

## **Politics of the Project: Radical Art in Britain (1972–79)**



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## ABSTRACT

The 1970s saw collaboration and local, grass-roots activism become common in radical art in Britain. Concomitant with anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-nuclear efforts, a group of Leftist artists challenged social and financial elitism, patriarchy and inequality in both the art world and British society by producing praxis-led artist projects in lieu of art objects. However, the reception and analysis of 1970s artist projects in general (and in Britain in particular) is still very limited. As a result the post-1989 period is widely cited as the dawn of artist projects in contemporary accounts. This thesis challenges such oversights by arguing that the ‘artist project’ emerged in the 1970s. It illuminates the 1970s artistic practice of project-making through a detailed historiography of projects created in Britain during that decade. The socially-driven art practice of the 1970s is contextualized by providing an historical account of the socio-political situation in Britain in the 1970s and the major social shifts that it entailed (such as the 1970 Equal Pay Act, Industrial Relations Act of 1971, the implementation of a three-day week, rising unemployment, strikes and riots). By recovering projects that have been marginalised within the art historical canon this thesis defines the character of the ‘artist project’ and demonstrates its significance within socially-orientated art practice. This definition is derived empirically through an analysis of three major artist projects as well as an examination of the Artist’s Union (1972-83) which initially brought these left-leaning artists together and thereby set the stage for the artist projects which followed. The three focal projects are: ***The West London Social Resource Project*** (1972) by Stephen Willats (which sought to expand the remit and reach of art and the social territory in which it physically operates by inviting the residents of four different neighbourhoods in West London to respond to questions about their immediate as well as wider physical and social environments); ***Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973-75*** [1973-75] by Margaret Harrison, Kay Fido Hunt and Mary Kelly (a collaborative in-depth study that the artists conducted at the Metal Box Co. in Bermondsey to document the past history and the present working conditions of women in the tin box industry); and ***The Peterlee Project*** (1976-77) by Stuart Brisley (who worked with local miners in an effort to empower them in building their own community in the new town of Peterlee). Characterised by a new type of artistic thinking, these projects were also informed by academic and commercial disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and communications. The thesis explores the collaborative thrust and shared radically reformist socio-political agenda operative within artist projects in Britain during the 1970s and demonstrates the way that they employed direct action to change the parameters of art, incorporating instigation, discussion and generative processes directly into its production. These projects expanded the reach and breadth of artistic practice as a means not only to challenge but also to seek to remedy the disillusionment caused by the shortcomings of the modernist agenda in art and society, including the promises of the welfare state in Britain.

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## List of Illustrations

Fig. 1:	‘Artist’s Union Invitation’ to the Introductory Meeting, 18 March 1972	37
Fig. 2:	Seth Siegelaub, mock-up draft of the Artist's Contract in English, c. 1971	58
Fig. 3:	Peter Davies letter to Conrad Atkinson, 16 August 1977	61
Fig. 4:	Joseph Kosuth, forged MoMA Visitor’s Pass, designed for the AWC, 1969	63
Fig. 5:	Stephen Willats, <i>Light Modulator No 2</i> , 1962	78
Figs 6–7:	Stephen Willats, <i>Colour Variable No 3</i> , 1963	78
Fig. 8:	Stephen Willats, <i>Organic Exercise No 3, Series 1</i> , 1962	83
Fig. 9:	Stephen Willats, <i>Manual Variable No 1 and No 2</i> , 1963	83
Fig. 10:	Stephen Willats, A selection of information retrieval sheets, including participant responses, from the <i>West London Manual</i> . Public Register Board, Greenford Public Library, 1972	88
Fig. 11:	Stephen Willats, Project recruitment poster, <i>West London Social Resource Project</i> , London, 1972–73	90
Fig. 12:	Anton Lavinsky, Kiosk for state publishing house Gosizdat, Moscow, 1925	94
Fig. 13:	Stephen Willats, A reproduction of the <i>Public Monitor</i> of the <i>West London Social Resource Project</i> shown at Gallery House London, 1972	95
Fig. 14:	Stephen Willats, The basic relationship between two nodes within the authoritative network. In Willats, <i>Art and Social Function</i> . London: Ellipsis, 2000, 51	104
Fig. 15:	Stephen Willats, ‘A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice’. In Jane Bilton, Stephen Willats, and South London Art Gallery, eds. <i>Stephen Willats: Changing Everything 1 July 1998–2 August 1998</i> . London: South London Gallery, 1998, 9	104
Fig. 16:	Women administering various tasks at the factory, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i>	119
Fig. 17:	Comparative charts for men and women’s wage differentials, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i>	119
Fig. 18:	Looped colour videos of men and women at work, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i>	119
Figs 19–21:	Close-ups of women demonstrating women-only tasks, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i>	119
Fig. 22:	Installation view, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i> , South London Art Gallery, London	123
Fig. 23:	Diary entry of Section Foreman, Clifton McKinson, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i>	127
Fig. 24:	Diary entry of Double Seam Operator, Eileen Szmidt, <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975</i>	127

Figs 25–28: Stuart Brisley, <i>The Peterlee Project: History Within Living Memory</i> 1976–77	154
Figs 29–30: Stuart Brisley, <i>Beneath Dignity</i> , Bregenz, 1977	157
Figs 31–33: Stuart Brisley and Christoph Gericke, <i>Survival in Alien Circumstances</i> , Documenta, Kassel, 1977	159

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## Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	iv
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	v
<b>1. Introduction to the Politics of the Artist Project</b>	
Conceptualising the artist project	2
The art historiography of the 1970s	8
The British context: theory and purpose	12
Social purpose	
Groups and collectives	
Reading projects throughout the decades	27
Defining the project through case studies	33
<b>2. Artists for Society, Society for Artists: The Artist's Union (1972–83)</b>	
State of Britain	38
The foundation of the Artist's Union	45
The structure of the Union and its workshops	53
Revolutionaries vs. reformists	64
Merging practice with bureaucracy	72
<b>3. Re-modelling Social Process: Stephen Willats's <i>West London Social Resource Project</i> (1972)</b>	
Art as social process	79
The <i>West London Social Resource Project</i>	87
A methodology for social relevance	98
Externalisation of art	107
<b>4. Representing the Struggle in <i>Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75</i> (1973–75)</b>	
Women's Liberation Movement: solidarity and collaboration	111
Division of labour in industry and the home	120
Socialist origins: the silenced half	130
Reception of labour	137
<b>5. Delegating (Community) Action: Stuart Brisley's <i>The Peterlee Project</i> (1976–77)</b>	
Refunctioning cultural production in the context of a New Town	143
<i>The Peterlee Project</i>	149
Extended performance	162
A failed success	168
<b>Conclusion</b>	171
<b>Bibliography</b>	177
<b>Appendix</b>	193

## **Introduction to the Politics of the Artist Project**

## Conceptualising the artist project

Conceptual art was ‘a mirror image of the world it criticised’, declared Margaret Harrison in 2000.<sup>1</sup> At the turn of the millennium, Harrison was lamenting how art-historical debates regarding the 1970s referred to ‘conceptualism’ as a blanket term for any work about ideas or that utilised text.<sup>2</sup> I consider such a conflation problematic for two reasons. First, it co-opts the wide variety of feminist work that flourished out of the second-wave of feminism post-68 – delineated by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker in *Framing Feminism*, Hillary Robinson in *Feminism Art Theory*, and Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan in *Art and Feminism*, among others – under an umbrella that negates the specific issues and tangible needs of women artists in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, lumping artists and artworks that address socio-political issues together under the rubric of ‘conceptualism’ is marginalising, because they are more difficult and time-consuming to exhibit and view (if not equally challenging to cognize) than a lot of the conceptual work from the decade, including that of Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Gilbert & George, Jannis Kounellis or Joseph Kosuth.

Albeit indirectly, Harrison’s statement is indicative of a significant shift taking place with regards to art practice at the beginning of the 1970s. Sceptical of art that was self-reflexive and whose sphere of interest was limited to the art world itself and its community, a group of artists, including Harrison, chose a different path through which they sought to deal with and investigate socio-political issues that mattered to them on a personal level. For many artists, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, this arose from a need to sustain a living through art practice or to have a say in a predominantly white patriarchal art system, especially for artists who were women, homosexual or people of colour. There was also a desire to go beyond the archness,<sup>4</sup> futility,<sup>5</sup> narcissism<sup>6</sup> and lack of pleasurable visuality<sup>7</sup> of conceptualism and its dislocation from society ‘in continuation of the Modernist apolitical project’,<sup>8</sup> as described by Neil Mulholland, even if the outcome was work that possessed conceptual qualities.<sup>9</sup> Like Tony Godfrey, who marks 1972 and Documenta V in Kassel as the end of conceptual art, Harrison also admits that, for many colleagues, conceptualism ended in 1972 with ‘The New Art’ show organised by Anne Seymour at the Hayward Gallery in London, which showcased work by avant-garde artists such as Keith Arnatt, Art & Language, Gilbert &

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Harrison, ‘Statement’, *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965–75*. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Harrison, ‘Statement’, *Live in Your Head*, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds. *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement, 1970–85*. London: Pandora, 1987; Hilary Robinson, ed., *Feminism Art Theory: An Anthology 1968 to 2000*. Blackwell 2001; Helena Reckitt, Peggy Phelan, eds, *Art and Feminism*. Phaidon Press, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*. Art & Ideas. London: Phaidon, 1998, 248.

<sup>5</sup> Anny De Decker, 1972, quoted in Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*. Art & Ideas, 257; see also Michael Corris, ‘Review: Ian Wilson’s Discussion at The John Weber Gallery’, *The Fox*, No.2, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Popper, *Art, Action and Participation*. London: Studio Vista, 1975, 270.

<sup>7</sup> John Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, Cultural Politics. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Neil Mulholland, ‘The fall and rise of crisis criticism’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol 1, No 2, November 2000, 57–77.

<sup>9</sup> Terry Smith argues that there was also a shift within the movement of conceptual art by 1971 that problematised the social, language, cultural, and political conditions of practice, and their application to real-life issues. See Terry Smith, ‘One and Three Ideas: Conceptualism Before, During, and After Conceptual Art’, *e-flux*, Issue 29, November 2011, <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68078/one-and-three-ideas-conceptualism-before-during-and-after-conceptual-art/>> [Accessed 3 April 2018]

George, and Hamish Fulton.<sup>10</sup> In *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Lucy Lippard dates the end of conceptual art as 1972 and this is the date I set my starting point for the narrative I explore. This was the year the Artist's Union was established by artists who were no longer interested in, nor satisfied with, making art about art, especially during a time of 'fierce [political] debate and intellectual ferment'.<sup>11</sup> These artists set out to change the status quo.

The political character of this agenda to change the status quo was reformist, rather than revolutionary. The reach and scope of May 1968 in the political history of Britain was distinct. While the events both inspired and activated artists in Britain to take grass-roots action, these artists were not attempting to produce a revolutionary dismantling of the state as their counterparts were in France. Instead, the events of May 1968 were a catalyst for the proliferation of social movements, which manifested itself in Britain through its advocacy for a reformist politics. Reflecting on the global impact of these events, despite their failure to overturn state power, Immanuel Wallerstein notes: 'The triumph of the Revolution of 1968 has been a triple triumph in terms of racism, sexism, and analogous evils. One result is that the legal situations (state policies) have changed. A second result is that the situations within the anti-systemic movements have changed. A third result is that mentalities have changed'.<sup>12</sup> While artists in Britain maintained an allegiance to the ethos of May 1968, the impact of what happened in France triggered instead, an alternative strategy that involved working with the state rather than against it. This was partly because of the lack of success of the movement in France – with the state reasserting its power – and partly because many of the artists in Britain were already engaged with the state through its various mechanisms including, but not limited to, the Arts Council, the Labour Party, and the Trade Union Congress.

Mary Kelly asserts that 'for many, May 1968 is simply an event in the political history of France but for some it has come to mean the beginning of an era characterized by new social movements', most prominently the Women's Liberation Movement.<sup>13</sup> Kelly had been one of the artists, cultural producers and intellectuals who had been affected by May 1968, both in terms of the intense cultural activity it engendered and through her experience of it as an unsuccessful precedent, informing the shift to a reformist strategy that involved working with and within state institutions and mechanisms rather than against them. Kelly had come to London from Beirut where she had been teaching art. She states that, 'As part of a community of new left intellectuals, mostly educated in France, my introduction to politics was Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre on scarcity and, of course, Marx'.<sup>14</sup> It was in this environment that the London Women's Liberation Workshop (1969) – one of the largest women's groups of the period – was founded. Kelly was introduced to the feminist reading/study collective titled the History Group (1970) and had participated in the 'Miss World' protest later that same year. Kelly, who says that these experiences 'changed [her] life' goes on to

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<sup>10</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, 1998; Harrison, 'Statement', *Live in Your Head*, 95.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison, 'Statement', *Live in Your Head*, 95; similar to Harrison, John A. Walker characterises the decade as having a politicising 'social and cultural ferment'. John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*. London: Tauris, 2002, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein and Sharon Zukin, '1968, Revolution in the World-System: Theses and Queries', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 4, July, 1989, 440.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 4, [Accessed 20 March 2020].

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

acknowledge that ‘even now, when I read [the “Miss World” pamphlet], I hear Laura’s [Mulvey] and Sally’s [Alexander] voices recounting our experiences of the protest, discussing the vulnerability of the spectacle, and I recall making a connection between images of women and ideology as a system of representation, which, for me, meant that art could have political efficacy’.<sup>15</sup> Margaret Harrison, a founder of the Women’s Liberation Art Group (1971) who was also at the ‘Miss World’ protest reaffirms Kelly’s point: ‘We were angry, we thought we could change things’ in response to the underlying social injustice that came to the fore following the events of 1968.<sup>16</sup>

As an artist who had connections with trade unions and the Labour Left, Conrad Atkinson states that ‘the Artist’s Union emerged from the events of 1968’, which also were among the motivations for him to exhibit *Strike at Brannans* (1972), a work documenting the year-long strike of the mostly female factory workers at the Brannans thermometer factory in Cumbria, despite having been invited by the ICA to show his paintings.<sup>17</sup> On his decision to eschew painting, Atkinson wrote: ‘Where *Strike* was concerned I was determined that it should be an effective action in the world of politics and trade unions. But I also wanted it to be an effective political intervention in culture. The strikers were engaged in a political struggle, but the cultural struggle was equally important for me’.<sup>18</sup> With *Strike at Brannans*, Atkinson enacted struggles internal to the social policies of the British state, just as Stuart Brisley who chose to work in a New Town – a signal undertaking of the post-war British Welfare State – a few years later in 1976. The legacy of what was, at the very least, an insurrectionary political situation, which came about in part as a critique of the old Labour politics of the French Communist Party<sup>19</sup> and its failure, triggered a shift to multivalent tendencies within the Left, and was constitutive for a new generation of political thinking, (anti-authoritarian, insurrectionary or autonomist such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Antonio Negri). Ultimately the Leftist struggle was now fought on multiple fronts beyond classical class struggle and included a focus on reforming state or state-linked institutions (many of which were cultural).

Through the works they undertook, these artists sought to challenge, amend and change rather than overthrow. This was reformist politics; and theirs was a radical attempt to work within and confront certain kinds of state mechanisms such as the Arts Council. Radicality for these artists consisted of founding a union to fight for artists’ rights; campaigning for equal pay; setting up camp outside exhibitions they deemed unfair (‘The New Art’, Hayward Gallery, 1972); joining striking workers such as those at Brannan’s thermometer factory in Cumbria (Harrison and Atkinson); supporting the efforts of the Cleaners Action Group for unionising night cleaners (Kelly with the Berwick Street Collective); and of participating in one way or another in the sit-ins at the schools they taught at (Stuart Brisley and Stephen Willats at Hornsey College of Art, and Kay Hunt at Guildford

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s interview with Margaret Harrison, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>17</sup> Author’s interview with Conrad Atkinson, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>18</sup> Documentation of “Strike at Brannans” in Conrad Atkinson, Sandy Nairne and Caroline Tisdall, eds., *Conrad Atkinson: Picturing the System*. London: Pluto Press: ICA, 1981, *Picturing the System*. London: Pluto Press: ICA, 1981, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company 1968.

School of Art)<sup>20</sup>. They aimed to reform education, art patronage and the Arts Council rather than to overthrow these mechanisms. Such reformism was evident in the letter written to the authorities by Brisley during the sit-in at Hornsey: 'We came so far, please help us go on with it. We need freedom in order to work better. Please don't put barriers in front of us. We cannot avoid being in your hands. Please don't stop us.'<sup>21</sup> This was less overtly radical than hard-core revolutionary artistic politics. Brisley, like Kelly, Harrison and Atkinson, who stood in support of strikers in their work, still carried a fidelity to the aspirations of 1968 but this did not mean these artists aimed to overthrow the institutions or state mechanisms they deemed unfair, problematic or biased, instead they adopted what they took to be a pragmatic, realpolitik attitude in the post-1968 conjuncture. They sought radical, social change through different counter-hegemonic means with which they challenged traditional practices and state mechanisms.

A major outcome of this reformist desire to shift gear was the introduction of the artist project. This marked a wider shift at that time within the British art community towards socio-political concerns. Artists began to adopt new, multifaceted and discursive methods of working, including collaborations with other artists and/or non-artists; often working outside studios, in places such as factories, mining towns or housing estates; and utilising tools such as field research, consultations and interviews, which were informed by academic and commercial disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and advertising. Artist projects were long-term investigations into specific socio-political questions initiated by artists, often in collaboration with others, inspired by personal interest or investment, or because of a lack of state support or government solution for a social issue. This engaged them in process-orientated work that frequently took months or even years to complete. In this regard, an artist project was a new model within art practice that employed an open-ended, non-hierarchical and horizontalist approach to investigate issues important to the artist(s) often regarding 'subalterns' as well as those who were socially, politically and culturally marginalized including women, homosexuals and people of colour — people who have no [official] history as defined by Gramsci<sup>22</sup> — frequently in collaboration with artists or non-artists. The intention behind the projects was to provide solutions to these issues, which echoed the wider avant-garde pursuit of direct social action and leaderless democracy, with its roots in the 1960s as well as in earlier anthropological studies such as Mass Observation, founded in 1937 by a team of observers and volunteer writers to study the daily lives of ordinary people in Britain.

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<sup>20</sup> Hunt had been active at the Guildford sit-in; her 'Guildford Minus 40' exhibition, documented the sit-in at Guildford School of Art in 1968.

<sup>21</sup> Brisley, Letter to the Authorities, 1968.

<[http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/39/60s/Text/Hornsey\\_College\\_of\\_Art\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_to\\_the\\_authorities\\_whoever\\_they\\_are\\_/page:3](http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/39/60s/Text/Hornsey_College_of_Art_____to_the_authorities_whoever_they_are_/page:3)> [Accessed 11 November 2014]

<sup>22</sup> The term 'subaltern' is used by Antonio Gramsci to indicate people who have 'no history'. Gramsci developed his concept of the subaltern in Notebook 25, a 'special notebook', thematically titled 'On the Margins of History (The History of Subaltern Social Groups'. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana, 4 vols. (Torino: G Einaudi, 1975), Notebook 25, "Ai margini della storia (Storia dei gruppi sociali subaltern)", 2277-2294. Marcus Green notes that Gramsci developed the concept of the subaltern to 'describe, categorize, and analyze the activity and conditions of social groups that lack relative political power with respect to ruling social groups' in Green, Marcus E. "Gramsci's Concept of Subaltern Social Groups." Order No. NR29495, York University (Canada), 2006. I discuss the issue of the subaltern in detail in the subsection titled "The British context: theory and purpose" further down this Chapter. Also see Gramsci, *Prison notebooks*. Vol. 1. Notebook 14, §39. Trans., J. A. Buttigieg and A. Callari, New York, 1992, 294.

While I am not suggesting it was an artistic movement, the move towards artist projects was part of a wider shift towards the socio-political within the art community in Britain, as discussed by John Walker, Andrew Wilson, and John Roberts among others, and acknowledged in the period by *Studio International*, which devoted a whole issue to ‘art and social purpose’ in March–April 1976.<sup>23</sup> Functioning as interventions for effecting change in social and cultural perception, and challenging (rather than reiterating) the dominant foundations of culture by proposing a counter-consciousness, artist projects presupposed a future-orientated, long-term effort and, more often than not, an open-ended process of elaboration. In other words, projects proposed solutions for particular issues created in the present, which required collaborative involvement over a period of time for resolution in the future.

Another reformist moment during the late 1960s and beyond was institutional critique, which, according to Blake Stimson, ‘preserved the institution of art in the context of 1968’s broad disavowal of institutionality by holding it accountable to its founding ideals’.<sup>24</sup> For Stimson, artists such as Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and Mierle Laderman Ukeles had undertaken institutional critique as a reformist response to the failures of *soixante-huit*, by questioning institutions, and seeking accountability and justice. With its anomalous character, institutional critique also preserved its fidelity to, and acceptance of, the failure of 1968 while retaining ‘its commitment to the old promise of institutionality’<sup>25</sup> according to Stimson.

Unlike institutional critique whose reformism has been acknowledged within the canon of art history, the radical reformism of the project work in Britain during the 1970s has not, until now, been examined in a deep and sustained manner. With my research, I have developed a significant reading of projects as a reformist form of politicised artistic practice, informed by their historical context. An investigation of project work has ongoing significance, and this study will pave the way for a better understanding of the 1970s, shedding critical light on the importance of these projects and artists for subsequent socially-oriented, collaborative artistic practice.

My definition of the artist project here has been derived empirically through analysis of a selection of major artistic projects on which I focus in this thesis: the Artist’s Union (1972–83), which initially brought left-leaning artists together, setting the stage for several artist projects that followed; the *West London Social Resource Project* (1972) by Stephen Willats, who sought to expand the remit and reach of art and the social territory in which it physically operated by inviting the residents of four different neighbourhoods in west London to respond to questions about their immediate, as well as wider, physical and social environments; *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75* by Margaret Harrison, Kay Fido Hunt and Mary Kelly, a two-year-long collaborative, in-depth study conducted at the south London branch of the Metal Box Co. in Bermondsey, London to document the past history and present working conditions of women in the

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<sup>23</sup> Walker’s book *Left Shift* chronicles this shift across the 1970s. Also see Andrew Wilson in Schönauer, Walter, et al., eds. *Good Bye to London: Radical Art & Politics in the 70’s*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010; Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*; *Studio International*, Vol 191, No 980, March/April 1976.

<sup>24</sup> Alberro, ‘What was Institutional Critique’, in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Alberro, ‘What was Institutional Critique’, in Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings*. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011, 26.

tin-box industry; and the ***The Peterlee Project*** (1976–77) by Stuart Brisley, who worked with local miners to build their own community in the new town of Peterlee, a deprived mining town whose inhabitants were all immigrants from a variety of areas including Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The foundation of the Artist's Union is the starting point, both in terms of the structure of this narrative, and the trajectory I propose for the move towards project-making as a new method of art practice. My research methods include an extensive investigation of archival material and original in-depth interviews with artists, as well as archival recordings of interviews conducted by others. I employ these interviews carefully in order to balance the artists' own recall of this period with my archival findings, and to build an argument based on a thorough consideration of all the sources. In addition to these testimonies, I draw on, survey and critique the existing and limited critical literature available on this subject, scrutinizing the artists' engagement with the archive itself, as material for generating work. Archives were central to the production of projects such as ***Women and Work*** and ***The Peterlee Project***.



## The art historiography of the 1970s

Unlike the heavily historicised 1960s and conceptual art, with seminal works by Thomas Crow, Anne Rorimer, James Meyer, Peter Osborne and Lucy Lippard, British political art of the 1970s has received only limited academic attention through a handful of surveys such as Edward Lucie-Smith's *Art in the Seventies*, Richard Cork's *Everything Seemed Possible: Art in the 1970s*, and John A. Walker's *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*; or terse mentions in other contexts such as Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson's *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, and Robert Hewison's *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960–75*, in which he covers the artistic, political and cultural front of Britain from 1960 to 1975, primarily focusing on the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> Except for Cork and Walker's surveys, the socio-politically inclined art of the 1970s has received very limited and often negative coverage, as exemplified by Lucie-Smith's analysis of 'the plethora of political art in the 70s' being impotent 'as a force of change' and inefficient 'as a weapon of propaganda'.<sup>27</sup> Nearer the time, it was associated with 'profound gloom' by Waldemar Januszczak,<sup>28</sup> and described as 'in crisis' by Peter Fuller who wrote an article titled 'Troubles with British art now' for *Artforum* in 1977.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, socially orientated and radical work from the 1970s has only attracted little academic and research attention. Examples include a Raven Row exhibition titled 'The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966–1979', which looked at the Artist Placement Group (APG) through the leadership of co-founder Barbara Steveni, Alex Sainsbury of Raven Row and Anthony Hudek; recent investigation conducted by Sanja Perovic on Stuart Brisley's *The Peterlee Project* following the relocation of the archival material from the APG archives to Brisley's own in 2013; renewed interest in *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* following its short-lived presentation at the Tate in London, in addition to recognition of Mary Kelly's acclaimed work and status in the art world, and the project's inclusion in surveys of Kelly; or limited references in anthologies such as those by Osborne, or Alberro and Stimson mentioned above, and a brief cameo (Stuart Brisley's *The Peterlee Project*, 1976–77) in Claire Bishop's work on participatory art practice, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. A comparable historiography on the politicisation of artists in the 1970s is *Art*

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<sup>26</sup> On the history of art of the 1960s and conceptual art, see Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996; Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998; Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004; James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004; Peter Osborne, ed. *Conceptual Art: Themes and Movements*. London: Phaidon, 2002; Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960–75*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; on the art of the 1970s, see Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999; Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art in the Seventies*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1980; Richard Cork, *Everything Seemed Possible: Art in the 1970s*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003; Walker, *Left Shift*.

<sup>27</sup> Lucie-Smith, *Art in the Seventies*, 93.

<sup>28</sup> Waldemar Januszczak, 'Making snap judgements', *The Guardian*, 4 July 1981.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Fuller, 'Troubles with British Art now', *Artforum*, Vol 15, No 8, April 1977, 42–47. See also Fuller, 'Where was the art of the Seventies?' In *Beyond the Crisis in Art*. London: Writers and Readers, 1980, 16–43.

**Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era**, which outlines radical work in the US by the Art Workers Collective, written by Julia Bryan-Wilson.<sup>30</sup>

Other recent art historiographies of the decade include Kathy Battista's **Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London**, where she investigates the concept of the feminist body as a site for making and exhibiting work by focusing on London as a cultural hub, uncovering rarely or never-before-discussed feminist performances and alternative creative platforms from the decade; the collection of essays edited by Laurel Forster and Sue Harper in **British Culture and Society in the 1970s: The Lost Decade**, which provides a general examination of the revolutionary and diverse cultural arena of the 1970s through a wide spectrum of cultural forms including art, literature, music and architecture – much like Bart Moore-Gilbert's **The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure?**, which also offers detailed analysis of the cultural production of the decade, incorporating drama, literature, radical politics, music, dance, cinema as well as visual arts. There are also a small number of articles that deal with 1970s radical art practice, such as John Walker's 'Radical Artists & Art Students versus Management & Bureaucracy during the 1970s', where he discusses increasing bureaucracy in art schools during the decade; Alex Coles and Tony Godfrey's articles on the 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965–75', the Whitechapel Art Gallery Exhibition, which included works by all the artists discussed in this research; Gregory Battcock's 'Art in the Service of the Left'; and Alan Leonard Rees's article 'Projecting Back: UK Film and Video Installation in the 1970s', which focused on film and video during the decade.<sup>31</sup>

In a significant sense, art practice of the 1970s has been a blind spot in history, rather like the decade itself, perhaps because the preceding ten years proved more enticing to historians. In **When The Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies**, Andy Beckett describes the general decline of the period, and in a similar vein Norman Shrapnel depicts the decade as 'a splitting headache of unemployment, class and racial friction and economic slump', while Richard Clutterbuck, Peter Fuller and Alwyn W. Turner, among others, also wrote about the decade in a negative tone.<sup>32</sup> I also suspect that the marginalisation of these artists and the negligence with which artist projects and political art of the 1970s has been treated is partly due to the difficulty of analysing these works within the traditional and formal terms of art history, in spite of the 'new art history' initiated at Middlesex University and through **Block** magazine (1979–90). According to Griselda Pollock, this became 'a site for publication of new models of art history that were deeply engaged with contemporary theoretical debates about

<sup>30</sup> Mary Kelly and Judith Mastai, **Social Process-Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–75**. Vancouver: Charles H. Scott Gallery, 1997; Stuart Brisley, **Modern Art Oxford**, and **Museum of Ordure. The Peterlee Project 1976–1977**. London; Aarhus: Museum of Ordure; Antipyrine, 2014; Julia Bryan-Wilson, **Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Kathy Battista, **Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London**. London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013; Laurel Forster and Sue Harper, eds. **British Culture and Society in the 1970s: The Lost Decade**. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010; Bart Moore-Gilbert, ed. **The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure?** London: Routledge, 1994; John A. Walker, 'Radical Artists & Art Students versus Management & Bureaucracy during the 1970s', *Journal of Art & Design Education* 20, no. 2, May 2001, 230–37; Alex Coles, 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965–75: Whitechapel Art Gallery'. London; Martin Creed: various locations, 2000; Tony Godfrey, 'Live in Your Head. London', *The Burlington Magazine* 142 (1165), 200, 247–248; Gregory Battcock, 'Art in the Service of the Left?' In *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973, 21–30; A. L. Rees, 'Projecting Back: UK Film and Video Installation in the 1970s', *Millennium Film Journal* (52), 2009, 56–71.

<sup>32</sup> Norman Shrapnel, **The Seventies: Britain's Inward March**. London: Constable, 1980, 13; Andy Beckett, **When the Lights Went out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies**. London: Faber, 2010; Richard Clutterbuck, **Britain in Agony: The Growth of Political Violence**. London: Faber & Faber, 1978; Peter Fuller, **Beyond the Crisis in Art**. London: Writers and Readers, 1980; Alwyn W. Turner, **Crisis? What Crisis?: Britain in the 1970s**. Aurum Press Ltd., 2013.

semiotics, ideology, museology, critical theory and feminism'.<sup>33</sup> Along with the efforts at Middlesex, feminist historians such as Rozsika Parker, Pollock and Hillary Robinson's invaluable work on the recovery and historicisation of women artists, and Jonathan Harris's *New Art History* have ultimately paved the way for the development of non-formalist art history to analyse socially engaged artworks.<sup>34</sup> As a result artist projects are now widely discussed in critical literature by historians such as Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and Pablo Helguera, among others, but these analyses focus predominantly on art after 1989.<sup>35</sup> I therefore aim to address a significant gap in academic literature by examining leading figures of the radical left art scene in Britain during the 1970s, and to provide an account of the decade with reference to the democratising legacy of its artist projects.

In 'Periodizing the 60s', Frederic Jameson emphasises the importance of recognising a period's internal contradictions between the hegemonic and the subordinate forces at play.<sup>36</sup> For Jameson, a period is 'the sharing of a common objective to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits', rather than a series of uniform events or ideologies.<sup>37</sup> Artist projects are examples of such creative and radical 'responses'. For instance, the Artist's Union can be addressed as a subordinate force developed by artists whose common objective was to protect their rights and get closer to society, in contrast to the hegemonic art market predominantly represented by the Arts Council. In this respect, Jameson's approach to historical analysis, which acknowledges that there are dominant cultural modes typical to specific periods and that these coexist with other cultural forms that respond to the socio-economic order of the period, has been a guiding light for me in constructing a historiography of artist projects.<sup>38</sup> Rather than treating artist projects as a defining feature or a movement of sorts, the intention of the following narrative is to provide a historiography for these paradigmatic projects that have so much to offer contemporary art practitioners working on projects, as well as to historians exploring under-narrated cultural forms of the 1970s.

Furthermore, just as ideals, norms or forms do not shift suddenly on the last day of a decade, various elements present during a particular period do not always come together holistically, but carry within themselves conflicts and antagonistic processes. My research is based on a specific reading of the 1970s that focuses on radical art practice, and the following case studies therefore provide an analysis of a particular thread that existed among the varied artistic tendencies then present – but it is not the only one. The political value of radical art has changed in the past 50 years: relocating one's practice to a factory or a mining town (as Brisley did in *The Peterlee Project*), joining forces with

<sup>33</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Art History and Visual Studies in Great Britain and Ireland' In Matthew Rampley, ed., *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*. Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History, volume 4. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012, 370.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London; New York: Verso Books, 2012; Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004; Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013; Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*. New York, NY: Pinto, 2011; Nato Thompson, ed., *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011*. MA.; MIT Press, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', *Social Text*, No. 9/10, The 60's without Apology, Duke University Press: Spring – Summer, 1984, 178–209.

<sup>37</sup> Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', 178.

<sup>38</sup> Also see Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

workers or going from door to door asking people to fill in questionnaires about their neighbourhoods (as Willats did in the ***West London Social Resource Project***) held socio-political significance in the context of the 1970s, and were novelties for the art world. Such actions have since become ubiquitous, with more artists working outside studios and collaborating with non-artists (as outlined by Bishop, Tom Finkelpearl, Grant Kester, Pablo Helguera, and Nato Thompson). In this respect, to truly comprehend art production in the 1970s, we need to refer to Left politics in Britain, radical politics and, more specifically, as we will see, to the significance of Antonio Gramsci for artists in Britain at the time.

## The British context: theory and purpose

Mark Nash, one of the former editors of *Screen* magazine, argues that the formation and consumption of theory flourished in the 1970s:

As opposed to the 1960s, which one might characterize as focused on anti-imperialist politics as well as the hippy personal is political movements, I would say that the 1970s were less utopian, marked by a teoria-filia born of the defeats of the late 1960s.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to Nash, I suggest that theory came secondary to tangible concerns for these politicised artists, because they were infinitely less utopian than the historical and neo-avant-gardes, and more interested in tackling issues through their art practice than investigating art itself. Similarly, Andrew Wilson posits that 'ideological theorisation took the back seat to a politics of play' during these years.<sup>40</sup> I would argue that this was a matter of pragmatism rather than a total abandonment of theory, and indeed many have written of the proliferation of theory in the 1970s, including Parker and Pollock.<sup>41</sup> The prioritisation of practice over theory was testimony to the sense of urgency that preoccupied artists. Like Margaret Harrison, who stated that she was interested in making art about issues she was involved in, Conrad Atkinson also sought to use 'practical experience and creative activities' rather than theoretical discourse in his works.<sup>42</sup> In that sense, these artists were more inclined to merge theory with practice, as advocated by Gramsci.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the still predominantly Marxist British Left had an anachronistic character due to what Stuart Hall described as the inability of orthodox Marxism to respond to issues of culture, race or ethnicity, as well as anti-war and anti-imperialist activism, and radicalised student politics.<sup>43</sup> The tensions within the British Left were partly due to the Marxist and Labourist revisionist discourse of writers such as Perry Anderson, in opposition to the communist humanism as represented by writers such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson.<sup>44</sup> A 'New Left' developed from radical student politics post-1956 and the tradition of 'communist and popular front politics', which for many young members (the 1950s generation) of the British Left, like Stuart Hall,<sup>45</sup> 'signified the end of the imposed silences and political impasses of the Cold War, and the possibility of a breakthrough into a new socialist project', as well as an alternative to the Labour Party or far left. These two political tendencies – one germinating from the student left, the other from the politics of communism and the popular front – were represented by two

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Nash in online conversation with Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 18, [Accessed 20 November 2015].

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Wilson, 'Art: Politics/Theory: Practice – Radical Art Practices in London in the Seventies'. In *Good Bye to London: Radical Art & Politics in the 70's*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Parker and Pollock, *Framing Feminism*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Harrison, 'Statement', *Live in Your Head*, 95; Conrad Atkinson, 'At the Heart of the Matter: The Body of Society'. In Atkinson, Sandy Nairne, and Caroline Tisdall, eds., *Conrad Atkinson: Picturing the System*. London: Pluto Press: ICA, 1981, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left', *New Left Review (NLR)*, 61, January–February 2010, 179.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*. London: Methuen, 1995, 93–99.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left', 177.

publications, *Universities and Left Review* (with Raphael Samuel, Gabriel Pearson, Charles Taylor and Stuart Hall as editors, and Perry Anderson, Graeme Shankland, David Marquand, Joan Robinson and Basil Davidson as contributors) and *The Reasoner* (subsequently titled *The New Reasoner*, with E. P. Thompson and John Saville as editors, and Rodney Hilton, Christopher Hill, Victor Kiernan and Eric Hobsbawm as contributors), which merged under the title the *New Left Review* (NLR) in 1960.

As Hall admits, the *NLR* never offered a homogeneous political or cultural tendency, and in that sense it mirrored the tensions and political disunity of the New Left generated primarily by their cultural milieus.<sup>46</sup> The *Universities and Left Review* came from the London–Oxford environment and, according to Hall, was made up of ‘modernists’; *The New Reasoner* derived from the industrial North, namely Yorkshire, and was organically connected to the working class.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the groups representing the two publications differed from one another on account of their ideological formations: while the *Universities and Left Review* group was associated with a younger generation that belonged to a post-war political tradition, the tendency within *The New Reasoner* group was towards pre-war resistance and anti-fascist movements – a tradition like that of the Popular Front.<sup>48</sup> But as a cornerstone of the British New Left, the *NLR* was influential in fostering interest on Gramsci’s theories, especially with Perry Anderson as its editorial leader.<sup>49</sup> Gramsci’s ‘ideas legitimised an already well-developed preoccupation with culture,’ and facilitated the assessment of culture and cultural transformation.<sup>50</sup> They also offered an alternative to the prevailing economism of the British Left, according to which economic structure had a direct impact on social reality. Several theorists have written on Gramsci and the significance of his concepts for the British Left after the 1960s.<sup>51</sup> It was not until 1971 that Gramscian concepts made their way to a wider audience. This was when his *Prison Notebooks* – a series of essays in the form of 30 notebooks consisting of 3,000 pages of history and analysis, written during his imprisonment between 1929 and 1935 – first appeared in English, under the title *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. The translation and publication of these notebooks came alongside a rising awareness of other ‘previously neglected dimensions of Gramsci’s work’ according to David Forgacs, who associated this interest with ‘student radicalization and the wave of rank-and-file industrial actions which lasted up to the mid-70s’.<sup>52</sup> In *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*, John A. Walker also acknowledged that Gramsci’s concepts of ‘hegemony and organic intellectuals’ were ‘influential’

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 184–185.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>49</sup> Perry Anderson succeeded Stuart Hall as the magazine’s editor in 1962.

<sup>50</sup> Madeleine Davis, ‘The Marxism of the British New Left’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11:3, 2006, 348.

<sup>51</sup> Tom Nairn, ‘The British Political Elite’, *NLR* 23, January–February 1964; Perry Anderson, ‘Origins of the Present Crisis’, *ibid*; Nairn, ‘The English Working Class’, *NLR* 24, March–April 1964; Nairn, ‘The Nature of the Labour Party’, *NLR* 27 and 28, September–October and November–December 1964; Nairn, ‘Labour Imperialism’, *NLR* 32, July–August 1965; Anderson, ‘Components of the National Culture’, *NLR* 50, July–August 1968; see ‘Soviets in Italy’ (ten articles from the *Ordine Nuovo* of 1919–20 translated by Quintin Hoare and introduced by Perry Anderson), *NLR* 51, September–October 1968; Edward Thompson, ‘The Peculiarities of the English’, *The Socialist Register*, 1965; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*. London 1975, 249–50; Martin Clark, *Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed*. New Haven and London, 1977; Raymond Williams, ‘Base and Superstructure’. In *Marxism and Literature*, London, 1977; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll*. New York, 1974, 25–28; John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1971; Gwyn Williams, *Proletarian Order*, London, 1975.

<sup>52</sup> David Forgacs, ‘Gramsci and Marxism in Britain’, *New Left Review* (NLR) 176, 1989, 77.

following the publication of his *Prison Notebooks*.<sup>53</sup> Perry Anderson has linked the strong interest in Gramsci in the 1970s – especially amongst the artistic community – to the publication of Raymond Williams’ essay titled ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’, in which Williams ‘at once endorsed and developed’ Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as a ‘central system of practices, meanings and values saturating the consciousness of a society at a much deeper level than ordinary notions of ideology’.<sup>54</sup> Williams’ point is significant because it sets up the turn to Gramsci, especially at the beginning of the 1970s, with regards to artists building a counter-hegemonic narrative and their realisation of the necessity to influence state institutions and actors in order to do so. The turn to Gramsci at the beginning of the 1970s came directly on the back of the failure of the revolutionary uprising of May 1968. For those radically reformist artists, Gramsci’s concepts provided an alternative Leftist trajectory to the Situationist politics that animated May 1968. According to Peter Smith: ‘Despite revolutionary zeal, or perhaps because of it, [the Situationists] sought immediate compensations for the miseries of daily life, and spontaneous methods of attack which they mistook for political strategy.’<sup>55</sup> Situationist politics focused on irreverence, anti-authoritarianism and ‘destructive creativity’ in its bid to attain political power.<sup>56</sup> However, there are ‘other forms of social power worth conquering’ as Wallerstein affirms: ‘economic power, cultural power (Gramsci’s “hegemony”), power over self (individual and “group” autonomy)’.<sup>57</sup> In this sense, the attempt to reckon with questions of hegemony, state power, and the subaltern was indeed a response to the perceived political shortcomings and defeats of 1968 – especially considering the rather attenuated character of May 1968 as a political conjuncture in Britain – one that manifested itself in a radical reformism that sought significant political and cultural change from within. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, Gramsci’s theories were circulated, adopted, debated and contested by the British Left, and as David Forgacs notes, were pivotal in both ‘freeing Marxism from “economism” [...]’, and in interpreting Thatcherism and the crisis of the Left’, later in the 1980s, and in ‘the theoretical reconstruction of Marxism in Britain’.<sup>58</sup>

Gramsci’s term for describing people who ‘have no history’ is the ‘subaltern’.<sup>59</sup> The concept of the subaltern refers to those who are excluded from the hegemony of power (i.e. financially disadvantaged people and groups such as workers and peasants, according to Gramsci). In my opinion, this group can be expanded to include financially disadvantaged artists and those who are socially, politically and culturally marginalised, such as women, homosexuals and people of colour.<sup>60</sup> For instance, women have been historically outnumbered by men in exhibitions, selection committees for exhibitions and directorial positions in art institutions, and have been relegated to the role of the object/content of artworks rather than their makers. Women artists – like homosexual artists or artists

<sup>53</sup> John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*. London: Tauris, 2002, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Perry Anderson, ‘The Heirs of Gramsci’, *New Left Review (NLR)*, 100, July-August 2016, 73; See Raymond Williams, ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’, *New Left Review (NLR)*, 82, November-December 1973, 8-13.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Smith, ‘On the Passage of a Few People: Situationist Nostalgia’, *The Oxford Art Journal*, 14:1, 1991, 123.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Wallerstein and Zukin, ‘1968, Revolution in the World-System: Theses and Querie’, 444.

<sup>58</sup> David Forgacs, ‘Gramsci and Marxism in Britain’, *NLR* 176, 1989, 69–88.

<sup>59</sup> Gramsci, *Prison notebooks*. Vol. 1. Notebook 14, §39. Trans., J. A. Buttigieg and A. Callari, New York, 1992, 294.

<sup>60</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. and ed., Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, 52–53.

of colour – faced a variety of institutional obstacles in the arts, and were markedly excluded from the history of art until the upsurge of second-wave feminism in the 1970s and the endeavours of feminist historians such as Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker.<sup>61</sup> The concept of the subaltern provides a framework to approach the strategies adopted by artist projects (e.g. women workers at the Metal Box co.) for achieving fair treatment and challenging the discriminatory practices of art institutions (e.g. Artist's Union and the Women's Workshop). According to Marcus Green, the idea of the subaltern 'creates not only a new terrain of struggle but also a methodological criterion for formulating such a struggle founded upon the integral analysis of the economic, historical, cultural, and ideological roots of everyday life', and is therefore essential for the historiography of artist projects as models of struggle.<sup>62</sup>

Gramsci states:

If the subaltern are going to promote a new hegemony and attempt to create a new state, they have to become a governing body and political and intellectual leaders within the old society before winning power, which requires 'infinite masses of people'.<sup>63</sup>

Here, then, we will see that the Artist's Union, particularly with its subgroup the Women's Workshop (whose goal was to promote the rights of the artist despite the inequity of the art world), and projects like *Women and Work* and *The Peterlee Project*, sought to enable a subaltern struggle for power. For instance, by documenting and displaying the discrepancies in pay across genders in *Women and Work*, the artists challenged the factory and the merits of the Equal Pay Act in terms of its cogency and usability, while Brisley aimed to empower the residents of Peterlee to take action to become decision-makers on issues relating to their community.

For Gramsci, the methodology for historicising the subaltern must start from the 'most primitive phases' and 'must record, and discover the causes of, the line of development towards integral autonomy'; in other words, recognise the subaltern's pursuit and recovery of their historical consciousness, so these past struggles and ruptures can guide future ones.<sup>64</sup> While difficult, Gramsci acknowledges that it is possible and necessary to produce a subaltern history. He writes:

Every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups should be of incalculable value for the integral historian. Consequently, this kind of history can only be dealt with monographically, and each monograph requires an immense quantity of material which is often hard to collect'.<sup>65</sup>

The emphasis Gramsci assigns to subaltern histories can also be traced in the note he wrote in reference to Ettore Ciccotti's article 'Elements of "truth" and "certainty" in the historical tradition', on

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61 Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', *Women, Art and Power*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988: 145–178.

62 Marcus Green, 'Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern', *Rethinking Marxism*, Volume 14, Number 3 (Fall 2002), 22–23.

63 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 6, §138, 1971: 238–9.

64 Ibid, 25, §5, 52.

65 Ibid, 25, §2, 55.



the thirteenth-century communes in Siena and Bologna where common people gained political power over the nobles:

When the people failed to obtain desired reforms from the commune authorities, they seceded, with the support of prominent individuals from the commune, and after forming an independent assembly they began to create their own magistracies similar to the general systems of the commune, to award jurisdiction to the captain of the people, and to make decisions on their own authority, and giving rise (...) to a whole legislative authority (...) The people succeeded, at first in practice and later formally, in forcing the inclusion into the general statutes of the commune of provisions that previously applied only internally to those registered as 'People'. The people, then, came to dominate the commune, overwhelming the previous ruling class.<sup>66</sup>

To that end, both *The Peterlee Project* and *Women and Work* come close to historical case studies of the subaltern, with their Gramscian goal of transforming the subordinate social positions of Peterlee residents and the women workers at the Metal Box co., respectively. Both projects historicise groups whose histories remained untold, albeit tracing back to only the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, *Women and Work* outlined the history of women who constituted a large portion of the labour force in the tin-box industry in south London since World War I (Southwark had been the home of workshop industries that employed women since the nineteenth century), and *The Peterlee Project* revealed a history extracted from the personal and collective memories of residents, some of whom had come as children to man the mines in the 1900s. To different degrees and through different approaches, both projects sought to abolish marginalisation by empowering their subjects and facilitating their autonomy. As Henri Weber argues, Gramsci suggested that in the West, 'the socialist revolution is envisioned as a slow process of the working class's assumption of hegemony after a protracted "war of position" in which the "casemates" and "fortresses" [on which the State rests] are besieged and overthrown one by one'.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, artist projects offer a model for transforming society by empowering people to win over these 'casemates'. In a sense, artist projects awaken people to recognise the mechanisms and patterns related to their own environments – their neighbourhoods or workplaces – and, ultimately, take control by participation and direct action with respect to decisions regarding their lives. Artist projects provide practical solutions to specific issues, one at a time, rather than trying to find universal truths and answers.

Griselda Pollock asserts that in the early 1970s, the radical artistic community in Britain 'retained an avant-gardist consciousness, harnessed now to the desire precisely not to "emigrate from society to Bohemia" (Greenberg's phrase) but to participate in the major political movements and contradictions of the moment'.<sup>68</sup> The terms of this participation, which the following chapters discuss,

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<sup>66</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3, §16.

<sup>67</sup> Henri Weber, 'In the Beginning was Gramsci'. In Lotringer, Sylvère, and Christian Marazzi, eds., *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*. Semiotext(e) Intervention Series 1. Cambridge, MA; London: Semiotext(e), 2007, 87; Weber criticises the Italian Communist Party (I.C.P) for their misuse of Gramsci, asserting that 'he does not examine the *revolutionary conquest* of power itself' and instead 'the proletariat's struggle for hegemony constitutes a preparation for the revolutionary rupture rather than the actual accomplishment of the revolution; it represents the condition for a victorious revolution but does not stand in for one', 88.

<sup>68</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Histories'. In *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–75*, 45.

were several fold, and positioned artists as negotiators, facilitators, researchers and/or collaborators according to the specific project goals, but never as geniuses working in solitude. Distinct from the traditional practice of art where the artist created an artwork (mostly) alone and through a unidirectional relationship with his/her material, artist projects were based on the participation of others and created outside the studio. This participatory relationship was between the artist and the particular community they chose to empower and work with, but occasionally also involved collaboration with other artists. In addition, projects were created with the intention of reaching a wider public than the chosen community, even perhaps during the timescale of the project's production and presentation. The artists also refrained from self-reflexivity in a medium-specific way, if not theoretically, and sought to connect with people in a way that avoided what Peter Bürger described as an inauthentic 'gesture of protest', like that of the neo-avant-garde which was ultimately subsumed as art by the institutions they intended to challenge.<sup>69</sup> For Bürger, provocation is unrepeatable: Duchamp's readymades, for example, where he signed mass-produced objects, thereby deeming them artworks, as a means to challenge an art market that valued the signature over the work, could only be provocative the first time. Once these works, or manifestations, as Bürger defines them, were placed in art institutions, they became affirmations of the status quo. In contrast, the intention of artist projects was not provocation but connection with society.

### **Social purpose**

Politicised artists were not interested in renouncing the visual skills they had acquired and mastered through the fine-art education route. Instead, they set out to approach their immediate social context and its issues through their visual practice, and to utilise their fine-art training as an essential tool, even if aesthetic concerns were secondary to political ones. Curator Judith Mastai asserts that what these politicised artists in the 1970s proposed 'was not an anti-art movement; on the contrary, questions of representation were central, but it was a utopian moment in which object making served ideas with the hope that Western society could be changed'.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, representation was a central feature of artist projects, but was only prioritised insofar as it served the artist's aims for challenging a specific issue. Hence the representation of ideas or forms in the art-historical sense was superseded by the presentation of facts and information. Thus, the output of artist projects often relied on documentation (statistical tables, graphs, charts and timelines), and in terms of form was guided by the conceptual paradigm of 'prominence of text', 'negation of aesthetic content' and 'serial and highly schematic structures', as listed by Alexander Alberro.<sup>71</sup> Equally, due to their reliance on vast amounts of information, artist projects required investment of time and effort by their audience.

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 53.

<sup>70</sup> Judith Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–1975*. Exhibition catalogue, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver 1997, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander Alberro, 'Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966–1977'. In *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, xvii.

While the four case studies I have chosen are distinct in terms of content and context, they embodied shared characteristics and exemplify my claim for the artist project of the 1970s as an essential practice. Each project was created with the intention of challenging and remedying a social, political and/or economic deficiency: the Artist's Union aimed to protect and promote the socio-economic rights of artists; *Women and Work* sought to challenge socio-economic norms affecting women by demonstrating the concerns of second-wave feminism particular to Britain in the 1970s, through both the artists' own predicament as women working in a male-dominated art community and the women workers who faced sexual division of labour at work and home; *The Peterlee Project* strove to remedy the antisocial conditions of a new town – a failed promise of the welfare state – dedicated to mining, one of the largest industries (and with the most active union presence) in Britain at the time; the *West London Social Resource Project* presented a cross-section of British society through four different neighbourhoods in west London, and illustrated the social expansion of art that increasingly occurred during the decade as well as the transdisciplinary aspect of projects. This selection demonstrates how 1970s artist projects introduced new formats for art production that continue to be used today, and, as such, set the context for future practical and theoretical work on projects. I argue that shedding critical light on radical and democratising art practice in Britain during the 1970s begins to accord proper recognition to artists and projects that have hitherto been marginalised by existing scholarship, and to contextualise contemporary project-based artistic practice.

The projects examined below took place between 1972 and 1977. This timeframe is a deliberate decision, as I argue that the height of radical art practice was realised before the end of the decade. The final years of the decade, by contrast, were a period of waning energy and enthusiasm for counter practice and collective efforts (the Artist's Union began losing momentum even though its final dissolution didn't take place until 1983), along with, ultimately, the return to a more individual art practice (the 'Thatcherite, 'do it yourself'<sup>72</sup> entrepreneurialism of the (London) art world, as gallery-owner Sadie Cole has described it; a 'wholesale return to painting'<sup>73</sup> as Victor Burgin has argued, or a self-conscious recursiveness in art, according to John Roberts). It was also part of a populist stance that ended up maintaining what Roberts described as the 'culture of containment' in Britain, where 'accessibility' and 'popularity' were favoured over 'experimentation' in order to maintain 'certain archaic, nostalgic and empiricist cultural and political formations'.<sup>74</sup> I discuss the causes and effects of this political downturn in the conclusion, along with an analysis of the outcomes of the projects investigated and how these can be seen to inflect contemporary practice.

Roberts scorns the 're-theorisation of art's social function through a new commitment to Bergeresque social themes',<sup>75</sup> as exemplified by exhibitions such as 'Art for Whom?' (Serpentine Gallery, 1978) and 'Art for Society: Contemporary British Art with a Social or Political Purpose'

<sup>72</sup> Sadie Coles quoted in Jonathan Harris, ed., *Art, Money, Parties: New Institutions in the Political Economy of Contemporary Art*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004, 97.

<sup>73</sup> Victor Burgin, 'The Absence of Presence'. In Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, 1069.

<sup>74</sup> Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 66; Roberts here refers to Perry Anderson and Martin Weiner's positions as demonstrated by Anderson in 'Components of the national culture', *NLR*, No. 50, 1968, and Weiner in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

<sup>75</sup> Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 63.

(Whitechapel Gallery, 1978), both of which investigated the social function of art and presented works with a social purpose. Though well intentioned, these exhibitions resembled compendia of works with social or political themes – as the organisers of ‘Art for Society’ admitted, there was more work (gathered from submissions, not invitations) than one exhibition could attempt to present.<sup>76</sup> However, this testified more to a lack of focus in the exhibition than a plenitude of work with social or political purpose. For Roberts, these exhibitions illustrated the artists’ efforts to ‘act socially among the "rest of humanity"',<sup>77</sup> whereas what was needed was an art ‘closer to the workings of the public sphere’ and that was ‘transitive, unstable and multifarious in its productions’.<sup>78</sup> Rather than representing a populist agenda devised by particular art institutions, artist projects were counter-hegemonic interventions that investigated issues of personal or political significance to the artists. Consequently, they challenged the elitism of art institutions and offered measures for addressing the incapacities of the welfare state.

While the socio-political was of significant concern for the artists discussed, to presume ‘social purpose’ acted as the over-arching *raison d'être* of their activities would be dismissive and only partially accurate. Rather, social purpose or, more precisely, socio-political issues, were the starting points for these artists. Projects shouldn’t be qualified solely according to the structural or formal changes they bring about in society. These were artist projects, hence art works, not projects resulting from government policies, and therefore need to be addressed in a way that investigates what they meant for the artists and for the art world as a whole. Although the artists took on the roles of collaborators, arbitrators, archivists and/or negotiators, they were first and foremost artists creating artworks, a vital aspect of which was their presentation and reception as artworks. In other words, artist projects occupied a place in the context of art, even if they also functioned on a practical level. In that sense, it is imperative to examine their representational, aesthetic and theoretical dimensions, as well as their effectiveness, ethical integrity and contexts of display. Due to their process-orientated and documentation-heavy qualities, artist projects are difficult to commodify. However, unlike their precursors, who set out to challenge the institutions of art during the 1960s by creating non-commodifiable, or what Lucy Lippard and John Chandler described as, ‘dematerialized artworks’, this was not the principal objective of these artists but a natural outcome of the temporal aspect of their projects.<sup>79</sup> The arduous task of preserving, archiving and/or exhibiting these works even today is testament to this.<sup>80</sup>

Since these artists began with a particular problem or issue, and pursued solutions throughout the process, I suggest that the trajectory taken by them was ‘transdisciplinary’, which, according to Mary Kelly, offered a better description of their character than ‘interdisciplinarity’, as suggested by

<sup>76</sup> Whitechapel Art Gallery, *Art for Society: Contemporary British Art with a Social or Political Purpose: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery 10 May–18 June 1978*. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1978.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Cork, ‘Art for society’s sake’, *Art for society*, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 79.

<sup>79</sup> Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, ‘The Dematerialization of Art’, *Art International* 12:2, New York, Feb 1968, 31–36, reproduced in Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 1971, 255–276.

<sup>80</sup> For instance, much of the academic research conducted as part of *The Peterlee Project* was destroyed by the Easington District Council, and what has been left of the project has only recently been reorganised and archived at the Tate Archives. Similarly, *Women and Work* was only on display briefly, first following the refurbishment of Tate Britain in 2014, and again following the inauguration of the Blavatnik Building at Tate Modern in 2016, to be wrapped up once again and removed from access due to its sheer volume. In an e-mail correspondence with the author, the museum’s senior team for art handling indicated that the work is inaccessible for all purposes including academic ones, due to its ‘size and nature’.

Homi Bhabha.<sup>81</sup> Rather than an interdisciplinary approach, which operates across disciplines, transdisciplinarity is ‘multireferential and multidimensional’, and affords an integration of disciplines that can be adapted to the requirements of (contemporary) society, and reaches at once ‘across, between and beyond’ disciplines, as defined by Basarab Nicolescu.<sup>82</sup> Adopting such a transdisciplinary approach, artist projects functioned as interventions for effecting change in social and cultural perception through building awareness of a problem and paving the way for its abolishment. For instance, while *Women and Work* didn’t eradicate the division of labour in industry, it empowered and supported women workers. Willats’s *West London Social Resource Project*, on the other hand, succeeded in involving people who hadn’t been exposed to art before over an extended period, activating residents to think about their social environment and relate to other community members.<sup>83</sup>

### Groups and collectives

Writing about the 1970s in 1980, Lucy Lippard notes that ‘socio-political art was more visible and viable in Britain than in the United States precisely because there were left-wing movements and parties artists could join or collaborate with’.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the situation in Britain was distinct: unlike the US, there was already a viable labour movement with trade unions providing an important ally for politicised artists. The position occupied by such artists in Britain was a pragmatic one, as illustrated by the artists whose projects I historicise in the following chapters. This pragmatic tendency developed further with the impetus of feminism and was also supplemented by the collaborative ways of working practised by collectives during the decade. Supported by the overall energy of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM), a great many of these were women’s groups that promoted consciousness raising, which they translated into practical strategies (projects like *Feministo: The Women's Postal Art Event* (1974–77),<sup>85</sup> initiated by Kate Walker; *A Woman’s House* by the South London Art Group; *Women and Work* (1975) and *Who’s Holding the Baby?* (1978) by the all-women Hackney Flashers, who documented women working in the home or outside in Hackney and the lack of childcare; or groups like *See Red Workshop*<sup>86</sup>) or interventions (*Women and Work*, or the *Nightcleaners* film by the Berwick Street Collective<sup>87</sup> about the women who worked as night cleaners in office buildings and their fight for increased wages in 1972). In keeping with Jameson, who traces

<sup>81</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, xix.

<sup>82</sup> Basarab Nicolescu, *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*. Trans. K. Claire Voss, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, 147–152.

<sup>83</sup> The reach of the *West London Social Resource Project* was not limited to the project participants – even people who had not filled out the questionnaires could read and comment on other participants’ responses.

<sup>84</sup> Walker, *The Left Shift*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Feministo* began as a postal exchange between Kate Walker and her friend Sally Gallop when Gallop moved to the Isle of Wight. The project involved the exchange of artworks through the mail between the two. This exchange quickly expanded, and the eventual network included 25 women aged 19–60. *Feministo* identified the difficulty of practising art while raising children and embodied a critique of domesticity and ‘its alliance with women’s normative femininity’, according to Katy Deepwell. The work was anti-hierarchical, used strategies developed out of consciousness-raising groups and included professional and non-professional, trained and untrained artists, as well as all media and genres. Katy Deepwell, ‘Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices’. In Janet Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006, 77.

<sup>86</sup> Founded in 1974 by three former art students who met through an advertisement in the radical feminist magazine *Red Rag*, the Women’s Workshop was a silkscreen-printing collective that produced posters that challenged chauvinist views of women and conducted service printing for the WLM. The workshop grew out of a shared desire to combat negative images of women in the media.

<sup>87</sup> At the time of filming, Berwick Street Collective members included Marc Karlin, Mary Kelly, James Scott and Humphry Trevelyan. Kelly was invited to the collective after the decision for filming the night cleaners was made, because it was felt a woman should be involved.

the socio-political conditions prevalent in the 1960s to decolonisation in Britain and French Africa, which was instrumental in humanising 'those inner colonized of the first world – "minorities," marginals, and women – fully as much as its external subjects and official "natives"',<sup>88</sup> I argue that the pivotal locus of the WLM in the 1970s was a continuation of the struggle to release women from the role of the 'inner colonized of the first world' that began in the 1960s.

David Graeber asserts that 'much of the initiative for creating new forms of democratic process – like consensus – has emerged from the tradition of feminism', which he attributes to the fact that women had already been conditioned 'to create a politics founded on the principle of reasonableness', since they lacked power within the traditions of patriarchal society.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, women had to construct something from nothing, completely on their own, and strictly on their own terms because, as Valie Export declared, 'The history of woman is the history of man, precisely because man has defined the image of woman' up until the 1970s.<sup>90</sup> The goal was to redefine this image, which only reflected the patriarchal order, and artists like Harrison, Kelly and Hunt used their practice to influence social consciousness, while historians like Pollock and Parker sought to rewrite the history of art to give voice to marginalised female artists and challenge the social structures and academies of masculine reality.<sup>91</sup> Pollock asserts:

...it was very strange to combine historical studies with what was actually happening. Feminism necessitated breaching that barrier. It also made it possible to see the history of art in a completely different light, following the thread of gender through its dark labyrinths and discovering a means of redefining women and creativity.<sup>92</sup>

Coinciding with this investigation and redefinition of art history was a formal, structural and contextual evaluation of art practice by women. Women's groups were indispensable for all women who came into contact with them, including artists, historians and theorists such as Pollock, just as they were vital for the women these groups aimed to reach and support. One of the most influential women's groups was the Women's Art History Collective formed in 1972 by Pollock, Parker, Pat Kahn, Alina Strassberg and Anthea Callen, which sought to study the history and images of women in art as well as the language with which this history was being expressed. Before Pollock and Parker set out to write their pivotal study of feminism in art, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985*, and before the collective's natural conclusion in 1975–76, the Women's Art History Collective became affiliated with the Women's Workshop, and therefore the Artist's Union.

Referring to her experience at the Women's Liberation Workshop as 'intense and immersive', Rosalind Delmar recounts, 'Workshop groups were committed to developing a collective, non-authoritarian practice growing from women working together. They aimed to be leaderless,

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<sup>88</sup> Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', 181.

<sup>89</sup> David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*. London: Penguin Books, 2014, 202.

<sup>90</sup> Valie Export, 'Woman's Art', *Neues Forum*, vol. XX, no. 228, Vienna, January 1973, 47.

<sup>91</sup> See Parker and Pollock, eds., *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970–85*.

<sup>92</sup> Griselda Pollock in online conversation with Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 16, [Accessed 20 November 2015].

autonomous and heterogeneous'.<sup>93</sup> This horizontal character was mirrored in the artist projects they initiated: *Women and Work*, *Feministo*, or *A Woman's House*, all promoted democratic principles. At the time, this form of leaderless and non-authoritarian organisation was a novelty for the New Left. Delmar writes:

No one could speak on behalf of anyone else and when differences were discussed, often with passion, the aim often was to give all views an airing rather than to arrive at a common position (...) This way of working enraged male left groups, who saw their role as providing 'leadership.' They were keen to teach us the lessons of the class struggle (in particular that women's issues came second, or were a distraction) and seemed unable to grasp that they might have something to learn from us.<sup>94</sup>

Notwithstanding the reluctance of a majority of men within the New Left and the Labour movement, women's groups provided an important model of operation during the 1970s with their leaderless and autonomous structures (e.g. the Women's Workshop). Despite missed opportunities and failed attempts, the impetus provided by feminism for democratising the art world and rupturing the male-dominated arts in Britain is incontrovertible. *Studio International's* 1977 issue (Vol.193, no. 987) dedicated to women's art, the initiatives taken by councils such as Southwark (*Women and Work*), Camden (*Women Power*) and Hackney (*Women Work in Hackney*, 1975) to show exclusively women artists, a significant increase in the number of shows dedicated to women's art organised by women, and the number of colleges offering courses in and resources on women's art (Camberwell School of Art, Middlesex Polytechnic, Goldsmiths and Maidstone College of Art) were among the victories of the WLM, despite the much longer time taken by art institutions to begin closing the gender gap in exhibitions and public collections.<sup>95</sup> In that sense, it is also important to emphasise the significance and instrumentality of the work done by the Women's Workshop in beginning to change the patriarchal tenor prevalent within the art community, starting with the Artist's Union and its efforts to be more egalitarian in terms of gender and race.

The foundation of the Artist's Union in 1972, as an artist-led initiative that sought to protect and promote the rights of artists, was both a symptom and result of the challenge faced by artists. Trained with the sensibilities and expectations of a post-war art world, many young artists found themselves caught between the promise of a traditionally privileged social position and that of an increasingly unstable 'non-wage-earning-class', due to the narrowness of the contemporary art market and limited state funding for non-formalist work. Faced with financial precariousness, many artists were forced to take on paid work that was tangential or unrelated to their practice, such as publishing, graphic design or teaching, and thus chose to build alliances with the working class by joining forces with the trade union movement. As such, critical analysis of the Union is essential, not only because

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<sup>93</sup> Rosalind Delmar in online conversation with Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 4, [Accessed 20 November 2015].

<sup>94</sup> Delmar in conversation with Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Period of Time', 4.

<sup>95</sup> Margaret Harrison 'Notes on Feminist Art in Britain, 1970–1977', *Studio International*, vol. 193, no.987, 1977, 212–220.

the organisation was a catalyst for several artist projects, but also because, through it, artists sought to question their own class positions and negotiate their rights as artists. The close examination of the Union that I undertake sets the stage for the case studies to come in terms of the state of affairs in Britain at the beginning of the 1970s, while also illustrating the conditions that motivated artists to build on the utopian aspirations of the previous decade and take a more hands-on approach. While the most significant in terms of reach and influence, the Artist's Union wasn't the only artist organisation established during the decade. Others included the short-lived Friends of the Arts Council Operative (FACOP, 1969–70), which campaigned for the Arts Council to revise its patronage strategies and for artists to have control of the arts<sup>96</sup>; the Artists Liberation Front (ALF), founded by John Dugger and David Medalla in May 1971 to promote their self-established 'movement for a people's culture'<sup>97</sup>; the League of Socialist Artists (LSA, 1971–77), founded by a group of artists associated with the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain; and the APG (renamed O+I in 2005).

Through different approaches, each of these groups sought to challenge the mechanisms of the art world at the time. In this respect, it is useful to compare the efforts of ALF with the artists I discuss in the following chapters. Through the ALF, Dugger initiated the ***People Weave a House!*** project, which took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) during November–December 1972. While described as a project, I consider ***People Weave a House!*** as an exception among the projects I examine, as it was a transitory event rather than a response or solution to an issue of importance. Taking inspiration from Chairman Mao's tenet – heed the old to bring forth the new – for achieving unity, Dugger introduced the traditional craft of weaving using plastic tubing (a new construction material at the time, donated by the industrialist Alistair McAlpine).<sup>98</sup> Production was executed by voluntary participants and directed by Dugger, while Medalla initiated political discussions as Head of Cultural Propaganda at the ALF, and puppet shows, music, and dance exercises were added to the communal activities. ***People Weave a House!*** was meant to demonstrate that 'ordinary people can make art and that major projects can be achieved via the small contributions of many individuals'.<sup>99</sup> However, like earlier examples by Medalla where he invited visitors to participate in the making of a work (e.g. ***A Stitch in Time***, 1968–72, which encouraged visitors to take part in the act of stitching, and ***Down with the Slave Trade***, 1968, which invited them to attach long polythene tubes filled with dried rice stalks from Asia to each other) to engender a sense of community, ***People Weave a House!*** was attended primarily by art world regulars (art students and other artists). Consequently, the project fell short of including 'ordinary people'. According to Walker, 'ALF's idealistic desire to involve the masses was somewhat vitiated by the fact that the ICA – a private organisation which required membership fees – did not attract many visitors'.<sup>100</sup> Hence, despite being a forerunner in terms of audience participation, Dugger and Medalla's project had its shortcomings: aesthetic concerns were only circumstantial for the artists, who were more interested in creating a social model that

<sup>96</sup> Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Images*. Bristol: Intellect, 2011, 45.

<sup>97</sup> Walker, *The Left Shift*, 86.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 89.



demonstrated how collective action could motivate a sense of community,<sup>101</sup> and they failed to propose a use for the house or specify its construction method.

The 1970s were also the decade in which several community arts projects were produced in Britain. Drawing on her own experience as a community arts worker, Su Braden documents a range of community arts projects in her book *Artists and People* (1978) sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The projects Braden discusses include The Paddington Print Shop in London founded by John Phillips and Pippa Smith in 1974,<sup>102</sup> which became a key community printing resource in west London producing work for various social causes as well as artists such as Lucian Freud, and bands like the 101-ers and the Sex Pistols; The Great Georges Project, also known as Black-e (formerly Blackie),<sup>103</sup> a combination of community and contemporary arts centre with an open-door policy in Liverpool; and projects initiated by the arts regeneration organisation Free Form Arts Trust in east London.

While similar to artist projects that included non-artists, community arts projects were different in not stemming from a particular artist's practice (e.g. Brisley's *The Peterlee Project* as extended performance) or in response to issues such as the division of labour in industry (e.g. *Women and Work* by Harrison, Hunt and Kelly). Instead, they functioned as free-form initiatives that aimed to engage and empower communities through working with artists. Braden's account of community arts relied on an understanding of artistic expression as a basic human freedom and the social value of releasing it from 'formal restraints'.<sup>104</sup> What also becomes clear from Braden's book is that while wide-ranging in their reach, content and context, community arts projects – in contrast to artist projects – were often initiated by a host organisation, or occasionally the community itself, and generally relied on a form of artist-in-residence scheme. This was largely due to funding since, as Braden notes, the key funding bodies 'have frequently preferred to finance only those projects which they themselves initiate', while 'embryonic projects set up independently by artists and local communities [struggle] for basic levels of subsistence'.<sup>105</sup>

Social responsibility, community improvement and cohesion lay at the core of community arts, but the end results (or the long-term goals) were less clear-cut than artist projects. In community arts, funding usually came prior to the project's content and structure: a government organisation such as the Arts Council, a Regional Arts Association such as Greater London Arts Association (GLAA), or a private body such as the Gulbenkian Foundation would set aside funds for a particular area and then advocate artists to participate. In the case of artist projects the extent to which the funding body had a say in the project's direction was limited. For instance, while *Women and Work* was created with funds from GLAA, the only stipulation was that they should be used in projects that would benefit

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>102</sup> Paddington Printshop evolved into londonprintstudio in the mid-1990s. Still active, londonprintstudio is an artist-run, not-for-profit organisation providing educational resources in the graphic arts for the public through practical engagement.

<sup>103</sup> The Great Georges Project was initiated in 1968 by Wendy and Bill Harpe, along with a group of artists, and was supported by the Peter Moores Foundation due to its commitment to participation and community involvement.

<sup>104</sup> Su Braden, *Artists and People*. Gulbenkian Studies. London; Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1978.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 16–17.

lower-paid members of the London community. Similarly, while *The Peterlee Project* was funded by the Peterlee Development Corporation (PDC), the organisation had no say in the project's content.

In contrast to community arts, artist projects – though distinct from object-based art works – still maintained the artist's (or the group of artists') authorial signature. Community arts projects, on the other hand, grew from the needs of particular communities, and artistic input was complementary to the work involved. Essentially, another individual could replace the designated artist in a particular community project, whereas an artist project would cease to exist without the authoring artist. Since the host organisation (e.g. Milton Keynes Development Corporation, the Arts Council, Gulbenkian Foundation or otherwise) or community (e.g. non-artists from a neighbourhood who shared common socio-economic conditions) produced the project, the artists involved had limited control over its process and outcome. Sculptor Liz Leyh's residency as town artist in Milton Keynes in 1978 is an example of an artist overshadowed by the host organisation's plans. As a supervisor of projects 'involving play or leisure pursuits' dictated by the community rather than an individual artist, Leyh described her position as 'running round advertising the development corporation project'.<sup>106</sup> Hence, although funded by a development corporation (in the same way as *The Peterlee Project*), Leyh's project was the opposite of Brisley's in terms of the artist's authorial freedom.

Though community artists in Britain sought to promote 'cultural democracy'<sup>107</sup> on the basis that cultural production is a right of all human beings, many in the art world dismissed community arts projects as amateurish and 'lacking in the elusive quality of excellence', according to Jean Battersby.<sup>108</sup> Braden, however, argues that 'the vocabulary of modern art is unable to articulate social relationships outside the international art market',<sup>109</sup> and that it is contradictory for institutions to fund community arts as a way of bridging the gap between the art world and public while continuing to promote 'high culture'.<sup>110</sup> This difficulty was exacerbated by the 'conflict between the notion of popularising art and the notion of artistic democracy'<sup>111</sup> – that is, the fundamental rift between the top-down (i.e. initiated by funding bodies rather than communities or artists) notion of the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy as a bottom-up process. Unless the relationship between artist and community was mutually accepted, community arts initiatives would remain paternalistic. Braden concludes that a successful community arts endeavour – success being measured by the particular community's acceptance and interest in the project – motivated the community to seek funding for continuation of the project.<sup>112</sup>

On the other hand, although relatively few in number, some community arts projects documented by Braden proved that when artists go through the 'painful process of changing their artistic vocabularies, they have formed a language which is accessible within the life of a

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<sup>106</sup> Braden, *Artists and People*, 49.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, xiv.

<sup>108</sup> Jean Battersby, *The Arts Council Phenomenon*. Gulbenkian Foundation, 1981, [Accessed 21 June 2017], <<https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/1981/01/The-Arts-Council-Phenomenon-1184-198.pdf>>, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Braden, *Artists and People*, 112.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 113–134.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

community'.<sup>113</sup> This was also the case for Willats's *West London Social Resource Project*, where he incorporated familiar objects or landmarks into the project to motivate participation and long-term involvement. Consequently, while community arts as a category remains distinct from artist projects, an important lesson can be taken away from its failures and successes: introducing a token artist into a community can result in both the isolation of the artist concerned and an artificial form of cultural importation that disregards the realities and needs of the community. For an artist to be effective in a project, it is imperative to consider people's contexts. To understand the specific context, however, we first need to develop a comprehensive conception of artist projects.

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<sup>113</sup> Braden, *Artists and People*, 170.

## Reading projects throughout the decades

In *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, John Roberts argues that ‘the development of various postmodernist practices and discourses throughout the late 1970s and 1980s has been an attempt to come to terms, first and foremost, with the undemocratic nature of Britain’s major art institutions and the undemocratic place of art generally within culture’.<sup>114</sup> The foundation of the Artist’s Union was a direct reaction to this undemocratic condition. The Union was also highly significant in exploring collective ways of working for artists, and led to projects that sought to alter both the content and context of art in society. One such project, *Women and Work*, shifted the location of art practice to the factory, establishing a connection with industry and emphasising collaboration between artists working with each other and with women workers.

Projects are the result of weeks and even years of labour: they involve an on-going process of learning, communication, integration and further learning from the responses of the audience. By their very nature, projects are orientated towards the future and require pre-planning (investigation and scouting) and structuring, and need to be formatted to respond to a particular problem (distinct from creating a concrete object or product). Mary Kelly argued that ‘such works concern themselves with systems critically, from within, not just as commentaries on them’.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, despite having a general objective, an artist project does not have a prescribed outcome and is therefore unlike institutional or state-run projects. For instance, it was Hunt’s personal familial and political connection to the south London area and its working class environment that motivated *Women and Work*, providing her with an opportunity ‘to honour [her] mother, her sisters and their mother, and the hundreds of working class women and girls, past and present’.<sup>116</sup> This motive combined with Kelly and Harrison’s commitment to the WLM and their dissatisfaction with the gendered division of labour and pay, to determine the project’s thematic structure. The idea of a collaborative project originated at the Women’s Workshop subgroup of the Artist’s Union.<sup>117</sup> With its all-women membership, the Women’s Workshop – although named after the Union’s foundation – predated the Union and was established when a group of women artists, including Harrison, Hunt and Kelly, decided to join forces with it in order for their ‘demands [to] bec[o]me an effective part of the Union’s aims and program of action’.<sup>118</sup> In-depth examination of the Artist’s Union and *Women and Work* project is vital to understand the politics of artist projects and the historical significance of the Women’s Workshop in terms of individual women, its influence on the British art community, and organic relations between different groups active during the 1970s.

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<sup>114</sup> Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 61.

<sup>115</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*. London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, xv.

<sup>116</sup> Kay F. Hunt, ‘Statement’ in *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965–75*. Exhibition catalogue, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000, 109.

<sup>117</sup> The Artist’s Union had six workshops (working groups), each focusing on an issue of significance to artists at the time and offering them a platform to determine aims and strategies. In 1973 the Women’s Workshop had 35 members and around 70 women involved.

<sup>118</sup> ‘A Short History of the Women’s Workshop of the Artists’ Union’, issued by the Women’s Workshop in April, 1974, TGA

20016/2/12/11

Artist projects respond to issues of significance to the artist, and in most cases relate to a specific need or absence concerning a community. In this sense, artist projects explore and contextualise socio-political issues that, at a larger scale, may involve society at large, and challenge the status quo. All the artist projects discussed below reflect the reformist spirit of such art initiatives in Britain during the 1970s, when artists sought to challenge and remedy a sense of disillusionment with the modernist agenda and the promises of the welfare state.

Artist projects also situate the artist among people's lives and therefore extend the concerns of art to the social territory in which it operates, which may often be outside of an art context. Willats argues that,

...a pre-requisite for an artwork that manifests a counter-consciousness is that the separation which existed between the artist and the audience is closed, that they become mutually engaged, to the point where the audience becomes the rationale in both the making and reception of the work'.<sup>119</sup>

In other words, the audience's role is switched from passive receiver to active agent in both the making and receiving of the work; no longer studio-bound, the artist meets the audience on its own grounds. To differing degrees, this was the case for *Women and Work*, *The Peterlee Project* and Willats's own *West London Social Resource Project*, where the separation between artist and audience ceased to exist as the work was created inside the audience's everyday reality.<sup>120</sup> Harrison, Hunt and Kelly's project was largely created in the Metal Box co.; Brisley moved to Peterlee, staying there for 18 months; and Willats's *West London Social Resource Project* was created inside the homes of participants in four neighbourhoods in west London. Furthermore, the primary audience of these projects were also the participants themselves, who were essential for both its production and reception. (It is important to note that, while vital for the project's existence, the factory workers in *Women and Work* did not collaborate beyond writing diary entries and giving interviews, often outside the factory.) The audience members were therefore bound by a mutually inclusive relationship, which emerged as a logical consequence of what Roberts defined as the 'historical shift in the subjectivity of the artist: the dissolution of the creative singularity of the (male) artist' during the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>121</sup>

Due to the long-term process involved in the production of a community project, collaboration is a vital element, enabling the artist to share responsibility and labour, and transforming the people involved from statistics to agents of change. Siona Wilson contends:

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<sup>119</sup> Willats, 'The Audience as the Rationale' [1985]. In *The Art Museum in Society: Collected Writings*, Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Art Gallery, 1997, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Audience in this context refers to the contemporary audience of the work in the 1970s. Since artist projects are responses to existing issues and are posed as challenges to concomitant circumstances, the relationship between the artist and the audience is a particular one and thus distinct from the project's subsequent audiences.

<sup>121</sup> John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*. London: Verso, 2007, 9.

Collaboration is the standard in British art of the seventies, and this is one of the ways in which the institution of art is redefined. ‘The Death of the Author’, as the title of Roland Barthes’s 1967 essay puts it, is often associated with art of the 1960s. But in practice, it is in the 1970s where we see the displacement of the individual author and the restructuring of the creative act in collective terms.<sup>122</sup>

Although Wilson’s point affirms what Roberts defined as the ‘historical shift in the subjectivity of the artist’, collaboration, though significant and widespread, was not a practice adopted by the majority of artists in Britain during the 1970s. Projects such as *The Peterlee Project* or the *West London Social Resource Project* were claimed as authorial projects by Brisley and Willats, even though they both involved the collective efforts of others. While the input of the collaborators was essential and their names listed, it was not specific – the projects could have existed with or without them. This is also apparent in a work like *Strike at Brannans*, which comprised documentation of the yearlong strike by mostly female workers demanding better working conditions at Brannans’ Thermometer Factory in Cleator Moor. The project is identified with Conrad Atkinson alone even though Margaret Harrison was involved in the research process and, I would argue, collaboration acted as an important element in the making of the project. On the other hand, there are artists such as David Medalla and John Dugger who promoted collaborative authorship and stressed participation as a means to eradicate barriers between artists and non-artists, and used labels such as ‘part artist’ or ‘catalyst’ to emphasise the different roles.<sup>123</sup> We also encounter more instances of collaborative authorship in projects by women, such as *Women and Work*, *Feministo* and *A Woman’s Place*, which demonstrate that collaborative authorship was practised in the 1970s in line with an ethos of feminism that valued common female goals rather than individual gains.

In addition to sharing the responsibility and effort required with others, artists frequently borrowed and/or adopted non-artistic methods from other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, communications and marketing, thereby expanding the reach and breadth of artistic practice. In this instance, projects were formulated through an extensive effort, involving interviews, tape recordings, visual and textual documentation, and fact checking over an extended period. Tables and graphs could also appear in the project outputs, as in *Women and Work* where the artists list types of jobs, pay grades, ratio of male vs. female in different pay grades, as well as shifts in these numbers. Similarly, archival or academic work could be an important feature, as in Brisley’s *The Peterlee Project*, or Willats’s *West London Social Resource Project*, in which extended sociological surveys provided a structural element. But while artists often employed methodologies from other disciplines, they continued using forms of representation and display associated with art practice. For instance, in *Women and Work*, the artists chose to include portraits of the workers, as well as two videos projected side by side portraying both women and men, to contrast with the monochrome grids of charts and data also on show. Similarly, Willats used visual cues such as gates, details from building

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<sup>122</sup> Siona Wilson, ‘Introduction’. In *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, xxi.

<sup>123</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 47.

façades, and lampposts specific to the neighbourhoods to make the project relatable. And for *The Peterlee Project*, Brisley placed archival photographs collected by local people at the core of his project, as a way of instigating community action.

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Artist projects of the 1970s can be considered precursors of the politically motivated projects that became prevalent during the 1990s. Claire Bishop argues that the fall of the master narrative of socialism, along with the Berlin Wall, in 1989, marked the ‘loss of a collective political horizon’ that was instrumental in popularising of the term ‘artist project’ in the 1990s.<sup>124</sup> For Bishop, the rise of participatory practice and the use of ‘project’ as a term revealed ‘a privileged vehicle of utopian experimentation at a time when a leftist project seemed to have vanished from the political imaginary’.<sup>125</sup> The rise of the project, according to her, provided a way to ‘replace the work of art as a finite object with an open-ended, post-studio, research-based, social process, extending over time and mutable in form’, and to demonstrate ‘a return to the social’.<sup>126</sup> Throughout *Artificial Hells*, she traces the historical trajectory of participation and collaboration as a concern of ‘the historic avant-garde in Europe circa 1917, and the so-called “neo” avant-garde leading to 1968’, identifying the post-1989 era as the apogee of such practices.<sup>127</sup> Bishop sees the emergence of participatory and collaborative work as a consequence of the failure of social projects like the welfare state, and the absence of ‘a political horizon or goal’, which had ultimately fostered the revolutionary ferment of 1968.<sup>128</sup> I posit that the rising use of the term ‘project’ after the collapse of socialism in 1989 was a revival of its use in the 1970s but often without acknowledging its history.<sup>129</sup> As such, it is important to clarify that artist projects of the 1970s were distinct from those of the 1990s, which stood for several types of art, including ‘collective practice, self-organised activist groups, transdisciplinary research, participatory and socially engaged art, and experimental curating’, as Bishop describes them.<sup>130</sup>

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello contend that there are three spirits of capitalism: a first stage dating back to the nineteenth century (entrepreneurial, speculative and based on industrial work), the second developed between the 1930s and 1960s (centralised, bureaucratic and corporatist), and the third, which they label connexionist (operating in networks and valuing social capital, mobility and diversity), dating to the 1990s and beyond. Boltanski and Chiapello argue that two forms of critique have accompanied capitalism from the very beginning: social critique (represented by the labour movement), and artistic critique (represented by intellectual and artistic circles, and focusing on capitalism’s dehumanising aspects).<sup>131</sup> While artistic critique emphasises ‘an ideal of liberation and/or of individual autonomy, singularity and authenticity’ (i.e. valuing less hierarchical and self-organised production, autonomy, and flexibility, which ultimately

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<sup>124</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 193–94.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 3, 194.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 193–194

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>131</sup> Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Gregory C. Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London; New York: Verso, 2007, xii.

became determinants of productivity in the second spirit of capitalism following the 1970s), social critique is concerned with ‘inequalities, misery, exploitation and the selfishness of a world that stimulates individualism rather than solidarity’.<sup>132</sup> For Boltanski and Chiapello, the maintenance and legitimisation of capitalism is in part sustained by the values of these anti-capitalist critiques because they can substitute as feedback, thus providing countermeasures for maintaining (resisting the opposition) and improving (profitability) the system. In this respect, the authors demonstrate how the new (connexionist) spirit of capitalism during the 1990s was connected to and indirectly made possible by libertarian critiques of the late 1960s and 70s.<sup>133</sup> As Sebastian Budgen argues, the challenges to bourgeois society brought forth by the left have been co-opted by this new form of capitalism, while also transforming the ‘metaphor of the network, originally associated with crime and subversion,’ into ‘an icon of progress’.<sup>134</sup>

I argue that collective ways of working, and flexibility in terms of work, demonstrated by the multiple roles of artists in the 1970s as teacher, advisor, collaborator and manager (often due to financial necessity), have foreshadowed and been instrumental in setting the stage for this new spirit of capitalism, which took hold in Britain in the 1980s and beyond. I consider the 1970s as a limbo period between what Boltanski and Chiapello refer to as the ‘industrial city’ (the second spirit) and the ‘projective city’ (the third spirit), especially in terms of how work was being executed. For instance, computers were not available during the 1970s, and unionisation was on a downhill trajectory despite proposed government measures to maintain the old ways of working, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Industrial Relations Act of 1971. While the decline of the old way of working was imminent, there is still no new way of working. To this end, it is vital to consider Boltanski and Chiapello’s concept of the projective city, to address the position most emerging artists in Britain found themselves in at the turn of the 1970s, with sales diminishing in the already very small contemporary art market. Boltanski and Chiapello state that:

In contrast to what we observe in the industrial city, where activity merges with work and the active are quintessentially those who have stable, productive waged work, activity in the projective city surmounts the oppositions between work and non-work, the stable and the unstable, wage-earning class and non-wage-earning class, paid work and voluntary work, that which may be assessed in terms of productivity and that which, not being measurable, eludes calculable assessment.<sup>135</sup>

Indeed, artists whose education had prepared them for the stability of ‘the industrial city’ (even though art practice was markedly distinct from industrial work) found themselves having to negotiate for a way of life that resembled ‘the projective city’. In 1974, Artists Now, an independent group of art professionals, issued a report titled *Patronage of the Creative Artist*, which documented the then

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 345.

<sup>134</sup> Sebastian Budgen, ‘A New ‘Spirit of Capitalism’, *NLR*, 1, January–February 2000, 149–154.

<sup>135</sup> Boltanski, Chiapello, and Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 109.



state of the art market.<sup>136</sup> According to the report, a majority of the estimated 850 artists graduating from art schools each year were moving into other sectors (teaching, illustration, graphic design etc.) because of lack of private or public support<sup>137</sup>: ‘Since the foundation of the Arts Council 27 years ago, something has been going wrong, and creative artists are today in serious trouble’.<sup>138</sup> John Walker also wrote about the weakness of the art market during the 1970s, stating that ‘British art schools trained far more artists than the art market could sustain’.<sup>139</sup> Artists challenged this situation by establishing the Artist’s Union, in an attempt to appropriate the power and legitimacy of the labour movement to combat the institutions of art.

Boltanski and Chiapello claim that the most valued characteristics in the projective city are flexibility and adaptability.<sup>140</sup> However, I would argue that these features are not only symptomatic of globalisation post-1989, they are also ‘residual’ forms of culture that the contemporary (art) world has appropriated from the ‘emergent’ forms of the 1970s<sup>141</sup> – residual because artists had already explored them in the 1970s, despite not being the dominant forms of art practice at the time. The most obvious manifestation of these characteristics is the dissolution of the traditional workplace, a process that can be traced back to artist projects that replaced the studio with the factory as a means for artists to relinquish their ivory towers and get close to society (Metal Box co. in Bermondsey in *Women and Work*), the mining town (the new town of Peterlee in *The Peterlee Project*), or the neighbourhood (west London in the *West London Social Resource Project*). By stepping out of the studio, and, more often than not, shifting the space of reception away from the gallery, these artists sought to eradicate the hypothetical boundaries of the art world and to reconnect with society at large.

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<sup>136</sup> Artists Now included Ian Bruce who served on the New Arts Committee; David Castillejo, theatre expert; Christopher Cornforth, professor at the Royal College of Art; Charles Gosford, aristocrat and artist who served as the Chairman of the Artist’s Union, 1976–1980; and Francis Routh, music expert.

<sup>137</sup> Artists Now, *Patronage of the Creative Artist*. London: Artists Now, 1974, notes, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>139</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 97.

<sup>140</sup> Boltanski, Chiapello, and Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 113.

<sup>141</sup> Williams defines residual forms of culture as cultural forms that actively influence contemporary society, and emergent forms of culture as forms and ideas that are developed by individuals or groups in opposition to, or independent from, the dominant cultural forms of an era. Raymond Williams, ‘Dominant, Residual, and Emergent’. In *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 121–127.

## Defining the project through case studies

Art practice that serves a function other than art itself, either directly or by implication, tends to challenge its own ontological conditions through pragmatism and by subverting the conventional structures of the art world. All the artists I discuss in the following four case studies exemplified a need for instigating social change through projects. Their objectives and methods were multifarious: Harrison, Hunt and Kelly strove to uncover discriminatory practices through collaboration with *Women and Work*; Brisley sought to empower people to build their own community with *The Peterlee Project*; Willats aimed to extend the concerns of art practice and the social territory in which it functioned with his *West London Social Resources Project*; and the artists involved with the Artist's Union aspired to build alliances with the working class and the labour movement.

As a whole, the following four chapters will focus on the concept of the artist project and its politics through empirical research on these four projects in chronological order. The first chapter is dedicated to the Artist's Union and will examine the situation, motivations and aspirations that instigated artists to found a union that catered to their specific situation, and to recalibrate their social position towards the working class and away from bourgeois institutions such as museums and commercial galleries. At the beginning of the 1970s, there was a significant gap between cultural production as it was understood and practised by artists, and the way in which it was supported by cultural policy. The Arts Council was the official support mechanism for art, but its role was limited especially for experimental art practice. The Artist's Union, founded partly as a response to this deficiency, promoted an ambitious project to make cultural labour part of the wider demand at the time for unionisation.

The second chapter begins by detailing the particular socio-political state of Britain from 1968 onwards, and continues by examining the Union's operational structure before discussing its reformist bent and what it meant for artists to merge practice with bureaucracy. As there is little published academic work on the Artist's Union, this chapter places the organisation in the larger context of artist collectives, and examines the artist's role in society by illuminating its inner workings and relating its 'biography' as a collective. As a contemporary of the Union, the Art Worker's Coalition in the US is considered for comparison, and an introduction to the Women's Workshop, as one of the most significant components of the Union, is also provided.

The third chapter looks at Stephen Willats, who used methodologies drawn from sociology, advertising, cybernetics and semiotics to create politically and socially engaged projects, often with an interactive function.<sup>142</sup> It focuses in particular on his *West London Social Resource Project*, which was the artist's first project to use the horizontalist approach advocated by the other artists discussed throughout my research. As before, I situate the project within Willats's wider art practice and examine it as a continuation of his object-based works from the 1960s, which often involved a

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<sup>142</sup> Willats defined himself as a conceptual designer rather than an artist like Brisley, who defined his role as a consultant in *The Peterlee Project*. These preferences are indicative of the expansion of the terms in which an artist's role was defined from the mid-1960s onwards.

form of interaction with the audience, as well as an antecedent to his later projects from the late 1970s and 80s. I also consider Willats's goal to extend the concerns and social territory of art, namely, 'the externalisation of art', as he described it. In this sense, the project explored whether art works can be integral to people's social reality and thus transcend the boundaries of their conventional social environment. As part of this discussion, I refer to his other projects, such as *From a Coded World* (1977) and *Inside an Ocean* (1978). As a whole, the chapter shows how the *West London Social Resource Project* (like his other projects) was a catalyst for those concerned with the relevance of art practice to society.

The fourth chapter discusses *Women and Work*, instigated within the Women's Workshop of the Artist's Union by Harrison, Hunt and Kelly, and largely funded by a fellowship given to the artists by the Greater London Arts Association (GLAA) Thames Television Fund in 1973. In this chapter, I also examine art practice that utilised collaboration to contest and problematise gender relations and the division of labour in industry and the home. As the culmination of a two-year-long collaborative study documenting the past and present working conditions of women in the tin box industry, the project was a strategic intervention that grew from the artists' commitment to the WLM. Through the example of *Women and Work*, the chapter also demonstrates the difficulty of mediating between the artist and worker through a comparison of cognitive (required for the production and reception of such projects) and manual labour (exemplified by factory work). In conclusion, the chapter will offer a discussion of the politics of representation, and what is at stake when a project's content and audience overlap.

The final chapter is devoted to *The Peterlee Project* by Brisley, and examines how the project sat within the artist's oeuvre as an extended performance. Between January 1976 and August 1977, Brisley worked in the new town of Peterlee as part of an APG initiative. In the first project proposal Brisley asserted that his purpose was 'to work towards a situation in which all people in Peterlee have a further opportunity to develop their own awareness of and participation in the evolution of the community'.<sup>143</sup> Following on from his socio-politically orientated performances, Brisley's emphasis in *The Peterlee Project* was to enable individuals to build their own community via three stages: a 'people's history' (archive of private memories), collection of historical material through public engagement, and a final, but unrealised, open workshop. In this sense, the chapter also investigates how Brisley defined his role as a consultant in what started off as a recovery project of the suppressed memories of Peterlee residents, in order to empower them to build their own community through direct action. Throughout the chapter, I scrutinise Brisley's intention to create a model for what he described as a 'social tool' that could be replicated elsewhere, and how an artist project might (or indeed might not) become a model for community-building. I also evaluate the terms of collaboration (and the dissolution of a singular authority) and direct action (and the necessity of presence), which the project was predicated on, and consider these as aspects of projects and performance art.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Brisley, GB 70 TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/1.

<sup>144</sup> RoseLee Goldberg declared that 'by its very nature performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists. Any strict definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself.' See RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance*

The conclusion examines the relationship between artist projects and neoliberalism in the specific context of Boltanski and Chiapello, and of project work in general. Since the analysis and historical account of artist projects is still quite limited, the post-89 period tends to be considered as their dawn by writers such as Bishop, Kester, Maria Lind and Mary Jane Jacob, among others.<sup>145</sup> However, it is my view that the foundations of artist projects were laid in the 1970s, and a historiography of these projects is therefore necessary to resituate this form of art practice in its proper historical era.

Essentially, this research is a response to the question: What is there to learn from the legacy of the 1970s? The historiography of the 1970s is only beginning to be developed, and my contribution breaks fresh ground through its conceptualisation and definition of artist projects. While there are academic studies currently being developed in a number of related fields, such as the history of arts policy, by Susan Jones; the roles of associations and unions in representing artists, by Jones and Richard Padwick, as well as these two artists' work with the a-n The Artists Information Company (e.g. Paying Artists Campaign launched in 2014); artistic collaborations during the 1970s, by Jo Applin, Catherine Spencer and Amy Tobin, among others; feminism and archives, by Jenna Ashton; and collective action and feminist activism in New York in the 1970s, by Rachel Warriner, I uncover significant work that has been overlooked.<sup>146</sup> I argue that as genealogical precursors to present-day artist projects, those from the 1970s – especially their approach to work, labour and representation, the sites in which they chose to work, and the structures of collective art production – also have much to offer today's practitioners working in similar modes and with comparable ambitions.

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*Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2001, 8–9.

<sup>145</sup> See Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, 2006, 178–183; Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Kester, *Conversation Pieces*; Mary Jane Jacob and Maria Lind, 'Returning on Bikes: Notes on Social Practice'. In *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011*; N. Thompson, ed., *Creative Time*, New York, 2012; Mary Jane Jacob, 'An Unfashionable Audience'. In S. Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995.

<sup>146</sup> Jo Applin, Catherine Spencer and Amy Tobin, eds., *London Art Worlds: Mobile, Contingent, and Ephemeral Networks, 1960–1980. Refiguring Modernism*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018; Jenna Ashton, 'Feminist Archiving [a manifesto continued]: Skilling for Activism and Organising'. In *Archives and New Modes of Feminist Research*, Maryanne Dever, ed., London: Routledge, 2018.

**Artists for Society, Society for Artists: The Artist's Union (1972–83)**

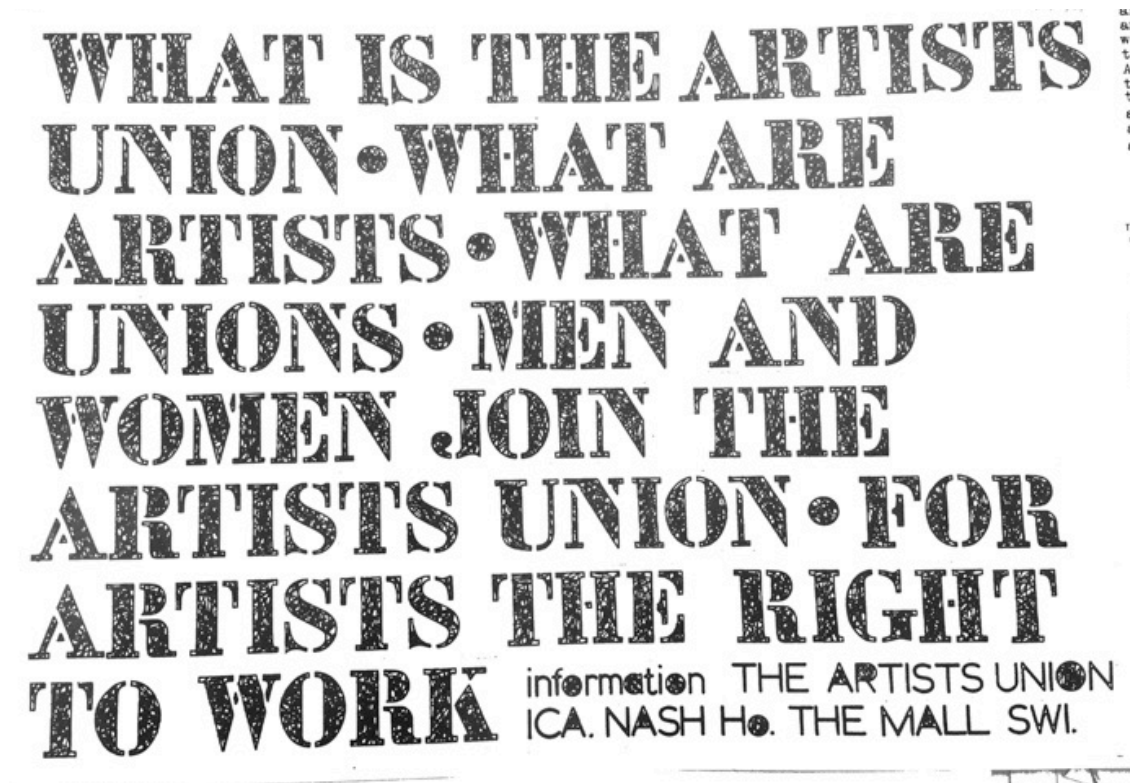


Fig. 1 'Artist's Union Invitation' to the Introductory Meeting, 18 March 1972, Tate Gallery Archive 200116/2/12/2

## State of Britain

The establishment of the Artist's Union in 1972 was instigated by artists who came together on a grassroots level to protect and promote their socio-economic rights as artists. At the beginning of the decade, the strong presence of the trade unions seemed to provide an important ally for these politicised artists. In this respect, it is necessary to consider the broader context of labour relations in Britain at the time, in order to address the formation of the Union and its significance for the emergence and development of the artist project.

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By the end of the 1960s, the New Left had given up on the Labour Party. In *The May Day Manifesto* published in 1967, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson and others from the New Left proclaimed: 'It is now clear that we shall not change that [British] society if we rely entirely or mainly on parliamentary political parties – we also need continuing and connected effort outside parliament'.<sup>147</sup> With massive cuts to the welfare state, cold-war politics and rising union militancy, public trust in the Labour Party's ability to instigate social change was waning.<sup>148</sup> The Labour government introduced austerity measures and strictly controlled public spending, and the balance of payments was restored for a short period in 1969, but the economy turned back into deficit shortly before the 1970 general election.<sup>149</sup> In light of these national economic problems, it was no surprise when Edward Heath, as leader of the Conservatives, took power from Harold Wilson on 19 June 1970, after six years of Labour government.

Originating in the 1960s, trade union militancy increased during the 1970s, while union membership reached its peak of 13 million, accounting for over half the workforce by 1979.<sup>150</sup> In an effort to challenge union power in 1971, the Heath government passed the Industrial Relations Act, which restricted the collective rights of workers by banning the union practice of the closed shop (a worker had to be a member of the relevant union to be employed in a particular factory or production line).<sup>151</sup> Strictly opposed by the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the act introduced new practices (still the basis of Tory labour laws) that prohibited strikes until a ballot was taken and notice given (typically a week, but often a month before). It also included setting up the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), which had the power to enforce a 60-day cooling off period before a strike could take place in nationally significant industries.<sup>152</sup> In January 1972, a national coal strike was called in response to the

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<sup>147</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution. Repr. 1965. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973*, 304.

<sup>148</sup> The trade deficit led to a currency crisis with the pound devaluing against the dollar from \$2.80 to \$2.40 in November 1967. See Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. British Studies Series. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.

<sup>149</sup> Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 2.

<sup>150</sup> Trade Union Congress, 'Timeline', <[http://unionhistory.info/timeline/1960\\_2000.php](http://unionhistory.info/timeline/1960_2000.php)> [Accessed 20 February 2018]; James Meadway, 'Neoliberalism, the Grassroots and the People's Assembly', *New Left Project*, 20 June 2013.

<[http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/Neoliberalism\\_the\\_Grassroots\\_and\\_the\\_Peoples\\_Assembly](http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/Neoliberalism_the_Grassroots_and_the_Peoples_Assembly)> [Accessed 10 February 2018], 2.

<sup>151</sup> Ann Lyon, *Constitutional History of the UK*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016, 451.

<sup>152</sup> J. W. Durcan, W. E. J. McCarthy and G. P. Redman, *Strikes in Post-War Britain: A Study of Stoppages of Work due to Industrial Disputes, 1946–73*. London; Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983; see also 'History of Wolverhampton, Bilston and District Trades Union Council 1865–1990', Chapter 10, <<http://wolvestuc.org.uk/index.php/wbdutuc/our-history?showall=&start=10>> [Accessed 24 May 2018]

act. The miners rejected the 8 per cent rise offered by the National Coal Board, and halted the transfer of coal to the power stations, which cut electricity supply across the country. Extreme weather conditions helped their cause and, after six weeks, they were given £116 million by their employers, increasing the average miner's earnings by 24 per cent.<sup>153</sup>

In *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, Tom Nairn asserts that society during the 1970s was 'decayed to the point of disintegration', in a Britain marked by 'rapidly accelerating backwardness, economic stagnation, social decay, and cultural despair'.<sup>154</sup> Five state of emergencies were called in just over three years between 1970 and 1974, and a memorandum dated 12 December 1973 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Anthony Barber, stressed that Britain faced the gravest economic crisis since the war.<sup>155</sup> Due to the increasing number of riots and union strikes, a three-day week was imposed across the country between 1 January and 7 March 1974. According to Bill Williamson, unemployment rates increased from 3 per cent in 1971 to 5 per cent in 1979, and to 7.1 per cent in 1980, with under-25 unemployment rising from 27.3 per cent in 1970 to 44 per cent in 1979.<sup>156</sup> In 1974, Heath called and lost an election, and was replaced by Harold Wilson who repealed the Industrial Relations Act shortly after coming into power. Yet as prices increased and unions demanded higher pay rises, unemployment also rose, causing even the Labour government to have qualms about union activities. When James Callaghan took over as the new Labour Prime Minister in 1976, the government faced severe financial problems. Dubbed the 'Winter of Discontent', the year 1978–79 saw rising levels of union militancy, including strikes by teachers, waste collectors, gravediggers, NHS ancillary workers and local government staff.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the British art market was still largely dominated by pre-1945 art. Diminishing public expenditure from the late 1960s onwards significantly impacted what was already a very small contemporary art system, financially governed by what the Artist's Union would call 'a system of state and monopoly [of private galleries] patronage, and the continuous dispensation of establishment standards of taste'.<sup>157</sup> This was perhaps a blessing in disguise for artists. Margaret Harrison recalls: 'The carrot of possible sales seemed to be disappearing and in a curious way freed us up, not only to consider our own economic condition as artists, but also to consider different perspectives for our work'.<sup>158</sup> Most of these artists were educated in British arts colleges and were at the beginning of their careers. Rather than 'fitting into a style of art production', as Harrison describes, they sought ways to use their formal education to explore issues that mattered to them,<sup>159</sup> such as socio-political unrest in Britain, the anti-Vietnam war protests in the US, and student and worker uprisings in Paris, Warsaw, Mexico City and Berlin, in 1968. In Britain, students and several staff

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<sup>153</sup> '1960s and 1970s Radicalisation', Cabinet Papers, <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/1960-radicalisation.htm>> [Accessed 12 February 2018]

<sup>154</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*. London: NLB, 1977, 67; 51.

<sup>155</sup> Cabinet Office, 'Public expenditure measures' CAB 129/173, <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2016/09/CAB129-173-1.jpg>> [Accessed 20 February 2018]

<sup>156</sup> Bill Williamson, *The Temper of the Times: British Society since World War II*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, 202–4.

<sup>157</sup> Artist's Union, 'The special contradiction in which artists find themselves', September 1974, TGA 200116/2/1/3.

<sup>158</sup> Margaret Harrison, 'Statement', *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965–75*. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000, 95.

<sup>159</sup> Harrison, 'Statement', *Live in Your Head*, 95.



members (including Stuart Brisley) who opposed changes to the art education system occupied Hornsey College of Art in London.<sup>160</sup> Originally meant as a one-day sit-in, starting on 28 May, led to six weeks of debate and confrontation with local authorities. Similar protests took place at Guildford School of Art and Maidstone College of Art and were supported by artists including Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, who were among the artists who would soon go on to establish the Artist's Union.

One of the events that instigated, albeit incidentally, the formation of the Union was the 'Art Spectrum' exhibition at Alexandra Palace, London (11–30 August 1971) organised by the Greater London Arts Association (GLAA) and the Arts Council of Great Britain, which featured works from 100 artists including David Hockney, Allen Jones, Barry Martin, Victor Pasmore, Yoko Ono and Tony Stubbing. Like many other contemporary selection committees, that for 'Art Spectrum' was made up of curators, dealers and critics, and included only one artist. This was unacceptable to several artists, who were extremely dissatisfied with what Gerry Hunt called an 'arbitrary and sloppy' selection procedure.<sup>161</sup> Instead of one token artist, Hunt advocated a selection process involving established artists who would then nominate less established and/or emerging artists, while asking questions such as: who selects the selectors? What criteria do the selectors employ? Should only artists be selectors or should there be completely open entry with no selection at all?<sup>162</sup>

Following several months of discussion, a group of artists – Conrad Atkinson, Barry Barker, Pauline Barry, Elona Bennett, Stuart Brisley, Marc Chaimowicz, Grant Cooke, Stuart Edwards, Gareth Evans, Margaret Harrison, Rex Henry, Gerry and Kay Hunt, Sarah Kent, Tina Keane, Mary Kelly, Carol Kenna, Robin Klassnik, Don Mason, Gustav Metzger, Jeff Sawtell, Colin Sheffield, Peter Sylveire and Priscilla Trench – made a commitment to the idea of a union of artists by drafting a set of aims, a constitution and an agenda at a meeting (open to public) held at Camden Studios in London, on 18 March 1972. Calling for a recalibration of the artist's position in society to one aligned with workers, the artists became agitators protesting the biased choices of curators and institutions, and collaborators working together with other artists and/or non-artists. More importantly, in the case of the Artist's Union or the Artist Placement Group (APG), they also set up new institutions and took on the role of art administrators. As Andrew Wilson asserts, these artists formed an 'active identification with the class struggle and the rights of the worker, reflecting a move from art that questioned its own condition to one that questioned the entire role of art within society'.<sup>163/164</sup> As pioneers, both the Artist's Union and the APG were instrumental in shaping art policy. Founded by John Latham and Barbara Steveni, the APG was an organisation set up to place artists in non-art environments

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<sup>160</sup> See Chapter 4 on Stuart Brisley's *The Peterlee Project* for an extended study of the Hornsey sit-in. See also Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*, London: Frances Lincoln, 2008, for an exposé on the Hornsey sit-in

<sup>161</sup> See letters from Hunt and Tim Hilton, *Art and Artists*, Vol. 6, No 4 (July 1971), 10; Gerry Hunt, 'After Spectrum', *Art and Artists*, Vol. 6, No 7 (November 1971), 12–13.

<sup>162</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 50.

<sup>163</sup> Andrew Wilson, 'Art: Politics/Theory: Practice – Radical Art Practices in London in the Seventies'. In Schönauer, Walter, Astrid Proll, and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, eds. *Good Bye to London: Radical Art & Politics in the 70's*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010, 129.

<sup>164</sup> Dan Graham in his *Presentation to an Open Hearing of the Art Workers' Coalition* claimed: '...we must go back to the old notion of socially "good works" as against the private, aesthetic notion of "good work" – i.e., art to go public'. In Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds. *Art in Theory 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

(corporations, government institutions etc.), but unlike the Union, which had a leaderless structure, the APG has been well documented, largely on account of Steveni who ensured that the organisation's efforts were thoroughly archived and promoted from its foundation.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, APG placements were financed by the host organisations rather than individual artists (as was the case with the Union). However, in contrast with the Union, which sought to promote the rights of artists as workers, the APG had a more bureaucratic style of management, which involved forging links with industry and acting as an intermediary between artists and corporations.

The Artist's Union's invitation is an opportune example of the working practices of these artists, especially in terms of the choice of font, its monochrome palette and simple message: 'What is the Artists Union? What are artists? What are unions?' The invitation contains no images, just text. It consists of these three sentences written with a font reminiscent of stencils, suggesting associations with a provisional and cheap process rather than a lithographic one. The stencil-like font, when closely inspected, is made of white and black spaces, which resemble a monochrome camouflage pattern. The white spaces are ample enough to make printing economical in terms of ink use and spare enough to not steal from the firmness of the font. These aesthetic qualities of the invitation hint at its method of production: the succinct text – written by the artists – was also hand-painted or stencilled by them and then printed on hand presses rather than an offset press, for distribution within London and beyond, by these founding artists themselves. Both reproduction methods indicate an effort to minimize cost: the application by hand required more manual effort and time yet avoided the external cost of accessing an offset press, despite the time efficiency of such a press. In any event, the artists sought a cheap and fast method of transmitting their message. The use of this font, and the decision to utilise cheap means of production and reproduction, resonates with other radical groups of the time and also reflects the terms of the formation of the Union. These artists did not have the financial means to promote their ideas extensively unless they adopted a hands-on and therefore cost-efficient approach. However, these aesthetic choices were not solely due to limited funds; the artists specifically chose this font, refrained from using imagery and utilised the whole page to make their message loud and clear, all due in no small part to their radical forbearers from May 1968, and their first-hand experience in the many protests taking place from that time and onwards. Conrad Atkinson acknowledges that the events of May 1968 had been formative for him.<sup>166</sup> More so than a watershed political moment in France, the time had been a catalyst for these emerging artists who were stimulated not only by what the event stood for politically in terms of its failures and shortcomings but also for its aesthetic, operational and methodical attitudes. The Union's invitation was one such example.

Ultimately, the artists were deliberately mobilising activist associations – one encounters

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<sup>165</sup> Significant scholarship on the APG and its history includes 'The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966–79'. Exhibition Catalogue, Raven Row, London, 27 September – 16 December 2012; Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso Books, 2012; Josephine Berry and Pauline van Mourik, in an interview with John Latham and Barbara Steveni, 'Countdown to Zero Count up to Now', *MUTE*, issue 25; Lucy Davis, 'Real Life/Beyond the Event', *FOCAS*, Singapore; Howard Slater, 'The art of governance. The Artist Placement Group: 1966–1989', *Variant* 11, Summer, 2001; 'Unit and the artist formerly known as APG', *Everything*, volume 2, no. 4: 11–14; Michael Corris, 'From black holes to boardrooms: John Latham, Barbara Steveni, and the order of undivided wholeness', *Art and Text*, September, no. 49: 66–72.

<sup>166</sup> Conrad Atkinson, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle

similar provisional and inexpensive forms of expression in protest cards. This is significant as proof of these artists' allegiance to other radical and left-wing movements, such as the Women's Liberation Movement or the Trade Union Movement, not only ideologically but also formally. In fact, both Mary Kelly and Margaret Harrison (as founder of the London Women's Liberation Art Group in 1970) noted in conversation that they had participated in several research-based and consciousness-raising groups which had overlapping memberships. It was the solidarity, social activity, moral and emotional support provided through these groups and the work generated from them – both in terms of artistic practice and academically rigorous historical work which was yet institutionally unavailable – that provided the foundations of the 'intellectual project' of second-wave feminism as it was described by Griselda Pollock.<sup>167</sup>

Both Kelly and Harrison had been at the Albert Hall in London to protest the Miss World Beauty contest, an event that has been deemed the first public protest of second-wave feminism in Britain.<sup>168</sup> Harrison recalled participating in the protests as Miss Loveable Bra with a pre-formed plastic chest piece with fur nipples while Kelly had written a critical (anonymous at the time in line with the collective ethos of the protests) pamphlet titled *Why Miss World* that framed the contest as a post-colonial spectacle.<sup>169</sup> Kelly noted that 'the repercussions of recent events in France were palpable' in London where many of the art schools were occupied. Soon after the Miss World protest, she also marched in the then largest anti-Vietnam war demonstration in London.<sup>170</sup> Like Harrison, she was engaged in several women's groups including the History Group and the London Women's Liberation Workshop. She was however also part of the Berwick Street Collective whose three other members were male. During our conversations both artists expressed the significance of these groups, not only in terms of introducing them to theorists like Gramsci, Freud or Foucault, but even more importantly for allowing them to transcend traditional and/or academic frameworks for thinking about gender, sexuality and women's oppression by providing new vocabularies and environments for solidarity.

By providing a platform where artists could gather with other artists and rehearse collaborative ways of working, the Union became a significant force in developing projects that set out to change the content and context of art. According to the definition proposed in the Introduction of this thesis, a project is a long-term investigation into socio-political questions initiated by artists, often in collaboration with others, inspired by personal interest or investment, or because of a lack of state support or government solution for a social issue that employs an open-ended, non-hierarchical and horizontalist approach. Moreover, artist projects are often strongly connected to politics, and the Union, as an organisation that sought to reposition art and artists in society, was testament to this. In this respect, it was congruent with an artist project in terms of intent.

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<sup>167</sup> Griselda Pollock in conversation with Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 14, [Accessed 20 November 2015].

<sup>168</sup> Siona Wilson, 'Introduction'. In *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, 1.

<sup>169</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle; Mary Kelly, interview with the author, 29 September 2018, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*; Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 1, [Accessed 20 November 2015].

Marx asserted:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling **material** force of society is at the same time its ruling **intellectual** force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal also has control over the means of mental production.<sup>171</sup>

Extending Marx's argument, John Roberts argued that 'because the dominant ideas of an epoch are those of the ruling class then the socialist artist must express in as cogent a form as possible the aspirations of the working class'.<sup>172</sup> In the early 1970s, the position of Marxism (and the British Left) in underestimating the effectiveness of culture and ideology was slowly beginning to be contested, especially with the English publication of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, in 1971. Gramsci argued that existing cultural styles are the result of 'social formations in which culture has been stratified into high and low and dominated by specialist intellectuals without organic links with the broad popular masses'.<sup>173</sup> In opposition to this, a national popular culture designates 'the possibility of an alliance of interests and feelings between different social agents, which varies according to the structure of each national society', as expressed by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith.<sup>174</sup> What Gramsci proposed instead was 'to construct an educative alliance between' dominant and subordinate couplings, including language and dialects, philosophy and common sense, high culture and popular culture, intellectuals and people, and party and masses, in order to establish 'an organic unity between theory and practice, between intellectual strata and popular masses, between rulers and ruled'.<sup>175</sup> In this respect, rethinking art practice was a step towards breaking down class reductionism (the domination of class over gender, race or sexual orientation as a concern of leftist discourse) in Britain. I argue that by aligning themselves with the labour movement through unionisation, artists were able to shift focus from class to the relations of production. Moreover, by transcending the borders of the art community and working closer to society, they could transcend the cultural system of 'high-art' and its 'dominant visual ideology'.<sup>176</sup>

While socio-political tensions provided the impetus, the theoretical principles of the New Left provided the basics for the founding of the Artist's Union. In turn, the Union laid the groundwork for art as a tool of socio-cultural change and initiated several artist projects, as discussed in the following pages. Considering that labour unions were at their strongest – albeit for the last time – at the beginning of the 1970s, the formation of the Union was timely in bringing practice and bureaucracy

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<sup>171</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and C. J. Arthur, *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1972, 64.

<sup>172</sup> John Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*. Cultural Politics. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990, 23.

<sup>173</sup> See David Forgacs, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, and Antonio Gramsci, edited by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith; translated by William Boelhower, *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985, 217–18.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>175</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 189; Q13, §36, 1635. See Chapter 5, on Stephen Willats's *West London Social Resource Project* for an examination of the use of language and how it can be modified to motivate participation.

<sup>176</sup> Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 22.

together as part of this reformist impulse. As expressed in the Introduction, I consider the 1970s as an interim period between the old industrial mode of working and a new, more flexible one where project work had an essential place. These two periods, or spirits of capitalism, as described by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, represent the 'industrial city', and the subsequent 'projective city'.<sup>177</sup> However, despite having to negotiate a living in what now resembled the third spirit, in terms of the instability and insecurity associated with new modes of work, artists still belonged to the second spirit in their pursuit of unionisation. In this respect, the formation of the Union represented an attempt (presumably, final) to hold onto the sense of solidarity associated with a centralised, stable and bureaucratic industry. By rehearsing collective ways of working, the Union helped give birth to collaborative projects such as *Women and Work* initiated by Harrison, Hunt and Kelly, through their involvement with the Women's Workshop, as outlined in the next chapter. Yet as working conditions began to change generally in Britain as the result of deindustrialisation, the significance of the Union decreased for many members. In a sense, the Union represented a mode of work already on the way out.

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<sup>177</sup> Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Gregory C. Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London; New York: Verso, 2007, 193–94.

## The foundation of the Artist's Union

The constitution of the Artists Union was ratified on 19 May 1972, and the organisation continued to function until 1983.<sup>178</sup> Members hoped that the constitution would set in place 'a democratic structure capable of flexibility and which is completely responsive to the needs and demands of its members'.<sup>179</sup> This emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness was also present in the operations of the Union, which held monthly meetings for interested parties at the ICA in Carlton Terrace, London. Despite the existence of a steering committee,<sup>180</sup> the Union advocated active participation from all members and 'positive commitment' to the organisation's concerns, proposals and direction rather than 'passive acceptance', thus promoting an essentially horizontal structure.

In September 1972, an article titled 'Union Now!', written by members, outlined the aims of the newly established Artist's Union.<sup>181</sup> Among these was the objective to

forge a strong and positively committed union which would actively campaign for the reversal of the artist's role as a passive acceptor of patronage into a positive initiator and decision-maker in the political, social and therefore cultural sectors of our civilisation'.<sup>182</sup>

This commitment signalled a need, and therefore a beginning: for artists to take matters into their own hands as Gramscian *organic intellectuals*, advocating for the interests of themselves and the working class. For Gramsci, each class produced organic intellectuals, as opposed to traditional intellectuals, who could articulate the fundamental interests and concepts of their class. There was therefore potential for the development of an intelligentsia organic to the labour movement: 'Technical education, closely bound to industrial labour (...) must form the basis of the new type of intellectual'.<sup>183</sup> An organic intellectual should participate in the practical life of industry as a 'constructor, organizer, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator'<sup>184</sup> like traditional intellectuals.<sup>185</sup> While the majority of the artists involved in the Union were not from working class backgrounds, they were aware of the issues affecting the socio-economically precarious, and been directly affected by the economic downturn and diminishing financial support for the art market. Indeed, Gramsci argued that an organic intellectual's function was precisely 'organizational' or

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<sup>178</sup> There was an American namesake of the Artist's Union dating back to the years of the Great Depression in the United States. In September 1933, artists who worked for the Emergency Work Bureau in New York founded the American Artist's Union. Initially – before officially becoming the Artist's Union – the group was called the Emergency Work Bureau Artists Group, and subsequently the Unemployed Artists Group. The group would hold unofficial meetings at the John Reed Clubs. As an organisation, the John Reed Clubs were named after the activist and journalist John Reed, and had been established in 1929 to cater to Marxist intellectuals, artists and journalists. In contrast to the Artist's Union of the 1970s in Britain – and as its initial name implied – the 1930s American group aspired to benefit artists by the provision of employment and/or state funding.

<sup>179</sup> 'Artist's Union initial working paper'. In Notes by Avis Saltsman, 2001, <[http://www.art-science.com/Avis/au/au\\_images/AU\\_booklet\\_wg.pdf](http://www.art-science.com/Avis/au/au_images/AU_booklet_wg.pdf)> [Accessed 8 May 2016], 1

<sup>180</sup> 'Artist's Union Membership Working Party Report, 23 March 1972.

<sup>181</sup> 'Union Now!', *Art and Artists*, September 1972, Volume 7, Number 6, Issue 78, 10–13.

<sup>182</sup> Artist's Union, Papers describing the aims and proposed constitution of the Artist's Union 1972–1974 TGA 200116/2/1

<sup>183</sup> Gramsci and David Forgacs, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999, 9.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>185</sup> Gramsci and Joseph A. Buttigieg. *Prison Notebooks*. Q4§49, 2: 200. European Perspectives. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992.

‘connective’.<sup>186</sup> No longer satisfied with the status quo or their position within society, artists involved in the foundation of the Union sought a more active position that within the arena of socio-cultural ‘decision-making’. Echoing Gramsci’s call for organic unity, the members stated:

There arises from within the increasingly oppressive nature of such a society another force, which begins to rise up against these oppressive tendencies as the dominant class seeks to preserve its rule at all costs. It is here that sections of the intelligentsia and middle class endeavour to disassociate themselves from the existing culture and join with the new forces rising from below that seek to overthrow the degenerate ruling class.<sup>187</sup>

Unable to support themselves through their practice alone, and occupying an ambiguous position in society, these artists set out ‘to create their own employers’ through a trade union that protected their rights.<sup>188</sup> The desire to ‘create employers’ was a result of their complex position as free agents – to ensure creative independence, fair treatment and recompense by the institutions that funded, collected or showed their work. In general, artists lack a specific body, or employer, to challenge. Prior to the Union, the closest artists had to employers were the state, largely embodied by the Arts Council, and the private sector, represented by multifarious galleries. Thus, the Union’s foundation contained a dual imperative: to change the artist’s function in society and to align it with working class politics, while also making art more socially relevant.

Art practice is a demanding process that necessitates high levels of mental and physical engagement, and is therefore ideally pursued in a full-time capacity. When this practice is not economically sustainable (as for the great majority of artists), the artist is obliged to find work to sustain a living elsewhere, commonly as a part-time art teacher, freelance creative in the culture and marketing industries, or seasonal worker in positions completely unrelated to art. Consequently, while other unionised workers had specific companies to oppose and strike against, artists had no such body, nor any alliance with others to fight their cause. With a trade union, artists would have been able to consider the state, government bodies and regional arts associations as employers. This would of course have differed from workers’ relations with a factory management since the relationship between artists and employing organisations was temporary and depended on the specifics of the project, work or exhibition. Nevertheless, the existence of a trade union for artists would guarantee that standards were kept and their rights protected.

Artists wanted a more active role within society, but what was it, more specifically, that prompted them to organise themselves as a union? Firstly, there was no organisation to protect those working in the ‘fine arts’ in Britain. While actors, musicians, writers, filmmakers and graphic designers all had their own unions, Britain was the only country in continental Europe in which visual artists

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<sup>186</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 5, Q12§1.

<sup>187</sup> ‘Union Now!’, *Art and Artists*, 10.

<sup>188</sup> ‘Patronage Workshop Contribution to the Culture and Crisis Meeting’, 30 November – 1 December 1974, TGA 200116/2/9/4, 1.

weren't unionised.<sup>189</sup> Conrad Atkinson broached this deficiency in his speech 'The Practising Artist' for the 'Artist's Union Conference on Art Education', at Imperial College, on 23 June 1973: 'Visual artists form one of the last basic non-unionised groups in the country. Musicians, actors, writers to an extent, photographers and freelance journalists are unionised and have given us a great deal of encouragement and advice'.<sup>190</sup> Atkinson mentioned several relevant comparable unions and wage schemes across the world: the Beroepsvereniging van Beeldende Kunstenaars (BBK) (Dutch Artist's Union), which was highly active during the 1970s and had already advocated a wage scheme for artists; the 200 writers' communes established in the relatively poor North Korea; the pro-artist tax system that artists established in Mexico; and the wage scheme for unionised artists in Cuba where art classes were open to everyone.<sup>191</sup> In England, on the other hand, a large number of its 12,000 artists were either struggling to earn a living by working in areas outside their professional qualifications, or were simply unemployed.<sup>192</sup> According to the Union, the Arts Council exerted highhanded control over how the small percentage of grants for visual arts was distributed and which artists were selected for public exhibitions, meaning that artists had little or no power over decisions affecting their careers.<sup>193</sup> Additionally, due to the Arts Council prejudice towards object-based art, project-based work mostly depended on grants won by artists, or on their own funds, and did not take into account the artist's time or the extra materials, people and equipment needed for the project's production and display.

The Arts Council's *modus operandi* depended on funding art rather than the artist, and unelected officials took decisions affecting the expenditure of public money and the dictation of taste. The Union perceived the structure of the Council to be oligarchic, constituted by people with no artistic expertise, as manifested in the funding selection criteria described by its chair: 'The test of eligibility for support is easier to sense than to define, but in broad terms the beneficiary objective must have merit or promise of merit, appeal or prospect of appeal, and must satisfy a discriminating need'.<sup>194</sup> Although any test of eligibility with regards to an artwork is intrinsically difficult to define, the chair's emphasis on 'sense' was indicative of the severely problematic, undemocratic and therefore restricted system of funding existing in Britain, which meant that Arts Council members unfamiliar with projects, experimental works and performances were likely to be dismissive. Consequently, the Council funded artists and artwork to their liking, ignoring particular media such as 'video' (claiming it

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<sup>189</sup> Equity (formerly British Actors' Equity Association), the trade union for actors, stage managers and models, was formed in 1930; the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) was founded in 1959; the Musicians' Union was originally founded as the Amalgamated Musicians' Union in Manchester, in 1893. There were also several independent groups, including the Independent Theatre Council, the Film Work Group, Free Form, the Independent Film Makers, the Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers, Engravers, and the Process Workers and Writers Action Group.

<sup>190</sup> Conrad Atkinson, 'The Practising Artist', draft copy of the speech given by Conrad Atkinson at the Artist's Union Conference on Art Education, Imperial College, London, 23 June 1973, TGA 201020/8/71, 3

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Artist's Union, 'National Membership Campaign', September – December 1972, TGA 200116/2/12/2 See Appendix I.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Arts Council Chairman's Introduction for 1969/70 Report quoted in 'Patronage Workshop Contribution to the Culture and Crisis Meeting', TGA 200116/2/9/4, 2.



was not art),<sup>195</sup> or censoring work they found inappropriate.<sup>196</sup> The arts minister Hugh Jenkins was among the few that argued for artists deciding on selection criteria rather than the Council. Jenkins asserted that a minister should not be responsible for artistic decisions, and this could only happen if 'the flow of influence comes up from the artist and his associated community associations and not down from the Government and its appointees'.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, the journalist John Pilger commented that 'those who confuse elitism with excellence and pretend that the one is the other fall back on the difficulty of constructing a balanced Council', which he described as 'the finest art patronage organisation in the world jellied in oligarchic aspic'.<sup>198</sup> The Arts Council was a critical institution for the Union to reform as part of its quest for democratisation in the art world, but it was not the only one.

The Union called for a radical shift in cultural policy and an infrastructure that would break the dominance of the private art market. As the Arts Committee of the Greater London Council (GLC) was eager to listen, the Artist's Union proposed a new structure and operation for the Committee, along with practical recommendations for action. The Union pointed out that because of heavy workload, the Arts Committee had handed over initial screening of applications for public funds to 'non-elected officers of the GLC', which caused applications to be diverted or removed altogether.<sup>199</sup> For instance, an unnamed Artist's Union member's application had been diverted to another committee 'without prior consultation with either the applicant or the Arts Committee, because the officer concerned considered that the work was "politically campaigning" and believed art should not be political'.<sup>200</sup> Whether or not this was a singular event of bias, it spoke volumes of the tendency to separate art and artists from society. The Union's proposal for avoiding such instances in the future was the formation of 'an advisory structure of elected representatives', which would share the workload of the Committee and 'provide specialised knowledge in particular spheres'.<sup>201</sup> The Union also argued that accountability was of utmost importance in selection processes involving cultural producers, and proposed that 'cultural producers should be represented by election (and liable for re-election if they failed to carry out their responsibilities) through their unions,' and responsible for reporting to their respective unions.<sup>202</sup> This, of course, was in direct contrast to the Arts Council and Regional Arts Association system of the 'friends of friends' approach, which tended to favour a particular style.<sup>203</sup> The Union maintained that it was a union's responsibility to offer equal treatment to all workers, and made a series of recommendations: the creation of special communities and

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<sup>195</sup> Video only began to be accepted as a medium of art in 1972 following Atkinson's exhibition 'Strike' at the ICA. After mounting the exhibition, Atkinson received a call from a Council representative who informed him that, upon seeing the video included in the exhibition, they now considered video as art. Conrad Atkinson, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>196</sup> Work by Atkinson and Tony Rickaby that due to be included in the 'Lives' exhibition curated by Derek Boshier was withdrawn by the Council in 1978. The artists were given no reasons other than the fact that the Council had taken 'legal advice'. John Pilger, 'Not in front of the Children', *New Statesman*, March 1978. In Atkinson, Sandy Nairne and Caroline Tisdall, eds., *Conrad Atkinson: Picturing the System*. London: Pluto Press: ICA, 1981, 70–71.

<sup>197</sup> Pilger, 'Not in front of the Children', 70–71.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>199</sup> APG, TGA 20042/3/3/3/1, 2

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

housing estates with purpose-built artist studios; workshop facilities for photography and printing; employment opportunities for artists within GLC departments; support for local boroughs such as Tower Hamlets for setting up representative arts committees with funding; allocating a percentage – ‘1.5% recommended in the Labour Party Document’ – of the initial building cost of public buildings, such as hospitals and schools, to artistic content; encouragement of exhibitions dealing with minority communities and work that related to ‘the life of ordinary working people’; and subsidising artists to give presentations on such work when exhibiting.<sup>204</sup>

The Union had four divisions: the membership, a branch committee, workshops (working groups focusing on specific issues regarding artists), and annually elected officers. The membership included all members that paid membership dues and was responsible for voting on policy and recommendations for action proposed by the workshops, as well as for electing Union officers. Officers included the chair, vice-chair, secretary, three members of a publicity group, three members of a membership group, two auditors and a representative to the Division Council.<sup>205</sup> The first officers of the Union included Mary Kelly (chair), Colin Sheffield (vice-chair), Stuart Brisley, Margaret Harrison and Carol Kenna (secretariat), and Elona Bennett who acted as both an officer of the membership group and convener for the Women's Workshop.

During the introductory meeting at Camden Studios, it was argued that by forming as a branch of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS), the Union would be subject to democratic process while gaining ‘immediate access to the power and facilities of ASTMS, and yet retain maximum autonomy in the definition and subsequent regulation of our affairs’.<sup>206</sup> The meeting was organised by the Policy Group, which included Stuart Brisley, Marc Chaimowicz, and Conrad Atkinson, among others, who prepared an ‘Interim Report’ listing the general aims and proposed definition of the Union. This stated that the Union would seek to view artists as

1. A liberating force for social change;
2. Working to establish closer relationships between art and the needs of the people;
3. Wielding art as a weapon against materialism;
4. Asserting art as a process catalysed by the artist in which people take a vital and creative role.<sup>207</sup>

As these descriptors evinced, the Union situated the essential role of the artist as within and for society, while other aims included the promotion and protection of artists' rights, such as more control over decisions regarding artists and selection for exhibitions. ASTMS was chosen as the organisation to join because of its expansionist and militant policy. According to the Policy Group's report, ASTMS had a

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 3–5.

<sup>205</sup> Auditors and representatives of the Divisional Council would only be elected if the Artist's Union affiliated with another union. See Artist's Union, ‘Proposal for Constitution’, Note (1a). In Papers relating to the London Branch of the Artist's Union, 1973–1982, TGA 200116/2/12/2

<sup>206</sup> ‘The Artist's Union Invitation’ to the Introductory Meeting, 18 March 1972 TGA 200116/2/12/2

<sup>207</sup> The first official meeting of the Policy Group was held on 27 June 1971. ‘The Artist's Union Invitation’ TGA 200116/2/12/2

Parliamentary Committee including 18 MPs and five peers, and a successful ‘negotiation record’.<sup>208</sup> It was also associated with both the TUC and the Labour Party but, more importantly, had an existing ‘structure for a united cultural front’, with a publishing branch for writers and publishing employees, staff recruited from the British Film Institute and a relationship with Equity and the Association of Cinematographic, Television and allied Technicians.<sup>209</sup>

However, after several months of discussion and contact with existing unions, the Policy Group decided to form a separate artist’s union that would be directly affiliated with the TUC rather than join an existing union. It was acknowledged that joining an existing union would mean artists could employ the union’s expertise and draw on its legal services, as well as its printing and distribution capabilities and even office space, but the need to establish autonomy as the Artist’s Union outweighed other concerns. If necessary, the Union could join forces with an existing union at a later stage.

Affiliation with the TUC was also a debated issue. But as John Walker argued, there were

...some critics [who] thought that forming a professional association to act as a pressure group and to uphold standards, such as the Association of Art Historians formed by British art historians in 1974, was a more appropriate type of organisation for artists than a trade union.<sup>210</sup>

There were several reasons for this. Firstly, it was difficult to define who qualified as an artist and whether calling oneself an artist was sufficient. For many artists who had secondary occupations, there were other unions to join such as the National Association of Teachers in Colleges and Departments of Education (NATFHE). Furthermore, a TUC-affiliated union was not a priority for financially successful artists, and would be time-consuming for others who had to juggle several engagements to sustain their livelihoods as art practitioners. Nonetheless, the majority of Union members argued that joining the TUC was imperative for defending their interests.<sup>211</sup> The first newsletter of the Union acknowledged that ‘artists could, as has been attempted in the past, have formed themselves into an association concerned with defending their interests as seen in a narrow, limited sense’, but this would have been at odds with their fundamental aim to reject artistic separation.<sup>212</sup> Besides, as delineated in the Policy Group’s ‘Interim Report’, associations outside the TUC without ‘direct political identity’ were likely to be vulnerable, although geared towards protecting their members.<sup>213</sup> In this respect, the rejection of artistic separation was highlighted from the beginning: ‘We cannot defend our interests as

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<sup>208</sup> Policy Group, ‘Artist’s Union: Interim Report’. In Papers describing the aims and proposed constitution of the Artist’s Union 1972–1974 TGA 200116/2/1, 2

<sup>209</sup> TGA 200116/2/1, 2

<sup>210</sup> The National Artists Association was formed in 1988. See Walker, *Left Shift*, 83.

<sup>211</sup> The official decision to affiliate directly with the TUC was voted by the membership at the ninth Branch Meeting on 4 November 1972, at ICA Nash House.

<sup>212</sup> First Newsletter of the Artist’s Union, TGA 786/5/7/2, 3

<sup>213</sup> Forming a non-registered union was also made difficult and even unlawful, to some extent, following the Industrial Relations Act, which stated that unions must register with the Government body, the Registrar of Trade Unions and Employers Associations, even though the TUC General Council advise(d) its members not to be registered under the Act during a conference on 18 March 1971. See Policy Group, ‘Artist’s Union: Interim Report’, TGA 200116/2/1

artists, except by working with those who seek to defend the interest of the vast majority of the population, i.e. the working class, against the many forms of exploitation that capitalism entails.’<sup>214</sup>

Kirsten Forkert states that the Union sought to prompt and recruit Members of Parliament to take action, instead of through ‘conventional workplace activism’, since artists lacked conventional workplaces.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, an art strike wasn’t a viable option either, as discussed by Luke Skrebowski in his essay ‘Working against (Art) Work’, since any cessation in the production of art would have little or no effect on the art market, which could sustain itself through the secondary market and/or the rediscovery of forgotten artists.<sup>216</sup> Besides, rather than withdrawing their labour, these artists wanted to use their work in the battle for socio-political reform, but were unable to do so as practising art alone left them unable survive. Many artists in Britain were already unemployed or underemployed, prompting Atkinson to declare, ‘the [art] system thrives on unemployment’.<sup>217</sup> The few artists who had lucrative working relationships with dealers and/or collectors, and were thus considered commercially successful, were tied to market taste and restrictive contracts with galleries, which typically took a third to half of a work’s sale price on account of overheads and risk. Neither of these situations meant that artists were uninterested in protecting their economic and cultural rights, but this was seen as a short-term goal alongside the more long-term one of recalibrating the position of artists within society. As such, affiliating with the TUC offered a means to identify their aims with people outside the community of artists.

This approach was in line with a Gramscian *war of position*, which bridged cultural and political struggle by forging unity with different groups, such as artists and workers. As Dominic Strinati explains, the concept of a war of position implies that ‘the revolutionary forces have to take civil society before they take the state, and (...) build a coalition of oppositional groups united under a hegemonic banner which usurps the dominant or prevailing hegemony’.<sup>218</sup> As Gramsci asserted, everyone can be an intellectual, in the sense that they contribute to the production and circulation of ideas, even if it is not their primary social function as it is for ‘traditional intellectuals’ who maintain and promote hegemonic authority. He argued that it is possible to see that ‘all men are “philosophers”’, by defining the limits and characteristics of the “spontaneous philosophy” which is proper to everybody’, and that the role of the revolutionary party is to identify, recruit and organise working class philosophers along with intellectuals from other class backgrounds who had been won to the workers’ movement, into a cohesive and disciplined unit.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, after the first year of the Union, discussions in the workshops confirmed the artist’s initial ‘concern to establish closer links with the “non-art” community’, with efforts ranging from opening workshop meetings to non-artists to involve the community in decisions, instigating artists to go into primary and secondary schools as a means to

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<sup>214</sup> TGA 786/5/7/2, 3

<sup>215</sup> Kirsten Folkert, ‘Artists and the Labour Movement’. In *British Culture and Society in the 1970s: The Lost Decade*, Laurel Forster and Sue Harper, eds., Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010, 52.

<sup>216</sup> Luke Skrebowski, ‘All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke’s Systems Art’, *Grey Room* 30, January 2008, 54–83.

<sup>217</sup> Atkinson, ‘The Practising Artist’, 2.

<sup>218</sup> Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1995, 169.

<sup>219</sup> Antonio Gramsci and David Forgacs, *The Gramsci reader: selected writings, 1916–1935*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999, 325.

introduce children to art through practising artists, and supporting worker struggles. Similarly, Conrad Atkinson's work *Strike at Brannans* (1972), which documented the yearlong strike by female staff at the Brannans thermometer factory and the resulting exhibition at the ICA (25 May–25 June 1972), can be considered a successful example of establishing links with the non-art community, as people involved with the strike were invited to public meetings at the ICA throughout the duration of the exhibition. As a temporary organising centre for the strikers, Atkinson's exhibition included original documents from the strike, such as video and photography from the first year, as well as subsequent developments. Having grown up in Cleator Moor (where the factory was located), Atkinson was no stranger to the strikers; his identity was rooted in the community and he had personally known most of the people involved. *Strike at Brannans* revealed that the reason for the strike was not financial, as the workers had already negotiated a pay increase before going on strike. Rather, the strike was about having a say over working conditions, risk of industrial injury, and their own social situation.<sup>220</sup> The Union considered Atkinson's exhibition proof that

art is not 'disconnected', 'superior', or on a 'higher plane' than the thoughts and experiences of ordinary people; that art can be an effective analytical and critical mechanism which does not necessarily result in a pretty 'art object'; that art is politics (not party politics, but politics); and non-political gestures are rarer than we tend to suppose.<sup>221</sup>

Similarly, both *Women and Work* by Harrison, Hunt and Kelly (which was directly generated by the Union and artists' discussions in the Women's Workshop), and *The Peterlee Project* (1976–77) by Brisley – to be discussed in the following chapters – can be considered significant projects that sought to forge links with the non-art community.

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<sup>220</sup> Atkinson, *Conrad Atkinson: Picturing the System*: 9–10.

<sup>221</sup> Artist's Union, 'First Newsletter of the Artist's Union', 3.

## **The structure of the Union and its workshops**

The Artist's Union operated much like other trade unions, in that there was a membership and dues system as well as a national executive.<sup>222</sup> Yet unlike other trade unions, the Union had separate 'working groups', defined as 'workshops', which dealt with specific issues or addressed the critical needs of artists. In total, there were six workshops: Patronage, Artists in Education, The Artist's Role in Society, Women in Art, Policy within the Trade Union, and Government Policy for the Arts. A practical mechanism for examining issues in depth, these workshops were platforms where aims, strategies and principles on issues of importance to 'the Arts and their relationship to western civilisation' were assessed and formulated.<sup>223</sup> The workshops had to have at least seven members, though were open to everyone, and would meet regularly at the Union rooms at Nash House. Anyone, member or non-member, could make suggestions or proposals that would then be shared with the full membership during the monthly branch meetings, potentially becoming part of official Union policy.<sup>224</sup> In retrospect, the workshops' relative significance varied: some involved a few people with localised interest, others such as the Women's Workshop, which now constitutes a major episode in the history of feminist art, had far-reaching influence.

The Women's Workshop was formed to fight sexual and racial discrimination in the arts. While, on the surface, women in art faced the same problems as everyone else, they also needed to challenge the male-dominance of culture, which prompted these women to seek a dialectic approach that incorporated feminism. In January 1972, a group of ten women artists, including Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt, Mary Kelly, Tina Keane and Carol Kenna, met at Su Braden's studio in Southwark.<sup>225</sup> The meeting was arranged to discuss the possibility of joining the Union as a group, rather than as individuals, 'because [they] didn't want to be marginalised'.<sup>226</sup> The women supposed that if they acted as a group, they could make sure that women's demands become an important part of the Union's objectives and plan of action. Since the Union operated through workshops designated for specific areas that affected artists, a special women's workshop fit perfectly within the Union framework.

Of critical import to the Union, and this thesis, the Women's Workshop aimed to support both women in the arts (such as by proposing studio space for women with children, crèche facilities and equal opportunities for inclusion in exhibitions) and women outside art practice (such as by seeking links with the women's sections of other unions, supporting worker strike actions, and creating projects). The Union's Regional Report from 1972 confirmed the Workshop's intention 'to support our sisters in their struggle for unionisation and also in the action they take as organised workers'.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> 'Artist's Union initial working paper', 1.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> The identities of the four other artists were not mentioned or remembered by anyone.

<sup>226</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>227</sup> Artist's Union 'Regional Report', quoted in Mary Kelly, 'A Brief History of the Women's Workshop', 75/

Actions they supported included the Night Cleaners campaign of 1972, through which the Cleaners Action Group, led by office cleaner May Hobbs, appealed to the Ministry of Defence for union recognition for women who cleaned office buildings at night to support their families; the 1972 Fakenham Occupation, where women workers' barricaded themselves in the Sexton Shoe Factory for 18 weeks; and the yearlong strike against precarious working conditions at the Brannan's thermometer factory in Cumbria.

Projects initiated by the Women's Workshop included *Women and Work* by Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly (discussed in Chapter 3), and the *Playground Project* (1972) by Jane Low and Tina Keane, which involved the production of outdoor pieces geared towards children and adults in cooperation with the Local Trades Council and Tenants Association. A project that was planned but never executed was *Womanhouse* (based on the American *Womanhouse* by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro) by Alexis Hunter, Sonia Knox, Sue Madden, Linda Price and others, who intended to transform a derelict house into a meeting, working and exhibition place for local women.<sup>228</sup> The project was subsequently realised by the South London Women's Art Group (Phil Goodall, Patricia Hull, Catherine Nicholson, Su Richardson, Monica Ross, Suzy Varty and Kate Walker) in 1974 as an impermanent exhibition-installation titled *A Woman's House*.<sup>229</sup> For this project, the artists moved into Radnor Terrace in London, turning it into a house/studio with exhibition spaces to investigate the idea of the home as a public environment and to question women's relationship with the home, which involved the artists working together as a group for two months.<sup>230</sup> The projects were linked by the desire to develop a support system for women, by creating spaces for sharing and consciousness raising as well as assistance in childcare.

The Patronage Workshop, also referred to as 'Art: patronage, marketing and money', analysed the circumstances and economic structure of the art world, and sought to protect and promote the interests of members while also regulating relations between members, the public, and private patrons. Given that, historically, art practice has been ontologically determined by its economic status (as a *sui generis* commodity with 'exchange value' but no 'use value'), the workshop aimed to create situations where art could transcend societal values motivated by profit. To this end, the Patronage Workshop sought to modify the public's relationship with artworks by involving artists as consultants on the boards of public institutions governing art patronage, thereby also extending the coverage of contemporary art. The Education Workshop was responsible for negotiating on behalf of members who were also employed in educational institutions. It demanded that artists teaching in art schools

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<sup>228</sup> *Womanhouse* was a feminist installation and performance space founded by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, along with their students from the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of Technology and women from the local community. In the Feminist Art Program, teaching was based on group cooperation, and aimed to help students achieve self-confidence, and 'restructure their personalities' according to their artistic goals. Essentially, Chicago and Schapiro sought to help students overcome 'a general lack of assertiveness or ambition, (...) lack of familiarity with tools and art-making processes, (...) [and] an inability to see themselves as working people', associated with being a woman. Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, *Womanhouse* Exhibition Catalogue. Valencia, CA: California Institute of the Arts, 1971; and Miriam Schapiro, 'Education of Women as Artists: Project *Womanhouse*', *Art Journal* 31, no. 3, Spring 1972, 268–270.

<sup>229</sup> Despite its significance for feminist work and its ethos during the 1970s, *A Woman's House* project hasn't been widely historicised and was mostly forgotten until its re-discovery by Kathy Battista during interviews she was conducting for her research on feminist work in London during the 1970s. Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

<sup>230</sup> Parker, 'Housework', *Spare Rib*, 1975, no. 26, 38.

were employed as artists and not as teachers of art, and that security of contract was put into effect for part-time workers. Teaching was a part-time endeavour for most artists, who were not represented by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) or Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions (ATTI). The other main objective of the workshop was to democratise art education by establishing stronger links between local authorities and artists working in education, and between artists and the community, through workshop initiatives.

The Trade Union Workshop was responsible for seeking affiliation to the TUC, and ensuring cooperation with other local, national or international artist organisations. The workshop also monitored the Union so that it operated without an autocratic structure of control, and maintained flexibility by relying on the activity of all members helping to forge policy, instead of one or a few leading voices.<sup>231</sup> The Government Policy for the Arts Workshop, on the other hand, sought to participate and create dialogue on a grassroots level with local government in order to influence policy, and employed artists as local consultants for matters regarding cultural decisions.<sup>232</sup> The Art, Science, Technology and Industry Workshop was responsible for providing information and raising consciousness on these fields to members, while the Media Workshop searched for ways to achieve immediate access for artists to mass media, to improve dialogue and 'supplement the current "journalistic coverage" which treats art as a part-time theatrical or news event'.<sup>233</sup> The Artist's Role in Society Workshop examined the position of artists in a class-based society. Although opposition to funding cuts and the promotion of artist's rights remained as short-term aims of the Union, the long-term aim was to unite artists with society by instigating projects, such as *Women and Work*, that enabled artists to liaise with working class communities and become involved with the labour movement.

The Union was pivotal in the evolution of the artist project, both in terms of initiating projects from the workshops themselves, and in terms of setting an example of artists working in collaboration for a mutual cause, such as the promotion and protection of artists' rights. Artist projects are long-term investigations into a specific socio-political issue, and the Union itself was one such investigation. Like artist projects, the Union's operation was predicated on collective effort and participation, and the workshop model both provided a guideline for working together and was instrumental in instigating projects geared towards specific issues. Like the projects, the workshops allowed members to compartmentalise issues and tackle them one by one. I also claim that the workshops – and thus the Union as an artist-led initiative – informed projects in terms of their standards of operation. Ultimately, the artists who founded the Union were either those already creating (or would go on to create) projects, or who had equivalent aspirations for a just and equal society.

The operational structure and principles of the workshops were anti-hierarchical and horizontal (in this sense, and as I explain in the final chapter, they were congruous with the operational model Brisley sought to instil in *The Peterlee Project*). Workshop delegates were not permanent

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<sup>231</sup> Artist's Union, Papers relating to Artist's Union workshops [c1975-1977], TGA 200116/2/9/5

<sup>232</sup> 'Union Now!', *Art and Artists*, 11.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 13.



representatives; they had to be re-nominated every three months, and decisions were taken by a majority vote at meetings, which would then be reported to all members at monthly branch meetings. All members held the right to raise their concerns at branch meetings if they believed the reports to be inaccurate or incompatible with the workshop's position, in which case the reports could then be withdrawn or revised at the discretion of the membership. In fact, all individual members had the right to propose alternative proposals, policies or actions, and the Union constitution clearly emphasised that no decision or policy could be made by a subdivision. Instead, direct participation, collective action and consensus – methods of operation also used in artist projects – were encouraged in the interests of democracy. Carol Kenna's article 'Policy in the Trade Union Movement' highlighted this:

The Union is an organic and flexible entity with no autocratic structure of control; it is therefore reliant upon the activity of all its members, and all artists are invited to join the union to help to forge a policy and put forward initiatives [...] because if you are not part of the solution you must be part of the problem.<sup>234</sup>

Although Union decisions were made by a consensus of two-thirds majority – namely, simple majority voting (see *The Artist's Union Proposal for Constitution*, Appendix II) – the system by which proposals were made, shared and implemented was based on open discussion, and therefore to a large degree on consensus. The Artist's Union Proposal for Constitution included in the Appendix is a preliminary version of the Constitution, which was ratified on 19 May 1972. It includes hand-written corrections by Barbara Reise, an American art historian and contributing editor at *Studio International* during the 1970s, as confirmed by Jo Melvin. Reise began writing for *Studio International* in 1968 with an initial article on Michael Greenberg, followed by a whole section on Minimalism in the magazine's April 1969 issue. Reise was involved with the magazine until her death in 1978.

The fact that Reise's markings appear on a document by the Union dated March 1972 – two months before the official establishment of the Union – indicate that Reise was in attendance at the introductory meeting at Camden Studios on 18 March 1972. What this ultimately reveals is that the unsigned article titled 'The Artists' Union: Interim Report', which appeared in *Studio International*'s May 1972 issue, was in fact written by Barbara Reise. This article had infuriated the artists because it contained information that was not intended to be made public. The document circulated at the 18 March meeting had been clearly marked 'Interim Report', and was issued solely as an information sheet for attendees, particularly because the Policy Group had signed an agreement that there would be no publicity until the union was constitutionally ratified as a branch of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS).<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Carol Kenna, Letter to Barbara Reise dated 5 July 1972, including 'Policy in the TUM' article printed in the September issue of *Art & Artists*, TGA 786/5/7/2

<sup>235</sup> Policy Group, Letter to the Editor of *Studio International*, in Papers relating to the London Branch of the Artists' Union, 1973–1982, TGA 200116/2/12/2

There was also a strict understanding that each workshop was an organic part of the Union, existing and operating as an instrument of the whole membership. Continuous and frequent reporting (at every Branch Meeting) was urged to fulfil this and motivate cross-fertilisation of ideas. This was necessary to sustain the anti-hierarchical structure of the Union and its workshops, since without 'mechanisms that ensure that information is as widely available as possible, and constantly reminding the most active members that there is no formal leadership structure and no one has the right to impose their will',<sup>236</sup> a particular member or clique of members could – without even intending – impose their views on the membership. Branch meetings were open to members, guests and prospective members. A simple majority was called for to pass motions on policy, and if this fell to less than two-thirds, the motion would be postponed to the next meeting in order to include postal votes. Changes to the constitution also required a two-thirds majority.

Although the operating system worked well in compartmentalising issues and their solutions, the workshops weren't all successful. A letter from the Patronage Workshop written in 1974 highlighted that one or more workshops were failing to report to the membership, warning that without collective action the Union would lose its strength, visibility and bargaining power for promoting the rights of artists, and would remain just a 'talking shop'.<sup>237</sup> In a similar vein, the Union newsletter, written by Will Davis from the Publicity Group in 1976, referred to dwindling attendance numbers, a decrease in membership and, worst of all, the possibility of the Newsletter ceasing to publish due to a lack of information from workshops.<sup>238</sup> Since the functioning of workshops was based on the free exchange of ideas and sharing of responsibility, its failure it would be detrimental to the whole Union. The matters referred to in these two documents weren't isolated events but, rather, harbingers of dysfunction and stagnation within the Union. Towards the end of the decade, some workshops were also failing to fulfil their responsibilities in developing proposals for action and producing reports.<sup>239</sup> For instance, the Publicity Group operated as a 'one-man group' during 1975, because members were preoccupied with other issues.<sup>240</sup> And as energy waned among members, some workshops found it difficult to hold meetings because of limited attendance.

Exasperated by the elitist attitude and limited reach of private galleries and patrons, the Union emphasised the need to expand the remit of art practice to include a wider section of society, by working at community level. Despite the different circumstances of the US earlier in the century, and Britain in the 1970s, I contend that for several reasons the American Artist's Union of the 1930s presented a rational and effective model to follow, more than other artist organisations of the time. Firstly, like the Artist's Union in Britain, the American Artist's Union acted in solidarity with workers and frequently joined them in picket lines, to 'forge links between them[selves] and the proletariat', as Andrew Hemingway expressed it in his survey of American artists and their links to the Communist

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<sup>236</sup> Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, 222–223.

<sup>237</sup> Carol B. Wyatt, 'Workshop Autonomy', Patronage Workshop, TGA 200116/2/9/3

<sup>238</sup> Will Davis, 'Newsletter', 1976, TGA 200116/2/12/19

<sup>239</sup> Wyatt, 'Workshop Autonomy', TGA 200116/2/9/3

<sup>240</sup> Davis, 'Newsletter', TGA 200116/2/12/19

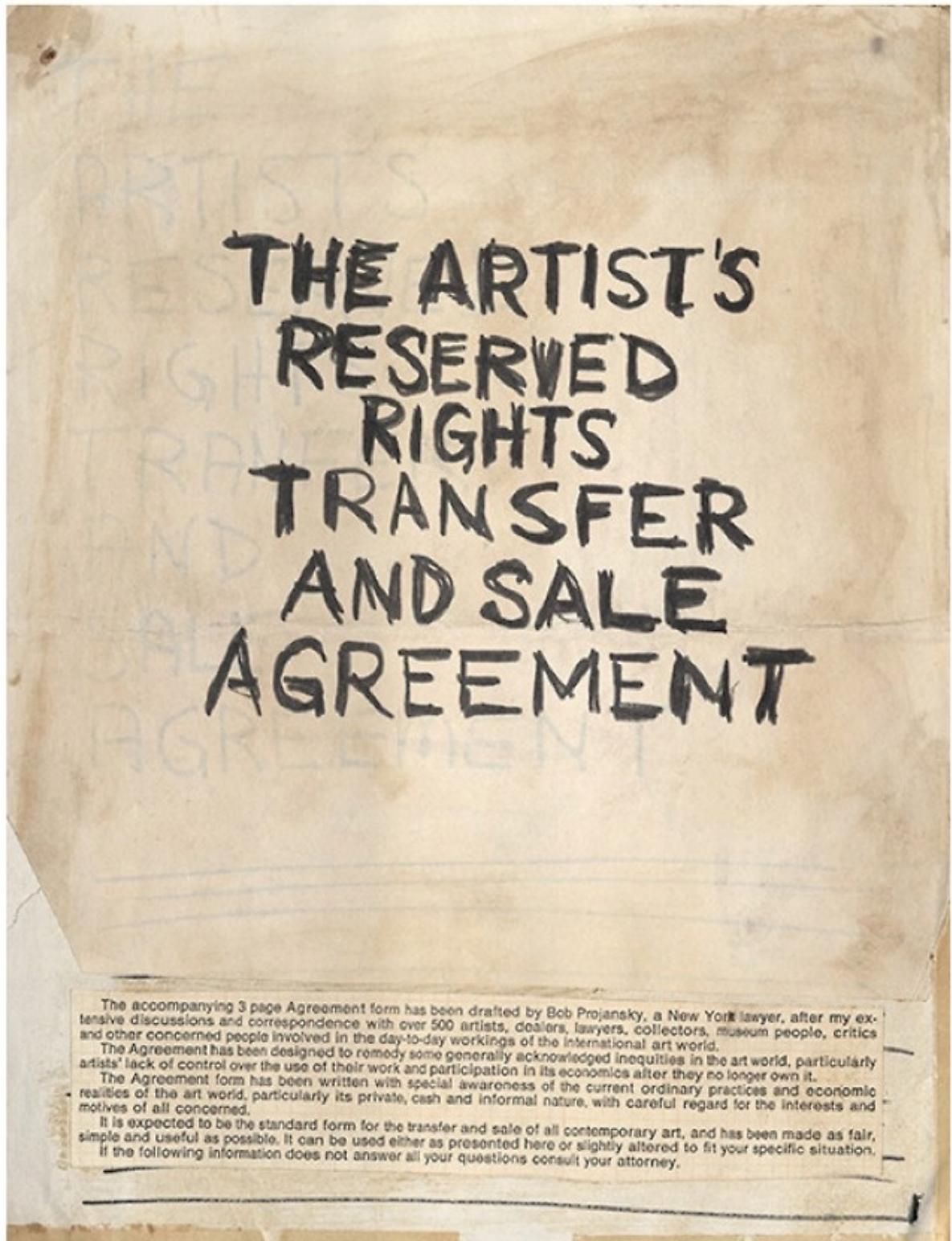


Fig. 2 Seth Siegelau, mock-up draft of the Artist's Contract in English, c. 1971. *Seth Siegelau Papers in The Museum of Modern Art Archives*, [I.A.91]

movement.<sup>241</sup> Secondly, although American artists had once been wage labourers, employed in the state-funded Works Progress Administration projects until its dismantlement,<sup>242</sup> the two unions were ideologically similar, particularly in their emphasis on the importance of organisation. Rally posters of 1935 for the American Artist's Union declared, 'Every artist an organized artist', along with its signature raised-fist logo.

In his study of the American Artist's Union, Nicholas Lampert notes,

If the 1930s can teach us one key lesson, it is the need to organize. Nothing changes when people do not engage in the long and difficult work of building a diverse, multi-cultural, working class movement from the ground up. This includes artists'.<sup>243</sup>

Similarly, the British Artist's Union's foundation and reason for existence rested on the idea of organising and effecting change from the ground up. At the Conference on Arts Education in 1973, Atkinson argued that 'artists who refused to become organised are as good as supporting the system'.<sup>244</sup> Promoting artists' rights was an essential goal for both unions. Founded during the Great Depression, the American Artist's Union fought for better economic conditions for artists, primarily by demanding exhibition fees when museums showed their work. Artists in Britain during the 1970s faced the same predicament: no compensation for participating in exhibitions, and some private galleries even charged artists for showing their works.<sup>245</sup> Hence artists could be forced to pay personally for material and production costs. Exhibitors sought to justify this by claiming that artists were getting exposure and prestige through exhibiting in their institutions. In 1936, Einar Heiberg of the Minnesota Artist's Union had brilliantly confronted the irrationality of this seemingly permanent situation:

Should a group of musicians play without recompense, for instance, simply because a hall had been provided? Should a singer give a program without remuneration simply because of the donation of a stage and possibly an accompanist? The artists felt there was no logic in the protests of the museum directors, and felt there was as much value in a given work of art as there might be in an orchestration, or a song, or a dental extraction. Prestige acquired from the hanging of a picture might bring the artists a lot of pretty words and some encouragement, but very few groceries.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 20.

<sup>242</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 27–28.

<sup>243</sup> Nicholas Lampert, 'Organize! What the Artist's Union of the 1930s Can Teach Us Today'. In ART WORK A National Conversation About Art, Labor, and Economics, <[http://www.artandwork.us/i/art\\_work\\_web.pdf](http://www.artandwork.us/i/art_work_web.pdf)> [Accessed 8 June 2016]

<sup>244</sup> Atkinson, 'The Practicing Artist', 5. Atkinson even shared an excerpt from painter Stuart Davis – the first editor of the American Artist's Union publication, *Art Front*.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>246</sup> Einar Heiberg, 'The Minnesota Artist's Union'. In O'Connor, Francis V., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973, 244.

Forty years later, it was still the private galleries, patrons and museum boards that reaped the profits, prestige and publicity of artist's works, even if prices for artists who had gallery representation were also positively affected. Furthermore, the problem of exploitation of the artist didn't end there. Atkinson, in reference to APG placements stated: '...artists recently burned their fingers with companies', resulting in artists being used by companies to improve worker efficiency or promote their products.<sup>247</sup> The original intention for artist independence within the organisation, or 'any instruction from authority within that organisation for the long-term benefit of society',<sup>248</sup> had failed, as it was unclear whether these placements benefited the companies concerned or the workers. This was partly also because artists were parachuted into organisations and were thus seen by workers to be closer to the management, and partly because it was unclear whether the 'artists [were] there simply to act as the creative supplements to corporate research and development, [and] to turn the wheels of industry's production', according to Julia Bryan-Wilson.<sup>249</sup> Essentially, artist placements revealed the vulnerable position many artists found themselves in, as they were just as prone to exploitation as workers, both by the so-called art market and the wider market of capitalism. This situation ultimately provoked the formation of the Union, and characterised its purpose: to counteract unfavourable conditions affecting artists and 'negotiate on behalf of the large number of artists precariously situated in part-time teaching positions'.<sup>250</sup>

One of the objectives pursued by the Union during the early 1970s was to draw up and distribute a draft contract for sale of an artist's work, which would give the artist the right to a percentage of profits on its resale. In the US, curator, dealer and publisher Seth Sieglaub had created 'The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement' (also known as the Artist's Contract, still used by Hans Haacke)<sup>251</sup> (See Fig. 2 and Appendix III). Although a mock-up, the hand-drawn quality of the title text and the collage of typed text over what presumably are line drawings and other hand-drafted text, chimes in with the aesthetic qualities of the Artist's Union invitation (fig 1) included above. The mock-up was subsequently updated (see Appendix III) to use a standard typeface resonating with the legal content of Sieglaub's contract.

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<sup>247</sup> Atkinson, 'The Practicing Artist', 2.

<sup>248</sup> Point 5 of the 'Artist Placement Group Manifesto', Barbara Latham, Joan Hills. APG booklet, London, TGA 20042

<sup>249</sup> Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 182; See Michael Corris, 'The Un-Artist', *Art Monthly* 357 (June 2012): 5–8.

<sup>250</sup> Artist's Union, 'National Membership Campaign', September – December 1972. Appendix I.

<sup>251</sup> First published as a poster, Sieglaub's contract, co-created with lawyer Robert Projansky, included the need for artists to have a document and the contract itself, which sought to protect the rights and interests of the artist as their work circulated within the art world system. With Sieglaub's contract, collectors agreed to pay the artist a resale loyalty of 15% of the increase over the original sale price and disclose the names of the new collectors, and artists held the right to reject an exhibition of their work. While it was never in use (perhaps as further proof of the Union's pragmatic approach, rather than advocating for all of these changes at once, the demands were lobbied for individually), the structure of the Union's draft contract of sale in 1973 resembled Sieglaub's contract, and followed the same order of demands: a 15% of increase in value to the artist; right of notification of exhibition so the artist could advise or dissent; right to borrow work for an exhibition; consultation about repairs etc.; rental fee for the artist when work is exhibited; reproduction rights; better insurance protection; ways for the artist to profit from community work; standard minimum operating procedures for galleries. Appendix III, Sieglaub, 'The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement', 1971; and Atkinson, 'The Practicing Artist', 3–4.

## NORTHERN ARTS

16 August 1977

Conrad Atkinson Esq  
52 Denman Road  
Camberwell Green  
LONDON SE5

Dear Conrad,

I thought it would be a nice gesture if you were the first artist in the country to receive a £50 exhibition fee for a one man exhibition.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Davies  
Visual Arts Officer

31 New Bridge Street Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8JY Telephone 0632 610446  
DIRECTOR: DAVID DOUGAN

Fig. 3 Peter Davies letter to Conrad Atkinson, 16 August 1977. Courtesy of the artist.

The implementation of a sale contract was a much-needed step forward in the Union's fight against artists shifting and transient relationship with employers, whether the government or private galleries. However, the Union's proposals for resale rights were strongly opposed by the Society of London Art Dealers, who insisted that 'its members already benefit artists by the existing system of commercial galleries, sales and commissions', without offering any proof of this claim.<sup>252</sup> Commonly referred to by its French name 'droit de suite', what the Union sought to implement was a form of commission for artists – a standard practice on mainland Europe.<sup>253</sup> In line with this, the Union also pursued a remuneration scheme for artists participating in exhibitions. This initiative proved more successful and, in 1979, after years of lobbying spearheaded by Atkinson, and two years after Union members made a specific request to arts minister Lord Donaldson, the Arts Council established the Payment to Artists for Exhibition Work scheme on the principle of recompense for public access to an artist's work, with a flat-rate fee of £100.<sup>254</sup> Atkinson himself was the first artist to be remunerated for his solo exhibition at Northern Arts in August 1977, before even the official establishment of the scheme (Fig. 3).<sup>255</sup> While artists in Britain had won the fight for compensation for showing their work in public, resale rights, an industrial levy on profit-making ventures, and a procedure for commissions and tax relief for artists instead of purchasers, were still issues waiting to be tackled towards the end of the decade, due in part to the slow pace with which pro-artist legislation was being ratified.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Roland Miller, 'Payments to artists for their work: idealistic hope or pragmatic reality?', *Artists Newsletter*, March–April, 1985.

<sup>253</sup> Under the internal market provisions of the Treaty of Rome, a European Union Directive on the resale right for the benefit of the author of an original work of art was made on 27 September 2001 in the UK. As per this directive, artists receive royalties when their works are resold.

<sup>254</sup> The scheme was delegated to the Regional Arts Associations in 1983 as a three-year trial, and at the end of the trial period, the Council of Regional Arts Associations reviewed the scheme and decided to establish a non-integrated Exhibition Payment Right through which each association and arts council could pursue a scheme reflecting their perspective on the value of payment to artists. Susan Jones, 'Brief history of Exhibition Payment Right', a-n The Artists Information Company, 2014, 2–8.

<sup>255</sup> Letter to artist from Peter Davies, Visual Arts Officer at Northern Arts Gallery, 16 August 1977.

<sup>256</sup> Artist's Union (London) Branch Meeting Minutes, 2 July 1977, TGA 200116/2/12/29, 2.

# **The Museum of Modern Art**

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900

## **Annual Pass**

No.

Name

Good until

**A.W.C.**

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Valid only when signed. Non-transferable.

# **The Museum of Modern Art**

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900

## **Annual Pass**

No.

Name

Good until

**A.W.C.**

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Valid only when signed. Non-transferable.

Fig. 4 Joseph Kosuth, forged MoMA Visitor's Pass, designed for the AWC, 1969.



## Revolutionaries vs. reformists

In 1969, a few years before the establishment of the Artist's Union, a group of artists and critics founded the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) in New York. Starting with demonstrations against the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the AWC positioned itself directly against art administrators and museum boards, much like a traditional trade union against factory management. Predominantly interested in protecting and promoting artist's rights, AWC members defined themselves as 'workers'. As art workers, however, they 'did not, by and large, take a populist stance or insist that their art itself was "for the workers"', according to Bryan-Wilson.<sup>257</sup> Rather than creating art that was accessible to workers, both the AWC and the Union were more interested in the question of art as a political activity, and in its operation and circulation in society.<sup>258</sup>

Writing about the social context within which the UK Artist's Union was created in 1972, John Walker states: 'In certain respects, artists were more like small manufacturers of luxury goods, or self-employed/freelance specialists whose income derived from various sources, some public and some private, than they were like blue-collar employees in a factory'.<sup>259</sup> Walker's point is relevant for two reasons: first, it alludes to the difference between the more pragmatic British artists and ambitious American 'art workers'; and second, it refers to the changing definitions of the artist, from romantic, social outcast or creative being working alone in the studio, to flexible, interdisciplinary multi-tasker. Whereas the British chose to organise as an established union and to work through their needs and demands systematically, one by one, the Americans were, as Bryan-Wilson claims, 'a tendentious and tenuous collectivity' that was bolder in their anti-establishment gestures.<sup>260</sup> AWC activities were primarily focused on museums – mainly MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum in New York – and ranged from protests in front of museums to producing forged museum passes, such as the one created by artist Joseph Kosuth (Fig. 4). It even went as far as reclaiming works, an example being when the artist Panagiotis 'Takis' Vassilakis, marched into MoMA on 3 January 1969, and unplugged, removed and left the museum with, his *Tele-sculpture* (1960) because he was unhappy with the museum's decision to include his work in a group exhibition without asking his permission. This was despite the work being a part of the collection at MoMA.<sup>261</sup> Considerably milder in temperament and activity than the AWC, the Artist's Union aimed to:

1. Promote and protect the economic and cultural interests of members and artists in general;
2. Regulate relations between members and patrons;

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<sup>257</sup> Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 27.

<sup>258</sup> One of the ideas before the foundation of the Artist's Union was to form an Art Workers' Union. Such a union would be involved in integrating art within general education in order to counteract the isolation of art and artists; setting up community workshops; including practitioners in pottery, furniture design, set design and weaving; and negotiating for public exhibitions in railway stations, cinemas, theatres and airports. See Carol Kenna, 'Some ideas about an Art Workers Union', TGA 200116/2/1

<sup>259</sup> Walker, *The Left Shift*, 83.

<sup>260</sup> Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 14.

<sup>261</sup> Jo Melvin in a conversation with the author confirmed that this work had been part of the MoMA collection, Cambridge, 11 October 2019.

3. Campaign for democratic reform of national bodies concerned with art patronage and for greatly increased national expenditure on art;
4. Promote participation by artists in local government and regional bodies;
5. Campaign for legislation for the benefits of artists;
6. Seek affiliation to the TUC;
7. Support the Labour Movement in general.<sup>262</sup>

As is evident from this list, the British weren't categorically averse to national bodies, patrons or dealers, but demanded revisions; in other words, they sought reform rather than revolution.

The Union represented a distinct positioning for artists in Britain by aiming to build an alliance with the working class and solidarity with the labour movement. This was also the logic behind the Artist's Union's wish to join the TUC. Again, this indicated a recalibration, and thus a reorganisation of power structures. The Union was taking a major step in its relation to the establishment by 'breaking off [its] alliance with the privileged class'<sup>263</sup> and forging a new one with the working class. As such, the members declared that they sought 'complete and unconditional independence of the Artist's Union to the Capitalist system'.<sup>264</sup> The Union maintained that artists were economically, socially and politically part of society,<sup>265</sup> but this wasn't only about solidarity with workers and the TUC; rather, it took the view that 'the end of capitalist cultural exploitation cannot be separated from the existing system of economic and political repression'.<sup>266</sup> In its belief that exploitation was a natural condition of capitalism, the Union saw itself as aiding the defence of the majority, namely, the working class, rather than just fighting for their own rights as artists.

Notwithstanding their differences, both the AWC and the Artist's Union created fertile spaces for debate with regards to the class position of the artist, artistic subjectivity and the politics of protest. In addition to demanding a royalties system for artists, the AWC petitioned for longer opening hours and free admission to museums to accommodate workers (several museums in Britain had introduced longer hours for the same reason at the turn of the century), and for the provision of exhibition space for women and minorities.<sup>267</sup> The coalition functioned for three years, and in 1970 allied with the MoMA's Staff Association to establish the Professional and Administrative Staff Association, an official union for art workers.<sup>268</sup> Yet, as with the Artist's Union, the extent to which artists could truly align themselves with the working class was problematic, not only in terms of issues of authorship – in the Baxandallian sense of art as an authored activity and craft as an anonymous one – but in terms of the more cognitive nature of artistic labour.<sup>269</sup> Even if an artist came from a working class background, the

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<sup>262</sup> Walker, *The Left Shift*, 85.

<sup>263</sup> 'Introduction to Artist's Union', TGA 200116/2/1/2, 2.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>265</sup> Artist's Union, 'Artists to join T.U.C.', Report on November Branch Meeting, 1972, 3.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>267</sup> See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>268</sup> See Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*.

<sup>269</sup> Michael Baxandall argues that artists gained a special class status in the Renaissance, as paintings became the creations of particular individuals as opposed to anonymous craftsmen. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

type of labour he/she engaged in could not be understood in the same terms as industrial-type labour. It was therefore problematic for artists to define themselves as 'art workers' unless they were occupied by something other than art practice. To this end, Bryan-Wilson stated that 'under capitalism art also functions as the "outside," or other, to labor: a non-utilitarian, non-productive activity against which mundane work is defined, a leisure-time pursuit of self-expression, or a utopian alternative to the deadening effects of capitalism'.<sup>270</sup> The understanding of 'art as labour', which the Union took to heart, prompted members to struggle for the right to work as artists, and to be recompensed for their labour, even if compensation was calculated differently than for a worker and the result of their labour had use value or not. In seeking occupational safety and the means for artists to sustain a living, artists were asking to be bound by the economic and ideological rules of capitalism, but equally, with dwindling state funds for the arts and exploitative market practices, no artist was also immune to the deadening effects of capitalism described by Bryan-Wilson.

As a reformist organisation, the Union sought to cooperate with the Arts Council and other art institutions to ensure the introduction and implementation of restructuring and reform efforts. One major perceived flaw of the Arts Council was its elitism and inefficiency, due to most of the work being done on a voluntary basis. As Atkinson stated, Arts Council and Regional Arts Association grants were seen as favours granted by a 'paternalistic, benevolent, self-elected group of prominent worthy citizens' rather than the artists' right, while private funding was often exploitative and served as 'cheap publicity' for donors.<sup>271</sup> In June 1974, the Union released its 'Proposals for Reform of the Arts Council', (Appendix IV) which were geared towards making the Council a more democratic institution and to enable artists to participate from the ground up. Like most of the Arts Council panels, the Visual Art Panel functioned without consulting practising artists. The Union argued that in order to engender greater accountability, one or more voted representatives from the advisory panels should be included in the Council on a rota basis. Since the Visual Arts Panel was particularly important, specific suggestions were made, such as proposing the panel 'make it its business to encourage applications for financial help from groups wishing to form galleries or carry out projects on collective or cooperative lines operated by working artists'.<sup>272</sup> Increasing the involvement of working artists would also relieve the panel of a vast amount of work by making it the responsibility of a wider and more diverse section of the arts community.<sup>273</sup>

Ideologically and strategically distinct from the AWC, the Union called for the recalibration of art practice in solidarity with the labour movement, a position that differed from that of the British Marxist-Leninist organisation, the League of Socialist Artists (LSA), founded in 1971. The LSA was backed by the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain (MLOB) founded in 1967, which initially pledged support for the People's Republic of China under Chairman Mao.<sup>274</sup> Although LSA

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<sup>270</sup> Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 27.

<sup>271</sup> Atkinson, 'The Practicing Artist', 2.

<sup>272</sup> Artist's Union, 'Proposals for reform of the Arts Council', 22 June 1974 in TGA 20020/11/24 1.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>274</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 51.

manifestoes were generally written anonymously, three named members included painter, filmmaker and poet Maureen Scott, who was the LSA's provisional secretary, graphic artist Bernard Charnley, and political activist Mike Baker, who was a member of the Communist Party.<sup>275</sup> LSA's base was the Communard Gallery in Camberwell, and their works were mostly socialist realist in style. Reproaching the 'New Left' for being the 'latter-day protégé of imperialist culture-reaction',<sup>276</sup> the LSA called for 'all progressive artists to join with [them] and place their art at the service of the working class'.<sup>277</sup> They also claimed that 'aesthetically good art can only be proletarian socialist in reflective content (and so progressive in effective content) and realist in form – can only, in other words, take the form of socialist realism'.<sup>278</sup> While there were supporters of several diverse political ideologies within the Union, there was no doctrinaire call for uniformity in artistic output – unlike the LSA, none of the Union members attempted to dictate what was 'good art', or what type of art was worth creating. Commitment and direct action were the only qualities the Union asked of its members, and it opposed rigid definitions regarding artists and art practice. Instead they invited

all those who feel themselves committed to being 'artists' (however they understand that) first (that is, enough to want an artist's rather than a teacher's or any specifically commodity- oriented union) and who are also interested enough now in our concerns, proposals and direction as currently emerging from work parties, to join with us in our present form.<sup>279</sup>

The Union thus celebrated diversity in language and modes of working, encouraged equal opportunity and refrained from promoting any one type of art. Walker acknowledges some members sought to make the Union a revolutionary organisation, arguing that trade unions were essentially reformist organisations with limited value and reach.<sup>280</sup> Even so, from the viewpoint of the LSA, all Union artists were 'petty-bourgeois individuals haunted by the fear of proletarianisation', whom they characterised as 'ultra-left, pseudo-revolutionaries, Trotskyists',<sup>281</sup> and LSA members joined the Union's meetings in an effort to sway members into becoming revolutionaries. In an effort to guide the Union away from 'empty agitation', the LSA called on its members to 'proletarianise' by becoming part of the working class, and to develop their 'base organs for struggle through which they learn the A, B, C of class struggle through day-to-day bread and butter issues'.<sup>282</sup> But though shared under the title 'A Fraternal Message of Solidarity and Support', the LSA's critique of the Union was essentially antagonistic, and soon became even more acerbic and aimed directly at individual members.

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 51

<sup>276</sup> League of Socialist Artists, Publications, 'Essays on Art and Imperialism', based on lectures given by Maureen Scott and Mike Baker in 1972, TGA 20026/1/2–10, 11.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>278</sup> LSA, 'Theses of Art: Socialist Artists', League of Socialist Artists, Material relating to the League of Socialist Artists 1971–1977, TGA 20026/1/2–10, 3.

<sup>279</sup> Artist's Union, 'Membership Working Party Report', 23 March 1972, TGA 200116/2/1

<sup>280</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 85–86.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>282</sup> 'A Fraternal Message of Solidarity and Support to the Artist's Union From the League of Socialist Artist's', *Communard*, TGA 20026/1/9, 2.

In February 1976, the LSA explicitly attacked the Union by accusing Marc Chaimowicz of being a 'degenerate, who is also a sinecurist of considerable skill and ability', and the Arts Council of awarding Chaimowicz £950 and thus facilitating the 'openly aberrative field' of performance art.<sup>283</sup> On performance art, the LSA stated: 'Clearly no sane or reasonable group, agency or individual could be found willing to give a penny to the Arts Council or the GLAA to spend on such filth. Only the beneficent capitalist state would be "enlightened enough" to fulfil such a function'.<sup>284</sup> For the LSA, Union artists were more interested in what they defined as 'art-careerism' and the pseudo-socialisation of art for the sole purpose of advancing their careers financially.<sup>285</sup>

Just as there were critics, there were various organisations that supported the Union, and several letters of encouragement were excerpted in the first newsletter of the Union. Among these was one from Mike Cooley, former-president of the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section, who said: 'The establishment of this Union is yet another sign of the growing awareness of white-collar workers of the need to engage in [working] class struggle'.<sup>286</sup> Another similar sentiment was expressed by Orhan Taylan, vice-president of the Turkish Visual Artist's Union, who wrote:

The most important danger of course is that an Artist's Union may be isolated from concrete political work. This danger will lead all artists' groups to pseudo-revolutionary, reactionary artistic manifestations, meaning nothing to anybody but themselves. The relation of your union to the Labour Movement has given me hope and joy.<sup>287</sup>

Taylan's letter wasn't solely a letter of support, but also recognition of the primary logic behind the Union, which was to recalibrate the artist's position in line with the labour movement. The founding members of the Union knew that it would have been 'comparatively easy' to register themselves as a society of artists, yet this would have resulted in total separation from the trade union structure, and therefore the labour movement, which was contrary to their *raison d'être*.<sup>288</sup>

Another continuing effort of the Union was to forge relations with other groups and expand its network of artists, a goal that was congruent with expanding the breadth of artistic practice pursued through artist projects. While not their primary concern (as it was for the AWC), the protection of artist's rights, amelioration of working conditions and abolition of sexual and racial discrimination within the art community was still within the Union's remit, an objective for which reaching and accommodating as many artists as possible was crucial. In fact, they even rotated the city in which the monthly branch meetings took place in order to accommodate artists from outside London.<sup>289</sup> The Union organised several national membership campaigns and, in a paper prepared for the 1973

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<sup>283</sup> LSA, 'Class War in the Arts! The LSA v The 'Art and Culture' Agencies of Monopoly Capital', booklet, TGA 20026/1/11-19, 1.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>286</sup> Artist's Union, 'First Newsletter of the Artist's Union', 1.

<sup>287</sup> Orhan Taylan, *Art and Artists*, November, 1972. In 'First Newsletter of the Artist's Union', 1.

<sup>288</sup> Policy Group, 'Artist's Union: Interim Report', TGA 200116/2/1

<sup>289</sup> Following a national membership campaign in 1973, branches were formed in the North West, South West, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, Reading and Wessex.

campaign, described how they proposed to change the conditions faced by artists: ‘...in cooperation with the relevant organisations, we will also want to negotiate on behalf of the large number of artists precariously situated in part-time teaching posts... There is strength in numbers’.<sup>290</sup> In order to fight for the rights of the artist, they needed as many artists as possible to join the fight – more members meant more power and a stronger base for negotiation. In 1973, after only one year, the Union reported having 500 members, representing a sevenfold increase on the initial 70 artists who attended the founding conference in 1972.<sup>291</sup>

Union member-recruitment strategies included supporting community artists’ campaigns, connecting with other unions and attending conferences. A Union newsletter was produced by members, with the printing costs covered by membership fees and fund-raising events. However, Union efforts weren’t always welcomed by the state. When the Union set up a table for member recruitment and information outside the Hayward Gallery in London during ‘The New Art’ exhibition in 1972, they were told to leave by Arts Council staff.<sup>292</sup> The Hayward Gallery was managed by the Arts Council from its founding in 1968 to 1986, and although no different from unions passing out leaflets outside factories, the Union’s act of setting up a table to distribute information was deemed ‘self-promotion’ unrelated to the exhibition. The Arts Council claimed that their position was due to the GLC lease, which stipulated that the gallery was not allowed to permit ‘any kind of promotion that is not specifically related to events in the gallery’.<sup>293</sup> Disagreeing with this statement, a press release was issued stating that the Union ‘believes that on the contrary, it is quite definitely “related to events in the gallery”’, in that it was an organisation which existed to promote and protect the interests of artists.<sup>294</sup> According to Gerry Hunt, regardless of the Council ban, they still managed to sell hundreds of copies of Union reports while also recruiting over a hundred new members, following discussions with visitors about the policies of the Union.<sup>295</sup>

Widening the reach of the Union with respect to empowering all cultural producers, whether they were members or not, was crucial:

We sincerely believe that in this present critical time solidarity is the prime, urgent necessity – to save jobs, to safeguard the arts, to broaden and increase the basis of state and local

Government patronage – and we therefore hope that this delegate meeting would produce plans for future action to defend the varied interest of all workers in the arts’.<sup>296</sup>

Recruiting more members and collaborating with other groups were felt to be necessary to influence systematic change. As part of this, the Union also reviewed its definition of membership, focusing away from the idealistic but elusive ‘artist as a liberating force for social change’, to a more vocationally and

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<sup>290</sup> ‘Artist’s Union National Membership Campaign’. In Papers relating to the London Branch of the Artist’s Union, 1973–1982, TGA 200116/2/12/2

<sup>291</sup> Gerry Hunt, ‘Report from the Exhibition Workshop’, Artist’s Union, Artist’s Union Newsletter, 1972, 6.

<sup>292</sup> Forkert, ‘Artists and the Labour Movement’, 59.

<sup>293</sup> Artist’s Union, ‘Artist’s Union Defies Arts Council Ban’, press release dated 15 August 1972.

<sup>294</sup> Artist’s Union, ‘Artist’s Union Defies Arts Council Ban’, 1972

<sup>295</sup> Hunt, ‘Report from the Exhibition Workshop’, 1972, 6.

<sup>296</sup> APG, TGA 20042/3/3/3/1/2

economically solid definition of the artist.<sup>297</sup> The revised definition included all practitioners in the visual arts, and therefore embraced those in trades such as drawing, printmaking, art printing, advertising, textile and industrial design, even though some of these were covered by existing industrial unions; self-taught artists; and artists who derived their income from full- or part-time employment. The only groups excluded were amateur artists and people employed in non-art related sectors. While this redefinition was in line with the Union's objective of establishing the artist's right to exist as a worker whose primary activity was the production of art, with no obligation to take work unrelated to their training, it was a move away from its argument made in 1972 for a union specific to artists. A large section of the membership was already made up of artists who derived all or part of their livelihood from alternative employment (such as teaching), yet artists were economically and existentially distinct from other workers of society. Even if their aspirations were aligned, the nature of artistic work placed it outside the classic wage-labour-capital relationship. The position of the Union was therefore unlike those of traditional bodies formed to represent workers and collectively bargain with employers. Since the economics of art making was different from coal mining or making metal boxes, a union that supported the traditional model of employment based on the relationship of capital (represented by the employer) and labour (represented by the union) was unsustainable.

The need to revise the definition of artist was an indication of the rising stakes of survival for artists, and, perhaps more importantly, of the changing face of the workforce. As expressed earlier, I argue that this social moment indicated a shift, a transitional moment, in western society and artistic practice. Structural changes in industry, partly motivated by profit expectations and partly by technological advancements, brought equally permanent changes for society. Boltanski and Chiapello state:

The multiple shifts [during the 1970s] changed the character of the whole society without a coup d'état, revolution or commotion, without wide-ranging legislative measures, and virtually without debate – or, in retrospect at least, without a debate commensurate with the upheaval that occurred.<sup>298</sup>

The Union and its attempt to conceive the artist as worker/proletarian foundered on precisely the shift to a neoliberal and deindustrialised political economy in Britain that began in the 1970s. In this respect, artists of the time could be seen as the canary in the coalmine: the demise of the Union towards the latter half of the decade was indicative of the wider decline of union power. I posit that projects emerged in dialogue with, and possibly out of, the collapse of the Artist's Union. The grassroots *modus operandi* of the Union informed the projects its members initiated, and developed both in terms of their collaborative methods and in terms of the solution-orientated characteristics of projects. The Union sought to respond to issues impacting artists, and projects emulated this strategy.

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<sup>297</sup> 'The Artist's Union Invitation' to the Introductory Meeting, TGA 200116/2/12/2

<sup>298</sup> Boltanski, Chiapello, and Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 194.

Artist projects embodied post-industrial modes of working, where the artist became an entrepreneur negotiating directly with the market – more like a precariat than a proletariat. I use the term precariat as it is defined by Guy Standing, as ‘a class-in-the-making, if not yet a class-for-itself, in the Marxian sense of that term’, with a ‘temporary labouring status’ and ‘precarious income’.<sup>299</sup> As discussed in the Introduction, these artists’ education did not prepare them to survive under conditions resembling what Boltanski and Chiapello term the ‘projective city’, where the most valuable characteristics are adaptability, flexibility, mobility and the ability to communicate, and work together.<sup>300</sup> Although Boltanski and Chiapello’s term refers to the 1990s, I argue that the financial precariousness artists faced during the 1970s forced them to be flexible – to adapt and collaborate. Like the projects it developed, the foundation (and demise) of the Union was a natural extension of the ethos of this moment. Just as the workshop aspect of the Union facilitated the conception of projects such as *Women and Work*, the principles of collaboration, horizontality and solution-orientation that characterised artist projects emerged from the particular history of the Union, and is testament to the organic (historical and conceptual) link between them.

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<sup>299</sup> Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London, UK; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014: 5–12.

<sup>300</sup> Boltanski, Chiapello, and Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 103–121.



## Merging practice with bureaucracy

In 1978, the artist David Binnington wrote that it was imperative for the artist to

regard the obstructions in the path towards becoming a vital, functioning member of society as formidable, and his or her present products or activities as having little more immediate effect than a “fart for peace” (spray-painted message on the Hammersmith Flyover) – but even that is better than silence.<sup>301</sup>

Six years had passed since the foundation of the Union, and the question still remained: how to reconnect artists with society at large? The general sentiment within the membership was that, without tangible results, the Union was nothing but an association of artists disconnected from society.

The essential issue for the Union was the alienating effects of capitalism, both in terms of the relation between the artist and his/her practice, and the relation between the artist and society. The end of private patronage by the nineteenth century had ended up creating a more rigid art community bound by an elitist art market. When the widening scope and reach of art education in Britain was added to that equation, living art was reduced to a ‘luxury commodity’, mainly produced by the small minority of artists able to earn a living through art practice.<sup>302</sup> For Union members, the rise of the art monopoly – run by a system of state and private patronage, which managed their own standards of taste – had contributed to the large-scale commercialisation of art and the inevitable situation in which artists found themselves in the class struggle, both morally and economically.<sup>303</sup>

The weakness of the British economy during the 1970s meant that the chief source of patronage was still the state. The small section of the art community that could keep their head above water was represented by private galleries, and was therefore committed to ‘the demands of establishment taste and marketable fashion’.<sup>304</sup> As such, demanding reform rather than revolution was a logical and attainable goal. Just as William Blake condemned the Royal Academy at the turn of the nineteenth century, crying ‘Liberality! We want not Liberality! We want a fair price, and proportionate value, and a general demand for Art!’, Union artists demanded fair treatment and an improvement in living standards for artists.<sup>305</sup> Allying with the labour movement seemed an ideal route for reformation, yet there was a contradiction: ‘In a society based upon labour, the work for which [artists] are best fitted, by choice, aptitude and training, is no longer regarded as socially necessary labour’.<sup>306</sup> Since artists were further dislocated from society by the existence of an art monopoly with limited scope and reach, negotiating a position for artists based on labour was difficult and, ultimately,

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<sup>301</sup> David Binnington in *Art for Whom?*, exhibition catalogue, 55.

<sup>302</sup> Living artists received less than 1% of the Arts Council budget in 1972–73. Patronage Workshop Contribution to the ‘Culture and Crisis’ Meeting, 30 November – 1 December 1974, TGA 200116/2/9/4

<sup>303</sup> Artist's Union, ‘The Special Contradiction in which artists find themselves’, TGA 200116/2/1/3

<sup>304</sup> Artist's Union, TGA 200116/2/1/3, 3

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 2–3.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 3.

incongruous, since artistic labour was distinct from industrial labour. The founding of the Artists' Union in 1972 aimed to tackle this contradiction on two levels: economically, by increasing employers and patronage, and ideologically, by reconnecting artists with society. While this seemed an ideal solution at the beginning of the 1970s, by the end of the decade plunging finances and energy levels were causing the Union to fracture into factions, as demonstrated by the failure of workshops and the diminishing numbers of members willing to commit time and effort to the Union. Two years before its official disbanding, the executive committee stated that the Union had a 'chronic need for manpower'.<sup>307</sup>

One of the ambitions of Union members had been to resolve the contradiction between the concept of unionism and the traditionally individual role of the artist. Admittedly, many artists were reluctant to join due to their understanding of unions as organisations that 'enforce[d] restrictive practices on their membership'.<sup>308</sup> This belief was also exacerbated by growing antagonism towards unions generally at the end of the decade. Writing in July 1981, artist (and Union member) Anthony Dorrell admitted:

I am not implying that our ideas, in 1974, were anything like a watertight cure-all, a panacea for the ills of British Art. In these matters we were inexperienced; we were confronting a number of quite well-meaning and adept bureaucrats and middle-ranking politicians whose time was spent doing little else but formulate proposals regarding this and that; we ourselves performed as conscientious but reluctant servants of the labour movement; we did what we could, to the best of our ability...<sup>309</sup>

Dorrell's argument reflects the financially precarious position that afflicted most artists, and highlights the fact that the Union was founded 'to seek a way for artists to live', even though it was only by the mid-to-late 1970s that 'the modest but earth-shattering notion of a national wages structure for artists was spelled out'.<sup>310</sup> Dorrell's emphasis on the 'reluctance' with which the Union was acting is also important for understanding the reformist bent of the actions it took during the 1970s. This isn't to say its members were inefficient or naïve; aligning with the labour movement was a practical move as well as an ideological one. Building on Gramsci's argument for the necessity of a revolutionary culture for revolutionary theory to exist, Perry Anderson notes:

A political science capable of guiding the working class movement to final victory will only be born within a general intellectual matrix which challenges bourgeois ideology in every sector of thought and represents a decisive, hegemonic alternative to the cultural status quo.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Artist's Union, '28th National Executive Committee Meeting', 20 June 1981, TGA 20016/2/3/32, 4.

<sup>308</sup> Peter Hill, 'The Artists Union', *Artists Newsletter*, no.1, September 1980, 17.

<sup>309</sup> Anthony Dorrell, 'The Year 1974'. In Anthony Dorrell's recollections of the AU's campaigns in 1974 for reform of the Arts Council and a delegate meeting titled 'Culture and the Crisis' [1974–1981], TGA 200116/2/19, 1.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>311</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *NLR* 1/50, July–August 1968, 3.

The Union was therefore artists' way of challenging bourgeois ideology, through 'join[ing] with the new forces rising from below that seek to overthrow the degenerate ruling class',<sup>312</sup> and disassociating themselves from the cultural status quo.

By the end of the decade, the Union was still working as a pressure group for artists with 'a national structure and network of branches, that held an annual conference, had subcommittees concerned with contracts, social security and taxes, and was represented on bodies concerned with copyright and censorship', according to the chair, Charles Gosford.<sup>313</sup> The Union had also achieved a 'considerable amount of credibility' with organisations such as the British Copyright Council, the International Association of Art and the Art Registration Committee, and was taking initiatives with the Visual Artists Rights Society and the Association of Artists and Designers in Wales.<sup>314</sup>

Meanwhile, much of what was being done by the Union, including membership recruitment, went unseen by many artists due to limited publicity. One London-based artist told the Secretariat of the Union's London branch that 'it was almost impossible to join the Artist's Union; it seemed to be invisible'.<sup>315</sup> Many artists complained that Union offices were unreachable by telephone, to the dismay of those who sought information and/or membership.<sup>316</sup> With a limited budget and waning energy levels, the Union was unable either to publicise its efforts effectively, or to mobilise artists to its cause. In addition, existing members seemed to be too busy with their personal responsibilities to devote time to it. In 1979, the London Branch could only gather eight members out of 75 to its meetings, prompting Richard Chapman to write a letter titled 'Narcolepsy in the London Branch', exclaiming, 'London members only deserve the sort of Branch that they are prepared to work for, on the present showing they deserve no Branch at all'.<sup>317</sup> In 1981, Gosford suggested a restructuring effort, which would involve hiring a paid member to work part-time at the Union office to supplement voluntary work done by members.<sup>318</sup> Yet this remained no more than a suggestion.

Mary Kelly points out that 'there was really no future' for the Union in the end because it was small,<sup>319</sup> and eventually a final vote was taken to decide whether it should remain autonomous or become part of a bigger union. The decision was to remain autonomous and, when pressure on the trade unions increased following the arrival of Conservatives in government, the Union's end was inevitable. Moreover, the Union was a secondary concern for most members.<sup>320</sup> In 1974, Su Braden argued that the organisation had been unable to rouse artists in Britain 'from their apathy in any great numbers',<sup>321</sup> a situation that was still critical at the end of the decade. However, this wasn't because of any fault with the Union's founding ideals, but simply because they had lost momentum. In the end, factionalism, dissent and lethargy spelled the end of the Union, which could find no common ground

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<sup>312</sup> 'Introduction to Artist's Union', 1972 TGA 200116/2/1/2

<sup>313</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 86.

<sup>314</sup> Chairman's statement to the AU, National Executive Meeting, 2 May 1981, TGA 20016/2/3/29

<sup>315</sup> Daniel Dahl, 'Secretariat's Report to the London Branch of the A.U.', April 1978, TGA 200116/2/12/50 4.

<sup>316</sup> The Artist's Union's Chairman's Report, 1.

<sup>317</sup> Richard Chapman, 'Narcolepsy in London Branch (a personal comment)', January 1979, TGA 200116/2/12/59, 2.

<sup>318</sup> The Artist's Union's Chairman's Report, 1–2.

<sup>319</sup> Mary Kelly, interview with the author, 29 September 2018, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Su Braden, 'A "Living" Wage?', *Time Out*, 21–27 June 1974, 16.

on which to unite the membership. Even the workshops, which were considered its most successful endeavour, contributed to its dissolution. Devoted as they were to specific issues, these separate working groups had failed to view the Union as an organic system, with no subgroup more important than the other. Consequently, instead of promoting collective action, the workshops heightened factionalism, especially when certain workshops and/or members failed to fulfil their responsibilities (such as to arrange and attend meetings, create proposals and produce meeting reports). Trouble was evident in the Patronage Workshop's letter to the membership, which read: 'If a workshop within this Union cannot act with integrity and as an instrument of the whole Union without its brief specified on a piece of paper, then it seems artists still have not realised the true value of collective action'.<sup>322</sup> Moreover, even discussions of race and gender could become contentious; for instance, men weren't allowed in the Women's Workshop meetings.<sup>323</sup> Perhaps it had been over-ambitious in attempting to act as a pseudo-political party that sought to influence government policy and the mass media, instead of adopting a more realistic strategy to promote the rights of its members and negotiate on their behalf. For Peter Dunn, it was this 'protracted bureaucratic struggle' that consumed all the time and energy of the Union.<sup>324</sup>

Whatever its shortcomings and successes, the Artist's Union had failed to assess the character of its membership, which reflected the bigger problem of defining the artist's class. Although the majority of the membership belonged to a middle class background – in between the capitalist and working classes – in the socio-economic context of the 1970s, most artists were obliged to work for a wage since they were unable to make a living by selling their work. Caught between the values of their middle class backgrounds and their (conceptual) status as wagedworkers, artists had two options: succumb to the capitalist structure of the art monopoly, or unite with their fellow artists in collective action. While partaking in the art monopoly was hardly ideal for any of these politicised artists (who had established the Union precisely because they were discontented with the monopolistic market), I claim that maintaining a balance between their political and cultural struggles through the Union was an impossible task because most still had to make a living through their practice and/or support themselves with other work. The Union required time and effort, which many members could not provide, and the declining power of unions during the latter half of the decade also helped determined the Union's demise. In this respect, rather than focusing on the diminishing efficacy of the Union before its disbanding in 1983, it is more useful to consider its role in the evolution of artist projects.

For John Roberts, the 'so-called economic rationalisation' that Britain witnessed in the 1980s resulted in a blockade of new forms of cultural production, distribution and thinking, as well as of the 'potentially enabling powers of such work and initiatives within the *culture as a whole*'.<sup>325</sup> Yet this wasn't an abrupt change following the introduction of Thatcher's policies. Labour policy in the second half of the 1970s was as inimical to democratic cultural initiatives as that of the government that

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<sup>322</sup> Carol B. Wyatt, Patronage Workshop, 'Workshop Autonomy', TGA 200116/2/9/3

<sup>323</sup> Conrad Atkinson, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>324</sup> Peter Dunn quoted in Forkert, 'Artists and the Labour Movement', 60.

<sup>325</sup> Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art, Cultural Politics*, 5.

followed, as illustrated by the Callaghan government's 8 per cent cut of public spending during 1976–77.<sup>326</sup> Kenneth Robinson, the Arts Council Chairman in 1978 – formerly Labour Minister of Health – had shelved 'Labour's Manifesto promise to reform the Arts Council as an "epithet"', stating that those advocating change 'cannot have thought seriously about the subject', as reported by John Pilger.<sup>327</sup> Moreover, these weren't isolated events by the Labour Party; the former chairmen of the Arts Council, Lords Goodman and Gibson, had also opposed implementation of Labour Party policy, and persuaded Harold Wilson likewise.<sup>328</sup> Even without waning energy and systematic failings, the Union had been treading on difficult ground due to the shortcomings of its allies, the Labour government and the TUC.

The Artist's Union was a crucial artist initiative of the decade, not only for its historical significance but also for its role in promoting the artist's project as a form of practice. And while its demise was indicative of the decade that followed in terms of the victory of individualism associated with neoliberalism and the end of unionisation, the formation of the Union has much to tell about the needs, ambitions and strategies of politicised artists, and the projects they developed in the 1970s. I investigate two of these in the final two chapters. following the next chapter, which will look at the subject of collaboration, as demonstrated by Stephen Willats' *West London Social Resource Project*, despite the fact that this artist was not affiliated with the Union. The fourth chapter will examine *Women and Work*, a project that came directly out of the Union. Initiated in the Women's Workshop as a collective and long-term endeavour, the project was founded on horizontal principles of a common ground shared by the three artists.. The final case-study chapter will focus on Stuart Brisley's *The Peterlee Project*, which followed in the footsteps of the Union in terms of pursuing a democratic and leaderless process.

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<sup>326</sup> Pete Green, 'British Capitalism and the Thatcher Years', *International Socialism*, no. 35 (Summer 1987), 3–70.

<sup>327</sup> Pilger, 71.

<sup>328</sup> *ibid.*

**Re-modelling Social Process: Stephen Willats's *West London Social Resource Project* (1972)**

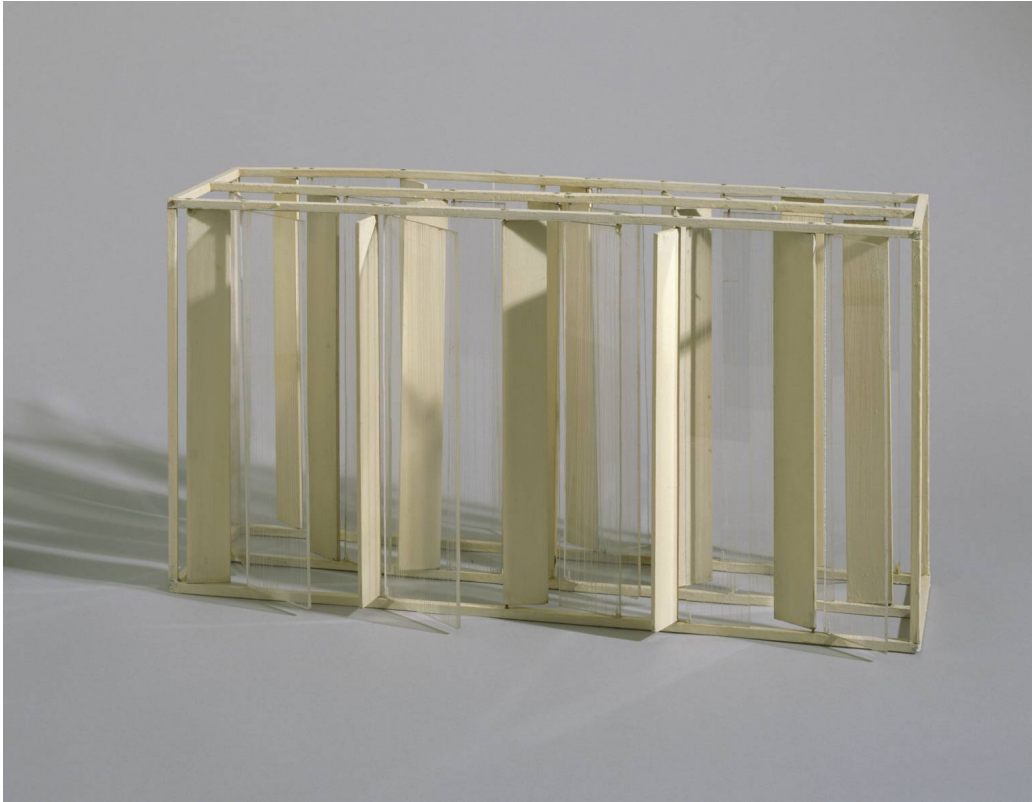
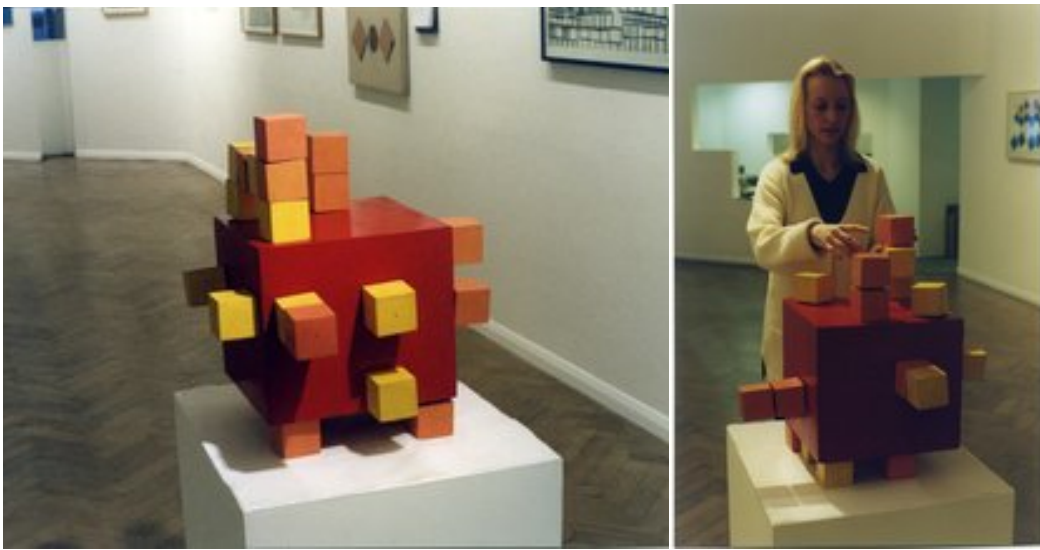


Fig. 5 Stephen Willats, *Light Modulator No. 2*, 1962. Tate Museum Collection, T12332. Photo: courtesy Stephen Willats.



Figs 6 & 7 Stephen Willats, *Colour Variable No. 3*, 1963. In *Stephen Willats – Concerning Our Present Way of Living*, Whitechapel Art Gallery & Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1979. London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1979.

## Art as a social process

Since the early 1970s, Stephen Willats has been working on projects where he examines social relations in open-ended processes – often with collaborators – with the intention of demonstrating that an artist can communicate meaningfully with people outside the art world. Grounding his art practice in these research-oriented projects, he seeks to investigate how people's perceptions and judgements influence their behaviour, and how social constructs can be rethought and transformed. With an artistic career that spans nearly six decades and numerous projects, Willats has set out to demonstrate what he calls 'the externalisation of art', by which he means a quest to situate art as an integral part of people's social reality and to transcend the boundary of art's social environment, typically confined to art institutions and galleries.<sup>329</sup> A considerable number of his works are collaborative (such as *the West London Social Resource Project* (1972), *Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project* (1973), *From a Coded World* (1977), *Inside an Ocean* (1979), etc.), while those that are not (works from the 1960s such as *Light Modulator No. 2* (1962) (Fig. 5), an outdoor sculpture of moving vertical panels, Perspex and wood through which people could pass and interact, or *Colour Variable No. 3* (1963) (Fig. 6 & 7), a moveable hand construction made of painted wood) rely heavily on the interaction of viewers. Willats's methods are experimental: he uses sociology, computer technology, cybernetics and semiotics to create politically and socially engaged works where audience engagement and input is imperative for the project's operation.<sup>330</sup>

Starting at the beginning of the 1970s, Willats worked on a number of extended projects, including: *The West London Social Resource Project* (1972), which took place in four demographically distinct neighbourhoods in west London over a six-month period and asked residents to fill out daily questionnaires about their homes and neighbourhoods, as well as their social relationships within these environments; the *Insight Development Project for Oxford* (1972, in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford), in which 120 Oxford residents were involved in a multi-part questionnaire about their physical and social environments during October, with their responses displayed in the museum; the *Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project* (1973), which took place over four days during the Edinburgh and Leith festivals and involved participants from four areas in questionnaires about their environments; *From a Coded World* (1977), which asked Perivale locals to re-think their views on their community and environment as a way of transforming their wider perceptions about society and its values; and *Inside an Ocean* (1979), a project Willats developed with the Whitechapel Gallery and residents of Ocean Estate near Mile End Road in east London, with the objective of fostering a relationship between them. During the 1980s, Willats continued to create long-term projects with residents of public housing estates across Britain, including *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers' Club* (1981–2), a project focusing on the wasteland outside the Avondale estate in west London created with local

<sup>329</sup> Stephen Willats, *Art and Social Function*. London: Ellipsis, 2000, 7–14.

<sup>330</sup> For a period during the mid-1960s, Stephen Willats defined himself as a conceptual designer rather than an artist – much like Stuart Brisley who was adamant in defining his role as a consultant in the *Peterlee Project*. The choice of these descriptors is indicative of the expansion of the terms in which an artist's role was defined from the mid-1960s onwards.



teenager Pat Purdy; *The Kids are in the Street* (1981–2), about a skateboard park near the Branden estate and the tensions that led to the Brixton riots of 1981; and *Brentford Towers* (1985), for which he worked with estate residents to map the interiors of their homes. Although each project focused on a different area and community, they all involved working with local people over an extended period to explore their environments, neighbourhoods and communities, and how these could be transformed. All these projects attempted to demonstrate that artists can communicate with people outside the restricted and elitist world of art through social process.

This chapter focuses principally on *the West London Social Resource Project* (1972) – Willats's first fully-fledged, collaborative project that focused on a specified area and represented a cross-section of society. Like his subsequent projects, this example followed the horizontal approach advocated by other artists discussed in this thesis and sought to understand what people felt about their immediate and wider environments and communities and how they wanted to improve them. It therefore encouraged participants to become more aware of their social and living conditions and to empower them to change them. It is this focus on participation that informs my definition of the artist project as a process that extends the artist's role beyond the conventional concerns of art and the institutions in which it operates. Through the *West London Social Resource Project*, Willats sought to create a model for transforming society by awakening people to the social mechanisms and behavioural patterns present in their environments, and to motivate them to take control through participation and direct action.

Before exploring the *West London Social Resource Project* in detail, it is useful to consider Waldemar Januszczak's assessment of Willats as 'an observer of the working classes, a collector of interesting types, a quaintly old-fashioned artist'.<sup>331</sup> While inaccurate, Januszczak's assertion is worth addressing because most of Willats's projects have indeed taken place in council estates or in neighbourhoods predominantly occupied by working class communities. Like an anthropologist, the artist in such instances surveys the estate community, its behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, based on the assumption that it has limited connection to art. Yet Willats did not just observe the residents of these estates, he also collaborated with them to create displays that incorporated image and text over extended periods, thereby promoting their agency and autonomy beyond the limits of their daily lives. However, it is problematic that Willats, a non-working class individual, made it his business to 'observe the working classes', with all the assumptions this implies and the risk that it would pigeonhole people and reinforce social differences. I propose that the reason Willats focused on council estates during the 1980s was because their presumed social homogeneity provided a contrast between residents' daily lives and the act of participation required for the project. For Grant Kester, the collaborative element in Willats' practice created 'defamiliarisation', which helped residents 'distance themselves from immersion in the life-world of the estate and to reflect back critically on the network of visible and invisible forces that pattern that world'.<sup>332</sup> In fact, the *West London Social Resource Project*

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<sup>331</sup> Waldemar Januszczak. 'Stephen Willats'. *The Guardian* (1959–2003), 6 Jan 1984: 8.

<sup>332</sup> Grant H. Kester. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013, 93.

included participants from a wider cross-section of society than just a council estate and represented various social classes, as Willats hoped to create a multilateral relationship with people.<sup>333</sup> In that sense, the project advocated an educative and horizontal power dynamic, and was congruent with Gramsci's 'common school' idea of education,<sup>334</sup> in contrast to schools for different social groups that were 'intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate'.<sup>335</sup> The idea of the common school was similar to the comprehensive education ideal in the UK, except that it began with primary education. Based on egalitarian principles, a common school would form the individual 'as a person capable of thinking, studying, and ruling – or controlling those who rule'.<sup>336</sup> In my view, Willats's wish to encourage people to think, study and voice their opinions and, in the process, transform social relations, made the *West London Social Resource Project* comparable to the notion of the common school.

The *West London Social Resource Project* can be considered the culmination of Willats's artistic training and kinetic exercises during the 1960s. I consider his object-based works made during his time as a student at Ealing School of Art (1962–3), and shortly after, as preliminary investigations of social relations on account of their participatory characteristics. The Ealing School of Art had an inventive approach to art education, incorporating different disciplines from fashion to music, and from film to fine art. The school's lecturers during the 1960s included Gustav Metzger and systems artist Roy Ascott, while students included the illustrator Alan Lee and musicians Pete Townshend, Freddie Mercury (then Bulsara) and Ronnie Wood. At Ealing, Willats was also heavily influenced by Ascott's Groundcourse created in 1963 as a sort of foundation course, which emphasised theory over practice and viewed the artist as part of a social system that could be changed or restructured. Ascott's diagrammatic Groundcourse Mind Map referred to society as an organism, stating that it required 'vigilant inspection and a viable programme for planning at all points'; and to art as governance, with which the artist can 'feed back information to effect social reform'.<sup>337</sup> According to Emily Pethick, Ascott sought to stimulate his students' 'consciousness with "behavioural" exercises, games and matrices that were aimed to shake up preconceptions and established patterns'. He also gave them

exercises [that] included perceptual problems, such as describing the world from the perspective of a sponge, or drawing the room in reverse perspective, and light-handling classes where they had to control a limited environment with lights, coloured filters, lenses and screens.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Willats's *Insight Development Project for Oxford* and the *Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project* also involved a comparably wide social selection of participants.

<sup>334</sup> A. Gramsci. *Selections from The Prison Notebooks*. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, eds. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, 40.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Roy Ascott. *Mind Map Groundcourse*. Ealing, 1963.

<sup>338</sup> Emily Pethick. 'Degree Zero'. *Frieze.com*. 2 September 2006 <<https://frieze.com/article/degree-zero>> [Accessed 30 November 2017]

Building on these exercises, the students were asked to create problems in groups and often for several weeks. During their second year, students would act as someone completely different from themselves over a period of ten weeks to observe different behavioural patterns, perspectives and social relations.

Following Ascott's course, Willats began to develop his phenomenological and cognitive concerns through a growing interest in cybernetics and learning theory (how information is received and digested). He had encountered these disciplines at Ealing and used them to create *Colour Variable No. 3* (1963), a moveable hand construction made up of a 35.5 cm red cube with smaller moveable cubes protruding from its sides, which required the viewer to decide on the configuration of the structure and note the changes made on sheets next to the work, thus rendering them a participant in the work. The participant could also explain their decision, thereby comparing their arrangements with those made by others.<sup>339</sup> As a whole, the work was designed 'to involve the participant in making relationships between perception, decision-making and self-determined behaviour'.<sup>340</sup> In that sense, it resembled Ascott's exercises involving perceptual problems, in terms of the way participants transformed the work and its relationship with the environment.

However, Ascott's influence on Willats's practice was more significant than has been expressed in the scholarship to date. For instance, Andrew Wilson contends that rather than an introduction, the Groundcourse acted as 'confirmation of a way of thinking that he had already been developing for himself'.<sup>341</sup> I would argue, however, that the Groundcourse provided both a scheme (behavioural exercises and perceptual problems) and the foundation for his projects because this was the first and only formal art training Willats received.<sup>342</sup> As opposed to a 'confirmation', I suggest that Ascott's Groundcourse in fact opened up a brand new way of thinking for Willats – whose practice was previously limited to creating portraits, notational drawings and writing manifestoes – where education, and equally, art, could be considered a mechanism that connected individuals (students and teachers) in a network where work was produced collaboratively, and that contrasted with the traditional unidirectional teacher–student relationship. Willats would advance this approach in his own teaching, and later in his projects in terms of his relationship with the audience. For Willats, education facilitated a different ideology of society, one 'of self-organisation based on one-layer networks between people, reflecting mutualism and co-operation between participants'.<sup>343</sup> Such an approach to education

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<sup>339</sup> *Colour Variable No. 3* (1963).

<sup>340</sup> Stephen Willats. 'Concerning Our Present Way of Living'. Whitechapel Art Gallery and Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum. Eindhoven, 1979, 14.

<sup>341</sup> Andrew Wilson. 'Stephen Willats. Work 1962–69'. In Stephen Willats and Andrew Wilson, eds. *Control. Stephen Willats. Work 1962–69*. London: Raven Row, 2014 (to accompany the exhibition *Control – Stephen Willats. Work 1962–69, [... Accompanies the Exhibition Control – Stephen Willats. Work 1962–69, 23 January to 30 March 2014, Raven Row, London]*). London: Raven Row, 2014.

<sup>342</sup> He had worked as a gallery assistant at the Drian Galleries in London from 1958 onwards and was introduced to a network of international artists, including constructivists such as Yaacov Agam and Gyula Kosice, and a year before he started the Groundcourse, Willats attended evening life-drawing classes at Ealing. See Willats and Emily Pethick. 'Conversations between Stephen Willats and Emily Pethick'. In *Control*: 68–76.

<sup>343</sup> Willats and Bronac Ferran, 'The Conceptual Designer in 1965: Stephen Willats interviewed by Bronac Ferran'. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 42:1–2, 2017, 208.

3. Re-modelling Social Process: Stephen Willats's *West London Social Resource Project* (1972)

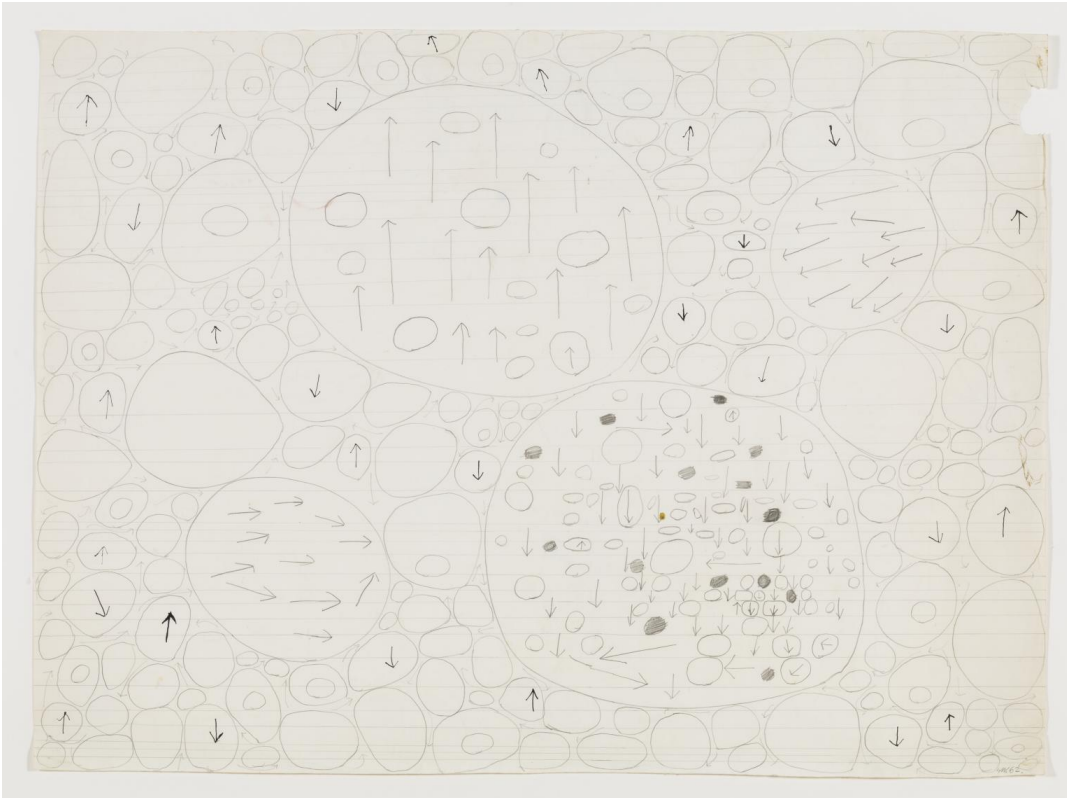


Fig. 8 *Organic Exercise No. 3, Series 1*, 1962. Tate Museum Collection, T14920.



Fig. 9 *Manual Variable No 1* and *No 2*, 1963. Image from the exhibition at Raven Row, London, 23 January – 30 March 2014. Photo: courtesy Marcus J Leith.

also mirrors the importance Gramsci assigned to the common school, which sought to give students the 'fundamental power to think' and therefore take action.<sup>344</sup>

Willats's first solo exhibition took place at the Chester Beatty Research Institute, a prominent cancer research hospital in London, in 1964. The exhibition presented a new series of drawings titled 'Organic Exercise' (1962), made up of two large circles filled with, and surrounded by, freely drawn circles in pencil (Fig. 8), along with drawings and notes on the 'Manual Variables' (1962–64) (Fig. 9) made up of moveable blocks. Living in Chelsea near the Institute, Willats was introduced to Dr Forrester, a resident doctor who had organised a gallery in the building out of interest in what was then going on in the art world.<sup>345</sup> It was fitting that Willats's first solo exhibition was instigated by doctors and scientists rather than members of the art world, since Willats would spend the subsequent decade initiating projects that sought to expand the remit of art by involving non-artists. In a text accompanying the works on show, Willats stated that his main concern was 'the problem of society and the personality of the individual, particularly [...] the subject's awareness of himself in relation to the society within which he must assert himself'.<sup>346</sup> Facilitating this awareness had been at the heart of Willats's works since the early 1960s. Like *Colour Variable*, the works on show at the Chester Beatty exhibition were experiments or devices that enabled the observer to explore the physical space they inhabited in relation to other individuals and objects, and asked them to note their choices and actions on sheets provided alongside.

Comparable to kinetic artworks in terms of their manipulability, this group of works investigated the relationship between the artwork and audience, rather than an action (or 'illusory' movement,<sup>347</sup> as in Op art) that revealed the possibilities of technology, or of time and light as aspects of the object's formal conditions. The works can also be considered an important step towards Willats devolving control to the viewer, who now becomes a collaborator necessary for an object's final condition. Of course, the viewer only became a collaborator within the parameters set by the artist, and answered his predefined questions. Nonetheless, I argue that it was these early works that helped Willats evolve his projects from the 1970s onwards, especially as they involved the audience in an active experience, first through physical contact with the object and then through describing their actions on the response sheets.

For Willats, 'an artist is a constructor of models', whose primary intention is to generate multi-directional relationships between him/herself, the audience and the artwork.<sup>348</sup> Such a relationship grants the audience an opportunity to alter the artwork by actively engaging with it, and therefore to influence the artist with their feedback. Building on his experience in Ascott's Groundcourse and his manipulable works, Willats during the mid-1960s began to explore the

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<sup>344</sup> Gramsci. *Selections from The Prison Notebooks*, 26.

<sup>345</sup> 'Conceptual Design. Stephen Willats in conversation with Christabel Stewart'. Stephen Willats' Studio, Rye, 14 December 2012. In *Control*, 54.

<sup>346</sup> Willats. Untitled introduction. In *Stephen Willats*. Exhibition catalogue. London: Chester Beatty Research Institute, 1964, n.p.

<sup>347</sup> Ian Chilvers and John Graves-Smith. 'Kinetic Art'. In *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*. 2nd ed. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>348</sup> Artspace. *Imaginary Audience Scale. [an Exhibition]* Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand, 27 March–23 May 2015. Auckland, NZ, 2015, 18

relationship between art and society further through a range of activities, from designing clothing and furniture to calling himself a 'conceptual designer'. He has written of this period:

By 1964, it became apparent to me that the *modus-operandi* the artist had inherited from the 1950s was not adequately able to express what was happening in society [...] so I decided to call myself a 'Conceptual Designer' and take very fundamental and practical areas of expression that were normally seen as the province of the designer, to integrate my work and practice as an artist with what people would consider useful and familiar. Several directions were simultaneously explored and one was clothing that would express the concept of self-organisation for the wearers, and to the people they encountered. As an agent for expression, these clothes were always envisaged as works of art; they were a strategy in communication and, if reproduced, they would have taken on the status of multiples.<sup>349</sup>

Coinciding with Willats's adoption of the role of a conceptual designer was his foundation of *Control* magazine in 1965,<sup>350</sup> where in the first issue he publicly announced his intention to become a conceptual designer.<sup>351</sup> Originally conceived to express the concept of self-organisation through a network of artists and their collaborators, *Control* magazine acted as 'as a vehicle for proposals and explanations of art practice between artists seeking to create a meaningful engagement with contemporary society'.<sup>352</sup> The self-funded first issue included an anonymous editorial written by Willats, as well as contributions from artist and educator Roy Ascott, British historian Logie Barrow, artist Mark Boyle known for his earth pieces made with Joan Hills and other collaborators in the 1960s, and designer Dean Bradley, who created cover illustrations for several early issues of the magazine. Also in 1965, Willats started teaching on the Groundcourse at Ipswich Civic College at the invitation of Roy Ascott, who had founded the original course at Ealing in 1961. Soon after, he also began teaching one day a week at Derby College of Art at the invitation of designer Ralph Selby, and three years later, in 1968, he began teaching at Nottingham College of Art and Design. As with *Control* magazine, teaching provided a platform for experimentation. But unlike many other artists at the time, education was not simply 'a means of making a living but an experimental kind of model'.<sup>353</sup> At Ipswich, Willats met each week with a group of students to work collaboratively on a project about an idea, with a view to finding solutions and making proposals to resolve a 'problem situation',<sup>354</sup> meaning that his relationship with the students was a horizontal and democratic one that mirrored his experience on Ascott's course. Everything developed through the course was done collaboratively as a group, with no works attributed to individuals. Furthermore, in 1965 Willats

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<sup>349</sup> Willats. *Multiple Clothing*. Cologne: Walther König, 2000: 12–13.

<sup>350</sup> The layout of the first issue of *Control* magazine was designed by graphic designer Dean Bradley whom Willats met in the first half of 1960s and whose office, Bradley's Design Communications, he used as desk space. This wasn't Willats's first and only involvement in the world of advertising; he had also worked at Stefan Starzynski's small design company Graphic Art Studio, and was briefly involved with JWT advertising agency in the mid-1960s. See Willats and Stewart. 'Conceptual Design', 57; Willats and Pethick. 'Conversations', 69.

<sup>351</sup> He discarded the term a year later in 1966 after realising that it wasn't financially sustainable. See Willats and Pethick. 'Conversations', 76.

<sup>352</sup> Willats, 'About Control Magazine' <<http://www.controlmagazine.org/about.php>> [Accessed 29 August 2017].

<sup>353</sup> Willats and Stewart. 'Conceptual Design', 56.

<sup>354</sup> Willats and Pethick. 'Conversations', 71

was only 22, around the same age as his students, which was another factor connecting them. As Willats explained, since no individualised work was being created and there was no external evaluation, the students were forced to conduct a process of self-criticism.<sup>355</sup> The problems tackled were similar to those provided by Ascott and included 'analysis of learning situations; tactile discrimination; predictive systems; analysis of restrictive thought processes; random variable situations; feedback with the environment; work out the amount of tolerance in the environment'.<sup>356</sup>

As I discuss below, the influence of Ascott's Groundcourse in terms of teaching and learning methodologies, and the way Willats used and advanced them, were pivotal to the development of the *West London Social Resource Project*, as well as to later projects. Starting with the *West London* project, Willats conceived of the artist as an instigator of change, who enabled participants to build awareness about themselves and their physical and social environments over an extended process. Theoretically, his projects relied on understanding the behavioural patterns and social codes people use to define themselves and those around them, and on investigating whether these parameters could be modified through the individual gaining awareness and empowerment.<sup>357</sup> An analysis of the *West London Social Resource Project*, followed by a critical investigation of his methodology, is therefore crucial for understanding the importance of project work within Willats's oeuvre. Below, I seek to illustrate the achievement of the project in terms of its capacity to effect social processes outside the perimeters of art. I suggest that Willats achieved this through his pursuit of context dependency, which he developed by using a language relevant to the community of the participants. Although the project has been approached as an example of participatory artistic practice by critics such as Grant Kester, Mark Hutchinson and Daniel Palmer, I argue that the significance of the project was its capacity to provide a new way of thinking, which I associate with Willats's experience in teaching – by closing the gap between teacher and student and between artist and audience.<sup>358</sup> Indeed, what makes the project significant for this thesis is the terms of the participation Willats instigated, and how it informed the politics of project making. By analysing the specifics of the *West London Social Resource Project*, I will explore how it informs my definition of the artist project, and its capacity to effect social process outside the perimeters of the art community.

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<sup>355</sup> Stefanie Hessler. 'Ten Questions: Stephen Willats'. Stephen Willats interview, *Kunstkrutikk*, 18 March 2016. <<http://www.kunstkrutikk.no/wp-content/themes/KK/ajax/general/print.php?id=76228&r=0.09570529498159885>> [Accessed 29 August 2017].

<sup>356</sup> Willats and Pethick. 'Conversations', 73.

<sup>357</sup> Willats. *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*. NAL, X901118, 2.

<sup>358</sup> Grant H. Kester. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004: 91-97; Mark Hutchinson. 'Four Stages of Public Art'. *Third Text*, 16:4, 2002: 429-38; Daniel Palmer. 'A Collaborative Turn in Contemporary Photography?' *Photographies*, 6:1, 2013, 117-25.

### **The West London Social Resource Project**

Building on his work both in terms of the kinetic objects he created and his teaching experience in the 1960s, Willats sought to extend the social territory of art with his *West London Social Resource Project*. The project began in March 1972, and took place over six months in four residential areas in west London, which he defined as 'project areas'.<sup>359</sup> These were Greenford (Area 1), Osterley Park (Area 2), Hanwell (Area 3) and Harrow (Area 4). Each of the four areas was selected as representative of different social groups: working class (Greenford), lower-middle class (Osterley Park), middle class (Hanwell) and upper-middle class (Harrow). For Willats, these four groups represented four 'typical life codes', expressed in the way people dressed and spoke, and the type of car they owned.<sup>360</sup> Although all the groups came from west London, they saw 'each other as physically, economically, socially separate'.<sup>361</sup> For Willats, however, rather than demonstrating inherited wealth, the distinctions related more to the level of managerial power held by members of each group, since the way society makes decisions 'determine[s] its ability to organise a social structure to support and ensure its survival within particular environmental conditions'.<sup>362</sup> Willats noted that a designation of upper-middle class (Harrow) corresponded to top-level professionals, such as a consultant surgeon, dean at a university and other executives; middle class (Osterley Park) corresponded to mid-level professionals, such as a head master, store manager or army officer; lower-middle class<sup>363</sup> (Hanwell) included shop stewards and clerical workers, while working class (Greenford) corresponded to manual labourers and factory workers.<sup>364</sup>

I argue that Willats' notion of life codes can be compared with the 'target audiences' model employed by marketers, which are generally classified into six demographic blocks or social grades: A, B, C1, C2, D and E.<sup>365</sup> This type of classification might be useful for reaching out to people on their own terms, but it is also biased and perpetuates social differences based on people's homes and occupations (with each understood as a proxy for the other, especially in Willats's case). It also involves a limited definition of class hierarchy in Britain, where status is often accorded through education and inherited wealth. Furthermore, such classification omits interests, life choices and other factors that can influence where people choose to live. Nonetheless, I claim that the intention with the *West London Social Resource Project* was not to dictate a particular viewpoint, as everyone received the same questions and treatment regardless of residential area and apparent typecasting.

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<sup>359</sup> Although the project was expected to extend over a three-month period, it ultimately took longer due to the amount of time participants took to complete tasks.

<sup>360</sup> Willats. *Art and Social Function*. London: Ellipsis, 2000, 30.

<sup>361</sup> Willats. 'West London Super Girls'. Recruitment poster. In *West London Social Resource Project*. London, 1972–73, NAL, X901153.

<sup>362</sup> See Willats. 'The Artist as an Instigator of Changes in Social Cognition and Behaviour'. London: Gallery House Press, 1973.

<sup>363</sup> Willats noted that lower-middle class participants were the only group who had a community centre and a residents' association, i.e. an organised structure where residents could take roles regarding the community.

<sup>364</sup> Willats. *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*, 1973, 10.

<sup>365</sup> Defined by the British National Readership Survey in 1956, social grade is a demographic classification system of households based on the occupation of the Chief Income Earner. A refers to high managerial, administrative or professional; B refers to intermediate managerial, administrative or professional, C1 refers to supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional; C2 refers to skilled manual worker, D refers to semi and unskilled manual worker, and E refers to state pensioner, casual or lowest grade worker, or unemployed with access to state benefits only.



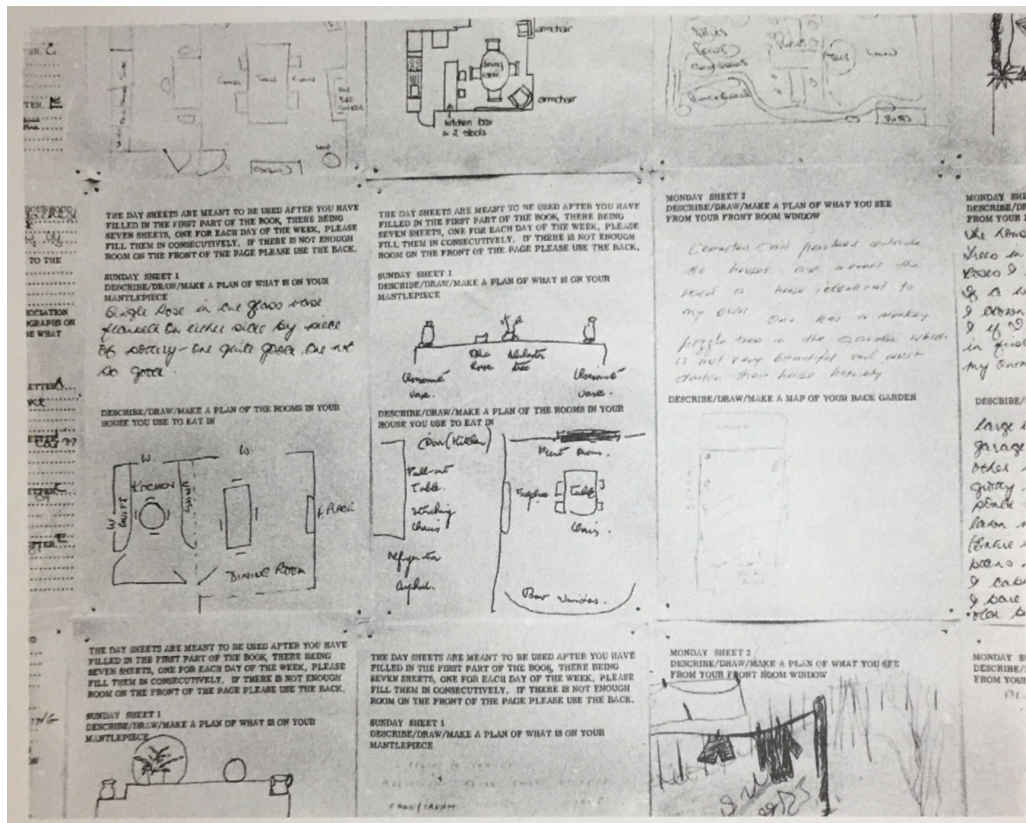


Fig. 10 A selection of information retrieval sheets, including participant responses, from the *West London Manual*. Public Register Board, Greenford Public Library, 1972.

Willats oversaw the operation of the project with a team of operators, which included photographers John Pennent and Mick Marshall, and cybernetician Jerry Brieske, in addition to a group of interviewers, including curator and author Rosetta Brooks, artist and lecturer Shelagh Cluett, artist and Willats's partner Felicity Oliver, Nancy Brieske, Susan Parker, and unnamed volunteers selected from people who had responded to leaflets distributed on a west London High Street. The interviewers were responsible for doing fieldwork, such as recruiting participants and collecting the daily questionnaires. Willats called this group the 'West London Super Girls', who he claimed were 50 per cent more successful in engaging participants than male recruiters.<sup>366</sup> Contextually, this circumstance illustrated the sexism that prevailed in the period, in that the work that Willats assigned to women mirrored the patterns of the labour market. Taking place two years after the Equal Pay Act of 1970, and a year before Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly began working on *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75* and founded the Artist's Union, the gender division of labour in the project reflected the bigoted attitude towards women in Britain at the time. In a way, these project operators were similar to Brisley's team of Peterlee residents, except that they were not residents of the designated project area. As described in the

<sup>366</sup> Willats. *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*, 1973, 10.

recruitment leaflet, the 'super girls' were vital, since their participation was essential for 'designing and operating' the project.<sup>367</sup>

Initially, the super girls were mainly responsible for recruiting participants by making door-to-door calls and explaining the project, emphasising that this was an artwork. To facilitate neighbourhood participation, people who had already accepted the invitation to take part were given leaflets and posters they could use to inform others about the project. Each area had a poster and leaflet showing its specific visual features, as well as photos of participant – recognisable to people from the neighbourhood – to encourage participants to put it in their windows. These visual features were also included in the questionnaires, which took the form of mix-and-match exercises and multiple-choice questions. Using participants' house windows as a medium for promoting the project was, in my view, a strategy Willats adopted from advertising, which often uses testimonials in marketing campaigns. During the first half of the 1960s, Willats had used the office of Bradley Design Communication, owned by Dean Bradley with whom he collaborated for *Control* magazine, as desk space. He had also worked at Stefan Starzynski's small design company, Graphic Art Studio, and in the mid-1960s was briefly involved with the JWT advertising agency, for which he proposed a research unit comprising specialists from various disciplines.<sup>368</sup>

An average of nearly half the people invited agreed to become participants: of 210 people approached, 109 agreed initially to participate in the project: Area One, Greenford, 32; Area Two, Osterley Park, 30; Area Three, Hanwell, 27; and Area Four, Harrow, 20.<sup>369</sup> Presumably, the high response rate was due to the novelty factor of the project – people were used to canvassers approaching them but not art practitioners. Following a first interview, participants were given a week to think about the project and consider further. After this week, project operators conducted a second interview and of the initial 109 people who agreed, 79 remained (Area One, Greenford, 17; Area Two, Osterley Park, 22; Area Three, Hanwell, 20; and Area Four, Harrow, 19). In the end, 47 of this 79 were able to complete the first stage of the project. The drop in numbers might have been due to loss of the novelty factor and realisation of the amount of time involved in participation. Following the initial week, and at the second interview, project operators distributed the West London Manual to participants so they could record how they perceived their social and physical environment. The West London Manual was made up of information retrieval sheets (Fig. 10) and included questions and blank space for participants' answers (with a carbon duplicating sheet provided), so that participants could retain the manual and hand over the carbon copy for display on the public register boards. In his 1973 project report, *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*, Willats noted that flexibility was an important element of the project to ensure its success, since he had to accommodate the varying amount of time people took to complete the tasks. Although the project was expected to take around three months, in the end it took about six months to complete because many participants asked for

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<sup>367</sup> Willats, 'West London Super Girls'.

<sup>368</sup> See Willats and Stewart, 'Conceptual Design', 57; Willats and Pethick, 'Conversations', 69.

<sup>369</sup> Willats, *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*, 1973, 10.



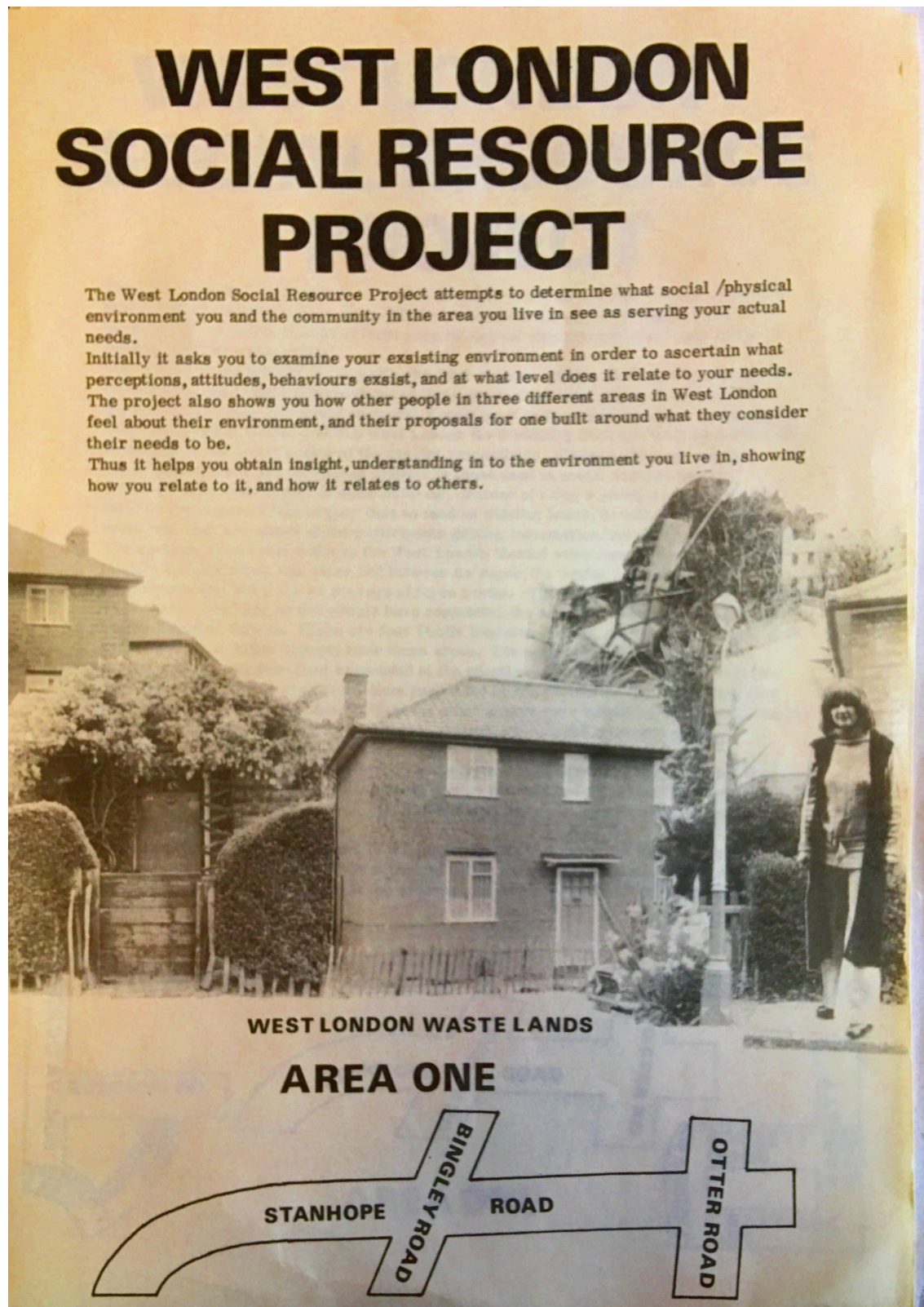


Fig. 11 Project recruitment poster, *West London Social Resource Project*, London, 1972-73. NAL, X901153.

extensions for filling in their questionnaires.<sup>370</sup> The manual comprised open questions, which related to a series of 60 problems. Participants didn't have to complete all the problems but were asked to work through them in sequence, responding to two questions a day.

The manual consisted of two parts: the first part included questions about the neighbourhood itself, while the second included questions about the participant individually. The initial questions were related to a participant's immediate as well as wider physical and social environment, and included questions or instructions such as, 'Draw or describe what is on your living room mantelpiece', or 'Draw or describe your ideal form of transport'. On average, the manual took two hours to complete and, of the final 47 participants who completed it, none was from project area four (upper-middle class); although the breakdown of the completed responses wasn't specified, the final models included proposals from all three areas, indicating that no one area had a dominating presence.<sup>371</sup> Although project operators repeatedly reached out to participants from project area four, not a single participant sent their returns back. The reasons for non-completion fell into three categories:

- 1) They had no intention of completing the manual because they didn't like the questions,
- 2) They had forgotten about the manual or didn't have time but were still interested in completing,
- 3) They had begun to answer the questions but didn't understand a particular question or were demotivated because it took longer than expected.<sup>372</sup>

Willats created recruitment posters for each project area, and these were distributed and displayed in each of those neighbourhoods. (Fig. 11) The posters included a textual collage that was replicated in each of the area posters, and images that were particular to each neighbourhood, such as street signs or specific buildings. The posters also featured one of the project operators, for example Felicity Oliver who can be seen in figure 11, as well as a small map of the streets included in this area of the project. Producing them by hand, Willats incorporated two different fonts – a sans serif and geometric font for the title using block letters and a more traditional style, serif font with curved strokes for the body text. The use of multiple fonts gives the poster a dynamic quality and the use of a serif font for the body text makes it easier to read. This dynamism continues with the images, as Willats incorporates images taken from different perspectives and in various sizes. The project operator included in the poster, for example, is almost as tall as the houses and lampposts, which adds another layer of dynamism.

The posters, like the questionnaires and other materials deployed in the project, were all handcrafted by Willats and his collaborators (i.e. project operators). The method of production and distribution of the project materials indicates a meticulous pre-planning and collaborative operation. The use of different fonts reveals Willats's aim to emphasize certain features of the project, and is similar to his decision to highlight the project operator (i.e. Felicity Oliver) over objects such as

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>371</sup> Willats. *Final Project Models*, NAL X901153.

<sup>372</sup> Willats. *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*, 1973, 12.

buildings and signs. Furthermore, the distribution and activation of the project was a collaborative effort requiring several people, just as its financing was made possible through the collaborative voluntary effort of Willats and his others.

As the project posters convey, the goal was to 'determine what social/physical environment you and the community in the area you live in see as serving your actual needs'.<sup>373</sup> In addition to determining participants' needs, the project was also an enquiry into people's perceptions, behaviours and attitudes. Since the project took place in different areas, the results showed participants how their needs related to those of people from the other areas. Perhaps as expected, participants' needs relating to their neighbourhood correlated with each other (despite their so-called life codes), as most were about the need for space regardless of project area – more space in their home, a garden or more parking spaces in the neighbourhood, in addition to various other needs regarding schools, playgrounds or the locations of amenities.<sup>374</sup> Although Willats's project formally resembled surveys and/or questionnaires conducted by sociologists and social scientists, it was distinct in that the data collected was not for the surveyor (i.e. Willats) alone, but also for the participants to gain insight into themselves and their neighbours: '[The project] helps you obtain insight, understanding in to the environment you live in, showing how you relate to it, and how it relates to others.'<sup>375</sup> (Fig. 11)

Participant responses were collected and made public for three weeks on public register boards in local libraries in the three project areas,<sup>376</sup> but names were not disclosed to allow participants privacy and freedom to share their ideas. When the public register boards were put up, a secondary audience was formed of people who had not participated but had heard about the project from participants, or saw their responses. Following the public displays, participants were given the chance to decide whether they wanted to continue with the project. A 'panel of experts', consisting of the computer scientist and founder of the software development company System Simulation Ltd, George Mallen, psychologist Max Henderson and cybernetician Jerry Brieske, then produced a report that synthesised the significance of the project and analysed individual returns displayed on the boards. This report, along with statistics about the project, was collated in a document that Willats called a 'Rule Book', which was delivered to participants who had agreed to maintain involvement in the project and served as a preparatory document for the second stage. These individuals also received the West London Re-Modelling Book, a follow-up to the West London Manual. The second stage of the project was formulated as a process of neighbourhood designing and, in the case of the West London Re-Modelling Book, asked recipients how they would choose to re-model their streets and, ultimately, their neighbourhood, using prompts like, 'What do you see as the ideal social structure for your neighbourhood?' They were then given three weeks to complete the re-modelling book, during which they were required to transform descriptive models into *prescriptive* models illustrating how their neighbourhoods could be. Similar to the problems in the manual, those in the re-modelling book were, as Willats explained, 'structured into a sequence that started from an intimate context (a participant's

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<sup>373</sup> Willats, Project recruitment poster. *West London Resource Project*.

<sup>374</sup> Willats, *West London Manual*, London, 1972–73, NAL, X901153.

<sup>375</sup> Willats, Project recruitment poster. *West London Resource Project*.

<sup>376</sup> Willats, *Art and Social Function*, 20.

own home) and progressed by degrees to a more general conceptual situation (a participant's neighbourhood community's ideal social structure)<sup>377</sup> Moreover, the problems were sequential: each led to the next, with the aim of using them as a basis for solutions in the future.<sup>378</sup> At this stage of the project, each area had its own team, as opposed to one team rotating through all four areas, and each team was responsible for distributing the re-modelling book, setting up the second register boards and presenting the final models to each participant. As a strategy, allocating one team to each area was effective for two reasons: first, the time the project took decreased considerably – one week instead of three for completion (since all areas could be covered simultaneously); second, each team was more motivated because they could see the project through from beginning to end.

A marked difference between the manual and re-modelling book was the number of problems, which were reduced in the re-modelling book as Willats realised they required more time and thought to complete than the manual. Initial questions involved the physical layout of participants' surroundings, their backyards and streets, and how these reflected social relationships; these were followed by questions regarding an 'ideal social structure of neighbourhood and its relationship to other communities in west London'.<sup>379</sup> The responses to these questions were multifarious: some participants left them blank because they found them too difficult to answer, while some invited their friends and family to answer in collaboration, and a few terminated their involvement, leaving the project altogether. In contrast to the first stage, the responses collated contained proposals for improvements that could potentially benefit the whole neighbourhood, which members of the community, regardless of their involvement in the project, were invited to vote on and/or suggest alterations. The results were again displayed on public register boards, with each participant's responses marked with a letter that would be voted on in order to generate an 'optimum model'. Public decision slips were provided near the boards, on which voters could pick their favourite responses and include reasons for their preferences.<sup>380</sup> Although anyone interested in the project could cast their vote, most were residents of the area. Willats estimated that 60 per cent of project participants took part in the voting process.<sup>381</sup>

The answers from participants were also diverse; some reflected people's tangible needs, such as repairs 'to prevent draught', in response to 'Describe, draw, make a map of what changes if any could be made to the interior of the house you live in, showing how they relate to the needs it fulfils'.<sup>382</sup> Some answers, on the other hand, revealed humour: in answer to 'Describe what social/physical needs your front and back garden fulfils', one person wrote: 'Front: A place to park my bike', and 'Back: A place to park myself.' The same participant's response to the instruction, 'Considering the needs your front and back garden fulfils, draw, describe, make a map of what alterations you could make to them', was to draw a curvy swimming pool, marked, 'Elizabeth Taylor's swimming pool, complete with

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>382</sup> Willats. 'The West London Re-Modelling Book'. In *West London Resource Project*, Sheet 2.

Elizabeth Taylor'.<sup>383</sup> Such personal and quirky responses were proof that participants had embraced the project, yet its significance to them was most obvious in responses to questions regarding transport facilities, cultural activities and social amenities, such as libraries, schools and shops, with suggestions ranging from, 'Change Brentside School to a mixed comprehensive with all local children going there', to 'Build garages for tenants' cars to be rented by side of rubbish depot'.<sup>384</sup> This was probably the first time many of these people had been asked about their needs regarding their environment, and in this respect the project gave participants a channel to voice their opinions about and influence their surroundings.

Although none of the project proposals was realised, they can be considered exercises in grassroots social planning and were comparable to those developed by the Artist's Union workshops for protecting the rights of artists, discussed in Chapter 2. These residents' recommendations could potentially have been addressed at a government level, but I surmise the project more closely resembled the teaching exercises Willats experienced in Ascott's Groundcourse, which engaged



Fig. 12 Anton Lavinsky, Kiosk for state publishing house Gosizdat, Moscow, 1925. In Alexander N. Lavrentiv and Yuri V. Vasarov. *Russian design: tradition and experiment, 1920-1990*. London: Academy Editions, 1995.

<sup>383</sup> Willats, 'The West London Re-Modelling Book', Sheet 3.

<sup>384</sup> Willats, 'The West London Re-Modelling Book'. Project Area Three, Hanwell, Sheet 8; Project area one, Greenford, Sheet 6.





Fig. 13 A reproduction of the *Public Monitor* of the *West London Social Resource Project* shown at Gallery House London, 1972. Photo: courtesy Stephen Willats.

residents in a process that encouraged them to think differently. Similar to the Union workshops where members discussed issues relevant to the group, the project gave local people the opportunity to discuss the proposals with members of their community and to learn about other neighbourhoods.

The proposals that received the greatest number of votes were named 'Final Project Models',<sup>385</sup> and were compiled into a 'Final Project Model Booklet' sent to all participants so that each participant could compare their answers with those of the finalists. They were also displayed in public libraries for the general public. As 'The Final Project Model Booklet' represented a consensus opinion, it was not necessarily typical of any one area.

A display about the *West London Social Resource Project* was also erected at Gallery House, an avant-garde space that operated for 16 months during 1972–73 under the leadership of the curator Sigi Krauss.<sup>386</sup> At Gallery House, Willats had initiated the Centre for Behavioural Art, which occupied an entire room on its top floor and formed a cross between a collective workshop, and a continuously evolving installation, where he organised weekly public seminars and documentary displays of his projects. In fact, the *West London Social Resource Project* grew out of, and was self-funded through, the Centre for Behavioural Art. Unlike the other projects I investigate in this study, the *West London Social Resource Project* was not funded by the state, or the Arts Council as a proxy of the state, or by a public and/or private corporation such as the Gulbenkian Foundation. It

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<sup>385</sup> Willats, *Art and Social Function*, 23.

<sup>386</sup> The German Government acquired the townhouse located next door to the Goethe-Institut London at 50 Princes Gate with an intention to expand the institute. Until that plan was executed, the director of the Institute suggested to Sigi Krauss that he curate and present exhibitions at the unoccupied location. A proponent of the artistic avant-garde, Krauss had a few stipulations: he insisted that the gallery never close, never charge admission, and never censor artists. He also insisted that Rosetta Brooks be his co-director, a position she accepted without pay. In addition to presenting exhibitions for a range of artists including Stuart Brisley, Gustav Metzger, and Marc Chaimowicz, among others, the space also became the headquarters for the Centre for Behavioural Art.



was in fact privately funded by the people involved with the Centre for Behavioural Art, including John Pennent, Mick Marshall, Jerry Brieske, Rosetta Brooks, Shelagh Cluett, Felicity Oliver, Nancy Brieske and Susan Parker.<sup>387</sup>

Anthony Hudek has described this space as 'a parallel school, with participants and students including artists, but also mathematicians and scientists, working in the field of artificial intelligence'.<sup>388</sup> Titled *Public Monitor*, and created as part of the ongoing installation at the Centre, the display about the *West London* project was a freestanding structure resembling a topless white cube installed in a room measuring 16(l) x 8(w) x 8(h) feet (Figs 12 and 13), which evoked the information kiosks used by Russian Constructivists during the 1920s.<sup>389</sup> Presented on the *Public Monitor*'s outside wall were a series of black-and-white photographs of wasteland areas from outer west London, which, according to Willats, 'provided an important vehicle for people in those areas to escape from the determinism of the world around them'.<sup>390</sup> Inside the *Public Monitor* photographs were displayed from the four project areas of Osterley Park, Hanwell, Greenford and Harrow, as well as maps, flow diagrams of events and documentation of the project's implementation.

As a whole, the *West London Social Resource Project* accomplished two things. Firstly, it introduced people who had limited contact with art (or artists) to contemporary art, therefore expanding the reach of art to people outside the art community. Secondly, it instigated a relationship – albeit short term – between people from different social groups by bringing them onto common ground 'where all the parts are equal and equally linked', so they could develop a meaningful sense of community.<sup>391</sup> Willats has described this process as 'a social homeostat [...] a structure that enabled four previously non-associating groups to arrive at common social models'.<sup>392</sup> However, to consider it a social homeostat assumes that the community was unable to manage or regulate itself prior to the project, even though this issue wasn't considered at any point during its development. The issues and types of questions – as well as their quantity – pursued in the second, re-modelling part of the project were modified as a result of experience gained in the first stage. Similarly, the decision was made to allocate a group of project operators to each area to facilitate a quicker turnout. But these modifications were not indicative of regulation but of how the project was shaped by feedback from participants. The presentation of proposals on public registry boards and submission of these to a vote were both democratic measures, but were not necessary for community building or for the long-term socialisation of different groups from the four project areas. Furthermore, filling out forms was a predominantly solitary activity no matter how many family members or neighbours accompanied the participant involved. On the other hand, several tools developed in the project, such as the use of public register boards, window posters and questionnaires were transferred to Willats's subsequent projects (such as the *Insight Development Project for Oxford* (1972) and the

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<sup>387</sup> Stephanie Willats, correspondence with the author, 20 February 2020.

<sup>388</sup> Anthony Hudek, 'Meta-Magazine. Control 1965–68'. In *Control*, 38.

<sup>389</sup> Willats was well versed in Constructivist practice through his former position at the Drian galleries during the late 1950s.

<sup>390</sup> Stephen Willats, 'The West London Social Resource Project, 1972–3' <<http://stephenwillats.com/work/west-london-social-resource-project/>> [Accessed 12 July 2016].

<sup>391</sup> Willats, *The Artist as an Instigator of Changes*, 9

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

*Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project* (1973)) because of their success in motivating participants, despite the difficulty posed by long-term commitment. Even if Willats's project did not ultimately develop into an organic community-building exercise, it nevertheless successfully expanded the social scope of art and offered a new model for how art in the 1970s could be produced, received and distributed. To understand how Willats sought to make art practice more socially relevant, we now need to look more closely at his methodology.

### **A methodology for social relevance**

At the beginning of the 1970s, Willats developed a methodology founded on what he considered to be the three essential variables of an artistic project: (1) The intentions of the artist; (2) the social/physical context in which the work would progress; (3) the audience to which the work would be presented.<sup>393</sup> To determine the form a project would take, which he defined as the 'Optimum Model',<sup>394</sup> Willats sought to achieve a balance between these three variables through a process of constant interaction and feedback. Since he was not interested in creating an artwork within an art institution, or in creating a work exclusively for the art community, the second and third variables were to be found outside the territory of the so-called art world, which has traditionally seen the audience as motivation for the artwork rather than its rationale. When the audience is the motivator, its choices and likes are secondary to those of the artist, but when the audience is the rationale, its preferences serve as guides for the artist and engagement with it is essential. Willats felt that positioning the audience as motivator was presumptuous and, although the art world was subsequently where his work was received, he sought to avoid the conventional hierarchical relationship of audience and artist by treating the former as a fundamental element in his practice. Hence the intention of the *West London Social Resource Project* was to advance the notion of the artwork as a social resource that would be seen as 'an integral part of its audience's daily routines' and environments.<sup>395</sup> I suggest that two interconnected elements in the project enabled this: context-dependent language and sustained participation.

Willats has argued that, until the 1970s, the relationship between artist and audience was unidirectional and authoritative, relying on 'a highly specialised and evolved set of languages and restricted codes, the correct reading of which would stem from a frame of reference built up on a knowledge of existing art environment precedence'.<sup>396</sup> For Willats, if a community lacked the necessary tools (historical context, frame of reference, etc.) for interpretation it would be unable to produce meaning; to produce meaning relevant to the community the artist would therefore need to adopt those held and understood by the community and not impose his/her own.

In the case of a specific audience, such as a particular neighbourhood group or housing estate, Willats argued that the artist needed to take into consideration 'the restricted use of language' shaped by that particular context. Here, Willats was influenced by British socio-linguist Basil Bernstein's early and controversial theories on the two types of language use, the 'restricted code' and 'elaborated code', through which Bernstein addressed the idea of the interconnected nature of language and social behaviour codes.<sup>397</sup> Willats was first introduced to

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<sup>393</sup> Willats, *Art and Social Function*, 6

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>396</sup> Willats, 'The Artist as an Instigator of Changes', 1973, 8–9.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 6.

these theories at a seminar Bernstein gave at the ICA in London in the early 1960s. 'Elaborated code' referred to the conventional use of language, where everything can be clearly understood without prior knowledge of the speakers; 'restricted code' referred to language that is context-dependent, used exclusively within the boundaries of a specific environment and thus filled with assumptions and references to prior experience or group identity. Elaborated code is used in formal and educated situations, and contains linguistic conventions such as subordinate clauses, adjectives, pronouns, and active and passive speech; restricted code is used in informal situations and is characterised by the linguistic expression or vernacular of a particular group, such as those belonging to a geographic area, a factory, or a club like the boy scouts.<sup>398</sup> I argue that, despite their prescriptive and culturally deterministic nature – especially as these could be understood as correlating with social class – these theories were significant for Willats because they offered a way to mediate between language and social relations. Identifying a restricted code and incorporating this into the project was imperative for ensuring its smooth operation, because if participants spoke a language Willats didn't understand, or vice versa, interaction would be impaired. For instance, Brisley faced a severe challenge during *The Peterlee Project* when participants accustomed to a hierarchical industrial structure had trouble following his more democratic and horizontal approach. Although what Brisley encountered was not exactly a restricted code, a disunity arose from the categorical differences that separated him and his audience. In this respect, it made sense for Willats to identify potential differences beforehand to prevent misunderstandings that could affect the operation of his projects. Being aware of different communication codes and making adjustments to develop a mutually meaningful process was more effective as a strategy than jeopardising the artist's intention by offering the participants full independence.

Writing in 1978, Rémy Saisselin described Willats as 'an artist behaving like a sociologist', who was more interested in the social environment of art – as opposed to the work itself – than any artist before him.<sup>399</sup> Despite the generalised nature of this claim, I suggest that Willats's approach was reminiscent of structural functionalism, the school of sociology represented by Talcott Parsons, who assigned more weight to social and cultural values and structures than internal psychological processes for determining social actions.<sup>400</sup> Saisselin added that Willats's work used 'language appropriate to the jargon of sociology, a text that speaks to readers of "restricted codes", audience perception, predictive language, social environment, parameters'.<sup>401</sup> While Saisselin acknowledged Willats's move away from aesthetic concerns and art institutions, he saw this as a form of bureaucratic art practice, arguing that Willats is 'behaving in terms of a bureaucratic society by producing his own version of Orwell's "newspeak"'.<sup>402</sup> Saisselin was therefore comparing Willats's use of terms and theories from different disciplines, and his creation of a meta-language (to liaise with project participants) with

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<sup>398</sup> Basil B. Bernstein. *Class, Codes, and Control*. London; New York: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>399</sup> Rémy G. Saisselin. 'Review: *Art and Social Function: Three Projects* by Stephen Willats'. *Leonardo* 11, no. 1, 1978, 77–78.

<sup>400</sup> Talcott Parsons. *The Structure of Social Action*. New York: McGrawHill, 1937; Michele Dillon. *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

<sup>401</sup> Saisselin, 'Review', 77.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

‘newspeak’, one of the coercive methods used by the totalitarian state in George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel *1984*.<sup>403</sup> What Saisselin didn’t touch on, and what I consider is possibly more troubling, was Willats’s presumption in assuming ignorance about art, and art language, on the part of the ‘non-art’ community. For example, in his project *Inside an Ocean* created for his solo exhibition ‘Concerning Our Present Way of Living’ at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1979, he felt it imperative to use a contextually relevant and translatable vocabulary. Developed in collaboration with the gallery, Willats sought to build a relationship between the closed circuit of the art community represented by the gallery and the people living in the nearby Ocean Estate occupied mostly by dockworkers. Located in both the gallery and the estate, the project was created with the active participation of residents who provided photographs, responded to questionnaires and assisted the artist in creating final displays. To build a relationship with the residents, Willats first spent time with them to gain understanding of their particular circumstances. In this instance, I attest his effort to create a contextually relevant language was less a result of presumption than of a desire to establish a mutually meaningful relationship.

For Willats, the contained nature of an estate provided a conducive environment for his projects as they were ‘reasonably socially consistent’.<sup>404</sup> However, since he didn’t make use of sociological tools when creating control groups for experiments, social consistency was assumed and dogmatic: a person’s place of residence does not necessarily correlate directly with their relationship to art. It is important to keep in mind this limitation of Willats’s later projects when examining his methodology for developing a socially relevant art practice, particularly in terms of his insistence on participation. As already established, he wasn’t interested in a relationship based on himself as artist and the viewers as audience. Indeed, his projects required participants who could commit to long periods of involvement, or even to continuous participation over a number of weeks or more. I propose that sustainability of participation was made possible by Willats’s context-dependent approach, because when participants find the problems, questions and goals relevant, they are more likely to embrace the project and participate with interest and enthusiasm. Of course, this approach is not fail-proof, as shown by the residents of area four in the *West London Social Resource Project*, who failed to respond. Although the low response rate in this group was partly due to lack of time for completing questionnaires, it suggests that the project wasn’t considered relevant enough for these residents to allocate time to participate.

In order to fully comprehend the terms and the scope of Willats’s relationship with the participants, it’s useful to compare his aims with a more recent project involving social housing, *Project Unité* (1993) staged at Unité d’Habitation, the Le Corbusier-designed modernist housing estate located in the post-industrial city of Firminy, which had lain half-empty since the 1980s until its renovation by architect Henri Ciriani in 1995.<sup>405</sup> The project was curated by Christian Philipp Müller

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<sup>403</sup> Newspeak is the official language in the totalitarian state of Oceania in Orwell’s classic novel. George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

<sup>404</sup> Willats. ‘The Operation of “From a Coded World”’. *Control Magazine*, Issue 10, 1977, 16.

<sup>405</sup> The roof of the building was restored by Jean-François Grange-Chavanis in 1995-1996 after the building’s pilotis, façades and terrace roof were listed as historical monuments in 1993.

and Yves Aupetitallot, and comprised around 40 installations by different artists who were invited to create site-specific works while inhabiting the estate. Claire Bishop has argued that,

[t]he use of the word 'project' rather than 'exhibition' in the title seems to imply that the totality of the situation (building, residents, artist residencies, installations) was more important than a final exhibition of 'works'. It carries connotations ... of art overlapping and engaging with the social sphere, rather than being at one remove from it.<sup>406</sup>

However, engagement with the social sphere in *Project Unité* was limited to the physical environment of the building and was thus distinct from Willats's project, which sought to engage with residents by going into their homes and encouraging personal involvement. In contrast, most of the artists in *Project Unité* failed, or chose not, to interact with the residents (immigrants, single parents and students) and instead treated the apartments, as Bishop argues, as 'self-contained galleries', thus responding to the building and its architecture rather than to its residents.<sup>407</sup> This failure demonstrates the difficulty of mediating between an artist and community without recognition of the latter's particularities. It is also important to consider Hal Foster's standpoint on works like *Project Unité*, that such projects involve 'sociological condescension' when artists fail to observe and critique the 'principles of the ethnographic participant-observer', and have limited or no engagement at all with the community.<sup>408</sup> In this respect, it isn't enough to just stand alongside a community; the artist needs to understand their realities, struggles and needs, in order to work with them for mutual transformation.

Where *Project Unité* entailed artists physically relocating only to the environment of the residents, the *West London Social Resource Project* required cognitive involvement on the part of participants, even if this involvement didn't amount to tangible transformation in real terms. As the project necessitated completion of daily questionnaires, participants also gradually formed a personal attachment to the project. Furthermore, by presenting the project material in public spaces, Willats intended to foster a second level of participation from people who had only come across the project from seeing documentation in public spaces (participant windows, public registry boards, etc.), by voting, or by proposing alternatives and revisions. However, it is also crucial to note that participation can be a vacuous concept, as Markus Miessen argues in his book *The Nightmare of Participation*, where he seeks to demystify participatory practices. Miessen gives the example of a referendum, the political participation method that seemingly offers people a choice, therefore mimicking democracy, when it is actually a political strategy used by political parties for deferring their responsibility as civil servants.<sup>409</sup> Unlike citizens voting on a referendum, Willats's participants had a wider range of power with regards to the outcome,

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<sup>406</sup> Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London; New York: Verso Books, 2012, 198–99.

<sup>407</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 197.

<sup>408</sup> Hal Foster. 'Artist as Ethnographer'. In *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, 196.

<sup>409</sup> Markus Miessen. *The Nightmare of Participation: Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010: 41–57.

since the project did not operate on a majority-consensus but gave participants the opportunity to develop proposals themselves with regards to their neighbourhoods. This sort of participation therefore offers room for 'case-specific criticality', the potential for honest judgement that can 'supersede political correctness' as proposed by Miessen, because it is user-generated and involves a popular vote even if the scenario is initiated by the artist.<sup>410</sup> The distinction between audience and participants also means that Willats was concerned with people on an individual basis and not solely as an anonymous group, like the audiences of conventional art environments. Moreover, audiences within institutional art environments are already culturally oriented to be interested in art, as they choose to go to these environments. Since Willats was concerned with expanding the reach of art beyond the art world, he located his projects in environments that were already familiar to the people with whom he chose to participate.

Willats recognised that each person's cognition is relative to his or her context, just as the meaning of something is dependent on its relevance to that person and their parameters of social behaviour. Consequently, a person indifferent to or uninformed about art will probably have different values than a member of the art community. For Willats, art can only be meaningful and have purpose outside the art community if the artist accepts the existence of different social contexts. Hence 'instead of presenting a preferred view, i.e. presuming that the artist's links between X and Y will be seen as meaningful by his audience, the artist embraces the concept of relativism, and the context dependency of the work'.<sup>411</sup> Embracing relativism, Willats sought to 'reorder the audience's perception of their own behaviour' by providing them with ways of viewing, but without declaring a right or wrong result or meaning. Arguably, this is as neutral as an artist can get in terms of relating to their audience. Unlike a painter, for example, an artist creating a project is dependent on audience members as participants for the project to function, and is therefore fundamentally distinct from a painter whose artwork exists even without an audience. By refraining from specific meaning, the project artist offers his audience the agency to construct its own meaning through participation in the project's development. Indeed, the process itself is more important than the final meaning, and it is this long-term and open-ended process, as we see in the *West London Social Resource Project*, that informs my definition of the artist project. Through this process Willats sought to initiate a balance with participants – what he called 'A State of Agreement' – who would move towards a mutual understanding with him and others as the project progressed. As I claimed in the Introduction, artist projects intervene in the foundations of culture through the active cognitive participation of the audience, in order to alter social and cultural perception. Willats's project is thus essential for the definition I propose since this approach was verbalised by the artist himself in his formulation of the state of agreement, which he saw not as compliance but as a mutual understanding people arrive at together through active participation.

Once a state of agreement is established, the aim is to externalise the purpose and meaning of art practice. In the case of Willats, I consider that externalisation meant connecting his art to the world

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>411</sup> Willats, 'A State of Agreement'. Published in conjunction with the presentation of Meta filter at The Gallery, London, National Art Library, X901119, 2.

people lived in, facilitating participation and redefining art practice and art institutions. This was necessary for bridging the gap between 'intention and performance', or theory and practice as advocated by Gramsci, who contended that without mental/cognitive participation and conscious responsibility there can be no meaningful human activity, just as it's impossible to separate production and practice from thought (*homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*).<sup>412</sup> According to Gramsci, 'each man ... participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought'.<sup>413</sup>

Willats's methodology depends on an interactive and therefore mentally active relationship with the audience, i.e. through the audience acquiring the information personally rather than being fed it by someone else. Such a relationship makes it more likely that the audience will find the work meaningful, according to Willats.<sup>414</sup> An interactive relationship can be modelled through construction of 'an incomplete matrix of informal references',<sup>415</sup> in the form of a sequence of cues to be connected or questions and/or tasks to be completed by the audience, and is an approach that induces the cognitive involvement of the audience without being descriptive or dogmatic. Furthermore, when the audience cognitively engages with the work by responding to a sequence of problems formatted as questions, they also contextualise the inferences provided by the artist through their own internal perceptions. Once a person writes down his or her perceptions, these perceptions become externalised. An artwork of this kind therefore supports a two-way relationship, since a problem directed to the audience in the format of a question represents both the asker's (the artist's) existing references and perceptions and those of the respondent (the audience). Willats notes that, ideally, the difficulty of the problems increases as the questions progress towards a conclusion previously stipulated by the artist to motivate the audience.<sup>416</sup>

Another condition to consider would be the ambiguity of the information relayed to the audience: if the information signals a particular view of the world, then it would either confirm the observer's already existing knowledge or conflict with it. But when the artist provides a loose matrix of information, audience members can freely interpret and establish new and alternative meanings. According to Willats, interactive models in art practice operate in such a way that 'participants having responded to presented problems, feedback into the model, which as a dynamic structure changes its state in accordance with the artist's specifications of its parameters, and the contextual nature of participants' decisions'.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Gramsci. *Selections From The Prison Notebooks*. Notebook 12, 9.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Willats and Midland Group (Nottingham, England). *Life Codes and Behaviour Parameters: Related Works and Texts*. Nottingham: Midland Group Nottingham, 1976, 8.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 10.



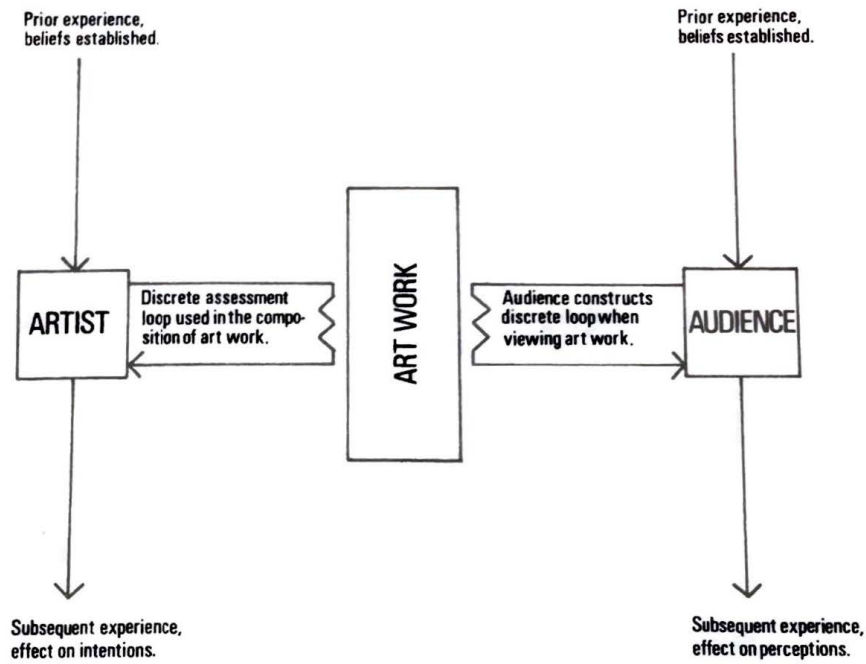


Fig. 14 The basic relationship between two nodes within the authoritative network. In Willats, *Art and Social Function*. London: Ellipsis, 2000, 51.

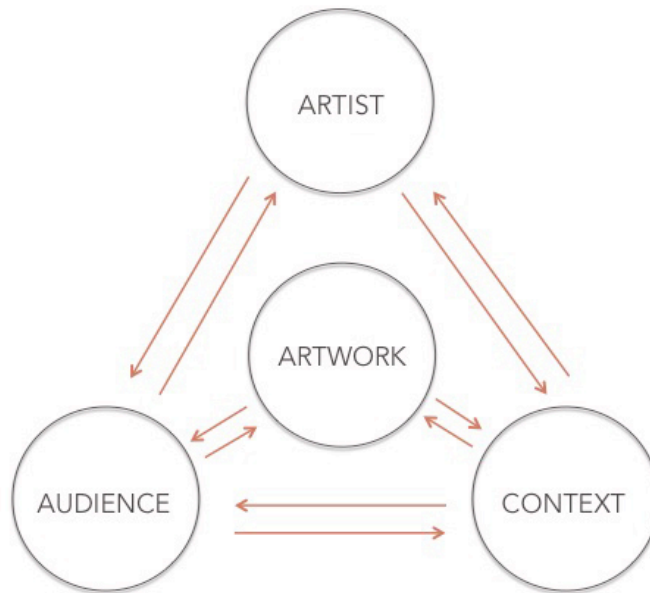


Fig. 15 'A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice'. In Jane Bilton, Stephen Willats, and South London Art Gallery, eds. *Stephen Willats: Changing Everything 1 July 1998 – 2 August 1998*. London: South London Gallery, 1998, 9.

Through his projects Willats, then, forged a two-way relationship with project participants by engaging them personally. Yet, crucially, it was still Willats who initiated the relationship and who therefore remained the creator of these projects. So, although engaged in a role that granted a degree of control over the course of the project and its outcome, participants were still just participants and had no authorial control. Even so, as the result of their long-term involvement (several weeks as opposed to a few minutes inside a gallery) they became mentally invested in the project and played an essential role in its development. Hence, just as the involvement of the initial participants were imperative for Stuart Brisley's *Peterlee Project*, residents' engagement with Willats's *West London* project, as well as with others such as *From a Coded World* (1977) – where he worked with residents of Perivale in west London over four weeks to raise awareness about processes of decision making in society and how perceptions impact behaviours – was of utmost importance. As Richard Cork emphasised in his review of the Perivale project, 'communicating with [Perivale] inhabitants on their own particular terms' was essential for Willats,<sup>418</sup> who briefed each of the volunteers responsible for going door to door to introduce the project to residents. He also personally discussed the goals of the work during seminars held in the Community Centre, answering residents' questions and ensuring ideas were clearly explained when volunteers visited them to collect and distribute questionnaires. Holding the seminars in the Community Centre was a deliberate strategy for making the project accessible to a wider range of people. Similarly, posting the results on public register boards in local libraries afforded people access to the project and its results, including those who had not participated. Like Brisley working with town residents for *The Peterlee Project*, going to where people lived and using local and public spaces such as libraries and community centres were pragmatic choices Willats made for expanding the reach of art.

For Willats, the traditional artist–audience relationship is exclusive, unidirectional and hierarchical. As opposed to such a relationship, which he defines as an 'authoritative network' (Fig. 14), he advocates an 'interactive network' (Fig. 15) that provides an open and mutual relationship between artist and audience. However, Willats's concept of opposing networks reflects a very conservative understanding of the artist's traditional relationship with his or her audience, which I posit has to more do with his predisposition for theories and terms (including from other disciplines such as cybernetics, advertising or sociology), a habit I also connect to his teaching experience, than with disregard for the avant-garde problematic of dissolving the boundaries between art and life. Nonetheless, one distinction of Willats's projects was his view of the audience as the project's rationale. In the interactive network, the context of the project is both shaped by the audience and can shape the project itself, and so on. In contrast, an authoritative network supports only a one-sided communication between artist and audience via the artwork, regardless of the audience's characteristics or context. In *Art and Social Function* Willats argues that when the relationship between an artwork and the audience is unidirectional 'the audience and artist become locked in their

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<sup>418</sup> Richard Cork, 'Stephen Willats: The Perivale Project', Serpentine Gallery, and Arts Council of Great Britain. *Art for Whom? [an Exhibition], Serpentine Gallery, London, 22 April–14 May 1978*. London: Serpentine Gallery, 1978, 27.

own perceptual biases'.<sup>419</sup> To avoid such a bias, he devised his projects as dynamic rather than static models, 'in the form of an interactive learning system which would be operational as a process through time',<sup>420</sup> where the involvement of the audience as participants rather than viewers was indispensable for the process.

In the *West London* project, the questions were designed progressively, both in terms of difficulty and content (i.e. beginning with questions regarding the wider physical and social environment of the participants in relation to their private home environments), and therefore encouraged participants to observe other people's behaviours as well as their own. Gramsci stated:

The fact is that only by degrees, one stage at a time, has humanity acquired consciousness of its own value... And this consciousness was formed... as a result of intelligent reflection, at first by just a few people and later by a whole class, on why certain conditions exist and how best to convert the facts of vassalage into the signals of rebellion and social reconstruction.<sup>421</sup>

For Gramsci, the creation of a new culture rested on the development of society's consciousness and awareness of itself, and while Willats's politics was influenced more by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose writings he studied during the 1960s, and his interest in perception and the constitution of meaning, than by Gramsci, I argue that the consciousness he sought to generate through his projects links him with Gramscian thought.<sup>422</sup> As Caroline Tisdall has written:

[Willats] never dictates the answers, but as soon as you join in one of his projects you can feel it is an effective kind of learning game designed to heighten awareness of behavioural patterns. It is a good example of an artist transforming theory, in this case cybernetic theory into a more immediate and accessible form.<sup>423</sup>

Indeed, the daily progressive questionnaires prompted participants to think in a more dynamic manner than people normally do. When the participants began to look for and recognise behavioural patterns, they were also urged to observe their environments both subjectively and objectively. In other words, as they surveyed their surroundings (i.e. neighbourhoods and/or neighbours) they were also encouraged to look inwards to consider how their existing beliefs and judgements were translating into emotions and behaviours, and how to be more open-minded about others.

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<sup>419</sup> Willats, *Art and Social Function*, 26.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>421</sup> A. Gramsci. *Selections from the political writings 1919–1920*. Quintin Hoare, ed. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, 11–12.

<sup>422</sup> According to the chronology by Emily Pethick, Willats encountered Merleau-Ponty's writings in 1962. Willats and Pethick. 'Conversations', 68.

<sup>423</sup> Caroline Tisdall. 'Stephen Willats Exhibition'. *The Guardian*, 10 October 1975, 8.

## Externalisation of art

In his projects, Willats fostered the cognitive awareness of participants to stimulate greater self-reflexivity about their perceptions and behaviours, and ultimately to question and modify their relationships with their environments, communities and society. Moreover, to achieve their full potential as social interventions his projects were intended to be revised, repeated and pursued further. I also contend that the *West London Social Resource Project* had potential as an operational model for city planning by highlighting the shortcomings of a particular urban environment and those areas that needed remedial action or reform. In particular, the project's second, re-modelling stage hinted at the first steps of what could become a people-led city-planning model in opposition to the standard model of government- or corporate-led urban renewal. If the final project proposals were pursued on a local government level, the project could incorporate community feedback into decisions that had genuine impact on the community.

Though adaptability was a vital element of Willats's projects as social interventions, the active role intended for the audience was what made them horizontal and participatory. Because he maintained the artist–audience relationship for an extended period, participants were often involved in the development of his projects for months on end, and took part in activities that were completely different from their daily routines.<sup>424</sup> Rather than acting as a passive recipient of messages, the audience played an active part in responding to questions or proposals for further action, as in the case of the *West London Social Resource Project*, or in producing original textual and/or audio-visual content (photographs, drawings and interviews, etc.) in projects such as *Inside and Ocean*, *From a Coded World* or *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers' Club*, among others. Willats's projects sought to promote a society that was more aware and in control, but it would be naïve to think that this control was total. Although Willats differed from Bruce Nauman, for instance, who tried to limit the viewer's role in order to reveal the nature of dependency in Western society, as Janet Kraynak has argued,<sup>425</sup> Willats still had control over the questions included in project manuals and over who could claim authorship of the whole project. Participants were in control only within the boundaries he set out, through the questionnaires and response sheets he provided. Hence, rather than an author, the audience engaged in what Willats defined as 'an act of mutuality',<sup>426</sup> which linked the making, meaning, presentation and reception of the work. Mutuality meant that people could collaborate with one another even if the project was their first ever encounter with each other as it allowed them to recognise a multiplicity of views. Recognition of differences (and similarities) prompted people to empathise and accept these differences, while taking part in the operation of the project (making,

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<sup>424</sup> Such extended involvement was present especially in his later projects, such as *Inside an Ocean* or *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers* (1980), where participants actively created displays by choosing images and adding text. See Nayia Yiakoumaki, 'Interview with Stephen Willats January 2014'. In *Stephen Willats: concerning our present way of living*. London: Archive Gallery; Whitechapel Gallery, 2014, 7.

<sup>425</sup> For an analysis of Bruce Nauman's work with regards to participation and control, see Janet Kraynak, 'Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman's Environments'. *Grey Room* 10, 2003, 22–45.

<sup>426</sup> Yiakoumaki, 'Interview with Stephen Willats January 2014', 5.

meaning, presentation and reception) involved exercising control, which they could then adopt and use in their daily lives.

With the *West London Social Resource Project*, Willats, then, stepped out of the studio and into people's lives, offering a context for them to voice their opinions, observing their social environments and encouraging them to think differently about these environments and themselves through their contribution to the project. This was in line with the proclamation he made in 1969 in panel 1 of the 'Art and Cognition Manifesto', where he wrote:

Any encounter by a human being with any state selected and thus programmed by an artist must affect and alter their behaviour in some way, the consequences of which must lay with the artist... the artist can be seen as a potentialiser of determinants.<sup>427</sup>

Willats advanced this concept of the artist as 'a potentialiser of determinants' through the 1970s, starting with the *West London Social Resource Project* and continuing with his later projects such as *Contained Living, From a Coded World*, and *Inside an Ocean* (1979) which took place at the Ocean Estate in Stepney, east London. Ocean Estate, which housed a mixed social community, was known as one of the poorest and most deprived areas in Europe.<sup>428</sup> After spending time there talking with residents, Willats met Kit Stone, a local community leader, who assisted him in initiating the project and involving residents. Like the *West London* project, it was in two parts: an initial stage when residents described their world as they saw it, and a second stage about how this world could be made different. Participants acknowledged that Willats was the first person to reach out to them without asking for anything in return. Willats intended to expand the remit of art rather than transform the material circumstances of residents: 'What you want is for us to do something for ourselves'.<sup>429</sup> Here, I deem Willats's attempt to expand the remit of art a success, as he instigates participants to evaluate their own internal or external circumstances and needs, and to take action to change these circumstances. This transcends the artwork's immediate area of concern, be it the museum, gallery or art institution, and to enter the real-life situation of people. However, although such feedback was encouraging in terms of the legacy of these projects, reflecting people's ability to recognise diverse viewpoints and their own relativity, the problem of material deprivation remained unchanged. However, Willats was never committed to the material transformation of residents' lives; his intention was to expand the remit of art, which he did by introducing people to a particular form of art practice. In this regard, I consider the real force of his projects to be their capacity for education and for encouraging participants to think differently. To participate in his projects, people needed to step out of their daily schedules and reset their mental routines, but, like education, they did not necessarily succeed in altering residents' material circumstances. Willats maintained contact with his former participants, returning to project areas years after their termination, and participants

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<sup>427</sup> Willats, 'Art and Cognition Manifesto'. In *Art and Cognition*. 1969. V&A National Art Library, X930243.

<sup>428</sup> Dan Coles. 'The Ocean Estate: Sink or swim?' BBC News Online, 15 January 2001 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1118242.stm>> [Accessed 7 January 2019].

<sup>429</sup> Yiakoumaki, 'Interview with Stephen Willats January 2014', 9.

themselves made an effort to keep in touch by visiting his new projects, which he advertised in former project neighbourhoods.<sup>430</sup>

With the *West London Social Resource Project*, Willats altered the way people encountered art. In addition to challenging the unidirectional relationship of traditional art making, his projects relocated art in society and provided the audience with an experience that was voluntary, dynamic and determined by context, based not on 'compliance, but something more active, a mutual understanding, an interaction between people'.<sup>431</sup> Yet, crucially, participants made none of the major decisions, so it would be overly positive to consider them as equal collaborators. Mark Hutchinson asserts that Willats's "'collaborators" were, in fact, raw material for his pre-existing practice: grist for his theoretical mill'.<sup>432</sup> While I agree with Hutchinson that his participants were not collaborators, I also feel they were more than just 'raw material', as the project involved free will. Unlike 'raw material' which can be formed according to its physical qualities, Willats's participants were free to react as they wished and potentially to alter the progress and outcome of the project. It's therefore fair to say that his model of practice was democratic in terms of its systems of operation, since it was based on principles of voluntary participation, voting and public presentations in neutral spaces such as libraries and community centres rather than art galleries. People could terminate their involvement at any time and invite relatives or friends to participate, which affected the direction the project took. Filling in questionnaires with neighbours or family members promoted a sense of community, while voting afforded a sense of agency and control.

In his attempts to link the artist with society, Willats established people as the indispensable ingredient of art practice. People were no longer solely the content of the project but had a genuine influence over its outcome and the messages and meanings it generated. When an artist project grants real agency to its participants – who are simultaneously its audience – without pigeonholing them into categories, it can begin to work as a model for informing and understanding society. Like the other projects investigated by this thesis, the *West London Social Resource Project* carried out a long-term investigation into the issue of expanding the scope and social reach of art practice, a process that Willats defined as the 'externalisation of art'. Formulated through an extensive and collective effort – of locals as well as other artists and specialists alongside Willats – the project engaged west London residents in thinking about their neighbourhoods and how these could better accommodate their needs. The implications of this were twofold: first, Willats offered an alternative approach to art practice, which through offering people an active and sustained role in an artist project enabled them to transform their understanding of themselves and others; second, because the project was dependent on the participation of a community, it located artistic practice at the heart of society and therefore acted as an educational mechanism for altering social patterns and behaviours. In line with the wider shift towards the socio-political in the art community in Britain, Willats's project offered a clear demonstration of how this could be achieved in terms of intention and structure.

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<sup>430</sup> Marcia McNally. 'Going Beyond the Plan: The Bandwidth That Is Stephen Willats', *Places*, 16, no. 3, 2004, 68–69.

<sup>431</sup> Willats. Note on inside cover, *Vision and Reality*. Axminster: Uniformbooks, 2016.

<sup>432</sup> Hutchinson, 'Four Stages of Public Art', 434.

**Representing the Struggle in *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75* (1973-75)**

## **Women's Liberation Movement: solidarity and collaboration**

First presented at the South London Art Gallery in May 1975, *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75* was created by Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly. *Women and Work* was the culmination of a two-year-long collaborative study the artists conducted at the south London branch of the Metal Box Co., in Southwark, London, which produced tins for preserving food. The project depicted the transformation of labour that had been ushered in by the introduction of automation and new technologies, as well as the constitution of the labour force during the first half of the 1970s until the implementation of the Equal Pay Act (EPA) in 1975.<sup>433</sup> As an in-depth study that documented the past and present working conditions of women in the tin box industry, the project was a strategic intervention that grew out of the artists' commitment to what was then known as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM).<sup>434</sup> While Harrison, Hunt and Kelly's art practices were formally and methodologically disparate, their shared commitment to the cause of women's liberation brought their interests together, initially at the Artist's Union where both Harrison and Kelly served as officers, and then at the Women's Workshop where all three artists came together to work on the *Women and Work* project.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Women's Workshop was one of the most active in terms of voicing demands and initiating projects, of which *Women and Work* was a prime example. In 1973, four out of nine officers in the Union were women, and women and men were near parity in the membership.<sup>435</sup> When the Women's Workshop was ratified on 9 May 1972, the artists set out to investigate the condition of women artists (such as limited representation in exhibitions, museum collections and academia) and to consider the need for a 'special dialectic' of feminism for resolving the problems women faced in art.<sup>436</sup> The Workshop proposed as an amendment to the general aims of the Union to take 'action to end sexual and racial discrimination in the arts', which passed by a majority vote.

The sense of solidarity facilitated by the Women's Workshop, which offered a space for observing and discussing each other's work, was invaluable for the artists, above all in nurturing the most crucial aspect of collaboration: destabilising notions of authorship. By rejecting individual artistic authorship and adopting a collective identity, Harrison, Hunt and Kelly – like other women artists that preceded them and those who were in turn motivated by their endeavours – were broadening the definition of what an artist could do: emphasising social engagement and process by offering an

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<sup>433</sup> Ratified on 29 May 1970, The Equal Pay Act aimed 'to prevent discrimination, as regards terms and conditions of employment, between men and women'. Companies were given five years to make the necessary adjustments for the application of the Act that came into force on 29 December 1975. It is said that the 1968 Ford sewing machinists strike was one of the triggers for the introduction of this Act, which also facilitated Britain's entry to the European Community. See *The Equal Pay Act 1970*, <[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/41/pdfs/ukpga\\_19700041\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/41/pdfs/ukpga_19700041_en.pdf)>; Jill Rubery, 'Equal Pay and Europe', <<http://www.unionhistory.info/equalpay/roaddisplay.php?irn=785>>, [Accessed 8 May 2016].

<sup>434</sup> Although this tag has long been dropped in favour of the Feminist Movement, throughout the thesis I refer to the movement as the Women's Liberation Movement as it was referred to during the 1970s.

<sup>435</sup> 'A Short History of the Women's Workshop', TGA 20016/2/12/11

<sup>436</sup> Women's Workshop, Constitution, 9 May 1972.



alternative to the normative artist-working-in-isolation model, while working towards the ultimate goal of shifting cultural ideologies of gender.

In addition to developing this sense of solidarity, the Workshop also aimed to support other women, with or without unions. To this end, they declared:

The Women's Workshop maintains that women in whatever sector they are employed are largely unorganised and consequently receive the lowest pay and work in the worst conditions; it is our intention to support our sisters in their struggle for unionisation and also in the action they take as organised workers.<sup>437</sup>

In that sense, *Women and Work* was an example of the outcomes of Gramscian community-based study, discussion and support-group endeavours, which provided space for women to share their experiences and discuss issues such as history, arts, women's health and unionisation. Other groups included: the Women's Liberation Art Group, formed following a large meeting of women at Camden Studios in 1970 by Margaret Harrison, Valerie Charlton, Ann Colsell, Sally Frazer, Alison Fell, Liz Moore, Sheila Oliver, Monica Sjoö and Rosalyn Smythe; the Women's Free Art Alliance founded as an art centre for women by Kathy Nairne and Joanna Walton, who worked in dance, theatre and therapy; the Women's Art History Collective; and the See Red Women's Workshop discussed in the introductory chapter. Judith Mastai argues that groups that cultivated platforms for discussing women's experiences, and for studying 'important texts which formed the basis for analysis and debate about class, society and women's roles', were fundamental to the development of the WLM in Britain<sup>438</sup> and a mechanism for bringing artists such as Harrison, Hunt and Kelly together. It was *Women and Work* that placed these three artists into women workers' lives and working environments, and it remains one of the most widely acknowledged collaborative projects of the 1970s. It was also unique in that each artist came from and returned to independent practice after the project ended, and it therefore stands apart from works by other artists who work collaboratively, such as Gilbert & George, Bernd and Hilla Becher or Jake and Dinos Chapman. The project was born out of the artists' commitment to feminism, and collaboration in this sense was not a defining characteristic of each of the artist's styles, approaches or methods of practice. Rather, the specific contribution of *Women and Work* to the artist project lay in its elements of collaboration and solidarity, which I argue were informed by the WLM. To fully understand the project, it is therefore important to explore its conception in line with the history of feminism and WLM during the 1970s.

*Women and Work* was largely funded by an Artists' Fellowship of £1500 from the GLAA Thames Television Fund, and was awarded in 1973 for use in projects that would benefit lower-paid

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<sup>437</sup> See Women's Workshop, 'A Brief History of the Women's Workshop of the Artist's Union, 1972–1973'. In Hilary Robinson, ed., *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968–2000*, Oxford, 2001, 87; Artist's Union 'Regional Report'. Quoted in Mary Kelly, 'A Brief History of the Women's Workshop of the Artist's Union, 1972–73'. In Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–1975*, exhibition catalogue, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, 1997, 75.

<sup>438</sup> Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 15.

members of the Greater London Community.<sup>439</sup> As an area, Southwark had been home to industries that employed women since the nineteenth century, and women had made up a large portion of the labour force in the tin box industry in south London since World War I.<sup>440</sup> A south Londoner, Kay Hunt came from a family of workers who had worked in the tin box industry for generations. In this respect, *Women and Work* was her way of ‘honouring living workers’ experience and the lives of her own mother and aunts who had all laboured in these factories’.<sup>441</sup> Hunt was accustomed to the real life of industry, and was thus the closest (of the three artists) to an *organic intellectual* (i.e. ‘someone who rises to a level of professionalism’<sup>442</sup> – in Hunt’s case, an artist from a social class that doesn’t normally produce intellectuals and who remains connected to that class contingently if not essentially) on account of her connection to both the working class and the art community. As Gramsci argued, the function of an organic intellectual is ‘organisational’ and ‘connective’, and Hunt provided this link between the artists and workers.<sup>443</sup> Hunt studied sculpture at Camberwell College of Art and taught at Guildford School of Art during the late 1960s. Along with 40 other faculty members, she had been fired at the time of the 1968 student occupation for supporting the students’ cause.<sup>444</sup> From the late 1960s, Hunt produced documentary works reflecting her own experiences, such as a nine-panel work consisting of official documents and literary quotes detailing the birth, war record and the death of her father; works in leather produced in homage to her mother who had been a leather worker in Bermondsey from the age of 14; and community history projects such as the exhibition ‘Guildford Minus 40’, which documented the sit-in at Guildford School of Art in 1968). Following *Women and Work*, Hunt went on to research women’s labour history from 1975 onwards for anti-war projects. In the Gramscian sense, Hunt emerged ‘organically’ from the ranks of the working class.<sup>445</sup> Although she was formally educated and thus not a worker, she was conscious of and responsive to the interests of workers, and pursued counterhegemonic ambitions, as demonstrated by her support of the Guildford students and the *Women and Work* project, among others. In an interview with John Walker in 2000 – one year before she died – Hunt stated that the most positive effect of *Women and Work* had been to persuade women workers at the Metal Box Co. to join a union.<sup>446</sup> Gramsci argued:

The trade union is answerable to the industrialists, but only in so far as it is answerable to its own members: it guarantees to the worker and his family a continuous supply of work and wages, i.e. food and a roof over their heads.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>439</sup> ‘Women & Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry. Part I, Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly. Catalogue Introduction, South London Gallery, 1975’. In Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 78; John Albert Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*. London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2002, 144.

<sup>440</sup> The tin box industry manufactured nearly 400 different types of tin from paint containers to hair cream cans and from grenades to ammunition boxes during wartime.

<sup>441</sup> Kay F. Hunt, statement in *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain*, 1965–75. Exhibition catalogue, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000, 109.

<sup>442</sup> Organic Intellectual, *Oxford Reference*. n.d., <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100253736>>, [Accessed 11 October 2018].

<sup>443</sup> Gramsci and Joseph A. Buttigieg, *Prison Notebooks*. Q12§1. European Perspectives. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992.

<sup>444</sup> John Albert Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*. London: Tauris, 2002, 144.

<sup>445</sup> Gramsci and Forgacs, ‘Intellectuals and Education’. In *The Gramsci reader*, 301.

<sup>446</sup> Kay Hunt quoted in Walker, *Left Shift*, 147.

<sup>447</sup> Gramsci and Forgacs, ‘Factory Councils and Socialist Democracy’. In *The Gramsci reader*, 94.

For Gramsci, the trade union as a tool of ‘industrial legality’ was ‘a compromise’.<sup>448</sup> In other words, while the project empowered women workers to join a union, hence securing legal representation, it was still up to the workers themselves to claim their own (revolutionary) rights in case of industrial dispute since the balance of forces inclined towards the industry. In that sense, it was crucial for the Women’s Workshop to embrace the specific needs stemming from the situation of the women workers. Jenny Wolmark posits:

[T]he ground-breaking idea that the personal is political meant that key issues within the women’s movement could be put on the agenda in a range of organisational environments from which such concerns had previously been excluded, such as the trade union movement.<sup>449</sup>

It was also through this new agenda that the largely white, middle-class WLM sought to develop alliances with the working class. *Women and Work* was one such effort.

Coming together with fellow women was crucial for women’s liberation; in fact, it was the common situation faced by women that facilitated the formation of collectives. But while conditions faced by women were broadly similar, their responses in the form of artworks or written accounts didn’t necessarily share a group identity. This plurality was underlined in an interview included in the arts section of *Spare Rib* dedicated to the 1974 ‘Arts Meeting Place’ exhibition in London. The Women’s Workshop acknowledged that the works in the exhibition didn’t present a group identity even though they ‘share similar, if not identical problems of isolation, both from other women artists and the general isolation of artists in a society, which is alien to collective creative activity’.<sup>450</sup> Indeed, collective work wasn’t only a feminist initiative to address the exploitation of women artists, but that of all artists in society. As discussed in the previous chapter, this condition was also evident in the ‘Art Spectrum’ show held at Alexandra Palace in 1971, which instigated debate among artists and prompted the foundation of the Artist’s Union in 1972.<sup>451</sup>

To the question ‘Why have a women’s exhibition?’ posed by the editors of *Spare Rib*, the Women’s Workshop response on behalf of all its artists was ‘...nobody else is going to do it for us’.<sup>452</sup> This was one of the defining virtues of 1970s feminism: women took the matter into their own hands and fought women’s oppression as women. Working collectively also meant a feedback system was created. Members of the collective or other people involved would talk to each other, discuss their works, offer criticism and essentially stimulate each other further. Artist Sonia Knox described brilliantly the breadth of this feedback system:

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>449</sup> Jenny Wolmark (2003), ‘The pleasure-pain of feminist politics in the 1970s’. In Helen Graham, Ann Kaloski, Ali Neilson and Emma Robertson, eds, *The Feminist Seventies*. Web book, York: Raw Nerve Books, <<http://www.feminist-seventies.net/Graham.html>>, [Accessed 20 September 2015].

<sup>450</sup> Women’s Workshop, Artist’s Union, *Spare Rib*, July 1974, no. 29, 38.

<sup>451</sup> While the ‘Art Spectrum’ show featuring 120 artists (100 male, 20 female) was criticised for several reasons, including its eclecticism and lack of consistency and quality, the two critiques that instigated a wider reaction and the foundation of the Artist’s Union came from Gerry Hunt and Margaret Harrison. Hunt’s objection was about the selection process, whereas Harrison argued that the show evinced the problem of limited funding especially with respect to women. Walker, *Left Shift*, 50.

<sup>452</sup> Parker and Pollock, *Framing Feminism*, 159.

I think feminist art should reach all women, not only women in the movement, but women workers in the factories and housewives in their local communities, as women seldom get the chance to criticize their own culture, analyse it and work out the ways in which their culture under capitalism affects their lives. Feminist art is one way of opening up these channels of communication between groups of women, the working class and other oppressed sections of society.<sup>453</sup>

Harrison was also at the forefront of women's discussion groups and was one of the founders of the Women's Liberation Art Group. Harrison's overtly feminist exhibition at Motif Editions in April 1971, which included drawings depicting Hugh Hefner dressed as a Playboy bunny in *He's Only a Bunny Boy But He's Quite Nice Really* (1971) (as inversions of the male artist drawing a female nude), and Captain America wearing fake breasts and a basque, had been closed down by police on grounds of indecency. Though she was already politicised by the events of 1968, the reaction to her one-woman show put the finishing touch to her politicisation.<sup>454</sup> Harrison's artistic practice during the 1970s employed humour and irony to challenge notions of masculinity and criticise the Vietnam War (such as *Captain America*, 1971/1997, a watercolour image featuring the superhero in high heels with fake breasts; *Banana Woman*, 1971, featuring a woman lying on a peeled banana with its tip in her mouth; *Son of Rob Roy*, 1971, a drawing featuring the male character in heels, holding pistols that resemble penises and a pistol in place of his penis), pop culture and issues of gender. Bringing socio-political, historical and cultural narratives together, these works investigated and critiqued gendered roles and were thus, theoretically, closely related to the collaborative work she engaged in through the Women's Workshop.

Harrison emphasised the vitality of making connections with the past, and, as we will see in the final chapter, Stuart Brisley did the same in *The Peterlee Project*, where he sought to empower a community in the present through practical engagement with the past. Harrison admitted that while strategies and tactics change, '[y]ou learn from the past. In order to think about what's happening now we need to make connections to previous actions'.<sup>455</sup> A case in point was her involvement in her partner Conrad Atkinson's *Strike at Brannans* (1972), about women on strike at the Brannans thermometer factory in Cumbria prior to *Women and Work*. *Strike at Brannans* documented the yearlong strike of the mostly female factory workers, who were demanding better working conditions. The result of Atkinson's year of research was an exhibition of newspaper coverage, case histories, wage slips, local people's photographs, films and videos at the ICA in London, an event that attracted media attention and turned the exhibition site into an organising centre for strikers. The artist also sold copies of a print featuring strike committee signatures over the factory license, to raise money for the strikers. Ultimately, as Harrison and Atkinson noted, the project facilitated the unionisation of workers at

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<sup>453</sup> Sonia Knox in *Spare Rib*, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism*, 161.

<sup>454</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>455</sup> Harrison quoted in 'Interview: Margaret Harrison: art, life and politics', *FAD*, <<http://fadmagazine.com/2013/05/26/margaret-harrison-art-life-and-politics/>> [Accessed 17 October 2015].

Brannan's south London factory, even though the Cumbrian workers were defeated.<sup>456</sup> Harrison's involvement as a researcher on *Strike at Brannans* was immediately after her one-woman show closed and was pivotal for her subsequent collaboration with Kelly and Hunt.<sup>457</sup> This was also when she realised that feminism 'had many layers of invisible history and politics to be investigated, in order to understand a societal structure, which placed [women] in a peripheral position'.<sup>458</sup> Harrison's personal experience therefore directly prompted her politicisation. As a result, she decided to link her art practice with the issues that concerned her, to restructure her strategies for working and evolve her position as an artist.<sup>459</sup>

According to Harrison, it was also at an initial meeting with other women artists interested in forming a women's unit in Su Braden's studio that they decided to nominate one another for positions in the Union.<sup>460</sup> Becoming Union officers empowered Harrison and Kelly in a variety of ways, helping them to develop better arguments, master public speaking and build confidence. Moreover, it became clear that they could no longer be satisfied with men's definition of women, and that feminism could only be defined by women, on women's terms. These were effectively the objectives outlined by the WLM. As Laurel Forster argues,

the WLM emerged as a complex set of challenges to the political establishment. It both demanded that society and institutions at large think about the role and rights of women; and concomitantly it challenged women to individually and collectively reflect upon, and become articulate about, their own lives.<sup>461</sup>

In a similar vein, Parker and Pollock stated that the need to 'change art by their collective presence' became increasingly the *modus operandi* of women artists in Britain during the 1970s,<sup>462</sup> whose collective efforts ranged from attending national conferences to campaigning for equal pay, welfare, contraceptives or abortion, and even to mundane daily routines. For instance, in 1970, the History Group of the Women's Liberation Workshop decided to participate in demonstrations in support of national liberation struggles in Vietnam and Palestine. Established in 1970, the Women's Liberation Workshop was a loose network of mainly all-women groups, most of which were neighbourhood based, though there were also campaigning groups. The History Group, founded shortly after the History Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford, in February 1970, was the first study/reading group of the Workshop and included Rosalind Delmar, Sally Alexander, Juliet Mitchell, Laura Mulvey and Mary Kelly. These workshop groups were committed to developing a collective and non-authoritarian practice, and 'aimed to be leaderless, autonomous and heterogeneous',

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<sup>456</sup> Margaret Harrison and Conrad Atkinson, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle.

<sup>457</sup> Jolene Torr interview with Margaret Harrison, 'Margaret Harrison Rackroom', *ArtSlant*, San Francisco, Mar. 2010, <<http://www.artslant.com/ew/artists/rackroom/130637>> [Accessed 26 October 2015].

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Laurel Foster, 'Printing Liberation: The Women's Movement and Magazines in the 1970s'. In Forster and Sue Harper, eds., *British Culture and Society in the 1970s: The Lost Decade*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010, 93–94.

<sup>462</sup> Parker and Pollock, 'Fifteen years of feminist action', *Framing Feminism*, 4.

according to Delmar.<sup>463</sup> The History Group's participation in national liberation efforts in Palestine and Vietnam also illustrated the non-divisive and open nature of the WLM. Writing in 1970, Kelly signalled that there existed 'a much deeper source of identification [...] between [their] own oppression as women and that of peoples oppressed as nations'; even if this identification was 'not equivalent', it was 'similar'.<sup>464</sup> In fact, the double issue of *Shrew* magazine in which Kelly's article appeared was also the result of a collective effort by the History Group. The issue included articles by Laura Mulvey and Juliet Mitchell, but all contributions were based on collective discussion.<sup>465</sup>

During the 1970s, the European WLM's slogan had been 'separate, but not autonomous', a motto that reflected the approach of most women's groups committed to engaging with a broader political agenda while pursuing the independent and specific needs of the women's movement.<sup>466</sup> Indeed, the statement for the March 1971 Women's Liberation Art Group exhibition at the Woodstock Gallery in London declared:

We are learning to provide each other with the confidence to explore and develop our own vision of a new consciousness: and we believe that the existing male-oriented art world, distorted as it is into a sort of international stock market, needs the transfusion of this new vision and new consciousness in order to survive.<sup>467</sup>

This new consciousness involved being open to making broad alliances with fellow women artists, as well as the liberation struggles of oppressed national groups and other exploited sectors such as cleaners or factory workers. Support of the women workers' occupation of the Sexton Shoe Factory at Fakenham in 1972, or the Grunwick Strike in 1976 led by Mrs Jayaben Desai, or the strike for the Cleaners Action Group, were all examples of such solidarity.

Jenny Wolmark acknowledges that it was the feminists in the Communist Party who facilitated the development of the National Working Women's Charter of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), 'with its key demands for equal pay, contraception and abortion on demand, more generous maternity leave and childcare facilities', in 1974.<sup>468</sup> Moreover, the implementation of the charter was made possible only through the recognition of 'the necessity to work with other politically sympathetic groups and individuals'.<sup>469</sup> Wolmark's assessment was congruent with Gramsci's emphasis on the importance of building organisations of struggle, in the process of struggle, which was particular to the working-class way of building coalitions and alliances. I argue that the drafting of the National Working Women's Charter, like the collaborative process through which *Women and Work* was created, echoed the Gramscian emphasis on building the strength of revolutionary organisations by

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<sup>463</sup> Delmar in email conversation with Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 1, [Accessed November 20, 2015].

<sup>464</sup> Kelly, 'National Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation', *Shrew*, December 1970. In Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 67.

<sup>465</sup> Kelly, 'National Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation', 67.

<sup>466</sup> Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time', 5.

<sup>467</sup> Liz Moore, statement for the first Women's Liberation Show at the Woodstock Gallery, 1–13 March 1972, in *Towards a Revolutionary Feminist Art*, 1972, no.1, 1.

<sup>468</sup> Wolmark, 'The pleasure-pain of feminist politics in the 1970s'.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

discussion, disagreement and internal dissent, rather than by bureaucratic decree – hence the importance of tactical alliances and united action.<sup>470</sup> Moreover, as Wolmark asserts,

...trust and shared agendas meant that a great sense of solidarity emerged from women working together over various issues. More often than not, this sense of solidarity overrode the factionalism (...) it also gave women the confidence to push for change in the face of considerable opposition.<sup>471</sup>

I maintain that it was this understanding of solidarity that made *Women and Work* significant. The project involved a long-term and collaborative effort, allowing artists to witness the gradual changes made by the factory management for implementing the EPA, and ultimately to pinpoint and question the division of labour in the home through their investigation of the division of labour in industry. As such, it has become an emblematic artist project of the 1970s.

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<sup>470</sup> Gramsci and Forgacs, 'Communism, 1919–1924', *The Gramsci reader*, 111.

<sup>471</sup> Wolmark, 'The pleasure-pain of feminist politics in the 1970s'.

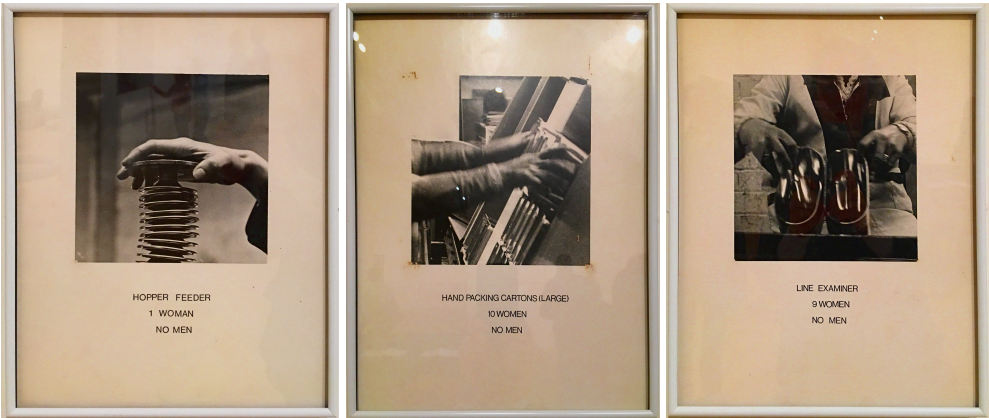
4. Representing the Struggle in *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75* (1973-75)



Fig. 16 Women administering various tasks at the factory, *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–1975*



Fig. 17 Comparative charts for men and women's wage differentials  
Fig. 18 Looped colour videos of men and women at work



Figs 19, 20, 21 Close-ups of women demonstrating women-only tasks



## **Division of labour in industry and the home**

*Women and Work* comprised enlarged reproductions of tables and charts showing various jobs performed by men and women, along with their wages; portraits of the women paid hourly, as well as a map showing locations where workers lived; photographs illustrating tasks performed by workers; and two looped films featuring women and men at work, along with taped interviews and photocopied documents. These photocopies were selected to demonstrate the differences in job descriptions for the two genders, wages and working conditions, and the repercussions of implementing the EPA of 1970, which aimed to prevent discrimination in terms and conditions of employment between men and women. The documents included: the number and percentage of female workers in various occupational groups; Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) materials related to negotiations for the implementation of the EPA; trends in average weekly and monthly earnings in all industries for males and females; 24 timetables illustrating average daily routines for women and men at the Metal Box Co., transcribed from interviews; charts showing the percentage of single and married women, and women employed full- and part-time; and a table collated from national survey results showing reasons for job changes among men and women.

The project's exhibition material was data- and documentation-heavy, and was presented in a raw and neutral reportage style. For the display of documents and photographs (Figs 16 & 17), they also borrowed systems from minimalism, such as grids and a monochromatic colour palette. The portraits displayed in a grid layout show different pay grades, from the lowest paid, Grade 1 at the top and the highest paid, Grade 5 at the bottom. Arranged along clear lines and placed side by side these portraits resemble the laying out of specimens from a scientific report. Upon close inspection, we see that the focus of the women's portraits is their hands whereas the men's portraits, which use wider angles, display their bodies. The portraits are black and white in contrast to the colour videos of the women and men that are displayed on loop. The monochrome quality of the photographs evince an intentionality, as the artists highlight the mundane nature and monotony of factory work.

The comparative charts listing wage differentials for men and women are amongst the plethora of records collated and presented by the artists. Their post-conceptual manner of display is complemented by their pseudo-scientific appearance across the sterile white space of the gallery but there is an incommensurable distance between these documents and professional sociological reports. Although, the artists' records parallel such sociological reports in their straightforward style of reportage, they are by no means qualified by processes of statistical research. The qualitative data was not actually collected by the artists but instead photocopied from documents obtained from the factory. The quantitative data bear the artists' biases and are determined by chance (participation is voluntary, and the artists have no control over variables amongst workers) more than by strict scientific research protocols. In short, the 'neutrality' of these documents, and their statistical validity is dubious from a scientific viewpoint. While I consider this pseudo-scientific attitude a hindrance in the

accountability and validity of their findings, the artists were exposing knowledge otherwise hidden, acting almost as progressive public workers unearthing information kept undercover about these workers. Furthermore, by displaying these charts and graphs with little or no commentary, they implicated their viewers by inviting them to delve into the plethora of materials, and decipher this information. In doing so, they risked becoming accomplices (by way of their indifference) to the inequality faced by the women workers of the factory.

The two videos (Fig. 18) showed female labour as manual and relatively static, while male labour appeared more active, both physically and mentally: while women could be seen wiping, cleaning and packing, men were shown operating heavy machinery or engaged in managerial or directorial work. But this division of labour was most visible in the tables, which categorised all hourly paid women as unskilled workers, such as operatives, assemblers or cleaners, in comparison with only 57 per cent of men described as ‘unskilled’. Moreover, while men held all the managerial positions (including supervisors and department heads), women were confined to clerical positions such as cashiers, secretaries, typists or office machine operators. The photographs (Figs 19, 20, 21), also illustrated sexual segregation: basic and repetitive tasks performed by women, as illustrated by close-ups of their gloved and ungloved hands which contrasted with the more physically demanding labour carried out by men, such as driving forklifts. These close-up photographs focus on the women’s hands, while their faces and the rest of their bodies remain outside the frame. This is a demonstration of the menial nature of the women’s positions rather than a means to deem them anonymous individuals. While the men were, more often than not, responsible for tasks that required them to mobilize their whole bodies (e.g. operating heavy machinery such as forklifts), the tasks women undertook involved their hands alone, which dictates the framing of these photographs.

None of the artists had been trained as an ethnographer or sociologist and they therefore ended up having to learn the necessary skills for empirical study ‘on the job’, according to John Walker.<sup>472</sup> Even so, there was a wealth of information collated in the form of charts, tables, medical records, time cards and schedules on the walls, and in binders displayed on tables. Timetables and medical records listed workplace accidents, which ranged from cuts and lacerations to a piece of tin lodged in a worker’s eye. In fact, a critical issue the artists uncovered through *Women and Work* was the inadequacy of safety precautions provided by management, and on the audio files there was even a manager’s testimony on the ‘physically painful’ decibel levels of the machinery and the lack of safety measures against this and other dangers in the factory.<sup>473</sup>

Although the exhibition material was not classified, the project can be usefully divided into three parts: the first comprised documentation collated from the 200 women who participated, including portraits of 128 female workers and over 40 interviews covering all types of jobs – skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled; the second included information on wage structures, evaluations, historical comparisons, conditions and trends, as well as resolutions from the 1975 TUC women’s conference collected from TGWU stewards; the third part summarised the artists’ findings for the study and also

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<sup>472</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 144.

<sup>473</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, ‘Miens of Production’, *Artforum*, Vol. 52, No. 9, May 2014, 147.

included a short and circumstantial conclusion, which acknowledged that there was indeed a crisis in the management of labour due to the implementation of equal pay and its contradictions (i.e., the disparity between formal equality and the inequality created by the allocation of roles and pay grades). This succinctness and lack of prescription was deliberate: by failing to disclose their own viewpoints, the artists aimed to encourage viewers to draw their own conclusions.<sup>474</sup>

The meticulousness and quasi-sociological character of the project was such that even though it was presented in a gallery, the project required diligence on the part of the audience to take it all in. Desks and chairs allowed visitors to sit down and read through the material (Fig. 22), and in her review for *Spare Rib* in 1975 Rosalind Delmar described the project as ‘one of deliberate under-statement’, adding that it was more like ‘an invitation to discovery rather than an overt declaration of findings’.<sup>475</sup> This understatement was the artists’ way of representing struggle, which for working-class women primarily involved the daily grind of domestic labour. While domestic labour was a critical issue scrutinised by feminist artists, the approach of Harrison, Hunt and Kelly in *Women and Work* was distinct in documenting the transformation of the labour process as it was taking place. In *Women and Work* domesticity and/or domestic labour was treated largely as a causal element; the work’s content itself focused more specifically on the division of labour, the implementation and impact of the EPA and, through documentation of the history of women’s labour at the factory, on offering a guide to the future. In fact, Kelly acknowledged that her initial interest in creating projects had been ‘entangled in the idea of art that had social purpose, not as a formal strategy but the historical context that gave rise to it, and as part of the trajectory of anti-formalism’.<sup>476</sup> She particularly sought to make artworks that were ‘more important than [her] name’ as a means to contest essential creativity and authorship in the basic sense of the term, and project work allowed her to do that. As Mary Kelly expressed in our conversation, the project was a means ‘to use the past to think of ways for living in the present’.<sup>477</sup> In this regard, *Women and Work* informs my definition of artist projects as proposals for specific issues that exist in the present, and that require collaboration over a period of time to arrive at a solution for the future.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> In 1975, when the project was on show for the first time at the South London Art Gallery (near the site of the study), it was intended to travel to trade councils and educational institutions for a year, thereafter moving into a permanent location at the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester, and to serve as a precedent into the workings and the inequalities of industry. This move never materialised. Seeking to locate the project 20 years later to include it in an exhibition of Kelly’s projects at the Charles H. Scott Gallery in Vancouver, Canada, curator Judith Mastai discovered that, Hunt, reluctant to part in the work in 1975, had decided to store it in her attic. Together with Hunt, Mastai unearthed the multi-layered and complex project, which was subsequently shown in Canada before making its way back to England. Having never made it to the National Museum of Labour History, the work has become part of the art-historical canon, and is now located at Tate as part of the museum’s permanent collection. Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 11.

<sup>475</sup> Rosalind Delmar, ‘Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry’, *Spare Rib*, 1975, no. 40, 32.

<sup>476</sup> Mary Kelly, interview with the author, 29 September 2018.

<sup>477</sup> Mary Kelly, interview with the author, 29 September 2018.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.



Fig. 22 Installation view, *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75*, South London Art Gallery, London.

In her review, Delmar referred to *Women and Work* as both the result of much-needed research about issues relating to women's liberation, and as 'a form of alternative propaganda'. She states: 'There is formality and insistence in the almost geometrical placing of black, white and grey visuals against bare white walls'.<sup>479</sup> This manner of presentation, together with the thoroughness of the project's charts, tables and other narratives, mirrored the repetitive nature of the labour and struggle for survival – physically and financially – of female workers, both in the factory and at home. The significance of this presentation was twofold: firstly, it facilitated the distribution of information related to the workers and provided them with a voice, albeit a proxy one; secondly, it emphasised the discrepancy of labour, wage and conditions of work and life that prevailed along gender lines, thus revealing a deeper understanding of the struggle involved in women's liberation.

My conversations with both Harrison and Kelly confirmed that exposure of the 'division of labour in the home' lay at the heart of *Women and Work*, despite the overarching objective of deciphering the division of labour in industry. As both women and mothers (Kelly, whose son was born in 1973, was the only one who became a mother after the conception of the project), the artists were experienced in the realities of childcare and domestic labour in combination with trying to sustain a career. Kelly notes that the project allowed her and her co-artists 'to see how that [having a child] underpinned the women's secondary social status',<sup>480</sup> which the workers at the Metal Box Co.,

<sup>479</sup> Delmar, 'Women and Work', 32.

<sup>480</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017, Carlisle, and Mary Kelly, interview with the author, 29 September 2018, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London.

whose lives were dominated by their work at the factory and at home, were not in a position to do. Hence the project was also a catalyst for empowering the workers to take notice and act. Armed with theory, the artists set out to fight for women as women. According to Kelly, the WLM turned to theory out of political urgency, to ‘change [their] lives and what [they] saw as the iniquitous conditions of “all” women’s lives, blatantly enforced in the workplace [...] and more subtly sustained in the home through the naturalisation of the woman’s role in child care’.<sup>481</sup>

In a similar vein, in the 1974 *Spare Rib* issue on the Artist’s Union, Kelly wrote: ‘My previous involvement with women’s work outside the home showed me to what extent women’s status in the labour market is determined by the social function of reproduction’.<sup>482</sup> The experiences of the women workers portrayed in *Women and Work* were no exception. Kelly added: ‘Women’s unpaid work in the home not only maintains the labour force in the physical sense, but also mediates the relations of production through the ideology of the family’.<sup>483</sup> In contrast to the male workers of the Metal Box Co., who talked about the machines and the labour, the women primarily talked about what they did at home with their children. Women identified with the roles of mother and caregiver, while men identified as workers. I suggest that in terms of men and women’s respective relationships towards the workplace, this was also an indication of a dominant ideology that translated femininity into maternity. In that sense, by outlining the extent to which women’s roles were ingrained within the structure of the family, *Women and Work* emphasised the ideologically constructed and contradictory nature of the family.

In *Housewife* published in 1974, Ann Oakley argued that housework is distinct from other work for three significant reasons: it’s private, self-defined and ‘its outlines are blurred by its integration in a whole complex of domestic, family-based roles which define the situation of women as well as the situation of the housewife’.<sup>484</sup> She also claimed that ‘the role of housewife reconciles two separate structures in modern society: home and work’.<sup>485</sup> With the advent of industrialisation, the formerly integrated nature of work and family no longer prevailed. Unlike traditional societies where the unit of kinship equalled the unit of production, contemporary society is based on the opposition between the economically non-productive and private work within the home, and the public and economically productive world of industry. Oakley’s socio-historical account of the role of the housewife and the differentiation of housework from other work is useful for contextualising the situation of the women workers portrayed in *Women and Work*. These women talked about housework at great length, while only casually mentioning the work they performed at the factory. In fact, Kelly stated that:

The sexual division of labour is not a symmetrically structured system of women inside the home, men outside it, but rather an intricate, most often asymmetrical, delegation of tasks which aims to

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<sup>481</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998, xvii.

<sup>482</sup> Mary Kelly in *Spare Rib*, No.13 in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970–85*. London/NY: Pandora Press, 1987, 161.

<sup>483</sup> Kelly, *Framing Feminism*, 161.

<sup>484</sup> Ann Oakley, *Housewife*. London: Penguin, 1990, 6–7.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

provide a structural imperative to heterosexuality. The most obvious example of this asymmetry is that of women engaged in social production or services who are still held socially responsible for maintaining labour power (i.e., males and children).<sup>486</sup>

*Women and Work* became an outlet for these women, where they could talk about the private and self-defined world of housework. Since working for wages in industry had not exempted women from being responsible for housework, maintenance of the home, children and husbands – thus supporting men to work in industry – was still considered women's social duty. Although women were not *forced* to do housework, any cessation of domestic labour could, potentially, have resulted in the cessation of work at the factory: had women workers decided to unite in strike against housework, their husbands' daily routines would have been heavily disrupted, if not brought to an outright standstill (and their children's, too).

Quoted in the *Guardian* on 10 March 1970, a member of the British Government attempted to normalise the economic dependency of women, by saying: 'The role of the housewife is an extremely honourable profession, but the normal responsibility for looking after her welfare falls to her husband.'<sup>487</sup> This comment testifies to the prevailing (male) approach within British society in 1970, at around the time the EPA was passed. In that sense, implementation of the Act was both socially challenging and practically difficult. While social acceptance of gender equality took several decades (and is perhaps still incomplete), full practical implementation of the Act was spread across five years to allow employers to make 'adjustments'. Such 'adjustments' at the Metal Box Co. included specific changes to job evaluation and payment, and consequential changes in the composition of the workforce to maintain profitability. In 1971 a job evaluation system (from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest grade) that categorised all women in grades 1–3 – regardless of merit and years of experience – was introduced. Although the TGWU negotiated a new wage structure that guaranteed women 100 per cent of the male grade rate by January 1976, as seen in Tables 9, 10, 11 and Tape 1, management reserved the right to absorb all bonuses within these raises. From 1971 to 1974 women's wage rates increased by 26 per cent at the south London branch even though the national retail price increase had been 68 per cent as a result of high inflation.<sup>488</sup>

Although *Women and Work* surveyed one factory among hundreds attempting to adapt to the new law, it signalled a larger situation that affected the wider population. For Jane Kelly, the exhibition showed 'the way in which industry copes with problematic, liberal legislation by either restructuring or ignoring its stipulations'.<sup>489</sup> Five years after the implementation of the EPA, an advertisement in *Spare Rib* for the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section (TASS) declared: "Women doing broadly the same work as men should be paid the same." So says the Equal Pay Act. But saying is one thing, paying is another. Employers have had years to regrade, reclassify

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<sup>486</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*. London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, 1.

<sup>487</sup> Quoted in Oakley, *Housewife*, 5.

<sup>488</sup> Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 86.

<sup>489</sup> Jane Kelly, 'Women Artists in the UK: Mary Kelly', *Studio International* No.3, Vol. 193, 1977, 186.

and reorganise jobs to avoid this'.<sup>490</sup> Women working at the Metal Box Co. factory were faced with precisely this type of reorganisation effort. Furthermore, these women didn't have a choice, they were obliged to work under these circumstances or be bound to housework with no means to secure economic resources of their own. *Women and Work* showed that during 1975 a shift that had been in the works since the introduction of the EPA had come to fruition: in an effort to absorb the consequences of the equal pay agreements, the Metal Box Co. reversed the long-running pattern of employing local middle-aged married women for work by two strategic actions.<sup>491</sup> The first was to make extensive investments in capital equipment, such as the installation of a fully automatic handle-assembly machine, which within a year replaced 20 female rivet machine operators.<sup>492</sup> Secondly, part-time working hours were eradicated, along with the introduction of double day shifts (alternating between 6am to 2pm and 2pm to 8pm each week, with reduced rest time and no tea breaks), which ultimately made work nearly impossible for women taking care of families. The interviews with women working part-time showed that many of them were reluctant or unable to work the anti-social hours of the double day shift. According to Harrison, the management was 'dropping the women's grades down, and grading them as lower, rather than raising their wages up'.<sup>493</sup> In short, rather than losing money due to the obligation of paying an equal rate to these women, the management chose to eliminate them.

Running the whole factory on shifts had been in the works for some time, and full automation with triple day shifts (12-hour shifts) had already been achieved in more modern branches of the company by 1973.<sup>494</sup> The introduction of double – or triple – day shifts meant the elimination of all part-time work. Most of the women doing full shift work were unmarried, separated or single, and tended to be from outside Bermondsey: at the time of the conclusion of the artists' study in March 1975, women were being transported from Hackney to work in Bermondsey.<sup>495</sup> Furthermore, the number of hourly paid employees was reduced from 485 in January 1970 to 391 in January 1975, 80 per cent of whom were women.<sup>496</sup> Ultimately, the call for the equalisation of pay for all members of society regardless of gender ended up causing greater harm for women with families; even when they were offered equal pay, industry reacted by eliminating part-time working hours.

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<sup>490</sup> Tass advertisement in *Spare Rib*, 53, London, December 1976, 16.

<sup>491</sup> See Tables 12, 13 and Tape 3; Mastai, 88.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017.

<sup>494</sup> Mastai, 88.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Table 14 and personal reports.

6:00 AM: GET UP, MAKE  
BREAKFAST  
6:45 AM: LEAVE HOME  
7:30 AM: START WORK, GET  
LINES READY  
8:00 AM: MACHINES START,  
KEEP MACHINES RUNNING  
12:30 PM: LUNCH, RING WIFE  
1:30 PM: START, INSPECTION,  
GENERAL SUPERVISING,  
LABOUR, PRODUCTION  
9:30 PM: FINISH WORK  
10:00 PM: GET HOME, LIGHT MEAL  
CHAT WITH WIFE  
12:00 PM: GO TO BED

CLIFTON MCKINSON, AGE 32  
1 SON AGE 10 4 DAUGHTERS  
AGES 7, 6, 4, 2

SECTION FOREMAN

7:00 AM: GET UP, GET FAMILY  
READY FOR SCHOOL & WORK  
9:00 AM: WASHING, CLEANING  
10.30 AM: GO SHOPPING  
11:45 AM: PREPARE MEAL  
12:30 PM: SERVE MEAL  
2:00 PM: CLEAN WINDOWS  
4:00 PM: PREPARE MEAL FOR EVENING  
4:30 PM: MAKE TEA FOR SON  
4:45 PM: LEAVE FOR WORK  
5:30 PM: START WORK  
9:30 PM: FINISH WORK  
9:45 PM: GET HOME, WASH UP  
HAVE TEA  
10:45 PM: GO TO BED

EILEEN SZMIDT, AGE 46  
4 SONS 1 DAUGHTER  
AGES 25, 24, 21, 19, 14

DOUBLE SEAM OPERATOR  
PART TIME 5:30 PM - 9:30 PM

Fig. 23 Diary entry of Section Foreman, Clifton McKinson

Fig. 24 Diary entry of Double Seam Operator, Eileen Szmidt

The daily logs filled by male and female workers evince the different approaches to work held by men and women. For example, the daily diary of section foreman, Clifton McKinson, aged 32 with four daughters and one son (Fig. 23), included leaving home, starting work, lunch, a telephone call to his wife, inspection, general supervising, end of work, dinner at home, a chat with his wife and sleep. On the other hand, the diary of double seam operator Eileen Szmidt, aged 46 with one daughter and four sons (Fig. 24), included getting the family ready for work and school, cleaning, shopping, meal preparation, making tea for her son, going to bed, and only a one-word mention of ‘working’. What these schedules make obvious is the importance women allocated to their families as well as the ideologically and culturally fixed gender roles appointed to (and to a great extent by) women within family structures under capitalism. Of the 18 actions McKinson listed, ten were about his factory work, whereas of the 17 Szmidt listed, 11 were related to housework. Szmidt mentioned work three times, and only in a perfunctory manner: ‘Leave for work, start work, finish work’. While men approached work as meaningful activity, women saw it as ‘dead time’, according to Griselda Pollock, who adds:

The social division of labour and women’s predominance in childcare could be read as sites for psychically-construed pleasures and re-enacted losses which constitute the subjectivity of motherhood. At the time, feminist theory tended to define motherhood as a sociologically conditioned role, in opposition to the conservative claim that it was an expression of biological femininity. The evidence in *Women and Work* pointed to still another way of understanding what it could mean for women: it



might be the complex activation of women's desire, and its reconfiguration within a patriarchal symbolic order.<sup>497</sup>

In line with Pollock's argument, I contend that the artists unearthed a need for examining the deeply emotional elements of motherhood, and the mental (and material) load that came with it. Based on the evidence of the diary entries, it seems as if the children belonged to the women, and the women alone, as men almost never mentioned interaction with their offspring. Just as the men identified themselves with the work they undertook at the factory, women were invested in their family lives. Domestic responsibilities rested on the women, yet this was both socially construed and assumed by the women themselves. In return, the mental load created by these responsibilities was invisible to the men, both because they were preoccupied with factory work and, to a large extent, because women already shouldered this load. Indeed, Kelly picked up on this in her *Post-Partum Document* that she began in 1973 with the birth of her own son. Claiming her role as an artist and mother combined in *Post-Partum Document*, Kelly attended to the relationship between mother and offspring, and provided a signifying space for such discourse. *Women and Work* showed 'the extent to which all the women interviewed were intensely involved with their life at home, with their relationships (...) which seemed a lot more "real" to them than their circumstances at work'.<sup>498</sup> The project thus revealed a critical discrepancy, namely, the duality of women's labour (inside and outside the home), and therefore the ideological and economic function of the family, which became one of the major debates within the WLM.

According to Pollock:

In its conceptualisation of the cultural as a site for the interrogation of the socio-economic, the project [Women and Work] should be compared with the work of an artist like Hans Haacke. And, unlike an exposé which uses already theorised notions of social power, the installation produced unforeseen knowledge.<sup>499</sup>

This unforeseen knowledge was not about equal pay but, rather, domestic circumstances. The artists didn't merely act as purveyors of information on the mechanical workings of the factory, they revealed the emotional and the psychological effects of industrial as well as domestic labour on the women workers. Peter Stupples argues that 'the dynamics of the feminist movement pivoted around the right questions to ask in order to centre the movement upon the actualities of women's experience, rather than conducting a compare and contrast debate'.<sup>500</sup> Likewise, *Women and Work* was not only a compare-and-contrast experiment devised to pinpoint discrepancies between female and male workers

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<sup>497</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Interventions in history: on the historical, the subjective, and the textual'. In Pollock, Griselda, and Penny Florence, *Looking back to the Future: Essays*, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture, Amsterdam: G + B Arts, 2001, 64.

<sup>498</sup> Kelly has always maintained that the theoretical and political grounding of *Post-Partum Document* was within the practice of the Women's Movement. Her initial intention with the work was to include socio-economic issues such as a sociological analysis of housework. However, she ended up excluding these issues, and instead focused on 'how femininity is formed in a psychological sense'. See Terence Maloon, 'Mary Kelly Interview', *Artscribe*, no.13, Aug. 1978, 16.

<sup>499</sup> Pollock, 'Interventions in history', 63.

<sup>500</sup> Peter Stupples, *Social Life of Art*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014, 132.

from a discourse of anti-patriarchy; it was based on women's intersubjective trajectory via a group working at the Metal Box Co. The project exposed the inadequacy and inherent contradiction of the EPA – an Act that many employers like the Metal Box Co. circumvented by changing job descriptions or employing women in positions with no male equivalents – the disparity caused by the negation of housework as work, and the overarching exploitation of the worker within capitalism. The project showed how measures such as the EPA dealt with the mechanics of achieving gender parity in wages and rights, but not the social stigmas, misconceptions and archaic beliefs regarding the economic dependence of women and the division of labour in the home. In that sense, *Women and Work* developed in response to the specific situation arising from the implementation of the EPA, even if it was simultaneously a reaction to the artists' personal commitment to feminism. The project addressed a particular problem and involved the collaborative effort of the three artists over a long-term process, and is thus congruent with my claim about the nature of the project and its specific formation in the 1970s.

### **Socialist origins: the silenced half**

The final year of the implementation of the EPA – 1975 – also marked the shift to an important stage of development for the WLM: a move from the ‘position of looking at the symptoms to examining the basic causes of the need for liberation by viewing [women’s] role historically, biologically, sexually and in terms of class structures’, as Harrison expressed it.<sup>501</sup> In her book *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Sheila Rowbotham notes that ‘a sustained struggle developed from the sixteenth century over the definition of “women’s work”’, as differentiation of the roles of husband and wife began when ‘the external world of work became the sphere of the man exclusively’, while the internal world of the family and the household was the proper business of the woman.<sup>502</sup> Before the sixteenth century families were closely related to production, with all children starting to work and produce from roughly the age of seven. In time, trades such as brewing, candle making and textiles, which had originally belonged to women, ‘were encroached upon and eventually taken over by men’.<sup>503</sup>

With the rise of industrialisation, structures of production shifted from families to factories. This, in addition to the rising importance given to childcare, along with the import attached to motherhood, locked women into the role of mother/giver/carer of the family even if they were still financially forced to work outside the home.<sup>504</sup> This role became so ingrained – until it was challenged in the 1970s – that the responsibilities related to social reproduction, and hence the family, remained linked without becoming a shared responsibility of the wife-husband entity. As Rowbotham describes, ‘with every new refinement in the division of labour women found themselves allocated either a place in which they were powerless or a place in which they were more severely exploited’.<sup>505</sup> Furthermore, although the shifts within the structures of production and the severing of the family from the site of production began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the socio-economic effect of these shifts, especially on women, was exacerbated with the rise of industrialism. As Rowbotham asserts, ‘the separation of family from work had occurred before capitalism, but as industry grew in scale it appeared in its most distinct and clear form’.<sup>506</sup>

By the twentieth century, families had acquired more mobility, and, as demonstrated by the workers in *Women and Work*, industrialisation meant that both women and men became individual producers (as opposed to the family as a unit of production). However, discrimination against women

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<sup>501</sup> Margaret Harrison, ‘Women: Sexuality & Socialisation’. Exhibition catalogue, Northern Arts Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, 17 February – 12 March 1975.

<sup>502</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution: a History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World*. New York: Vintage Books, 2014, 26.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> Childhood in pre-industrial England was short: girls were married at 12 and boys were married by 14. Most children would be sent out to work as apprentices by the time they were seven or eight in most middle-class families and some working-class families. With industrialisation, children began to occupy a precious and important role within the family, which prolonged childhood beyond puberty despite many working families still sending their children to work in factories and mines. Essentially, this had implications for women as childbearers and childrearsers in the family. See Oakley, *Housewife*. London: Penguin, 1990, 21–68.

<sup>505</sup> Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, 27.

<sup>506</sup> Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, 35.

was definitely not over.<sup>507</sup> While the alienating effects of industrialisation saw no gender boundaries, women were paid less than men for the same amount of work and still had to take care of housework; they were thus exploited by having to work under undesirable conditions and for brutal hours. For instance, women cleaners portrayed in the documentary film *Nightcleaners* (1975) by the Berwick Street Collective, which at the time included James Scott, Marc Karlin, Mary Kelly and Humphry Trevelyan, had to work the night shifts – frequently alone for hours on end – because they had to take care of their children during the day.<sup>508</sup> As a collaborative effort involving the collective and some of these women who cleaned office buildings at night, the film portrayed efforts to unionise these women. Originally titled *Nightcleaners Part I*, the film was initially planned as an ongoing series of films for the Cleaners Action Group, founded by one of the cleaners, May Hobbs. In March 1972, the Cleaners Action Group appealed to the Ministry of Defence for union recognition and a £3 raise in their £12.50 wages for 45-hour weeks.<sup>509</sup> A 24-hour picket organised by feminists and civil service unions supported their appeal by refusing to collect trash or deliver mail and milk, or by blocking telephone services. By August 1972, the management of the cleaning company agreed to fulfil these demands.<sup>510</sup> Albeit more an example of oppositional cinema than *cinéma vérité*, *Nightcleaners* depicted this situation while questioning both the socio-political issues it elucidated and its status as a film. As Claire Johnston noted:

Rather than tracing a series of political events in time, [*Nightcleaners*] attempts to involve the viewer in a process of consciousness-raising. In this process we (as the filmmakers say) ‘will come to realise both the poverty of our own consciousness and the real possibilities for enriching it’.<sup>511</sup>

Indeed, the film was comparable to *Women and Work*, both because it was the result of collective effort and because it challenged the status quo through its content and methodology.

Essentially, I propose that *Women and Work* has to be understood within the feminist social structures that fostered it, just like other collaborative projects from the early 1970s such as *Nightcleaners*, the *Feministo* postal exchange initiated by Kate Walker, or *A Woman’s Place* installation by the South London Art Group (SLAG).<sup>512</sup> All of these projects can be considered examples of oppositional cultural formation. With each, the artists presented the contradictions of a situation and offered viewers a space to make up their own minds without imposing prescriptions. For

<sup>507</sup> By 1975, women's earnings had risen from 51.1 per cent of men's earnings in 1972, to 55 per cent. ‘New laws to end battle of the sexes’, BBC News, 29 December 1975, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/29/newsid\\_2547000/2547249.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/29/newsid_2547000/2547249.stm)> [Accessed 14 April 2016]; as of 2011, the full-time gender pay gap in the UK has been 10 per cent, according to the Equality Human Rights Commission, and the average part-time pay gap is 34.5 per cent. See EHRC (2011) Gender pay gaps, 3.

<[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/gender\\_pay\\_gap\\_briefing\\_paper2.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/gender_pay_gap_briefing_paper2.pdf)> [Accessed 14 April 2016].

<sup>508</sup> Sally, one of the WLM activists portrayed in *Nightcleaners* stated: ‘The cleaners don’t actually see each other while they are working on a big building like Shell. Because they work on perhaps two to a floor, but usually they have a floor of their own, except where they have several floors, and they are not allowed to go onto each other’s floors, or speak to each other’, *Nightcleaners*, Berwick Street Collective, 1972–75, 16 mm, 90mins, © Lux Artist’s moving image.

<sup>509</sup> Bernadette Hyland, ‘Building a Socialist Library (10) Born to Struggle by May Hobbs’, 12 February 2015, <<https://lipsticksocialist.wordpress.com/2015/02/12/building-a-socialist-library-10-born-to-struggle-by-may-hobbs/>> [Accessed 29 October 2015].

<sup>510</sup> Hyland, ‘Building a Socialist Library (10) Born to Struggle by May Hobbs’; see also May Hobbs, *Born to Struggle*. London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1973.

<sup>511</sup> Claire Johnston, ‘*The Nightcleaners (part one)* Rethinking political cinema’, *Spare Rib*, No. 40, Oct. 1975.

<sup>512</sup> See Chapter 2.

instance, *Feministo* transformed the simple act of letter writing into an outlet and a medium where women artists could practice their art, while also forming relationships with likeminded women without leaving their homes. Similarly, by providing a physical space, *A Woman's Place* created a platform for support as well as for collaborative practice.

Writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Kelly noted:

After 13 years of scrutiny of women's and feminist art (...) the most important contributions are those which provide not only an image or even a new form [of] language, but those which delve down and move out into social life itself.<sup>513</sup>

I argue that *Women and Work* was one such project. Grounded in consciousness-raising, it was committed to the feminist movement not only in its content but also its context. The project was the culmination of several years of labour and was 'not [an] autonomous series'; instead it consisted of 'ongoing sequences of learning, communication, integration and learning some more from the responses of the chosen audiences'.<sup>514</sup> Kelly argued that projects like *Nightcleaners* and *Women and Work* 'concern themselves with systems critically, from within, not just as commentaries on them'.<sup>515</sup> Of course, the artists were not the ones doing the actual manual work; theirs was mental labour, which was instrumental in excavating the terms and scope of the manual labour and struggle the workers experienced.<sup>516</sup>

This discrepancy between the types of labour the artists and the workers undertook was an indication of the distinctive class positions held by each group of women. In that sense, Hunt's familial connection to the working class positioned her as an ideal agent for building an alliance between two otherwise discrepant groups of artists and workers, in the Gramscian sense. Although Hunt's position as an artist located her alongside Harrison and Kelly as white, middle-class women, by instigating this project Hunt sought to give these women workers 'homogeneity and a consciousness of [their] own function in the economic sphere', as advocated by Gramsci.<sup>517</sup> Harrison and Kelly's involvement in the development of Atkinson's *Strike at Brannans* and *Nightcleaners*, respectively, involved similar efforts and were instrumental in the development of the specific approach taken for *Women and Work* as a project. The artists – despite their class positions – located their practice where working class struggle took place, observing, examining and diligently studying what life was like for these women workers for two years in an effort to document changes in the labour force.

Like *Nightcleaners*, the production of *Women and Work* was based on collective effort. The authorial voice was equally distributed among the three artists and belonged to all of them combined. While each artist's individual position and approach must have been instrumental in the

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<sup>513</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*. London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, xiii.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, xiii.

<sup>516</sup> The artists were also responsible for taking care of their children. While Hunt's children were older, both Harrison and Kelly had to take care of their very young offspring while working on the project. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Kelly's *Post Partum Document* deals directly with this issue.

<sup>517</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Q4§49.

final form, structure and display of the work, no single name had a higher stake in the work's initial reception.<sup>518</sup> Indeed, the initial delivery and reception of the work was also a collective endeavour, with readings, conversations and discussions continuing throughout the duration of the exhibition (1975). As with Stuart Brisley's *The Peterlee Project*, which I will discuss in the next chapter and which was predicated on egalitarian principles of collective action through an open process, *Women and Work* surpassed the individual efforts of Harrison, Hunt and Kelly and was more than the sum of its parts.

Juliet Mitchell has stated that 'socialism was foundational for the women's movement and those of us who were and still are on the Left understood where we had to expand it intellectually'.<sup>519</sup> Her comment is crucial for an understanding of the methods and ways of approaching issues used by woman artists in the 1970s. The occupation with socialism, and especially with Marxist theory, belonged to what came to be known as first wave feminism, which was concerned predominantly with achieving equal opportunities for women. From the late 1960s onwards, however, radical feminism – especially in conjunction with other Leftist social movements – sought to deal with patriarchy and women's oppression at a more fundamental level than advocating for equal rights. Differentiated now as second wave feminism, this was a fight against the oppression of women that shifted away from the notion of women's economic position within the workforce, to the psychic formation of women through reproductive and domestic labour. Unlike other social movements that were interested in protecting the rights of 'oppressed' groups on the grounds of race or class, second wave feminism focused on sexual difference. As Kelly recalls, 'questions of sexuality and the "sexism," [sic] were deeply imbricated with those of class, race and nationality [...] this perspective was there from the start, at least in the European Women's Liberation Movement, not something that came later, and I was reminded of the slogan, "separate, but not autonomous," which described the need for an independent women's movement, and at the same time, a commitment to engage with the broader political agenda'.<sup>520</sup>

One of the key tools utilised by second wave feminists were in the form of community-based, women-only study and support groups that sought to raise consciousness of and empower women collectively. These groups provided a platform for discussions of women's shared experiences, alongside the study of important texts on class, society and women's roles. The History Group was one such group, whose members included Kelly, Mitchell and Delmar (whose husband Geoffrey Novell-Smith had just finished translating Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* at the time of the group's foundation) who were devoted to reading Marx and Freud. As Kelly describes, the group was committed to making 'sexuality pass into the grand narratives of social change'.<sup>521</sup> Indeed, Kelly herself was from the transitional generation who were part of the emergence and evolution of second

<sup>518</sup> Although the initial ambition had been to share ownership of the work, according to Harrison, Kelly's name was emphasised over hers and Hunt's during the project's presentation as part of Kelly's retrospective in Canada in 1997. The rift between the two artists remained even after Hunt's death in 2001. Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017.

<sup>519</sup> Sunit Singh, 'Emancipation in the heart of darkness: An interview with Juliet Mitchell', *The Platypus Review*, Issue 38, August 2011, 1.

<sup>520</sup> Mary Kelly, 'On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>>, 4, [Accessed 20 March 2020], 7.

<sup>521</sup> Juli Carson, 'Excavating Post-Partum Document: Mary Kelly in Conversation with Juli Carson.' In Rereading 'Post-Partum Document.' Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1999, 190.

wave feminism. While early feminist responses to Freud's writing had framed his work as anti-woman, especially in the writing of feminists in the United States such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Eva Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectics of Sex*, or Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in Britain; for second-wave feminism, Freud was significant. Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* provided a valid and critical response, and delineated the shift to Marx and Lacan through Freud. Like Mitchell, several members of the History Group were amongst those who formed the Lacanian Women's Study Group in 1973, which emphasized the shift towards questions of sexuality and the psyche through readings of Lacan, whose theories opened up new possibilities for feminism. Adopting methods from various historical epochs and theorists, including but not limited to Marx, Freud and Lacan, the members of this group set out to fight against the oppression of women, as Mitchell relates in *Women: The Longest Revolution*, and Rowbotham in her book *Hidden from History*.<sup>522</sup> For Mitchell, the solution to the problem of subordination lay in the concept of the family, and in her 1978 essay 'Erosion of the Family', she stated:

From its inception until today many feminists have argued not (...) for the end of family but for, in whatever kin or communal form it occurs, an equality of reproduction with production; producing people should be as important as producing things.<sup>523</sup>

I argue that this emphasis on the necessity for such an equalisation was present in *Women and Work*, as the artists demonstrated the direct but latent relationship between reproduction and production by pinpointing the division of labour in the family, through presenting the division of labour in industry. The artists also marked a shift away from first-wave feminism, towards questions of production that were integral to second-wave feminism, with its focus on sexuality and the subjectivity and ideological oppression of women. Beginning with a question that related to production and equal opportunity, by way of the Equal Pay Act [1971] and its shortcomings, the project evolved into an examination of the division of labour as it related to the domestic role of women — the artists discovered that the women workers' subjectivities were in fact determined by their role in the home. These two roles, that of the economic and the subjective, were inextricably entwined. In concert with the turn towards questions of subjectivity in the broader New Left, this was also a moment characterizing the internal developments in feminism.

Rather than straightforward political reforms, women in the 1970s were concerned with the specificity of femininity and its representation in culture. As Julia Kristeva noted, while existentialist feminists aspired 'to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history', post-1968 feminists sought 'to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past'.<sup>524</sup> Socio-political projects such as *Women and Work* created by women artists set out to

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<sup>522</sup> See Mitchell, *Women, The Longest Revolution: Essays on Feminism, Literature, and Psychoanalysis*. London: Virago, 1984; Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against It*. London: Pluto Press, 1992.

<sup>523</sup> Mitchell, 'Erosion of the Family' *New Society*, 1978, in *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 201.

<sup>524</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans., Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1. Autumn, 1981, 19.

scrutinise and expose the stakes of being a woman in industry and beyond, while also reminding us of what Pollock describes as ‘the radical potential for change’<sup>525</sup> offered by feminism. Essentially, women-only groups, their efforts for consciousness-raising, publications like *Spare Rib*, *Shrew* and *Red Rag*, or academic narratives by women on women’s history, feminism and women in art, provided spaces where personal histories could be shared. Hitherto, lacking a medium for sharing, outreach and, most importantly, representation, these personal experiences – like those of the Metal Box Co. workers – had been largely suppressed and overlooked. Unearthing these experiences, one by one, as Harrison, Hunt and Kelly did for the workers, were the first steps towards social change, in line with the slogan ‘the personal is political’. Indeed, the project and the reality of domestic labour was a personal matter – each had to balance childcare and their art practice – just as it was a political necessity for the artists, as demonstrated by their involvement with the Artist’s Union. For instance, Harrison admits that she was expected to put up shows and continue to work even after she had just given birth: ‘They didn’t get it, because they didn’t have children’, she said, even in reference to her fellow women artists.<sup>526</sup> Yet domesticity and/or childcare weren’t responsibilities she or her fellow artists tried to avoid; rather, they strove to achieve recognition and build awareness. For Kelly, having a child overlapped with her working on *Nightcleaners* and *Women and Work*, and that informed her realisation that ‘[motherhood] was underpinning women’s secondary social status even though it was naturalised because of the pleasure and bond [one] has with [their] child.’<sup>527</sup> Accordingly, emphasising and building awareness about this taken-for-granted nature of domestic labour and its connection to a women’s identity became a political matter for all three artists.

The artists forged two distinct alliances through the project: one with the management of the Metal Box Co., and one with the workers. Although the first wasn’t entirely an example of organisation for the oppressed, it was necessary for the artists to gain access to the factory, collect documents related to the workings of the enterprise and, most importantly, speak with the workers. The artists were discreet about what they were doing, and the management assumed they were making a documentary about the factory according to Kelly, who told me that had the management been aware of the documents they were collecting, they wouldn’t have been as lenient.<sup>528</sup> In fact, when the managers saw the project at the South London Gallery at the end of the study, they were furious, and even tried to ban the women workers from attending the exhibition.<sup>529</sup>

The alliance forged with the women workers was crucial. All the Metal Box Co. workers were invited to the opening of the exhibition at the South London Gallery. Visiting an art gallery was a first-time experience for nearly all of the workers, and they were all ‘pleased and flattered’ to see their portraits on the walls.<sup>530</sup> On the other hand, the facts uncovered and subsequently exhibited angered the all-male management of the factory, which banned the artists from entering the factory again.<sup>531</sup>

<sup>525</sup> Pollock, ‘Histories’, in Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 50–51.

<sup>526</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Walker, *Left Shift*, 146.

<sup>531</sup> Delmar, ‘Women and Work’, 32.



This ‘ban’ was an indication of their success in drawing attention to a real situation – the division of labour in industry (as well as in the home) and the consequent oppression of women. In discussion with Kelly, she pointed out that, ‘the management thought we were making a documentary about the work of making metal cans’ and that they ‘were photocopying things we probably weren’t authorised[to see]’, which included materials documenting the job and pay differentials between male and female workers, work conditions and the scarcity of health and safety measures.<sup>532</sup> The artists had stirred up and awakened the management to what Delmar described as ‘a particular aspect of a general system of class exploitation’.<sup>533</sup> I propose that the artists’ impartial exposition of the material was born out of a conceptual art tradition and was therefore an aesthetic choice rather than a calculated measure to stir things up with management, even if that was the ultimate result. By probing the hitherto-undisputed factory management through their presentation, the artists were challenging both the management itself (as well as officials in charge of implementing the EPA) and their audience (and perhaps, to a lesser extent, the workers) to think about and take action to change the status quo.

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<sup>532</sup> Mary Kelly, interview with the author, 29 September 2018.

<sup>533</sup> Delmar, ‘Women and Work’, 32.

## Reception as labour

John Roberts posited that political art in the 1970s was ‘peeling away the onion of representation’, not only by representing novel subjects, but also by challenging the politics of representation and its content, context and implications for the audience.<sup>534</sup> In that sense, projects that examined socio-political issues like *Women and Work* and *Nightcleaners* went beyond appearances to probe and scrutinise the underlying relations within society and industry, and to challenge, resist and transform biased identities and meanings. As one such political project, *Nightcleaners*, in Griselda Pollock’s reading, ‘examined its own relation as a cultural form to the struggle of women to unionise in the context of the politicisation of women and that of art making/cinema itself’.<sup>535</sup> *Women and Work*, on the other hand, challenged the merits of the EPA in terms of its cogency and usability, through portrayal of the division of labour in industry and ideologically and culturally fixed gender roles, and sought to build awareness and help transform the subordinate socio-cultural position of women workers.

In *Framing Feminism*, Parker and Pollock documented a new tendency within the women’s art movement, which they defined as ‘strategic artistic practices’.<sup>536</sup> Without abiding by a specific mode, style or medium, these practices disrupted dominant modes of making and distribution, distinguishing themselves from documentary cinema, realist and/or figurative painting, narrative and fiction, which Pollock considered to be ‘too complicit with bourgeois signification’.<sup>537</sup> As an intervention in representation and cultural practice that sought to link contemporary socio-political discourses with issues of class through feminism, *Women and Work* was a prime example of such strategic practices.<sup>538</sup> With these projects, Harrison, Hunt and Kelly (like Brisley and Willats with theirs, as we will see in the following chapters) interfered in the praxis of life rather than remaining one remove from it.

In his editorial for *Studio International*’s issue devoted to women artists in 1977, Richard Cork stated that the tone adopted by the women contributing to the issue was of ‘rational analysis, informed by an awareness of woman’s dilemma yet resolute in its wish to go beyond rhetoric and establish irrefutable evidence of how and why this dilemma has come about’.<sup>539</sup> This was certainly the case for *Women and Work*, which displayed hard facts regarding the obvious gender differential in the type, form, structure and even outcome (wages) of labour undertaken by men and women. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, in addition to portraying the sexual division of labour in industry, *Women and Work* emphasised the split between ‘home’ and ‘work’ and questioned the duality of

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<sup>534</sup> John Roberts, *Stuart Brisley: A Retrospective*. Exhibition catalogue, ed., Sandy Nairne. London, ICA, 1981, 14.

<sup>535</sup> Pollock, ‘Histories’, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 42.

<sup>536</sup> Parker and Pollock, *Framing Feminism*, 58.

<sup>537</sup> Pollock, ‘Histories’, *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 43.

<sup>538</sup> While interventions such as *Women and Work* or *Nightcleaners* directly challenged the socio-economic system of power and ideology by their very conscious acts of representing struggle, another tendency within art was to utilise forms and materials that had hitherto been excluded on account of their ‘domesticity’ (such as weaving, stitching, quilting, crochet, and the incorporation of food), and thus challenge the anonymity associated with craft work and the dismissal of such works as art on account of their utilitarian value.

<sup>539</sup> Richard Cork, ‘Editorial’, *Studio International* No.3, Vol. 193, 1977, 164.

women's roles posed by the economic and ideological function of the family. Women's virtually hidden domestic responsibilities – consisting of anything from food shopping to nursing – which took up the largest portion of their lives, were made visible through their portrayal in *Women and Work*. The subdued and taken-for-granted nature of unpaid domestic labour was emphasised by the stark contrast of how women and men workers approached and described their daily lives and time at the factory. The women identified with their domestic roles and only spoke of their lives outside the factory, in contrast to the men who rarely mentioned anything but what they did at work. This contrast confirmed Bea Campbell's claim that '[i]t is in woman's domestic role that we see the roots of her social position'.<sup>540</sup> Although the women portrayed in *Women and Work* were 'working' women – nominally equivalent to men through earning wages – their subjectivities remained unchanged by this 'work' and were still largely defined by their domestic roles. Furthermore, since domestic labour required considerable time (approximately six hours or more, as documented in the workers' diaries), these women were further cheated in terms of pay, since they were unable to work during these 6+ hours. Division of labour is a double-edged sword: it impinges upon industry as well as the home, and women were assigned to certain roles in industry just as they were within the family. By highlighting the link between the division of labour in industry and the home, the artists were therefore also attempting to underscore the false separation between the public and the private spheres.

Working-class struggle was at the forefront of the critique of dominant ideologies and power, an approach borrowed primarily from the traditions of socialism and Marxism; and in Britain the WLM emphasised the struggles of working women while also challenging the politics of subjectivity, sexuality and the family. Pollock has claimed that the socialist tendency was dominant among a wide spectrum of British WLM supporters in the early 1970s, but remained distinct from earlier feminist and suffragist tactics and strategies, which were 'predominantly but not exclusively middle-class'.<sup>541</sup> However, as Angela Davis asserted in *Women, Race and Class* (1981), even these second-wave feminists were reprimanded for their limited class base and for being still largely white and middle class.<sup>542</sup> Indeed, except for Hunt's connection to the south London working class, the artists were separated from women workers at the factory by class boundaries. In line with Davis's claim, as educated women the artists were considered to be exempt from the brutal conditions of manual labour. However, as explained earlier, many artists needed to support their practice with paid work and were therefore still tied to the capitalist financial system. Furthermore, as women artists in a male-dominated art world, Harrison, Hunt and Kelly were also susceptible to bias in terms of rights, wages and opportunities. By getting closer to the workers and meeting them in their working environment, these artists were expanding the reach and breadth of artistic practice and challenging (rather than reiterating) the dominant foundations of culture, both of which were important aspects of project work.

Moreover, by situating their practice inside the factory and outside the conventional sites of art production, they also challenged normative attitudes about the art world. As Harrison has stated,

<sup>540</sup> Bea Campbell, 'Sexuality & Submission'. In S. Allen, L. Saunders, J. Wallis, eds, *Conditions of Illusion*, Leeds: Feminist Books, 1974, 99.

<sup>541</sup> Pollock, 'Histories', 47.

<sup>542</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

many artists moved ‘out of the galleries into the street’ during the 1970s.<sup>543</sup> Instead of merely calling women to join their workshops, Harrison, Hunt and Kelly went into the locations where working class women laboured, struggled and suffered, and simultaneously attempted to change the site of reception for the project by bringing these workers into the gallery. However, while the artists believed the workers had the right to know about what was going on outside the closed circuit of the factory and their homes, shifting the terms of reception of the work created problems in terms of the politics of representation.

The representation of these women and their struggle in the factory (exacerbated by the implementation of shifts following the introduction of the EPA) was an extensive and meticulous endeavour, which reflected the onerousness of their work. This meant some responsibility for deciphering the sociology of the study was imposed on the audience, a process that involved absorbing a large amount of information and could take several hours. Structurally, Kelly, Harrison and Hunt challenged how art was made and received with *Women and Work*, as a simple and cursory reception was not enough to capture the project’s scope. Viewers need to stop, read, listen and sift through a plethora of text, tables, charts, numbers and photographs to understand what was presented. By reconceiving reception of the project as labour, the artists were therefore making explicit the difference between factory labour and the cognitive labour necessitated by the project, thus echoing the difference between working- and middle-class employment.

The way in which *Women and Work* presented the research material called for a learning process. When Delmar wrote, ‘the material, unfortunately doesn’t “speak for itself”’,<sup>544</sup> she was expressing a sense of disappointment. Although she applauded the work as ‘a stimulating and thought-provoking experiment’, she also asserted that the work’s ‘informational style [was] insufficiently backed by explanatory guidance’.<sup>545</sup> Yet, this was the very aim of the artists: by presenting the results of extensive research without spelling out its implications to the viewer, the artists revealed the ‘invisible social practices through bare informational record’, but ‘without actually picturing anything at all, as though to picture would necessarily be to obscure the facts or, worse, mislead’, as Eve Meltzer claims.<sup>546</sup> While it is true that the artists exposed social practices, it’s not the case that they were not ‘picturing anything’. The artists were documenting facts and figures selectively as women (hence personally aware of the stakes and the discrepancies involved), with the objective of revealing the division of labour in the home by way of the division of labour in industry. Viewers had two options: they could either decide to be intellectually involved in the work, or could leave the gallery space wondering whether what they had seen had anything to do with art. But there is a midway between these two options: just by looking at the comparative diaries and videos, and perusing the photographs, a viewer could easily draw conclusions about the sexual division of labour in industry while also perhaps becoming aware of a similar division of labour in the home.

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<sup>543</sup> Margaret Harrison, interview with the author, 25 May 2017.

<sup>544</sup> Delmar, ‘Women and Work’, 33.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 187.

As noted earlier, there was a third part of *Women and Work* in which the artists shared their conclusions with the viewers at the South London Art Gallery in 1975, yet didn't offer a specific interpretation of the material collected at the Metal Box Co.<sup>547</sup> The absence of deductive reasoning by the artists was proof of their lack of didactic stance – by adopting an objective role, they resembled sociologists presenting field research. I claim that this deliberate nonpartisan position was the artists' way of juxtaposing mental and manual labour. Harrison, Hunt and Kelly presented the results of their own mental labour from the past two years in the gallery as factual information on the manual labour of the women workers. Accordingly, viewers were implicated in a similar form of mental labour: they had to go through the material consecutively, piecing the story together in order to draw their own conclusions.

Though the project maintained the traditional context for displaying and receiving art, i.e. the gallery, it overturned expectations of what was traditionally viewed in this environment. The project didn't give itself away at once – viewing had to be a gradual process. As such, it posed a challenge to the reception of art by aiming to represent struggle through both content and context. By exploring a pragmatic standpoint – both in relation to the project's form and its dependency on collective effort – the artists questioned the project's ontological status as a work of art, as well as the terms of their own authorship. The project painstakingly presented every aspect of the labour – laying out the facts and linking the division of labour in industry and the home – but avoided challenging the factory's operation or offering solutions.

The reception of a project like *Women and Work*, which prevented the viewer from receiving its meaning at once, was distinct from the reception of modernist art, which fosters what Clement Greenberg referred to as an 'effect of presence', with its power to 'move and affect'.<sup>548</sup> *Women and Work* invited the viewer to look 'into' the work rather than 'at' it, in direct opposition to what Greenberg advocated when he claimed 'quality' works are to be looked at and not read.<sup>549</sup> In that sense, the project wasn't what Michael Fried championed either. Fried stated:

It is as though one's experience of [modernist art] has no duration [...] because at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest. [...] It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting [...] to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness: as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.<sup>550</sup>

It was impossible to experience *Women and Work* 'in all its depth and fullness' at once. The type of reception Fried described 'persists in time, and the presentation of endlessness that (...) is central to

<sup>547</sup> 'A Brief Summary of Findings From the Exhibition', in Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–1975*, exhibition catalogue, Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, 1997, 83–89

<sup>548</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Jackson Pollock: "Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision"'. In *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*. Collected Essays and Criticism 4. Chicago, IL: Chicago Univ. Press, 1995, 255–56.

<sup>549</sup> Greenberg, 'Introduction to an Exhibition of Barnett Newman'. Reprinted in John O'Brian, ed., vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 54–55.

<sup>550</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 145–146.

literalist art and theory is essentially a presentment of endless or indefinite duration'.<sup>551</sup> *Women and Work*, on the other hand, required time, as well as cognitive competency – skills that the women at the factory might not have had the opportunity to develop. In that sense, by inviting these workers into the gallery, the project reproduced a certain kind of social domination but with a participatory flavour. The women workers weren't participants in the work but were co-opted into being its subject, especially as they lacked the level of sophistication the work demanded. This was problematic in terms of the project's politics of representation: while intending to support these women in their struggle for equal pay and treatment, *Women and Work* was simultaneously oppressing them by representing them as a site of exploitation, ostensibly without doing anything about it. Yet as Hunt's testimony confirms, *Women and Work* prompted many of the women working at the Metal Box Co. to unionise after being exposed to the WLM through the project. The project therefore facilitated the politicisation of these workers, thereby also demonstrating the political agency of artists and the potential efficacy of an artist project.

Political art isn't an end in itself or '[a model] of modernist redemption', as Dorian Ker reminds us,<sup>552</sup> but as political works, artist projects can be important in their own time as they respond to immediate problems. *Women and Work* attended to issues outside the perimeters of art and exposed information about the division of labour in industry. As Lucy Lippard stated, 'good political art must raise questions as well as confirm convictions'.<sup>553</sup> *Women and Work* achieved this by representing a struggle previously kept within the confines of the factory and sought to raise understanding among gallery visitors about a socio-economic reality, even if this representation was not entirely liberating for the workers. But perhaps more importantly, and despite its deficiencies, *Women and Work* illustrated how artists could intervene and challenge socio-political measures such as the EPA, or the New Towns Act, as we will see in the next chapter. Through *Women and Work* the artists documented the division of labour, the inefficiency of the Act – or the capacity of industrial management to circumvent it – and raised workers' consciousness with regards to their rights as individuals, motivating them to unionise and fight for these rights. The project also demonstrated how politics could bring artists with formally distinct practices to work collaboratively long-term, in pursuit of a common personal objective: women's liberation.

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>552</sup> Dorian Ker, 'Britain does not exist', *Third Text*, 14:50, 2000 116–121; 121.

<sup>553</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, 'Caring: Five Political Artists', *Studio International*, No.3, Vol. 193, 1977, 197.

**Delegating (Community) Action: Stuart Brisley's *The Peterlee Project* (1976–77)**

## Refunctioning cultural production in the context of a New Town

In 1974, the Artist Placement Group (APG, 1966–79)<sup>554</sup> applied to several new town development corporations through introductions made by the Town and Country Planning Association, to place artists on extended project-based residencies.<sup>555</sup> Like other APG placements in industrial or government organisations, this proposal rested on the idea that an artist could have a positive effect on a town and its people. The APG initiated contact with several new towns but the application to the Peterlee Department Corporation (PDC) was the only one that came to fruition.<sup>556</sup> Among the artists approached by the APG, Stuart Brisley was the first to accept, and was placed in Peterlee in 1975. Brisley was particularly interested in working in a mining town, partly due to his father who was adamantly pro-unionisation.<sup>557</sup> After a month of feasibility research in the area, Brisley told the corporation that it was ‘absolutely useless’ to make artworks as part of his placement as ‘any presumed aesthetic value attached to an artwork would fail to benefit people living in Peterlee’. Indeed, earlier attempts to produce artworks for the town, such as Victor Pasmore’s Apollo Pavilion, had been deeply unpopular with residents.<sup>558</sup>

Near Sunderland in north east England, Peterlee was conceived by the local council of Easington in 1948 following the New Towns Act of 1946, which formed part of the post-war Labour government’s commitment to peacetime planning, nationalisation and the welfare state, and spearheaded the post-war reconstruction effort.<sup>559</sup> The town was built in direct response to requests by Durham miners to alleviate the housing shortage in the county, where many families were forced to live in limestone caves along the coast.<sup>560</sup> This was a time when mining was still vital for British industry, and by 1975, 80 per cent of the Peterlee male population still worked in coal mining.<sup>561</sup> ‘Miners are the salt of the earth,’ Lewis Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning had declared in 1948. It was also a somewhat mixed community: a large proportion of the population had come

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<sup>554</sup> Artist-run organisation conceived by Barbara Steveni in 1965 and founded by artists, including John Latham, Barry Flanagan, and David Hall, among others, to negotiate placements in governmental and industrial organizations.

<sup>555</sup> New Towns were designated areas developed across Britain between 1946 and 1970 to alleviate the housing shortage and contribute to reconstruction efforts after World War II.

<sup>556</sup> As these associations were directly linked with government policy, they were subject to the Official Secrets Act unless complete.

<sup>557</sup> Brisley, interview with the author, 20 April 2015, London. Brisley had written his graduate thesis at Florida State University on Peterlee and artist and architect Victor Pasmore, who was assigned by the PDC as a town artist and who would provide design consultancy.

<sup>558</sup> ‘Artist Project Peterlee January 1976–September 1977 Observations: Stuart Brisley,’ Tate Britain Archive, GB 70 TGA 20042/2/2/5/1. During his time as town artist, Pasmore designed the part walkway and part sculpture Apollo Pavilion (c. 1967), which was to become the focal point of the town, ‘not only optical but also ‘environmental’ and pedestrian’. The structure fell into despair shortly after opening, and was to be demolished following a campaign proposed by locals in 2000. However, the Pavilion was restored in 2009 with the help of a Heritage Lottery Grant of £336,000. See *History is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain*, survey exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London, 2015.

<sup>559</sup> In 1974, Easington became a local government district in the eastern part of County Durham. The proposal for Peterlee was in response to the need for a centre for the various villages built around the pits that were sunk in the early 1900s. New Towns Act, 1946 9 & 10 Geo. 6. Ch. 68, <[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1946/68/pdfs/ukpga\\_19460068\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1946/68/pdfs/ukpga_19460068_en.pdf)> [Accessed 19 March 2015].

<sup>560</sup> Peterlee was the only New Town requested by the people through their local government. Tim Brennan, ‘Of Commune and Community’. In *The Peterlee Project 1976–1977*. Exhibition catalogue, London: Modern Art Oxford and Museum of Ordure; Aarhus: Museum of Ordure and Antipyrine, 2014, 134.

<sup>561</sup> Brisley, interview with the author, 23 November 2013, London.



from Scotland, Wales and Ireland,<sup>562</sup> which had moved to Peterlee because it offered employment and housing.

In 1946, C. W. Clarke, the engineer and surveyor of the Easington District Council (EDC) had prepared a report entitled *Farewell Squalor*, which stated, ‘The outstanding feature of the [mining] community [...] is the communal spirit shown. In what other industry is the same camaraderie shown between the people to the same extent as exists in the mining villages?’<sup>563</sup> However, Brisley’s first inspection of the town and conversations with residents showed him that no such a spirit or sense of community existed: ‘If you went to the mining villages there was a tremendous sense of tradition and history but in Peterlee itself you had no sense of that’.<sup>564</sup> In a way, the development of the town had ‘suppressed any sense of collective experience... There was plenty of it probably but it was sort of private, you see, not public’.<sup>565</sup> He felt a sense of community might be instigated by unearthing the history of the town from memories extant in the ‘the bodies and heads of the people living in Peterlee’, and making them public.<sup>566</sup> The revelation of this history became the first part of *The Peterlee Project*. Entitled *History Within Living Memory*, it involved the collection of photographs, drawings, magazine and newspaper clippings, and video and tape recordings of conversations with locals, conducted by a group of residents with Brisley acting as consultant. The purpose of this stage was

...to create the means whereby people may be afforded the opportunity to contribute to a people’s history of the New Town of Peterlee [...] to encourage the development of an historical consciousness in the area, as a necessary pre-requisite for an understanding of the circumstances and actions in the present and action in the future.<sup>567</sup>

I suggest that the outcome of this first stage was comparable to a subaltern history in Gramscian terms. Gramsci advocated that a study of the subaltern should be transformative,<sup>568</sup> as the subaltern “‘have no history”: there are no traces of their history in the historical documents of the past’. According to Marcus Green, he saw this transformation ‘occurring from below’, as was achieved by *History Within Living Memory*.<sup>569</sup>

Brisley envisaged that *History Within Living Memory* would be followed by two subsequent stages that would enable individuals to build their own community through social process:

Stage 2: Historical Material Collection and Public Engagement – this stage involved the collection and collation of historical materials relevant to the area, such as studies made in the area before and after

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid. Most residents relocated to Peterlee due to decisions made by various development corporations after the Distribution of Industry Act of 1945, which encouraged the move of new industry towards development areas.

<sup>563</sup> C. W. Clarke, ‘Farewell Squalor – A Design for a New Town for the Redevelopment of the Easington Rural District’, Easington Rural District Council, 1946, 11.

<sup>564</sup> Brisley, interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Brisley, ‘Proposal for The Peterlee Report presented at the Sunderland Art Centre in May/June 1977’, TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/5.

<sup>568</sup> Gramsci, David Forgacs, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from Cultural Writings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, Notebook 14, §39, 294.

<sup>569</sup> Marcus E. Green, *Rethinking Gramsci*. London: Routledge, 2013, 88.

the development of the New Town, proposals made by local government, and commissioned research papers on the history of the PDC and women in the area, as well as proposals for the third stage. In this final stage, materials accumulated in the first stage were exhibited as photographic slides accompanied by live commentary at the Sunderland Art Centre. Lectures were prepared for schools parties and made available to organisations on request.

Stage 3: Workshop as a 'Social Tool' – this final stage was to assume the form of an open workshop. Community interests and the continued development of historical awareness, as well as issues and proposals for actions, would be at its heart, and would include town hall meetings and talks, lectures and discussions in schools, clubs and societies. In other words, it would create a platform for debate where members of the community could socialise and discuss current issues of interest regarding Peterlee and the surrounding villages. Brisley would end his consultancy once this stage was established.

This final stage was seen as potentially continuous and would be replicable in other towns, even without the presence of the artist.<sup>570</sup> Brisley approached the project like a performance but with one crucial difference: while most of his performances involved him alone, this project necessitated a sense of collectivity and communal effort. He described the project as a tool to 'extend performances' into society.<sup>571</sup> During his first couple of weeks in Peterlee, he spent his time walking around town and drinking coffee, a process he described as 'a bit like catching fish...you're wandering about and somebody starts talking to you'.<sup>572</sup> The first person Brisley encountered was John Porter, a disabled examiner, who became the first of his six recruits.<sup>573</sup> Soon the number of people he was acquainted with increased. Although he took photographs and was initially involved in the documentation collection and interview process, he ultimately left this responsibility to the recruits, because he 'felt too alienated' and it 'was too alienating for them as well'.<sup>574</sup> Essentially, this delegation meant extending his performance into the social field. Claire Bishop, however, defines delegated performance as 'the act of hiring non-professionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing' the artist's 'own socioeconomic category, be this on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, or (more rarely) profession'.<sup>575</sup> In this respect, and since the recruits were performing their own identities and not Brisley's, I suggest that Brisley's intention was to elaborate his performance collectively, and it was thus an act of trust whereby participants would retain their own sensibilities rather than stand in for him.

The project was envisaged as a radical experiment predicated on constant learning and participation, and that provided a social tool to enable the community of Peterlee to come together, interact and discuss issues pertaining to the town and beyond. For Brisley, it embodied an attempt to

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<sup>570</sup> Questions and proposals at the final stage could include: 'Why can't we paint our front doors the colour we want? Why can't we have allotments? Why is the Jaguar plant not employing people over 35?' Brisley, quoted in Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London and New York: Verso Books, 2012, 337; see also 'Observations: Stuart Brisley', GB 70 TGA 20042/2/2/5/1.

<sup>571</sup> Brisley, interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

<sup>572</sup> Melanie Roberts interview, 'National Life Stories, Artists' Lives: Stuart Brisley', 1996 British Library London, C466/43, 218 <<http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Art-photography-and-architecture/021M-C0466X0043XX-0100V0>> [Accessed 3 February 2019]

<sup>573</sup> One of the initial recruits dropped out because she didn't want to participate in conducting interviews.

<sup>574</sup> Melanie Roberts interview, 'National Life Stories, Artists' Lives: Stuart Brisley', 1996, 218.

<sup>575</sup> Claire Bishop, 'Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity', *October* 140, Spring 2012, 91.

transcend the transience and ephemerality of performance, to restructure the relationship between artist and audience and, ultimately, to prevent the project becoming dormant by instigating continuous dialogue. Brisley, however, attached more weight to the final stage and process of dialogue among residents than to the documentation. Thus, in a way, he resisted what Rebecca Schneider defines as the archival logic of modernity that values document over event.<sup>576</sup> As discussed below, Brisley's aim was also to value memory – by reconnecting it to the present and future of Peterlee – over the archive, as an endeavour from below, made by the people for the people, and to transcend the hegemony of the administration. Moreover, since he intended the project to continue after he left Peterlee, the significance of the social aspect of the project, as a platform for interaction and discussion, would surpass its archival dimension.

Brisley defined his role as a consultant rather than a leader or manager, which was in accordance with his intention 'to erode the sense of isolation and social introversion and to attempt to collectivise specific experience'.<sup>577</sup> This decision is also crucial for understanding the project within the context of 1970s Britain. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'consultant', stemming from the Latin word *consultare* (to discuss), means 'a person qualified to give professional advice or services, e.g., in problems of management or design; an adviser'.<sup>578</sup> Consultancy, especially when it is external, involves using the expertise of one person to solve a specific issue and/or problem. Brisley's involvement as a consultant situated him in participants' lives as well as in those of the residents they interviewed, thus extending the concerns of art and the social territory in which it operated – a defining characteristic of artist projects. As discussed in the introductory chapter, artist projects functioned as interventions for effecting long-term social and cultural change and, more often than not, were open-ended. They worked by developing solutions for particular issues – in this case, the inadequacy of the well-intentioned New Towns Act of 1946, which sought to resolve the problem of housing – through the collaborative involvement of local people over a period of time.

For Bojana Kunst, when applied to artistic work, the term *project* 'denominates, not only a specific term, but also a temporal attitude or temporal mode, where the completion is already implied in the projected future'.<sup>579</sup> I argue that, as proposals to issues identified by artists, projects indicate a finite process, even if they involve significantly longer-term commitments than object-oriented art practice. In the case of *The Peterlee Project*, although Brisley's aspiration was for it to evolve into a social tool – a workshop – whereby residents would continue to interact, socialise and collaborate indefinitely, his term of consultancy (as the project's author) was finite (18 months). In this sense, Kunst's assertion also relates to Boltanski and Chiapello's concept of the projective city, where projects are the norm in terms of how work is carried out.<sup>580</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello state that:

<sup>576</sup> Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', in *Perform, Repeat, Record Live Art in History*, eds., Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, Bristol: Intellect, 2012, 140.

<sup>577</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/8.

<sup>578</sup> Oxford English Dictionary <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39956?redirectedFrom=consultant&#gt;> [Accessed 12 April 2015].

<sup>579</sup> Bojana Kunst, 'The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making', *Maska, Performing Arts Journal*, No. 149–150, vol. XXVII, Autumn 2012, 112.

<sup>580</sup> Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Gregory C. Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London; New York: Verso, 2007.

Activity expresses itself in the multiplicity of projects of all kinds that may be pursued concurrently and which, no matter what happens, must be elaborated successively, since the project represents a transient mechanism in this logic. Life is conceived as a succession of projects; and the more they differ from one another, the more valuable they are.<sup>581</sup>

Like Boltanski and Chiapello, Kunst questions this 'multiplicity' and the dominating and pragmatic use of the term 'project' in the twenty-first century, its sheer banality and the fact that it has become an 'empty signifier' within the context of pervasive contemporary 'modes of working through radical individualisation and project-oriented sociability'.<sup>582</sup> Kunst is referring here to Foucault's *Order of Things* (1966), where he posits that the ubiquity of and frequency with which words or notions are used might bring forth anxiety.<sup>583</sup> As opposed to this notion of a project as the all-encompassing horizon of all creative processes and, in keeping with other artist projects of the 1970s that proposed a counter-consciousness, *The Peterlee Project* conceived of a collaborative process of direct social action.

It is crucial to analyse *The Peterlee Project* within Brisley's artistic oeuvre and the context of Britain during the 1970s to understand the full range of the decade's artist projects. The project illustrates the socialist ethos that informed the aspirations of these artists, their view of what constituted project-making in visual art terms, and, for the first time since Constructivism, their vision of art practice as surrendering its autonomy in favour of social purpose (i.e. for the autonomy of Peterlee residents). If we recall Brisley's initial observations, that 'any presumed aesthetic value attached to an artwork would fail to benefit people living in Peterlee',<sup>584</sup> it becomes clear that he was attempting to eschew aesthetics for a social and practical outcome that would also remain valid as art. Brisley held three exhibitions associated with the project – at Northern Arts Gallery, Newcastle (1976), Sunderland Arts Centre (1977), and Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham (1977) – which presented a broad range of audio-visual material collated for the project,<sup>585</sup> including transcriptions of interviews with older residents, Brisley's photographs and other visual material. Buses were arranged from Peterlee to the Easington area to take people to see the exhibition.

*The Peterlee Project* also has much to tell us about the temporality of the artist's project in the 1970s, along with its demotion of the aesthetic. Like performance, artist projects treat temporality differently and seek to replace the binary relationship between performer and viewer with collective practice. Since *The Peterlee Project* had no agenda or blueprint, it could be shaped by participants to their own needs at any particular moment. This fluidity also carried with it the potential for continuity: with its open and perpetual structure, *The Peterlee Project* represented past, present and future simultaneously, and was therefore distinct from the art object as an historical item representing a particular aesthetic that exists only in the present. By contrast, with the input of residents, the project

<sup>581</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>582</sup> Kunst, 'The Project Horizon', 112.

<sup>583</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>584</sup> 'Observations: Stuart Brisley', GB 70 TGA 20042/2/2/5/1.

<sup>585</sup> A subsequent exhibition was held at the Reg Vardy Gallery, University of Sunderland, titled 'Peterlee Report: The Peterlee Project 1976–2004', 2004.

could continue to evolve and transform, and potentially change entirely from earlier and later versions. In addition to analysing Brisley's approach to performance, this chapter will go on to investigate the idea of the extended performance and how Brisley failed to achieve this in *The Peterlee Project*, despite its success as an example of subaltern history.

## The Peterlee Project

As discussed in Chapter 2, Brisley was one of the founding members of the Artist's Union in 1972, and from this point on was primarily interested in using his artistic practice to challenge cultural norms and question the British class system.<sup>586</sup> The mildness that Brisley associated with Britain at the time was most evident in the contrast with the aggressive behaviour displayed in France, where confrontations between police and students in May 1968 brought workers out on general strike and the government near to collapse. French students initially took to the streets in support of those arrested at the Paris X University at Nanterre, and were joined by musicians, poets, communists and socialists, and, finally, millions of workers, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the French workforce. These groups ultimately agreed to form an electoral alliance to take down the de Gaulle government.<sup>587</sup> While the French were revolting for a real transformation of society, May 1968 manifested itself in Britain through an advocacy for a reformist politics as delineated in the Introduction. One instance of this manifestation was the sit-in at Hornsey College of Art where Brisley was teaching, which called for reform in the education system. Stuart Brisley was responsible for teaching the complementary studies programme titled Visual Research, at Hornsey School of Art following the Coldstream/Summerson Report. The course was comparable to the basic design course at the Bauhaus, designed to develop students' fine art skills and their understanding of theory. Following the protest at Hornsey, Brisley was appointed to the faculty as student advisor/tutor. His appointment was unique as he was the only member of staff chosen directly by the student body, when a temporary administration was put in place with the involvement of the student union, during the sit-in.<sup>588</sup> As a loud voice in the 1968 Hornsey protest, and the only faculty member chosen by the student body, Brisley authored a letter 'to the authorities, whoever they are', which declared:

We want to create a creative community that helps us to become the sort of designers and artist that we want. We don't want to become prototype designers or artists built up to serve the society as it is now, because we know that we can do better than this...<sup>589</sup>

Initially provoked by a dispute over cuts to student union funds, the sit-in transformed into a six-week-long period of occupation and debate that questioned institutional authority and the proposed change in status and resources to students following introduction of the Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD) and vocational courses. Along with the support of students and several staff members,

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<sup>586</sup> See Chapter 2. Also see Melanie Roberts interview, 'National Life Stories, Artists' Lives: Stuart Brisley', 1996, British Library London, C466/43, <<http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Art-photography-and-architecture/021M-C0466X0043XX-0100V0>>

<sup>587</sup> See Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2013; Angelo Quattrocchi and Tom Nairn, *The Beginning of the End: France, May 1968*. London; New York: Verso, 1998.

<sup>588</sup> David Buckman, *Artists in Britain since 1945, Vol 1*, Bristol: Art Dictionaries Ltd, 2006; Melanie Roberts interview, BL, C466/43; Penelope Curtis, Keith Wilson, and Royal Academy of Arts, eds, *Modern British Sculpture*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2011; See Lisa Tickner, *Hornsey 1968: The Art School Revolution*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2008.

<sup>589</sup> Brisley, Letter to the Authorities, 1968.

<[http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/39/60s/Text/Hornsey\\_College\\_of\\_Art\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_to\\_the\\_authorities\\_whoever\\_they\\_are\\_/page:3](http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/39/60s/Text/Hornsey_College_of_Art_____to_the_authorities_whoever_they_are_/page:3)> [Accessed 11 November 2014]

the protesters demanded a total revolution in education, including the elimination of GCE entrance qualifications and examinations in art history and general studies.<sup>590</sup> Plans to re-establish Hornsey as a polytechnic and incorporate it into Hendon and Enfield colleges of technology posed a threat to senior administrators' positions at Hornsey, prompting an unlikely alliance between these officials and the students, and a countrywide educational debate. The polytechnic plan was ultimately opposed because it exacerbated the disparity between universities and public-sector colleges.<sup>591</sup> In the end, no substantial transformation in the system occurred, the pre-sit-in regime was restored and, in 1973, Hornsey was amalgamated with Hendon and Enfield colleges to become Middlesex Polytechnic. Lisa Tickner argues that the Hornsey sit-in 'fought the cultural revolution on the ground against the wrong enemy, in the wrong way, and of course with the wrong result'.<sup>592</sup> Nonetheless, the sense of solidarity engendered by the sit-in among students and faculty members who took part created an awakening and was a harbinger of 'a complete review of art education' on a national scale.<sup>593</sup> Brisley's role as one of the louder voices in the faculty during the Hornsey sit-in indicated the politicised route his art practice would take in the 1970s.<sup>594</sup>

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In his initial project proposal to the PDC in 1975, Brisley asserted that his purpose was 'to find the means through which to work towards a situation in which all people in Peterlee have a further opportunity to develop their own awareness of and participation in the evolution of the community'.<sup>595</sup> His aim was to empower individuals through interaction and sharing memories and experiences, as well as through discussion about their needs and expectations for themselves and the town. For Brisley, the active involvement of local people was vital: the first stage depended on them sharing memories and experiences, and would help build the sense of solidarity necessary for the project to sustain itself.

The project's first stage, *History Within Living Memory* was essentially a people's history, following in the footsteps of the History From Below Movement. The latter arose in the late 1960s as a reaction to traditional historiography and involved an aspiration to write the history of common people, while also promoting the same horizontal approach of direct social action and leaderless democracy.<sup>596</sup> *History Within Living Memory* was a combination of oral and visual history, which chronicled Peterlee residents' consciousness, both past and present, the town's short past, and how, through the pits, the wider area towards the coast became industrialised, until it finally reached

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<sup>590</sup> Tickner, *Hornsey 1968*, 2008.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Association of Hornsey College of Art (founded by students and staff), *The Hornsey Affair*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, 144.

<sup>593</sup> Tickner, *Hornsey 1968*, 100.

<sup>594</sup> When his teaching days were reduced from three to one during and following the sit-in, Brisley and students from the Visual Research course worked with severely palsied patients at the Normansfield Hospital. Along with the sit-in, working at the hospital demonstrated how artists can be 'useful in society'. See Melanie Roberts interview, BL, C466/43/08 F5280B.

<sup>595</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/1

<sup>596</sup> Brisley was also influenced by groups like the History Workshop, initiated by historian Raphael Samuel with a mission to democratise history, or the earlier Mass Observation, founded in 1937 to study the daily lives of ordinary people in Britain by a team of observers and volunteer writers. Brisley, *The Peterlee Project 1976–1977*, 2014, 121.

Peterlee in 1950. By revealing the history of Peterlee residents, the project would potentially empower them to take control of, or at least have a say in, decisions affecting their town and community.

The project as a whole covered Peterlee and the industrial villages around the Easington, Castle Eden, Shotton, Horden and Blackhall pits, because the majority of Peterlee residents had moved from these areas following the town's conception and the period from 1900 was their earliest memory. Sponsored by the post-war Labour government, the New Towns Committee, established under the New Towns Act of 1946, concluded there was a need to designate (define the physical boundaries where the new town was to be developed) and construct new towns independently of local authority control, and that these would instead be managed by development corporations assigned and supported by central government.<sup>597</sup> Building and other operations, such as providing water, electricity, gas, sewerage and other services, would also be maintained by the development corporations. These aspirations were manifest in the 'guiding principles' and recommendations published by the New Towns Committee in 1946, which deemed it imperative for the towns to be socially balanced, self-contained with shops, transportation and social facilities, and to be able to offer work to residents.<sup>598</sup> There were three waves of new town development: the first immediately followed the war in 1946–50, a second came in 1960–64, and a third took place in 1967–70. The 1946 Act was amended in 1965 and 1981, and additional Acts were legislated for Scotland and Northern Ireland.<sup>599</sup> Peterlee formed part of the first wave and was the sixth of 28 government-sponsored new towns, and one of 14 within the district.<sup>600</sup> With a population of 28,000 in 1976, it was also one of the smallest<sup>601</sup> and had a character that was distinct from other new towns. Peterlee was also designed to support social and commercial life, and to provide alternative employment to mining, including jobs for women, which the pit villages lacked.<sup>602</sup> A further rationale was to create a focal point for families scattered along the coast between Sunderland and Hartlepool,<sup>603</sup> and to improve the living conditions that prevailed in the pit villages, as described in Clarke's report, *Farewell Squalor*:

Let us therefore close our eyes on the 19<sup>th</sup> century's degradation and squalor, and let us look back with unseeing eyes on the sordid existence of the first decade of this century (e.g. Blackhall, Horden, Easington Collieries), let us blind ourselves to the septic and ugly building wens and ribbons perpetrated and planted upon us between the wars, and let us open our eyes and look brightly forward to the new town, the new living ... Peterlee.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> The development corporations were granted 60-year financial loans from the Treasury; see New Towns Act, 1946.

<sup>598</sup> New Towns Committee (Reith Committee) Interim Report, New Towns Bill. HL Deb 11 July 1946 vol. 142 [cc.321–77].

<sup>599</sup> Starting in the 1960s, towns were expanded and developed by local authorities such as Cramlington, Killingworth and Tamworth, yet like Cambourne or Wixams, founded after the 1970s, they weren't designated as New Towns. Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*. London: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>600</sup> Peter Lee was a miner who began working at the Littletown Colliery as a pony driver when he was ten years old. By the time he was 21, he had worked at 15 collieries. With the belief that the life of miners' should be improved, he went to night school and became a representative at the Durham Miners' Council, then Rural District Councillor and later County Councillor. The new town proposed by Clarke in *Farewell Squalor* was named after Peter Lee due to his efforts in raising the standard of living for miners. See David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945–51*. London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2008.

<sup>601</sup> TGA 201114/4/1

<sup>602</sup> Colin Ward, 'New Town, Home Town', *Where We Live Now*, BBC Two, 21 February 1979.

<sup>603</sup> John Ardill, 'Peterlee-an Intellectual Powerhouse', *The Guardian*, 24 June 1969.

<sup>604</sup> Clarke, *Farewell Squalor*, 11.



Immediately after its foundation in March 1948, the PDC appointed the Russian émigré Constructivist architect Berthold Lubetkin to devise the architecture of the new town. Lubetkin's proposal for tower-block flats was rejected on the grounds that the geology of the area could only support a maximum of three-storey buildings, as the coal mine beneath the construction site would cause subsidence and surface movement.<sup>605</sup> George Grenfell Baines replaced Lubetkin, who resigned in 1950 after two years had passed without progress, and new building construction progressed quickly, though often with the use of poor-quality materials.<sup>606</sup> Moreover, the New Town Committee's emphasis on maintaining open and continuous communication between development corporations and residents of new towns was subsequently 'ignored, or simply forgotten', according to Brisley, especially in the case of Peterlee.<sup>607</sup> Unlike other planners in Britain, which were mediated by unions or local authorities via the electorate, development corporations were only accountable to the government.<sup>608</sup> To make matters worse, the PDC was administered and directed by people who came from outside the area – out of the eight members of the PDC board, only one was appointed from the EDC, and almost all were therefore unfamiliar with the area's social intricacies.<sup>609</sup>

The district had experienced acute poverty and deprivation during the interwar years. Commenting on the decentralisation of the coal industry and the subsequent flow of people towards the new towns, Stuart Howard recalled how 'the people living in the dying corpse of the ancient coalfield were slowly decanted into the industrial centres and new towns of the future'.<sup>610</sup> Peterlee was a result of this decentralisation process – a perfect example of modernisation. Yet with the rapid decline of the coal-mining industry by the end of the 1960s, the PDC had to develop new industrial estates and manufacturing facilities to generate employment.<sup>611</sup> In partnership with the Northern Economic Planning Council, the PDC set out to create opportunities that would make Peterlee 'a northern crucible for Mr Wilson's white-hot technology', according to the journalist John Ardill.<sup>612</sup> However, initiating plans for an IBM science centre, or appointing the artist Victor Pasmore to revitalise the town with new buildings, was not enough to rectify the shortcomings of the PDC, which failed to provide the town's promised shopping and social amenities.<sup>613</sup>

At the end of the 1960s, 90 per cent of families living in privately owned houses in Sunderland had no indoor toilet; 75 per cent had no bath and 50 per cent had no cold running water.<sup>614</sup> While Clarke's vision of Peterlee's future was always optimistic, 30 years later, at the time of Brisley's placement in 1976, the conditions in which residents lived and their prospects of employment had only

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<sup>605</sup> Peter Daniel, 'A New Suburban Landscape: The South West Area: Peterlee New Town', *The Town Planning Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Oct., 1960), 210–218: 211.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>607</sup> TGA 201114/4/4

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>609</sup> TGA 201114/4/10

<sup>610</sup> Stuart Howard, *An Introduction to the Peterlee Project* (DVD), (Radix, 2005).

<sup>611</sup> Robert L. Galloway, *A History of Coal Mining in Great Britain*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1969; Norman Emery, *The Coalminers of Durham*. Stroud: History, 2009; Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*. London: Faber, 2010.

<sup>612</sup> Ardill, 'Peterlee-an Intellectual Powerhouse', 10.

<sup>613</sup> An IBM-operated laboratory was established, however the PDC's plans for a Northern Science Park in Peterlee to initiate public engagement and create new employment opportunities were unfruitful. NT/AP 1/5/46 Economic Models Ltd., 'Peterlee Science Park Project: Report for the Peterlee Science Advisory Committee' (no. 42), June 1971.

<sup>614</sup> Peter Calvocoressi, *The British Experience: 1945–75*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979, 140.

slightly improved. Moreover, the sense of camaraderie residents remembered from the past had all but disappeared, both because of the lack of resources in the area and the fact that many residents had moved house several times on account of pit closures and the development of the new town. Although Peterlee was established in 1948, *History Within Living Memory* included events, photographs and information from the period older residents remembered, when mining began and three coastal area mines were sunk (Easington Pit was sunk in 1899, Horden in 1900, and Blackhall in 1909). Their main motivation for moving had been the prospect of work.

On Brisley's suggestion, the PDC applied to the Manpower Services Commission to suggest participants for the project from their list of unemployed residents. The first person was recruited in February 1976, and the project itself began once all five recruits – Jane Bennison, Karen Carr, Pat Gallagher, John Porter and a fourth woman, whose name was not disclosed – were employed in April 1977.<sup>615</sup> Brisley trained the recruits to use tape recorders and, without giving specific instructions, asked them to talk with their friends, taking into consideration the scope of the project. Brisley's first recruit was a disabled ex-miner named John Porter, while his second was Pat Gallagher, a politically conscious 18-year-old girl, whose older sister was a university-educated teacher. The mining community was known to be self-reliant and male dominated, and to consider women – albeit a strong and respected force in the community, especially during times of war – as belonging strictly in the home, while the men carried 'a strong sense of machismo and male camaraderie'.<sup>616</sup> According to Brisley, Porter was 'absolutely typical [of this machismo]', while Gallagher was resistant to it, having been exposed to ideas about feminism and gender equality through her older sister.<sup>617</sup> In fact, the group could have been considered a microcosm of the whole community, not in the demographic sense but as a reflection of the clash between the old ways of working (centralised, bureaucratic and corporatist) associated with industry, which Boltanski and Chiapello define as the second spirit of capitalism, and the third spirit associated with more flexible and non-hierarchical modes of working (valuing social capital, mobility and diversity), as discussed in Chapter 1.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Initially, one other participant was recruited, but she left because she didn't want to conduct interviews.

<sup>616</sup> Brisley interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

<sup>617</sup> Brisley interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

<sup>618</sup> Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Gregory C. Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London; New York: Verso, 2007, xii.



Figs 25, 26, 27, 28 Artist Project Peterlee / History Within Living Memory 1976-77 © Stuart Brisley & © Durham County Record Office, Tate Archive TGA 201114/4/1.

In total, two thousand photographs, one thousand slides and 50 taped interviews, which shifted private memory into shared history, were collected (Figs 25, 26, 27, 28). The photographic materials included in the project have been copied from originals lent by the people of Peterlee. In addition to these photographs, a series of photographs taken by Brisley in 1976-77 have also been included. Figures 25 and 26 are two examples of images copied from the originals. The first of these images shows a coal miner bending down to pick up coal from a pile left on the pavement. He is wearing white gloves that contrast with the pitch-black pile of coal, much like the bright white dresses of the three women shown in figure 26. These three women are part of the working community of Peterlee and thus represent a significant constituency amongst the residents. The two younger women on each side display faint smiles while the older woman in the middle has put her hand on the shoulder of the woman on her right as a demonstration of their solidarity. The women's white dresses and smiles, albeit faint, pose a stark contrast to the darkness associated with coal mining. The more recent images taken by Brisley shown in figures 27 and 28 retain this contrasting quality through their monochrome palette, but evince a quietness associated more with deserted spaces than a town inhabited by a united community. The young woman in figure 27 seems out of place in the photograph with her striped t-shirt and voluminous skirt in front of a row of simple homes. Her left hand rests on her hip while she holds her chin with her right hand and gazes far left, as if in deep

thought, her pose reminiscent of one in a fashion shoot.

While the photographs taken by Brisley are annotated, the rest of the images are not attributed to anyone. Brisley uses these anonymous images almost as ready-mades, repurposing them for the project, thus attaching a value to them as art historical documents. This appropriation is made in a seemingly nonchalant and perfunctory manner, and it is unclear whether Brisley has permission from the photographers to use these or whether the images are from public sources. None of these collated photographs are credited, which implicates Brisley in an ambiguous position in terms of the politics of representation. Even though these photographs are neutrally styled, they still have meaning, were photographed by people, and portray people whose names are undisclosed. Whether this is on purpose or due to a lack of information is unclear, which I consider negligent on Brisley's part.

In addition to the photographic material, the interviews were also a significant component of the first stage. The stories people revealed in their interviews were often quite morbid, even if the narrative tone was matter-of-fact. For instance, one miner casually mentioned his mother's first husband's death while describing coal hewing:

When you were coal hewing you had a little stool – in old fashioned Durham – ‘a cracket’. Now [hewing while sitting on a cracket] my mother's first husband was killed doing that. That's what they call curving a judd, underneath you see [undercutting the seam of coal].<sup>619</sup>

The natural disposition of the miner was to approach death as something as commonplace as getting a cold in winter. Death, and consequently funerals, were routine in a mining town. Another interviewee explained: ‘Now I know a certain man, he's dead now, he was always in ten o'clock shift. He used to go to all the funerals because he used to get his tea, you see’.<sup>620</sup> These interviews also portrayed the communal spirit that Clarke had associated with mining towns in *Farewell Squalor*. For instance, Mrs Lowden, the daughter of a miner, spoke of the kindness she remembered of life in a mining town. Describing her memories of new people coming to town, she recalled how

...they arrived just as they were. And you helped them out, with a cup and saucer, or a knife and fork or something like that. And they had no furniture, they had no carpets on the floor or anything like that, but in those days people were extremely kind to one another... You would say, ‘Come in and have a meal’, you didn't know them, and they didn't know you, but they would come in and have a meal and it was a jolly good meal, such as was known in miners' families.<sup>621</sup>

The set-up of these interviews was similar to what Mrs Lowden remembered: candid conversations taking place in people's homes. As conversations, they were also preliminary to the

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<sup>619</sup> *Peterlee Report*, Interview with Dave and Ruby, Larmer & Rose, 2 May 1976  
<[http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/29/70s/Text/Artist\\_Project\\_Peterlee:\\_First\\_Peterlee\\_Report/page:23](http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/29/70s/Text/Artist_Project_Peterlee:_First_Peterlee_Report/page:23)> [Accessed 10 January 2015], 23.

<sup>620</sup> *Peterlee Report*, Interview with Mr & Mrs Harrison, 24 May 1976, 19.

<sup>621</sup> *Peterlee Report*, Interview with Mrs Lowden, 10 August 1976, 15.

development of the open workshop, not just material for *History Within Living Memory*. In this respect, Brisley's project reflected Gramsci's call for the construction of alliances within the community, especially with its emphasis on the creation of a social tool (i.e. the open workshop), the encouragement and the formation of historical awareness, and the community's 'consciousness of itself, its strengths and weaknesses, its achievements and problems'.<sup>622</sup> In a report presented at the Sunderland Art Centre exhibition in 1977, Brisley stressed that 'without the development of such a consciousness, there can be no sense of community and therefore no resolution of the aims of the new town idealised in (...) *Farewell Squalor*'.<sup>623</sup> Brisley had intended to utilise 'art as a cohesive force',<sup>624</sup> and saw the collection of material and memories as an organic process, which would evolve through experimentation and hence be consistent with a Gramscian agenda.

As 'a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria', Gramsci's theory of hegemony was a dynamic one.<sup>625</sup> Distinct from the concept of 'dominant ideology', which implied 'static, totalising and passive subordination', Gramscian hegemony assumed 'an active and practical involvement of the hegemonised groups', because it also accounted for 'the interests and the tendencies' of these groups.<sup>626</sup> Furthermore, through the philosophy of praxis, Gramsci distinguished proletarian hegemony (counterhegemonic ideas, groups, people) from 'an instrument of government of dominant groups to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over subaltern classes; it is the expression of the subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government'.<sup>627</sup>

The appointment of residents as project participants was therefore a step towards their active and practical involvement in the development of historical consciousness as members of the subaltern class, and towards their education in governance. Several people talked about coming to Peterlee as children after moving house several times due to pit closures, or for better opportunities for work, which meant they had to build their social circles from scratch more than once. One Peterlee resident explained, '...we just stayed there three weeks. But nobody knew anybody else at all because the people had come from Straffordshire...Lancashire... and all the counties round about Durham.'<sup>628</sup> Another resident spoke about his mother who never had the chance to settle: '...she never had a home, she used to put the furniture on the train, then she'd move from one place to another. Nine times out of ten father would be at the station and would say, "Leave it on the train"'.<sup>629</sup>

These interviews demonstrated the difficulty of rooting due to the shifting social community of the area. As a result, the active participation of residents (both for sharing their experiences and for

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<sup>622</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/6

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. and ed., Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, 182.

<sup>626</sup> Gramsci and Forgacs, *The Gramsci reader: selected writings, 1916–1935*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999, 424.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid, 423–424.

<sup>628</sup> *Peterlee Report*, Interview with Mrs Lowden, 10 August 1976, 14.

<sup>629</sup> *Artist Project Peterlee*, Interview with Mr A. Allen, 28 March 1977, 11.



Figs 29, 30 *Beneath Dignity*, Bregenz, 1977. Photo: courtesy Janet Anderson.

extracting and organising these experiences for *History Within Living Memory*, and their subsequent participation in governance via the proposed workshop) and the dimension of open discussion encouraged by the project were congruous with the steps towards democratisation and genuine transformation outlined by Gramsci.<sup>630</sup> However, while the first and second stages of the project proved successful in terms of active participation, the third failed to achieve democratisation in

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<sup>630</sup> Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Historical Materialism Book Series 24. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

terms of governance, as the project was essentially terminated – for reasons discussed in detail below – when the EDC decided to discard materials prepared for the project before Brisley could establish an open workshop. The council's decision interfered with his plans for the project as an extended performance, even if it succeeded as a transformative experience and example of subaltern history. We must therefore consider what Brisley intended for the project to assess its scope in its final form.

Throughout the 1970s, Brisley's areas of concern remained centred on human value. Although he didn't agree with the perspective of the APG, which he felt was essentially right-wing and allied with management rather than workers, his emancipatory ambitions and interest in mining culture led him to accept the invitation to be placed in Peterlee.

The miners were very important in the union system; they were the kind of aristocracy of the whole union movement. They were regarded in a sense as being heroic... And I carried that to a certain extent, and so the idea of going to Peterlee was rather important.<sup>631</sup>

I consider Brisley's interest in the experience of mining and his involvement in Peterlee as formative for two performative works he created during the 1970s. His performances involved presenting his body under conditions of extreme discomfort, endurance and constriction, in what has been described as 'cathartic rituals' (to use Mark Crinson's term),<sup>632</sup> and these two performances were no exception.

*Beneath Dignity* (Bregenz, 1977; London, 2002) and *Survival in Alien Circumstances* (Kassel, 1977) involved prolonged and exhaustive tests of endurance executed in the confined spaces of coal pits. For instance, taking place on the quayside of Lake Constance in Bregenz, *Beneath Dignity* (1977) (Figs 29, 30) was a three-day performance Brisley made to an audience of ten people on its first day, and to around 500 on its last day. During each performance, he would lie on the ground inside frames made to the size of his body, with outstretched arms and legs. The frames – two of which had polythene stretched across – were placed side-by-side on a line towards the quay. A black cord was tied to each frame, which Brisley would lie under, moving his arms and legs to express the size and limited reach of his body. The first frame was empty except for the cord, while the second was filled with water the third with chalk, and the last two with the stretched polythene were filled with black and white paint, respectively. After repeating the motions on each frame, Brisley would jump into the lake and swim away, to be picked up later by a boat. Brisley's movements alluded to the tight space and constrictions imposed on the body in seams of coal, which he had learned about through his conversation with miners in Peterlee. The way his body moved conveyed a sense of human dignity through the expression of extremity and the paradoxical relationship between 'looking up to' people and 'looking down on' others, and referred ultimately to notions of human value.

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<sup>631</sup> Brisley interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

<sup>632</sup> Mark Crinson, 'The Incidental Collection – Stuart Brisley's Peterlee Project', *Mute Magazine*, 2004 <<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/incidental-collection-stuart-brisleys-peterlee-project>>, [Accessed 17 October 2014].





Figs 31, 32, 33 Brisley and Christoph Gericke, *Survival in Alien Circumstances*, Documenta, Kassel, 1977. FRAC Bourgogne Collection.

Like *Beneath Dignity*, *Survival in Alien Circumstances* (Figs 31, 32, 33) was also a commentary on the concept of work in relation to mining and the unfavourable conditions of miners. Taking place over 14 days in Kassel during Documenta 6, the work involved Brisley and an assistant (Christoph Gericke) digging a hole, where he would live for two weeks and leave the traces as an installation. The park where the performance took place was a World War II deposit site, which meant they came across all kinds of rubble, even human bones (verified by a doctor), before reaching water. On the final day, Brisley and Gericke lay quietly in the water for 30 minutes. Coinciding with the latter half of Brisley's involvement in *The Peterlee Project*, this work was almost a homage to the miners:



I had this strong sense of the relationship between a kind of absolute misery of physical effort to work within 18 inches of a coal seam and the sort of dignity that expressed itself in terms of how everybody thought of miners... they were rather important for the economy.<sup>633</sup>

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Questions concerning authority, how authority is established, reneged on, dissolved, or shared, constituted a crucial part of Brisley's practice. As an educator, he inculcated the idea of authority as 'a shared material within space and context' to his students.<sup>634</sup> Tim Brennan suggests that with *The Peterlee Project*, Brisley explored the 'fundamental question of what to do with power as a tangible material'.<sup>635</sup> I argue that Brisley's attempt to relinquish his authorial power was an attempt to collapse the boundary between artist and audience. Defining his involvement in terms of consultancy, Brisley aspired for the Peterlee residents – his audience – to take on an active role, as it would be the people of Peterlee that steered the project after he left. For the project to be fully realised, the residents had to come together through a public process and transform it in light of collective concerns without the need for an authority figure. In that sense, the project was Brisley's method of emphasising human agency by transcending the hierarchical relationship between artist and audience. In fact, he had formulated such a process in 1975, in a statement entitled 'Anti-Performance Art'. In what could also be read as a plea for the transcendence of 'decadent individualism' through his postulation of the concept of anti-performance art, he strove to reposition performance so that it could transform the binary relationship between the artist and audience:

It is no longer possible to conceive of this as a personal activity. The initial concept may arise through one person but it is very quickly modified, and transformed through collective involvement, which is critical. Each person assumes a role and set of responsibilities according to his/her understanding of the activity. These interactions of abilities continuously readjust themselves according to circumstances. The activity itself is capable of being transformed through many stages in relation to the initial concept-contextual circumstance, and [collective] action.<sup>636</sup>

When repositioned as anti-performance, performance art was no longer predicated on the one-way relationship between performer and audience. The multidirectional, open structure of *The Peterlee Project* – from its operation with the participants to the open workshop intended for the final stage – was founded on an egalitarian political process and collective action. In fact, Brisley's emphasis on horizontal principles, such as self-governing and collective decision-making, chimed with

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<sup>633</sup> *Stuart Brisley*. 2006. *The Eye*. [London]: Illuminations.

<sup>634</sup> Brennan, 'Of Commune and Community', 131.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>636</sup> 'Anti-Performance Art'. Extract from the catalogue for *Inglese Arte Oggi* (1960–1976), Milan, November 1975

<[http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/29/70s/Text/Homage\\_to\\_the\\_Commune:\\_Stuart\\_Brisley\\_s\\_statement\\_in\\_the\\_catalogue\\_for\\_Arte\\_Inglese\\_Oggi/page:18](http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/29/70s/Text/Homage_to_the_Commune:_Stuart_Brisley_s_statement_in_the_catalogue_for_Arte_Inglese_Oggi/page:18)> [Accessed 21 February 2015].

the idea of leaderless direct democracy advocated by self-proclaimed, 'small-a' anarchists (as recently explored in the work of David Graeber, for example).<sup>637</sup>

Discontented with an art market that valued material gain over social welfare, Brisley sought to restructure 'the way art is made, the way it behaves, and [what it] is related to', as a means to withdraw from the materialism he associated with the art market, the private gallery system and its prescribed channels of profit-making.<sup>638</sup> His engagement with the APG and foundation of the Artist's Union all resulted from this intent to bring art closer to society and away from capitalist institutions, thereby recalibrating the value system of the art world to consider 'human value as the ultimate basis for human interaction'.<sup>639</sup> For Brisley, it was through this embrace of the humanist position – that of centring society around people and emphasising human value – that the artist would begin to act politically and generate change: 'For the artist embracing these conditions, art as form is irrelevant, art as action all important without recourse to the past or future and without thought for art operating eventually as a monument to the maker...'<sup>640</sup>

Brisley advocated activities that effected change and challenged cultural and social norms through their content and form: media such as painting, sculpture, community projects, installations, sound, video, films, and teaching, as opposed to art that only referred to immediate issues via known and conventional forms. As such, he asserted that the artist could '[step] out of the accepted pattern of his profession... [and become] political in action'.<sup>641</sup> More than anything – and similar to the intentions with which the Artist's Union had been founded – what was present in each work, performance, project or action by Brisley was a desire to position the artist at the heart of society and to 'mak[e] human value [the] common value'.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>637</sup> See David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013; *Revolutions in Reverse*, London: Minor Compositions, 2011.

<sup>638</sup> Stuart Brisley, 'Statement made for Penrose Award', TGA 20042/2/2/5; also see Chapter 2 on the Artist's Union.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>642</sup> Brisley, 'A Case, A Dream, A Nightmare, or Mere Rhetoric', 4.

## Extended performance

Perhaps not unlike social movements that sought moral transformations such as abolitionism, feminism, or gay rights – albeit on a much smaller scale – *The Peterlee Project* aimed to transform residents in the mining town of Peterlee into active agents. By questioning the dogmatic industrial ways of working with its rigid hierarchies, but by not framing the direction of the project, its course rested on the community's response and willingness to collaborate. As collaborators, the participants – and therefore by extension the whole community – would no longer be consumers but authors responsible for extending the performance. *The Peterlee Project* should therefore be considered an extended performance (or anti-performance, as suggested by Brisley) with a democratic structure – that is to say, democracy in its ancient Greek sense of 'rule of the people', from *dêmos* (people) and *krátos* (power or rule), which '[refers] to communal self-governance through popular assemblies such as the Athenian agora'.<sup>643</sup> Informed by Brisley's radical aesthetics, *The Peterlee Project* involved a reframing of art that situated the artist directly in people's lives, therefore extending its concerns and the social territory in which it operated, and creating the conditions for a society based on egalitarian principles and relations.

From Sanja Perovic to Mark Crinson, almost all contemporary accounts of *The Peterlee Project* tend to describe it as an archival project, which for Brisley was the objective of only the preparatory first stage.<sup>644</sup> Though important, the project's archival achievements should not be allowed to overshadow the project's intended function as a social tool. It is also imperative to expand assessment of the project beyond the 'archival impulse' of the art world, and to reconsider its intentions as an extended performance, wherein Brisley's role as an artist would become that of a facilitator for historical awareness and the present-day consciousness of community. By extending the performance and therefore relinquishing his authority (but not authorial signature since the project is referred to as Brisley's), he shared responsibility for the production of the project with the residents. This shared concern was distinct from his original starting point and is what steered the project as an extended performance. For Brisley, this involved a reversal: 'The initial concept [of the performance by the artist] cannot be realised, until it itself has been overcome, transformed by others with a collective concern, through the public process.'<sup>645</sup> Through the introduction of the anti-performance, the artist could initiate what 'appears to be a non-alienated organic state, a total condition leading from the initial concept, through process on context, determining a necessary inter-functioning of conditions – art process, social context, political consciousness, collective action'.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, 155. See 'δημοκρατία'. In Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 'A Greek-English Lexicon', at Perseus; N. G. Wilson, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*. New York: Routledge, 2006, 511.

<sup>644</sup> See Crinson, 'The Incidental Collection – Stuart Brisley's Peterlee Project'; Sanja Perovic, 'Performing History: Some Keywords'. In *The Peterlee Project 1976–1977*, exhibition catalogue, London: Modern Art Oxford and Museum of Ordure, 2014, 7; Jonathan P. Watts, 'Stuart Brisley Modern Art Oxford', *Frieze* 30 October 14 <[http://www.frieze.com/issue/print\\_back/stuart-brisley/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/stuart-brisley/)> [Accessed 2 May 2015].

<sup>645</sup> 'Anti-Performance Art'. Extract from the catalogue for *Inglese Arte Oggi (1960–1976)*.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Peterlee Project* was Brisley's attempt to raise awareness about the history of Peterlee and to use this as a tool for generating dialogue in the community about the town's present and future. In a similar vein, Perovic has suggested that Brisley was seeking to 'perform history' with the project, and was thus an example of what she defines as the 'historical turn' in art (i.e. the rising popularity of exhibitions that juxtapose art and history), in line with a 'performative turn' in historical inquiry (i.e. historical re-enactment).<sup>647</sup> For Perovic, this double mirroring – the 'historical turn' in art and the 'performative turn' in historical inquiry – is part of the rapprochement of two antithetical fields (performance and history). In fact, the extent of interest in the so-called historical past for performance is simply 'an empathetic, immersive reactivation of the past as present'.<sup>648</sup> The defining aspects of this reactivation, however, are to do with neither history nor the past, but with notions of immediacy, immersion, experience, presence, action, and interaction.<sup>649</sup> Increasingly, this has become a reactivation of the space through which all efforts are geared towards closing the gap between the artist and the audience. As such, the artist assumes the role of a creator of situations in which the audience participates, instead of a producer of something to be seen or beheld. However, such an understanding of performance haphazardly conflates it with so-called participatory art, and creates the difficult task of demarcating performance art as a particular form of art practice, like painting, drawing, miniature, and so on. While it is not my intention here to propose a (re)definition of performance art, it is important to touch on conflicting accounts of what defines performance art or its boundaries, to elucidate Brisley's intentions in extending performance to the social field – thereby resisting the dormancy of the archive – and aid discussion of his practice.

In her pioneering study, *Performance Art: Futurism to the Present* (1979), RoseLee Goldberg declared that 'by its very nature performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists'.<sup>650</sup> She added, 'any strict definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself'.<sup>651</sup> Goldberg's emphasis on the 'live' nature of performance art, however, has been somewhat moderated with the increasing valorisation of documentation and its role in mediating performance. Similar to contested attempts to define performance art, the validity of such mediation is also a topic of debate. In defiance of the mediation of performance through documentation, and with reference to the necessary and active participation of the audience – the **presentness** required for performance art – Peggy Phelan proclaimed: 'Performance's only life is in the present'.<sup>652</sup> Amelia Jones, on the other hand, valorised the mediated presentation, with which she claimed the viewer could have a **performative** relationship.<sup>653</sup> Indeed, she asserted that mediated presentation offers neutrality, enabling the viewer to become an embodied interpreter, which the 'manically charged' present of live performance denies.

<sup>647</sup> Perovic, 'Performing History: Some Keywords', 7; See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996; Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October* 110, 2004: 3–22.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>650</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2001: 8–9.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>652</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993, 146.

<sup>653</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

What Adrian Heathfield defines as ‘eventhood’ can perhaps be considered as the mediation of the distinct approaches of Phelan and Jones. Similar to the idea of presence with relation to performance, eventhood, in Heathfield’s terms, involves ‘bringing the reception of the artwork into the elusive conditions of the real, where the relation between experience and thought can be tested and re-articulated’, and, as such, it is a reference to the relationship between perception and interpretation of the work.<sup>654</sup> He writes: ‘Eventhood allows spectators to live for a while in the paradox of two impossible desires: to be present in the moment, to savour it, and to save the moment, to still and preserve its power long after it has gone’.<sup>655</sup> While Heathfield’s focus is contemporary performance practice and its so-called flux, his comparison of documentation to a vestige of a moment past – a so-called relic to be saved into memory – is congruent with Jones’s claim for the potency of documentation independent of the live moment it represents. As a matter of fact (at least in its proposed form), *The Peterlee Project* aspired to carry this potency one step further. The final stage was devised as an open and continuous workshop dedicated to further developing historical awareness, which began in the first stage, and to exploring issues and problems of locals and proposing actions for solving these issues. Material collected through the project would be made available to the public via the workshop, which would also involve a programme of talks, audio/visual presentations, exhibitions, lectures and publishing regarding the history of the area and its people, and discussions and proposals for the development of the new town as well as Peterlee. In this sense, the project aspired to combine memory (something ontologically belonging to the past) and living (a shared characteristic of society and performance).

The perpetual characteristic of the project, and thus its openness, however, were not actualised. In April 1977 – before concluding his contract in August – Brisley proposed that once the workshop was established in the final stage, the maintenance of the project be transferred to the local authorities, who would preserve the collected materials, administer the presentation and publicity, provide space for the open workshop for discussion, and guarantee the project’s sustainability. In June, the PDC and the local authorities had a meeting to which Brisley was not invited, and in August, the supervisor of the project, Leslie Cole, newly appointed by the Peterlee town council, ordered the transfer of all materials collected in the first and second stages of the project from the PDC to the EDC.<sup>656</sup> In turn, the EDC renamed the project *People Past and Present (Area of Easington)*.<sup>657</sup> Essentially, the council was interested in the project as a heritage programme rather than as a social tool that could be sustained. As a result, they decided to preserve the audio-visual materials and eliminate the rest.<sup>658</sup> The physically destroyed (by burning and/or wiping out) material from the second stage of the project included:

<sup>654</sup> Adrian Heathfield, ‘Alive’. In *Live: Art and Performance*, ed., Adrian Heathfield. London: Tate Publishing, 2004, 9.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

<sup>656</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/8. The meeting coincided with the completion of PDC’s terms for the development of and their responsibility in Peterlee. As a non-governmental organisation contracted by the government, PDC was to hand-over all responsibility to the Easington District Council. Since the responsibility of overseeing Brisley’s project was also transferred to the Council, decisions related to the project and its documents were within the jurisdiction of the Council.

<sup>657</sup> The Easington District Council became defunct in 2009 as part of the 2009 structural changes to local government in England.

<sup>658</sup> Brisley interview with the author, 20 April 2015.

1. History of the Peterlee Development Corporation by F. Robinson, Rowntree Trust, University of Durham, commissioned by the project, 1977;
2. Comparative Studies in New Town Planning by Gary Armen;
3. History of Women in the Area by Pat Gallagher, commissioned by the project, 1977;
4. A critical examination of Artist Project Peterlee and two other statements by David Brown;
5. Concept, structures, history and proposals for an open workshop in the Easington District;
6. Documents from the Free University created on the university's invitation for *The Peterlee Project* to be presented at Documenta 6 Kassel, West Germany in June 1977, and at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in August 1977.<sup>659</sup>

It is still unclear whether the destruction of project material was a retaliation on the part of the council, which was hostile to the PDC primarily on account of the council's lack of representation and the PDC's failure to keep them informed.<sup>660</sup> Since its establishment in 1948, the PDC had earned a reputation for paternalist omnipotence due to their authority over plans regarding the town, from the choice of shop tenants to public facilities, and even over whether residents were 'properly' looking after their houses and keeping their children off grass verges and landscape areas.<sup>661</sup> The PDC was not responsible for everything regarding Peterlee, but the district and town council's responsibilities and areas of authority had clearly been subsumed, resulting in antagonism and *The Peterlee Project* being treated as collateral damage. In October 1977, what was left of the project became the property of the EDC.<sup>662</sup> The loss of the above documents also meant the destruction of the whole concept of the project for Brisley, effectively nullifying his 18-month-long effort towards the establishment of an open workshop in Peterlee. This 'was about the worst thing that could have happened', according to Brisley, to which he reacted by leaving Peterlee.<sup>663</sup> Though this was undoubtedly detrimental to the project, it was also the artist's responsibility to guarantee its development until all stages were achieved, if not its survival in perpetuity. While a horizontalist and leaderless approach is commendable, and was perhaps necessary for giving equal opportunity to the people of Peterlee, it was overly optimistic without the provision of enough guidance. Moreover, Brisley's intentions weren't translatable to the council, since they considered him a town artist like Victor Pasmore who would apply his artistic skills to creating a tangible artwork. This is where the intention of the artist and the actual outcomes of a project can clash with each other. Ultimately, the only part of the project accomplished was *History Within Living Memory* – a tangible outcome that the council could (and did) embrace.

Despite failing to achieve all of Brisley's intentions, as I argue in the introduction, the project is still emblematic in presupposing a future-oriented, long-term and open-ended process – one that would empower the people of Peterlee in building their community, despite the hardships of mining,

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<sup>659</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/8

<sup>660</sup> TGA 201114/4/10-11

<sup>661</sup> TGA 201114/4/10-12

<sup>662</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/9. The archive was subsequently sold to Tate Archive by APG under the helm of Barbara Steveni in 2004 without the consent of Brisley.

<sup>663</sup> Brisley, interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

through extended collaboration. Guided by Brisley, the residents of Peterlee developed an historical awareness of the area and its people by conducting interviews and collecting material over a period of 18 months, thereby successfully building a subaltern history of their town.

The destruction of materials gave the project an ambiguous status: though it failed to achieve permanence, it succeeded in creating a 'certain archival presence', to use Perovic's term.<sup>664</sup> While Perovic investigates the 'difference between performing history and the "becoming historical" of performance',<sup>665</sup> I argue that what is at stake here is neither the project's historicity nor its efficacy in the performance of history, but Brisley's non-partisan (also socially oriented and functional, as opposed to purely aesthetic) agenda of engendering the historical awareness of Peterlee and extending performance to direct social action. History was used as a facilitator for building awareness and a sense of community among Peterlee residents; how this history was performed was secondary, provided the residents themselves performed it. Writing about his intentions in hindsight, Brisley stated that 'by extending the activity into the social dimension as an everyday process and taking on a role leading from behind, performance is transformed as it dissolves into the social environment as an agent'.<sup>666</sup> This dissolution is not so much an aspect of ephemerality, as is often associated with performance, but stems from the way in which actions become second nature to those involved. When performance is transformed into an agent, it becomes a social tool, which was the essence of the project Brisley aspired to develop. Ultimately, the project would cease to exist as a project and become a model for similar open workshops for community building elsewhere. Rather than continuing to be proposed by Brisley, these actions would therefore be motivated by community interests. In Claire Bishop's terms, Brisley was 'testing out techniques from performance in a social context',<sup>667</sup> for use in different contexts. Echoing Bishop, Tim Brennan considers Brisley's performances as '[a] series of related probes' sent out 'to test the boundary between art and life'.<sup>668</sup> In this respect, the project can be considered a failed test, since the performance did not become an everyday process, nor was it transferred to the people of Peterlee. As Peter Bürger claims:

The unification of art and life intended by the avant-garde can only be achieved if it succeeds in liberating aesthetic potential from the institutional constraints, which block its social effectiveness. In other words: the attack on the institution of art is the condition for the possible realisation of a utopia in which art and life are united'.<sup>669</sup>

Indeed, *The Peterlee Project* failed to achieve this unification despite Brisley's attempt to divest performance from its institutional context and the singular authority of the artist. It therefore

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<sup>664</sup> Perovic, 'Performing History', 9.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Brisley, note on inside front cover, *The Peterlee Project 1976–1977*, 2014.

<sup>667</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 174.

<sup>668</sup> Brennan, 'Of Commune and Community', 135.

<sup>669</sup> Peter Bürger, Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy, 'Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*', *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010), 696. Brisley's approach is similar to the attitude adopted by Eastern European avant-garde artists during the 1970s, which Piotr Piotrowski identifies as the aim 'to erase the boundaries between different art tendencies (art and anti-art, modernist and neo-avant-garde painting), between different forms of neo-avant-garde practice (performance, conceptual art, Fluxus) and, above all, between art and life'. Piotr Piotrowski and Anna Brzyski, *In the Shadow of Yalta Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009, 219.

may be useful to consider Brisley's project as a "failed success" in terms of a Gramscian subaltern history, rather than in terms of his original intention to extend performance into the social sphere.



## A failed success

Brisley believed that people have an inherent critical ability to think about and change their world, and it is my view that in his emphasis on the necessity of active and democratic participation his approach was essentially Gramscian. Gramsci stressed that it was imperative for the working class to form organisations that worked towards a just and equal society. He asked: ‘Is it better to “think,” without having a critical awareness (...) or, is it better to work out consciously and critically one’s own conception of the world?’<sup>670</sup> adding that ‘the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is...’<sup>670</sup> For Gramsci, genuine transformation of society required a clear political programme that went beyond resistance to direct involvement and organisation of those involved in production (such as miners, workers or residents), and the building of institutions that enabled people to realise their self-emancipation.<sup>671</sup> Since Brisley’s project aimed to involve people in the continuous building of their community, it would fulfil Gramsci’s requirements for changing society through collaborative struggle and production, as well as through discussion and dissent, rather than through adoption of the dominant culture of capitalism. Brisley aspired for the project to be a social process and a live proposal, inherently linked to ‘the passage of history, and a tool for consciousness’.<sup>672</sup>

As with the majority of Peterlee’s social and economic affairs, the PDC was aware of the progression of the project. Brisley’s consultancy began in January 1976, with Jim Ewing from the PDC acting as official contact for the project; one year later, in January 1977, Leslie Cole, public relations officer at the PDC, replaced Ewing.<sup>673</sup> Brisley originally planned to withdraw from the project slowly, as the people involved gained more responsibility in terms of arranging interviews, collecting and organising materials for *History Within Living Memory*, overseeing the historical research (material that was destroyed) and developing public engagement (organisation of meetings with residents), prior to the project’s third stage. Integrating the project into the community was supposed to be an open and gradual process, involving discussion among the five participants and revision, ‘to enable people with widely differing experience and understanding to participate’.<sup>674</sup> However, after the first few months, it became obvious that there was a distinct division between the views, interests and behaviour of the five main participants, which resulted in ‘a serious breakdown’.<sup>675</sup> This breakdown wasn’t due to class barriers (all came from working-class backgrounds) but to the heterogeneity of intra-class identities: the participants who had not received higher education based their identity on the experience of mining, an industry with a clear hierarchical structure. According to Brisley, ‘the conflicts within the group were due to this structure’; he assumed that Porter, as the only male in the

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<sup>670</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 323.

<sup>671</sup> Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Historical Materialism Book Series 24, Leiden: Brill, 2009, and *Counterforum Lecture*, London, 3 May 2010, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exe5U3kFU5g>> [Accessed 10 January 2015]

<sup>672</sup> Brisley in *The Peterlee Project 1976–1977*, 2014, 122.

<sup>673</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/6. Following an article in the *Guardian* written by Caroline Tisdall, the project was transferred from the Department of Social Development to the PR Department. This alone proved that PDC’s stakes in the project had shifted: the project was now considered a PR tool rather than for the betterment of the community and improvement of social conditions in Peterlee.

<sup>674</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/7

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

group, sought 'to lore them about', while Gallagher, 'having been politicised to the terms of feminism, was very resistant to any kind of macho'.<sup>676</sup> Having been accustomed to a chain of command, Porter, in particular, had trouble with the proposed horizontal configuration, which conferred independent personal responsibility on everyone.<sup>677</sup> This meant that the horizontality of the project and therefore its democratisation was compromised, despite Brisley's renunciation of his own authority.

As Brisley sought to reduce his authorial direction, the obvious authority was thought to be the PDC, which the participants considered to be their employers. The anxiety caused by this ambiguity of leadership, and by the broad nature of the project, prompted some participants to withdraw from discussion of matters involving the community or procedures, all of which were intended to be equal. Participants who had been through higher education, however, had no difficulty grasping the open structure of the project. Brisley felt these difficulties reflected Peterlee society, which in his view was 'over-ridden and camouflaged by a common political debility, fostered by the fact that political power in Peterlee has been held by the Development Corporation over and above the people' since 1948.<sup>678</sup>

Was the project terminated because the district council and/or PDC were not willing or able to support an open project founded on egalitarian principles? In all likelihood, its termination was caused by a combination of factors. One of these was the difficulty of translating Brisley's intentions to the participants, partly because these depended on experimentation and a hands-off approach, and partly because of the culture of industrial communities, which traditionally favoured hierarchical relations and the gender division of labour despite their sense of solidarity. Other factors must have included the limited funding, both for the running and continuation of the project (operational costs, compensation for participants, workshop space, etc.), and for publicity to engage people in and beyond Peterlee. Another major factor was the destruction of valuable documents and its demoralising effect on Brisley and the participants.

It is perhaps fair to say that conflict was not handled with sufficient care, and that more emphasis should have been given to facilitating participation and to clarifying the intellectual and moral aims of the project to encourage those involved to become 'actors'.<sup>679</sup> As Graeber posits:

The best democratic process depends on the nature of the community involved, its cultural and political traditions, the number of people taking part, the experience level of the participants, and of course, what they are trying to accomplish—among any number of other immediate practical concerns.<sup>680</sup>

This brings us to the central question: was the project already bound for failure before being terminated, because the clash between tradition and novelty posed by the open structure was too significant to overcome?

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<sup>676</sup> Brisley, interview with the author, 23 November 2013.

<sup>677</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/7

<sup>678</sup> TGA 20042/2/2/5/1/8

<sup>679</sup> Andre Tosel, 'In Francia'. In *Gramsci in Europa e in America*, ed., E.J. Hobsbawm, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995, 11.

<sup>680</sup> Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, 208.

Brisley could have sought to adapt the project to the realities of the community and, to avoid anxiety and ambiguity, could have assumed leadership until it became established. He could also have brought in volunteers to increase motivation among the community, and developed a concrete master plan so that the objectives of each stage (especially the third) were more comprehensible to participants and the rest of the community. Nonetheless, the project's failure to achieve open workshop status, which would have extended its performance aspect into the social field, shouldn't overshadow its success as a subaltern history. It was a commendable of Brisley to allow participants to make their own decisions, to conduct interviews and choose which questions to ask and of whom. By giving them the necessary tools (how to use a tape recorder, make transcripts, collate photographic material, etc.), he provided space for them to develop a sense of agency and awareness of their past. As Gramsci states, 'learning takes place especially through a spontaneous and autonomous effort of the pupil, with the teacher only exercising a function of friendly guide'.<sup>681</sup> The appointment of Pat Gallagher, as a female resident of Peterlee ideally positioned to research the history of women in the area, and to build on that history for a better future, had been made for this reason. Hence despite its premature termination, the study can still be seen as a success in terms of empowering the participants to collaborate and engage in direct action.

It was vital, according to Gramsci, that the subaltern acquired a 'conscious historical awareness of their time and its background',<sup>682</sup> and knew 'how, why, and by whom it ha[d] been preceded, and what benefit it may derive from this knowledge'.<sup>683</sup> Even without the third stage, *The Peterlee Project* fulfilled this need: by speaking with older generations, and revealing memories and customs that had been hidden or forgotten, the participants were able to develop historical awareness of the area and its people, i.e. of themselves, thereby building their own subaltern history and bringing past and present together. Through remembrance of Peterlee's collective past and, in particular, of what miners and their families had endured throughout the decades, the project provided a space for counterhegemonic discourse. The element of collaboration and community action engendered by *The Peterlee Project* is why it was a success and why it made a significant contribution to the emerging character of the artist project in the 1970s. By activating non-artists, the project shifted the traditional unidirectional and hierarchical relation between the artist and audience to a lateral one, creating a platform for interaction and knowledge production (i.e. a 'conscious historical awareness' of present-day Peterlee and its past). Hence despite its failure to establish a continuous and replicable workshop and thereby extend its performance into the social field, the project succeeded in enlarging the concerns and social territory of art practice and in fostering a counter-consciousness among the town's residents. The knowledge they produced, which would otherwise have disappeared, still survives and testifies to their efforts and commitment, which is what Brisley originally sought to activate.

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<sup>681</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 33.

<sup>682</sup> Romano Giachetti, 'Antonio Gramsci: The Subjective Revolution'. In Dick Howard and Karl Klare, eds, *The Unknown Dimension*, New York: Basic Books, 1972, 164.

<sup>683</sup> Pedro Cavalcanti and Paul Piccone, *History, Philosophy and Culture in the Young Gramsci*. St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1975, 23.

**Conclusion**

In the last three decades, despite the ongoing market dominance of object-based art, socially committed, participatory and multi-disciplinary art has become widely used by artists such as Suzanne Lacy, Tania Bruguera, the Cybermohalla Ensemble or Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, and by hundreds of others whose projects are referred to in compendiums such as *Living as Form* by Nato Thompson, former chief curator of the New York-based non-profit arts institution Creative Time, or *Public Art (Now): Out of Time, Out of Place*, which focused on 40 artist projects from around the world.<sup>684</sup> In turn, such socially engaged art practice has also been thoroughly historicised in the work of Claire Bishop, who traces the history of participatory art practice and emphasises three key moments – the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Paris student rebellion of 1968, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – and argues that, following the collapse of socialism in 1989, ‘project’ as a term began to be widely used ‘to replace [the concept of] the work of art as a finite object with [that of] an open-ended, post-studio, research-based, social process, extending over time and mutable in form’.<sup>685</sup> As I have argued throughout this thesis, there are also a number of other historians who address socially engaged art practice such as Grant Kester, whose seminal book *Conversation Pieces: Community & Communication in Modern Art* tracks what he defines as ‘dialogic’ works – projects that entail conversational exchanges between different communities; Tom Finkelpearl, who investigates contemporary projects produced through social cooperation, which he refers to as ‘dialogue-based public art’; and artist Pablo Helguera, who provides a blueprint for socially engaged art by delineating its ‘materials and techniques’.<sup>686</sup> While each of these historians utilise a distinct but conceptually related term to refer to these collaboratively created *social* projects, the most important common denominator lies in their view of the post-Cold War era as marking the nascence of projects. Of course, they also reference earlier periods, such as Bishop referring to the Bolshevik era and 1968, or Tom Finkelpearl addressing collaborative examples such as the *Project Other Ways* (1969), which he describes as an ‘uncharacteristic endeavour’ by Allan Kaprow and educator Herbert Kohl to invite a group of sixth graders from the Berkeley area, believed to be ‘functionally illiterate’, to create graffiti – which many were well-versed in – to show how different pedagogical methods could provide learning. In the dominant discourse, however, project as a word has become a loosely employed term

<sup>684</sup> For instance, Suzanne Lacy seeks to ‘counter misleading media images with empowered community-oriented actions’, such as her *The Roof is on Fire* (1993–94) where over 200 teens sat and talked about violence, sex and family in parked cars on a rooftop garage in Oakland, California; Tania Bruguera’s *Immigrant Movement International* project (conceived in 2006; active between 2008 and 2015) was ‘an artist-initiated socio-political movement’ that sought to investigate ‘what it means to be a citizen of the world’; the Cybermohalla Ensemble, comprising interdisciplinary practitioners and writers, emerged from the Cybermohalla (2011–) project formed by the Delhi-based think tank, Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education and Sarai-CSDS create works that range from publications to conversations and designs to radio broadcasts; Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s public intervention project *Tiza* was an attempt to engage people by inviting them to write their own messages using large pieces of chalk (or their remnants) the artists placed in public spaces with ‘politically confrontational histories’. See Nato Thompson, ed. *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Cambridge, MA; London: Creative Time; MIT Press, 2012, 178; 214; Tania Bruguera, ‘Immigrant Movement International’, 2006–15, <<http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/486-0-Immigrant+Movement+International.htm>> [accessed 24 March 2019]; Claire Doherty, Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, Chris Fite-Wassilak, Matteo Lucchetti, Magdalena Malm, Alexis Zimberg, and Situations (arts organisation), eds. *Out of Time, out of Place: Public Art (Now)*. London: Art Books Publishing Ltd, 2015.

<sup>685</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 193–94.

<sup>686</sup> Grant H. Kester. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004; Tom Finkelpearl. *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*. Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2013; Pablo Helguera. *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*. New York, NY: Pinto, 2011; Shannon Jackson. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011.

for any work of art produced collaboratively after 1989.<sup>687</sup> For example, Bishop claims that, ‘since the 1990s, the project has become an umbrella term for many types of art: collective practice, self-organised activist groups, transdisciplinary research, participatory and socially engaged art, and experimental curating’.<sup>688</sup> Echoing Bishop, Boris Groys asserts that ‘in the past two decades the art project – in lieu of the work of art – has without question moved center stage in the art world’s attention’.<sup>689</sup>

Contemporary projects represent ‘a mode of working’, and are the dominant form of work in what Christian Boltanski and Eve Chiapello define as the ‘projective city’, the third stage of capitalism beginning in the 1990s – following the first stage during the nineteenth century, and the second stage, the ‘industrial city’, between 1930s and 1960s – where qualities like ‘adaptability’, ‘flexibility’ and ‘mobility’ are valued above all else.<sup>690</sup> In a similar vein, Groys posits that the omnipresence of projects since the early 1990s

may presuppose the formulation of a specific aim and of a strategy designed to achieve this aim, but this target is mostly formulated in such a way that we are denied the criteria which would allow us to ascertain whether the project’s aim has or has not been achieved, whether excessive time is required to reach its goal or even if the target as such is intrinsically unattainable.<sup>691</sup>

Contemporary projects may or may not have a set timeframe, follow a set strategy or have a specific goal at the moment of conception. What is primarily apparent from both Bishop and Groys’s accounts is the mutability of the term ‘project’: the term now refers to almost all forms of art practice that involve people working alongside the authoring artist (perhaps with the exception of internet and post-internet art) and are ‘in opposition to traditional, expressive and object-based modes of artistic practice’, according to Bishop.<sup>692</sup> Furthermore, as Bishop and Kester demonstrate, contemporary projects are more the product of a globalised art practice that take place in a range of places, from a cruise on Lake Zurich to the Bowland Forest in the north of England, or in countries such as Argentina, Thailand, Burma, and Tibet, and are created by practitioners from around the world, such as Ala Plastica from Buenos Aires, Oda Projesi from Istanbul, Superflex from Denmark, Huit Facettes from Senegal, and Ne Pas Plier from Paris.<sup>693</sup>

In contradistinction to Bishop, Kester and Groys, my study, focusing here on the British context, offers greater historical depth and specificity, fleshing out the history of how the concept of the project emerged in the socio-political context of the 1970s, when unionisation was a fundamental factor contributing to the generation of collective work. In this respect, I argue that the Artist’s Union (1972–83) was seminal, both in terms of situating collaboration in artistic practice and in generating

<sup>687</sup> Finkelpearl, *What We Made*; Jackson, *Social Works*, 22–23.

<sup>688</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 194.

<sup>689</sup> Boris Groys, ‘Loneliness of the project’. In *Going Public*, Berlin: Sternberg Press/e-flux, 2010, 78.

<sup>690</sup> Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello and Gregory C. Elliott. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London; New York, NY: Verso, 2007, 103–21.

<sup>691</sup> Groys, ‘Loneliness of the project’, 83.

<sup>692</sup> Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19.

<sup>693</sup> Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 9–12; Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 20–23.

projects that emulated the grassroots *modus operandi* of the organisation and its principles of collaboration, horizontality and pragmatism. Although the Union's attempt to envision artists as workers emerged as part of the general shift towards a deindustrialised economy in Britain – and thus reflected the decline of union power along with the Union itself – the history of the Union and its projects, such as *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75* by Margaret Harrison, Kay Fido Hunt and Mary Kelly, is essential for understanding the ethos of the decade and artists' impulses for developing projects. Through Artist's Union case studies, including *Women and Work, The Peterlee Project* (1976–77) by Stuart Brisley, and the *West London Social Resource Project* (1972) by Stephen Willats, I examine in detail the characteristics of these projects and trace their emergence, thereby making the discourse more precise, focused and conceptually rigorous. In-depth scrutiny of the Union, which situates the organisation within the larger context of 1970s collectives, is particularly important, because this has not been addressed by any of the historians mentioned above who deal with socially engaged art practice, and has received only limited attention in studies of 1970s Britain despite the significance of unions in the nation's post-war history. My study gives proper recognition to the Union as an organisation from which several artist projects were conceived, and also explores how artists merged practice with bureaucracy through the Union workshops.

The legacy of the 1970s shows us first and foremost that collaboration between artist(s) and non-artists (i.e. participants, factory workers, residents, and etc.) in the production of artistic projects and/or artworks was rarely entirely mutual: projects were attributed to individual artists despite their participatory and/or collaborative elements. As Miwon Kwon points out, surrendering the 'privileged right or ownership of artistic authorship' as a means to democratise art, or as a gesture of 'critical generosity', simultaneously reaffirms the artist's superior position even if it also implies a need for solidarity.<sup>694</sup> Here, Kwon refers to Maurice Godelier's discussion of the paradox that stems from acts of giving and receiving, and the concept of the gift along with the intrinsic debt that accompanies it for the receiver. For Godelier, giving

seems to establish the difference and an inequality of status between donor and recipient, which can in certain circumstances become a hierarchy: if this hierarchy already exists, then the gift expresses and legitimizes it. Two opposite movements are thus contained in a single act. The gift decreases the distance between the protagonists because it is a form of sharing, and it increases the social distance between them because one is now indebted to the other.<sup>695</sup>

Recognition and acceptance of this – rather than seeing it as a hindrance or a failure – is crucial, because it can lead the way to building sustainable, ethical and constructive relationships between artists and communities. As seen in all three projects examined, the intention to democratise art did

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<sup>694</sup> Miwon Kwon. 'Exchange and reciprocity in the 1960s and after'. In Anna Deuze, ed. *The "Do-It-Yourself" Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media. Rethinking Art's Histories*. Manchester, UK; New York, NY: New York: Manchester University Press. Distributed in the US by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 233–34.

<sup>695</sup> Maurice Godelier. *The Enigma of the Gift*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 12.

not preclude artists from claiming ownership of these projects; in other words, artist projects were recognised as the creation of the artists who initiated them, even if, in practice, they were produced in collaboration with others. In this sense, there was no sense of intrinsic or apparent ‘debt’ because the roles of the artists and participants were acknowledged as separate, even if the relationship between them was multidirectional and horizontal. By acknowledging the binary nature of the relationship between artists and people, these projects were not emphasising hierarchy but, instead, engendering multiplicity, free will (if there was a collaborative element even though it was not a prerequisite, as seen in *Women and Work*) and critical awareness. For instance, Harrison, Hunt and Kelly instigated the unionisation of women workers by awakening them to gender inequalities and their own rights; Willats introduced project participants to art – something they hadn’t been widely exposed to before – and prompted interaction between diverse individuals; and the Union changed the way artists dealt with issues that mattered to them, allowing them to collaborate and act in unison (in contrast to the traditional idea of the artist as creative genius working in solitude), and hence opened up new possibilities for art practice.

As I have argued in my exploration of the genealogy of projects from the 1970s, artists created projects as a means for effecting change in social and cultural perception by challenging the dominant foundations of culture. In the 1970s, artist projects presupposed a future-orientated, long-term effort, and, more often than not, an open-ended process, even if there was a proposed resolution in the future. In other words, projects proposed solutions for particular ‘live’ issues (such as the rights of artists, gender inequality or issues related to particular environments) selected by the artist through collaborative involvement with individuals from outside the art community. In this respect, I have identified the historically specific character of the artist project as it emerged in the 1970s with which contemporary projects can be compared and assessed.

This genealogy is also essential for future comparative work that tracks the emergence of the artist project in the wider geographies of continental Europe, Latin America and Turkey. For example, a similar dynamic to the one that I discovered in Britain can be seen in the collective project, Action for the Revolution Theatre (Devrim İçin Hareket Tiyatrosu (DIHT), 1968–71) in Turkey. DIHT was founded by performance artist Mehmet Ulusoy, film director and screenwriter Ali Özgentürk, sculptor Kuzgun Acar, poet Can Yücel and film director Bige Berker, among others, who came together at the Turkish Teachers Union (Türkiye Öğretmenler Sendikası (TÖS), 1965–71). Combining agitprop techniques with the Anatolian theatrical play tradition, DIHT was formed with the intention of bringing counter-hegemonic struggle to the streets and therefore to the heart of society through performance. During the three years the project lasted, the collective produced 20 performances that travelled across picket lines, neighbourhoods and political demonstrations. Members were repeatedly arrested for the political nature of these performances and the collective disbanded following the coup d’état of 12 March 1971, after which Ulusoy moved to Paris where he founded the Théâtre de Liberté with a group of artists from the Centre Americain, an interdisciplinary cultural centre founded in



1931.<sup>696</sup> Another avenue of research that could be pursued are the projects initiated by the short-lived Visual Artist's Union (Görsel Sanatçılar Derneği (GSD), 1975–80) in Turkey, whose disbanding was triggered by yet another coup d'état, on 12 September 1980, nine years after the termination of DIHT. As a comparative example, Turkey is significant, both in terms of the parallels demonstrated by the pragmatic impulse of artists in taking on projects such as the DIHT and the resonance of unionisation, as well as the differences provoked by the specific cultural and political context of Turkey with its iterant military coups. I claim that the Turkish context of the 1970s has important wider implications for the genealogy of the artist project I have outlined in my study of Britain in the 1970s, and represents an avenue of work I will be exploring in future, starting with an article investigating the history of Action for the Revolution Theatre.<sup>697</sup>

In contrast to a trans-historical conception of the project, my thesis offers a precise historical and theoretical genealogy through which the contemporary character of artist projects can be addressed and historicised. This more historically detailed understanding of projects from the 1970s, both in terms of their origination and character, throws the generality of contemporary discourse into relief, thereby providing a richer understanding of the usage and shortcomings of 'project' as a term employed today. My aim has not been to abstract a universally valid and binding definition of the artist project, but to offer a historically specific account of its emergence in Britain in the 1970s and to indicate how this history has informed its development since 1989 in ways that have yet to be fully addressed.

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<sup>696</sup> In light of my initial conversations with Zeynep Öz, curator of the Turkish Pavilion in the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2019, and artist Sibel Horada Coşkun who co-produced a collective performance that makes connections between contemporary experience and the times of DIHT, titled *Spot Welding* (October 2016, Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul), which took shape in response to a call by Horada, Yasemin Nur and Emre Koyuncuoğlu, there is even the possibility for a show on DIHT in Istanbul. One possible location that came up during conversations was SALT, where the archives for some of the artists (e.g. Kuzgun Acar) involved with DIHT are held. SALT is a cultural institution, which seeks to explore critical and timely issues in visual and material culture, and to cultivate innovative programmes for research and experimental thinking. On 6 February 2016, SALT hosted James Scott from The Berwick Street Collective for a Q&A session with the author following a screening of *Nightcleaners* as part of 'Greatest Common Factor', a film compendium at the institution's Galata location. <<https://saltonline.org/en/1323/greatest-common-factor>>.

<sup>697</sup> I am already working on a comparative article investigating Action for the Revolution Theatre. My working title is 'Collaboration on the Streets: Action for the Revolution Theatre'.

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**ARTISTS UNION**  
NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN  
SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 1972

\* WHO ARE WE RECRUITING?

Until recently, people working in the 'fine arts' had not attempted to organise themselves for their own protection. Great Britain is one of the only European countries where this situation still exists. 'Fine art' is the only professional sector still undefined by the trade union movement. Musicians, actors, writers, film makers and designers are unionized; artists should be too.

\* WHY DO ARTISTS NEED UNIONIZATION?

There are over 12,000 practising artists in England alone. Most of them are either unemployed or earning a living in areas unrelated to their professional qualifications. Those 'employed' as artists are dependent on an archaic system of patronage represented, on the one hand, by the private gallery which operates for the benefit of market speculators and on the other, by the state. Through bodies such as the Arts Council, autocratic control is maintained over the distribution of grants and the selection of work for public exhibitions. Needless to say, decisions affecting the majority of artists remain outside of their own control.

\* HOW CAN THE ARTISTS UNION CHANGE THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS?

The Artists Union was formally constituted in May 1972 and has a rapidly growing membership. We intend to affiliate to an appropriate trade union in the near future. As a strong branch within a recognised union we will be in a position to demand the kind of representation which will protect the interests of our members in relation to public patronage. In addition, we will promote legislation which will regulate the exploitative relation now existing between artists and private patrons. In co-operation with the relevant organisations, we will also want to negotiate on behalf of the large number of artists precariously situated in part-time teaching posts. As an important step towards realising our aims, we are launching this membership campaign. There is strength in numbers.

\* WHAT ELSE DO WE WANT BESIDES BETTER CONDITIONS?

The main activity of the union falls within the workshops. Members report on the research and discussions of these vital workshops at the monthly Branch Meetings. The reports have demonstrated our concern to establish closer links with the 'non-art' community, the need to democratise art education and to take action against sexist or racist discrimination in the arts. Affiliation to the trade union movement suggests more than fighting for our own ends, it means identifying our aims ultimately with the working class movement as a whole. This in turn means questioning the very nature of art and the role of artists in a class society.

IF YOU ARE AN ARTIST WE URGE YOU TO JOIN THE  
ARTISTS UNION. IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE  
PUBLIC, WE HOPE YOU WILL STUDY OUR PROGRAMME  
AND TELL OTHERS ABOUT IT.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION WRITE TO:

THE SECRETARIAT  
ARTISTS UNION  
C/O I.C.A., NASH HOUSE  
12 CARLTON TERRACE  
LONDON S.W.1.

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## THE ARTISTS UNION

### INVITATION

#### INTRODUCTORY MEETING : MARCH 18TH, 1972

The purpose of the meeting is to define a set of issues around which the Union will take its form during its first year of operation. The meeting is open to artists deciding to accept the invitation to join the Artists Union being created as a Branch of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, (A.S.T.M.S.). This meeting is not called to question the concept of unionisation, and if you attend it will be on the understanding that you are in general sympathy with the decision to form this Union, and with the following aims:

#### GENERAL AIMS

- To bring the handling of decisions affecting artists into the hands of artists themselves.
- To help the living arts perform the vital function of establishing the quality and identity of society.
- To dedicate ourselves to the establishment of the living arts as an integral part of our social, political and economic situation.
- To represent a new consciousness of the political responsibilities of the artist, which is in turn to see the artist as:
  - a liberating force for social change
  - working to establish ever closer relationships between art and the needs of the people
  - wielding art as a weapon against materialism
  - asserting art as a process catalysed by the artist in which people take a vital and creative role

#### THE UNION

The Artists Union is being formed as a Branch of the Association of Scientific, Technical & Managerial Staffs, which is in turn affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. The Union will be subject to democratic process as laid down in the Rule Book, provided each member on election. In forming a Branch of an existing union, as opposed to the initially more attractive concept of a completely autonomous union, we gain immediate access to the power and facilities of A.S.T.M.S., and yet retain maximum autonomy in the definition and subsequent regulation of our affairs.

The particular issues which follow as a consequence of the General Aims will define the work and the structure of the union, and their determination will be the business of this Meeting.

The Meeting will be held at CAMDEN STUDIOS, CAMDEN STREET, LONDON N.W.1 (nearest underground: Mornington Crescent) at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday, March 18th, 1972.

Agenda enclosed.

THE ARTISTS UNION

PROPOSAL FOR CONSTITUTION

*agreed  
waived  
into  
abeyance* (The ideological basis of the ARTISTS UNION is contained in the General Aims and all ARTISTS UNION activity and policy will be conducted in relation to those aims.)

Decisions on action and policy is in the hands of the membership attending Branch Meetings or voting by post. (No action) or policy decision may be made by any sub-division of the ARTISTS UNION.

The main activity of the ARTISTS UNION will fall within the framework of the Work Shops, and it will be assumed that members will be concerned with one or more of these Work Shops, to maximise the effectiveness of the ARTISTS UNION; i.e. the ARTISTS UNION will aim to avoid any form of 'passive membership'.

The ARTISTS UNION has four divisions..... Membership  
Work Shops  
Branch Committee  
Annually Elected Officers.

ty

MEMBERSHIP

The MEMBERSHIP will be taken to mean all paid up members of the Artists Union, either as an independent union, or as a branch of another union.

The Function of the MEMBERSHIP will be:

- To elect 1st*  
1a. To vote ~~annually~~ *every 12 months* for Union Officers .. (Secretary, *minutes / agenda*  
Chairman, *informational*  
Treasurer, *sec's meetings*  
(Two Auditors)  
(Rep to Divisional Council))  
*to serve a maximum of 12 months*
- 2a. To vote on policy and recommendations for action as proposed by the Work Shops and from the floor, and to discuss and vote on means of implementation.

Actively the MEMBERSHIP will:

- 1b. Form themselves into Work Shops according to their individual professional or ideological concerns to actively promote the Artists Union.
- 2b. Attend Branch and Work Shop meetings when ever possible.
- 3b. Abide by the Constitution, (General Aims) and *decisions of the* Artists Union Decisions.

Notes.

- (1a) The election of auditors and rep to Divisional Council would only occur if the Artists Union affiliates with another union.
- (3b) The Membership would take into consideration overriding personal interest or matters of conscience should they arise.

#### WORK SHOPS

The Function of the WORK SHOPS will be:

- 1a. To investigate areas designated by the Membership as being of special concern to the Artists Union, ~~and the promotion of the General Aims.~~
- 2a. To propose Artists Union policy in these areas to be put to the Membership with suggestions for the implementation of such policies.
- 3a. To aid the implementation of Policy if and when instructed by the Membership.

The Organisation of WORK SHOPS:

The separate internal organisation of WORK SHOPS will be left to the membership to define, however the WORK SHOPS will:

- 1a. Have a minimum membership of seven Members. *to have representation on branch comm. mtg.*
- 2a. Produce three copies of a written report of progress and recommended policy *[excluding dates and attendance of meetings.]*
  - One to be given to Branch Secretary for union files.
  - One for the WORK SHOP convener to present to Branch.
  - One for WORK SHOP files.
- 3a. Elect a Convener to the Branch Committee *and* who will also give the WORK SHOP report to the Branch Meetings.

#### GENERAL

- 1b. WORK SHOP decisions will be taken on a majority vote at WORK SHOP meetings. If it is felt by any member of a WORK SHOP that the report read to the Branch is inaccurate, or does not reflect the true position of the WORK SHOP, this may be raised at Branch meeting immediately after the Convener has finished speaking. It will then be at the discretion of the Membership as to whether the report be withdrawn.
- 2b. If there is opposition to WORK SHOP decisions as described in the reports, but these have in fact been endorsed by the majority of a WORK SHOP membership, the opposition have the opportunity to put alternative proposals to the Branch at Branch Meetings.
- 3b. WORK SHOPS are empowered to call on any outside help, i.e. non-members, or members of other unions to work, aid or advise.

#### NOTES

- (3a) WORK SHOP Conveners are not permanent representatives but in fact must call for a vote of confidence before each Branch Committee Meeting, and must be re-nominated every three months.

Creation or Dissolution of WORK SHOPS:

- 1c. New WORK SHOPS will be formed at Branch Meetings from motions approved by the Membership.
- 2c. Motions to form new WORK SHOPS can be sent to the Secretary *no later than one week* before Branch Meetings so as to be included on the agenda, *or raised from the floor during any other business.*
- 3c. Motions to dissolve WORK SHOPS must be sent to the Secretary *no later than one week* before Branch Meetings so as to be included on the agenda and allow for a postal vote.
- 3d. The creation or dissolution of WORK SHOPS is the prerogative of the Membership at Branch Meetings. However this does not preclude the setting up of unofficial work shops, or of individual members proposing policy and action.

#### BRANCH COMMITTEE

The BRANCH COMMITTEE consists of the Work Shop Conveners and the Artists Union ~~Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer~~ <sup>officers</sup> and will meet <sup>and any other members</sup> one week before the Branch Meetings. <sup>No later than</sup>

The Function of the BRANCH COMMITTEE will be:

1a. To co-relate information presented by the Work Shops to present to the Membership at Branch Meetings.

2a. To arrange the agenda of the next Branch Meeting.

The Work Shop Conveners bring to the Branch Committee two copies of the Work Shop report .....

One to be given to Secretary for files.  
One read to BRANCH COMMITTEE.

The Work Shop Conveners will also bring to BRANCH COMMITTEE dates and places of all Work Shop meetings as far as is known.

#### BRANCH OFFICERS

##### THE CHAIRMAN:

- 1a. Will chair all Branch Meetings and Branch Committee Meetings.
- 2a. Will be responsible for the counting of votes at Branch Meetings, including himself. There will be no casting vote. .ty.
- 3a. May be a member of a Work Shop, but may not be the Convener.

##### THE SECRETARY:

- 1b. Will assemble the agenda on the advice of the Branch Committee including postal suggestions.
- 2b. Will inform the membership of all dates of Work Shop and Branch Meetings.
- 3b. Will give all postal votes to The Chairman immediately before Branch Meetings.
- 4b. Will act as an information source for the Membership.
- 5b. Will be responsible for keeping all Artists Union files up to date, and for keeping the minutes of Branch Meetings.

##### THE TREASURER:

- 1c. Will act as TREASURER for the Branch, and for the Work Shops if asked.

All officers of the Artists Union can delegate their work load to other members, but they alone will be responsible to the membership for all actions associated with their office.

#### BRANCH MEETINGS

BRANCH MEETINGS will be held monthly, and are open to all Members, prospective members and invited guests. However at the beginning of each meeting the Chairman will ask the membership if there is an objection to any non-member present. Should this be so, a motion will be put to the membership that this person be asked to leave.

Generally motions on policy will be voted on and carried by members at Branch Meetings by a simple majority. In the event of less than a two thirds majority it can be put to the membership that the motion be put over to the next meeting so as to include the postal vote.

Postal votes will be included on the election of officers and on any other matter at the discretion of the Membership.

All changes in Constitution <sup>[and General aims]</sup> must have a two thirds majority. <sup>[including the postal vote.]</sup>

# **THE ARTIST'S RESERVED RIGHTS TRANSFER AND SALE AGREEMENT**

The accompanying 3 page Agreement form has been drafted by Bob Projansky, a New York lawyer, after my extensive discussions and correspondence with over 500 artists, dealers, lawyers, collectors, museum people, critics and other concerned people involved in the day-to-day workings of the international art world.

The Agreement has been designed to remedy some generally acknowledged inequities in the art world, particularly artists' lack of control over the use of their work and participation in its economics after they no longer own it.

The Agreement form has been written with special awareness of the current ordinary practices and economic realities of the art world, particularly its private, cash and informal nature, with careful regard for the interests and motives of all concerned.

It is expected to be the standard form for the transfer and sale of all contemporary art, and has been made as fair, simple and useful as possible. It can be used either as presented here or slightly altered to fit your specific situation.

If the following information does not answer all your questions consult your attorney.

#### WHAT THE AGREEMENT DOES

The Agreement is designed to give the artist:

- 15% of any increase in the value of each work each time it is transferred in the future.
- a record of who owns each work at any given time.
- the right to be notified when the work is to be exhibited, so the artist can advise upon or (see Article Seven (b)) veto the proposed exhibition of his/her work.
- the right to borrow the work for exhibition for 2 months every five (5) years (at no cost to the owner).
- the right to be consulted if repairs become necessary.
- half of any rental income paid to the owner for the use of the work at exhibitions, if there ever is any.
- all reproduction rights in the work.

The economic benefits would accrue to the artist for life, plus the life of a surviving spouse (if any) plus 21 years, so as to benefit the artist’s children while they are growing up. The artist would maintain aesthetic control only for his/her lifetime.

Although the contract may seem to alter the previous relationship between artist and art owner principally by putting new obligations on the owners, the Agreement really does some very good things for the collector. In return for these obligations, which are almost costless for the collector, he gets substantial benefits; the Agreement is designed:

- to give each owner the formalized right to receive from the artist (or his/her agent) a certified history and *provenance* of the work.
- to create and clarify a non-exploitative, one-to-one relationship between the artist and the owner.
- to maintain this relationship—what lawyers call “privity”—between the artist and each successive owner of the work.
- to establish recognition that the artist maintains a moral relationship to the work, even as the collector owns and controls it.
- to give assurance to the owner that he is using the work in harmony with the artist’s intentions.

#### WHEN TO USE THE AGREEMENT

The Agreement form has been designed to be used by the artist at the time of the FIRST TRANSFER—

either by gift, or barter for things or services, or sale

of EACH INDIVIDUAL work of art—

either a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a graphic, a multiple, a mural, an immovable sculpture, a non-object work, or any other fine art you can think of

from the artist to ANYONE else—

either a friend, another artist, collector, museum, gynecologist, lawyer, corporation, landlord, relative or dealer.

IMPORTANT: It is NOT for use when you lend your work to exhibitions or when you give it to your dealer on consignment. It IS for use when the dealer sells your consigned work.

In short, the Agreement form is to be used when you part with your work for keeps.

Its terms are effective and it requires a very simple procedure to keep it in effect with each successive owner of your work of art.

It requires the artist and the first owner of the work to fill out and sign the Agreement form and also, to affix a notice of the existence of the Agreement somewhere on the work of art itself.

#### HOW TO USE THE AGREEMENT

1. To begin, xerox or offset a number of copies of each page of the Agreement form. You will need at least 2 copies for each work you sell or give or trade away. (Save this copy to make future copies and so you can refer to this information.)

2. Fill out the contract forms—one copy for you, one for the new owner, and another copy of the last page only (from which you cut out the notice to affix to the work). Make sure that you fill it out legibly.

3. Follow the simple instructions in the margin of the Agreement form. Double check to make sure you have filled in the spaces that must be filled in and struck out what must be struck out.

IMPORTANT: Fill out only those parts of the Specimen TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD which identify the work and the original parties to the original Agreement (“between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ made the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_\_.”). Be sure you fill out the specimen NOTICE.

You will note that the contract form speaks in terms of a “sale” (“whereas Artist is willing to sell the Work to Collector and Collector is willing to purchase. . . .”); this doesn’t mean you can’t use it when you give a friend a work or pay your dentist with a painting or trade works with another artist. We have used the words “sell” and “purchase” only for the sake of simplicity (likewise, we use the term “Collector” just because it is the most all-inclusive word for this purpose). Strictly speaking, even if you are giving or trading your work you are “selling” it for the promises in the Agreement and whatever else you get.

This Agreement form is not a bill of sale or an invoice, nor is it a substitute. If the work is sold for money, prepare a separate bill of sale for your financial records.

In Article One, you enter the price OR value of the work; you, the artist, can put any value that you and the new owner agree upon. If the work is resold for a figure higher than the one you have entered as “value”, the owner will have to pay you 15% of the difference over that figure; obviously the higher the figure you put in, the better break the new owner is getting. If you are giving a friend a work or exchanging with another artist (you need two separate Agreements for the latter situation) you might want to enter a nominal value so that you would get some money, even if he/she later sells it for less than what your dealer would sell it for.

IMPORTANT: If there are rights given the artist under the Agreement form that you as the artist do not want, you strike them out. IMPORTANT: be sure to examine ARTICLE SEVEN (b); if you don’t feel you must have a veto over all details of the future exhibition of the work, be sure you strike (b) out of ARTICLE SEVEN. Few collectors will want to buy a work if their right to lend it for exhibition is so restricted by someone else. If you give a work away you can leave (b) in, but that will make it very difficult for your friend to sell it. We have put (b) in because (a) is the least an artist should accept and (b) is the most he/she can ask for. If (a) is not enough for you but you don’t need (b), have an attorney draft a short rider to the Agreement setting forth those specific controls over exhibition that you feel you must have.



4. You and the Collector should each sign both copies, yours and his, so they will both be legal originals.

5. Before the work is delivered, be sure that a copy of the NOTICE is affixed to the work. DO NOT cut it out of one of the originals. Put it on a stretcher bar or under a sculpture base or wherever else it will be aesthetically invisible yet easily findable. It should get a coat of clear polyurethane—or something like it—to protect it. It won't hurt to put several copies of the NOTICE on a large work.

If your work simply has no place on it for the NOTICE or your signature—in which case you should always use an ancillary document which describes the work, which bears your signature, and which is transferred as a (legal) part of the work—glue the NOTICE on the document.

**PROCEDURE FOR FUTURE TRANSFERS.** For future transfers, the owner makes three copies of the TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD form from his original (without the words "SPECIMEN"). He then fills them out, entering the value or price that he and the next owner have agreed upon. Both the old and new owners sign ALL THREE copies of the dated TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD, each keeps one copy and the third is sent with the 15% payment (if any is required) to the artist or his/her agent. The old owner gives the new owner a copy of the original Agreement, so he will know his responsibilities to the artist and have the TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD form if HE transfers the work.

#### **THE DEALER**

If you have a dealer, he is going to be very important in getting people to sign the contract when he sells your work.

The dealer should make the use of the Agreement a policy of the gallery, thereby giving the artists in the gallery collective strength against those few collectors and institutions who do not really have the artist's interests at heart.

Remember, your dealer knows all the ins and outs that go down in the business of the art world. He knows the ways to get the few reluctant art buyers to sign the Agreement—the better the dealer the more ways and the more buyers he knows and the easier it will be. He can do what he does now when he wants things for his artists—give the buyer favors, exchange privileges, preferential treatment, discounts, hot tips, time, advice and all the other things that collectors expect and appreciate.

The Agreement only formalizes what dealers do now anyway; dealers try to keep track of the work they have sold, but now they can only rely on exhibition lists, catalogues, hit-or-miss intelligence and publicity to keep them up-to-date. The Agreement creates a very simple record system, which will automatically maintain a biography of each work and a chronological record of ownership. It is private, uncluttered and no dealer should ever have to hire another secretary to administer it; if each work engenders a dozen pieces of paper over the entire life of the Agreement, it will be a lot. The requirement of giving a *provenance* to the current owner is no more than what goes on today, but under this system it will be accurate and almost effortless.

A dealer shouldn't be expected to do this for nothing; it seems reasonable to compensate the dealer with some part of the 15% he/she is collecting for the artist, perhaps one-third of it.

When, as is often the case, an artist moves from one dealer to a more prestigious one, the first dealer might continue to collect whatever payments are occasioned by the resale of the earlier work.

When a dealer BUYS work directly from the artist (for resale or otherwise), they should write the intended RETAIL value of the work in their Agreement, NOT the actual amount of money the dealer is paying the artist, which would be less.

Getting the contract signed is mostly a state of mind. If your dealer does not think the benefits of the Agreement are important for you, he will have dozens of reasons why he can't get those few reluctant buyers to sign it; on the other hand, if he seriously wants you to have these benefits he will be able to overcome all those obstacles without losing a single sale.

#### **THE FACTS OF LIFE: YOU, THE ART WORLD AND THE AGREEMENT**

The general response to the preliminary draft of this Agreement form has been extremely favorable; the vast majority of people in the art world feel it is fair, reasonable and practical. A few have expressed certain reservations about whether or not people will actually use it. These reservations can be summed up in two basic statements:

- "... the economics of buying and selling art is so fragile that if you place one more burden on the collectors of art, they will simply stop buying art ...", and
- "... I will certainly use the Agreement—if everyone else uses it ..."

The first statement is nonsense; clearly the art will be just as desirable with as without the Agreement and there is no reason why the value of any art should be affected at all, especially if this contract is standard practice in the art world—which brings us to the second statement. If there is a problem here, this statement reflects it: it is the concern of the individual artist or dealer that the insistence on the use of the contract will jeopardize their sales in a competitive market.

If we examine this notion carefully, we see it doesn't hold up.

ALL artists sell, trade and give their work to only two kinds of people:

- those who are their friends.
- those who are not their friends.

Obviously, your friends will not give you a hard time; they will sign the Agreement with you. The ONLY trouble will come when you are selling to someone who is not a friend. Since surely 75% of all art that is sold is bought by people who are friends of the artist or dealer—friends who dine together, see each other socially, drink together, weekend together, etc.—whatever resistance may appear will come only in respect to some portion of the 25% of your work that is being sold to strangers. Of these people, most will wish to be on good terms with you and will be happy to enter into the Agreement with you. This leaves perhaps 5% of your sales which will encounter serious resistance over the contract. Even this real resistance should decrease toward zero as the contract comes into widespread use.

In a manner of speaking, this Agreement will help you discover who your friends are.

If a collector wants to buy but doesn't want to sign the Agreement, you should tell him that all your work is sold under the contract, that it is standard for your work.

If he buys work only from those few artists who won't insist on using the Agreement he is being very foolish; non-use of this Agreement is a very dumb criterion for building one's collection.

## 4

There are other things that you can point out to the reluctant collector:

- first of all, it's not going to cost him anything unless your work appreciates in value. If that doesn't cut any ice, and he wants to keep *all* of whatever profit he might make with your work, you can simply write in a higher value for it, thus giving him a free ride for the first part of the appreciation he anticipates.
- if and when he sells your work and he owes you some payment, he doesn't necessarily have to pay you with money; you can give him credit against the purchase of a new work or take payment in services or something other than money.
- of course, if a collector buys a work without the contract when the use of the Agreement has become the standard practice for the artist, the collector will have to rely on sheer good-will when he later wants the artist (or his/her dealer) to appraise, repair or authenticate it. Why he should expect to find any good-will there is anybody's guess.

Is the collector really going to pass up your work because you want him to sign the contract? Work that he likes and thinks is worth having? If the answer is yes, given the fact that it won't cost *him* anything to give you the respect that you as the creator of the work deserve—if that will keep him from buying, he is being very stubborn and foolish and nobody can tell you how to illuminate him.

Using the contract doesn't mean that all your relationships in the art world will hereafter be strictly business or that you will have to enforce your rights down to the last penny. Friends will still be friends; you will be able to waive your rights to payments (in whole or in part), your right to make repairs, to grant reproduction rights, to be consulted—but they will be YOUR rights and the choices will be YOURS.

The Agreement form has been prepared to be used by any and all artists—known, well-known and unknown. Simply make a lot of copies and use it whenever you give, trade or sell your work. It will be effective from the moment you use it. The more artists and dealers there are using it, the better and easier it will be for everybody. It requires no organization, no dues, no government agency, no meetings, no public registration, no nothing—just your will to use it. Just plug it in and watch it go—a perfect waffle every time!

### ENFORCEMENT

First, let's put this question in perspective: most people will honor the Agreement because most people honor agreements. Those few people who will try to cheat you are likely to be the same kinds who will give you a hard time about signing the Agreement in the first place. Later owners will be more likely to try to cheat you than the first owner, with whom you or your dealer have had some face-to-face contact, but there are strong reasons why both first and future owners should fulfill the contract's terms.

What happens if owner #2 sells your work to owner #3 and doesn't send you the transfer form? (He's not sending your money, either.)

Nothing happens. (You don't know about it yet.)

Sooner or later you do find out about it because it takes a lot of effort to conceal such sales and the grapevine will get the news to you (or your dealer, anyway). To conceal the sale, owner #3 has to conceal the work and he's not going to hide a good and valuable work just to save a little money. And if he ever wants to sell it, repair it, appraise it or authenticate it, he **MUST** come to you (or your dealer). When you do find out about such a transfer—and you will—you sue owner #2, who will be stuck for 15% of the increase based on the price to owner #3 OR on the value at the time you find out about it, which maybe much higher. Clearly, a seller (in this case owner #2) would be extremely foolish to take this chance, to risk having to pay a lot of money just to save a little money.

As to falsifying values reported to the artist, there will be as much pressure from the new owner to put in a falsely high value as from the old owner to put in a low value. There are real difficulties inherent in getting two people to lie in unison, especially if it only benefits one of them—the seller. In 95% of the cases the amount of money to be paid to the artist won't be enough to compel the collectors to lie to you.

You will note that in the event you have to sue to enforce any of your rights under the Agreement, ARTICLE NINETEEN gives you the right to recover reasonable attorney's fees in addition to whatever else you may be entitled to.

### SUMMATION

We realize that this Agreement is essentially unprecedented in the art world and that it just may cause a little rumbling and trembling; on the other hand, the ills it remedies are universally acknowledged to exist and no other practical way has ever been devised to cure them.

Whether or not you, the artist, use it, is of course up to you; what we have given you is a legal tool which you can use yourself to establish ongoing rights when you transfer your work. This is a substitute for what has existed before—nothing.

We have done this for no recompense, for just the pleasure and challenge of the problem, feeling that should there ever be a question about artists' rights in reference to their art, the artist is more right than anyone else.

Seth Siegleaub, 24 February 1971, New York

## SEE OVERSIDE FOR AGREEMENT FORM

Please POST, REPRODUCE and USE this poster freely.

This poster is not to be sold.

All the information contained on this poster will also be contained in the April 1971 issue of Art News, Studio International and Arts Canada.

The cost of the production, printing and distribution of this poster has been underwritten by the School of Visual Arts in New York.

For further information: Seth Siegleaub, Post Office Box 350, New York 10013, U.S.A.

DESIGN: CRISTOS GIANAKOS

**AGREEMENT FORM :**

AGREEMENT OF ORIGINAL TRANSFER OF WORK OF ART	
Fill in date, names and addresses of parties	<p>This agreement made this _____ day of _____, 19____, by and between _____ (hereinafter the “Artist”), residing at _____ and _____ (hereinafter the “Collector”), residing at _____;</p>
Fill in data identifying the Work	<p>WITNESSETH: WHEREAS the Artist has created that certain work of art; Title: _____ Identification #: _____ Date: _____ Material: _____ Dimensions: _____ Description: _____ (hereinafter “the Work”); and WHEREAS Artist is willing to sell the Work to Collector and Collector is willing to purchase the Work from Artist, subject to mutual obligations, covenants, and conditions herein; and WHEREAS Collector and Artist recognize that the value of the Work, unlike that of an ordinary chattel, is and will be affected by each and every other work of art the Artist has created and will hereafter create; and WHEREAS the parties expect the value of the Work to increase hereafter; and WHEREAS Collector and Artist recognize that it is fitting and proper that Artist participate in any appreciated value which may thus be created in the Work; and WHEREAS the parties wish the integrity and clarity of the Artist’s ideas and statements in the Work to be maintained and subject in part to the will or advice of the creator of the Work, NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing premises and the mutual covenants hereinafter set forth and other valuable considerations the parties hereto agree as follows:</p>
Fill in price or value; strike out one not applicable	<p><b>PURCHASE AND SALE. ARTICLE ONE:</b> The Artist hereby sells to Collector and Collector hereby purchases the Work from Artist, subject to all the covenants herein set forth (for the price of _____ receipt of which is hereby acknowledged) (at the agreed valuation for the purposes of this agreement of _____).</p>
Fill in name, address of artist’s agent, if any; strike out one not applicable	<p><b>FUTURE TRANSFERS. ARTICLE TWO:</b> Collector covenants that in the event Collector shall hereafter sell, give, grant, barter, exchange, assign, transfer, convey or alienate the Work in any manner whatsoever or if the Work shall pass by inheritance or bequest or by operation of law, or if the Work shall be destroyed and insurance proceeds paid therefor, Collector or Collector’s personal representative shall: (a) file a current TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD in the form and containing the information set forth and called for in the specimen hereunto annexed and made a part hereof, completed and dated, and subscribed by Collector or Collector’s personal representative and collector’s transferee, with the (Artist at the address set forth above) (Artist’s agent for the purpose: _____) within thirty days of such transfer, distribution, or payment of insurance proceeds, and shall (b) pay a sum equal to fifteen percent (15%) of the Appreciated Value (as hereinafter defined), if any, occasioned by such transfer or distribution or payment of insurance proceeds to (Artist at the address set forth above) (Artist’s agent for the purpose: _____) within thirty days of such transfer, distribution, or payment of insurance proceeds.</p>
Fill in name, address of artist’s agent, if any; strike out one not applicable	<p><b>PRICE/VALUE. ARTICLE THREE:</b> The “price or value” to be entered on a TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD shall be: (a) the actual selling price if the Work is sold for money; or (b) the money value of the consideration if the Work is bartered or exchanged for a valuable consideration; or (c) the fair market value of the Work if it is transferred in any other manner.</p>
	<p><b>APPRECIATED VALUE. ARTICLE FOUR:</b> “Appreciated Value” of the Work for the purposes of this Agreement, shall be the increase, if any, in the value or price of the Work set forth in a current duly executed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD over the price or value set forth in the last prior duly executed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD, or, if there be no prior duly executed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD, over the price or value set forth in ARTICLE ONE herein (a) In the event a current duly executed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD is not timely filed as required by ARTICLE TWO herein, Appreciated Value shall nonetheless be computed as if such current TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD had been duly executed and filed, with a price or value set forth therein equal to the actual market value of the Work at the time of the current transfer or at the time of the discovery of such transfer.</p>

<p>Strike out one not applicable</p>	<p><b>TRANSFEREES TO RATIFY AGREEMENT.</b> ARTICLE FIVE: Collector hereby covenants that he will not hereafter sell, give, grant, barter, exchange, assign, transfer, convey or alienate the Work in any manner whatsoever or permit the Work to pass by inheritance or bequest or by operation of law to any person without procuring such transferee's ratification and affirmation of all the terms of this Agreement and transferee's agreement to be bound hereby and to perform and fulfill all of the Collector's covenants set forth herein, said ratification, affirmation and agreement to be evidenced by such transferee's subscription of a current duly completed and filed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD.</p>
<p>Strike out (b) if not required</p>	<p><b>PROVENANCE.</b> ARTICLE SIX: Artist hereby covenants that (Artist) (Artist's agent for the purpose as set forth in ARTICLE TWO) will maintain a file and record of each and every transfer of the Work for which a TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD has been duly filed pursuant to ARTICLE TWO herein and will at the request of the Collector or Collector's successors in interest, as that interest shall appear, furnish in writing a provenance and history of the Work based upon said records and upon Collectors' notices of proposed public exhibitions and will certify in writing said provenance and history and the authenticity of the Work to Collector and his successors in interest, and, at Collector's reasonable request, to critics and scholars. Said records shall be the sole property of the Artist.</p> <p><b>EXHIBITION.</b> ARTICLE SEVEN: Artist and Collector mutually covenant that</p> <p>(a) Collector shall give Artist written notice of Collector's intention to cause or permit the Work to be exhibited to the public, advising Artist of all details of such proposed exhibition which shall have been made known to Collector by the exhibitor. Said notice shall be given for each such exhibition prior to any communication to the exhibitor or the public of Collector's intention to cause or permit the Work to be exhibited to the public. Artist shall forthwith communicate to Collector and the exhibitor any and all advice or requests that he may have regarding the proposed exhibition of the Work. Collector shall not cause or permit the Work to be exhibited to the public except upon compliance with the terms of this article.</p> <p>(b) Collector shall not cause or permit any public exhibition of the Work except with the consent of the Artist to each such exhibition.</p> <p>(c) Artist's failure timely to respond to Collector's timely notice shall be deemed a waiver of Artist's rights under this article, in respect to such exhibition and shall operate as a consent to such exhibition and to all details thereof of which Artist shall have been given timely notice.</p>
<p>Strike out one applicable</p>	<p><b>ARTIST'S POSSESSION.</b> ARTICLE EIGHT: Artist and Collector mutually covenant that Artist shall have the right, upon written notice and demand to Collector made not later than 120 days prior to the proposed shipping date therefor, to possession of the Work for a period not to exceed sixty (60) days solely for the purpose of exhibition of the Work to the public at and by a public or non-profit institution, at no expense whatsoever to Collector. Collector shall have the right to satisfactory proof of sufficient insurance and pre-paid transportation or satisfactory proof of financial responsibility therefor. Artist shall have the right to such possession of the Work for one period not to exceed sixty (60) days every five (5) years</p> <p><b>NON-DESTRUCTION.</b> ARTICLE NINE: Collector covenants that Collector will not intentionally destroy, damage, alter, modify or change the Work in any way whatsoever.</p> <p><b>REPAIRS.</b> ARTICLE TEN: Collector covenants that in the event of any damage to the Work, Collector shall consult with Artist prior to the commencement of any repairs or restoration and if practicable Artist shall be given the opportunity to make any required repairs or restoration.</p> <p><b>RENTS.</b> ARTICLE ELEVEN: In the event that Collector shall become entitled to any monies as rent or other compensation for the use of the Work at public exhibition, the Collector shall pay a sum equal to one-half of said monies to (Artist) (Artist's agent as set forth in ARTICLE TWO herein) within thirty (30) days of the date when Collector shall become entitled to such monies.</p>
<p>Strike out (a) if not applicable</p>	<p><b>REPRODUCTION.</b> ARTICLE TWELVE: Artist hereby reserves all rights whatsoever to copy or reproduce the Work. Artist shall not unreasonably refuse permission to reproduce the Work in catalogues and the like incidental to public exhibition of the Work.</p> <p><b>NON-ASSIGNABILITY.</b> ARTICLE THIRTEEN: No rights created in the Artist and for the Artist's benefit by the terms of this Agreement shall be assignable by Artist during the Artist's lifetime, except that nothing herein contained shall be construed as a limitation on Artist's rights under any copyright laws to which the Work may be subject.</p> <p><b>NOTICE.</b> ARTICLE FOURTEEN: Artist and Collector mutually covenant that there shall be permanently affixed to the Work a NOTICE of the existence of this Agreement and that ownership, transfer, exhibition and reproduction of the Work are subject to the covenants herein, said NOTICE to be in the form of the specimen hereunto annexed and made a part of this Agreement.</p> <p>(a) Because the Work is of such nature that its existence or essence is represented by documentation or because documentation is deemed by Artist to be part of the Work, the permanent affixing of said NOTICE to the documentation shall satisfy the requirements of this article.</p>
	<p><b>TRANSFEREES BOUND.</b> ARTICLE FIFTEEN: In the event the Work shall hereafter be transferred or otherwise alienated from Collector or Collector's estate in any manner whatsoever, any transferee, taking the Work with notice of this Agreement shall in every respect be bound and liable to perform and fulfill each and every covenant herein as if such transferee had duly made and subscribed a properly executed TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD in accordance with ARTICLE TWO and ARTICLE FIVE herein at the time the Work was transferred to him or her.</p>

Fill in NOTICE  
in full (Do not  
remove from  
original)

**EXPIRATION. ARTICLE SIXTEEN:** This Agreement and the covenants herein shall be binding upon the parties, their heirs, legatees, executors, administrators, assigns, transferees and all other successors in interest and the Collector's covenants do attach and run with the Work and shall be binding to and until twenty-one (21) years after the deaths of Artist and Artist's surviving spouse, if any, except that the covenants set forth in ARTICLE SEVEN, ARTICLE EIGHT and ARTICLE TEN herein shall be binding only during the life of the Artist.

**WAIVERS NOT CONTINUING. ARTICLE SEVENTEEN:** Any waiver by either party of any provision of this Agreement, or of any right hereunder, shall not be deemed a continuing waiver and shall not prevent or estop such party from thereafter enforcing such provision or right, and the failure of either party to insist in any one or more instances upon the strict performance of any of the terms or provisions of this Agreement by the other party shall not be construed as a waiver or relinquishment for the future of any such terms or provisions, but the same shall continue in full force and effect.

**AMENDMENT IN WRITING. ARTICLE EIGHTEEN:** This Agreement shall not be subject to amendment, modification, or termination, except in writing signed by both parties.

**ATTORNEYS' FEES. ARTICLE NINETEEN:** In the event that either party shall hereafter bring any action upon any default in performance or observance of any covenant herein, the party aggrieved may recover reasonable attorneys' fees in addition to whatever remedies may be available to him or her.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have set their hands and seals to this Agreement as of the day and year first above written.

SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN

## NOTICE

Ownership, Transfer, Exhibition and Reproduction of this Work of Art are subject to covenants set forth in a certain Agreement made the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_, by and between \_\_\_\_\_

and \_\_\_\_\_, the original of which is on file with \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_

(Artist)

(Collector)

Fill in ONLY:

data identifying  
the Work

names of parties  
("between \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_")

date

(Do not remove  
from original)

SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN - SPECIMEN

### TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND RECORD

To:

Know ye that \_\_\_\_\_  
residing at \_\_\_\_\_  
has this day transferred all his right, title and interest in that certain Work of art known as:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Identification #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Material: \_\_\_\_\_

Dimensions: \_\_\_\_\_ Description: \_\_\_\_\_

to \_\_\_\_\_ residing at \_\_\_\_\_,

transferee, at the agreed price or value of \_\_\_\_\_. Transferee, hereby

expressly ratifies and affirms all the terms of that certain Agreement made by and between \_\_\_\_\_

and \_\_\_\_\_

on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_, and agrees to be bound thereby and to perform and fulfill all of Collector's covenants set forth in said agreement.

Done this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_,

at \_\_\_\_\_

29020/11/24

22nd June 1974

ARTISTS UNION

PROPOSALS FOR REFORM OF THE ARTS COUNCIL

The Arts Council

1 That in the field of the visual arts the Council should be instrumental in initiating and subsidising a whole pattern of galleries projects, art activities - large and small long- and short-term and these, once set in motion, should be responsible for administering their own funds including the awarding of grants. In this way the Council would be actively encouraging a much wider range of art activity, with artists taking part from the ground up.

2 In order to extend the democratic operation of the A.C. there should be: one representative (or more) on the Council of each of the advisory panels - a post to be filled by vote of each panel, together with appropriate representation of Regional Arts Associations if necessary on a rota basis devised to avoid undue emphasis of any sectional interest.

3 That members of the Council other than salaried officials receive a fee or honorarium for their attendance or other time spent in Council activity. The voluntary aspect of the Arts Council work has tended to encourage its elitist character and also has not made for the greatest efficiency (see below).

The Visual Arts Panel.

1 That the panel should advise on matters of policy rather than matters of taste. Hitherto the panel has been responsible for deciding upon exhibitions and other projects, and has awarded grants to individuals and enterprises. We now propose that this work be shared between the panel and other bodies as follows:

- a) the panel to be concerned with overall policy in the visual arts i.e. its recommendations would form the support for the general initiative to be taken by the Arts Council.
- b) the panel to be concerned with major collections, major galleries and retrospective exhibitions of national importance
- c) except in the case of retrospectives of major living artists the panel would not be concerned with awarding grants to individuals
- d) the panel would make it its business to encourage applications for financial help from groups wishing to form galleries or carry out projects on collective or cooperative lines operated by working artists
- e) groups thus subsidised should be responsible for administering their own funds including the awarding of grants to individuals
- f) the panel should not passively await such applications but should take steps to initiate such group activities - if necessary proposing personnel
- g) the panel should encourage with sensitive and continuing interest all such activities

1 The above provisions are intended to relieve the panel of much of the present burden of considering applications from individuals to make decisions on matters of taste the responsibility of a much wider section of the artistic community to encourage a much greater diversity of art activity and to help end the present isolation of a large number of individual artists.

2 That if the above proposal or a similar one is put into effect the present financial sub-committee of the panel should cease to exist.

3 That the panel should meet once a month in order to deal with the volume of work.



Sheet 2.

4. That each panel member should hold his/her seat for a minimum of two years.
5. That panel members, other than salaried officials, should receive a fee or honorarium for their attendance or other time spent in panel activity.
6. That plenary meetings of the panel be public, the minutes of such meetings be published, and all applications for grants be recorded.
7. That where the panel has to decide upon the awarding of a grant (to an individual or body) the applicant(s) should have the right, and be invited, to attend in person, and should have the right to be accompanied by two witnesses or observers.
8. That in the event of a panel decision being over-ruled by the Council, causing an insoluble dispute, the panel should have the right of appeal to the Minister.
9. That as far as is consonant with the efficient operation of the panel, the membership should be chosen on the basis of parity between the sexes.
10. That the panel should be composed as follows:
  - one third representatives of democratically based art societies and groupings;
  - one third nominees of the Arts Council, including relevant officers;
  - one third representatives of appropriate trade unions.

Thus, if, for example, the Trade Unions represented were the following: AU, ATTI, Art Administrators, NUT, NALGO, Museums Association and one industrial union, the total membership of the panel would be twenty-one.

In addition, the panel should have the power to co-opt individuals for special purpose or projects, and to elect its own chairman/woman.

11. That it should be the panel's role to select and recommend personnel for appointment as relevant officers of the Arts Council.
12. That the panel and the Arts Council should have the task of considering ways and means by which the present very small proportion of the total funds that is spent on the visual arts could be increased.