Network Entelechy: Critical Writing on Contemporary Art in North-West England

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ABSTRACT

My research investigates the production of critical writing on contemporary art in north-west England. My methodology employs Actor Network Theory (ANT) in proposing connections between humans and non-humans - in this case writers, editors, artists, and curators, along with non-human actors including artworks, institutions, galleries and workspaces. Combining this with the concept of entelechy - the actualisation of potential – has enabled me to describe the way writing emerges, as well as the way writers develop.

The aim of my research was to construct an experiment that revealed entelechy manifesting in the networked experience of a sample of regionally-based critical writers. Key to gathering information on this was my fieldwork, which involved interviewing a group of writers who also agreed to keep diaries describing their work patterns over two separate months in 2018.

I discovered that the activation of actor networks not only produces texts but also contributes to an individual writer's learning process, partially by enabling interaction with editors, artists and fellow writers, and partly by what I call "self-fixing" and "self-monitoring." My research highlights in detail the way the writing process is marked by a rhythmic alternation between closeness to the text and distancing, and that for every writer all texts emerge from a different network. My analysis of the way writers speak about the writing process furthermore reveals "multi-subjective" instances surrounding difficulties that concern network function. Thus, my research not only describes how networks enable entelechy, but it also describes how potential can sometimes falter. This leads me to the conclusion that critical writing is produced through difficulty and not just despite it, and that the consequence of underpaid or "free" writing, where training is informal and sporadic, and "self-monitoring" and "self-mending" play important roles, is network entelechy.

INTRODUCTION

Context

Using an approach based on Actor Network Theory (ANT) and the work of Latour (1988a, 1991, 1996, 2010) and Callon (1986), my research situates the production of critical writing on contemporary art within networks connecting people, artworks, locations and objects.

My research studies how these networks are mobilized to produce "entelechy" - the actualisation of potential. This was demonstrated in my fieldwork, involving ten independent writers based in North West England, whose work patterns I recorded in April and September 2018.

Positioning the research alongside debates on the historical role and current direction of art criticism as articulated by theorists including Newman (2008), Gielen and Lijster (2015), Deepwell (1995), Rogoff (2008), Lippard (1971, 1995), and Phelan (1997), my research focuses on a geographic region where much critical writing on contemporary art is published in locally-based online journals, from which writers have frequently received little or no fee. However, many writers value this work as experience that will aid them to find paid commissions from printed art journals, or towards establishing a career in other fields connected with art.

The research provides insight into the constant flow of documentation and reflection on contemporary art that enters the "archive" as theorised by Groys (2014), while my approach to entelechy reflects on Agamben's ideas surrounding the concept of potential (1999). Further remarks on my theoretical framework follow below. In terms of structure, context and theory are examined in the early part of my thesis, while the later chapters, 5, 6 and 7, concentrate on interviews recorded during my fieldwork, enabling theory to open up and examine in detail the process of writing.

The gap my research fills lies in the detail it reveals about the writing process as experienced by writers involved in my fieldwork, and in detailing the workings of separate networks that incorporate non-human as well as human actants in the production of every text.

This research explains why it is possible for writing on contemporary art in this region to appear to be flourishing while many of its writers receive scant reward, relating them to the "precariat" referred to by Standing (2011). Evidence also suggests that

some UK cities are currently experiencing cultural growth, because conurbations like Manchester and Liverpool enable the sort of “grassroots and alternative culture” (Hardy and Gillespie, 2017) that property prices increasingly prevent in London. My research reflects the existence of this “grassroots and alternative culture” within the regenerating city that temporarily supports the survival of cultural workers including critical writers.

Personal background to the research

I have been writing about contemporary art for national publications since 2009, having previously worked in broadcasting, specialising in arts programming. My decision to concentrate on critical writing about contemporary art had much to do with the presence of so much new art in my home city, Manchester, and its neighbour, Liverpool - art which appeared in the competing crowd of museums and galleries that had helped to change the look of our city centres from the mid-1990s on. The rising visibility of contemporary art in the north-west has been reinforced since 1999 by Britain’s biggest festival of contemporary art, Liverpool Biennial, and since 2007 by Manchester International Festival, which includes a strong element of new visual art. At the same time, locally trained artists have been living and working here, based, frequently in old industrial buildings, as I describe in Chapter 4. The presence of art, and artists, have been accompanied in the north west region by a rising number of new critical writers.

In 2015 I was asked to become a mentor and working group member for #writecritical, a scheme sponsored by Contemporary Visual Art Network, North-West, as part of the regional research project Art:ADDS (Art: Audience, Development, Discourse and Skills) that ran between 2014 and 2016 with the aim of improving opportunities for artists, young people and writers. The #writecritical scheme resulted in the publication a book (Robertson, 2016). Taking part in the scheme was a fascinating and thought-provoking experience for me and many others.

Meeting the writers who took part in this scheme, as well as other mentors, led me to wonder how new writers, especially, can continue to survive and develop their writing skills. I also wanted to know how they go about writing, how they find the words to respond in new and original ways to new exhibitions and new experiences

in art, how and where they get work published on a regular basis, and how writers' relationships with other people, and with art itself, combine to create words. My interest in discovering the reasons why so much new writing today attempts to engage critically with contemporary art in north west England led to the research behind this thesis.

Subsequently, some of the writers who took part in CVAN Northwest's #writecritical scheme have helped me in my research, by participating in my fieldwork, described below. I have also included occasional autobiographical comments within the research, including some of my own responses to the questions I put to writers participating in the fieldwork.

Research questions

My initial hypothesis was that critical writers make an important contribution to the circumstances in which art can be experienced by wider audiences, by producing text that evaluates, explains, and publicises art in cities where regeneration processes have done much to bring contemporary art to public attention in spaces like Tate Liverpool, or at events like Liverpool Biennial. But many writers, including me, had more than once been prepared to write about contemporary art, while expecting little or no financial reward from the publications which commissioned the text. Furthermore, there is little training available to anyone wanting to write critically or to develop their writing if they manage to get work published, beyond one-to-one feedback from editors and rare mentoring schemes like #writecritical, referred to above. Yet in the north west region there is no shortage of newly-published writing on contemporary art. I wanted to know what caused writing to keep being produced in these circumstances.

Therefore, when I began the PhD I asked the following research questions:

1 How can critical writing continue to benefit the wider contemporary visual art milieu?

2 What is it that makes critical writers want to keep writing when they know their writing will not be paid properly?

3 What keeps the greater body of writing renewing itself, across wider fields of relationships?

4 Is there any way we can understand the relationship model any better with a view to identifying a fault or dysfunction underlying the endless production of free

writing?

Aims and objectives

My aim was to construct an experiment that revealed entelechy manifesting in the networked experience of a sample of regionally-based critical writers. My objectives were:

1 To invite a range of writers, who varied from relatively inexperienced to full-time professionals, to take part in this experiment.

2 To use the experiment to record the production of critical texts by these writers during April and September, 2018, each writer keeping a diary of their writing in any form, from commissioned pieces to experimental work, and each writer being interviewed by me in the weeks following those two separate months.

3 To observe and describe how the networking process enables entelechy in the production of texts.

Methodology

My focus in this enquiry was upon the processes behind the production of writing rather than on the institutions surrounding the production of art. Crucially, I wanted to know what made critical writing continue to appear, particularly when writers were learning how to write as they went along and were frequently under-rewarded or unrewarded.

In studying the processes behind the production of writing I began to think about the relationships that bind together around the production of a critical text. In seeking a methodology that could address these relationships, I tested Actor Network Theory (ANT) as an analytical tool for use in my investigation. This proved useful in being a material-semiotic approach that can be used to link together human and non-human actors, and which can convey meaning as well as taking account of materiality.

In practical terms ANT influenced my decision to conduct fieldwork involving writers and helped to shape the questions I put to them in recorded interviews. ANT also considerably influenced the analysis of the fieldwork that appears in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

However, I found more in the interviews than information upon which the idea of actor networks could usefully be brought to bear. Notably, I became interested in the

interviewees' manner of speech and its delivery, and in particular the way some of their statements broke apart or fragmented rather than coming together or assembling. These examples of "split subjectivity" I refer to in Chapter 2.

Theoretical framework

ANT's usefulness to this research originates in its treatment of a network as an understanding of the writers' connections with artists, editors and other cultural workers, as well as the art about which they intend to write, plus the relationships between writers and all the other material circumstances surrounding the making of text, including institutions, festivals and biennials, publication platforms, plus buildings and spaces including galleries and studios.

ANT furthermore provides insights into the curatorial process that informs a written response, as well as recent developments in thinking about the relationship between visitors and museums, as I describe later in chapter 4. Furthermore, ANT also informs certain environmental conditions affecting the location in which this research has taken place: the "post-industrial" north and north west of England, and in particular the cities of Manchester and Liverpool, in which long-term urban regeneration has taken place. Approaching more closely the actualisation of the writing itself, ANT has been used to understand a writer's relationship with the personal space in which writing takes place, including such small details as the positioning of computer screens, or the arrangement of a writer's desk.

Considering the relations writers make in order for writing to take place, I also made use of the notion of "entelechy", or realisation of potential in the Aristotelean sense, and I have investigated how this might work in relation to the networks in which writers act. This approach linked actor networks to the actualisation of text, producing the phrase "Network Entelechy." Here, the "workings" of an actor network are examined with special attention to the text produced by it, aware also of the extent to which entelechy can fail as well as succeed.

In thinking about this, I found especially useful the writing of Agamben, particularly his commentary (Agamben, 1999: 243-271) concerning Herman Melville's story of 1853, Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street, which focuses on a character who is employed as a clerical writer in a mid- nineteenth century legal office.

Bartleby's work, which requires him to copy legal documents by hand, is willingly done at first, but eventually he starts to express a preference not to do what is asked of him. This entering into what Agamben calls the 'abyss of impotentiality' (Agamben, 1999: 181) may be observed as much in the writing task he is being asked to do as it can be seen in his response to being asked. This awareness of an "abyss" has been used in my analysis of the writing processes revealed by writers who participated in my fieldwork.

Conceptual framework

My intuition was that networks activated in the production of text would connect critical writers with artworks, institutions, and other human and non-human actants. In order to examine this and describe it, I needed to observe and understand the way in which a group of critical writers go about their writing tasks during a given period of time, from the birth of their ideas for a piece of writing through to final publication. In this way I could show entelechy occurring within networks. The fieldwork necessary for this evidence to be gathered was to form the core of my thesis, but this fieldwork needed to be framed by an examination of the theoretical arguments that have taken place within recent years in the field of art criticism, to provide background as to the position writers as well as artists might take in approaching contemporary art. I examine also the nature of contemporary art as it relates to concepts of contemporaneity, as described by Agamben (2009), Groys (2013), and Osborne (2010). This addresses in particular the issue identified by Erber (2013) and Fabian (1983) of 'denial of coevalness' in writing about recorded interviews, a practice which can create distance and hierarchy between the researcher and participants in fieldwork.

Fieldwork

In planning my fieldwork, I intended to follow the work of ten writers, all based in north west England, over a period of two separate months, April and September, 2018. These are busy times in the curatorial year as they coincide with the launch of major exhibitions for summer and winter and therefore create opportunities for writers to comment on these shows. The writers I contacted and who agreed to take part in this fieldwork were Lara Eggleton, Tom Emery, Sue Flowers, Laura Harris, Sara

Jaspan, Joanne Lee, Lauren Velvick, and Jack Welsh. I also took part in the exercise and (following the unavailability of one other writer at a late stage), Mike Pinnington, co-founder of the Liverpool-based online journal the Double Negative. All writers were sent a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form, each carrying the Manchester Metropolitan University logo, and in each case the consent form was approved, signed and returned. Permission to use all the extracts included in the following chapters has also been granted in all cases.

The fieldwork consisted of writers keeping a diary recording work undertaken during the two months, which on completion was sent back to me, followed by the recording of an interview conducted by me, the two interviews undertaken by each writer involving a different set of questions. The first interview contained the following ten questions:

1 Why do you choose to write about contemporary art?

2 Do you think of what you write as "critical writing"?

3 Can you describe to me the range of writing you produce? (including journalism, academic writing, gallery text, etc)

4 In what way do you think digital social networks and personal relationships function in how you obtain work?

5 What was the first piece of writing you got published and how did that make you feel?

6 How do you generate ideas for writing?

7 Do you experiment with your writing, trying out new approaches, that you might describe in terms of "creative" writing?

8 Do you commission other writers? If so, how much time do you spend dealing with them?

9 Do you put effort into developing relationships with editors?

10 Do you have a website, and if so, how much time and effort do you put into web-writing, blogging, etc?

In the second interview I asked the following twelve questions:

1 When does an idea become a real piece of writing, for you?

2 Do you edit and re-write a piece of writing as you progress, or do you plan everything in advance?

3 Does the process of writing ever take you on any surprising intellectual or imaginative pathways?
4 What happens if an idea you have sent receives a rejection, or the person to whom you have sent it fails to respond? How do you deal with rejection?
5 Do you ever write in response to other writings or publications, by people you know, or don't know?
6 Are you ever approached by artists to write about their work, or to collaborate with them on a piece of work? If so, what are your thoughts about such approaches and what they might result in?
7 Do you attend press conferences, exhibition launches, and private viewings, and are they useful to you?
8 Do you earn money from your writing - and do you ever write for no fee? What are your thoughts on making a living as a writer?
9 Do you sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on a piece of writing?
10 Is "non-writing" time important to you?
11 *What is your place of work like? Describe your desk, or your best location for writing*
12 How do you think critical writing adds or contributes to contemporary art's relevance in our region?

In broad terms, the first interview gathered information on the varieties of writing produced by interviewees, and their sense of social connectedness, while the second interview gathered information on the process of writing, the issue of payment, and the possible impact critical writing may have on readers. Both sets of questions were written at the same time, but once I had recorded the first interviews, the production of writing as it was felt and experienced became a natural investigative direction to pursue, in order to describe entelechy. The second interview series also revealed more about the interactions between writers and the objects surrounding them as they wrote, as well as the role of distraction and loss of concentration in writing, as described in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition, by the time I had transcribed the first set of interviews I had become aware of each writer's mode of speech, including hesitations, verbal jump-cutting, and re-takes, referred to in Chapter 2 in terms of "split-subjectivity," reflecting personal difficulties and problems experienced by writers in relation to work and writing about contemporary art.

After going through each set of scripted questions I went on to ask each interviewee a small number of extra questions that were tailored to the individual concerned. In the interests of clarification, I also often asked secondary questions following on from the answers supplied by interviewees.

It was important that the writers who agreed to take part in the fieldwork were by no means working in identical circumstances. They were not all from the same age-group, they did not all have the same level of writerly experience, they were not all full-time writers, nor were they all primarily writers (some are practicing artists, and others are curators, for instance). This diversity also contributed to my interest in how different writers go about writing, for different publications and audiences. Three main areas of interest therefore dominated my analysis: the importance and behaviour of networks bound together by text-production, the "inside story" of the writing processes at work behind entelechy, and the way these two themes linked to the issue of writing for no pay or low pay.

Overview of narrative

I begin **Chapter 1, Writing Contemporary Art**, by considering the recent historic background to critical engagement with contemporary art. Here I introduce the theorists whose work I refer to throughout my thesis, notably Bruno Latour, whose writing on Actor Network Theory (ANT) informs my approach to writers' relationships with artworks and art worlds, Boris Groys and his interest in value hierarchies and cultural "flow", and Giorgio Agamben, whose ideas about potential and its actualisation, or entelechy, figure especially in my later chapters. Agamben and Groys are also haunted by the work of Walter Benjamin (1977, 1985), whose ideas on cultural recall, authenticity and aura are also later referred to by me.

Aware of arguments over whether or not art criticism has been experiencing a crisis concerning its level of seriousness, I examine debates claiming the possible breakdown of what Habermas (1962, 1983) defined as the 'public sphere'- a concept that began to come under strain with the onset of press privatisation as far back as the nineteenth century. In today's digital and highly interconnected era, I reflect on how we experience our own participation within a profusion of publics, capable of consuming and understanding in increasingly varied ways. I note, too, how digital publishing is furthermore a field in which anyone can make their individual voice

heard. But, as I go on to argue, critical writing on art has also become richer and more experimental, due partly to the impact of writers reacting and responding to the distanced standpoint of the traditional twentieth century white, male critic. Freedom to write performatively, poetically, or in a manner that uses audio-visual technology to enable more wide-ranging interactions with audiences, is expanding, and may be a source for optimism, in contrast to the much-made complaint about criticism being in a state of decline or deterioration.

A more complicated problem is presented by the relationship between writers and an art that consciously refers to itself as "contemporary", and has done for several years, in the context of increasing globalisation. What is it to be "contemporary", and part of a globalised world? This condition of "contemporaneity" forms the core of **Chapter 2, Writing Time: Art, Writing and Contemporaneity**. Referring once again to Agamben, Groys, and Benjamin, I link also to my own recent experience, travelling frequently between the north west of England and Latin America. The condition, then, of "contemporaneity", is reflected in the disjointed understanding of what it is to be alive in an interconnected, globalised present that so frequently suggests and invites a misleading sense of homogeneity.

The consequent issue of "denial of coevalness" identified by anthropologist Johannes Fabian (Fabian, 1983), in relation to anthropological fieldwork and the use of interviews is also addressed here, because it raises implications for my own use of recorded conversations with writers. My argument is that the practice of revealing "split subjectivities" by using interviews can perhaps be justified in the extent to which similar "split subjectivities" are exposed within interviews themselves, in interviewees' descriptions of work habits, and even in their own speech patterns and linguistic jump- cuts. These are dealt with in detail later.

Encountering art, and describing and analysing its effect upon us is not necessarily an experience that must lead inexorably and inevitably to words and then to the act of writing. But accessing and then articulating our memory of such experiences seems to summon up a physical and almost visceral reaction that accompanies the finding of words for what we have seen, felt and sensed. I was not simply asking a group of writers to talk about their experience of encountering art, although these experiences often become significant events that were described within interviews. More importantly, I asked writers to describe their experience of writing about it. To

contextualise these questions, I made the subject of speaking about writing the theme of **Chapter 3, Speaking of Writing**. Here I explore writing models, notably the "protocol analysis" approach of Hayes and Flower (1981), questioning the way writers have, by this form of analysis, been separated and possibly isolated from the social complexity in which even the most concentrated forms of writing occur. I go on to link speaking about writing to the "lifeworld" concept proposed by Habermas (1987) as a model for a society which is colonised by systems, and I compare this with Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1961). I position the activity of writing critically about art into an ongoing, wider conversation, adding energy to the "flow" behind Groys' idea of "value hierarchies" (Groys, 2014: 39), in which artistic innovation is constantly fed into the archive of the museum and memory of the internet. Finally, I question the social constructivism behind the models of writing I have examined, comparing them with Latour's concept of Compositionism (Latour, 2010: 472).

In **Chapter 4, Networks, Contemporary Art, and the Regeneration City,** interview extracts from writers participating in my fieldwork are used to illustrate the formation of social networks and their relationship with actor networks. All the writers who took part in my fieldwork have developed their own social network that can come into play when identifying interesting new work, new projects and other experiments, any of which can pave the way for ideas that generate writing. Every exhibition launch provides an opportunity to meet other writers, artists, curators, collectors and others. But the use of Actor Network Theory (ANT), in linking the writer with a network of other actors, human but also non-human (a category that includes artworks) provides me with a useful method to observe how texts come into being. The temporary, ever-changing activation of these networks around the binding factor of text-generation is behind each writers' experience of development as a critical writer.

However, the circumstances in which these interconnections between actors take place are also significant, as I go on to argue. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the regeneration programmes that brought about so many of the changes seen in the region's biggest cities have gathered pace with the addition of new or dramatically-improved museums and galleries. As a result contemporary art has a significant presence, attracting interest from increasing numbers of visitors, which have also

been boosted by important festivals like Liverpool Biennial. The possibilities for young contemporary artists also expanded in the 1990s, because of the amount of cheap studio space available in the plentiful number of derelict or disused factory buildings. Citing Benjamin (1977) and Zukin (2010), I examine the connection between aura and authenticity in these locations that bring artists and writers together, but which also attract consumers and property developers.

My interest in the number of emerging critical writers in the north-west region, and the way they interact, takes me in **Chapter 5, Writing and Making a Living** to the issue of writing, both as an act and as a form of work. Here I examine the importance to writers of their workplaces, as well as what I call the "rhythm" of work. Using extracts from interviews with writers taking part in my fieldwork, I show how the working routines of writers are immersed in complex swerves between action and inaction, diligence and distraction. Writing is also an isolated activity that separates the writer from the network that activates around the binding factor of text-production. This isolated situation, I found, has to coexist with the need for contact, for instance, with partners, family and editors, and, subsequently, the possible need to deal with rejection. These observations are followed by an investigation into the reasons why writers who want to develop a critical approach can possibly go about doing so without being paid for what they write (although this is not to say writers never get paid for any piece of writing they succeed in getting published). For the emerging writer, as a day-to- day occupation, writing for commission generally means writing for online journals, and this mainly takes the form of writing without receiving a fee. This phenomenon of "free writing" affects much online publishing, beyond arts journalism, of course. But my focus on contemporary art writing reveals the connective importance of actor networks, binding writers, artworks, institutions and galleries together in the production of new texts. "Free writing" therefore emerges as a significant factor in the documentation and evaluation of new art in the spaces, galleries and museums that position themselves so centrally in the regenerated vision of the post-industrial city.

Writers in actor-networks form one, "widescreen" picture of the critical writer's experience. But I intended to get closer to the emergence of text, and the way the making of text relates to the daily experience of the writer. Addressing this in **Chapter 6, Entelechy at Work: Where Do the Words Come From?** I argue that the appearance

of words on a formerly-blank screen or page is an example and demonstration of entelechy: the actualisation of potential. In other words, writing's potential, activated by the actor-network within which the writer connects with other actors is actualised in the form of text. While collaborations with other human actors, notably artists, are not uncommon, the activation of a network capable of potentializing and then actualising a particular text is not always straightforward. Writers talk here about the difficulties they often encounter in planning, and the importance they place on reflection, and "non writing time."

In **Chapter 7, Scrappy Notes and Weird Diagrams: Finding Time to Experiment**, this leads to further comments on the importance within the discussion of potentiality, referring to Melville's fictional character, Bartleby, and comments made by Agamben, and the 'abyss of impotentiality' (Agamben, 1999) that surrounds the practice of writing. I then explore the possibilities available in writing experimentally, looking at the breadth of experimental approaches in UK education, and the forms of writing experimentation may be useful in challenging, notably so-called "artspeak." Further extracts from interviews recorded during my fieldwork convey a range of attitudes towards experiment, before examples of particular writing experiments experienced by writers involved in my fieldwork are examined in detail, and a range of remarks are examined on its usefulness.

In my **Conclusion**, I first underline the role of difficulty and unpredictability for writers in producing critical text, discussing also the importance of actor networks which I argue are activated with the production of every text. I mention again as a result of my fieldwork the importance for writers of objects and space, linking space and place to the effect of regeneration on cities in the north west region. I also remark on the importance of writers' improvisational behaviours and the "transformative" education theories mentioned in Chapter 3. Finally, I return to the condition of contemporaneity I discussed in Chapter 2, making observations about the importance of writers' experiences as "multi-subjective" responses.

Chapter 1

Writing Contemporary Art: Changes in Critical Practice

Introduction: What Do We Mean When We Say "Art Criticism"?

My research is focused on a written form of cultural production identified by a phrase which, at first sight, may seem self- explanatory.

Taking a critical stance of any sort towards an artwork might be considered a form of art criticism. This stance might begin privately, inwardly, with a thought. This thought may emerge subsequently as a spoken statement. It will, therefore, be expressed in words. But given the fact that art has a history, and that we are familiar with artworks that span that history, and that people have been commenting on them for perhaps hundreds or thousands of years, the critical stance taken may well end up being a written one, adding to that history, that written record, that written discussion.

Today, many forms of writing on the subject of art might be described as art criticism. A short review of a new exhibition in a regional newspaper, for instance, or a feature analysing themes in certain examples of contemporary art for a prestigious journal, might both suffice. In the UK, the list of journals specialising in contemporary art is wide, from the text-heavy, academic and professional leaning *Art Monthly* (based in London); to the image- heavy, advertising-laden *Frieze* (London and New York, whose organisation also promotes art fairs). In between are many others including the long-running *Art Review* (London); the recently- launched *Burlington Contemporary* (London); the "grassroots"- focused *Art Licks* (London, online only), the irreverent and much- praised *White Pube* (London, online only), plus regional titles including *The Double Negative* (Liverpool, online only) and *Corridor 8* (Manchester, online only).

In addition, national and regional newspapers contain regular arts coverage, and local events guides (frequently online) also have a role in promoting and evaluating contemporary art, which is further reflected and discussed in the broadcast media, on radio and television. But in looking closer at this activity, that is focused to such an extent on writing, certain aspects of the above descriptive phrase "art criticism" come into inevitable contact with other areas of thought, and writing. The history of art, and its significance socially, have given rise to theories that attach art to wider

philosophical arguments. Why does art matter? Why is it important to think about it and write about it today, in cities like Manchester or Liverpool?

My approach towards answering such questions has led in the chapters that follow towards the writings of three contemporary thinkers. Bruno Latour's interest in contemporary art is informed by his wider ideas about networks, shaping much of my thinking on the emergence of critical text from the interactions of writers, artists, artworks, institutions and others. In addressing the history of art and how it has been theorised and discussed, Boris Groys and Giorgio Agamben also feature throughout, as do the reflections of both writers on the ideas of the twentieth century German writer, Walter Benjamin. In this chapter I also consider the role of the critic in relation to Jurgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere, and in addition I talk about the impact of some of the philosophical positions taken by art critics in Europe and the United States, from the early 1960 until today. This leads me to contrast a long-running sense of pessimism felt by some critics with the engaged and engaging approaches taken historically by feminist and performance- based critics.

Bruno Latour's significance has become well known for his involvement in the approach to anthropology and group relations known as Actor Network Theory (ANT). In terms of the thinking behind ANT, Latour acknowledged the importance of the late nineteenth century French criminologist and social psychologist, Gabriel Tarde, who focused his attention on social interactions between what Tarde thought of (after Leibniz) as "monads," re-named by ANT as actors or actants. The usefulness of ANT for this research lies the way actors can be considered to be non-human as well as human, and so, accordingly, my analysis of critical writing on contemporary art can be summarized as follows: the human writer encounters a non-human artwork, within a non-human setting like a gallery or a museum, turning the resulting experience into an evaluation over a period of time, during which human and non-human accomplices enter the network, such as notebooks, an editor, a word processor, friends and family, and a workplace. This activated network has one specific purpose, which is the production of a text.

The coming-together of art objects, people, text and documentation are also at the heart of Boris Groys' work. Groys, a Russian-born philosopher and cultural theorist, employs an approach to contemporary art that in many ways enlarges on Walter Benjamin's writings, particularly in relation to Benjamin's theories of cultural

reproduction and value. Famously these include the notion of "aura" and authenticity, and the affect upon them of mass reproduction, first through printing and photography, and more recently though digital technology. How art is remembered and the way it affects the way we continue to create and understand what we consider to be art are issues that bring together Groys, Benjamin and Latour, in my approach to the work of the art critic now.

But my work also asks how critical writing is generated and goes on being generated, and how writers identify the field of criticism as one that is meaningful to them, and with which they can identify. So my work also goes on to investigate the importance of potentiality and its actualisation, brought together in the concept of entelechy, and in later chapters I consider the role of networks as important in initiating this. Here I will refer to the biopolitical theories of the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, on whom Benjamin has also had an impact, particularly in the latter's insight concerning the "state of exception" under which both thinkers claim we live permanently.

Before returning to these theorists to bring together their ideas with my research, however, I want to open, briefly, a window on to the world of the art critic in today's culture industries, in which I situate my own work as a critical writer as well as that of others who have participated in my fieldwork. In taking account of the different audiences that today's art criticism can reach - from specialised or academic readers to wider, general audiences accessed via newspapers and broadcast media – it is important to remember that since the 1990s, internet publishing has been expanding, creating new audiences and new possibilities for the way writing about art can be presented and explored. Many of the theorists and critics I go on to discuss in this chapter have tried to take account of the implications of this. As a consequence of digitalization and the internet, and reflecting a situation experienced by the newspaper and magazine publishing industry worldwide, the survival of "career journalists" has been undermined by falling sales for traditionally-printed and financed forms of publication. It may be possible today for anyone to write about art, but being paid to be published online or in print is never guaranteed – although, in some respects, it never was. It may even be possible that some writers including art critics may today be said to be part of a "precariat" (Standing, 2011), that state associated with freelance employment, short-term contracts, and lack of security, experienced by many other

workers in times of economic austerity.

Theory, Critical Writing and Contemporary Art

With the expansion of digital technology and the internet, Groys reminds us that although they are still present, notions of elitism and ownership in relation to art have shifted significantly. Just as anyone can freely reproduce and circulate aspects of, and objects from, their own lives, art is itself subject to complex patterns of reproduction and circulation. Despite historic movements and gestures in art, such as conceptual art or performance art, that emerged in the 1960s with the partial aim of rejecting or destroying the gallery system, contemporary art, and the museums and spaces in which it manifests itself, continues to achieve a sense of value within culture, because of its reproduction and circulation. Here the role of the critical writer and theorist both play a significant role in the documentation, where art enters what Groys calls "always already a value hierarchy" (Groys, 2014:39). Accordingly, theorising the value of art also creates a value for theory itself (Groys, 2014:13).

Since the 1990s, Groys has described a loss of cultural recall, which has accompanied increasing globalisation and an expansion in the speed and storage capacity of the internet (which Groys thinks has replaced organic, communal memory). Memory, he thinks, enabled people in the past to situate art within tradition, until the advent of a modernist attitude, which he sees beginning with the French Revolution, when art began a series of breaks with the past, a process that gathered pace in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nowadays, Groys thinks, art finds authenticity when it becomes a part of the "cultural archives," and the role of the critical writer is important in this process, in which we find ourselves immersed in a continual contemporaneity Groys describes as being in "the flow". Groys is a pessimist, his world-view flowing from that of Walter Benjamin, with whom Groys shares a dedicated interest in modernist gestures and their relationship to power – in, for instance, the rise of the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany and their adoption of particular aesthetic forms.

For Latour, though, "we have never been modern" (Latour, 1991). Modernism's utopian break, which fascinates Groys, is for Latour its problem, condensed in the very optimism that cut it off from the past. While Groys is perhaps more interested in the way the moment of breakage is fundamentally linked to aesthetic attempts at absolute newness, Latour's work has concentrated on the history of science and

technology, and their role in reinforcing a sense of modernity.

Latour's emphasis on networks of human and non-human agents can instead crack open the problematic shell into which utopianism and fetishization can trap an "enfolded" example of scientific or technological knowledge. The importance of the utopian element is revealed in the role of morality alongside technology within the same enfolded problem. Latour thinks that "Once we have grasped morality as well as technology in its ontological dignity instead of relating them, as usual, solely to what is human, we may see that their relation is not at all that of means to end… The two modes of existence ceaselessly dislocate the dispositions of things, multiply anxieties, incite a profusion of agents, forbid the straight path, trace a labyrinth – generating possibilities for the one, and scruples and impossibilities for the other (Latour, 2002: 257).

Both Latour and Groys see contemporary art as coming into being in a state, or multiple states, of contradiction. For Latour contemporary artworks bring moments of "iconoclash" (Latour, 2010) to audiences or viewers, which he describes as an experience when "one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further enquiry, whether it is destructive or constructive" (Latour, 2002:6). For Groys, contemporary art contains a paradox between the urge to wipe clean and make new and the urge to enter the archive of recognition and value (Groys, 2008). But as I discuss later, Groys also acknowledges the "super social" nature of contemporary art, which contains certain elements compatible with ANT.

This means that for Groys, the role of writer or "author" becomes crucial in the role of "mediator" in the endless process of "innovative exchange", according to which, phenomena associated with the profane can become "valorised" within cultural memory and vice versa (Groys, 2014:191). This is a constant process. But in the production of words the author, according to Groys, brings thought into the "infinite play of language, writing, and textuality" (Groys, 2014), which is in itself "part of a single, constantly developing play of differences" (Groys, 2014: 183) from which nothing, no statement, can ultimately be completely detached.

To a certain extent, then, Groys is saying something similar to Latour's suspicion of the "fetishized," in regard to any authorial judgement, or any critical statement. But for Groys, the process of "innovative exchange" is continuous and endless, and related

perhaps to Aristotelian concepts of the infinite, whereas Latour centralises human complexity, and the hubbub of the *polis*. More precisely, Latour describes contemporary art as kind of violently restless collective, using the phrase "this maelstrom of movements, artists, promoters, buyers and sellers, critics and dissidents" (Latour, 2010: 75). This is an important definition, because it sees critics to be in on the act, and not external commentators.

Using a more scientific metaphor, Latour adds, "Nowhere else but in contemporary art has a better laboratory been set up for trying out and testing the resistance of every item comprising the cult of image, picture, beauty, media, or genius." But it is the collective, the crowd, the "maelstrom" that jointly produces the "laboratory." Some critics like Francis Halsall have gone so far as to claim that in dedicating so much of his thought to networks and their inescapabilty, Latour "works like a contemporary artist" (Halsall, 2016: 440).

In setting up this laboratory, the "maelstrom" of actors described by Latour continues to thrive or survive through their interconnections, critical writers included. Bearing in mind my particular interest in writers, however, I am also interested in their quality of life, and the personal and impersonal forces that come together in generating and developing texts. Here I relate my research to the theories of Giorgio Agamben.

Potential Unrealised – The Bartleby in All Writers

According to Agamben, the "state of exception," defined originally by Benjamin, forces humans into "bare life," separate from the "form-of-life" which (when and if it can be achieved), "is truly poetic that, *in its own work*, contemplates its own potential to do and not do and finds peace in it" (Agamben, 2016: 247). Agamben's comments on Melville's story, *Bartleby,* describing the life and death of a "bare life" writer, have some relevance here. Agamben sees the separation between form-of-life and bare life as perhaps having begun in the prehistoric past, with "the event of language" itself (Agamben, 2016: 247); or, relating the problem to Aristotle and the origins of Western Philosophy, "the scission of being into essence and existence and the introduction of time into being" which "are the work of language" (Agamben, 2016: 247). This theme of language and time is further investigated in Chapter 3: Speaking of Writing.

Agamben also offers some fascinating observations on contemporary art's position, in "substituting the life itself for the work" (Agamben, 2016: 246). This suggests that to

write about contemporary art is to attempt to capture none other than the artist's "form-of-life", which Agamben thinks the art itself is constantly trying, but failing, to do. The authenticity of this artistic "form of life" might also be linked to Groys , who again echoes Benjamin when he considers the question of aura in contemporary art as one in which aura is not so much lost permanently as constantly being lost and rediscovered, and is endlessly relocating, due to of the combined work of artists, curators and critics. My main interest in Agamben's writing, however, concerns the theme of potential, about which he argues that "The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality" (Agamben, 1999: 182). He is referring to what lies within every individual; the possibility of making something actual only matters in relation to the level of possibility that it might not actualise at all. Alluding to Aristotle, whose thought on the workings of entelechy appear in the Metaphysics, Agamben continues: "If a potentiality to not-be originally belongs to all potentiality, then there is truly potentiality only when the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes into it fully"(Agamben, 1999: 183). Defining what he means in more detail, Agamben adds, "What is truly potential is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such" (Agamben, 1999: 183).
One character who haunts, or ought to haunt, the mind of any writer who struggles in this way to "exhaust impotentiality" is that of Bartleby, the awkward protagonist at the centre of Herman Melville's short story, Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street, first published in 1853. In the story, a young man called Bartleby is described as having been taken on as a copywriter in the Wall Street office of an attorney, from whose point of view we are told about the ensuing events. He describes how Bartleby is enthusiastic and diligent at first, although he works "silently, palely, mechanically." But there comes a day when his only response to the work he is given to do is to reply, "I would prefer not to." These words succeed in undermining the entire sense of order and productivity in the office, and Bartleby's fellow copywriters grow ever more furious with Bartleby's behavior. The attorney, whose business and whose composure are also being disrupted, attempts to rid himself of Bartleby, but cannot. Eventually Bartleby is removed from the office, where he had decided to live full-time, and is taken to the Halls of Justice (a place of incarceration), where he eventually dies, having met the offer of food to eat, paid for by the attorney, with his stock phrase, "I would prefer not to."

Bartleby's character has been commented upon in recent years by many writers, including Agamben (1999: 243) and Deleuze (1998). For Deleuze, Bartleby's words, articulated by his voice in the office, are a kind of negative performance, a denial of the authority of the attorney and the law. The fact that Bartleby does not categorically refuse to do what he is told, and refuses to accept any help whatsoever, makes him ambiguous, but at the same time, radically powerful. Perhaps this very ambiguity actually contains potential. For Agamben, this is the case, in the sense that according to Agamben, impotentiality and potentiality must go hand in hand. But as Alexander Cooke points out, Agamben addresses the individual, while Deleuze addresses a potential community (Cooke, 2005). Thus, in 2011 Bartleby was made a hero of the Occupy Wall Street movement, which used the character's five-word rejoinder as a call to action, by inaction, and refusal. But Bartleby is not simply a refusenik, and he never tries to get other copywriters to say they "prefer not to" do the boring and repetitive tasks they are required to do all day. Bartleby is not so much making some kind of protest but rather he is putting up a linguistic wall, which could be construed to embody Agamben's sense of "impotentiality," making his presence in the attorney's office an opening-up of the "abyss", his compulsion to continue to express his negative preference finally resulting in his own reduction from skeletal thinness to a state of starvation and death.

But because of the nature of his work, Bartleby also engages us, writers especially, in thinking about what it is to have to embrace repetitive, alienating tasks. In response to the nature of his work, however, Bartleby never tries to write anything "original". But the critical writers I have heard from in my fieldwork, have, perhaps, experienced what might be called "Bartleby moments", of preferring-not-to, after which they have gone back to whatever task they had found themselves faced with – be it boring, or challenging, or thought-provoking. At the same time, they must attempt to write in an original and readable way, unlike Bartleby, whose work is not intended for a sizeable audience, as he is required to copy legal documents. But as the psychiatrist Josh Cohen points out, when outlining his thoughts on Bartleby as a kind of "burnout", Melville wrote the story as a result of being the victim of his own success, under pressure from his own family to repeat the type of novels, like Typee and Omoo, that had made his name. Convinced he should be writing

something entirely different, and probably uncommercial, Melville seemed to be commenting on copywriting his own fictional formulae. In the light of this, the very writing task Bartleby is being paid to take on might therefore be understood as a form of impotential, an opening of the abyss. For Cohen, Bartleby is making a "withdrawal from the world of intelligible motives, from shared rules of communication" (Cohen, 2018: 15-16), reminding him as a psychiatrist of every patient who tells him "they want to crawl into a hole or to become invisible or to be allowed to stop caring or wanting or feeling, or to remain in a state of indecision" (Cohen, 2018: 17).

What is important, then, about the critical writers I have researched here is the extent to which they have decided to use language as a means to actualise potential, remembering Agamben's idea that language is itself "an idea", or "a revelation". According to Agamben, the experience of language introduces the infant to the concept of time; that the utterance of words and their understanding does not just represent the distance and difference from a time before language was understood, but which also capture the reality of what is "now". It is appropriate, therefore, that the writers I chose to study concentrate their use of language on art that calls itself "contemporary," addressing the condition of contemporaneity, a subject I take up in the next chapter.

The Critic and Taste

The working lives of the critical writers I have met in my research have been examined from the point of view not just of their networks, and remuneration, but also in terms of personal motivation, how they develop ideas and go about getting commissions, their level of interest in experimenting with writing, how they deal with rejection, and how they feel about the publications they write for, in print and digitally. Accordingly, I now want to move on to looking at the position of the working art critic today within a historic context.

In the United States, the influence of one major critic, Clement Greenberg, still pervades. Partly because of this, art criticism has been seen, by some, to have been experiencing a crisis of confidence in recent years. When US commentators addressed the state of criticism in the early-2000s, in the book *Critical Mess* (Rubinstein, 2009), they were largely negative and pessimistic. In the view of one

of the book's reviewers, Cynthia A Freeland, critics "See themselves as stuck in a dilemma: art critics must either rely on their "eye" or taste to pronounce value judgments or draw upon some theory of art to provide more analytical accounts of art's meaning and function" (Freeland, 2009:245). Greenberg, she thought, "Whose influence appears to be both envied and despised, adopted both options, buying into a formalist theory of art that allegedly justified his reliance on his own "eye" to issue grand pronouncements of value."

Discussions about Greenberg and issues surrounding artistic taste, revolving around his "eye" and his theory, refer back to his influential essay the Avant Garde and Kitsch, (Greenberg, 1965) written on the outbreak of World War Two, in which he tries to position wealthy elites in relation to the art they can afford to collect or support. He saw the Avant Garde as dependent on a nation's elite for its support, but his conclusion at that time was that elites in totalitarian states like Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and the communist USSR would avoid identifying with any art that announced their own elite status. Instead, elites, including those of the USA, would prefer to identify with popular or mass taste. The position of the avant-garde was therefore to make art that revealed the inner workings of art itself.

By 1990, the British-born art historian and academic, Michael Newman, observing a decline in "the quality and rigor of art criticism…since the mid-1980s, if not before" (Newman, 2008: 56), noted the way developments in art, notably Conceptual art, had "displaced criticism from its role in relation to the avant-garde by incorporating critique – including the critique of a descriptive, objectifying epistemology – into the practice itself… In this context, the role left to the critic is either to become himself a writer or artist, or the meta-critique of this move, of the turn to theory" (Newman, 2008: 30).

Whereas Newman sensed a "failure" of Greenberg's modernist avant-garde, Groys, who is (to paraphrase Newman) one of today's "meta critics," sees art as having moved away from being a minority occupation. Today's artists, according to Groys, "investigate and manifest mass art production, not elitist or mass art consumption," producing work that goes "beyond any notion of taste and aesthetic consideration" but "spaces in which a critical investigation of mass image production can be effectuated and manifested" (Groys, 2011).

While Newman saw Greenberg as having thought in the tradition of Kant (whose

work on aesthetics, Newman argues, reconciled British ideas of "taste" with Prussian ideas of aesthetic unity), Groys identifies Greenberg's continuing relevance in relating what Groys calls "advanced art" to a source of knowledge. For Groys, the role of the critic is therefore linked to explicating this knowledge. For writers like Newman, however, the aesthetic matter of "taste" is still troublesome.

The Critic and the Public Sphere

I think Newman sees art criticism as the application of judgement to artworks, and theory as philosophising about art and society, and therefore criticism and theory for him appear as separate disciplines. Both, however, are deeply affected by consumer culture due to the commodification of art itself. Newman also identifies the inherited importance in North America of "taste" when it comes to writing. Significantly, too, he considers changes to what Habermas defined as the "public sphere" – that bourgeois interconnection between the coffee house, the salon, the club, and the printed periodical, that emerged in the seventeenth century and became increasingly privatised during the nineteenth (Habermas, 1962/1989)**.** Writing in the early twenty first century about the rise of the internet, Newman (in his 2008 update of his essay) recognises the recent emergence of "multiple publics and potential publics, distributed in various ways, sometimes geographically, sometimes within the same national or urban space; and an individual might participate in more than one public" (Newman, 2008: 55-56).

These "multiple publics and potential publics" perhaps had not emerged quite so clearly in 2003 when *Critical Mess* was published. But the internet did exist, and despite the fact that *Critical Mess* came in its wake, accompanying the rise of blogging and online journalism, surprisingly little appreciation was made of it in the book. One contributor, the art historian James Elkins, in particular, even blamed the very abundance of art writing for criticism's perceived woeful condition. In his short diatribe of 2003 (Elkins, 2003) Elkins was unable to quantify how many publications included art criticism, let alone how many writers were producing it. But much of what was being written was, according to him, of very little importance – primarily because it was merely descriptive. As Elkins described art writing's status, "It's dying, but it's everywhere" (Elkins, 2003).

This change in the "public sphere," has been taken rather more seriously by European

academics such as Pascal Gielen and Thijs Lijster, who have traced the way it has changed in recent history by linking those changes to David Harvey and Marshall McLuhan's ideas about "time-space compression" (Harvey, 1990). Gielen and Lijster see art criticism as a product of journalism, itself a component of this "public sphere," recognising and quoting Walter Benjamin on the disappearance of "distance" with the increasing speed of travel and communication having led to the death of storytelling. In Benjamin's words this is: "A concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to find a new beauty in what is vanishing" (Benjamin, 1977:87).

Gielen and Lijster go on to reflect upon the continuing impact of this compression, mentioning the increasing internationalisation of museums and the disappearance of the "local" in art. "Walk into any Museum for Contemporary Art and you will find it hard to tell whether you are in New York, Beijing, Sao Paulo or Dubai, if you only have the works to go by," they write (Gielen and Lijster, 2015: 30-31). Alongside this is a problem with time, bringing to mind Benjamin's Angel of History, and Groys on the "archive": "Media technology," they say, "has burdened us with the problem that everything can be preserved and remembered, which inevitably makes remembrance practices rather arbitrary affairs… Just about anything can potentially be reabsorbed in the here and now, as long as it is brought to our attention. The contemporary has no past and therefore no future" (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:30).

Gielen and Lijster see this situation as having undermined the relevance of one type of art writer: the art historian. On the other hand, they see new possibilities opening up for criticism, despite the fact that the "commodification of the international art world and the displacement of the salon and the museum by the stock market and the biennial" has uprooted critics from their traditional place as "part of the historical conscience of art" (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:34).

Furthermore, Gielen and Lijster are wary of celebrating "a brave new world of nomadic, hybrid and amateur art criticism," because "Only too often a one-sided criticism of authority and institutions as such, combined with an uncritical praise of the 'network' has foremost stimulated commodification and neo-liberalisation." (Gielen and Lijster, 2015: 35) - a point I want to return to in relation to my own approach to Actor Network Theory.

Instead, Gielen and Lijster argue for a theoretical turn in criticism, according to which writing can be generated linking "the art work to the experience from which it came, even if this experience is, as Benjamin noted, the experience of a crisis of experience." (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:38) This linking of artwork with crisis- ridden experience, they anticipate, will produce a "re-historicization" of art criticism (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:39). But they also want to see what they call "new school art critics" venturing into places that are "alien to art" (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:39). "After all, the public sphere does not exist by and of itself but is consciously regenerated by the very acts of the critic" (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:39). Citing de Certeau's distinction between place (*lieu*) and space (*espace*), they direct our attention towards the latter, which can be changed, moulded, brought together from disparate elements. Where de Certeau saw urban walking as the way to discover "a space of enunciation" (de Certearu, 1998:98), Gielen and Ljister envisage the process being taken much further with the aid of new media. They also suggest that what they call the "'displacement' of criticism will therefore have to go hand in hand and be compensated by what we might call an '*espacement*'" (Gielen and Lijster, 2015:40). This continuous reshaping of space that might be undertaken in its application to critical practice, calls to mind Groys' writings on art installations and the possibilities for experiencing space and using such experience to expose the "ambiguous character of the contemporary notion of freedom that functions in our democracies as a tension between sovereign and institutional freedom" (Groys, 2009). Critical "espacement" is an interpretative involvement, in which the role of the critic becomes wider, while distinctions between critic, artist, curator and public perhaps more fluid.

But the distinct role of the critic in relation to the public sphere is still mourned for by some. Hal Foster is a contributor to *Artforum* - the same New York-based art journal for which Greenberg once wrote.

In recent times Foster also put his writing to the task of linking the beleaguered critic, clutching their "bedraggled banner," (Foster, 2015a:122) to the deterioration of the public sphere, as defined by Habermas. It is important here to discuss how Foster arrives at this position, having previously examined in great detail the repeated death of the avant-garde and "neo avant-garde" in *The Return of the Real* (Foster, 2015b) – an attempt to map out the changes that art underwent between the 1950s and mid-90s, moving from what was defined as "neo-avant-gardism" (a term coined by the

German Marxist critic, Peter Burger), towards minimalism and postmodernism (terms more connected with the writings of US critics like Rosalind Krauss, whose work I mention further, below). Here Foster tried to maintain a balance between European art and theory and its North American equivalents, and possibly his most important observations concern the impact of European cultural theory on US writers and artists. It was written, also, during a period when in his own territory, the "culture wars" were waged on the arts, making it necessary for Foster to counter the conservative, "pastiche" side of postmodernity.

Foster's more recent book, *Bad New Days*, takes account of the way in which the recent wave of "participatory art" has aimed to remake or repair the public sphere, but he detects signs of utopianism, as well as pessimism, in much of the art as well as in the words of curators. Even Nicolas Bourriaud**,** who is so much associated with the participatory turn, "has acknowledged the compensatory nature of this participatory impulse" (Foster, 2015b:123).

In Foster's opinion, "Today the social bond is as pressured as the public sphere is atrophied, and criteria more robust that discursivity and sociability are required in response." (Foster, 2015b) Turning his attention, as a result, to the concept of citizenship, Foster reminds the reader of the recent and continuing repressive policies of countries like the UK and the USA in "disqualifying" citizenship by redefining it "as a privilege, not a right", and evoking the rising numbers of undocumented refugees, migrants, stateless and occupied people, he wonders how, in the immediate future, one can redefine citizenship, perhaps along Habermas' lines of a European citizen, or a "citizen of the Anthropocene suggested by Latour." (Foster, 2015a) Agamben's concept of "bare life" and Benjamin's "state of exception" all come to mind here, too.

While agreeing that for criticism, the challenges are many, I now intend to examine the way critique has experimented with new techniques in order to interact with, and comment on, changes in art. This develops the argument that it is in the networked bonds that are constantly forming and mutating that critique continues to find tools to develop. It is important to this argument to acknowledge next the importance of feminist theory and its impact on critical writing about art.

The Impact of Feminist Theory

While Latour, Agamben, and Groys argue from the point of view of being what

Michael Newman might call “meta-critics” and philosophers, watching over the thinking of entire societies, Foster’s identification with a need to redefine the idea of citizenship, and Gielen and Lijster’s ‘Espacement’ idea both seem committed to forms of criticism that engage practically with societies that are in crisis. But with good reason, some approaches to criticism have consciously stressed separation and return, a back-and-forth process that includes room for reflection and debate. Here I want to examine how, under the influence of feminist theory, which emerged from the late 1960s onwards, just such a process continues to be stressed, reflected and recorded in certain varieties of writing, and, as I examine later, changing the way writing emerges, moving the act of writing to a stage that can be described as performative.

“When we speak about art criticism,” wrote Katie Deepwell, founder of the UK-based journal *n.paradoxa*, in 2016, “Most people’s first reaction is newspaper journalism: art criticism is thought to be the reflection of what’s happening today and ‘now’ in terms of exhibitions and immediate critical reactions to how good or bad they were or how ‘noteworthy’ or ‘important’ they are to attend in order to keep up with a certain taste. While we usually think about criticism as a reviewing practice offering judgement (even though criticism rarely pronounces negative judgements and is not just exhibition reviews), it is criticism’s very production and dissemination that plays a role in naming and authorising certain art works alongside certain manners of reading and agenda-setting…Selectivity is everywhere…” (Milevska, 2015).

Deepwell relates the approach taken by *n.paradoxa* to the work of the Italian critic and activist, Carla Lonzi, who made a distinction between “encounter” and “mediation” in her work. Deepwell explains: “Mediation would be the perfect reading: something digested or finished. An encounter would be meeting on which you would reflect but it would be necessarily incomplete and temporary: another encounter would or could change your relationship. Critics change their views over time: think about Lippard’s essay ‘Changing since Changing’” (Deepwell and Milevska, 2016:189).

Before commenting on Lippard’s work, including “Changing Since Changing”, it is worth considering Lonzi in a little more depth. Lonzi’s group, Rivolta Femminile, founded in the early 1970s amid political ferment in Italy, advocated a form of separatist feminist development, embracing *autocoscienza* (consciousness-raising) and debate, and reflected their experimental approach in recorded discussions, manifestos and other

publications. Describing the contribution to this movement of the work of one participing artist, Carla Accardi (also a friend of Lonzi), Leslie Cozzi comments: “Allowing women the physical and intellectual distance necessary to examine their own experiences, these spaces would, so it was argued, facilitate creative female labour and allow women to produce original signs (ie art, literature, or any other creative work). Thus, a separatist space was not only a physical place, but a mental imperative. It is no coincidence that the library, the press, and the bookstore became the most prominent institutions of Italian feminism” (Cozzi, 2011:77). Lonzi, in fact, eventually rejected art criticism in order to dedicate herself to feminist thought and practice full-time.

Lippard, a critic whose work began to achieve recognition during the same period as Lonzi, was just as much connected to the counter- cultural movements of the time, but took a perspective that consciously opposed the most influential male critic of her day. In Changing Since Changing, originally published in 1976 - the essay referred to by Deepwell - Lippard looked back to her first collection of essays, *Changing*, published in 1971 (Lippard, 1971), and confessed: “I recognise now the seeds of my feminism in my revolt against Clement Greenberg’s patronization of artists, against the notion that if you don’t like so-and-so’s work for the “right” reasons, you can’t like it at all, as well as against the “masterpiece” syndrome, and “three great artists” syndrome, and so forth. I was against all these male authority figures, not because they were male, but because they were authorities” (Lippard, 1995:32). The essay stresses, too, the extent to which women’s art had, at that time, to be searched for, and was “forged in isolation … deprived not only of its historical context, but also of that dialogue with other recent art that makes it possible to categorise or discuss in regard to public interrelationships, aesthetic or professional” (Lippard, 1995:35).

Later still, Lippard observed further changes, adopting the metaphor of the network in another summary of feminism in art of the 1970s, and noticing “Various combinations of artists or of artists and non- artists, often anonymously or under the rubric of a collective or network or project. Some women work cooperatively--helping an individual artist to realize her vision on a monumental scale and in the process both giving to her work and getting input for their own work. Others work collaboratively, perhaps according to their own special skills, needs, and concerns. And others work collectively in a more or less consciously structured manner aimed at

equal participation, skill - and power-sharing. Each of these means helps to achieve an end result of breaking down the isolation of the artist's traditional work patterns. None precludes individual work. (I find from my own experience that the dialogue or critical/ self-critical method stimulates new kinds of working methods and a new flexibility. By integrating feedback into the process, and not just as final response to the product, it also changes the individual work)" (Lippard, 1980:365).

These views of "change" through reflexivity, within a network, have been linked by Janis Jeffries in her essay "Text and textiles: weaving across the borderlines" (Deewell, 1995:166), in feminist art practice, to the "expanded field" argument behind the rise of postmodernism put forward by another major US critic, active from the early 1960s - Rosalind Krauss. In her essay on the subject, Krauss concluded that "the logic of the space of postmodernist practice is no longer organized around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of material, or, for that matter, the perception of material. It is organized instead through the universe of terms that are felt to be in opposition within a cultural situation" (Krauss, 1979:43). Krauss, whose career began in the early 1960s, writing for *Artforum* and later co- founding the journal, *October*, responded to the Greenberg stance in a closely-argued, theoretical way, in contrast to Lippard's outright opposition to "authority." Her formative work celebrated the minimalists of the late 60s and 70s, including Serra, Smithson, Andre, and Long, whose work also brought about a new relationship with audiences, a subject I take up next.

I stressed the significance of feminist thinking, not just in order to situate certain strains of feminist thinking within art criticism (such as those set out by Deepwell above), but also in order to point towards the importance of dynamics, and movement, within art in the wider sense. I relate this to the importance of what Gavin Butt has referred to as a "theatrical turn" (Butt, 2005:8-9) in the arts since the 1960s, accompanying his argument for a new type of criticism to emerge. As Butt explained, "…Even though the collapse of critical distance has been entertained before in the postmodernism of the 1980s, I think the mode of unease with criticism *today* is of a different order. It is, I feel, less rooted in a resistance to traditional forms of criticism – less a re-run of the 1980s – and more a sceptical approach to the heritage of criticism left to us by postmodernism itself" (Butt, 2005:3-4). Attacking also the institutionalisation of theory within the academy, Butt argued, "That the modern

critic's judgement of quality may have subsequently both transformed, and then passed into, a received set of values of a particular class or group within society – thereby becoming *doxa* – should not detract from criticism's important role in initially striking out *from* it" (Butt, 2005:3-4). He goes on to focus attention on "the *performativity* of critical response" (Butt, 2005:6).

To explain what he means by this, Butt refers to J.L. Austin's concept of "performative utterances" (Butt, 2005:10) and the work of, among others, Peggy Phelan and Amelia Jones.

Performativity and Critical Agility

As well as having been applied to writing about the performing arts, the term "performativity" has a wider relevance. In feminist theory, which has had a significant impact on Phelan, Jones, and other writers whose work I discuss below, performativity emerged as a key concept in Butler's analysis of gender identification (Butler, 1990). But since 1990, the word performativity has been applied to, and has affected, other disciplines, and has been identified in particular with ANT. For instance, Annemarie Mol's examination of treatment of the vascular disease, atheroschlerois, was able to show how it is a disease that is "done" or enacted according to the various approaches observed during the stages the patients were examined and treated in a Dutch hospital (Mol, 2003). In another ANT-related development, the word "performation" was coined by Michel Callon (2006), in a work that sees contemporary economic systems not so much as having been imposed (ideologically or as a result of politics) or having evolved (in a so-called free market) but, increasingly, being enacted. Economics and healthcare both clearly and constantly bring together humans and objects in networks, about which an ANT- influenced approach reveals something surprising, insofar as we can say both economics and illness are performed as much as they are manifested.

But performativity is also evoked by Groys in his examination of contemporary art being "under the gaze of theory" (Groys, 2012). Here Groys positions contemporary society as having changed significantly since Debord's definition of the Society of the Spectacle in the 1960s, according to which post-War populations consumed passively and delusionally. Now, constantly engaged in social media, travel, sport and exercise, a "regime of theory" forces society to think "it is not enough to live: one must demonstrate that one lives, one should perform one's being alive" (Groys, 2012)

Groys' claim as a result of this is that "in our culture it is art that performs this knowledge of being alive" (Groys, 2012). The way art does this is by being "super social" (a term Groys borrows from Tarde) in that art, unlike democracy, can form societies that include rather than exclude children or "the mad", as well as non-humans like birds or machines. Groys' "super social" definition could well anticipate any number of actor- networks being brought together in the context of contemporary art. And in such contexts, art can be seen in performative terms, as a contextual dance between forms, media, chronologies, narratives, emotions, expectations. It seems appropriate therefore to think further about the production of critical text in relation to the "super social" nature of contemporary art, which I argue has a strong connection with the definitions of "performative text" put forward by Peggy Phelan. This allows me in due course to consider the performative importance of actor networks that bind together around the production of text.

Phelan uses her characteristic style and brio to define the way she writes:

"Performative writing is different from personal criticism or autobiographical essay, although it owes a lot to both genres. Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for "what philosophy wishes all the same to say." Rather than describing the performance event in "direct signification," a task I believe to be impossible and not terrifically interesting, I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion (repression, fantasy, and the general hubbub of the individual and collective unconscious), and made muscular by the … force of political repression in all its mutative violence" (Phelan, 1997:11-12).

It is important to remember that Phelan's main area of attention as a critic has been performance art, dance, and theatre, but that she sees it as impossible and pointless to document the essential singularity of any performance. To photograph it, film it, record it, describe it in words that simply "describe", are all additional to the central, temporal gesture of performance, which happens, then stops happening, and is gone. The "gone" and disappeared nature of performance means that a sense of loss is made noticeable in all experience, a sense she wants performance writing to address. "I want less to describe and preserve performances," she writes, "Than to enact and mimic the losses that beat away within them. In this mimicry, loss itself helps transform the repetitive force of trauma and might bring a way to overcome it" (Phelan, 1997:12).

The parallels between Phelan's notion of losses that "beat away within" performance and Benjamin's notion of loss of aura are noticeable here.

Another US academic, Della Pollock, employs six definitions or "excursions" to explain what she means by the phrase "performative writing": *evocative*, *metonymic* (in taking "its pulse from the difference rather than the identity between the linguistic symbol and the thing it is meant to represent", (Pollock, 1998:82) *subjective, nervous*, *citational*, and *consequential* (all her italics). What is interesting, however, about the various forms such writing can take is that – potentially – they have the power to generate more writing, more response. Rebecca Schneider looks at this in her essay "Solo Solo Solo", by questioning the myth of the single individual artist. "Often," she writes (Schneider 2005:36), "A solo artist performs as if alone or singled out, only to perform a kind of echo palette of others, a map of citations and a subjectivity so multiply connected as to be collective." Referring to jazz and other forms of "cross cultural imagining" she notes the extent to which "solo" work produces "choruses of witnesses – that is, various audiences of persons, objects, documents, photos or testimonies that stand as witnesses, each, in different ways, rendering accounts in diverse but collective reiteration" (Schneider 2005:80-81).

Jane Rendell expresses a similar point of view of the critic's awareness of multiple interpretative possibility in the way she picks out the differing voices and attitudes that can be communicated through writing, seeing these variations as "sites", exploring not just the idea of critical distance but also the feelings of critical closeness and intimacy, and relating the sum of these positional possibilities to a form of critical architecture. She writes about exploring "the position of the critic, not only in relation to art objects, architectural spaces and theoretical ideas, but also through the site of writing itself, investigating the limits of criticism, and what it is possible for a critic to say about an artist, a work, the site of a work and the critic herself and for the writing to still 'count' as criticism…a form of art criticism which is itself a form of situated practice" (Rendell, 2010:2).

In this research, too, I am aiming to show how multiplicities, seen as networks, mutate, and ideas are generated through interconnected change. But change as a performed thing. This awareness of the new possibilities of criticism are, of course, also responding to the ways in which art itself has changed since the 1960s, its "theatrical" or "performative" role having been described by writers on the US side of

the Atlantic such as Michael Fried (1967) and Krauss, and from a more European perspective by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008). But art's social role is even broader now. As the British- based Israeli academic, Irit Rogoff notices: "The old boundaries between making and theorising, historicising and displaying, criticising and affirming have long been eroded. Artistic practice is being acknowledged as the production of knowledge and theoretical and cultural endeavours have taken on a far more experimental and inventive dimension, both existing in the role of potentiality and possibility rather than that of exclusively material production" (Rogoff, 2008:97).

Irit Rogoff's notion of "criticality" is a sort of never-ending creative adventure with the tools of critical theory at hand to forge and improvise new devices attuned to temporal alteration. But her work is questioned, albeit gently, by Ingrid Commandeur (2016). She admits "Rogoff has been accused of leading the life of a typical lecture- circuit theorist, far removed from the less self-aware masses of audiences and art critics, who are lost to the corruption of the market and the culture industry" (Commandeur, 2016:238-239), but she counters this by pointing out that criticality's "notion of participation, performativity and *meaning taking place as events unfold*" (author's italics) (Commandeur, 2016:238-239) strongly reflects many of the art world's own developments, from the 1990s onwards, particularly in terms of exhibition formats and curatorial practice. Arguing that traditional art journals and newspapers no longer have "exclusive rights to notions of criticality" (Commandeur, 2016:245) she points out the extent to which "it is no longer possible to hold on to fixed positions between printed and online criticism, or between criticism, display and cultural production as such" (Commandeur, 2016:245).

This also foregrounds another consideration, which Natasha Lushetich raises, in summarising the purpose of what she calls "performative critique," which she sees as being the "re-education of perception" (Lushetich, 2016:255). This refers not only to critics and artists but also audiences and participants. What are the interconnections and roles of the writers I am writing about? As I previously mentioned, it was obvious from the outset that not all of them write full-time, and that many of them are involved in other activities – art practice, teaching, or curating, for instance. As active writers they interact with innumerable other actors, including artists, institutions, and artworks. But other occupations and responsibilities make demands on their time, including healthcare, childcare and wellbeing activities, transport, and

domestic work. Such temporal divisions also have a part to play in the cultural production that these writers are involved in.

Critics continue to emerge, to debunk entertainingly as well as to interpret and engage with contemporary art in combative and inventive ways, using all the tools of new technology and evolving critical theory. Is theory so troubled in the current political and cultural climate as some have claimed it to be? Perhaps theory and criticism are so closely intertwined in contemporary art that the production of text can only intensify, in multiplicities of styles and formats. Commenting in the wake of the 911 attacks, climate change denial, and the rise of what we now refer to as "fake news," Bruno Latour argued in 2003 for "a realism dealing with matters of concern" rather than fact (Latour, 2004:231). Noting the way in which the word "thing" denotes not only an object "out there", but (in northern European languages at least) also a gathering, Latour called for an even broader critical approach in which the object of critical attention becomes just that - a gathering:

"Whatever the words, what is presented here is an entirely different attitude than the critical one, not a flight into the conditions of possibility of a given matter of fact, not the addition of something more human that the inhumane matters of fact would have missed, but, rather, a multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, sociology to detect how many participants are gathered in a thing to make it exist and to maintain its existence" (Latour, 2004:245-246).

Latour's position thus has become much more "curatorial" in recent years – and in fact he has curated exhibitions such as *Reset Modernity!* in 2016, and his bigger recent publications have resembled them, incorporating websites in the case of 2013's *An Enquiry into Modes of Existence* (Latour, 2013). But how can the ordinary, individual critic even begin to move towards organising this kind of extensive "gathering" approach to objects of their concern, in the field of contemporary art?

Perhaps only the operation of a network that includes critics, artists, artworks, institutions, spectators, and other actors, close and distant, possibly harsh, possibly intimate, will show writing moving onwards in tough times.

Chapter 2

Writing Time: Art, Writing, and Contemporaneity

Introduction

From summarising the way theory has impacted upon criticism and contemporary art, resulting in the emergence of new approaches to writing, I now want to consider the time of writing – conscious of the times we are living in and how we respond to these times. It is important to examine how critical writing about contemporary art is an engagement with contemporaneity itself, first because of the positioning of contemporary art historically, at the beginning of the twenty first century, secondly because of contemporary art's global and local presence and significance, and thirdly because *contemporary* art and critical engagement with it both reflect contemporaneity as a condition. But it is a condition in need of explanation. I will begin, therefore, by looking at contemporaneity through the work of writers including Peter Osborne, Boris Groys, Giorgio Agamben, and Walter Benjamin, as well as recent writings by Marina Silvello, Julia Vassilieva, and Pedro Erber.

Following my examination of critical writing and contemporaneity I go on to introduce and discuss, for the first time, extracts from interviews I recorded with writers participating in my fieldwork during Spring 2018 and Autumn-Winter, 2018-19. The use of these extracts addresses an important question that emerges about the use of interviews in relation to this condition of contemporaneity, however: the question of "denial of coevalness" (Fabian, 1983: 32), raised by Johannes Fabian in relation to anthropological fieldwork. My approach to interviews is therefore examined and explained in relation to time and distance. Appropriately, I also begin to explore the *formative stage* of critical writing in the network sense, or its future potential. A writer's initial *motivation to write* (and first engagement with a network) and their views about *the effect writing may be capable of having on the wider world of contemporary art*, (through the networks they have learned to initiate) are issues that question the relationships between writers and contemporary art. But, as I will show, they also access certain fragmented modes of expression, observed in interviews, that draw on different, perhaps conflicting emotions, which are more difficult to express. I will argue that these modes of expression argue strongly for

change in the contemporary art world as writers experience it, and that this articulation of change, which emerges through writers' development and experience connects strongly with time, addressing the issue of contemporaneity.

In this chapter, then, I want to examine what it is to engage in critical writing on contemporary art, by foregrounding a sense of contemporaneity as a condition of the time(s) we are living in. Later this chapter therefore considers the subject of critical writing on contemporary art in one geographical region, by gathering together different experiences of time spent writing, in terms of the effect writing is hoped, by its writers, to have, upon contemporary art in that region. This shared condition of differing practice during a particular historic time finds its focus in forms of practice – contemporary art and critical writing on art – that themselves are products of and reflections upon contemporaneity.

Contemporaneity in Theory

Before examining its implications for critical writing, it is necessary first of all to explain what is meant by this term, "contemporaneity." Ostensibly, the word describes a condition - the situation of being aware of what it is to be alive in the contemporary moment. This situation has been thought about especially in Peter Osborne's recent work, where he has written, "The concept of the contemporary projects a single historical time of the present, as a living present – a common, albeit internally disjunctive, historical time of human lives."(Osborne, 2010: 4) – the most important word in that sentence perhaps being "disjunctive." Osborne sees the way we understand this "living present", however, as "speculative" because "There is thus no actual shared subject-position of, or within, our present from the standpoint of which its relational totality could be constructed as a whole, in however temporally fragmented or dispersed or incomplete a form." Osborne therefore foregrounds the importance within the "living present" of fictionalisation and geopolitics, because our understanding of the multiplicity of place, location, position and the history of each is so shared (via social interconnectedness) and so acute. "Increasingly," he writes, "'the contemporary' has the transcendental status of a condition of the historical intelligibility of social experience itself." (Osborne, 2010: 6)

I want to compare Osborne's view of the contemporary with those of two other writers,

Boris Groys and Giorgio Agamben, beginning with Groys' announcement, "Never before has humanity been so interested in its own contemporaneity" (Groys, 2013: 137). Groys' philosophical view of art history argues that unlike the "archive" of the museum, established to preserve its contents against the flow of time, humans exist "in the flow", despite the fact that, at the same time, certain aspects of our lives and identities (our national insurance numbers, for instance) are "inscribed into cultural archives".

Art and artworks of course are tied to historical periods and the personalities and influences of certain individuals, details of which are preserved in the museum archive, but Groys notes that in recent historical periods, such as the 1970s, the work of time-based artists started to embrace "the flow" and rebelled against the static permanence of the museum. As a result, the museum began to change, eventually becoming a "stage" for this flow-based art that worked with time instead of attempting to arrest it. Subsequently, Groys thinks the museum has since become a Wagnerian "gesamkunstwerk" or total work of art, in which everything and everyone involved becomes part of one grandiose, curated creation that does, however, have an ending. Examples of such a "temporary and suicidal dictatorship," have been seen before, according to Groys, mentioning twentieth century examples such as Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire of 1916, Andy Warhol's Factory and Guy Debord's Situationist International. Contemporary art, Groys thinks, is increasingly based on the curatorial project, enacting its own temporary nature, as each new show in the contemporary museum space attempts to contribute to "the flow." He calls this "synchronisation".

Groys' comments on the migration of the cultural archive of art history to the internet, which I noted in my first chapter, also frees the museum to become a centre for activity (including events like lectures, performances, yoga sessions, and creches), which are constantly listed and described, in turn, on the internet, via museum websites, and events pages. This "theatricalization" of the museum (or gallery) is at its most dramatic at the opening or launch event (an experience discussed in later chapters as being the least useful time for writers to review a show, for obvious reasons of distraction). But, as Groys also notes, if classical modernism analysed the "thingness of things", contemporary art does a similar analysis of the "eventfulness of events", frequently reflecting on the way events unfold in time, and how they are documented. Reflection

on contemporary art, however, is done from "inside" the artwork, rather than outside; within the installation, for instance,
or immersed in the performance, in a museum or gallery that is effectively borderless. Groys sees this "irreversible" form of flow-based museum-centred art as radically opposite to the role of the internet, where time and viewpoint can be reversed and manipulated (and Groys is most emphatic on the internet's surveillance potential).
If Groys' understanding of contemporaneity is in its "flow," the accompanying presence of the cultural archive is to store and interpret (with the help of the artist) the evidence recording this flow. In owning, storing and manipulating material in digital form, of course, the critical writer is doing what most other people are doing, with their mobile phones and laptop computers, all the time. But in the production of documentation on contemporary art, the work of the critical writer is also understood to have an archival role, of some significance, because of the increasing complexity of the way museums and galleries act as sources of activity, as well as stages for artists to revisit and rework the accumulative archives. At the same time, the internet and social media are still in development; their impact is continuous and ongoing. Recording and reflecting in new, digital, hybrid forms, the current, ever-growing range of online journals and platforms only began to appear ten to fifteen years ago, while new forms are constantly evolving. Meanwhile the internet's importance as a "thingless" museum of objectless aura, and of kitsch - the ultimate repository of the archive - is changing and will also continue to do so, continuing to alter the position of museum, artist and critical writer.
However, as Julia Vassilieva comments on Groys, "The very fundamental paradox that his writing embodies is the paradox of thought struggling to take shape and make meaning when the preconditions for this - the schemes, the knowledge, the certainties - have progressively been demolished, to a degree that they can no longer sustain philosophical inquiry as we used to understand it" (Vassilieva, 2016: 267). The flow of contemporaneity, Groys sees as the inevitable result of over a century of cultural flux, from the initial stages of modernism onwards, in a constant attempt by artists to penetrate lifeless certainty and release some (almost mystical) transformative essentiality, only for that essentiality to become evidenced in the ever-growing, ever-adapting archive, bent on capturing Benjamin's concept of artistic aura. From Benjamin,

Groys also derives his sense of historical movement ("progress") as conducive to destruction, seen most famously in Benjamin's description of the Angel of History, inspired by Paul Klee's monoprint, Angelus Novus, of 1920. Contemporaneity, for Groys, is transitory, but in its hunger for transformative essence, in searching for and becoming ever more part of the "flow", contemporaneity establishes its dominance and its fascination.

Giorgio Agamben's views on contemporaneity are more mysterious in the way they are expressed, as well as being, literally as well as metaphorically, much darker. As Agamben writes, "The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light but rather its darkness. All eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity, who is able to write by dipping his pen in the obscurity of the present" (Agamben, 2009: 44).

Agamben uses terminology derived from neuropsychology to enable him to draw an analogy between the way the consideration of contemporariness could resemble the way humans look upwards, at outer space, only to perceive in between points of visibility a darkness that is the product of "off-cells" in the eye. In other words, the darkness is "a product of our own retina" (Agamben, 2009:44). The challenge he is thinking about is to penetrate the darkness of our own present, knowing that its obscurity is similarly the result of human perception. Yet this challenge is "Something that never ceases to engage" the viewer. "The contemporary," Agamben continues, addressing those who live in contemporaneity, "Is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from (their) own time" (Agamben, 2009: 45). Returning to outer space and astrophysics, Agamben then draws another analogy between contemporary darkness and the darkness of space, a darkness that may have resulted from retreating galaxies whose speed exceeds the speed of their light's ability to reach Earth. Within the darkness of the contemporary is therefore some light that, "while directed towards us, infinitely distances itself from us. In other words, it is like being on time for an appointment one cannot but miss" (Agamben, 2009: 46). These complex metaphors involving concentrated attention (staring into space, and into darkness) and never being able to quite catch the retreating light source, go towards defining the

contemporary in an accumulative way. But Agamben also stresses that such forms of attention also affect the contemporary condition, by creating the "urgency" of the impossible appointment, which is in the "untimeliness" of the situation – what he calls "the anachronism that permits us to grasp our time in the form of a "too soon" that is also a "too late"–of an "already" that is also a "not yet.""

It is important here to connect Agamben and Groys in their mutual debt to Walter Benjamin, and in particular to the sense they capture in their writings on contemporaneity of what Benjamin called "Messianic time." As a writer with interests in Marxism and Jewish mysticism, Benjamin sees time as capable of realising radical change. But this change, which is the end of time, is not necessarily far away in some remote and distant future. Indications of radical difference, and the possibility of radical change, are potentialized in objects, texts, situations available and discoverable in the present as "weak messianic signs" that tell those who can read them that time is short. "In this sense," as Groys puts it, "Our present time is not a postmodern but rather an ultramodern time, because it is the time in which the scarcity of time, the lack of time, becomes increasingly obvious. We know it because everybody is busy today—nobody has time" (Groys, 2010). These "weak signs" Groys sees in the twentieth century avant-garde, whose "universalist power is a power of weakness, of self-erasure," (Groys: 2010) which Groys also sees working through the breakup of mass culture and the spread of social media in which everyone's everyday life, including that of artists and critical writers, can be shared. Even Agamben's concept of "bare life", therefore, in which life is reduced to its basic characteristics of survival and precarity, can be shared on the internet.

These writings on the contemporaneous are continuing to resound and provoke thought. Relating her treatment of contemporaneity to the writings of Osborne, as well as Agamben and Benjamin, Marina Silvello echoes Osborne thus: "The contemporary is not just a presentness where we, contemporaries, exist together, but it consists of a joint of different temporalities" (Silvello, 2019: 5), but she then oscillates towards Agamben and Benjamin in stating, "In a way, it could be said that the contemporary contains the primordial seed (the arkhe) to see the future…" (Silvello, 2019:5). Coming to mind here, again, as an image that generates time, Benjamin's evocation of the

Angelus Novus, the Angel of History, that faces the past, but is blown towards the future, its wings unfurled by a "storm from paradise" (Benjamin, 1977: 259-60). When Silvello reminds us about Benjamin's "now-time", or "Jetztzeit," she describes how he "Historicizes the instantaneity of the present, rendering it as an interpoint-like object, a prism refracting history as a whole" (Silvello, 2019: 12).

Contemporaneity brings together different experiences of time "disjunctively" as Osborne puts it, in addition to defining, or attempting to define, a period of time historically. But despite the compelling nature of this condition, thinking about it is, according to Agamben, like trying to make an appointment one "cannot but miss." Threaded through these thoughts on contemporaneity, linking the writings of Agamben, Groys and Osborne, I have mentioned, too, how conscious I am of Walter Benjamin's concept of the "weak messianic" gesture in triggering moments of historic awareness, pointing backwards or forwards in time.

Contemporaneity and Interviewing

But there are other, deeper problems with contemporaneity that have been identified by other writers. Examining the term in historic chronology, but also in psycho-social experiential time, Pedro Erber sees the word contemporaneity expressing both "The historic period that succeeds the modern and the time we occupy in the twenty first century" as well as "the relationship between two events at the same time" (Erber, 2013: 28-49). However, in trying to locate the "specificity" of the contemporary in relation to the modern, Erber identifies a "need to come to terms with the condition of a growing transnational contemporaneity as a decisive phenomenon of the so-called globalised world."

It is this problem that he refers to as "the discontent or disquiet with the contemporary, this denial of contemporaneity" (Erber, 2013: 29), drawing on the term the "denial of coevalness", coined by German anthropologist Johannes Fabian in his influential book, Time and the Other, originally published in 1983. When Fabian described "an aporetic split between recognition of coevalness in some ethnographic research and denial of coevalness in most anthropological theorizing and writing" (Fabian, 1983: 35) he was referring to anthropology's tendency, through a reliance upon fieldwork, to introduce a

distance between the time-based conditions of encountering and communicating with ethnographic contacts and the conditions under which ethnographic material, like the interview, is written about and turned into anthropology. As Fabian puts it: "The temporal conditions experienced in fieldwork and those experienced in writing (and teaching) usually contradict each other" (Fabian, 1983: 71). This problem arises partly because "anthropological writing is inherently autobiographic" (Fabian, 1983: 87), but also because during the time taken to work on turning research into text, change happens to the subjects of research. Meanwhile the research takes over the time of the researcher, as "persons, events, puzzlements and discoveries encountered during fieldwork may continue to occupy our thoughts and fantasies for many years… our past is present in us as a *project*, hence as our future" (Fabian, 1983: 93). Discussing this distancing tendency, Erber adds how it "Establishes itself in the transition from oral, dialogical knowledge to the written medium, a distance that allows the anthropologist to look at, observe, and objectify the Other. Allochronism is thus grounded on a primacy of seeing and observing, on the transformation of the other into an object of contemplation; in brief, it consists of a sort of aestheticization of the other" (Erber, 2013:30).

These observations have important implications for this research on critical writing, notably in the way the practice of interviewing has a tendency to isolate the interviewee in a different temporal zone as well as continuing to try to relate to the interviewee in the writing and its sense of time, resulting in a "split subjectivity" which is "at work in the practice of fieldwork in general, that is, whenever interviewing is involved as a methodological step in humanistic research. Indeed, the contemporaneity implied in the very concept of "interview" is implicitly challenged by the inevitable hierarchy between the roles of interviewer and interviewee and by the objectification of the other implied in the process of interviewing and reporting" (Erber, 2013: 31).

Significantly, too, in referring to Agamben, Erber reminds his reader how the darkness Agamben sees in the contemporary "is not a passive and nostalgic darkness" (Erber, 2013: 37), but a way of approaching the need "to protect one's sight from the blinding light of the present" (Erber, 2013: 37). Ultimately, though, Erber is dissatisfied with Agamben because of what Erber calls his "messianism without god" which "forecloses

any possibility of approaching the contemporary in its most novel, problematic, and thought-provoking aspect: in short, the fact that the same word names today the historical period in which we supposedly live and the very impossibility of historical periodization, insofar as the unity of its putative subject unravels itself in singularities irreducible to generalization"(Erber, 2013: 44).

Next in this chapter, therefore, I want to address Erber's concerns about contemporaneity, and to consider further the notion of contemporaneity in relation to interviews, conscious of the relationship between myself as researcher and the writers I have interviewed.

So, regarding the writers taking part in my research, each one situated in the contemporary, and writing about an art that calls itself "contemporary", it may be misleading, if not impossible, to describe their experience in truly collective and generalised terms, basing my comments on selected interview or diary extracts.

My thoughts on this of course acknowledge the different perspectives writers have, as well as their differing backgrounds. Their focus is on the contemporary artworld that their writing addresses.

What I can emphasise here, however, using the ANT approach I am taking, is the extent to which these writers each possess their own sense of individual potentiality, and the way this potential can interconnect with contemporary art, artists, and all the other agents, human and non-human, gathering in actor-networks bound together around the production of critical texts.

What, specifically, are the problems that arise, then, in relation to my use of interviews? First, the way I have selected extracts and separated them. Separate experiences of time, exploring individual understandings of past, present and future, and the passage of time, have been brought together to create what Osborne might call a "speculative" unity of experience.

Furthermore, I interviewed writers and received their diaries in two phases, roughly coinciding with spring and autumn, the busiest times in the gallery year. This was intended as a way of tracking a sense of the way interviewees themselves had experienced their work having changed over time, but of course it also gave rise to change being noticed by me about the writers being interviewed. Revising this chapter,

for instance, I am reminded how some interviewees seemed more serious during the second interview, perhaps because it was only by experiencing the first interview that they were able to get an idea of how searching the second set of questions might be. Interviewees had also experienced change in their own lives: one writer moved her home, for instance, to take up a new job, in between the first and second phase of interviews and diaries. In addition, she and other interviewees completed major projects and started new ones. For some, family life or illness intervened. I have also experienced change, moving my location periodically, my writing now taking place across two continents.

Later, in Chapters 5 and 6, I go on to describe the way writing is frequently experienced in terms of a rhythmic break, alternating between phases of distraction and phases of connection, in which the present and the past are also drawn upon, reflecting Peters' analysis of improvisation (Peters, 2009: 27), but which equate to a differing awareness of time.

At the same time, I must remind the reader that I am also one of the writers whose experience of writing contributes to my own fieldwork. Having begun by referring among other texts to Agamben's essay, What is the Contemporary, and having been writing about the subject of contemporaneity in a place very distant from the post-industrial English north, I stood one night outside what is now my second home, in south west Argentina, watching clouds moving rapidly overhead in the high wind, and staring into the black sky behind them, where millions of very bright stars mapped out constellations totally unfamiliar to me. Interrogating the gaps of darkness in between those pinpricks and splashes of fire presented difficulties: in relatively unpolluted parts of the southern hemisphere, like this, the viewer is made much more aware of the sheer size and brilliance of what blazes overhead in the moonless sky. Concentrating the attention on true areas of darkness necessitates the avoidance of any optical distraction. While investigating and identifying what lies there, at whatever level of potentiality, is, according to Agamben, like chasing after an appointment I will inevitably miss, he also stresses that the act of staring becomes a profound priority, "something that never ceases to engage" (Agamben, 2009: 45).

In what follows, I must acknowledge what Fabian calls the "denial of coevalness … the

allochronism of anthropology" (Fabian, 1983: 32) encountered in writing about writers, based on interviews I have conducted with them. But I also propose to identify what might be seen as a parallel "split subjectivity," (Erber, 2013: 31) demonstrated in the use of language found within individual interview extracts, showing unresolved tendencies in the complex relationship between contemporary art, its institutions, galleries, artists and audiences, born out of actor-networks in the production of critical text.

Contemporaneity in Interviews with Critical Writers (I)

During my first set of interviews, the first question asked of all the writers involved in fieldwork was *"why did you choose to write about contemporary art?"* Bearing Erber's previous comments in mind, in bringing these responses together, it has to be admitted that at this point I am selecting, cutting, placing emphasis, and therefore altering each writer's fuller statement – their interview "time", and their understanding of time within their own experience. Addressing the personal history of each writer, the answers elicited by this question each foregrounded the importance of writing as a chosen approach to art, with a variety of forms of engagement suggested by writers – engagement with art, with artists, with other people, with other actors – further reflecting what Erber called a "split subjectivity." Shared experiences, between writer and writer, or shared circumstances were difficult to find. But each writer talked in terms of an outward-moving motivation to connect.

Associating her move towards critical writing with an experience of linking with a community, Lauren Velvick's statement began with the information that after studying at Manchester University, "Which doesn't have an art course", she then "Just made friends with people who were doing art or were in bands and things like that… I graduated in 2010…I knew I wanted to stay in Manchester, but it's that kind of thing of graduating right in the middle of the credit crunch (laughter) and the recession, so everyone was a bit like, "what are we gonna do?"" Lauren took a decision to develop her interest in art at an alternative art school. "So I started going to the Islington Mill Art Academy" Lauren continued, referring the free, peer-led alternative art school offering bimonthly sessions at Islington Mill, Salford, "And I wasn't sure then whether I wanted to make art myself. Or curate, or what. But (I) just got more and more interested in the writing side of it. And

enjoyed doing that more."[1] This statement is interesting because of the way Lauren links the credit crunch of 2008 with the decision to attend Islington Mill Art Academy, coinciding with making friends who were artists or musicians. Her increasing interest in writing was therefore related to the networks of friends who were also pursuing art or music in a milieu in which money was decidedly short.

The precariousness of critical writing makes the issue of payment an important and sometimes delicate issue, as I go on to discuss in Chapter Five. But in Tom Emery's reply, he simply talks about the need to find a way to continue to visit shows after graduating, and keep paying attention to the art. "Well, at first I was doing it for free," he said to me, "As most people do, I guess. Also, I wasn't looking to do it in any professional capacity … I'd finished my MA, I had a part-time job that was quite boring and wasn't keeping me very busy, and I just wanted to stay engaged with the art scene in Manchester. So just – just something that would make sure I was concentrating when I was going to see shows. Paying attention. That's just it for why it started." Tom's use of the short phrase, "Paying attention", and his following concluding phrase, "That's just it for why it started," seem , to me, to cut through the sense of uncertainty he describes in the earlier part of the extract, when he recalls "I wasn't looking to do it in any professional capacity" and the job he was doing that was "quite boring and wasn't keeping me very busy."[2]

For Jack Welsh and Sara Jaspan, the move towards writing underpinned a similar sense of relatedness to artworks themselves, as physical things. Sara, who studied literature, and grew exasperated at having to spend so much time reading books before being able to write anything, said about contemporary art: "I prefer the physicality of an exhibition, or art, where you can look at something and see it or be in it and digest it in your own time"[3]. Especially in her use of the words "be in it", Sara's words about the experience of being close to an artwork has particular relevance to the "performative" aspects of contemporary art, which can carry over into the way it is written about, as I have described in Chapter One. Jack Welsh, on the other hand, explained how after he had done his BA in Fine Art, he began to practise as a sculptor. "I've always been practically

[1] First Interview with Lauren Velvick, recorded at the Bluecoat, Liverpool, 31.07.2018.
[2] First Interview with Tom Emery, recorded at Manchester Metropolitan University, Righton Building, 12.06.2018.
[3] First interview with Sara Jaspan, recorded West Didsbury, Manchester, 11.06.2018.

engaged with making," he said, "And throughout that academic framework I found myself really passionate about research and theoretical studies and art history. And that kind of underpinned my making process. And that's something that's really developed to the point where now where I view that as my primary creative output. That's something that I continue to explore. And that's really how I became interested in writing about visual art."[4] What strikes me about Jack's statement here is the way it builds, almost sculpturally, from talking about being "practically engaged in making," through research and theory that "underpinned my making process", towards that final sentence describing his interest in writing.

Rather than speaking autobiographically about her reasons for writing, the writer and editor Lara Eggleton began her answer with a statement about contemporary art and how it provides ways of approaching wider issues, saying, "I write about contemporary art because I think it's always a good acid test of what's going on in the world. It's a reflection of, or a refraction of, what's going on in the world in terms of events and happenings and political, ideological shifts." But shortly after came a more precise statement with regard to writing: "It's a kind of way of engaging with the world through a kind of middle person, a kind of middle entity, I suppose." This use of the expressions "middle person" and "entity" each place the writer in such close proximity to art that an experience of it interprets aspects of "the world," and this leads to act of writing, as Lara continued to explain thus: "And that's quite a creative way of kind of gaining knowledge and interest in the world without having to be a journalist, I suppose, which has a much more direct, descriptive role.

And I wouldn't call myself a journalist for that reason." The way Lara identifies journalism with descriptive writing then leads her to define her own approach, which is tellingly aware of a desire for a connectedness to "the world" that is directly related to the act of writing. "I think writing about art for me is a kind of, is a creative process. …It's a way of, I guess, meshing with other people who are thinking about, or responding to the world in different ways. So there's a sort of extra layer, I guess, of engagement with the world, so there's something collaborative and creative and generative that goes on in that

[4] First interview with Jack Welsh, recorded at MMU, Righton Building, 15.06.2018.

space, that I'm inspired by." [5]

In talking about her initial interest in writing about contemporary art, the Lancashire-based artist and writer Sue Flowers told me, "I've always felt that there's a missing communication gap between practice in quality contemporary work and people. Just general people."[6] Sue's words are in some contrast, then, with those of Lara Eggleton, Jack Welsh and Sara Jaspan, above, because of the way Sue makes us aware of the formal distance between art and the public. She continued, "And I've been really conscious of language and linguistic use. That the arts have their own language.

And I often smile when I go into galleries with people who aren't artists. I've got a friend who teaches plain English and she often critically interrogates the panels and says, "What the hell does that mean, Sue?" Or "Can you tell me what this means?" So I think there's definitely a sort of accessibility driver that makes me want to write." One important aspect of Sue's field of engagement therefore may be with the style of language employed in writing about art, and not just in galleries. But, again, it is only through the act of writing that she can achieve this.

Another writer, Laura Harris, describes her motivation, again retrospectively. But here we are presented with a scenario that is shot through with negative emotions. While studying for a Masters in Art Theory at Liverpool, she visited that city's 2014 Biennial "And it made me so angry, and I really didn't – politically – I felt it was very sort of – it needed picking apart.". In the way Laura's sentence breaks up, here, I am interested in the way her sense of continuation is interrupted by changes of mind, and of competing priorities, "I really didn't" followed by a different subject, "politically", after which she returns to her own emotional reaction, "I felt it was very sort of", only to end with four words that might equally refer retrospectively to the entire sentence as to the exhibition she had visited: "it needed picking apart." Laura went on to state, in one unbroken but convoluted sentence, conveying much movement, "And also it was a bad exhibition, I felt, so I wrote this piece, just in my bedroom 'cause I was just writing it for myself, to get it out, and then I emailed it to Laura Robertson," a reference to co-founder and editor of Liverpool-based The Double Negative online arts journal, "Who I'd never met

[5] First interview with Lara Eggleton, recorded at the Tetley, Leeds, 29.07.2018.

[6] First interview with Sue Flowers, recorded in Sun Square, Lancaster, 14.06.2018.

before, I never knew anything about it, I just googled Art Writing Liverpool, and I sent it off, and then the very day I was leaving Liverpool to move back home to my Mum and Dad's, she replied, and said, "great, yes, we're going to publish it."" The phrase, "Just to get it out" is particularly striking, because of the way it expresses forcefully, again, the emotional motivation and movement of the written review, with further movement evoked in the email to Laura Robertson, the google search, sending off the completed piece of writing, the move to her parents' and the email reply accepting the review. Afterwards, Laura Harris talked about the positive feedback she received, while otherwise "The press were very scared to write negative reviews," a situation which "Boosted my confidence, so I carried on." [7]

Contemporaneity in Interviews with Critical Writers (II)

During the second and final set of recordings, recorded approximately three months after the first, a question was asked that attempted to address critical writing's relationship with art and artists, its institutions – galleries, museums, and art schools – and audiences. It was worded as follows: *"How do you think critical writing adds or contributes to contemporary art's relevance in our region?"*

In contrast to the earlier question asking about the motivation to write critically, in which most writers tended to refer to the personal past, this later question generally received answers that took the writer and the world in which they write into the future. It came as little surprise to find many of the answers seemed positive, at first, about the role of critical writing. But looking at those answers in detail, a variety of concerns arose.

In looking at the different answers to this question, also, I would argue that they convey to us some insight into a mode of contemporaneity, in each writer's sense of their writing and its possible relevance and effect – the possible outcome, in other words, of "network entelechy."

Text-based artist and academic, Joanne Lee, for instance, emphasised the importance of writing becoming more accepted by art students as a possible form of practice. She began her answer stating, "People are… feeling increasingly confident to use writing as a medium, just as they might use film-making or painting or whatever. So I think it's

[7] First interview with Laura Harris, recorded at the Bluecoat, Liverpool, 26.06.2018.

contributing in the sense that … it just is *the stuff*."[8] This expression, "the stuff", expresses strongly the way Jo thinks writing is becoming an accepted and available medium within contemporary art, possessing many possibilities for use that artists and art students can explore. Jo continued, "There are multiple registers of what stuff does and where it's published as well, so maybe there's something just generally enriching about the way things are being talked about in different ways on different levels, being accessed on different channels. It feels like the more the better. Like there's a multitude of voices." In such expressions of support for a "multitude of voices," it is possible to suggest that Jo is perhaps illustrating the notion put forward by writers like Osborne, Erber and Silvello concerning many different versions of experience sounding across global dimensions.

However, examining the general expressions of support for journalistic varieties of critical writing involving other interviewees, some reservations were evident. Many writers agreed about the importance of critical writing in encouraging public awareness of art in the region. Expressing this quite succinctly, for instance, Laura Harris stated, "Without critical writing art galleries are just – I dunno - shouting into a kind of abyss"[9], capturing in a very simple way the importance of documentation referred to by Groys. Tom Emery, using the plural pronoun "we" to refer to critical writers as a group, said, "Obviously we do this because we're interested in contemporary art and we think other people should be interested in contemporary art. So there's the whole thing where part of the reason you're writing about stuff is to bring people's attention to it".[10] At this point in the extract, Tom changes the use of pronoun to "you", indicating a change of stress, moving from a sense of speaking on behalf of a group of writers to speaking in an advisory or instructional capacity about a situation he understands quite well. "Obviously, that's not the full reason," Tom continues, "'Cause then, if that was all you were doing, you'd just get a job in PR instead."

This idea of journalistic writing being produced in order to fulfil a need for publicity for galleries or museums was criticised by one interviewee, Sara Jaspan, for what such writing might say about the region's art world. She began, "If we had a purely

[8] Second interview with Joanne Lee, recorded Hallam University, Sheffield, 15.03.2019.
[9] Second interview with Laura Harris, recorded at HOME, Manchester, 23.03.2019.
[10] Second interview with Tom Emery, recorded at MMU, Righton Building, 01.11.2018.

celebratory art writing scene … that would reflect maybe a not very healthy art scene." Immediately, Sara then added a more combative thought about writing's purpose. "Or it would encourage a kind of complacency, and I think critical art writing does play an important part in helping to fight that".[11]

But several interviewees, including Sara, also acknowledged that the publicity aspect of writing about contemporary art does have its uses, particularly in relation to increasing the public's awareness of art and the venues associated with it in the north, as opposed to London, even to the extent of simply recording and "archiving" the work that is put on show. As Lauren Velvick mentioned, "In the north of England, so much would just go totally undocumented, and just disappear completely, were it not for people writing these short reviews, for things like Corridor 8. And that's because the art world in this country is so, so London-centric. I think that's really important, because the admin that goes into archiving your own projects is something a lot of people can't do."[12]

Laura Harris also argued that the role of critical writing emanating from the north did more for art in the north than writing about the north from London, either by writers or publications based there, when she said, "I think for one thing it takes the art and the institutions that we do have here seriously. I think that often you open a magazine or a website or whatever, and the coverage of the north, or Liverpool … seems like a box-ticking exercise. Like, "Oh, we've got to cover something up in Liverpool".[13] At this point, Laura qualified her remark by saying, "Or, not so much Manchester, but I get that sense in Liverpool. So writing critically and taking it seriously and not seeing it as just like a non-London place, is important." Laura's differentiation between Liverpool as a "non-London place" and Manchester, is interesting, because Laura implies Manchester is perhaps taken more "seriously" as a "non-London place" than Liverpool, by London-based media.

In his answer, however, Jack Welsh took a different line on relationships between critical writers, art venues and institutions. He recognised the importance of critical writing "To get a conversation going, I think it's really important," but he then added, "I still wonder about the relationship between institutions and critical writing. In terms of how they

[11] Second interview with Sara Jaspan, recorded at HOME, Manchester, 05.11.2018.
[12] Second interview with Lauren Velvick, recorded via Skype, 13.12.2018
[13] Second interview with Laura Harris, Ibid.

view it. It's almost a quick hit for them. They say, "Ooh yeah, get someone to - " And they don't really care. And I don't think the
quality of the engagement matters to them".[14] Here, Jack seems to be identifying and describing the workings of a hierarchy or power-system imposed on the critical writer, by "institutions."

Jack then went into further detail, in which his fragmented use of speech is as informative as the statement's literal content. He stated, "I've had some instances where something I've written - and I think it's quite telling, the response of people you're liaising with, if there's slight critical undertones, and it's not a complete - how what they would say to the writer would differ from how the institution would publicly acknowledge or even reference it – sometimes not at all… And you do get some outlets in the north west where marketing material and critical writing is confused very easily." Examining it more closely, Jack's complete statement brings together a series of phrases and sub- clauses that might not connect, according to strictly-imposed conventions of grammar, but nonetheless, in its jump-cutting quality, rather like a series of edits, it contains much emotional richness. This emotional quality is added to by the use of a kind of dramatized imaginary statement ("Ooh yeah, get someone to - ") that echoes Laura Harris's previous "Oh, we've got to cover something in Liverpool…" The dramatic element in both statements, by Jack as well as Laura, takes the speaker and listener momentarily out of the statement's accumulative sequence and into a separate, imagined situation, in Laura's case the world of a London-based newspaper or journal, and in Jack's case that of a regionally-based museum or gallery, by inventing an imaginary voice.

This issue of writing about contemporary art situated in the north can be seen to relate the work of the critical writer based in the north to national as well as local audiences. This makes it necessary to remind ourselves that most of the writers taking part in this research contribute to different publications and platforms, from the cross-Pennine Corridor 8 or the Merseyside-based The Double Negative to national journals like Art Monthly. But the "representation of art in the north" issue was qualified in several cases by a separate concern for *regional* audiences and the minority status of those who are

[14] Second interview with Jack Welsh, recorded MMU, Righton Building, 26.10.2018.

aware of contemporary art in the north – a subject addressed by Sara Jaspan, when she said, "I think critical art writing plays a very important role for the development of an artist's work, often, but in terms of the relevance of the contemporary art within our region, it's difficult to say, because I really struggle to work out how many people actually engage with contemporary art writing or critical art writing".[15]

Sue Flowers echoed these sentiments, beginning by saying, "I think my feeling is that most people who read critical writing about the arts are either already artists or working within the arts community".[16] She goes on to describe, in relation to Preston's Harris Museum and Art Gallery, where our interview was being recorded, "There's a massive bunch of people that might walk up and down Friargate every weekend, but just don't visit museums, galleries. It's not for them, or they just never thought of it. So I think there's a lot that critical writing does at the moment that contributes to creative practice in terms of inciting debate and getting people together. But I guess I'm just thinking about the bigger picture of where it could go if it was more -" And here she hesitates, before adding, "If there was a portal that made it more accessible." Again, this break within the sentence, and reformation of the sentence, conveys an emotional depth expressed in the exploratory jump made by the speaker in the final few words.

Sue's choice of the word "debate" and the phrase "getting people together," and Jack Welsh's use of the words "getting a conversation going," earlier, were reflected in several other answers to the same question, associated, for instance by Lauren Velvick, who was addressing the level of critical ambition in writing attempted by regional writers, when she said, "I think there's definitely space for deeper criticism. And more dialogue".[17] Sue Flowers also linked her desire for increased dialogue with the CVAN critical writing programmer of 2016, in which several of the writers involved in this research took part, including me. "Anything," Sue said, "That is finding another way of exploring, explaining, developing dialogue, developing understanding, particularly developing debate, I think, I think that's really healthy for visual art, cause I don't think we're used to what I really enjoyed on the mentoring programme, (which) was that role

[15] Second interview with Sara Jaspan, Ibid.

[16] Second interview with Sue Flowers, recorded at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, 19.11.2018.

[17] Second interview with Lauren Velvick, Ibid.

of working with an editor and just thinking you can reframe things."[18]

What Sue and previous speakers may be suggesting, then, is that the practice of writing and subsequently being published can also stimulate greater and wider discussion and debate on contemporary art, by helping to improve the criticality of the writing - collectively contributing to art and writing, as well as adding to art's archival afterlife. Joanne Lee, too, saw the expansion in writing she observed earlier, in her own field of art education, as a sign that artists in the future may be able to expand their practice into writing, as well as publishing independently. "I hope that actually it widens the range of voices," she said, "So that it's not just a sort of art-historically-trained, kind of literary people who've got access to the mainstream media, (and) will be published in Art Monthly, or in wherever."[19] Put differently, Jo sees the emergence of new "voices" being deeply connected with the emergence of new forms of writing and new forms of publication, going beyond the specialised nature of art writing as it stands currently, especially in the world of journalism and academia. Joanne then talked about "That kind of space where it's through really informal things like zines, or whether it's other kinds of online digital channels where people are speaking about things, I feel like widening the voices. I think Michel Foucault has this thing about "multiplying the comings and goings", broadening the paths, and I just thought in general that seems like a good idea. There might be more noise and more stuff that makes the teeth hurt, or is like quite badly done and I guess there's a different sort of quality control and there's not an editor checking things. I suppose I feel quite un-precious about that."

Contrasting with his previously-quoted remarks on critical writing's role in serving the interests of artistic PR, Tom Emery also emphasised the critical writer's job in doing the *opposite* of PR, in being freely able to identify and select which art, and artists, are important, and should be written about. "A lot of the time," he said, "Well, I guess all of the time, really, I'm writing about a show because I think someone should write about it. Whether that's for good or bad reasons, it depends on the show. But it's because I think people should know about it, I guess."[20] But, like other interviewees, Tom also saw writing as a provocation for greater public thought and conversation. "I guess the other

[18] Second interview with Sue Flowers, Ibid.
[19] Second interview with Joanne Lee, Ibid.
[20] Second interview with Tom Emery, Ibid.

side of it is the critical engagement side of things," he said, "Where you want to encourage readers and visitors to the gallery to be critically engaging with stuff, even if … you're not giving your opinion that you want people to agree exactly with everything you're saying. But more the case of you … giving your opinion and you're writing about it critically … because you want to create – open up a space for people to think about it critically." Here, as in the earlier example of Jack Welsh's statement, Tom's way of expressing what he means is broken down into short phrases, indicating different, rapidly-generated, attempts at approaching the subject, moving from thought to speech. He was more direct in the next words he chose, which concerned the extent to which galleries might actually learn from written reviews. "And then there's the other aspect … the feedback aspect, you know? If you're writing a negative review, about a show, particularly, it's then thinking: will the gallery see this? And will they recognise what I've said as valid criticisms? Will they do something differently next time, based on what I've said?"

In Tom's statement, as well as those from Joanne Lee, Lauren Velvick and Sue Flowers, another aspect of time is reflected, in addressing the consequence of the text upon (in Tom's case, and Sue's) galleries or curators, and in those of Joanne and Sue, on the future broadening of critical discussion and exchange.

The importance of identifying valid and worthwhile contemporary art, worthy of critical attention, was also addressed, from the position of working as a commissioning editor, by Lauren Velvick, long associated with the online journal Corridor 8. Here she emphasised the need for new critical writers to be trained to think more widely, especially on the subject of reviews, and not just try to review "headline" exhibitions. "I've been asked a couple of times to give, like, critical writing workshops," Lauren said, "And I always say, well, I'd rather give workshops on how to take criticism, because that's the issue, really… That's what you come across most in trying to edit and write and commission in a regional context, is people getting really, really upset if they don't get a major review."[21]

In summarising replies given to the question asked about the contribution critical writing

[21] Second interview with Lauren Velvick, Ibid.

makes to contemporary art in the region, a number of important themes emerged concerning the interaction of art, audiences, writing, and power in the art world, with an underlying dissatisfaction for the way things are *at present*. Phrases such as Sara Jaspan's "I really struggle to work out how many people actually engage with contemporary art writing or critical art writing" and Sue Flowers' belief that "most people who read critical writing about the arts are either already artists or working within the arts community," demonstrate real concerns about the limited links between contemporary art and the public in the north, and both see writing as *a key to improving those possible links*. Other areas of concern, such as the "PR" issue raised by Tom Emery, was qualified, not least by him, in his remarks on "the feedback aspect" of critical writing, questioning whether galleries in particular might change, curatorially or otherwise, in any way, in responding to critical engagement from writers. And when Jack Welsh talked about the power relations of institutions and galleries towards writers, he was expressing another concern that could be explored further, *with a view to change in favour of deeper criticality in writing.*

Conclusion: Noting the Intersubjective in Writers Talking about Writing

I have mentioned how listening to and reading through these interview extracts has impressed on me the extent to which responses *move attention towards the future*, in the sense that in imagining a future, or futures, in which writers, artists, and audiences can in some way coalesce in more complex and creative ways, it is arguable that critical writing *is already trying to play an important role in making this happen*. As well as part of the "documentary process" Groys identifies as central to the archiving of art and the explicatory voicing of the museum, writing as experienced by writers is seen as part of the sheer flux of contemporaneity, in its definitive and ongoing sense of change.

With reference also to what I earlier referred to as Groys' concept of the "borderless" museum, it seems that in the condition of contemporaneity in which certain writers see themselves working and writing, there are also multiple forces at work that draw the writer closer towards the role Groys awards to the museum of "staging" the art. And in what Joanne Lee describes in increasing "the number of voices" produced by writing, as well as outlets for writing, even to the extent that they might make "the teeth hurt", I

notice another "stage" being proposed – in which writing as *act* and as *text-object*, works *as performance*. But that at the same time, echoing comments made by for instance Jack Welsh, above, forces are being exerted by the museum to prioritise the publicity aspect of what is written, against which the critical writer might want to *object or to rebel*.

In response to Erber's deep suspicions about contemporaneity and "split subjectivities," I have admitted these can be clearly sensed in the variety of responses to both the key questions. But, especially in certain answers to the second question from Jack Welsh, Laura Harris, Tom Emery, and Sue Flowers, as well as one from Laura Harris to the first question, I have noted how the fragmentation of language denotes internalised "split subjectivities," all of which reflect differing forces operating between writers and art. The subjects being spoken about when these examples of language-fragmentation happened include **power relations with institutions** (Jack Welsh), **media representation of contemporary art in the north** (Laura Harris), **hostility towards curatorial decisions and artworks** (Laura Harris), **art signage in galleries and museums** (Sue Flowers), and **the need to make critical thinking appeal to a wider public** (Tom Emery). This is not to say that other important issues are not raised or described effectively in coherent and organised ways by others or by the same speakers. But it does indicate the existence of conflicting or unruly groupings of thoughts that writers have striven to articulate. Speaking of critical writing, therefore, takes us into the contemporaneous in surprisingly emotionally-charged ways.

As much as my role as a researcher and interviewer may misrepresent the voices of writers I have interviewed, by attempting to bring them together and construct a "speculative" contemporaneous impression, the "bringing together" does seem, from the interview extracts I have selected, to reflect *desires shared* among writers, emerging from a common practice in writing on contemporary art, expressed in the identification of ways in which the relatedness of their practice to the artworld can and should be improved.

The fact that many of the writers, and artists who write, who were involved in my fieldwork are also freelance may also contribute to the importance they place on interconnection with others in a similar position (in their own sense of "networking," in

other words, as well as the ANT interpretation). Connectedness, I think, therefore contributes to a writer's personal "story", or career, and in relation to the contemporary art that appears in Manchester, Liverpool, and other northern post-industrial cities, is also connected with an involvement in place and space, positioning the writer in relation to the historical past and present, and contributing to their own sense of a personal and community past – all of which I go on to describe in Chapter 4. While the practice of interviewing within my fieldwork may have introduced a distance between me and the writers who have taken part in my fieldwork, my own past has seen me working within many examples of these temporary, but formative, communities, creators of their own histories, and those of the individuals brought together among them. Contemporaneity inculcates the bringing-together of these temporary structures, as well as creating the temporary actor-network in the act of writing.

Chapter 3

Speaking of Writing: Understanding how Writing Becomes Us

Introduction

With reference to Latour, Groys, Agamben, Habermas and Benjamin, I have examined the changing role of the critic in relation to contemporary art, considering especially notions of taste, the public sphere, the impact of feminist theory, and the development of more agile writing approaches. In analysing how writing comes about, I have adopted the concept of actor networks, bound around text production.

As outlined in Chapter 2, also, I have also begun to examine the act of writing, and to listen to writers talk about what it is to write, in the condition of contemporaneity. Here too I have tried to take account of the effect that a "denial of coevalness" (the term coined by Johannes Fabian) has upon fieldwork, emphasising instead the commonality of commitment to an art that identifies itself as "contemporary". From this I have reflected on the extent to which a "split subjectivity," revealing internal tensions in art writing, can be discerned in the speech of writers who took part in my own fieldwork.

In selecting the writers who took part in the fieldwork, I approached individuals who were at a stage at which they had succeeded in producing a certain amount of critical writing that had been published, but were still developing a professional body of work and were still exploring new avenues in terms of writing style, writing formats, and possible publishing outlets. Therefore, it is important to emphasise the extent to which writers taking part in my fieldwork have been actively continuing to learn, not just in order to develop as writers, but as a result of the way they have gone about writing by activating networks. This aspect of writing and learning forms an important theme in what follows.

One of the most immediately striking results of the first round of diaries and interviews was the importance to writers of learning about writing – not only about how to write well, and effectively, within the constraints and demands of published critical writing, but also to learn about what happens when writing takes place, and how to explore new ways of making writing inventive through experiment. I explore the experience of writing in more depth, in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Furthermore, writers seemed to value the experience of describing the writing process and the work they do, not least of all by talking about it during the recorded interviews. Planning this chapter, then, it seemed important to approach critical writing in such a way as to identify the ways the act of writing has been theorised or modelled, and to ask what happens when people learn to write, and why it is so important – bearing in mind, also, that learning can continue into adulthood.

In the first section of this chapter, **Language, Speech and Writing**, I begin by thinking about the emergence of language with reference to Agamben, linking this to the idea of potentiality. I go on to discuss David Olson's work on writing and speech. Here, some mention is also made of the rise of "external representations" including diagrams, maps, formulae, novels, and certain types of artwork. Next, I consider **Models of Writing** as they have emerged since Flower and Hayes first developed their influential cognitive process theory in the early 1980s, considering similarities between their observations and my own in my fieldwork, relating the fieldwork also to ideas about "post-process" thinking among writing theorists. This leads to an examination of **Talking About Writing**, describing what happens when models of writing are developed, by asking writers to talk about what they are doing, using the so-called "talking out loud" approach. I link this to my own research in talking and listening to critical writers.

Throughout, it will be evident that the way writing has been theorised has constantly been linked to ideas about **Writing and Learning.** In consequence, my survey moves towards the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky and Jean Piaget, who drew different conclusions about learning and socialisation. This takes me towards the educational approaches taken by Knut Illeris and Jack Mezirow whose work has argued in favour of what they call Transformative Learning, where they find relevance in the philosophical theories of Habermas. From this, I focus on **Writing, Art, and Society**, where I want to compare these views on transformative learning with recent critical reflections on the socio-cultural theories of Jurgen Habermas, in particular, his concept of "lifeworlds," comparing this with Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling".

The above theoretical approaches to writing and learning are based, broadly, on social constructionism, in this case stressing the extent which sense is made of the world as a result of social interaction and the contribution language makes towards the

construction of reality. Related to this is another "constructivist" position, according to which knowledge of the outside world is built up within each individual, due to socialisation. What is fascinating in surveying constructionist and constructivist approaches like these is the extent to which writing might be seen to connect the knowledge-building individual with reality-building inter-conversant systems suggested by Habermas and Williams. In both, the individual learns by interacting with the whole. More recent ideas by Rebecca Coleman also expand these ideas with regard to the role of digital technology. This research also notices the way text-producing networks have helped to train writers.

However, this leads me back to ANT and its conflicts with constructionist or constructivist positions. In my final section, **From the Constructed to the Composed**, I describe how pro-ANT commentators including Latour have long expressed doubts about constructivist thinking. I go on to reconsider the way problems revealed in my own research such as the "split subjectivity" I have identified in writers' statements, as well as what I later describe (in chapters 5 and 6) as "self-monitoring" and "self-mending" behaviours revealed by writers in their descriptions of day to day writing habits, may provide arguments for the importance of objects and non- humans in text production.

Language, Speech, and Writing

I began Chapter 1 speculating about how an example of critical writing might emerge from a thought, manifesting itself first as a spoken statement, perhaps in conversation. But to express an opinion verbally or to engage in dialogue are, as Agamben reminds us, dependent on the use of language, whose acquisition is a marker of change early in the life of every human, and so the creation experience in infancy is, as he puts it, "the simple difference between the human and the linguistic" (Agamben, 1993: 48).The experience of entering language therefore creates a sense of history. This movement away from the "ineffable" nature of infancy in understanding and entering language and "diachrony" (changes in the meaning of language) marks not just the beginning of what Agamben sees as the "process" of history but is also an observation of the "potentiality" of language itself. This issue of potentiality is one I return to in later chapters, as I observe and interrogate writers on the act of writing.

But if people have the potential for language, how does it lead to text production and literacy? The cognitive developmental psychologist, David Olson (Olson, 1994), argues that writing and speech evolved separately, so that writing (which is generated by thinking) cannot be said to "stand in" for speech; writing is not a speech-replicating system in the sense that an audio or video recording might preserve and be capable of playing back the details of a statement or conversation so that they can be heard again, along with all their imperfections, after the original spoken event has ended. One thinks, here, of the differences in the use of language we encounter in witnessing Samuel Beckett's one act play, Krapp's Last Tape (Beckett, 1959), in which an elderly, failed writer obsesses over his annually- updated collection of tape-recorded autobiographical recollections, never completely satisfied with the accounts he hears from previous years, when his voice sounded younger and he was more confident. As a result, he becomes sad, frustrated and occasionally violent with the tape machine and the spools of tape he treats like toys.

Reading a piece of writing is therefore a way to understand some aspects of another's thought, but only within a community which has accepted certain "principles of reading", also expressed by Olson as "a working agreement on the appropriate or valid interpretation(s) of those texts" (Olson, 1994: 274-5). In looking at the history of writing systems, Olson is able to examine the way that developments such as the evolution of alphabets encouraged reflection on language, but that writing could never bring everything speech can "do" into consciousness. "Scripts", or examples of writing, are therefore "models" of linguistic knowledge, and through them writers learn to utilise metalinguistic methods such as "conjecture" "inference" and "assumption" that seek to further influence the reader, in compensation for the gestural and expressive aspects of speech that writing cannot capture.

Subsequently, and historically, there has been a dialectical interaction between writing and culture that Olson argues has gone on to generate tools such as maps, diagrams, mathematical theories, and popular fiction. Another consequence of this, according to Olson, is that examples of visual art might therefore be said to have evolved as a result of the development and continuing advancement of writing.

This sense in which writing and other cultural tools have to be understood in terms of

their relationships with human beings (and, increasingly, non-humans) “reading” them or “writing” them is also provocative. Writing may be separate, but ideas concerning “domain specificity” even suggest other human creative skills have evolved separately, because the result of what they specialise in producing are so unique. As Eduardo Marti and Juan Ignacio Pozo have described (Marti and Pozo, 2014: 11-30), this “domain specificity” may apply to a wide range of “external representations” or “notational systems” including writing, numerals, diagrams, or musical notation.

Models of Writing

The writers taking part in my research agreed to be interviewed by me, answering questions on the way they write and the day-to-day routines and habits they have acquired and developed to help them produce text on a regular basis. Subsequently, I was struck by the parallel between this aspect of my fieldwork and systems that have been developed by researchers investigating ways in which writing can be “modelled.” When the U.S. educational theorists Linda Flower and John R. Hayes,’ published their influential text, A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Hayes and Flower, 1981), they put forward the idea of “modelling” what goes on during the act of writing, using what they called “protocol analysis.” This involved a small group of writers “talking aloud” about what they were doing when they wrote.

Hayes and Flower’s cognitive process theory of writing included three stages they identified by the terms Planning, Translating, and Reviewing. Planning including ideas generation, goal-setting, and organisation. Translation, possibly the most mysterious part of the process, represented the action of converting the planning contents into written text. Reviewing included reading, revising, and editing the text. The process was also visualised as a “flow chart”, making it open to criticism concerning irreversibility (because the process can only flow in one direction), as well as oversimplification. Furthermore, a “monitor” component in the chart was seen to “oversee” the entire process, representing the unique overseeing “mind” of the writer in question.

The role of the “monitor” was important within the “recursive” nature of the model, in indicating that the writer was not constantly working in the direction suggested by the flow chart. Throughout, the “monitor” would be able to pull back from any particular

stage of engagement and see the greater context, or the "bigger picture" of what the writing was doing, and how it was working, and could make alterations and adjustments accordingly.

The goal-focused nature of cognitive process theory indicates that the act of writing might be thought about, or taught, in rhetorical terms, in which writers are aiming to address a reader or an audience whose requirements or needs have to be understood as thoroughly as possible in order for text to be "well-written." There are similarities between this outlook and that of discourse analysis, in which texts are examined by asking questions concerning their intended finished state, by considering the demands of a publisher or the expectations and desires of a given readership or audience. And certainly, among the writers taking part in my fieldwork, these rhetorical demands were, by necessity, very much in the minds of the writers who talked to me, particularly with regard to writers who were pitching ideas for work to the more established journals, where an understanding of the publication's "house style" would be important for the writer as well as the reader.

But these "goal-focused" aspects of Hayes and Flower's model were criticised by psychologists Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987), who emphasised the importance of beliefs and constraints influencing the operation of writing processes, and David Galbraith (Galbraith, 2009: 5), who identified "two conflicting processes in writing: an explicit planning process, incorporating many of the features assumed by classical models of writing, and an implicit text production process, which operates according to connectionist processing principles." These conflicting processes also seem to be reflected in some of the comments made by writers in the feedback to my own fieldwork, who all demonstrated having a clear understanding of what was required from a piece of writing commissioned by a particular publication, with its own style and audience, but were not always logical in the way they planned the same piece.

Hayes later updated the Cognitive Process Theory in Modeling and Remodeling Writing (Hayes, 2012). Here, Hayes removed the monitor, and thoroughly re-evaluated the importance of "translation," considering especially the role of long-term memory (affecting, for instance, an understanding of correct spelling or grammar), and

transcription technology (handwriting, typing, etc). Hayes also recognised the importance of “motivation,” which affects the amount of time writers put into the task of writing, as well as reflecting their life-condition, Hayes in this case referring to the motivation behind unemployed people wanting to write as a way of dealing with stress. These aspects of motivation can be recognised in my own research, in examples I show in chapters 5 and 6 that include the reasons behind choosing to write about the specialised field of contemporary art in the first place, or the desire to be commissioned and published by particularly reputable journals, or the desire to be paid properly for the work involved in writing.

Another change in Hayes’ thinking affected the importance of planning and revising. Hayes for instance recognised that some writers create plans they do not write down. This ambiguity concerning plans and revision are also reflected in the responses of writers involved in my fieldwork, showing that in the act of writing, the situation of the writer, the awareness of an audience, and complex issues arising from surrounding environments, may all interact.

But criticisms of process theory’s empirical approach were frequently made, and some appear in collected form, edited by Thomas Kent (Kent, 1999), subsequently summarised and evaluated by Kevin J. Porter (Porter, 1999: 710-715). In the case of the latter, it is interesting to note the way process and “post-process” approaches differed. In noting the “high level of generality” in process theory, Porter notes “it is conceivable to fold in all local, situated writing processes into a single generalised writing process, but at the price of making this model almost completely vacuous, perilously ad hoc…” (Porter, 1999: 712). However, he goes on to add, “The fact that we use the term writing to label all these various practices is already an indication that such higher-level generalisations are operating and are perhaps warranted. The unwillingness to make that concession "almost, but not entirely"- is, it seems to me, what most separates post-process theorists from process theorists.”

Perhaps in what follows, the feedback from critical writers has contributed to some “local, situated writing process” model, although even between individuals within the small group of writers taking part, writing environments and personal lives differ widely, and in some cases, writers are still combining different forms of work and practice, that

include writing.

Talking About Writing:

From the initial stages of my research I became interested in gathering information about the way critical writers work, as well as about the process of text production, by getting writers themselves to tell me about their working lives and how they went about writing. I believed the means by which this information was to be gathered would be achieved best in the form of interviews and simple, action-based diary-keeping. As I have mentioned, these methods have resemblances to those employed in Hayes' and Flower's work behind the Cognitive Process Theory of writing development.

Hayes and Flower's methodology, "protocol analysis," treated a recorded interview as a "thinking aloud protocol". As previously mentioned, protocol analysis also identified the importance of understanding audiences in order to generate text, thus considering writing as a rhetorical form. It should be emphasised here that the entire reason for thinking about writing in this way was to improve methods for writing to be taught.

But of course, this approach left much room for doubt concerning the effect of the writer being influenced by being observed and intruded upon in the first place, as US-based English language academic Don K. Pierstorff pointed out (Pierstorff, 1983: 217) when he asked whether the information gathered from writers included "*everything* that is going on in the writer's mind during that act," also adding "we have no way of proving that the results of any experiment would have been the same had we not been watching."

Further radical criticism was levelled at the Hayes' and Flower's process theory by educationalists including Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holzman, who pointed out that the protocol method is a form of "introspection", a term first coined in the nineteenth century by the early psychiatrist William Wundt. They note the way such attempts at finding mental "transparency" were cast into doubt by Freud's ideas concerning the unconscious, but that the protocol method relied also on trained "introspectors". "It is," say Cooper and Holzman, "Rather an odd thing to talk about what you are thinking about when you are doing something. Only those particularly trained to perform this trick, or those with special talents in this direction, can be sources for the data. When

they succeed, the results are usually not the clear and reasonable accounts found in the work of Flower and Hayes, but something much stranger" (Cooper and Holzman, 1983: 289). Interestingly, at this point in their essay, Cooper and Holzman then quote a passage of writing by Virginia Woolf (describing Herman Melville), to illustrate the unique way her mind "wandered" (Woolf, 1978).

I cannot claim that any of the writers taking part in my fieldwork were trained as "introspectors". Their descriptions however capture the extent to which writing is not a straightforward process in which, for some people, the "wandering" mind plays an important part.

Crucially, however, Cooper and Holzman's argument asks whether writing should be thought of (and taught) as a social activity or one that takes place in isolation. They argue for the former, proposing the term "ecological" writing, and later, "writing as social action," an approach that moves attention away from individual writers to social systems themselves – and identifying ways in which power structures affect writing development.

In response to Cooper and Holzman's critique of Flower and Hayes, it is important to mention that in my own research, diary entries recorded details of writers' working lives, and these were, in part, enlarged upon by interviews. But only in the interviews was the act of writing systematically investigated. None of the writers were made aware of the other writers taking part in the research, but my questions were also designed to investigate the connections between writers and other actors involved in contemporary art in the region, with a view to producing text. In many ways, writing emerges as deeply social, or "ecological", from statements made by writers taking part in my fieldwork, as can be seen in the ensuing chapters.

The critique made by Piersdorff also raises important questions concerning the extent to which it might or might not be possible to gather a complete representation in words of a writer's thoughts on what they are doing when writing, and the extent to which experiments using the "thinking aloud" methodology might possibly have a unique effect on the results achieved. However, regarding my own research in examining the work of critical writers on contemporary art, it should be pointed out that I was not concentrating entirely on the process of writing, but also on the wider social and artistic

context.

However, it is important to add that for writers, the experience of talking about writing, during their having taken part in mentoring schemes, for instance, or in my fieldwork, does seem to have had an influence on the way some of them thought about the importance and the function of their writing.

As explained elsewhere, several of the writers involved took part in a mentoring programme organised by the arts organisation Contemporary Visual Arts Network, North West, in 2016. One of these writers, Sue Flowers[22], described a possible change in her practice, partly influenced by having taken part in the mentoring scheme: "What I'm experiencing at the moment is the power-balance has been shifting between the visual and the written …Towards writing. Which is kind of a bit surprising to me. Because I've been a visual artist all my life. But I find when I want to process things I'm moving towards words (rather) than images… And I wonder if it was doing that little thing, the mentoring thing, because it gave me permission to say "you can write, you're okay at writing, and actually, you might be able to do it.""

Not only this, but the process of writing itself as described by writers is prone to distraction, interruption, and reconciliation, contributed to by non-human actors as well as human ones. My opinion is that the "total picture" of what it is to write, if it is possible to capture such a thing, has to take into account all the external actors, like objects, systems, and other texts, that affect writers during the act of writing, taking the writer away from, and then back to the entelechy of text production. These patterns are examined in further detail in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

While it is not the purpose of my research to develop a new writing model, but to understand the experience of critical writers, and how they produce work, it is important in proceeding, to understand how Cognitive Process Theory has in more recent years given rise to the rise in "post- Process" thinking.

Here, the whole idea of a writing model is questioned. As theorists linked with this "post-Process" movement have argued, the Cognitive Process theory with its well-known writing models perhaps became too much of a prescribed educational method, reducing the act of writing to a "series of codified phrases that can be taught," as one

[22] Sue Flowers, second interview, recorded 19.11.2018, Harris Museum, Preston.

writer, Lee-Ann Breuch, has described, in aiming to find a new "post-Process pedagogy" in education, by arguing that Process-thinking had become a "thing" to be "mastered", partly because of the way it became "commodified" by teaching programmes (Breuch, 2002: 130-138). Breuch identified a "post Process" position in three segments. First "Writing is public," and writers need to identify with a task of communication via "language in use" which comes about through a realisation of meaning through acts of communication with others.

Second, "Writing is interpretive" in that "Writing becomes an activity that requires an understanding of context, interaction with others, and our attempts to communicate a message." But, third, "Writing is situated", and can adapt to changes in context and situation, rather than following rigid rules.

From the interview extracts I use in later chapters, there seems a certain amount of agreement with the writing models put forward by Flower and Hayes, but also certain similarities with corrective ideas put forward by their critics. However, after interviewing writers in detail, I still felt I was not getting a clear impression of a "writing model" perhaps because of the perceived importance of additional new phenomena including the use of digital technology and the relationship between the writer and the internet, as well as freelance work patterns and multi-tasking, all of which were reflected in the experience of writers I talked to.

Writing and Learning

In this section of the chapter, I look at the possible ways in which current educational theory may have a bearing on choices taken by writers taking part in my research. I relate my view of education and the experience of writers taking part in my fieldwork to ideas connected with what the Danish professor of lifelong learning, Knud Illeris, calls "transformative learning." Linking this to the importance of the social aspect of individual learning experience, I refer back to the influential theories of child psychology put forward in the mid-twentieth century by two very different thinkers, Piaget and Vygotsky, and to the later work of Jack Mezirow and Barbara Rogoff, arguing for the importance of a social context or total social picture being acknowledged and understood.

Knud Illeris writes (Illeris, 2018) about the stages of cognitive learning, which overlap with other emotional and social learning dimensions. Illeris derives much of his thinking from the work of two major twentieth century developmental psychologists: the Swiss-born Jean Piaget, and the Russian- born Lev Vygotsky. It is important before going further to note how these two influential theorists' work differed, as well as noting Illeris' rejection of behaviourist arguments. Piaget's cognitive observational learning involved four stages, from the development of motor skills through to the development of recognition and understanding, to the development of logic, to the development of an ability to solve problems, each developmental stage affecting the individual's ability to learn.

Vygotsky argued that thinking had two psychological functions: elementary and advanced, the former involving basic memory and the latter moving outwards from the individual into language and culture via mediation with others. Philosophically, Vygotsky, working in the early period of the Soviet Union, was therefore perhaps more socially constructionist than the constructivist Piaget.

Vygotsky's emphasis on mediation revolved around the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), imagining a space where there is potential available to an individual to learn to achieve new skills by mediation with others, according to the level of learning they have so far reached. One major contemporary US educationalist highly influenced by Vygotsky's ZPD concept, Barbara Rogoff, has done much work in researching the "mediating" role of language and culture in community, which she sees as vital. This notion of community is based on her research among Mayan communities in Guatemala, where, as she recalled in one interview (Glăveanu, 2011: 408- 418), she noted how children learned weaving techniques not from direct instruction but from integration into a group where they "picked up" knowledge from ongoing and continuing experience, in which "observing and pitching in" were essential and natural acts.

Illeris' four cognitive learning phases seem to move from Piaget's internalised, socially constructivist model of individual learning towards Vygotsky's more "mediated" model. Occurring in a developmental, consecutive fashion, Illeris' phases begin with the "cumulative," which happens during the first years of life, characterised by "a type of

automation that means it can be recalled and applied in situations mentally similar to the learning context"(Illeris, 2018: 2: 4), a type of learning Illeris also relates to the training of animals. Following from this, the second phase, "assimilative" learning happens when "a new element is linked as an addition to a scheme or pattern that is already established", and Illeris associates this with school learning (which would include learning to write). During the third phase, "accommodative" learning, or "transcendent" learning, it is implied that "one breaks down (parts of) an existing scheme and transforms it so that the new situation can be linked in" (Illeris, 2018: 2: 7). This is characterised by a sense of that new situation being "significantly new or different," and, Illeris adds, possibly painful. The fourth type of learning, "Transformative", is "far reaching" in Illeris's words, because "this learning implies what could be termed personality changes in the organisation of the self, and is characterised by simultaneous restructuring of the whole cluster of schemes and patterns in all of the three learning dimensions, a break of orientation that typically occurs as the result of a crisis-like situation caused by challenges experienced as urgent and unavoidable, making it necessary to change oneself in order to get any further" (Illeris, 2018, 2: 7-8).

In introducing this idea of "transformative learning" into a discussion about critical writers, it is necessary first to remind ourselves that the writers taking part in my fieldwork vary in age, but that the youngest at the time the research began were in their late 20s. Most are graduates of higher education and have full or part time work (as writers, editors, artists, curators, or academics). The results of the fieldwork suggest that the sense in which their writing "fits into" their working lives has been, and continues to be subject to change.

It may be possible for an argument to be mounted that the decision writers take to pursue critical writing brings about a process of transformative learning; that the act of writing critically about contemporary art (about which all the writers taking part in the fieldwork had pre-existing knowledge and interest) involved changes in individual "organisation of the self", as Illeris puts it, and that the "crisis-like situation" he refers to could be understood convincingly in terms of finding a stable occupation (or career) or defining activity for each writer's time of life. Significantly, Illeris sees the importance of transformative learning in contemporary contexts that include the need to change

career or find different forms of employment due to the vicissitudes of globalised economic behaviour. Furthermore, he identifies the trauma experienced as part of transformative learning with the "resistance" to change that sometimes follows; a version of change that is part of adult, post-school experience.

In his case for transformative learning, Illeris also acknowledges the influence of the US sociologist Jack Mezirow, who actually coined the term in the late 1970s, having himself acknowledged a debt to Habermas' ideas of instrumental and communicative rationality. Habermas' conceptualised in communicative rationality the "telos" (the purpose) of speech and communication to be in social agreement whereas instrumental rationality veers towards the manipulative (Habermas, 1984).

Mezirow's borrowing and application of this terminology to learning is explained thus: "In instrumental learning, the truth of an assertion may be established through empirical testing. But communicative learning involves understanding purposes, values, beliefs, and feelings and is less amenable to empirical tests. In communicative learning, it becomes essential for learners to become critically reflective of the assumptions underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1991: 7). Mezirow, who died in 2013, might not have been surprised, had he lived, to read the results of fMRI brain-scanning experiments in 2014 supporting Habermas' theories of communicative action. The conclusion reached here was "that strategic reasoning is associated with reduced activation in brain regions previously described as the moral sensitivity network and to areas linked to emotional processing, most likely pointing to the selfish and less social character of this logic. Furthermore, both communication styles may be different with respect to language related networks." (Schaefer, Heinze, Rotte, Denke, 2013).

Next in this chapter, I return to Habermas' ideas, this time readdressing his concept of the "public sphere" and the role of the writer within it.

Writing, Art, and Society

I have previously stated that during my fieldwork I selected writers as emergent practitioners who were beginning to develop bodies of work, styles of writing, and careers within the networks across which they interact around the binding factor of text production. In this part of the chapter I examine whether we can say critical writers

whose focus is contemporary art develop a wider, shared reality through the networked nature of their writing.

In cultural terms, this "shared reality" might be compared with Habermas' concept of "lifeworld," or Raymond Williams well-known concept of Structures of Feeling, put forward in the latter's book The Country and the City (Williams, 1973a, 1973b). This comparison between Habermas and Williams has already been made by Geoff Boucher (Boucher, 2011: 62-78). For Habermas, the "lifeworld" is "the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and present, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to satisfied if actual utterance is to be at all meaningful" (Habermas, 1987 :131). Thus the "lifeworld" enables communication by language. In Habermas' estimation this "lifeworld" is, under capitalism, constantly being "colonised" by techno- governmental "systems" that force citizens to think in more functional ways, changing them within and without, culturally, socially and psychologically. Williams also perceived psychological depth in his "structures of feeling."

Linked to affect and emotion, "structures of feeling" come together with already-existing, "dominant" and "residual" cultural relations. At the time he was writing, Williams detected "pre- emergent" strains in aspects that included the media culture of the day (the UK of the 1970s), influenced by newspapers, radio, television, and advertising, but throughout, he emphasised the importance of the affective – consciously separating what was understood and accepted socially and what was felt personally. As an example of how this could have been seen to have reflected a sense of class-consciousness, he looked back to Wales in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the emergence of the Welsh industrial novel, identifying structures of feeling in what the UK sociologist Rebecca Coleman describes as the "physical characteristics of Welsh industrial areas and their social relations and historical events, that have come to constitute its working life" (Coleman, 2017: 600-622). Writing, in other words, conveys affect, reflecting these structures of feeling.

It is important within Williams' concept to understand the extent to which these "structures of feeling" are not just "emerging" or "emergent" and constantly coming-into-being, but also, as Coleman argues, in her analysis of the influence of digital media in the present, "pre-emergent" and therefore potential. Coleman herself, however,

writing in 2017, describes a different cultural scenario containing “infra-structures of feeling” where “digital media work against each other in complex architectures of text, textures, platforms and devices” focusing on “anticipation,” “pre- emption,” “prehension,” and “premediation.” She notes how different digital presences affect time in different ways, identifying how Twitter creates a “real-time, live connected present”, and how Netflix creates a “suspended or expanded present.” She also notes how digital technology itself, based so much on the functioning of algorithms, is constantly and diligently creating its own directions for change, also affecting contemporary art, as I have elsewhere described (Dickinson, 2017). Coleman concludes that “if pre-emergence is a defining quality of contemporary media culture, this suggests that it is necessary to develop approaches to grasp the non-coherent, flexible and changing, where the emphasis is on nextness, happening, and what is in the making.”

While acknowledging Williams’ class-conscious stance, Coleman stands back from it. Her vehicles of affective influence are “infra-structures” that are corporately owned, growing and changing through mass human participation and feedback. Habermas would perhaps observe the extent to which digital media systemically continue to “colonise” the contemporary lifeworld.

In recent times, however, other political writers on the left, like Hilary Wainwright, have thought differently, noting in 2011, how “structures of feeling” can also “help us to understand the renewed unease at the social consequences of the rampant free market system on daily life, and provide insight to the lived experiences of co-operative, solidaristic values and open, anti-authoritarian organisational logics that are in a process of formation” (Wainwright, 2011). As well as in examples of politically-aware contemporary art, it is quite possible to detect such “anti-authoritarian logics” in many current examples of critical writing including work by some of the writers taking part in the fieldwork supporting my research. But, as I have previously noted, networks activated by critical writers in order to produce text also include, and depend on, formal institutions like galleries, art schools, and a market-driven system that inculcates what Groys calls “value hierarchies”, to which critical writing also contributes.

Coleman’s sense of structures of feeling is therefore interesting in as far as it captures

the contemporary hyper-awareness of technological possibility as affective and future-centric. As such, it points towards a type of potentiality that is techno-dependent, and focused on human emotions and expectations. Here, however, I have been aiming to relate to Raymond Williams' concept of a written or expressive record or reflection of group-affect. I have also referred to Habermas' concept of "lifeworld". In both examples, it is important to dwell on the extent to which a multi-sensed, affect-based "world" is constantly in flux. For Habermas, that lifeworld is subject to influence by system-change, while Williams' structures of feeling struggle with the very concept of expression itself – for how can they come to be "structures" of not by expression, or utterance?

What writers like Coleman omit however is the extent to which, as ANT makes us aware, technology is not "neutral", but as Latour would put it, "prescriptive", demanding that users comply with sets of rules that ultimately do not only penetrate what Habermas would call "lifeworlds," (in order to make money for instance), but also reconfigure them, as noted by Rob Heyman and Jo Pierson (Heyman and Pierson, 2015).

One way of looking at what I have described so far in this chapter is to think that the group of writers who have taken part in my fieldwork, and who are at a time of life or stage in their careers where they are using writing to establish their future direction, might be seen to be engaged in a kind of "transformative learning", as defined by Illeris and Mezerow. This argument is broadly socially constructivist in theory, and places learning very much in the wider, collective context.

But there is a problem in linking this idea of personal-technical transformation with arguments based on ANT. If constructionist and constructivist outlooks see construction building a reality, it is misleading to think that actor networks construct a reality that we can understand or apprehend simply through reading the accounts of human actors describing the way they perceive networks. The reality the ANT approach offers is in the network interaction and transcends the mind of any actor. Consequently, the constructive urge to make meaning from what has been "constructed" misses ANT's main insight.

From the Constructed to the Composed

As Antonio Cordella and Maha Shaikh have explained, addressing misunderstandings

about ANT in 2006, "The *essence* of the theory stands in the argument of the co-definition and co-evolution of objects, both called indistinctly actors. Thus the constitutive essence of actor network theory cannot be confused with the constructivist assumption of interpretism, it follows that ANT does not only propose a new way of questioning reality; it also introduces a new way of conceptualising the understanding of reality" (Cordella and Shaikh, 2006: 14). Actor networks, as the writers also point out, are not necessarily stable, and relationships can change between actors, whether they are human or non-human – as certain accounts given by writers involved in my fieldwork testify in Chapters 5 and 6. The arrangements and routines according to which a writer likes to work, consisting of relationships between the writer, other humans, and the objects and technology around them, for instance, might change, and evolve, just as the relationship between a writer and an editor might alter. As a result, texts may not be produced in the way they may had been intended, in some cases they may fail to be produced at all, and their potentiality may not be fulfilled.

ANT, in the opinion of Cordella and Sheikh, "has been forced to adopt the ontology of interpretivism and thus suppress its own ontology" (Cordella and Shaikh, 2006: 1). Thus, writers I have interviewed might individually be seen to have learned from experience of actor networks how to write for publications and platforms, but the "reality" opened up by these networks is not stable, and as accounts also testify, subject to mutation and change. As writers go about encountering different artworks or different tasks, in order to produce different texts, different networks are activated. Text producing networks have a multiple ontology, that can only partially be described by talking to writers.

For Latour, criticisms of constructivism have coincided with his declared awareness of a new sense of urgency about the state of the planet, leading to the coining of a new term, "compositionism". For Latour, constructivism is problematic not only because the term duplicates that applied to an early twentieth century Russian art movement, but also, in the terminology of social science, it is centred on the extent to which its approach presupposes some overall act of design. "Implied in constructivism is an agent which masters its own acts of making," Latour has written (Latour, 2003: 27-46). Equally a problem for Latour, as a consequence, is the question of what exactly it is that is being constructed. He continues: "What is interesting in constructivism is exactly the opposite

of what it seems to imply: there is no maker, no master, no creator that could be said to dominate materials, or, at least, a new uncertainty is introduced as to what is to be built as well as who is responsible for the emergence of the virtualities of the materials at hand." (Latour, 2003: 6). He is particularly suspicious of the role of "social relations:" "…How on earth could one invoke the more solid stuff of social relations to account for the solidity of the harder facts of nature? Are the facts discovered by sociologists and economists so much stronger than the ones constructed by chemists, physicists and geologists? How unlikely" (Latour, 2003: 4).

Key to Latour's suspicions of the "constructed" viewpoint is the role of uncertainty: that there is no guarantee that an object, a phenomenon, an attribute, will hold together in such a way as to be inevitably "constructed." While Latour (in 2003) tried to retain a hold on the use of the word "constructivist," considering (and, for the time being, rejecting) the word "compositionist," he saw the former term struggling "uphill" in the opposite direction to deconstruction, both meandering, in deconstruction's case to "avoid the peril of presence", and in constructivism's, "to try and catch as much presence as possible."

If the tone of Latour's article captured a wariness of the constructivist outlook, urging caution in the face of what he perceived as too much certainty, his later statement, 'An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto"' went much further, and, in a way, it comes from a different time. "It is the time of time that has passed," (Latour, 2010: 472) Latour states, marking, with dark humour, perhaps, the desperation and the absurdity of attempting to write, of all things, a manifesto - that form of revolutionary publication that, in the twentieth century, sought to "break" with time, as Groys has pointed out, and as I referred to in Chapter 1. Like Groys, Latour again reminds us that the iconoclasm behind so many twentieth century art movements is no longer possible and instead of iconoclasm, for Latour, there is now only "iconoclash".

But if the "time of time" has passed, where is Latour positioning himself - and us? Perhaps writing, and writing about art, must assume a greater urgency, because Latour, as his work here and since makes clear– places us in the Anthropocene, that term defining a new geological period in which human activity can be seen to have marked and changed the planet permanently, irrecoverably. For Latour, there is no "new world"

to be constructed, or revealed by deconstruction. And critique has run out of steam, having "all the limits of utopia; it relies on the certainty of the world *beyond* this world. By contrast, for compositionism, there is no world of beyond. It is all about *immanence*" (Latour, 2010: 475).

This idea of immanence, of the intrinsic nature of what matters, as well as what might be understood to be divine, in what already exists, coincides in Latour's recent thinking on Lovelock's notion of Gaia (Lovelock, 1979). With this in mind, and attempting also to re-address Benjamin's image of the Angelus Novus, the Angel of History, which has to see all the ruins of so-called progress piling up in the past, Latour states "compositionists believe that there are enough ruins and that everything has to be reassembled piece by piece." (Latour, 2010: 475-6). For Latour, writing about Gaia in 2011, we are "not postmodern, but yes, we are postnatural" (Latour, 2011: 9), as well as "post natural, yes, but also post cultural" (Latour, 2011: 11), and so compositionism (a word he decides he likes because "it has a nice connection with another word: compost", (Latour, 2011:8), would follow climatologists in bringing "the whole Earth on stage" (Latour, 2011:8).

In examining critical writing, the impact of ANT as well as Latour's turn towards compositionism together offer the challenge of describing what Latour might call a "mode of existence" or "regime of truth," as he has already labelled literature. From the point of view of this research, for instance, the act of writing emerges as a busy subject area for study, especially attuned to the role of reflexivity. As Latour recalled in an account of his ethnographic research in San Diego during the 1970s, "Every course of action, even the most ordinary, is constantly interrupted by a miniscule *hiatus* that requires, from moment to moment, an inventive act of repossession by the actor equipped with his own micromethods." (Latour, 2013: 292). What Latour calls scientific "breachings" I think could well be a useful term to apply to many of the "rhythms" revealed in the work patterns of writers involved in my fieldwork, and described in Chapters 5 and 6, including distractions, changes of posture, ad hoc planning routines, technical rearrangements, and desk layout changes.

These point further to the interactive contribution of non-human actants, from laptops and mobile phones to post-it notes and the view from a window. I think also the multi-

subjectivity shown in interview extracts in Chapter 2, discussing writing in the condition of contemporaneity, also manifest moments of linguistic hiatus and recovery.

Writing after ANT is also faced with the problem of how to explain, with words, these reflexive worlds. Discussing what "sort" of reflexive text might be achievable, Latour talks about having to resolve three paradoxes: first "common to all forms of writing: how to be "at once here (in a setting x) and there (in another setting y); the second is common to all sciences: how to be at once here (in x), there (in y), and *in between* managing the network that ties the two together; the third is common to all texts that try to escape the alternatives between fiction and science: how to steer a course between being believed *too much* by the readers and not enough" (Latour,1988, 2: 165-166).

In what I write about writers, I hope I do not end up creating a text that is "too believable or not believable enough"; in linking writers to networks I hope to be in between two settings; in taking account of speaking and writing I hope to be "here" as well as "there." In what follows I also hope to describe the entelechy of text production through activated networks, in all their precarity and fragility. I hope, too, that the extent to which writers have learned and are continuing to learn from the experience of networked text production can go on to aid network entelechy and the production of significant writing in and of the region, but relevant to wider readerships.

Chapter 4

Networks, Contemporary Art and the Regeneration City

Introduction: Writers and Networks

My previous chapter examined writing, theories of how it has been modelled, and how writing connects with learning, linking these thoughts to Jurgen Habermas' "lifeworlds" concept and Raymond Williams "structures of feeling," before examining the way ANT and Latour in particular questions such constructivist approaches. I then suggested ways in which a "compositionist" form of writing could approach the subject.

Earlier, in Chapter One, I examined how criticism has drawn closer in recent years to the fields of curatorship and performance. Even as it strives to be active, however, such writing remains material and separate from speech, the performative element of writing, for instance, endeavouring to take the reader into the versatility of the activity being addressed. Following this I wrote about writing in contemporaneity, and how the "denial of coevalness" described by Johannes Fabian may affect my own use of interviews, suggesting in response that multi-subjectivity affects speech as well as a sense of commonality.

In this chapter I begin to situate my examination of critical writing in northern and north west England, hearing from writers in extracts taken from my fieldwork recordings about how they go about creating professional relationships, built around personal as well as digital communication. I offer Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a useful method to hypothesise how text is produced by writers in networks that include other human and non-human actors. This leads me to relate writers and the contemporary art about which they write to the recent history of urban regeneration in the cities of Manchester and Liverpool, in particular. In looking at regeneration, I associate the mobilization of actor networks, bound together around the production of texts concerning contemporary art, with the use and redevelopment of post-industrial buildings, locations, and zones.

My fieldwork involved a group of ten writers, who included me. Most (but not all) of them I already knew from having encountered them during a Contemporary Visual Art Network (CVAN) mentoring programme in 2016. All these writers are based in the same

region, and many of us were already acquainted with one another, or have become acquainted since the mentoring project.

As critical writers, however, we each have connections with a wider contemporary art world, in which artworks are objects of attention that come and go, as exhibitions and other opportunities to see art are presented, and artists produce work locally for public attention. Offering an ANT approach enables me to suggest that when they are encountered, these artworks, and other non- humans including institutions, galleries, museums, buildings, sites and districts, may be understood to function as actants within mobilized, text-producing networks.

Having begun to assess the nature of a text-producing network, I will explore next the artwork's role within it. After this I will refer to my fieldwork to examine the way writers themselves understand the word "network", in the sense of those purely human social contacts a writer assembles from personal and professional links with, for instance, artists, editors, curators, and other cultural workers. These personal networks, I argue, contribute to activated, text producing actor networks.

Finally, I will examine the way regeneration adds further non-human actants to these actor networks, integrating critical writing into time and space, as well as geography. In chapters 5, 6, and 7, I go on to observe how networks are activated to potentialize writing, and how the writing process is actualised, in a stage I refer to as entelechy.

ANT: Background

Actor Network Theory, which developed in Europe at the beginning of the 1980s, is a system of describing and investigating the interactions of networks that come together to shape knowledge. From its inception, ANT's supporters caused controversy for their inclusion within networks of non-humans and material objects as well as human beings. ANT theorists like Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, the British sociologist, science and technology scholar, John Law, and the Dutch philosopher and ethnographer Annemarie Mol, considered networks to be all-embracing; in their constant interconnectedness, and their tendency to mutate, to fall apart and to regroup, there is nothing beyond them. Networks exist everywhere, the relationships and the agreements made with their formation building all meaning. Describing this situation so starkly is to underline

the extent to which ANT rejects the conventional concept of "society" and much sociological theory.

During the 1980s and 90s ANT's development was shaped by Bruno Latour and sociologists and scholars of science and technology studies including Michel Callon and John Law. In terms of the sociological thinking behind ANT, Latour acknowledged the importance of the work of late nineteenth century French criminologist and social psychologist, Gabriel Tarde, praising Tarde's outlook not least because of the former's difference with Durkheim's ideas of social cohesion. For Tarde, and ANT, what matters are the interactions between what Tarde thought of (after Leibniz) as "monads," which ANT terms actors or actants. Importantly, networks analysed using ANT also mix humans and non-humans, notable examples of which have included scallops, bacteria, guns and God, according to the theory of "generalised symmetry" in which all actants possess equal agency.

ANT's early history was noted for new approaches to science and technology, questioning the distinctive sense of modernity to which they had contributed. Notable examples of early ANT studies include Latour's examination of the networks that were mobilized during the nineteenth century in successfully putting into action conclusions arising from Louis Pasteur's experiments (Latour, 1988), Latour's study of the failure of a highly unusual, automated public transport system in Paris in the 1960s (Latour, 1996), and Michel Callon's account of another failed experiment to protect viable, valuable scallop colonies for future rearing on the coast of Brittany (Callon, 1986: 196-223).

In that famous essay, Callon includes a useful moment-by-moment description of the development of an actor-network, or "structure of power relationships" as he calls it, in the process of what he terms "translation," a kind of mutual agreement between actants that the formation of a network is of mutual value. These "moments" move from "problematization," in which researchers taking part in the study "sought to become indispensable to other actors in the drama by identifying the problems of the latter" (Callon, 1986: 1), and suggesting a particular course of action, to the second phase, "interessement", in which researchers attempted to "lock" actors into their roles. Stage three, "enrolment", sees inter-relative strategies agreed upon, before the final moment of "mobilisation", in which researchers ensured that all actors, and the

"collectivities" they represent, were not "betrayed" by those collectivities.

Callon, in the above work, was cautious about referring to networks, a term which, at times, has become contested because of its literal application. I find the term useful, however, in describing the interconnections of actors during production of critical text, though I use it with the proviso that each network is specific and will change from text to text. Interestingly, Callon also mentions that despite mobilisation, translation may fail – a mobilisation is therefore primarily an *attempt*.

Importantly, too, the role of the researcher for Callon was key to defining networks and their mobilisation.

In my observations, I also need to identify my role as researcher. Clearly, I had a role in observing and recording a series of actor networks that were activated to produce texts during the fieldwork.

I could therefore describe my fieldwork in terms of an activated network. Stage by stage, then, it might be possible to suggest that *problematisation* occurred when each individual writer was contacted with regard to taking part in my fieldwork; *interressement* occurred when writers agreed to keep diaries and be interviewed within agreed time-frames; *enrolment* occurred when tasks of writing took place within those observable time-frames; *mobilisation* occurred when writing was initiated, to be commented upon later by writers themselves in their diaries and subsequent interviews.

But if my above account serves as a workable description, it also follows that having been involved in this research, each writer has also taken part in several translations, each involving a different network that has been mobilised in response to a separate artwork, or artist, or theme, to make a separate text. Each actor network would therefore be temporary and unique, but would provide links to the mobilization of subsequent networks.

In this thesis, I suggest that it is possible to describe numerous processes of translation having taken place, defining networks which assembled with the specific purpose of text-production surrounding works of contemporary art and the artists responsible for making them. Examples of texts produced and published by writers participating in my fieldwork were the result of networks combining writers' individual social contacts,

other actors relevant to the particular artwork or artistic theme examined in the text, and non-human actants, including artworks, which I will begin to examine next.

ANT and Artworks

I have suggested that in applying Actor Network Theory to the networks connecting critical writers and contemporary art, we enter a situation in which actors or actants that are non-human, and those that are human, can be usefully perceived as equally important in affecting the overall success, or failure, of the network. In due course, I will mention the importance as actants of institutions and buildings, including galleries, museums, and artists' studios. But in considering critical writing about contemporary art, artworks themselves must receive particular attention, because of their central role as objects of scrutiny, evaluation and interaction for writers, artists and audiences.

Artworks have previously been attributed with agency, notably by Alfred Gell (Gell, 1998). Also of some relevance to this research, art objects were considered similarly in a study using ANT as a methodology, by Michael Zell (Zell, 2011). Here, Zell looked at the links between Rembrandt, his patrons and enthusiasts, or "liefhebbers," and their connections with his paintings and prints, which, as Zell tells us, were frequently presented as gifts, in order to secure future support for the artist, during a period when the economic structure of the Dutch Republic was becoming increasingly capitalist-oriented, and other artists were beginning to shift their attention towards monetary transactions for work undertaken. Zell's use of ANT is argued as follows: "in privileging material objects in the establishment and performance of social activity, ANT does offer a new paradigm that allows us to reimagine the social world as being composed of composite networks of relations in which objects, including artworks, are critical, mediating agents" (Zell, 2011: 9).

Supporting this, Zell quotes from Rembrandt's letters to patrons and looks at some of the work Rembrandt produced. In describing one startling, early painting of Rembrandt's, The Blinding of Samson, 1636, Zell uses terms like "physical violence and vivid pictorial form … endorsing the painting with a forceful urgency" (Zell, 2011:17) that are meant to capture something of the work's power to act with agency.

With regard to Rembrandt's later etchings, Zell observing that experimental versions of

particular works, printed on expensive, imported Japanese paper, were sent to a core group of enthusiasts, and once a work was finished to Rembrandt's satisfaction, larger numbers were printed on cheaper- quality paper. A network of critically engaged art enthusiasts was necessary, Zell argues, for Rembrandt to develop artistically, as well as to go on producing work.

In looking at critical writers and their contemporaneous consideration of art in the north west of England, I think it is possible to approach contemporary art in a similar way, using ANT. There are, of course, important differences between the art of seventeenth century Amsterdam and contemporary art in the twenty first century. Rembrandt's artworks – paintings and prints – were portable and therefore, as nonhuman actors, it was to the advantage of the greater network that these artworks could move about. Today's contemporary art, including photography, film-making, sculpture, painting, publishing, and performance, may or may not be portable, and more than one individual object may be brought together in, for instance, curated assemblages, shown in galleries and museums. The contemporary installation is a common example, and for Groys the primary example of the way different media can be combined to establish a focus for viewers to make their assessment (Groys, 2009). Such examples of contemporary art are developed and curated with the intention of being experienced, in ways that critics like Krauss noted in the 1970s, and as noted in Chapter 1 (Krauss, 1979: 33-44). Other experience-based forms of contemporary art include performance art, or art based on the amassing of archives or documentary film or photography, or so-called "relational" art. Art as an experience and as an event, manifesting Groys' observations about the theatrical nature of the contemporary art museum, referred to in Chapter 2, offers a multiplicity of overlapping sensory possibilities for the critical writer to engage with artworks. I make further comments on the "mass usership model" of the museum, later in this chapter.

Artworks are created, combined and positioned by artists, curators and technicians in order for observers to engage with them in desired ways, as well as ways that are less predictable, and therefore the aforementioned cultural workers also become key actors in the same networks that include the critical writer at this stage of engagement. It follows, too, that the public can also be seen to be involved, and to connect with a

network producing text. The timing of this engagement is also important. A gallery or museum press office publishes and distributes text and floor plans in co- ordination with press viewing and exhibition launch dates, introducing press officer and publicists into the network, and at the same time this reinforces the role of the artwork, revealing more and more details about it, for the hoped-for consideration of the critical writer and the wider audience.

As Zell argues, Rembrandt's works adopted performative stances in the portrayal of their subject matter - in their use of costumes, their use of light, and composition. But, particularly in appealing to non-specialist public audiences, contemporary artworks are no less performative within the networks that are mobilized, in an account offering an ANT approach, to produce critical text.

As I have previously described, however, Groys claims contemporary art contains paradoxes, which I have related to what Latour calls "iconoclash." This element of internal dialogue, within every successful contemporary artwork, adds further complexity to its role as network actor, facilitated, as it is, by its deliberate placing in a certain setting, be it a gallery, museum, public space or landscape.

Each possible setting, gallery or museum, for instance, might well be considered to function as a non-human actor in that it is not just a place to see art, but it is also a programmed and marketed domain whose existence, regionally and nationally, unfolds strategically, alongside others. In the context of my research, for instance, galleries like Tate Liverpool, Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, Manchester Art Gallery, and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, have evolved since the late 1980s, while others like FACT, Liverpool have also opened, as nationally-recognised, regionally-based centres for contemporary art. Across them all, patterns of curatorial thought are identifiable, to be frequently traced in the critical commentaries produced by locally-based writers including some of the ones taking part in my research.

Further non-human actants in text producing networks will be examined later in this chapter. Next, however, I want to look at the way the sense each writer has of a network, consisting of human, personal contacts. This differs from the concept of an actor network, but can contribute to the activation of such networks, bound together and activated in the production of texts, in circumstances such as that presented in the

northwest region by regeneration.

Network Voices

My fieldwork interviews presented many examples of narratives describing the coming-together of person-to-person connections. When formulating the list of questions to ask interviewees, I was interested in the importance of digital as well as personal contacts in describing the importance of networks to obtain work and initiate the writing of a text. The subsequent interviews with writers covered a wide age-range, from young (late 20s) to middle aged (mid 50s), and therefore writers' experience of digital technology varied between those younger ones who had grown up with the internet, and social media, some older participants (like me) who could remember the pre-digital world, and some in between. Answering the question "how much do networks, virtual and personal, contribute to the way you obtain writing work?" I was keen, too, to receive information on what the word "network" meant for each participant, enabling me to gain some impression of the range of contacts they could call upon in generating a text, as well as an impression of any emotional aspect in their network connections, such as friendship or enmity, that might contribute to the deepening and continuation of contact, or otherwise.

A useful place to begin, because of the directness of the language used, is with one of the younger writers, Tom Emery. "It's incredibly important!" he began, "As I'm sure everyone must be saying."[23] Tom had already described his history as a writer at the time of being interviewed. He had been getting reviews published about contemporary art for approximately five years and was beginning to earn a certain, limited amount of money from it. "It's like anything in the art world," he continued, "You can't really get anywhere without knowing people. So you just have to get to know people." Here Tom paused and then added: "Well, especially when you're starting out, I suppose."

There was a sense here of Tom's experience contributing towards an accumulation of wider social confidence as well as a certain sense of ambition, the latter indicated in the phrase "you can't really get anywhere." Initially, then, Tom formulated his answer in terms of personal relationships with other professionals in the art world. Shortly

[23] First interview with Tom Emery, 12.06.2018. Manchester Metropolitan University, Righton Building.

afterwards in the same interview he named the editor of one national journal, Art Monthly, describing the way he had established a working link with that publication. But Tom then switched to talking about "Picking up things like commissioned essays, gallery texts, things like that - I think that's certainly from just when you meet people, when you get to know them, just when you know them over social media, really." Notable in this sentence is the blurring between the sense of knowing people face-to-face and knowing people via digital technology. Perhaps this blurring reflects Tom's "millennial" age-group, but the effect then became more pronounced in the next two sentences, which marked a further stage in articulating Tom's understanding of network-building: "And then there's that certain thing where your published profile gets to a point, and then your social media profile reaches a point, where people are finding you just via that, rather than having an established personal relationship. But, even still, having those personal relationships is valuable in getting work."

Tom was clearly keen to keep widening his personal connections, which have contributed to the way he values himself and those around him, his sense of meaning in what he does, and the categories of work he is involved in.

The answer provided by another writer, Jack Welsh, placed a different emphasis on the importance of internet-based social relations and the way they can be built or expanded, by putting effort into publicising the work he succeeds in getting published. He told me, "In terms of going about getting work, I think there are issues with self-promotion, (and) visibility which I think you're always aware of. Like today I had a piece of writing go live which I did yesterday, so I've been pushing it today, on social media, and I'm just thinking in my head how I'm going to keep doing it without over-pushing it. And where to post it to increase its visibility."[24] In other words, Jack's published text, at the time of the interview, was partly fulfilling the purpose of contributing to his social network. He concluded, "So I think it's really important in terms of other work, thinking one or two steps ahead, even if you're not sure about that next piece of writing, not sure about the context of it."

The importance of digital networks also informed the response of mid-career artists including Sheffield-based academic, artist and writer, Joanne Lee, who uses digital

[24] First interview with Jack Welsh, 15.06. 2018.Manchester Metropolitan University, Righton Building

technology to keep in touch with a variety of contacts, while emphasising that this technology helped to develop long-term social connectedness. "If I'm honest," she said to me[25], "I think it's not that these things are usually wholly digital, because quite often those networks, they're formed over time and usually have evolved. I would say I have met the people with whom I might then continue a conversation, digitally. It's rarely that people would only really know me online." Jo expanded on her statement to talk about the academic world in which she meets new contacts relevant to her multiple interests and involvements: "I go to a lot of conferences, I go to quite a lot of events, so it's not like I sit in a digital network space and don't go out into the wider world. So, I think having perhaps met people at events I am – I hate the word "networking" because it makes me feel sick – but I do, if I meet interesting people, I try to sort of stay friends with them, whatever you want to be, a critical friend." As we will see, Jo was not the only interviewee to dislike the verb "networking." She continued: "So I will hunt them down a bit on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram or wherever it was I think they might be. Because I kind of want to know what they're up to a lot of the time. And whether there are things they're doing that I continue to be interested in. But beyond that then we quite often continue a dialogue."

Lara Eggleton, an art historian working as managing editor for the cross-Pennine online journal Corridor 8, spoke not only about her own personal networks, but also the role her publication plays in enlarging the network connectivity of less experienced writers. "We flag up a lot of opportunities to each other as they come up, so if we can't always do things, we pass them on to somebody else,"[26] she told me, "It feels quite generous, our networks, that way. And that's across the north, that's quite useful. Yeah, my connections in Leeds are quite strong. I've been here a long time." Despite the fact that Lara is an experienced writer, though, she thinks that social networks are constantly in need of attention and structural renewal, adding (with the words "you know that" addressed to me, as another writer) that new contacts "Are pretty crucial to getting – you know that - writing opportunities, just knowing the right person to pitch to. So that's a pretty crucial network to getting writing out there. There's some that I haven't

[25] First interview with Joanne Lee, 27.06.2018, Sheffield

[26] First interview with Lara Eggleton, 29.06.2018, The Tetley, Leeds, July 29th, 2018

cracked yet, you know, that you keep trying different ways."

Stressing again the importance of digital media in social connectivity, writer-curator Lauren Velvick was on the verge of moving from Liverpool to Hull to start a new job when she spoke to me. "I've been using the internet a lot since I was about thirteen,"[27] she said, "I'm quite silly, and honest, and quite political. And you often get advice saying, "oh, you know, you should be very professional", but I don't think that's true. I think, especially in the art world, if you – it matters more if you have a lot of followers, not necessarily what you say." Lauren also acknowledged the importance of having worked as an editor as well as a contributor for Corridor 8 in generating the number of followers she has, noting also the extent to which digital media develops enable contacts to be established on an increasingly wide scale, when she concluded, "Being able to interact with people in other cities who I've met through writing and through art is invaluable."

However, another writer, Laura Harris, demonstrated negative feelings about digital social networks, which she stated she did not use, "Because they make me feel cold inside." But immediately she added: "I mean, I use Twitter to promote my own writing, rather than to get more writing. So if I write something I'll Tweet about it, make the editor pleased or whatever. But I don't use Facebook

or Twitter to form contacts or anything like that."[28] Laura defined the connections she did find significant as, "Definitely actual friendships I guess, and that has been as a fallout of … beginning my writing with the Double Negative," referring to the online arts and culture journal founded in Liverpool by Laura Robertson and Mike Pinnington. "They're very good at setting up these networks," Laura Harris continued, "And if you see an opportunity you can share with them over an email, or they might share an opportunity with me over email. But these are more – I dunno – I don't like to think of them as networks, they're more like friendships, built on shared interests."

Elsewhere, Laura defined her connections as being "More like a support system," and, illustrating this, added, "If I was having a terrible art-writing month I could email someone and be like "I'm having this experience, have you ever had this?" And they might say, "Yeah". It's quite small as well, the network."

[27] First interview with Lauren Velvick, 31.07.2018, Bluecoat, Liverpool, July

[28] First interview with Laura Harris 26.06. 2018.Liverpool, Bluecoat

Laura Harris claimed, too, that these relationships, which, in contrast to her earlier comment about social media, might not make her feel so "cold", having contributed to her continuing to write about art in the long term. "If I didn't have those people around me, I might have just stopped, because it might have felt like less of a thing," she said, with the illustrative comment, "Yeah, going to the pub and chatting for ages about art writing with someone equally obsessive was very motivating. And without that I might not have been able to sustain the motivation."

But there was also a note of anxiety expressed by Sara Jaspan, another editor and writer (for Corridor 8 as well as Creative Tourist), in the way she talked about human social networks, an anxiety that coexisted with the knowledge that work can, and should, be generated by participating in them and developing them. Sara admitted having reservations about deliberately cultivating her social networks: "If I was trying to be strategic, and think quite carefully about a career, or advancing myself or whatever, then pro-actively nurturing the connections I had probably would have made sense. But it's not something I do consciously"[29]. She added, using the word "networking" in a negative sense: "And also I'm really bad at any form of networking, or anything like that. So, I try to avoid that kind of thing as much as I can. So, I don't, but I should."

From the interview extracts I have been looking at, it is evident that networks can be used as a way of expressing connections between writers, artists and other cultural workers across digital as well as more personal realms of contact, including face-to-face contact. Furthermore, digital and personal understandings of the "network" expression overlap. The impact of the "networking" expression as a verb, however, creates among some writers a certain degree of anxiety or displeasure about feeling duty-bound to cultivate and maintain the possibilities of relationships that present themselves. Sara Jaspan's worry about networking, and Joanne Lee's hatred of the same term, both bring to mind the possibly physically-demanding or conversationally-challenging opportunities presented at exhibition launches or press shows, when email addresses are exchanged, artists are introduced to writers, writers find out about each other's latest achievements and failures, and forms of competitive behaviour may emerge.

Introducing new connections to writers' personal networks was, on the other hand,

[29] First interview with Sara Jaspan, 11.06.2018, West Didsbury, Manchester

encouraged, almost as editorial responsibility, by Lara Eggleton of Corridor 8, and has been acknowledged by several participants who have worked with Sara Jaspan or Laura Robertson of The Double Negative. Digital connections aid the commissioning of work, but can also aid the extent to which a published text is subsequently received by audiences, as Laura Harris and Jack Welsh both acknowledge, the latter expressing concern about "over-pushing" a newly-published piece of writing, with a view to its visibility generating more work. Importantly, too, relationships developed via networks can provide what Laura Harris calls a "support structure" that she also acknowledges has helped her overcome difficulties and to persevere with writing critically about art.

This idea of the "support structure" was taken further by writer and editor Mike Pinnington, who with Laura Robertson co-founded the Double Negative. Mike said to me: "I think publications like ourselves, Corridor 8, and people like the White Pube who are even more recent, are enabling people to engage with art in different ways. Empowering people to engage with art and see that they have a voice, or to respond when they don't agree with what's being programmed. Or that there should be more of one thing than another"[30]. Mike's situation as editor, as well as a freelance writer, with much experience in both fields, enabled him to speak with a note of confidence, which no doubt has been aided by the number of public engagements to which the Double Negative commits itself. But Mike's account of the Double Negative's sense of purpose is of course important too in understanding its stance not only towards new writers but also to art institutions in the region. Mike continued: "It's given people an opportunity to think "yeah, I could do that". You know, what those guys are doing, it tells me that art isn't just for that rarified elite." Thus, the idea of "empowerment", which Mike claims publications like the Double Negative can offer especially to the new and inexperienced writer, matches the need for museums and galleries like Tate Liverpool to widen and strengthen their engagement with audiences and local communities, and appeal less to an "elite".

In further comments from Mike, we can begin to identify ways in which the existence of publishing platforms like the Double Negative can actively encourage what ANT calls a

[30] Interview with Mike Pinnington, 15.04.2019. FACT, Liverpool.

process of "translation" by identifying agreed needs, that link institutions, publishers, writers and contemporary art, leading to the activation of networks to produce texts.

Talking more specifically about the Double Negative in the context of Liverpool's regeneration, Mike also stated, "I think hopefully it really reflects the power for culture to change." And at this point he referred back, rather judgmentally, at what he had just said, commenting, "I mean that sounds really clicheed and that sounds, I'm sure, like the Council line, what they would trot out about what culture's doing…" But having guarded himself, Mike continued, "I think a mature critical response is also reflective of that maturity, hopefully," his use of the word 'maturity' referring to the changed culture, before adding, "And it shows that like there's a real conversation happening between the producers and the people who go to these things and write about them. So, I think it's all part and parcel of a healthy cultural landscape." Within this "healthy cultural landscape", then, Mike sees the output of platforms including the Double Negative as part of the "real conversation" that is going on between "producers" including institutions and galleries and "the people who go to these things and write about them" – the final part of the statement placing writers and publishing platforms on an equal footing with producers, but also on a slightly different footing to what might be termed the people who go to these things and *do not* write about them.

In encouraging new writers, then, I think Mike is developing an idea about their significance in being able to participate in this "real conversation", while at the same time being aware that as they develop as writers, helped by the publications for whom they write, they contribute to wider change, worded as a "healthy cultural landscape." The extent to which Mike saw change having occurred was expressed in his next and final sentences: "And I think if there wasn't a Double Negative, or a publication like that, I think it would reflect a different Liverpool. One that maybe wasn't ready for a critical press." In short, then, Mike sees the change that has occurred through writers engaging in a conversation with institutions as therefore significant but also progressive. Furthermore, Mike strengthened his comments towards terms that challenge innate conservatism in the art world, especially towards social inclusiveness, when he stated, "You know, we're very vocal about being working class, for instance. And that's an issue that art has suffered with for a long time. It isn't necessarily welcoming to diverse

audiences, or doesn't appear to be welcoming to diverse audiences." And, next referring to a series of comments and articles published by the Double Negative specifically addressing the subject of class, he went on, "So when people talk about diversity on their pages or online, I think it really emboldens and empowers people not from traditional backgrounds." Having once again used the verb "empowerment" in relation to potential writers, Mike explained the "traditional backgrounds" they may very well never have experienced as being, "Well, traditional in terms of who occupies this weird arts landscape. Which tends to be, you know, white, and upper middle classes. This kind of curatorial class, this arts professional class that still very much exists, I think."
The connectivity explored here in terms of networks that can be activated in the production of critical texts is therefore energised by interests that present themselves as mutually beneficial. The "traditional" staff behind institutions, galleries and "producers" of contemporary art, in all its experiential forms, including festivals, need new writing from as widespread a range of backgrounds as possible, in order to refresh and widen audiences as well as to generate art that engages with them. At the same time, people from non -"elite", non-white, non-middle class backgrounds might well find connections in the still-privileged worlds of the institution and the gallery, connections that can activate networks that will actualise potential for critical text, with the publishing platform performing an "enabling" role. These comments by Mike Pinnington have some bearing on the development of the "mass usership model" of museum that I will refer to later in this chapter. But they also encapsulate the sense in which networks producing critical text can collectively be activated by sharing a sense of change, improvement and futurity. In the context of regeneration, however, this sense of change, improvement and futurity takes place in a landscape that has frequently reinvented its past.

Regeneration

There are further levels of connectivity that interest me, too, in the extent to which galleries and museums that specialize in the exhibiting of contemporary art have in other ways assisted and contributed to the policies and practice of regeneration that have transformed certain key geographical areas of the north west region's biggest cities

in recent years. The ANT-guided approach to my research will be extended here in looking at the phenomenon of regeneration. I am not the first to do this. Previous studies such as that by Stephen Dobson (Dobson, 2015), employed ANT in examining the fate of a Sheffield bike trail, questioning the inclusivity of that city's approach towards disadvantaged communities. My approach, however, avoids analysis of neoliberal economics, as arguments concerning urban planning and policy in northwest cities deserve a separate study that is beyond the scope of research focusing on critical writing. Indeed, the writers I interviewed said little themselves about regeneration, which might reflect my line of questioning or a sense of regeneration being beyond their control. Nonetheless, regeneration impinges upon this study, being part of the context in which critical writing has come to be seen to matter in the north west region as mentioned below. Benjamin's theory of 'aura' also becomes useful to this discussion because of its association by Zukin with the re-use of old building stock.

Looking in more detail at regeneration's beginnings in the north west, in Liverpool, the huge changes that affected that city's Royal Albert Dock, which began in 1981 with the leasing out of derelict nineteenth century warehouse space to the new Maritime Museum, led in 1988 to the opening of Tate Liverpool, which, since then, has contributed enormously to the way that waterfront location has become a focal point for tourism, with the rebuilt Museum of Liverpool and the relocated Open Eye Gallery of contemporary photography only a short walk away.

National awareness of Liverpool's cultural appeal was boosted in 2008 when the city received the European Capital of Culture award. Looking back over ten years of change, in which art, history and popular culture have shaped the city's "embrace of tourism", making a significant economic contribution to Liverpool, Mike Pinnington wrote about the Albert Dock's altered significance, neatly summarising it thus: "Now part of a vital cultural and lifestyle economy rather than a maritime one, instead of dockers it welcomes throngs of cruise ship passengers and day trippers" (Pinnington, 2019:14).

In Manchester, contemporary art took part in a parallel "embrace of tourism." The nineteenth century Manchester City Art Gallery was extended, renamed and refurbished between 1998 and 2002 with a new building specialising in contemporary art. The city's other large public art gallery, the Whitworth, was expanded in 2015, doubling its

exhibition space, which always includes new art, and introducing other features including a glass-walled, tree-level restaurant, and a family-friendly garden. Purpose-built arts centres providing space for new art also opened, notably HOME, in 2015, a merger of the earlier Cornerhouse organisation with the Library Theatre company.

In both cities, too, the public profile of contemporary art has been heightened by alternating festivals: Liverpool Biennial, which began in 1999 and is Britain's largest contemporary art event, and Manchester International Festival, launched in 2007, in which contemporary art is a major feature.

Both festivals have used derelict or neglected buildings and locations as venues – contributing in some cases to their further use and a wider awareness of their aesthetic appeal. In what follows, the importance of old building stock in the regeneration of post-industrial cities like Manchester and Liverpool is further examined, with regard to the actor-networks in which writers consider contemporary art.

The presence of spaces exhibiting contemporary art in the region's biggest cities has been matched by the presence of practicing artists, who have been able to work in low-rent studio space, often found in previously-disused or derelict factory buildings. Considering regeneration, therefore, I will describe how a wider range of buildings, streets and districts in certain urban areas can also boost networks that can be mobilized by writers to produce texts.

The link between gentrification and the presence of art and artists has long been described in detail by the US writer, Sharon Zukin, her work in particular commenting on the regeneration of the Lower Manhattan area of New York City from the 1960s onwards, since when, comparable changes began to transform many other cities globally. In 2010 she noted how these regenerated city centres frequently endeavour to foreground the importance of the art museum and the role of contemporary art: "Liverpool and Bilbao have torn down their abandoned waterfronts and turned ageing docks and warehouses into art museums" (Zukin, 2010:1). Developments like these exemplify what Libby Porter describes in addressing the way cities worldwide have striven to establish a "brand" to propel their local tourist industry. "The intention", she says, "Is to maintain (or if you do not already have it, establish) a distinctive heritage offer in the inner city, by physically revitalising city spaces" (Porter and Shaw, 2009:

244).

The “heritage offer” made by cities has appeal not just to tourists but also to artists and subcultures. Zukin writes about the importance within the regenerated city of finding new purpose in old buildings, which she refers to as “the aestheticization of the authentic” (Zukin, 2010: 20),

in moving cities towards “destination culture.” Referring to this revaluation of old, formerly derelict or run-down building stock, Zukin is careful, however, to also make associations with Jane Jacobs’ pioneering work in the 1960s, as well as with Benjamin’s notion of aura (Zukin, 2010: 220-221), Zukin widens her view of the authentic to take in the notion of community, and cultural “zoning.” “We already use the streets and buildings to create a physical fiction of our common origins,” Zukin writes (Zukin, 2010: 220)**,** “Now we need to tap deeper into the aesthetic of new beginnings that inspires our emotions. Authenticity refers to the look and feel of a place as well as the social connectedness that place inspires. But the sense that a neighbourhood is true to its origins and allows a real community to form reflects more about us and our sensibilities than any city block.”

But then, as Porter also notes, cities that take “cultural planning” seriously do not always retain their artists. “Somewhat perversely, those city governments seeking to ‘invent’ creative quarters often do so by actively displacing artists and subcultural groups from those very neighbourhoods,” she notes (Porter and Shaw, 2009: 246). One senses how the quest for authenticity continues to affect the popularity, for consumers and tourists, of an area like Manchester’s Northern Quarter, formerly occupied by young artists (before rising rents forced them to move further away), as much as it does to the success of museum zones like the one surrounding Liverpool’s Albert Dock, home of the above-mentioned Tate Liverpool, or Manchester’s Castlefield, where the Museum of Science and Industry is located. This is also housed in former warehouses built in the nineteenth century and a former railway station, and is situated adjacent to the forthcoming Factory arts centre, planned to rise in the shadow of Granada Television’s old studios. But artists continue to experience displacement. The closure of Manchester’s Rogue Studios, in 2016 and 2017, and the removal of their artists to new premises further away from the city centre, for instance, was the subject of much

reportage, by a range of writers who included me.

For writers on contemporary art in the northwest of England, much attention is spent on writing not only about what they see in the major museums like Tate Liverpool, but also about the many independent contemporary art galleries that also occupy spaces that have been upgraded and improved from post-industrial abandonment, as well as work made by artists occupying related artists' studios. Obvious examples at the time of writing would be Liverpool's Royal Standard, or Manchester's Paradise Works. Recording and commenting upon the fate of such spaces, which also work as experiments in community, and which frequently experience short lifespans, seems to create as much writing as these same studios and their galleries generate exhibition reviews.

Returning, then to the version of the writing event that ANT can provide, a network focused on the production of a text not only connects human actors including artists, editors, curators and cultural workers, but also artworks and the spaces and buildings in which these artworks are produced and shown. The fact these buildings are frequently repurposed from earlier uses, and may also be of some age, contributes to a sense of authenticity and aura referred to Zukin. The sense a certain community might have of "authenticity" connected with place also extends in personal terms to the lives and careers of human actors like artists and writers, many of whom associate the development of their practice with such sites. Thus "the past" can be interpreted in terms of personal associations as well as in terms of the period design or patina of an "authentic" building. There is therefore a sense of Bakhtin's "chronotopic" - Bakhtin's word for "time-space" (Bakhtin, M.1981: 84–258) - in the relationship between artists and writers and place-location in regenerated cities – or, possibly, the "schitzochronotopic", a term coined by the anthropologist Safet Hadzimuhamedovic (Hadzimuhamedovic: 2018), in talking about the way in which different histories, or awarenesses of time, can co-exist in relation to one place.

In my own writing career, too, I have experienced numerous buildings or locations that created or cultivated an important sense of community, many of which were founded on an association with contemporary art and which enjoyed a sense of "authenticity" in having had a previous purpose or use. These included, in Manchester, the Cornerhouse arts centre (a former furniture store), the Green Room theatre (built under a Victorian

railway viaduct arch) and the Hacienda nightclub (formerly a yacht warehouse), all of which were situated on the same street, Whitworth Street West. I can link each building not only with pieces of writing I published, but also with personal relationships and networks, and with the early period of Manchester's regeneration in the 1980s, as the city emerged from a long period of economic depression and high unemployment, when finding work as a writer was extremely difficult.

But Benjamin saw the relationship between the past and the present the opposite way round – he saw the present in the past. "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. [Jetztzeit]" (Benjamin, 1977, 263). In other words, it is not so much a matter of history being captured and perceived in whatever we call the "authentic" as it is a matter of the "authentic" being relevant because it fills with the present.

Benjamin continues: "Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past." Fashion certainly does become part of the way certain regenerative effects are made to resound, in marketing the "authentic". And the use of space by artists, writers and others, in working together, frequently contributes to them acquiring a fashionable status. But the allure of fashion is fleeting; Benjamin, in fact, links fashion with death, as McCole observes (McCole, 1993:244).

Meanwhile the aura observed by writers like Zukin in old buildings is only part of the story of the regeneration process as it continues to unfold in Manchester and Liverpool. Another obvious change, affecting artists and other creative workers who try to cling on to low-rent urban space, is the appearance of new, high-rise buildings. These vary from hotels and office blocks to speculative, rented apartment schemes. The expansion of glass architecture today has flowed from the technology of the neglected nineteenth century shopping arcades that fascinated Benjamin in the 1920s, as Pierre Missac has described in relation to Manhattan (Missac, 1995: 147-172), lending the centre of Manchester today the epithet "MancHatten".

Aura and After

It is important to note, however, that one writer who has recently made significant comments on Benjamin's notion of "aura" and authenticity is Bruno Latour. Writing with Adam Lowe, the argument presented is that it is not so much the reproduction of a work of art that affects the aura surrounding the original, but the quality of the reproduction. Rather than "aura", therefore, Latour and Lowe prefer the concept of an artwork's "trajectory" or "career," finding it particularly useful, especially in relation to the performing arts, in discussing the quality or "degree of fecundity of the whole cornucopia" (Latour and Lowe, 2010: 11) relating to a work. This relates to ANT's approach to human and non-human interactions in that Latour and Lowe are focusing on the coming-together of actors in a productive process, which might be the latest production of a Shakespeare play, or, as argued in their essay, the employment of new technologies in making an ambitious facsimile of Veronese's painting, Les Noces de Cana, The Wedding Feast at Cana, 1563.

"The theme of authenticity has itself been a late by-product of a constant activity of reproduction" Hennion and Latour noted in an earlier essay (Hennion and Latour, 2003: 91). Whether or not authenticity has been manufactured or can truly be said to be "authentic" in the first place, however, the notion of authenticity nonetheless contributes to the experience of post-industrial cities like Liverpool and Manchester as providers of culture, as I have noted above. In thinking about the buildings, spaces and areas with which such authenticity has been associated, similar "trajectories" might equally be traced, in terms of the processes of their repurposing, re- appropriation, and alteration, by artists, planners, architects, politicians, enterprises and corporations. Aura, the word Benjamin employed to describe the mystique and authority emanating from the "original" work, is, as Latour himself acknowledges, also sensed in the performative, the changing importance of which one writer, Elisabetta Cristallini (Cristallini, 2013: 27-31) emphasises, in arguing that during the Dadaist period in which Benjamin was writing, aura began to migrate from artworks and into the bodies of artists themselves, noting the work of Duchamp, Pollock, Klein, Beuys, and others, as significant examples of twentieth century artists whose practice foregrounded performance. Certainly, performance continues to feature significantly in contemporary art, and contributes to the extent to which art now theatricalises the role of the

museum, as observed by Groys, which I mentioned in Chapter 2**.** It is also possible to detect elements of the performative in Zukin's description, cited above, of neighbourhoods in which authenticity is marked as much by the development of "real community" as pre-existing "look and feel", or "social connectedness."

It is important to explain here that I am not suggesting the mobilisation of networks around text production focusing on contemporary art is triggered simply by an awareness of the "authenticity" perceived in revamped building stock, or simply by the presence of artists who happen to include performance in their practice. But writers taking part in this research, within the northwest region, frequently mobilize networks in which other actors, human and non-human, connect within zones of regeneration, wherein the use of buildings has certainly changed, and to which the production and presentation of art has begun to respond. Interestingly, it has perhaps been at the moment certain buildings encountered change of the most profound sort, that art responded most directly, such as the closure of Rogue Studios, Manchester, in 2017, when powerful works like Hilary Jack's We Are Not For Sale appeared. Added to this is the growing tendency among museums towards greater public participation, and the "mass usership model" described by Alistair Hudson, director of Manchester's Whitworth Art Gallery, as "museum 3.0" (Stevens, 2014).

My own visits to the Whitworth in the summer of 2019 drew me to one particular exhibition that reflected urban change and connections between humans and non-humans, strongly bringing to mind ANT. The site of the former Reno Club, on Princess Road in Moss Side, Manchester, was subject of an archaeological excavation in 2017 (Pidd, 2017), in which objects including beer bottles and makeup compacts, retrieved from this former basement venue in Moss Side, were retrieved.

Displayed at the Whitworth, they reflect the Afro-Caribbean and mixed-race audience which met, socialised, and danced there in the 1970s and 80s. But this is not a show about nostalgia, as an installation that includes Linda Brogan's filmed interviews with some of the surviving attendees reveals the complexities of their lives beyond the subcultural world that first brought them together. It is possible here to observe how networks connecting curators, researchers, archaeologists, former attendees of the club, objects from its site, the site itself, which is still undeveloped, and the Whitworth Art

Gallery building (whose location is within the Moss Side local authority ward) were activated to produce this show, whose significance and emotional power, I would argue, originates specifically in the way that connectedness is manifested in the combination of objects, diagrams, photos and long interview sequences. The show also illustrates how policies of regeneration fail to improve certain poorer districts, like that surrounding the Princess Road heart of Moss Side.

Network to Text and Text as Network

In this chapter, I have employed ANT to bring together human and non-human actors in a text describing the mobilization of networks whose binding factors are, themselves, texts in production. My fieldwork mobilized specific networks which during a particular period of three months in 2018 produced specific texts, which later chapters will examine more detail regarding their entelechy – their actualisation. ANT has also aided me in bringing together material and subjective themes in locating writers' actor-networks within the context of urban regeneration, where notions of what Benjamin termed "aura" and authenticity, reappraised in terms of Latourian "trajectory," have been applied to buildings and districts.

Regarding critical writing on contemporary art, it may also be helpful to reflect on Rita Felski's thoughts on ANT in relation to the humanities in general (Felski, 2016: 215-229). Imagining a situation in which the humanities might be lost altogether, Felski asks "Is it possible to voice a defence of the humanities that is not anchored exclusively in the value of "critical thinking"? Are there other attitudes, orientations, modes of argument in play?" (Felski, 2016: 216). Answering this, Felski suggests a series of "actions and practices" (Felski, 2016: 216) that she thinks can "recompose the humanities." These she lists under four alliterative titles that it might be argued could also be thought about in relation to the mobilization of networks surrounding contemporary art's presence in regenerating cities. These categories begin with "curating" in the sense of caring for what Felski terms "the outmoded" (Felski, 2016: 217) in the face of the "creative destruction" of business thinking and the supposed superiority of innovation.

I have argued above that the activation of networks by writers on art has, in recent years, taken place simultaneously to and, because of what Zukin calls "destination

culture", in parallel with the destructive and reconstructive practices that have transformed the major cities of northern England, with art and culture positioned at the heart of the aesthetic reinterpretation of spaces that were once considered "outmoded." Secondly, Felski's term "Conveying," applying to the transmission of the humanities through time, can be seen to resonate in the documentation and evaluation of contemporary art by writers, by the activation of networks focused on critical text production. Third, "Criticising", again includes an element of caring for criticism as an historic tradition, whilst developing a need for empathy instead of thinking of others "as being driven by hidden structures that only the critical gaze can discern" (Felski, 2016: 221), a commitment which, when applied to critical writing and contemporary art, can be seen to embrace the purposefulness and inclusivity of the network, and its ability to "translate" through text. Felski's final category, "Composing", as the writer herself puts it, "speaks to the possibility of trying to compose a common world, even if this world can only be built out of many different parts," (Felski, 2016: 221), positioning text and actor-network in a key position connecting contemporary art with the diversity of communities and potential audiences and participants whose position in a changing UK region may not, so far, have been close to contemporary art.

I have argued for the beneficial effects of networks mobilizing to produce critical text, actualised by human actors producing it in engagement with non-human actors affecting its production. I would like in this final section of the chapter to think further about the production of critical texts responding to contemporary art in a way that foreshadows and anticipates a closer examination of the writing process. It is possible, as Rita Felski has explained elsewhere, in comments on works of literature (Felski, 2017), to examine text in itself as network, in which human and non-human actors combine to mobilize. Such an examination "reassembles the social", to paraphrase Latour. It is not impossible, therefore, to imagine how finished, actualised critical texts can mobilize internal actors in the act of being read. For instance, in one exhibition review of Everything I Have is Yours, by Eileen Simpson and Ben White (Open Music Archive), shown at Salford Museum and Art Gallery, and published in Art Monthly, October, 2019, I describe the work's combination of objects and humans, in the form of old vinyl and shellac discs and a video projection, the latter including male musicians and female vocalists, all elderly, who

trigger audio samples from the same discs, discs they remember from their teenage years, and responding to these samples with sounds of their own making. These visual and audio exchanges take place in a soundproof recording space, Stenner Hall, at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester, in which we see human actors surrounded by instruments including drum kits, guitars, bass guitars, and saxophones, plus amplifiers, microphones, stands and cables. The visual sequences in which these actors are captured are intercut with animated closeups of the vinyl and shellac discs, their labels and sleeves, their logos, and the titles of songs and original recording artists. The soundtrack we hear is a coming-together of the material - old, out of copyright samples preserved in plastic grooves- and the subjective – improvised contemporary responses. Meanwhile our response as viewers and listeners takes place in a space dominated by the video screen which is concealed by the vinyl and shellac display wall within the museum's multifarious municipal collection. The museum itself, therefore, is an actor affecting the double process of reflection that visitors experience in viewing and hearing these local musicians and singers responding to musical extracts from their own pasts.

In this chapter I have argued that networks originating in human relations, personal and digital, expand with the mobilization of actor networks into multiple linkages with the non-human. Specifically, I have argued that artworks, buildings, districts, institutions and publishing platforms can be considered non-human actors. I have also examined the activation of actor networks involving critical writers having arisen from agreements between actors arising from the regeneration of cities in the northwest of England. Arising from this, I have considered the importance of the notion of aura and the relevance of re-used, renovated or improved building stock. Finally, I have discussed the network's importance in relation to text-production and art, and the changes and challenges experienced socially in post-industrial cities like Manchester and Liverpool, concluding with the beginning of a closer "zooming in" (as Felski would put it) on the networked nature of text itself.

Chapter 5

Writing and Making A Living

Introduction: Writing as Work

My approach began by situating critical writing historically, having summarised and examined certain key developments in art criticism and the theory surrounding it, from the 1960s to the present. I followed this by examining the condition of contemporaneity and the implications of this on use of interviews in fieldwork, which I then introduced in an examination of the practice of writing, as it has been theorised since the 1970s. This led to a consideration of the ways critical writers connect with others, in which I use the metaphor of the network theorised by ANT to represent and discuss the interaction of actors in the production of critical texts. In thinking about this, the importance of non-human actors, including artworks, in relation to human ones, became revealing.

ANT, I have argued, is helpful in thinking about what happens between the critical writer and the artwork. But, perhaps paradoxically, the work of writing involves certain acts of distancing, as this chapter makes clear. As I examined the statements I had recorded during interviews with writers, I began to wonder if these instances of separation implied network breakdown, albeit temporarily.

Writing involves continuity, and so I looked at the writer's experience of working day-to-day. During my fieldwork, which featured a group of critical writers based in the north west of England, I wanted to know how writers can survive and make a living while at the same time maintaining and fuelling the motivation to write. Establishing an income, as well as constructing certain beneficial conditions are both key to enabling the writing to take place and keep taking place.

This chapter begins, then, by describing the writer's workplace, and what it contains, including many of the material accomplices to text production such as the laptop, the mobile device, and the notebook. I look also at the way writers position their physical bodies in order to write, and how their work is not a static process, but one in which humans and objects move about. Details, too, of writers' relationships with partners and family during the hours of writing also appear as important. A picture is assembled of the daily work routine of the writer, the time-based pattern that enables writing to develop and emerge.

In attempting to understand writing as a work-process, I became interested in

examining the kinds of thinking that take place in the writer's mind, from logical and careful to carefree and dreamlike. Gradually it also became evident that writing as work, and as a daily routine, partly involves an element of removal and separation from the distractions caused by, for instance, noise, or broadcast media, or partners – but at other times involves a desire for distraction and a reconnection with the outside world, which causes, periodically, a distancing from the evolving text. This movement, which I interpret as a rhythm, leads me towards thinking about what happens when writers in networks "disconnect," even for a short period of time. I continue my examination of the issue of separation/connection in writing work by examining the extent to which writers experience writing as an isolated activity.

With the critical writer's need to pitch and sell ideas to editors, project managers, publications and institutions, the connectedness and continuity a writer maintains and works for can also be compromised by rejection. I therefore explore the relations writers build with those who commission critical writing, and I find out about the resilience writers learn and use to address criticism of their own work.

As Pascal Gielen notes in an ANT-related account of the contemporary art world, (Gielen, 2015: 30-31) networks can remain connected by their "tensions, contradictions and controversies", and even the production of a hostile review can therefore reinforce a network in the context of a local art "scene" (as Gielen puts it) or more widely, across contemporary art globally.

All that matters in terms of ANT is the network's "binding factor", which in the case of this research is the production of critical writing on contemporary art in the north west of England. In this chapter, therefore, I try to expose some of the tensions and difficulties experienced in text production, from the point of view of the writers whose time and effort is spent initiating it, developing it, writing it, pitching it, getting it published, and trying to make a living out of it. Writing is seen as an act of material and immaterial labour.

This chapter therefore moves on to examine the question of payment, and of so-called "free writing," and what motivates writers to keep producing words when little or no realistic reward might be offered. Related to this, in the knowledge that the work of writing often has to combine with other activities and sources of paid work, I also describe some of the ways in which writers balance their time.

In this chapter, too, I continue to think about networks differently, contrasting the way

writers themselves conceive of networks – as connective structures that aid their own development – but also as networks whose junctions can connect but also appear to disconnect. The latter approach, influenced by ANT, has implications for the way I will begin to deal with the importance of entelechy in my next chapter, which explores the way words manifest themselves in the process of writing. In this chapter, however, we are very much positioned alongside the writer, witnessing their day-to-day behaviour in keeping going, continuing to write and continuing to develop their writing.

The Writer's Workplace

All the writers who agreed to participate in my fieldwork answered questions about the ways they work. As stated in my Introduction my primary research question asks if critical writing can continue to benefit the wider contemporary visual art milieu. As I explored in Chapter 2, contemporary art is produced with an awareness of contemporaneity, and from a situation in which a variety of actors, including human and non-human, are constantly interconnecting. But in order for critical writing to be constantly produced and published and for it to circulate in and around that milieu, it is necessary for there to be a body of writers, ready, willing and able to dedicate time to document and evaluate that art, and capable, too of engaging with all the difficulties involved in pitching, selling and placing work for publication. For their writing output to continue through time, enabling them to gain experience, and learn, these writers need to feel as if they will be valued, in some way, for having undertaken that work.

To begin with, I want to show how writing works its way into the writer's world. Once writing has developed into a familiar act of work, and part of a regular routine, work finds its place in space as well as time. This is reflected in extracts from interviews with writers participating in my fieldwork. Many of the writers I have interviewed are self-employed or freelance, and for them, the writer's world is often, but not always, the home. Other writers with more than one occupation also seem to write at home rather than another place of work. In each case, I wanted to get a real sense of the way writing fits into personal space, and the way this personal space is altered and adapted to generate work. Different writers need different settings, of course, and each home is different, but in every instance, writers needed a form of "separation" from work and domestic distraction.

Some, like Sara Jaspan, have a room dedicated specifically to writing. She told me

"We've got a spare room which we use as a study …and my desk is by the window.[31]" Similarly, Sue Flowers referred to "The place I do most of my writing" being "At the computer in my studio. So, it's in an old barn.[32]" These separate writing spaces, like many, more conventional office spaces, are frequently customised by their custodians. Sara Jaspan, for instance, talked about her desk thus: "My desk is a good size. It's pretty large. I think that's quite important, because I think I need space around me to be able to think. When I'm in the middle of an article, usually it's filled with pieces of paper, and notebooks, and articles, and mess. And then at the end of each article it gets cleared away. And it's a fresh desk again, and it kind of mirrors the process of the work developing." Interestingly, though, Sara mentions soon after the extent to which this space of separation, the room with the desk, also contains certain distractions. It features a plant, for instance, and the closeness of the window "Is really important because I spend a lot of time staring out of the window. And I consider that to be part of my work process, and so I know a lot about the street in front of our house". Sue Flowers also describes her desk being surrounded by piles of paper and, referring to her partner's artistic practice, many stacked-up oil paintings, but also, "There's a lot of natural light, which is from the barn roof lights, and I've got a big textile banner that I collaborated with a Ghanaian artist on – so I've got lots of very visual stuff around me." Another home-based writer, Tom Emery, has, however, gradually erased a former, formal sense of separation between work and domestic space. "I always work at home" he told me, "Which I probably shouldn't do, 'cause it does affect motivation and there's too much distraction…And it used to be that I was quite disciplined about that. Where I would sit up at the desk, well, the kitchen table, so I used to have a desk set-up, working properly, but these days I tend to do everything in recline on the sofa, which I really shouldn't do, but I just can't get out of the habit of doing. So it is a very informal, relaxed, lazy, easily distracted workspace. Which probably does not contribute very well to me working. But I can't seem to get out of it."[33]

There seems to be some significance here in Tom's sense of not being able to "get out of the habit" of adapting a physical position and situation where he is easily distracted, because despite it, he retains the ability to write. In his case, and those of Sue Flowers

[31]Sara Jaspan, second interview, recorded 05.11.2018, HOME, Manchester.

[32]Sue Flowers second interview, recorded 19.11.2018, at the Harris Museum, Preston.

[33]Tom Emery, second interview, recorded 01.11. 2018, Righton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University.

and Sara Jaspan, the line separating writing from the home environment is permeable. This reminds me of Walter Benjamin's famous observations on the architecture of Naples, where "The stamp of the definitive is avoided" (Benjamin, 1985:169), and "porosity" makes ambiguous the difference between, for instance, building work and dilapidation, or privacy and communal life.

This "porousness" is characteristic, too, of the lines separating writing-work from domesticity in the home of Joanne Lee, a lecturer and artist whose practice focuses on writing and self-publishing. For a significant period of time her writing has been done "Usually in a room where there are other things going on. Like my partner's there, you know, maybe, sometimes the television's on and I've headphones in." [34]Talking to Joanne, who is in her fifties and is the oldest of the writers taking part in my research, I got the impression this work arrangement is well-established, as she added, "When I was living in a one-bedroom flat, that was very much the case." Describing the current scene in more detail, she continued: "I write at home in the sitting room," which she described as "Like a weird joined space, so we've got a fire in the middle and two rooms - it's like a stove in the middle and two rooms that come off it. So, I can sit in one room slightly away from the chaos of, I dunno, Bargain Hunt on the telly, and I'm on the other side of the wall, but I can see my partner and he can see me." Jo described this as arrangement as, "Sort of companionable, we're doing different things, but in the same space." This arrangement, "porous" in terms of separation between work and domestic spaces to those of the writers I mentioned above, but more formally arranged, makes it possible for there to be a strong element of connection with her partner. Jo's description almost suggests their relationship acts as a partner to her writing.

But it would not be accurate to conclude that all the critical writers I have spoken to work in separate spaces with porous borders around them. One writer who puts a great deal of effort into separating writing from opportunities for distraction is Jack Welsh. "I've developed strategies to maximise writing," he said, "So for me, writing in a public environment focuses me. Library, coffee shop. Within a working day pattern."[35]Here Jack also revealed his need to clearly define time as well as space, therefore, in order to avoid distractions. He continued: "I think I'm at my most productive and most clinical in

[34]Joanne Lee, second interview, recorded15.03.2019, Hallam University, Sheffield.

[35]Jack Welsh, second interview, recorded 26.10.2018, Righton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University.

the evening, past half-nine, till about midnight – everything goes quiet and I can just hammer away at everything. And at other times just trying to police those disruptions that can distract you. Social media – I use a blocker. Put it on for three hours, you can't access it at all. Tools like that…" At this point in his sentence, though, Jack revealed a deeper, psychological element in this description of his approach towards his writing work, when he added, "There's always that nagging self-doubt for some bits of writing, that can prolong the amount of time on a piece, I think. Whereas sometimes I just wish I could hammer it, send, that's gone. I over-think, I think." And here, at this moment of introspection during the recording, Jack recalled a moment of connection with someone else. He continued: "I was having this conversation with another writer, we were talking about this very issue, about over-thinking, fact-checking, research… Making sure that (the) environment is right for the piece, when actually a more liberal, free, gut approach can actually be more productive. Obviously, you need to get a balance, but yeah." Interestingly, Jack then remembered that the writer with whom he discussed the issue of "over-thinking" was Tom Emery, who stated to me, "I don't know if I could be one of those people who goes and works in, like, a coffee shop. I don't have an office I could go to. I could go to the library or something, I guess, which I probably should, but I don't, so I just work in the living room." For every writer, the preferred line of separation between the writing-workspace and the surrounding environment, with all its distractions, can vary between porous and impermeable, but in most of the cases of the writers I have spoken to, it can be broken, temporarily, or altered. Even in the case of writers who have a full-time job, like Joanne Lee, her most significant writing takes place in the home, with this porous dividing line very much in evidence.

The Rhythm of Work

I was struck, too, by the amount of physical movement described in statements made to me about writers' work-spaces and writing routines. Sara Jaspan, whose account of her desk and office made it appear so separated from the rest of her domestic space, had this to add: "I think (a) change of environment is also really important, so if I've been working there for too long, then I have to go to work in a café. For a morning. Or something like that. I think it also depends on what kind of work I'm doing. Where I am in the process. So if I feel I've reached a kind of dead end, and I'm struggling, going out and working in a café can really help. But if I'm really in the flow and I've got the right

frame of mind, staying where I am and continuing is good." But Sara immediately returned to talking about the café option. "Yeah," she mused, "A quiet café with the internet is my other working environment. Yeah. With noise-cancelling headphones." These final three words were accompanied by laughter.

An alternative work location was described to me, also accompanied by some laughter, by artist-writer and mother, Sue Flowers: "The other place where I do a lot of my work … is when there's crap on telly, and the guys want me to be with them…" At this point she referred to an additional, recently-acquired piece of writing technology: "I bought a bigger phone. I use it mainly for writing and taking photographs. I should probably get a tablet." This form of writing happens, Sue said, when "I'm comfortable and I'm in the zone, and that has a fire in front of it, a television, and possibly a dog on my lap." Here, again, the importance of human relationships and of family permeates the border separating writing and distraction. The writer adjusts it, letting it settle around her.

Joanne Lee emphasised the extent to which writing arrangements are in fact provisional, temporary solutions. Talking about moving her position when writing, she began by saying, "So the other place I write is on the sofa at home and I've got a footstool, and I sit there with my feet up on the footstool. And my laptop on my lap. And I write like that a lot as well, but I'm starting to become aware that it's not very healthy for me… So, I move between the sofa and my desk, at the moment, to do different phases of things, probably." Her next sentence revealed a further detail, regarding future plans, when she added, "But whilst I can concentrate and get on, whilst other things are happening around, my long-term aim is to have a different base that I can go to write." This reflects how one, very experienced writer's sense of where and how to position themselves when writing has evolved and is continuing to evolve.

In the act of writing about writers and their work patterns, I find myself moving my laptop from the desk in my bedroom to the dining table in the adjacent room, prompting me to wonder if I could apply a form of "rhythmanalysis" to writing-as-work, as described in relation to "space, time and everyday life" by Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 2004), and, separately, by Gaston Bachelard (Bachelard, 2014:85). Bearing this in mind, another "rhythm" is also identifiable in some of the techniques writers use during the production of text, in the way, for instance, two of the writers interviewed, Sara Jaspan and Joanne Lee, both write using devices allowing them to see two different versions of a document at the same time, an IMac screen in Joanne's case and a specially-rigged

"twin screen" Sara has had installed on her desk.

But behind this rhythmic alternation exhibited by writers between engagement and distraction, solitude and company, or one text and another text, there often exists a problem in concentrating on ongoing pieces of writing. Talking about this, curator and writer Lauren Velvick, admitted, "Yeah, I'm terrible at focusing. I really am. I have to … trick myself into it, in a way. Like, I'm a really, really slow writer, so I have to allow myself a lot of time to kind of write a little bit, then think about it for ages, look at something else for a bit, and then kind of come back to it. And then I'll know what I want to say."[36] Qualifying this, Lauren added, "I think some people can just write things overnight and it'll be fine, and if I do that, it's a load of crap. I really need to spend the time kind of going over things and honing things and losing my concentration and coming back to it."

Another young writer, Laura Harris, who writes for a PhD as well as pursuing freelance writing, blames loss of concentration on being "overloaded" with work. Her way of dealing with this is to disconnect. She told me: "I think my ideas are somewhere in the back of my head, and they coagulate whilst I'm cooking, or whilst I'm going for a run, or whilst I'm reading something else. And then I can come back to it in a few days, maybe even sometimes a few weeks. Or a few months. And I'll know what I was trying to say."[37]For some writers, then, losing concentration seems not just to be inevitable, but beneficial and necessary.

It is not unusual to assume distraction indicates some negative aspect about work today, particularly with regard to so-called immaterial labour, relying on the literacy or numeracy of the person doing the work, and their frequent reliance also on the computer. As Josh Cohen put it, in 2018, "In modern Western culture, our individual day frequently becomes one long attestation to our desire not to work. Many of us, even when working hard, turn in hope and comfort to the prospect of stopping, spending large parts of even our most productive days fidgeting, staring into space, distracted by the window or the computer screen. Distraction is usually a form of disguised lethargy, a way of emptying activity of any content, of stopping without really stopping. It is a form of non-work, but one that tends to induce a state of nervous exhaustion rather than rest" (Cohen, 2018: xii).

[36]Lauren Velvick, second interview, recorded 13.12. 2018, via Skype.

[37]18 Laura Harris, second interview, recorded 23.03.2019, HOME, Manchester.

But many writers taking part in my fieldwork seemed to need to be distracted, for reasons that seemed positive, and ultimately beneficial, even though they might have seemed in their statements to have been aware of a fault in the way they went about writing.

When Tom Emery was asked if he ever experienced problems in being able to concentrate on writing, his reply echoed those of the previous two interviewees, "Always!" But he went on: "I always find … once I've got to the point of being concentrated, it's fine, and I can normally just stay focused on it. And work on it until it's done." Describing this in more detail, he built a picture of his concentrated but last-minute approach, "So normally I'll just do the first draft in one go. Sometimes you might break it into pieces, but typically I'll just write it all in one go in a day. Usually the day it's due, or a couple of days after." It was quite easy for him to provide me with a recent example of how this approach works in practice: "So, I had two pieces to write, one of them was due on Monday and the other one was due yesterday. And I'd been to see the shows, I'd done interviews with relevant people, I'd done the research, I'm fine with doing that part, that's the fun part. But then I was fully intending to write it over the weekend, and I ended up not starting either piece. So, I did the piece due on Monday all on Monday, I did the piece due yesterday all yesterday."

Tom's account of this brings me back to thinking about the porousness of his work-home boundary. But in his case, the boundary is not just porous, but perhaps not there at all. "That's just what I'm like with all work," Tom says, "If it's like a normal job in an office, it's fine, cause you're at work or you're at home. But then, that boundary doesn't really exist, and I don't do that well when the boundaries are blurred. It becomes difficult for me to define what's work time and what isn't work time. Cause one day you're going to Newcastle and back, another day you've got to write a thousand words on a Sunday. That typical work structure doesn't exist, so I find it hard to define the boundaries, I guess."

These discussions of boundaries and porosity, and of the rhythms exhibited in the movement of writers to and fro, from one location to another, and even from one text to another, all suggest that moments of "distancing" take place, enabling or causing writers to see or think about what it is they are writing in a different way. They also suggest that writing as work invites a continuous interplay of detachment and attachment.

This finding may present me with a difficulty when considering the importance of connectedness in critical writing, and the importance of junctions and linkages in any analysis involving the idea of the network. Before looking at this, however, it is necessary to develop a clearer picture of what is meant by "detachment." It is evident from what writers have told me that this sense of removal from writing-as-work is sometimes more than momentary or instinctive – removal or detachment is often deliberate and intentional, and takes up additional space in the normal daily routine in the form of taking "time out". I therefore asked writers about the importance for them of "non writing time," revealing, in some cases, a similar need to "de-focus", seen here, for instance, when Sara Jaspan said: "Once a piece has been commissioned, or once I've agreed to write a piece, especially after having seen an exhibition, or speaking to an artist, all those things, having a period of time just to digest that, and not write, is very important. Because that's when a lot of thinking goes on, I think. Not consciously. Not conscious thinking."

Lauren Velvick, who writes as part of her job as a gallery curator, as well as writing freelance, also spoke about "non-writing time" as "Something I've actually consciously tried to carve out. 'Cause I found, like last year, that I had so much freelance work on, and I was working full-time as well, that I'd almost been wringing out every little thing I had to say, and that I wasn't putting anything back in." To rectify the imbalance caused by having "wrung out" everything she "had to say", Lauren went on to talk about "Trying to consciously make time to actually read interesting stuff. And go and see interesting stuff that I'm not trying to convert into a piece of writing." She values reading in particular because "I find if I'm not reading enough, then my writing gets worse. I repeat the same phrases more than I like to… So, if you're trying to have a creative output then having creative input's really important, I think." In Lauren's use of phrases like "trying consciously to make time," or in Sara's preceding remarks about "having a period of time to digest," there is an impressive sense of the writer endeavouring to capture and control their own time, and to use the act of capture to fix a problem they are experiencing with writing. In other words, these are acts of self-monitoring, or self-mending.

Distancing, Isolation and Networks

The act of distancing may seem diametrically opposed to the act of connection, which I

have previously argued, using an ANT approach, is my key to understanding the production of critical text. But in addition to a need for writers to distance themselves, the experience of isolation is also frequently described during interviews with writers. Tom Emery, for instance, sees isolation as inevitable, because, "Obviously writing is something that you do on your own."

Tom also noted that there might be a particular tendency towards isolation outside London, despite living in a big population centre like Manchester. "I think it might be different if you were in London," he said, "Because that's where most art critics are. So it would be easier to run into people." Tom also recalled the experience of isolation particularly when he first began critical writing, "Because then, I didn't know any other writers. Except for other Corridor 8 people who were just doing the same things I was doing. So, when I was trying to break into paid writing it was a case of "I don't have a network to talk to", so I don't really know how to do this. I can email the editor and get in touch, but I don't know what that email is supposed to look like. I can pitch but I don't know what a pitch is supposed to look like." Once again, an element of "self-fixing" is seen here, especially towards the end of Tom's statement where he talks about not knowing what an email or a pitch are supposed to look like. For new writers especially, it seems isolation is not just experiential, but existential, because little basic, practical guidance is available for individuals intending to begin critical writing from scratch.

Jack Welsh, who admitted that he often feels isolated as a writer, went on to mention the importance of social networks in helping him to continue writing critically, even to the point of doing unpaid writing as a way of reconnecting: "I think networks, again even people from CVAM[38] a few years ago, I'm still in contact with quite a lot of those, and Double Negative, Corridor 8, those networks are really crucial. And I think for me doing a bit of writing every now and then, unpaid, just to keep in the conversation … is important. I think sometimes you can forget that other people operate in similar ways."

However, Joanne Lee associates the solitude of writing not so much with isolation but with a connective move, through to readers, and the implications following on from the act of reading. "All writing's ultimately for an audience," Jo said, "But eighty per cent of

[38]CVAN, Contemporary Visual Art Network Northwest (CVAN NW), organised a mentoring scheme between 2014 and 2016, in which many of the writers involved in my fieldwork were involved. A selection from the writing that emerged from this scheme was published as Being Curious: New Critical Writing on Contemporary Art, edited by Laura Robertson, Liverpool, the Double Negative, 2016.

the things that I write are things that I have agreed to write for somebody, so that I feel like there's a connection to somebody else, to the publication, to a context where something's going to happen. So, I don't feel like it's isolated. It connects to a community." For Jo, too, the solitude of writing is important psychologically, despite the porous barriers between the writer's desk and the domestic otherworld. "I really like the time alone," she said, "Things and thoughts. I find it a really – I like to be convivial and social, but I actually really also need it. I can even remember it as a child, I'd play with friends and then need time on my own. Just to sort of come back to myself again. And I haven't really changed. And writing is a very consciously solitary activity and I value it for that, I think. Which is why, when I write at home, I quite like there being somebody else who's doing something nearby, but in a companionable isolation. They're doing their thing and I'm doing my thing."

In relation to the notion of writing alone rather than in collaboration with someone else, Jo commented, "I find writing is kind of "me" time. Because I have written alongside somebody in the past and I found that really hard work actually. I've got to go and write this, usually to a deadline, which also concentrates the mind, so I have a reason to go and do that writing, at that particular time." At this point in the statement Jo provided more detail on writing alone, and her feelings about the space she feels most comfortable in to be able to write, when she added, "I can't write at work. I can't go and find a room at the university. It's just the wrong headspace. I can't go to the library and write. It's too much like, that's work and I need somewhere out of there."

Jo also talked about the other "twenty per cent" of what she does, by which she meant her own Pam Flett Press output, "Which is not for anybody else and is my "myspace", and it is often the thing that gets pressured out because the other deadlines come in and it's harder to justify doing these things "selfishly."" Jo's "eighty per cent" and "twenty per cent" division in her writing work is the equivalent of a similar division observed by Jack Welsh when he talked to me about his writing output being a combination of "commissioned and self- driven work". He and Jo both talk further about the nature of this "self-driven" work in Chapter 7, which concerns experimentation in writing, but here, I want to direct attention to Jo's comments on the way the commissioned work exerts pressure on the self-driven, because the latter seems "selfishly" motivated.

Another element of connectivity that becomes evident during the ostensibly isolated

hours of writing-work, especially during commissioned writing, is the role of an editor (self-driven work perhaps also meaning self-edited). Sue Flowers expressed this when I asked her about the importance of isolation in her writing. She replied: "I think it (isolation) probably helps. But I think it's really important to have that kind of feedback, to put something together. I think the editorial thing's really interesting."

Writers and Editors

With the importance of commissioned work in mind, writers were asked if they put time and effort into developing relationships with editors. Many replies began negatively – a reaction I found surprising, given the need to obtain work in the first place. Lauren Velvick, for instance, answered, "Not really. I probably should do more. If it happens, it kind of happens organically." This suggests an informal approach, perhaps originating in a writer's desire not to appear too "pushy" towards an editor. Sara Jaspan began her reply in a similar way. "Again, it's one of those things where I probably should," she told me, but then followed with a series of sentences that capture how intimidating it is, even for someone who works as an editor (which Sara does) to approach another editor, especially the editor of an established contemporary art journal. "I often find that the editors at the bigger publications aren't interested in developing a relationship. And I've tried to develop them, but always met a bit of a brick wall … for example, Laura (Robertson)[39] put me in touch with 'Paul' at Frieze, and I really wanted to develop that, but I think they're just very busy and don't have a lot of time." Sara's words reflect very much a hierarchy that exists within contemporary art journals, with the London-based Frieze possibly at the top.

Artist-writer Sue Flowers also answered negatively. "No," she said, and here there was once again some laughter before she continued, "Zero…. I just feel like I haven't got the time." Her reasons, including, "a bit of nervousness … confidence" and "not knowing what kind of opportunities are out there," were superseded by unease at the thought of successfully getting a piece of writing commissioned. "How can I fit that into my current working practice?" she asked, rhetorically, "Cause even if it was paid work, the deadline scenario about my other freelance work would be challenging." Here, it seems, is one argument that can be levelled at the phenomenon of unpaid writing, so commonly

[39]Laura Robertson, co-founder and editor of the Double Negative online journal.

associated especially with online journals, like the Double Negative, Corridor 8, and others: lack of a fee puts off experienced artists or writers from pitching ideas, and therefore these publications have to concentrate on developing new writers, and continually encouraging more of them to consider taking up critical writing.

But even among the youngest writers I talked to, such as Laura Harris, a PhD researcher who pursues a variety of writing projects including critical writing, the idea of developing links with editors seems difficult. "Well, not really," she replied, "Kind of. I mean, it's all (done) over email, so I have these names that are constantly in my life, like Chris, Isabella, but I've no idea who they are or what they look like. Or anything about them. So, I'm always very polite and professional in my emails, but even in my professional life I've never been motivated by networking or making contacts. It seems to me to be a very alien way of operating." I was interested in those final two sentences and the association between "networking" and "making contacts" which Laura finds an "alien way of operating." Here, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the word "network" seems to be associated with a rather cold or cynical process whereby social contacts are built up with a view to generate communication advantageous to the writer. Recalling what Lauren Velvick and Sara Jaspan said above, also, this approach to developing a network seems to be what they feel they "ought" to do, but have not, preferring what Lauren referred to as a more "organic" approach.

One writer strongly supportive of developing relations with editors, although he did not use the word "networking" in what he said, is Tom Emery. "I mean, you have to, don't you?" he began, "If you want to write for art magazines … You have to cultivate the relationships with editors." But having said that, he added another important detail about writing outside London: "It's a funny relationship. Because especially living in Manchester rather than London you rarely if ever meet them in person. I've met Patricia (Bickers, editor of Art Monthly) a couple of times. I've never met anyone from Frieze, or Art Review, or – I've met people from Corridor 8, but they're people based in the north." Tom's statement very much reflects again the extent to which the established art press is based in London, but his words and those of Laura Harris, previous to him, also convey a strong sense of how "impenetrable" the London-based art press seems, to writers based outside London. Here, perhaps, we encounter another version of isolation for writers.

"It's a funny relationship," Tom continued, "And I guess, it's not much of a relationship,

either. It's kind of a one-way thing, where I'm just sending little pitches and then hoping that they will be responsive to those pitches. And there's not much other than that. So, it's cultivating a relationship in the sense that I'm trying to, over time, over a kind of trial and error of sending them things, and seeing what they respond to, and trying to figure out what they like. Yeah, I guess that's really kind of the extent of the relationship, you know, we're friendly by email, but I don't really know any of the editors I work with. So, it's kind of a weird one." The impression Tom creates here very much emphasises the extent to which the emerging critical writer based in the north is forced to learn "on the job", and to self-maintain and self-fix through evolving, semi-understood relationships with publications based in London.

"The north" – because it is the locality in which the writers taking part in this research happen to be based – is perceived by most writers who talked to me as providing better relationships with locally-based editors. Sara Jaspan sums this up with her comment: "There are editors that I have developed a really good relationship with over time, and there hasn't been a pro-active, conscious attempt to develop it, it's been more natural. And I guess those are the publications like, for example, Corridor 8 or the Double Negative or Creative Tourist, before I became exhibitions editor, where I've worked with them a lot over a sustained period of time." As I have mentioned, however, the publications based in the north do not usually pay a fee, and continually have to encourage new writing and inexperienced writers as a result.

Paradoxically, one writer recognised the possible importance of a negative relationship with the female editor of a publication. As Laura Harris recalled, "I recently wrote something for the White Review and I really didn't enjoy the editing process, or her attitude towards editing, so I'm probably not going to pitch to write with her again. So I suppose that is a relationship of sorts. But just the opposite of what you asked about!" The identification of a negative link in a network echoes the examples of disconnection or possible network malfunction or breakdown I refer to elsewhere in this chapter.

It is important here to note, however, the ways in which Lauren Velvick, Jack Welsh, and others, interpret the term "network." As previously noted in Chapter 4, rather than seeing a network in ANT terms, writers I was talking to saw networks as they have experienced them, consisting of human actors. Moreover, they are seen not just as connected groups of individual humans, sharing information and advice, offering support, and, sometimes, friendship, but also as networks that can and should be built

deliberately, as an act of self-help. This is further reflected in many of the comments I heard and recorded when I talked to writers about experiencing rejection from editors – which is an aspect of writing work that one interviewee, Jack Welsh, said "Used to be the spectre in the room," until Jack learned how to deal with it.

Tom Emery reflected a widespread attitude to rejection. "I guess you learn not to take it personally," he said to me, "I don't get too invested in anything before I've written it. Just because I know that most of the time, the things that I pitch are going to get rejected." Tom's reason for saying this, however, once again returned to the issue of writing from the north, when he continued, "Especially because the magazines are all based in London, or internationally, and you're stuck here in Manchester, writing about regional stuff. So, I know if I'm pitching a review of a show, in Wakefield or whatever, then Frieze aren't that likely to pick it up. So, I'm expecting from the start there's a high possibility it's gonna get rejected."

A similar sense of self-developed resilience was expressed by Lauren Velvick, whose work elsewhere in the arts sector had already prepared her to expect rejection as a writer. She told me: "I'm so used to applying for things and not getting them and so I think you become desensitised to it really … it's par for the course."

Writing in academia also sometimes creates problems surrounding rejection, according to Joanne Lee, who told me about one "terrible incident" in which a conference proposal was accepted, "And it went to peer review. We got some comments back. We addressed the comments, sent it back. And then never heard anything. Like for months. And like academia being academia, I wasn't really unduly concerned. They want it tomorrow and then you never hear anything for eight months. And then it's gonna happen in two years' time anyway. But what had happened in between times was that they had decided that our article didn't fit with the scope of the other pieces, in the end, that they'd received. And they'd decided not to include it. But there were two editors to the journal and each one thought the other one had told us."

Attending exhibition launch events, press conferences or press trips also drew unenthusiastic replies from writers. "Most of the time they're not useful," Tom Emery told me, "I go to private views, but normally that's just in a social context. I don't normally go to the private view of the shows that I'm writing about. Just because anyone that visits private views knows that's the worst time to actually see the exhibition." The "social context" Tom referred to is also mentioned by others, including

Lauren Velvick, who said about attending launch events, “It can be like a nice thing to do, in terms of networking, sometimes, but not so useful from a writing perspective.” Again, the word “network” is used here, to talk about developing relationships between writers, artists, gallery staff, and others. Its importance is noted by many writers, in relation to launch events, but not seen by most of them to be essential or unmissable; there is a sense that if you miss one launch event, you can always go to another.

The press-related event was generally seen negatively, too. “Having seen the kind of press and marketing machine in the arts from the other side,” added Lauren Velvick, who works full-time as a curator, “I tend to think my own research is going to be more useful than what I’d be given at a press launch, if I’m really wanting to do some critical work.” Marketing departments only seem to be favourably regarded during major events like city-wide festivals where journalists have to visit multiple venues, as Tom Emery describes, recalling his visit to Glasgow International in 2018: “If you’re on a really tight schedule, and you just need to see the show really quickly, then having a minibus to take you round all the venues is helpful, especially just like in Glasgow, some of the exhibitions or projects were quite far apart from one another. It’s not that easy to get around on foot. But then, for Liverpool Biennial, I decided to skip the actual bus tour and just go round on my own, cause everything’s, like, walking distance.”

Tom also talks about visiting shows in order to review them as a task requiring as little distraction as possible. “So, in that specific set of circumstances,” he said, “I don’t really like to speak to people. When I’m reviewing the show I just want to go, and see it preferably on a quiet day. Occasionally if there’s a performance or something, you kind of have to go to the preview. If there’s something that you need to see. Otherwise I try and skip them.” In relation to exhibitions, then, the important moment of linkage is between the writer and the artworks; press officers and marketing staff are seen as almost superfluous – unless, as in the case of minibus tours of Glasgow International, they are providing, free of charge, a service for which writers cannot ordinarily afford to pay.

On Payment

All the writers I interviewed were asked whether they get paid for their writing. In most cases the first critical work they succeeded in getting published will have been in journals or platforms that are based locally, in the north of England, and appear online,

usually offering no fee. Following this, writers were able to start writing for nationally known, London-based art journals, many of which do pay their contributors. In some interviews, there was a sense of having learned to write critically by working for a certain time without payment. Lauren Velvick, for instance, told me: "I do get paid now. When I started writing reviews I didn't. But then, I also didn't know how to write reviews when I started, so I was pretty happy with that. I wasn't comfortable asking for a fee at that point, because I didn't feel like my skills were something I was wanting to sell. You know, I didn't feel like I'd developed them enough. Whereas now I feel like I have."

In Lauren's case, and those of most other writers I spoke to, writing occupies only one part of their working lives. Artist-writer Sue Flowers, who admitted to me "I rarely get paid for my writing," then went on to associate that fact with the way she balances writing with all the other arts-related activities she takes on. "If I was paid, I could treat it more seriously as a job," Sue said, "And I would prioritise time to do it." The two preceding extracts, from Lauren and Sue, illustrate the contrasting forces exerted on writers who work for nothing. "Free writing" encourages the writer to a certain extent, by publishing texts, and encourages them also to develop their skills with editorial guidance. But lack of remuneration causes the writing to be less of a priority, if, or when other forms of paid work are also available.

From the point of view of the publishing platforms that cannot pay fees to writers, there exists a great deal of sympathy for them. For Mike Pinnington, for instance, not being paid has been part of his own experience. "I've been in this situation loads of times," he said to me, "So there's loads of stuff I've written where people have just been very vague about whether there is a fee or not. It's not come up at all. And so … I've written that thing, before I've known that I'm not getting paid for it." [40] Mike's comment highlights the way in which some publications never actually mention the lack of a fee unless the writer brings up the subject. He continued: "So I'll just be as transparent as possible with any young writer, any writer that comes to the Double Negative. I'll just be transparent and say what I can offer and what I can't offer in the given circumstance, really." However, Mike was not able to foresee a time in the immediate future when web-based sites like the Double Negative can offer payment, no matter how much they

[40]Mike Pinnington, interviewed 15.04.2019, FACT, Liverpool.

might want to. “Ultimately, yeah, I’d love to pay every writer that comes to us,” he said, “Because I think the standard of content on the website … the quality is high enough to be paid for. So now we’ve reached that point we should be paying for everything but I don’t know what the model is, unless I become so great at selling advertising space or I get someone who I can afford to pay for once a week, to sell advertising space for us, I’ve no idea what the model is.”

However, as Tom Emery explained, even the journals that do pay writers are not all able to offer generous fees. “I generally earn a very small income,” Tom said, “In relation to my general income, writing is a significant part of that. I still wouldn’t describe it as very much. ‘Cause the fees aren’t very high, there are only a small number of publications that exist, and even fewer publications that actually pay the writers. So – you know, well you just figure the number (of pieces of writing) that you could realistically do (in) a month. Still, even if you were doing that every month, you still wouldn’t earn very much money from it. There wouldn’t be enough to earn a living.”

Tom therefore concludes that the only way for him to earn enough by writing would be “If I broadened what I was writing about. To just be more of a journalist, I suppose more of a general culture journalist. And even then, that would probably mean going to London. And it would mean – you know, I feel quite comfortable, quite confident, writing about art, ‘cause I’ve spent quite a long time within it. Whereas I’d have to learn something entirely new if I was going to start writing about theatre or music or whatever.”

Speaking for myself as a writer, I come from what Tom referred to as a “general culture journalist” background, and I only started writing critically on contemporary art in my mid-50s. But most of the writers I have spoken to, ranging in age between their 20s to their 50s, continue to exist, and persist, within a wider arts community, where working for little or nothing is an accepted everyday reality. It may therefore also be important here to consider the issue of “precarity,” and to assess whether or not critical writers see their situation as having anything in common with other workers who have to survive, for instance, on short-term or “zero hours” contracts. Here I am interested in finding out how much writers share a sense of their own economic insecurity with other workers, especially in the field of the arts.

Sue Flowers, for one, sees working in the arts as increasingly becoming impossible for some. “I know many people from many different walks of life, who work in the arts,”

she told me, “And … particularly at the moment, with the state of the economy, people are being asked to do more and more for less and less. And if people have got a private resource, then great. But it just means a lot of talent’s going unseen, unheard. And I think it’s wrong and it’s really sad as well… I’m feeling that a lot of the people that I’ve grown up with through the arts and are managing to keep going are the ones that are a bit better off.”

As Jack Welsh explains, this situation may seem extraordinary to people who are not familiar with working in the arts, no matter how close these people may be to a critical writer. “My partner, who’s super-supportive, who’s not in the arts,” Jack explained, “She cannot understand this – “*You’re going and you’re not getting paid?*” – she just can’t fathom it. I feel like a complete idiot trying to justify myself sometimes.” But, as Lauren Velvick points out, not writing because it fails to pay may lead to a loss of opportunity for some: “I do have a bit of a problem with people sort of declaring to younger writers or people who are emerging, like, *“never write for no fee.”* Because (sigh), at the end of the day, we’re living under austerity politics, at a time when funding is being cut, and refusing to ever do anything for no fee is just gonna cut out a great swathe of people from ever trying.”

I have witnessed just such advice being given to young writers, at one event held at the Tetley, Leeds, when I listened as a London-based critical writer give exactly the same advice Lauren referred to: *“never write for no fee.”* Ironically, the event was held by the online journal Corridor 8, which did not, at that time, pay its writers[41].

Much of this discussion about “free writing” parallels Mark Banks’ comments on the debate the UK in 2011 surrounding unpaid internships, a debate that led to “the sight of various politicians, arts organisations and managers distancing themselves from the offering of unpaid internships”(Banks, 2017:104-5), thus putting “issues of exploitation and class inequality back on the agenda of cultural work.” The difference here, as I have explained, is that critical writers work and write generally in a freelance capacity, and that the offers of “politicians, arts organisations and managers” are less direct, less first-hand. But what remains interesting about “free writing” in the contemporary art milieu, is the way even experienced writers will keep doing it, albeit occasionally. As Lauren Velvick told me, “At times when I’ve been working part-time or freelance, if it’s

[41] In December 2019 Corridor 8 announced that from 2020 it would wherever possible pay writers with support from organisations and that published writing will appear as “supported content.”

something that I've been really interested in or something I'd really like to support and I don't feel like it would detract too much from my other duties, then, yeah, I will do stuff for free. Like voluntarily, but it just depends on weighing up the pros and cons." And Jack Welsh stated, "I will take on, let's say, a Corridor 8 review if it's interesting and if I've got the capacity to do it. For me there's a lot of value in that. As a supplementary every-now-and-then thing. In terms of a ratio, I would say, one in three? One in four? I'd get paid for. Pieces of writing of different sizes, different lengths. And the other three, no."

I was interested in the way Jack says "there's a lot of value" for him in writing a review for no fee, because he is, of course, not referring to financial value, but the "cultural capital" described by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986: 241-258), which, in critical writing's case, would refer to an increase in knowledge and experience, and possibly a widening of connections. But equally, writers can learn ways to pare down their own spending in order to take on unpaid work, as Jack Welsh also noted: "In terms of payment I always try to get at least travel expenses. If it's not in Liverpool or Manchester. If it's further away, look for the cheapest travel, buses, etcetera, to bring travel costs down." By doing this, writers perhaps perpetuate the free-writing situation to the advantage of galleries, museums, and arts organisations, while still believing they, as writers, are gaining experience, and getting published.

However, some writers, Tom Emery included, refuse to write for nothing. When he described his reasons for this, a picture emerged of his transition from being someone who encountered art in transitory ways to becoming a paid writer, and, in so doing, creating texts that have a "permanence" about them. "I wanted to do something to sort of be engaged with the art scene around me," Tom recalled, "Rather than go to shows, look at them a bit, and then forget about it. I wanted to do something that made sure I was concentrating. And critically engaging with what was happening. It was only later after I'd been doing it for a bit that someone else suggested to me I could get paid for it. That began to be a real possibility. And then once I started getting paid for it,it kind of became impossible for me to be motivated to do it for free anymore." Like many of the interview extracts included in this chapter, Tom's statement was punctuated, and ended, with laughter.

Conclusion: Networks and Writing Work

I have been writing about writers and the way they work, identifying ways in which writing as a daily routine and an act of work can relate to a writer's involvement in networks. Within the chapter I have identified two different interpretations of the word "network", the first of which, expressed in simple terms could be termed "perceived networks," which are networks as writers themselves conceive of them and experience them, connecting the writer with other writers, artists, editors, and arts workers. Elsewhere, I describe networks bringing together human and non-human actors, as theorised in ANT analysis. Following an ANT approach, and using interviews with writers to investigate lived experience, I have examined the way work patterns among writers constantly connect, disconnect and reconnect. "Porous" barriers surrounding places and spaces of work, for instance, encourage this movement, which I have referred to as a "rhythm", a term drawn from Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. Even situations like solitude and isolation, relating to the writer's need to distance themselves from their current text, can be seen also to be acts of disconnection and reconnection with the network that is producing that text. This, together with the writer's tendency towards self-mending - learning resilience, for instance, after experiencing rejection from editors, or working out the vagaries of the London-based art press from a regional perspective–can collectively contribute to the "mental mobility" associated by Gielen (Gielen, 2015) with immaterial labour. I have observed too, how in the north west of England, in particular, the rise of online journals specialising in contemporary art and culture, offering unpaid space for emerging writers, and publishing a constantly-renewing flow of text, are giving rise also to a focus, for these writers, on self-education, opportunism, and potentialisation.

Following on from this, my next chapter will develop a deeper understanding of the different approaches that writers take towards writing critically, and the process of putting words together, as it is experienced by critical writers. Interview extracts build a picture of the way words are assembled, and texts produced, in an actualisation of potential that I refer to as entelechy. I explore the ways ideas are generated and turned into finished pieces of writing, and the extent to which writing is carefully planned or more improvised. I discover what critical writers gain from writing collaboratively, with artists, for instance, and I explore ways in which writers also respond to writing by others. Writers also talk about their involvement in their own websites and blogs, aiding a knowledge of their own development and sense of writerly identity. I consider the

extent to which writers are performing when they write.I think about the way the material and immaterial work of writing contributes to the contemporary art world of the northwest region, and I begin to create an impression of how entelechy is produced by networks, as conceived in ANT.

CHAPTER 6

Entelechy at Work: Where do the words come from?

Introduction

In my previous chapter I began to examine how critical writers approach the process of writing, as a routinised form of work as well as a series of activities that encourage and promote the production of text. In what follows, I will describe ways in which critical writing comes into being as text; how words appear and build up on the screen and on the page, evolving towards completion and publication, or presentation, for a possible audience. Here, therefore, the writers who participated in my fieldwork talk about ideas becoming workable, worked-upon pieces of text. Looking at writing in more detail, they talk about how they revise, edit and complete their pieces of writing.

Having said that, I am aware, even as I am writing this, that I am not, so far, quite conscious of my text's content, as it will stand when I have completed it. How will I go about saying what I want to say? I may think I have an approximate idea. But the way the text gets written is often rather hit and miss. Moment by moment, typing this on a laptop, I lock into the action of making *this* word and then *this* word, this sentence and then the next, adding, I hope, to what I've already written, and to an overall, growing and expanding written discourse. But sometimes I subtract, I remove, and I rewrite. At this stage, of course, the chapter is only just beginning. I need to select extracts from my interview transcripts, put them into some kind of order, and think about what the interviewees were saying, as they said it. Their words will interplay with my own. My writing may therefore lack a clear direction, but it does not come into being from within a linguistic fog. There is a potential in the materials at hand and in the purpose of the project itself, and in the intention of the writer, this writer.

I intend to treat writing as an example of *entelechy* - a word that originates in Aristotle's philosophical distinction between potential and actuality, describing the realisation of the former into the latter. This is one theme I will go on to explore in what follows. With the help of my interviewees' spoken words, I will show how changes in writers' approaches can stimulate the putting-together of words, in relation to contemporary art. I begin by looking at a writer's sense of what it is for text to become "actual" or "real." I also look at collaborations, between writers, artists and others, in order to produce work that may consist of, or can include, new text. This is followed by an

examination of the way planning and editing affect writers' construction of words. Artworks and exhibitions themselves are, of course, also a key source for the production of words, and I look in detail at the interaction of critical writer, artist, artworks, and institutions, in three case studies, using an ANT approach that situates artwork and writer as actors in the same text-producing network. Here, I also return to the dimension of time, looking at the diaries that writers kept over two separate months in 2018 in order to observe the way texts developed over time, and took up time to write. Diaries and interviews also contribute to findings concerning the way certain texts emerge from wider conversations, again taking place across periods of time.

And so I write. And it seems I have written something – a paragraph or two. But I've also paced the floor, walking from one room to another and back, and, in the manner of some of the comments made by writers in the previous chapter, I have distracted myself, by doing unrelated tasks, like housework. I think, because of this, about the loss of writing potential these activities have caused, reminding me of other questioners of potential, captured in literature, notably Bartleby, the humble copywriter at the heart of Herman Melville's story, whose character and behaviour has been analysed by many, including Giorgio Agamben. Some consideration of Bartleby will conclude this chapter. Despite having ability, Bartleby begins to greet the work he is given, and subsequently any approach made to him, with the famous words, "I would prefer not to." To a certain extent, all writers can find themselves in the position of this strange character at any time, by losing time, wasting it, or failing to do anything with it. Yet, by re-engaging with their potential, and returning to the keyboard or the notepad, the critical writer confirms their on-off conversation with contemporary art and the networks generating its continuation and circulation, by bringing into existence a physical object in the form of a text.

When Writing Becomes Real

As a way of beginning to investigate this process of transformation, in which potential is actualised, all the writers who participated in my research were asked when they thought an idea became a "real piece of writing" for them. The results were revealing. At one extreme, reflecting an attitude of pure practicality, we have Tom Emery's instant response: "When someone commissions it, I guess!" which was followed by laughter, and shortly after, some details on selling an idea to an editor. "Basically, I might do a bit

of work on a pitch, if I know that it's a publication where they like you to work on the pitch. Or I might just fire ideas at people. But then it doesn't become a real piece of writing until it gets commissioned."[42]

Answering the same question, Sara Jaspan replied in a very similar vein: "It's essentially when I've been commissioned to write something. So an idea becomes a piece of writing, I guess, once we've had the process of 'I've pitched it, and it's been agreed,' and all those things. I guess the idea becomes a piece of writing for me as soon as I've opened a Word document and started putting down my first ideas."[43] For writers like Tom and Sara, knowledge that the writing will be published is reason enough to begin to actualise the text.

For Jack Welsh, however, the fact that he writes "self-driven" texts, as well as work that has been commissioned from him, means that he sees what he writes in terms of an evolving "process". He told me: "I think it would be when you reach a certain point in the process, so for me, whether or not that's the self-driven piece of writing to something you've agreed to write."[44] This process Jack refers to has two stages, as he went on to explain: "For me it's always in two halves… the research, idea development, drafts, planning, getting there if you're going somewhere for example. …Once you've kind of at least committed – it's that point when the first draft happens." Jack makes the text actual, it seems, by building up to a sense of commitment to the work, at which point it becomes a first draft, a "real" piece of writing. Lauren Velvick had a similar point of view, when she described the way she works to make an idea into textual reality, in terms of the time she takes. "I tend to jot down some ideas and then have a break for a bit," she stated, "And then sometimes I percolate over what I really want to do with it, and then go back to it, and make it into something readable by other people."[45] Identifying more precisely the moment when actualisation happens, she added, "So I guess that at some point during the gap between an initial draft and the first edit."

For another highly self-driven writer, Sue Flowers, who is a practising artist, the actualisation of text goes back to an even earlier phase – to that of having an idea in the first place. Beginning her reply to my question, her words were: "If there's something

[42]Tom Emery, second interview, recorded 01.11. 2018, Manchester Metropolitan University, Righton Building

[43]Sara Jaspan, second interview, recorded 05.11.2018, HOME, Manchester.

[44]Jack Welsh, second interview, recorded 26.11. 2018, Manchester Metropolitan University, Righton Building

[45]Lauren Velvick, second interview, recorded 13.12.2018, via Skype.

that really touches me, just a concept … it's at the point of experience, I would say." Going into more detail, she added, "I do take a lot of notes. Even if it's just a little phrase, or something someone's said in conversation. I write it down. And I've got hundreds of notebooks. I keep everything on my notepad on my phone so that I know with my writing it's all in one place … so I might write that little phrase or that little idea there, and then a week, several days, maybe even a few months, revisit it." [46]

So far I have described the ways in which writers perceive a text beginning to emerge from potentiality to become a "real piece of writing" perhaps when an idea is made note of at an early stage, or at the moment the idea is commissioned, or when the writer reaches a draft stage of writing. Some writers, however, do not sense that their work has become "real" until publication. Corridor 8 editor and freelance writer and blogger, Lara Eggleton told me, "Often it's other peoples' responses, I guess reader responses." The example she gave me was a recent blog: "I put it out there into the ether, but I don't expect anyone to read it. My blog is like my saved space. But then someone wrote to me and said, oh wow, I really like what you've written and it really chimed with me."[47] Describing the way her blog works, Lara said, "I try to be spontaneous, it's about me writing something and not over-editing it, and not kind of over-thinking it. And I think that's what often makes it meaningful for someone else. That rawness … has a freshness and a spontaneity to it. Sometimes I think that is the finished work, that's what I'm aiming for, something that actually jumps off the page and the screen and I've achieved that by not working or overworking it." But, perhaps more from the standpoint of an editor, Lara added, "I guess if I'm talking about critical writing or academic writing, then it, to some extent, it is about the publication. It is about the final review. The final peer review or the proof that you tidied up and there's no ends hanging out. And there's something different about that kind of writing. Where you need a bit of closure. Where it's going live somewhere and you can't edit it anymore and it has to be done." Print and publication, then, supply another possible moment of "actualisation".

Yet another perception of what it is to feel your text to have become "real" as opposed to a possibility, and remaining therefore in a state of potentiality, was provided by Laura Harris, whose immediate reply to my question was: "I don't know if it ever does." She

[46]Sue Flowers second interview, recorded 19.11.2018, Harris Museum, Preston.
[47]Lara Eggleton, second interview, April 16.04.2019, via Skype.

continued, “I always feel like the idea is never quite achieved by the texts that I produce, because at the moment I’m more interested maybe in the form of writing, rather than what I’m writing about.”[48] Explaining this mention of “the form of writing”, Laura continued, “I’ve been doing a bit more experimental stuff. And I feel I’ve got this idea of what I mean in my head, but I’ve never achieved it in my actual writing.” Laura was one of the youngest to participate in my fieldwork, and, like many others involved in this research, took part in the CVAN NW mentoring scheme of 2014-16. Perhaps the sense of dissatisfaction I sensed in her reply partly is a reflection of the constraints placed upon her by what she is required to write, especially when it comes to commissioned work. Talking about this, in fact, Laura went on to mention “The reviews that I’ve had published in particular, I tend to find that I’m not particularly proud of them, because I find reviews quite boring. I never read, really, other people’s reviews.” But Laura Harris also qualified her answer, echoing Lara Eggleton’s earlier remarks to the effect that an idea could also be considered to be “real” when it eventually appears in print. “If I see it in print,” Laura told me, “Then I always get that sense of distance that you need to understand it as a whole thought, as an idea that you’ve put out into the world. So then I can understand it, like, as someone else might see that this is an idea that I’ve achieved through text.” In another statement, Laura talked about seeing a finished text in print in even more physical terms, when she added, “There’s something special about seeing what you’ve written, actually, materially, in your hands.” However, Laura’s dissatisfaction still persisted among these thoughts, rising to the surface in another sentence: “I always feel I could’ve done something else, or I didn’t quite do what I meant to do. Or it didn’t quite work how I thought it would.”

In the reply given by one other participant in my fieldwork, there seems to have been a combination of all the above observations. The artist-writer Joanne Lee began by stating, “I think it depends what it is. Some things feel like they’re quite applied … they are a real thing, from the beginning, because the time is so limited to deliver that real thing.”[49]Here, Jo gave me a recent example of a planned project about a street she walks along regularly, to her local tram-stop and back. For this project she had originally intended to combine text and photographs. But an opportunity came along for her to produce a text-only account, for a deadline, thus actualising the project, while the

[48]Laura Harris, second interview, recorded March 23.03.2019, HOME, Manchester.

[49]Joanne Lee, second interview, recorded March 15.03.2019, Hallam University, Sheffield.

photo-text version remained, at the time of the interview, as a possibility for the future. "I think I spend a lot of time finding what the form should be if I'm not given a form," Jo continued, describing the difficulties of deciding on the right way to make a text actual when it is not commissioned within a given style (as would be the case with a journal or magazine commissioning an exhibition review, for instance). Jo then said: "If it's a chapter for a book and it's this sort of book, I can understand that, and even if you push the boundaries of it, you know the space that you're putting into, whereas if it's like … an artist's independent publication, it could be anything from a fifty foot long concertina book to something entirely digital to an essay without words…. how do you decide?" Answering her own question, Jo then added, "I think the content tells me how to decide. It's not just a random thing. It's the form-follows-function idea. The stuff tells you what it needs to be in the end, but it can take me quite a long time to do that if I don't already have a specific location or context in mind."

It appears, then, that potential in writing develops differently towards actualisation, according to the way individual writers perceive it. Entelechy, then, works in fast and slow ways, each writer having a differing ontology of the text's emergence from potential. The reasons for these differences in perception may, perhaps, be associated with levels of experience, or training, or ambition, or confidence. Despite their youth, for instance, Tom Emery and Sara Jaspan both sound practical and confident about text becoming "real" the moment it is commissioned - in Tom's case perhaps because, at the time of being interviewed, he was only interested in writing one kind of critical text: the exhibition review (a form of text Laura Harris dislikes, perhaps because of the stylistic rules it places on the writing). Jack Welsh and Lauren Velvick, however, both perceive the actualisation of text as happening during the process of writing itself, and both express it clearly in their description of the stages of work as they experience it. In her answer, however, Sue Flowers pinpoints actualisation at the moment of having an idea, as if actualisation can only happen because of the existence of that idea, which grows like a seed. Maintaining emotional impact is equally true of Lara Eggleton's comments on blogging, but her editorial and academic knowledge differentiates the blog from the form of text critical writing must take, as she sees it, at the moment of publication, which, as Laura Harris says, is a material actuality. Despite their differences, what I am also struck by, in all of the statements so far explored, is the effort, and the physicality, reflected in these accounts of what it is to actualise an idea into form, into critical text,

each writer capable of itemising the different tasks that they have developed to begin the writing process in what becomes the work of text-production.

Collaborations and Conversations

Inevitably, critical writing on contemporary art involves frequent meetings and conversations with artists themselves, which in the sense of entelechy, or of thoughts concerning art becoming written texts, can be articulated in the form of the interview, or can take the form of a collaboration between writer and artist, with a view to generating new work for both parties. Other forms of conversation involving writers, artists and other arts workers, such as debates on websites or in journals, or even the current common practice among online journals of an editorial callout, also generate written responses. Another way of bringing writers and other practitioners together is the writers' residency scheme, of the sort put into action by journals like Corridor 8 recently, which sees writers based for periods of time in galleries and getting to know gallery staff and artists. Most critical writers who have taken part in my research will be familiar with many of these kinds of writing. In ANT terms, such collaborations open up temporary networks connecting writers, artists, artworks, platforms, and publications with potential to create new work prioritised.

Thinking about my own work, some of the earliest critical writing I succeeded in having published included an interview with the Athens-born performance artist Evangelia Basdekis (someone I have collaborated with subsequently), and a collaboration with the British conceptual artist John Newling, commissioned by the public art programme In Certain Places, based at UCLAN, Preston, that resulted in a book. In each case, I gained much insight into the thoughts of the artist in question, and the workings of their practice, by sharing the same space as them for substantial periods of time. In ANT terms, new texts were produced, but new work for the artists was also completed and validated in textual form.

Many of the writers I interviewed for my research had similar, positive thoughts. Sara Jaspan, for instance, answered my question about artist-writer collaborations in the affirmative. "That's happened quite a few times, actually," she said, "And that's definitely my favourite kind of writing. It's the kind of experience that I've got the most from, intellectually and creatively and in terms of my development as a writer." Curator and writer Lauren Velvick replied in similar terms that also reflected the quantity of the

writing that was generated this way. She replied, “The majority of the writing I’m doing at the moment and over the past year has been artists approaching me to write about either a specific project they’re doing or some specific work, and… it’s my favourite kind of writing to do.” Significantly, Lauren went on to mention the importance of the interactive and conversational background from which a piece of writing of this sort emerges, when she added, “I find just being able to spend that time talking something through with someone and thinking about the different ways you can articulate ideas, through writing, and through the visual, or in space, I find really, really interesting.”
One collaboration, if successful, can also lead to further, similar work, as Sara Jaspan described to me: “At times it’s led to multiple collaborations as well, so for example with John Powell-Jones, I wrote a text for him, and then, about a year later, he approached me for a second time and I wrote a second piece about his work.” The mutually beneficial nature of the interaction between writer and artist was also helped in other ways, according to Sara, because of the way “We also exchanged reading lists and books and that’s something that helps push my thinking forward on certain subjects.” Evaluating the importance of such collaborations, Sara thought, “I’d say they result in much richer writing and I would say that it’s something that should happen more often because I think there’s maybe a bit of a gap where artists don’t necessarily realise they can approach a writer to work with them and collaborate. Or if they do, they don’t really know how to go about it. It’s something that benefits artist and writer and can lead to something more interesting than an exhibition review.”
For some of the writers I interviewed, however, collaborations have become more complicated. Artist and writer Sue Flowers for instance describes a collaboration involving more than one other practitioner, and with no clear time limit set for an outcome. It pre-dated, and to a great extent ushered in, her interest in writing. “A couple of years ago, I worked with a mixed group,” she recalled, “A writer, a musician, a textile artist, and theatre artist and myself. We got together to skill-share and swap ideas. We met sort of once a month, for about two years, to explore what collaboration meant … and I think that gave me permission to be more creative with my use of text, within my artwork… We had a series of one-day, one-off events.” Within the group Sue valued “The importance of a sense of play. But also the sensitivity of people not wanting to lead -(and) that it was a collaborative process.” But she decided to leave, eventually, “Because I got frustrated that we weren’t getting any tangible thing out of it, because

with music and dance and spoken word … it's an instantaneous thing, whereas with the visual arts … you need time to build a "thing"."

Thinking more about why this had happened, Sue concluded, "I think people perhaps were being a little bit over-sensitive, and I thought, '*No, let the writer lead, from a writing perspective. And then we can really immerse ourselves in those other worlds.*' I think I see writing as part of my creative practice now. Which I probably wouldn't have said three or four years ago. That's been a definite shift." Here, I am interested in the way Sue talks about the "thing"-ness of the work of the visual artist, which she contrasts with the ephemeral nature of music or dance, concluding that the text that the writer can potentially link the group and "immerse ourselves in those other worlds". In ANT terms, then, the writer's potential is key to activating a network and bringing forth a text.

Jack Welsh was also rather guarded in his feelings about writer-artist collaborations. "I think it's got to be a creative collaboration," he told me, "And it has to be right for the artist. And it has to be right for me. And the output of that I think is crucial … if it's a puff piece for an artist, there's no real point in doing it." However, Jack continued, collaboration can be "Something … that pushes us both forward, in a way." He thought of one notable example of this, in a collaboration he worked on with the sculptor and installation artist specialising in light, Liz West. "She asked me to write about her work," Jack said, "She was in a position where she hadn't really had anyone respond to her work. And that happened through a series of studio visits, and I wrote an essay about her new body of work, and her relationship with colour. And we self-published small, colourful booklets about the essay, and she's still using some of the text for her artist's statement. …For me, it had a lot of value. Both ways, a reciprocal value."

Laura Harris described to me another form of artist-writer collaboration that she was working on at the time of the interview. This had been commissioned by the online contemporary art journal, theFourdrinier, associated with the Manchester independent gallery, Paper. "I'm writing with my friend Elise Ashby. She does drawing, and I wanted to write about her practice in a way that tried to recreate her practice. So her drawings are very sketchy, you can see the previous forms that she layers over. I wanted to write a text that sort of showed its workings-out." Describing how she saw the collaboration working, Laura explained: "So I'm going to have a paragraph about some element of her practice, that I'm gonna refine down until it's some kind of aphoristic comment about

her work… and I'm doing all of that in Google docs, so Elise can see what I'm doing and how I'm thinking. Each edited paragraph will just have things crossed out, or blocked out …So you'll be able to properly see the thinking. And then Elise is gonna print it off and … draw all over it, and in it, and through it. And she'll be able to edit it as well, she'll be able to scribble out some words, add some other words, sketch over it." In this account, and that of Jack Welsh, it is important to notice how certain collaborations coalesce to form a unique, combined text, which in the case of Laura's collaboration with Elise is part artwork, part text, within an existing publication, and in Jack Welsh's collaboration with Liz West took the form of a one-off illustrated edition.

I also wanted to find out about writer's responses to other writers, after reading their texts and deciding to reply directly in print, or eliciting further thoughts in more indirect written ways. Jack Welsh told me, for instance, "I've done a lot of bits of writing in response to conversations. In response to other bits of writing, almost trails. Conversations between writers around a theme, etcetera, that are all interlinked by the resulting bits of writing. And I always find that quite fascinating. When you respond to someone else's work. I don't do it enough, in all honesty." When he gave me a specific example, Jack also drew attention to the way journals in the region now actively encourage a call and response process. "I think it was at the beginning of the year," Jack recalled, "Through the Double Negative, conversations with Laura (Robertson), and a few others, it was conversations around public art. It was quite a closed conversation. And a similar thing … on class,[50] her and Mike (Pinnington) have published a series about class. Been involved in those conversations."

Tom Emery sees this "response" element in critical writing as being important in even more diverse and generalised ways. "Obviously," he said, "You're writing about art, so you're also reading about it, so you're reading what other people say about stuff, so then it's more a case of that forming more of a general, wider context that something that I might respond to. So then maybe, I guess it's just like thinking about how the piece you're writing fits amongst the sort of general critical consensus maybe. Or the wider context of what other people are saying about it." This comment touches on two important factors in critical writing, the first of which could be referred to as the stage

[50]The Double Negative's strand, entitled Class IS a Big Deal, was triggered by the Panic! Report, (Brook, O;Brien and Taylor, 2018), and resulted in a large number of replies and comments, some not made public by request of the writers. A selection of comments appears in the Double Negative alongside an editorial overview (The Double Negative: 2019).

of current critical debate on a given topic (class, for instance, as seen in the Double Negative's strand, described above, or health, as noted by Sara Jaspan in the piece she describes writing, later in this chapter), and secondly, informed critical insight into art and artists in terms of individual and collective output. Here I am interested in the writer's sense of a network extending into other networks. In ANT terms, the binding factor behind Tom's networks, at any given time, is to actualise potential in the form of texts, but here he is relating this text-production factor with actors, artworks and institutions that might provide further opportunities to extend networks more widely. The writer and the text she or he produces therefore have the potential to produce future texts from the activation of expanded networks.

Planning, Editing, and Writing

In fields such as journalism or academia, the writer is frequently given a formal house style, including a format, a word limit, and a deadline, for a piece of commissioned writing. But even in the field of "self-generated" work, as described above by Joanne Lee or Jack Welsh, where the conventions associated with, say, magazines or journals may not apply, the text still has to find a form, although, as has also been mentioned by Joanne Lee, it can take some time for this to be found, especially if it has not been commissioned and it has no deadline for delivery. The labour that goes into arranging the project into its form involves finding an order, and a requirement therefore to edit; to find a sequence for statements to be made, to juxtapose one statement with another, to open or introduce the text, and to conclude it, despite the fact that many of these requirements may be rhetorical devices.

When the writers participating in my research were asked whether they planned their work in advance, or edited and rearranged their writing as they went along, most responses revealed, at first, a marked reluctance to want to plan. In Tom Emery's reply, for instance, we see an allowance for the constraints that are imposed on most of his written output to do the planning for him, becoming a kind of internalised series of learned arrangements."I don't plan what I'm doing," Tom said, "I tend to be writing quite short things anyway. The longest piece I might write might be fifteen hundred words so there's not a lot of planning you can do for a piece that's that short. You kind of know without having to plan that the intro, the conclusion, whatever else, so the basic structure is there without you having to put much thought into it. So then in terms

of editing and rewriting and rearranging things, I just do that as I'm going."

Sue Flowers was more interested in finding freedom to use time to let her thoughts about the writing develop. "I edit and rewrite all the time, without the shadow of a doubt," she said to me, "I am not a great planner, but I think I would edit and rewrite and leave it and then revisit it … and then when I revisit it I can see whether it works structurally. So then I might get a plan, because for me the most important thing is to get the feelings and emotions down in a very authentic way." Sue's interest in "feelings and emotions" in her writing is born out in her involvement with poetry and self-generated projects, and projects in which visual art and writing overlap and interact.

Another artist working with writing, Joanne Lee, admitted similarly, "I'm a very bad planner in advance." Describing how she used to sketch out a "skeletal sort of structure" she went on to talk about her current approach. "What I tend to do now is I think I sort of trust my brain a little bit more … often it's not a structure or a plan but I'll just jot down a bunch of things – I used to do it on paper, and I do it now directly on to the computer. And I'll just have this quite – it looks almost like a spine on the page … it's sort of like key ideas and usually that'll be a beginning. A bit like a weird shopping list, maybe, rather than a plan. And not all of them will make the final cut." This list or "spine" Jo describes becomes a base from which writing can begin to flow, but, as Jo continues, they allow room for surprises. "As I start writing I usually end up finding that I go somewhere that I didn't expect, and actually - and I tell this to students all the time, and they look at me with sort of horror, because they're trying to write their essay and finish it - but I write in order to find out what I think."

Speaking personally, this is a feeling I have often had about my own writing. Jo went on to explain: "Because I think I know what I think, and then I start with this set of ideas, and then as I stitch them together, or even add to those things, or realise some of them aren't really that important at all, or are clearly related to something else, that's when the thinking happens. So yeah, I think as I go."

Lauren Velvick's answer to my question about planning ahead or editing as she went along drew the answer, "A bit of both." Describing how she works, Lauren created a vivid picture of her colour-coded approach to building and drafting a piece of writing: "Say if I'm reporting on something that's happening I'll make lots of notes by hand, then type the notes up, and differentiate between … the descriptions of what's going on in one colour and then my comments upon what's going on. And they'll be in another

colour. And then I'll make a really loose plan. About the things I want to cover, I'll do, maybe, headings. And then … try to work through it, but it often changes quite a lot as I'm going along."

But Sara Jaspan, much of whose writing has to fit journalistic requirements, also revealed the necessity of writerly freedom. Sara's statement echoes that of Joanne Lee, above, in relating writing, as it develops, to thought. "I used to plan," Sara said to me, "And I probably should plan more. And I do occasionally, if I know I've got a particular argument I want to make. But more often than not, I just start writing and let it develop as it goes. Because I think I find the flow of my articles much better that way, and also, I think, for me, writing is thinking. Very much so. And my structure or argument or ideas form in the writing process."

This view, expressed using the words, "writing is thinking" or writing "in order to find out what I think", as Joanne Lee puts it, is, however, conditional, and dependent on the writing being constantly revisited, as Jo describes: "When I come back the following day, I start from the beginning and I read it from there. And I start moving and correcting and tinkering and adding. So the first bit is worked over and worked over, and fussed with, possibly less as I get to the end. And maybe that's possibly because the momentum of the piece starts to degenerate. At the beginning I'm finding out and I'm thinking, and it's almost like a caring for the text, in some ways, I think I'm sort of fussing over it. And then once it's sort of okay, I feel like the rest of it starts to generate."

This transition into "generating" the writing, once a certain amount of text has been worked over and built up, relating it to the way the writer thinks they might "think", is captured further by Lara Eggleton – using what I think is the significant word, *potential*: "I think writing has that potential to sort of like grab you and pull you under," she said, "Or make you realise after you've written something that you think differently about it. Or that something's not as simple as you thought. So often I find that I can think quite polemically, like there's a danger in me thinking in that way or thinking in binary terms, and I start to write something, and I just think, no there's all these other aspects I haven't thought of. Or there's an inherent contradiction with that way of thinking about it. Or I often find paradoxes. Or I find, in many cases, I would say it complicates things. But in interesting ways." Turning these thoughts back towards her own physical sense of wellbeing, Lara then added, "And also it makes me feel better. I think there's some kind of really therapeutic service that it provides, in the sense that I'm getting something

out, something's wedged in there and I need to loosen. I need to get it out. Also, these roots…" And Lara mentioned at this point that she had just been gardening, before continuing, "But these roots are all kind of tangled, and pulling up a root, of a weed, is like immensely satisfying. And it feels like that with writing, you sort of dislodge something, and it has its own life."

Case Histories: Three Written Projects

Sara Jaspan went on to talk in more detail about a constant, generative approach to planning that she has adopted, citing the example of a piece she wrote for Art Monthly, On Cripping, (Jaspan, 2018: 44)which concerned an event presented at the ICA, London, by the Crip Theory Group, a group of artists who all identify with chronic illness and campaign for its recognition in the art world.

"For something like the On Cripping article a sort of planning process is involved," Sara told me," If it's really complicated subject matter, I'll take copious notes, I'll then transfer them to a Word document, and then I will go through a long process of then refining the notes into another Word document, moving the notes around, grouping them. So it's not a plan where it's like you go through a,b,c, and d in terms of what I'm going to say. But there is a planning, structuring process going on in terms of how I filter those ideas and group them together."

But preparing to write any article as someone working in freelance circumstances also involves working on other pieces of writing at the same time. Looking at Sara's September 2018 diary, it describes, day by day, how the piece for Art Monthly developed, and how her improvised planning process worked, but also how often she was able to work on the Art Monthly piece, alongside her other work, and shared it with others as the piece neared conclusion. Noting how she went to London to attend the event about which the article emerged, on September 1st, she wrote: "Lots of reading, research and note making around the topic during train journey down. Taking notes at the event." On the train back to Manchester later the same day, Sara records she did "admin", including emails and reading, and for the next few days she is occupied by preview-writing for Creative Tourist. On Wednesday 5th, Sara is sorting out her notes: "Tried to dump all ideas into one thematically structured document, but as usual this process spawned further multiple Word documents with more scattered thoughts and ideas." Her next comment reveals a slightly worried turn: "Went on a few walks and did

yoga throughout the day as a way of thinking and managing anxiety." On Sunday 9th, Sara writes that she "Met a friend in a coffee shop, where I worked on AM article – going over and editing what I'd written and trying to draw the piece to a conclusion. I knew what points still needed making but wasn't sure how I was going to end." Later she "Got home, worked on it some more. Sent to the founding artist of the Crip Theory group that the article was about for feedback, also sent to some friends to read over." The deadline for the Art Monthly piece was the following day, Monday September 10, when Sara, after going for a run, "Spent the day implementing feedback from Crip Theory group artist and friends, cutting down to fit within the word count (1,250), proof reading. Submitted at 4.30."

Irregular patterns of writing and development due to the need to fit in other work are also reflected in Jack Welsh's second diary, where one piece of writing is tracked from pitching to completion. On September 18th, Jack responded to a Corridor8 regional editor's callout for a review of Rob Mulholland's temporary installation 'Settlement', at Birkrigg Common, near Ulverston, Cumbria. "I was interested in the site-specific nature of the work and engagement with issues of public art," Jack's diary records. On Saturday 22nd, Jack did research into Morecambe Bay Landscape Art Commissions,[51]"The area and organising transport for visit." This took some time because, as he told me in his second interview, "Extra dialogue came because of the inclement weather. There was a danger the work would actually be pulled. So we were liaising every day, because of the high winds."

His journey to view the work took place on Monday, September 24.th Describing it in the diary, he wrote, "This involved a 3-hour round walk to reach the site and engage with the landscape, which I felt was important to the piece." During my interview, Jack went on to talk about the work itself, a previous version of which had been shown at Heysham: "It consisted of three angular structures. About the same size as Anglo -Saxon dwellings. All reflective with reflective metal cut-outs of people … Three men, three women and two children." However, Jack did not respond altogether positively to the work at Birkrigg, which he felt "Was isolated, had no relationship to the environment." Nonetheless he was impressed with how popular it proved to be with the public. "There were so many people there. It must have been about fifty people, just coming to visit

[51] Commissioned by the charity Morecambe Bay Partnership.

it," Jack recalled, "A lot of dog walkers. I talked to quite a few people, and they, three or four, went to see the first iteration of the work. And said they preferred the first, as well." Describing why this was, Jack added, "In Heysham it was in long grass. And it looked like it had been embedded for a while. There was a churchyard, there were new houses, and for me that's what it really lacked any dialogue with." As an example of what the work may have ignored, Jack remembered that at Birkrigg, "There's a big plot of land for sale. Green land, to become housing, and I don't know, the work didn't offer any real comment." Apart from the time taken to travel and walk the area, and the time that went into avoiding bad weather, Jack was able to add some reasons for his interest in writing about the work, in that "It really sparked a lot of thinking. And I went off and I was researching the history of the area, etc, as I was writing, and it kind of informed what the end content was as well."

On the way home he worked fast, it seems, describing in his diary: "Initial notes and thoughts recorded in notepad and outline of article typed up during the return journey." In my subsequent interview with Jack, he said, "I always try and get everything down…roughly a similar word count, key ideas, so it could be a whole paragraph about an idea to flesh out, and then redraft it and shape it that way. And that's something I do for every bit of writing." Thinking about how this approach came about, or was learned, Jack stated, "I think that's years of speaking to people." He also mentioned the impact of the CVAN mentoring scheme in which several of the writers contributing to this research were also involved, including myself. Jack continued writing the piece over the following two days, producing the first edit on Wednesday 26th and a final edit on Saturday 29th, finally filing the finished article of 900 words on Sunday, September 30th.

My third, rather different example of text coming into being comes from Sue Flowers. As she recorded in her second diary, Sue spent much of September 2018 working as project manager on an exhibition, Whittingham Lives: Hidden Histories – Alternative Futures, at Preston's Harris Museum. The exhibition concerned the former hospital for the mentally ill at Whittingham, near Preston, (once the largest such hospital in Britain, before its closure in 1995). The show explored the role of creativity in relationship with mental health recovery, and contained a combination of archive material and visual art, some of which was produced by Sue herself. On September 3rd, Sue writes in her September diary that she has written a 250-word introductory text for the exhibition. The following day, she reviewed nine panel texts for the exhibition, and then, after

working a full day at Lancaster University, she rewrote on September 6th a panel text about the singer-songwriter, Kevin Coyne, who worked at Whittingham Hospital in the 1960s. The text was "based on interview with former head OT (Occupational Therapy) at hospital for 25 years. Would like to transcribe the interview - no idea when I'll have the time!", Sue wrote. Her longest entry on the show described events on the 7th, thus: "Spent approx one final hour reviewing panel text for WL exhibition - passing on for further editing re accessibility and grammar. Have been doing this in an unpaid capacity - but offered to help with writing because totally love trying to get the key info/context and meaning/ over in an accessible creative way with respect and sensitivity for service users and folk with MH conditions. It's been a team effort around 10 contributors but many only able to stay in their own 'slot' of artist or historian or academic… The short word limit a nightmare because there's so much to say. Keep telling myself less is more." Lower down, Sue added, "Looking forward to seeing what is slashed for the 150 word rewrite."

Talking to me about the experience of working on the exhibition, Sue revealed more than just a concern for short word limits imposed on the writing of exhibition signage. The show was coordinated by three curators, one from the Museum's archive department, one from Social History, and one from the Lancashire Museums Service, plusa a lead artist, a researcher and lecturer in art history from UCLAN, alongside Sue. "And Carol (the researcher/lecturer) and I decided we would try and put the labels together. And then it went through this … kind of – mashup of the different perspectives – and the different voices. And the museum's director was saying, 'it needs to be readable from an eight -year -old's point of view. You can't use that word.' And I've always been aware of accessibility, but you don't want to lose the content. Carol and I spent ages getting it to a point, and then we had to hand it over, and we handed it over, and it became something else."

This seems to have marked only the first stage, however, in the final wording of the exhibition signage, as Sue went on to explain. "I think people tend to work in their silos of experience. And the museum group that ended up finalising it said well we need someone with a mental health perspective, and I said, well, I've got that. Because I've got family members and I can revisit that." Sue was therefore asked to review the signage and pointed out a detail that she considered to be factually incorrect. "It was a phrase that someone had written about Kevin Coyne's work," she continued, "And I

think they'd just looked on Wikipedia as to who he was." Questioning what had happened, Sue then said, "It's like, what is okay? What's okay from a museum perspective? What is okay from a creative perspective? To be able to herd those levels of experience into something that might address a specific challenge, it would have been nice to be in a situation where I could've been responsible for that. And managed it. But I volunteered my time … because I didn't want it to go wrong. So it was outside my project management duties. And both Carol and I gave a lot of time to try and make sense of that."

In focusing on the production of a particular kind of text, this story, which brings together arts professionals from different disciplines in the curation of an exhibition featuring archive material and artworks, presents us with another kind of network. Instead of a two-way dialogue existing between writer and editor, for instance, a plethora of different voices, affecting possible curatorial outcomes, gives way to a stage when the signage gets "handed over" by Sue and Carol, after which it becomes "something else." The example of the Kevin Coyne text not being factually correct when reviewed also indicates how it was the voluntary, unpaid participant in the network who was able to act as a corrective to the final text. In terms of entelechy, the potential actualised in the production of signage text seems to have been met depotentialisation in the form of compulsory compromise across the network, perhaps an unavoidable product of the different "silos" of experience working in the museum, and its politics. What comes across, to me, in all three of the above accounts is the sheer amount of time taken up by engagement and reflection, research and communication with organisations, editors, other writers, professionals and friends, aside and apart from the process of putting words to screen or paper. Responses also show how the artistic phenomenon being considered and written about may not always be a single artwork or show: Sara Jaspan was writing about a live event, involving presentations, films, and discussions; Jack Welsh was writing about sculpture and environmental art; Sue Flowers was co-writing exhibition signage for a show that included archive and contemporary art. In each case, background research and reading were necessary in order to provoke further thought, and in each case, the views of other people also mattered, Jack having spoken, for instance, to sightseers at the Birkrigg site, Sara having spoken to conference representatives as well as her own contacts, and Sue having worked with a group of curators, academics and museum managers.

These interactions invoked networks, in the ANT sense of the word, that combine humans and non-humans. In Sara Jaspan's case, she interacted with conference participants, work presented at the conference, the editors at Art Monthly, and the texts she read in doing her research. In Jack Welsh's case, he interacted with Rob Mulholland's artwork and its landscape surroundings, the dogwalkers and their dogs, contacts at Morecambe Bay Partnership, and editors at Corridor 8. In the case of Sue Flowers, she interacted with a panel of curators, academics and managers, a mass of archive, and an assemblage of artworks, including new commissions. Words emerged in every case over a number of days, in stages, in drafts that were reviewed, corrected, edited, and redrafted until final versions could be submitted, then published or presented.

In all these detailed examples, describing writing projects tracked in diaries, it is noticeable how the potential that is latent within each actor-network to address a subject finds its way to actualisation in the form of writing, along routes that cannot be described as entirely smooth or straightforward. In part, writerly potential struggled at times to become actualised, as time was captured by other forces – ranging from other work-related tasks, to the need to step back from the writing and reflect, to delay caused by weather conditions. In my previous chapter, I examined the importance of "non writing time" for the critical writers participating in my fieldwork. But here, in what has been written and said about examples of work produced in the same month, September 2018, written up in diaries and recalled in interviews, I am observing a more detailed impression of "non writing time" – time that is not just part and parcel of the reflective process generating further writing, but time that consists of delays, hold-ups, conversations, diversions, stress and anxiety, and travel, all seemingly capable of putting off the act of writing, and the actualisation of potential. Intermixed with this are the moments of real encounter with the subject of the writing itself, which in all cases was highly interactive. We imagine Jack Welsh, for instance, in the landscape at Birkrigg, surrounded by it, talking to people, looking at how the artworks relate to what is around them all, and we imagine Sara Jaspan at the event at the ICA, talking, meeting activists and artists as well as note-taking, and we imagine Sue Flowers in meetings and conversations with different arts professionals at the Harris Museum. Sometimes the non-writing gaps are unavoidable, at other times they are wilfully entered into. But around those gaps, and because of them, the production of a complete piece of writing

can be pulled together.

Thinking about this in my own writing, I can identify a similar pattern of gaps patterning the texture of words produced. At the time of writing this, two other writing tasks, one an exhibition review for Art Monthly, the other an essay for an artist's publication, have begun their evolution in note form, the research having taken place only a few days preceding the time of writing this, involving trips to the Humber Street Gallery in Hull and a one-day festival in Liverpool, respectively. Deadlines are looming, but the writing of this chapter takes priority. Even so, I am distracted by emails that must be answered, and other errands and chores that have to be done. Writing takes place in bursts, often moving from one text to another. Every time I switch, I open up another gap affecting the piece of writing I have temporarily abandoned. The potentiality to make words appear is therefore regularly and inevitably subject to interruption. Sometimes, the non-potential affecting one piece of writing overlaps with the potential to write another.

Perhaps, because of the constraints of time, a piece of writing is never really finished, but has to be abandoned, then "handed over," as Sue Flowers described her work for the Whittingham Hospital exhibition, above, or sent to a journal for another editorial eye to pass judgement. But Joanne Lee had another insight into the way writing undergoes another phase of change that is to a certain extent is associated with time for reflection and rest.

"Quite often at the end," she told me, "I then find there's two things that regularly happen. Something that I thought might be going near the end has to be put much higher in the text, so somewhere I thought I was going, I realise is maybe quite a key thing, and maybe it needs to be there much sooner. And I see that happening often." This observation of a "key thing" whose repositioning may (perhaps significantly) alter the structure of a piece of writing, contains a word that re-occurs in the final words of what Jo had to say. Here she referred to her partner. "I quite often say to Mike when I've been writing all day or we're going to go to bed, it's like, okay, I've done it, but the last line isn't quite right yet. Or the last sentence or so… I can't quite get there just at the moment." Describing this in more detail Jo recalled an interview with "I can't remember which writer now, where he talks about asking his brain about the problem he was stuck on. Like, going to bed, not thinking about it, consciously, but he had this phrase, "let the boys in the basement do the work." And I quite often will say to Mike,

'I've done it, I've written it, it might need a little tiny bit of editing … but I can't quite figure how it ends, so I'm just going to go to bed and let the boys in the basement do the work.'" Finally, Jo re-applied the term she had used earlier, when she stated, "And then quite often the next day I will find, it's like finding the key, almost, that fits, that locks the door. And it's like, yeah, that finishes it, it's not too trite, it's not too clicheed, it's not like ta-DAAH! – it's got a tone."

Looked at from an ANT point of view, the completion of a text might be seen as the moment of a network's complete mobilization, which as Felski points out, can be understood in two ways, first in terms of a network binding together to produce the text for it to be available for reading, and second, in terms of the text itself having been brought together as a network combining its formal elements as well as its content. But another way of understanding what happens when a text reaches completion can be glimpsed in the concept of entelechy and, indeed, in the word entelechy itself. Aristotle's concept was encapsulated in a word he invented, a neologism combining *enteles*, meaning "fully-grown", with *echein*, meaning "to have," and *telos*, or "end." Therefore, the word expresses completion while at the same time containing the notion of possessing that completion by having grown towards it and being seen to have grown, in other words by having performed its growing-towards-completion.

The concept of entelechy in relation to text-production, does, I think, complement that of ANT, in demonstrating the idea that any text that convinces its readers is one which actively performs its meaning. As more than one of the writers taking part in my fieldwork told me, a finished text can seem to tell the writer what the writer "thinks", and perhaps it must be able to do so in order for it to tell the reader. In its state of completion, and in having reached an ending, in publication, the critical text reaches the condition of performability, observed and understood through its ability to show how it grew and developed. However, as I have shown in the results of interviews with writers, the growth and development of critical text in particular is, under the conditions the writers in question have to work, not always smooth or straightforward. And, importantly, the writers in question are at a stage where they are still exploring what writing can do; even those writers whose careers are established (like Joanne Lee or Sue Flowers) are interested in writing better, or writing differently. As the next chapter explores, experimentation is one way in which the writer might refresh or reinvent what they write.

Chapter 7

Scrappy Notes and Weird Diagrams: finding time to experiment

Introduction: Bartleby Revisited

Listening to critical writers talking about the rhythms of their working day, in the previous two chapters, and the habits and hiatuses they describe in producing the words for each ongoing piece of writing, it is not impossible to understand how a completed text has finally "exhausted all its impotentiality," in Agamben's phrase, which I first referred to in Chapter 1.

Thankfully the writers I have talked to have not needed, or been forced, into the total withdrawal made by Melville's character, Bartleby, whose path is a total descent into what Agamben calls the "abyss" of potentiality, which is "the potential not to act" (Agamben, 1999:181). But their varied work, often done on a freelance basis (fully or partially), and often containing a combination of "self-driven" and commissioned projects, does sometimes contain elements of the repetitive, the formulaic. And gaps appear, as I have shown, in switching from task to task, and in being delayed or distracted or anxious. Bartleby's "abyss" continues to exist, in the working life of every critical writer - the unpaid nature of much of their work perhaps reminding each one of them, on a daily basis, of the extent to which any potential they may want to actualise being undervalued by the networks they are activating.

What I am commenting upon is not so much the fact that this "abyss" exists, because as Agamben attests it is impossible for actuality to occur without the exhaustion of impotentiality. What interests me, in the context of critical writing, is the extent to which so much actualisation in the form of text production is actually happening, and not failing to happen, despite the gaps, delays, and all the other fissures and loopholes that exist in the production of any critical text.

Two themes flow from this, that chapters 5 and 6 have illustrated. One concerns the amount of writing that continues to appear, aided by the large number of new writers and the continuing role of online publishing platforms, as well as opportunities to think, learn, and get published by those publishing platforms, or with the help of arts organisations like CVAN, within mentoring programmes or workshops.

The other important theme concerns the decision by writers to continue writing, despite the non-incentive nature of free writing, and complications of freelance multi-

tasking. The fact that writers continue to “self-fix” and can gain advice from other writers or editors also helps networks to continue to be activated and writing to take place. Every distraction, delay, and switching of attention to another task may open up what Agamben calls the “abyss” that underlies every moment. But these can also be understood as the reflexive “breachings” described by Latour, which are referred to in Chapter 3, causing writers to invent their own “micromethods” in finding a solution to a writing problem.

Is there a way to enhance the potential to be inventive that teeters on the brink of what certainly can sometimes feel like the “abyss”? Describing, for instance, the sense of frustration that writers often feel when working, Angelika Bammerhas this to say: “I am sitting at my desk, writing. Or, as academics more typically put it, I am “trying to write”. A sheet of paper, still blank, is in front of me and a New Blank Document is on my computer screen…. Why do we cast what we are supposed to do as the very thing we never seem quite able to do?” (Bammer, 2015:1)

This problem about writing is, as we have seen, not unique to academics. Anyone who writes must endure a degree of mental labour, during which certain words are selected and put into a certain order, thus creating and organising lines of thought via lines of text. For the art writer, these lines of thought and text are organised in response to objects, in this case, contemporary artworks and the contexts in which these artworks appear. In Chapter 4, I described how the use of ANT in addressing the relations between non-humans and humans including writers can bring to life the production of critical texts by the activation of actor networks. In Chapters 5 and 6, I focused on writing as a process, thinking about the work that makes writing happen, and the way the potential to write is actualised during the stage I refer to as entelechy.

My purpose in this chapter is to consider the attitudes among writers towards experimental approaches, and to describe how some of these experiments have worked in practice. These, I discovered, are approaches that many of the writers taking part in my fieldwork claim to find helpful and enjoyable in providing a means to refresh or reinvent what they do as writers. Bearing in mind each writer’s relationship with contemporary art, however, I look first at the uses of experimental writing in current art education. Next, I examine what it is that writers who engage with contemporary art might be using experimental techniques to change, including various formulaic forms of writing, notably what has been called “artspeak”. After this, reference to ANT enables

me to shed further light on the experience of experimentation itself, based on information and observations made by critical writers who were interviewed during my fieldwork, each having also completed a diary recording all their writing projects during the month of April, 2018, and then again in September the same year. During the first series of interviews, a series of identical questions was put to the interviewees, including the following: “Do you experiment with your writing, trying out new approaches that you might describe in terms of “creative writing?”

While not every participant was attracted to the possibilities of experimentation, all the writers who wrote diaries, and were interviewed by me subsequently, understood the broad relevance of the question in terms of the way an experimental approach can supply the solution to a problem they have been experiencing with writing. Seen through the perspective of ANT, I was also looking for unconventional means writers can employ to aid entelechy.

Experiment, Education and Publishing

At this point I want to consider why experimentation might become important to art writers today, situating the idea of experiment and creative writing within the context of contemporary art writing, especially for emerging writers.

First, it is important to note that within UK higher education, critical art writing and the experimental techniques sometimes associated with its production are recognised at postgraduate level in the UK at some (but by no means all) major institutions and courses taught there, including the Royal College of Art’s Critical Writing in Art and Design MA programme, the MPhil and PhD programmes in Art including art writing at Goldsmiths, and the MLitt in Art Writing at Glasgow School of Art. In parallel with these developments in higher education, a variety of journals specialising in experimental art writing have emerged, in print form, including the Happy Hypocrite (founded by Maria Fusco in 2008), 2HB (co-founded by Ainsley Roddick and Francis McKee in 2009 and based in Glasgow CCA), F.R.DAVID (edited by typographer Will Holder), and the US-based Dot DotDot (2000-2011). Meanwhile, the rapid expansion of online publishing has also supported experimental art writing and research in journals like Shifter, Doggerland, and the White Pube – as well as on bigger publishing platforms, notably e-flux.

Commenting on this in 2011, John Douglas Millar was especially interested in the extent

to which experimental art writing was appearing in print, reflecting a wider interest among artists and curators in archives, and in 'zine and book publishing. He noted: "The relative safety of the paper-bound book within contemporary art circles may suggest a negative reaction to the digitalising of artistic production, a skewed romanticism where books are the final ruins of modernity, a Tintern Abbey for the digital age" (Millar, 2011:31-32).

Millar also observed how the adventurousness of journals like some of the ones listed above contrasted sharply with a lack of experimentation in the world of British fiction, arguing that the experimental impetus in contemporary art and art writing actually came from literary origins, in 20th century literary modernism: "While academic and creative disciplines cross pollinate in the art world, they seem increasingly estranged in the literary world. The result is that the influence of experimental and avant-garde fiction waxes in the world of art while it wanes in the world of publishing. The works of Burroughs, Bataille, JG Ballard, Georges Perec, Jorge Luis Borges, Flann O'Brien and BS Johnson, anthologies of Imagist and concrete poetry, these can all be found on the shelves of the modern art bookshop but they get short shrift and have demonstrably little influence in the publishing world, where they are seen as difficult and unfashionable next to the dull tomes in thrall to the 19th-century realist novel (or po-mo variants thereof) that pepper weekend review pages."[52]

Millar was negative about the "institutional" nature of what lies behind much contemporary art publishing as well as the "muddled" way critical writing is taught at MFA level, at Goldsmiths, for instance, to students from backgrounds in art schools as well as literature courses, leading to what Millar calls a "babelogue" trend in visual art itself. Quoting an article in Frieze by the Dutch curator-philosopher, Dieter Roelstraete (who co-founded the aforementioned journal, FR DAVID), a list of leading artists either reflecting or influencing this "ever-expanding speech bubble" (Roelstraete, 2011) which included the South African conceptualist Ian Wilson, sound artist Susan Philipsz, Swedish artist Karl Holmqvist, British artists Tris Vonner-Michell and Imogen Stidworthy, and Turner prizewinner and winner of the Golden Lion at Venice Bienalle, 2013, Tino

[52]It is interesting to notice the changes that have, however, begun to take place in UK literature since Millar wrote this, in 2011, in the recognition of experimental writing, reflected, for instance, in the award of 2017's Man Booker Prize for fiction to the US writer, George Saunders, for Lincoln in the Bardo, the same award in 2018 to Anna Burns' novel Milkman, and the 2018 Man Booker International Prize to the Polish writer Olga Tokarczug's novel, Flights. Tokarczug was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2019.

Sehgal.

Millar revels in taking a grumpy, suspicious attitude towards experimentalism in art writing, seeing it in some ways as conservative, in continuing a twentieth century modernist tradition. But he views contemporary British literature as being even more conservative. By necessity, Millar's outlook ignores a wider interest within the academic world, in what Bammer calls "writing otherwise". Bammer's experience of this originates in a course she co-teaches (at Emory University, Atlanta, GA), called "Experiments in Scholarly Form", aiming to "break disciplinary codes" (Bammer, 2015: 65) by daring to "experiment with styles or genres that were not standard academic writing, or set writing aside and consider the expressive possibilities of other media" (Bammer, 2015: 63). Bammer's attempts to escape or change the alienating effects of academic language have run parallel to work by academics in the UK, employing the same moniker, "writing otherwise" - including Jackie Stacie and Janet Woolf (Stacie and Wolf, 2013). But, relevant to the theme of this chapter, the need to "write otherwise" also coincides, and perhaps has parallels with comments about using experimental approaches to break away from the "formulaic" nature of journalism, made by participants in my fieldwork.

Here we should bear in mind the extent to which critical writing, once published, becomes open to discourse analysis, using the sort of "heuristic" proposed by Johnstone (2018: 7-8), in which we can employ "a set of discovery procedures for systematic application or a set of topics for systematic consideration" (Johnstone, 2018: 8), including asking questions about the World, People's Purposes, Linguistic Structure, Participants, Prior discourse, and Media. Applying that analytical process to the process of writing rather than reading, I would suggest that any critical writer working in the field of journalism would have to consider all these questions when shaping the style and structure of their writing for the publication or platform for which it is intended. As a reading of Queneau's Exercises In Style demonstrates entertainingly (Queneau, 2010), the same story can be told in at least 119 different ways, all of which lead the reader into a different "universe". Clearly, then, a piece of commissioned critical writing on contemporary art has to adopt a specific focus. It will generally have to relate to a known work or works, artist or artists, and an artistic context; it will reflect the extent to which the writer's approach fits the intentions and broad appeal of the publication or platform; it will be written in a way that observes the structural and linguistic rules and

"house style" of the publication; it will reflect the way the publication relates to its readership (and other participants, especially in the case of online platforms); it will reflect certain qualities about the writer about which the readership may already have knowledge and attitudes; and it will reflect the wider context of the publication or platform itself, in its long-term aims and history. Experiment, then, can enable a break with some or all of these considerations: the break that perhaps anticipates the "breakthrough" articulated elsewhere in this chapter by one of the writers who participated in my fieldwork, Sara Jaspan.

Artspeak

It also seems necessary here to look at one more of the "formulaic" writing forms that critical writers may be aware of, and wish to challenge or avoid, but to which they may end up contributing. Unique to contemporary art, this type of writing is also one of its products. Outside contemporary art, and especially in the media, it has a controversial reputation. An example of how this reputation affects its external perception comes from my own experience, when I worked as a producer on BBC Radio 4's weekday arts magazine programme, Front Row. One of my regular tasks was to find guests and contributors. But whenever it came to finding critics of contemporary art, I would always receive the same dire warning from senior producers or presenters in London: "For goodness sake, Bob, make sure they don't talk *artspeak*."

The development of artspeak, recently renamed International Art English, or IAE, "Made art harder for non-professionals" according to Alix Rule and David Levine (Rule and Levine, 2012), who co-authored an essay on the subject in 2013, based on close analysis of 13 years of gallery press releases published in the online journal, e-flux. Rule and Levine were not the first, however, to focus their attention on this form of writing and communication. Roy Harris's earlier analysis of artspeak traced the history of art commentary, and the connection between visual art and language, back to classical Greece and Rome (Harris, 2003). His "integrationist" approach to the practice of writing about art – a much broader understanding than Rule and Levine's – rejected the (then still pervasive) structuralist interpretation of language, as well as the traditional "psychological assumption that words enable thoughts and ideas to be transmitted from one person's mind to another" (Harris, 2003:185). Instead, for the integrationist, "the painting of a picture or the building of a bridge are just as much communicational

enterprises as the performance of a symphony or the writing of a novel. Whether words actually feature in the end-product of such an enterprise is of less importance that they will have been implicated in some way or other at all stages of its development" (Harris,2003: 185). Meaningful communication, for Roy Harris, is therefore dependent on integrating macrosocial conversations, examples of which he identifies as taking place in, and between, trade, law, politics, education – and art. Consequently, regarding artspeak at the beginning of the 21st century, Roy Harris is damning – selecting, for instance, a speech by Sir Nicolas Serota about Michael Craig-Martin's An Oak Tree, 2000 (Harris, 2003: 198) about which Harris comments "Serotaspeak is artspeak in the service of an institutional theory of art", adding that there has been a "collapse of the supercategory," concluding "When the range of art forms purports to extend from Homer and Rembrandt on one side to such enterprises as bandaging public buildings or rearranging rubbish tips on the other, the end is in sight"(Harris, 2003:199).

While Roy Harris was not looking, however (or perhaps he was too concerned with looking backwards), contemporary art became a global phenomenon. Its institutional nature, however, as Harris identified, has remained powerful and preeminent. Affecting also gallery signage, catalogues, and artists' statements, artspeak accelerated alongside the international spread of biennials and white space galleries, from the late 1990s onwards. Rule and Levine observed, significantly, that the language of contemporary art is identified today by obtuse and rarified phraseology loosely lifted from various branches of continental philosophical theory, and utilizing very few nouns, "has everything to do with English, but it is emphatically not English." They continued: "Our guess is that people all over the world have adopted this language because the distributive capacities of the Internet now allow them to believe—or to hope—that their writing will reach an international audience" (Rule and Levine, 2012).

Responding to this, the artist, film-maker and writer Hito Steyrl noted that gallery press releases are usually written by "overworked and underpaid assistants" (Steyerl, 2013), and that while they "constitute the bulk of art writing, they are its most destitute strata, both in form and content." But she also identified the fact that IAE, as an international form, was just as likely to be the product of writers from non-English speaking countries, whose first language may therefore not be English, reminding readers of Mladen Stilinovic's infamous work, An Artist Who Cannot Speak English is No Artist, 1992, and of the neo-colonial, neo-liberal capitalist forces behind contemporary art's international

spread.

But even “ordinary” language, everyday-speak, is difficult to suggest as an alternative to written formulae, for, as Judith Butler argued in an exchange cited by Naomi Scheman (Scheman,2015: 44), it has ideology embedded within it. Butler’s strong support for forms of difficult theoretical writing is designed to navigate and cross the ideological minefield “common sense” hides, buried within ordinary language. “Estrangement from the everyday, the taken-for-granted,” comments Schleman, “Can be both philosophically and politically empowering” (Scheman, 2015: 47). But, Scheman also notes, specialised, theoretically-challenging language can also become “concretised” because of having been taken up by “small numbers of privileged theorists” resulting in “an exclusive conversation in a purpose-built language” (Scheman, 2015: 47).

Experiment and Writers

After the completion of their first diary of writing projects in the Spring of 2018, I recorded interviews with the writers taking part in my fieldwork, with identical questions asked of each, including the following: “Do you experiment with your writing, trying out new approaches that you might describe in terms of “creative writing?” While not every participant was attracted by the possibilities of experimentation, all the writers who participated understood the broad relevance of the question in terms of the way an experimental approach could provide a possible solution to a problem they were experiencing with writing, or simply a fresh approach. I was therefore interested in gaining some evidence of the experimental act containing potential for new writing. Seen through the perspective of ANT, I was looking for further networks activated by writers in bringing about entelechy.

Looked at individually, each interview revealed a slightly different approach to the subject of experimentation; a different set of needs, and a different set of actions in practice. As a result, it might be useful to observe, initially, that the answers I received described not only a variety of experiments but also a variety of contexts out of which a need to experiment arose. In other words, there is more than one version of what it feels like to step outside the “normal” or prescribed way of writing. And what it “feels like” did emerge as an important factor, within the overall picture of an experiment in action.

Referring to ANT, then, it is possible to see how each writer I interviewed mobilized of a

new actor network reflecting what the music scholar Benjamin Piekut, writing about avantgarde music in the USA during the 1950s and 60s, calls "a plural ontology of experimentalism"(Piekut, 2014: 191-215), describing his approach in the following words: "By understanding agency as an eventful relation among actors of all kinds, and by conceiving of ontology as contingent and plural, and observing action as a series of mediations that circulate reference – by taking on these methodological principles, we are equipped to meet and describe the world with an appropriate level of complexity"(Piekut, 2014: 191).

This "plural ontology", a development of what Annemarie Mol called a "multiple ontology" (Mol, 2002), I will employ here to provide details of the circumstances in which the writing experiment takes place, as well as a providing a means to trace the experiment's development in time. In examining writing experiments, this plural or multiple ontology contains elements of *decision, performance,* and *reflection* all of which are both personal and communicable, and which forge new, communicative strategies that I will also describe.

Contexts for Experiment

Sara Jaspan, who works as an editor for the online journals Creative Tourist and Corridor 8, is, as I have previously described, a writer who works from home and, due to her workload, is very self-motivated. "I think a lot of the time it feels like you've got loads of deadlines and there's quite a lot of generic work," she told me, "And you just want to get stuff out of the way, and that becomes quite formulaic writing, because it's not that important to you."[53] I detected a sense of unease in the way Sara talked about "formulaic writing", perhaps because of her use of the pronoun "you" for herself, thus externalising her person within the sentence. But she switched back to using the first person, "I," in what followed, as she continued, "I sometimes find reviews for publications quite limiting, because you have to work within their stylistic boundaries and it has to fit with the publication's identity. So, yeah, I do occasionally experiment. In different forms…And when I do, it's usually quite a positive experience. It can be a bit of a breakthrough with writing." Specifically, Sara went on to mention "There's been a few artist's commissions, where it's been a more collaborative process, and they've been

[53]Sara Jaspan, first interview, 11.06.2018, West Didsbury, Manchester

looking for a more creative response, and I find that kind of thing the most challenging, but also the most enjoyable and the most rewarding."

Two things seem significant about this interview extract. First, Sara articulates the desire to write in a way that differs from the "formulaic" approach demanded by the publications she spends so much time writing for, which are produced according to an established house style. Experimentation therefore offers an alternative and perhaps more aesthetically or intellectually satisfying route towards bringing words together. Secondly, Sarah mentions collaborative projects with artists, thus connecting her with others in the production of new text, as well as providing an opportunity to step outside the isolated role of the writer engaged with her normal, formulaic work. So, in the case of this writer at this early stage in her career, the use of experiment to be able to take a new creative approach provides opportunities to expand her existing network, linking her to other writers, artists and other cultural workers as well as enabling her to break out of a writing formula or habit.

To summarise, then, Sara's role as an editor means she works within stylistic boundaries, which she feels the need to challenge, citing the examples of artist commissions as having provided a successful route to experiment in her writing. Another writer, Lauren Velvick, was at the time of her interview based in Liverpool, where she was employed in curatorial work at the Bluecoat Gallery. In her interview, she also expressed strongly the need to seek the opportunity to experiment. "Yes," her answer began, "I've been doing more of that recently. Or whenever I get the chance, really. 'Cause I work full time and I do freelance work, after all ... There isn't so much time for experimentation. But the times I do do it, I find it really … fulfilling. So, I'm trying to make more time for that"[54]. Lauren was then able to talk about having taken part in one writing experiment that led to her being able to connect with new collaborators. "So, for example, with my involvement with the Liverpool Biennial Associate Artists' Programme, where I was nominated for that, and then put on it, and then, everyone seemed rather confused as to why, because I'm more of a writer and a curator than an artist, but I was like, "*It's too late now, here I am!*"" At which point she laughed, before continuing, "So the exhibitions that we were in as part of that, I kind of got to think around how writing might be presented in a gallery, and things like that."

[54]Lauren Velvick, first interview, 31.07.2018, Bluecoat, Liverpool

Again, Lauren was also able to relate her experience of experimentation to an expansion of her network, due to her involvement in the Liverpool Biennial Associate Artists' Programme. In particular, she related her work with this programme to the new position of being a writer/curator among visual artists. It was this new context that situated Lauren's experience of experiment. To summarise this context, Lauren's role, combining curating with freelance work, switched to associating with artists in a gallery-based project requiring a new use of text. This new context produced an element of surprise for her and others ("everyone seemed rather confused") but because it was "too late now" the relationship went ahead.

Another interviewee, Jack Welsh, is based in Manchester and Liverpool. A practising artist and lecturer who has moved away from sculpture to writing, he responded to my interview question by expressing a similar need to break with traditional approaches to writing, but with some exasperation. On being asked if he tries to write experimentally, his initial words were "Not as much as I feel I should." He paused before continuing, "I think that is something that's (in) the April diary, which no doubt we'll talk about - it's caught me in this process of having a go. I do feel how I approach general writing, whether that is critical texts… that could do with more challenging circumstances… But I think, at the moment I'm quite aware of the style of how I'm composing bits of writing, and how I approach thinking and translating that, and there's definitely room to shake up that structure. So yeah, I do, but I could do more."[55]

One attempt by Jack to "shake up that structure" took part shortly before this interview, and was described in his diary for April as well as what followed in the interview recording. It is examined in more detail later in this chapter as an example of "experiments in action." Summarising the context for Jack's use of experiment, though, I will say for the moment that working on his own, Jack set up a formal experiment that analysed and re-arranged a certain kind of formulaic text, producing a new textual form.

Sue Flowers, an artist who co-runs an independent arts organisation, Green Close, near Carnforth, in a rural part of Lancashire, has been working with differing writing forms including poetry, fiction, and journalism for several years. In 2018 she took part in a creative writing course connected with a project concerning Whittingham Hospital, a former asylum for the mentally ill, near Preston (the subject for the exhibition she

[55]Jack Welsh, first interview, 15.06.2018, Righton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University

worked on, described in Chapter 6). Sue began by relating her level of experience as a writer to her feelings about experiment, saying, "I see myself as a fledgling writer, really, so I'm kind of enjoying experimenting. And immersing myself in the writing course was fun because it was a very accessible programme. So the woman who was running it was a professional writer doing a PhD, in the therapeutic use of creative writing within mental health settings."[56] Recalling the techniques introduced by the professional writer running the course, Sue then described, "She had quite a few little, kind of tools … thinking of some adverbs and cross-placing words, and seeing what comes from, say, folding pieces of paper together and joining a "chair" with a "sloppy house," or whatever it could be. So that's been quite fun."

In brief, Sue, who is primarily a visual artist, has benefitted from taking part in a course run by a professional writer, in which rules and constraints introduced new textual forms.

However, another artist-participant, Joanne Lee, who uses text as a central part of her practice, and who publishes her work in a variety of forms, such as 'zines, that could be described as experimental, began her answer by expressing some reservations about veering too far, or too readily, in an unpredictable direction. When asked if she experimented in her work, she replied, "Yes. Though I've also got this other voice in my head, which is a Mark E. Smith voice, which is "For God's sake don't start improvising"[57]. Laughing, Jo went on, "So there's another little part of my head that is – that talks down formal experiments in some ways. Just get on with it and say what you mean! Say it, kind of clearly." Reflecting on her own experience, Joanne made a further observation: "But I think I also imagine always that better writing will take a longer time. And the experimental thing, sometimes, I think, is realising that … sometimes shortness and quickness and the constraints of that can actually produce something better or different." This use of the term, "constraint" in bringing about experimental work, comes up again in Jo's final few sentences on the subject: "My default position is always, it'll take me six months or something. Whereas lots of things I've produced … really have been much, much quicker. That quickness of constraint I find really, probably, quite an important tool." On the other hand, Joanne's diary included the

[56]28 Sue Flowers, first interview, 14.06.2018, Sun Square, Lancaster

[57]Joanne Lee, first interview, 27.06.2018, Sheffield. Joanne's remark about Mark E. Smith refers to his lyric, "Don't start improvising for Christ's sake," which appears towards the end of the song "Slates, Slags, Etc," track 2 on side 2 of the Fall's EP, Slates, Rough Trade Records, RTO71, 1981.

following section, taken from notes written for a show at Five Years collective in London: “Working on a long-term project (a life’s work, even) has periods of excited development and intense production, as well as the inevitable doldrums of stuck-ness and slow uncertainty. It ebbs and flows through cycles of collecting, making, shaping, thinking, getting lost and being re-found that can take many months or a single day.” Summarising the context in which Joanne seeks to experiment, then, she understands very well some of the pitfalls, including a lack of clarity, and the risk of creating a messy, non-communicative outcome. But, by using constraints or rules in a fast-moving writing experiment, it is possible that valuable work can emerge relatively rapidly.

Only one participant among all the writers responding to my fieldwork replied negatively to the question about experimentation. When asked if he ever wrote in an experimental way, writer-curator `Tom Emery replied: “No, not really.” He immediately described what he wrote, reflecting back to an earlier part of the interview thus: “So I guess, like I’ve been saying, everything I do is fairly straightforward. Yes, straightforward, exhibition reviews, journalistic stuff.”[58] The word “straightforward” Tom uses to describe what he does is meaningful, here, in terms of the way he aims to communicate with his reader, as well, perhaps, as the way he fashions his prose. He continued by explaining, almost apologetically, “I don’t know why. Cause I know a lot of other writers, they go into that area, on top of their critical writing practice. They go into the creative writing side of things. But – I don’t know, I’ve just never actually – it’s never really interested me to do it, I guess. It’s not that I don’t enjoy reading other people’s work in that field. And I understand why people are interested in doing it. But, I’ve never wanted to do it.”

Tom therefore maintains an awareness of other writers’ interest in experimentation, but he is satisfied with pursuing a journalistic approach and developing it.

For another writer, though, learning the formulae of journalism remains significant, while at the same time experimental writing has also become important to her future development. When I asked Liverpool-based, freelance writer and PhD researcher Laura Harris whether she ever wrote experimentally, she replied: “In the context of art writing, not so much, because I don’t have an outlet for it. So I guess I’ve been vaguely, in the back of my head, thinking about starting a project with one of the art writers I

[58] Tom Emery, first interview, 12.06.2018, Righton Building, Manchester Metropolitan University

know, that are in a similar stage in their career to me, where we could try out more creative ways of art writing"[59]. Mentioning an "art zine" she had written for in the past, Laura then went on to detail her reservations about experimental approaches, saying, "Firstly I'm worried that if I start doing that, it might be a dead-end, career-wise. I mean, the reason that I haven't pushed that further is because I feel like I'm just getting to the point with my art writing where I can get paid for what I do, and I know what they want me to do, in order to get a commission." Laura therefore thought "Taking the creative risk seems like the next step that I haven't taken yet," and continued by mentioning some recent efforts she had made to obtain commissions allowing her to write in a more experimental way. "I've applied for the Independents' Biennial here[60]for writing residences," she said, "And I pitched to them saying I would use this as a space to explore alternative ways of writing about art. And Laura Robertson[61] and I are doing a project vaguely themed around it, very vaguely. So, yeah, I think I need to make those spaces and take those risks outside of a career where you're trying to get the commission, get the name for yourself."

Experiment, then, for Laura Harris, contains risk while retaining importance. But she still wanted to learn how to expand what she sees as the "formulaic" approaches taken in art journals, whether journalistic or academic, in order for a real career to develop as a writer. The statements by Sara Jaspan and Tom Emery also reflect this latter position strongly.

In the case of several interviewees, including Laura Harris, Sara Jaspan, Lauren Velvick, Jack Welsh and Sue Flowers, I comprehend a general willingness to experiment with writing, coinciding with a need to see what writing can do, and, for some of them, there was expressed a sense of pleasure in experiencing the result. Sue Flowers was alone however in paring down her thoughts to the microcosmic level of words themselves, echoing Bachelard's ideas about the way words combine to produce unforeseen new meanings: "Unexpected adjectives collect around the focal meaning of the noun. A new environment allows the word to enter not only into one's thoughts, but also into one's daydreams. Language dreams" (Bachelard, 2014: 165).

[59]Laura Harris, first interview, 26.06.2018, Bluecoat, Liverpool

[60]32 Liverpool Independents' Biennial, "sister festival to Liverpool Biennial", which aims to support local artists and venues, supported eight writers in residence in 2018.

[61]Laura Robertson, co-founder and co-editor of the Liverpool-based online culture platform, the Double Negative.

Also in Sue's statement, we again see a description of a strong collaborative element in the form of the course she joined, and the production of new work as part of a group presided over by a professional writer within a wider project. Collaboration with one or more artists or writers also appealed to Laura Harris and Sara Jaspan. Jack Welsh saw the experimental process differently, in being more of a solo project, however – at least in the instance he was describing. Also because of his interest in communication theory, he was conscious too of wanting to "shake up that structure." This experiment, and one Joanne Lee took part in, are examined in more detail below.

Several writers also expressed concerns about finding time to experiment. In her diary, Sue wrote: "The desire to write versus my living reality and work commitments is very challenging. I'm not sure how healthy it is, it creates this inner frustration and internal dialogue."[62] And in her interview with me, she said, "I think the best way to generate ideas is to have time to think. It's just the space." Looking back on the project she previously described as benefitting from, Sue added, "I just allowed myself to go to a creative writing course at Whittingham that our project was running. I thought, I'm going as a participant. And just having two hours a week, it just flows. I wonder what I would be like if I was just on a, on a course, or in a more structured job that was about writing, I don't know." For Sue, writing seems to act as an experimental form in and of itself, complementing but also competing with her work as a visual artist. She explained: "I think because I inhabit this visual world … I want to be able to explain that process that goes on between seeing and the emotive response to it. I'm constantly coming up with ideas. But I also – what I found when I was doing that course was that as I was writing I was getting ideas about what else to write. And I thought I'm not sure how good this is for my mental health 'cause I could almost feel it could become quite obsessive for me. 'Cause I just – I think it's because it's a new process for me and I'm still working out my relationship with it."

Writing as work and writing experimentally do not seem to mix easily, except in the experience of Joanne Lee, an experienced artist who specialises in text production, frequently of an experimental nature. The implication in what Sara Jaspan and Laura Harris have to say is also that experimentation takes place most successfully at a particular time, and that the practice of experimentation and discovering new forms of

[62]Sue Flowers, diary entry, 26.04. 2018

creativity often takes place when that time has been set aside, and protected.

Experiments in Action

But during the time it takes to experiment, to test and explore new creative techniques, what exactly are writers doing? What does it mean to experiment? It seems necessary at this point to understand what experimentation looks and feels like. Not only this, but to ask two questions, based on the responses of participants so far. First, to what extent do writing experiments try to overcome an over-familiar writing formula? And second, to what extent does a writing experiment create and follow its own rules, its own constraints?

One good example of a writing experiment is identified in Jack Welsh's diary, where Jack records the following activity:

"Production of textual work as part of an ongoing series. In the spirit of 'uncreative writing', I have typed the same story from several different websites verbatim on Microsoft Word, seeking to replicate the layout of that website as much as possible - without images. As Word isn't designed for such editing, this places emphasis on language, typeface and empty space. The works have been joined into one PDF of around 15-25 pages each document. I have not disseminated these works beyond my own website as yet, although I am considering turning them into small printed editions once I create several of these works"[63].

This experiment was based on the work of the American conceptualist poet and critic, Kenneth Goldsmith, founder of Ubu-Web, the non-commercial archival website for avant-garde material. Goldsmith's manifesto, Uncreative Writing, appeared in 2007. Jack went on to explain further details in his interview: "That whole idea that even the most banal acts even in the editing process and the design process - which are something I've been doing quite a lot of, actually, as paid work - those decisions you take are actually creative… So, for me it was … it was just playing around and experimenting and going, oh, alright Kenneth, are you telling the truth, here?" Jack then explained what he did during the experiment, as "Just typing out", before providing some personal and professional background to what he did: "I'm really interested in typefaces cause, even in my studio practice, at Royal Standard, I was really fascinated in

[63]Jack Welsh, diary entry, 16-20.04.2018

web-browsers and layout and content, and I was interested in marketing and identity, etc. So, they're re-occurring interests. And I've always loved reading, newspapers especially, websites, are a big part – I can't get enough of it." Finally, he described what he did: "And I just thought, hmm, let's just try, get several different kind of say, similar stories, from different platforms, all online, not from paper, and try to replicate in a crude manner the layout but removing all the information. So, sidebars, adverts, web address browsers, just letting the white space communicate. But actually, seeing what happens to the text. And just purely experimental."

Jack's experiment therefore was based on strict constraints and was entirely exploratory and strongly connected to his own work, practice and experience. At the same time, Jack recognised that he didn't "invent" the experiment – he was testing the work of Goldsmith. He admitted to me: "It's been done, okay, but for me, it was interesting, I think. It was an interesting exercise." Jack also described the time he set aside to work on the experiment, saying, "Obviously it took a while. Typing everything out and that…I did think quite a lot about those decisions that Goldsmith references. The replication process. Those choices you make. And I did note down to myself what I thought … I tried to define what typefaces were, which I find really interesting as well, just trying to work it out. Whether to include holding boxes to replicate, which I did on some but not on others, so actually, my own methodology became strained at that point, I was contradicting myself. I mean, that's just a football match that happened, out of the Observer."

I also asked Jack about the outcome from the experiment, to which he had referred briefly in the diary entry. He explained: "My thoughts about how that could happen go further. I don't know if that's relevant to the question, but possibly thinking of turning them into a series of small lo-fi zines, just to see how that happens, and what happens when you try and fit that content into too small a page, what happens then, what will the impact be?"

In this case, then, the writing experiment was less an attempt to change a writer's established or learned "style", and break away from any writing formula, than a conscious effort to create a series of writing-based publications – a form of artwork that, importantly, points out or highlights the limitations and disciplines behind a particular form of journalism and publishing. These limitations and disciplines deliberately expose and undermine the reasons behind journalistic and media formulae.

The introduction into the public realm – or that part of the public realm overlapping the art world – of these formulae has proved controversial, as Goldsmith's own artistic output has proved.

Another writing experiment was described to me by Joanne Lee, during her interview, when she recalled events from 2017, when Jo took part in a residency in Finland. The residency involved nine artists, mostly from Scandinavia but also from Spain and Iran, and everyone was, in Jo's words, "Encouraged to write a bit like George Perec did[64]in terms of responding to sitting in a café … and responding to a particular place." Jo described the location of the café as being "In a market square in a part of Finland that's bi-lingual, Swedish-Finnish. It's not a place I know, I'm very much the outsider, I don't speak either of those languages, so I couldn't eavesdrop or do my usual things, but I could look and watch. And so we all wrote in our own languages." Jo also described the constraints that had been imposed on the exercise as "We could be there any hours of daylight, I think.…So, we had to note the time when we were making a particular observation, or something we'd seen and wanted to write about." At the time, Jo expected that the text she wrote "Might get re-worked in some way into another kind of text during the time there, but actually it ended up pretty much staying true to the way it was written at the time. And that also felt quite unusual cause I'm quite an editor. I fuss and I finesse things, quite a lot, and that was kind of not, that was keeping it as it was, quite straightforward." Concluding, and reflecting on the exercise, Jo said about her approach, "In some ways, they're almost like anti-structures, like maybe writing faster, writing (and) not fussing with it, those are the strategies that are slightly against my natural tendency to stay with something. Really, like polish it and move it around slowly."

Evident within the above quote is Joanne's sense of having been in an unfamiliar place where she was slightly uncomfortable, unable to communicate or understand the local spoken languages, and almost in an alienated state. Her description of the experiment makes it sound like a direct, literal way to experience time and translate it into

[64]Perec, Georges, 1936-1982, author, playwright, maker of crossword puzzles, and member of the Oulipo (Ouvrir de literature potentielle) group of experimental writers, whose practice utilises constraints to create new work. Examples of this in Perec's writing include the novel La dispiracion, 1969, which avoids the use of the letter "e", and La Vie mode d'emploie, 1978, translated as Life, A User's Manual, by David Bellos, 1987, which concerns the residents of a block of apartments and the construction of a vastly-ambitious, self-destructive conceptual art project, the brainchild of a character called Bartlebooth (a name combining Melville's character Bartleby and Valery Larbaud's Barnabooth).

"defamiliarized" text, a reference I am making hereto the Russian Formalist critic, Shklovsy, who argued that writing and art should re-arrange formal devices in surprising new ways.[65] As such, it may confirm Millar's observation about the conservatism behind experimentation in art writing, because of the way it maintains a line of thought originating in twentieth century modernism, and the hope of the future that existed therein, according to Groys. But, in the light of the existence and persistence of "formulaic" writing, the need remains to find strategies "to try and disrupt a bit what the usual modus operandi would be", as Joanne puts it, later in the interview.
This attempt "to try and disrupt what the usual modus operandi would be," as also seen in descriptions of the writing experiments undertaken by Jack Welsh and Sue Flowers, must also be seen as a conscious act – a kind of *performance* (with or without an audience) in which the writer does not know the outcome but may well be observing certain constraints – constraints that have not yet been learned or internalised to the extent that they have become formulaic.

Reflections on Strategy

Perhaps, then, it is in the variety of strategies one takes that formulaic writing and language can be outmanoeuvred, or, at least, criticised. Thinking very much from the perspective of the early stage she occupies in her career, Laura Harris sees herself taking a multifaceted approach to writing, which consciously includes the theoretical and the feminist, while also identifying with the value of experimentation. As she told me, "I'm writing for an art zine called Doggerland. I'm writing about cultural theory. So it's more philosophical than art, I suppose." She added how "I write field notes a lot. So it's like a diary but a work diary. But that's mainly for my PhD." With regard to her academic work she also said, "I've been experimenting with creative writing. Creative non-fiction. And this is something that I want to do for my PhD. But then also thinking around how I can do that, with my arts writing." Next Laura explained a particular problem she had encountered in writing about art: "So I find – I mean, I stopped, diminished in my amount of exhibition reviews because I got a bit bored of the strict, formulaic ways that you have to do it. So then, now, I've been trying to think of other ways to write art writing. And I've been trying that out in my feminist political writing and my work, and

[65]Schklovsky, Viktor, 1893-1984, expressed definitively his theme of "defamiliarization" in the essay, Art As Technique, 1917.

maybe soon, I'll try that in my art writing, if I get the space to do that." At this point in the interview, I asked Laura, "It involves more words than usual?" And she replied, "Erm – different words. Or, you know, maybe I'll – it'll be much more personal, diary, or fragmentary. Not an essay with a beginning, middle and an end. Sort of an exploration through text. Yeah."

The above extract from the interview with Laura Harris is alive with twists and turns. "I'm writing for an art zine…it's like a diary but a work diary…I've been experimenting with creative writing…this is something I want to do for my PhD…But then also thinking around how I can do that… I stopped, diminished my amount of exhibition reviews because I got a bit bored…now I'm trying to think of other ways…" One might say this series of thought-manoeuvres, captured in speech, reflects a dialectical response to circumstances, which reflects some, but not all, of the circumstances impinging upon many critical writers. Context, then, causes an example of what I have referred to in Chapter Two as speech-based "split" or "multi" subjectivity".

Laura's closing remark, "Sort of an exploration through text," connects closely with what might otherwise be seen as a contrasting perspective on the predicament of the critical writer in relation to experimentation, and the dilemmas surrounding its use, from Joanne Lee. "The other thing, in terms of experiment," she began, "The other figure that I sort of find myself turning to, is this idea of being like an earthworm in the middle of a lot of stuff. And so, in some ways, although I feel … I am quite practised at writing, and I could, at a push, I could tell you how I structure things, the reality is, I like to imagine myself like pushing blindly through this mass of stuff that I've gathered, making sense of it, and using the writing to kind of, sort of, shape it. Using the writing to find out what's there. And to sort of search. And I think that is a sort of experiment, that willingness not to just believe I'm writing to the structure, but to kind of find out what I'm doing as I do it."

Continuing, Joanne described some of the tactics she uses, or has used, as alternatives to drafting a structure for her writing. They are immediate and, literally, close to hand. But, as she mentions at the very end of the statement, digital technology provides increasing immediacy, and intimacy. "I used to write in longhand as a way of thinking differently", Jo said, "Then kind of go to the computer. But I must admit I very rarely – I do it (now) in a very different way. I do scrappy notes and weird diagrams. But I very rarely actually draft things. I'm not sure, I don't think that was a conscious decision to

step away from that, it probably was just a habit or convenience, whereas the computer took over all of our lives."

Writing here in a more speculative way, we can identify two modes of feeling in the above interview extracts with Laura Harris and Joanne Lee, both concerning inner responses to the practical experience of experiment: one dialectical and mobile, the other a kind of burrowing, or immersion. One tactical, the other tactile. One intellectual, the other intuitive. Bearing in mind that these modes precede the generation of some later stage of practical written production, I am able to add that they address the *potential* of that future production.

We should also remember that these statements, like statements made by other participants, have come from a position of being open to collaboration with other writers, but remain inner and personal. Statements like these, from Joanne and Laura, as well as from Jack Welsh earlier on, point towards the importance of *reflection*, following experience of experimentation in writing.

Experiment as Experience

It might be useful here to look more broadly at the extracts I have used, in describing different categories of experience with regard to the practice of experimentation in writing. Based on a very simple observation of what participants say on the subject in the extracts quoted, the most obvious categories define themselves thus:

1 Experiment becomes desirable for writers lacking the opportunity or time to experience it – (Sarah Jaspan, Lauren Velvick, Sue Flowers)

2 Experimentation can become a source of concern for writers who have experienced it usefully in the past (Jack Welsh, Sue Flowers, Laura Harris).

3 Experimental practice can expand a participant's network of writers (Sarah Jaspan, Lauren Velvick, Sue Flowers, Laura Harris, Joanne Lee).

4 Experimental practice helps writers to break away from "formulaic" approaches to writing – especially in the case of freelance writers (Sarah Jaspan, Laura Harris)

5 Experiment does not replace - but rather responds to - the understanding of certain formulaic writing forms, such as journalism or academic writing, which have to be learned and practised for practical, career-enhancing reasons (Tom Emery, Laura Harris).

6 Experiment can become a practice containing pitfalls as well as possibilities (Joanne

Lee)

7 Experiment can create new work focusing on writing (Joanne Lee, Jack Welsh, Laura Harris, Sue Flowers, Lauren Velvick)

These are just a few versions of how experimentation, that act of stepping outside an understood and conventional way of writing, affects writers. I have also focused on the way experiment feels for writers. Based on what writers have had to say on the subject, it seems important to recall the way experimental work, given over to finding new forms of creativity in writing, always happens after a conscious *decision* has been made to do so (by setting aside time, notably, but also by thinking in terms of introducing constraints or collaborating with others).

The experiment itself may also be considered a form of *performance* – made even more so by the fact that it permits and encourages time for *reflection* to take place afterwards. The final reflective outcome from experimentation allows experience to be communicable, through conversation within a collaborative group, perhaps, or through publication of a resulting text or work.

Throughout the above, I have examined the entelechy of certain new texts in circumstances that writers have produced during protected time periods. Actor-networks that were mobilized in the making of these texts sometimes included human collaborators. But also important and noticeable in some cases is the extent to which non-human actors including text itself, and even individual words, became part of a network, mobilized in the entelechy of new text. This is seen, for instance, in Jack Welsh's description of his writing experiment, and in Sue Flowers' description of the writing programme she took part in. Describing a writing experiment, therefore, combines elements of what Rita Felski describes as "zooming out" and "zooming in" (Felski, 2017: 5) from focusing on networks that produce texts to focusing on texts as actor networks.

I have paid attention to interviewees' internal, personal descriptions of experimentation in writing in order to try to take my narrative into a position where I can talk about entelechy, and about potentiality being actualised. In the case of some of the interview extracts included above, entelechy is being described. Jack Welsh, for instance, sees a way in which an experiment (the Kenneth Goldsmith exercise) is converting in the writer's mind into a future project ("lo-fi zines"). Lauren Velvick also realised how being accepted on to an artists' scheme commissioned by Liverpool Biennial could allow her

to realise a writing project in a gallery. The series of potential projects articulated by Laura Harris expresses a sense of career development as well as the potentiality to write in different ways. Similarly, Sue Flowers used the experience of a creative writing course within the context of an ongoing, wider project, although the resulting work seems to have a more generalised potential across her future written output. In the case of other writers, potentiality is seen in less specific, though no doubt equally important terms, such as a "breakthough" in writing, as Sara Jaspan puts it. In the case of Joanne Lee, the potentiality question remains forefront throughout, it seems, due to the fact that despite her reservations about experimentation, her work (much of which is self-published) is constantly evolving according to her own constraints, which exist largely outside the world of conventional publishing. In my opinion, her idea of an "earthworm in the middle of a lot of stuff" creates a powerful image of entelechy.

In the above, I have examined the need to experiment and explore forms of writing, as voiced by a selection of participants in my fieldwork. I have noted how most participants shared an opinion that experiment amounted to an act that could challenge, alter, or replace a formulaic form of writing (journalistic, academic, etcetera) or initiate a new way of creating text. Thinking about the potentiality of the experimental, the value of such writing also lies in the way it can create texts that are unfamiliar, which can decode or deconstruct the formulaic and predictable, and which can perhaps point towards the poetic or the ineffable.

CONCLUSION

Review of research questions

The primary research question mentioned in my Introduction was, “How can critical writing continue to benefit the wider contemporary visual art milieu?” My research leads me to say that the answer lies in the extent to which emerging or inexperienced writers will continue to be willing to write for little or no fee, for online journals, in the hope that they will eventually build up a body of work, a knowledge of writing, and enough contacts to begin to be paid, eventually. Put more simply, this means all that needs to happen is for the situation to remain unchanged. The contemporary art milieu, consisting of institutions, galleries, artists, journals and other writers, has enough presence in the north west region to create a constant flow of new exhibitions and work to require regular journalistic coverage. However, indications of change are emerging from one major publishing platform, Corridor 8, which has announced that it intends to pay writers from 2020, with support from arts organisations and commissions funded by ACE, while retaining the right to edit content.

In further research questions, I asked, “What is it that makes critical writers want to keep writing when they know the writing will not be paid properly?” The answers supplied to me by writers taking part in my fieldwork suggest that they not only desire to learn through the experience of unpaid writing, but that in the act of mobilizing networks that turn potential into actuality in the form of text, they feel they have support.

I also asked, “What keeps the greater body of writing renewing itself, across wider fields of relationships?” My response to this is that critical writing is renewed by the flow of writers willing to initiate and activate networks to produce texts. The greater body of writing, in the sense of critical writing across the region, is highly dependent on the continuation and renewal of the artistic milieu referred to above.

Finally, I wanted to know, “Is there any way we can understand the relationship model any better with a view to identifying a fault or dysfunction underlying the endless production of free writing?” My fieldwork reveals many examples of networks being strengthened by relationships between writers and editors, artists who collaborate with writers, writers and curators and writers and other writers. But breakdowns and faults in communication do occur, as reflected in several cases that are described in

my fieldwork, caused by the hierarchical distance between writer and editor, and leading to a loss of entelechy, or a shift of potential towards a different entelechy.

Review of aim and objectives

My aim was to construct an experiment that revealed entelechy manifesting in the networked experience of a sample of regionally-based critical writers. My fieldwork was designed to fulfil this aim, having met my objectives, which were:

1 To invite a range of writers who varied from relatively inexperienced to full-time professionals to take part in this experiment.

2 To use the experiment to record the production of critical texts by these writers during April and September, 2018, each writer having kept a diary of their writing in any form, from commissioned pieces to experimental work, and each writer having being interviewed by me in the weeks following.

3 To observe and describe how the networking process enabled entelechy to occur in the production of texts.

Review of the fieldwork

The writers who took part in the fieldwork were of a wide age-range, and they use writing in a variety of ways. As I stated in my Introduction, they were not all purely writers, as some were artists using writing as part of their artistic practice. However, the research revealed that most of the writing that was commissioned during the fieldwork period was journalistic, with other examples of exhibition texts and signage being mentioned as well as academic writing by several interviewees. The detail I received on this writing work forms the basis for my description of work routine and writing practice in Chapter 5 and entelechy in Chapter 6.

In responses to the question about experimental writing, some writers expressed an interest in breaking away from, or finding an alternative, to the formulaic side of writing, this frequently being associated with journalistic work, while a minority of writers used experimentation as a central element within their practice. Some experimental work took part during the fieldwork period, as described in Chapter 7.

The most successful aspect of the fieldwork was the material I gained from interviews and diaries, the interviews revealing the most detail, especially in relation to work routines and writing practice. The diaries were inconsistently kept, some writers merely

recording a day-by-by timetable of what they did, while others took time to reflect on what their days had contained. I therefore consider that I should have been more exact in describing what sort of diary I asked each writer to keep.

However, I did find useful material in the diaries, while the interviews provided a great deal of essential detail, as I had control over the amount of time spent in conversation. One question I asked was revealing in a different, and negative way. During the second interview, I asked: "Do you ever write in response to other writings or publications, by people you know, or don't know?" Most writers replied that they did not respond in such a way, despite the fact that as writers, they know at least some other writers. Despite the success and the need for journals in the region to issue "call outs" and to stimulate debate by asking for contributions on a particular subject, such as the Double Negative's recent series on class in the arts, the extent to which writers use writing to debate points made by others in writing is minimal.

Reviewing the research

I began this research thinking that critical writing on contemporary art in the north west of England was being produced against the odds, as a result, perhaps, of sheer determination, or even desperation, on the part of a generation of writers. I knew, and subsequently I detailed in my research, how the bulk of new writing, especially by less-experienced writers, is unpaid. I knew that in addition, training is occasional, or informal, and if it happens is usually on a one-to-one basis, in conversations between writers and editors.

What the research showed, however, was that very often, a writer's ability to "self-mend" and to learn from their own mistakes may be an additional and regular source of learning. The research showed, too, the importance of networks as social structures that can support writers and help to find opportunities for writing to be initiated and to find publication.

What I understood from the results of my fieldwork was that texts are produced *through* difficulty, and not just *despite* it. Difficulty and hiatus were not occurrences to be avoided, or that could be avoided, but had to be experienced. Furthermore, due to the fact that I had adopted an approach based on Actor Network Theory, I could conceptualise how networks connecting humans and non- humans dealt with these productive difficulties, establishing how potential can be found in networks, capable of

reaching entelechy.

I set out to distinguish actor networks from "networks" in the more commonly-used, conversational use of the word, which I refer to in Chapter 5 as "perceived networks." Regarding this, I was interested to notice how several of the writers I interviewed were keen to vilify this latter use of the expression, particularly when used as a verb.

One conclusion I went on to make, resulting from having taken an approach influenced by ANT concerns my definition of a network, which is bound around text production. I view every text as being the product of a separate network, activated for the specific purpose of producing that text, through its own entelechy, whose potential begins with the formation of that network. Following Agamben on entelechy, however, I also suggest that the activation of a network does not bring about an inevitable entelechy, or actualisation of text. An intended text can be the victim of changes within its own network, and its potential can therefore fail to find entelechy. Some writers I spoke to expressed doubts about whether a text they have produced is indeed an "actualisation" of what was originally intended. As one writer, Laura Harris, described in Chapter 6, in response to my question, "when does an idea become real?" she used the words "I don't know if it ever does."

In some cases, too, a text might be rejected or temporarily abandoned, and subsequently resubmitted for another platform or publication, thus changing the network, and finding entelechy in a new, and possibly rather different form. Changes to the text may also be made during this entelechy because of having to adopt to this new orientation. Describing the frequency of, and fluctuations within, these text-producing networks brings us closer to understanding the need and ability to develop adaptability in approaching writing with a view to developing a body of written work as well as developing writing skills, that relate strongly to the "transformative learning" claims I go on to make below.

My fieldwork indicates that networks combine selectivity and improvisation, familiarity with place and space mixing with elements of the unpredictable. While networks may well form around personal human connections such as friendships with editors and other writers, and collaborations with artists or curators, they also, in the context of critical writing, find focus on artworks as the subject of consideration for the writer. But, as I explained in Chapter 4, other non-human connections are also important, manifested not just in the routines and habits built around objects and locations, such as

favoured places to write, but also in the locations where writers and artists associate, including galleries or studios, which in the north west region have very often been refurbished or regenerated buildings, or have been situated in regeneration zones I connected with Benjamin's notion of "aura," beneficial to the economics of regeneration.

Networks can therefore be formed according to the needs of writers as well as other actors such as editors, publishing platforms, artists, or institutions. In this way every text-producing network connects with other networks addressing the publicity surrounding museums and galleries, the role of culture in the north west regeneration economy, and the documentation and archiving of contemporary art in the long-term archival memory of the internet.

Place

This research also set out to relate critical writing on contemporary art to the experience of regionality and urban regeneration. Focusing on the North West of England the research has been based on fieldwork involving a group of writers whose interest lies in contemporary art, during a period when the biggest cities in the region, Manchester and Liverpool, have been continuing to undergo regeneration that began in the 1980s, and developing and expanding their culture and tourism industries. The fieldwork revealed writers' links with regional museums, galleries, and festivals as well as artists, pointing to the importance of regional writing in terms of documentation and evaluation of art in the region, in addition to the importance of critical writing in bringing contemporary art to the attention of national audiences and readerships as well as regional ones.

The fieldwork also revealed a connection between, on the one hand, regionally-based publishing platforms like the Double Negative, Corridor 8, and Creative Tourist, and the manner they appeal to new writers, and on the other hand, the need on the part of local institutions and museums to widen their cross-community appeal and level of engagement. This interaction, between audience- widening and encouraging new critical voices, emerges as a kind of self-renewing force for cultural production in form of critical commentary, as well as contributing to the "buzz" or sense of excitement surrounding culture on a popular level, within regenerative centres like Liverpool and Manchester.

But not all the writers involved in the fieldwork were based in large cities, and,

furthermore, several writers also spoke about the extent to which they engage with art in other parts of the country, also being compelled to do so because of the need to work elsewhere. Crucially the fieldwork revealed much detail about how writers go about writing, in a field where those new to writing about art are actively being encouraged to contribute to online journals and platforms especially.

Criticism and state of writing

In discussing critical writing historically, and in observing the important contribution of feminist and performance based approaches that have emphasised the value of networks and "agility", I have noted the presence of similar networks socially in the lives of writers in my fieldwork, and I note also the importance of performative and experimental approaches in writing.

I have addressed the extent to which writing and the production of texts serves the interests of galleries, museums and Groys' notion of the "archive" of contemporary art. As such, the networks that form with such regularity, especially since the expansion of the internet, include the presence of online publishing platforms that encourage new writing and to a certain extent contribute towards the emergence of writers over time. While the range of writers varies from relatively untrained to highly experienced within the same region, it is in the field of online journals where varying levels of experience combined with an interest in furthering a possible career in the arts can count collectively for a great deal, especially contributing to an individual writer's sense of development.

A writer's ability to "self-mend" that I observe and describe in Chapters 5 and 6 relates to their success in sustaining work and developing their writing, as much as it does to their ability to produce any text to the stage of entelechy. The sense in which the state of writing in the region can be assessed therefore has to be related to the amount of documentation by new or developing writers that is being produced in this way. While experienced writers do remain in the region and can also contribute to online platforms as well as other, fully paid forms of publishing, the state of the region's writing remains volatile and unstable, its reliance on freelance and part time writers leading to frequent movement from one possible contract or workplace to another, relocation from region to region, and changes to career that can sometimes lead to abandoning writing all together.

Learning

Another conclusion I have reached is that the sense writers have of what they are doing contributes to an experience of learning. This is partly conveyed in investigations into what Latour refers to as "micromethods" responding to instances of "hiatus" and what I call "self-monitoring" and "self-mending" in writing practice, revealed in the fieldwork and described in Chapters 5 ,6 and 7.

These behaviours are notable for being reflexive in origin, although through reflexivity they can give rise to the experience of reflection. Regarding this, I have described the way habits surrounding objects like laptops, mobile phones, notebooks, and the physical position of the body of the writer in relation to furniture and domestic space, as well as the proximity of partners or family, can collectively assist and perpetuate the production of texts in actor networks.

In addition, I have equated certain habits of writing such as distancing from other people to enable the writer to concentrate on text, and then distracting the attention away again from text, as a form of rhythm, in describing which I have equated it with the "rhythmnanalysis" theory of Lefebvre.

Again, I see this as contributing towards, rather than detracting from, the production of critical writing. I argue that through these behaviors, which perhaps began in an improvised form and which have developed through repetition, and which continue to evolve and change, a form of learning takes place.

This sense of learning emerges from details contained in the interviews conducted during my fieldwork, where the process behind writing was examined in detail during questions. As a part of their writing practice, which I have examined in terms of it being a job as well as it being a productive act, I have observed how writers also learn from other writers, editors and artists, in addition to those improvised routines and habits that writers develop *in situ*, on their own, through continuing to experience the act of writing.

I argue also that these experiences and behaviors might be understood as a form of long-term "transformative" learning, quoting a term coined by Mezirow and further explored by Illeris, as described in Chapter 3. In addition, I associate the sense of urgency in addressing certain challenges that Illeris and Mezirow both identify with the stage of transformative learning to be marked further by the "split subjectivity" seen and heard

in examples of writers talking about writing and discussed in Chapter 2, in which sentence structures undergo fragmentation, stoppages and restarts when interviewees try to describe problematic situations they face as writers on contemporary art in the north west region.

Network entelechy, network ontologies

From my fieldwork it is clear that every text must answer a different requirement, from an exhibition preview to a lengthy feature exploring an ambitious theme, and from exhibition notes to the signage accompanying a new show, and that each text goes through several stages of preparation and research that each writer organises to suit the requirements made of them, combined with their own established writing habits. The network of human and non-human actants that is activated to produce the relevant text may already be partially in place before these preparations begin, or may assemble only as preparations progress. As mentioned above, I have shown through the results of my fieldwork how some writers conceive of a text being ´real´ at various stages, depending on the individual, varying from the initial stage of having an idea to the time of it being commissioned, to the time of its planning, to the moment of its publication. In arguing that new networks form every time a text is conceptualised or imagined, the thinking about text becoming "real" which I write about in Chapter 6 proposes not different entelechies (because entelechy clearly must refer to the moment of publication and completion of the net's-work) but different ontologies, or ways of experiencing and feeling the way the "thinking" of the text can be brought to entelechy. More than one writer articulated the idea that, as Joanne Lee puts it in Chapter 6, "I write in order to find out what I think." This enables the completed text to have "its own life", in Lara Eggleton's words, also in the same chapter.

The problem of "linking ontologies" has been aided by Latour's concept of "compositionism," in stressing a need to describe the folding together of things, objects, places, the non-human and the human, the non-writing time as well as the writing time in the writing process, in moving from potential towards entelechy. A total landscape of text-production may well be difficult to describe, but in assembling multiple "inner" accounts of text production my aim was to capture a sense of the multi-faceted and multi-personal character of network entelechy.

But with so much writing emerging from networks in which the unpredictable must also

play a part, from the reflexes, improvised or rehearsed, that writers perform in the formation of networks to the formal and foregrounded extreme of experimental writing, it is also possible to say that the natural consequence of underpaid or "free" writing (where training is informal and sporadic, and "self- monitoring" and "self-mending" play important roles) is this same situation of network entelechy. Perhaps, then, networks are in some ways writing themselves.

Contemporaneity and its discontents

Against the background of contemporaneity, I also tried to deal with the issue of using interviews and grouping them together in the light of Fabian's critique of ethnography, which he described in terms of a "denial of coevalness." This issue introduced doubt into a practice I am probably over-familiar with, having worked for many years as a journalist who regularly records interviews, and as an oral historian. Perhaps the impression of experiences that were somehow shared was, in fact, a misapprehension introduced by the interviewer or researcher, introducing also a hierarchical distinction between research and those being researched.

But responses made by others like Berval Bevernage (2016) make an appeal for non-coevalness, hypothesising a "normal" or "referential" contemporaneity against which "the Other" can be compared, but mentioning also the importance of certain examples of the past insisting on remaining in a present that has, seemingly, moved on. One of the examples he gave, for instance, was of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the Mothers of the Disappeared, who still demonstrate every Thursday in the centre of Buenos Aires, as a reminder of their children who were among those kidnapped and murdered in secret during Argentina's military dictatorship of the 1970s.

My own response to Fabian, however, was to call attention to what could be called the "multi- subjective" nature of some of the interview extracts selected from my fieldwork, noting the reasons for this, emotional or experiential, behind the fragmentation of certain sentences, and the way they re-started or switched direction.

Addressing contemporary art, these "multi-subjective" speech extracts were selected from answers in interviews with writers where they were speaking about their own needs, relating them to shortcomings they identified especially in art institutions and in the media, with which their own networks were sometimes linked. Looked at in Chapter 2, these included writers' needs to widen links between the public and art institutions,

the need for deeper criticality from writers as well as the public, and widespread dissatisfaction with the function of art institutions at present, combined with a general concern for the future. Specifically mentioned by writers were issues including power relations with institutions, media representation of contemporary art in the north, hostility towards curatorial decisions and artworks, art signage in galleries and museums, and the need to make critical thinking appeal to a wider public.

Contemporary art gives rise to multi-subjective responses like those I identified, as the result of a constant negotiation between manifestations of art that see themselves as summing up or commenting upon what it is to be contemporary, alongside the local needs and shortcomings of actor networks producing critical texts. The network entelechy of critical text is a manifestation of ontology as thought through network, and of responses, behaviors, and feelings shaped by reflex, leading to the actualisation of words that have emerged from human interactions with non-humans.

But despite the way an individual writer's awareness of network entelechy can help them to gain insight into the nature of contemporaneity through extension of networks, the "multi-subjective" side of my evidence reflects real difficulties that can arise in network function, difficulties that writers alone cannot resolve. Despite network entelechy, critical writers remain in a weak position within the contemporary art milieu. But because of network entelechy, there appears no end to the production of critical writing.

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