

**Archives at Play:  
The Castlefield Gallery Archive  
and the Curatorial Project**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of Manchester  
Metropolitan University for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy. This work  
was fully funded by AHRC / NWCDTP  
Collaborative Doctoral Award.

**PhD 2024**

Manchester School of Art

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## **Abstract**

This research investigates the archive of Castlefield Gallery through a proposed curatorial methodology. It does so via constructing a theoretical framework for the archive in the gallery, and reflecting on experiences of activating the gallery archive. Through this research, I posit the Castlefield Gallery archive as presently underutilised, arguing that it could become an active agent in a process of reflection and conversation around who and what Castlefield Gallery are to their constituents. I work through curating to critique and stimulate the archive into a more active role, using interventions to the archive, public events, and exhibitions. I situate these interventions in a theoretical framework of post-structuralism – facilitating unruly journeys through the Castlefield Gallery archive.

Theories of 'the archive' as a powerful influence on the present form a key part of the writings of Derrida & Foucault, major contributors to the movement of post-structuralism. I consider how their writing shares a stress on the importance of shifting, societally constructed interpretations of things, rather than searching for a stable meaning to the thing itself. At any time, there is a degree of slippage, or 'play' (Derrida, 1966), in forming our interpretations - but I show how both Foucault & Derrida propose that interpretations of culture don't 'play' randomly, they develop from existing and emergent systems – structures of validation understood as 'archive'. In this way, the relation between present and 'archive' form an influence on the possibility of what can come next. Practical exploration of this understanding of 'archive' as applied to the Castlefield Gallery archive is the departure point for this research.

## **Acknowledgements**

Through my four years of study, I have benefitted from four exceptional Principal Supervisors. My warmest gratitude to Dr. Steven Gartside, Professor Amanda Ravetz, Dr. Dani Child, and Dr. Gulsen Bal, I thank you all for your work and support. Alongside the academic team, I have spent this time with artists of incredible skill and imagination. My drive to get closer to art and artists keeps me wanting to curate, thank you for working with me.

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## Introduction

This thesis is the written element in a piece of practice-led research on the archive of Castlefield Gallery. I have questioned the constitution and contents of the archive, and how it might become a more active part of Castlefield Gallery. To do so, I have worked through curatorial practice spanning exhibition outputs, new commissions, events, and research workshops. Through working with the Castlefield Gallery archive, I have proposed a new curatorial approach situated within a post-structural theoretical framework. This approach, I argue, is uniquely suited to working with archives, which are themselves a pressing concern for the cultural ecology. This written thesis establishes my theoretical framework, investigates the Castlefield Gallery archive, describes my proposed curatorial methodology, and reports my curatorial work based on the above.

This research is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, via the North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership, and is a collaborative PhD between the Manchester School of Art at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Castlefield Gallery. The motivation for this research is to mark Castlefield Gallery's 40<sup>th</sup> year of working with contemporary artists, and as a hub of contemporary art in the North-West of England. There is an extended introduction to the gallery further on, but it is practical to lay out a brief overview here at the outset. Castlefield Gallery was established in 1984, by a group of artists who had recently graduated from Manchester Polytechnic (and one from the Royal Northern College of Music). In 1982, the group had founded Manchester Artists Studio Association, to create a space for painting, for building artistic community, and to generate income through offering art education (life drawing classes etc). Two years later, the group wanted somewhere to exhibit the art which inspired them, as well as offer exhibition opportunities to contemporary artists of the city. They opened Castlefield Gallery, initially located on Liverpool Road, off Deansgate. The gallery relocated in 2001, moving a short distance to Hewitt Street, behind Deansgate train station – both venues would be considered a small but generous gallery space. Today, the gallery continues a commitment to

developing artists of the region, whilst bringing respected names from contemporary art to the city. This is achieved via approximately 4 main exhibitions in the gallery through the year, with numerous development events taking place throughout the exhibition run. The traces of this activity come together to form the Castlefield Gallery archive, located in folders on shelves in the meeting room. Both Castlefield Gallery and the archive are given a detailed outline in this introduction.

Undertaking the research through a practical curatorial approach, I opted to be based at the gallery for much of the research period. I spent my time looking through the archive and engaging in the daily working of the gallery, as well as preparation for the two main exhibitions which would be the nexus of my research (as discussed in Chapter Four). I was embedded in Castlefield Gallery exhibitions and activities, welcoming visitors, attending events, helping with tours of the gallery, and gaining insight into the life of the gallery as it approached its fortieth birthday. As Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG) marks its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024, it is natural that its team would wish to look back on the life of the gallery. Birthday celebrations were marked when the gallery turned 35 through the exhibition *No Particular Place to Go*, in which CG reflected on their history of showing sculpture in Manchester. In 2014, a post on the 'News' section of the CG website marks the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of the gallery, where CG's then-Director, Kwong Lee, calls up the pioneering spirit of the gallery founders, stating that the gallery at 30 is as vital and energetic as it was when it began.<sup>1</sup>

It is down to the existence of an archival urge that we can look back on these activities today. A need to keep traces of history somewhere safe from the passages of time, putting the past in order. But why should it be a birthday ritual to celebrate, or mythologise, past relevance? We might answer that acknowledging the effort and vision of historic members of CG is a mark of respect by the current community who gather around the gallery.

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<sup>1</sup> It's a touchingly human post, titled Castlefield Gallery Turns the Big 3-0!, and can be found at <https://www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk/news/castlefield-gallery-turns-the-big-3-0/>

The networks of staff, volunteers, students, visitors, artists, families and peers whom I describe as the constituents of the gallery are reminded of what has been, and what might be, achieved. We can say that it shows the trajectory from then to now, how things change between particularly notable points in time.

But through this research I have come to believe that there is more to the Castlefield Gallery archive (hereafter CGA) than instrumentalising the past at isolated moments. That as well as marking time, or celebrating history, the CGA could be active in connecting to the community of people around CG. It could be used to develop new perspectives on CG amongst its community of constituents, a laboratory experimenting with new ways for the gallery to work, connecting with and using the imagination and efforts of the past. But when we use the archive, we do so within an existing structure, and can become mired in the same narratives we seek to refresh. There is a tension when working within the established systems of order – the physical and virtual spaces, the specific language, and inherited objects – whilst asking how it might be used otherwise, to foster new ideas, or new systems.

This is a tension which haunts the theories of archival practice central to my research - a presence Donna Haraway describes as 'a lurking question stalk[ing] the project of refiguration' (Haraway, 1994:60). The question is this - how to re-imagine the existing structure, while inside that structure? From the late 1990s, a swelling of artists and curators have been grappling with precisely this tension, finding ways to work with historic material and ideas, seeking to challenge the structures and systems which established their dominance. Where archives have historically been used by states and organisations to consolidate power through control of narrative and visibility, increasingly today they are a site at which galleries challenge the inherited values of the western artworld.<sup>2</sup> Academic and art historian Hal Foster coined the term 'anarchival' (Mereweather, 2006:144) to describe the abundance of

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<sup>2</sup> Examples include; artist Harold Offeh's Sky TV show, *Statues Redressed*, artist Jasleen Kaur's project *Gut Feelings Meri Jaan* exhibition, Danielle Braithwaite Shirley's work *Black Trans Archive.com*, or the Radical Ancestry season at FACT in Liverpool.

projects tackling these issues, often concerned with more complex histories, or unstable cultural projects. In these ‘anarchival’ artworks, creativity is used to disturb our relationship between past, present, and future.

‘Anarchival’ is how I frame the research of the *Archives at Play* project – a disturbance in the archive of CG. A disturbance in the still pool of the CGA to see what floats up, and how the traces of the past spread and interact. I have opened the CGA to many collaborators to find unexpected connections through forty years’ worth of traces of exhibitions, events, artists, and visitors. New experiences amidst letters from Bridget Riley and Patrick Heron, visitor comments purporting to be from Lubaina Himid (this is unconfirmed), bracketed asides in Board Minutes (‘arrived late’), frustrated faxes and pivotal commissions. The purpose is not to re-present and deify this material – but to find ways in which this past is still lively, active, and unruly.

## **Research Questions**

Through this research, I have investigated how the CGA might become a more active resource in the work of CG. For example, how the archive might be used to engage visitors in the ongoing story of the gallery or continue to value historic artistic projects. In doing so I have looked to address several research questions which underpin the project.

### **How is the CGA constituted?**

To work with the CGA, it was necessary to investigate how it is composed. Not only what materials might be found in the archive, but how these are selected, retained, and accessed. Exploring the boundaries of the archive (i.e. why some items and not others, or how the space might be used) led to constructive findings on the value of the CGA as it stands. A detailed consideration of the CGA is found in the introduction, and reports on experiments with the boundaries of the archive through curatorial interventions appear throughout this thesis.

### **How is the CGA a part of the gallery?**

Understanding the influence of the CGA was a turning point in this research. This thesis addresses my shift in hypothesis from the CGA as something prescriptive on the work of CG, to a contention of the CGA as an underused resource. Locating myself within CG provided an insight into the present status of the archive, as well as an interview with the team member currently responsible for the care of the CGA - found further in this Introduction. An extension to this question might ask, 'What does the CGA mean to the gallery?' and ultimately, 'Why does the gallery keep an archive?'.

### **How might the CGA be activated through curatorial interventions?**

Many approaches to artistic work with archives exist, and have evolved in nature - as discussed in the Theoretical Framework. However, this research proposes that it is by focussing on the particularities of an archive in context that we might find the most appropriate approaches. Chapter Four presents my experiments in curatorial interventions with the CGA through exhibition

making, identifying strengths and weaknesses in approach. The section 'Constituents and the Castlefield Gallery Archive' in Chapter Two reports on findings from curatorial interventions with groups outside of an exhibition setting. Ultimately, I look for curatorial interventions which challenge conventional readings of the archive, situating this approach in theories of 'play' – as discussed in Chapter One.

### **How might a different relationship with the archive affect the gallery?**

Through my curatorial interventions into the CGA, I look for how a new relationship with the archive might affect the workings of the gallery. For example, could the archive be used to gain perspective on gallery activity for the team, or create new networks between constituents of the gallery? Whilst I propose benefits to making the archive an active and unruly presence in CG, long term evaluation of this type of curatorial activity would be required to fully appreciate the impact on the gallery.

The above research questions frame this research, and I found them often growing and tangling with one another. For example, to engage visitors in the constitution of the CGA would be a substantial change to how active the archive is in the gallery. Alongside these questions, a set of Aims and Objectives have accompanied the research, which we shall consider now.

## **Aims & Objectives**

**Aim 1** - I aim to disturb the story of Castlefield Gallery as currently structured by their archive, to expand the considerations of Castlefield Gallery with constituents (people working at Castlefield Gallery, artists, visitors, etc). I will conduct interventions into the archive of Castlefield Gallery, playing with the structure of the archive material, and through contemporary activity which will become a part of the archive.

**Aim 2** - I aim to contribute critical findings to the possibilities and challenges of curatorial practice as a method of 'play' with the Castlefield Gallery archive. I will experiment with the possibilities of curatorial practice as the method to 'reconfigure what counts as knowledge' (Haraway, 1994:62) in a gallery.

**Objective 1** - *Research into the Castlefield Gallery archive, leading to interventions in its use and reading.*

**Objective 2** - *Engage with artists and audiences around and connected to Castlefield Gallery, uncover their relation to the archive-as-discourse of Castlefield Gallery, and from this knowledge, shape interventions to the archive through my curatorial practice in Objectives 1 and 3.*

**Objective 3** - *A curated programme of public events, activities and exhibitions. In which gallery practices between artist, audience and Castlefield Gallery address and challenge the structures of the archive. These events and exhibitions then enter the archive.*



## Methodology

With the preceding research questions, aims and objectives, this project sought to uncover findings on the status and possibility of the archive of CG. To do so, I deployed a curatorial practice with methods including close reading of the archive, analysis of the CGA, workshops, interviews and discussion, artistic commissions and exhibitions. These I developed inside what I propose as a viable curatorial methodology, Becoming-Curator. Chapter Three looks in depth at how I shape this approach, adapting it from an essay by curator and academic Suzana Milevska (Milevska, 2013). But it is valuable at this introductory stage to establish the background to selecting this approach, considering the research methods used, and how with further testing and evaluation my approach of Becoming-Curator might become a practical curatorial methodology.

The approach I present as a potential methodology focusses on opening the CGA to unexpected encounters alongside constituents through creative situations (be they a talk, event, or exhibition) to uncover more findings on the potential of the archive. However, this is an evolution of the Collaborative Doctoral Award (hereafter CDA) as it was originally proposed in 2020. In the CDA, the focus is put as such:

*'The project investigates curatorial process with partner organization, Castlefield Gallery, the research question is to consider how the exhibition history of a 'small to medium' sized visual art gallery can be 'mined' to reveal less visible histories of artistic development and deferred value?' (MMU / Castlefield Gallery 2020)*

At the outset of this research, the direction appeared to be towards demonstrating the valuable role CG plays in supporting artists in developing their careers – using the CGA to show how artists have gone on from

projects with CG to more established work.<sup>3</sup> To this end, it would be necessary to understand the contents of the archive, and I undertook a process of close reading of the materials therein. During this close reading, I would take written notes of recurrent themes affecting gallery activity, of unusual and notable projects, or connections between names and organisations. I was discovering echoes of Arts Council strategies, historic essays by notable artists, and the experiments and tribulations in the running of an artist focussed gallery. It was a process of immersing myself in the CGA, and I realised that the linearity of my written notes could not adequately express the interrelations and motifs carried in the archive. As with the CGA, my notes from 1984 would remain at some chronological distance in my book from details of 2004. At this point, alongside my notes, I created a large digital mind map, which could visualise clusters of gallery activity. Now I could see events such as the very first CG website (launched in 1996, but you had to go to a particular internet café to view it) in context with CGs work with digital art, as well as their website history. Partnerships with trusts and foundations, commercial galleries, and peers such as MMU or The Whitworth could be seen in the context of financial imperative, as well as creative alignment. It should be said that this was a partial process, governed by my own values and editing, and unable to record all names and connections, but it was a far more active way to see the CGA, and prompted a shift in the direction of this research. Rather than the CGA being an inert repository from which to demonstrate the deferred value of working with CG to their constituents and peers, I wanted to focus this research on the CGA itself. What was its influence or imperative? How could the archive become a more active agent in the gallery activity? I considered that the CGA might hold more potential than was currently realised and set about investigating the constitution and activation of the archive.

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed - realising that CG and the Turner Prize both started in 1984, I looked at the correlation between nominees to the Turner Prize and artists who had worked with CG, finding a significant overlap. As I write in Chapter Two, 'from Howard Hodgkin (nominee, 1984 / exhibited at CG 1991) to Veronica Ryan (winner, 2022 / exhibited at CG 1987)'.

I could not at first see what methodology might guide my research, but I was active in trying different methods. I have mentioned the close reading, alongside the use of notes and digital mind maps – both effective tools. Another approach tried was qualitative data analysis, using the software Nvivo. I determined that I would analyse the data from the online archive of CG, as it held text on (nearly) every exhibition from the beginning of the gallery.<sup>4</sup> I spent a long time bringing the text into Nvivo, and began to look for word frequency, and word relations. However, this was not a productive approach. Word frequency analysis was mired in words such as ‘gallery’, ‘art’, or ‘Manchester’, and words relations only provided weak connections (perhaps given the heterogeneity of contemporary art projects). Whilst data analysis of this kind did not appear to be furthering the research, the amalgamated website text in an easily searchable document has proved to be incredibly useful – see Chapter Two and using the archive with Constituents for more details.

Whilst continuing my research into the CGA, I was working towards fixed exhibition dates. From starting the project in late 2020, the first exhibition would be in Spring 2022, the following in Spring 2023. I found having this focus of activity extremely useful, shaping my approach to the research. Towards the exhibitions, I was looking to better understand CG and their archive, and conducted eight interviews with people who had been involved with CG past and present.<sup>5</sup> I found that the interviews were productive, providing greater context on the CGA, but more often uncovering the ethos and history of CG. Critical reflection on these interviews furthered my understanding of the history of CG, but rarely addressed the importance of the archive (excluding the interview with the person currently responsible for the archive!). Given this, I did not process the interviews through any analytical tools, but rather appreciated them for bringing me closer to the story and ethos of CG.

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<sup>4</sup> The online archive can be found on the Castlefield Gallery website.

<sup>5</sup> Four are used in this thesis and can be found in the appendices.

In producing the two major exhibitions, I commissioned seven new artistic commissions, with each artistic engagement prompting new ways of thinking about archives, or particularly the CGA. I orchestrated eight events, again provoking conversation around working with archives. To prepare for workshops, I undertook to digitise a large portion of the CGA, not only creating a resource, but further immersing myself in the contents of the archive. These scans were used by participants to make new connections or stories through the archive, revealing more about what people were drawn to in the CGA. Through this work with the archive, I realised that I was applying curating as a method to experiment and research the CGA. It was through this iterative process of research and activity around the exhibitions that the shape and possibility of the CGA was become clearer. I am reminded of curator and writer Nicholas Bourriard, who said in an interview ‘when I have a question, I curate an exhibition, and when I have a few answers, I write a book’ (Bourriard, 2018:online). Reflecting on the relationship between writing curatorial theory and practice, Bourriard positions the activity of curating as ‘the place for interrogating or sometimes verifying ideas’ (Bourriard, 2018:online) and the written text as the site those ideas can be set down. Developing Bourriard’s thinking, I should stress the value of having two research exhibitions on the same subject, and an ongoing curatorial practice, in which to refine and clarify the questions I was asking. As I worked through exhibition making on the CGA, hypothesis and approaches were tested and altered.

With this sense that a curatorial approach would be the way to conduct this research, I revisited texts which had shaped my curatorial thinking. Doing so, I found a resonance with my approach in the essay *Becoming-Curator* by Suzana Milevska (2013) and saw the possibilities for adapting the essay into a prospective methodology.<sup>6</sup> I continued my practice of exhibition making, workshops, interviews, archival analysis etc as before, but now conceived of them inside a guiding container of the approach I

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<sup>6</sup> A full description of my adaptation of ‘Becoming-Curator’ into a way of conducting a curatorial investigation can be found in Chapter Three.

adapted – Becoming-Curator. The approach I had adapted from Milevska's essay emphasises certain ways of curating, and I have tuned it to be particularly well suited for archival projects. However, it is important to note that this is (to my knowledge) the first time that this curatorial approach has been structured as a toolkit of methods – and thus would require greater testing and evaluation before being truly understood as a methodology.

For example, we can say that curating contains different methods, what heritage scholars Trinidad Rico and Rachel King term 'tools for gathering evidence and shaping knowledge' in their book *Methods and Methodologies in Heritage Studies* (2024). For example, when working with an artist on an archive commission, I discover what attracts them in the archive, and what they want to share with a public audience. When I curated an installation directly within the CGA, it reveals evidence of the vulnerabilities and stresses on the archive. The exhibitions or workshops are data gathering processes, and my presence and critical reflection shape an understanding of the archive, which might be tested in later activities.

While my approach of Becoming-Curator structures a way of following these methods, further evaluation and trials would be required for it to be considered a methodology - a tested 'research design and rationale' (Rico and King, 2024:5). To do so would require durational assessment, further evaluation, and ideally deployment in a new context. Duration would be important, as whilst my interventions in the CGA produce data in the short term, (for example I see the results of constituents connecting around archival material in interviews or exhibitions), Becoming-Curator doesn't contain a method looking at how this activation of the archive affects the gallery working over time. With further evaluation, it would be interesting to take apart parts of the approach (i.e. the strand of translational curation) and refine these methods in isolation. Finally, to take the approach of Becoming-Curator to a new setting would test the approach under different circumstances, revealing whether the methods were robust in various circumstances, and eliciting new evidence on Becoming-Curator as a

potential methodology. These considerations are discussed further in Chapter Three, and in the conclusion.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This research contributes to the critical thinking around the use and activation of archives within a visual art gallery context. My contribution to knowledge comes through furthering the theoretical context to archival practice, by proposing a particular curatorial approach to archival experimentation, and by developing a set of practical recommendations for the archive of Castlefield Gallery and similar venues.

### **A New Theoretical Context**

In Chapter One, I establish a post-structural lineage to a movement in archival artistic interventions. In particular, I consider a shift from an abstracted notion of 'archive' as influential on the social imagination, to a practical understanding of an archive as active in shaping situations between organisations and constituents. My contribution here is to further practical post-structural archival thinking through an application of Harawarian ideas as found in the essay 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (1992), and proposing a connection between this paper, and an early Derridean notion of 'play' (1966). By connecting these papers, and showing their relevance to archival thinking, I propose a new context for activating, or 'playing' with an archive.

### **A New Curatorial Approach**

To investigate the CGA, I developed a curatorial approach based on this context of 'playing' with the archive. In the previous section, I detailed how this approach (Becoming-Curator) contains curatorial methods, and in Chapter Three I closely consider my adaption of Milevska's essay to a mode of archival investigation. I propose how, in the archival context I establish, this method of catalysing the archive brings constituents closer to the activity and history of the gallery. In addition, by involving constituents in the activity

of the archive, it generates unexpected perspectives and avenues of enquiry for the gallery.

### **New Archival Actions**

Following this research, I present a series of recommendations for activating the archive. Given that CG have been my partner organisation, I have tailored these recommendations towards their circumstances. This said, as a series of actions, they have value more broadly to galleries interested in the archive as a resource for rethinking their relationships with constituents. In Chapter Two, whilst considering the term ‘constituents’, I look at ‘*The Constituent Museum*’ (Byrne, J. Morgan, E. Paynter, N. Sánchez de Serdio, A. Železnik, A., 2018) – and how for the group of galleries and museums who published this text, the archive is considered a site of radical potential to rethink the museum. It is galleries like those represented by the writings above, who see the archive as a potential tool in advancing their practice, that I consider the receptive audience for my actions and recommendations.

## Introducing Castlefield Gallery and the Archive

What constitutes the archive of Castlefield Gallery? What traces are accumulated in the span of Castlefield Gallery and where are the boundaries? This line of questioning asks what kind of materials we might find within the sites termed as ‘the archive’. What is in the folders of the designated archive space, or on the website? Online, text from sources such as press releases or exhibition handouts, inside Castlefield Gallery, two shelves of magazine files hold plastic report folders packed with documents in a space with ‘Meeting Room’ written on the door.<sup>7</sup> But how and why does something become archival? Probing the constitution of the archive spreads out from the archive folders and towards the edges of these spaces and definitions – for example, whether the equipment purchased for a particular exhibition and kept in a cupboard might contribute value to the archive. Or, closer to the artist’s hand, why a set of plants used in an installation, and then distributed amongst the staff team, couldn’t be considered as a distributed archival object. In an interview, the director of the Van Abbemuseum, Charles Esche, identifies something called ‘the Grey archive’ (Asia Art Archive, 2012: online), where the objects are neither official paperwork nor artwork - a zone of indeterminate boundaries populated by materials not quite one thing nor another. Acknowledging this space, a periphery demonstrating the subjectivity and complication of archival categorisation, means we should broaden the question from *what* into *how* the archive of Castlefield Gallery is constituted – to consider the network of decisions and possibilities around what is kept, how that gets decided, how the material is stored, accessed, disseminated, and used. The wide spectrum of archival materials bound with the dynamics affecting the preceding questions constitute my broad definition of an archive structure (as developed in my Theoretical Framework Chapter). I argue that it is by working with the broader archival structure that we might get the most

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<sup>7</sup> A more complete description of the Castlefield Gallery Archive is covered in the following section.



inspiration from and activation of the archive, to keep it as a space of vitality and discovery.

Think of the archive of Castlefield Gallery as a still pool of water. A flat surface lets us peer down to the bottom; a story of DIY artist-led origins, artists gifting works to keep the gallery afloat, local communities, pivotal commissions. The archive pool is fed by upcoming events becoming archival events, exhibition photography stored online, gallery guides tucked into document wallets. But the flows of material into the pool is getting weaker; correspondence goes unprinted and flyers are sent digitally. No-one is swimming in the pool, bringing the layers of mud from the bottom up to the top. No stones are skimmed to watch ripples bounce and interfere with one another. There is no growth around the edges, blurring the boundaries and bringing alien nutrients. With a thinning input, little activity or diversification, the archive pool will become stagnant. To stir life into the archive, look to the broad definition of how the Castlefield Gallery archive is constituted. We must consider what is kept, how is the material stored and accessed, and how it might be used, activated, roused to life.

In this introduction, I will offer a portrait of CG, before giving an in-depth introduction to the archive. My intention with the former is to provide an outline of the partnership organisation, whilst showing how the archival approach I endorse would need resources already subject to great pressure. In the latter, I introduce the CGA, establishing the ground of this research, and beginning to question the fixed boundaries and constitution of the CGA. By starting to critique the logics by which the archive works, I show lines of potential disruption to the CGA, or how we might look at the structures of the CGA from new angles. In addition to this, spending time working with traces of the past can create perspectives on current gallery activity which are rooted in history.

## **A Portrait of Castlefield Gallery**

As I advocate for the potential of experimentation with the CGA across all strands of the gallery, I understand that it requires resources which are subject to intense competition. My curatorial practice of activating the CGA required the support of the gallery team, and access to funds from CG and academic supporters. So, before I consider the constitution of and experimentation with the archive in Castlefield Gallery, I want to first recognise the challenges faced with integrating experimental archival work.

Castlefield Gallery is split over two floors, with a wall space of around 70m, and a capacity of 100 people standing. It is larger than many pop-up type spaces, studio, and commercial galleries in Manchester, but small in terms of a civic institution.<sup>8</sup> Per the website and their charitable objectives, Castlefield Gallery have a remit as a contemporary art gallery focussed on developing artists at all stages of their career, particularly in the Manchester City Region and the Northwest of England. The gallery works to deliver these objectives under pressure of decreasing financial resources requiring detailed audience metrics. As CG is a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) the Arts Council England currently (as of 2024) contribute £71,288 annually - approximately 10% of the income of the gallery (Charities Commission, 2022:online).<sup>9</sup> As an NPO, Castlefield Gallery receive this funding for the period 2023 to 2026, the lowest award for Visual Arts, and Combined Arts, in Manchester.<sup>10</sup> For the period 2018 – 2022, Castlefield Gallery were awarded

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the space is larger than the Manchester based commercial galleries Saul Hey or Contemporary 6, and larger than the exhibition spaces in AO studios, Rogue Studios or Paradise Works studio – but smaller compared to the Whitworth, Manchester Art Gallery, or The Holden Gallery.

<sup>9</sup> National Portfolio Organisations are 990 organisations which receive an amount of regular funding from the Arts Council England for a span of around 3 years. As of January 2024 ACE have just extended NPO funding for an extra year, with the Chief Executive citing competition and pressure for the ACE funds as one of the reasons.  
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/time-to-think>

<sup>10</sup> Data from the 'Investment Programme 2023 – 26 Data – Offered organization, NPO, IPSO, Transfer' file available for free public download at  
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Investment%20Programme%202023-26%20Data%20-%20Offered%20organisations%2C%20NPO%2C%20IPSO%2C%20Transfer%20.xlsx>

£70,000 annually – so although 2023 meant an additional £1,288, factoring inflation into this figure suggests this is roughly a £16,000 decrease.<sup>11</sup> As investment from Arts Council England (ACE) in Castlefield Gallery is decreasing (given inflation), measures of impact on audiences become simultaneously more important to prove the worth of the gallery, and far more challenging as various survey and review initiatives are trialled, and then changed.

In 2022 ACE announced they were moving audience survey input and analysis from The Audience Agency (who had themselves taken over audience survey input and analysis in 2018) to PriceWaterhouseCoopers, which would use a different input platform called Illuminate (Arts Council England, 2022:Online). Although Illuminate was meant to be functional in April 2023, for the start of the funding period, it was delayed to June (Arts Council England, 2023: Online). While Castlefield Gallery work to adapt to new platforms for demonstrating their value, whilst receiving less funding, it is necessary for them to look for additional funding streams. As per the Financial Filings of Castlefield Gallery to the Charities Commission for year end 2021/22, these include investment from: Manchester City Council, The European Social Fund, The Art Fund, the Grenada Foundation, the Brian Mercer Charitable trust, the Patrons scheme, public donations, and corporate donations through the New Art Spaces initiative – to name only a selection (The Charities Commission, 2022: Online). All this fundraising requires work of submission, management, administration, events, evaluation etc which requires staff resources (there are no dedicated fundraisers on the staff at Castlefield Gallery), whilst the same staff maintain the objectives of the gallery and their commitment to artist development.

In 2023, the gallery held four long running exhibitions at their gallery space: *Tale of the Frozen Bits* by El Morgan, *Archives at Play 2* curated by

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<sup>11</sup> Inflation Calculator at the Bank of England website suggests that £70,000 in 2018 would equate to £87,232 in 2023. Thus, £71,288 is roughly a £16,000 decrease in investment in line with inflation.

me towards this research, *The Poetics of Water* with Jessica El Mal and Parham Ghalamdar, and an Omid Asadi solo exhibition. El Morgan's exhibition proposal was selected from the Castlefield Gallery Associates in a biennial exhibition opportunity; the research presented in this thesis is a collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University; Jessica El Mal and Parham Ghalamdar have been part of a project involving five Northwest partners rethinking gallery collecting models in view of the climate crisis, and Omid Asadi's exhibition is part of the core CG objective of supporting artistic development in the region.

Each of these exhibitions included between three and five exhibition specific events to connect visitors to the artworks, alongside a programme of events for the Castlefield Gallery Associates. The Associates are artists who pay a yearly contribution of £60 to become members, and gain access to special events, mentorship, and the application to the exhibition slot – this time awarded to El Morgan. The Associates are also able to apply for studio space in one of the Castlefield Gallery New Art Spaces – pop-up project spaces around the Northwest of the UK managed by Castlefield Gallery. In turn, the Associates in the New Art Spaces also hold events and exhibitions across the region. In 2023, alongside working on the ongoing exhibitions programme, the New Art Spaces, and The Associates, there have been 45 events administered by Castlefield Gallery (Castlefield Gallery Archive, 2023:online).

I give an overview of these financial and artistic commitments to show how hard the gallery are working to deliver on their core objectives in the face of straightening resources. While I argue that deploying the CGA could be folded into an exciting dimension of the gallery work, I know that to experiment with this different way of working is uncertain and costly. The above should demonstrate why uncertain and costly experimentation isn't an enticing prospect for CG at the present time. This said, there are small

activities which can keep the CGA active – for example, diversifying the objects entering, or keeping placements or interns making ‘archive stories’.<sup>12</sup>

## **A Portrait of the Archive**

The following description of the CGA as it is understood within CG – by which I mean the designated historic traces of CG – is the first attempt to outline this uncatalogued and diverse body of material. By doing so, I reflect on the constitution and status of the archive. This establishes the ground of the archive which I aim to disturb, finding points into which curatorial interruptions might follow. It allows us to consider the broad sense of the CGA, to get insight into what is kept, who decides what is kept, how it is kept, and how the materials are accessed and distributed.

In this account I have aimed to describe the CGA from a subjective perspective, reflecting on the CGA as someone using it. This is an application of my methodology of Becoming-Curator (discussed in Chapter Three) with the CGA, proposing that it is through encouraging non-hierarchical, personal relationships with the archive, that we can uncover more unexpected connections, or departures of inspiration. In describing the CGA, I will follow an order based on Irit Rogoff’s approach to radical actualization of a gallery space, considering the Objects, Spaces, Actors and Situations of the archive.<sup>13</sup> However, while this order makes sense in working from the smallest object to the broadest situation, to give an account of someone approaching the archive it feels illogical to discuss the items before the space they inhabit. For that reason, I will look at the spaces, objects, actors and situations of the CGA.

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<sup>12</sup> Archive Stories is the name I gave to the social media posts which took a theme to be explored through the CGA. I encouraged placements and staff members to make a selection of 4/5 objects from the archive and a very short piece of text which explained why that theme, and what the items were. Themes included ‘trace’, ‘home’, and connections to the first exhibition of CG.

<sup>13</sup> For more on Irit Rogoff’s project of actualizing the potentiality of the gallery space, see Chapter One on my Theoretical Framework.

## Spaces

By analysing the space of the CGA, I consider how the structures which hold the archive shape the contents within them, or the understanding thereof. I look at how archive materials accumulate in this space and are ordered within, discussing the access and navigation of the space. I consider the distinctions marking out what is considered 'archive' and remain observant for unruly traces which might act as points from which to disturb the narrative of CG as structured in the CGA.

There is one space which most clearly appears to hold the CGA; the 'Meeting Room' inside CG.<sup>14</sup> Here, traces of past CG activity are kept in chronological order, with a degree of security enabling differing levels of access. But the space is not inert in affecting the constitution of the archive, having a bearing on the nature of the objects that are kept, how they are kept, and accessed. How this space works, or shapes use, has repercussions for the functioning of the CGA and how it might be activated. Whether this site is messy, welcoming, or functional, has an impact. To give an example, the size of the physical room determines how many people might be able to access the space simultaneously. While my broad definition of the archive allows for an extremely distributed sense of the spaces of the CGA (i.e. the shutters of the current gallery carry a history of artworks and commissions), focussing on the organisation and approach to this main space raises questions of how the traces of CGA can remain an active part of the gallery.

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<sup>14</sup> There is another space, which I see as the website of CG. From here, someone can look back through the history of exhibitions and events (and news) of CG from anywhere, without requiring to be in the physical gallery. This is perhaps the most public site of the CGA, and contains a wealth of information, predominantly text, on historic activity. However, I focus on the physical site of the CGA here, as most productive to the gallery, and without wanting to divert into a broader discussion around online access and preservation. I will, however, say that when CG updated their website in June 2024, it has made the Archive functionality much harder to use. The previous website had an Archive section which was navigable by year, along with a deeply flawed search function. But a visitor could relatively simply look at exhibitions which took place in the year 1984 (for example). Currently, a visitor would need to repeatedly click 'next' through an unsorted timeline of exhibitions all the way to 1984. This research advocates for the archive to be accessed and used by diverse constituents, and currently the website does not contribute to this kind of activity.

The gallery Meeting Room measures 330cm wide, 413cm deep and 260cm tall, and as such, is quite cramped. The room became the Meeting Room in 2022, in the identity redesign of that year – having previously been known as ‘Office 2’. This space was made available to rent in 2014, in an effort to increase revenue to the gallery.<sup>15</sup> Images online (currently lost during the website migration) presented a windowless space, lit by fluorescent tubes, with chipboard desks, industrial racking shelves full of post-it notes and biros, an incredibly small oil heater, and a single sheet of flipboard paper taped to the wall. While the furniture has become more personable, the fluorescent light and issues with heating remain. Instead of the office set-up, the room is outfitted with an A0 plan chest, a large table (around 120cm x 240cm), and a total of five sets of shelves. The shelving and plan chest mean that this is a space well suited to storing materials (mainly paper), and the enclosed space around a large table makes it the best space in CG for meetings.

Of all the shelves in the space, the archive holdings sit across just two units. We will cover what and how under Objects, but in terms of Space, six shelves of the two units hold the archive materials. The other shelves on these units are taken up by surplus copies of publications that accompany exhibitions, CDs and memory sticks with exhibition-specific content, magazines and a maquette of the gallery (see *figs.11 & 12*). These shelves should be seen as the first point of the CGA's spread out from its designated containers, attracting material by degrees of proximity further and further removed from an objective exhibition history. At this closeness, the material has strong archival relevance to an exhibition – surplus copies of the *Diagonal Noise* publication (exhibition at Castlefield Gallery, 2016) is playfully produced with a cassette tape and thematically colourful string, and feels wasteful to just dispose of. The cardboard maquette of CG (approx. 1:100) was constructed by James Ackerley to mock-up the layout for his

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk/news/office-2-available-for-rent/>

sculptures as a part of the 2016...*In Dark Times* exhibition, and is far too well made and (potentially) useful to throw away.

This is an instructive observation: it is a power of the CGA - and perhaps all archives - to attract material at the periphery, we might say archive-adjacent objects and systems. And to emphasise, the CGA as it should most usefully be defined is the broad archive definition, encompassing the spaces, objects, actors and situations - and the pressures that shape the functioning thereof.<sup>16</sup> So, when considering why the CGA attracts material, we can look to the nature of the room in which the physical holdings are kept; a clean and less used space designed for storage, it suggests itself as somewhere to keep things that seem precious. For this reason, the Meeting Room is often used as a holding space during exhibition changeover, where artworks can be kept safe out of the way. The space attracts the publications, prints or ephemera from an exhibition in the same way, which over time take up residence in the space. It is valuable to observe that the CGA has this energy for growth but, without an archive strategy, it expands in these ways that do not at first appear to be 'archival' (pertaining to exhibition and exhibition events) and are therefore shaped more by practical pressures than archival thinking. While the designated physical archive files and folders might be getting thinner, the traces of a broad archive are expanding around the edges of the space itself.<sup>17</sup>

Moving out from the shelving units that hold the designated archive folders - one of the other units in the room is full of back copies from journals such as *Art Monthly* and *Artists Newsletter*, and the other two store the books, zines and publications which have gathered around CG. For example, artist Garth Gratrix was in the gallery preparing for an exhibition of prints developed as part of the PIVOT artist development programme (exhibited in May 2022). Whilst there, Garth gave a copy of their '*In Collaboration With...*'

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<sup>16</sup> Such as the lack of other space, demands on time for staff, or pressures from funding.

<sup>17</sup> This growth is to a huge degree if we consider the CG online storage as a repository of correspondence, images and plans that might otherwise have entered the archive.



publication to the gallery. This publication went into the shelves but is not recorded in any content management system. As with the CGA, the resources needed to keep a collection of publications ordered and active are at a premium, and usually deployed elsewhere.

Between the archival documents, publications and old magazines, the room is filled with writing and images somewhere connected to traces of activity by CG. The space surrounds you with records of activity, ideas, history and essays in wildly differing registers: on one side of a page is a feature about David Hiscock's Olympic athletes commission (exhibited in CG September 1992) and on the other is a feature about Diana Princess of Wales titled 'The Sexual Volcano' (Esquire, June 1992). There is an abundance of traces that have found their way into this room, and not always via well-documented routes. In the plan chest, prints that were to be sold for fundraising are kept in tissue wrapping. A couple of drawers up are small well-wrapped bags containing 'soil from 'Formosa'' from the artist Channel\_A's work in the 2008 *Asia Triennial Manchester*. On top of the plan chest are bubble-wrapped posters for exhibitions by CG from the late 80s, and on the walls are prints which have been given to the gallery, or are to be sold from the gallery. Around the sides of the room are plastic chests which hold media fast becoming unreadable – MiniDV tapes and DVDs. Recordings of events, talks, and launches - which don't fit well in the A4 document wallets - have been gathered into these boxes.

This space, where across six shelves the neatest traces of the CGA are kept – the flyer, the press release, the install photograph – has attracted an incredibly rich archival periphery of materials, gathered into a small room. It is a space where objects valued for their cultural content accumulate, without necessarily being strategically part of the CGA. This space holds a variety of materials; framed prints, maquettes, MiniDV tapes, earth, assorted documents, publications and magazines as the most obvious – and does so according to very little logic. Because of exerting so little structure over what materials should be in which location, or how to navigate and use them, it has a lot to offer those people looking for unexpected connections, or to have

an unplanned wander through the history of CG. A jumbled logic of uncertainty, chance and accident has brought this assemblage into this space, which enables the possibility for the chance encounters, discovery and inspiration that I argue is beneficial to working with the CGA.

Working on the CGA in the Meeting Room I open folders, scanner, publications, notepads, laptop, and assorted records across the large desk, and follow the 'adventure of the trace' (Derrida, 1966:292) through the story of the gallery. The space allows for engagement with these disparate materials, while still feeling intimately stuffed with object histories, surrounded by drawers, chests and folders ready to be opened - what Bachelard calls 'the first differential of discovery' (Bachelard, 1969:85) in his book, *The Poetics of Space*. In Bachelard's writing on the intimacy of closed cupboards, drawers and boxes, there is a useful comparison to an exploration of the CGA in this space – referencing an analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's story, *The Gold-Bug* by Jean-Pierre Richard. At the conclusion of Poe's story, when the incredible treasure is found and counted, Richard emphasises that it is the poetic rather than forensic exploration of the chest that allows the most precious mystery of treasure hunting to continue. Richard writes that it multiplies and points to other unknown treasures, arousing dreams and schemes, and it is in this way the chest becomes truly bottomless. Bachelard tells us that 'The infinite quality of the intimate dimension could not be better expressed' (Bachelard, 1969:86). The physical space of the CGA, with its chronology and uncertainty, with records without neat accounts, is replete in the intimate dimension.

While the physical archive space enables an open-ended discovery of its contents, it is not 'open' in the sense of allowing access to any visitor. The same uncertain accumulation that makes for playful discovery of the archive mean that there are papers which can reveal personal data, or materials of uncertain provenance. This is something we will consider more closely when discussing the vulnerability of the archive in the 'Threads of the Archive' section (Chapter Two). Because of this, the archive space remains separated from the gallery, and visitors are rarely brought into the Meeting Room to

look at the archival objects. However, we can turn our attention to them now, to see what kind of materials are gathering in the CGA.

## **Objects**

Having considered the space of the archive, I will look at what we find within the CGA. In the discussion of the physical spaces, I showed how the spaces were not neutral, but held the archive in their own dynamics of use, or logics of order, susceptible to glitches and un-planned accumulation. These dynamics shape how and what materials are held in the CGA. Now I want to look at the objects which have accumulated there – what kind of materials we find, how they might be used for perspective on the gallery, and ways in which I have used them. I also emphasise how the objects themselves are not a clear and linear history, but contain unruly gaps and anomalies.

The objects of the CGA are the traces of past activity accumulating in, and my broad archive contends, around, the gallery. For CG, there are objects kept for utility, items kept for posterity, and a gulf in between where objects persist according to some other logic - usually uncertainty about how to resolve the object (i.e. dispose of or sort into a space). In this gulf is the Van Abbemuseum concept of 'grey' archive material – items such as artists plans or maquettes of exhibitions – as well as 'exhibition material ... from the 1970s when we started to become environmentally aware and didn't throw everything out' (Asia Art Archive, 2012; online). Archival objects such as the mugs, kept for their utility, stay active through use, carrying their history in a very different register to the various exhibition documents involved in the work with artists that is the purpose of CG.<sup>18</sup> When not celebrating an anniversary, these document traces tend to stay out of sight, in a strange inverse of perceived archival value and utility. So, I will address this lyrical register of words and images printed and kept in the folders designated as

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<sup>18</sup> The following section relates the foundations and aims of the gallery.

the archive. I shall start by looking at the kind of material traces which are kept according to design, objects held through a desire to preserve.

*Figs. 9 and 10* show a good sample of the kind of materials that constitute a lot of the archival documents, and how these objects are stored and arranged. They give us an example of what is kept, and how it is kept. There is no set vocabulary for the fittings of the archive – but call the hard plastic, see-through container in *fig. 9* a magazine file, and the flexible document wallet open in *fig. 10* a report folder. There are presently 41 of these magazine files dedicated to holding traces of CG past activity, holding 262 report folders. When CG reopens in their present Deansgate location, in 2002, the folders change from the red plastic report folders to see-through ring binders. What remains constant across the change is that the archival materials are overwhelmingly paper, and to be stored at A4 size. It is a requirement for the objects that can be stored here and a limit – later in the chapter we look at an A3 page from an arts journal (*fig. 6*) which requires a large scanner able to shrink the piece, or to be cut, or folded. To gear the CGA towards paper at A4 size is a logical choice, when so much of the preparation for an exhibition would suit this constraint – but it does create a distinction which it can be productive to dismantle. To tell the story of the gallery through objects and materials other than documents can change the experience of engaging with the archive – as I found in my work with George Gibson & Grace Collins, Anna FC Smith, and the students who curated *Peripheral Visions*. Embracing the ‘outlaw’ archival traces, and bringing them into conjunction with the designated materials, brings a new dimension to the CGA.<sup>19</sup>

In *fig. 9* we see the magazine file holding the report folders which document the exhibitions from March 1984 through to March 1987. In total,

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<sup>19</sup> I use ‘outlaw’ here considering Foucault’s contention of the archive as ‘first the law of what can be said’ (Foucault, 2002; 145). This being the case, there are outlaw statements not preserved by the archive – or in this instance, non-paper or non A4 documents. This is something I explore in the Theoretical Framework with reference to Irit Rogoff. For CG, this outlaw archive should be brought into conjunction with the designated archive.

fourteen exhibitions and fourteen report folders (one for each exhibition), starting with John Hoyland, and ordered chronologically through to Stephen Cooper & Mary Wood. A bristle of yellow post-it notes marks where objects have been moved or used, a feature common to the magazine files, with more added during my research. As in *fig. 9*, on the front cover of each report folder is the name of the exhibiting artist or group exhibition title and the dates of the exhibition. In this instance, the additional information '1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition' is handwritten on the front piece. I value the handwritten titles for two connected reasons; first, this thick marker pen is a human touch in the archive, and second, it is open to errors. For example, if you look carefully in *fig. 9*, a piece of cardboard with scratchy black ink pokes out from the top of one of the report folders. It's the folder containing objects from the Patrick Heron exhibition – but this handwritten header reads 'Paintings, Drawings & Gouaches by *Michael* Heron' (my emphasis). It's not that the CGA should abandon order and striving for accuracy, rather that slips and glitches like this pierce the boundaries of the CGA. Doing so, these glitches open the archive to a more complex, blurred approach to archival thinking inside CG. An archival logic intent on recording a flawless account of productive human activity in a small, artist-focussed organisation, will inevitably miss a large quantity of what keeps such an organisation going – the people, the constituents involved.<sup>20</sup>

Opening a report folder, there is no certainty as to what material will be inside, as archival strategies aren't in place to prescribe what objects should be kept. Instead, people have deposited items as they felt were appropriate, influenced by previous archival choices (more on this next in 'Actors'). Because of this, opening a folder has an excitement of discovery - you can find letters from Patrick Heron, or Paula Rego tucked inside folders.

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<sup>20</sup> In Chapter Two, the section, 'Origins in the Archive' shows the value volunteer and co-operative labour has and continues to hold for CG. The upcoming text on 'Actors' considers the unassigned position of 'archivist' in CG. By constituents I refer to those groups of people brought together through CG such as artists, staff, public and students. The term has gained prominence since the publication of 'The Constituent Museum' (L'Internationale, 2018), but I don't intend to advocate their positions of museology / gallerism through adopting this term, it simply works well. However, see Chapter 2 section 'Constituents and the Castlefield Gallery Archive' for clarification.

Old insurance claims for damages to artworks and accompanying letters of apology to the artists detailing the circumstances. There are frustrated faxes about the British Art Show, arguments about fees from sponsors, a short-lived Zine called the Granby Row Review, and a typewritten essay by Frank Bowling. This variation in material makes for a diverse journey through the archive of CG, but *fig. 10* provides a grounding for the objects inside the folders.

On the left of the folder in *fig. 10* is a consignment note from Waddington Graphics, with the costs for several Hoyland printed editions being borrowed by CG, and the conditions for commission if sold.<sup>21</sup> On the right are objects used in promoting the exhibition at CG: in the front, a bright mail invite with a borderless image of the John Hoyland promotional work, and at the back, an A5 folded flyer with the same image alongside information about the gallery and exhibition.<sup>22</sup> In the middle, with just the serif graphic header 'John Hoyland' poking out, is a flyer for the Waddington Graphics exhibition *Prints & Monotypes 1979-83*. Perhaps it was sent with the consignment note, or in the arrangements for borrowing the prints, but it marks at the outset of CG the start of an interesting relationship with commercial galleries. We see traces of the relationship with commercial galleries in the folders artists from Paula Rego in 1989 or Howard Hodgkin in 1991, through to the Nina Chua & Daniel Silver exhibition in 2023.

I draw attention to this commercial relationship considering CG's ongoing drive to generate income, and the possibilities for developing regional artists by connecting them with national and international commercial galleries. In this way, the objects of the CGA can be something which helps give perspective to discussions on current activity – a disturbance in the CGA might stir up traces leading to conversations on what

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<sup>21</sup> Waddington Graphics were a commercial gallery authorized to manage prints of John Hoyland works at the time. A consignment note details the costs associated with the pieces so a gallery care aware of the prices for insurance and sales when they borrow them.

<sup>22</sup> The image is 'Harvest 6.3.81', and it's not quite a square painting – it's 90 x 96" acrylic on canvas work.

activity produces results, and how that activity might change. As despite this early instance of commercial cooperation, it is a side of the CG operation which isn't extensively nurtured, given the lack of traces in the CGA and my own experience in CG.<sup>23</sup> I would argue the primary reason for this is a lack of resources and direction. There may be aspects of an artist-led, charitable space not wanting to be seen as driven by market imperatives, instead aligning themselves with funding outside of the commercial sector – for instance with local authority funding, EU funding, or trusts and foundations. The relationship with commercial galleries can also be read alongside the history of the exhibitions programme. Commercial galleries are contacted for exhibitions featuring works by established artists (e.g. thematic group shows or established solo shows), and don't have a role when programming leans more to local artist development, or gallery-initiated projects based on public finance (e.g. local authority etc). At the gallery inception, there was a drive to support the regional artists through sales, and in the years following the withdrawal of NPO status (the Castlefield Gallery | Agency years (roughly 2012 – 2018)) working with artists to develop income through sales was part of the regeneration strategy. This is a subject that merits further research, as I see potential for commercial collaboration to contribute to both financial and artist development activities in CG. Working through the archive objects helps us gain perspective on relationships such as this in the span of the gallery.

In *fig.10*, we see how commercial objects are present in this very first archive folder. In addition to the flyers and launch invite, there are four press cuttings covering the exhibition and gallery launch, the press release from CG, and the hard copy photographs of Hoyland artworks used for press images. I have wondered whether this folder creates a blueprint for later archival activities, as we tend to find these kinds of objects in the later

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<sup>23</sup> The Pivot programme of 2022 is an interesting example. A collaboration with the Bluecoat gallery in Liverpool, Pivot aimed to support 5 artists – a common thread across whom was a desire for greater commercial traction. The result was the creation of an editioned work which might be sold through the respective galleries. However, this doesn't play into the strengths of CG or the Bluecoat, as opposed to creating relationships with commercial galleries.

folders. But the variation of objects across the folders suggests to me a twin process of referring to previously archived objects, alongside lack of strategy. I can't say why correspondence might be kept sometimes and not others, or why there are occasionally glorious negative contact sheets of photographs from openings, as there is no governing archive logic. As per my contention to keep the archive active and unruly, I don't consider this diversity of material drawback, but instead propose an archival strategy which embraces keeping a variation of objects as a feature of abundance and discovery - to make novelty and discovery a principle of the CGA.<sup>24</sup> How this abundant variation is enacted could take many forms, involving different constituents of CG in selecting or producing objects for the archive. From artists to visitors to front of house volunteers, written, recorded, or otherwise produced, the archive would become something active alongside the exhibition. In turn, the archive becomes a more lively space to engage with past constituents and gain perspective on the current activity of CG. This approach would require a broader definition of what objects could constitute the CGA, and by extension would impact the spaces, actors and situations of the CGA. By making this an archival strategy, the whole of the Meeting Room, what was once Office 2, could become a living archive – rather than the current takeover by slow archival creep (the spreading of prints, publications and ephemera associated with the archive). Each new exhibition could have its own guiding logic and commentary attached to the archival process, allowing later users to understand why a scent, or song, was present alongside the correspondence and press cuttings.

Back in the current formation of the archive, this variation of objects within the folders makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive guide to the objects within. In addition, this approach to keeping objects has meant that some interesting pieces contain sensitive personal information such as addresses (even if they are from forty / thirty / twenty years ago), or simply

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<sup>24</sup> This approach puts me in mind of what Derrida calls 'blind tactics' in 'Différance' (Derrida, 1982) – described as 'a strategy without finality' and 'an empirical wandering' (Derrida, 1982:7). It is not an attempt to reach a final position of completeness, but rather an archive logic promoting experimentation and adventure.



correspondence that the individual in question may never have wanted to be available years later. This wide-ranging material became a challenge when wanting to work with the archive outside of the gallery (see Chapter Two and the section on Constituents and the CGA); how to deploy the archive objects respectfully but actively outside of CG. To do so, I began making digital scans of objects in the CGA – but only of material which was explicitly public facing.<sup>25</sup> This includes flyers, leaflets, and press cuttings – but does not, for example, contain the consignment note for the Hoyland works, or any named or addressed correspondence. Even though the consignment note provides an insight into the process of exhibition making and value of the Hoyland works in 1984, and does not disclose any compromising information, it was necessary to have a completely clear process for the scanning. I occasionally made exceptions, and edited documents to anonymise people in objects from decades ago, but the straightforward rule of only including explicitly public facing material was a productive guideline.

Each folder would take a considerable amount of time to scan, and I only got to the end of 1997. There were three key benefits to this work. First, I could print selections of archival objects to allow for situations where objects could be experimented with - collaged or used in new configurations. Second, it allowed access to a selection of CGA objects without needing to be present in the physical space. Third, it meant a prolonged period of looking carefully through each folder. Being able to experiment physically with scans of the objects of the CGA opened new ideas on what Rogoff calls their potentiality. Taping them across walls, working into them, and cutting and combining them alongside visitors or staff invited new ways to experience these records of the past. Having remote access to this amount of public facing material meant that during workshops or sessions on the archive, I could relate projects or conversations to pieces of the archive, or even grant external partners access to build with the objects. Finally, the time spent crawling slowly through the CGA immerses you in the names, ideas,

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<sup>25</sup> Colour scans, in a good resolution, which are presently stored on the CG cloud storage and accessible to any staff with a CG email address.

and spirit of the gallery – creating greater possibility to make connections across exhibitions and projects, people and places. Frequently, someone I would meet at an opening in another gallery in Manchester, or in wider cultural activities, would have been involved with CG – and enjoy discussing their creative work in historical perspective. The archive felt active at these times, connecting me to constituents through the life of CG.

In keeping with the spirit of activating the CGA through blurring its boundaries, the final thing I want to draw attention to in the objects of the archive are the bugs, the glitches. The demonstrations that the collection of objects of which the CGA is constituted is the result of unruly human processes and should be embraced as such. In this case, the things which are *not* where they should be in the archive. In 2022, when Veronica Ryan won the Turner Prize, I was aware that she had exhibited at CG – but could only find a single document relating to the exhibition. It was inside an archive box of assorted objects, which had been used as part of the *No Particular Place To Go* exhibition marking the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Castlefield Gallery. This was a press release from 1987 (*fig. 2*) promoting what must have been a short exhibition (27<sup>th</sup> November to 9<sup>th</sup> of January) of Ryan's sculpture, showcasing a preoccupation with boundaries, and an evolution in the artistic vocabulary to address the relationship between landscape and human form. But there is no report folder for the exhibition, no additional correspondence, or objects. The CG exhibition comes after Ryan has exhibited at the Battersea Arts Centre in 1983, and the ICA in 1985. But the report folder for this exhibition was either never created or has become misplaced. The online archive has no mention of the exhibition, with 1987 having only one exhibition listed, and 1988 only two. These kinds of anomalies make space in the CGA to wonder what might have happened, adding to what Bachelard describes as the 'infinite quality of the intimate dimension' (Bachelard, 1969:86). Some items aren't completely missing, but have become dislocated, ending up – as the Ryan press release did – in other archive boxes, or collections made to research an artist or point in history. This kind of error is less an archival glitch than lack of care and scatters interesting content in harder to find places. When I came across a contact sheet of

negatives from an exhibition install in the wrong folder, I would move them back to the right one. To reiterate, making the CGA active and unruly does not mean making it difficult to use, so much as embracing an abundance of archival traces. It is an enjoyable part of archive investigation to detect and return an errant set of images to their home, but not one which takes priority over replacing objects alongside their closest networks. The bristling yellow Post-It notes are often the signs of a removed object, although they don't give details of what was removed, to where, by whom.

Not all the object anomalies are lost or missing – some simply aren't compatible with the space of the report folder. There is a box of MiniDV tapes that sit outside of the plastic wallets, content in objects unmoored from their exhibition report folders. A tape containing the recording of an interview with Cory Arcangel, along with his glockenspiel performance, is in here.<sup>26</sup> When George Gibson & Grace Collins made their installation on the CGA, they used one of the MiniDV tapes, digitising and re-displaying the video, with interesting results (see Chapter Four on the exhibitions). Gibson & Collins were interested in the diverse media in the CGA, and the waning ability to 'read' the archival traces of 3.5" floppy disks, VHS and MiniDV's.

The objects in the designated CGA are a rich record from the inception of the gallery, told across (mainly) promotional materials, press cuttings, gallery handouts, and correspondence. Later folders contain visitor comments, which give a fascinating insight into the reception of the exhibitions – an example of widening contribution to the CGA. The objects going into the designated archive are continuing to amass with each exhibition, and extra room is needed on the shelves for more report folders.

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<sup>26</sup> The event took place in the now closed greenroom venue, a home for contemporary performance and screen work. The greenroom closed in 2011, following the news that along with Castlefield Gallery, they would no longer be receiving funding from ACE as an NPO. The history of the greenroom is itself now subject to an archival practice research project mapping the programming of temporary performance across Manchester. A short video of the performance is available on the Castlefield Gallery Vimeo site, accessible via the website, although no new videos have been uploaded for 5 years. I sincerely hope that content such as this short video, and all the videos on the Vimeo platform, are not lost in any website migration.

The accumulation of grey archive objects, materials adjacent to the exhibition, is slowing due to pressures of environmental sustainability and constraints on space. Thought is given to not producing too many additional publications or buying new materials without reason. But there is also a decline in the variety and number of objects that are entering the designated archive. Whilst physical gallery handouts are still produced and present for putting into the archive - correspondence or images are not printed out, and so are not archived. Notes or diagrams from artists are not kept, and increasingly online promotion means that we don't see much of the early types of material persisting in the archive - although press cuttings, in the form of printed excerpts, are still found there.

Objects are the body of the CGA. More revealingly, this should be understood as - the decisions and definitions of the objects of the CGA amongst constituents are the body of the CGA. When the people inside CG think in the broad definition of the archive – as I have seen happen, for example with Kelly Jayne Jones' installation – then the storerooms, walls, and all objects of the gallery become vectors for connection between times, constituents, and ideas of CG. While this could veer to insular nostalgia, this research has shown how artists and collaborators can open out and engage past and new constituents through object histories. Cultivating the CGA as more alive to activation can be developed through a different approach to the objects kept there, embracing an abundance and diversity of traces. This development would come via the actors of the CGA changing their approach to archiving objects, which would impact the situations in which the objects were used, leading us to the following sections.

## **Actors**

Having considered the spaces and objects of the CGA, I turn to the people involved in its formation. Once again, I am interested in how the CGA is constituted, and points at which it might give rise to unexpected ways of thinking about the story of CG.

In my interpretation of Rogoff's sites for seeking potentiality within the gallery, the actors of the CGA are those people involved in creating, changing, and cultivating the archive. It's interesting to compare the ideas of 'actors' as applied here between two of my core theorists, Donna Haraway & Rogoff. In considering the sources of production and re-production of meaning in the world, Haraway writes that 'I use the terms actors, agencies, and actants for both human and nonhuman entities' (Haraway, 1994:64). Haraway is clear about the trouble to her theory when we define actors or agencies as exclusively human, in that these entities may easily be read as 'hero' figures, who manipulate inert actants. The concern here is that this framework would affirm hierarchies of meaning making agency, in which European, rational males have created structures in which they are at the top - 'the One True Copy of the Prime Mover' (Haraway, 1994:65). For Haraway – the objects of the CGA should be seen as actors. But when Haraway describes 'actants' as 'bundles of action-functions' (Haraway, 1994:65) I believe we have something approaching the entities of Rogoff's objects in situations, able to shape and swerve action but not through traditional 'heroic' agency. In my use of Rogoff, when considering the 'liberation' of 'meanings and possibilities embedded within objects, situations, actors, and spaces' (Rogoff, 2008:04), it is more practical to consider actors as human agency. This said, I think Rogoff fundamentally agrees with Haraway, going on to write that objects, situations, actors, and spaces 'function in a complex system of embeddedness – one in which social processes, bodies of learning, individual subjectivities cannot be separated and distinguished from one another.' (Rogoff, 2008:04). My position is that the non-human objects and spaces of the CGA have agency in the meaning production thereof – but that, in utilising Rogoff's entities, the distinction between human and non-human agency is a blunt but productive one to make.

As of February 2024, there is one leading actor in the archive of CG – Leslie Remonato. My interview with Leslie is included as Appendix 3, so I will address the pertinent aspects therein, before reflecting on the broader cast of actors in the CGA. Since 2022, Leslie has been the Communications & Audience Development Coordinator at Castlefield Gallery, but has worked at

CG from 2018. Prior to 2022, Leslie was the Gallery Coordinator, and would assist the (then) part-time Communications Coordinator, Jennifer, with various tasks. Jennifer had responsibility for placing things in the CGA, and Leslie assisted her, explaining what went into the archive. Upon Jennifer leaving the gallery, Leslie took on her role, including the management of what went into the archive. I have shown how resources are not abundant for archive work in CG, so it is understandable that this position is part of a broader job description. However, I find it interesting to consider whether the position, which encompasses the archival duty, would affect the kind of objects which are kept. For example, Leslie talks about her access and understanding of many of the objects which make up the CGA: she is responsible for designing and printing the gallery handouts which are kept, for managing the press relations and mentions which feature in the archive, and gathering and sharing the visitor comments which are also archived. Given the access and familiarity, the Communications role appears the most appropriate custodian of the CGA.

One line of experimentation would be to suggest that diversifying the responsibility of archivist might create a richer diversity of objects therein. But more pragmatically this would likely result in fewer entries as people forgot, didn't have time, or simply a less defined workload as Leslie supports others contributing to the archive. Another more practical experiment would be to actively engage other CG constituents to bring Leslie ideas for objects to archive. This already happens by archiving visitor's comments – either by way of the 'cardboard cards ... next to the front door' (Remonato, Appendix 3), or by transcribing feedback on an ACE survey – but visitors aren't told that their reflections on the exhibition or event become a part of the CGA. Visitor feedback is a fascinating part of the current objects of the CGA, as more extreme views tend to move a visitor to comment. A visitor history of the exhibitions would make for a far less CG-oriented history, with diverging views on the exhibitions and events.

Discussing the objects in the CGA, Leslie confirms those discussed in the objects section. 'Handouts, plans, price lists, articles' (Remonato,

Appendix 3) are found in the CGA, but also printed matter produced for an event or exhibition. Leslie also confirms the element of discovery in objects of the CGA, too – mentioning the more ‘unexpected documents’ that have entered the archive. As an example, Leslie mentions the ‘lovely cards that the artists shared with us’ (Remonato, Appendix 3) – thank you notes which Leslie has placed in the CGA. Here we find an active experimentation with the CGA – Leslie is diversifying the objects which enter. An excellent example is from Omid Asadi’s solo exhibition, where Leslie has included a dandelion seed in the archive. This research endorses this approach to expanding and experimenting with what is kept in the CGA. There are conservation considerations, which lie beyond the scope of this research, as to whether and how organic material should enter the archive. But by introducing a seed into the archive, Leslie has welcomed an object which changes future relationships to the Omid Asadi exhibition. As an object, it makes the installation present when exploring the archive – beyond an image of the installation, it is the thing itself. It is not another piece of flat paper and text (or image) communicating in a way refined by the voices in CG, but an unusual object, an intimate and small thing found in the archive. The inclusion of the seed blurs the boundaries of the CGA, holding the door open to greater experimentation with what the CGA might be.

My findings from this research focus on how the CGA can play an important ongoing function in attracting and engaging constituents in the life of gallery. To do so, I stress an active role for the broad archive, keeping the spaces, objects, actors, and situations of the CGA lively. It is useful to consider what Leslie, as the prime actor, thought the CGA was important for. I identify two types of response – historical and active. The historical importance is what Leslie initially proposes, ‘for art historians in the future’ (Remonato, Appendix 3). For me, this historic value of the CGA includes using it for celebrating anniversaries, such as the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary show Leslie discusses (*40 Years of the Future / Painting*), or the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary

exhibition (*No Particular Place To Go? 35 Years of Sculpture*).<sup>27</sup> These exhibitions create points for reflecting on the changes in CG and the artworld on important milestones. Thoughtfully and provocatively curated, the selections for the '40 Years of the Future' exhibition contrast the issues and forms in contention with painting in the region from now and 40 years ago. It shows paintings exhibited in CG's first years, alongside contemporary works, broadening our way of seeing both, and helping establish a story of British painting.

This historical approach is a genuine and valuable way of celebrating the enduring importance of CG – and I propose should be woven into the active life of the gallery. We can compare this historic approach with an active one when Leslie talks about the value of the archive in communications, with the example of International Women's Day. Women have been fundamental in the direction and programme of CG since the beginning, and Leslie used the archive to find images of previous directors, curators, and team members for a post on social media. The post received above average 'likes', and far above average comments and responses – people wanted to share in the people and stories of CG. Using the archive as a way of engaging people with threads of the gallery history is a good way to keep connected with past and present constituents. I suggest this as active work, although the International Women's Day post was inspired by external events. My vision of the importance of the CGA is as something brought into ongoing, active situations.

I end our interview by inviting any final thoughts on the CGA, and Leslie reflects on two of my key findings – that the archive becomes enjoyably stimulating when you discover unusual objects in it, and more personal items connect you to the story of the gallery. Leslie prefaces these reasons by saying that the CGA 'is fun!' (Remonato, Appendix 3) – and I believe they are all connected. It's enjoyable to discover something unusual,

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<sup>27</sup> Such anniversary celebrations go back to '10<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations' in 1985, and a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebrated rather than the 20<sup>th</sup>.



and to find something that makes a very personal connection to the past. This is the 'intimate dimension' of discovery in the CGA (Bachelard, 1969:86).

There are many actors around the CGA. Leslie talks about asking Gass (Curator & Deputy Director) about including the dandelion seed in the archive, and working with a placement to populate the archive folders. The gallery handouts and plans are made with artists and CG team. But these people would not necessarily see themselves as active in the CGA, until the archive is an active part of CG –as with the visitor comments, and letting visitors know they are part of the archive. The public are not otherwise a major actor in the CGA, with access not promoted, and requiring careful management.<sup>28</sup> To make the CGA active is symbiotic with the actors. If the importance of the actors' work increases, their resources (time and effort) are invested in the CGA. For the duration of this research, I have been another key actor in the CGA, putting resources into creating situations with the archive. These situations are instances in which we might activate the archive.

## **Situations**

I have discussed the spaces, objects and actors of the CGA, and now want to consider the situations thereof. I frame the situations of the CGA as activation of the objects, or of actors and spaces *with* the objects. This means times when the contents of CGA objects are connected with collaborators through presentation, discussion with groups, or brought into exhibition contexts. When I say that the spaces of the CGA might also be activated, it is worth remembering that it is usually not for their archival value. For example, the physical space is valuable as a meeting room, and the website as a place to share information.<sup>29</sup> These instances are situations

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<sup>28</sup> As we have seen, the contents of the archive are not guarded against revealing personal data and could not be made viewable to everyone.

<sup>29</sup> Leslie makes the point that she thinks about the Meeting Room as the 'Archive room', and uses the online archive for inspiration. (Remonato, Appendix 4)

where little to no archival activity takes place. Actors can create situations of/with the CGA, but again I would stipulate that it requires some mobilisation of the contents of the objects. For example, as an actor in the CGA, I might be talking with a group of visitors about archives in a general sense. But it is when we involve the objects of the CGA that we create an active situation. A good example is to consider how from a total of seven new commissions across the two exhibitions in this research, I would consider that five were situations of the CGA – bringing objects into contention.<sup>30</sup> These commissions are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Four.

Situations of the CGA are how we open the archive to active and unruly process, bringing new people into reading and sharing the story of CG. This happens in degrees, where involvement can be to a greater or lesser extent. For example, the one site where objects of the CGA are on constant display is in the gallery's toilet. A poster from the first CG exhibition is framed and displayed above the cistern, facing you on entry, prominent to all who use the facilities. This kind of re-presentation of objects is one way of creating a situation with the CGA, and something to reflect on whilst using the bathroom – but this is a weak situation; there is no context, discussion, or experimentation with the poster. There are no sites where people can leave feedback or contribute new understandings of the poster. This is a low activity situation. In contrast, I consider Ashokkumar Mistry's 'Being the Polemic' as a high activity situation. This event took place as a part of my exhibition *Archives at Play 2 (AAP2)* and was designed to use the objects of the CGA to explore power dynamics in archives, and ways of finding new narratives from objects in archives.<sup>31</sup> I shared access to the digitised parts of the archive to Ashok, who made a selection of images and texts from the archive. These were printed, allowing the visitors to cut, work into, and tape these creations around the walls of the gallery. We used the objects to talk about funding, arts education, and the future of the gallery sector, while

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<sup>30</sup> These would be Sarah-Joy Ford, Chester Tenneson, Kelly Jayne Jones, George Gibson & Grace Collins and Anna FC Smith. There works

<sup>31</sup> For a public description of the event, see <https://www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk/event/ashok-mistry-being-the-polemic/>

creating an evolving display. The CGA was incredibly active and unruly in this situation, becoming an open source kaleidoscope through which to look at CG. During the event, I thought how incredible it would have been to make this visitor-made project an ongoing installation in the upper gallery. Throughout the duration of *AAP2*, the walls would have become layered with the archive, trends and new connections emerging, and keeping the history an actively enjoyable part of the present.

Situations are all the ways in which the CGA might be kept open to new interpretations and perspectives – the exhibitions, online archive stories, workshops and talks. This research uncovers new situations that the objects, actors, and spaces of the CGA can be brought into. It provides a theoretical and practical framework for these processes, and advocates for more situations of the CGA. I opened this section by writing how description of the parts of the CGA would give insight into the constitution and status of the archive. By considering the spaces, objects, actors and situations of the CGA, we have a thorough grounding in the processes and production of the archive.

## Chapter Outline


Having introduced the CGA, and its position in CG, Chapter One establishes the theoretical framework for this research, and how I would position the CGA. This Chapter charts an evolution in the cultural approach to archival work which is mirrored in the practical development of this research. It begins with a consideration of how Derrida & Foucault present an abstract notion of the archive as a prescriptive force limiting the possibility for change. This was the grounding for the first exhibition, *Archives at Play*. I then consider a movement towards a more specific analysis of archives via the work of Lisa Darms and Irit Rogoff, looking at how these practitioners make the archives they work with practical and political. I reconcile the abstract and particular approaches to the archive in the work of Donna Haraway, and Derrida once again – looking at how the two theorists use ideas of play to make archives practical and powerful.

This research required a thorough grounding in the archive of CG, and I have already introduced the spaces, objects, actors and situations which constitute the CGA. This established, in Chapter Two I use objects from the CGA to weave a story of CGs history, looking in particular at the founding principles of the gallery. I found that these key principles can be used to open conversations about the trajectory of CG today, to better understand the gallery. This leads to my device of ‘threads’ to navigate the CGA, strands of activity which recur through the CGA, and can be used to navigate the archive without becoming overwhelmed. Threads, I contend, are a powerful tool for exploring the archive, and were useful in the commissioning of artists, as well as when working with the CGA alongside the constituents of the gallery, and Chapter Two closes with a critique of my experience with bringing people into the archive.

Following the constitution of the CGA, and its grounding in my theoretical framework, Chapter Three sets out my proposed methodology of Becoming-Curator. Whilst it is unusual to have the methodology so far into the thesis, this placing reflects the time it took to arrive at the approach I felt

was fitting to work with the CGA. In this practice-led research, I began with the materials of the archive, a lot of cultural theory on archives, and my experience of curating. I thus set to work getting to know the archive, whilst reading about archives, and developing exhibitions and events. Through this process, an awareness of the CGA developed through my embeddedness in the gallery. A theory of using the archive based on an abstract notion from Foucault & Derrida was tested and found wanting in my first exhibition, and I found an approach to curating which aligned with my understanding of the CGA. Based on an essay by Suzana Milevska titled 'Becoming-Curator' (2013), I structure a methodology based on experimentation and destabilising established understandings of the CGA. My methodology emphasises collaborative work, an opening of the CGA to diverse constituents, relinquishing measures of control in order to know the CGA differently. Becoming-Curator as an essay, and as methodology, uses the notion of Becoming as articulated by Deleuze & Guattari. Whilst this research does not seek to provide a definitive guide to Becoming as an idea, it does establish, as Deleuze & Guattari write, that 'becomings are minoritarian' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; 339). This foregrounds movement away from the control structures of a usual curator, or archive, and into messier and more collaborative territory. This has meant honing curatorial methods to follow artists as they develop projects with the CGA which have been challenging to CG, but in their resolution have always brought more to light from the CGA.

The work with artists forms the subject of Chapter Four, where I discuss the two exhibitions using the CGA. We consider the exhibition as a format for public experience, before each artists' contribution in turn. There is discussion about why artworks were chosen, and how I saw them connecting to both the theoretical framework and my methodology. It is incredibly important to stress that any critique in this chapter is of my curatorial actions, and never of the work of the artists. Also, this chapter could have been substantially larger – with each detail meriting a discussion as to why the artists worked in the way that they did, and the repercussions thereof. For example, Kelly Jayne Jones chose to title her work by not using letters found on a western keyboard, but instead a series of typographic symbols which

created an image -  This was a deliberate departure from customs of the past (naming your work something typable) to see what effect this departure had. One unexpected result was that it could not be credited on Instagram due to lack of the symbols needed, and thus received less social media presence. For similar reasons of space, Chapter Four also cleaves to the work made for exhibition and does not cover public events as a part of the exhibitions – usually an elaboration of an artists' practice. However, I would mention here how productive the event with Harold Offeh was towards this research, in my thinking and confidence. Harold is an incredibly generous and imaginative artist, and I am grateful to have worked with him. His event developed his live artistic practice of re-posing historic photographs of himself and reflecting on this physical connection between past and present.

To conclude, I emphasise the powerful potential of the CGA to bring people into the story of CG, to be a site of experimentation, and to gain new perspective on the trajectory of the gallery. However, I consider that this potential would require an ongoing period of activity to be fully evaluated. This research has only been able to begin playing with the CGA, thus its practices remain alien to the working of the gallery, something not embedded in CG. Rather, it would be, as Haraway argues in 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (1992), through an *ongoing* process of refiguring the archive that the possibility to change is engendered, as more self-awareness is gained. The recommendations of this research are thus that archival activity should not be limited to anniversaries but become an ongoing part of CG. Of course, it is not straightforward to embed a strand of experimental archival practice, and the proposals for ongoing archival activity are made in the awareness of the pressures on CG's resources which are discussed earlier in this introduction.

This research has been conducted with the CGA, as part of a busy, functioning gallery. For four years, I have worked with the team, artists, visitors, peers and students around Castlefield Gallery, and I have seen the

potential of the CGA as a kaleidoscope, throwing unique and evolving patterns and diffractions of past, present and future. When students curated an exhibition of archival objects, new networks of artists and audiences were created around the gallery. Artists brought names out of the archive, which led to discoveries, stories, and a greater perspective on the cultural life of the region. Archives at Play, as a piece of research, has involved more people than could be listed here. We brought the archive into the exhibition space, we brought the visitors into the archive space, and we shared the past beyond the gallery.

## Chapter One - Theoretical Framework

### An introduction to the theoretical framework of archives

From the 2000s, a body of curatorial practice and accompanying literature has grown in urgency around the power, and the potential, of cultural archives (*documenta11* in Kassel (2002), *Archive Fever* at The International Centre of Photography (2008), *Once Upon a Time... The Collection Now* at Van Abbemuseum (2013), *The Archive of the Commons* at Reina Sofia (2016)). The archive understood as a system of values, and archives as material traces of the past, are framed as both gatekeepers of artistic validation, and the tools to dismantle those gates. This archival discourse has evolved in galleries and public debate at large - maintaining a predominantly post-structural foundation, whilst shifting to acknowledge the local and situated interactions with and within the systems of the archive. Throughout this evolution, theories of the archive are concerned with the construction of meaning, and value, in exchanges and experience. Questions from 'who chooses what is kept?', to 'how it is accessed?' help a society or organisation interrogate the traces of the past deemed to be significant, to whom, and why.

In the discourses around cultural archives, we see development from an abstraction of 'the archive' understood as instrumental in the formation of discourse and values in a system (be that an art gallery, a city or a social group), towards a more practical consideration of the affective potential of traces of the past surrounding us (from 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism And The Privilege of Partial Perspective' by Donna Haraway (1988), to 'Preserving Contradiction: The Riot Grrrl Collection at the Fales Library' by Lisa Darns, (2012), *No Archive Will Restore You* by Julietta Singh (2018), 'being close to, with or amongst' by Onyeka Igwe (2020), the artworks *Reading the Realness* by Harold Offeh (2021) and *Gut Feelings Meri Jaan* by Jasleen Kaur (2021)). This development takes into account both the theoretical and material formation of archival structures in critiquing the functioning of systems from cities to art galleries. In this way, we can



engage archives as a site of powerful potential to explore new ways to read our contemporary world and construct the future, challenging existing values or following new connections. I argue that opening this play of material interaction to the constituents of a gallery, before and against the prevailing 'archive' of meaning making, has great potential for engaging the archive in the production of a subjectivity - the ongoing project of constructing and knowing the self. In this instance, the subject is Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG), and my research has been conducted through curatorial practice with the Castlefield Gallery archive (hereafter CGA), experimenting with how the materials of the past shapes our understanding of the present, influencing our imagination of what might be possible.

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter has evolved through the research, mirroring the development above. The curation of the *Archives at Play* (hereafter AAP) exhibition in 2022 was strongly informed by post-structural texts from Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Following the exhibition, critical self-reflection shifted my hypothesis on the entity of the CGA; rather than being a structure which limits change, I argue that it constitutes something powerful yet un-activated. Lisa Darms and Irit Rogoff's writing shaped my understanding of this shift; whilst within a genealogy of post-structuralism, they move their negotiation of discourse from the theoretical to the particular, advocating for a more situated, political approach to archival practice. I adapted my approach to the archive, and for the 2023 *Archives at Play 2* (hereafter AAP2) exhibition, returned to Derrida alongside the writing of Donna Haraway, creating a curatorial methodology structured on Suzanna Milevska's 'Becoming-Curator' (Milevska, 2013). In this chapter, I describe the theoretical underpinning of my curatorial practice by tracing these developments. I consider how an interpretation of these theories impacted my understanding of the CGA, and their bearing on curatorial practice.

## A Post-Structural Presence in Archival Practice

My research commenced in 2021 during a period of restricted access to CG arising from the COVID pandemic. Due to this restriction, instead of being physically based within the CGA and witnessing the practical workings of the gallery, I began by constructing a theoretical perspective on the archive with which I would experiment. In doing so, I looked to a body of writing and artmaking from the 2000s, which saw high-profile exhibitions, artworks, and critical writing intently engaged with ideas of the archive often using the lens of post-structural pioneers Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. I proposed the following logic to this: Derrida and Foucault position the archive as a powerful agent in dynamics of power, instrumental in shaping the potential for radical thought or action. Applying aspects of Foucault's 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1969) and parts of Derrida's 'Archive Fever' (1995), curators, critics and artists of the new millennium use theories therein to critique an artworld system with outdated values. The conception of archival systems presented in these two texts, as mechanics by which discourse may be created or controlled, can be seen in contemporary archival projects challenging the exclusivity and homogeneity of cultural archives. Whilst it is in the practical application of these ideas on 'the archive' with *an* archive (such as the CGA) that I argue we uncover the potential for the unexpected encounter, or change, I consider their contribution to curatorial archival practice by firstly examining their influence in critical work from the 2000s.

In the 2006 Whitechapel Gallery publication, *The Archive*, editor Charles Mereweather writes that:

'One of the defining characteristics of the modern era has been the increasing significance given to the archive as a means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated stored and recovered.' (Mereweather, 2006:10),

This publication offers a context for how artists and cultural commentators have critiqued the concept of the archive as a tool of authority determining

possibility. Unsaid in Mereweather's introduction, however, is an essential position for both Foucault and Derrida that, far from a neutral repository of accumulation, storage and immaculate recovery, the archive is a system complicit in the production and formation of knowledge. For Foucault,

'The archive is not that which ... safeguards the event of the statement ... it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the *system of its enunciability*.' (Foucault, 1969:146).

For Derrida,

'...the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future.' (Derrida, 1995:17).

The point being made is clear and useful: when we refer to the archive – including the CGA - we are not only identifying a repository of historical information, but the systems by which the material is selected, kept, organised, accessed and disseminated. This raises questions: how are decisions made about what is kept? By what structure are the contents held or connected? How can the materials be used? In what situations are these materials usually deployed?

Foucault's *The historical a priori and the Archive* (1969) and Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995) both appear in the Whitechapel Gallery publication. They are referenced as philosophical grounds for contemporary artists working with archives, such as Susan Hiller and Thomas Hirschhorn. In a 2000 interview, academic and curator Okwui Enwezor and Hirschhorn discuss Hirschhorn's practice of creating precarious monuments in public spaces to critique hierarchies of power. These are spaces of public observance not 'situated by decisions imposed from above, by those in power' (Mereweather, 2006:117). Hirschhorn's artistic interventions are a resistance to traditional narratives of history found in typical brass

monuments. Whilst framed as parallel to the prevailing discourse on public monument, Hirschhorn changes the content– i.e. naming his work *Monuments*, communicating history in public spaces – but opting to use ‘everyday’ materials, presenting them for only a limited time, and dedicating his monuments not to the ideals of industrialists or generals, but to the writings of thinkers, philosophers, and theorists. By using a familiar language of monuments, Hirschhorn draws attention to the discourse of traditional public monument whilst presenting an alternative. In doing so, Hirschhorn presents a critique of what Foucault would call the ‘system of enunciability’ (Foucault, 1969:146), the dynamics of power (i.e. the questions of what is remembered and how this is deployed) in our cities that lead to public monuments - the legacy of which the UK is still working through today.<sup>32</sup>

This critique to the systems by which historic values are reified, retained and represented is a feature of what Hal Foster, in his essay ‘An Archival Impulse’, terms ‘an archival impulse at work internationally in contemporary art’ (Mereweather, 2006:143).<sup>33</sup> The application of archival projects to challenge traditional hierarchies of value was visible in the high profile 2002 *Documenta 11*, under the Artistic Direction of Enwezor.<sup>34</sup> To address the globalised new millennium, Enwezor positioned the exhibition in Kassel as one of a series of global research ‘platforms’, confronting a Eurocentric cultural discourse that affirmed Documenta’s position geographically and metaphorically as a centre of culture. This Documenta would address how systems of economics and ideology, drivers of the

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<sup>32</sup> I refer to the reappraisal of public art; from the work of artists such as Eric Gill, to the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol in 2020, when the statue of the slave owner and trader was removed from its plinth by protesters and thrown into the harbour. Speaking with Harold Offeh in preparation for our 2022 ‘*Playing with the Past*’ event, Harold spoke about a project he had made about a very similar event. In 1982, following the Toxteth riots, a group of protesters toppled the statue of Liverpool MP William Huskisson for his opposition to the abolition of slavery. The plinth to the statue remains, at the bottom of the road on which I live.

<sup>33</sup> Foster published the essay online, as well as in the collection *Bad New Days* (2015). In *Bad New Days*, the quoted sentence is edited, and instead reads, ‘Yet an archive impulse returned with special force in the early 2000s, to the point where it could be considered a distinctive tendency in its own right’. (Foster, 2015: 32)

<sup>34</sup> Including Hirschhorn’s Bataille monument.

globalised world, are invisibly enforced through hierarchies of value in cultural systems – and within this, the possibility of art to foment radical new futures. In his introduction to the catalogue, Enwezor points to the artistic avant-gardes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, let’s say’ (Enwezor, 2002:45) and how, whilst they agitated for change in an artworld system privileging values of western modernity, they had ultimately been doing so from a position so bound within the structures it sought to critique, that it was already captured, unable to foster the circumstances for meaningful alternatives.<sup>35</sup>

Enwezor’s curatorial investigations into the potential for the materials of the past to influence our present continued in 2008, with an exhibition titled *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* held at the International Centre of Photography in New York. Through naming the exhibition after Derrida’s essay and opening the exhibition catalogue with a quote from Foucault’s ‘Archaeology of Knowledge’, Enwezor’s post-structural influences are clear.<sup>36</sup> He examines the concept of the archive through exhibitions at a global scale, and does so utilizing the similarities between Derrida and Foucault’s notions of an archive. In a review of Enwezor’s 2008 exhibition, archivist and academic Lisa Darms sums up the above; that during the 2000s there exists a ‘preoccupation in the art world with the idea of “the archive”’ (Darms, 2009:253), that this has been applied from avant-garde to conceptual artists as a means of examining systems of gallery practice, and that ‘the works by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, have shaped artistic, critical, and curatorial practices.’ (Darms, 2009:253). We will later return to Lisa Darms’ critique of the application of the abstracted

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<sup>35</sup> Enwezor relates this inherent neutralization as already applicable to *Documenta 11* in the catalogue: ‘The propagators of the Avant-garde have done little to constitute a space of self-reflexivity that can understand new relations of the artistic modernity not founded on Westernism. The foregoing makes tendentious the claims of radicality often imputed to exhibitions such as Documenta or similar... What one sees, then, in Documenta’s historical alliance with institutions of modernism is how immediately it is caught in a double bind in its attempt to navigate both its radicality and normativity’ (Enwezor, 2002; 47)

<sup>36</sup> Enwezor commences the text with the quote ‘The archive is first the law of what can be said...’ (Foucault, 2002; 145)

concept of the archive found in the texts of Derrida and Foucault. Derrida and Foucault provided the foundations for the curatorial direction of this research via their impact on the curation of *AAP*; in the following section I will address how I interpreted, and experimented with, their position.

### **Foucault and Derrida in Archives at Play**

In the opening lines of *Archive Fever*, and *The Order of Discourse*, both Derrida and Foucault evade the act of beginning.<sup>37</sup> They raise the idea of an elsewhere in which another beginning has already occurred, framing their own commencement within an existing history, and culture. In doing so, they demonstrate an important facet of post-structuralism; rejecting the immaculate genesis of idea, note, or lecture. Both are pioneers of post-structuralism, a system by which the understanding of any object or utterance, written or spoken, are contingent and conditional upon a complex web of existing specific discourse. In essence, it proposes that our understanding of the world is mediated by existing associations of shifting cultural, historic values. By this understanding, to make a claim to a beginning, an origin, ignores the processes of judgement and adherence that enables their contribution to this discourse, and is thus contrary to their intentions of acknowledging – and unpicking – the power of discourse to exercise control.

Both Foucault and Derrida argue that the construction of discourse is subject to its own dynamics of power, laid down across hierarchy, institution, law, tradition – and, for them, discourse is structured with the concept of ‘the archive’. This ‘archive’ is the system of storage and dissemination for ideas and concepts - laws, objects, values and narratives etc – agreeable to those parties able to enforce such claims. This ‘archive’ is not a single physical repository, but a broad range of value judgements distributed across social

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida assertively displaces the beginning, writing ‘Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive.’ (Derrida, 1995:1) whereas Foucault conjures this elsewhere more subtly, ‘I should have preferred to be enveloped by speech, and carried away well beyond all possible beginnings, rather than have to begin it myself.’ (Foucault, 1970:51)

systems (from families to museums and galleries) acting with and through the interests of the parties that are able to shape it, by ascribing value to what is carried through time (with connected aspects of access and dissemination). The archive – for post-structuralists - influences what is permitted in a specific discourse, ‘The archive is first the law of what can be said’ (Foucault, 2002; 145) and, in controlling what is said, the archive is forceful: ‘What is at issue here ... is the violence of the archive itself, as *archive, as archival violence*.’ (Derrida, 1995: 7). What is revealed is a concept of the archive as a system that enforces and structures our production of meaning, showing how this impacts our possibility to act, and interact, differently.

Let’s follow the logic of the above through an example; if a flyer in a colourful modern style is made for the first exhibition and kept in an archive of CG, but a little formatted price list for the exhibition isn’t – it supports the claim that the archive carries flyers, not price lists. Archiving the flyer requires time, space and organisation which are resources that come with a cost to the organisation – inferring value in the material kept. By extension, it establishes a historic style (‘colourful modern’) for the flyers – which becomes an ongoing thread of visual identity. Meanwhile the price list is discarded after each exhibition and recreated according to expediency rather than as a part of the gallery identity. As price lists aren’t kept in the archive, it becomes less likely that associated material pertaining to costs and sales are archived whilst, for example, posters are a natural extension of the amassing flyers. There are then repercussions for the value of these kinds of material outside of the archive, for example, in decisions of how or whether they are produced. Whilst this line of argument might appear specious (if the price list or other budgetary object is important to an exhibition – just keep it), there is a vital factor: presently in the CGA there is no archive policy, few resources dedicated to archival practice, and rare archive stimulus (uses that might engender change, such as interaction or regular application). This means there are very few challenges to the contents and structure of the archive; as such, it is more likely to continue replicating the kinds of content and situations – the same material and structures shaping the archive, reinforcing

practices. To extend our hypothetical price lists/flyers scenario, this means that those using the archive years or decades later are thus presented with material which reflects not a balance of activity, but an unexplained weighting towards the visual communications. It is worth remembering that CG was established by a group of people who were predominantly artists just out of education, and not necessarily focussing on what to keep in the archive. In an email exchange with founding member of CG, Sheila Seal, she writes 'I don't remember having a plan for the archives' – understandably, there was a huge amount of work to be done keeping the gallery open and thriving. In this way, inadvertent archival trends can ossify to become archive practices.

It was a model of this reinforcing cycle that led me to a hypothesis of the archive as constraining the interactions of CG with their constituents – staff, artists, visitors, peers etc. As ways of doing things become recorded in the archive, and the values therein become entrenched, would the possibility to try alternative approaches become less likely? Was the selection of objects based on what had gone before, rather than looking for contemporary uses for the material selected? Were artists describing their work according to a formula for press releases? How were historic gallery activities reaching contemporary artists and visitors? How might the CGA find alternative utility for constituents – perhaps becoming a possible entry to the work of CG for the artists, studios and visitors of the city – if it hadn't previously been imagined thus?

The preceding logic was the foundation for my hypothesis of the CGA as a limiting agent in CG. Therefore, I experimented in *AAP* by commissioning artworks that engaged with the materials of the past in ways that were less expected, less centralised and hierarchical. In doing so, I acted to reject any further affirmation of what I posited as the structure of the CGA as per Derrida & Foucault's conception of 'archive'. As part of this, I considered it essential to uphold Foucault's warning about 'commentary' (Foucault, 1970:56). Foucault argues that structures of discourse, including the system of the archive, value secondary texts seemingly promoting new



navigations of their meanings, given that they depend upon the primary discourse for their validity. He writes:

‘Commentary exorcises the chance element of discourse by giving it its due; it allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is the text itself which is said’ (Foucault, 1970:56).

My interpretation of this, enacted in *AAP*, was that any projects engaging with the materials as held in the designated archive of CG would not create any new understanding of the archive but, rather, they would validate the archive as it was – secondary text acting as ‘commentary’. As I now believe, and as we shall consider, there is a great deal of nuance in how an archive might be negotiated through interaction, largely dependent on the particular situation of the archive. In practice, the CGA has little current regular influence as part of the gallery, and is a system that should not be further ignored but more embedded in the ongoing activities of CG. As it stands, the dynamics shaping the CGA do not reflect value, but are symptoms of disuse, and, in this way, the archive becomes stagnant, sunk beneath its own repeating accumulation.

This understanding of the CGA as a site of great potential currently unactualized came from the work of *AAP*. Through projects such as Sarah-Joy Ford’s that brought visitors into the physical archive space, or Chester Tenneson’s pieces connecting the gallery history to personal history, I observed an excitement for constituents of CG in connecting to the stories and structures in the CGA. This was a shift in my understanding borne from becoming more aware of the practical, situated workings and interactions of the CGA – rather than a theoretical view on archives. However, this shift doesn’t discount the importance of the theoretical positions of Foucault and Derrida. They show the great potential of an archive to influence possibility and shape interactions, warning that this power can amass around systems benefiting from the preservation of values represented in the archive. But these ideas should act as the foundations for moving focus to a particular archive.

I opened this chapter positing an evolution in curatorial practice towards engaging with archives in the actual as well as theoretical, and Lisa Darms articulately argues for the importance of this shift. In Darms' review of Enwezor's *Archive Fever* exhibition, she highlights a preoccupation of curatorial practice with post-structural implications of 'the archive', whilst remaining disconnected with the practical contingencies of an archive. She writes:

'While this show was a successful reflection of the art world's interpretations of archive as theory, it is difficult for the archivist to recognize his or her own practices (and agency) within it.' (Darms, 2009:256).

In the next section, I will address Darms' ideas towards a more practical engagement with an archive.

### **From the Theoretical to the Actual Archive**

As of 2023, Lisa Darms is the Executive Director of the Hauser & Wirth Institute – a non-profit organisation that focuses on archival practices as a redress to issues of inequity within the arts, from education to exhibition.<sup>38</sup> Prior to this and, whilst writing the review of Enwezor's exhibition, Darms' was the Senior Archivist for the Fales Library & Special Collections at New York University. Inspired by the model of the Fales Downtown Collection (an archive of the New York arts scene of the 1970s to the 1990s) in 2009 Darms established the Riot Grrrl Collection at Fales, archiving a feminist movement and developing archival structures able to respond to contemporary challenges (Darms, 2012). This approach expands the theoretical grounds of archival practice driven by contemporary practical considerations of

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<sup>38</sup> Whilst the Hauser & Wirth Institute is non-profit, their main funder is the commercial Hauser & Wirth Gallery, although it's written large on their website that they operate 'independently from our primary funder, Hauser & Wirth Gallery' (Hauser & Wirth Institute, 2023:online)

archiving. Darms writes that her inspiration, The Fales Downtown Collection, was a new kind of archive. It encompassed a range of materials designed to be ephemeral, creatively subversive, or crowd authored. It was able to reflect the contribution of people and groups who had been excluded from, and now distrustful of, institutional structures. Darms argues that the Riot Grrrl Collection must balance the tension between access and preservation, amidst contributors and users looking to deploy the materials in ways beyond the traditional scope of institutional affiliation (Darms, 2012).

As Darms talks about the need for long term preservation and access to materials, one aspect stands out, that is, a resistance to archive practices which flatten historical narrative into a dominant single discourse. Instead, Darms identifies the importance of carrying a material history in ‘...all its multiplicity, in a way that opens up the movement, eschewing strict periodization and categories...’ (Darms, 2012:336). This is the potential for archives in becoming structures of contradictory, affective history – divergent from the kinds of necessarily ordering, centred dynamics of power persisting in the ‘violent’ archive described by Foucault and Derrida. Whilst Foucault and Derrida appear to acknowledge the potential power of the archives of the repressed, in their formulation these archives remain part of an equation on the subjugated side of power and control.

Consider how, for Darms, the readings of a video in the Riot Grrrl archive must remain multiple and should not be reduced to either strength or vulnerability (Darms, 2012:336). Darms identifies that this awareness of complexity is a gap in Riot Grrrl’s historical narratives: ‘the glamour of its legacy overrides the realities of poverty, mental illness, sexual violence, addiction and internal feuds’ (Darms, 2012:339). She focusses on a specific narrative of a particular movement – but I contend that this is an essential aspect of a modern archival practice, and of curatorial projects engaging therewith. To ‘preserve the contradiction’ (Darms, 2012) in engagement with archives is a challenge – and by no means is this an argument to maintain everything as it is. Do not let contradiction and complexity excuse the projection of values that resist positive change. Instead, it calls for an

approach to archives that is aware of tendencies to shape history into totalising narratives – one which admits the spectrum of human endeavour.

Darms writes that ‘All archives are records of failures as well as successes.’ (Darms, 2012:339) This would encompass human hopes and mistakes but, unless referring more abstractly to material that is not archived, I can’t yet agree. In the Riot Grrrl Collection there are unfinished projects, disagreements, and unrealised goals – just as in the CGA we can find unrealised building plans, or rejection letters from funders and artists. But Darm’s has warned us of how the ‘glamour’ of a legacy can erase the contradictory struggles within; how, in the system of archival interaction, failures can become anomalies to be hidden or consolidated into stories of overcoming. Our post-structural foundations show us that the archive system is not just what is kept, but how it carries the history, and this is the crux of Darm’s practice. Darm’s work points us towards an archive theory more closely entwined with the archival systems of retention and use - encouraging better understanding of each aspect through awareness of the relationship between them.

Systems of archival retention influence use and vice versa – where ‘use’ might be through public presence, research, or artistic deployment, and retention spanning distributed, digital, chronological, ephemeral etc. To incorporate ‘failures’ (let us say instead the traces of the unrealised, the contradictions and complexities) into an ongoing archive system means finding ways to productively engage with these same anomalies in the ongoing production of the subject. It means to carry the past in an acknowledgement of a flawed present as complex as the material reflected upon. We can read Darm’s frustration at the disconnection in this relationship when reviewing Enwezor’s exhibition:

‘In Enwezor’s interpretation, the prognostic function of the artist is purely positive, while the (invisible) archivist seems incapable of anything but adding to the discursive formation of “manifest authority.”’ (Darms, 2009:257).

Darms' advocates for a curatorial practice engaging with archives which engages less with the abstraction of archives as unknowable dynamics of power, and towards a practical relationship with the situation of the archive. She writes:

'By discounting the archivist, Enwezor presents the archive as an entity formed by invisible structural forces, rather than by individual decisions' (Darms, 2009:256)

At the opening of *AAP* my Principal Supervisor at the time, Professor Amanda Ravetz, kindly asked me 'where's the archive?'. It's the same question in Darm's review of *Archive Fever*. I had deliberately rejected engagement with commissions or exhibition structures that validated the content (including systems) of the CGA in order to foster un-prescriptive perspectives. This exhibition was about different ways to read and carry the past! But Professor Ravetz' question stayed with me through the exhibition. It stayed with me in conversations with visitors as they stopped and chatted, through events, in reflecting on the exhibition with artists and CG constituents. It changed how I read the texts I had been working with, and how I worked with reading and understanding the CGA. Following this process, when I read academic and curator, Jean-Paul Martinon's writings on the possibility of the curatorial as 'an act of jailbreaking from the pre-existing frames ... a strategy for inventing new points of departure' (Martinon, 2013:4) my focus was on the jail as being vital to the 'jailbreak' - how you must know what you've left to understand a 'departure'.

Practically - to stimulate alternative experiences with the CGA, my curatorial practice should acknowledge the existing constituent experiences with the CGA. As this experience was minimal, then animating the materials of the archive in unexpected ways was the alternative to the existing – the 'jailbreak' or 'departure'. I had considered this as contrary to Foucault's warning of commentary (Foucault, 1970:56). But, as commentary is a procedure for controlling discourse 'to gain mastery over its chance events,

to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality' (Foucault, 1970:52) then, logically, there are curatorial practices that might animate an unruly 'formidable materiality' of the CGA. In the following section, I look to the work of curator and theorist Irit Rogoff as someone who has progressed this curatorial approach, bringing a focus to the material practicalities of cultural spaces, with the aim to elicit unexpected possibilities – 'chance events'. Not looking for new possibilities as answers to a demand for results – what Rogoff refers to as 'quantifiable and comparable outcomes' (Rogoff, 2008:2) – but as a mode of engagement with experimentation and exploration honed in the gallery that can be carried through life.

### **The Materials of the Archive and Outlaw Statements**

The nexus of Rogoff's curatorial theory can be considered through the *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* project, initiated in 2005 and taking place across venues in Europe. Co-curating three key exhibitions with associated publications, symposia and events, *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* posed the question 'what can we learn from the museum beyond what it shows us?' (Rogoff, 2014). Rogoff produced varying texts around the *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* project – and I use three here: 'Academy as Potentiality' (2007) for *Zehar Journal*, which was part of the Documenta 12 Magazine Project; 'Turning' (2008), which featured in the inaugural issue #0 of *e-flux journal*; and 'The Educational Turn' (2014), an impact case study of Rogoff's project submitted by Goldsmiths, University of London, for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework.

*A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* was motivated by a resistance to the values of the Bologna Process – a reform aimed at making higher education a more comparable and transferable marketplace across Europe, which faced criticism as prioritising the commercialisation of higher education.<sup>39</sup> As such, Rogoff

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<sup>39</sup> For a plain language historical account of the process towards a market driven higher education sector in England see the 2018 publication *Democrats, Authoritarians and the Bologna Process: Universities in Germany, Russia, England and Wales* by Judith Marquand. Marquand concludes regarding England that 'as market principles dominated English higher education policy more and more, the wider purposes of universities became harder and harder to pursue. The pursuit of undiluted market objectives started to destroy the goose

structures *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* as a 'site of both oppositions and imaginative possibilities' (Rogoff, 2007:5) against broader shifts towards neo-liberalisation in society - notably homogenisation, bureaucratisation, and instrumentalization of knowledge. With opposition to the values of the Bologna Accords as the catalyst for the project, *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* would shelter a non-commodification politics of education in a gallery setting. Commencing with a critique of the commodification of education, *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* imagined an alternative approach to learning, trying to foster a curiosity from which to incubate questions and challenges to the construction of society. Rogoff is clear to point out that critiques to existing systems (education, democracy etc) and orders (hierarchies of value) enabled through this network would not be designed through the intention of 'delegitimizing' the present structure to usurp it. This would be to trade in the 'absolute rights and wrongs' of seeking power: 'we don't expend energy forming opposition, but reserve it for imagining alternatives.' (Rogoff, 2008: 08).

In the *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* project, Rogoff explores how a gallery can experiment with its subjectivity through a Foucauldian theory of the archive, unpicking the systems and materials of the gallery to experiment with what a gallery might be. As with my aims for disturbing the CGA, *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* looks to animate the materials of the gallery in unexpected ways, generating chance meetings of past and present. If we consider the background for this work, we uncover the challenges and discoveries that the project faces. In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault admits the possibility of 'chance events' escaping the controlling warden of the archive systems of control (such as commentary). However, in 'The Historical a priori and the Archive', Foucault presents the most powerful conception of the archive. It is that level between possible utterance and record that determines the reception and use of any statement or thing. It is the 'rules' that constitute '*the general system of the formation and transformation of statements*'. (Foucault, 1970:146. Foucault's emphasis). It is a system of relations, regularities and particularities of such

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which lays the golden eggs. A major national tragedy has needlessly been unfolding.' (Marquand, 2018:161)

specific, broad, fleeting and deep complexity as to be indescribable as a unified entity during its process.<sup>40</sup> However, Foucault goes on to propose that we might better understand part of this indescribable system of archival control when we start to interrogate a small aspect of it. As Rogoff deploys gallery materials to experiment with the logic of a gallery, we question what we expect of a gallery. Through experiments, we learn more about conditioned expectations and responses to materials. This way, we might reflect on what we consider inside the scope of 'utterance' for a gallery, and potentially stretch the limits thereof.

Going further, Foucault states that the positive continuation of a discourse - as is determined by the archive as system - does not infer a greater degree of validity, truth, or any notion of progress towards some objectively 'better' discourse (and we are given the examples of political economy, medicine, and natural history as discourses subject to this law). Thus, we must accept that, depending on archive relations, any discourse can be, or appear to be, regressive. The work of Rogoff and her collaborators suggests that in the modern systems of archive, they perceive a logic which flattens the political and social sphere. We can infer this from *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* as an attempt to uncover a system of knowledge production outside of the prevailing system of enunciability (wider social practices typified by the Bologna Process). If (as I believe Rogoff perceives them to be) the structures of discourse formation are contrary to your own values, then your utterances, statements, acts, all appear as diminished (if at all) within the system of enunciation. We should ask, if, as Foucault argues, 'the archive is first the law of what can be said' (Foucault, 2002:145), what happens to outlawed statements?

Foucault writes that the archive is a not a system which 'despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for

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<sup>40</sup> Passed time, Foucault suggests, makes an appreciation of historical archive functioning easier. Given Darm's warning of the eclipsing nature of the glamour of legacies, we might rather be suspicious of an urge to narrate the past with simplicity rather than assume a better perspective.



future memories, its status as an escapee' (Foucault, 1970:146). With *A.C.A.D.E.M. Y*, Rogoff wants to encourage critical thinking presented as under threat by fomenting knowledge production outside the prevailing structures of archive relation and reception; the gallery as a space for outlaw statements. This is the provocation: to see something in the gallery that it isn't designed to show you! To evade the orderly regimes of visibility that are the business of a gallery. We are encouraged to discover the complex relations of the archive as system of meaning making by trying to evade them. This is why Rogoff discounts the energy spent delegitimizing existing structures. If we act within a framework of meaning making established by a structure of discourse, our actions are shaped by, and indeed affirm, that structure. Our understanding is already captured by the frame of discourse we look to escape and yet *A.C.A.D.E.M. Y* proposes that, in the environment of a gallery, we might be able to experiment with a formation of discourse outside of this frame.

Irit Rogoff brings a new perspective to a corpus of curatorial practice engaging with a theory of the archive. In *A.C.A.D.E.M. Y*, it is the materials of the exhibition (artworks, invigilators, rooms etc) as part of the system of the art gallery which are the subject and method of exploration into the production, and value, of cultural meaning. By framing the gallery ecosystem as complicit in our reception and production of cultural activity, constituents have a clearer foundation from which to explore alternative ways to use and interact with our gallery spaces. I believe that this is Rogoff finding a method by which to deploy the Foucauldian archive against itself: to reveal the rules by which particular statements/ideas accumulate by using those same rules. We saw how Lisa Darms argued for the framework of curating archives to move away from unspecified structural forces, to draw our attention back to the material work of archival systems. In her review of *Archive Fever*, Darms writes that Enwezor granted artists an exemption from the very same structural forces of production and reception they sought to critique. I believe that Rogoff's curatorial approach reconciles the contemporary exhibition process with the contradictory, situated archival approach that Darms shows us. Let me be practical: in uses of the CGA, this reconciled approach means

that the materials and systems of the archive are vital - less as objects fixed to a flattened reading, but instead as objects with historical complexity and potential imminence *as part of* the ongoing subjectivity of CG. The archive can be deployed as points of history that can be brought into new and unusual interaction, producing unexpected ideas or associations. The archive as a resource used by artists and audiences not to fix a linear narrative of the gallery, but to catalyse entries into thinking about who CG are today, and possibilities for their future.

How the materials of the archive are deployed in the gallery towards this end is a practical consideration, one which would involve a degree of sharing control and opening the interpretation and representation of the archive. It should involve inviting other constituents (be that artists, visitors, staff, peers etc) to experiment with how the materials of the archive are retained, read, and distributed in the systems of CG. Rogoff proposes two terms which can support this process – ‘Actualization’ and ‘Potentiality’. Together, they offer a guide for those considering the materials of the gallery as presently constituted, whilst encouraging their alternative possibilities. ‘Actualization’ acknowledges the present network of functions and processes in which action and interaction takes place. The ‘complex system of embeddedness’ (Rogoff, 2008:04) that the gallery is structured by. Here, Rogoff identifies points in the gallery system to which we can apply this approach – writing that Actualization is about being conscious of the ‘meanings and possibilities embedded within objects, situations, actors and spaces’ (Rogoff, 2008:04).<sup>41</sup>

If Actualization prompts an appreciation of the particular dynamics across the objects, situations, actors and spaces of a gallery, Potentiality holds open the possibility that it could be otherwise. Potentiality encourages

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<sup>41</sup> I followed this guide in order to introduce the CGA earlier, as I find this definition of the archival topology an incredibly useful way to think about potential nodes of the archive – encompassing both Foucauldian and actual archives. To conceive of the CGA in terms of objects, situations, actors and spaces, allows us to stay rooted in the practical tensions of the gallery archive, whilst staying within the archive as system of power dynamics that I identify Derrida and Foucault share.

that resources be deployed to divert Actualization. It appears too simple – of course you would change a system that wasn't working well - but that would be a case of working towards an expected alternative outcome, and not the process that Rogoff is arguing for. Potentiality is not a straightforward delegitimization of a process in order to replace it, but an action towards discovering what you haven't yet established. It means bringing objects, situations, actors, and spaces into configurations that might not first appear to have any use value, and seeing what might grow from there – a process which confirms the benefit of opening the archive to collaboration and the need for resources to be able to do so. But such experimentation means Potentiality comes with uncertainty, and, as Rogoff points out, 'the possibility that acting will end in failure' (Rogoff, 2008:04). I question what Rogoff's definition of failure is here, in the absence of an expected outcome against which to measure success. But the reassurance that not all experiments with Potentiality turn out the way you might have hoped is valuable.

Both Rogoff and Darms' projects are political – using the gallery space in opposition to the marketisation of education, and to the flattening of a feminist movement respectively. Both approach the archive as an agent capable of affecting change and, in doing so, contribute to the discourse around archives as sites of discovery and criticality, rather than as material deployed to assert positions. Their projects situate the gallery as an actor in wider society, with The Riot Grrrl Collection focussing on sharing activist art and *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* deploying contemporary art for activist thinking. I see the CGA project as aligned more closely with the latter. Amongst others, Darms & Rogoff articulated the potential for the materials of an archive not to reaffirm a past, but to reveal its own structures to alternative uses, critique, and exploration.<sup>42</sup> This was the direction I followed in the exhibition that came after *AAP*. I would embrace an experimentation with the traces of CG's

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<sup>42</sup> Here I am thinking of texts such as; 'No Archive Will Restore You' (2018) by Julietta Singh where the marks left by society on the body are examined for affect, 'What is Hauntology' (2012) by Mark Fisher where the treatment of past material traces in culture are presented as gauging the health of social imagination of the future, and the artwork 'A Couple Thousand Short Films About Glenn Gould' (2005) by Cory Arcangel in which the materials of YouTube are mined as an archive of reinterpretation.

past and show this layering of time in the title of the exhibition – *Archives at Play 2* (henceforth *AAP2*). Incorporating Rogoff's research, in *AAP2* I would engage more closely with the materials of the CGA, to stimulate questions of the structures by which those materials were kept, used, or distributed. This approach moves towards answering Professor Ravetz's question as to where the archive was – the CGA becomes part of Martinon's curatorial 'jailbreak'. Bearing the material-focussed approach to the archive in mind, I returned to the writing of Derrida, who extends a theory of the archive as a political project, and expresses how this powerful force always contains its own radical an-archival seeds.

### **A Practical Return to Derrida's Archives**

In the 1995 text *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida uses etymology to assert the nomological power of the archive, pointing to the contemporary archive as an echo of the *arkheion* – home to the rulings and balance sheets of the Greek superior magistrates, the *archons*. However, it is in the earlier 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' from 1966 that we find Derrida identifying a more radical potential at work within the archive – and it is this relationship in the archive between law and radicality that is worth exploring further.

In *Dust* (2002) Carolyn Steedman gently deflates some of Derrida's more strident recourse to Greek social and linguistic structure as a blueprint for the contemporary archive, but *Archive Fever* still contains two key aspects of the Derridean theory of archives vital to my positioning of the CGA. The first is that the archive has the potential to be a powerfully positive force in the activity of CG with their constituents. As Derrida writes:

'There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.' (Derrida, 1995:04).

Here, Derrida refers directly to political acts of oppression through manipulation and control of archives – obscuring traces of state violence or acts which might otherwise threaten the power and legitimacy of the rulers. But, for Derrida, what is true of this explicitly political archive is true for structures from a family household to a gallery, or to a civilization. Whilst this sentence about political power controlling the archive conjures images of authoritarianism, it can be thought of in a healthy, positive interpretation. Derrida tells us that to enable access to the interpretation and representation of the past is to allow for the kind of freedom of debate and learning that can lead to a respectful and engaged institution.

I contend that this open access to archive materials is one of the key factors for success in Rogoff's project, generating questions around the possibilities of a gallery space. It is only possible to see beyond what the museum wants to show you, when you don't ask the museum to decide what that is! Indeed, the open archive as political force is certainly at the root of Darms' work of maintaining the current and future accessibility (keeping alive) of a complicated feminist movement. Indeed, Derrida's democracy of the archive is best expressed in Darms' complicated figure of the archive as genre defying, contradictory, and conscious of participation by groups who have previously been marginalised in archive structures. Comprehending the political potential of the archive leads us to ask, as Derrida does, why aren't archives always seized upon as structures of control? This is the second aspect of *Archive Fever* that I want to address - that within each archive, to a greater or lesser extent, exist the seeds of its own overcoming. Or, how 'every archive ... is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional' (Derrida, 1995:07).

Using the convention of quotation in an exergue as an example, Derrida points to the practice of laying in stock the tone of the coming text through a few words. The intention, Derrida suggests, is that authors use the exergue to establish a literary association – the exergue as signpost in literature for the text to come. Derrida follows by asking how, then, we might think outside of the cultural associations which signpost our understanding

when using the same pathways that established their positions. He argues that the quotation in the exergue that can 'prearchive the lexicon' (Derrida, 1995:07) might be radically overcome via the text it precedes. It feels like we have returned to the conflict between an archive as preservation of the past, versus the radically-generative archive – the territory of Foucault's warning about commentary, and Rogoff's outlaw thinking. But Derrida offers a tactic for following the institutive, revolutionary threads of the archive - through his notion of 'Play'.

## **Play**

In 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' (1967) (SS&P), Derrida discusses the frameworks in which we construct meaning from our experiences – to give a hypothetical example, when encountering a Renaissance painting. Derrida emphasises that many factors would be acting to determine our reception of this artwork, such as the time of our encounter. Between then and now, the painting may not have changed at all, but the social relation to religion, patronage, beauty, etc. have undergone shifts through the centuries. Had you seen the work contemporaneously, then your class, gender, or relationship to the model, could all have been working to shape your encounter of the piece. You might have made a joke about the work, relating it to a Renaissance trope long since faded into obscurity. And yet we still experience Renaissance paintings in palazzos or galleries (as well as now on super yachts). They still carry a kind of status, and might hold a broadly agreed narrative – albeit both subject to change given contemporary perspectives. The frameworks of our understanding have degrees of latitude based on numerous personal and social factors.

This hypothetical example shows different levels of Play in our construction of meaning for this artwork, across the personal and the societal, through time and place, shared and individual. For Derrida, Play is used to refer to the changing range of feasible (or 'sensible') meaning making within given structures - determining the plausible relations between experiences and utterances - and a subject's application thereof. It is another

striking overlap between Derrida and Foucault as I would argue that the mechanics guiding Play are essentially the same as those identified by Foucault as the 'level of archive'. Derridean Play appears to be the space identified by Foucault between '*langue*' and '*corpus*' in which statements might become coherent or otherwise be deployed. Derrida addresses the same conceptual ground as Foucault does three years later: looking into the role of the past in the constitution of the present, from which will emerge the future. But Derrida presents a clearer vision of the factors influencing the possibility of Play, and what was happening to them in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Derrida, there has always been a jostling coalition of grand concepts that have occupied a central force in governing experience – that is, narratives which effect a large role in the structuring of meaning making – religion, laws, metaphysics etc. Within these systems, Play is at work, and allows for development and change (for example, from religion to science), so long as the substitution takes place within a model of structurality evolved from the existing form of central structure.

The core argument of 'SS&P' is that the claim those centralised structures once had in the production of meaning is broken - and through rupture as opposed to evolution.<sup>43</sup> The argument is that, in the late 1960s, Derrida witnessed an era where the commonly held structures generating levels of shared agreement were collapsing and were not being substituted by equivalent concepts. This constitutes a breakdown in the structure of 'central' forces' claim to structural governance. At which point, Derrida argues, 'in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse' (Derrida, 1967:280). From thereon, society must acknowledge its own – potentially conflicting - role in the construction of multiple discourses. With these multiple and contentious discourses now occupying the 'central structure' (whilst having none of the centred properties of the previous examples) we find ourselves grappling with the parameters of meaning

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<sup>43</sup> Derrida attributes this breakdown of central structural forces to a lineage that has culminated in an era (i.e. the 20<sup>th</sup> Century) towards an embrace of its breakage – but credits Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger as authors sensitive to a more subject oriented metaphysics.

making, from within structures we ourselves have made / are making.<sup>44</sup> This is the crisis of Derridean Play, implicit in Foucault's conception of the archive, Lisa Darms contradictory archives, and Irit Rogoff's archival activism: how do we rethink and remake our own structures from within a structure we inherit? How might the CGA be active and unruly in its activity?

To encourage those processes that might take us beyond the structures in which we depart, Derrida writes:

'Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.'  
(Derrida, 1967:292).

Before we examine what Derrida means by this, let me state that I see radical Play as a direction from which to approach an archive towards its revolutionary, institutive potential. As Darms shows us, we can achieve this through the complexity of archival materials, and we should keep in mind the learning from Rogoff that this is made easier by opening the Play to the gallery constituents. But what does it mean that Being should be conceived on the contingency of Play rather than the other way around? Derrida follows this possibility with the conjecture that Play conceived of thus would be a step towards Nietzschean affirmation – itself a state of subjectivity with a gargantuan and complex theoretical framework impossible to address here. But Derrida gives clues as to what this affirmation of Play would entail:

'...the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.

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<sup>44</sup> Perhaps it's trite, but worth noting, how similar this notion is to ideas of post-truth – where competing discourses promote alternate ways of seeing the world. But keep in mind, Derrida is not questioning the truth of experience, rather the production of meaning therein.



*This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center.*' (Derrida, 1967:292. Derrida's emphasis).

Whilst it is reductive to adequately approach Play via its conclusion in Nietzschean affirmation, Derrida is clear that this is a case of how we handle our part in the construction of structurality – or, how we make meaning with/from the archive. Derrida refers again to the rupture at the centre of structurality, our role in the production of discourse, and how Play (as before a dichotomy of presence or absence) must be admitted to derail any attempt to assert a presence in the vacated centre.<sup>45</sup> For Derrida, those multiple competing discourses vying to occupy the empty centre in our production of meaning making can never sit comfortably *because they are incompatible with our broken structure of centrality*. But of course, discourse is the product of people, and it is people who are trying to make discourse fit into a broken structure. It is necessary for afflicted societies to deal with the rupture of structurality (through embracing Play) before we can cope with multiple competing discourses.

To translate this strategy into something practical might entail working with the CGA by first believing that it need not be given value via claim as to origin, or as to truth. To work in the opposite mode with the CGA would, for Derrida, be 'limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present pieces*' (Derrida, 1967:292) – in other words, to become trapped in pre-existing models of structurality. Embrace Play, and constituent exploration of the CGA 'surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace' (Derrida, 1967:292, Derrida's emphasis). This latter strategy is presented as that which has the potential to most potently allow us to engage with parameters of the archive not already inscribed by the archive - 'no

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<sup>45</sup> In the essay 'Differance' (1968) Derrida will talk of Play as remaining 'beyond the opposition' of positive presence or negative absence in the strategy of Differance. As a strategy, Derrida writes, 'It is hazardous because this strategy is not simply one in the sense that we say that strategy orients the tactics according to a final aim ... In the end, it is a strategy without finality.' (Derrida, 1982: 7) I see a serious overlapping here with the fallibility of Potentiality that Rogoff proposes.

longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism' (Derrida, 1967:292).

We began by identifying the familiar question of how to engage with an archive in a way which was potentially radically generative – and Play is Derrida's answer. Let me pause and make the same emphatic point as can be found in the later discussion of my methodology of Becoming-Curator: this is not an invitation to chaos. This is not Derrida suggesting that groups abandon any shared values or aims, but a principle that the direction towards those aims, and the aims themselves, should be ever open to Playful testing. I do not think it is by chance that Derrida uses the phrase 'the innocence of becoming' when talking about Play – I think it is related as antecedent to the project of Becoming as set forth by Deleuze & Guattari. This innocence, perhaps, can be read as a Becoming of subjectivity not already ordered by hierarchies of subject value defined by Deleuze & Guattari - namely male, European, human, rational. In which case, radical Play might be seen as experimenting with Becoming.<sup>46</sup> These steps towards affirming Play can be measured, and insulated, generating new interactions and interferences across the CGA. This is Derrida's tactic for an archive to overcome the archive.

It may seem that, by involving the abstracted approach of Derridean Play, I have re-opened the gap between those engaging with the practical material potential of the archive (Darms and Rogoff), and the more abstract structural forces (Derrida and Foucault). But tactics of radical Play speak to precisely the tension we return to throughout this theoretical framework: how do we engage with the structure and material of the archive in a mode with the potential to overcome those same materials? Not with reverence, but with joy! How do we feel the past anew, use it otherwise, discover new connections all changing how we think the future? The tactics of radical Play are concerned with what Darms addresses as preserving the complexity -

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<sup>46</sup> See the chapter on my methodology of Becoming-Curator, and how this experimentation is in the name of greater possibility of being through becoming, not less through chaos.

not flattening a legacy to good or bad but working with the shifting nature of archival power. The tactics of radical Play acknowledge that delegitimising existing structures to substitute your own is insufficient in the project of sheltering new approaches to education or galleries as per Rogoff, advocating for experimentation without predictable outcomes. And radical Play as a tactic with the CGA is how it might be used not to validate an existing subjectivity of the gallery or celebrate an ongoing presence – but to welcome constituents to animate the story of CG, uncovering new exchanges through the structures and material of the archive.

### **A Game of Cat's Cradle**

To reconnect the material and abstract structural dimensions of archive theory, I want to bring my theoretical framework to conclusion via an essay by Donna Haraway, 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (1994). In this text, Haraway proposes a type of play as guide in the project of weaving abstract and actual, linguistic and material, in the processes of change and growth. 'In no way is story telling opposed to materiality' (Haraway, 1994:63), Haraway writes, and in this process of knotting the textual and the technical we can consider 'how worlds are made and unmade, in order to participate in the process' (Haraway, 1994:62). To do this, Haraway uses the open-ended game of Cat's Cradle as a metaphor for how we might create systems more encompassing of a range of experiences and constituents against a backdrop of structural homogeneity, when 'the practices that constitute technoscience build worlds that do not overflow with choice about inhabiting them...' (Haraway, 1994:60). Haraway identifies many of the same challenges and possibilities facing theories of the archive that we have uncovered – discussing a variety of tactics and collaborators in generative archival projects.

To show why I believe this text is pertinent to archival theory, we must establish the relationship Haraway makes between two terms: 'technoscience' and 'nature'. Arising from the interplay between the two, I identify a familiar archival tension, that is, how to create new paradigms for

subjectivity from within those we inherit. In this text, technoscience is applied to an interconnected set of structures that shape the course of world building. Haraway describes technoscience as 'among other things, a practice of materializing refigurations of what counts as nature, a practice of turning tropes into worlds' (Haraway, 1994:60). Although no institutions are named, we can look at technoscience as the practical structures shaping the world that a subject inhabits. From norms of formatting a 'good' job application, to prevailing approaches to beauty, Haraway considers technoscience as the figures through which stories of the world are made actual and does not like the direction it has taken. She asks:

'Must technoscience – with all its parts, actors and actants, human and not – be described relentlessly as an array of interlocking agonistic fields, where practice is modelled as military combat, sexual domination, security maintenance, and market strategy?' (Haraway, 1994:60).

Here, Haraway implicates systems of education, politics, lifestyle, and subjectivity as bound up in cultural tropes of antagonistic profit and loss – and believes it could be different. But technoscience is a dimension of the world we inhabit; it exists against a ground. For Haraway, this is the realm of nature, which she describes as:

'...the densely packed location for the simultaneously ethnospecific, cultural, political, and scientific conversations about what the allowable structures of action and the possible plots in the sacred secular dramas of technoscience – as well as in the analysis of technoscience – might be.' (Haraway, 1994:59).

Nature is where technoscience both happens and is commented upon.

Note how Haraway draws attention to nature as the site for *conversations* on the processes of technoscience? In the site of nature, we appear to have an aspect of the Foucauldian structure of commentary - at

once challenging and guarding the given discourses. Nature is presented as the site for shifting agreements and disagreements on the discourses of the world; a shared place flowing with notions and myths that is our 'complex inheritance'. And, in turn, nature is influenced by technoscience's 'refigurations of what counts as nature'. The two have an interplay, and the process of this interplay – for Haraway – is the site against which our sense of who we are is constructed; the interplay defines the frameworks of potential. The process of this technoscience and nature relationship, I propose, maps to the mechanics defining the potential for meaning construction that Foucault attributes as the 'level of archive' - Foucault's 'systems that establish statements as events ... and things.' – as 'the system that governs the appearance of statements' (Foucault, 1969:145). It should be seen as the mechanics of establishing discourse within the 'rupture' in structurality foreseen by Derrida (1967). The fundamental move for Haraway, foreshadowing the work of Darms & Rogoff, is that Haraway addresses this archival project as one of resistance to the direction of technoscience, for those who fall outside of its dominant win/lose cultural discourse.

We should consider Haraway's conception of technoscience as the result of what Derrida identifies as the process following the rupture at the centre of structurality. It is the result of human discourses vying in a broken structurality, discovering the scope of their ability to shape the world. I mean that, when describing nature as a 'star wars test site' and normality for technoscience as 'war, with all its ramifying structures and stratagems' (Haraway, 1994:60), Haraway is arguing that the structure of discourse which has taken hold at the centre of Derrida's model of meaning making is one of conflict and heroes.<sup>47</sup> Haraway suggests that technoscience as a tool for

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<sup>47</sup> Ursula le Guin's 'Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1986) published 6 years prior to Haraway's work, is a piece of speculative anthropology, and the best place to feel how a story of conflict has taken control of the structuring of discourse – 'how the mammoth fell on Boob and how Cain fell on Abel and how the bomb fell on Nagasaki and how the burning jelly fell on the villagers and how the missiles will fall on the Evil Empire, and all the other steps in the Ascent of Man.' (le Guin, 1986). And Le Guin identifies the crux straight away, how to displace this discourse structurality from within it, before humanity destroys itself in the story of the hero. For Le Guin, stories are poison and remedy, Derrida's pharmakon: 'Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we'd better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with

refiguring nature is revealing how potent the capture of structurality can be – with the result that the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is a ‘fully imploded, fully artifactual, natural-cultural gravity well of technoscience. We do not so much swerve into this well as get sucked into it irrevocably.’ (Haraway, 1994:60).

Haraway is part of a lineage of post-structural archival theorists, I argue, who address a fundamental contemporary debate of rethinking structure from within the structure we inherit. I propose Haraway’s interplay of nature and technoscience as a theory of archive. Foucault designated this complex web of structures defining the appearance of statements as the ‘level of archive’. Derrida would perhaps - in keeping with the stretching of definition into its opposite – both simply and complexly designate it as a process of *arkhē*. (Derrida, 1995:2) From the root of the word ‘archive’ Derrida ascribes the *arkhē* as shelter for the principles in which our lives play out: the domicile of the superior magistrate in Ancient Greece, the *arkhē* contains the objects (records) and ideas (interpretation) of the law. *Arkhe* shares with ‘A Game of Cat’s Cradle’ a conception of twin forces of nature and law, commencement and commandment, *physis* and *tekhnē*.

It is not a revelation to align Haraway with a post-structural approach to analysing the production of knowledge.<sup>48</sup> But we benefit by considering this paper as addressing the practical importance of archival theory – emphasising the benefit to world building by including the experience of a wider range of actors than those who have been shaping technoscience so far. In application to the CGA, this would translate as engaging constituents

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when the old one's finished. Maybe. The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story, and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.’ (le Guin, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> The 1988 essay ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’ sets out to show precisely that claims to objective knowledge are rarely without political application. In the essay, there are even throw-away riffs on the aspects of Derrida we have just been examining – ‘But then came the law of the father and its resolution of the problem of objectivity, a problem solved by always already absent referents, deferred signifieds, split subjects, and the endless play of signifiers. Who wouldn’t grow up warped?’ (Haraway, 1988:576)

in the systems of the archive – and emphatically in the way that Rogoff proposes. It would be flawed to expect to learn something from constituents' explorations of the CGA when the constituents are carefully selected by the gallery, with the material aimed toward expressing a particular presence, and with expectations of the outcome. For CG, their archival activities could affect the construction of their subjectivity toward the aim of making new art happen, and supporting the artistic development in the North West. Haraway sees this project of radically shifting the frames of discourse as vital for creating equitably inhabitable worlds. Writing that 'Queering what counts as nature is my categorical imperative' (Haraway, 1994:60) pre-empts the Xenofeminist Manifesto by 24 years in calling for the demolishing of certain practices given refuge in myths of nature in order to enable a new future.<sup>49</sup> Then Haraway presents our recurring motif – 'A lurking question stalks the project of refiguration' (Haraway, 1994:60) - how do you refigure the archive, or discourse, or technoscience, or nature, or gallery, without reaffirming the structures that enabled the first figuration? Haraway is optimistic, introducing the ideas that we may need in our process of refiguration using the metaphor of a game of Cat's Cradle. In the game of Cat's Cradle, loops of string are held over fingers, before being picked up and moved into new patterns around the fingers. There is no end, or victory state, other than the ability to keep making new and interesting patterns – a tangled dead end should be reversed out of. Whilst possible to play alone, it is with collaborators that we can be surprised by new patterns and rhythms. Ideas from this game are used in Chapter Two, where its threads are borrowed as ways of knotting together different elements of the archive.

I want to address four parts of Haraway's essay pertinent to my application of archive theory to CG. These are two strands of practical advice

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<sup>49</sup> 'If nature is unjust, change nature!' goes a slogan of the Xenofeminist Manifesto. Haraway's model seems to me more practically useful, locating the production of 'just' in the interplay between culture (technoscience) and nature. The Xenofeminist Manifesto is powerfully succinct about its aims, however, 'affirming a future untethered to the repetition of the present.' (Laboria Cuboniks, 2018:online). I look forward to further research on the actions and legacy of Xenofeminism, as presently a lot of it seems tethered to a repetition of Donna Haraway, and it will be interesting to see what this update has brought to an understanding of the post-structural feminist discourse.

for archival theory, with which we might refigure the interplay of technoscience and nature –the storytelling, and the reading – and then reflections on what, or who, might be involved in this process. To start though, let us consider why Haraway identifies Cat's Cradle as the model for this project. Initially, it is presented as a pragmatic decision - a straightforward substitution. The argument goes that technoscience has followed game theory into a downward spiralling zero-sum market logic, so we should present a different kind of game on which to model progress. Haraway has good reasons as to why Cat's Cradle should be swapped into the paradigm of discourse narrative structure. It becomes more rewarding as it engages together multiple 'nonhomogenous ... nonisomorphic ...sometimes mutually repellent webs of discourse' (Haraway, 1994:69). To be enjoyed it must keep changing hands as opposed to sitting in possession, that to discover new patterns it must change hands among collectives of heterogenous players. And that there is no win condition – only an ever changing, ever growing repertoire of collaborative complex figures. These are metaphors for ways of thinking, but this is the method and project that Haraway is engaged in, 'to make metaphor and materiality implode in the culturally specific apparatuses of bodily production' (Haraway, 1994:62).

Haraway's concern is the increasingly limiting options for subjectivity being presented through the interplay of nature and technoscience, and that at the root of this 'spiralling mimesis' are tropes constructed from myths of conflict and victory over the other, knotted with materiality. Cat's Cradle, writes Haraway, offers a different way of forming the myths for how worlds are made and lived in – and does so through shifting the discourse on discourse, what Derrida saw as the structure of structurality. So, given that stories, myths, metaphors are how Haraway can see a way out of the situation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, she offers a couple of threads of good practice for refiguring the interplay of technoscience and nature – a Harawarian contribution to archive theory addressing how to remake structure from within. That this project of refiguring discourse must do so by intervening in what can count as a 'good primal story' (Haraway, 1994:61)



across all discourses and boundaries, and that 'Textual rereading is never enough' (Haraway, 1994: 62).

To intervene in a good primal story, Haraway tells us, should take place across advertising and community organisation, video games and academia. For the CGA, it would entail intervention from different perspectives and in different uses. The 'good primal story' could be a rethinking of tropes around difficult relationships, scientific concepts, or gallery origins – what matters is doing so whilst following the paradigm of Cat's Cradle. This would mean staying away from fixed discipline identities, or single possessive heroes. Instead, we are encouraged towards the borders between existing disciplines and narratives, the 'zones of implosion' (Haraway, 1994:62) where friction creates awkward and unexpected protagonists. To open the figure of the archive to new and exciting figures, Haraway argues, means to repeat, analyse, and develop the patterns made in the less familiar exchanges. This might seem like advice for the production of new tropes, but consider Haraway's advice that this entails 'apprehending and refiguring' (Haraway, 1994:61). We are reminded that our practice must begin with apprehending (or reading) the shape and customs of our discipline before we can appreciate where the border regions are. And reading, or deciphering, the tropes of the world is essential to the project of refiguring it – but not sufficient. On this, Haraway is emphatic – 'Textual rereading is never enough, even if one defines the text as the world.' (Haraway, 1994:62).

This is an important point - this new way of interacting with the world, that Haraway steers us towards, cannot be brought about by understanding or interpreting the present state differently. It will not be sufficient to change our interpretation of the present interplay of technoscience and nature without getting involved in the remaking. This is pivotal in the process of world making that Haraway presents – different ways of reading the world have no purchase in world making without some kind of 'materialized refiguration' (Haraway, 1994:62). Haraway writes:

‘The point is not just to read the webs of knowledge production; the point is to reconfigure what counts as knowledge in the interests of reconstituting the generative forces of embodiment.’

And notably, ‘however modestly, however partially, however much without either narrative or scientific guarantees.’ (Haraway, 1994:62). In this short admonition as advice, we can hear echoes of Foucault’s warning as to the warden of commentary – who will guard the webs of knowledge by giving them their due by a secondary reading – and the prelude to Rogoff’s project of experimentation without guarantee.<sup>50</sup>

Let us pick up these strands as advice on archive theory and imagine some figures with the CGA. To look at how the archive might be ‘otherwise’ as Haraway says. First we read, or listen to, the CGA – records held in a closed meeting room, a poster in the bathroom, the 35<sup>th</sup> year anniversary exhibition *No Particular Place to Go* (2019). There are artworks on walls or left in plan chests, odd parts of an installation or leftovers from a workshop, dotted between offices and store cupboards. Abundant traces of creativity and context are latent, unactualized. The borders of the CGA - those spaces where ‘nonhomogenous, nonisomorphic webs of discourse’ (Haraway, 1994:69) should cross and meet – are not sites of activity. Having apprehended the boundaries and flow of the archive, we intervene with the seeds of open-ended stories into the borders of the CGA. How can we bring it into interdisciplinary experiments – however modest or without guarantees? The gallery might open the archive to students – just as students founded the gallery in 1984. But to stop things becoming too comfortable, instead of the painting and sculpture students, it might work with digital media, performance, and poetry students. Let a story of the archive be read and then rewritten in unstructured ways with gallery constituents, not seeking to claim any fixed position, but for the pleasure of potentially starting something unexpected.

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<sup>50</sup> In Haraway’s line, there is also a strong resemblance to Marx’s 11<sup>th</sup> Theses on Feuerbach (1845) ‘Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.’

The last piece of practical reflection I want to draw out is the definition of ‘actors, agencies, and actants for both human and nonhuman entities’ (Haraway, 1994:64). There is a similarity here with Rogoff’s definition of the entities we might engage to let us think through a gallery differently (objects, spaces, actors, situations), and a clear affinity in purpose – to enable worlds otherwise than they are presently constituted. I believe that both Haraway and Rogoff expand the cast of affective agents in order to move away from a primal trope – the hierarchy of majoritarian positions that Deleuze and Guattari identify, as they point us away through Becoming.<sup>51</sup> Namely, that the interactions of the world are geared to value a subject that is white, man, adult, human, and medically rational.

### **Theoretical Framework - Conclusions**

I have turned and returned to ‘A Game of Cat’s Cradle’ throughout this research, and Haraway’s ideas of entanglement and tentacular working as ways of remaking worlds continue to be visible in art practice (*Entangled Pasts* opening at the Royal Academy in 2024, and ‘A Tentacular Pedagogy’ keynote to art school leaders in 2023 from Kai Syng Tan to name a couple). Haraway brings a great deal of optimism into the project of knotting stories and materials together, wedging open the structures of discourse to the potential of richer worlds. I argue that we must see this paper as a practical archive theory, made in a time when it was becoming evident that structures needed to change, whilst the question remained of how to swerve these powerful tropes from within the worlds they had made. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, this is why Haraway created a field of study dedicated to feminist multicultural antiracist projects with the piercing vision of critical theory.

My research is located alongside my interpretation of Haraway, with threads from the CGA being passed from hand to hand. I have shown how Haraway sits at a juncture between the theoretical and the material,

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<sup>51</sup> See my methodology chapter for further on Becoming as part of Becoming-Curator.

positioning the production of meaning in an interplay between nature and technoscience. In this position, Haraway grasps the power of the archive in shaping our understanding of experience (as per Foucault's 'The Historical *a priori* and the Archive' & Derrida's *Archive Fever*) against a Western backdrop of ruptured structurality (as per Derrida's SS&P). But it is material interaction which is given prominence in Haraway's contention, through the narratives we construct around those materials – it is never sufficient to have one without the other. Archive materials (as understood in Rogoff's definition of archive materials) must be understood as part of the meaning making structures of society. More specifically, they hold great potential in the construction of subjectivity, and even hold the possibility for considering our subjectivity otherwise. The CGA is a political tool in that its use can change the way that the gallery is understood or imagines its direction. But each new trace in the archive should be understood as contributing to the CGAs radically institutive potential.

To make the CGA active by a structure of Cat's Cradle is to wedge the archive open so that new patterns might emerge, and then to keep on reading and mutating those patterns. To do so must involve (as affirmed by Rogoff and Darms) collaborators from diverse disciplines, enabled to keep playing and analysing previous figurations or archive material in order to produce their own. In my first exhibition, *AAP*, I understood Haraway's advice that rereading was never enough to be equivalent to Foucault's warning on commentary – that any engagement with the materials and structures of the CGA would be futile. However, returning to Haraway's text, I realised that textual rereading should be the start of thinking something 'otherwise', as how Martinon's vision of the curatorial as a 'jailbreak' needed to understand its escape. It was for this reason that following *AAP*, I commissioned artists to intervene in the CGA, welcomed students into the CGA, spoke about the gallery history at community events, led classes on the archive as research workshops, invited staff and volunteers to create Instagram stories of the archive. But this research is finite, and these projects for the most part kept

to themselves.<sup>52</sup> To work in an approach closer to Cat's Cradle, the CGA should continually be passed from actor to actor, even as it accumulated more traces of the activity of CG. New exchanges could collide crowd sourced Instagram photography from the most recent exhibition opening with the press release for the first gallery event into a piece of folk music, which would in turn become the soundtrack to a scientific paper on lichen, and on and on. In this way, the CGA can become a way into both reading and telling a story of the gallery, changing an experience of the gallery discourse. An evolving kaleidoscope, creating new patterns with each twist, and recording them for future use. This kind of archival project requires its own particular structures and resources – from the preservation and availability of material (in the style of the new archives pioneered by Lisa Darms) to the space for experimentation – but such a process has the potential to refigure the relationship of CG with not only its constituents, but with its ongoing practices.

My theory is that the archive materials of CG are currently unactualized and should be used as tools collaboratively with a wide spectrum of non-homogenous constituents. The CGA should be woven into new configurations, and those figures should leave a trace within the CGA – ready for new collaborators to find and refigure. Each new pattern of the CGA should acknowledge that the times in which we activate them are as contradictory as the times in them that we reanimate. This should not be a project of seeking to assert presence, or value, but one of experimentation in the *possibilities* of value and presence. The CGA should become an active part of the gallery, for constituents to learn with and discover. In this way, it can remain an unruly actor in the ongoing project of Castlefield Gallery.

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<sup>52</sup> Things crossed over, but not perhaps in a substantially meaningful way – as 'modest' as they come. Parts of the research workshops featured on the social media takeover alongside placements and staff archive stories, but in a manner wholly predictable for the social media channel.

## **Chapter Two - Using the Archive**

In this Chapter I report two distinct approaches to using the archive: as a source of reflection, and as a resource for outreach. The first we can characterise as a more introspective practice, engendering a greater awareness of the foundations and history of Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG), and giving perspective on the present and future of the gallery. The second we should see as a way of keeping the archive active, disturbing the traces of history from their submerged state and opening it to new audiences, new uses – as per Aim 1 of this research. The two approaches inform one another, happening in tandem. As constituents reflect on the CGA through reading and research, so it shapes their ability to engage others in the archive. As diverse groups explore the CGA, so it leads to unexpected reflection and further research. This would be a benefit of keeping the CGA active, growing a knowledge of CG history among constituents.

In the Introduction, I set down a detailed description of the CGA as it stands, so readers should have a good sense of the type of materials under discussion. Chapter One then presented a theoretical framework for this research, whilst showing how I found the CGA to be presently submerged, or unused. This Chapter then reports on instances of playing with the archive, opening the CGA to subjective readings and uses.

## Origins in the Archive

Using the archive for reflection, I will consider objects from the CGA which frame the origins of Castlefield Gallery. Importantly, this is not a piece of writing setting out a history of CG as an authoritative account of the past. That kind of text - fixing a single linear version of events and written in a definitive voice - is contrary to what I have found to be the most stimulating activity with the CGA.<sup>53</sup> Instead, I deploy and disturb the archive subjectively, amid a multiplicity of collaborators, allowing connections and complications to emerge, layering more and varied contact into reading the traces of the past.<sup>54</sup> This is what can make the archive active, unruly, stimulating. To encourage this, I have immersed myself in the CGA, talking with people about this project at cultural openings, meetings, symposia etc. I argue that there is room in the unruly archive for personal interpretation, additions, or revisions. So, instead of a definitive overview of the past, I offer a thread tangled through materials from the early years of CG.

It is a relatively simple thread, tied to the formation and early years of the gallery. Other threads could be far more complicated, less chronologically-bound, wandering more obtusely through the CGA.<sup>55</sup> I discuss my use of 'threads' as tools of the CGA further in this Chapter, but this subjective and meandering depiction of the formation of CG acts in two ways: firstly, to use the archive materials to gain perspective on how CG have and might work and, secondly, to layer further unexpected connections

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<sup>53</sup> Consider my Harawarian imperative from the Theoretical Framework to encourage non-homogenous collaboration and uses of the CGA. Also, my methodology of Becoming-Curator (presented in the following chapter) similarly encourages experimentation away from institutional (majoritarian) readings.

<sup>54</sup> It might sound wrong to describe a piece of writing as made 'amid a multiplicity of collaborators', but it is only through my exploration of the archive with the artists, staff, and publics, that I have reached this stage of articulating the archive. Someone coming to these objects without the experience of CG and the people around it might communicate these origins very differently.

<sup>55</sup> For example, the CGA could be used to look at a history of sculpture, and its relationships to gender and class in the North. This might follow exhibitions or moments at the gallery featuring Sir Anthony Caro, the Henry Moore Institute, Andy Goldsworthy, Nicola Ellis and Ryan Gander.

into the CGA. This is one approach to engaging with the CGA, and for someone looking to instrumentalise a history by pointing to examples of firsts, or bests, it is not the most appropriate approach. It further complicates the space of the CGA and, in doing so, aims to foster more coincidence and diffraction of the materials.<sup>56</sup>

Castlefield Gallery was founded the same year I was born, opening its doors for the first time on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1984. Tangling the story of CG with more personal details (mine or others) not only makes the gallery history a more personal narrative, but helps me loop the thread around other events – for example, that CG and I are also the same age as the Turner Prize, whose winners and nominees regularly appear in the archive of Castlefield Gallery: from Howard Hodgkin (nominee, 1984 / exhibited at CG 1991) to Veronica Ryan (winner, 2022 / exhibited at CG 1987). But CG was not established as a glittering showcase of English creative talent, instead it was the answer to a contemporary and regional exhibition space that Manchester was lacking.

### ***Fig. 1 – The Manchester Artists' Studio Association Flyer***

Before CG was founded, the artists who felt that absence began by making a space for themselves to paint, where they could engage with the city of Manchester through the contemporary art they believed in. The Manchester Artists Studio Association (hereafter MASA) was formed in 1982 by a group of graduates from what was then Manchester Polytechnic. *Fig. 1* shows a flyer for MASA and, although it has no date, we can date it to between 1985 and 1987.<sup>57</sup> It is an A4 piece of paper, three panel Z-fold, with a photograph

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<sup>56</sup> I use 'diffraction' here in the Harawarian sense; 'my favorite optical metaphor ... the noninnocent, complexly erotic practice of making a difference in the world, rather than displacing the same elsewhere.' (Haraway, 1994:63). Haraway is identifying a way of reading which takes into account the position of the reader, as well as those around them, and indeed the object read.

<sup>57</sup> The factors that help us locate the flyer between these years are the list of funders, the identification of Sir Anthony Caro as patron, and that Sally Medlyn is listed as a North West Arts Officer – she is listed as Deputy Director of North West Arts in the 1987 Arts Council England return.



from the outside of Castlefield Gallery (someone sitting just inside) and an image of the inside of the studios. There are no images inside, just magenta text, cheerfully offering life drawing classes daily through the week from 6pm to 9pm for 80p (concessions 30p) '*You don't need to book; just turn up!*'. The lessons were subsidised by Manchester City Council's Adult Education Department, and tuition was led by members of MASA. A former member told me this brought in an appreciated small fee, as did the listed Saturday morning children's workshops ('for children 6-11 ... every Saturday from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm' (*fig. 1*)) although apparently this could get chaotic, acting as a creche while parents went shopping.

From life drawing to Children's workshops, study days and school residencies, the leaflet stresses this point: 'Educational work is central to the activities of MASA and Castlefield Gallery'. MASA were a group committed to fostering and furthering an engagement with contemporary art at all ages. The members had left art education and, finding no studio in Manchester connecting to the city through contemporary art, started their own. Able to organise, creative, and ambitious, they were active in delivering workshops and events at their Granby Row studio base, in schools, and in the city. Having established the studios, they wanted somewhere to showcase the art that was exciting them, and that the members were making – so applied for funding to establish Castlefield Gallery. A key supporter was the North West Arts Board, one of ten regional boards that distributed Arts Council funding via regional offices, prior to the Arts Council England (ACE) becoming centralised in 2001. There is a message of support from Sally Medlyn, Visual Arts Officer, on the MASA leaflet – above another quote from the first Castlefield Gallery patron, Sir Anthony Caro. This pair of quotes, around which the leaflet introduces the story of MASA and the creation of CG, are two perspectives on a foundational idea of the gallery – to connect the city and contemporary art. One perspective from the position of a funder, and one from an artist. Where the funder, North West Arts, see a group able to provide a service 'to organisations and individuals' in Manchester, Sir Anthony Caro emphasises the value of the gallery in bringing discerningly selected art into the region.

In providing a service to organisations and individuals, MASA and CG want to be entrepreneurial, and we read their commitment to generating funding from their art – in the workshops, through the Art Rack ('Original works of art up to the value of £45 can be purchased...'), and the advert for original commissions undertaken. Back in 1986, North West Arts officer Sally Medlyn calls the group 'a dynamic artists organisation'.<sup>58</sup>

This ongoing work to balance financial resilience alongside artistic integrity runs through the CGA, across ACE, trusts, auctions, gifts, patrons, and commerce. Often it entails the 'great deal of voluntary work' which *fig. 1* credits in the founding of CG – with the front of house at Castlefield Gallery still operated by volunteers. Whilst the work towards CG's financial resilience is a lens on public arts funding in England, it also reveals the value placed by artists in artist-led spaces – Sir Anthony Caro's perspective on CG in the pair of quotes. *Fig. 1* is very clear, 'Castlefield Gallery, situated off Deansgate, is an artist-run gallery'. It was founded by the Polytechnic artists, ('MASA established the Castlefield Gallery') and whilst we will return to many sides of this idea, it is worth establishing that as an artist led space, 'The artistic policy and exhibition programme is determined by a committee of artists from MASA'. The decisions about which artists to work with, what medium to focus on, how to exhibit and engage the city with contemporary art are all made by the committee of artists who have set up the studios and then set up the gallery. In this flyer, we read how people perceive Castlefield Gallery, and what the gallery brings to the city. Vitally, we understand the importance of the people involved in shaping the gallery. In the next object we can meet one of them.

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<sup>58</sup> The obfuscating terminology of 'dynamism' echoes into the present day of ACE strategy. In 2020, ACE released their ten year funding plan, making one of their investment principles 'Dynamism' - referring to the need for cultural organisations to develop business models that become more financially resilient 'in order to build successful businesses over the next decade' (Arts Council England, 2020:online).

### Fig. 3 – City Centre News Announcement

*Fig. 3*, Page 16 of City Centre News, Manchester, May 1984. This is a news article cut out and kept, although the first column has been cut off too short.<sup>59</sup> Half of this article is a photograph of Sheila Seal. She's outside the gallery, in front of one of the huge windows which let in so much natural light, perhaps so we can see the 'Castlefield Gallery' signage, or perhaps because the light was better there. For some reason, as she stands outside for a press photograph, Sheila is carrying a painting. Sheila is the first person to manage the Castlefield Gallery. It is a role variously described in documents of the CGA as 'manageress', 'administrator' and 'organiser'. From Glasgow, Sheila had moved to Manchester, and for a time lived in the Lock Keepers Cottages next to the canal, opposite the bar Dukes 92, with her husband Peter Seal - another of the MASA artists. Alongside establishing a dynamic contemporary gallery, Sheila played bass in a Manchester band considered the second hardest working Manchester band 1988-89 - The Man From Delmonte (Manchester Evening News, 04 September 1992 – *fig. 4*.)

A contrast to the measured promotional tone of the MASA flyer (*fig. 1*), this article (*fig. 3*) reinforces foundational ideas in the origin of CG. We read about Manchester's lack of a studio scene ('absence of facilities' [sic]) for young painters, how MASA are a studio with an 'integrated role in society' through education, and their entrepreneurial partnerships with 'other professionals such as architects and city planners'. There's mention of the 'artists touch' in transforming the 'grim premises' which, whilst intended as a compliment, I read as renovation of someone else's property for free. The struggle for independence through financial self-reliance is foregrounded again – with the solution poised between the model of MASA working on a 'self help and co-operative basis' and the hope to 'make the scheme self-financing by the sale of paintings'. The article ends by mentioning in passing that Sheila will be in the gallery to talk to visitors who might be 'newcomers to

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<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, it has been reproduced intact on *fig. 8*!

contemporary art'. This is a quick comment, but it speaks to something of real importance for small galleries – the interface between gallery and public.

I put a great deal of care and thought into the exhibitions I curate, and get productive feedback and pleasure from being in the exhibition space with visitors. I see how people engage with the work, what makes them smile, what questions they have or how the exhibition moves them. I see broad demographics, backgrounds, and interests, and I will eagerly listen to the thoughts of visitors and talk to people about the exhibition. The conversations I have with visitors impact how I work, and how I understand and communicate the exhibition. But being in the exhibition space is not always possible, and then this vital part of the visitor experience of the exhibition is in the hands of the Visitor Team. At CG presently, this role is filled by an able group of volunteers managed by a Front of House role – and I have had the pleasure of working with several of them throughout this research. But for smaller galleries such as Castlefield Gallery, I can't emphasise enough the value of this connection to the people coming through the door. That the person they meet is interested and knowledgeable about the art, and the artists. That they have a sense of the history of the space and the ethos of the gallery. Looking at this photo from 1984, gallery manager, artist, and bass player, Sheila Seal was the ideal connection between Manchester and Castlefield Gallery.

### **Fig. 5 – Artists Newsletter Announcement**

Sheila's thoughts on the gallery in her own words appear in a 1984 article in the Artists Newsletter (*fig. 5*). The title 'artist run GALLERY' appears above three dense columns of text, with a photograph of the huge windows outside the gallery, and a neatly hand drawn floorplan of the ground floor.<sup>60</sup> This first home of CG, shown in the floorplan and photograph, is now in 2023 an

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<sup>60</sup> But not of the basement, which is a shame, but perhaps space restrictions meant that two hand drawn floorplans was too much? We should wonder why the floorplan was included, and take into account that this is a newsletter focused on artists. Perhaps for reasons of interest, i.e. expect a gallery of *this* size. Or maybe so that artists who wanted to exhibit there had a sense of the room available, and new what kind of artwork might suit the space.

Italian bistro. The current gallery team and I ate there and were impressed by the high ceilings and spaciousness of the place. The size wasn't lost on the CG founders; Sheila writes that it is 'ideal for showing big painting and sculpture', and contemporary artworks of that era – by artists such as Anthony Caro, John Hoyland, and Gary Wragg – could require a lot of wall and floor space to exhibit. A 1986 Manchester Evening News review of CG's second anniversary exhibition (a retrospective of the artists that had shown at the gallery in the first two years) wonders how a Michael Lyons sculpture, too big to enter via the door, got in there. The review goes on to confirm that the large space is well suited for 'encouraging young local artists, most of whose work seems to be big, bold and usually abstract.' (Robert-Blunn, Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1986:28). The reviewer enjoys the warm welcome to the gallery from Sheila, and goes on to praise CG for presenting modern art, by Northern artists (whilst mentioning that the Cornerhouse are supplying neither).

In *fig. 5*, Sheila, too, writes of the 'distinct lack of showing space for contemporary art in Manchester since the closure of the Peterloo Gallery some years earlier' (Seal, 1984. *Fig. 5*). We should consider this another foundation of CG, 'to bring high-quality new work to Manchester and to spotlight exciting work being made within the region.' (Seal, 1984. *Fig. 5*). To give some context, these are artists in their 20s, in the early years of the Hacienda and the 'Madchester' movement, building their own new artistic community. In this spirit of making a new culture for the city, the MASA artists work cooperatively to provide the energy and direction of CG – relying on one another and following their artistic interests. Once again, Sheila writes that the artists 'provide the main source of voluntary work' from preparing the spaces, 'distributing posters', and producing exhibitions. A lot of effort is going into the gallery, and the MASA artists identify early on that a dedicated job role is necessary, someone to manage the funding applications and the exhibition programme, to channel and maintain the 'ten or so enthusiastic and energetic artists'. So, Sheila decides to put her artistic practice on hold to run the gallery. It is an immediate albeit subtle clarification to the 'artist run GALLERY' of the article title – the MASA artists don't believe they can be

effectively run by someone trying to balance the gallery work with an art practice. The gallery is run by someone who comes from an art background, embedded in the artistic scene of the city, but focussing on the gallery. Whilst managed by someone focussing on the gallery, it is still the collective of artists who 'make all the decisions regarding the exhibition policy/programme'. We saw this in the MASA flyer (*fig. 1*), but here we get a flavour of that programme, reading that the current policy is 'committed to the traditional values of painting and sculpture'. It's a peculiar focus for a contemporary art gallery opening during an era of electronic creativity. By contrast, Cornerhouse (opening just around the corner from CG on Oxford Road in 1985) prioritised artforms including cinema and photography, whereas CG's first solo exhibition of a photographer was David Hiscock in 1992, a series sponsored by Visa showing the 1992 Barcelona Olympians. Even in this photography show, the work is heavily worked onto by hand, with graphite and paint on top of photographs that make use of motion blur and in-camera distortion.<sup>61</sup>

In 2023, CG still ensure that space is made for painting and sculpture, with a biennial exhibition opportunity awarded to MA/MFA Fine Art and MA/MFA Painting graduates from the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). It is a palpable connection to the CG founders and their values. The last instance was in 2022, and the applicants were selected by the Programme Leader of MA/MFA Fine Art at MMU (in 2022, Ian Rawlinson), the curator of CG (in 2022, Matthew Pendergast) and a guest selector (in 2022, artist Hardeep Pandhal). But, back in 1984, Sheila tells us that the exhibition selection process is entirely in the hands of the artists –

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<sup>61</sup> Castlefield Gallery develop their relationship with video and computer made art during the 90s: in 1993 they held an exhibition called 'Print Out' writing that 'Although there have been some uses of the computer in the field of art for a good three decades now, it is only within the last few years that a more widespread curiosity has led to a growing exploration of creative potential' (Castlefield Gallery, 2023:Online). In 1996 the gallery launched its first website as part of the Back/Slash exhibition (although you had to go to the Cyberia internet café if you wanted to visit it), and in 1997 CG was a venue for the Video Positive festival between Manchester and Liverpool – a festival of video and electronic artwork started in 1989 as a project by the organisation Moviola, who would grow into the FACT Gallery in Liverpool.

understanding that this means it will follow the 'predilections' of those artists, as well as shift with the changing constitution of MASA.

In making the exhibitions, and deciding the direction of the programme, the artists are contending with what they perceive as 'the suspicion of contemporary art in the mind of the public' (Seal, 1984. *Fig. 5*). They appreciate the narrative around contemporary art as an obscure insider's club and aim to combat this suspicion with carefully selected art, as well as by bringing public and practitioner together at every opportunity (public talks, video interviews, painting workshops and children's clubs are mentioned).

CG was founded as a gallery designed to bridge the publics of 1980s' Manchester with the contemporary artworld. In the first year of being open, someone could walk in and see some Anthony Caro sculptures, or work by Manchester artist Sarah Feinmann, and have a conversation about them – who these artists are and why the work is being exhibited. As Sheila writes, 'our aim at Castlefield Gallery is to get good contemporary art seen and understood by a wider public and to encourage that public, where possible, to buy.' We read again how the commitment by CG to exhibiting art meaningful to the public is tied to a belief in the value of that art or the creative industries potential to 'obtain a degree of financial independence'. Even then, the artists recognised that it was a 'hard struggle' (Seal, 1984. *Fig. 5*). But this hope in the potential for sales of art to support the running of CG persists in the CGA.<sup>62</sup>

Back in *fig. 5*, the financial support gratefully received to CG takes up the end of the article, but one comment stands out from the conclusion in tone and sentiment. After stating the objectives of CG (to exhibit good contemporary art, to widen the public who see good contemporary art, to

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<sup>62</sup> As of 2023, the gallery request a 20% share of sales from work sold through the gallery in their exhibition contracts, and have successfully sold work both through exhibitions and in the Manchester Contemporary Art Fair. Sales of work to support the gallery in hard times also recur, with notable auctions in 2012 (*Put Your Money Where Your Eyes Are*) and 1991 (*A Friend in Need*).

further that public's understanding of this art, to sell the art if possible), Sheila writes 'If however, it looks as though we would have to compromise our exhibition programme to meet these objectives, then the game would quickly lose its appeal'. The rest of the writing is measured and clear, but this sentence has a different balance – referring to the project of CG as a game. This project is something that the artists enjoy and, when you're giving so much time to something for what is described in the same article as 'a small salary', it's understandable that it should be fun, something Sheila would want to do. The fun at the heart of this game, for the artists, is the exhibitions programme. If they had to compromise in this – exhibit someone whose work they didn't respect because it would either bring a larger audience, or generate more sales - then the game would lose its appeal. What would they do? Walk away from the gallery rather than compromise the programme? It suggests a lot about the factors going into CG for the artists in the mid-80s: the demands on their time, the importance they placed in the exhibitions programme, and how they balanced the gallery alongside their lives. This article tells us about the foundations of the gallery in Sheila's words; the artists deciding the programme and the nature of that programme, the connection with the public by bringing the artists and city together, and how it might remain a financially viable project. In this next article, we can begin to step back, and get a broader view of the group.

### **Fig. 6 – The Artful Reporter Announcement**

This object – *fig. 6* – an article from *The Artful Reporter*, April 1984, is one of my favourite objects on the origins of the gallery in the archive. Titled 'Artists' Intervention in Manchester' it addresses the future with a robust confidence. This confidence is particularly impressive when I remind myself that the people in the large leading photograph of the piece are closer in age to the university placements and students at CG than to the current Deputy Director & Curator, or Director. The people in the image are MASA Members – not long out of Higher Education and sat in their gallery space unwrapping giant



works of well-respected British modern painting.<sup>63</sup> They've worked hard to get this kind of art to Manchester, and here it is. I wonder if the people in the photograph are trepidatious about the forthcoming opening. The photograph is one reason I love this piece – an image of the founders of Castlefield Gallery as they bring in the large John Hoyland canvases for the first exhibition. Maybe directed by the photographer, they look earnestly at the carefully wrapped works, dressed like The Cure or The Fall. Heavy fabrics, big collars, long coats, strong jaw lines. It's a good photograph, well-posed from foreground to background, with the fingers of the closest MASA Member beautifully printed. You can make out the ribs of his knitted jumper.

The original version of this article is folded and kept in a document wallet, but at a little over A3 in size, it is too big for a lot of scanners, and this version is cut off halfway through. Fortunately, someone has found a way to reduce it down onto one page (*fig. 6* second version) – although you lose the detail of the photograph. The original is printed on a yellowing paper with deep smudgy inks, and the scan hasn't reproduced it well. The substance of the piece reinforces ideas we've heard, and I'll cover these first, but there's a texture to the writing that adds another layer of interest to the story of Castlefield Gallery. We start with some extra background to the gallery, however - that in 1984 the Castlefield area has been newly refurbished. Upper Campfield Market Hall, where CG first open their doors, was a Victorian market building built around 1880, at a time of industrial trade and connection. But this article suggests that the area hadn't been in regular use, and the new art gallery is part of the regeneration.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the council were glad to have some open doors in the new development, welcoming the artists into the area. We read the commitment to CG as a space for people to see the big names of contemporary British art, alongside artists with a regional connection. Switching to the black and white reproduction of *fig. 6*,

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<sup>63</sup> By this point, John Hoyland had exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1967, alongside Anthony Caro at the São Paulo Biennale in 1969, and at the Serpentine Gallery in 1979.

<sup>64</sup> In 2023, the Campfield Markets are once again being refurbished, this time with a focus on technology and digital industry (Manchester City Council, 2023: Online).

we can read that the artists will be present to discuss the artworks, and the context of their production and exhibition. Again, we hear the aim of selling the work directly from artist to industry and public in a sustainable market, along with an ‘I wish them luck...’. This drive for sales, writes the author, is an artistic response to the economic pressure of a government unwilling to fund art in the public sphere.<sup>65</sup> Thus, goes the argument, the artists rely on one another in ‘self-help, self-determination and co-operative decision making’ in trying to monetise the products of their labour with the public – ‘an up-front, producer/consumer relationship with their local audience’.

There is more texture about the exhibitions programme, here, too. We know that CG wishes to focus on painting and sculpture, and now we read that the artists making these decisions share ‘an overriding ethos of the inherent quality of painting, [and] by implication the particular power and capacity of painting to create emotion, mystery and its own meanings.’ This statement is cogent with the early years of CG programming: modern and predominantly abstract sculpture and painting proliferate, with artists Patrick Heron, Mali Morris, Sir Anthony Caro, Sarah Feinmann, making art that didn’t re-present the world, instead using painting and sculpture to more obliquely express experiences and ideas.

The pieces could be read in different ways, generating a multitude of ‘meanings’ for the gallery public. The writer of *fig. 6*, Jill Morgan, is aware that this programming policy might seem off-putting to the public. That the policy seems at odds with the intention of the gallery to dispel the suspicion of the public towards contemporary art – a suspicion borne of trendy people in galleries nodding appreciatively at piles of bricks, or blank canvases. So, the author cautions us that ‘the open, accessible policy of the studio should be remembered.’ Here, I suggest, is a moment of misalignment between aim and delivery: an accessible studio is not the same thing as an accessible exhibitions policy.

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<sup>65</sup> Margaret Thatcher entered her second term as leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom with a landslide election victory in 1983.

I would never suggest that the exhibitions policy should compromise for greater visitor numbers - the game would lose its appeal. But it is optimistic to believe that the commitment to working with artists pushing at the edges of contemporary artistic endeavour after long years of training and practice is reconcilable with a sustainable producer/consumer market. This disparity was picked up at the time, too. Irene McManus, in a Guardian review of the 1985 Patrick Heron exhibition (*fig. 7*) puts it like this 'ANOTHER painter's painter, another abstract show at the eager young Castlefield Gallery'. In March of 1985, exactly 12 months since CG opened, it has a reputation for showing artist's artists. Irene goes on 'if they're going to develop as a gallery, they'd better start diversifying'.<sup>66</sup> It is once again the friction from the MASA Flyer (*fig. 1*) as CG in the mid-80s tries to provide a service to both a broad public and to a specialised artistic audience. In fairness, even the more specialised artistic audience weren't overly impressed with the Patrick Heron exhibition, as seen in the review from art historian Alex Blyth (*fig. 7*). Alex dismisses the 'Artspeak' presented in a quote contextualising Heron, identifying him as an artist dependent on the 'beneficence of an over-privileged few, but makes no attempt to have relevance to a wider society.' Reviewers can take positions or have names to make, so I am not presenting these pieces in judgement of the Patrick Heron show. I do so to suggest a perspective on CGs exhibitions programme after a year, and how following the ethos of the inherent quality of painting described in *fig. 6* can still be seen as programming artist's artists - despite the warm welcome and open studio.

However, 'Artists' Intervention in Manchester' (*fig. 6*) is written before CG had opened, with their intention to reconcile the edges of contemporary art with the public of Manchester. The method, it says, is to treat artwork like any other job – 'a full-time job which involves spending time painting, organising life classes, sharing in the administration of the Association'. It is a

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<sup>66</sup> This term, diversifying, makes me think again of the ACE investment strand of Dynamism – which 'may involve organisations changing both their missions and their business models' (ACE, 2023:49).

response that Jill Morgan situates in a ‘Mancunian ethic’ (implied as a hard-working make-it-happen attitude) in contrast to the situation she sees young artists finding after art school – ‘no job, no apparently useful skills, no shared ideology, no role in society.’ So, no point to art school? But it is not the arts education that is found lacking in this article, instead, the ‘institutions and art structures’ which should support the coming together of art and public are the ones not delivering.

This idea, that the interface between public and contemporary art should be better embedded in education and civic life, gives us perspective on the article, and prompts us to look at the author – that further layer of interest in the story of Castlefield Gallery. The writer, Jill Morgan, is a curator dedicated to supporting the potential of contemporary art to change attitudes, people and places. This article is replete with emphasis on working hard for the art you believe in, a belief in the power of that art to make a difference, and the possibility of contemporary art to connect to a broad public, because these are the foundations that Jill built at Touchstones Gallery, in Rochdale, during her time as Exhibitions Coordinator and then Curator. When you search online for ‘Jill Morgan Curator’ you find Turner Prize winner, Lubaina Himid, calling her ‘one of Britain’s great feminist curators’. (A-N, 2021: Online) and curator and researcher Derek Horton remembering how Jill Morgan led a local authority gallery in Rochdale to be known for ‘exhibitions celebrating the oppositional stance of some of the most significant feminist, black and working-class artists of the 80s.’ (The Guardian, 2017:Online).

Before I knew of Morgan’s reputation, I came across the name ‘Jill Morgan’ in the minutes of the first Castlefield Gallery board meeting, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1984, as one of the Directors of the Manchester Artists Studio Association. Or, as *fig. 6* declares as a clear interest in the contents of the article, ‘*a trustee of M.A.S.A., acting in a general advisory capacity*’ [emphasis from original]. The minutes of the very first CG board meeting were interesting enough for me to show them to a contemporary CG employee who observed that, amidst all the details of accounts, business and committee, was the seemingly more personal comment made in

brackets next to Jill's name – '(arrived late)'. Was it fair that this passing detail of 'arrived late' was now forever held against Jill Morgan? I agreed, and later did a casual search to see if there was more to Jill than a missed bus, or overrun meeting. Pulling on that thread, coincidences quickly piled up, to the point where I was able to connect past and present artists on a commission for the 2023 exhibition celebrating the work of Jill Morgan at Touchstones (curated by Derek Horton), *A Tall Order*.

It is incredible how seemingly insignificant details in the CGA, when turned and focussed upon, can become their own threads of discovery. I have found that, by immersing myself in this archive and using the CGA as a lens on the world, it has created the opportunities for seemingly very unlikely connections. This is a demonstration of how the CGA might become active and vibrant again, able to create new connections and new artistic opportunities, stirring these countless traces around, opening the CGA to multiple perspectives, and then pulling and following threads. Whilst the article reiterates much about the ideals of CG, beyond that it reminds us of the extraordinary commitment to the ideals of art that the people directing CG lived by. Not long out of art education, this group brought together individuals with a radical faith – that the experience of contemporary art was not only meaningful to a city public but that it could be a viable way to live. In October 2023, CG shared the photograph from *fig. 6* on social media, looking forward to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the gallery. One of the people in it replied, happy to see that the gallery was still working with exciting, contemporary artists.

### **Fig. 8 – First Show at Castlefield Gallery**

This review, *fig. 8*, is the final object we will comb through in this selection. The doors to the gallery have been opened, and a multitude of traces start falling into the archive, press reviews, visitor comments, letters, faxes, invites, rejections, forgotten prints, projectors, models, maquettes, ceramics, Christmas cards, seeds and all the accumulated material of a contemporary art gallery. So, what does reviewer Len Green think of this first CG

exhibition? First let me summarise the foundational ideas of CG in this review which I have previously identified.

The review draws a parallel between CG and a London Cork Street venue, known as the place for respected commercial galleries, so CG is communicating a commercial imperative. The spaciousness of the gallery is admired, recognised as suitable for showing the painting and sculpture of the time. As is the commitment that CG will show the leading British contemporary artists while keeping a spotlight on the art of Manchester and the Northwest. It is noted that there have been limited opportunities in the city to get this kind of ongoing contemporary provision until the opening of CG. Financial support is acknowledged from a number of sources including the North West Arts board, Manchester City Council and private foundations. Exhibitions are decided by the selection committee, which is comprised of all the artists in MASA, who will consider the slides and applications of interested artists. And finally, that the gallery was 'simply another run-down building which the artists from MASA have transformed'. When arriving for the John Hoyland opening, our writer observes that the floor had only just dried from its varnish, the masking tape only just peeled from the windows.

What did Len make of the exhibition? It's an anti-climactic review – the Hoyland paintings are described as 'tame' found to be a bit 'nice' – lacking the usual 'old aggressive style'. Leaving aside the questions about the 80s valorisation of aggression and fearless exploration as modes of expression in modern art, Len qualifies his review with the reasons for this polite selection. John Hoyland isn't exhibiting these works in a newly-varnished gallery space to further his own oeuvre – it's an 'unselfish gesture to help the newly opened Castlefield Gallery.' It is an artist offering the capital of their respected name and artwork to support an artist led space, where the artists make the decisions, and construct the space, where 'leading artists' work will be shown, and the artists connect that work to the city. This willingness to get involved with CG is how established artists contribute and express the value of a space committed to growing the contemporary art scene of a city. This could be another thread to follow: the supportive gesture of artists from John

Hoyland to Sir Anthony Caro becoming gallery patron in 1985,<sup>67</sup> the donations of artworks to auction in 1991 including work by Patrick Heron and Albert Irvin when funding is pulled,<sup>68</sup> to the letter from Bridget Riley in the archive from 1994 explaining that she would exhibit at CG because she believed in their aims.<sup>69</sup> The value of a space like CG, to the contemporary artists of Britain, and to all the people of Manchester, is a good point to leave the story from the origins of CG.

## Conclusions from Origins

Using the archive to trace these foundational principles of CG brought me far closer to understanding what was important for the gallery then, and how that has shaped where CG finds itself today. It supports a sense of the gallery as somewhere important, valued by artists, shaped by people who believe in culture. This, in turn, has impacted how I work with the archive – feeling closer to a D.I.Y, spirited ethos of making art happen on its own terms. I argue that sharing this story of the origins of the gallery changes how others understand the gallery and might inspire further onward investigations.

Looking closely at these objects in the CGA can be used to create a position from which to examine the 40 years since the gallery opening. For example, when in *fig. 5* we read about a commitment of CG to the values of

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<sup>67</sup> Un-knighted, it was simply 'Anthony Caro' at the time of his becoming Patron in 1985 – confirmed in the second board meeting, where his letter of acceptance was read out by the nominated chairman. The usual chairman, Peter Seal, was absent – so in his place, Neil Grant has taken the role of chair. Neil is the artist at the front of the image in *fig. 6* and is now Emeritus Professor of Art at Chester University.

<sup>68</sup> The auctioneer is that famous catalyst of Manchester arts and music, nightclub impresario and label founder, Tony Wilson. On his headstone are words from the novel 'Manchester Man' by writer Mrs. G. Linnaeus Banks – 'Mutability is the epitaph of worlds. Change alone is changeless...' (Banks, 1876). It's worth remembering each time a new 'Factory' complex opens, or Hacienda branded cultural event is launched, that lazy trading on nostalgia was an anathema to the man whose legacy is being branded and resold. The past is an influence, a material that shapes us, it's how we use it today that counts.

<sup>69</sup> By 1994, Bridget Riley had exhibited work in two Documenta festivals and been the British artist at the Venice Biennial. Kate Jesson, who was on the exhibitions selection committee at the time, recalls going to Riley's studio and being touched by her generosity, despite her representatives advice that CG wasn't a worthwhile venture (Jesson, Appendix 1).

painting and sculpture, I was able to look at contrasting regional organisations (such as Cornerhouse or FACT) as well as CG programming since that time. This is an example of using the CGA to gain interesting perspective and insight. To do so requires a way of navigating the CGA, which I present as 'threads' through the archive; considering origins are one thread of the archive – where any number are possible. I want to now share my concept of threads, and their value for navigating the CGA.

### **Threads Through the Archive**

I started this account by saying how it would be different from a comprehensive guide to the origins of CG, and instead one possible thread tangled around a few objects from the archive. Using threads allows us to follow an idea through the archive, stringing objects together. Different threads can tangle around the same object, but create very different patterns, and are useful for navigating an extensive repository such as the broad archive of the CGA. The idea of the threads comes from two sources: Donna Haraway's 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (Haraway, 1994), and the thread as an aid for navigation through a labyrinth. Here I want to discuss the value of threads through the archive by way of these two reference points.

Threads have been a figure in this research since the beginning and come from one of my original sources – Haraway's 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (1994). For Haraway, this game of exchanging patterns of threads is a model of knowledge production based on discovery, inclusion, and respect, as threads are woven into new patterns by non-homogenous collaborators. Haraway writes:

'My intention is that readers will pick up the patterns, remember what others have learned how to do, invent promising knots, and suggest other figures that will make us swerve from the established disorder of finished, deadly worlds.' (Haraway, 1994:66)



In the CGA, I use threads to string together objects and ideas that can be exchanged with collaborators, to weave new and interesting webs from the material. Importantly, using threads in this way means not seeking a final position for the CGA, but for the pleasure of doing, and seeing what shapes emerge amongst constituents. This, I propose, is a model for an active and inclusive archive.<sup>70</sup>

My second reference of the thread comes from the story of the Minotaur and the Labyrinth from Greek mythology. In the broad conception of the CGA, the archive stretches across a network of objects and people relating to events and exhibitions which are part of the arts and culture sector of the Northwest and across the UK. To begin with, the CGA appears as an ocean of text relating to vaguely remembered names or exhibitions – with no shape or direction, just connections. The more I dug into it, the more connections I found to me – but that seemed to suggest the archive as something defined by a personal relationship. Having worked in the arts and cultural sector of the Northwest for a decade, I found a lot of familiar names; I discovered my undergraduate photography tutor had volunteered at CG in the mid-90s, during Helen Chadwick's last commission before she died tragically young. But what could the CGA mean for people who didn't share this background? The idea of the archive as a labyrinth occurred to me, something that you could get lost in, or lead you to swerve towards something that appeared familiar, before finding yourself lost again. In the story of the Labyrinth, Theseus is given a 'clew' (a ball of thread) from Ariadne to help him navigate, thus threads appeared to me again as a motif for my thinking of how to travel through the CGA. They would allow you to navigate in and out of the archive, following an idea or theme. You could branch off to investigate, whilst still finding your way out.

The story of the labyrinth suggests more to think about in relation to archives. Most productively for me was considering how the labyrinth was

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<sup>70</sup> For a more thorough application of Haraway's essay to the theories in this research, see Chapter 1.

foremost a way to keep the Minotaur *safe*, but hidden, and thus neutralized. King Minos had the labyrinth made to lose this creature so close to them yet so shameful, the monstrous son of his wife the Minoan queen, the result of their disobedience of the gods. In a parallel, archives can also be a neutralizing technology, closely guarded, with rigorous rules. Archives can be a way to keep vulnerable histories close, closed, and under control. I don't suggest that CG were hiding material in the archive, but as its content doesn't meet contemporary expectations of protecting personal data, it is a source of vulnerability. This was brought into focus through the commission by Sarah-Joy Ford (discussed in Chapter Four).

With the notion of the thread as a collaborative and navigational technology in the CGA, I used them in the curation of *AAP2*. Threads gave me a way of talking about the CGA with the artists involved, particularly in the development of the 2 new commissions. Recognising the limits to resources necessary for a full archive exploration by the newly-commissioned artists, I was able to offer patterns of threads which I had found through the CGA for them to take up and reconfigure.

I identified five threads through the CGA:

1. The idea of the artist-led,
2. Decision-making structures in CG
3. Connecting with the public
4. Foregrounding contemporary art
5. Financial resilience.

I identified these threads by reading through the CGA, whilst making notes and sketching diagrams, using digital mapping software to connect recurring ideas, and reflecting on themes which were still pressing concerns for CG. Through the 40 years of documents, these threads represented recurring motifs woven across the activity and principles of CG. By following one of these patterns, someone could follow a broad and productive journey through the archive, learning something of the gallery and without getting too

lost. It was interesting to see how the new commissions picked up these patterns and wove them into new figures of the CGA.<sup>71</sup>

To use threads means acknowledging the multiple paths through the archive. It is an approach to navigation which embraces the open-ended nature of the traces constituting the archive, with an intention to create and pass on new patterns to future users. The threads I identified, as an approach to activating the archive, were present in *AAP2* for visitors as a list in the installation by George Gibson & Grace Collins, detailing the 5 motifs above. But otherwise, they remained a useful but hidden mechanic for working on the archive with collaborators, using the CGA with a variety of groups, in novel settings. This activity always illuminated new perspectives on the CGA, to greater or lesser extent. In the following section, I will consider how sharing patterns through the CGA has taken place in this research.

### **Constituents and the Castlefield Gallery Archive**

I proposed at the opening of this chapter that a way of bringing life back to the still pool of the CGA would be to open it to multiple perspectives. Here I will outline how this has worked in practice, and what experiments with activating the CGA can reveal. The projects entail sharing the spaces, objects, actors and situations of the CGA, and encouraging the traces that are stirred up to become part of CG activity (and thus return to the CGA). It is a process of activating the archive through workshops, conversation, and exhibition – and would ideally constitute an ongoing strand of work to keep the CGA active. It is a process of opening the CGA to constituents.

Throughout this thesis, I write about engaging constituents of CG through activity of the CGA – and it is useful to clarify who and what I mean

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<sup>71</sup> For more details on the commissions, see Chapter 4. One particularly interesting observation was that the artists responding to the threads I suggested seemed most interested in the decision making and organisational structures of CG. The minutes book, or the financial resilience were ideas which the commissions kept coming back to.

by constituents. I am referring to people brought together through CG, and the aims of the gallery to develop the artists and arts culture in Manchester and the North West. This includes past and present members of CG (volunteers, staff, board members etc), past and present artists, visitors, CG Associates, and the network of peers and interested audience sectors. In short, it is those who share traces of activity with CG – including at a distance through online or offsite activity. Of course, this implies lesser and greater degrees – someone might have heard of CG and have a vague opinion on what they do, or you might be the regular exhibition technician at the gallery. At the beginning of this research, I was using the term ‘stakeholders’, denoting those people with an interest in the activity of CG.<sup>72</sup> However, I didn’t appreciate the ownership it implied. Instead, ‘constituents’ describes the many people which come together in CG, it encompasses historic participation, and it suggests a potential for input.

Use of the term constituent to describe those people connected to a gallery has been more common since the reader, *The Constituent Museum*, was published in 2018. The book considers the widespread museum activities afoot in reframing the relationship between a gallery/museum and those who visit it – with questions about use value and role in civic cohesion at the forefront.<sup>73</sup> Presenting case studies and reflections on the changing relationship between western society and the museum, the writings in *The Constituent Museum* (TCM) promotes a move from seeing the visitor as a ‘passive receiver of predefined content’ to positioning the relationship as one of ‘collaboration and co-production’ (Byrne, J. Morgan, E. Paynter, N. Sánchez de Serdio, A. Železnik, A., 2018:10). Collaboration in the constitution of the CGA alongside visitors is something I have already favourably considered, but there are differences between constituents as positioned in the projects of TCM and in my usage.

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<sup>72</sup> I’m drawn to Haraway’s term ‘collaborators’ for people who can come together in CG. The only drawback for me is that it seems to imply an overly active role, and sometimes people might just want to come and enjoy seeing an exhibition.

<sup>73</sup> Project examples abound, but include the rise of useful or socially engaged art around the Assemble 2015 Turner Prize win, the spread of projects connected to Arte Útil, and documenta15 to name some of the more well known.

Essentially, my use of constituents does not connote a structurally engineered relationship but is more of descriptive term for a network of people who brush up against CG. In TCM, framing visitors as constituents is the crucial move in updating museum relevance, which is not my intention through use of the term. This said, TCM stresses the potential of radical archival practice to create and stabilise a new paradigm of constituent and museum relationship. It imagines the archive as ‘an active and constituent tool in the production of power and knowledge regimes’, and indeed the ‘central and most accessible’ one (Byrne, J. Morgan, E. Paynter, N. Sánchez de Serdio, A. Železnik, A., 2018:10). The following reflection on a piece of archival research in TCM certainly confirms a lot of my findings from activating the CGA, (including thread metaphors!):

‘By revisiting forgotten networks of artists and practices, the research and the exhibition revives them while weaving a new inter-generational constituency of activists and artists.’ (Khouri, K. Salt, R., 2018: 315)

TCM adds to the list of examples where great importance is placed in archival thinking to affect the cultural structures around us, in this latest refiguring of the societal/cultural dynamic.

Whilst I admire the practical way in which the projects of TCM seek to update a cultural sector (predominantly in Europe) weighed down by values no longer reflective of society, my use of constituents does not carry the implications of use set out in TCM. Yes – keeping the CGA active in my contention would mean a process of relationships, thus seemingly the definition of the ‘constituent’ archive. But I am reticent to align my use of the term to a politically charged movement when I don’t propagate the surrounding ideology.<sup>74</sup> For the purposes of this research, constituents of CG

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<sup>74</sup> For a phenomenal text on the political potential of the constituent archive from a TCM perspective, consider *Decolonising Archives* (2016) published by L’Internationale. This is a group of cultural institutions situated in Europe including MSU in Zagreb, Museo Reina Sofia

are those who share, or have shared, contact with the gallery. We can now consider five cases through which, along with varying constituents, I've tried in different ways to stir up the CGA.

## **Back On Track**

Back on Track are a Manchester-based charity who support adults to make positive changes in their lives. Members might be managing addiction, convictions, or problematic mental health, and the consequences these things bring to living and working.<sup>75</sup> Learning new skills is a core part of their process, and I was introduced to members of Back on Track when they visited CG as part of an art class. I gave them a tour of AAP in 2022, and we got on well. I appreciated the way they questioned and engaged with the exhibition, and the group responded well to my approach to curating and discussing the work. Ahead of AAP2, I contacted the group to see if we could spend time working with the CGA, as part of their art sessions, and to see how the CGA might be activated and used. They agreed to work with me for a half term block of 6 workshops, each lasting 2.5 hours and taking place weekly on a Friday morning. I devised sessions which explored ideas around archives, using the CGA as a practical example. Each session had discussion and practical parts except the visit to Manchester Art Gallery, in which we discussed the idea of communicating societal values through art.

I felt that the most successful of these sessions was a workshop around sculpture. Using exhibitions from the CGA as examples, we considered different times and approaches to sculpture. From the first patron

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in Madrid, MACBA in Barcelona, M HKA in Belgium, MSN in Poland, Salt in Türkiye, and Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven alongside complementary partners. L'Internationale supported the publication of The Constituent Museum with Valiz, and many of the case studies and writers in TCM are drawn from within their networks. *Decolonising Archives*, a text by Carlos Prieto del Campo, sets out in clear and strident tones a manifesto for the 'Archive of the Commons' - a cultural political project protecting subaltern heritages from the crushing homogenization of dominant cultural memory. The outcomes of this different approach to archival thinking are hoped to be a more inclusive societal imagination and thus more inclusive political constitution.

<sup>75</sup> 'Members' was the term that those attending Back on Track chose to use for themselves.

Sir Anthony Caro, through Andy Goldsworthy, Nicola Ellis, Jocelyn McGregor, and finally to current patron, Ryan Gander. It was successful in that the group were happy to discuss the different trends in sculpture, referencing societal and cultural shifts, locating this discussion in their hometown. In the practical part of the session, we worked with air drying clay to create sculpture based on what we had discussed – new sculptures based on a wander through the CGA. The practical aspects of the sessions meant I had time to talk to members individually, and for members to talk with each other. It made time for processing ideas from the introduction to the session and being able to talk about them. An important finding from the success of this session was that the CGA was the vehicle, not subject, of the workshop. We had previously (and enjoyably) looked at the political and historic aspects of archives, how they could affirm societal values, and how they could be turned against themselves to question those values. But the session on sculpture felt more complete, and more productive. This strengthened my thinking that publics don't always want to become radical archivists, rather they want to enjoy experiencing archives thought radically. This echoes the shift in thinking from *AAP* to *AAP2*, from negating to negotiating with the objects of the CGA (see Chapter One). This session affirmed a way of using the CGA with threads, creating patterns the collaborators could follow, explore, and make their own.

The sessions with Back on Track were intended as research workshops, to support the curation of *AAP2*, and production of this thesis. They revealed how versatile the CGA could be in projects reaching out of the gallery, and in drawing people into the story of CG. Pieces made in the workshops, including the sculptures, were used in the archive stories published on CG social media mentioned previously.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/Crsg-PpNPnj/?hl=en&img\\_index=3](https://www.instagram.com/p/Crsg-PpNPnj/?hl=en&img_index=3)

## Castlefield Forum

The individuals and businesses of Castlefield Forum are part of the community of that area – living or working in Castlefield. They had all seen, or visited, Castlefield Gallery and considered the gallery a neighbour. The forum works to preserve and promote the area as a charitable organisation, supporting projects which keep the area a vibrant and inclusive place to be. The forum meets quarterly, and I attended a session in order to share my research into the CGA, and talk to people of the area. This was a very different kind of engagement than with Back on Track, a single conversation about Castlefield Gallery with the local community. The evening that I spoke at had a particularly cultural focus, with presentations and discussion from the Castlefield Viaduct project, and the soon to open Factory International (now known as Aviva Studios) – two other major Manchester cultural projects in the area. I used the talk to discuss the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CG, and my research into the CGA. I presented the work of previous exhibitions, the principles of CG, and invited those present to the opening of *AAP2* or to call in and see me anytime.

The format of the session didn't allow for physical involvement with the objects of the CGA, but even this limited engagement created connections and findings on the history of CG. Members of the forum did attend the opening of *AAP2* and came separately to the gallery to chat about their experience of the history of the gallery. Additionally, there were people in Castlefield Forum who knew CG and its team from the earliest days and wanted to share memories of their experience. This event was different from the other constituent sessions in not producing materials or having any practical engagement with objects or spaces of the CGA. What I took from the session is the extent to which history can draw people into an idea, and how in this instance the CGA acted in an advocacy role. One of the people from Castlefield Forum who visited the gallery was able to see material from an exhibition they had featured in, thanks to the project of the following constituents.



## Peripheral Vision

The title and concept for the exhibition, *Peripheral Vision*, was devised by 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate Art History & Curating students of Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). I had spoken with the group previously as a guest lecturer on archival thinking and was approached about taking forward a longer brief together. The students are prime constituents of CG, with a passion for learning about art, as well as embodying the long relationship between CG and MMU.<sup>77</sup> The group worked with the CGA on a brief to curate an exhibition as a team with an external partner, identifying the theme of 'Peripheral Vision'. The title comes from a Ryan Gander quote situating CG as the centre of the periphery, and the students wove threads through the CGA knotting together projects addressing the margins and edges of society. I had two sessions with the students in the university, and they had four afternoons with me in CG going through the archive. The final two-week exhibition took place inside *AAP2*, in the upper gallery space occupied by the installation of George Gibson & Grace Collins. Across two shelving units (used in a previous CG exhibition, *Diagonal Noise*) materials sourced and reproduced from the CGA were presented. Whilst using familiar objects such as invites and press releases, it also featured a print by Mark Leckey, a film by Jordan Baseman, and cut out self-portraits of artist Qasim Riza Shaheen. The exhibition had an opening event, and a listing on the CG website. Through a constituent project, the CGA was being brought into the exhibition space. (See *fig. 11* for an image of the install).

This constituent project was a productive experiment for ways of working with the CGA. First, it connected constituents through the gallery. I mentioned an artist, David Alker, from the Castlefield Forum coming into the gallery and discovering material from an exhibition he appeared in re-presented. Showing these objects demonstrate that CG values the work of historic constituents, and David was happy to stay and share his experiences

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<sup>77</sup> With CG being founded by former Manchester Polytechnic (now MMU) students – see earlier in this Chapter.

working with CG. It shows that the creative work done for an exhibition 20 years ago is still inspiring and interesting for constituents today. In this way, it threads a new moment of the CGA, with students animating past artists' ideas, shared with staff and visitors. The physical resources necessary for this project were minimal; shelving which CG already owned (taking approximately 200cm of wall space with a depth of around 20cm), reprints of the archive objects, and display equipment (monitors, media players and stands). The heavy investment came in time spent supporting and coordinating the constituent archive work – and I recognise the challenge to resources this poses to the gallery. Having content digitised allowed for off-site research and preparation which was a great benefit. The students were able to search through the text I had collated from the online archive, and get an idea of exhibition theme, whilst bookmarking exhibitions whose report folders might reveal more interesting objects. The public-facing archival objects digitised in the shared storage allowed the students to look at the types of objects available, to have a sense of what might be used. Being able to work with the students in the physical spaces of the CGA was essential. It allowed us to explore the items which have gathered around the archive but are not situated within the report folders – an accumulation nodding to Esche's 'Grey Archive'. This included publications, a framed Mark Leckey print, and a DVD from the PureScreen film series. These objects which gather in the spaces of the CGA have a very different appeal to the documents and allow for a richer reconfiguration of the CGA. I initially wanted to hold the Peripheral Vision exhibition inside the space of the CGA, to bring audiences inside the room which usually holds the objects. However, to remove the meeting facility for two weeks was unworkable, and the exhibition was presented next to the front of house desk in the gallery space. On reflection, I believe this was the better route, bringing the archive objects into the exhibition space. Any visitors could experience the collection of items, without going into a space which might have felt dauntingly too far into the mechanics of a gallery.<sup>78</sup> This is a development of the idea I touched on

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<sup>78</sup> With the attending sense of potentially needing to know how to react, what the materials meant.

about the sculpture session with Back on Track constituents (see above) – that visitors don't always want to become active in deconstructing archive theory, rather, they enjoy seeing interesting uses of the archive. Of course, the two are not exclusive, but I believe that (as with Lisa Darms' criticism of Okwui Enwezor's exhibition, *Archive Fever* (see Chapter One)) the draw to critique the structures of the archive can overpower the potential of turning them to new uses.<sup>79</sup> Finally, that the students were able to devise an exhibition of diverse objects and appeal by using the CGA is incredibly encouraging. It can be a concern that the structures of the CGA can limit the kind of interesting objects there, but with support from CG and their tutors in MMU, *Peripheral Vision* demonstrated that there are fascinating threads running through the archive ready to be found.

I would recommend something like *Peripheral Vision* becomes an ongoing feature of CG activity. Not only did it strengthen the bonds with partners (MMU), future constituents (students) and previous artists, it was a way for staff and visitors to gain perspective on a trajectory of CG. In Appendix 3, Leslie talks about drawing inspiration from objects in the CGA and here they are on exhibition. This is the CGA as inspiring, connecting, living organ of CG.

## **Venture Arts**

Venture Arts are a Manchester charity working with learning disabled artists. Venture based artists have shown across the UK and internationally, including a 2022 group show at commercial London gallery, TJ Boulting. They work from studios located close to Castlefield, and we met when I gave a tour of AAP at CG to a visiting group. As a long-standing partner of CG, I was glad to invite Venture Arts to take part in this series of explorations of the

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<sup>79</sup> An example would be to compare Susan Hiller's 'From The Freud Museum' (1991-6) with Cory Arcangel's 'A Couple Thousand Short Films about Glenn Gould' (2007). Both engage in a critique of taxonomy, looking at subjectivity in the relationship between individual and trace – but whereas Hiller uses traditional archival boxes and display, Arcangel creates something new and old. Writing new algorithms to show us YouTube like we've never seen it, in a way that Haraway might describe as getting involved in the messy act of production.

CGA. We had initially discussed a series of workshops in CG with the objects, as well as work in the Venture Arts studios. I believe that durational work with the CGA leads to better experimentation, through familiarity with the objects and ideas it holds. However, we needed to adapt due to a busy period for Venture Arts, and held a single artist session. This coincided with *AAP2*, so we had a tour of the exhibition before settling into the Meeting Room space, where the CGA is located. The workshop comprised of four Venture artists, two supporters and myself.

For the session, I had printed reproductions of objects from the CGA, drawn from the digitised selections. Scissors, papers, and pens were available, and we worked through collage to bring elements from the CGA together in unusual conjunctions, or to isolate aspects. I had run a similar session with *Back on Track* and found it a good way to introduce what kind of materials are in the CGA, whilst opening up discussion on how they could be used differently. A key difference here was that this was the only planned session, however, it still produced findings on working with the CGA. Even as a one-off, this session was an enjoyable way of discussing our interests in the arts and life beyond the archive. We used funding reports or press releases from the CGA, but cut them out of context to reflect on ourselves. Spending time around a table, working with the creative traces of the CGA, opened conversations on romance, holidays, and vegetarianism. It was refreshing to use the CGA in a way which didn't try and comment explicitly on the CGA. Indeed, this kind of activity is important to my approach for playing with the archive, allowing the archival traces to become a foil for more personal explorations. It reminded me of the admonition from Irit Rogoff not to expect some kind of practical learning output from every activity (and the encouragement of modest exploration we will see in my methodology of *Becoming-Curator* in the next Chapter). As with *Back on Track*, the products of the session were shared as part of the series of archive stories published on CG social media throughout *AAP2*.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/CsQhdxov3MT/?hl=en&img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CsQhdxov3MT/?hl=en&img_index=1)

## Staff Session

CG Director, Helen Wewiora, proposed a workshop session with the staff to consider the process and findings of this research. This was a great opportunity to work with the staff of CG - the constituents with the most input into, and relationship with, the gallery. The session was planned for a full morning (3 hours), with 6 staff and 1 placement present. I structured the session around three talks and workshops, with advance preparation needed to engage properly. The session took place in the upper gallery space during an exhibition changeover period, meaning there was room to sit around a table together, and to use the clear walls of the gallery space. I brought together ideas from activity across the total Archives at Play research, developing and testing experiments with the CGA alongside those who maintained the archive. The talks outlined the context of the research and contents of the CGA, the activity of the research and findings from exhibitions and events, and examination of the 'wishes' as visitor feedback from *AAP2*. My intention was for the staff to see the powerful potential of the CGA, which could be nurtured and used in gallery activity. The practical elements asked attendees to share a story of the CGA, collage and exhibit reproductions of the CGA, and to discuss a visitor wish.<sup>81</sup> I wanted some part of the staff session to create a new moment in the CGA, so invited all notes from the day to become the archived object from the event.

Through this session, I was particularly interested in how the CGA brought the staff of CG together in a sense of shared experience and purpose. Introducing the idea of the broad archive, and the grey archive, stirred memories in the staff of the ephemera and objects which they shared but hadn't considered as archival previously. This included things taken home from exhibitions (rather than thrown away) which created a distributed

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<sup>81</sup> The 'wishes' were part of the visitor feedback mechanism in George Gibson & Grace Collins installation. Visitors were able to leave a wish about the future of galleries, which would be archived. I think about how the CG founders wanted something that didn't exist in Manchester at the time and made it happen, acting on their wishes to make them reality. 40 years later and the conditions to start new galleries are very different, but articulating what you want is a good place to start.

archive in the homes of the staff – and we must assume, previous staff too. In this way, a broad conception of the archive creates tangible connections between the staff and CG. Talking about the founding principles of CG (using objects from The Origins in the Archive section of this chapter) led the staff to consider how they were enacted today, and how the needs and practices of an artist-led gallery had changed.

The first practical piece of work – sharing a story from the archive – was the most productive in encouraging conversation on the activity of CG. This meant picking up to three objects from the CGA connected through any kind of thread devised by the staff member.<sup>82</sup> For example, one person selected a project from the year they were born which appealed to them. The piece had taken place in the upper gallery space of the current Deansgate venue, whilst it was used as the 'Project Space'. This initiated conversation on the viability and uses of a project or residency space today. By using personally derived threads, staff learnt about objects and exhibitions in the CGA they may not have known about, deepening their sense of the gallery history, and more about each other's cultural interests. Discussing the wishes left by visitors was a good mechanism for speculating on the future of CG (to read all the wishes, see Appendix 5). Wishes covered thoughts on programming, access, and funding, and staff used them to initiate discussions. For example, someone raised the wish 'More workshops led by artists (time permitting)' to talk about the events programme which accompanied exhibitions. This brought us back to thinking about how outreach through workshops and classes had been a major part of the early CG practice.

The intention to place the notes from the event into the CGA did not work. I encouraged a conversational format, and the nature of the event (reflective, unassessed) meant that there was no motivation to take notes.

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<sup>82</sup> As with *Peripheral Vision*, I gave the staff access to the online archive text and digitised archive materials to use as a search tool, before encouraging them to look in the CGA.

In the staff session, the CGA allowed us to consider the trajectory of the gallery, from founding to present day, and into the future. It was a morning in which the most active constituents of CG could meet and discuss what the gallery has done, and what it could do. The CGA was a resource through which the staff felt connected to one another, and to a legacy of artist development activity. In this way, the CGA was a reflective resource which worked well.

### **Using the Archive - Conclusions**

Outside these specific examples, constituents have disturbed the still pool of the CGA throughout the duration of this research – bringing new perspectives, connections, and traces to the archive. Objects and structures of the CGA have been brought into contention, and had potentiality enabled, through talks, artists commissions, university placements, and exposure to diverse visiting publics. The five examples examined above are cases in which the CGA is deployed in very differing situations, with a broad range of constituents. The potential for the CGA to be productive in such varying circumstances was something worth noting – however, this comes with careful design. For example, the same practical activity was received very differently with different constituents. Collaging reproductions from the CGA across the gallery walls with Ashokkumar Mistry and the public was a joyful, unruly, and exploratory – whereas with the staff (more familiar with the contents, and the process of fixing things to the gallery walls) the rebellious spark was absent.

From the successes with Back on Track and Venture Arts, I found that the CGA as vehicle rather than subject of exploration could lead to the most interesting engagements. This means that the structures of the CGA should be engaged with as a mechanic secondary to a broader thread – be that theme, or experience.

Finally, it's important to consider the effects on the CGA arising from constituent activities. We can say that the CGA has been active in shaping constituents outlook on the gallery (however temporarily) in these 5 cases,

but the traces left on the CGA have been minimal. Digital remnants persist in archive stories on social media from Venture Arts & Back on Track, or on the CG website in Peripheral Vision. The people from Castlefield Forum left a wish as part of AAP2, and there was the unsuccessful attempt at preserving the notes from the staff session. I believe that creating a way for the CGA to record experiments upon itself could dramatically advance experiments with the archive, in the same way that sharing my own threads through the archive helped others develop their own ideas. This aligns with Haraway's idea of threads creating patterns which are passed from hand to hand among collaborators.

In this Chapter I have shown how materials of the archive can be used to investigate the origins of Castlefield Gallery. From ten objects can unravel a 40-year story of working with artists and publics, giving us a long view on the activity of CG today. From the personal connection to the commercial aspect, we can see what has remained constant, and what has come in and out of fashion. This shows how productive the CGA can be in reading, and questioning, the trajectory of the gallery – alongside different groups of people. In making this pattern, I argue that we should value the subjective nature of the archival traces by acknowledging the many paths through the archive, and our part in the navigation thereof. This way of looking at the CGA is one of multiplicity and fluidity, seeking more and different stimulating patterns. It is an idea brought together in my figure of the threads, based on Haraway's Cat's Cradle, and the threads through the labyrinth. The practice of threading new figures through collaboration sits within my theoretical framework (Chapter One) and aligns with my methodology of Becoming-Curator (Chapter Three). It is a process of encouraging novel and un-hierarchical experimentation.

I am optimistic that the seeds of experimentation already exist in the CGA, with the creative and passionate constituents of the gallery. Staff, artists, students, neighbours, peers and visitors all enjoyed a dip in the pool of the CGA – stirring up new perspectives and traces in the archive. I see the way forward as twofold: enabling ongoing activity of interaction with the CGA,



and allowing the CGA to grow and mutate through capturing these new interactions. The CGA would then become something inspiring for the present, not just for posterity.

### **Chapter Three – Becoming-Curator as Methodology**

In the 2013 essay 'Becoming-Curator', Suzana Milevska considers curatorial practice through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Becoming. This perspective on curatorial activity has the potential, Milevska suggests, to uncover more equitable experiences of art in society, challenging power structures in the art world with a new form of institutional critique. In this chapter, I present my approach to the research of the Archives at Play project - made by adapting the concepts found in 'Becoming-Curator' into a potential methodology of curatorial practice. I consider the practical benefits and concerns when working with a gallery such as Castlefield Gallery and their constituents that Becoming-Curator as a methodology directs us to address, and reflect on how this methodology supports the aims of this research. I argue that not only is Becoming-Curator (hereafter BC when referring to my adaptation) appropriate as a methodology for curatorial research into the archive of Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG), but that it can fulfil Milevska's vision as a new form of institutional critique. I start by introducing my relationship to BC as an approach, before an in-depth analysis of 'Becoming-Curator' and my adaptation to BC. I discuss why this methodology chapter appears at this point in the thesis, and consider what this means for the curatorial activity that has already taken place.

Before this, however, it is important to reiterate my caveat from the Methodology section in the Introduction. Namely, that whilst BC has guided my data gathering and research, it is an approach, which would require future research to establish as a tried and tested methodology. I have adapted a perspective on curating into a new praxis designed to investigate an archive, and frame it in this Chapter as a potential methodology – but further work would be required to establish it as such. With regards to terminology, I refer throughout this Chapter to the creation of my curatorial methodology, but this should be understood as a rationale I adapted and followed requiring further evaluation before being shared as a viable methodology. With that in mind, I have presented in this Chapter the work

towards adapting BC as a methodology, starting by considering the potential for a curatorial methodology.

### **The Benefit of a Curatorial Methodology**

Although it might seem incompatible to a creative endeavour so dependent on the individual, defining a curatorial methodology allows for reflection and development of approach. Asking a curator “What curatorial approach did you follow in exploring this subject?” can help us refine an understanding of the methods by which artists, ideas, and organisations have investigated a vision of the world. In turn, we might demystify a practice which can appear shaped by insider connections, obligations, persuading and negotiation.<sup>83</sup>

To articulate a framework in which curatorial practice proceeds, how artistic and organisational relationships are conceived, what that means for outputs (exhibitions, events, etc), and how this impacts audiences as well as future projects – this framework allows for a clearer communication of curatorial practices and priorities, enabling us to refine, improve, and experiment. This ongoing iterative development is essential to BC – it is way to reflect on how I have researched the Castlefield Gallery archive (hereafter CGA), deployed connections, navigated partner expectations, and worked with artists. BC is not a formula, but as a prospective methodology it is a rationale to understand the approaches to ideas. It is a way towards answering the question ‘how did you curate this?’, and lets us debate different curatorial approaches, assess strengths and weaknesses, look for improvements across approaches. It articulates a position from which new potential might develop which, as we shall see, is one of its own precepts.

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<sup>83</sup> Milevska affirms this pervasive vision of the rockstar curatorial profession, using quotation marks to refer to it as one of ‘the ‘sexiest’ professions available in the international art world’ founded in travel and highly refined taste (Milevska, 2013: 70). Additionally, see Chapter Two – where I show how the founders of Castlefield Gallery think carefully about their exhibition programming in order to not arouse the ‘suspicion’ towards contemporary art in the mind of their visitors that it is an insider game.

## **‘Becoming-Curator’ – Analysis and Adaptation to Methodology**

Milevska opens her essay ‘Becoming-Curator’ by clarifying that it is not an investigation into the process of becoming a curator – looking at the motivations and education leading to the career choice of curator – but rather a discussion of Becoming as a lens on curatorial practice. She sets out to find what Becoming might prompt us to look more closely at within curatorial practice, or think differently about, and what this means for the role of curator. The opening paragraph makes a simple distinction, but it is one of the principles of Becoming enunciated by Deleuze and Guattari most clearly – that ‘Becoming is never imitating’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; 355). To apply this to ‘becoming a curator’ as opposed to ‘Becoming-Curator’, imitation would entail a process of attaining a career of curatorial subjectivity predicated upon an existing idea of what ‘a curator’ is – a notion of a network of actions, conditions and relations that constitute ‘a curator’. We orbit this idea, of avoiding imitation of established positions, throughout ‘Becoming-Curator’, and I adapt it as a key tenet of BC – that it is by enabling movement out of established routes of exchange (for example, between gallery and artist exchanges of knowledge, exchanges of cultural production, exchanges of archival histories) we might find new strengths, weaknesses and therefore possibilities, into our line of inquiry. For the methodology of BC in this research on the CGA, this destabilizing of established exchanges means uncovering unexpected lines of narrative through the archive, activating the material of the archive in new ways, collaborating between CG and its constituents to explore ways through the CGA in as many of its relations as possible. Following BC entails not using the CGA to perform an established function, but experimenting to see how it might be used. Let me emphasise this key point in my research – a methodology of BC proposes that the archive must be activated by diverse constituents of CG to enable the traces within to be thought and used otherwise. To connect the idea of ‘otherwise’ to the implications of the caution of imitation for the CGA – consider this early statement on Becoming: ‘resemblance, on the contrary, would represent an obstacle or stoppage’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 272). The potential of the CGA, for CG, is not in projects seeking to resemble the past, or resemble

uses of the past, looking for essences to imitate, but in projects engendering unforeseen encounters through the CGA. Encounters that might have implications for the rules and order of the interaction between the CGA, CG, and their constituents – a process Deleuze and Guattari term ‘deterritorializing’.

Having made the productive distinction between Becoming-Curator and becoming a curator, Milevska shows us the two conditions essential for understanding Becoming-Curator. The first is the foundation of Deleuze and Guattari's Becoming, that:

‘...there must be a certain isolation from the majority (becoming-man), and I interpret this first movement when becoming-curator emerges as a possibility.’ (Milevska, 2013; 65)

This first step is crucial to BC, and although the interpretation of Becoming stretches beyond the scope of this research, the focus Milevska suggests is presented with clarity in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. Here is my interpretation to allow us to continue: Deleuze and Guattari propose that encounters between things of the world – bodies, objects, spaces and ideas – are subjected via systems and language to hierarchies of ‘majoritarian’ positions. I would argue that this hierarchy of exchanges is similar in essence to Foucault’s level of archive, the rules governing the value and transformation of utterances (Foucault, 1970:146 – see Chapter One). Those exchanges most agreeable to the ‘archive’ take precedence over those who are not recognised within the archive / hierarchy. ‘Majority implies a state of domination’ Deleuze and Guattari write, and further:

‘When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 339)

Becoming is the process that Deleuze and Guattari present as challenging structures or systems which create this majoritarian state of domination – ‘becomings are minoritarian’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 339). To do so, it is necessary to understand how, for Deleuze and Guattari, these systems of regulating domination function - namely relying on the articulation of fixed positions. They write:

‘You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you’re just deprived. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you’re just a tramp.’ (Deleuze and Guattari , 1987; 185)

Thus, Becoming implies acknowledging and moving away from networks ordering (loosely what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘territorializing’) exchanges of hierarchy, expectation, and discourse. And, as Milevska writes, it is the first condition in enabling Becoming-Curator. In my adaptation, this may manifest through a curatorial approach enabling engagement with the archive free from expectations, outside hierarchies of value ascribed to archival projects, potentially subverting dominant readings of the archive. In the broad definition of the CGA that I encourage, I have stressed that it must acknowledge the questions of what is kept, why, and how is it used. These are what Deleuze and Guattari would consider territorialised structures, thus BC should seek to disrupt – or deterritorialise. This might be done by creating (curating) interruptions in the space of the archive (such as the work of Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford (see Chapter Four)), or relinquishing the majoritarian control over who decides what is shown from the archive (such as in the *Peripheral Vision* exhibition (see Chapter Two)).

The second move in Becoming-Curator, as described by Milevska, entails focussing the lens of Becoming on the world of galleries, curators, artists and the parties engaged in the spheres of arts and culture. That, following the isolation from majority described above, ‘a certain isolation

must also occur from the minority, namely when a curator...is profiled as 'a curator' through the event(s) of curating' (Milevska, 2013; 65). In Milevska's essay, she introduces Becoming as first creating opportunities for exit from the broad category of majoritarian systems, before focussing this practice on a world constituted by systems structuring exchanges around art, galleries, archives, artists and visitors. This move should be considered as inherent to my construction of BC as a curatorial methodology – the grounds for BC are the cultural landscape. Someone following BC might be working on a project of any subject (nature, society, politics etc) but, operating in a curatorial mode, it should be given that the intention is to work creatively, and in the cultural sector. Thus, a curator following BC acknowledges the first precept of seeking movement away from majoritarian positions with the artists, galleries, publics etc through which they pursue curatorial practice – i.e. with CG.

The two conditions we have looked at above are taken from Milevska's introduction, and are the foundations for BC developed in the following pages. Adapting these workings from Milevska's 'Becoming-Curator' to my methodology of BC, I contend that BC is not an approach of imitating to attain a territory of 'a curator', but a process to enable encounters of minoritarian discourse, entailing a continuous process of exchange across networks between the art, ideas, galleries, visitors, and many greater or lesser collaborators in a curatorial project. It is through this methodology, this approach to curating, which might stimulate a more unruly and active archive for Castlefield Gallery. BC is a methodology of experimentation for the sake of experimentation, and is thus not given to producing straightforward results. Consider Irit Rogoff's thinking from Chapter One, how a challenge for the cultural world is to not look to displace systems with something better (thus validating the structure of the system in the first place), but rather to see where imagination and experimentation *might* lead. Consider, too, Rogoff's concession that this is a project open to messy 'failure'.

But before BC becomes burdened by it, let me address a potential misapprehension of Becoming – that it advocates for anarchy, rather than a

process towards alternate possibility. Deleuze and Guattari address this when they rhetorically ask:

‘What does it mean to dearticulate..? How can we convey how easy it is, and the extent to which we do it every day? And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is danger.’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; 185)

Here is their answer:

‘Staying stratified – organised, signified, subjected – is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever. This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; 185)

Deleuze and Guattari are telling us that movement and possibility are the ideal scenario, but that territorialised order is not the worst state of affairs, compared to the ‘suicidal collapse’ of a demented system. There is a clear restraint cautioned here, which is important to the understanding of BC – that this is a methodology investigating via novel approaches, not collapsing potential. It is a process of negotiation, and experimentation, not chaos.

Milevska further considers the processes of Becoming, using what she terms ‘a specific curatorial grammar’ (Milevska, 2013; 65) to analyse ‘being’ and occasionally (although I contend erroneously) contrasts this against Becoming. This comparison between Becoming and ‘being’ situates BC as a post-structural methodology of curatorial practice, further supporting



BCs application in archival projects – given my theoretical framework of working with the archive.

The foundation for Milevska's device of 'curatorial grammar' is found in an essay by Claire Colebrook, titled 'A Grammar of Becoming: Strategy, Subjectivism and Style' (Colebrook, 1999), quoted throughout 'Becoming-Curator'. In this essay, Colebrook examines the concept of strategy as inherent to subjectivity through an understanding of the subject as constructed through grammar, 'whereby political subjects or identities are effected through certain ways of speaking' (Colebrook, 1999; 118). From this position, Colebrook applies Becoming to this subject construction, considering that:

'The very concept of the subject is tied to a strategy of being and essence, rather than becoming. And this is because the subject is not just a political category or representation but a movement of grammar.' (Colebrook, 1999; 117-118).

Following the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, and therefore wishing to move away from majoritarian positions, Colebrook argues for strategy founded upon a grammar of Becoming rather than a grammar of being. Using this argument, Milevska asserts that "Becoming-Curator' therefore implies a movement of grammar'. (Milevska, 2013; 66), and that 'Becoming is therefore about negotiating the discursive constitution of subject.' (Milevska, 2013; 66). To clarify 'discursive constitution'; Milevska appears to be connecting Colebrook's understanding of subjects as constituted through 'certain ways of speaking', through Deleuze and Guattari's territorialized articulation to enforce dominance of the majority, and to a post-structuralist, Foucauldian, understanding of discourse as structuring systems of knowledge controlled according to dynamics of power (see Chapter One). The implication to BC is clear, as is the pertinence to this research into the CGA; my methodology of BC should be understood as a process of exploration based on a post-structural conception of archives as systems of meaning-making, and looks for ways to activate them outside of expected

discourse construction. I have structured this contribution to knowledge using Milevska's essay, founded upon Colebrook's discussion of grammar.

Having proposed that Becoming is a process of negotiation with discourse construction, Milevska tells us that 'discourse is always physical or corporeal' (Milevska, 2013;66). Thus Becoming must be understood as a negotiation between language and the physical world. The mechanics of this argument work like this: people, objects, entities are constructed in part by the language structure by which we understand them (as per the above contention) thus, for there to be negotiation / experimentation with the discourse of which we / they are constituted towards deterritorialization, the territory they presently occupy must be recognised. There must be a recognition of the present state, before opening that state to change. I have identified how this antagonism between the role of the 'what is' in creating the conditions for the 'what could be', is central to my research with the CGA, to the creation of BC, and recurs through the genealogy of post-structuralist literature.

Chapter One follows the positions of this debate, but to emphasise this part of BC, I shall recall three examples. The first is Irit Rogoff's deployment of the terms 'actualization' and 'potentiality' in analysis of the *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* project at the Van Abbemuseum in 2006. Rogoff states that these connected terms work by 'actualization' considering the present possibilities of material (including space and human interaction), and 'potentiality' looking for new connections in their encounters ('Our interests were in the possibilities for the museums to open a place for people to engage ideas differently – ideas from outside its own walls.' (Rogoff, 2008)). For Rogoff, the existing material encounter is bound to the process of unlocking new meanings for the museum constituents. The second is Donna Haraway's contention that to engage in the project of swerving the apparatus of cultural production towards a more equitable trajectory, we must become familiar with the present modes of production. Haraway writes: 'What constitutes an apparatus of bodily production cannot be known in advance of engaging in the always messy projects of description, narration, intervention,

inhabiting, conversing, exchanging and building.’ (Haraway, 1994). And lastly, although not featuring in Chapter One, consider Dr. Je Yun Moon’s notion of ‘epistemological games’ (Moon, 2013; 237). Here, Moon looks at evolution in choreography, proposing that it is only by playing with the existing rules that new systems can be found: ‘to continuously negotiate with the conditions of possibility that have been helplessly circumscribed...’ (Moon, 2013; 237). I stress this relationship with the materials of the past for its practical implications for the approach of BC with the CGA – and because it has been a productive tension during this research. It was only following analysis of the first *Archives at Play* (hereafter *AAP*) exhibition of 2022, where as a priority I negated the material of the CGA, that I moved towards the position of negotiation – the ‘messy projects’ of ‘epistemological games’, seeking ‘potentiality’ whilst acknowledging the ‘discursive constitution of subject’. Using the materials of the CGA to see them differently.

The productive tension between existing states of being and possible states of becoming described above is central to what I argue is a misplaced either / or dichotomy of Becoming *versus* Being. Milevska refers to this tension in ‘Becoming-Curator’, using a Colebrook quote to propose that *who* is speaking becomes irrelevant (as anchored in a subjectivity, an essence of self, or ‘being’) in comparison to the *act* of speaking (as an action separated from the essence of self, thus of potential Becoming). In June 2023 I met with Suzana Milevska online and asked whether this apparent discounting of ‘being’ towards Becoming was intended – the response clarifies the position a great deal:

“Perhaps I put it in a too blunt and radical dichotomic way. In fact ‘being’ and ‘who is speaking’ is not irrelevant, but on the contrary – it was and it’s still seen as the only relevant and fixed position. Something that is true and fixed. Becoming cannot be thought without being, since neither being nor becoming exist in vacuum.” (Milevska, 2023: See Appendix 4)

We see Milevska here acknowledge the role of being, the existing state - or in the case of this research, the present constitution of CGA - alongside the project of Becoming. I understand this clarification to reconcile the mechanics of being / Becoming with the need for negotiation with the discursive constitution, and how discourse is always corporeal. For BC, this is a productive and important tension to bear in mind; there is never a break between what the CGA was, and what it could be, only movement away or towards something, from the preceding state. BC advocates for an ongoing process, not a fixed state. This discussion in 'Becoming-Curator', and with Suzana Milevska, aligns with the realisation discussed in Chapter One that, in order to inspire change in the CGA, the broad definition of the CGA *must* be engaged with. In BC this means that artworks should interact with the spaces, objects, actors, and situations of the CGA, and ideally in a way which points to the dynamics of how they are kept, and used.

Milevska ends this section of 'Becoming-Curator' by affirming the experimentation with destabilization of established exchanges and encounters in a curatorial project – and I make this a key component of BC. This means that the exchanges through which the CGA is active must be engaged with, and then disturbed, for example, through new uses or new users. BC deployed to this end should mean that the community of constituents - artists, visitors, peers, staff - have encounters with the CGA that enable negotiation with its possibility, not encounters that transpose essences of being from context to context. The latter would be an example of using the archive to imitate an idea. Instead, the CGA should be used for - as MacCormack is quoted in 'Becoming-Curator' - 'mobilizing rather than reifying the way we think the self' (MacCormack, 2004). To use more from MacCormack's quotation, BC advocates for 'a setting off of the subject without a final aim...but with an idea toward what one becomes' (MacCormack, 2004; online).

In 'Becoming-Curator', Milevska poses several questions to understand the event of 'becoming-curator' against concepts of truth and reality. This is occasioned by Milevska expanding on the importance of the

concept of the 'rhizome' as used by Deleuze and Guattari, and it is useful for framing the terminology and understanding of BC to consider what this means. As with Becoming, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of the rhizome is a huge project, but what follows addresses the pertinent aspects for BC: Deleuze and Guattari present rhizomatic growth as a desirable model of interaction and development, working with yet independent of hierarchies of order, and able to produce lines of activity towards unexpected outcomes dependent on situation and collaborators. The rhizome operates between states (i.e., in a state of Becoming) fomenting connections between points which might not otherwise have required or suggested connection. A rhizomatic model:

'operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots...has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight...the rhizome is an acentred, nonhierarchical, non-signifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; 22)

In BC, the CGA can become part of a rhizome, as an ingredient in an ongoing set of encounters and evolutions, with unexpected ways in, out, and through. The terminology of 'line of flight' describes a process in which a new path from or through this de-centralised system comes into being dependent not on a design of hierarchy, but through the energy of the circulating parts of itself.<sup>84</sup> A line of flight is neither always positive or negative to the Rhizome but highlights an area where energy is escaping (or advancing) the boundaries of the system. Just as connections through the CGA may flourish and be forgotten, their presence means the possibility for further, alternative connections.<sup>85</sup> I am particularly reminded of various features of the CGA

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<sup>84</sup> Consider the work of the students who followed the idea of 'the periphery' through the archive as part of the AAP2 exhibition, reconnecting with artists and parts of the archive that had been dormant.

<sup>85</sup> There is a clear connection between this description of the Rhizome as featuring no 'organizing memory', with Derrida's diagnosis of a 'rupture' in the 'center of structure'. To remind ourselves - 'The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure – one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure – but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the

which recurred in interactions with artists and constituents throughout this research as clearly stimulating lines of flight. Symbols such as the three beasts logo, or stories such as the horses wandering inside the gallery, grabbed attention. These may have been specific to the time and artists, but they should indicate points of energy in the CGA. Instances of CGA materials attracting further energy could be experimented with – we might ask, how could the CGA record exhibitions in a way which keeps them sparking further interest?

So, within this rhizomatic system of movement, in the absence of organising principle, Milevska looks for guidance on how, in a curatorial project featuring interactions with (for example) archives, artists, technicians, technology, drivers etc, we might know which most productively contribute to the ‘event’ of becoming-curator?<sup>86</sup> To answer, Milevska suggests using the epistemological constructivist philosophy of Ernst Von Glasersfeld to reach the following conclusion – the curatorial subject may continually gather and disregard knowledge in the service of becoming-curator as befits their own experience and their experience of the curatorial project.

This solution offered in ‘Becoming-Curator’ doesn’t satisfy me in the construction of BC. If we were to pose this test to BC, i.e. what is conducive to the approach of BC, I would suggest that it is a re-framing of the misapprehension of Becoming I address earlier in this chapter, its apparent

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play of the structure’ (Derrida, 1966; 278). Deleuze and Guattari are busy here conceiving of an unorganised structure, which in Derrida’s formulation would lead to greater ‘play’ in the structure – but could we reverse the equation, and suggest that enabling greater ‘play’ in a structure could (at least in appearance) bring about a more Rhizomatic model of interaction?

<sup>86</sup> ‘Event’ here does not refer to a broad category of things happening, into which we might say that curatorial events might often include exhibitions, events, research, but is another concept in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. In this instance, we can continue without doing too much violence to Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘event’ to say that it refers to the ongoing collection of understanding that allows a subject to continue moving toward Becoming. This is occasion for another referral to Derrida’s ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences’ where the opening paragraph immediately casts aspersions on the present conception of the word ‘event’. Derrida implies that an ‘event’ understood as a moment or occasion suggests an almost impossible enclosure of time in which interactions occur, rather than the messy ongoing interference of processes including exhibitions, events and research.

tendency to chaos. To phrase the issue another way, what's to say that my train ride this morning wasn't more valuable to the curatorial project than a meeting with a group considering the relevance of the CGA to their understanding of archives? The answer arrived at via Von Glasersfeld seems an unnecessary addition to the rebuttal by Deleuze and Guattari – that a follower should stimulate encounter whilst remaining open and alert, exercising discretion in your project, and experimenting where you can.

Milevska draws 'Becoming-Curator' together by offering examples of three interwoven threads of contemporary curatorial practice. They are the practices of curatorial projects which, for Milevska, lead the curatorial subject beyond the fixed set of encounters which can be imitated to become a curator, and towards exchanges which constitute the event of becoming-curator. For my construction of BC, I propose to use these examples as gauges by which to consider, or critique, the curatorial project. To be clear, I use these three threads not as steps which must necessarily be taken, but instead as ways of thinking and practicing a curatorial methodology, applicable in different stages of a project. Further, for BC, they are not conditions which might be either met or not, but instead support ways of learning from each project. They can be seen as catalysts for onwards movement.

First is the 'translational performance of the curatorial 'event'' (Milevska, 2013: 68). This is a focus on the relationship between the application of cultural theory in the development of a curatorial output (Milevska, 2007: online). Milevska argues that the disconnection between the two, thus requiring a process of translation, reveals findings across both sides. The argument runs that putting in place the structures for making visible, or experiencing these findings, may lead theory and practice – or idea and outcome – to understand themselves and their relationship differently.

As a device of BC I propose that we should make connections in a project visible to consider exchanges between ideas, artists, spaces and

visitors. Do they allow us to dispute or develop the connection between them? In my curatorial practices with the CGA, how clear were the motivations behind displaying a certain piece, working with a certain artist, or holding a particular type of event? Let me say emphatically - this does not just come down to communication with the visitor. Whilst interpretation, or accessibility to the project, is certainly part of the translational performance, this does not mean trying to communicate every decision to each visitor. This said – the translational performance was central to my decision to include large wall text for each artist in *AAP2*. However, more practically useful for enabling translational performance in curating is a coherence in the activity across encounters in the project, and the ability to spend time considering what potentialities might arise from them. This brings me back to the recommendation that, to be effective, BC should work on projects in durational fashion. The crux of the translational performance of curating is to learn from developments to an understanding of theory, or practice. The CGA could only be said to be active and unruly when framed as an ongoing part of CG practice – regular archive activities would build a discourse from which theory and practice could both learn in the specific site of the CGA.

The second thread is that of ‘critical curating’ – a curatorial approach asking questions of the systems in which it functions, from the structures through which galleries (or other spaces) deploy curatorial practice, to the expectations of curatorial outputs. Critical curating pursues a destabilizing of traditional practice, such as the exhibition being the apex of the curatorial output. Because of this, critical curating encourages greater attention to the processes and research of curatorial practice, including events, seminars and discussions.

To situate critical curating as a facet of BC means to consider the influence and norms of the many structures (partners, funders, spaces, relationships) that traditionally enable a curatorial project to take place. Referring to MacCormack’s argument of the physicality of discourse, and the importance of recognising our position within it, critical curating must mean questioning the hierarchies and expectations around our position in a



network, and then experimenting with alternatives. One tactic in negating this cultural discourse is outlined in Milevska's example - instead of a final exhibition being the primary site of findings, we should see the potential to learn from the process as whole. As my research explores new ways to question the story of CG, I have collaborated with partners that come from outside the majoritarian gallery discourse – what Rogoff would term ‘ideas from outside its own walls.’ (Rogoff, 2008) (see Chapter Two). Critical curating, as a measure within BC, means an awareness of the structures and expectations in a project, and exploring methods of progress otherwise. Whilst pursuing critical curating, it is important to keep in mind Deleuze & Guattari's advice to experiment judiciously (‘the art of dosages’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; 185)) as well as Rogoff's direction not to only seek alternatives in order to establish new systems (‘we don't expend energy forming opposition, but reserve it for imagining alternatives.’ (Rogoff, 2008: 08)). With this guidance, we can see critical curating more as a process of discovery, rather than institutional adjustment.

The final thread of BC is ‘curatorial agency’, which asserts the potential for curatorial projects to be active in affecting change – not just passively representing ideas of the society but positioning the curator as ‘an active societal agent...towards the improvement of society in general’ (Milevska, 2013: 69). The examples given of this societal improvement are creating equity in recognizing knowledge across difference, and a strong opposition to the ‘hegemonic model of curating that blindly imposes itself onto ‘subaltern cultures’ (Milevska, 2013: 69). It is straightforward to see curatorial agency, activity designed to effect positive social change, as an example of a project capable of moving a curatorial subject towards networks of becoming-curator. But as a feature of BC, this condition of curatorial agency as affecting societal change becomes unwieldy to capture or demonstrate, and unduly prescriptive about the type of project that BC might be deployed towards. How can we claim that a reimagining of the CGA conforms to Milevska's standards of societal improvement? Instead, I apply to BC the instruction towards collaborators that Milevska points to affecting this kind of impact – with ‘art for social change and collaborations among

curators, artists and activists' (Milevska, 2013: 69). Collaboration, Milevska argues, with those who are driven to find new possibilities through culture, is essential for curatorial agency. From curatorial agency I adapt for BC the potential to affect change through working collectively with those aligned in subject and practice.

Milevska concludes 'Becoming-Curator' by bringing together the implications of Becoming as a process when engaged with 'curatorial translation', 'critical curating' and 'curatorial agency':

'I want to emphasize the usefulness of ... 'becoming-curator' as a way of questioning power structures within both curatorial and art worlds.

'Becoming-curator' is effectively a new form of institutional critique, not as a way of pitching subjectivity against the institution, but as a way of intertwining the construction of subjectivity with that of institutions...'

(Milevska, 2013; 70)

Here we see an interesting potential for 'Becoming-Curator', that it attempts to advance institutional critique by involving the institution in a rebuilding process. Whereas proponents of institutional critique (artists such as Hans Haacke, Vito Acconci, Andrea Fraser) have traditionally practiced 'exposing' the forces shaping cultural institutions to publics ('pitching subjectivity against the institution'), 'Becoming-Curator' suggests an approach for institutional change alongside constituents and practitioners. I believe that following BC as a methodology of working with the CGA could realise my vision of the archive as an organ of CG in which experimentation and exploration of the gallery can take place.

I now want to set the essay to one side, and recap the directions that someone following my methodology of BC should observe:

- Establish that this is not a project looking to attain a previously ascribed position; *BC* is an ongoing process of discovering connections, or challenging positions, not asserting states.

- A curatorial project using BC must recognise the framework of Deleuzian Becoming, acknowledging that networks of majoritarian positions prioritise certain activity and behaviours as more worthwhile than others. Following BC we look for practices that evade reaffirming these networks.
- Be attentive to the practices which affirm discourse built into the ideas, structures and collaborators involved, and look to experiment with these practices through curatorial networks.
- How can you enable curatorial-translation? Making relationships of ideas and practice visible to allow for further challenge.
- How can you affect critical curating? Creating processes towards a curatorial project challenging a privileging of the final output (usually the public exhibition) and emphasising the forms of research through which the output emerges.
- Finally, how do you move towards curatorial agency? Making your project active in society through selections of collaborators including artists, activists, and communities engaged in your subject.

I argue for BC as an approach and position for curators but recognise that it cannot present a map of processes towards an end goal. As befits a methodology based on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, it has rhizomatic features - points at which unexpected outcomes or connections are more likely to gather and leak beyond the scope of our curatorial project – lines of flight. But this is a feature of this methodology, to put energy into the system of a gallery and its constituents, uncovering where these lines of flight might erupt, and where they might lead.<sup>87</sup> The processes of BC fold in and act upon one another, shaping the total curatorial practice, and stimulating ongoing practice. In this way, it is suited to projects which allow for iterative experimentation, returning to the same subject and building on learning.

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<sup>87</sup> For a practical example, consider my reflection on the 'Being The Polemic' workshop with Ashok Mistry which formed part of *AAP2* in Chapter One. This event suggested an entirely new exhibition with the CGA.

## On the chronology of forming *Becoming-Curator* as a methodology

For this research into the CGA, the methodology of *Becoming-Curator* has meant positioning myself in the middle of archival objects, ideas and collaborators in a project, in an effort to realise 'effectively a new form of institutional critique' (Milevska, 2013; 70). We might understand BC as a project of arousing critical possibility from within an existing system – how could the CGA be otherwise, and what does that mean for the traces within? How might an artistic commission engage an audience with the ongoing story of CG, and what would that lead to? Suitably enough, the realisation that '*Becoming-Curator*' could be turned into a methodology came in the middle of the exhibition activity towards this research. It was following my exhibition *AAP* in March 2022 that I devised BC as a curatorial methodology, a point in which my research had led me to engage more closely with the materials of the CGA. My curatorial methods (including events, research conversations, workshops, exhibitions) and reading of the materials of the CGA itself have evolved through this research, and developed my understanding of how the CGA might be deployed and activated through a curatorial methodology.

As per the evolution of my theoretical framework for this research in Chapter One, the development of my methodology followed a similar route. After the activity of the *AAP* 2022 exhibition I considered that a curatorial approach with the CGA that emphasised experimentation with the material, rather than deny the validity of the material, would be more productive in disturbing the story structured by the CGA.<sup>88</sup> In the terminology of BC, I argue that the value of the CGA is best deployed as part of a project of *Becoming* rather than looking to deny the CGA's fixed sense of being. However, given this mid-point turn to BC, it's interesting to consider what adopting BC at this stage in the research means for the previous curatorial activity of the *AAP* 2022 exhibition. To be clear, *AAP* was not curated with the

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<sup>88</sup> For a demonstration of this in practice, please refer to my findings reflecting on Gregory Herbert's work in Chapter Four, leading to a practice of negotiation with the CGA, rather than denial of a single validity in the CGA.

methodology of BC in mind, whereas the curatorial activity following *AAP* has been.

BC as a curatorial methodology encompasses retrospective activity conducted within the project frame through Becoming, absorbing the earlier activity to include it in the ongoing whole, emphasising that entry and exit routes exist across the curatorial practice as a totality. The earlier curatorial work with CG towards *AAP* was not conducted through BC, but it can contribute productively when BC is adopted during the same curatorial project. To quote Claire Colebrook on Becoming (a key source for Milevska), 'there is a multiple and synchronic stratification and structuring, not something located at a single point but a creation of possible points through the event of lines, striations and articulations'. (Colebrook, 1999; 132). 'Becoming' Milevska clarifies 'is thus not a process that happens through linear time and a result of dialectically overcoming certain obstacles.' (Milevska, 2013; 67). The stresses on the 'synchronic stratification' and non-linear processes propose that it is a potential of BC to not just admit, but indeed welcome previous activity into a process of Becoming. This endorses the methodology as one in which activity not initiated within it can be reactivated as contributing to the project deploying BC. Let me stress, this not only makes BC suitable for adoption at the mid-stage of my research, but also renders it ideal for working within archives. Thus, as with the activity of *AAP*, so with the traces of material and activity recorded in the CGA, the value placed on Becoming as part of BC enables us to involve past activity as part of a present project of mobilisation, thinking, and engaging.

However, whilst we can welcome previous activity into a project of activating the archive using BC (e.g., we can, in BC, use the CGA via Chester Tenneson's commission for the 2022 *AAP* exhibition to inform our approach to understanding personal readings of the CGA), this admittance does not infer to previous activity the same qualities as we hope to achieve by working in BC. If BC as a curatorial methodology has an imperative to experiment outside of established territories of hierarchy, or purpose, then these values are not retrospectively bestowed on the work of *AAP*. Rather,

with BC, *AAP* becomes material for us to pursue these values in the ongoing project with the CGA. Interestingly, we should also be clear that *Archives at Play 2* (hereafter *AAP2*) is curated in light of the values of BC but is only part of a movement towards a way of working with the CGA, and should not be seen as a destination.

### **Becoming-Curator for Castlefield Gallery, and the Aims of Archives At Play**

The functions of BC correspond to the epistemological and practical work of my research. Aligned with my theoretical framework, Milevska operates from a post-structural lineage guided by Deleuze and Guattari. It is the application of these theories into a curatorial practice that fixed my decision to use BC as a rationale for curating play in the archives of CG.

BC encompasses post-structural play and an ethos of CG. I propose that BC can be seen as following Haraway's call to 'queer what counts as nature' (Haraway, 1994: 60), a move towards destabilizing majoritarian discourses. I similarly argue that BC as a methodology seeks the periphery – a position that artist patron of CG, Ryan Gander, asserts that CG operate from (Gander, 2014: online). Whilst in Deleuze and Guattari's *Becoming* we can never claim to attain a fixed position of periphery, it should entail a state of continuous moving toward connections of becoming-minoritarian that can be seen as the prime activity of *Becoming* – that of an awareness and movement away from majoritarian positions of discourse.

To follow a methodology of BC implies a continuous process towards a network of possibilities, affected by moves out of fixed curatorial subjectivities, and towards coexistence and interference of multiplicities. These multiplicities are constituted by collaborating constituents and collaborating structures. For example, how the archive of CG, constituents in CG, and cultural theory, all have overlapping and different trajectories – and how making these approaches cohabit in projects of the CGA can uncover findings for each of them (this would be the process of curatorial translation).

At the start of this research, I hypothesized that the CGA was a structure exerting an influence of past practice on present activity, limiting the potentiality of the gallery. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, I imagined the CGA territorializing and ordering the articulation of the being of CG. That 'The archive is first the law of what can be said' (Foucault, 2002; 145). Resulting from my work with CG and the CGA towards the 2022 AAP exhibition, I adapted this hypothesis. The CGA exerts negligible influence, but has potentiality, which I argue should most productively be activated to inspire, challenge, provoke new exchanges between CG and their constituents. This is a move which can be framed as negotiation with, not negation of, the CGA – for which BC is the appropriate methodology to meet the Aims of this research. I will now look at how BC fulfils these aims.

***Aim 1 – I aim to disturb the story of Castlefield Gallery as currently structured by their archive, to expand the considerations of Castlefield Gallery with constituents (people working at Castlefield Gallery, artists, visitors, etc). I will conduct interventions into the archive of Castlefield Gallery, playing with the structure of the archive material, and through contemporary activity which will become a part of the archive.***

The CGA traces a story of CG, but it is submerged; maintained without strategy, in memories, in a busy meeting room, in materials through the space, with a disconnected web presence. In AAP2 I disturbed the images, objects and histories of the archive, bringing them into the exhibition space to challenge the ideas of what was kept and why – making a space for anyone who came to contribute a change they would want to see in galleries (look at Chapter Four and George Gibson and Grace Collins' project in AAP2 for a practical discussion of this). I took reproduction material and a discussion of the CGA to groups beyond the gallery walls, to see what lines of flight emerged from these new uses and users, and welcomed in groups to develop curatorial projects navigating the archive from their own perspective (see Chapter One and the discussion of constituent activity for this). These were events to bring people together for discussions on the role and potential

of the archive, and the ability of creative methods to make new connections across the CGA. This is just a selection of the work with the CGA by following BC, but a comprehensive body of material will enter the CGA, with the intention to act as a rhizomatically designed entry / exit to it. Simultaneously part of this research and exhibition object, a specially made archive box from AAP2 will enter the CGA, to act as a point of flight for further projects of the CGA.

Images of the bespoke Archive Box which will enter the archive can be seen in *figs. 43, 44, 45 & 46*. The box was made as part of George Gibson & Grace Collins installation - bringing the CGA into the exhibition space and presenting objects from the archive in playful and unusual settings (see Chapter Four for more details of George & Grace's installation). This box contains the archived material from both AAP1 & AAP2, visitor contributed 'wishes', notes and scans made during the AAP project, and material from this research project. The intention is that it acts as a point of interest and excitement for those using the CGA in the future, an unruly intervention in the CGA using the logics of the archive – much as Thomas Hirschhorn's *Monuments* use the language and context of monuments, but with very different forms and contents.

I would note that the wording at the start of Aim 1 is not in the spirit of a methodology of BC. By claiming that it will be me, the 'I', creating this disturbance appears contrary to the process of Becoming as a collaboration moving towards potentiality. Instead, it sounds as if an individual will be the sole creator of the state of 'disturbance'. I appreciate the room for interpretation, but the distinction is worthwhile to BC. A more precise opening line might read 'I aim to bring together constituents of CG to enable the circumstances by which the story of the gallery as structured by the CGA can be disturbed...'.



**Aim 2** - *I aim to contribute critical findings to the possibilities and challenges of curatorial practice as a method of 'play' with the Castlefield Gallery archive. I will experiment with the possibilities of curatorial practice as the method to 'reconfigure what counts as knowledge' (Haraway, 1994:62) in a gallery.*

In Aim 2, the term 'play' is based on its application in Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' (1966) (referring to a latitude in interpretation, substitution, transformation) and suggesting a lineage through Haraway, into a contemporary curatorial/archival discourse advanced by Irit Rogoff and Lisa Darns. Chapter One traces this lineage and discusses the application of 'play' as a benefit to research disturbing the CGA. BC, with its emphasis on uncovering the circumstances that might enable unexpected potential routes through the CGA should be seen as a method encompassing Derridean 'play'. Therefore, I meet Aim 2 through the findings on the challenges and possibilities resulting from a deployment of BC with the CGA.

When I first wrote Aim 2, I considered the second sentence a development of the first – presenting Haraway's rally to challenge the formation of cultural narratives as inherently a project of 'play'. It can certainly be argued as one, but the phrasing in the Aim poses a different question of BC, worth pursuing, albeit difficult to demonstrate: can a project of BC that has taken place in CG effect ongoing changes in the utilisation and encounter of the CGA?

I respond by looking at the context of the Haraway quote, keeping in mind that (as per Aim 1) the activity which has taken place during this research will become part of the CGA. This quote comes from Haraway's paragraph contending that 'Textual rereading is never enough' (Haraway, 1994, 62) – my changing reading of which informed several decisions in the curation of both *AAP* and *AAP2* exhibitions. It is also contains Haraway's argument for the necessity to become involved with the materials of production, which in this research project corresponds to the entry of the

entire AAP project within the CGA.<sup>89</sup> The archive box discussed above – itself a reimagining of what archive boxes could be, commissioned by artist collaborators – enters the CGA as a launch pad for the practice of BC, from which users are encouraged to create their own challenging, unpredictable paths through the CGA. The activity of AAP is visually and theoretically different from the other material of the CGA, acting as a lure for ways of encountering the CGA, a ‘time capsule’ ready for activation. We can say that even if restraints of space, time and money mean that the CGA remains difficult to access, the AAP project archive – structured by BC – enables a potential change of encounter. Haraway puts it like this, ‘The point is to get at how worlds are made and unmade, in order to participate in the processes... The point is, in short, to make a difference - however modestly, however partially, however much without either narrative or scientific guarantees.’ (Haraway, 1994; 62) By entering the CGA, this research gets into how the archive is made and unmade.

BC, with its precepts of interaction and questioning, is an ideal methodology for the aims of this research. Not only is BC a way to achieve these aims, but it begins to question their construction! I will now conclude by bringing together the key points from this Chapter.

### **Becoming-Curator as Methodology, Conclusions**

In this Chapter, I began by outlining the value of a curatorial methodology, showing how it could help enunciate an approach to working in arts and cultural institutions. I have shown the moves through which I turn Milevska’s essay on the idea of Becoming-Curator into a practical curatorial methodology for use with the CGA, something which I believe would benefit the work of CG. Grounded in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of Becoming, BC as my methodology seeks curatorial experimentation beyond established practices. In doing so, it seeks movement away from hierarchies and towards

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<sup>89</sup> Discussed above around the challenges or opportunities of the materials of the past in incubating the future.

multiplicities – encouraging work with collaborators. I want to draw attention to how much BC as methodology dovetails with my Harawarian framework for working with the CGA, with Cat's Cradle resisting any final state, and at its best among many non-homogenous players.

The consideration in this Chapter of how BC sits in the timeline of this research is also productive in demonstrating how appropriate it is as an archival curatorial methodology. I looked at how the idea of the Rhizome, connected to Deleuze and Guattari's *Becoming*, is a way to think about bringing many historic traces into archival projects – embracing non-linear ways into and around the spaces, objects, actors and situations. Building on the apt nature of BC to this research, I considered my methodology in light of my aims, finding that the critical nature of BC could meet and cast new light on the nature of the aims – questioning the elements of individual endeavour, and finality.

I am indebted to Suzana Milevska for her insightful application of Deleuze & Guattari's *Becoming* to curatorial practice, and for her generosity in sharing both time and thought with me. I have sought to contribute to, and develop upon, Milevska's offering - principally by structuring a practical application of the ideas in 'Becoming-Curator' into the approach, BC. This has involved a close critical evaluation of elements from 'Becoming-Curator', resulting in modifying certain aspects, rejecting others, and demonstrating the particularly apposite traction that BC brings to archival research. My work has advanced an understanding regarding the importance of the position of 'Being' in relation to *Becoming*, with practical application in recognising the constitution of an archive as it is, before opening it to a process of *Becoming*. Similarly, where curatorial agency is promoted towards social activism in Milevska's process of *Becoming-Curator*, my practical model shows that this can be modified towards a direction to work through collaboration. In terms of repudiation, I find Milevska's use of Ernst Von Glasersfeld's philosophy an unnecessary complication to the work of discerning the processes valuable to BC. Instead, I show how Deleuze & Guattari advise careful experimentation and discretion sufficiently in their formation of *Becoming*.

Finally, I demonstrate how BC is particularly appropriate for archival research – reading across one of Milevska's key sources (Claire Colebrook) and Deleuze and Guattari on their Rhizomatic model of activity. In this way I show how an archive might productively be activated by inviting diverse constituents to find their own paths and lines of flight through the archive. Paying attention to recurring points along these lines can be telling for where energy lies in the archive, and the archive is an ideal site of 'multiple and synchronic stratification' (Colebrook, 1999; 132).

My advances to Milevska's positioning of Becoming-Curator are designed to support a practical application of BC for curators working with archives. I have turned a curatorial approach towards a set of methods designed to activate and investigate repositories for traces of the past, in the hopes that curators might experiment and further explore the possibilities of this potential methodology.

To conclude, by following BC as a curatorial approach to the CGA, we enter a process generating unexpected connections. It is a process of possibility – creating networks of encounter through the CGA across constituents, time, ideas. My focus, the CGA, with its diverse forms including filed records, human memory, online accounts, and objects, should be encountered through networks of curators, artists, visitors, peers. How can we facilitate unexpected encounters across this space? I answer this by bringing people into the project, as per BC. I talked my ideas through with the staff of Castlefield Gallery – to hear what CG would find important in this project; to listen for the discourse surrounding the CGA, to recognise the critical curatorial systems in which this research takes place, and to bring collaborators into the project. Artists were then commissioned to spend time considering the CGA, inviting further collaborators into the BC process. In *AAP2*, George Gibson and Grace Collins, addressing decision making in artist led spaces, exhibit an internal document from 1991 in which CG staff discuss which artist to work with. The document suggests installation artist, Chara Lewis. At that time recently moved to Manchester but now a board member of CG and Programme Leader for BA (Hons) Fine Art at Manchester

Metropolitan University (MMU). Chara had even been George Gibson's lecturer in Fine Art at MMU, further complicating the networks of history and collaborators. I asked Chara what seeing her name there meant in an interview for this research:

“Yeah, it means a lot, actually. It sort of comes a bit full circle to come back to that first show as well. And for it to be an ex-student as well, George, showing it, that's a really nice piece of synchronicity ... to feel that I'm part of the archive, part of the history of the gallery, and also be part of its present and its future, as well as a board member.”

(Chara Lewis, 2023: see Appendix 2)

This is one particular instance of disturbance in the CGA leading to a new perspective and positive reflection. But BC encourages us to see this point as a node in a process of questions; of the relationship between MMU and Castlefield Gallery, the encounters between names in the archive and positions in the city, the shaping of trends in art by education. BC is about arousing critical curiosity, investigating who CG are by looking at what activity has taken place there, alongside a community of constituents.

With this in mind, the next chapter considers the artists and works brought together in both *AAP* and *AAP2*. These artists are constituents who have occupied many positions around the gallery, moving from students, associates, artists and peers. Their work raises questions on how the CGA might be deployed to remain an active and unruly element in CG.

## Chapter Four - Archives at Play Exhibitions

From the outset of my research into the Castlefield Gallery archive (hereafter CGA), I intended to work through the medium of the exhibition. This mode of public activity would be the nexus of my practice, although as I shortly discuss, an exhibition has come to be associated with a diverse range of outputs. In my experience as a curator, I have used exhibitions to consider contemporary ideas of family bonds, persecution of LGBTQIA+ people, and on the subjective nature of memory.<sup>90</sup> My intention was therefore build on this experience and develop my approach to curating to investigate the CGA. The programming team at Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG), responsible for scheduling the exhibitions and activity of the gallery, assigned exhibition slots of around 10 weeks in Spring of 2022 and a similar amount of time in 2023.<sup>91</sup> Commencing this research project late in 2020, I found it useful to establish the exhibitions as points around which my ideas on the CGA could formalise, and develop further through collaboration with artists, staff, and visitors. At these times, parts of CG would be opened to the public, and ideas presented through the work of artists - either newly commissioned or specifically loaned. The ideas within each exhibition would approach the CGA from multiple directions; new ways of considering what familiarity had blurred from perception, or raising what had been submerged. The exhibitions would activate the CGA with the public the public, through artworks, events with speakers and artists, tours, and activities. These events would make time to discuss concepts in greater depth or offer practical experience of making or doing borne from the exhibition. The exhibition would be how I would research the CGA, using my curatorial methodology.

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<sup>90</sup> Respectively – *Kinship* 2019, *VUKANI/RISE* 2015 & *Wake Up Together* 2019, and *Pieces of You* 2016. All at Open Eye Gallery.

<sup>91</sup> The programming team can be flexible depending on the exhibition – for example, the Castlefield Gallery Associates coordinator might be more heavily involved during the associates show. The core of the team are the curator, Matthew Pendergast, and Director, Helen Wewiora.

In this introduction, I first consider developments regarding exhibition making as part of curatorial practice. The intention is to contextualise my position; that as a curator I value exhibition making as the site around which research and action coalesce. Exhibitions of artworks and performances become the thoughtfully composed hub of conversations, ideas, and production – from which can stem more of the same. I see curatorial practice as facilitating this process amidst artists, institutions, and publics, to the benefit of those involved.

Changes in exhibition making reflect an ongoing evolution of the relationship between art and society.<sup>92</sup> Picking up in the late 2000s, academics, critics, and curators sought to define a shift in the work of the curator toward exhibition making which embraced a greater social and political remit. The curator needed to address wider social issues if they wanted to be relevant in a networked world, more conscious of social disparities. In 2007, as an approach to reconciling social conscience with contemporary art, curator and academic Paul O'Neill identifies a reliance on 'Discussions, lecture programs, conferences, publications, and discursive events' (O'Neill, 2007:247) – pointing to the high profile Documenta 10 and 11 exhibitions where this approach appeared as the foundation of the project. O'Neill considers how curatorial projects have become more concerned with reflecting on their own status in the world, and most visibly at the global fairs, biennials, triennials etc. These projects account for their values and privileged positions through greater reliance on the kind of dialogues and critical reflections listed. The logic here is that through the accompanying

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<sup>92</sup> From cabinets of curiosities, to the opening of the Louvre, commercial galleries to civic museums, how exhibitions are presented and to whom are part of a web social relations which can be used to discuss place and time. You can see this in the terminology of 'Museum 3.0' (Hudson, 2015:online). For Hudson (a key propagator for the constituent museum model, discussed in Chapter 2) galleries and museums have evolved to reflect the changing attitude and behaviours of the public. Museum 1.0 would have been a didactic, top down model – where someone in power would have decided what art it was important for the public to see. 2.0 would have reflected the shifts in public interest in museums or galleries, and the need to acknowledge the visitor. 3.0 is then 'an institution whose meanings and functions are created by the actions of its users.' (Hudson, 2015:online). The reasons for these 'updates' can be discussed as functions of a changing relationship between art and society.

talks and publications of an exhibition we might learn more about the issues addressed within the exhibition. This emphasis on not just experiencing an exhibition but learning more about the ideas behind them gave rise to the notion of the Educational Turn in curatorial practices (circa 2007-2010).<sup>93</sup> This 'turn' produced fruitful expansion of the curatorial beyond gallery exhibitions, and into a polyvalent social commentator located in the sphere of art. Boundaries and hierarchies were challenged, questioning systems of values reaffirmed in standards of quality, relationships with visitors, or definitions of an artist.

This was an evolution in exhibitions which had been going on over a long time. In the 1942 exhibition, *First Papers of Surrealism* Marcel Duchamp disrupted the exhibition experience with his webs of string threads covering the usually uninhibited process of looking at art, drawing attention to the setting of the exhibition. O'Neill highlights 1960s America as a moment when the exhibition came to have 'critical precedence' (O'Neill, 2007:241) over the artworks within it – arguing that exhibition had become more meaningful than any particular artwork within it. Nicolas Bourriard's 1998 publication *Relational Aesthetics* identified how artists were shifting the value of art from being located in the object and to its reception – the artwork is latent until the exhibition experience. But the educational turn was more than an update to exhibition making, rather, it sought to challenge what the curatorial project of an exhibition was. To work in the traditional mode – presenting works of art in a space - was to ignore the social constructs which surrounded the foundational structures of an exhibition, who they privileged or disenfranchised. Instead, this new approach meant that an exhibition could be a speed date night, a run, or a series of workshops. What seemed important, suggests O'Neill (citing Dave Beech & Gavin Wade's publication *Curating in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*) was the knowledge production, the expansion of the discourse beyond the walls of an exhibition (O'Neill, 2007:249). This post-structural influence in curating around the 2000s has been covered in

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<sup>93</sup> For a comprehensive list of projects which suggest a pedagogical turn in curating, consider the introduction of Paul O'Neill's book 'Curating and the Educational Turn' – page 13. One example we have already looked at in Chapter 2, Irit Rogoff's *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*



my theoretical framework in Chapter One; in another Paul O'Neill edited book of 2007, Mick Wilson identifies a 'Foucauldian moment in art of the last two decades, and the ubiquitous appeal of the term "discourse"' (Wilson, 2007:202).<sup>94</sup>

But this expansion of the curatorial remit was not without criticism. Whilst my research has roots in the post-structural theories of archives, I argue that to activate the dormant CGA, working with objects in a directed environment has the most potent results. As a curator of the CGA, whilst working with artists, through workshops, or student projects, exhibition making was the centre of my practice. However, a discussion around exhibition making vs discourse production in curation remains lively. One notable detractor of the 'educational turn', curator and writer Jens Hoffman, had reservations on the reluctance to focus on the exhibition making process in the traditional form. In a heated 2011 discussion with curator and researcher Maria Lind in Mousse Magazine, Hoffman coined the term 'paracuratorial' to refer to 'lectures, screenings, exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited' (Hoffman, 2011:online). The thrust of Hoffman's argument is that creating an experience through an exhibition is a craft, and one which can be judged on the quality of the installation, the work with the artists, and the catalogue essay. By expanding the remit of the curator, and turning away from the exhibition, not only does curatorial quality become harder to gauge, but we lose the experience that a critical and well-made exhibition can contribute as 'important social ritual' (Hoffman, 2011:online). For Hoffman, the possibilities of the exhibition are not being fully explored, whilst more curators host speed dating nights (to use my example). As to expanding the discourse, Hoffman points out that his exhibitions are not unquestioning as to their own structures – 'challenging normative codes ... staying by and large

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<sup>94</sup> In 2007, early in the process of the educational turn in curating, Mick Wilson is identifying the same prevailing fascination with Foucault that Lisa Darms does in her review of Okwui Enwezor's exhibition, *Archive Fever* (see Chapter 1). Here, Wilson is not only pointing to this discourse driven artwork influencing the educational turn, but also appears slightly frustrated with the 'ubiquitous appeal' of the term discourse. I believe it is the frustration of someone who sees a buzzword used with little critical engagement with the theoretical underpinning.

within the gallery space' (Hoffman, 2011:online). Maria Lind's challenge to Hoffman is that through his adherence to the exhibition, he does not 'make art go public' (Lind, 2011:online) through the broadest, most appropriate formats. How can the staged exhibition, in the gallery space, possibly respond to all the new art and situations of the contemporary world? It should be noted how Lind and Hoffman's positions as to the possibilities of the exhibition echo a central contention in my Theoretical Framework – i.e. the conditions by which the new might evolve from the past. Curating in the way advocated by Hoffman, writes Lind, is 'business as usual' – too familiar to be challenging. Instead, Lind advocates for 'the curatorial'. This is a methodology of beginning with the art, but then engaging it in 'specific contexts, times, and questions in order to challenge the status quo' (Lind, 2011:online). At the close of the conversation, Hoffman appears resolute - this expansion of curatorial work does not effectively advance the discourse, it just undermines standards of curatorial practice.

The above is partially a debate about access to art – although neither mentions the word. Lind is arguing for taking art into as many situations as possible, without pointing out that the art gallery can be a daunting place to enter, replete with codes and norms. In this regard, Hoffman's position as entrenched in the gallery feels outdated. It should be remembered, however, that just as gallery spaces (from the grand house, to civic building, to white cube) can be a barrier to entry, it is wrong to assume everyone wants to participate in the lectures, workshops, or the outdoor art experiences Lind advocates for. This debate is also a call for standards in the creation of a public experience. Hoffman is frustrated by the nebulous terms of the curatorial, buttressed by the promise to challenge the status quo – an echo of Mick Wilson's identification of the Foucauldian moment, and his frustration at "'discourse" as a word to conjure and perform power.' (Wilson, 2007:202). There is a sense that Hoffman feels dismayed at the artform of the exhibition, blaming the shifts in curatorial expectation for a lack of quality, disguised by the notion of expanding the discourse.

The debate feels at once outdated and relevant. Outdated because we needn't be prescriptive about an approach to curating – even if, as Hoffman argues, this means greater quantity with fewer examples of exhibition quality. But questioning a curator's approach to exhibition making, as something constructed with artists and a well-made installation, is incredibly pertinent. O'Neill identifies Documentas 10 and 11 as predicated upon discursive events, and 2022's *Documenta 15* demonstrated that this approach is still a fault line in the contemporary art experience. This was an exhibition of coming together around art, not to valorise the art object, but to make time for each other. The collective Ruangrupa were appointed the curators, and in turn invited further collectives for whom art served a community purpose. By dint of this approach, the craft of the exhibition was secondary to the discourse of the community. Club nights, discussions programs, and activation with friends were the modes of experience. As per Lind and Hoffman, *Documenta 15* could be read as challenge to the status quo, or as the result of turning away from traditional exhibition making. It was certainly one of the most divisive Documentas in the history of the quinquennial. *Documenta 15* is an extreme case, but it also demonstrated another important change for curatorial practice – the shift in art making from object based production, to more performative, social practices. How would Hoffman reconcile the curatorial practice of exhibition making with a discursive arts practice? Perhaps suggesting that artists today were 'para-artists'? But I believe that this is a false argument. Of course as curators we should follow artists making creative, critical practice – whether through object based or performative works - but a balance can always be struck in curating an engaging exhibition.

I side with Hoffman about the potential of the exhibition to create a moving and meaningful experience. I believe that exhibition making through space and objects is a powerful method of activating the CGA. Furthermore, that exhibition making is a craft which can update and reflect the evolving relationship of art and society. The exhibition space should be somewhere special for a breadth of visitors to explore ideas from different perspectives. It should feel as special for the art student or curator as to the young family

looking to get out of the rain for 15 minutes. In this regard, I appreciate Lind's contention to 'make art go public' which I believe must mean to situate art in an approachable context. When I examined the foundational principles of CG in Chapter Two, I noted how the gallery understood how important it is to have someone confident and knowledgeable to welcome people into a space which might feel daunting – and I believe this aligns with Lind's imperative to make art reach the broadest public. I recognise what Lind has to say about the need for a curatorial approach which adapts in contexts, too - but I don't think it is useful to propose that different job roles should act curatorially ('a curator, an editor, a communications person, and so on' (Lind, 2011:online)). Rather, I think, a curator might need to deploy different approaches across different parts of their practice. In my work with Back on Track, I was delivering educational workshops geared towards my audience – but, whilst working educationally, I was still a curator thinking about the exhibitions. What would the group I was working with make of my installs, and commissions? Here I am at odds with Hoffman when he relegates work with artists on things never to be exhibited into the 'paracuratorial'. Many of my interactions in the course of this research have contributed to the production of the exhibitions – conversations and questions which have changed how I look at the CGA, or how it might be used.

The exhibition thus becomes my nexus of research and artistic intervention for questioning the CGA – with careful thought as to the staging of the experience, and the impetus to reach a broad range of publics. The two exhibitions have benefited from the input of constituents around the gallery and have proposed interesting challenges and opportunities for the CGA. This Chapter considers the artistic works featured across both exhibitions, with reflection on my curation throughout.

## ***Archives at Play*, Introduction**

Over 34 days of opening, *Archives at Play* received 1021 visitors to the gallery, averaging just over 30 visitors per day.<sup>95</sup> Looking at the post-Covid visitor figures, this places the exhibition as just above the average visitor figures to CG. The exhibition used the full gallery space, as well as the room in which the archive of CG is housed, known at the time in the gallery as Office 2 (it has since been renamed 'Meeting Room'). I found, through talking about the exhibition both inside and outside of CG, that a simple way of framing *Archives at Play* (hereafter *AAP*) was to say that it opened conversations about how the relationship between past and present shape our understanding, and our imagination of the future. For example, how contemporary language of 'invasive' species of flowers hid historic approaches to botany borne of colonialism, and what that meant for our present understanding of nature.

My intention with this exhibition was to foster an approach to the Castlefield Gallery archive which focussed on the archive in its broad definition - the systems of selection, retention, access and dissemination at play in shaping the material traces, and the hierarchies of value therein. Very deliberately, I had not presented materials such as historic press releases or correspondence from famous artists in a way which might recount a story or suggest a particular narrative to CG. There was only artistic engagement directly with the traces of the CGA archive in the most tangential way, through Chester Tenneson's commission. At this point, as observed in my Theoretical Framework and Methodology chapters, I was working in the belief that to re-present any parts of the archive was to limit the potential for creating the active and unruly CGA that I aimed towards. My reading of Donna Haraway and Foucault shaped this decision, and there is further detail below in reference to specific artistic commissions.

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<sup>95</sup> For this set of visitor figures, I have used the figures recorded on a handheld counter by the volunteers who coordinate the front of house activities, recorded in a central shared spreadsheet. Whilst the exhibition was open over a seven week period, this time included the Easter weekend – during which time Castlefield Gallery is closed – as well as two days in which sickness or incidents in the city meant that the gallery couldn't be open.

For *AAP*, I invited the artists Chester Tenneson, Gregory Herbert, Kelly Jayne Jones, Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford and Dr. Yan Wang Preston to be part of the research exhibition. Each artist was asked to make new work, either by developing an existing artwork or using an existing style. This condition was in order to keep within budget, whilst securing the work of this amount of high quality artists. In addition, I asked that we develop an event or complimentary piece of material to run alongside the exhibition.

Below are reflections on the five commissions, and my findings from them regarding activating the CGA. Before I address these, I begin with a consideration of my inclusion of a selection of archival material in the exhibition.

### **A Selection of Archival Material**

For the duration of *AAP*, I exhibited A4 copies of 80 scanned documents from the folders of the CGA. I chose the objects based on what I found intriguing in the CGA, traces which stirred an interest, and left me wanting to know more. As I have written, I did not want to construct any kind of narrative of CG through these documents or use them to imply any particular position on the gallery. I wanted to float some of the strange traces of the gallery activity back to the surface to pique interest; stories of horses roaming in the gallery, or of walls coated in white chocolate. The intention was to hint at the breadth of traces contained in the CGA, in both content and form.

Documents included press cuttings, correspondence (handwritten, typed, and emailed), press releases, faxes, notes, photographs, minutes, publications, and ephemera - from the opening of CG in 1984 to the material relating to the exhibition prior to *AAP*. These documents were presented loose, with no preservation coverings or chronological structures provided for the area they are displayed upon. They were shown in no order on top of a custom-built shelf, beneath the works of Dr. Yan Wang Preston and above part of Gregory Herbert's installation – the installation is visible in *figs. 12* and

13. Visitors were encouraged to leave their own memories of CG via the provided blank cue cards and mix these with the archive material.

I was sceptical about including this material, given my hypothesis of the CGA as active in structuring a limiting discourse. As Foucault writes:

‘...in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role it is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.’ (Foucault, 1970: 52).

In my position of access to the CGA I saw myself as like Derrida’s ‘archons’ from the opening of *Archive Fever* (1996) - a privileged position controlling the records of law and commerce, and the interpretation of these records.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, I had concerns about the interactive invitation for visitors to contribute their own memories using blank cards, considering Hal Foster’s critique of performativity that ‘Activation of the viewer has become an end, not a means’ (Foster, 2015: 142). By selecting and exhibiting documents from the history of CG in an exhibition ahead of the gallery’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I considered myself to be part of the production of a particular discourse around the gallery which, understandably, would prefer a positive narrative.

However, a key finding of this research has been that whilst the CGA could become a powerful site for connecting constituents with the activity of CG, it presently has a negligible impact. This is suggested by the rare activity using the archive materials, the depleting variety of materials held in the CG archive folders, the infrequency of historic references in CG activity, and the volume of external pressures shaping CG action – funding, staffing, venue management, partnership working initiatives etc. My contention that the archive of CG is commensurate to Foucault’s formulation of ‘the archive’

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<sup>96</sup> See Chapter 1 for more on Derrida and the archive. Archons were the names of the magistrates in ancient Greek towns, responsible for records of property and debt.

(Foucault, 1969:145) as a layer shaping the understanding and direction of CG discourse overstates the role of the CGA, where the letters, kept ephemera, records of historic events, and 'Grey' archive objects create little in the way of momentum, or barrier to activity.<sup>97</sup>

It was following reflection on *AAP*, along with further reading and curatorial activity, that I now consider the priority to be activation of the CGA by embracing the 'ponderous, formidable materiality' (Foucault, 1970:52) of the archive, rather than denying it. It would be engagement with the presently submerged archive that would act as a disturbance capable of creating an active and unruly CGA, thus meeting the first aim of this research. The debate around materiality as an approach to engaging with history whilst evading discourse formation can be read in the chapter on my Theoretical Framework. For Irit Rogoff, it is enabling new approaches to materials which can uncover new directions within a gallery discourse, through the concepts of 'actualization' and 'potentiality' – recognising the present deployment to uncover the potential uses of objects, situations, actors, and spaces. The aim being to uncover new potential within galleries through less expected approaches to these materials. I consider Rogoff's prompting towards potentiality as embedded in my methodology of Becoming-Curator, as a move of destabilization from expected action or outcome. But I contend that the presentation of the CGA documents I used in *AAP* doesn't fully meet this challenge. Whilst it was rewarding to see people sifting through the massed documents, the setting was too weak to pull people in the gallery into the contemplation of the archive I had hoped. However, as with much of *AAP*, this experimentation with the CGA was an essential development in my research into how the CGA might be used.

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<sup>97</sup> I use the concept of the Grey archive as taken from Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum. See the introduction for more on the Grey archive within the CGA.



## ***English Gardens* by Dr. Yan Wang Preston**

*English Gardens* comprises six black and white darkroom prints of plants not native to the UK, using compositions from traditional Chinese bird-and-flower paintings. The series shows how ideas such as elegance, or information such as location and seasonality, can become embedded in objects, language, or forms – and what different approaches to this embodied history can mean. Yan's framed photographs are present in *figs.* 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Donna Haraway's 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (1994) was instrumental in my decision to collaborate with Yan on this project. For Haraway, it is first the environment we grow up in that demonstrates the power of a culturally structured common place - surrounding us with the 'figures, stories, and images' (Haraway, 1994:60) that shape our agency. I show how this idea is almost analogous to the 'archive' of Foucauldian theory that defines the 'utterable' (Foucault, 1970) in my theoretical framework (Chapter One). Yan's photographs use plants in compositions which carry meanings learnt in her upbringing in Shanghai, and her studies into traditional Chinese arrangements. Not only does this work broaden the concept of an archive, showing how objects and arrangements can become the container for concepts such as strength or harmony – but it can also illustrate the dangers and politics of disregarding archives of knowledge. Each of the works use plants that are termed 'invasive' to the UK, but these plants were frequently brought to the UK by botanists interested in importing beautiful new species - the Rhododendron being a well known example. Yan's research for this photograph looked at how, when the Rhododendron was brought to the UK from China, it was as a decorative plant, with no sense that it would grow so prodigiously in the UK climate. It has gone on to have a disruptive effect to diversity in the UK due to its ability to gain such ground coverage. However, the contemporary terminology of 'Invasive Species' hides the role of colonial plant hunters in disregarding the nature of the Rhododendron when introducing it to the UK. In this way, the works show how language is used to obscure and reshape history, just as objects can embody it.

In showing these works, I wanted to think about how the CGA was liable to myths and tropes growing around it – through language and meanings attributed to the items within. However, it would have required a far closer connection between *English Gardens* and the material of the CGA to make clear for viewers the parallel of how archives might contribute to discourse construction. This could have been an exhibition setting which illustrated the role of the archive in the formation of identity, using objects from the CGA to illustrate the hypothesis. In terms of my curatorial methodology of Becoming-Curator, making more of a connection between *English Gardens* and the CGA would have more clearly demonstrated translational curation and critical curating – connecting artworks, cultural theory, and materials of the CGA – to stimulate new approaches to the CGA. My resistance in bringing the archive material into close relationships with the artworks stemmed from the belief that engagement with the archive materials with the artworks constituted an act of re-reading, against which Haraway suggests that 'Reading, no matter how active, is not a powerful enough trope' (Haraway, 1994: 62). I thought that using the CGA in conjunction with the artworks would only further bolster any myths of the CGA. On reflection, I would argue that connecting the CGA with *English Gardens* would have been more akin to Haraway's advice to 'queer what counts as nature' (Haraway, 1994: 60) – making it possible for visitors to see the CGA in a new light.

### ***Entangled Ways of Being* by Gregory Herbert**

*Entangled Ways of Being* interrupted the plumbing systems of CG, bringing water gurgling through pipes visibly coming in and out of the gallery walls. Within the system of pipes, under special lights, edible plants and mushrooms grew. The commission is site specific, and I asked that Gregory install the piece around, and tangled with, Yan's prints of *English Gardens*. The installation is visible in *figs.* 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18.

The piece is a disturbance to the plumbing as a hidden framework of the gallery. It is a response to my early hypothesis that the CGA was a

similarly hidden framework shaping CG activity, with *Entangled Ways of Being* prompting that new ways of growing within these obscured structures was possible. In commissioning this work, I wanted to enact Jean-Paul Martinon's possibility of the curatorial as 'an act of jail breaking from pre-existing frames' (Martinon, 2013: 4). But, as I consider in Chapter One, I didn't make visible the frames from which I wanted to effect an escape – I used the plumbing as an analogy, when I should have engaged more directly with the materials of the CGA. This might have made the stories and rules of the CGA present in the exhibition, and thus the possibility of play within them, offering CG constituents the opportunity for what Hito Steyerl describes as 'the improvised creation of new, common rules' (Steyerl, 2017:18).

In presenting Gregory's piece around Yan's (pipework was between, above and around the prints) I wanted to open both pieces to different interpretations than either artist had initially intended. This was a difficult decision for me to make as my approach as a curator is focussed on the integrity of the artist, and here I seemed to be opening out the singularity of the artists' work. I consulted with both artists, and it was a measure of the trust we had built in the relationship toward the exhibition that both were willing to try the entangled presentation. I see this presentation as an early experiment with the methodology of Becoming-Curator (hereafter BC) which I would adapt and follow *after* this exhibition (*AAP*). In displaying the works in this way I was moving to deterritorialize both pieces, connecting them in a new multiplicity – a new collaboration with unexpected collisions and references. And again, whilst this experiment inspired my curatorial methodology greatly, I argue that it is the CGA which would benefit from being entangled in multiple new artworks. In the same way that Gregory and Yan's works are thought of in unexpected ways through their coming together, the CGA could have been an active part of this new multiplicity. Even the simplest approach - bringing documents with relevance to the subject of Yan & Gregory's work into the installation – would have allowed for

greater discussion on the analogy I was drawing between the artworks and the archive.<sup>98</sup>

### ***The Beat Goes On* by Chester Tenneson**

Chester produced ten 30cm x 30cm handwritten signs reproducing text found in the CGA that carried a personal meaning to him. These were presented with sculptures in which objects alluding to the history and function of CG have been made absurd, on the themes of artistic nurture and experimentation. Chester's artwork is visible in *figs.* 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23.

Whilst Chester was developing this project, I was aware that it was the work which most closely re-presented text and events held in the CGA. I wondered whether it would function as what Foucault might term 'commentary', and thus (according to my early hypothesis), validate an institutional narrative and affirm the CGA as a structure for the work of CG. But rather, *The Beat Goes On* is a clear demonstration of how the archive might be navigated according to personal experience. By responding to the history of the gallery from a personal perspective, Chester's project moves the CGA away from an institutional narrative and into a subjective framework. Foucault's caution as to 'commentary' (Foucault, 1970) warns against secondary texts which seemingly promote new navigations of history whilst depending upon a primary discourse for their validity. But, by locating the commission in personal history, and critically without *re-presenting* them but by making them absurd – Chester is sharing the possibility of a new lens through which to navigate the CGA. In this way it is an approach of

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<sup>98</sup> For example, CG presented an exhibitions which used mushrooms (used in Gregory's installation) to consider new networks of growth – *The Ground Beneath Your Feet*, 2018 – or exhibited Andy Goldsworthy in 1992 – *Snowball Drawings* and *The Throws*. *Domestic Shrubbery* was the title of a Daphne Wright exhibition in 1995 which used plants to think about identity, boundaries and home.

negotiation with the archive rather than production of commentary, as an act of playing with the construction of discourse.<sup>99</sup>

*The Beat Goes On* was a major development in my research into ways of engaging with the CGA. At the heart of this project was Chester's long standing relation to CG and thus the text of the CGA, the place the gallery has been, the people he has met there, and the experiences it has created. Chester has worked with the gallery as a signwriter, attended as an associate, and more recently has a relationship with the gallery as a tutor in MMU. From this came artwork that was clear, caring, and light-hearted in its discussion of CG. When giving tours of the exhibition, I found it incredibly enjoyable to open up conversations about what the sculptures (visible on pages 5 & 7 of Appendix 1) might be communicating. It was on one of these tours that a visitor asked what I considered to be an insightful question – what would happen to the works following the exhibition? I thought about to what degree *The Beat Goes On* was a site-specific project, dependent on the framework of CG. They benefit in context from being exhibited in the gallery whose archive is under discussion, but they needn't be fixed in this space. Instead, though, the question can be thought as whether these works are *archive* specific – resonating more specifically when part of the wide net of the CGA. To this I would wholeheartedly agree. They become satellites of the CGA, creating a bond between the archive and wherever they find themselves. In a gesture of great kindness, Chester gifted one of these works to the gallery – it is the work at the top of page 6 in Appendix 1. It is hung in the office of Castlefield Gallery, and has a line from the very first press release, it reads 'A location which is ideally situated'.

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<sup>99</sup> A similar study between commentary and negotiation might be made between Cory Arcangel's *A Couple Thousand Short Films about Glenn Gould* (2005) and Susan Hiller's *From the Freud Museum* (1991-6). Both critique structures of archive and discourse formation, but through different artistic languages. Whereas Hiller uses the archival boxes and anthropological collection to critique their own fallibility, Arcangel creates an open source programme to glean YouTube into a canonical classical work – exposing and making absurd the movements in discourse formation.

\*\*\*.©     ).\*\*\*. by Kelly Jayne Jones

In \*\*\*.©     ).\*\*\*. Kelly brought equipment and materials from the storerooms of the gallery into the exhibition space, creating an installation in a very dark room, designed to suggest a ritual observance of the past. Entering through a soft golden curtain, it took a moment for eyes to adjust to find pieces of old CG equipment (slide projectors, unused monitor stands, speakers etc) arranged around a wooden structure like a shrine. A low steel bowl was filled with water and had rusted into a pool of amber rings like an eye. The space featured sound and video works, including two projected videos and two soundtracks looping at different lengths. The video works use shapes and signs from astrology which dissolved in a liquid fashion, and the sound pieces focused on breathing and flute noises. The installation is visible in *figs.* 23, 24 and 25, but it is impossible to recreate the experience of this space in an image.

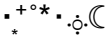
I commissioned this work to think about stretching definitions of the archive, to imagine a different approach to holding a history from that held in the designated archive space. In this way, \*\*\*.©     ).\*\*\*. was a response to the CGA's chronological structure and reliance on paper documentation. Through this commission, I wanted to discover more about the relation of object, memory & archive.

Carolyn Steedman opens her chapter 'The Space of Memory: in an archive' (2001) with Foucault's contention that systems of organising history inhabit a space of memory, structuring how memory might function, but warns us that these organising systems should not themselves be thought of as the space of memory. To apply this to the CGA, the system of the plastic folders holding documents arranged chronologically is a choice about how to record the events, but the room that holds those folders might equally hold objects, sounds, or smells – all able to evoke different sensations from an exhibition. By allowing space for less structured memory in a narrative of

history, Steedman argues that engagement with an archive can stretch from the erotic to the oneiric, concluding:

‘The Archive ... through the cultural activity of History, can become Memory’s potential space, one of the few realms of the modern imagination where a hard-won and carefully constructed place, can return to boundless and limitless space’ (Steedman, 2001: 83).

This quote has relevance to one of my methodology’s core precepts, namely, that if the strength of BC lies in encouraging unruly ways in and out of the CGA for a multitude of constituents – how can the CGA be made somewhere exciting to traverse? If the archive is constituted as a boundless erotic and oneiric space, an infinite arousing dreamscape, I believe it will tempt more constituents in.

And indeed, in discussions within the space of this artwork I found that imagining expanding the boundaries of the CGA into something different from a traditional archive was exciting for constituents in CG. There was a willingness to talk about the ways in which memory worked, or what a boundless archive could contain. From speculation on Stone Tape Theory (imagining how buildings or landscapes bear traces of human activity within them) to the smell of old exhibitions,  was a space which encouraged people into considering memory as a function of the CGA differently.

### ***Archive Fever by Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford***

For this commission, Sarah-Joy wrote a text inspired by her research and experience in archives and embroidered this text onto 35 white cotton gloves. These are the kinds of gloves ubiquitous in imagination with archival activity, used to carefully turn pages or lift relics. These 35 embroidered gloves were exhibited in the room where the folders and documents of the CGA is kept, arranged all over the shelves, and in the drawers of the room.

Due to requiring separate invigilation, and the pressure on the room as a meeting space for the gallery, this installation was only open to the public twice a week - during which time I would be present. A recording of Sarah-Joy reading an expanded version of the embroidered text during an event in the exhibition is publicly available, and the installation is visible in *figs.* 26, 27, 28 and 29.<sup>100</sup>

The title of this piece, chosen by Sarah-Joy, is the same as the title of Derrida's canonical text on the archive, and a key reference for this research (see Chapter One). Sarah-Joy's artwork, however, encourages a more tactile and sensual relationship to the rules of the archive – playing with the strictness and adoration of archives to frame them as spaces charged with an eroticism. Lines such as 'the illegible scrawl of a love letter' and 'the lust for something only you know' (Ford, 2022) bring a secrecy and sensuality to Derrida's conception of the archive as site of political power. In this way, the piece encourages a movement towards incorporating a more embodied and personal relationship to archives, alongside a Derridean understanding as discussed in Chapter One. It even ends with lines from Julietta Singh's *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018), itself a text on the idea of the body as an archive of personal and societal values. This piece thus sought to advance a canonical understanding of archives, whilst practically demystifying the CGA –inviting people to come and see the space.

As an installation in the physical space of the CGA, *Archive Fever* disturbed the usual functioning of CG, and incorporated into the artwork the CGA in a broad definition - including the spaces, objects, actors, and situations of the archive. Visitors entered into the system of the CGA to find a piece which commented on the nature of archives. I enjoyed opening the drawers of the plan chest to show visitors where Sarah-Joy had hidden gloves with lines like 'Touching up against the past' and 'disputes no one

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<sup>100</sup> As of March 2024, Castlefield Gallery make use of Soundcloud to host several audio clips, including the recording made by Dialect for use alongside Gregory Herbert's piece. For the recording of Sarah-Joy, please see <https://soundcloud.com/castlefieldgallery/touching-the-archive-by-sarah-joy-ford> . Please be aware that this recording features one instance of strong sexual reference by way of associating vinyl gloves with a sexual act.



wants to remember'. In this way, the CGA became an active participant in the work, making the archive a place of discovery and hidden interest. As the invigilator during this time, I would encourage people into the space, and take the opportunity to talk to them about the CGA – capitalising on the interest which Sarah-Joy's beautifully embroidered gloves inspired.

The negotiation around making the room holding the CGA public for the duration of the exhibition was productive as to the position of the archive in the gallery. First, the space needed to be prioritised for purposes other than an engagement with the archive – being the only place with a degree of privacy and room for discussion. It was a generous gesture for CG to put this aside for two days a week, and look for alternative meeting arrangements. Second, that there was uncertainty as to what the archive contained, and that inviting the public in might accidentally disclose personal or sensitive information. There was a sense of the archive as a vulnerable space, where unknown information might betray the gallery. My role as an invigilator mitigated this risk, as I was able to share information and glimpses of the archive with visitors in the knowledge of what the objects contained. However, both the status of the space, and the uncertainty around the contents of the archive, are factors which contribute to the CGA being little used. *Archive Fever* is an artwork that engaged in multiplicity with the CGA (as per BC) – predominantly through the structure of the archive rather than a narrative history of CG. In this way, as an installation dependent upon the space of the CGA, the work was successful in stimulating engagement with the archive without asserting a particular position on the gallery.

### ***Archives at Play* - Conclusions**

This exhibition was an experiment with how the theories underpinning my research could be expressed through curatorial practice. By working with artists and the CGA, I tested my ideas of the archive as a system of control to be turned away from, and learnt that this hypothesis required a far more nuanced approach. Instead, the archive should be brought into artists practice. It was incredibly useful to be able to test and then refine ideas

through the two separate exhibitions, uncovering more about the CGA in the process, and how it might be activated in the future. This is an ongoing approach which my methodology and theoretical framework advocate for in work with the CGA – iterative practices using an archival underpinning.

In this exhibition I saw the interest which constituents of CG brought to the selection of archival material, to Chester's personal journey through the archive, and in exploring the archive space through Sarah-Joy's work. This wasn't an interest in following the institutional story but a process of discovery, as strange traces of the CGA were allowed to float to the surface. I committed to incorporating the traces of the CGA in the following exhibition, asking artists to rework and reframe them lifting them from any institutional settings.

As I mentioned earlier, entangling the work of Yan Wang Preston and Gregory Herbert was something of a catalyst towards my methodology of BC. Although not directly sparking the concept, it was a moment in which both artists' work was opened to different interpretations than either had perhaps planned due to their proximity – deterritorializing their projects as I argue we should deterritorialize the CGA. Their installations alongside the selection of archival material pushed me towards seeing Becoming-Curator as an approach to opening the CGA to new and unruly activation. Curiously, I didn't experiment with entangling artists' work in the following exhibition – although I would like to keep this practice alive.<sup>101</sup>

Kelly Jayne Jones installation prompted me to consider how alternate ways of holding history could be worked with – thinking beyond the chronological office of folders, and suggesting different ways in which the past was carried and communicated. This was something I would

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<sup>101</sup> In the 2024 exhibition, *40 Years of the Future:Painting* at Castlefield Gallery, the curator, Gass, employed this approach to spreading artists work through the gallery space rather than keeping each artist to their own space. It's something which I appreciate as bringing a more fluid texture and rhythm to an exhibition, rather than blocks of tone.

recommend in archival experimentation, and executed in the following exhibition, as I shall now discuss.

### ***Archives at Play 2, Introduction***

*Archives at Play 2 (AAP2)* ran from the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2023 through to the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2023. There was an opening event on the evening of Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup>, and a ‘Slow Saturday’ opening on the Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> – where no alcohol is served and the atmosphere is quieter. The exhibition received 1,154 visitors over 50 days of opening, averaging 23 visitors per day.<sup>102</sup> As per *AAP*, the exhibition made use of both the upstairs and downstairs of the gallery – although unlike *AAP*, this exhibition had no installations inside the space of the CGA.

The production of *AAP2* made use of budget from within Castlefield Gallery, and additional funding from the North West Consortium of Doctoral Training Partnerships (NWCDTP – the funders of this research) following a successful funding application. As a part of this additional funding, I commissioned an online 3d model of the gallery – to increase access to the exhibition and to think about the potential for archiving these kinds of models.<sup>103</sup> Because of this, a record of the exhibition is available online, and there is considerable archival potential in recording exhibitions in this way, at a relatively modest cost.<sup>104</sup> Having an online version of the exhibition means that anyone can look back at the presentation of the exhibition, and I can discuss decisions or intentions of exhibition making with people despite the

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<sup>102</sup> As with my previous figures, these are taken from the internal spreadsheet, where front of house volunteers use a handheld clicker to record the numbers of visitors and then enter that figure into a central sheet.

<sup>103</sup> The address at which you can find the online model is:  
<https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=ADxA4TcPCo8>

<sup>104</sup> The company I used to make the capture charge on a sliding scale according to the nature of the space being photographed. In the case of Castlefield, £350 covered the time to capture, create and edit the model – including information points in the model. There is then a £50 per year charge, and I covered two years of hosting in order to use the model in this research.

exhibition having long closed. The model offers a trace of exhibition activity significantly different from any currently held in the archive in content and experience. Rather than recording behind the scenes activity, or focussing on single spaces or works as with installation photographs, it allows navigation of the space, and the experience of moving through a total installation. Castlefield Gallery have produced an online model once before, during the Covid pandemic. Whilst restrictions were in flux, this model allowed artists to share their work more broadly than the physical exhibition might allow. However, the model was hosted on a mini-site which is now not working, so is lost from the CG archive website.<sup>105</sup>

*AAP2* was titled as such to couple it clearly with the first exhibition, to make visible the ongoing nature of this research. I wanted to show, through a 'sequel' exhibition, how previous activity at CG continues to have a bearing on contemporary work – referencing the CGA beneath the surface. The essential development from *AAP* was the adoption of BC as methodology for working with the CGA, which would entail engaging artists more closely with the materials of the CGA. BC provides the structure to think about bringing collaborators into an un-hierarchical exploration of the CGA, and how that experience can be framed and mediated – this is something discussed in the artists' projects below. The core of the exhibition was to bring constituents of the gallery into thinking about how the past plays a role in the construction of subjectivity, explored by bringing materials and ideas from the CGA to the surface of the gallery in new ways. The aim was to rethink how CG understood and carried its past, considering how it might reveal new ways to constitute or activate the archive.

As I wanted artists to spend longer responding to the CGA rather than presenting updates to existing work, this meant repercussions for the budget. It wouldn't be feasible to commission works which engaged closely with the

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<sup>105</sup> *Obstructions* was the exhibition, and the digital model is still findable via the artists websites. However, this digital loss is something I touch on in the introduction around the web archive. Similarly, external sites such as soundcloud or vimeo are used to host CG content which is at risk without care and management.

archive to suitably fill the exhibition space, and so in discussion with the CG curator, I proposed 2 commissions which would directly use the CGA, and 2 artists showing existing work contributing to the theme of the exhibition. Responding to the CGA would be Anna FC Smith, and a collaboration of George Gibson & Grace Collins. I chose these artists for their relationship to CG (who were part of the gallery history), and whose practice would fit with the collaborative deterritorializing approach in BC. Anna has been a CG Associate for some time, and was working on art which addressed rituals and communal folk practices. This interest in commonly held history was a perfect fit for the *AAP2* project, looking to open the CGA to new readings. George had been a CG associate, and had previously shown at CG, so was part of the gallery history. I approached George for her expertise in working with fan culture, making a connection between this archival project of re-animating traces of the past in unruly fashion, and the work of zines and fan fictioning she is knowledgeable about. George wanted to work with the writer and artist Grace Collins, someone I had worked with briefly in a previous job. I knew that Grace would bring an institutional criticality perfect for the practice of BC – in which critical curating, a questioning approach to the frameworks one operates within, is one of the core tenets.

I met with Anna, and George & Grace separately, and spoke to them about my research. It was incredibly useful to use my concept of five threads through the archive, explaining about the vastness of the archive and how threads (mine or others) could allow navigation and exploration. I also emphasised the presently submerged nature of the archive, and how it was important to bring these ideas and traces into the work - I wanted constituents to see pieces of the past in new ways through these commissions. BC was also present in our conversations, allowing me to talk first and foremost about making and discovering new connections rather than seeking previously ascribed positions (essential to the practice of Becoming, and central in BC). But also about curatorial translation (how might ideas in the artwork, and their relevance to the exhibition, be made clear), curatorial agency (how might we work together, and bring others into, working with the CGA), and critical curating (how might we challenge firmly held ideas in the

frameworks we were operating within). Following our meetings, Anna, George & Grace were able to spend around three or four days at CG to look through the archive material and gather research for their installations.

Alistair Woods and Gherdai Hassell would be presenting existing works which expanded the theme of the power of archives in identity and culture. Again, I wanted to bring constituents of CG into the exhibition: Alistair Woods is a founder a local artists studio in Manchester, and Gherdai Hassell had won a CG Artist Professional Development Award at the 2022 Manchester Open exhibition at the HOME gallery. I had seen their work through the network of events and conversations around CG, and knew they had projects which directly addressed archives. When I approached Alistair and Gherdai, I shared with them my research and methodology, and they were pleased to become collaborators in the research project.

In a marked difference to *AAP*, I made use of self-adhesive plotted vinyl lettering on the wall to introduce the artists' projects. Using wall text is not regular practice at CG, due to cost, time, and environmental impact. Instead, a gallery handout is used for information. In *AAP2*, I thought it would be useful to give context without requiring further consultation of a document – being already an information rich exhibition. I was also bearing in mind the precept of Curatorial Translation from my methodology of Becoming-Curator, looking to make clear the project meanings, and their intentions. For me, the wall text helped deliver on these expectations and was a useful addition to the exhibition. It grounded each body of work and made the exhibition more easily navigable. I will now turn to those bodies of work here, and discuss how they contribute to findings for working with the CGA. More attention is given to the work which directly engages with the CGA, but consideration is given to the other projects for their contribution to the curatorial research practice.

**George Gibson & Grace Collins - *i hope all is well and that life seems a little calmer for you now***

George & Grace were working directly with the CGA. Over 3 days of visiting and digging through the CGA, they selected 5 objects to act as keys for the 5 threads I identified through the archive. The threads were; 1. the idea of 'artist led' space, 2. decision making structures in CG, 3. connecting to the public, 4. foregrounding contemporary art, and 5. financial resilience. These five items were presented using vivid and unusual archive boxes, accompanied by 5 pieces of poetic writing on the selected thread. As part of the installation, people could write a wish for the future of CG, and galleries more widely, on a custom-made notepad and drop them into glass receptacles. These wishes would become a part of the CGA, creating an entry for visitors' thoughts into the archive – working towards my recommendations towards a more 'open' archive.<sup>106</sup> The installation can be seen in *figs. 30, 31 and 32*, and by using the online model (address in footnote 103).

The installation took up the whole of the upper gallery in CG, creating a space I considered a reliquary. Visitors were able to look through objects usually kept behind-the-scenes, out of sight in the archive. The minutes book in particular had an aura of a sacred text, kept safely inside the display cabinet. The written pieces next to each object tried to give visitors more to think about alongside each thread. Accompanying a scrappy back of house list of potential artists for an exhibition in 1991, the text features the line 'may we never paint for kings' (Gibson & Collins, 2023) – ruminating on the experience of the artist led space. This unusual reliquary was looking to make the CGA feel exciting, special and powerful – disturbing the usually submerged archive. I wanted to encourage the CGA as a space of discovery and interest – but not unrelatable, not as objects beyond personal meaning.

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<sup>106</sup> In the introduction of this thesis, I consider the value of introducing more voices to the CGA. My theoretical framework encourages non-homogenous players to contribute to the CGA, and my methodology stresses the importance of collaboration and experimentation.

This was achieved in the installation in two ways, the presentation, and the selection of objects.

First, the presentation of each object was crafted with incredible skill, creating a series of displays which played on the idea of the archive box, but made this usually staid equipment colourful and exuberant. This display made the archive something which seemed inviting, luxurious, and bright. George Gibson worked on the display boxes and used colours from the most recent CG identity rebrand – warm reds, yellows, and purples. George & Grace had been particularly drawn to the iconography of the early gallery logo featuring the three wild beasts (an oxen, a wolf, and a stag) and had made embossing stamps of their heads. Gold embossed beasts added a strange yet grand finishing touch to the boxes. This created a markedly different setting to the plastic report folders and magazine files which I considered in Chapter One. Each object had an air of something exciting through these reimagined archival boxes.

But ensuring that the CGA didn't become something valorised just for its own sake, George and Grace chose to work with unruly objects, that is, things which stretched and challenged the constitution of the archive. These included objects that were becoming obsolete or falling out of the constitution of the CGA – the VHS tape pilfered from Manchester School of Art, or a MiniDV tape of an event at CG from a big, jumbled box of other MiniDV tapes. It also included moments of something not going quite right, such as the standardised letter informing an unnamed artist that their work hadn't sold at the fundraising auction, or the mercenary list of potential artists for an upcoming exhibition slot considering who 'sells well' compared to who 'is interesting'. George and Grace wanted to share this messy, expansive notion of the archive as something distinctly human – making the CGA seem closer to the visitors who walked in. By presenting these unruly objects in their playful settings, I wanted a different kind of CGA to become thinkable for the constituents of the gallery. BC as a methodology was being enacted, with George & Grace as collaborators helping constituents from staff to audiences



to imagine the CGA in a new way, a measured experiment disrupting the archive.

A fostering of imagination was part of the process of the installation, George & Grace described their work as a ‘collaborative fictioning’ (Gibson & Collins, 2023). This encouragement to think differently about CG extended into the section for the visitor wishes.<sup>107</sup> We had discussed how incredible it was that 40 years ago a group of students had wished for a visual arts space that was missing for the city – then made it happen. The audience participation space encouraged this approach of wishing for something that wasn’t here as the first step to making a change. It was made clear in the wall text above the wish station that these wishes would be entering the CGA, creating a snapshot of reflection from visitors on the gallery space. My reservations as to audience participatory spaces stand from the earlier exhibition (see above section on archive material in *AAP*). However, in this instance, as part of the artists’ installation the invitation to contribute was at a distance from the host gallery – and I believe that this made a difference. Phrasing the contributions as ‘wishes’, creating a special notepad and pencil set, and making these traces a part of the archive, made for a fun experience and a range of interesting contributions. I refer to my recommendations in the introduction, that visitors might be encouraged to share feedback on shows when it is made clear that their comments will enter the archive of that exhibition. This way of working with the CGA invited new kinds of material into the archive.

There were challenges to working on this installation which was instructive regarding the vulnerability of the CGA. The MiniDV tape of the event at CG was from 2008, presented on a 7” x 5” screen – yet when I delightedly showed it to a colleague, they amazedly pointed themselves out. In a few minutes, we had identified a number of the others there, too. People working in across culture in Manchester, and internationally. Whilst the recording was a public event, I considered that there may not have been any

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<sup>107</sup> For a full list of the wishes, see Appendix 5.

notices of filming at the time, or statement of intent as to the recording. In comparison, today, CG request that an image of the notice of recording and intent starts the camera roll, video, or is read out in a sound recording. I managed to contact and get permission from the people we could identify, who were frequently quite delighted to hear that the recording existed and was being shown.<sup>108</sup> But what does this mean for the box of recordings in the gallery? What is their purpose if ethical treatment prohibits their use? What questions does this raise for recordings and media made today? A similar situation occurred with the mercenary list of artists who sold well or were interesting. Whilst conversations on this distinction might not be unusual in determining gallery programming (particularly when we remember that CG had a keen commercial aspect) it appears unkind to see it set down like this. Furthermore, 23 years on from the documents writing, there were names on the list of artists still working in Manchester. This led to conversations between George & Grace and I about what they would like to do – I suggested redaction, but they wanted to explore consent to show the list. I spoke to a couple of artists on the list, who both agreed to the full display, but it increasingly felt like this wasn't an enthusiastic consent, and we agreed that the piece needed to be redacted.

These challenges were resolved in ways which felt incredibly satisfying. Contacting people found from inside the CGA was always a positive experience, and a way of connecting to their past work or activity. *i hope all is well, and life seems a little calmer for you now* was an installation which I felt truly interrupted and activated the CGA. It used craft and imagination to bring knotty parts of the archive to light in new ways, and as thus was a successful validation of the progress of both BC as a methodology, and the findings in my theoretical framework. As a curatorial piece of work with the CGA, I felt this installation met both of my Aims.

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<sup>108</sup> I was quite delighted to see how it was the same chairs and tables used in the gallery from 15 years ago. This was a similar delight to discovering the same mugs in the 'News' section of the archive from almost 20 years ago. These are archival objects for me.

## **Anna FC Smith – *A Body Politic by The Name of The Guild of St. Luke***

Anna was working directly with the archive and spent 4 days in the gallery looking through the CGA. As an artist working in mixed media and with a passion for the aesthetics of rituals and guilds, Anna created an installation which imagined the CGA as something carried through folk myths and symbols. Using stories found in and around the CGA, Anna created a pageantry of banners and sculpture. A car trailer was fringed with material printed with watercolours referencing photos and stories found in the CGA. On the trailer stood a sculpture of an ox – one of the beasts of the old CG logo, and the symbol of St. Luke (patron saint of the guild of artists). On the wall above, four ceramic pendants represented CGs progress with artists in the city, and above them, three banners continued using the printed watercolour images. The installation filled the double height downstairs space of CG and can be seen in *figs. 33, 34, 35 and 36*, or by using the online model (address in footnote 103).

Anna had looked through the CGA and found meeting notes from the 1980s, from van purchases to issues with rodents. She had scanned press photographs of the founders installing the John Hoyland, and - as with George & Grace - been taken by the imagery of the three beasts logo. All these references had been woven into the images in the work, creating an installation incredibly rich with stories from CG history - but requiring considerable decoding. Each image related directly to text or image from within the archive. Even the chequerboard trailer top on which the oxen statue sat came from Sheila Seal's writing 'the game would quickly lose its appeal' (Seal, 1984 – see *fig. 5*). But there was no way for a visitor to know this unless they spoke to someone in the gallery. This had been an approach designed to activate the CGA between people, a communal history. It was also a reconnection to the early years of CG, where Sheila Seal or someone else would enthusiastically talk with visitors about the work (see Chapter Two). The idea was to make the CGA an archive communicated between constituents – artist, staff, and visitor, all had to become part of sharing a story of CG. It was a way of stirring up the CGA between people, with a

potential for embellishment or error. This approach was a great pleasure in tours, or events, where visitors were delighted by all the different connections across the work.<sup>109</sup> However, as the installation was downstairs, and the volunteer front of house person needed to remain predominantly upstairs, very few people were enquiring about the works. There might also have been a difference between how much someone from the Studio Association which ran the gallery (as it was in the early years) wanted to engage with visitors, compared to the current front of house volunteers. Going some way to addressing this, I printed a three page A3 handout which was laminated and kept next to the installation. Visitors could look through and find the stories and images which had inspired the work. However, this did significantly change an aspect of the work, and some visitors did not want to engage with any accompanying documentation, either.

Having experience of *A Body Politic...* as well as George & Grace's installation, and *Peripheral Vision* (see Chapter Two, and Constituent Activation section) suggests that good engagement with the CGA benefits greatly from a member of the CG team being on hand and willing to talk through the objects and ideas. There are a great many fascinating stories in the CGA which can connect to constituents across time, but they are stories which are told more easily from person to person than written down, and I think this kind of conversation in CG would be a good thing. This said, as per the debate between Lind and Hoffman from the introduction, there are visitors who want to enter discussions and those who want to simply enjoy looking at something in peace. What is needed for the CGA is a balance between the two, and Anna's work certainly has a considered mischief which can be enjoyed visually.

I argue that *A Body Politic...* compliments the installation by George & Grace in looking for new ways to animate the CGA – benefiting from my development of theoretical framework and methodology. Once again we see

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<sup>109</sup> Even an architecturally notable neighboring tower had made it into the work, which happened to be where Rick Astley's 'Never Gonna Give You Up' had been recorded. This breadth of connection was a pleasure to share.

a process of artist collaborators weaving the threads of the past into new patterns, helping us see connections and comparisons between past and present. Importantly, we see the artists working directly with materials from the CGA – although it's notable how George & Grace worked with the actual contents, whereas Anna used images and moments. Two approaches revealing different strengths; where George and Grace's work made the CGA seem exciting and powerful through presentation, Anna's work sought to make it lively and active through communication. I consider that there could be further work done in the direction Anna took.

### **Alistair Woods – Assorted Works**

Alistair Woods was showing seven paintings and two sculptures made in 2023, just prior to the exhibition. Each piece, through the signs, gestures, and media, layers historic and contemporary references. High and low culture are similarly blurred. The painted works appear as abstract, colourful pieces, with no immediate subject. Looking closer reveals Greek statuary behind a graffiti tag. Marks made with a lighter, like a bored teen on the bus, appear alongside fruit bowls of quince and pears. Signs and symbols are brought into relationships to form new associations, you are greeted by a Greek handling bust wearing a Naples football scarf, with a British Rail enamel pin. The works can be seen in *figs.* 37, 38 and 39, or by using the online model (address in footnote 103).

As one of the artists not working directly with the CGA, I included Alistair to develop the exhibition theme of bringing historic and contemporary references together in new patterns. This was the purpose of the commissions with the CGA, to spark new projects or readings of the archive, and Alistair's work demonstrated this idea using archives of art history and popular culture. All the titles of the paintings are taken from British sitcoms, yet many feature images from the canon of art. Exhibiting these works, I wanted to show how art can be a way for symbols to move out of their designated spaces and into new relationships – mirroring the aims of this research and my work with the CGA.

As with Anna's installation, Alistair's pieces contain a rich set of references which can be discussed, but have an instant and attractive visual appeal. Alistair has a passion for painting as a medium; the use of colour is thoughtful, and the paintings make use of materials including oil paint, leather dye, airbrush ink, marker pen, and chalk. But the intention in these works is to move the reading away from traditional hierarchies of high or low culture. The basic fan-made bust of the footballer Maradona sits in a protective case, given the same protection – and thus implied status – as the (replica) Greek bust. It is this encouragement in Alistair's work, to reappraise the systems of values in art of old versus new, fan or artist, high and low culture, that I wanted to extend to the CGA. Importantly, they make visible the kind of experimentation with hierarchy that BC encourages, questioning systems of value (such as the protective case for a fan made bust, or the 'Greek' handling bust wearing a football scarf). These works do not engage directly with the CGA, and are therefore subject to the same critique I have of my curation of parts of *AAP* – that they do not activate the CGA strongly enough. However, unlike my curation of work in *AAP*, due to my developments in methodology and theoretical framework, they clearly communicate the subject of entangling layers of history in order to see things differently.

### ***Onion Spawn Studies* by Gherdai Hassell**

*AAP2* featured six of Gherdai's *Onion Spawn Studies*, all from 2023 and previously unseen. Gherdai also produced a new sculpture to accompany the works, with the same look and ideas of the *Onion Spawn Studies*, but using fabric and found materials. *Onion Spawn Studies* are watercolour and collage works on A3 paper, mounted and framed. They loosely take the shape of an onion as it sprouts roots and shoots, depicted in bright watery washes, with body features (eyes, hands, lips) cut from fashion magazines and worked into the pieces. The works can be seen in *figs.* 40, 41 and 42, or by using the online model (address in footnote 103).

Gherdai's artistic practice has focussed on examining formations of diasporic identity, and the impact of cultural history on the present - *Onion Spawn Studies* continues this work. As a black Bermudian artist living in England, Gherdai references the text '*Mind the Onion Seed: Black "Roots" Bermuda*' by Nellie Musson (1979), which describes the history of the onion as a plantation crop of Bermuda – a British colony from 1684 to the present day. Musson's book considers the role of the onion plantations in shaping the identity of those who were forced to work them, and the relationship the onion has to Bermudian identity. In *Onion Spawn Studies*, the onion becomes a loaded symbol, combining the metaphor of an onion to describe a layered identity with the specific associations to Bermudian heritage. These entangled layers of history and identity are further complicated by Gherdai's use of collage – where images of black women from fashion magazines are inserted among the roots and shoots of the onion spawn.

*Onion Spawn Studies* is not an answer to the hovering question of how subjectivity is formed amidst history, self, and culture. But it does offer an eloquent object in which these forces are brought together to create further dialogue. I found these artworks valuable in tours and conversations, to ask what archives are carried in our bodies, and what archive structures are we surrounded and bombarded by? How do these archives interact and coalesce around us? In Gherdai's work I see a grappling with Haraway's notion of Cat's Cradle (see Chapter One). There was the interplay of nature and technoscience, history and culture, Bermudian colonisation and black culture as depicted in fashion magazines. Gherdai took these referents and wove them into new figures, shared with the audiences of AAP2.

With both Gherdai and Alistair's work, I question what the effect of presenting them throughout the exhibition, rather than keeping them separate, could have been. Keeping the projects distinct appears as the standard course of action, given each body of works' collective themes – whilst remaining relevant to the exhibition overall. However, both bodies of art would have sat well in relationship with the new commissions, perhaps adding different ways of considering the commissions specific to the CGA,

and vice versa. I can see an argument that this is the kind of experimentation with traditional exhibition approaches which BC would encourage.<sup>110</sup> This kind of reflection on exhibition making has been invaluable in developing my research into the CGA, and how it might be activated. To see each exhibition as part of an ongoing process of experimentation with the archive, uncovering new connections or approaches. I will now conclude with observations from the exhibition making process.

### **Archives at Play Exhibitions - Conclusions**

Across both exhibitions, I learnt more about the CGA by working with collaborators, and namely the artists. This was a multifaceted learning, with aspects of the CGA revealed through exhibition making, as well as being the subject of the artwork. Artists' requests to show certain objects from the CGA raise questions of ethics, or requests to work in the spaces of the CGA show the pressures on the room. This said, seeing what objects and ideas the artists were drawn to suggest the parts of the CGA which retain a strong attraction. The graphic logo of the three beasts proved to be a recurring motif, suggesting an interest in more striking visual identities for CG. The mechanics of the gallery fascinated the artists (finances and decision making processes), although this might have been an interest particular to the position of an artist. From Chester's work, through to George & Grace and Anna, the commissions delighted by bringing ideas from the CGA which were less about gallery milestones and narrative successes than the strange and symbolic. If the CGA would become a thriving site of experimentation, then these exhibitions suggest it is the strange and complicated which would make the best material for engagement.

The artists demonstrated the diverse ways in which the CGA might be animated, as well as how it might be conceived in greater breadth. When

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<sup>110</sup> Although more pragmatically, this kind of presentation may have caused an issue with the use of the space, perhaps requiring a bunching up of works around the commissions. In addition, Alistair and Gherdai's works would have struggled to be as clearly identified with the cut vinyl wall text.



Kelly Jayne Jones created an installation using materials found in the storerooms of CG, visitors responded to a material history made spiritual - the archive of CG through readymade sculpture. In some ways, this was an approach shared by Chester Tenneson, plucking readymade sentences from the CGA – yet Chester’s work was about the CGA as self-portrait, his own thread through the CGA. By working in the broad definition of the CGA (a wider network of objects than currently constitutes the CGA, coupled with a framework conscious/critical of the dynamics by which the CGA is constituted) Kelly and Chester made wildly differing projects, both using traces of the CGA in their own style. It is a testament to the versatility of the CGA.

However, it wasn’t only collaboration with artists which led to new ways of considering the CGA. By being present in the exhibitions, I learnt how interesting the CGA (in its broad conception) can be for visitors to the gallery – for other gallery workers, students, or families, each visitor had reflections on the work. Whether it was their own relationship to personal archives, discovering more about CG, or to explore the strange and inspiring ideas the CGA holds. Sharing stories of horses wandering through the gallery space, climbing walls erected, or people suspended, were things that visitors wanted to hear about. Equally, the CGA was a way to talk about contemporary art history. The role of the gallery in Helen Chadwick’s final commission, a typed essay by Frank Bowling, an early Jordan Baseman video, or exhibiting Turner Prize winner, Veronica Ryan. I felt through the exhibitions that visitors appreciated knowing that they were part of something strange and important when they visited CG, and this could be achieved through the CGA. It relates to the foundational tenets of the CG as somewhere to learn, with a knowledgeable person present to discuss the gallery.

The exhibitions involved projects not directly addressing the CGA in both *AAP* and *AAP2*, although in very different ways. In *AAP* I presented artworks to draw analogies between themselves and the CGA, showing projects which addressed the power of hidden structures as per Gregory

Herbert or Yan Wang Preston. However, because of my hypothesis of the CGA as a restrictive influence, I denied any involvement of the CGA itself (as discussed above). In *AAP2*, Gherdai and Alistair's works were part of an exhibition directly about the CGA, furthering a conversation rather than drawing oblique analogies. I see Alistair's work most closely in relation to George & Grace's project of bringing historic traces directly into new relationships and settings to change how we see them. Gherdai's project is more aligned with Anna's practice of interrupting the transmission of history and culture, creating imaginative new nodes of reflection. In this way, I argue that projects not directly addressing the CGA can still become a valid part of investigating the archive, on the condition that they are part of a larger exhibition or activity rooted clearly in the CGA.

This perspective comes from having conducted this work across two exhibitions, allowing for reflection and development. It was only by testing an approach to the CGA in *AAP* that I could determine my curatorial methodology of BC, so influential in the process of curating *AAP2*. Following *AAP* I realised the importance of involving the CGA in its broad definition – the spaces, objects, actors, situations and the decisions shaping them. This was a shift in theoretical framework as discussed in Chapter One. But how to work with the archive was equally important. I wanted to resist any influence to imitate the past, so an emphasis on openness to experimentation was essential, and I didn't want to fashion a new institutional voice for the CGA, so collaborators would be necessary. Reflecting on Milevska's essay 'Becoming-Curator' following *AAP*, I realised that it could be turned into an approach for working with the CGA. BC would address the findings from *AAP*, encouraging experimentation and collaboration as foundational ideas. BC wouldn't privilege the final exhibition as the sole site of meaning (encouraging more activity with the CGA throughout the process as with *Back on Track* or other constituents), but respects the exhibition as somewhere to share ideas. *AAP2* was thus collaborative, critical, and ongoing, a process of experimentation with the CGA.

BC developed my thinking around the use of the CGA, and how to communicate this with the artists. Because of BC, I felt able to commission artists with a far more specific brief, without feeling overly prescriptive. This said, I have no wish to detract from the findings of *AAP*, or position the exhibition as less than *AAP2*. Rather, they are part of an ongoing process of investigation into the CGA, and this is a key finding of my conclusion – the CGA should be something kept active through exhibition, even if that must at times rely on solely ‘paracuratorial’ methods. In my theoretical framework I apply Haraway’s notion of Cat’s Cradle as something that must be passed between constituents to the CGA, building a repertoire of new patterns. This process is what both exhibitions should be seen as part of. Within the exhibitions were smaller, constituent led interventions into the CGA (discussed in Chapter Two) – activity which Hoffman might deride as ‘paracuratorial’ – but which might take place outside of specific exhibitions such as *AAP*, or *AAP2*, to keep the CGA lively.

Whether through talks with groups such as Back on Track, alongside students as per *Peripheral Vision*, or through exhibitions like *AAP*, bringing the CGA into the ongoing activity of the gallery uncovers new ways for constituents to connect with CG. Maintaining archive activity reveals the importance and value of the CGA. Following this discussion of the practical facet of my research, I will now turn to my conclusions from the project.

## Conclusions

In this conclusion, I draw together findings on working with the Castlefield Gallery archive (hereafter CGA) from throughout this thesis. They are the results of my experimentation through a practice of curation, uncovering a greater understanding of the CGA and how it might be activated. Reflecting on each Chapter, I present my conclusions, and the implications of this research beyond CG, before proposing recommendations to Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG) in regards of the CGA, and finally ideas for further research and limitations to this research project.

The CGA is a challenging resource to work with, which has great potential to contribute to the activity of CG through a curatorial methodology. It is wide-ranging in nature, resulting from a limited archival strategy, and because of this, it contains objects which vary in practical application, aesthetic value, or that include information requiring further ethical clearance. These features make for a rich seam of discovery, whilst making it difficult to employ the range of materials in artistic commissions, or to open the CGA to collaborators. The team at CG might look at instituting a more general approach to retaining a selection of documentation, including objects not currently included (such as correspondence or budgets) but, as discussed in my Introduction, it could also go beyond the current understanding of the CGA. A more ambitious archival strategy might look to keep unusual objects from projects, challenge the spaces of the CGA by changing the format from A4 documents, or bring a wider range of voices into the archive. As we saw in the Introduction, some of these ideas are already entering archival practice – keeping objects such as a dandelion seed from an exhibition, or ‘earth from Formosa’, and archiving visitor comments. But even with the current approach to the archive, my Archives at Play project has shown that as challenging as the CGA is to work with, it is also a resource which can be incredibly exciting, inspiring, and informative for constituents. It would be to the benefit of CG for it to become a more active, unruly, part of gallery life.

## **Conclusions from the Introduction**

In the introduction to this thesis, I established the background to this research, before presenting a portrait of Castlefield Gallery (hereafter CG) and the CGA. At the outset I asserted that CG conduct valuable work in supporting and exhibiting artists of Manchester and the region, doing so with resources subject to intense competition. This is the ground to my conclusions and recommendations – that work with the CGA should be seen as an opportunity, rather than identification of a perceived failure of action. This said, I argue that the CGA should become a more utilised resource in the delivery of the education and projects which the gallery offers.

In my portrait of the CGA, I set out to do two things. The first is to give the first detailed look at the constitution and status of the archive as it stands in the gallery, to understand the subject on which this research is focussed. The second is then to extend an understanding of the CGA beyond the objects and into a system of dynamics, showing how the decisions around the archive are far from neutral, but impact the selection, retention and use of the CGA. When looking at the room in which the CGA is kept, I found that the archival function was secondary to the pragmatic need for a meeting room space, but that the room (as archival site) had accumulated traces in unexpected ways. The prints in the plan chest, paintings on the wall, MiniDVs in the boxes, magazines and publications, all held a wildly diverse, rich history. However, this archive is submerged, sinking out of sight of the constituents of the gallery. The choice of objects entering the CGA is similarly reducing, with a default to digital ‘archiving’ instead of correspondence or plans entering the historic traces. These are issues of the team at CG valuing the CGA as a resource worth nurturing and investing in. Nurture is something which we see happening when we look at the actors in the CGA. The actors currently responsible for the archive upkeep, and primarily Leslie (as part of the whole staff team), are bringing diverse and unruly traces into the CGA, increasing the possibility for exciting future interactions – and this should be encouraged. However, when I consider the current situations of the archive, I find very few instances of the CGA being regularly exposed to a

public audience, the notable exception being the poster from the first exhibition in the toilet. This again supports a finding of the CGA as a resource which was underutilised within the gallery.

My work with the CGA suggests that when talking about the archive, we must acknowledge more than the objects in a designated space and see it as a wide-ranging network of points and dynamics. From the shutters on the gallery to the plants taken home by staff, from the store cupboards to the decisions of digital storage, my concept of the broad archive welcomes these points into activity. The CGA should become understood in this broad archive sense, to fully realise the potential for its activity – positioning it as something engaged with on a far more regular and personal level. It moves the CGA beyond a set of folders, and into the life of the gallery and its constituents.

From my in-depth consideration of the CGA, I reported on the kinds of objects held in the archive, a huge diversity of material, and in some cases, sensitive information or recordings. But this varied and difficult contents needn't prohibit activating the archive. As I have found across the exhibitions and collaborations, there are ways of working with the archive which maintain ethical use, whilst acknowledging the many artists, staff, and audiences involved in the history of the gallery. Indeed, making visible these constituents role in the history of CG is something which would signpost the gallery as a vital part of the city culture, significant to the education and creative scene of the city of Manchester.

These are important findings in this research; that the CGA is presently a submerged resource, and that by activating it CG might connect more with their constituents. That part of activating the CGA is to understand it in a far broader sense, bringing the archive closer to the daily life of the gallery. An active CGA would then allow artists, audiences, staff and students to see themselves as part of a network spanning local artists' studios to Turner Prize winners. This stems from valuing and activating the CGA.

## Conclusions from Theoretical Framework

In Chapter One, I presented the evolution in my thinking on how we should frame an understanding of the CGA and work therein. It is important to observe that these developments arise from the ongoing exhibition making process, and continual work exploring the CGA, rather than taking place exclusively theoretically. I argue for the activation of the CGA as an iterative process, which is why it's necessary to stress active development. The theoretical position I arrive at is ultimately Harawarian, proceeding from a post-structural lineage. I position Haraway's paper, 'A Game of Cat's Cradle' (1994) as grappling with a central concern of working in the archive, be that CGA or more abstractly; how do we remain open to experimentation within the system we inhabit? What interrupts activity from congealing around power, tradition, and convenience? My use of Haraway provides practical advice that I will surmise here.

First, work with the CGA should be an ongoing practice. This means working with the CGA not just on anniversaries or special occasions, but as a strand of activity running through the work of CG. This might be in student exhibitions, events with artists, projects for volunteers or placements, or asking staff to engage with the archive. It could take place online, in the gallery, at events, or out in education settings. This is the move, for Haraway, away from a zero-sum game of victory or loss, and towards an open-ended process of exploration - 'however modestly, however partially, however much without either narrative or scientific guarantees.' (Haraway, 1994:62). This exploration will keep the CGA active.

Second, this activation of the CGA must happen *with* constituents, not just initiated within the gallery. It should engage 'nonhomogenous ... nonisomorphic ... sometimes mutually repellent webs of discourse' (Haraway, 1994:69). Finding new connections in the CGA, keeping the archive active, will be more likely to happen when multiple partners can use it to weave their own patterns, rather than meet expectations of use. This is what will keep the CGA unruly. To paraphrase another of my key theorists, Irit Rogoff, it will

allow us to learn things we may not have intended to (Rogoff, 2014). This is a great potential strength to the archive.

Third, work with the CGA must intervene by using the objects and systems of the archive. When writing ‘Textual rereading is never enough’ (Haraway, 1994:62) or encouraging us towards ‘materialized refiguration’ (Haraway, 1994:62), Haraway is telling us that to truly understand how the CGA works, and thus might work otherwise, we must interrupt its existing traces and systems. This ensures that we keep our activity focussed on the practicalities of the CGA, and not an abstract notion of ‘archive’ – something learnt from the process between *AAP* and *AAP2*.

My theoretical framework traced a move from the cultural sector engaging with archives an abstract idea, to the practicalities and possibilities of work with actual archives. In doing so, I discuss how archives are framed as powerful forces in preserving values, or overcoming them, what Derrida termed their ‘institutive and conservative... Revolutionary and traditional’ potential (Derrida, 1995:07). The CGA should be seen as a powerful force in the future of CG. Derrida proposes the notion of radical Play as a method for making and remaking our own worlds (Derrida, 1927), but we needn’t become Derridean scholars to enact this concept. It is present in Lisa Dams’ notion of preserving the complexity and contradiction within archives (Dams, 2012), and in Hal Foster’s ‘anarchival’ projects (Mereweather, 2006) encouraging a reframing of complex relationships between past, present, and future. Both approaches resist flattening narratives of the past, insisting on opening participation in history. The CGA can become active, unruly, and importantly, powerful, when we understand it within the framework I propose.

## **Conclusions from Using the Archive**

Chapter Two presented uses of the archive. I began by using objects from the CGA to stimulate reflection on the foundations and trajectory of CG, before considering instances of using the CGA alongside constituents of the gallery. In this chapter, I share my concept of ‘threads’ as an approach to



navigating the CGA. As with my theoretical framework, I developed these uses through ongoing work with the archive. I will stress again: whether spending time reading through the folders, opening the archive to artists, or helping placements prepare ‘archive stories’ – it is ongoing activity which makes the CGA something exciting to share, and valuable to use.

Looking back at stories of CG in the CGA can support perspective on contemporary practices in the gallery. We see the high value placed on someone being present in the gallery to share the gallery ethos, the commercial aspect of the gallery, and the educational dimension. All of these are still fundamental to CG, but of course against a very different social background – I don’t believe it is instructive, therefore, to try and judge the actions of one time against the other.<sup>111</sup> However, it is productive to follow the story through the archive – to start by reading that CG are ‘committed to the traditional values of painting and sculpture’ in 1984 (*fig. 5* - Seal, Artists Newsletter), and then trace that commitment, asking whether, and why, it is still true today. This is using the CGA to gain perspective, and is something evidenced in a popular social media post celebrating International Women’s Day.<sup>112</sup> It is part of keeping the CGA active, although I would add the caveat that the CGA should not remain activated only from within the gallery team, as per my conclusion to engage diverse constituents.

My concept of threads has been invaluable in activating the CGA. It encompassed the ideas of differing routes through the archive, and an idea of stringing different objects and points of the archive together. In this way, threads are more than themes, although threads can be used to propose themes through the CGA. Using threads meant I could introduce recurring motifs through the CGA to artists, groups, or any other constituent of the gallery, before proposing that they could identify their own threads. This was a practice which allowed a way into using the CGA, but more could be done

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<sup>111</sup> In the chapter, I look at how certain ideas seem to be recurring, notably, the language of ‘dynamism’ in the Arts Council England – but whilst certain factors seem to echo through time, the circumstances in which CG operate are too multifaceted to compare eras neatly.

<sup>112</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/castlefieldgall/p/C4QgPpJN-y9/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/castlefieldgall/p/C4QgPpJN-y9/?img_index=1)

to create a usable archive. I collected all the text from the 'Archive' section of the website into a single document, meaning terms could be searched, and then cross referenced in the physical archive – but this is a very temporary solution. More facility for searching the CGA would mean greater constituent engagement.

The CGA can be a resource for working with diverse constituents around CG, and across varied settings. From Castlefield Forum to Back on Track, Chapter Two shows how I was able to use the CGA to engage people in the work of CG, from advocacy to education. This demonstrated how valuable the CGA could be as a resource, and how versatile. The CGA needn't be limited to a history of CG, but rather can be utilised in many ways. From this research, I see the potential of the CGA as an educational resource as particularly striking. As a repository of so much art history, and with regional relevance, it can be used to discuss changing attitudes across a huge number of subjects. One of the most involved case studies in this regard was *Peripheral Vision* as a partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), leading to an exhibition of CGA material, and my following finding.

The CGA can connect past and future constituents of the gallery. By exhibiting objects from the CGA, *Peripheral Vision* brought the historic creative work of artists back to the surface of the gallery, through a project of arts education. This is the kind of activity which should take place more frequently. Not only does this activate the CGA in an unruly fashion, encouraging constituents to find their own threads through the archive, it demonstrates how artistic practice in the gallery is valued, and valuable beyond the run of the exhibition. When an artist whose work had been included in *Peripheral Vision* came into the gallery, they were thrilled to see how their practice was still meaningful to the future constituents of the gallery. Allowing groups to represent submerged traces of CG history not only actively values the past, it creates new networks of constituents and potential discovery.

## **Conclusions from Becoming-Curator as Methodology**

Chapter Three proposes my design of a potential curatorial methodology, Becoming-Curator (hereafter BC). It looks in depth at the theoretical underpinning of Becoming as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari and focusses on the construction of a curatorial methodology, rather than leading directly to conclusions for the CGA. However, I found BC to be a methodology ideally formulated for working with the CGA and other archives, particularly within the framework I have proposed. To demonstrate how BC posits and affirms several approaches which recur through this research into the CGA, I will summarise how precepts of BC overlap with my conclusions for the CGA.

In my methodology of BC, we set aside trying to replicate how things have been done before and emphasise an ongoing process of discovering how things might be otherwise. This corresponds to ongoing work with the CGA to keep it lively and valued. In attempting this, BC cautions that we will be working in systems which reaffirm certain practices as more worthwhile than others, and that we can try to experiment with evading these majoritarian positions. For the CGA, this means not using the archive to valorise history, but to invite unexpected readings and uses. These two facets of BC drive towards keeping the CGA active and unruly. To achieve this, BC makes clear that we should bring collaborators into our curatorial project. This is a conclusion that repeats through this research, in tandem with enabling our collaborators to explore the archive free from expectations, potentially subverting institutional readings of the CGA. I consider it a product of a cohesive approach that conclusions overlap between different areas – for example, the importance of involving diverse groups of people in archival projects arises in my theoretical model, my methodology, and from experiments with using the archive.

In my theoretical framework, I draw a link between Derrida's use of the word 'becoming' in his description of radical play (Derrida, 1967:292), and the use of Becoming for Deleuze and Guattari. I consider how radical play

was Derrida's proposal for how people might construct discourse without seeking to replicate a ruptured structure of meaning, or to be practical, how we might make and remake aspects of society without emulating historic power structures. This precept is central to the practice of BC, a curatorial methodology designed to evade and experiment with majoritarian positions. I have therefore designed a curatorial approach as a method of play with the CGA, as per Aim 2 of this research.

As a final thought on my work in designing a potential curatorial methodology, I would stress once again that further testing and evaluation on Becoming-Curator would be needed before this approach could be considered a methodology. This testing and evaluation could look in-depth at how Becoming-Curator might capture data from workshops and conversations, or whether further analysis steps need to be factored into the approach.

### **Conclusions from The Exhibitions of Archives at Play**

The exhibitions *Archives at Play* (AAP) and *Archives at Play 2* (AAP2) have been the core of this project, bringing together the direction of research and collaboration. Even when there was no direct exhibition output created from activity (such as the Venture Arts session) the exhibition was the framework, or container, into which findings from the activity would sit. This is how I reconcile the debate between Maria Lind & Jens Hoffman around the value of exhibition making in curatorial practice in the introduction of this chapter. However, exhibition making can take many directions – from using the whole gallery space, to a couple of shelving units, to a selection of images. Exhibition making is how we should disturb the CGA, so long as we remember the previous conclusions – it should be part of an ongoing, collaborative, unruly process, directly involving the CGA. A well-made exhibition, featuring objects and ideas from the CGA, with sufficient rather than overwhelming interpretation – and the willingness to share stories – will connect constituents of CG through the CGA.

Collaborations come through artists invited to investigate the CGA, students learning more by connecting objects, staff members sharing their personal interests, or audience members sticking one archival reproduction next to another on the wall of the gallery. All these interruptions to the CGA took place in this research, leading to a greater shared experience of CG among constituents.

### **Implications Beyond Castlefield Gallery**

Whilst focussed on my work with CG, this research contributes to the discourse on the role and possibility of the archive for art galleries more widely. In pursuing my research questions and experimenting with uses of the archive, I advance a movement of arts professionals and researchers for whom archives remain a site of power and potential, to be mobilised and investigated. Here I want to reflect briefly on some of my lines of enquiry and conclusions which might be followed in the gallery sector more broadly, and particularly in the context of how galleries are thinking and working with their archives now.

Throughout this research I have advocated for the archive to become a space of ongoing activity (with respect for the pressures faced by galleries presently). This argument is predicated on the notion that an archive can be used to bring constituents closer to the work and history of a gallery, as well as to each other, maintain the life of artistic projects, and inspire new ones. Essentially, this position addresses the question – what is the archive in a gallery for? My research suggests that galleries should be minded that holding records just for the sake of posterity is a missed opportunity. During my time in the CGA, I was delighted to assist with offering information towards two catalogues raisonnés for notable British artists. But as rewarding as recording CGs place in the career of established artists is, this neglects the vast majority of those who have been involved in CG. Similarly, as I write in the introduction, anniversaries are frequently points at which the gallery excavate the archive. But such displays run the risk of flattening complex

histories into heroic narratives - something I show Lisa Darms warning against in Chapter Two. The Bluecoat arts centre in Liverpool is an example of somewhere experimenting with what else their archive might achieve. Presently in 2025, a permanent archive exhibition in the 'Vide' space (an internal void housing the lifts and stairs, set apart from the galleries but a reasonable sized area) showcases some of the materials from a 65 year history. Predominantly flyers and posters, visitors can get closer the history of the centre – with its history of showing local artists, musicians and poets through turbulent political eras for Liverpool. There is an appreciation here that the archive can connect with the Bluecoat's constituents, letting them get to know the 'personality' of the organisation, changing their relationship to the centre. This engagement with the archive is admirable, and my research would suggest that art spaces making room to present the archive, such as the Bluecoat, might consider two key further points. The first is to make this presentation of the archive more active. Commit to changing the exhibitions, opening the materials to different threads through the archive to keep the display (and the archive) feeling fresh and suprising. The second is the involvement of diverse groups in the archive exhibition. It's understandable for the organisation to initiate their archive display, but for the archive to reveal something unexpected, or become truly unruly, it needs to be opened to outside influences. In spaces such as the Bluecoat, who work regularly with local creative people (their Blue Room programme is an ongoing workshop for neurodivergent adults, for example) this combining of audiences and archive could be a straightforward step.

I have mentioned the group of museums, galleries, and academic partners, L'Internationale, in Chapter Two – they published the book *The Constituent Museum*. This group of creative partners also address the archive as a catalysing force in rethinking the gallery or museum space, and I see this research in context with some of their thinking. In her book *Radical Museology*, art historian and critic Claire Bishop looks at three of the partner galleries – the Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and the Muzej sodobne umetnosti Metelkova (MSUM) in Ljubljana. Bishop considers how the three organisations experiment with the potential of the art

space with their publics, and archives factor largely in their process. Bishop points to the Reina Sofia's display of Picasso's *Guernica*, and how before reaching the painting, visitors see propaganda posters or magazines from the era of the Spanish Civil War – archival material 'to ground Guernica in social and political history' (Bishop, 2013:40). From the Van Abbemuseum, Bishop notes how their archive is 'constantly integrated into the displays' (Bishop, 2013:65) in a move to root the institution as accountable for its cultural position, eschewing the relativism of 'cultural entrepreneurship'. In MSUM, Bishop finds a series of archive displays, showing materials from historic projects at MSUM's sister gallery, the Moderna Gallerija (administered by the same team), a Punk Museum (Slovenian punk scene from 1977-1987), and an oral history project talking to artists of the area.

In each of these cases, the archive is a part of the gallery's / museum's approach to changing the relationship with their constituents. We see ways of experimenting with what people expect from art spaces (situating the organisation and collection more closely in society and politics) and encouraging greater institutional transparency. This kind of activation of the archive, bringing constituents closer to the institution, is something this research endorses. Where I believe my research might contribute to the thinking from L'Internationale group, is that whilst I admire this focus on the active and open uses of the archive, it can perhaps appear as prescriptive, or overly academic, to visitors. Bishop notes of MSUM's overabundance of documentation 'every visitor has to become her own curator' (Bishop, 2013:55) – something which might be off putting, or unsuitable to a casual audience. The institution wields the archive, and the visitor is presented with an unmanageable sea of data, or a cherry-picked viewpoint. This is where this research would argue for opening the archive to constituents on an ongoing basis – keeping modest activity iterating in the gallery, learning from the projects as they progress. This said, these spaces may indeed hold numerous small interventions or activities in which the archive is explored from a non-institutional vantage – and that it is in the nature of modest interventions to not be recorded in journals and websites.

The above are just a few examples of where organisations are trying ways that their archives can contribute as a more active part of the gallery, with my thoughts on how they could develop this activity. With this in mind, I want to offer practical recommendations for CG on how the archive might achieve its potential, before clarifying my contribution to knowledge from this research project.

## **Recommendations**

I want to propose five recommendations to act on my conclusions. I have deliberately kept these recommendations succinct, whilst giving concrete direction as to the action required. I believe that these recommendations continue the work of Aim 1 of this research, disturbing the story of CG as structured by the archive and deepening the relationship between CG and its constituents.

- **Nurture the archive.** This is my primary recommendation – that the CGA is a valuable resource, and should be attended to as such. Time, money, and skills, should be dedicated to the archive, demonstrating its importance to the gallery. This should include ensuring that a digital archive is present, or that the physical archive is well maintained. The CGA should be held as a resource recognising that it evidences CGs significant contribution to the art history of England, not just in historic terms, but for artists presenting work there today. This would change the relationship to the CGA for constituents of CG.
- **Grow the archive.** More, and more diverse, contents should enter the archive. This should involve archiving correspondence whilst being mindful to redact any sensitive information and archiving more exhibition preparation materials (budgets, plans, meeting notes etc). Beyond this, there should be a drive to include less expected materials – let visitors know that their comments are archived, ask volunteers to prepare archival reflections (recording or written), and



moving towards keeping objects. This primes the CGA as a more attractive space of discovery and activation.

- **Make the archive an ongoing part of CG activity.** The CGA should not only be used on special occasions (anniversaries etc), but utilised as a valued resource for exhibitions, communications, events, advocacy, and education, throughout the CG programme. It is a facet of the gallery which excites and draws constituents into the work of CG, carrying traces of strange and meaningful activity. What's more, it is a resource which the gallery has available at no additional cost. This will keep the CGA an active, lively facet of the gallery.
- **Invite people to use the archive.** Constituents should be enabled to find new connections and uses for the CGA. This is part of keeping the archive active, inviting collaborators to use the CGA as a resource for their own ends, but it also reveals less institutional narratives through the archive. Inviting diverse collaborators resists convenient or traditional systems of use and could reveal areas of interest that might not be apparent from within the gallery. It will help the CGA to grow in terms of functionality, as well – uncovering more versatile practices for using the CGA. This will preserve the CGA as an unruly, challenging space.
- **Create tools to use the archive.** If the CGA is to be an active part of the gallery programme alongside collaborators, better tools for navigating the archive are needed. During this research, I experimented with creating a searchable text file (containing text from the online archive), and making digital scans of public facing CGA material, both of which allowed for greater archive activity. Creating more professional versions of these tools would be an effective start to enabling archive use. This would allow for constituent use of the archive, keeping the archive active and unruly.

These would be my immediate recommendations for the team at CG, but further research might also clarify the efficacy of work with the CGA. Before we end, I would like to clarify my contribution to knowledge, before considering some of the limitations of this research, and notions of further research which have struck me during this project.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

Though my five recommendations above are tailored to CG, the findings of this research should find resonance in other arts organisations. In my Theoretical Framework (Chapter One), and in the section above on Implications Beyond Castlefield Gallery, I give examples of how archives – both particular organisational archives and conceptual notions of established dynamics – continue to be frequent sources of inspiration and subjects of critique for artistic projects. Questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ we work with archives are not going to disappear quickly. Conversely, when I have spoken with arts professionals at institutions across Manchester and Liverpool, the archives of these spaces came be framed as difficult to work with, under resourced, or unworthy of attention. This research contributes a framework for conceiving the archive of arts organisations as an active and inspiring participant in the life of a gallery, through my theoretical foundation and particular curatorial approach. I have experimented with different ways of imagining archives through exhibitions, installations, events and workshops, and hope to further the discourse on how archives might be more productively activated.

I have created a critical framework, drawing on Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida, which endorses ‘playing’ with the archive as something inspiring and productive – a framework which could be shared with gallery peers. Drawing on the findings considered in detail in Chapter One, other galleries / museums might consider working with their archives differently. My research suggests that the first step would be to prompt the archive into activity, and ideally an indefinite period of ongoing activations. In this research, this required someone to lead the activity (myself) and a situation –

whether an exhibition, workshop, or event. The output needn't be spectacular, or even public, what is important is starting to work with the archive. When Haraway writes 'One does not "win" at Cat's Cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open ended than that.' (Haraway 1994:70) it is pointing to the crux being in the activity, accentuating the benefits of continual experimentation, reflection and discovery. When galleries deploy their archive at isolated points, there is no practice or experience to call on, it is an unused muscle. Next, the archive should be played with by diverse constituents. Galleries looking to learn from this research should consider that activation of the archive from within can only achieve so much. To see something that, to paraphrase Rogoff, the museum doesn't want to show you, new players must be invited into the archive. In this research, this was achieved through artistic commissions, student interventions, and events in which the archive was explored from outside the gallery. And in addition to the posters and press clippings, museums and galleries should consider playing with the structures of the archive as well. The rooms, the rules, the systems which decide what enters or what is excluded from the archive. This is 'to get at how worlds are made and unmade, in order to participate in the process' (Haraway, 1994: 62). In this step galleries and museums might learn about the strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities of their archival structures. Again, this research invited artists and publics into the archive space, finding ways the archive might become more enmeshed in gallery life.

Alongside this theoretical development, I adapted a proposed curatorial methodology from an essay by Suzana Milevska, structured around a practical set of approaches to an archive. Firstly, picturing a curatorial project through Deleuze and Guattari's lens of Becoming encourages a willingness to move away from hierarchies of value – or more prosaically, away from what galleries and museums might take for granted as outcome or activity. Who sets the framework for the project? How might constituents work with the archive in a new way? These are the kinds of questions that a gallery or museum might open up, in order to allow for a movement of Becoming. But adherents to this way of working should remain conscious of the advice by Deleuze and Guattari, that dosages matter, and

that interventions should be modest – a level of security is desirable to enable further experimentation. As I have written, this is only a potential methodology at present, requiring further evaluation. But I would like to see this approach tested further as a rationale for data gathering and analysis. The premise of doing things otherwise, and my adaptation of Milevska's strands of curatorial translation, critical curating and curatorial agency, are such a fitting rubric for this kind of archival experimentation that I hope it could benefit other galleries or museums.

Finally, my practice as a curator, aligned with my theoretical underpinning, and guided by the curatorial approach of *Becoming-Curator*, has demonstrated the value of research-by-curation. I would dearly like to see other galleries and museums investigating their own archives and practices by giving their curators the time and resources to experiment upon them, through the skills they already possess. Through two exhibitions, eight events, numerous workshops and countless conversations I have grown far closer to the archive, and hopefully brought people with me. My practical recommendations for CG are the results of curatorial experimentation, but they can be taken up and shaped accordingly by those looking to journey into their own archives.

This has been my contribution to the discourse of archival thinking in galleries and museums, and I hope it is of value to those interested in working in the area. For those people, I will finish by offering a few thoughts on the limitations of this project, and directions of onwards research which struck me in the course of the work.

## Limitations

In Chapter One, I show how Lisa Darms is sceptical of homogenising a notion of archives or archival force, and how she then went on to create a new kind of archive in the Riot Grrrl Collection. Indeed, my hypothesis of the CGA needed completely rethinking following more time with the gallery and a better understanding of the archive of CG. Whilst I have geared this research to the working of the CGA, I have tried to remain open to a broader context of archival practice – drawing on my experience of visiting the archives of galleries and museums in the North West to better appreciate the differences and commonalities.<sup>113</sup> Whilst not perhaps a strict ‘limitation’ I would be intrigued to try taking the findings of this research into another arts context. What would be the result in a larger organisation? What adjustments would be required if applying the findings for the archive of a performing arts company? By working closely with a ‘live’ project partner, this research has benefitted from the rigours of working alongside a very active organisation, but whilst there is benefit in this close attention to one instance, perhaps some of the broader scope is limited.

The second limitation to note concerns the ethical collection of data for this research project. The core issue is this: that a great amount of conversation and discovery takes place outside of formal research methods. For example, when I wanted to talk to someone who had been involved with CG in more formative years, I made an appointment with a previous staff member and interviewed them about their experiences. We completed all the necessary ethical consent forms, and the interview can contribute to reflection and historical knowledge of CG. However, if at an opening I’m in conversation with a someone who shares thoughts and feelings about the history of CG, with no ethical paperwork to hand, I cannot ‘unhear’ this new information. Of course, if this information represented a crucial turning point in the research, I would find some way to ethically represent it, but instead

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<sup>113</sup> I am thinking about the archives of the Manchester Art Gallery, the Whitworth, MODAL, The Holden Gallery and Central Archives in Manchester, Open Eye Gallery and the Bluecoat in Liverpool, The Grundy Gallery in Blackpool, and the Arts In Libraries project in St. Helens.

it's simply low level data about CG streaming in to my awareness at openings, talks, or anywhere I share my research project. Someone has been in a show, with someone else, inspired by a tutor at Manchester Polytechnic, and they wound up working in some notable place. This kind of web of connection and experience has surrounded me and this research since the very earliest days, building up in my mind an awareness of the gallery history and working practices. However, without an ethically recorded contribution to the research, it is only the researcher's own reflections and interpretations which might be acted upon. The same is true when inside a close relationship working with artists. I visited Gherdai three or four times in her studio to discuss her artworks and inspirations, and our conversations would roam across books, artists and ideas. The same is true of any of the new commissions, and the artists' thoughtful commitment to their practice and our project. To a degree, this is a condition of working in a live environment, where as a researcher I am immersed in the workings of CG and surrounded by incoming data. But I feel that learning from this, future researchers using a curatorial approach could put in place a more comprehensive ethical framework, one in which data capture could perhaps become easier when working with artists and publics, or as part of a working gallery.

With these limitations in mind, I now conclude with thoughts on further directions which the research could take.

## Further Research

This research has found the need to disturb the CGA, presenting findings on how intervention in the archive might take place. However, it does not evaluate the effect of ongoing archival activity. I have argued that it would lead to greater connection between constituents of the gallery, leading to a shift in how the gallery is understood among constituents – but research would need to investigate this hypothesis during a period where my recommendations for an active CGA are in place. Does making the CGA an ongoing strand of CG activity change how the gallery is perceived by peers, participants, and other publics? Does it affect a willingness within CG to deviate from the patterns of the past? Would a closer relationship to the traces of history impact the future of the gallery? It would be fascinating to see the effects of my recommendations, and how they might positively support Castlefield Gallery in their work of supporting creativity and culture in Manchester and beyond.

This research has proposed a curatorial methodology for activating the CGA, alongside a practice of exhibition making. However, what tools would enable the CGA to become the active unruly element I believe it can be? What systems of content management, or archival strategy, are suitable to an organisation of this size and nature? Alongside the importance of archival strategy to society I discuss in Chapter One are a growing number of experiments in less centralised, ethical archives. These include; distributed archives where objects are held by various people with a central signposting service, new content management systems prioritising different kinds of materials, or community / folk archives where history is held by a group of people in shared communications. In Chapter Three, when discussing my methodology of BC, I consider 'lines of flight' in the CGA – points which appeared to attract interest and energy in the course of this research. One piece of onward research into the constitution of the CGA might ask, how can the archive record activity in a way which keeps it attractive and active to future constituents?

The final piece of further research I would be interested to see pursued concerns the proposed curatorial methodology of BC. Through this research process, I have found the approach I adapted from Milevska's essay (2013) to adeptly respond to archival concerns. However, protracted research on the methods and framework therein might reveal a more comprehensive and more well-tuned methodology, able to deal with the ethical issues above, and potentially suited to a wider range of organisations. As a curatorial approach, I believe it is of great value to those looking to see things otherwise.



## Figures in the Thesis

**Fig. 1** – The Manchester Artists' Studio Association Flyer, c. 1985-87.

Above, the front of the flyer, and below, the reverse, or inside. Held by the Castlefield Gallery archive (hereafter CGA)

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Requirements*



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Winsor & Newton

Open 9 - 5  
(including Saturday)

Manchester Artists Studio Association  
Third Floor  
Stonebridge House  
16-18 Granby Row  
Manchester M1  
061-236 1078

Castlefield Gallery  
5 Campliff Avenue Arcade  
Off Deansgate Manchester M3 4FW  
061-832 8034

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday 10.30 am - 5.00pm Sundays 12.00 - 4.30 pm  
ADMISSION FREE.

MASA is a company limited by guarantee (No. 1838334) and a registered charity (No. 515571).



HOW TO GET THERE

MASA STUDIOS are within walking distance from Piccadilly Bus & Train Stations (see map).

CASTLEFIELD GALLERY  
BUS from Piccadilly: 15, 94, 252, 253, 255, 263, 284  
RAIL: Deansgate station is less than 100 yards away  
ROAD: The Gallery is close to the western end of the Mancunian Way

DESIGN: Read (061) 223 2392.

**masa**

Manchester Artists Studio Association  
Third Floor, Stonebridge House  
16-18 Granby Row, Manchester M1  
061-236 1078

**manchester  
artists  
studio  
association**

**masa**

Manchester Artists Studio Association.  
Third Floor, Stonebridge House,  
16-18 Granby Row, Manchester M1  
061-236 1078.

**INTRODUCTION**

Manchester Artists Studio Association (MASA) was formed in 1982 by a group of graduates from Manchester Polytechnic. After moving into an old warehouse in the city centre, they converted it into the present well lit centrally-heated studios, which provide not only working space for painters, but also a venue for public art classes run daily by MASA.

"... MASA has grown rapidly from a small group of painters sharing a studio to a dynamic artists organisation which offers skills and resources to organisations and individuals." - Sally Maffey, Visual Arts Officer for North West Arts

MASA immediately became involved in the region's art scene in order to increase opportunities to see contemporary art in Manchester. In 1984, with the help of grants and a great deal of voluntary work, MASA established the Castlefield Gallery, Manchester's contemporary art gallery. The Gallery exhibits work by both nationally known and local well established artists, showing some of the best contemporary art being produced in Britain.

"The Castlefield Gallery does a very important job in contributing to the exposure of high art to those who live in the North of England. Nowadays the distinction has become blurred and so much art comes over like you 'must' which is quickly ignored and quickly gets forgotten. The Castlefield Gallery chooses and promotes art with discrimination and clarity." - Anthony Carr, sculptor.

MASA and the Castlefield Gallery form a registered charity and are a company limited by guarantee. MASA and the Gallery exist to provide opportunities for artists to work in Manchester, and, through a varied programme of activities, to increase public interest in contemporary art.

**STUDIO SPACE AND MEMBERSHIP**

The studios, situated near Piccadilly Station, have space for thirteen painters, as well as a public area used for daily art classes. Since the beginning of MASA there have been regular opportunities for committed artists to apply for full membership or for a four month studio contract. The four month contract is ideal for those painters needing a concentrated spell of studio work. The rent of each studio space is low because full members take an active role in the art educational work undertaken by the Association, as well as contributing to the running of the Association. Contractors are not expected to help in the running of MASA.

If you are interested in applying for full membership or for a studio contract, contact the secretary.

**ART AND EDUCATION**

Educational work is central to the activities of MASA and the Castlefield Gallery. This work enables contemporary art to be brought within the reach of those who have had little contact with it, as well as extending the appreciation of a public already familiar with contemporary art.

**EDUCATIONAL EVENTS AT MASA**

**LIFE DRAWING CLASSES**

These classes are held daily, Monday to Friday, 6.00 pm - 9.00 pm, and are run in conjunction with Manchester City Council's Adult Education Department. They are suitable for anyone, from the absolute beginner to the professional artist. Tuition is provided by artists from MASA, materials are on sale at MASA.

**MONDAY female model, 2 poses TUESDAY male model, short poses WEDNESDAY female model, 1 pose THURSDAY female model, short poses FRIDAY female model, 1 pose.**

Charges free. 80p (30p concessionary) You don't need to book; just turn up!

**STUDY DAYS**

Study days cover all aspects of painting and drawing, with tuition from MASA artists, and often involve collaboration with art galleries. In the past, MASA has worked with the City Art Gallery, Cornarhouse, Whitworth Art Gallery and, of course, the Castlefield Gallery. They usually involve looking at, and discussing, a particular exhibition, followed by a practical session in the studios, sometimes working from a life model.

For details of future study days contact MASA.

**EDUCATIONAL EVENTS AT THE CASTLEFIELD GALLERY**

**CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS**

These are intended for children aged 6-11, and are held every Saturday from 10.30 am until 12.30 pm. The workshops are often led by MASA artists and involve the children in making objects, drawing and painting. These workshops also help to encourage children to visit galleries and become familiar with the art that is being produced today. Fruit juice and biscuits are provided, please bring working clothes for your child.

Fee: £1.50 per child. There's no need to book; just turn up!

EMMA ANDERSON, Education Officer for the Castlefield Gallery, organises a programme of varied educational events for schools and community groups. These include talks, workshops, concerts and poetry readings. For details of current events, contact Emma on 061-832 8034.

**ARTISTS IN SCHOOLS**

Members of MASA have held residencies in schools through the North West Arts Trust in Education' scheme. Through working with, and getting to know, an artist, the children not only develop artists skills, but are also able to relate the activity of an artist to their own lives.

Schools interested in this scheme should contact, in the first instance, MASA.

**VISITS TO YOU**

MASA Artists not only work at the studios, schools and in art galleries, they are also available to visit community groups. If you are interested in organising a talk, workshop or a study day in collaboration with MASA, please contact the secretary.

**EXHIBITIONS AND ART RACK**

Work by MASA artists is regularly exhibited in galleries, libraries, foyers and in other such public places. Work exhibited is usually for sale, as is the work in the studio. Original works of art up to the value of £45 can be purchased from a service known as 'Art Rack'. Art Rack has a collection of unique works of art in two easy-to-view stands, one display stand at MASA the other at the Castlefield Gallery. Why not consider purchasing an original work of art? Besides adding an object of interest and value to your home or office - which will give you and your friends pleasure for years to come - you will be giving much needed support to an artist.

Commissions can be undertaken by artists from MASA - contact the Association for details of fees - it doesn't cost a fortune!

**THE CASTLEFIELD GALLERY**

The Castlefield Gallery, situated off Deansgate, is an artist-run gallery exhibiting contemporary British art. The artistic policy and exhibition programme is determined by a committee of artists from MASA. There are eight exhibitions each year, including the annual Open Summer Show for artists in the North West. Besides inviting artists to exhibit, the Gallery also welcomes applications from artists for exhibitions. It has one full-time organiser, and a part-time education officer, as well as several voluntary workers.

All the works in the exhibitions are for sale and payment can be arranged in interest-free instalments. Work bought through the Gallery means not only support to an artist, but financial support for the Gallery too - enabling it to expand its range of educational activities.

Open Tuesday to Saturday, 1.30 am - 5 pm and Sundays, 12.00 - 4.30 pm. Admission is free. For details of the current exhibition, telephone Emma on 061-832 8034.

**FRIENDS**

YOU can join the growing number of people who support MASA and the Castlefield Gallery by becoming a Friend. In return for your support of the visual arts in Manchester, there are a variety of benefits that we can offer you.

Before each exhibition at the Gallery, Friends receive an INVITATION to the Private View - providing an opportunity to meet other Friends and the exhibiting artist. A NEWSHEET is also posted to you free of charge, giving news and reviews of visual arts events and forthcoming activities. By becoming a Friend you are also entitled to a 33% DISCOUNT on oil and acrylic paint ordered through us, as well as up to a 50% DISCOUNT on materials at selected art shops in the North West. There is also an ANNUAL EXHIBITION for Friends work at a city centre venue.

BECOME INVOLVED IN MANCHESTER'S VISUAL ART SCENE - JOIN AS A FRIEND TODAY. Send a cheque/postal order for £8.50 (£7.00 concessionary), payable to the Castlefield Gallery, in Castlefield Gallery, 5 Campliff Avenue Arcade, Deansgate, Manchester M3

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

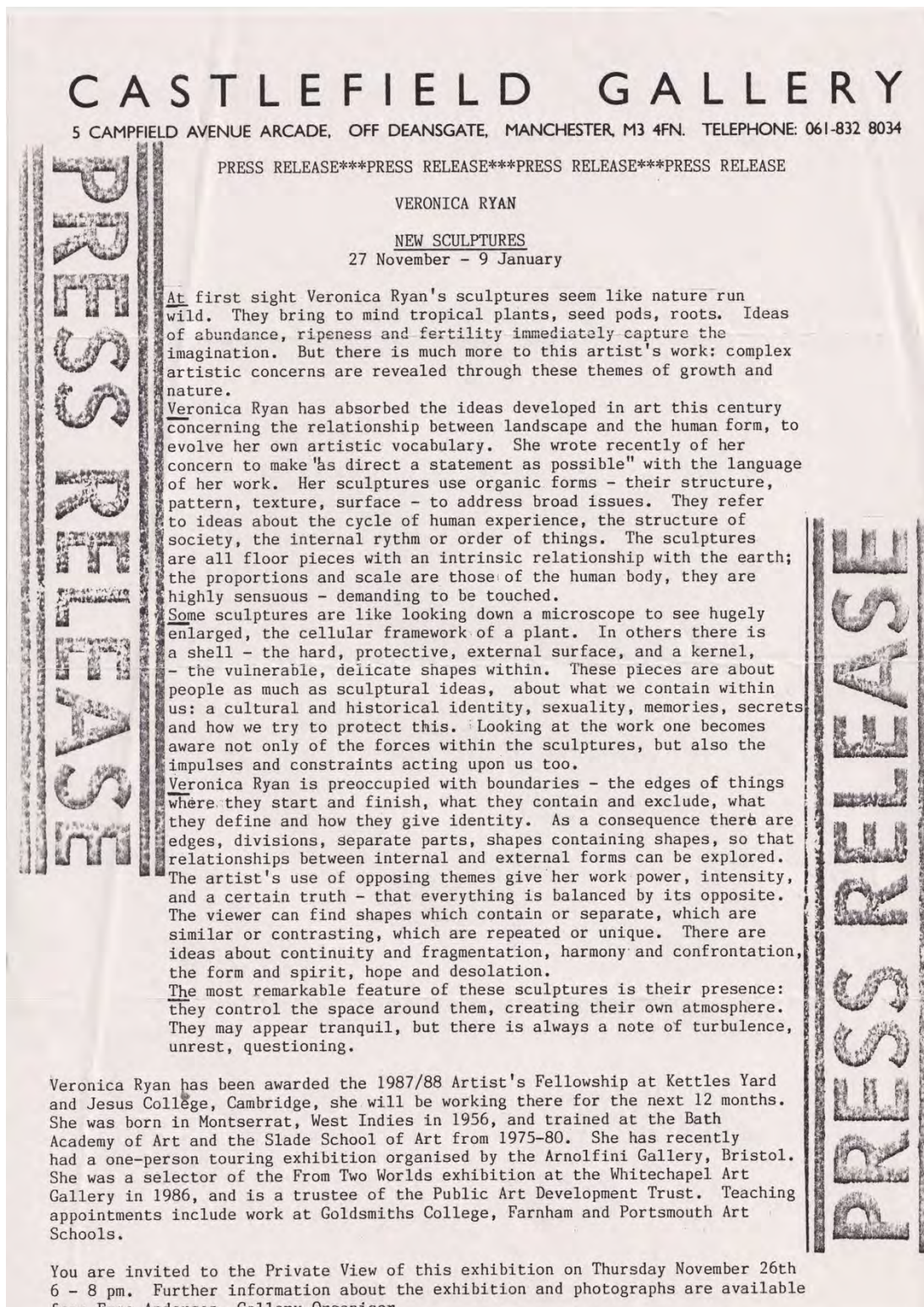
MASA and the Castlefield Gallery gratefully acknowledge the financial support given by the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Granada Foundation, North West Arts, Manchester City Council, the Henry Moore Foundation, the Elephant Trust, Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, Marks and Spencer, E. J. Arnold, Binder Hamlyn.

PATRON: Anthony Caro

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Andrew Causery, Rosemary Marsh, Fiona Monte, Jill Morgan, John Stevens, Richard Wilkinson.



**Fig. 2** – Castlefield Gallery Press Release for Veronica Ryan exhibition, 1987. Held by the CGA.





**Fig. 3** – City Centre News Announcement, 1984. Held by the CGA.

City Centre News, Manchester, May 1984.  
Page 16



**CASTLEFIELD GALLERY**

Sheila Seal, the manageress at the Castlefield Gallery

## Helping hand for budding artists

**THE BUDDING** artistic talent of Manchester is to get a strong helping hand.

The initiative and determination of the newly-founded Manchester Artists Studio Association is aiding artists to practice their skills and promoting painting for the public by providing classes and exhibitions at the Castlefield Gallery.

The total absence of facilities for young painters in Manchester prompted third-year fine-art students at the polytechnic to acquire 13 studio spaces on the top floor of Stonebridge House in Granby Road.

The "artist's touch" soon transformed the grim premises, and they now provide a working environment for serious out-of-work and budding artists.

**Integration**

In a time of economic

By ISABELLE ROSIN

It also develops one's sensitivity towards our surroundings—a quality which appears to be more and more lacking in our society."

The association works on a self-help and co-operative basis.

MASA wants to promote art in the city and have an integrated role in society. As well as providing a base for professionals it organises evening classes for the public and hopes that in the future it will be able to work in conjunction with other professionals such as architects and city planners.

And what better proof of their work ethic and policies — to promote painting in all its forms — than the opening of the Castlefields Gallery, with their first exhibition on the most prominent contemporary artist,

John Hoyland.

The opening ceremony went with a bang, but as Sheila Seal, manageress of the gallery said: "The opening of this contemporary art gallery was an uphill struggle. Contemporary art has in the last few years been totally ignored, here in Manchester.

"We are living on the past and need to know more about the art of today."

"We will promote contemporary art by organising exhibitions and talks, and in the near future we hope to organise workshops for children."

Economic pressures have brought a greater sense of awareness to the need for being financially independent and Sheila is hoping to make the scheme self-financing by the sale of paintings.

For newcomers to contemporary art, Sheila will be on hand to talk to visitors.

**Fig. 4** – Manchester Evening News, The Word, 1992. Held by British Newspaper Archive.

12



*Jimmy Christman's*

**The WORD**

Manchester Evening News

HE'S BACK WITH A NEW BAND AND A HATFUL OF SONGS...

# Yes, it's the Man From Delmonte!

REVEILED by some, loved by others. There is no doubting that The Man From Delmonte were always talked about.

They had character and depth, and if you didn't like that character then you might not be alone, but you couldn't ignore the band's presence.

After *The Inspired Carpenters*, there is little doubt that in that 1988-89 period The Man From Delmonte were Manchester's hardest-working band. Australian Mike West, frontman and songwriter

with the Delmontes, was the antithesis of what that whole Manchester scene was supposed to be about.

Now, in 1992, he's back in Manchester with a new four-piece band, a hatful of songs and his trusty rat-like dog, Roger, to put a few more people on their guard. His latest project is still in that Delmonte vein, named *Surfaria*.

So why did Mike not just continue on as the Delmontes, but when Sheila (Sue) left to have a baby and Martin Vincent left to write for City Life and paint watercolours, I thought I'd do something on my own," he says.

Comedy

"I made some demo tapes and took them around record companies. They all said, 'It sounds great, but get a band together and then we might sign you.'"

Surfaria isn't The Man From Delmonte, but they are participants in that same lyrical scribble. Mike plays weird games in his songs – comedy and tragedy juxtaposed.

Mike says, "I've got no problem with a bit of comedy in my songs. Some people have asked me is this serious? As if a song has to be a joke or earnest, it can't be both."

Surfaria's new line-up with the return of ex-Delmonte member Sheila Seal on bass. Old Trafford had Mark Messers on piano and Curtis Cunningham on drums.

The sound is a bit more sophisticated than the Delmontes, who were once described by NME writer James Brown as "ideal music for a Radio 4 gardening programme".

Record-wise, the debut four-track EP from Surfaria is released on September 28 on Turquoise records.

It contains four tracks and is produced by American Dave Young, responsible for the engineering on The Happy Mondays debut



**■ SURFARIA:**  
"I've got no problem with a bit of comedy in my songs," says Surfarist and songwriter Mike West

certs were like religious revival meetings, with a sea of pleading hands beckoning from the front row for a flick of the fringe from Mike West. So when are Surfarist about to start breaking the local boards?

"We are doing an acoustic set at The Britten Production pub on September 13, as part of the In The City seminar, and our first proper date is at Jalen's Crag, opposite Manchester University on September 28 and we'll be ready to bring a touch of beach culture to the kids," says Mike.

**Message**  
The Man From Delmonte were robbed of a place in the hallababoo which surrounded Manchester in 1989. In truth, there was no Manchester scene or sound as such. Variety is the key in this city's music scene, something which most bands were constantly putting forward.

Maybe this time around, even without the vision of local journalists like Sarah Champion, who had more to do with the rise of Manchester than any single club or label, the message will finally get through.

In Manchester, it's what the kids want that counts, and Mike West is still a wanted man in this town.

## CHECK IT OUT

**■ TEN** out of ten to Manchester's Super Merchants for a travelling gig at 10 Hole on Monday night. Unfortunately, after buzzing a packed house they now have the headache of sorting out meetings with record companies hoping to sign them.

**■ THAT** Uncertain feeling release for second single on Dead Dead Good records on Monday, entitled *Close To The Edge*. They are headlining The Dead Dead Good night at the Boardwalk alongside labelmates Kerosene (who have had to change their name from Collision for legal reasons), The Cherrys and Paddock Four as part of the In The City seminar on September 13.

**■ BEING** hailed as the second best band in Manchester by rock bible *Kerrang!* are High Blas. A three-piece, formed back in 1987, they're long been known as with gig-guns at Manchester's Rockworld, being compared with the Dan Reed Network, Living Colour and early Led Zeppelin with a bit of George Brown Brown in for good measure. The band are currently demoing for both Warner Bros and Island records.

**■ GENERATIONS** in the Inspired Carpenters out on Monday, produced by Pascal Gabriel.

**■ SOS** State's next single will be out in about four weeks. It's time featuring special guests UB40.

**■ THE** new Happy Mondays single, *Smiling Thinking*, is out on Monday – the first offering from their Chris Francis/Tina Turner-produced fourth album.

## GIG GUIDE

**TODAY**

- **Wizards Of Twiddle**, The White Blowers, Club 57, Piccadilly Street, Oldham.
- **Teddy Cole and the Rock Roots Band**, Ragga, Band On The Wall, Swan Street, Manchester.
- **Screaming Beavers**, Soul, Occam, The Waterpings, Bolton.
- **Frost, Golden Mean**, Ashwood Park Hotel, Bolton.
- **The Idealists**, The Shack, West Street, Oldham.
- **Worship**, Studio Barz, Bolton.

**TOMORROW**

- **Millon Rilton Band**, Club 57, Oldham.
- **Baggy Brothers**, R'n'B, Band On The Wall.
- **Engins**, Twice 2: Rock, The Witchwood, Old Street, Ashton-under-Lyne.
- **Frost, Goshie Tokes**, Marple Library Club, Marple.
- **The Idealists**, The Lancaster Tavern, Whitworth Street, Oldham.

**SUNDAY**

- **Red Eye Blues**, Mancunian Blues Band, The George, 3, Compton Road, Marple Bridge.
- **Blue Rattlers**, The Shack, Oldham.

**MONDAY**

- **Hullo Hullo**, Muddy Muddies, Mad poppers who want you to look out for them, PJ Bells, Oldham Street, Manchester.
- **Original Sin, Walter Miley's Road**, Club 57, Oldham.
- **Stranger In Town**, New blues band, The George, Marple Bridge.
- **Atomic Kandy**, Women-only event, Band On The Wall, Manchester.
- **Kath Hancock Band**, Folly, The Witchwood, Ashton-under-Lyne.

**TUESDAY**

- **Rank Outsiders, Ya Ya's**, Showcase night, Band On The Wall, Manchester.
- **Flutebark & The Cherrys**, Dead Dead Good top rock out night, The Witchwood, Ashton-under-Lyne.
- **Spontaneous Apple Creation**, Awful name of the week, Occam, The Waterpings, Bolton.

**WEDNESDAY**

- **Revolution & The Everything**, Tolomatic: Manchester Bandwalk, Little Peter Street, Manchester.
- **27000, 16 Blue**, Top local rock, Rockworld, Oxford Street, Manchester.

**THURSDAY**

- **Sundaze**, Muddy Song and dance group from Zimbabwe, Band On The Wall, Manchester.
- **Atlanta Roller**, Blues, The Witchwood, Ashton-under-Lyne.
- **Willemans**, Country Swamp, Occam, The Waterpings, Bolton.
- **Big Town Playboys**, Big band swing, The Met, Market Street, Bury.
- **Marlyn Crisp/Eddie Provost**, Doo: Modern jazz, Band On The Wall, Manchester.
- **Clas of Soul**, The Witchwood, Ashton-under-Lyne.
- **The Infected Rock**, Occam, The Waterpings, Bolton.
- **Whirligig**, Marble Arch, Manchester.
- **The Faraway Tree**, The Studio Barz, Bolton.

Penny Anderson

## WE WANT MORE, YANKS TELL JOHNNY

**JOHNNY** & the buffa behind Manchester's Family Foundation, is a little non-plussed by his success.

The band's debut single on Manchester's 380 Records, *Xpress Yourself*, followed up its massive underground club success by charting at No 44.

Since then, Johnny has been finishing five tracks for a mini-album due for release in late October.

Then the good news... American record company Giant, who licensed *Xpress Yourself*, have had such a great reaction to it that they want the album.

Unfortunately, in America, as far as royalties go, a five-track mini-album only counts as a single, so Johnny has got to record another three tracks at short notice to benefit from a hefty advance from the Yanks.

Image © Reach PLC. Image created courtesy of THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

**Fig. 5 – Artists' Newsletter, 1984. Held by the CGA.**

# artist run GALLERY

## Castlefield Gallery

by Sheila Seal

By now, most of *Artists Newsletter's* readers will have heard of the Castlefield Gallery – Manchester's newest venue for contemporary painting and sculpture. To evaluate and report upon our exhibition policy and related issues is not easy since the gallery only opened in March this year. Inevitably our ideas may change as we gain in experience but the following should give some insight into the gallery's policies and the reasoning behind them.

The gallery developed through the Manchester Artists Studio Association. The painters who had only recently established the studio group perceived the need for a gallery committed to showing the work of living artists (there had been a distinct lack of showing space for contemporary art in Manchester since the closure of the Peterloo Gallery some years earlier). The first step towards starting the gallery was to find suitable premises. We were looking for a building with substantial space, in a central part of town, with good public access and an affordable rent. The building we finally decided upon has large 'shop front' windows (an undoubted advantage), and, on the ground floor, a very high ceiling. The basement gallery is more compact – suitable for holding workshops. The building had no heat or light – in a way an advantage because it left us free to plan specialised lighting and to keep radiators etc from breaking up the wall space.

So, at this stage we had a building, ten or so enthusiastic and energetic artists and not much else. The next step was to convince various funding bodies of our sincerity and actually raise enough money to equip the gallery, pay rent etc and plan the exhibition. This is where the whole project would have become impossible if the artists alone had tried to do everything, while also trying to paint and develop the activities at their studios.

It was never the intention of the artists that the gallery should be completely artist-run. The bursts of enthusiasm that happen when a group of like-minded people get together can't be expected to last and it was understood right from the beginning that the project would be a full-time job for somebody. If you are divided between painting and 'gallery sitting' one is bound to win over! It happened that I was interested in the project and happy to spend time developing it, though for several months it could have gone either way.

The artists did, and do, make all the decisions regarding the exhibition policy/programme and as soon as we felt secure about the premises (the landlords were interested in the idea and agreed to 'hold' the premises for us), I began approaching artists to show. The programme of any gallery will surely reflect the predilections of those choosing the work – in this case those people are all practising artists. As members of the studio group leave and others take their place, so the exhibition programme and policy may change. At present, the foremost motive in choosing exhibitions is to bring high-quality new work to Manchester and to spotlight exciting work being made within the region. If showing the 'big names' helps to place the gallery firmly in the public eye, then that is so much the better for everyone, but that is not why we show artists such as Hoyland or Caro.

Our current policy is based around painting and sculpture but is not absolutely exclusive of other disciplines. We do not feel we are promoting any one school or style, but would like Castlefield to be seen as a gallery committed to the traditional values of painting and sculpture. We receive many sets of slides each week and although most of the shows to date have been selected by invitation, we wish to see as much work as possible and encourage artists to apply. The exhibitions on the whole are one or two-person shows originated by us, but occasionally we might have a small group show or take a touring show. All exhibition costs except framing, are met by the gallery, in return for which we take a commission on sales and hope that the artists might be available to give talks etc. We do our best to pay artists for such work.

In Manchester there is no similar gallery to the Castlefield – the municipal and university galleries tend to have only touring contemporary shows and don't have the opportunity to originate many of their own

contemporary exhibitions, so we feel we really are filling a gap in the city's provision for the visual arts. Next year will see the opening of a new visual arts centre in Manchester – how this will affect our own programming is impossible to say as yet.

The artists in the studio group provide the main source of voluntary work – from the very beginning they have painted walls, cleaned floors, distributed posters, transported paintings etc. The gallery could not function without this practical help, nor without the administrative work put in by other volunteers.

All the artists in MASA are concerned about the contact, or often lack of contact, between the artist and the public. We are aware of the suspicion of contemporary art in the public mind and believe that our choice of painting/sculpture to exhibit, could win the confidence of the public. We feel we have a mandate to reach the public and believe that the interests of the public and practitioner alike are best served by bringing the two together wherever possible. We aim to provide talks by exhibiting artists, videos about artists/art issues and practical workshops for children, where artists, either those exhibiting or others, take a day's practical session in the gallery with a group of children, working loosely around the painting/sculpture in the exhibition.

We are keen to develop this educational side of the gallery's activities to include workshops for older children

or adults, a series of talks and discussions on various art related topics, making videos about each artist we show and so on. At present, of course, many of our visitors are those already interested in 'art', but we aim to attract the uninitiated by offering these events and making clear a 'way in' to enjoying the art on show.

With the current economic situation, many galleries like the Castlefield must be aware of the need to develop sales of work, and we consider this to be of paramount importance. The gallery must strive to obtain a degree of financial independence but also we believe art properly belongs on walls – public and private. In Britain generally, (and it seems sometimes, in the North West particularly) there is no real tradition of buying art, and so inevitably it will be a hard struggle, but one which we feel ready to tackle.

To conclude, our aim at Castlefield Gallery is to get good contemporary art seen and understood by a wider public and to encourage that public, where possible, to buy. If however, it looks as though we would have to compromise our exhibition programme to meet these objectives, then the game would quickly lose its appeal.

### Financial Details

The running and conversion costs for this gallery have been obtained from a number of different sources: The gallery received £16,500 as a combination of grants from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Granada Foundation, North West Arts and Manchester City Council to cover running costs over a 15-month period ending March 1985. They also obtained conversion monies for lighting and heating from the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Department of the Environment, totalling £4471. Programme costs are assisted through sponsorship, for which they have, so far received £680 for specific exhibitions, £150 business sponsorship plus 'sponsorship in kind' from other firms. Sheila Seal is paid a small salary by the gallery to administer it and she is seeking grants for 1985/86 of about £30,000, from a variety of sources, to cover revenue costs including a full-time administrator and a part-time assistant and also to fully develop the education programme. The proposal is also to increase the number of exhibition slots a year to at least eight (there are seven in the first year).

### Gallery Programme

The shows to date have been Anthony Caro (June/July); Geoff Rigden, Rob Welch (July/August); Tricia Gillman, Sarah Feinmann (September/October) and Gary Wragg (November/December).

Sheila Seal is Gallery organiser of the Castlefield Gallery.

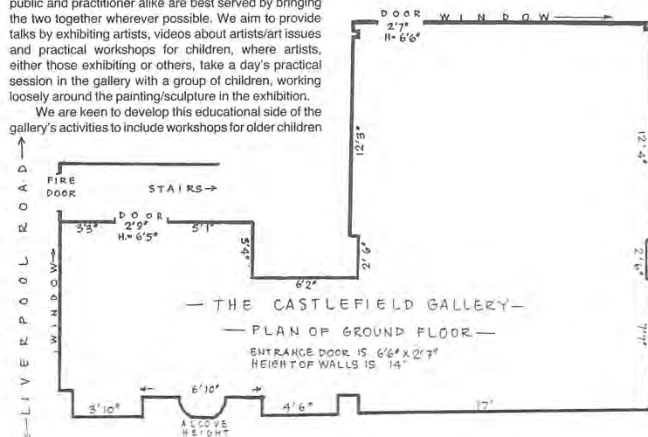




Fig. 6 – the artful reporter, 1984. Held by the CGA.



# the artful reporter

The arts newspaper for the north west      Over 30,000 readers monthly      Issue No 67 April 1984

## Artists' intervention in Manchester

**Jill Morgan reports on an enterprising development in the city centre**

IN THE iron-work arcades and stern grandeur of Manchester's shrine of the industrial revolution—the newly restored and revamped Castlefields area—art is muscling its way in. Brilliantly vibrant, heavyweight abstract paintings can be seen in this heart of the re-awakened spirit of Victorian power and motion. Manchester has a new gallery.

The Castlefield Gallery, opened on 20th March, is a product of artists' enterprise, organised and managed by a collective artists' group, the Manchester Artists' Studio Association. The Gallery will be showing the work of mainstream British painters—most of whom have never been seen in the city—together with the work of artists with a regional connection. The opening exhibition announces the Gallery's policy with a bang: John Hoyland is the Big Daddy of contemporary British abstract art, a tough, fluid painter with an aggressively masculine stance and a heart of gold. The exhibition includes recent paintings and some work hitherto unseen—abstract paintings that deal impressively with problems of scale, weight and psychological tension. It is fascinating to see this opening show in the ambience of the Castlefields site—far from being "crushed by the wheels of industry", this is abstract art that challenges and rivals the spirit of the Industrial age.

Your visit to the Castlefield Gallery will not be a mystifying plod around white, empty, hostile spaces—the gallery itself is intimate and friendly and it is the policy of the Manchester Artists to make the experience accessible and enjoyable. Artists and the administrator, Sheila Seal, will be there to discuss the work on the walls and to involve you in the practical issues at stake in producing, showing and selling art,

are uniquely able to do.

The gallery aims to sell work—to institutions, to industry, to individuals; the artists are trying to break the mould of the inflationary and elitist art dealer monopoly in order to sell directly to Mancunians. I wish them luck; so far they are determined that the pitfalls of capitalist intervention in the art-market (graphically illustrated by recent scandals involving American Abstract Expressionism and the C.I.A., 'New' German Art and the London and New York dealers, the Saatchi collection and the Tate Gallery, London) can be avoided.

**THERE IS a strong sense of self-determination, a vigorous work ethic and will to succeed about the Manchester Artists' Studio Association that contradicts the concept of artists as ineffectual woolly liberals. You had better believe that these artists are serious. The Association, which is behind the Castlefield Gallery project, is primarily a Studio Association, providing studio space for artists in central Manchester.**

The artists are a product of the social and economic pressures on art in the 1980's, pressures compounded by the current government's determination to reduce expenditure on art education and public support for the interventionist arts activities in our society. Most of the artists involved in the M.A.S.A. project have trained in or originate from Manchester, and the volition for the setting up of an independent artists' studio space came from the absolute lack of any dynamic visual arts initiatives in Manchester as they saw it in 1981.

The Association works on the principles of self-help, self-determination and co-operative decision-making. It offers 13 studio spaces in ideal premises on Granby Row (adjacent to



J. R. Smith

*Members of MASA preparing the John Hoyland exhibition in the new gallery.*

ner from Piccadilly Station) and runs an Associate Membership scheme which enables artists to take advantage of the facilities of the studios, to attend life classes and to exhibit their work in mixed exhibitions. The full members of the Association share an overriding ethos of the inherent quality of painting, by

and capacity of painting to create emotion, mystery and its own meanings. Other artists and theorists might want to take issue with this philosophy, but before we take up the anti-iconoclast cry of "art for art's sake", the open, accessible policy of the studio should be remembered.

existing institutions and art structures and can be manipulated by them—producing work for someone else to market, to show, to interpret and thereby to control. The M.A.S.A. artists are trying to intervene directly in that process, they are determined to produce art and promote and market it in a



Fig. 6a – the artful reporter, 1984, full scan. Held by the CGA.

# the artful reporter

free!

The arts newspaper for the north west Over 30,000 readers monthly Issue No 67 April 1984

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The Association works on the principles of self-help, self-determination and co-operative decision-making. It offers 13 studio spaces in ideal premises on Granby Row (adjacent to U.M.I.S.T. and round the corner from Piccadilly Station) and



Members of MASA preparing the John Hoyland exhibition in the new gallery.

runs an Associate Membership scheme which enables artists to take advantage of the facilities of the studios, to attend life classes and to exhibit their work in mixed exhibitions. The full members of the Association share an overriding ethos of the inherent quality of painting, by implication the particular power

and capacity of painting to create emotion, mystery and its own meanings. Other artists and theorists might want to take issue with this philosophy, but before we take up the anti-ikonoclast cry of "art for art's sake", the open, accessible policy of the studio should be remembered.

The artists involved in M.A.S.A. wish to have a role within society, they have chosen an up-front, producer/consumer relationship with their local audience; they wish to be seen as workers—full-time artists actively engaged in the business of making art and promoting it. All the artists who work at M.A.S.A. are committed to the idea that being an artist is a full-time job, which involves spending time painting, organising life-classes, sharing in the administration of the Association.

As much as anything, this work ethic is denying the romantic, popular view of the artist as an isolated genius or a privileged amateur dabbler. I also find it a response to the social and economic vacuum in which most of today's young artists find themselves on leaving art school—no job, no apparently useful skills, no shared ideology, no role in society. In this state they are not strong enough to challenge the

existing institutions and art structures and can be manipulated by them—producing work for someone else to market, to show, to interpret and thereby to control. The M.A.S.A. artists are trying to intervene directly in that process, they are determined to produce art and promote and market it in a direct, simple way. Their ethic is a very Mancunian ethic and they deserve real success in a city which has been without the impetus of a gallery like the Castlefield for too long.

● The Castlefield Gallery (tel. 061-832 8034) is situated on the junction of Liverpool Road and Deansgate. The opening show of paintings by John Hoyland continues until 22nd April. Opening times are 10.30-6.00 Tues-Sat., 12.00-4.00 Sun. Manchester Artists' Studio Association is at Stonebridge House, Granby Row (tel. 061-236 1078). The Associate Members' Exhibition is at Longsight Library Exhibition Hall, Stockport Road, Manchester, until 13th April.

Jill Morgan is Arts & Exhibitions Officer at Rochdale Art Gallery and a member of the Visual Arts Panel of N.W.A. She is a trustee of M.A.S.A., acting in a general advisory capacity. This article reflects her own opinions rather than those of the Association.

Fig. 7 – Patrick Heron review, 1985. Held by the CGA.

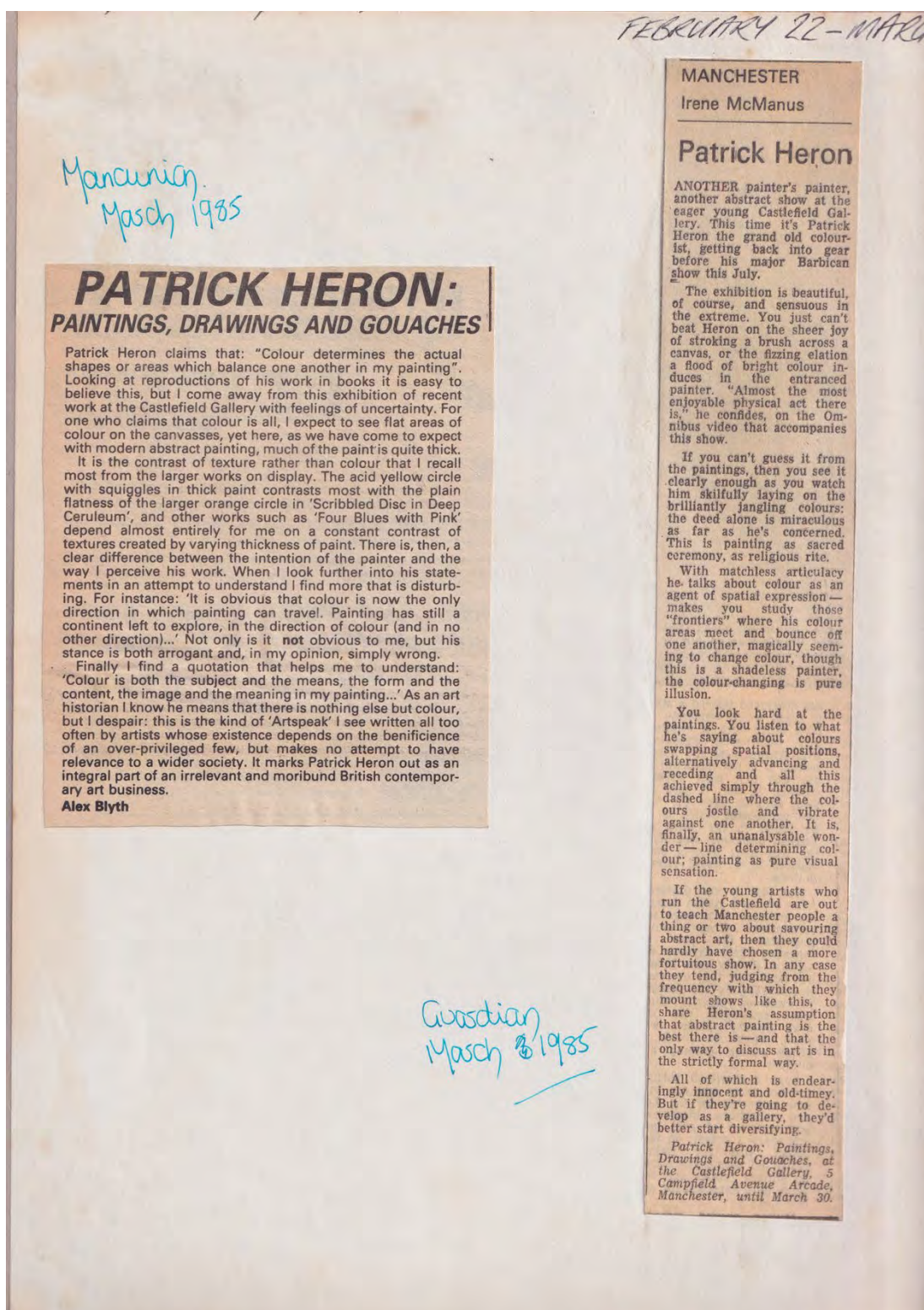
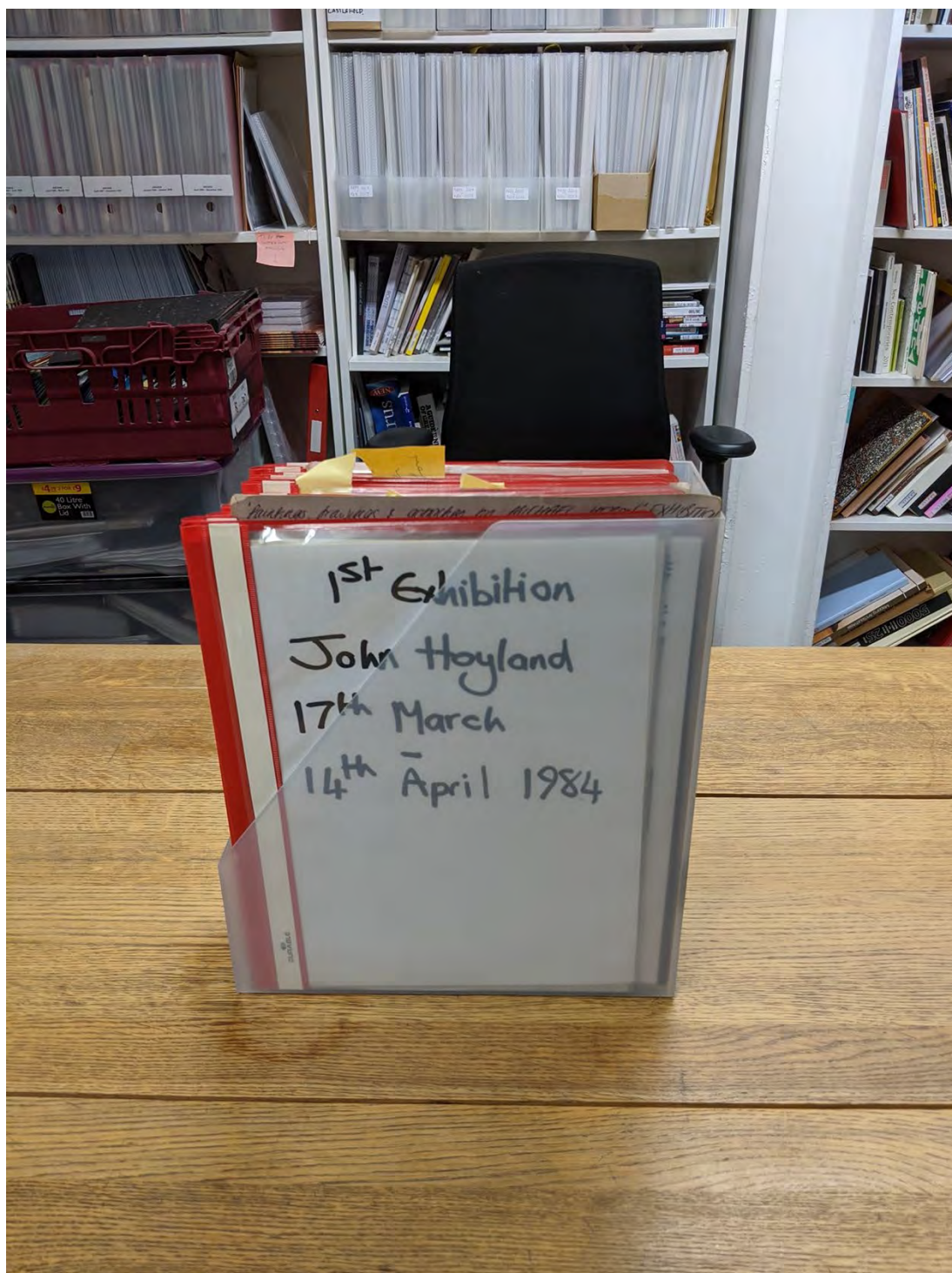




Fig. 8 – John Hoyland review, 1984. Held by the CGA.

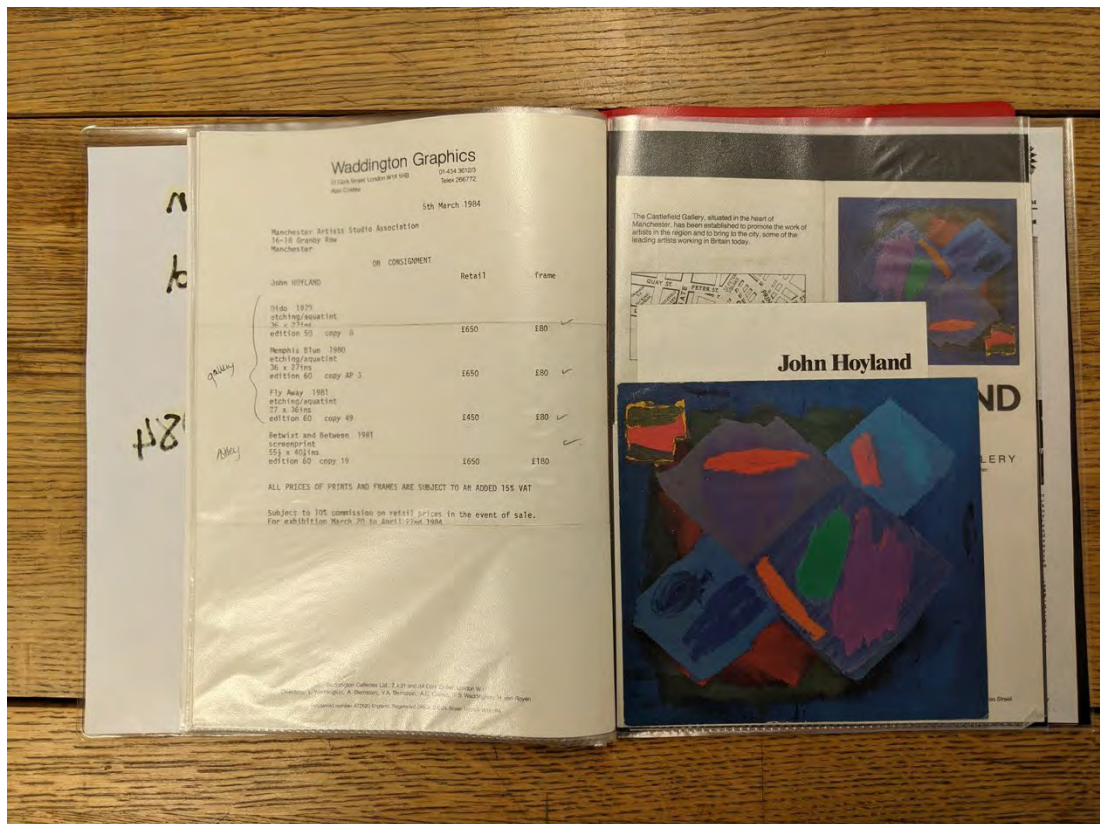


**Fig. 9** – Magazine File in the CGA. Photograph by Thomas Dukes.





**Fig. 10** – Report Folder in the CGA, containing materials pertaining to the John Hoyland exhibition. Photograph by Thomas Dukes.



**Fig. 11** – *Peripheral Vision* exhibition install, 2023. Photograph by Thomas Dukes.



**Fig. 12** – Upper Gallery of Castlefield Gallery. *English Gardens* (2022) by Dr. Yan Wang Preston (6 framed photographic prints), *Entangled Ways of Being* (2022) by Gregory Herbert (interruption to plumbing), and the shelf presenting material from the CGA. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.





**Fig. 13** – Two framed photographic prints from *English Gardens* (2022) by Dr. Yan Wang Preston, above the loose selection of material from the CGA. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 14** – Four pieces from *English Gardens* (Dr. Yan Wang Preston, 2022) with plumbing from *Entangled Ways of Being* (Gregory Herbert, 2022) interrupting in the middle. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 15** – A print from *English Gardens* (Dr. Yan Wang Preston, 2022) above a growing part of *Entangled Ways of Being* (Gregory Herbert, 2022). Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 16** – Growing parts of *Entangled Ways of Being* (Gregory Herbert, 2022). Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 17** - Growing parts of *Entangled Ways of Being* (Gregory Herbert, 2022). Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.





**Fig. 18** – Lower space of Castlefield Gallery. Visible in upper are pipes from *Entangled Ways of Being* (Gregory Herbert, 2022). The squares of text are from Chester Tenneson's *The Beat Goes On* (2022), and the orange wall is the opening to Kelly Jayne Jones's *•+°\*•.☺ ☺.☺•\*°+•*. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 19** – A sculpture from *The Beat Goes On* (Chester Tenneson, 2022). Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 20** – A piece from *The Beat Goes On* (Chester Tenneson, 2022). Text from the first Castlefield Gallery press release, found in the CGA. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 21** - A piece from *The Beat Goes On* (Chester Tenneson, 2022). Text from the press release of the final show (2000) at the original Castlefield Gallery venue, found in the CGA. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 22** – Sculpture from *The Beat Goes On* (Chester Tenneson, 2022). Referencing the 'Launchpad' exhibitions which took place from 2012 - 2018. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 23** – A plant and a zine by the golden curtain, the entry to Kelly Jayne Jones's exhibition (2022). A piece from *The Beat Goes On* (Chester Tenneson, 2022) visible in the top left. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.

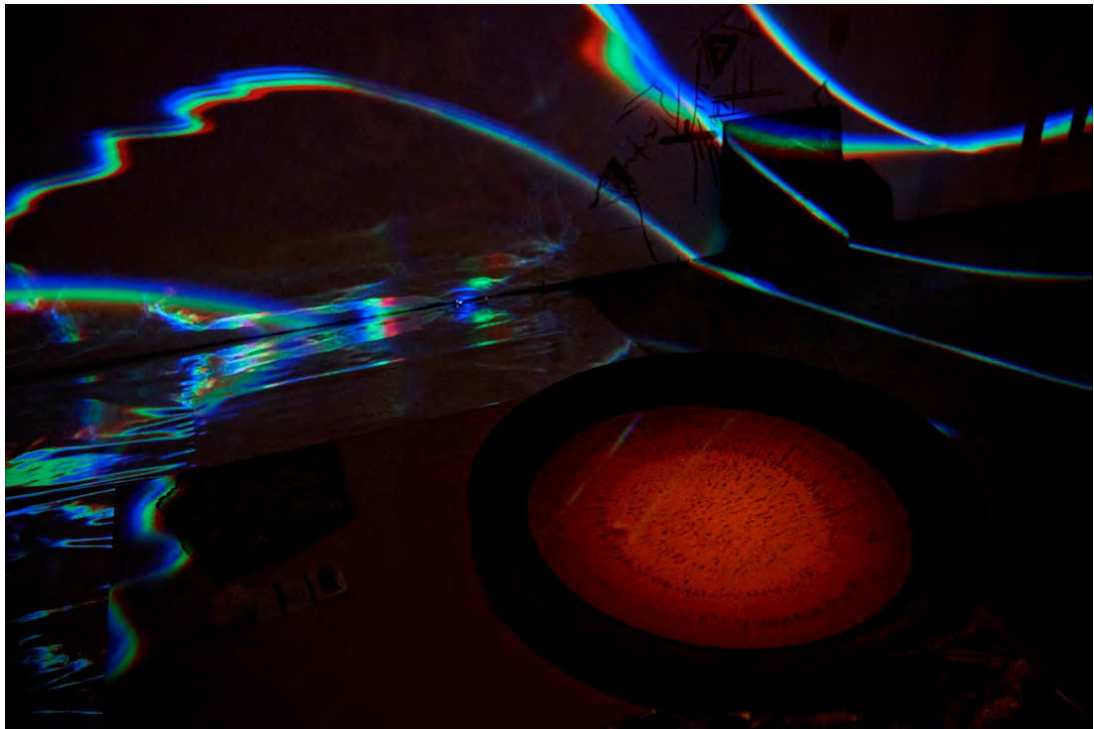




**Fig. 24** – A detail from *•+°\*•.φ.℔     ∩.φ.°\*°+•* (Kelly Jayne Jones, 2022).

Projections reflecting from a metal vessel of water around the space.

Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 25** – Parts of *•+°\*•.φ.℔     ∩.φ.°\*°+•* (Kelly Jayne Jones, 2022). The

lighting made it very difficult to capture. Photograph by Rob Battersby, 2022.



**Fig. 26** – The room holding the CGA, featuring the site specific installation *Archive Fever* (2022) by Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford. Photograph by Thomas Dukes.



**Fig. 27** – One of the embroidered gloves from *Archive Fever* (Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford, 2022). Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2022.





**Fig. 28** – *Archive Fever* (Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford, 2022) installed around the magazines and storage of the CGA. Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2022.



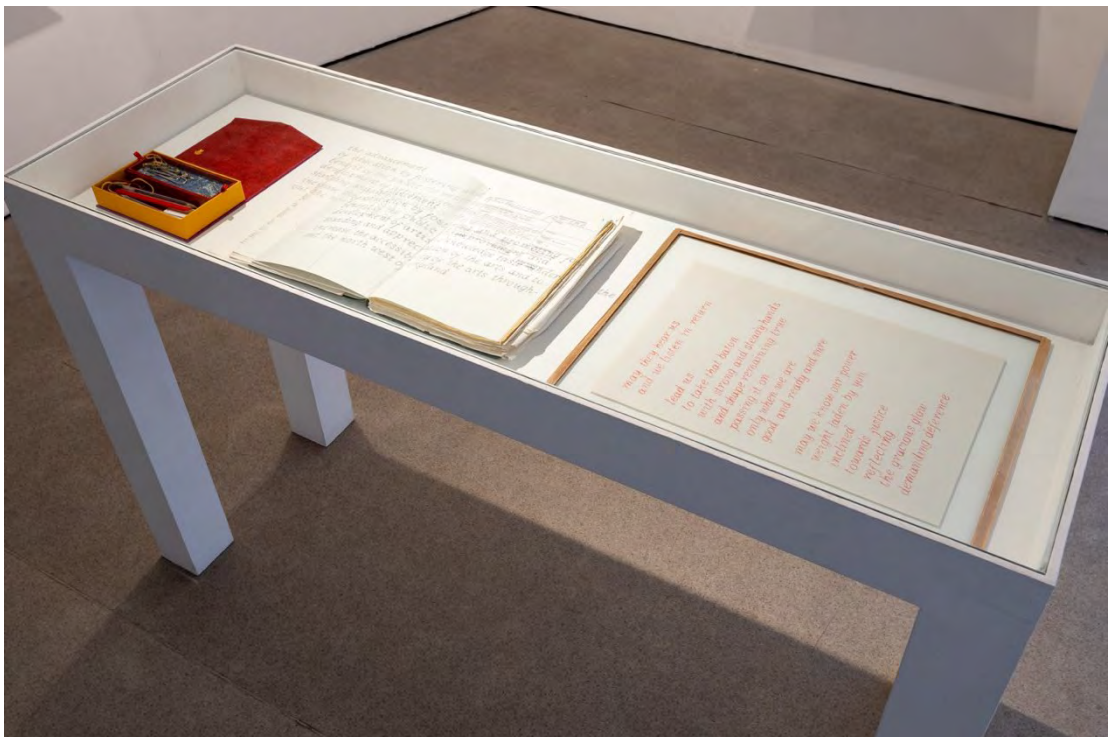
**Fig. 29** – *Archive Fever* (Dr. Sarah-Joy Ford, 2022) installed in the plan chest of the CGA. Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2022.



**Fig. 30** – Upper space of Castlefield Gallery. With *i hope all is well, and life seems a little calmer for you now* (2023) by George Gibson & Grace Collins. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 31** – As part of *i hope all is well, and life seems a little calmer for you now* (George Gibson & Grace Collins, 2023), the minutes book of Castlefield Gallery was opened to their first meeting. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.

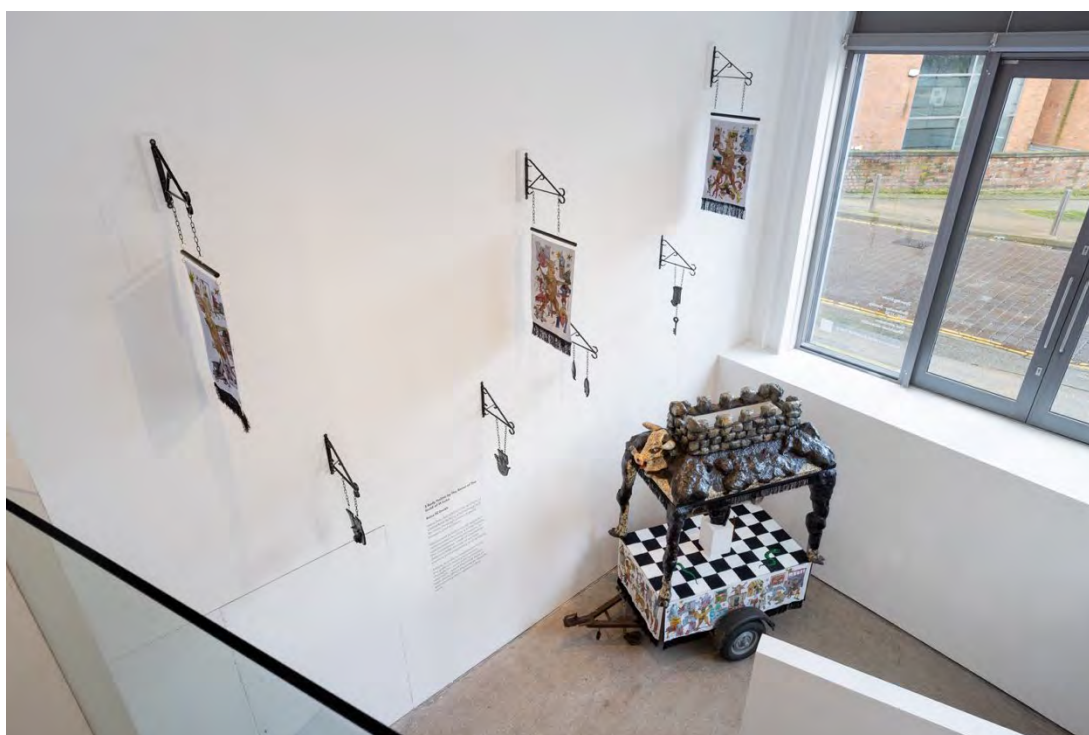




**Fig. 32** – Objects from the CGA and written pieces as part of *i hope all is well, and life seems a little calmer for you now* (George Gibson & Grace Collins, 2023). Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 33** – *A Body Politic* by The Name of The Guild of St. Luke (2023) by Anna FC Smith. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.

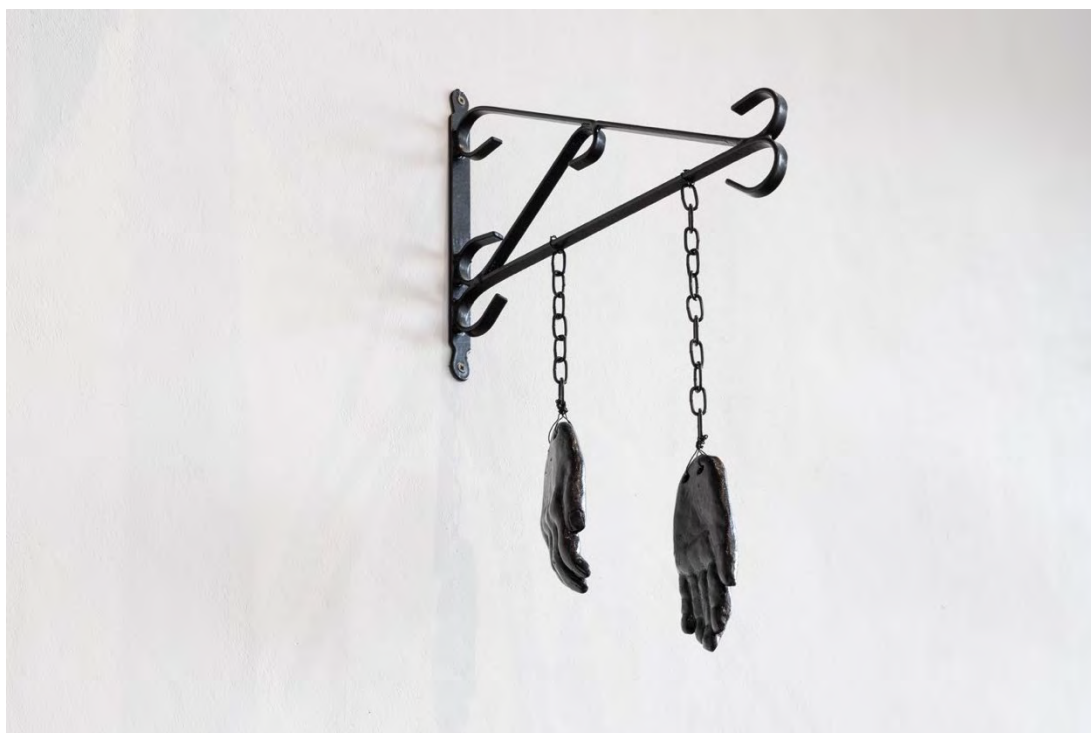




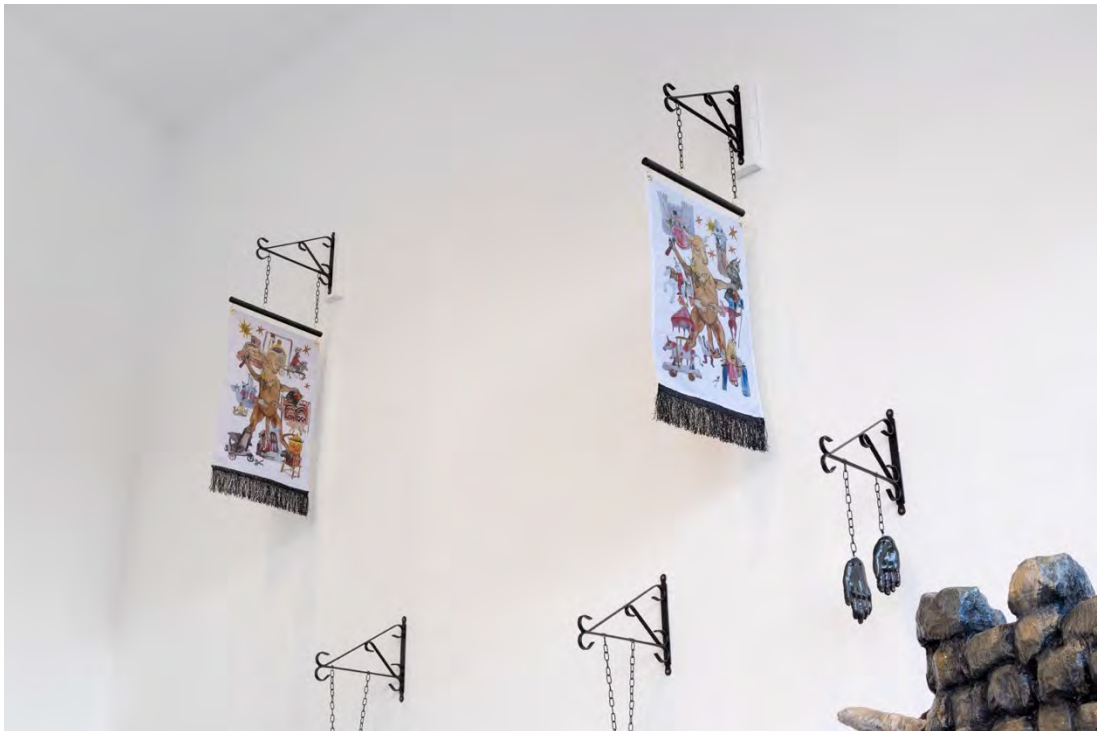
**Fig. 34** – Processional trailer and ox from *A Body Politic* by *The Name of The Guild of St. Luke* (Anna FC Smith, 2023). Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 35** – Ceramic 'helping hands' from *A Body Politic* by *The Name of The Guild of St. Luke* (Anna FC Smith, 2023). Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 36** – Banners referencing images from the CGA as part of *A Body Politic* by *The Name of The Guild of St. Luke* (Anna FC Smith, 2023). Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 37** – *Talk of the Town* (2023) by Alistair Woods. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 38** – *Falling in Love Again* (2023), by Alistair Woods. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.





**Fig. 39** – Works by Alistair Woods (2023). Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 40** – *Onion Spawn Studies* (2023) by Gherdai Hassell. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 41** – *Onion Spawn Studies 15 & 13* (2023) by Gherdai Hassell.

Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.



**Fig. 42** – *Sire of the Sea* (2023) by Gherdai Hassell. Photograph by Jules Lister, 2023.





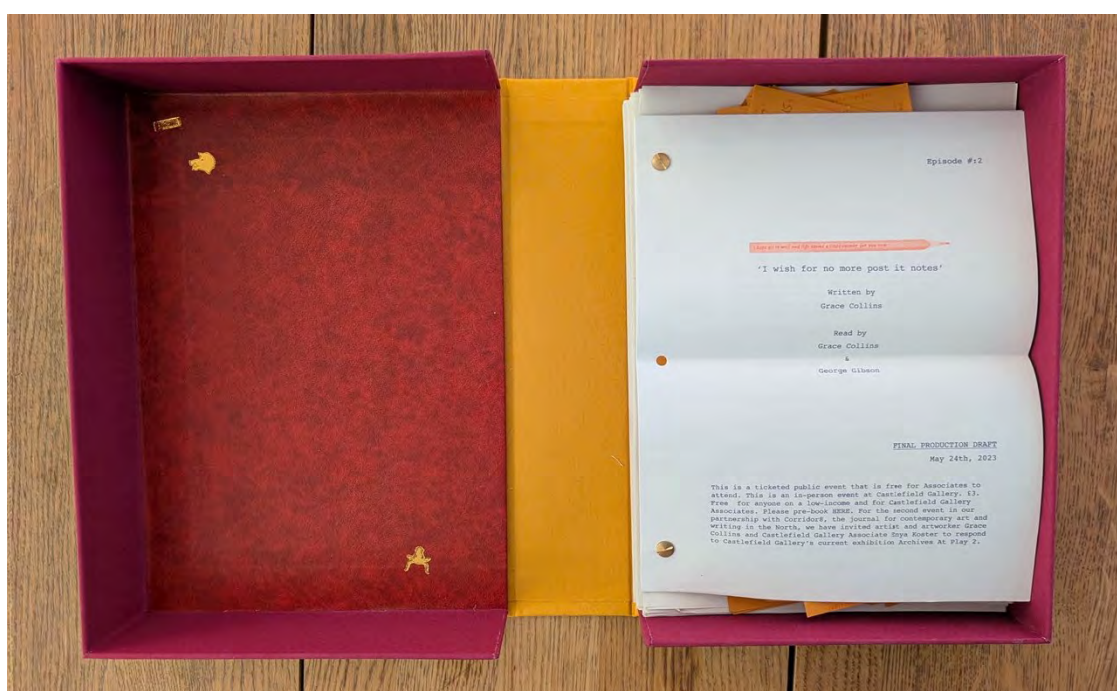
**Fig. 43** – *Archive Box* (2023) by George Gibson & Grace Collins. Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2025.



**Fig. 44** – Details of the *Archive Box* (2023) by George Gibson & Grace Collins. Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2025. Showing wishes gathered as part of AAP2 alongside a reproduction of a Patrick Heron flyer upon which someone has made notes regarding the CG Patrick Heron exhibition.

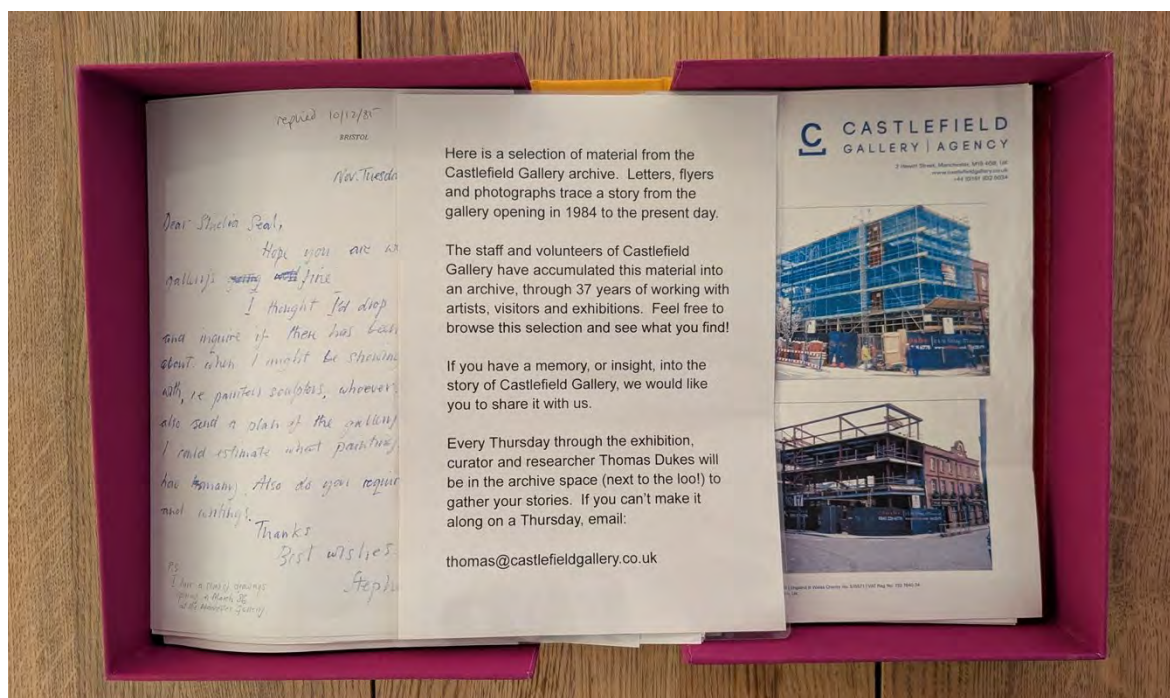


**Fig. 45** – Details of the *Archive Box* (2023) by George Gibson & Grace Collins. Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2025. Showing the script from an event as part of AAP2.





**Fig. 46** – Details of the *Archive Box* (2023) by George Gibson & Grace Collins. Photograph by Thomas Dukes, 2025. Showing reproductions from the archive and the sign that accompanied them in AAP1.



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## **Appendix 1**

### **Discussion between Kate Jesson (KJ) and Thomas Dukes (TD) re. Archive of Castlefield Gallery.**

**Conducted in person 09/03/2023**

**Thomas Dukes (TD):** So I'm now recording. It's the 9th of March 2023. I'm with Kate Jesson. You've had a look at all of the participant information sheets and the consent form. That's all signed up.

Good afternoon. Thank you for being part of the interview.

**Kate Jesson (KJ):** My pleasure.

**TD:** Could you start by introducing yourself?

**KJ :** Yes, my name is Kate Jesson and I was once the exhibitions coordinator for Castlefield Gallery. I'm now a curator at Manchester Art Gallery.

**TD:** And what pronouns would you like me to use in any writing?

**KJ :** She or her is fine.

**TD:** Wonderful. So please share your understanding of what Castlefield Gallery does and your understanding of the ideas that drive the gallery.

**KJ :**The Castlefield Gallery exists to support contemporary artists and that support is determined by artist need. So it changes over time and it changes in its priorities. It's like Castlefield is like the smallest space yet is also the sort of biggest conceptual space in the city as well. It's like greater than the sum of its small part, I guess. It's almost like a... I guess it's where you go... How am I going to explain this? I don't know what it does and the ideas that drive it. It foregrounds artists where many galleries foreground the artwork and they sustain their relationships with their artists, which I think is really important too. So whilst they're providing artists with an exhibition space, they're also supporting artists to develop and create the work for that space and beyond that space too. So it has its... And it marries that up for its associate sort of artist schemes and has its finger on the sort of pulse as to what's relevant really in contemporary art practice at the minute.

It used to be described, but this is sort of... It used to be described by other galleries in the city as a feeder gallery. It's a weird expression if you think too much about it. But this idea that it existed in the arts ecology in relationship to the other spaces. So if an artist approached Manchester Art Gallery, there was an expectation that the artist had started at Castlefield and had sort of made their way forward because talent development was very much associated with a gallery like Castlefield. But I don't think that's true

anymore. I think artists progress without any exhibition history in their own city and that all galleries, no matter how institutional they are, have a talent development responsibility.

**TD:** Thank you. I love what you said about sustaining relationship with artists, drawing attention to that relationship with artists.

**KJ :** Yes, otherwise everyone just pops up and pops down again and you're on a sort of exhibition conveyor belt. So at the time you've got your project and then it drops off the end and then the next thing is whizzing down in a sort of generation game kind of a way. And like the generation game, you'll never be able to remember. You remember the...

**TD:** Cuddly toy.

**KJ :** Exactly. Yeah, exactly. And then everything else will be a blur.

**TD:** So do you have a relationship with Castlefield Gallery?

**KJ :** So I used to work at Castlefield Gallery. I started off as a volunteer. I cite Castlefield Gallery as pivotal to how I'm a curator in the city to this day. I started off as a volunteer in 1992, back when it was on Liverpool Road, on the Upper Kenfield Market. They were nurturing and developing young contemporary curators, which weren't really a thing because a contemporary curator only really dates back to the late 1980s. So long before you could study it or do a Masters in it, it was a very sort of hands-on, learn as you go along but supported experience. And then I was paid... Then that progressed to a part-time paid opportunity. And then I was able, with that experience, having done art history, so graduated with no practical knowledge or experience of anything. They gave me everything that I needed to then be able to be a curator for Corner House.

**TD:** So you mentioned that they were nurturing contemporary curators. What kind of thing do you mean?

**KJ :** Well, there wasn't any... It sounds crazy now because everyone's a curator, or everyone's paying money to be a curator, regardless of the fact there are less and less curator posts now than there perhaps were then. There wasn't a defined route to work. There wasn't a... Unless you were going to do a museum studies type course. I didn't want to do a museum studies course. It wasn't like it was a particularly set programme. It wasn't like a list of things that they took you through. But you were just supported to be able to do the job. So you're always working alongside somebody who had experience of it, whether it was taking down a show, putting up a show, drafting the interpretation, drawing out the preview invites, because it was the land before computers. All those little bits that you needed in order to fill out a future, look what I've done, job-wise.

**TD:** And who was there? Do you remember who was there?

**KJ :**The legendary Celia Cross. She taught me the importance of care, and then it came as a huge surprise how little care is enacted in art galleries after my experience with Celia. So she was the then director. Jude Macpherson, she managed the more... Sort of the finance, the admin, the mission side of the gallery, really, the ability to be able to do it. I worked alongside Chris Lethbridge, who was developing artists' opportunities, particularly through commissioning programmes that then went on to be called CIDS, the Cultural Industry Development Service. And then I worked... Then the decision-making process was managed by the artists from the Manchester Artists Studio Association, MASA, and they had a sort of rolling committee of X amount of years that you served. So they chose the programme, and they also had to take time, being the technicians, to install the programme too. And then there were other volunteers that I worked alongside along the way. I think that's everybody, but I'll... Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**TD:** So I'm guessing that the answer is a resounding yes, but the question would be, has the gallery meant something to your practice and life in Manchester?

**KJ :**A resounding yes. The Castlefield still sits in my heart. It's sort of ethos. It's sort of, "Don't worry, just sort of see, just give it a go, see if it works. It doesn't matter if it doesn't work, out with it. Just be adventurous, be caring, be thoughtful." And also, I guess the other thing it teaches you very early on, it taught me, is that there wasn't an office. You are in your gallery, so you're in the display site. So from the outset, the relationship between the artist, the art, and the visitor was foregrounded. So it wasn't like I could spend all day in an office and never meet anybody in my show or any visitor. You were sort of embedded. So you learnt very early on how to communicate quite difficult things to all sorts of people in all sorts of different ways. And it's a skill that comes with experience, and I got shed loads of experience because I was sat there every day.

**TD:** I think in the very earliest press release, it talks about the connection between the visitors and the artwork and the artists being the pivotal place where the exchange is happening. When people are coming in, there should be someone there who knows about the art, who knows the artist really well. And it's really like that's that exchange point there.

**KJ :** Yeah, that was really important. And knowing as well, I guess it's a bit like those that work in shops. It's knowing when to offer or to respond to need, but then also to allow people their own space to think and see and to look and to just sort of stand with that experience. And those are core skills that have significantly contributed to the type of curator that I am today. In fact, it took me years to get used to the fact that my later jobs weren't in the gallery space. So I used to say, "Well, what do you want me to do?

What is that?" And then, of course, there was no departments. You did everything. So it also took me a long time to work out what I did when I joined galleries that had learning departments or press departments or

commons and marketing departments. But then also, it was very much ideas driven. That's a good idea. We instantly distract ourselves, doing something, have a conversation, have an idea, get really carried away with the idea, then decide to do the idea. And then, of course, that doesn't sort of...

That's a very artist-led way of working, which is sort of foregrounding creative thinking, particularly creative thinking in practical solutions. Or just things that you wanted to see. And then you realise when you come out of that environment that people actually need... People might not necessarily want that outside of a sort of... People think that they want that, but in actual fact, not all galleries do want that. They just want you to sort of process this thing called work. So yeah. So sometimes I look fondly back and think it was like this sort of beautiful, innocent time, but I think hindsight might be playing a part in that as well.

**TD:** So speaking of looking back, what do you know about the archive of Castlefield Gallery and what could the archive be?

**KJ :** So I know nothing about the archive of Castlefield Gallery because I have no memory of ever consciously archiving anything. I think we must have just kept everything. I have no memory of archiving. I have no memory of being taught how to archive. I definitely wasn't told... I have no memory of being told what needs to be kept, how to keep it, what you would extract as unnecessary. I definitely don't remember extracting... So for example, you probably don't need to keep the quotes of a transport job that never happened, but I don't remember ever reducing that information. So unless somebody else has reduced the archive. I don't even have a memory of where the actual tangible... Where the thing... Where it was all kept. Sounds crazy, doesn't it? But I don't.

I wonder if it's something that Jude did, because Jude was very much the... If I called her an administrator, it sounds awful because she was so much more than an administrator. She's an artist herself, a huge creative thinker. But I can only presume somebody else was doing it. And I also don't know... I left Castlefield before it moved from Liverpool Road to its new address. And that normally comes with a bit of a clean out and a tidy up. So I also don't know what happened between that physical move, what got moved from one building to the other, what got dumped, what got cleared, who knew what to keep, who didn't know what to keep. And even now, I wouldn't not be able to direct you to where this thing in the gallery was.

**TD:** That's interesting. I guess the follow-up question is, what could the archive be? But that feels a bit disjointed now I think about it. That's really interesting to know. Would you like to comment on what you think the archive could be? I think that's a bit of a suspectable question now I think about it.

**KJ :** I mean, I'm old and it's weird, isn't it? I'm older now, obviously. I think when you're working in that way, when you don't really know, you're sort of doing it. I think the benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing. And with the temporary exhibitions programme, with the emphasis on temporary, I think

an archive is pivotal for keeping the organisational history of somewhere. Without which, the gallery doesn't have a history in a way, because it is the outcome of all those various different outputs. And I think memory, to rely on people's memory, is problematic, because memorialising a memory are so subjective. And then I probably remember the good bits. I've probably forgotten the bad bits, but I would hope the bad bits were equally in the archive, because we learn so much more from when things go badly than what we do necessarily when they go well. I think it plays a pivotal part in telling the art story of our city as well, which is very patchy, because institutions like the Art Gallery tend to have the archive, but that's not the whole history of our city.

I think Castlefield, its programme, the exhibitions in our city, the spaces, the studio spaces that have come and gone in our city, I imagine that the archive is invaluable to understanding what contemporary art, late '80s through to the present day in the city was. And then how I guess that would relate to other cities, other UK cities, and what else was happening further afield. Not just in the choice of artists, I guess, but the way in which the programme was structured, and also the language within which I think the programme... There's always buzzwords that leave the funding or press, and I think it's just interesting to be able to... Quite often, we as an industry think that we're trailblazing newness, and it's remarkable how little we do is actually new. So yeah, I think it's absolutely pivotal. I don't think you can not have one. I think it's pivotal to a successful artist-focused space.

**TD:** That's a really productive answer to a very fluffy question.

**KJ :**Thank you.

**TD:** Thank you for somehow reading through what I wanted, and yeah, that's great.

**KJ :**I went from there, I don't know, I don't know what it is.

**TD:** Yeah, no, that was brilliant. So speaking about memory and memorialising, feel free to indulge now. Do you recall any exhibitions or activities by Castlefield Gallery in particular? And then if so, what is it that made them stand out?

**KJ :**What Castlefield was primarily doing when I was working there was juxtaposing... It was very small, so they tended to be solo exhibitions, single artist shows, and they would juxtapose an artist who was working in Manchester or the North West region with an artist who was working outside of the North West region. So back then, you would be local or regional, or you'd be national, but national only meant London. Now, London feels regional, and the artists who work in our city are as national as an artist working in London. Does that make sense?

But it was really important then that although you were focused on our own artists, you weren't foregrounding them by their regionality. So one show

would be by a MASA artist or an artist working in a city, and then the next exhibition would be by somebody that the artists in the studio wanted to see in their city, that either inspired their work or had a connection to their work or would help them progress with their work. Or that they just liked. I mean, I think there was just a huge section of, "I really like this artist. Let's bring them to Manchester and share that like and see who else really likes the artist." So things that stand out, I mean, obviously, building relationships with the studio artists, having access to the studio, the smell of a studio, and just being in that environment, I think, was hugely important to me. And then I did things... I mean, things that stand out in my mind as well tend to be the...

I remember Anthony Cairo was the patron, because Anthony Cairo had a commitment to artist-led practice himself and had set up an artist exchange sort of residency program, I think in America, but I would have to check my facts and names on that. I remember we did a... I remember he came up for one of our anniversaries and spent the weekend with us. And it still blows my mind to this day that Sir Anthony Cairo had spent so much time with us and artists in the city. I remember him asking me to order... Oh, the other thing is, if we were ever pretending, if we were ever thinking that we were... that we had to be professional, and we didn't really know what professional meant, so we had a rather skewed idea of what professional meant, but it normally meant... We used to sort of... It normally meant if big people were coming, changing into something that retrospectively looked more like something an accountant might wear, but we thought that would make us look more serious. I remember we took him to the Yang Tsing, which is a posh restaurant in Chinatown, because we thought... And back then it was the poshest place to go. And none of us ate there, because none of us had any money and we're all voluntary-led. And we were sort of pretending. And then Anthony went... My wife always orders for me, so Kate. And there was about 50 pages to this menu! I had no idea. I hadn't eaten out, because we didn't have any money. And it was that sort of...

And then I also vividly remember there used to be parts of the gasometer that used to be on the site where Home is now. And they used to be in the arches, and they looked like Anthony Caro's. And Anthony Caro went, "They're the best public art I've ever seen in a city." It's little things like that that stick in my mind. It was the time and the care and the consideration that artists gave to other artists.

And likewise, with working with artists like Bridget Riley, getting to go with the artists from MASA down to Bridget Riley's studio, and Bridget Riley giving her whole day over to us. Even though her dealer had told her not to bother with Castlefield Gallery, because you don't need it. It's not part of your career trajectory. But again, she was herself embedded in an artist-led studio support system. It was really important to her. So she did take the time, an entire day, for us to see how she worked, for us to talk through what work we were going to show, and then the considerable amount of care that she took as an artist to make sure that we did it to the best of our ability. Again, in a really supportive way. So those relationships really stand out. Other studio visits really stand out. And then just the weird and wonderful things that

happen when you literally just have this public space and people can walk in, anyone can walk in off the street and have any conversation with you about anything. And we were young. So you'd work late, you'd go out. Am I still covering the question or am I heading down some sort of crazy memory lane?

**TD:** No, this is perfect. We're talking about what we remember about the institution or the organisation. And the friendships.

**KJ :** Yeah, that you meet with the people that you met there and the colleagues. I absolutely loved it. I mean, admittedly, I thought you probably had to volunteer for a couple of months before you got a job, and it turned into a couple of years. But back then, you could sign on. So I just claimed the dole and volunteered there and got housing benefit. I don't, I mean, I must have been really poor, but I don't remember it being, I don't remember it being, maybe I've blacked it or blanked it all out. It's not exactly like we're sitting on a fortune at the sort of top high end of a local authority art gallery.

**TD:** Other people have spoken about the previous level of affordability of being an artist, that it was something you could do whilst having signed on.

**KJ :** Yes.

**TD:** There was more security, there was more financial security for whilst you're trying to pursue an art career that meant that there were more opportunities.

**KJ :** There must have been. There must have been. I don't remember starving, put it that way. But we couldn't have had any of us. We couldn't have really had any. I mean, I remember Jude could make a pair of leggings for a night out in about 20 minutes, just draw them, cut them out, sew them, job done. It was that sort of, it was that sort of, and also all the buildings that now contain the Swanky Pants apartments were empty. So we kind of had the run of the city. We were putting artists into mill buildings, we were creating, they'd be called meanwhile spaces now, but project spaces. There wasn't really the same, not that we were reckless, but there wasn't the same risk assessment or liability. Looking back, these places were inherently unsafe. But yeah, still so much fun. And going to London and we'd go out on, we'd pick a city and a group of people would sort of try to meet as many artists in Stoke, for example, as possible and go around all of their spaces and then feedback our sort of, our cultural fact, highs and lows of being an artist in Stoke. Or Birmingham, or Wolverhampton. Don't know why we're picking strange places like that. But yeah, or even London was different then. There was a fantastic greasy spoon on Cork Street, which is unimaginable now, but we'd always associate a studio visit with a fry up. Don't know why, it must be like, make you hungry. So we used to have a brilliant network of knowing where to get a mug of tea and a bacon sandwich, no matter where we were. And I also got to travel on, there were sort of North West networks. So the North West Arts Board, as it was then, would pay for Northern curators to go to things that you could apply to. So I'd go on a funded trip to

Venice with sort of other curators from other spaces across the North of England as networking. I just remember thinking, first time I went to Venice, oh my goodness me. Oh, brings me so much joy. So yes, it's...

**TD:** That's wonderful. Thank you.

**KJ :** Yeah, a little bit of that helps, but...

**TD:** It really does. It really does. So to sort of wrap up, not to sort of rush, but through the archive of Castlefield Gallery, I can identify these five themes of activity that keep on recurring in the correspondence or in the writing. So I'll just run through them, and I'd like you to respond to the activity of Castlefield Gallery in the context of these ideas. So they're just ways of opening up your thoughts on the way Castlefield Gallery work historically, work now, could work in the future, around first the idea of being artist-led. So what does it mean to be artist-led? Are, as Castlefield Gallery describe themselves now, artist-focused? And what does that offer?

**KJ :** Oh, the power of language, hey? I still call it artist-led, although arguably it's probably not, is it, in the same way, because it's... It was... It had a studio, and in a weird way, I've always wanted to have it to have its studio back again. And obviously, it would be a very different studio now than it was then, but there was something about the sort of... This sort of... This manufacturing or this sort of production space of stuff happening all of the time in relation... So you had the making and the display, I suppose, in a... Running in tandem. And it had a very close relationship with the other studios. Now, obviously, this is before computers, so now you can find a studio space by going online, but back then, Castlefield was very much like a drop-in space for artists' needs. So you'd call in and say, "I need a studio. I need a supplier of this. I need a sort of... Like a sort of... Like a sort of one-stop help spot for artists." Okay. Artists-focused. I would play the devil's advocate. How more artist-focused is Castlefield compared to other galleries? I wonder who else would consider themselves artist-focused. I think it is artist... I think it's more artist-focused. I think... Hang on. I'm trying to say. You'd be surprised how few galleries consider artists as the sort of number one priority, or to use a gallery or a new word, as a stakeholder. Number one stakeholder would be your artists. I find sometimes I actually have to remind galleries that their foregrounding artists is kind of important. So it is artist-focused, which sounds like you shouldn't have to say it because it's a gallery, so what else is it focusing on? But in actual fact, it does need stating. It makes sense if you know that not every gallery is artist-focused. That makes sense.

**TD:** Thank you.

**KJ :** Often it's about the output, the outcome, the art, the thing. And not many people realise that it's a relationship with the artist that's running in tandem with the thing. Every acquisition here is a relationship with an artist. But you'd be surprised not everybody... Once you've got the thing, you have the relationship with the artist. So that's sustaining a relationship to the artist. That's good. And artists are needy. And sometimes that's



perceived as a problem. The artist has critical rigour. They fight to maintain something. And sometimes it's in a much easier way of doing something, but that's not the way that the artist is intending for that thing. You're a much better person generally, whether you're a curator or not, if you can see some of life through the eyes of an artist than you are in a slightly... I've heard it over the years, "Oh my God, someone's on the phone again." But we've given them a show, so why do they keep coming back to us sort of attitude? And you'd never get that at Castlefield. You'd be embraced if you went back to Castlefield.

**TD:** Yeah. Connecting to audiences. So how do visitors and local audiences connect to the work of Castlefield Gallery, and how does the gallery connect to the work of the city, cultural work of the city?

**KJ :** Gosh, that's a real discuss. Audiences, that's a weird word, isn't it? There's something so passive about an audience. And I hear, you could be a participant, you could be a visitor, resident, and you're an audience. Audience makes me think, I don't know. I don't think that you wander in off the street into a gallery like Castlefield Gallery, like I think you don't wander in off the street to a studio project space, and you don't walk in off the street to a Cork Street or Bond Street art gallery, even though they are all equally public-facing galleries, all seeking an audience, and anyone in principle can walk in off the street.

I don't think you walk in off the street necessarily to a gallery like our Gallery either. And that's not to say that that's a bad thing, because I very much believe in an arts ecology, and I believe that if you didn't say come here as a child on a school trip, then join the Saturday art club, and then maybe grow up and be a banker, I don't think you would then, I think those people become the audiences of venues like Castlefield. Because contemporary art can be quite hard. You've got no hindsight, you've got no, you're living it, they're commenting, it's an expression of the time in which we live now. And that can be quite hard without, and also generally people don't like contemporary art.

They didn't like the Pre-Raphaelites, they forget they didn't like the Pre-Raphaelites. They forget they didn't like post-Impressionism, they forget they didn't like Impressionism, they forget they didn't like Surrealism or Dadaism, they didn't like any of it when it actually landed. We've got a lovely article about Henry Moore's mother and child from the Manchester Evening News, and it says 'monstrosity' in great big letters, and now it's deemed a highlight of the collection, like the Pre-Raphaelites, like the Impressionists. So, it takes a certain person to become an audience member, if you're an artistic audience, of a venue like Castlefield Gallery.

I've forgotten the question. How does it connect to the... And so, how do you connect the person in the building looking at the stuff with the stuff? And I think Castlefield plays with that relationship all of the time. And the other pivotal bit of it is to do with language, and how you create, how you presume somebody is clever, but just doesn't have the specific knowledge or

information that will unlock a greater reading or understanding of what you're looking at. And you have to be...

You've got to be brave to a degree. I think people feel quite brave coming into Manchester Art Gallery. I think people feel that there's some sort of alarm system that goes off, that when we can somehow tell if you've got culture or you know your art history or not, they feel judged or they feel insecure, and then it makes people feel defensive. And when they feel defensive, they go into attack mode. So then they start to say, "It's all shit anyway. You can't fool me. Tracey Emin's bad. La da da da da. Damien Hirst. La da da da da."

So they have an ever-changing, responsive way of trying to bring some bespokeness into their relationships, because what they have is intimacy. That sounds wrong, but they have... It's a small space, and nine times out of ten, they have a one-to-one relationship with somebody, and that's incredibly rare. You aren't going to wander around, Tate Modern and be able to ask of somebody lots and lots of questions and feel comfortable in finding out those things, because you don't want to go, "I don't know. I don't know. What is it? What am I looking at?" So that work is never done. There is always, always ways of connecting audiences, and also helping artists to connect to audiences as well, because it's a bit like what we were discussing earlier. You're not being asked to explain it, because if you could explain it, then why did the artist bother to make it in the first place, and why have you given over the space to it? But you have to be able to give people relevant avenues into it, I guess. And that's quite often actually done by just sharing the question. This artist is interested in knowing or understanding or exploring blank, and that's where you as a visitor is also being invited into that.

**TD:** Thank you. That's really good. That's an interesting idea. Financial sustainability.

**KJ :**Oh, joy.

**TD:** So, are Castlefield part of a sustainable financial cultural system for artists and audiences?

**KJ :**Is there a financially sustainable ecology for artists to exist? Because if it does, bags would be in that gang. Nothing is financially sustainable. Nothing. It's all done precariously. It was precarious over 30 years ago, and I think it carries on being precarious. You get a tiny amount of money in the grand scheme of things. You overpromise, because you're so grateful to have anything at all. I can't think any other industry overpromises. It gives so much more than what they're actually receiving, and I think we over... We think too much of outcomes, because people want tangible things that can be accounted for, and it's very hard to talk about quality when all anybody really wants to know is quantity. So, how do you describe the changing... What is the financial merit of changing one person's life or one person's perspective weighed up to a headcount of X amount of people came in? So, you play the

game, and you play the game, and you play the game, even though the game don't have the right rules and it's probably the wrong game.

And sometimes with Castlefield... I joined as a member of the trust when Castlefield failed in the very first year of the NPO, because I was absolutely furious, and then I thought, "I'd probably be better channelling the energy of anger into making sure that Castlefield can ride out this period and be an NPO in the future." And then you are left sometimes wondering, "Who wants to be an NPO? Who wants to be?" It just doesn't work. It doesn't sort of necessarily help the nature of those idea creative spaces. And if you took away the amount of money it takes to justify the tiny amount of money that you got, you have even less money.

**TD:** What do you remember of that time when the NPO was removed?

**KJ :** I remember getting the... I remember not thinking it could even be an option. Then I remember going through the list of all the funding and not finding Castlefield. And then I remember the phone call starting about, "Where's Castlefield? It's got to be on here somewhere. It's not on here. What does that mean? Oh my God." Then I remember the phenomenal expression of support that was shown to Castlefield from peers all over the country, but also through the auction program. And then it got back in it again. And it's a good thing to be back in it, but it's not. It's not Nirvana.

And I think financial sustainability might be a myth that we all think we're going to get, but we never do. Because ultimately, we're still project funded. NPO is still a three-year program. It's still hard to think like a business if you're forever having to renew those contracts, those relationships, those funding, those projects, short-term projects, short-term contracts, freelance contracts. So none of those are helping anybody get mortgages or any sort of long-term security in life. Thus has it ever been so. And this is a city built on culture. You don't get the investment if you don't have the... You ain't got a story. You haven't got something to say about yourself. I think artists... Sorry.

I think to be financially sustainable, artists need to be funded for being an artist, a bit like the Northern Irish model. I think if that's the only way we could actually, as a sector, be financially sustainable. So you get paid to be an artist, but it doesn't mean that you'd knock out 42 paintings, have eight shows. You've applied as that status, and the state is paying you to be that person. Bit like after the war, and the whole reason why the Arts Council exists in the first place. Artists were so well paid to be official war artists during the First World War. And the Arts Council existed to pay artists. Now quite often, the Arts Council pays for the institutions. Yeah, and that doesn't actually weirdly benefit an artist. But we might have to go back through some of this.

**TD:** It's absolutely fine.

**KJ** :In my what you say and what you don't say, because I wouldn't want to make Castlefield's position with the NPO precarious.

**TD**: You'll be able to go back.

**KJ** : Yeah.

**TD**: I think that's really thoughtful. It's just the way you said it. It's really interesting.

**KJ** :Thank you.

**TD**: That's great. Timely. Are the gallery contemporary? Do they stay relevant to contemporary art in the North West and the UK?

**KJ** : Such good questions. I think the next bit of that question, if I answer that, is if you're going to ask me how. And then I might doubt. And that might make me think that my first part of the question might be incorrect.

**TD**: There's no correct or incorrect answers here. It's all just how you feel about it.

**KJ** :And contemporary, if we take contemporary as its most basic definition, so it's art that's not just made today, but it's a contemporary expression of today, then yes, Castlefield Gallery is contemporary. And relevance is something I've talked about for a long while, but it's only really become under the sort of part of this new Arts Council language. I would say, what would I say? Let me just read your last bit again.

Do they stay relevant in the North West and the UK? I think they show a certain type of art at Castlefield. I mean, relevant, yes. Representative, maybe not. But really, you just need more Castlefields to capture a wider sort of representation. I mean, it's contemporary art that's made to exist in a space like Castlefield, and that's not all of contemporary art practice. I think it helps support wider contemporary art practice through its new art spaces and its advocacy and training programmes.

But yes, I mean, it's very white. I mean, it's less white than it was, but it's still very white. And in a city like Manchester, then that is arguably not relevant. But yeah. I do sort of, maybe it's a bit like cheating, but I do trust Castlefield to give me a snapshot of contemporary art practice. And I'm grateful that I have it as a constant stream through Castlefield. I think its absence would be massively felt, because I don't think there's any other space that's doing that, weirdly in a city this size, doing that regularly. And I think it's too much to ask of Castlefield to do it all. It's interesting that you say outside the UK, you don't say internationally. And then you define the sort of, then it's also, I mean, we have national artists, some of whom live in the Manchester or North West region.

**TD**: Good.

**KJ** : Is that okay?

**TD**: Yeah, I think I'm going to refine that to talk about a couple of the bits that you've spoken about.

**KJ** : Okay, cool.

**TD**: So then the final question, and I think I'm going to reorder the questions too. Power, power in the gallery. So how are decisions made in the gallery? What are the kind of structures that you understand in the gallery?

**KJ** : Gosh, that's a good question. That's something I ask myself on a daily basis, working here. I don't actually know. I've always felt that the Castlefield, me as a trustee, I don't need to be a curator when I'm there as a trustee. I don't feed into the programme, I don't suggest ideas, I have total autonomy on how they devise a programme. And that's made me feel that I don't actually know how they devise a programme. Presumably they have a structure, presumably they have a requirement to be representative, presumably they have to represent sort of gender and they have to represent lots of different media or different ways in which artists are working. But how they make the cut as to what gets into the show and what doesn't get into the show, how much of that programme is from unsolicited proposals as opposed to proactive curating, I don't actually know.

And I don't know, I mean that can be quite dangerous, isn't it, if you don't know how the decision-making process is, because you need to know where you are in relationship to that, I guess. Because nobody's really making subjective choices, they're making objective choices, but I guess people might think it's not for me or it's not my sort of work. I should know more about that, really. I mean the board doesn't make a... the board exists for all the dull things involved in an art gallery, like the lease or the rats or the lack of a lease or a bit of planning permission or a landlord contract with Marks and Spencers or employment rights or staffing issues or HR issues or cash flow issues. And I think that's kind of how it should be. And they have the autonomy to do what they know will work for their space, which feels relevant, which feels interesting. Yeah. I think that's great.

**TD**: Once again, I feel like you've kind of, in your answer you've prompted me to think about the question differently, which is really useful, so thank you. I feel like this has been really, really helpful. And that is where I would like us to wrap it up, unless you have any final comments on the use of the archive as a lens to look backwards and forwards.

**KJ** : Oh yes, looking backwards and forwards. What do we learn? What do we learn from our past, though? What do we learn from the archive? And why do people go, what triggers you to go back into an archive? Sort of because it's one thing to have it, but then it's how useful, how is it used, and how present is it? So I personally think, though this will never happen because nobody has any capacity, is that you should be able to find the 1984

exhibition as easily as you can find whatever's on today. That there needs to be digitalisation of an archive to make it accessible, or to people know, to know that it exists, to know that it might hold something that they need research wise.

I say this with a totally undigitalised and undocumented archive, but how does it work? Curiosity. How does it, how does it, how does it, why have it if it just, which is how I feel about my box. So why do I have my box? Because even, I think I have my box of what I did for Castlefield, so I remember, I don't forget what I did for Castlefield, but as we've demonstrated, I've forgotten vast amounts of stuff I've done for Castlefield. Unless I opened my box, I wouldn't know to look for the thing that I couldn't remember that I'd done to know to look for, if that makes sense. Yep. So, yeah. And then what would, why, what would we, I think we learn, I think we learn repetition, I think we learn, I think we can perhaps see systems and structures and maybe the decision making process by looking back over.

I suppose it's not just like the 1986 exhibitions programme, but then that's got the context of what was happening in the city in 1986, culturally what was happening, what was happening socially. Culture's not a vacuum, it's not like we just do, we just pluck artists out of the sky and do it in a self-indulgent way. Culture is very much impacted on by wider social, economic and political decisions. It was a political decision to put Castlefield in Castlefield as a place making. Thirty years ago, Castlefield was full of burnt out cars, motorbike shops and print workshops. And then there was no reason to go to that part of Manchester unless you needed to do any of those three things.

So, it must, I suppose we have an archive because it's our story or it's part, it's part of our city story. And that's got to be important because I think maybe it's okay as well not to know why you need it, but if you didn't have it, it couldn't be called upon at that point of need as well. Oh, I feel like I'm trying to write a PhD.

**TD:** You're doing a great job of it as well, embarrassingly so.

**KJ :**Whoa, okay, this is like, wow, meaning of life stuff.

**TD:** You've really identified some of the core questions for the research. I'm going to stop the recording there.

**KJ :**I feel like I need to lie down.

**TD:** Thank you so much, thank you so much Kate. Thank you so much.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Discussion between Chara Lewis (CL) and Thomas Dukes (TD) re. Archive document from Castlefield Gallery.**

**Conducted in person 02/05/2023**

**Thomas Dukes (TD):** Okay, we're recording. I'll put that there so I can just see the time.

Welcome and thank you for being part of my project on the archive of Castlefield Gallery, looking at what the archive is and how it operates. It's the 2nd of the 5th, 2023. I'm here with Chara Lewis. I'll try and keep the interview to around 30 minutes.

**Chara Lewis (CL):** Yeah, that's good.

**(TD):** Yeah, I'll try and keep it aimed towards the archive of Castlefield Gallery. But at the end, if there's anything that you want to go back to, or anything that you've thought about, that would be really great. And then to reflect on the interview.

So first, can I ask you to describe your current relationship to Castlefield Gallery?

**(CL):** Yes, currently I'm a member of the board of Castlefield Gallery. I also have the additional relationship of having a partnership with Manchester School of Arts. And being the programme leader of Fine Art, we have that relationship as well, where our students benefit from the menteeship and things as well. That relationship with the Castlefield, which I really value as well on behalf of the students.

**(TD):** Me as well. I appreciate it a lot when we get students coming in to volunteer, or to do placements, or just who want to come and look at the work. I think it was set up by a Manchester Polytechnic students and that relationship is great.

**(CL):** It's still going, yeah.

**(TD):** So your name is mentioned on a piece of the archive material that's being represented as part of the installation by George Gibson and Grace Collins. Could you talk about how you came to know the Gallery at the time, and a bit more about your side of the story around that document?

**(CL):** Yeah, so my side of that is that I finished art school in 1990. And then immediately moved to Manchester and tried to find my way into being an artist in Manchester. And one of the really formative things that helped me to do that was discovering Castlefield Gallery and starting to just get involved with chatting to them, getting to know Chris Lethbridge in particular. And

then, because they knew about me, I also joined the Slidex scheme, so they had some slides of my work as well, and I was able to get involved with anything that they were doing to do with artists getting together and discussing their work or showing each other's work to each other and things. That was really helpful as well to enable me to become part of a community of artists as well in Manchester, most of whom hadn't come from Manchester School of Art. Most of them, like me, had come into the city after graduating, which is interesting. So people like Ian Rawlinson, for example, were involved, and Martin Vincent and that group of artists. And at that time then, following, I suppose, that nascent relationship, I was asked, somebody came to my flat, actually...

I'd been away, I'd been away on a honeymoon, actually, and then as I got back, the day I got back, somebody was knocking on the door, saying, "We'd like to put you into a show." They hadn't been able to get hold of me because I'd been away for a couple of weeks. "Would you like to be in a group show in the gallery?" So I said, "Yes, please," and went along and looked at the basement space. I think I've always liked to use lighting and control that kind of theatrical, slightly theatrical side to the way that my work is shown, so I was quite glad to be offered the downstairs space, which had no windows and controllable lighting, so I kind of set about making some work or kind of finishing some work to put into that space.

**(TD):** Why did you move to Manchester? And then you said there were a few who'd come into Manchester.

**(CL):** Yeah, there were. So I think most of the people that were here were because they maybe were from the area and moved back, having been to art school elsewhere. But in my case, I'd been to art school at the Ruskin in Oxford, and my partner was studying at Medlock at Manchester Poly, as was. He was still in his second year, so I moved up to Manchester to be with him, basically. So I decided for love that I would move to Manchester. That was my reason.

**(TD):** And then maybe this is an obvious question, but how did you know to get in touch with or go and chat to the gallery?

**(CL):** I think I might have just seen the gallery, because it was in a really good, prominent spot. My studio was just down the road on Ellesmere Street, so I would have passed it probably cycling into the city centre.

**(TD):** Which studio was it?

**(CL):** It was in a studio which was in the same building as Sigma Studios, and it was called Cotton Run Studios. So I was just there for a few years in that space.

**(TD):** Just out of interest, were you living central at the time?



**(CL):** No, I was living in Wally Range. You couldn't live central, there wasn't anywhere to live in the city centre, apart from India House. There wasn't anywhere much.

**(TD):** I think maybe we mentioned that David Alker was saying there was like 300 people.

**(CL):** Yeah, they lived on top of the Arndale bus station. I was cycling in from Wally Range to the studio and then probably on into town past the Castlefield. Being an opportunistic sort of artist, I just probably popped in and started a conversation, I should think I said, "I've newly arrived," etc.

**(TD):** And that Chris was there to chat and get to know you. He was very good to chat to.

I love that feeling of someone at the flat, like, "It's really, really soon. We'd love to work with you." Yeah, those emails. I know it's a bit short-notice...

**(CL):** I think I had an answer machine.

**(TD):** So can I ask you to reflect on what it means to you to have your name in the exhibition currently?

**(CL):** Yeah, it means a lot, actually. It sort of comes a bit full circle to come back to that first show as well. And for it to be an ex-student as well, George, showing it, that's a really nice piece of synchronicity, I think, as well, to have that. And to feel that I'm part of the archive, part of the history of the gallery, and also be part of its present and its future, as well as a board member. It's really nice.

**(TD):** Good.

Yeah, we didn't really address the fact that this was your first gallery show, did we?

**(CL):** Yeah.

**(TD):** And then following that, do you feel like it was quite a big part of your work as an artist in the city?

**(CL):** It was not just that. I think it really helped me to get started in my career as an artist, to be... Because unless you have a show, you're not recognised as a viable artist sometimes. So having that recognition from a gallery was really, really helpful. It helped me to get things like the Prince's Youth Business Trust funding, because it meant somebody believed in me as an artist, and potential good prospect for them to invest in, as well. And it meant other people were more aware of me as well, of my practice. So it was helpful, yeah, I'm sure.

**(TD):** And you've kindly brought slides in so we can see the installation work.

**(CL):** Yeah.

**(TD):** Thank you. And George was a student of yours?

**(CL):** Yeah. Yeah, George was on Fine Arts, yeah.

**(TD):** And you said it made it sort of full circle.

**(CL):** Yeah.

**(TD):** Sometimes I think about the word, , a 'healthy' relationship. And I know that's a really loaded term, but there is something about being able to see change and growth, maybe not to say growth, but the way that things kind of go around. So I'm glad that you mentioned that as well. So finally, I'd like to invite your thoughts on why Castlefield Gallery keep an archive, and then how it could be, or is, used.

**(CL):** I wouldn't have thought of them doing anything else, I suppose. It's so important to artists to archive things. So as it was set up by artists, I'm not at all surprised that they then had the instinct to archive everything. Because I think you have a view to posterity, you have a view to legacy. I'm presuming that's what they were making sure of as well, that there was a legacy in that archive. The work that they've done for the sake of the artist as well as for the gallery. I suppose, I don't know, maybe it's me, but I think most artists that I know, certainly from the days of slides and photographs, would be quite carefully archiving things, and also keeping their notebooks and sketchbooks and things and anything else around their practice. Not really with a sense of what would happen to it necessarily, just that that's what you do, if you think of yourself as an artist maybe. It's different now, I think, because everything's digital. You still try to keep everything in your hard drives then, don't you? You've got this hard drive archive going on, as well as other non-digital things.

**(TD):** Sometimes I'm concerned that digital makes it feel like you're archiving things, but you're not actually doing it in the same way. You're like, "Oh, I can always access this." ...

**(CL):** Cataloguing them properly and being able to find them again.

**(TD):** Writing on the top of it what show and when it was, and holding them in a place. There's always this sense that you can lay hands on them.

**(CL):** I knew exactly where it was, even though I hadn't looked at that folder, that box file, for many years. I knew exactly where it was. It took me two seconds to dig it out.

**(TD):** That feels like a good relationship with the past.. I feel like it's one of those questions where looking for an answer to why would you keep an archive, you can kind of just, because it's what you want to do, you want to

hold on to where you come from. That legacy idea, as well - I feel like some people are resistant to that. You're not trying to win a Nobel or something.

**(CL):** I know it sounds a bit narcissistic, but it's kind of what you do. Maybe we were just taught that way, as well, to always keep your slides at that time, keep your good slides and keep them safe.

**(TD):** Because there's always the, "Where's your journal? Where's your reflective journal?" and stuff like this. But maybe some of this answers to why students should be doing that. I don't know how well that's taking as a, "Look how you're developing. Look what you're doing." The archive can be part of that. I love this, "For the sake of the artists." I always feel like that could be the thing that the archive could maybe do more of. It's fun to be able to say, "Ah, I know where I can find records of where I've come from or what I'm doing," to see how I've connected to this artist who was there, or to see how this artist over here was working, as well. I suppose the "How it is used" part is more speculating, maybe. If that's not something you feel like answering...

**(CL):** Well, it's interesting, isn't it, to see you using it for research now, and to see things... It's being seen as something that could be mined as a seam of various kinds of information or images, in a way that the slide library that we keep here is now a very useful archive. There are various things that people will reference for publications or whatever. So you never know, I suppose, how something might get used in the future, as well as just being a repository for things. It could be actually used... I don't know. It's interesting to know how you feel you're using it, I suppose, for your research. Differently to perhaps how it might have been intended.

Would you think it was always intended that people could come and research all of these historical things?

**(TD):** I think to keep it as a research object is the wonderful term that means you can do kind of...As long as the next person can come and do research on it, you can invite an artist to respond to it, or share it with a journal, there's so much that you can do to just look closely at it and what it's done, and how it's worked.

I feel like I could do more and more and more with it. The more I do with the archive, the more I'm like, "Oh, this could be used in this way, or this is exciting, or this engages people in this way." But it's interesting.

**(CL):** Yeah, so do you think it... I mean, how are you using it, I suppose, is my question back to you. How are you using the archive for your research?

**(TD):** For me, I like to look at it as a way of getting perspective on something. Maybe I can feel that galleries today can become very present. They're very focused on the present, on staying, doing something, and working, and just staying afloat. I think it's a good idea to get a bit of perspective on what are the things that you take for granted, what are the threads that you always have to keep juggling. I guess I'm prone to metaphor, but yeah, if you're

juggling loads of balls all the time, you never get to stop and look what they are, or why you're doing it like that.

**(CL):** And you might forget what happened in the past that's actually very similar to what's happening now, or you might think that you've got a really new idea and actually somebody's... that's already... has actually been done in some way. So I think having been here for so long as well, I feel that that's happening to me a little bit. Somebody will come and go, "Oh, I've got this really great idea for using a house as a gallery." then I know that loads of artists did that at one point in Manchester and used each other's house as a gallery as part of the annual programme, but nobody might... they might not even know, or they probably don't even know, that the annual programme ever existed or what it was. Or easily be able to find out, maybe as well, if things have dropped off. You know, off the web and the online resources that were there at the beginning, probably sort of, you know, not been updated or not been renewed or something, and then they're gone.

**(TD):** Yeah.

**(CL):** So where do you find out about those things?

Absolutely.

**(CL):** Actually, Castlefield Archive might be one of those places that still holds those sorts of memories and that kind of information about the things that have gone before us.

Yeah.

**(CL):** So it's... yeah.

It feels like it sharpens a critical awareness as well, because if you come to something and you think you don't understand a house as a gallery, you don't understand the social make-up of that area, or you don't understand maybe why that house is being used as a gallery, or what does it mean for this particular kind of either a new build or a terrace or something. But if you can see a bit more of that background, then you can see, I feel like exactly this, it gives you a bit more of a critical awareness.

**(CL):** Yeah.

And making those resources experienceable now, like findable, I think is a good thing to do as you are.

**(CL):** Searchable.

Yeah.

**(CL):** And also, yeah, a sense of what it was like to be an artist-led or an artist in Manchester, at different times and what's affected that, and what's

changed in that experience of artists, I think, over the years. I think that's important, because it's reflected. There's a lot of artist-led stuff, but there's an ecosystem where they can get into galleries or do other things. That's interesting to see as well. So things like that, where artists are shown in each other's houses because they didn't have the opportunity to show elsewhere, so it was a way of making your own situation for the art to happen.

And that's what Castlefield came from, that need, that artist-led, not curator-led, kind of need not led by anybody else either, by the council or anything. It was artists deciding to do something for artists, because they could see the need, that was so important that they did. And then it also has continued to, because of the artists they were showing and the changes in those artists and the changes in those practices, from probably quite a modernist, relatively conservative approach to something much more postmodern and maybe relational and things like that going through, and then how that's changed again. And then the touring shows that come through, what are they indicative of?

It's kind of interesting, isn't it? It's like looking through layers and strata and seeing what's happening.

**(TD):** And all of these things are sort of, I mean, not even barometers, but measures by which you can say, oh, is that what artists have been pushing for? And is that different today? Why is it different?

**(CL):** It's only a slice, it's only a little part of the picture as well, of what was going on in non-gallery spaces or studios. And the fact that there were studios that you could cheaply have lots of space and put on shows in, as well at that time, in the city centre, and a wealth of spaces that you could do things in, meant that a lot of things were happening outside of the little slice that was going on in Castlefield's gallery as well, but it still gives you that little segment of what was happening.

**(TD):** Yeah, there's like a hub that you can go and look at if you want to see things coming through or going out.

**(CL):** Yeah, and that's just a piece of a larger puzzle, I suppose, if I want to mix my metaphors a bit more. But yeah, it wouldn't give you the whole picture to look at that archive. It would only give you a part, wouldn't it, of what was going on.

**(TD):** They're very partial. I'm finding that the archive is very partial in what it's kept. There's a lot here that hasn't been kept.

**(CL):** Yes, so even the archive isn't the whole picture itself of what's happened in the Castlefield, leave alone what's happened in the city, but it's better than nothing. Better than no records of anything.

**(TD):** We kind of had a chat towards there, but is there anything that you're thinking about the archive that you'd like to raise? And this is more broadly,

not necessarily maybe focused on Castlefield Gallery's archive, but interest in why archives are important, if you're seeing them.

**(CL):** Well, I think for me as an artist anyway, and for brass art, archives are a really essential research scene for our practice and something to respond to. So we've worked with a number of different archives and different kinds of archive in order to feed our practice and to give ourselves something that we're responding to within our practice. It's a place for unearthing things. It's a place where you can bring things back to life and give them new meaning potentially as well, which is something that we're really interested in. So these things are dormant in the archive for so long and then somebody comes along and decides that that's interesting for a particular reason, perhaps nothing to do with the reason it was ever collected, but it then gives it a new meaning as well.

So I think that all that potential, that nascent potential within an archive is really interesting.

**(TD):** I was just checking our time there. Do you ever feel, like with brass art and looking at archives, do you ever feel that there's something that makes... So when you say there's all this dormant archive, I think a lot about why does certain things in the archive kind of draw people to them more? How do you make archives a bit more... Because some things, or I don't know what you've found, but some things they seem to draw more people to them and people sort of gravitate to these stories that are like myths.

**(CL):** Yeah, we work with Cheetham's or "Chetham's" Library and they were saying that everybody goes for the Marx and Engels, or everybody goes for the, what's it called, the Bellevue Archive, the photographs I think they've got as well from Bellevue's circus. Because they know about that and they'll go for that, or they'll go for the Marx and Engels story. But there's so much more in the collection than that, and so much interesting stuff. We discover it, and I think what everybody does, hopefully, is bring their own interest to that. So they'll discover things that, because they're interesting to them, because of something else, because of some other interest in something. So we ended up with that particular place.

We were just looking for things that somehow just chimed with our research already, our existing things that we'd done before, or things that we were individually interested in or knew about. So things like Athanasius Kircher, who's a Renaissance polymath, we knew about him already for a completely different reason, because he was involved with pre-cinematic spectacle, Magic Lanterns, and he had images of these things in his amazing books of all kinds of different, interesting, scientific stuff. So we knew about him, but we spotted the books in the library, and they revealed a whole other load of stuff to do with geology and volcanoes and things that he was interested in, and amazing folding diagrams that we ended up working with. So there's got to be an element of serendipity, as well as the element of having existing concerns, I think, that you bring to that archive. I would say.

**(TD):** Yeah, I think that it can feel like this big, or my experience is it can feel like this big sea of stuff and times, and it's an archive of an art gallery, so there are fantastical ideas and things that have been made happen. And unless you come with, I keep on saying thread, but unless you come with some way of getting through there, it can just feel a bit like an elaborate thing.

**(CL):** You need a starting point.

**(TD):** Yeah, you need something to help you go through. And sometimes I think that ergo, like the Marx and Engels stuff, it's like I've got a grasp on that, and I can come at it with a bit of a position, and I can follow that thread through here, and come out. I might have discovered that Marx was dead cold when he was writing, or something like that, or he liked this library space. Yeah. I think a lot about when stuff's dormant, and then how to keep an ember burning. I don't know, how do you keep this material so it wants people to...

**(CL):** I like it when there's a collection in an archive where you can see things, because often, or nearly always, aren't they, they're very, very well boxed up and labelled and stored. So I like things like museum stores, where everything's a little bit out on the shelves still, and you can walk around and just find things by accident. But you can still find things by accident by looking through an index, or even through a digital catalogue, but actually seeing things sometimes, and the strange juxtapositions that you find. That's something that I find really interesting as well. Especially going in with a completely open mind as well, and not really knowing what you're looking for in the first place, but then revisiting, and then whatever comes to the surface, then you start to go a bit deeper with that thing.

**(TD):** The experience of the archive can be really often overlooked. I think that this was something that there was a lot of radical archive conferences, it sounds like, in the late '90s, early 2000s.

**(CL):** The artist-archivist sort of ideas.

**(TD):** And that made the experience of the archive feel a lot more... Well, it prioritised someone who's come, and not an academic, not a researcher, but someone who's just going to have the experience of it. And that shelves, not knowing what you're going to find, the serendipity, the accident, that can be more rewarding than everything being laid out. And I know we said then, or you said, the digital catalogue, you can also find this. But it's not quite as fun. Or it's like the poetics of opening something, and you find this letter, and you're like, "Oh, I feel like I've got a lot closer to someone."

It'd be fun to work with... It'd be fun to push the space a bit more. I guess that's what I was trying to do with George and Grace, to imagine what would it be like if experiencing the archive was more like this, and the books were held in these sacred or unusual ways.

**(CL):** Yes. Interesting. So did they find that my name was part of the collection then? Did they discover that or something?

**(TD):** Well, yes. That letter was... I gave them five threads to respond to, and one of them was, "What does it mean to be..." I think that was the artist-led. And they were saying that as much as the sense of being artist-led can feel very egalitarian and really positive, there are still the discussions, there are still a lot of dynamics.

**(CL):** Decisions being made about who gets in and who doesn't. Who gets selected.

**(TD):** As you were saying and some other people have said, it's just making that clear, because it's really positive. People say, "I was able to go and chat, and I'd stay part of something, I'd stay part of going and doing crits," or things like this.

**(CL):** Yes, it's interesting that that thing [the document containing Chara's name] has been revealed and people don't know anything about it as well, the discussions about who was going to be in that show and things.

**(TD):** I think it's strange that it was written down. I asked them to censor the bottom of that letter, just because they say, and we were saying, "Everywhere have these discussions. All of the galleries have this discussion."

**(CL):** Yes, but they don't write it down.

**(TD):** They don't write it down.

**(CL):** It's a letter, is it?

**(TD):** It's just a typed document. So maybe someone was asked to prepare...

**(CL):** Minuting things, yes.

**(TD):**...and then it happens. Those power, or how decisions are made, is another thread through. Someone just knows an artist, and then so...

I'll draw it to a close, but how have you found the process of reflection?

**(CL):** It's been great to be able to do it. I really enjoyed it. Thanks for the opportunity to talk about it.

**(TD):** I'll close the interview. That was wonderful.



### **Appendix 3**

#### **Discussion between Leslie Remonato (LR) and Thomas Dukes (TD) re. Archive of Castlefield Gallery.**

**Conducted online 14/03/2024**

**Thomas Dukes (TD):** Good morning, Leslie.

**Leslie Remonato (LR):** Good morning - it's the evening!

**(TD):** Please, could you say what your name is and your job title at Castlefield Gallery?

**(LR):** Yes, I'm Leslie Remonato, and I am the Communications and Audience Development Coordinator at Castlefield Gallery.

**(TD):** And how long have you been doing that?

**(LR):** I think it's been a bit more than a year now. I can't remember when I started doing that job exactly.

**(TD):** I met you in early 2021, so you must have been there for three and a bit years?

**(LR):** No - I started working at Castlefield Gallery in 2018, but I started working as the Communications Coordinator sometimes in 2022, I think.

**(TD):** Could you describe the archive of Castlefield Gallery?

**(LR):** Well, it's a tough question, really. Describe the archive at the gallery, right? Well, it's currently behind me, actually. But it consists in a lot of various formats of documents that have been collected since the 80s, since we opened the gallery. And they can be found in the archive room, or Office Two, mainly. It's been classified per year, and per exhibition, and projects, and you can find all sorts of things in there, from handouts and price lists for exhibitions to, I don't know, flyers to promote the shows, press articles about exhibitions, and sometimes some more unexpected documents, such as transcriptions of emails, or some lovely cards that the artists shared with us. Well, I guess there's also recordings, like videos, all sorts of films, yeah.

**(TD):** I like that you described it first as the archive room, and then as Office Two. And I guess it's the meeting room now.

**(LR):** It is, oh, yeah, that's funny. That's funny. Oh, right.

**(TD):** The history of the room. But I like 'The Archive Room' as well.

**(LR):** And in my mind, it is, first of all, the archive room more than the meeting room, funnily enough. Because every time I come here, well, no, every time I come here, I have a meeting, really, but I know that I come here quite regularly to have a look at the archive for various projects I work on. And so it makes sense for me that this is the archive room, and this is the first thing that you see when you come in. You don't see a meeting. You see the archive. So for me, it's the archive room.

**(TD):** And you said that you've been using the archive a bit. Have you been using it recently a lot?

**(LR):** Well, I've been using it yesterday, really. There is this placement from the University of Salford, who's working with me at the moment on comm's. And I wanted her to create a folder for Logical Song, Rowland Hill's exhibition. And so it's funny that you actually asked me yesterday if I was happy to do this interview, because I literally spent the morning explaining to her how we create a folder, what we put in there, what it's for, where it goes. So, yeah, that's what I did. But also, you don't have social media, but because we're working on 40 years of the future and the painting show, I did use the archive quite a bit. And on Instagram, for example, for International Women's Day, we wanted to celebrate the women who were part of the gallery's history. And I dived back and tried to find some photos of Sheila Seal and some previous directors. I only found Celia Cross in the end. I tried to find other photos of female directors, because there have been a lot, but Celia Cross is the only one I found with Sheila Seal.

**(TD):** Oh, sorry, I didn't hear you.

[I ask if we can continue with me asking questions in the chat – my microphone has stopped working – sentences in italics are Leslie reading out the questions I have sent]

**(LR):** Yeah, I guess, yeah, I guess that could work. Should I read the questions? Okay.

*Is it right that you are the person responsible for putting things into the archive for Castlefield Gallery?*

It is right. Yes, I am the person responsible for putting things into the archive of Castlefield Gallery.

**(TD):** *So what does that role entail?*

**(LR):** Every time we have an exhibition or an event going on at the gallery, I make sure to keep documents that might be important in the future for someone who tries to understand what an exhibition or an event was about, who were the artists there, what was the reaction from the press, this sort of thing, what works were exhibited. So really, I just collect documents that show that. It's a lot of documents that I produce myself to be fair. Because I'm the one who makes the handouts at the gallery, I'm the one who makes

the price lists and the plans, and so I have access to them very easily and I make sure to save some to put them in the archive folder. I'm also the one who's in contact with the press, so it makes sense also for me to know what the press has written about the show and to put that into document, print it and add it to the folder. Or sometimes when it's been printed in a magazine, I can just add a copy of that magazine in there.

And also it's me who collects the comments, the written comments from the audience, the visitors. We have some cardboard cards that we leave next to the front door where visitors can say what they thought about the exhibition. And we survey them because we just need to report some data to the arts council every year to get funding and in this survey I had a question for people to share what they thought about the show or the gallery or the event they attended because sometimes it's just for a very specific event and I then collect these comments, write them down and I add them to the archive folder.

Then if there are other things that I think are important, for example, for Omid Asadi's show where there were a lot of dandelion seeds on the floor, I asked Gass when he de-installed the show if he could give me one of the seeds so I could add it to the archive folder to just keep a memory of that. So yeah, that's it.

**(TD):** *How did [you] get the role?*

**(LR):** When you say 'the role' you mean the fact that I put the archive in the archive folder? Initially Jennifer, who was the communications and audience development coordinator before me, was in charge of looking after the archive and making sure that there would be a folder for each of our events and exhibitions. When I say events, I don't mean every single event, like most of our events are connected to exhibitions anyway, so I don't know if that makes sense. So if we have a recording of an event somehow, it will end up in the exhibitions folder that is connected to this event. Anyway, yeah, you got that.

Anyway, so Jennifer was in charge of the archive before me and when I was the gallery coordinator, that was my role, my previous role, I actually ended up helping her a lot. She was only working part-time and so she needed quite a lot of help on comm's, which is why I ended up getting her role in general because she taught me everything, really. And this was part of the role. I started doing it when I was still the gallery coordinator to help her. At first she showed me how and told me what to put in there, and then after a while I just knew essentially what was supposed to go in there. And then after I became the communications coordinator, I kept doing it because now I'm full-time and I still have time to do that when she didn't, so I don't need anyone to help me with that, really.

**(TD):** So was it from Jen that you learned what items went into the archive?  
[sent via chat]

**(LR):** It was from Jen, really, yes, she's the one who explained it to me.

**(TD):** *Could you recap what items go into the archive?*

**(LR):** Okay, so in the archive we put various documents that list what works are part of an exhibition, who are the artists who were part of the exhibition, but also we get reactions from the visitors, reactions from the press, and other various things that we think might be important. And so that includes handouts, plans, price lists, articles, whether they are online articles or printed articles. And yes, comments from the audience. And if, for example, if there is an object or something that was printed especially for an event or for an exhibition, I'll keep that. We had a booklet printed for Roland Hill's show, so I kept that. And as I said previously, for Omid's show, I kept the dandelion seeds, so anything that can, that is connected to an exhibition and that can give more information about what it was like and how it was perceived.

**(TD):** *Is the archive important?*

**(LR):** Yes, I think the archive is very important. I mean, my background is in art history, so I would be insane if I pretended that the archive is not important. It is essential, I think. And, I mean, it will be essential for art historians in the future, probably in the future, probably. But I'm just looking at, I was just thinking about it earlier today, actually, how what was kept in the archive really informed the way we, like, Gass and Helen thought about the 40 years of the future painting exhibition, for example. How the work that Sheila Seale and the MASA team did in curating the show in 1984 was so good that now we can kind of base our current show on what they did 40 years ago. And thanks to the archive, we have a record of what they did 40 years ago, which is how we can use that. So it is really important, yes, so we know what the history of the gallery is, what the values of the gallery were 40 years ago, what they are now, how they are, our current values are inspired by what the MASA artists believed in 40 years ago. Does it answer your question? Good.

**(TD):** *What is the archive used for by the gallery? [You've said about the anniversary exhibitions].*

**(LR):** I guess there is that, yes, we use it for the anniversary shows. Like this, for the 40th anniversary, it's all about painting and thanks to the archive, we knew that in 1984 we had several shows with painters in them. And then for the 35th anniversary, it was all about sculptures, so we knew who exhibited, when, and what works were there, and that helps us to decide what artists we are going to contact. It also helps for me in terms of communications, I guess, as I said, for the International Women's Day, it was good for me to know who were the women who had been part of the gallery's history and how we could just celebrate them. Yes, I think, yes, does that answer your question.

**(TD):** *Do you have anything further that you would like to add about the archive at Castlefield Gallery?*

**(LR):** I think it's fun! Maybe that's not what you were expecting me to say, but I quite like the gallery's archive because you've seen it before, but it has sometimes very surprising things in there. Some more personal things that make you feel closer to the people who worked there 10 years, 20 years, 40 years ago, and you can relate to them and understand what they went through when they were putting up an exhibition. It's nice to see, yes, maybe the emails and I don't know; I remember finding some flyers for previous exhibitions that date back from the 2000s, I think, where I was like, this is incredible, I really like these documents and I wish I could produce the same thing now, and somehow I cannot because of budget reasons, but somehow it did inspire me in some ways to see how the previous person who was in charge of communications did her job and, or did their job, I don't know if it was a woman but it often is, which is why I said her, but, and how maybe I can get inspired by that myself. And I guess now we have also the digital archive on the website, but also like I keep scrolling on Instagram on our accounts to see what Jen posted a few years ago, to see how she would promote something, a show or event and how I can learn from that really. Yeah, sorry, it was a bit chaotic, the answer to that last question.

**(TD):** I agree, it's a good thing for an archive to be fun. [Sent via chat]

**(LR):** Cool. Thank you.

## Appendix 4

### Q&A – between Thomas Dukes (T.D) and Suzana Milevska (S.M) re. Becoming-Curator

Conducted via email 16/06/2023

**Thomas Dukes (TD):** In the introduction to your thesis, you mention the archive and draw a parallel to the labyrinth. The archive / labyrinth relationship has always excited me, so can I ask what drew you to this?

**Suzana Milevska (SM):** The metaphor of labyrinth with four entrances stemmed out the necessity to distinguish between different topics that intertwine or intersect in each multi-layered archive, at least in one point. At the time I was starting my research I was not aware of the relevance of the term 'intersectionality' (Kimberlé Crenshaw) for my own research, but I came to similar observations and conclusions through my experiences of archival browsing. Background: I guess the anecdote of how I could get the permissions to enter the Bulgarian archives – as a Macedonian - is the best example to illustrate the reverse irony of intersectionality.

For your information, the Bulgarian state does not recognise the existence of Macedonian language (see the conclusion of my PhD) and Macedonian people as a different nation from Bulgarians so this is in the core of long-term conflicts between the two countries that even at this very moment – 18 years after I completed my Ph.D. - keeps in standstill of the negotiations of North Macedonia to be admitted to European Union. Because of these and other nationalist conflicts (e.g. with Greece about the use of the name 'Macedonia') many researchers of Macedonian background are not admitted in the Bulgarian and Greek archives without special procedures and permissions, under a suspicion that they'd be after some secret documents that may recover some contradictions, etc.

However I was 'lucky' because my research was 'about women' that was interpreted as not so relevant, at least not so contextually related to the more problematic issues and documents that might be related to the nationalist macro-historic contents. I said 'irony' because eventually I ended up with a lot of unknown images representing women fighters for national identity and other relevant iconographic imageries as insignias, flags and shields, and my conclusion was that the issue of gender difference often shrinks, it's undervalued and overwritten by the nationalist discourses and conflicts, at least in South-Eastern Europe – at that period I was also not aware of the concept of 'femonationalism' by Sara R. Farris.

To conclude, the metaphor of the archive as 'labyrinth' turned into a useful methodological tool that allowed me to navigate through different corridors entering from different starting points/doors and checking how and where the different issues – gender, nation, transgression queer (third gender/tobelijs-sworn vergins) - meet each other.

**(TD):** To get into your essay, *Becoming-Curator*, I have wondered - if *Becoming* "is more about becoming the offspring of the event" - is it also about becoming the procreator of the event?

**(SM):** If one tries to follow consistently the original Deleuzian concepts of 'Becoming-woman' or 'Becoming-animal' the first obvious difference between this concept and the grammatically correct 'becoming a woman' or 'becoming an animal' is the missing articles from the former concepts. Although one could think the concept 'becoming-minor' 'becoming-curator' in reverse, or as an uroboros – as a kind of vicious circle in which the event is the origin and a result of curating at the same time, the missing article may help one understand that 'Becoming' is not so much about creating any particular events, but about subjectivity and transformation the events bring and enable the potential of curator to become the offspring. One relevant note here – according to Deleuze 'Becoming' doesn't happen gradually, perhaps that's why the relevance of the term 'offspring' should not be overlooked (if Deleuze wanted to talk about education, growing, or other forms of development and acquiring knowledge he would have used other term).

Having said all this, I am not a Deleuzian originalist so I see your point and I understand how this line of thought can be developed further (e.g. in the context of the age of eventualisation and festivalisation of culture). Nevertheless I'd be very careful about further liberties with interpretation of this concept because of the danger of its simplification, and the possibility of its superficial use in an attempt to offer a down-to-earth distinction between curating as a profession and curating as a vocation. And I am not improvising here – this is not a hypothetical situation - once it really happened to me in Vienna. Namely at a high-profile event at the Academy of Fine Arts where I was invited to share the floor with Ruth Noack the language editor and proof-reader of the titles and abstracts revised my English without my knowledge. She then added the article 'a' in my lecture about *Becoming-Curator*. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/31945/suzana-milevska-and-ruth-noack-on-how-to-become-a-curator-at-the-academy-of-fine-arts-vienna/> I spent half of my slot in explaining what's wrong about this correction (that turned out not so bad because at the end everybody was talking about this).

So no, 'Becoming-Curator' it's not a recipe of how to become a curator and how to create events, but it's a theoretical concept about the processes and events that lead to the new curatorial subjectivity. Perhaps additional background information and cavity worth mentioning is that I was not educated as a curator and I never studied nor taught in curatorial departments and my practice was event-based. The 'event' in Vienna was all about curatorial programmes so to me it felt relevant to discuss about the difference between the academic and practice-based curatorial experiences.

**(TD):** Can you expand on the first movement of isolation from the majority? I feel I can follow the second movement - entering the 'grid of relations and knowledge exchange' - but would like a little more of your thoughts on the first movement.

**(SM):** I'd like to offer a simple example about these two movements rather than offer further interpretations of Deleuze's theoretical concepts. I'd use the patriarchy as a context. A woman curator needs to rise above the majority, let's say women and men curators. Yet being a woman is not enough, there is still need for a second movement among women curators. Since not all women curators are feminists and care about disentanglement of patriarchy the second movement would allow to the woman curator to distinguish herself and rise above the majority of curators, and distinguish herself from women - as 'minority' (although 50% of population). One could guess easily that I followed this 'formula' in my own practice.

**(TD):** I tie myself up between the two positions in the event of becoming a curatorial subject, and I think it's because I'm looking at it wrong! There's the idea of the 'difference between 'who is speaking' (which becomes irrelevant) and 'the speaking itself' which mark a difference between grammar of being and grammar of becoming. I get tied up between the 'who is speaking' being irrelevant (as a grammar of being), and the later contention that 'discourse is corporeal' - seemingly making our 'being' relevant again, and indeed vital in the project of becoming (as per the final line of the Patricia MacCormack quote).

**(SM):** This is really important question. Perhaps I put it in a too blunt and radical dichotomic way. In fact 'being' and 'who is speaking' is not irrelevant, but on the contrary – it was and it's still seen as the only relevant and fixed position. Something that is true and fixed. Becoming cannot be thought without being, since neither being nor becoming exist in vacuum. So even if one gives new credentials to being in terms of relevant performative relations between corporeality and corpo-fiction it's important to be aware of the context of the point made by Deleuze – that becoming is a direct critique of the concept of fixed identities with some essential characteristics on which basis the concept of being was thought and constructed throughout history and philosophy.

**(TD):** Can we speak about why you look for 'Truth' in the event of becoming-curator? My reading is that you ask us to think about how to recognise the knowledge exchanges and lines of flight conducive to the second move - that of isolation from minority and towards becoming-curator, the building of the curatorial cognizing subject. But is it possible in becoming-curator to recognise a felicitous speech act? Could one turn an infelicitous statement into a part of the curatorial cognizing subject?

**(SM):** Thank you for this, I guess rhetorical question. I'd completely agree that the act of recognition of the limitations of becoming-curator – the infelicitous speech acts due to the complex socio-political context and current condition of production – can contribute towards the event of 'Becoming-curator'. However this may be true in terms of subjectivity, but I am very sceptical about felicitous speech acts in terms of political reality. Recently I became even more sceptical – particularly after the last Documenta that revealed so many contradictions between 'saying' and 'doing' in the international curatorial and artistic scene/stage (in terms of Austin). I don't



believe in some absolute truth of the event of becoming-curator. There are as many becomings as there are curators. The only relevant truth is the event of recognising of the potentiality of curating and even if the felicitous speech act is not realised at the end of a project due to all too many obstacles and exclusions it's still something to which one has to strive.

**(TD):** For my process of adopting becoming-curator as a methodological device, I suggest that the 'Three Moves' you propose as examples can be deployed as markers in gauging the practice of becoming-curator. That someone looking to adopt becoming-curator (which I argue curators should) can work towards the first two movements, and then reflect on their practice against your Three Moves. What would you think to this?

**(SM):** Let's discuss this during our zoom. I'd rather hear more about your own research and methodology first, and try to answer your questions with taking into account your own context, aims, experiences, and practices. I hope that using my methodology and methods will help, but they should not be followed rigidly because – well - your 'Becoming' can be the offspring only of your own events. One of my own events of becoming offspring took place back in 2004, on the peak Pelister, on elevation of 1200m while following then young artist's performative 'baby' steps, but that's so site-specific. I guess you thought a lot about your own 'Becoming' and I want to hear more about it – auto-theory is so undermined but I find it very relevant because ironically it brings us closer to general 'truths.'

## Appendix 5

### Wishes gathered as part of Archives at Play 2.

From the installation by George Gibson & Grace Collins, *i hope all is well and life seems a little calmer for you now* (2023). Responding to the prompt 'What do you wish for the future of galleries?'

Theme	Notes/Wishes
<b>Programming:</b>	I wish for the arts to have an impact on the future generation. I wish that Castlefield have a program for young artists! To inspire and promote creativity.
	Make outsider art more insider.
	Show work relating to illness/health
	That they join forces and do the things (social change) that works/ talks about on a larger scale. Art world working environments to be less toxic, less box ticky, less gaslighty? That art carries on being made which I think will happen anyway. Be more diverse, more interaction with the public
	I would wish that galleries showcase work from all parts of the world, have more residencies and diversity. Full diversity and young, new artists
	To have a focus on illustration. Exhibitions around illustration are lacking in the North-West. Need to be spread out more.
	Less capitalism, more collectivity projects. Workshop project to rethink together the art world, maybe in Castlefield Gallery?
	Continue to be a free thought provoking gallery. Optional donation. Thank you for an interesting 1st visit today.

	Collaboration with music venues to emphasise visual presence and power
	I wish Castlefield Gallery can still be and I guess will be this lively. Collaboration amongst artists, and share of knowledge and ideas
	I wish plenty of visitors and contemporary art lovers
	To show my work and others lol
	I would like to see open opportunities for local artists to contribute/ community projects
	I wish galleries would be more open to new, local artists showing and curating in exhibitions
	More student led/ post grad exhibitions. Collaboration with MMU. I wish the arts were prioritised within schools, and that students were exposed to art galleries from a young age. As a geography teacher I wish students could see cultures represented within art as well as written media.
	To continue operating and inspiring others
	I wish for the development of the gallery as a ? space, meeting place of ideas and more transparency? relating to opportunities for artists. ? art ? to more people and demystifying it.
	I wish more consistency and less pretentiousness. George and Grace exhibition and thoughts are profound and inviting to stop and reflect
	A place to laugh, eat, learn+ decide your future as a collective
	For artists to fight for what they believe to be right! Make noise, make change, care for one another.
	To increase their recognition of talent= engagement
	More galleries and more emphasis and importance and value put on art galleries, art education, etc.
	VR

	Any Mancunian glass makers or ceramics? Mancunian fashion?
	Space to play space to get down and nap and then make art
	Honest real places that represent real local artists
	I just want to see unusual art that makes me feel executed + glad to be alive.
	I would like to see something uncanny and dark, dark, dark
	More curation
	Child friendly art/child collabs!
	Talks with artists/Q&As
	A wish for more exhibitions by George + Grace
	unapologetical authenticity/creators who create art not for an audience or the viewer's eye, but for themselves, their own release, exploration, expression, and perspective. Thank you (heart drawing)
	Wine and food and late closing times (heart drawing)
	For a solo exhibition by Joe O'Rourke
	A lot of interesting yet weird exhibitions
	Immersive art using light and sound
	I would love to see more interactive art exhibits that I can touch
	Sound & Matter
	A site for wonderment. A space to stay with the trouble. Build a new world
	I wish for art galleries to be more interactive
	Care and compassion. A place to play and connect.
	Thought provoking pieces that make time stand still. Light spaces, open environment. Opportunities for new artists to express freely. Thank you to the arts, you make the world a better place.

	A reminder that art should set the imagination free. That their spaces hold time, for peace, reflection and beauty. And that in itself is a triumph. Thank you.
	I wish that were art spaces dedicated to music from Manchester
	Surprise me, entrance me. Take me out of my comfort zone.
	That artist led spaces become the cathedrals of tomorrow
	Hang out areas for discussions and thoughts to roam amongst strangers + friends around art (heart drawing)
	More interactive (heart drawing)
	More interactive installations
	More love to be spread in galleries and out of them
	Art + Community focus expanding works beyond the gallery, social impact + inclusion
	For the gallery to have great interest and foot traffic
	I wish art to be less influenced by the business aspects of the industry.
<b>Funding:</b>	Decentralised Art's Funding- give power back to the city's artists. Not big wizz in London (lol)
	Relief of financial ties. Art is free and artists school and life. Is this possible in a capitalist society?
	Fair fees for technicians
	I want crazier & more daring (not conceptual) art exhibitions. And a more physically accessible events/talks programme + more free on the talks
	More funding for the arts in the North
	I wish that the government will stop starving the arts of funding
	More funding I wish as well for galleries to become completely accessible to all

	More support and funding for the smaller galleries so we can continue to survive in the current financial crisis
	I wish the gallery had more money for advertising so the people of Hulme realised it's here and it's an inclusive space they can visit + snacks (smiley heart drawing)
	My wish for Castlefield Gallery is to grow and expand and take over the whole block
	More government recognition and funding support
	I wish galleries were better supported financially. I think this would let them have more personality.
	I wish for enough money for the arts and Castlefield Gallery to be bountifully funded.
	Start to be paid properly GLAM sector to be funded properly...
	More workshops led by the artists (time-permitting) v
	My wish for the arts is that the government invests in, appreciates, + supports creativity from schools to care homes
<b>Accessibility:</b>	Variety of expression and intellectual accessibility
	Break the Manchester clique!
	Becoming even more of an accessible platform for artists.
	To always be free, increased accessibility. Get more people involved- children!
	I wish that the future of galleries put accessibility at the forefront. Have spaces that are inclusive for all.
	I wish galleries were closer to citizens, for the usual citizen who never enters the gallery
	For all artists in exhibitions to create community & conversation around art. Not excluding others regardless of background or disability.
	I wish they were not so white - it hurts my eyes & I wish more local people could exhibit in them

	My wish is that galleries become a space of communal gathering. Open to all who want to come and enjoy. My hope is that artists get to show and develop from relationships with galleries.
	I wish that everyone feels represented and welcome. It should be a safe space & inclusive.
	To be more diverse and include and educate on more female artists
	Young voices people from Manchester, Excluded voices - people who aren't necessarily in the art world
	Can art galleries please start giving more work opportunities to those just starting out/fresh from uni/they have no idea what they're doing/ changing profession/willing to learn - because it'd be great to get some fresh blood into this bloodstream - Thanks!
	More listening; more communitarian ways of becoming together
	Diversity less boring art made by white men. Young artists, the new generation.
	I want the arts to be more accessible + better funded. Highlight the importance of arts education without it being hierarchical.
	To be more accessible & welcoming.
	An open and inclusive space for everybody
	More art + galleries for everyone
	I wish for galleries to be relevant and reflective.
	I wish we could continue to have more independent galleries in the city that are visited in the masses regularly
	I hope people who feel they are not smart enough to find the meaning to the art come to galleries more & realise they are inclusive for everyone because they are something everyone should have the opportunity to see :)

	I wish that we move forward with spaces to share narratives of power that speak to all people and continue to inspire creativity in those who may feel they have lost theirs. I'd like to see space used and shared equally.
	More diversity More accessibility #transpride #Asianbipride
	I wish for galleries to be more accessible for a wider variety of ppl. I hope for govt. funding so that galleries can be a therapeutic place for ppl and so that the impact they can have (positive) can reach many rather than the elite few (heart drawing)
	I wish the arts in remote and rural regions felt as included as arts in the cities
	To be more diverse and include and educate on more female artists
<b>Gallery feedback:</b>	I hope that I continue to be surprised and moved on my next visit. I really enjoyed this one. Thank you all involved- Daniel, London
	I wish coming to places like this didn't just make me sad and despondent that I will never have art opportunities like this.
	Interesting art work showcasing guilt in eyes - My opinion guy 28/03/2023
	Galleries have been part of my life for the past 36 years, I can't imagine a world without the retreat into these unique, reflective spaces
	I wish for this gallery to endure. That on another visit to Manchester I may see some beautiful art ai or more beautiful beautiful than presented here today on the 31st May 2023 -
	Castlefield is such an amazing space with a great programme. My wish is that continues what it does for another 40 years.



<b>Random:</b>	Squiggle
	I hope that one day you will display one of my pictures -
	Ramadan Mubarak
	I am hopeful in an abstract sense- that all will align and things will be better and ? joy of making
	Artists based outside London sometimes ask themselves what it means to be an artist based outside
	I wish I could fly- Daisy
	More life, less death
	More peace less hate
	Hope their art is like this
	More nepotism! Less diversity! More money!
	Wall of money
	I wish for more adventure and spontaneity. I wish for health & family.
	Today I wish for anger & discomfort that pushes us towards change. We are all responsible for what happens next. We all have to let go of something we are holding onto.
	I wish to be featured in one! The ultimate dream
	For them to be abundant with new citizens in wonderland awe
	I wish for Hollie to live in a stress free life and continue to make others happy
	More frogs
	Deez nuts
	SLAY!!! =)
	Everlasting Love
	(drawing of a long-haired smiley person with caption) I like
	Power of Youth
	I am wild
	You are doing alright, keep it up I suppose

	Reownership of distribution
	Wishing for harmonious relationships at home + work
	May we all find love joy and balance (heart drawing)
	I wish humans will embrace the mystical, and spiritual, and transcendent.
	I wish for miserable fuckers to find some joy and perspective in the arts. God Speed!!!
	I wish for inspiration (heart drawing)
	5 McChicken selects
	I love Katie + Manc (heart drawing)
	I wish to become a successful model a well paid here in Manchester. I wish my marriage is always happy! I wish to be God in human form. To help the ones in need. To be a vessel for light in the universe! Talia 2023
	Fear God, God does not favour the wicked
	I wish for emptiness