associated terms and phrases, and consistently link these to particular groups of people and specific outcomes. For example, Empty Shop is repeatedly described in mission statements as a 'platform to produce and exhibit' artworks (2009a, 2009f, 2010a, 2010b), and artists in particular are encouraged to use Empty Shop in order to 'develop a particular piece of work' (2009a) although it is further noted that the space can be used for 'anything arts related' (2009f), that 'anyone' can hire the spaces for 'creative projects' (2010b), and that 'people of all ages, backgrounds and levels of experience' thus have an 'opportunity to make, exhibit or view art' (*ibid*).

The 'FreeBirds Agreement' (2010c) also places 'a strong emphasis on producing and developing your art practice', although the means by which FreeBirds might do so is more prescribed. For example,

> The Empty Shop ethos – community, conversation and skill sharing is something we value highly […] [and] we expect you [to] share this approach to your practice and activities as a FreeBird.

FreeBirds are further encouraged to use the studios 'regularly' and 'actively', as 'essential for the dynamic of Empty Shop HQ' and are 'expected' to demonstrate a 'serious level of commitment to your fellow FreeBirds'.

However, people who 'don't fit into any of these categories' (i.e. who do not identify as 'artists', 'practitioners' or 'FreeBirds') are also invited to 'get involved' (2009a), and it is noted that 'there are […] opportunities to […] to gain experience […] by contributing in various hands-on ways' (2010b). Additionally, in an interview for *The Guardian* (Groves 2013) the co-directors suggest seemingly position themselves in the role of 'educators' or 'teachers'.

## 7.2.1 Doing things differently and 'common' values: forming and joining Empty Shop

When asked about their early experiences and motivations for forming Empty Shop, the co-directors both highlighted a desire to 'experiment' [ESD2] and to create something that they 'didn't think existed' [ESD1]. For example, ESD2 returned to a period of time prior to the opening where the two 'hung out quite a bit […] and shared a lot of thinking time'. ESD1 similarly commented that they used to 'go round galleries and various events and stuff and talk about how we would do this differently or

in some cases better', pointing out that 'most people go, 'right, a gallery is done like this'' and then 'replicate the same model over and over again', but that they thought it was 'important to do things differently' and had wanted to 'create something really accessible, really democratic'. ESD1 then recalled a point when 'we both happened to be back [in Durham]' and thought 'let's give it a go'. As such, and although both co-directors imply forms of 'learning' (e.g. in working out 'new' gallery models) neither explicitly suggest 'learning' as a reason for founding Empty Shop.

A number of members who joined later did, however, point to membership as an opportunity to gain 'experience', albeit in different areas and ways, that suggested just such an explicit focus on 'learning', even if they did not necessarily use that term. For example, ESV2 indicated that she had intentionally sought out arts groups, although not Empty Shop in particular, to find a location for her university-based group to meet and had later volunteered because she was 'looking for work experience'. Similarly, ESF2, who had just graduated, contacted Empty Shop as he was looking for a studio space that would allow him to 'grow as an artist'. Both members thus arguably sought membership out as a means by which to 'learn' actively (i.e. in noting that they wished to find out more, or develop further). Likewise, ESV1 also initially suggested that he had volunteered because he 'wanted to do something related to this [Empty Shop] […] after uni', and then added:

> I wasn't really doing it for C.V. purposes or anything, it was more […] just like getting involved […] I really like promoting art to different people […] I just felt by working with them I could help them do that.

Here, ESV1 re-works an initial statement to clarify that he would not do something 'just because it looked good on my C.V.', and that that 'wasn't the reason' he joined. Rather, membership is suggested to be motivated by ESV1's pre-existing interest in promoting art that correlated with a similar interest in Empty Shop, thus prompting his offer of 'help'.

Indeed, members predominantly suggested that they 'got involved' with projects and activities they 'recognised' as having values that matched their own. For instance ESF2, at an initial meeting to discuss the available studio spaces, noted that he quickly realised,

> They [the co-directors] were on the same wavelength as me with regards to art […] I just hit it off with them […] here it was just about making great art and pushing yourselves as artists […] and that's what sold me.

TMF2 thus posits this first encounter as a meeting of minds, where certain beliefs and values 'with regards to art' were recognised in kind. Similarly, ESF3 recalled that the first event he attended at Empty Shop,

Had an 'Empire Record' feel and what I mean by that is that everyone in the room really seemed to get what they were doing and there was lots of goodwill […] there was a really good vibe […] it felt like everybody was behind it.

In the above example then, ESF3 extends this notion of 'recognition' to suggest that everyone present 'got it' (i.e. could 'de-code' activities) and then got 'behind it' (i.e. recognised the activities as valuable). Moreover, both ES31 and ESV2 suggested a rapid assimilation into practices and activities that were likewise posited as immediately understandable: ES31, for instance, remarked that she had 'made friends with them all [the other members] instantly' noting that there was a 'lovely friendly sort of approach […] 'all-come-along, all-pitch-in' sort of thing'.

As such, no member suggested a period of 'apprenticeship', and no member articulated anything akin to a struggle to 'de-code' group norms, with the possible exception of ESLT1, who remarked that it took him 'six months' to notice there was 'somebody with a real vision' at Empty Shop, having previously contributed work to an exhibition in the expectation that he would 'never hear from them again'. However, members did suggest a number of forms of 'learning' and tended to associate these with particular types of activity, including 'artistic development'; 'experience and 'professional practice'; and the idea that the two co-directors 'led by example', which the following sections explore in turn.

## 7.2.2 Artistic 'growth'

When talking about their experiences of Empty Shop, all three FreeBirds remarked upon processes akin to 'artistic growth' or 'development', and all three noted the role that mutual support and encouragement had played in this. For instance, ESF2 remarked:

It's a good environment to be in I think […] it's just good to have a group around you, and seeing them pushes you […] you go the extra mile once you see the great work they're making and you realise I've got to start getting my bum in gear.

ESF2 further remarked upon a more direct encounter:

[X] would always challenge me [she'd] always come over and go, 'well why are you doing this, why?' Like at uni […] 'why is that important to you? Why that colour?' […] You couldn't get away with doing any old thing […] that was good that.

In these examples, ESF2 suggests a fundamentally social, active and on-going experience of 'learning', whereby other FreeBirds offered not universal or blanket encouragement but specific and focused critique, challenging existing working methods and the decisions taken, and 'pushing' each other

through both direct engagement and by example. Indeed, ESF2 later remarked upon the profound impact this kind of interaction had had upon the work he produced, stating:

> When I look at my portfolio of work […] I just think no way would that work have come about with, or went that way, if it hadn't been for me being in this place, without question.

Similarly, ESF1 pointed out that studio holders would 'motivate each other' and 'were able to give each other feedback', while ESF3, reflecting back upon his involvement, noted that,

> We would just sit round the table and say, 'we want to do this, what do you think?' And it was really kind of round-table blue-sky thinking, all those clichés […] people just talked and […] it was a safe place […] a bit of a laboratory […] you could test things, you could try things for the first time, you could test things together and develop projects and artworks together in collaboration and then reflect upon it once done.

In this final example, ESF3 suggests involvement in a continual and active process that seemingly enables and allows for creative experimentation, development and reflection, and thus again implies that membership had a profound impact on what kinds of artworks were made, how and with whom. ESF3's account does differ in some respects to those discussed above however. For instance, ESF3 includes in the 'we' the co-directors and possible others, not just the other FreeBirds. He also describes Empty Shop as a 'laboratory', a common metaphor in art practice (e.g. Bishop (2004: 51) talks of a 'reconceptualisation' of the "white cube" gallery model in favour of the 'studio or experimental 'laboratory'', listing a number of international curators and artists who likewise use the term). ESF1 and ESF2, however, rely on descriptors associated with previous training (e.g. ESF2 repeatedly suggested the experience was like 'being at uni', while ESF3 talked of the studio members holding 'crits' or 'critiques', a practice commonly employed within higher education).

Yet while all three FreeBirds articulated notions of 'development' and artistic 'growth' that relied upon critique and social encounter (with other FreeBirds and/or their artworks), they only very infrequently mentioned skills, or the sharing of skills, techniques or methods. For the FreeBirds, then, it appeared that 'growth' did not necessarily or explicitly involve the exchange of any skills or experiences.

## 7.2.3 'Experience' and professional practice

While the examples discussed above focus specifically on the making of artworks at Empty Shop, and thus tended to be articulated by the FreeBirds (as practising artists), further understandings related to involvement in exhibitions more broadly, including notions of 'experience' and professional practice', were suggested by a number of members and at times overlapped with some of the points discussed above.

For example, in addition to ESV2's comment that she wanted to get some 'good work experience' by volunteering at Empty Shop, ESV1 noted that he had been 'invigilating the exhibitions', and that he had curated an exhibition at Empty Shop with a friend. ESV1 went on to describe this exhibition as:

> Good because it was […] stuff that neither of us had really done before, you know, like where to hang things on a wall, it sounds quite simple but equally it's not because it's easy to make stuff look overcrowded […] it was kind of like uncharted territory […] we didn't really know what we were doing but actually it all went really well.

Similarly, when asked to describe Empty Shop, ES31 first noted that it was an 'art space run by artists' and then added:

> Its just really fun and people that haven't been able to show their work before can get a bit of an experience of that and learn what it actually is like to deal with putting something on a wall, which is quite good.

ES31 later commented additionally:

> If you submit something to a big gallery you might not necessarily be asked to show up with your painting and put some nails in […] that's really hands-on stuff that I think is really useful for young artists or mature artists or hobbyists or anything […] I've seen girls that cant even use tape measures, that could have been fixed just by going along to Empty Shop.

In each instance, members point to the gaining of 'experience' through their involvement with varying exhibitions, and seemingly posit 'experience' as active, practical engagement in 'new' areas, and as open not just to 'artists' but to 'people', volunteers, and 'hobbyists or anything'. Moreover, while members here suggest 'experience' is acquired, retained and transferable in some respects (e.g. ES31 implies that once you know how to use a tape measure in one situation, you can do so again elsewhere), both ESV1 and ES31 arguably stop short of suggesting the direct application of one 'experience' to a new situation, but instead imply that they have learned to operate within broad parameters of practice. For example, ESV1 notes that 'stuff' should not look 'overcrowded', but does not suggest any particular means for achieving this (e.g. exact measurements between works), while ES31 suggests that working out how to 'actually' install work is 'useful' and 'good', but is something that people learn to 'deal with', rather than highlighting any 'fixed' procedure. As such, both ESV1 and ES31 seemingly here refer to 'experience' as a means by which to learn certain 'practical' techniques and methods, and as a means by which to test out, and work in relation to, 'professional' norms.

A number of FreeBirds similarly suggested notions of 'experience' when talking about the putting together of exhibitions. For example, ESF2 remarked that he had been involved in 'pretty much […] everything' since joining, noting that he had 'helped in some shape or form' with 'quite a lot of the

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exhibitions'. Moreover, ESF2 later added that he 'wasn't so good with curating' or 'experienced' in this prior to his membership at Empty Shop, adding,

> Taking the experience of […] short deadlines […] for example, if you [had] given me an exhibition next week […] a number of years ago I would have probably panicked and maybe turned it down, because it's not long, whereas now just with the experience I've had here that wouldn't bother me at all, I'd be ready to go.

Here again, 'experience' is indicated to concern an active and ongoing involvement in the 'new' or unfamiliar. Moreover, in pointing out that he was not 'so good with curating' previously, ESF2 similarly suggests an increased ability to work within professional norms (e.g. that he has learned the 'right' way to curate). Indeed, ESF2 does not suggest that 'experience' can be directly 'transferred' from one situation to the next, but rather draws upon past 'experiences' as a means by which to mark a changed confidence and sense of self, whereby a past self that would have 'panicked' is positively contrasted with a current, seemingly more confident, self, able to capitalise on opportunity.

However, although ESF2 thus suggests an understanding of 'experience' that correlates with that provided by ESV1 and ES31, and similarly used the term 'experience' only in relation to the curation, installation and organisation of exhibitions (e.g. ESF2 never suggested, for instance, that he was an 'experienced' artist) we might note a difference in the value attached to this 'experience'. For instance, while ESV1 described curating the exhibition as 'rewarding' and 'so much fun', for ESF2, it was strongly linked to his desire to 'grow' as an artist, and to his sense of self.

## 7.2.4 Leading by example

Volunteers, FreeBirds and other members were not the only ones to suggest that they had 'learned' through involvement, for the co-directors also articulated similar understandings. For instance, talking about the beginnings of Empty Shop, ESD1 remarked that although the co-directors,

> Knew in our heads what kind of thing we would probably do […] we just kind of figured it out on the fly to some degree as well […] it's all about creative response.

ESD1 here suggests that the lack of an exact plan was, at least in part, positive and useful, for this allows him to respond 'creatively'. ESD2 put forward a similar example, commenting, in relation to an exhibition proposal for an artwork designed to hang 'directly over [the] stairs', that:

> We said 'yes' because we knew we would have to make it work, we didn't say 'no' because we were worried […] if you'd asked me in 2008 whether I could build a floor, even a temporary one, I would have told you 'probably not', but I knew how they worked [laughed] I'd never built one before, now I have.

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Again, ESD2 appears purposely to allow for a 'creative response', in this instance by accepting the artwork before figuring out an installation strategy. Indeed, ESD2 here appeared to use this example as indicative of a way of working (e.g. that the co-directors would 'say yes' whenever reasonably possible, even if it required building a temporary floor), and as an example of 'creative' problem-solving as engaged in by the co-directors. He later pointed out, however, that as an independent and non-funded organisation, the co-directors necessarily had 'to rely on [their] learning' in instances such as this, for professional help (e.g. scaffolding) was prohibitively expensive. In both examples then, ESD1 and ESD2 suggest on-going processes of 'discovery', and an innovative resourcefulness that relied upon their ability to 'replicate' and adapt existing structures and systems (e.g. to build a floor).

It further appeared that the co-directors were 'known', or socially recognised, within Empty Shop as a 'resource' in and of themselves. For instance, a number of members, included ESF2, ESF3 and ES31 all noted that they had asked one or other of the co-directors for advice or help, thus positioning them in a pedagogic role, with ES31 in particular remarking that she had asked the co-directors 'about career route[s] in art', and had done so specifically because they were 'really quite down-to-earth'. ES31 continued:

> Because they are adults with jobs it's pretty realistic so it's nice solid advice, they're not telling you it's all going to be sunshine and roses […] when you read interviews from successful artists about becoming an artist and they're like, oh just try really hard and it will all work out […] it's nice to hear a realistic voice, being like, you're going to have to work really hard, and probably get a job, but it will still work out.

In the above then, ES31 describes referring to two sources of advice, and despite receiving roughly approximate suggestions, rejects that found in interviews while positioning the advice given by the co-directors as valuable and useful, seemingly on account of their being identified as 'real people' with 'realistic voices'. While there might be a number of additional factors at play here (i.e. advice might be perceived as more palatable when given by known acquaintances), ES31 in this example suggests that the advice given is fundamentally tied to, and gains legitimacy from, a more 'complete' understanding of who the co-directors 'are', i.e. their identities as co-directors, as 'creative' people, their attitude towards art and their past experiences in the creative industries. In other words, ES31 suggests an embodiment of 'learning'.

While ESLT1 did not suggest at any point that he asked the co-directors for advice, he too indicated an embodied understanding of 'learning', remarking:

> All those times I can't be arsed to do something […] I can't imagine [x] or [x] ever saying, 'oh I can't be arsed today' you know […] they're a real example […] the way they live and the way they manage [Empty Shop] […] I see those guys as the guys that don't cop out, don't

dodge opportunities and always have the energy to make things happen […] in that respect I learn from them, I'm influenced by them.

In positioning the co-directors as exemplars, ESLT1 draws not only on what they know and do, but also the 'way they live' and their 'energy', commitment and determination, or the kind of people they are held to 'be', and thus also suggests an embodiment of 'learning'. Moreover, it might be noted that ESLT1 here suggests no 'dispensing' knowledge from one person to another, nor does he suggest that he might 'become' in the image of the co-directors, but instead states that he learns from and is influenced by their example.

## 7.2.5 Summary: Empty Shop

In summary then, the members of Empty Shop interviewed tended to suggest, as part of their active and 'lived experience[s] of participation' (Wenger 1998: 3), multiple, and at times overlapping and interconnected, understandings of learning as 'artistic growth', 'experience', 'professional practice' and 'creative response'. Moreover, while each of these understandings was described as fundamentally social and contextual, members were at times relationally positioned (e.g. some members were held to have pedagogic roles, while others sought advice), only certain members appeared able to take up certain ways of 'learning', and members seemed to value, navigate and combine, these understandings very differently. Thus, for instance, while ESV1 described his 'experience' curating as 'fun', for ESF2 'experience' was used to chart an increasingly confident and able self as part of a broader understanding concerning artistic 'growth'.

Moreover, it would again seem that understandings of 'learning' were culturally bound. For example, members in Empty Shop rarely indicated any skill exchange, but rather tended to suggest 'experience' in relation to 'professional' norms, or economic circumstance. Here again, particular models of the artist are suggested, so that for the FreeBirds 'artistic growth' was suggested to combine an existing ability (or 'natural' talent) that might be 'developed' through social interaction, and where the sharing of skills is neither appropriate (for members' work is individual) nor appropriate (i.e. may be held to compromise authorship). Similarly, in the case of the co-directors, we might note a similarity between their suggested 'reliance' upon learning as a means by which to navigate financial limitations, as imposed by their desire to work 'outside' of a particular gallery model, and the D.I.Y. 'ethos' described by Daniels (2014: 8) as an 'auto-didacticism' where artists work 'in frugal ways as a political and philosophical modus operandi'. Again, it would seem that everyday forms of action (e.g. the accepting of artworks before working out an exhibition strategy) are enfolded with political and cultural ideals of the artist.

## 7.3 The Mutual

The texts published by The Mutual also do not use the term 'learning'. However, from the very beginning The Mutual arguably describes itself and its members in a manner that implies varying forms

of 'learning', arranged around a central and consistently presented aspiration to continue their artistic practice and/or to become 'professional' (2010c). For example, members are commonly stated to have a 'desire to continue to practice art' (2009b, 2010a, 2010c), or, in later years, are described as 'developing creative practitioners' (2011c), 'early career practitioners' (2012b) or 'emergent' (2012c), terms that all suggest an active and ongoing artistic practice and one that aims to 'develop', or to become 'established'. The Mutual is then relationally described as 'here to support, promote and facilitate […] new and exciting work' (2009b), or later as a 'facility' (2010c), 'tool' (2011c), or 'neutral bridge between institutionalised art making and the first forays into the professional realm' (2009b).

Texts suggest two central means by which this professional 'becoming' might take place. First, they note a number of 'exhibition opportunities' (2011c), whereby members are 'encouraged to submit proposals and work' to a 'rolling exhibition programme' (*ibid*). Second, texts frequently emphasise notions of 'mutual support', focusing on reciprocal 'encouragement' (2009b), and 'unbiased' support as a means by which to 'sustain fresh art practice' (2010b), or to 'realise ambitious ideas' (2012c). Indeed, in return for their free membership, members are 'expected to reciprocate in some form of assistance such as […] skill sharing' (2011c), or to share 'what skills and time you can […] with the membership' (2012c).

Finally, more specific 'opportunities' are offered via the internship programme, described at the time as 'designed to offer […] a broad and diverse range of experience and insight into art exhibition and event management and administration' and for 'hands on experience and input to provide a credible initiation towards a professional career of art practice and management' (2010a).

## 7.3.1 Finding or 'recognising' opportunity: forming and joining The Mutual

When asked about their initial reasons for forming or joining The Mutual, and their early experiences of membership, members of all 'types', tended to suggest that they were looking for a way to continue their art practice, or for an 'opportunity' to do so, although the founding members noted that they had quickly expanded upon this initial idea, so as to include 'all of our peers' [TMC1]. Thus, for instance, TMC1 noted that at the point of graduation she felt 'absolutely helpless' and that 'even before we actually graduated we [the founders] began to anticipate that', adding,

> We didn't know how to bridge the gap between art school and the outside world and a professional practice, we all wanted that at the time […] and we came together to sort of find a way.

TMC1 then added that The Mutual 'came out of our realisation of how powerless and how isolated you are as one artist, and how powerful you can be if you come together as a body'. Similarly, TMC3

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talked of attending a 'pretty awful' personal development week at university, and an exhibition organised by a fellow student who had 'invited [only] her friends essentially', which, at the time, TMC3 had felt should be shared 'with everyone'. TMC3 then remarked that after a chance meeting, the founders decided to 'do our own thing' and to set up a 'tool for graduates, this idea of the first step on the ladder', and that even at this early stage, they were 'quite self-conscious […] about the bigger picture' and were 'already talking about long-term membership schemes and […] how to organise ourselves'. As such, although much of the above arguably implies 'learning' (i.e. in positing a period in which the founders together 'learned' to 'bridge the gap' and to organise themselves), this is not explicitly referred to as 'learning', but rather as an attempt to navigate a situation in which they felt 'helpless', and as action seemingly undertaken in response to what was perceived as a 'lack' of appropriate training as provided through higher education. As TMC1 noted, 'I wasn't ready for anything'.

As was argued in Chapter Five, a number of members of the Mutual similarly described feelings of isolation [TME+1] and/or powerlessness as an individual [TMP2, TMP3, TME1, TME+3] and suggested these feelings to be a prime reason for membership, noting, for instance,

> It can be quite hard and not everyone can get one space […] they were just trying to […] give a lot of different people a platform […] they were just trying to make it easier and that sounded really good […] I emailed […] to say that I was interested [TMI3].

Furthermore, a number of members suggested that they had recognised a potential 'opportunity', and had become members in order to be admissible for the opportunity in question, although they did so very differently. For example:

> I just found it interesting because they mentioned like arts and music […] and I'm quite involved in music […] I thought that might be a good opportunity to get out and maybe play […] some of my music or perform [TMD1].

> I saw […] the call out for the recent project […] based on ideas of collaboration across distance and that totally jumped out at me […] [it seemed] so completely, totally, 100 per cent apt […] it seemed like something that I really should be doing because it seems to be fitting so exactly [with my current work] [TMI2].

> I have to say I was quite attracted to their name […] [my work] feels very isolating and me-centred […] I really wanted to get out of my own work and so it felt like The Mutual was quite attractive right away […] yeah it's a kind of togetherness [TME+1].

In the above examples, members appear to interpret, or 'de-code', the 'opportunities' offered very differently: TMD1 describes a one-off chance to 'play' or 'perform' music he indicates is already

complete; TMI2 suggests that a call for contributors 'jumped out' because it matched with pre-existing ways of working; while TME+1 suggests a desire to 'get out' of her existing work and to be 'part of' something bigger. Thus although all three mark out an 'opportunity', and relate this to an existing and ongoing artistic practice, they each put forward markedly changed expectations of involvement, and imply similarly changed expectations with regard to possible opportunities to 'learn', which the following sections explore in more detail.

## 7.3.2 Making and developing

When talking about their membership, a number of members stated that they had made work specifically for an exhibition, or after they saw the 'call out'. For instance, TME+3 commented that he had made work because he knew he 'would need to have something to put in the show', and that during the initial stages of The Mutual, when a number of exhibitions were planned in advance, he would, 'instead of making anything that I thought of', be 'working at something which would be in that [the next] show, and which I thought would be appropriate for it'. Similarly, TMI2 and TME+4 respectively stated:

> Before I put in the proposal it was just a kind of rough idea of something I might possibly like to do in the future […] but then […] The Mutual thing […] made it concrete, so I'd kind of committed myself.

> So I'd actually been doing a lot of research about this movement […] then as soon as I got the mail asking for these pamphlets, I thought that that would be a wonderful medium to actually represent some of the research that I'd been doing […] so one sort of […] 'leap-frogged' onto the next one, which was how I got involved.

In each case then, the exhibitions or call outs are suggested to be generative of 'new' work, so that from a number of possible ideas, members select or propose work they think will be suitable for a specific exhibition, or adapt pre-existing ideas so that they match, in some respect, the specifics of the brief (e.g. so that work that might at one point have taken any form, comes to be made as a pamphlet).

However, after this point members tended not to discuss the making of artworks, or any kind of 'work in progress', but to 'skip' to the exhibition. The exception to this was TMI2, who commented that '[x] and [x] and I were constantly emailing […] putting together ideas and suggestions and organising things', adding that this collaboration had 'really sparked off ideas'. In contrast, TME+3 noted,

> Afterwards there would always be time to sit down and discuss it, before the show opened […] it's a useful thing to kind of know […] that someone's looking at your work and thinking of it in a kind of critical sense […] it's useful to have that feedback […] another person's perspective can throw out an idea that you might want to continue with or […]

something that in their view could perhaps be changed […] I mean the beauty of it is you don't need to follow everyone's idea […] you can just do exactly what you want or you can take on aspects of what they've said.

TME+3 thus notes the importance of 'another person's perspective' and describes feedback as 'critical' (i.e. as offering suggestions and highlighting areas of possible improvement), as having a potential impact on future work, and as something he actively navigated, rather than directly transferred or necessarily applied. However, TME+3 indicates that feedback was only received once the work was finished and installed, rather than during the period of production. TMP3 made similar comments, first suggesting,

I guess it […] starts when you're at art school and people that you share a studio with and people that you're learning alongside […] a lot of the time after people graduate […] you don't want to let that go because it's such a valuable kind of part of pushing yourself as an artist and pushing your ideas […] so I guess what The Mutual did is provide another space for people to continue having a dialogue and exhibiting work.

TMP3 then later added:

An essential part of developing your practice is […] showing it to other people and talking about it to other people, otherwise you can't really, how can you develop?

Here again, TMP3 suggests that 'showing ' and 'talking about' artworks is 'essential' to artistic 'development', and again indicates that this took place once the work was finished and on display, that is, in the 'space' of the exhibition. Moreover, TMP3 suggests that this approach is an attempt to re-create situations and practices already recognised as 'valuable', that is, as helping members to 'develop'. However, TMP3 went on to note that this situation could not be exactly replicated, because it was 'really hard to afford a studio, let alone a studio of all of your friends' – a point the chapter returns to in Section 7.4.

### 7.3.3 'Experience' and professional practice: learning how

For the vast majority of members, the exhibitions, and work on the committee (where applicable), presented a further kind of 'opportunity': an opportunity to 'experience', or to be actively engaged in and to test out, varying forms of 'professional practice'. For example, TMP2 remarked:

Just to have that experience in organising things and understanding how things work […] even just realising that […] maybe that I already know how to, like, do those sort of things but without the experience […] you don't know that […] you cannot really teach that sort of thing […] you can't teach how to run a collective […] it's too contrived […] it's just not real.

Here, TMP2 links 'experience' with the chance to try thing out for 'real', adding that this cannot be 'taught' but necessarily involves active participation in events and activities as a means by which both to find out 'new' things, and to discover and confirm what he 'already' knew. In this sense, TMP2's remarks bear similarities to those made by TMC1, who also suggested membership to have been 'a really experimental thing', where, after graduation, 'you start to form your ideas about how you can live in the outside world', in part by asking 'if I do this, what will happen?'.

Not all members suggested this kind of 'experimental' experience, but instead pointed to their involvement as a means by which they had 'picked up' bounded, and seemingly more acceptable, forms of practice. For instance, TMD2 stated directly:

> All artists' collectives, especially ones that are in their early stages like The Mutual, are about learning and about learning how to work as an artist.

Arguably implicit in TMD2's statement is the idea that not all ways of working as an artist are possible, and that members must instead learn 'how to work'. Something similar was suggested by TME+2, who first remarked:

> We made a poster for the exhibition […] and then they [the committee members] said you know, it has to have this, that and the other on it, and they sent it back […] really like small obvious things which I suppose before you've really done it, you don't think you know […] [like] printing costs a fortune […] you have to have certain logos on all your posters.

Perhaps similarly, TME+2 later commented that 'learning to […] work alongside other people and make it [the exhibition] fit' was 'important', and then added:

> Having the whole exhibition work as an experience for a viewer to walk around […] I don't know, I suppose […] I don't think I have to learn to compromise but […] [I was] just learning how to put it together.

In both instances, TME+2 appears to suggest his involvement with The Mutual resulted in an increased professionalisation, ranging from 'small obvious things' concerning logos on the posters, to 'important' installation and curation techniques, to the navigation of social situations that allowed the exhibition to 'work' for the viewer, all of which are implied to be the 'right way' of acting (e.g. the poster is returned to him for correction, the exhibition 'works').

In this respect, a comment by TME+3 is helpful, for TME+3 appears to posit that involvement in ARIs *in general* acts as a marker of professional practice, commenting:

People always try to make shows for themselves and with groups of friends after they've graduated […] and then you'd move into […] Glasgow's kind of art world or whatever […] [you] would be kind of accepted […] you would be [pause] applicable for other things.

TME+3 here draws attention to a wider 'art world', which the members of The Mutual are suggested, at least potentially, to be able to move into and be accepted by, so as to become 'applicable' for further opportunities. TME+3 then went on to argue for The Mutual as 'original' in this field on account of their being not a ''just for us' […] thing' but 'for everyone'. As such, TME+3 highlights the wider cultural value of certain forms of practice within complex and overlapping field of practice, and implies that those who wish to be 'accepted' as professional artists need to produce themselves in accordance with a number of cultural, organisational, social and even economic norms (e.g. that those financing the exhibition would require their logo be included on the poster). In other words, TME+3 suggests that members 'learn' professional practice as a kind of 'field strategy' (Bourdieu 1993) of 'succession' (Swartz 1997: 125-6), whereby members learn 'legitimate professional procedures' and accept these as valuable (*ibid*) which then allows, in kind, for their recognition as 'artists', and artists of a certain type.

## 7.3.4 'Experience' gathering: accumulating and exchanging

Following on from the above, a number of members indicated a different, although at times overlapping, understanding of 'experience', whereby 'experience' was something to be acquired, accrued and exchanged not just within The Mutual, but in relation to a broader field of art production and display. For instance, TMC2 remarked,

When I moved to Glasgow, I did want to throw myself in the deep end and, you know, really get involved [in] what was going on […] I've continued to do that […] one of the things I really want to do is […] learn all these, like, basic things […] funding applications and finances […] admin and logistics […] kind of build up some experience that will help me get like a real paid job in the future.

In this example, TMC2 first suggests a kind of active engagement of the kind discussed previously, but then goes on to note a number of 'basic things' that she wants to learn, and 'build up', finally noting her hope that this accrued, and seemingly retained and transferable, 'experience' might 'help' her get a paid position. Other members suggested similar notions of 'experience' as something 'built up' and exchanged. TMI1, for example, when talking about ARIs more generally, commented:

Obviously people use these kind of committee things very strategically […] there's only so much you need on your C.V. before you can move to the next thing […] what's the point of doing it unless it's a rung on a ladder? […] it's taught to you at art school […] I'm not saying it's a great system […] it's a horrible experience culture.

In the above, TMI1 again suggests that members might acquire and exchange 'experience', noting that this was part of a wider 'experience culture', but adds to this that ARIs (and their committees) a) act as a 'rung on a ladder', or way of acquiring such experience, and b) that members might thus 'use' membership 'strategically', both to gain experience and, at a certain point, to exchange this for something else, or 'move on'. Indeed, TMI1 further described The Mutual as 'very much like an experience-gathering device'.

TMC3 also suggested that The Mutual might enable members to take the first step towards 'something credible', adding:

> [The first step towards] something paid probably, actually yeah, something paid because […] you offer yourself up to do things for free but even now to do something for free you have to have lots of experience, I mean next week I'm interviewing candidates for voluntary roles [in her paid position] and god forbid I'm going to have to say no to some of them, which is obscene, because […] some of them don't have experience, I mean now you have to have experience and qualifications to […] not be paid to work hard for someone.

Here then, TMC3 also refers to 'experience' as something people might 'have', and demonstrate in order to obtain, in this case, further voluntary work. Furthermore, TMC3 notes her frustration at this situation, presented in the above as a closed circle of sorts (i.e. that only people who already have experience can gain further experience), and her hope that The Mutual might act differently by offering members a 'first step on the ladder to being able to support yourself'.

A number of members indicated that this had been the case, pointing to The Mutual, for example, as 'kind of instrumental in more than half of the […] work that I actually put out after graduating' [TME+3], or implying that their involvement had led to 'bigger' projects [TMI1] or had 'helped' them get paid positions [TMP1]. However, the vast majority of members who highlighted their membership as allowing them to acquire, and potentially exchange, 'experience' tended to do so not neutrally, but to further suggest this 'experience' had a personal, and often emotionally articulated, value. For instance, TMP2 described his membership as a 'golden opportunity' to 'explore', TMI2 remarked upon her membership as a 'catalyst for working in different ways' and further noted 'how important it was [to be] involved', while TME+1 and TME+3 respectively commented:

> The fact that they have allowed my work to manifest itself within The Mutual is a huge blessing, is just such a gift, because from there then I make new work […] I have to say it is very invaluable actually because if time passes and you're not making and you're not part of something […] it would have become too isolating and I would have kind of lost touch […] personally for me just belonging to something feels invaluable.

> I […] picked up odd technical skills and things […] perhaps the most useful learning thing was that it taught you very much to be […] how to be part of something, a group or community […] and how that can work and that's as useful as skills and things.

In the above, TME+1 and TME+3 appear to indicate both an 'experience' that can be accrued and exchanged (e.g. that enables TME+1 to go on and make 'new' work and TME+3 to gain 'technical skills'), but which is simultaneously associated with learning to 'belong', and positioned as emotionally and personally valuable. This is not to argue that all members of The Mutual perceived membership in this way, or even that all members were able to get involved (TMD1 and TMD2 remained, at the point of interview, 'dormant' members). However, it would seem that some members were able to draw upon the opportunities and experiences offered by membership at The Mutual to 'test out' possible careers, to generate and develop 'new' work, to discover what they already knew (e.g. as TMP2 suggested), and to re-position themselves within a wider field of art production.

## 7.3.5 Summary: The Mutual

The final point raised above with regard to notions of 'belonging' again overlaps with areas previously discussed, and is returned to in Chapter Eight. However, a number of additional points concerning members' perceptions of 'learning' might be briefly summarised here. For instance, members frequently indicated that they joined The Mutual in order to capitalise on a potential 'opportunity', and, although the opportunity in question was interpreted in varying ways, members often noted the potential to exhibit work, to make 'new' work, to receive 'critical' feedback [TME+3], to 'explore' possible careers, and to gain and accrue 'experience' that might later be exchanged for other, 'bigger' opportunities [TMI1] or paid positions [TMP1], all of which might be viewed as forms of 'learning'. Indeed, members often appeared to move between overlapping, and at times intersecting, understandings. For instance, the term 'experience' was used to refer to both an acquired and transferable knowledge that members 'had' and retained (suggesting the 'acquisition' metaphor (Sfard 1998: 5)), and to a continuous and exploratory 'testing' of practices, areas of work and understandings of the self (suggesting the 'participation' metaphor (*ibid*: 6)). In both cases 'learning' was suggested to be fundamentally active, social and contextualised, so that even 'basic things', such as 'admin' and 'finance', which TMC2 indicated she might acquire and later transfer to new situations, were 'learned' in practice, during projects, and from other members.

Moreover, the forms of 'learning' suggested again seemed to be constructed in relation to a particular, and cultural, ideal of the 'professional' artist, adopting and re-constructing both practices previously deemed valuable, and those that might be recognised as legitimate in the future. In other worlds, members at The Mutual appeared to 'learn' not just certain skills, 'basic things' [TMC2] and when to solicit critique, but how to work as an artist of a particular kind, so as to, potentially, allow for their entry or acceptance to the field as 'legitimate players' (Johnson 1993: 8). However, while a number of members suggested that they had been able to make this 'next step', by no means all members were

either able or willing to do likewise, and the 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al.1993 [1976]: 10) suggested by some were interpreted quite differently by others.

## 7.4 Membership as 'lived participation'

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that there is no 'single general account of learning' (Hager 2008: 682), and that members did not by any means always indicate that they had joined the ARIs in question explicitly in order to learn, but rather that there were, to adapt Saljö's remark (2003), a number of activities, processes and understandings that members 'labelled', or constructed around notions of, 'involvement', 'experience', 'creative response', 'artistic growth', 'discovery', 'professional practice' and 'skill sharing', and which might be viewed here as varying forms, or understandings, of 'learning'. It has further been demonstrated that these multiple forms of 'learning' worked in complex, and at times overlapping and intersecting, ways, and were fundamentally attached to, and could significantly impact upon, the (evolving) artistic practices engaged in, the artworks produced, the ways that members thought of themselves and each other, and the contexts (social, cultural and economic) in which members operated. In other words, 'learning', however it was articulated or tacitly understood, was suggested to be complex, situated and social, and to have resulted from a 'lived experience of participation' (Wenger 1998: 3).

Further, the forms of 'learning' suggested by members appeared to be culturally constructed, for members in each ARI indicated understandings not found in either of the other two. Members of 85A, for example, consistently suggested a 'skill exchange' between members that was rarely, if ever, mentioned in either Empty Shop or the Mutual, and while members in both Empty Shop and The Mutual looked for 'critical' feedback, they seemed to do so at very different stages in the process of making and displaying work. Moreover, it would seem that members 'learned' cultures (or attempted to), as part of their experience of participation, although it was noted that members were 'subsumed' (Hager 2008: 683) into the ARIs in question at different rates (or remained peripheral, or 'dormant' members, or members of an 'extended family'). Similarly, the 'learning' of cultural values was articulated very differently, so that while some members appeared to be seamlessly assimilated, others explicitly attempted to 'pick up', certain actions, understandings and values, and others again were instructed to do so, or directly sought (and then navigated) advice.

Bearing this in mind, we might contend the implication, set out in Chapter Four, that knowledge in general, or cultural values, meanings and ideas in particular, would first be constructed by founding members and then 'transmitted' to new members, at least in so far as 'transmission' refers to the 'passive reception of knowledge' (Sfard 1998: 6). No member, in any ARI, suggested anything akin to this kind of 'reception'. Rather, members suggested active and on-going forms of 'learning' that often navigated, and even extended, existing norms and practices. Similarly, the 'ideas, values and beliefs of the group' were often indicated to have been 'experienced' not 'as 'natural'' (Inglis 2005c: 10), but as

requiring explicit, active (and, at times, on-going) attempts to 'learn', and then navigated and reconstructed in practice and over time.

However, a number of members did suggest that they had actively acquired (albeit through practice and interaction), 'skills' and 'experiences' that were articulated in a manner akin to that of the 'acquisition' and 'transfer' metaphors, and which members 'made one's own' (Sfard 1998: 5). This specific case is further discussed in Section 7.4.2 in relation to notions of exchange, the wider contexts in which members worked, or wanted to work, and education research calling for understandings of 'transfer' to be discarded (Hager and Hodkinson 2009).

The above raises a further point, for members in each ARI, in positing already shared values, or suggesting differing interpretations of (or varying attempts to 'de-code') an 'opportunity', seemed to bring to bear in each instance their individual 'life histories' (Hager 2008: 683) as well previous training, concepts of self, ideas about art, artists and artistic practice, and multifarious lives lived at least partly elsewhere and with other people. While every attempt was made not to 'bracket off' these already formed selves, it is worth repeating here that the members in each ARI were by no means 'empty vessels' awaiting the 'transmission' of knowledge. Likewise, members did not indicate that the ARIs in question were 'detached' (Pederson and Dobbin 2006, Wolff 2005) from wider field or contexts. Rather members in each appeared to adopt, replicate or work in reaction to practices, systems and ethoses encountered elsewhere (e.g. at university), relied upon numerous 'other' spaces (e.g. members of The Mutual were often required to find their own studio spaces, or places in which to produce artworks), and as such may be thought of as (re)constructing practices from 'pre-existing' cultural patterns, or 'raw materials' not wholly of their own making (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11). For example, while 'professional practice' at The Mutual worked in relation to wider art world norms, and was further suggested as a means by which to navigate the period after graduation, for which members indicated they were not 'ready', at 85A, the focus on collective practice and shared authorship again constructs practice as subversive, or as a 'strategy' (Moore 2007: 216) by which members contested a 'mainstream' understanding of art as produced by an individual.

This again is to not to argue either that members were inviolably bound by cultural practices within the ARI in question (or within a particular field), or that their experiences, understandings, values and practices, formed prior to membership, rendered shared involvement and participation impossible: as has been argued above, neither appeared to be the case. Rather it is to focus upon the complex and nuanced ways in which members constructed, navigated and reconstructed understandings of learning, with significant consequences for the kinds of artworks produced and displayed, and the kinds of artists members held themselves to be, or wanted to be.

It is in this sense that the following sections return to the data above in order to further explore two key issues: the opportunities for interaction made available to members in each ARI, and an investigation into the pervasive understanding of 'skills' and certain types of 'experience' as 'innate'.

## 7.4.1 Interaction in the ARIs

It was noted in Chapter Four, and again in Chapter Five, that for Bourdieu the artistic field was not 'reducible to a population […] linked by simple relations of interaction' (1993: 35), so that individuals were thought to occupy the same social space not on account of their 'social relationships with each other but because they share[d] similar structural relations to economic and cultural resources' (Bottero and Crossley: 2011: 101). However, throughout this chapter it has been demonstrated that members were not only 'linked' by interaction, but that interaction and exchange between members (and between members and the artworks produced. ESF2, for instance, noted that he would 'go the extra mile' once he saw the 'great work' made by others) enabled members to 'learn' from each other continually and actively. Moreover, these cultural and political constructions of learning were demonstrated to have resulted in significantly changed understandings of the self, of the kinds of practice generated, and of the artworks produced and displayed, although as was highlighted above, not all forms of 'learning' were equally valued everywhere. In other words, just as it was argued in Chapter Six that identity was not suggested to be achievable in isolation, but was produced socially and within certain boundaries, the examples discussed throughout this chapter propose that 'learning' too relies upon a series of social interactions and encounters.

As such, two arguments might be made here. First, without wishing to 'reduce' the three ARIs in question to relations of interaction, it seem that notions of interaction must nevertheless be addressed and included within theories concerning the production of culture, as a mechanism by which members 'learn', exchange, produce and come to share certain knowledges and dispositions, something Bottero and Crossely (2011: 101-2) have argued even Bourdieu 'tacitly relies upon'. Second, it is perhaps through this focus that the very different opportunities for interaction available to members in each ARI are rendered most visible, and as such, might be discussed briefly here, so as to make clear the varied 'opportunities' and commitments presented in each instance, and their potential impact upon meaning-making within cultures more generally.

For example, in 85A, projects were held to require large amounts of time from members dedicated not to a singular project, but to a shared way of life [85AC6]. Thus 85AE1 pointed out that he had spent the 'whole autumn […] filming once or twice a week', while 85AC5 noted that 'to do a project like *Chernozem* […] you've got to dedicate months of your life with no income to kind of make it happen'. 85AC5 also pointed out that members wanted to 'keep going with it' and to 'stay on' for the foreseeable future. In contrast, in both Empty Shop and The Mutual, some kinds of membership were held to involve activity and commitment over long periods of time (e.g. ESD2 noted that he was in contact with ESD1 'probably two or three times a day' to allow them to 'come to decisions together', while TMP2 'ended up staying I guess for over a year'). Other forms of membership were more flexible (e.g. ESV2 noted that volunteers worked 'on quite a casual basis'); or were seemingly bound to a limited period of time (e.g. members of The Mutual tended to indicate work on singular exhibitions,

so that, for instance, TMI2 'got involved' for the period of the 'project that I was doing with them' and then had started 'working on new things' elsewhere). In other words, certain kinds of membership were suggested to have a certain kind of 'lifespan' or 'end-point', and provided varying opportunities over the course of that 'lifespan' for members to interact.

Moreover, the possibilities for interaction were seemingly further bound by the artistic practice concerned and the 'spaces' made available to members. For instance, while members of 85A worked, and then performed, collectively, and were thus in close proximity for extended periods of time, members of The Mutual, as discussed above, often made work individually and elsewhere, for studio space was not regularly included in the 'call out', members were not generally required to collaborate, and the artworks produced did not always necessitate any form of assistance or 'contribution' from others. Thus interaction largely was held to have taken place in the space of the exhibition (e.g. where 'critical feedback' was obtained), or to have been conducted through email (e.g. 'call outs' and proposals were primarily sent to members electronically).

This is not to argue that any one ARI was 'better' than any other, or to suggest that the opportunities for interaction provided were necessarily interpreted by, drawn upon, or made available to members equally and uniformly. Indeed, members interpreted and made use of these 'opportunities' to interact very differently: TMI2, for instance, initiated regular contact and the exchange of ideas that led to the generation of 'new' work and 'new' working methods, while TME1 noted that she had 'literally had no [face-to-face] contact with them', as she had sent in an already completed film, and, due to 'prior commitments', was unable to attend the 'opening of the exhibition'. Similarly, although Empty Shop offered members access to both a studio and gallery space, this was no guarantee of those spaces being used: ESF2 noted that at the beginning of his membership, the FreeBirds would be 'all in here [the studios]', 'working together and exhibiting together', but this group later 'dispersed for various reasons' so that there were no longer 'artists in here all the time'. Rather, it is to highlight that everyday interaction, such as that demonstrated in this chapter though the lens of 'learning', was fundamentally imbued with cultural and political ideals, and worked to construct members in particular ways. As such, the opportunities members had to interact, and the nature of those opportunities, is both of significance in terms of the individual and local production of the artist, and in once again pointing out that it is not possible to do and be everything everywhere.

## 7.4.2 Negotiating pre-existing languages for learning

The final section in this chapter returns to a point raised a number of times in the above, namely that members in each ARI appeared to see themselves as 'vessels' for certain kinds of knowledge (Hager 2008: 679), even if they simultaneously indicated that this knowledge had been 'learned' socially and contextually. This is not necessarily problematic: as Sfard (1998: 9) has pointed out, 'giving up the acquisition metaphor is neither desirable or possible' for it allows for certain kinds of thinking that 'cannot be achieved' with the 'participation metaphor'. Moreover, understandings associated with the

'acquisition metaphor' are, as Hager (2008: 679-80) argues, widely accepted as 'common-sense' and 'dominate popular thinking about learning', and so it is perhaps not surprising that members suggest them here. It was further argued, however, that all metaphors for learning are partial, and that they might import certain agendas, while occluding others (Hodkinson et al. 2008). In other words, it was suggested that,

> Language is not simply a mirror of reality […] language is a practice […] the language or languages we have available to speak about education determine to a large extent what can be said and done, and thus what cannot be said and done (Biesta 2005: 54).

As such, this section returns to one such 'language' for learning - as organised around the 'acquisition' and 'transfer' metaphors – in order to explore the ways members produced, and came to understand themselves, through 'languages' or 'raw materials […] not wholly of their own making (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11). While metaphors of 'participation', 'discovery' or becoming' might equally have been selected here, the 'acquisition' metaphor was selected both because it was suggested in each ARI, and because it is connected to notions of 'transfer', a metaphor held by Hager and Hodkinson (2009: 619-621) to lead to a 'continuing misunderstanding of the processes it stands for', and refuted outright by Hodkinson et al. (2008: 43), who argue that,

> There is no learning transfer. There are people who have learned, who learn as they move and learn after they have moved.

Hager and Hodkinson (2009) and Hodkinson et al. (2008) here reject the metaphor of transfer partly on the grounds that they do not consider it to work conceptually (e.g. in suggesting that knowledge is simultaneously transferred and retained). A related argument is made by Hager (2008: 681) when he notes that 'knowledge and information cannot be recorded in the brain in the same way they can be recorded in books', and wonders why individuals tend to locate both 'inside'. Yet members in each ARI described themselves as having 'transferable key skills' [85AE2], or suggested that certain 'experiences' might be retained and transferred (e.g. ESLT1 and TMC2 describe certain skills or 'experiences' as something they 'had', rather than could do). It would seem then that even if members learned before, during and after they had 'moved', and actively worked to re-contextualised knowledge in a second location (e.g. as 85AE2 suggested), they nevertheless perceived this, and conceived of themselves as able to, 'transfer' intrinsic skills and experience.

Again, this is not necessarily problematic. For example, for 85AC6 in particular, and members of 85A in general, the 'ownership' of certain kinds of knowledge was predominantly held to result in a form of social recognition (e.g. where members were 'known' as 'having' a certain expertise), to allow each member to contribute something 'different' [85SC2], and thus constructed individual contributions (and by extension the members who 'had' such knowledge) as having an individual, and 'unique', value. However, for a number of members in The Mutual, the accrual of 'experience' was, at least in

part, undertaken in the expectation that it might later be 'exchanged' in return for a paid position [TMC2, TMP1], or a 'bigger' exhibition [TMI1]. Similarly, in Empty Shop, ES31 at one point noted that she might return to do an 'internship', and when asked about this, commented,

> Work experience […] helps me […] because with the art world it's usually all about your portfolio and your C.V. and where you've been and proving that you know what you're doing.

Here then, members are constructed in relation to understandings of 'acquisition' and 'transfer' very differently, for it would appear that those seeking to enter an 'art world' (rather than operate outside the mainstream, as members of 85A did) were obliged to first obtain, and then 'prove' [ES31] certain abilities and competences, in order to then gain paid employment or further opportunities (which may themselves not be paid, as TMC3 pointed out). Indeed, Empty Shop and The Mutual both offered members this kind of 'first step' on the ladder [TMC3], so as to support members' development and enable them to get 'something credible'. However, it might be noted that the 'language' of acquisition and transfer, in positing intrinsic skills and abilities, constructed in each ARI (although in differing ways) a self that was evaluated on the basis of accrued and demonstrable knowledge. Importantly, while some members seemed able to 'strategically' navigate this 'experience culture', recognising when their C.V. would allow them to 'move to the next thing' [TMI1], this was by no means the case for all. Indeed, a number of members, finding that they 'lacked' the necessary experience suggested they were unable to 'move to the next thing', a situation often suggested to be fraught, and experienced as a kind of crisis, e.g. as was arguably the case when TMC1 noted that she 'wasn't ready for anything' and felt 'helpless'.

As with pre-existing understandings of the 'Romantic' artist then, it would seem that while members in the ARIs were at times able to select, construct and re-construct existing 'cultural patterns' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11), they were not able to make themselves up in any way that they liked. Rather, it would seem that members, and particularly those wanting to find a place in a wider art world, at times were obliged to act and think of themselves in certain, 'legitimated' ways. The final chapter now turns to discussions such as these, so as to draw conclusions for the research project.

# Chapter Eight

## ARIs and the construction of culture[s]

This final chapter first draws together the arguments made throughout the thesis in order to reflect upon the aims and objectives set out. It then addresses the relationships, overlaps, tensions and limitations posed between these key findings, as flagged up in previous chapters, so as to avoid, for example, reducing any one finding to an 'output' of another. In doing so, this final discussion argues that those involved in the ARIs actively and continuously produced and navigated distinct 'culture[s]', in part, through the selective 'framing' (Goffman 1974) of membership, notions of 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013), the production and management of particular 'narratives' about the self (Ricoeur 1991), and a 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) of membership. It is argued that in each of these key areas of study, we can see the construction and legitimation of particular kinds of artistic practice, product and person, with significant ramifications for the kinds of artwork made, produced and displayed, and by whom. Moreover, it is reiterated here that the distinctions noted between each ARI are in themselves evidence for the social construction of the categories of 'art' and 'artists', and for the complex, local and at times messy and fraught construction of meaning within particular and bounded 'situations' (Goffman 1963, 1969), rather than as corresponding to any universally 'true' definition, or singular theory as homogenously demonstrated or applied in practice.

Following on from this discussion, the chapter turns to consider the implications of, and contribution to be made by, the thesis, with regard to the literature concerning ARIs, the construction of artistic cultures (and art and artists), and in relation to the production of cultures, and non-'artistic' cultures, more generally. The thesis then ends by outlining a number of particular areas where further research is required, and which may be addressed in the future.

## 8.1 Key findings: the research aims and objectives

This thesis set out to answer the question: how do artist-run initiatives construct culture[s]? The key findings, presented in relation to the first four proposed aims and objectives, were as follows:

**Aim One**: Critically review theories concerning the construction of 'cultures' as potentially applicable to ARIs.

> Objective 1: Identify key areas of research concerning notions of 'culture';
> Objective 2: Define 'culture' as a working concept;
> Objective 3: Investigate the social, historical, political and geographic contexts in
>       which ARIs operate;
> Objective 4: Identify possible precedents for the ARIs selected as case studies;
> Objective 5: Critically review theories of art production;

Objective 6: Propose key mechanisms by which 'cultures' may be constructed by members;

The thesis first drew upon material in cultural studies, anthropology, cultural sociology, organisational studies, museum studies and the sociology of art, all of which are concerned the study of 'cultures' (albeit from differing perspectives and within differing disciplinary boundaries). It was then argued (in Chapter One) for a working concept of 'culture' that denoted the 'maps of meaning' and value (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10) as actively re-constructed by members in ARIs through everyday life, and which would 'bring into being' as intelligible and meaningful selective and bounded ways of thinking and being, as well as certain objects, processes, relationships and positions. As such, 'culture' was thought likely to have a significant bearing upon the objects that came to be viewed as 'art', the persons who could claim the position of 'artist', and the particular values and meanings attached or denied to both within ARIs. It was further suggested that these 'cultures' were unlikely to be uniformly shared or to operate in isolation, but to be experienced as part of a life lived, within organisational boundaries (and potentially within further sub-divisions), and in relation to various broader contexts and pre-existing structures. These 'cultures' were also predicted to be complex, layered and at times ambiguous, where individual members were likely to have varying abilities (or powers) to construe, construct and transform the world (Fairclough 2010). In other words, it was proposed that each ARI, as a 'bundle' (Law 2003) of practices, objects, persons and understandings, and as inclusive of the material and the social, also operated in relation to, and intersected with, cultural 'patterns' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11), so that the terms 'ARI' and 'culture' were not exchangeable, but interlinked.

Following from this discussion, Chapter Two provided a more detailed contextual introduction to ARIs that sought to situate artist-run activity in social, historical, political and geographic contexts and identified four key 'strands' of activity – including notions of the 'alternative', D.I.Y. and grassroots practice, collectivity and co-operatation, and activism. By these means, a number of precedents, sanctioned movements, debates and existing notions of value in the arts were discussed, while remaining alive to the tensions inherent in categorisation and the consequences of an assumed commonality between ARIs internationally. Chapter Four then argued against any 'essential' understanding of art, highlighting that members in each of the three ARIs discussed appeared to identify 'art' and 'artists' very differently, and proposing instead that members actively brought both categories into being. The chapter then argued for a focus on three mechanisms by which this cultural production might take place - membership, the construction of identity, and the ways in which members 'learned' - drawing in each instance on a further range of literature to expand upon the sociological approaches discussed, and to arrive at a series of revised hypotheses, which included the 'framing' of membership (Goffman1974), notions of 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013), identity-work through narrative (Ricoeur 1991), performance (Goffman 1969) and identification (Jenkins 2008), and 'learning' as 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) taking place within 'learning cultures' (Hodkinson et al. 2008).

**Aim Two**: Critically analyse the cultural construction of 'membership'

Objective 1: Identify how members perceived the ARI;

Objective 2: Explore the (multiple) forms of 'membership' suggested by members and any associated behaviours and/or understandings;

Objective 3: Investigate any requirements for, and boundaries surrounding, membership;

Objective 4: Investigate the social ties suggested between members and the relative positioning of members;

Objective 5: Investigate any emotional attachments suggested by members as connected to 'membership'.

Chapter Five critically analysed a variety of data (e.g. published texts, drawn diagrams and interview transcripts) in relation to each ARI, and argued that although members did not always describe the ARI in question in the same way (e.g. members of Empty Shop and The Mutual tended to use a variety of terms, with little suggested overlap), members in each ARI did indicate particular, and shared, understandings of 'membership', although these were selectively and distinctively 'framed' (Goffman 1969). Thus, for example, members in 85A predominantly noted two forms of membership, each with differing boundaries and requirements, so that members might simultaneously 'belong' to the 'family' (or 'extended family') but, on account of their not being involved in certain key activities (e.g. set building), were not considered to be part of the 'core' group. At the same time, other 'possible' features and understandings (e.g. 85A as a Community Interest Company) were not put forward as salient (Entmann 1993) or appropriate. Furthermore, it was argued that boundaries of this kind were not inviolable (e.g. in Empty Shop membership was suggested to be a largely porous category), or inflexible (e.g. 85AE1 was placed in a 'boundary' position, and members indicated a certain 'flux' between the 'extended family' and the 'core group', so that members could 'jump up' [85AC6]). Rather, the boundaries, social ties and requirements for membership could be negotiated and/or interpreted very differently by members, so that, for instance, in The Mutual, 'dormant' members with no previous involvement in exhibitions or activities articulated a strong emotional connection to the ARI, while 'committee' members did not. Indeed, it was pointed out that the meaning-making involved in the construction of certain 'frames' was at times messy and complex, with members working to overcome potential disjunctions arising from practical necessity and potential contradiction (as was arguably the case for notions of 'democracy' at Empty Shop).

Highlighting the distinctive understandings articulated by members in each ARI, it was further argued that 'membership' constructed notions of 'art' and 'artists' very differently, so that, for example, in Empty Shop 'art' of any kind might be made and displayed by 'anyone', whereas members of 85A located their practice outside of a cultural 'mainstream'. In other words, what could be made, how and by whom was significantly changed. The chapter made two final points. First, it returned to notions of 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013) to argue for 'membership' as having an emotional appeal, whereby members chose to belong and emotionally invested in their 'legitimate' membership, although in

varying ways (e.g. as comradeship in 85A, or to assuage isolation in The Mutual) and with varying degrees of commitment (e.g. members of 85A indicated an 'overriding' group identity, while members of The Mutual suggested 'free access'). Second, it returned to Bourdieu's (1993: 30) characterisation of the artistic field as a 'field of struggles' to suggest that while it was possible to view all of the above as related to 'competition' in the field, doing so risked 'emptying out' membership of its constructed significance.

**Aim Three**: Critically analyse the cultural construction of artistic 'identities'.

>Objective 1: Identify the (multiple) identities articulated by members;

>Objective 2: Explore the narration of 'artistic' identities and any associated behaviours and/or understandings;

>Objective 3: Investigate the 'management' and/or 'performance' of artistic identities as suggested by members;

>Objective 4: Investigate any instances of identification with pre-existing categories of being as suggested by members;

>Objective 5: Investigate any occasions where artistic identities are suggested to be 'achieved', negotiated or 'rejected'.

Chapter Six also critically analysed a variety of data (e.g. published texts, drawn 'timelines' and interview transcripts) in relation to each ARI, and argued that members rarely adopted a singular identity, but instead appeared to actively manage multiple, fluid and complex identities. It was further argued that this kind of identity 'management' was achieved through 'narrative' (Ricoeur 1991), whereby members made links between select 'episodes' so as to produce themselves as meaningful and coherent (even if that consistent narrative relied upon notions of continuous change, as was the case in 85A), and through identification 'with' certain pre-existing understandings, such as those posed by the 'Romantic' artist, the artist as 'craftsperson', and the artist as 'professional' (where members would at times combining a number of pre-existing understandings so as to flexibly position themselves and take advantage of opportunity). Members also further signalled occasions when they had 'performed' certain identities. Importantly, it was noted that members in each ARI indicated distinct identities, so that, for instance, while members in 85A and Empty Shop posited a 'natural creative' self, at 85A this 'creative' self was continually reinvented, while at Empty Shop it was largely articulated as stable from childhood onwards.

However, while some members did strongly identify with positions made available through the ARI in question (as was most notably the case for ESF3, who continued to identify himself as a 'FreeBird' a number of years after his membership had ended), no member simplistically 'acted out' culturally suggested and encouraged identities. Indeed, members in 85A predominantly resisted the term 'artist', and as ESF2 made clear, all identities were not permissible everywhere. Rather, it would seem that some members, although by no means all, negotiated and identified themselves in relation to distinct cultural 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10), so as to render themselves 'intelligible' to

others (Moore 1994), and that those who were unable or unwilling to do so tended to suggest a struggle to be 'heard' coherently (e.g. as was suggested by ESLT1). Finally, it was argued that the cultural construction of identity was 'intimately bound up' with the social (Inglis 2005a: 7) and the material, as well as the symbolic and embodied notions of identity, and that although members in each ARI were, to some extent, able to select from a 'historical reservoir [of] existing cultural patterns' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11) not all 'existing cultural patterns' were so easily rejected, and members were not all equally accepted as 'legitimate' everywhere. As such, it was proposed that identity-work was complex, uneven and at times fraught, with a number of significant 'real life' implications for those wishing to identify as 'artists', and/or with associated 'artistic' identities.

**Aim Four**: Critically analyse the cultural construction of 'learning' (or related terms).

      Objective 1: Identify implicit and explicit forms of 'learning' as suggested by members;

      Objective 2: Explore any associated practices and/or understandings

      Objective 3: Identify the 'metaphors' for learning implied and/or adopted in each

            instance

      Objective 4: Investigate instances where members suggest knowledge was 'transferred', 'transmitted', 'shared' or retained;

      Objective 5: Investigate notions of 'apprenticeship', or points at which members

             'learned' to participate.

Chapter Seven critically analysed published texts and interview data for each ARI, and argued that although members by no means always explicitly suggested they had become involved in the ARIs in order to 'learn', they did overwhelmingly indicate understandings that might be recognised as forms of 'learning'. For instance, in Empty Shop ESF2 suggested that 'artistic growth' was a factor prompting membership, while the co-directors talked of relying upon a 'creative response' that allowed them to solve problems as they arose, while avoiding (expensive) professional help. Some members further indicated periods of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991), in which they explicitly attempted to 'learn', and navigate group norms, although it was noted that this 'peripheral' membership did not always result in a transition to 'full' membership, nor was it interpreted in the same way, or necessarily restrictive (e.g. 85AE2 indicated that 'peripheral' participation allowed for a number of simultaneous roles and responsibilities elsewhere). Moreover, it was noted that the forms of 'learning' suggested were also distinct in each ARI. Thus members in 85A tended to talk of a 'skill exchange' between members, whereby 'acquired' (Sfard 1998) knowledge was 'transferred' or 'shared' between members as part of an on-going and largely open-ended artistic practice, where 'practice' was suggestive of notions of learning as 'participation' (*ibid*). However, members in Empty Shop and The Mutual talked of 'critiquing' artworks, and of navigating and applying this advice as part of a professional practice associated with the figure of the artist (e.g. as a kind of 'becoming' involving the continual exchange of knowledge that 'built upon' previous understanding, or 'constructed' knowledge), although at differing stages in production.

As such, it was suggested that members had 'learned' within, or in relation to, cultural 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10), although members again appeared to do so unevenly. For example, while some members were able to significantly and rapidly re-position themselves, or to re-work understandings of the self (i.e. to understand themselves, through their 'participation' as increasingly able or confident), others struggled, either at the point of acquisition or over extended periods of time to do just this. Moreover, it was noted that in each ARI members appeared to adopt certain 'learning practices' in relation, or in opposition, to pre-existing forms of 'artistic' learning (e.g. in reaction to a perceived 'lack' of appropriate experience as gained through art school, or in line with understandings concerning collective practice). Thus members not only learned 'new' skills, but learned how to become certain kinds of artists, who made certain kinds of artworks, through certain procedures and processes, and in relation to pre-existing fields of related activity (e.g. as 'professional' artists with demonstrable 'experience' that could be exchanged for 'bigger' exhibitions elsewhere, or as members of a collective whose joint 'contribution' and shared authorship reinforced a 'non-mainstream' position). In other words, it was argued that the everyday interactions and processes associated with varying forms of 'learning' were imbued with, and constructed members and their artworks in relation to, cultural and political 'ideals' of the 'artist' and 'art'.

## 8.2 ARIs and the construction of culture

The final aim, and associated objectives, stated:

**Aim Five**: Evaluate how key findings concerning the construction of culture within the ARIs relate to existing theoretical frameworks and artistic practice.

> Objective 1: Identify key findings relating to the construction of culture;
>
> Objective 2: Address the relationships and areas of tension posed between key findings;
>
> Objective 3: Identify the limitations to research;
>
> Objective 4: Review existing approaches and theoretical frameworks relating to the production of 'cultures';
>
> Objective 5: Propose refined theories concerning the construction of 'cultures';
>
> Objective 6: Evaluate the implications of the research in relation to current practice and future research

The remainder of this chapter now turns to this final aim (and associated objectives) in order to make some final points, explore the relationships between key findings, address a number of important limitations concerning partiality and to highlight the contribution made by the thesis.

## 8.2.1 Summary of key findings

Each of the key findings discussed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, and outlined again above, takes a particular lens by which to explore the construction of culture within the three ARIs who participated in research. In each case it has been demonstrated that those involved in the ARIs worked within, and in relation to, distinctive cultural 'maps of meaning' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 10), so that the artworks or art projects produced, and the 'artistic' identities claimed, were not singular or homogenous throughout the three ARIs, or even within any one. Rather, distinct 'cultures', as deeply complex and dynamic productions in themselves, were argued to construct as 'legitimate' very different understandings concerning what members should be and do, how, with whom, and with what intended result. These cultures were then navigated, interpreted and at times re-constructed by individual members. As such, the production of artistic culture[s] within each of the three ARIs, while drawing upon and at times reacting against broader discourses, pre-existing cultural 'patterns' or 'raw materials' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11) and contexts, is suggested to be fundamentally local and subject to constant, active negotiation by those involved.

It is in this sense that the ARIs studied bear comparison to Bourdieu's (1993: 81) notion of art as 'the product of a vast operation of *social alchemy* jointly conducted, with equal conviction and very unequal profits, by all the agents involve in the field of production', although we may add to this now that while all the agents in a given field may contribute, in some respect, to this 'vast' and 'joint' production, they seem to do so unequally, and within particular, bounded, and at times contradictory 'situations' (Goffman 1963, 1969). In other words, what was considered a 'legitimate' way of being and thinking within one ARI was not suggested to necessarily coalesce with that constructed as 'legitimate' elsewhere. Indeed, a central point made within this thesis is that while members in each ARI indicated cultures that drew upon pre-existing, and widely available, 'raw materials' (Clarke et al. 1993 [1976]: 11), they did so in a manner that was distinct, and which did not suggest any harmonious accord or singular accepted discourse. Thus, for instance, while members in each ARI appeared to construct themselves in relation to the pre-existing figure of the 'Romantic' artist, in Empty Shop this tended to result in stable narratives of the self that began with childhood and highlighted instances of (untaught) artistic ability, while members of 85A tended to put forward narratives of continual reinvention, which 'tracked' an adult self via key moments of change. These then are understandings that suggest a fundamental, and potentially irreconcilable, difference.

Moreover, just as what was constructed as legitimate appeared to differ between the three ARIS, it might be added here that what was constructed as legitimate within any one need not be accepted as such outside of the organisational boundaries posed. For instance, what was considered to be 'professional' artistic practice at The Mutual may not have been recognised as such by those working in the 'bigger' galleries to which some members hoped to gain admittance, while those who came to exhibitions at Empty Shop may equally have rejected as 'not-art' the objects displayed. Similarly, 85A's multidisciplinary 'brand' (2010a, 2013e) might be viewed as an appeal, or 'construal'

(Fairclough 2010: 5) that attempted to transform art rather than any definitive construction of art, although, in time, this construal may come to be widely and 'obviously' accepted. Indeed, it is arguably the case that 85A's 'brand' is already being recognised as such within a cultural mainstream: as noted in Chapter Two, 85A have been named as one of the '8 Scottish-based artists to watch' (*The List* 2012), and as one of the top 'ten emerging artists from Scotland' (Kotzé 2012).

This discussion leads in to a related point, namely that meaning-making within cultures, while at times presented as 'fixed', 'achieved' or 'established', was seemingly subject to constant and active re-negotiation, adjustment and challenge over time, even if that re-negotiation, adjustment and challenge was an attempt to secure or consolidate an already 'established' identity (as ESF2 indicated, when he noted that gaining experience in curating would 'help' him as a 'solo artist'), or to 'develop' upon previous art projects, as was suggested to be the case at 85A, by 'foraying' into 'unknown territories' [85AC7]. In other words, members indicated a constant state of 'becoming' that was, necessarily, never 'complete' (Hager 2008: 685), but which was rather continually engaged with, in part, through a number of 'everyday' activities and involvements. Indeed, it has been argued throughout this thesis that is through just this kind of 'everyday' involvement, undertaken as part of a 'lived experience of participation in the world' (Wenger 1998: 3), that members worked to produce themselves, and their work, as having meaning, significance and value, and that even 'mundane' or 'routine' understandings concerning artistic practice were nevertheless imbued with cultural and political ideals.

However, this is not to suggest that all members in each of the three ARIs were able to produce themselves as significant and meaningful: it has been repeatedly demonstrated that this was not the case. Rather, the production of meaning was suggested to be complex, messy, at times deeply ambiguous and fundamentally uneven. It is in further relation to this notion of complexity that the next section addresses the relationships and overlaps posed by the key findings.

## 8.2.2 Relationships and overlaps between key areas

In Chapter Four, three key 'mechanisms' or 'lenses' by which to investigate the construction of culture within the three ARIs were proposed: a focus on 'membership', 'identity' and notions of 'learning'. Throughout the three discussion chapters (Chapter Five, Six and Seven) a number of potential links, areas of overlap and possible tensions between these three 'lenses' have been suggested. For instance, it was noted that members might choose to 'belong' (Guibernau 2013) and/or attempt to 'learn' group norms, practices and values in an attempt to 'join in' – what might arguably be described as 'learning to belong', although, as 85AE1 indicated, this attempt did not necessarily result in 'full membership' (Wenger 1998).

This particular overlap (e.g. between Guibernau's (2013: 32) notion of 'belonging' as compelling members to accept group norms, and Wenger's (1998) suggestion that members 'learn' to participate) might then productively bring distinct areas of enquiry into contact, so as to further explore processes

of 'belonging' as 'learned'. However, there were two particular areas of overlap that were not so easily reconciled: notions of identity as 'learned', and a potential conflation between concepts of identity and belonging.

To begin with the former: in Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'community of practice', members are described as moving from 'legitimate peripheral participation' to 'full membership', a process that has been described by Fuller (2007: 19) as answering 'the question of *what* is learned […] in terms of identity formation (rather than the acquisition of knowledge products)'. This is a concern for two reasons. First, it was demonstrated in Chapter Seven that members in each ARI combined metaphors for 'learning', so that they learned both certain ways to participate, or 'be', as well as certain skills, or 'knowledge products'. In other words, learning was not suggested by the members in the ARIs to be an either-or question, but to involve multiple and overlapping processes, products and identities. Second, this reduction of 'identity' to an 'output' of learning does not account for the complex, multiple, shifting and culturally and socially negotiated and 'achieved' identities discussed in Chapter Six, which were suggested to be partly formed in relation to previous and additional contexts and understandings, where certain identities were rejected or resisted (e.g. members of 85A were reluctant to self-identify as 'artists', while 85AE2 seemed to prefer her 'peripheral' membership to 'full' membership), and some (such as that of 'co-director' or 'founder') were further indicated to be unobtainable under any circumstances. Indeed, it was noted in Chapter Seven that certain forms of 'learning' were only open to certain kinds of members (e.g. volunteers were not involved in the critique of art works), and thus it would appear that some identities acted as a barrier to engagement in certain kinds of 'learning', rather than as something to be 'formulated' through learning.

This is not to suggest that learning did not involve identity formulation, for it was argued in Chapter Seven that some members learned to position themselves as, for example, 'core' members. Nor is it to suggest that in self-identifying in particular ways members did not also involve themselves in particular, and associated, kinds of learning. For example, members in The Mutual, who identified themselves as 'artists', engaged in forms of learning that might be viewed as associated with this identity, e.g. in the soliciting and giving of critical feedback. Rather, it is to argue that the two concepts are more productive, and of more critical use, when they retain a conceptual clarity and distinction from each other.

The second point concerns the potential relationship between notions of identity and belonging, where, for example, Guibernau (2013: 1-2) has argued that identification with a group 'tends to play a major role in the construction of individual identity', where 'the individual's self-identity is gradually replaced by the 'overriding identity' of the collective' and thus that 'identity is constructed through belonging and exclusion'. Indeed, Anthias (2002: 491-4) has argued that the concept of 'identity' is 'of limited heuristic value', in that it focuses the 'analyst away from context, meaning and practice', and 'reintroduces essentialism through the back door', Anthias suggests instead a 'translocational positionality', understood as,

> A more adequate means of addressing the range of issues relating to belonging [including] the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production within complex and shifting locales [and] the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation (ibid: 502).

In other words, while Guibernau (2013) posits a relationship whereby 'identity' is produced through 'belonging', Anthias (2002) has argued for concepts associated with 'belonging' as of greater analytical use, and suggested these be used in place of notions of 'identity'. However, while acknowledging both points, we might suggest here that belonging and identity each have a usefulness not captured by the other. For example, and to adapt Lloyd's (2014: 55) observation, members might 'posses a particular identity' and yet feel as though they do not belong (e.g. as TMP1 suggested, when he pointed out that he was 'only an operational committee member' who 'never really felt an affinity with The Mutual'). Conversely, members might 'feel a sense of belonging without claiming a particular identity' (e.g. as TME+2 indicated, initially stating he was not a member and that he was 'surprised' to have been contacted for the research project, but that his involvement had been a 'big deal' that 'meant a lot').

It would appear then, that to reduce identity to a by-product of belonging (or vice versa) is to curtail the scope of useful work that can be achieved by retaining both as interlinked, although not interchangeable. Further, it is because the concept of identity is, in Anthias's (2002: 494) words, more broadly 'socially meaningful', that it is useful within this thesis, for it potentially allows for debate 'beyond the academy' (Whitehead et al., forthcoming) in a way that 'translocational positionality' arguably does not.

## 8.2.3 Limitations to the research

In addressing key areas of overlap and tension, it seems that one important limitation, noted throughout the thesis, bears repeating. This is that the three 'lenses' employed are not suggested here to offer any 'complete' understanding of identity (or membership, or learning), nor are they suggested to together form any complete mechanism by which any one ARI, or cultures in general, might be comprehensively and exhaustively understood. Rather, the findings and arguments proposed are necessarily partial, and are partial in a number of respects. For example, although a number of interviews were carried out with members in each ARI, in no ARI was every member (past and present) interviewed. Interviews were further only carried out with those indicated by gatekeepers to be 'members', and thus no interviews were carried out with individuals who may have tried, and failed, to obtain membership. Indeed, interviews took place only once, and thus at a particular point in membership, rather than at several points throughout membership.

It might be also be reiterated here that there is a danger in overstating the case for culture, and that, as has been pointed out in varying chapters, the social, material and symbolic are all at play within the construction of 'art' and 'artists', are at times are not easily distinguishable from each other, and open up further avenues of enquiry that are discussed below.

Finally, it should be clearly stated that this thesis does not offer any kind of 'reflection' of artist-run practice, but instead works to bring a specific account into being, and does so through a series of selections and omissions (e.g. through choosing from far longer transcripts the salient quotes to be discussed). These selections and omissions were both necessary, on account of the framework provided by the thesis, and were the results of an attempt at every point to be rigorous, fair and to seek points of contradiction or extension. However, the thesis is nevertheless a 'material process through which culture has come to be' (Bennett 2007: 32), and has 'come to be' in a particular way that might have been otherwise. The work that the thesis might now go on to do (*ibid*: 33) is discussed below.

## 8.3 Implications for research

Drawing upon the key findings discussed above, and in light of the limitations noted, three particular contributions might cautiously be proposed: that in the ARIs studied, artists, as well as art, were the products of collective action; that the disciplinary boundaries surrounding the sociology of art might be productively extended so as to allow for notions of 'belonging' (Guibernau 2013) and 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) as important factors in the production of culture; and, finally, that the mechanisms and theories used and adjusted throughout this thesis can be understood as 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004) for studies concerning not just the construction of artistic cultures, but cultures of all kinds. Contributions to the literature concerning ARIs, which is largely written from a position 'outside' research, are discussed in the section below.

To begin with the former, it has been argued throughout this thesis, in line with Becker (2008 [1982]) that 'art' is the product of collective action, and that analytic theories of art only account for practice insofar as they offer a means by which to comprehend 'people's personal understandings' (Whitehead 2012: 6). Indeed, the thesis has offered an in-depth account of this kind of collective action, highlighting the complexity, inequality and messiness involved in the production of 'art' within three ARIs, and thus offers a local, dynamic and individually negotiated example that acts as a counterbalance to arguments, such as Becker's (2008 [1982]), which operate on a far grander scale. For example, Becker (*ibid*: xxiv) talks of group consensus as arising from 'joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things', yet as has been suggested above, not all knowledge is jointly held, interpreted or accepted, even within the organisational boundaries posed by a single ARI, and members can strongly agree on one point (e.g. that The Mutual provides opportunities for arts graduates) while others remain shrouded in ambiguity, confusion and/or direct contradiction (e.g. whether The Mutual was a collective, community, co-operative, or 'tool' etc.). In other words, it would seem that 'conventions' are neither so straightforwardly, nor so evenly, learned and applied in practice. This

small point is nevertheless a significant one, for it reiterates that members of ARIs cannot be expected or assumed to behave and think in certain ways. Indeed, as was demonstrated above, members at times articulated understandings that might be viewed as surprising (e.g. in suggesting a strong sense of belonging while never having contributed). It is exactly this kind of complexity and contradiction that must be engaged with if artist-run practice is to be understood as more than a 'general' category, a point I return to below.

A similar argument might be made with regard to 'artists' as the product of collective action, although here there is a particular gap to which this thesis might contribute more specifically. For example, it was noted in Chapter Four that while art historians (e.g. Shiner 2001, Baxandall 1972) and those working within the sociology of art (e.g. Inglis 2005c, Tanner 2003, Wolff 1993 and Zolberg 1990) have argued for the 'artist' as constructed rather than 'natural', they tended to do so by focusing on the changing 'role' and 'status' of artists over time (Tanner 2003: 107), and often concentrate analysis upon the construction of the 'Romantic' artist in the nineteenth-century. As a result, contemporary examples, or examples of this construction in progress are, on the whole, missing from debate. This then, is a gap to which the thesis, and Chapter Six in particular, has something to offer, for the above arguably provides just such an account of contemporary and on-going identity-work, which despite its limitations (e.g. in focusing only on three ARIs) has some potential value in developing a largely historical discussion. Indeed, in exploring the uneven practices of identity-work, whereby members drew (in multifarious ways) upon historical constructs such as that of the 'Romantic' artist and did so across varying sites synchronically (rather than over time, at key historical moments) there is potential scope to link existing research to current practice, and to further call for the sociology of artists not as a second-order question within the sociology of art (where anthologies and edited volumes tend to dedicate only one section, if that, to the study of artists, e.g. as is the case in Tanner (2003) and Inglis and Hughson (2005)), but as a significant avenue of enquiry, where strong differences can obtain even within a very limited geographical range.

In addition, we might turn here to the 'potent emotional content' of identity-work, belonging and membership (Guibernau 2013: 2), as strongly suggested by members in each ARI (although in varying forms and for varying periods of time) and propose an approach that crosses disciplinary lines. To explain: it has been argued above that those involved in the three ARIs do not simply make certain objects in accordance with certain legitimated practices and procedures, but significantly invest in membership as a means by which to 'matter' (*ibid*: 28) in the world, to construct a sense of self that is legible and which can be 'heard' as meaningful, and to be involved in a practice that is 'valuable, important [and] worth sacrificing for' (*ibid*: 65). Indeed, as has been repeatedly noted, membership was, for some, not a 'job', but 'our life […] who we are' [85AC6], involved 'dedication' to each other [85AC5] over months if not years, so that members suggested they would 'go to the end of the world' for each other [85AC1], and described 'incredibly personal' times in which they cared 'intensely' [TMC3] and to the 'detriment' of their health [TMC1] but as 'people who [gave] a shit about art' [ESD2] had '[gone] for it' [ESD1], making lifelong friends and supporting each other through 'tough

times' in the process [ESF2]. This was not the case for everyone, nor was it the case equally, but I would suggest that the production of art and artists within the ARIs discussed above was neither emotionally neutral, nor is this emotionally charged production adequately addressed by questions that focus on the 'how' of techniques and distribution, of labels applied or denied, or of art as 'expressive' of certain 'preferences' (Inglis 2005c: 14). I would argue here then, that the sociology of art should take its sociological rooting seriously, and include, as a matter of course, investigation into the social ties, relationships and attachments forged, navigated and rejected through collective action as an aspect of artistic practice of fundamental importance to those involved, and which cannot be side-stepped when considering the production of art, artists, art systems or art worlds.

I would further propose that this expanded sociological understanding of 'culture', and the mechanisms and theories used and adapted throughout research to explore 'culture', has an additional application in that it constructs a framework that is 'possible in practice' (Peräkylä 2004). For example, it was argued above that membership is not merely procedural or 'factual', but works to construct 'legitimate' practice(s) as undertaken by 'legitimate' members towards 'legitimate' ends. Further, it was suggested that membership, in constructing a division between members and non-members, may be perceived and experienced as an emotionally invested attachment so that members do not just contribute, but belong (although members may interpret these social ties very differently, and some members may be more powerfully positioned than others). I would suggest that this recognition of membership as a constructive practice might be equally productive and useful to investigations that focus on poetry circles, creative writing groups, indie music labels, independent publishers or theatre companies. Indeed, it may be that it works with regard to a number of kinds of collective action and not just those that might be termed 'artistic', including, for example, grassroots political activism, independent food producers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or hackers. This is certainly not to say that membership would be constructed in the same way, or that it would be equally meaningful for members in each case, points that have already been refuted in relation to the three ARIs discussed above. Rather, it is to suggest that 'membership' (and identity and learning), as analytically conceived and applied here, is a potentially useful tool open to further application (and critical revision) within any enquiry that similarly seeks to understand the complexities involved in cultural production in practice, and which may help to render visible the multiple tensions, ambiguities and complexities involved in this kind of everyday action.

## 8.4 Implications for practice

This thesis has been written from a particular position, and one not concerned with making (or imposing) any judgements as to what should count as 'art', who should be an 'artist', or what the actions, decisions and/or future plans of those involved in the three ARIs studied, and in ARIs more generally, should be. Rather the focus of this study has been the judgements and decisions made by those involved, and, as Becker et al. argue, those involved 'haven't asked for our advice and don't need it' (2006: 3) - although I would add that while the 'gatekeepers' I spoke to certainly didn't solicit or

need 'advice', they all welcomed, and were interested in, another opinion and perspective. I hope that I have offered them that, and done justice to the time they shared with me. However, while leaving artist-run practice to the practitioners to figure out for themselves, as a necessary part of that practice, there is one area within what might loosely be termed 'practice' to which this thesis might make a final contribution: the predominant construction of artist-run practice in literature including anthologies, surveys of practice, artists' journals and magazines, and the art press, as singular, shared, or at the very least as having certain key similarities.

This then, is to return to an argument begun in Chapter Two, where it was noted that ARIs were frequently suggested to be 'united by a common culture' (Detterer 2012: 21), or to otherwise share certain key features (as stated, for example, by Staniszewski (2012), Ault (2002), Pagé (1996), Bosse and Obrist (1996) and by eight of the contributors to *Institutions by Artists* (2012)). Further, it was noted here that the dominant presentation of the 'artist' was either singular (e.g. Detterer (2012:22) states that 'the artist […] cooperates and shares'), or seemingly so commonplace and 'obvious' that the term merited no discussion at all (e.g. as Staniszewski (2012), Ault (2002), Pagé (1996), Bosse and Obrist (1996) all implied).

It was argued in Chapter Two that this construction of an overarching similarity should be rejected, on the grounds that it was inaccurate, unhelpful, and worked to occlude animating tensions and critical divisions in the field. I would now add to this that the notion of ARIs as belonging to a largely unified category is further obstructive on one central count: it fails to critically engage with ARIs on the terms they propose. As such, artistic practices that attempt to fundamentally re-constitute and re-organise the field of artistic practice, from varying perspectives and through varying approaches, are arguably 'emptied' of the very distinctions that constitute and render practice meaningful for those involved, so that activity is reduced to a single, seemingly homogenous category. Thus, for instance, Empty Shop's focus on democratic access to the arts, and 85A's challenge to 'mainstream' arts production, might be lumped together under the banner of the 'alternative'.

It has been argued above that the three ARIs who participated in this research project were key sites for the production of (distinct) cultures with profound consequences for notions of 'art' and 'artists', not to mention the significant impact they were suggested to have upon individuals' understandings of themselves and their place in the world. The question then is this: if other ARIs also operate as key sites for the production of distinct cultures, what is gained through this construction of overarching similarity in the literature, and what is lost? What impact might this construction of similarity, as working both in the literature and in the vernacular of artist-run practice, have upon artists' decision-making, and the ability of those involved in ARIs to work in the world?

I cannot yet answer these questions, but I would suggest that while constructions of similarity may have once been useful to draw attention to a burgeoning area of activity and to claim some kind of critical mass, and may still be useful pulling together practices that overlap and come into contact with

each other, and which may well have shared concerns and key features in common in some instances, they are no longer a responsible or adequate means by which to present and engage with ARIs. I would thus argue, with Goldbard (2002), Claxton (2005) and Dickson (1998) against any mythologising of artist-run practice, and against constructions of similarity that inaccurately present all artists and all ARIs as somehow 'the same', thus perpetuating a number of 'givens' (Thompson 2005) without critical attention, and which threaten to remove from view the very distinctions that members in the ARIs discussed above worked so hard to construct.

I would hope, in offering empirical evidence of the complexities and distinctions involved in meaning-making in practice within the three ARIs studied (which is, to the best of my knowledge, the first attempt to do so in relation to notions of membership, identity or 'learning') to lend weight to a more nuanced approach.

## 8.5 Avenues for future research

As a relatively new field of enquiry, there are a number of approaches and avenues for future research that I think may prove beneficial in working towards a more developed understanding of the impact and workings of ARIs, two of which stand out in particular. First, it seems that membership and involvement, as part of a 'life lived', take place not solely within the boundaries of a single site, but in relation to multiple sites over time, and as such research which 'tracked' members and engaged in longer-term fieldwork seems likely to offer further valuable perspectives. Second, it often seemed to me that there was a missing layer of involvement – the non-members, rejected members and visitors – who also encountered the ARIs although in varying ways. While the line of enquiry taken required a great deal of space and time to allow for a sufficiently detailed engagement, and thus arguably left little to no room for any additional 'voices', perspectives of this kind were likely to have proven invaluable, particularly in relation to work concerning the boundaries surrounding membership. Indeed, this may have provided an avenue for the further investigation of meaning-making as engaged in (or not) by visitors at the point of display, or possibly after, and thus for an extended account of cultural appropriation and use. These then, are points that I would like to return to in future work.

It has also been noted at varying points throughout the thesis that care must be taken not to overstate the case for culture, and that the social, material and the symbolic were all at play within ARIs, and all as such constitute avenues of further enquiry. However, as these avenues were discussed in Chapter Six, there are three further areas to which the thesis could not stretch that I would like to briefly outline. First, a number of members appeared to invest certain geographical locations with emotional significance and/or talked of 'place' in such a way as to position an understanding of 'place' as constructive, rather than as 'simply and evidently 'there'' (Gubrium and Holstein 2007: 3). For example, TMP2, TME+1 and ES31 respectively remarked:

> I kind of wanted to […] leave Glasgow to see if I […] I missed it in a way, to challenge it and to see if I wanted it, or if I needed it, like as a place […] in my life.

> It's a very supportive environment for artists and, of course, Glasgow is very good for that.

> Empty Shop [was founded] in response to there not being many places where young established artists could show their work, in a sleepy town like Durham, and there being so many empty shops closed by the recession just sat there wasting away.

Remarks such as these are reminiscent of those made by Beck (2002) and Faguet (2012) in Chapter Two, who argued for place as a significant factor in enabling or disabling specific productions of culture, and thus, I would suggest, indicate a further area of enquiry with potentially significant import. A second area of interest concerns the strand of thinking that Fox and King (2002), Marcus (2008) and Lizardo (2011: 28) identify as 'post-cultural' in anthropology. While there are, as Chapter One noted, a number of varied opinions and possibilities here (e.g. Marcus (2008: 3) has argued that the concept of 'culture' is no longer viable, while Fox and King (2002) have argued for a local, rather than global approach), the work in this area has not been fully explored for reasons of space, and yet offers a potential challenge to the concept of 'culture' employed within this thesis that might critically extend and develop future work, and so will be returned to. A final area, similarly offering a critical perspective that might be used to develop thinking, is psychology, where for example Minissale (2013: xiii) has argued that 'contemporary artworks provide situations where emotions, sensory perceptions and concepts combine in unique ways to structure meaning'. Here then, is a potential fourth mechanism by which to study the production of culture, and one which might expand upon the learning theories discussed in Chapter Seven and offer fresh perspectives as to how individuals 'construct new knowledge about ourselves and the world we live in today' (*ibid*: xiv).

## 8.6 Closing remarks

Finally, I would like to return to the ramifications of the research project and to suggest once more that, despite the primary focus upon ARIs employed throughout this thesis, this study has significance more broadly within the field of art, and for research concerning the production of artistic and non-artistic cultures. A number of the most important findings are summarised below:

- There are now vast numbers of operative ARIs throughout the world, and ARIs are widely promoted as 'the norm' for young artists in the United Kingdom (a-n 2008). This thesis has demonstrated, in the instance of the three ARIs studied at least, that involvement in ARIs can lead to the production of 'new' and challenging artworks, to 'new' and challenging forms of practice, and to processes that seek to 'open up' art to 'anyone'. In other words, ARIs can act as key sites in the production of art and artists, and they warrant further critical attention.

- The ARIs studied did not correspond to any single, harmonious ARI culture. Rather, each continually constructed and legitimated *distinct* forms of artistic practice, as performed by different 'types' of person, through different forms of practice, and with varying end results. It is in this sense that I have argued for the social construction of the categories of 'art' and 'artists' within specific 'cultures'. I have further posited that this meaning-making may not be accepted as legitimate beyond established boundaries – a point with both significance for the understanding of artistic 'conventions' (Becker 2008 [1982]) more broadly, as well as for the practical or 'real life' experiences of members.

- The concept of 'membership', used within the thesis as a means by which to explore both the kinds of practice legitimated within the particular boundaries set out by the ARIs in question as well as notions of friendship, loyalty and belonging, allows for an understanding of the three ARIs studied not simply as sites of cultural production, but as places where members might 'matter' (Guibernau 2013: 28). This point, I believe, has further significance not only for the sociology of art, which tends to portray cultural production as emotionally neutral, but also for research into cultural production more broadly.

- The thesis also offers an account of the social construction of artistic identities, demonstrating the ways by which members in each ARI studied drew upon, and navigated, distinct cultures as a means by which to identify themselves legibly, and be 'heard' as meaningful. Despite the concentrated focus of this data, contemporary examples such as those presented in the thesis are largely absent from sociological debate, and thus have the potential to significantly extend a largely historical area of enquiry.

- Similarly, the thesis offers, via its enquiry into the 'lived participation' (Wenger 1998) of members and the forms of 'learning' recognised (or implicitly adopted) by members in each ARI studied, an account of everyday interaction as imbued with cultural and political ideas of the 'artist' and 'art'. Here too then, the data presented has the potential to contribute to, and to challenge, theories of knowledge production that do not allow for interaction, or which consider 'learning' to be neutral, natural and passively 'transmittable'.

- Finally, it bears repeating that members in each ARI studied were not equally able to claim certain identities, to work in certain ways, or to cross certain boundaries. As such, it might again be stated that the production of culture is not straightforward, neat or even, but complex, local, ambiguous, at times emotionally fraught, and in constant flux.

The final point made here is an important one, for there were a number of members who suggested they were still searching for a place in the world, for an opportunity to resolve the balance between artistic practice and the practical demands of 'real life', or to legitimate a sense of self previously rejected. A singular ARI then, is not the answer to everything, for everyone. However, there were members, in each of the three ARIs studied, who worked tirelessly to create opportunities for others, who founded studios that they themselves did not need, who sourced materials and equipment as required by members they had never met, who supported each other through 'tough times' [ESF2] and 'believed' in the work produced [ESF1], who would go to the end of the world for each other [85A81], and who

often took the opportunity of the interview to heap praise upon those who had provided such 'golden' opportunities [TMP2].

Bourdieu (1993: 81) once spoke of artists as 'collectively mandated to perform a magic act', and his point is a useful one. Yet what members indicated during this research project was not an act of magic, but an act of dedication, an act that suggested a belief that the world could be made differently; that they might find, or create, a place in the world to which they might to belong. It was an act that relied upon vast quantities of hard work and sacrifice, and on hard work and sacrifice that might just as easily have remained undone, or un-attempted.

It was, perhaps most importantly, an act that relied upon the power of collective action and upon those members who decided, at some point, to give it a go.

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85A -

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# Appendix One: Database of potential case studies

| Name | Location | ARI? | CVA? | Membership? |
|------|----------|------|------|-------------|
| The Mutual | Glasgow | x | x | x |
| Transmission | | x | x | x |
| Market Gallery | | x | x | x |
| Lowsalt | | Closed | x | ? |
| The Duchy | | x | x | ? |
| A. Vermin | | x | x | ? |
| David Dale | | x | x | x |
| Washington Garcia | | x | x | ? |
| Kendell Koppe Gallery | | x | x | ? |
| Central Station | | x | x | x |
| Glasgow Independent Studio | | x | x | x |
| Ten til Ten | | x | x | ? |
| WASPS | | No | x | x |
| The Telfer | | x | x | ? |
| Ironbbratz | | x | x | x |
| EmergeD | | Closed | x | ? |
| The Glasgow Collective | | x | x | ? |
| Intermedia | | No | x | ? |
| 85A | | x | x | x |
| The Glue Factory | | x | x | x |
| Southside Studios | | x | x | x |
| Mary Mary | | Dealer | x | x |
| Sorcha Dallas | | Dealer | x | x |
| The Pipe Factory | | ? | x | x |
| SWG3 | | x | x | x |
| The NewBridge Project | Newcastle | x | x | x |
| Situation Rhubarb | | x | x | ? |
| 25SG | | x | x | x |
| CIRCA | | x | x | ? |
| Amber Collective | | x | x | x |
| Empty Shop | Durham | x | x | x |

# Appendix Two: Sample research agreement

Research Agreement

This agreement relates to the PhD research undertaken by Emma Coffield working at the International Centre for Culture and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University under the supervision of Chris Whitehead.

The researcher:

- Will not mention by name any participant / the artist-run initiative
- Will keep all data securely and use it for the purposes of academic research only.
- Will ensure that all participants have the right to withdraw at any time, although data provided up to that point may be kept and used within the research.
- Will provide a full transcript for each participant, plus the ability to add further comments, although participants will not be able to delete information.

The undersigned:

- o Have granted the researcher permission to collect data between the dates agreed below
- o Have granted the researcher permission to gather documents relating to the research project
- o Have granted the researcher permission to contact individual members of the organisation for the purposes of research
- o Have granted the researcher permission to attend further meetings / events and to record these for the purposes of research

Dates for research: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Participant's signature(s):

## Appendix Three: Sample interview schedule

Interview Schedule


**Before we start, is there anything you would like to ask me? Did you have any questions about the form?**

Could you tell me a little bit about yourself to start?

And could you tell me about [x]?
> Could you describe [x] for me?

Why did you join [x]?
> How did you find out about [x]? Do you remember how/why you joined? Did you have any reservations? Has anything surprised you? How long have you been part of [x]?

Would you say you had any particular role within [x]?
> Do you have any particular responsibilities / positions? Could you describe them for me? What does this involve? How did it come about? How do you feel about this? Was there anything you couldn't get involved in?

I'd like to ask you a few more questions based on what you've just told me, is that ok?

You mentioned _____ Can you tell me more about that?
> Could you describe / define ___ for me? How does this work at [x]? Could you give me an example? Is this something you are involved in? Are other people involved?

What does _____mean to you?
> How do you feel about this? Why do you think this might be?

Is _____ different to _____?
> In what ways? Are there any similarities / differences? Could you give me an example? Why do you think that might be?


In my research I use the word membership / identity / learning – is that a word you would apply to [x]?
> Is this different to what we were discussing just now? In what way?


Could you draw [x]?
And on the back, could you draw a timeline for yourself?


**Thank you so much for helping me with my research. Before I go is there anything you would like to add / ask me?**

# Appendix Four: Sample individual permission form

Research Agreement

This agreement relates to the PhD research undertaken by Emma Coffield working at the International Centre for Culture and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University under the supervision of Dr. Chris Whitehead.

The researcher:

- Has gained project approval from the HaSS Ethics Committee at Newcastle University and will abide by these standards
- Will keep all data securely and use it for the purposes of academic research only
- Will ensure that all participants have the right to withdraw at any time, although data provided up to that point may be kept and used within the research
- Is willing to provide a full transcript for the relating participant(s), plus the ability to add further comments, although participants will not be able to delete information
- Will not refer to any participant by name

I agree to participate in the research, as described above

Yes / No

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time

Yes / No

I would like to receive a transcript of the interview

Yes / No

Name of participant _____

Name of researcher _____

Date _____

# Appendix Five: Sample interview transcript

I = Interviewer
M = Member of ARI
█ = Potentially identifying information (e.g. names, roles taken)

[I and M introduce themselves, consent forms are signed and permission to record is given]

I: before we start is there anything you want to ask me
M: erm no I think you've just pretty much explained your er your whole thing so it's fine
I: ok so to start with can you tell me a little bit about yourself
M: erm well erm [pause] was [pause] I grew up in █████ erm and my father's ████████
████████████████
I: mm
M: and er er studied ████████ and then finished and now I'm well I'm ████████
████████████████ er [laughs] and erm well ████████ actually erm er I dunno what
what else do you want to talk about
I: no that's ok er and can you tell me about ██
M: er ██ is a collective erm of artists and I mean that's pretty br it's pretty broad I mean
there's all sorts of people in ██ but it's kind of er loose knit group of people who er get
together erm and put on kind of immersive er art shows which are er as much about the
experience as they are the materials and er erm the content er and yeah I mean I guess that's
sort of the the crux of it [laughs]
I: and er
M: but it's so much more [laughs]
I: do you remember when you joined
M: I do erm well I mean I don't know if joined is the right word because there is like a core
group of people and I'm not that [laughs] but er I remember it was er ████████████████
████████████████████████████████ and er it it was right before erm [pause] the er
████████████ not the last one but the er one before
I: that's ████
M: ████ yeah er and my flatmate at the time ████████████████ had I don't even know
how but ████ heard about that we live we lived right on ████████████████ and
████ heard about a barbeque down in this disused bit of land and I think it was like a
Saturday or a Sunday and we had nothing to do so we thought why not we'll go check it out
and we'd heard it was kind of based around a art project that was going to be happening but it
was more just to see what was going on yeah er so we went down there and it was just like
you know a group of the friendliest people you've ever met and er er just you know having
some burgers and drinking some beers and explained that they were doing this project called
████████████ erm and seeing as I was ████████████████████ but not necessarily
enjoying it that much or being a bit disillusioned it seemed like something that was kind of
right up my alley and you know you it it just sort of er seemed like it had been something that I
had been looking for in ████████ anyway and erm I also wanted to get er get some hands on
experience with er sort of helping out with er art projects and things like this so erm you know
they said we we need any volunteers that we can get and that kind of thing so you know
come back at I don't know I can't remember what it was like come back er a month later or
whatever when they were going to start the build on the site erm and so that's what I did er
████ as well er ████████████████████████████████████████████
████████████████████████████████████████
I: [laughs]
M: er and so yeah that was kind of my introduction erm
I: and so you mentioned there that you er that this was something you were looking for so
what was it specifically about ██ that was the reason you joined
M: er
I: or got got involved

M: well I dunno it kind of like happens more yeah I guess it happens a bit more like organically that that you know you just kind of [pause] I I knew I was aware that kind of things like this happened in ▮▮▮▮▮ but I hadn't really had that in because if you I mean it's kind of different when you're ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and so I wasn't really part of that art school er world you know I I'd kind of like seen it er but yeah it wasn't really er I hadn't been really initiated into that world so [laughs] this was kind of something really new for me but I end up again I knew it it existed but I just didn't really know where to find it you know what I mean erm and I was kind of hesitant you know you expect things like this to be kind of er a bit insular or closed off or you know kind of a [pause] scene as it were you know but er this seemed like er really refreshing and er they were er you know really welcoming and kind of er it didn't matter like where you were coming from kind of thing you know erm I don't think I even asked I mean it was just like oh you're here you're here to help that's fine you know
I: and so since er ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ was the first one have you been involved with things
M: yeah
I: after that
M: er ▮▮▮▮▮▮ that was the longest thing that I've done with them erm so in ▮▮▮▮▮▮ I was just like ▮▮▮▮▮ basically they had these ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮ [laughs] erm and we kind of er took tours of the park and er collected data which was sort of just er I mean that was part of the artwork really it was it wasn't actual data er [laughs] but sort of went round with in these lab coats I mean but mostly it was just kind of I mean it was a lot of fun it was like two weeks of of er you know meeting new people and erm kind ta taking them around erm and learning about these different works of art which like I I hadn't met any of these artist before and that was a cool thing actually about ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ it wasn't just ▮▮▮ they had like er [pause] brought in er a bunch of quite established artists actually erm to do sculptures so that was cool to see the mixture of this kind of DIY thing and then there were some really finished pieces of work as well erm [pause] and so I just like a lot of it was just learning about like all these kind of different practices and stuff and er that was really interesting for me but then sorry I don't even know [laughs] what was the question again
I: [laughs] so there was ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and then after that
M: after that was ▮▮▮▮▮▮ yeah I think they called they or ▮▮▮ emailed me er I think it was was it that it must have been that summer at the end of that summer ▮▮▮▮▮▮ had this idea for making a movie and everything and would I be ▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ [laughs] so he said you are you interested and I said yeah I'll give it a shot you know are you sure kind of thing and yeah yeah so er [pause] it wasn't even that actually it was [laughs] at first they said we just need like as many hands as we can get for you know lighting even camera work that kind of stuff so I did I showed up and they were filming something in right by where ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ was where the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ used to be or still are I'm not sure erm and [pause] and and at that point I think ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ so then he asked if I could ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and then it just kind of went from there like I think that whole autumn we we er we were like filming once or twice a week erm just in kind of crazy er abandoned er disused bits bits of land and abandoned locations and stuff erm and that was just amazing but I mean a lot of fun a bit crazy because er nice and then the only other thing that I did with them was a gig a erm just a one night thing in in the ▮▮▮▮▮▮ er for they had like a ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ er thing where they had got a whole bunch of different artists and like er dancers and well just different kinds of entertainment I guess erm and they put on a thing about it was called er ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ about erm [pause] like as as all their things are it was kind of like a semi-historical investigation but I guess it was sort of the most formal thing that I've ever seen them done which was like the closest thing to an actual play and again ▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ [laughs] in the this in this thing but erm er erm [pause] that was like a like a week or two of preparation and then they just did a one off er thing for that night er so it was those three things I think that er yeah basically were the
I: and have you wanted to be involved in anything else that they've done
M: erm [pause] well the only other things that I can think they've done are er have been out outside of ▮▮▮▮▮ actually I think I'm trying to [pause] or either that or I haven't been in

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████████ while they're doing them so I think if I had had been around I would certainly have you know helped out any way I could have er er

I: and are you still involved with them

M: well I as far as I know it's kind of it's a bit on hiatus at the moment I think a lot of the members are doing er their own kind of work erm [pause] and I don't know it seems like er they don't have any immediate ideas as far as I know anyway erm but I imagine they'll regroup at some point and [laughs] and they all work together and none the less I mean they you know even if it's just two or three of them they're constantly working on different things but ██████ I'm not sure what's happening at the moment

I: ok and would you say you had any particular role or responsibility

M: no [laughs]

I: [laughs] ok erm

M: I just take take orders I mean er not orders but er you know it's I'm not like I haven't been involved in creating anything if if that's what you mean or making any decisions particularly you know it's er [pause] kind of er a prop is a good word I guess but like that that sounds like you know I've been mistreated or something but that's not the case but er it's kind of er [pause] I wouldn't pretend to know you know what I mean they have def very definite ideas about what they want to do and and I wouldn't pretend to know where they've come from or or er [pause] even pretend that I had any sort of good input [laughs] erm

I: when we sat down at the beginning before I turned the recorder on you'd said that you were a little bit worried maybe about not being able to talk about it because you felt you were on the periphery I can't was it periphery the word you used

M: yeah or like at at I don't know like I said there's a a core group of people and that might be like [pause]

I: could I get you to draw that out for me would that be ok

M: draw it out

I: yeah like rather than writing down the names or like if you if you could sort of somehow map out on there

M: ok sorry I forgot you know who the names are ok [mumbles]

I: what it looks like

M: [draws] well there's like I don't know maybe about █ people in here

I: ok

M: and that includes er

I: oh you can write their names down [laughs]

M: er [writes] I'm going to forget people

I oh no no no don't worry I won't [laughs] it doesn't have to be specific

M: [laughs] erm well anyway there's [pause]

I: yeah so roughly eight there

M: roughly ██████████████████████ people who are and mind you actually when I started ████████████ and everything its as far as I know ████ didn't really exist or it did but they were doing it under ██████

I: ok

M: er which was ████████████████████████████████████████████ ████████████████████████████████████ but that was kind of their project but it involved everyone who's in ████ as well so you've got this like group of people who are really they come up with the idea they plan it erm [pause] so that's they kind of do all the pre-production and everything erm and a lot of them are like tech kind of people like ████ and ██████ erm and ████ as well like erm as well as being kind of artists in their own right they they really do this kind of all that er all that tech like you know like the stuff that kind of really makes it happen they have the expertise basically

I: ok

M: erm and then it kind of everyone else comes in as like hands you know like [laughs] erm er

I: so where are you on this

M: erm [laughs] out here [laughs]

I: and is there anyone else out here

M: [laughs] well ██ would have been at the time and there but like there are countless people like for ████████ like there must have been close to like 40 people in all actually you know helped out doing that thing and like I couldn't even possibly remember all their names they wouldn't remember mine you know erm [pause] so there's like a lot of people and sometimes it's just to if it's just to come and like like what I do you know just come in and you're in one

shot of a film like in a costume or whatever but like people do it because it's you know it's like going to a fancy dress party but you're actually creating something you know er so there's lots and lots of people who are who are involved but not necessarily you know they're part of ██ but they're not actually you know creating the er the output or the er [pause] yeah like so and then there are people who are closer like erm who do like things logistically like who help out a lot with like the planning er in a kind of more less creative sense let's say like in a more practical way like ████ kind of bridges that er thing but then you've got like er ████████████ ████████████████ [pause] er I can't even remember but er er and yeah they will like handle like pick up the slack in terms of like you know oh we need people to take care of selling tickets or you know there's like a bit more responsibility and they're like you know they're trusted er and and you know they they also work in like the theatre and stuff like this so they kind of they know how these things work er so yeah it's I think that's the best way I can kind of
I: yeah yeah that's great
M: sum all that up but er but really I'm just like a [pause] one of the people who just kind of you know I I'll do whatever is kind of needed of me you know what I mean I don't like have any kind of input into
I: and at the beginning you said that you'd got involved if I've got you right because you you were looking for something like this has that changed I mean why why are you still involved
M: erm just because they're my friends now and and every experience I've had with them has been kind of unparalleled by er anything that I've ever done before you know and er it's just such a joy and like a satisfying experience when when it all comes to fruition you know just just even in the most minor way to be like I've been a part of that and er erm [pause] yeah you feel kind of proud erm and proud of the people who really did you know the main bit of the work you know as your friends erm as people you admire as artists as well you know so its like er you know as like a person who ████████████████ it's kind of like I understand my place in all this where it's [pause] to give support and to [pause] and appreciate as well you know erm so sometimes I feel as much a part of the audience as I do of the show you know [pause]
I: and [pause] has your involvement meant anything to you personally
M: er yeah definitely I mean beyond the people I've met and sort of the friends I've made do you mean like er
I: no no including that
M: well there's that and then [pause] erm [pause] again yeah that sense of sort of accomplishment in a way [laughs] even though I know that sounds crazy after just what I've said about kind of not actually doing much but er but yeah like you've you're part of something and then that's followed through and it's like [pause] you know you can't you couldn't do something like that alone so it's it's great to [pause] to know about this kind of like a facility basically you know like
I: mm
M: [laughs] a community center or whatever it might be but it like you know obviously it's a lot more dynamic than that but er [pause]
I: so when you say more dynamic than the community center or the facility what do you mean
M: well just because it's not like an institution you know like it's mobile and it's kind of erm [pause] yeah there aren't any there aren't any rules or anything like that I mean or any kind of er [pause] I don't think I've ever seen anyone vote on anything or anything like that you know it just sort of seems to it seems to happen [pause]
I: would it be alright now if I just asked you about some of the things you've already said
M: sure yeah
I: and maybe what you meant by the term so at the beginning you described them as a collective of artists could you tell me what you mean by the word collective
M: er as far as I understand it [laughs] er it would just be a erm [pause] group of artists who work together towards a common goal erm and each person er has their own kind of er talents and expertise to bring bring to the table
I: and so when you say erm expertise or talents could you give me an example
M: sure well like I mentioned there erm like ███ is a wizard with ████████████ ████████████████████████████████████████████████ so that's just one example but then like ██████████ is is is the the er [pause] like he's basically the ████████████████ ████████ I would say like the whole aesthetic of ███ well like is definitely strongly influenced by ████████████████████████████████████████████████████ ████████████████████████████████████████ [pause] er then you've

got like ███████████████████████████████████████████ █████████
██████████████████████████████████

I: [laughs]

M: ████████████████████████████████████████████████████████
████ kind of the go to guy for anything that's like er scripting like writing stuff like that or even doing like formal stuff like proposals and stuff ████████████████████████████
████████████████████████████ erm and then ████ is like er er kind of all things at once █████ like a sort of a [pause] cheerleader organiser you know ████ you you could kind of say █████ like the captain captain of the team of whatever [laughs] you know like ███ has to corral everyone make sure things are run smoothly and all that

I: mm

M: erm [pause] er so ████ kind of like almost a motherly [pause] figure I guess erm and then yeah like █████ does a lot of er sound and stuff like that erm [pause] ████████ does does lots of stuff jack of all trades [laughs] er trying to think what else and then like they have people who are in theatre so like for acting like erm ██████████ does a lot of that erm [pause] yeah I mean and then everyone kind of pitches in where where the help is needed but a lot of the designs will be based on what █████ come up with and [pause]

I: so could you erm I'm assuming you're one of the guys that pitches in

M: er yeah I mean if I if I like know how to do it you know what I mean er if they were like can you set up this er you know projector or whatever well no I can't [laughs]

I: [laughs]

M: but er

I: so but if you could er give me an example of a time when they've done that but right from when they asked you or how it started kind of all the way through

M: er well █████████████ it was like er I remember helping ████ like you know digging holes [laughs]

I: but how how did you get to the point where you dug some holes

M: oh I just went to the site and was sitting around it was does does anyone need any help and he was like yeah [laughs]

I: ok

M: o er yeah stuff like that on that one erm [pause] but I'm not us like I haven't usually been part of build building stuff that much erm because that's generally like [pause] they kind of get down and graft and do that like they have a a very good like working system and rhythm and I think they know how long it takes when it's like people that you've seen working before and kind of you know [pause] more of a routine kind of thing erm so it's more [inaudible: been more about?] the performance side since since ███████████ I mean erm [pause] so I think I'm maybe a just a go to guy when they need like a you know a body to put stuff on or whatever [laughs]

I: [laughs]

M: a mannequin

I: at the beginning you'd said that you were you were at ████████████████

M: yep

I: and that you were sort of aware of this art school world and that you'd kind of seen it but you weren't part of it what what's this art school world could you describe that for me or tell me more about that

M: well people making things you know what I mean and er and whether that be like you know er an actual object or er an event or an occasion you know but erm so [pause] well and just a community as well you know like any community like er erm [pause]

I: when you say like any community [laughs] what what do you mean

M: [laughs] erm [pause] well I mean kind of social I mean it's like a social group you know er erm well you have like you know your community of let's say I don't know at university it would have been like you know art students or science students you know the people who kind of hang out together [pause] share common interests let's say erm [pause] but then the thing is with this kind of art school world that that common interest is just just er [pause] well to create I guess you know er not just to talk about it [laughs]

I: so who who are the people that are involved in this community

M: er what do you mean you mean in art

I: erm

M: well people who go to art school [laughs]

I: people who go to art school

M: I guess so yeah or people who have been to art school as well you know er

I: so the art school is important

M: oh I would say yeah it's fundamental yeah erm

I: why

M: just because it's like a [pause] sort of breeding ground you know for erm [pause] yeah people people who [pause] erm [pause] who aren't necessarily focused on [pause] careers you know it's very like in in the moment kind of thing you know like [pause] although that makes it sound kind of erm flippant but it's like obviously a lot of planning goes into these experiences but they're like one-off things you know and they're not er they're not really for sale either you know erm [pause] so it's kind of like endeavor for the sake of it if you know what I mean like er like let's see if we can actually do this and pull it off you know it's instead of going like well is that a good idea like well what's the point or or

I: and is that ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or is that something wider and more general or

M: oh I don't know if I'd be able to answer that

I: ok

M: erm I think ▮▮▮▮ is pretty unique in that way I mean it's in terms of what I've come across er [pause]

I: in what way are they unique do you think

M: erm I don't know it's hard to describe

I: [laughs]

M: it's something almost like mystical like they work together like I guess a lot of it has to do with trust and just like friendship but I think mainly trust like trusting each other's kind of ability and ideas erm like an implicit one you know or like as I said like I don't think I've ever seen them kind of you know raise their hand and vote it's just like [pause] they talk it out and it's like ok well this let's let's [inaudible] you know

I: and you think that's unusual

M: erm [pause] I think it's unusual yeah definitely like that [pause] you know like I've been in bands and stuff and I know like even how difficult it is to get four people in the same room and like you know once a week to practice and you know be on the same page even about like what you're doing and so that when you see it with like two dozen people it's kind of remarkable you know that they can kind of get on with it and actually actually accomplish it [mumbles]

I: erm all the way through when you've been talking about ▮▮▮▮▮▮ you'd said that there were all sorts of people involved but that it was this collective of artists

M: yeah

I: and that they might have these different specialisms ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ but you've never used the word artist in conjunction with yourself you described yourself as a prop

M: yeah well I'm not

I: or a guy

M: yeah yeah

I: or so you the word artist isn't something that you would apply to yourself

M: no well at least certainly not in this context no

I: [laughs] ok can I ask you why that is

M: er well well just because I don't contribute anything er [pause] er of of artistic merit I think [pause] I mean you can call mime an art perhaps [laughs] but that's about as far as it goes you know erm

I: ok

M: so I would never claim to be responsible for any of the ideas or

I: right

M: erm or anything like that yeah [pause] I I wouldn't take credit for anything that ▮▮▮ has done [pause]

I: ok erm and also you were talking about ▮▮▮▮▮▮ at one point

M: yeah

I: and then at some there's some transition I guess or there's a change

M: yeah again again I can't tell you much about that but I think it had I mean I think ▮▮▮▮▮▮ was meant to be ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ I'm not really sure [laughs] er and I think it just had to do with like maybe it's to do with ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ er it probably still exists even I know they still have like email addresses under that that name so er [pause] but I just don't remember ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ being

like chucked around maybe like people had patches and stuff but I don't remember [pause] that being billed as an ██████ of er

I: do you know when it changed [pause] has it changed

M: yeah yeah

I: yeah

M: I mean the first er [pause] yeah the first I kind of knew about ███ was I guess when we started █████████ or kind of maybe I'd seen about heard about it and then like having put it all together and been like oh this is the same people like you know er [pause] so I guess ██ is like the broader

I: mm right

M: er whereas ██████ was I think █████████ people who actually set set up something

I: and you also talked at er the beginning was er the kind of stuff that you were looking for was erm hands on experience I was just wondering what you meant by the word experience

M: [laughs] er [pause] er

I: would it help if erm if it's experience in something normally isn't it so what

M: no no no

I: no

M: well I guess perhaps like what I was looking for I mean like er [pause] oh well you know like er experience for [pause] a c.v. or whatever you know like oh I can say I've you know invigilated here and worked but that really like I wouldn't I could put it on my c.v. but I don't think it would be a strange job that I'd be applying for I think where they would go oh that's [laughs]

I: so you don't it's not on your c.v.

M: er I'd put it down as kind of like a hobby or whatever like a

I: ok

M: you know like but er not a hobby but like you know like experience as in outside of work experience

I: ok so it's not connected to work

M: because it's never it doesn't it's never no it's er [pause] anything that I've ever done hasn't been very difficult work it's possibly been dangerous sometimes [laughs]

I: [laughs]

M: but that's kind of you know erm yeah that's besides the point but

I: I'm getting the idea that it's quite separate from your work so erm is that right

M: well I don't have any work so [laughs]

I: [laughs] but is it separate from the idea of work for you

M: oh yeah

I: so what's the idea of work can you just sort of tell me what it is that you imagine

M: erm well [pause] doing something for like [laughs] monetary remuneration I guess er [pause]

I: is it in a specific area or

M: what work er that I

I: yeah the things that you would like to do

M: oh I er [pause] no no no not at all I mean like I just mean as a general idea like er [pause] er [pause] I don't know maybe I'm explaining this wrong

I: no

M: it is I mean it is work what like especially what they do erm [pause] but [pause] I don't know there's a sense of purpose about it I guess and a sense of like er there's always like a kind of festive atmosphere you know so it's [pause] to call it works seems to be feels to me to like cheapen the whole thing you know erm

I: can I ask you why that is

M: just because it's something more than that you know it's like er [pause] it maybe yeah I don't know endeavor might be a better word or kind of er erm [pause] yeah

I: [laughs] erm you also said that when you were working in █████████ that you were learning about works of art what did you mean there by the word learning

M: erm [pause] the well there was like a com quite a complex er what would you call it not story but they'd like really worked out [pause] this kind of fiction er about like what ██████ ███ was so there was kind of like a whole er [pause] like it was really immersive I mean that was the intention right erm but that's because they it was such a well kind of constructed er concept you know but that was also quite it had a lot of depth to it so like you're kind of understanding all this different stuff as as it goes on and er you know they they explained it all

at the beginning but you're kind of erm [pause] baffled I guess I was anyway I was like ok you know it sort of makes sense but then it all got built and stuff and you're like wandering around and seeing a new thing every time you pass through it and kind of erm [pause] you know like anything they do there's so much kind of detail and er [pause] er yeah I guess there's so much detail that you kind of you know you could go through it a dozen times and still miss something or er

I: so when you said learning there so you is that different to this idea of experience

M: erm [pause] I don't know I guess you learn you learn something from any experience but erm [pause] but I guess what I meant by that is that I was kind of [pause] more intentionally trying it was the first time I had met any of them so I was learning about all these people as people you know as individuals as like so learning about them as friends basically erm and you know just of out of interest you know what they do and everything like that learning how they all got tog I mean like how something like this I don't know can work and er and so after that point I guess it becomes more about the experience once you kind of know er all the people and how it kind of works and everything it's er less about learning er just the experience of doing it and seeing it completed er and [pause] yeah

I: that's great erm final question just on the back of here could I get you to erm sketch out or draw or list a kind of timeline for yourself

M: of

I: of the key events or erm occasions or roles or periods of time whatever you'd like to

M: er what starting with █████████████

I: you can start wherever you like

M: ok erm [writes] let's say this is when I ██████████████ I think erm so [murmurs] █████████ ████████████████████

I: it doesn't have to be specific but yeah I'm pretty sure that was ████

M: so I guess it would have been about [pause] ████ maybe that I went to that barbeque [writes] erm [pause] oh no it would have been ████ wouldn't it because █████████████████ ████████

I: ████████████████

M: so I mean you had the build right after that erm [pause] the show went on for two weeks I think and it was like glorious weather as well [laughs] er then [writes] so later that summer [writes] er ████████████ starts [pause] and that went on for a long time [laughs]

I: [laughs]

M: well basically until I think it's still going on I think ██████ still editing that erm film so er and then somewhere in between █████████ starting and then the ████████████ show going on there was that er [pause] I'll say █████████ show [pause] which was last [pause] er and then er █████████████████ which was really like er I mean that was it's actually one of my favourite things that they've done er

I: why was it your favourite

M: erm [pause] it was really well written and er [pause] I guess it was a little more er [pause] it was more traditionally you know er my favourite thing it's hard to say but it's my favourite it probably was these were all a lot more fun but all I mean by that is kind of [pause] er [pause] like a bit of theatre really interests me basically it's er it was really cool erm it's like a really good satire basically so I thought that was that was something that I'd never seen them do I mean something a bit more kind of a bit more straight-forward but they actually pulled it off like still with their typical flare you know what I mean so I was I was unsure whether like it would kind of translate to a setting like that first of all with a venue like the ███████████ and em em but I thought it worked really well so er it was a different crowd as well totally you know it's a kind of er that came to that show I mean kind of an older clientele I would say

I: [laughs]

M: [laughs]

I: that's great that's everything I was going to ask is there anything you want to add or anything you want to ask me before I turn this off

M: no just like er er nah I think that basically sums it up yeah er just basically er yeah to not overstate my kind of role in this at all erm I'm kind of [pause] kind of an observer I suppose

I: why is that so important

M: just because I really respect what you know these guys do and er as I said I wouldn't want to er I wouldn't want to er take credit for any of it really er I'm just like really happy to be a part of it erm

I: that's great

M: I feel privileged
I: that's been so useful thank you so much I'll turn this off

[42.46]