Can I Borrow the Picasso? Cultivating Social Collecting Practices

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Declaration

I, Morven Gregor declare that the enclosed submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and consisting of a thesis meets the regulations stated in the handbook for the mode of submission selected and approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

I declare that this submission is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award.

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25th Aug. 2021

Supervisor Support

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Abstract

This study investigates collecting and encountering contemporary visual art through practices which, at present, are rare in Scotland. Inspired by international, long-established collections discussed in this thesis, the title explicitly asks the question: can I borrow a work of Modern art. The study that follows re-directs that question focusing on current collecting of contemporary art and pursues related threads of enquiry; from practical questions to understanding the participatory experience to theoretical contextualisation.

Adopting an ethnographic methodology, this research aims to understand and compare three practices: group collecting; *artotheks* (or art libraries) and community commissioning. Beyond deploying familiar ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, interviews and case studies, this methodological position follows contemporary ethnographic practice. There, as here, researchers are actively involved in the projects studied, and the subjecthood of participants is respected, even fostered, as well as probed.

Theoretically, the lens of gift exchange as described by Marcel Mauss and others, notably Roger Sansi, provides a tool for analysing the nature of the relationships described in the case studies and how these relate to other contemporary art practices, such as socially engaged practice and relational aesthetics.

Group collecting is revealed to be a highly enjoyable activity for those involved and also perceived as an opportunity for extending knowledge of contemporary art and engaging with artists. However, as a model which sits within the commercial framework of the artworld questions of financial accessibility, obligation within exchange relationships and the necessity of existing proclivities to purchase art remain.

The second case study involved the creation of an art library, modelled on those operating across Germany. While the findings detail many practical considerations, the conclusion

notes that a local *artothek* allowed borrowers to experiment with living with a range of artworks without any financial risk. Moreover, it created a social space and opportunities for discussion and consideration of art and other matters.

The final case study demonstrated that a school group of young people and one teacher could work with a mediator to commission an artist to make work for their school, following a protocol developed by the French organisation *Les Nouveaux commanditaires.* The study reveals what is involved from each perspective and analyses arising relationships.

Examining these three processes together demonstrates that each model could be adopted more widely and a supplementary report provides points for consideration for anyone interested in doing so in or beyond academia. In studying these systems I show how Sansi's writing on participation, art and gift-exchange can be extended beyond art production to collecting and encountering contemporary art, thus maintaining the agency of all those participating.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

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Chapter One: Introduction: Can I Borrow the Picasso? Cultivating Social Collecting Practices.

It is February 2020 and I'm visiting an exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, *NOW: Katie Paterson*. As, seemingly always, I'm in a bit of a rush. I was in Edinburgh for a research interview and I'm on a strict timetable to make travel connections back home to the West coast. But I want to do just this one more thing while in the city.

Slightly distracted in the first few rooms of the exhibition, I come to the work *Earth-Moon-Earth* (2007) and immediately the Morse code script arrests me. Old family memories surface of my Dad chanting dit dit da, as he revised for navigation exams. And that makes me listen to the work; the gaps and the music. And then I walk around the piano and see the keys depressing automatically and I think to myself, that's the moon playing the piano and I can hardly tear myself away. But I glance at a clock, one of the line of planet times and I realise one is actual earth time and I should move on (*Timepieces (Solar System)*, 2014).

In the next room is *Totality* (2016); a mirror ball comprising an image of every eclipse. I realise that photographs I've previously seen do not capture the sensation of the work. The room is huge and yet the ball is at my eye level, allowing me to see in detail the tiny eclipses. The light dances and I'm disoriented; am I moving? Or the ball? Or the room? I am immersed in the artwork.

Pulling away, I realise the works have slowed me down. I have taken time. I have had the gift of time given to me by these artworks.

Of all the exhibitions I have ever visited, why start this study with this recollection? In part because I allowed myself to be changed by the experience of an artwork, but also to lay

down an aesthetic terrain. Let me explain.

This study explores encountering and collecting contemporary visual art through specific approaches which at present are rare in Scotland. Central to the establishment and operation of each of these programmes are principles of equality of cultural access and mutual respect which inform their actions. I will examine three practices through desk-based and active research; private collecting groups, art libraries (known as *artotheks*, commonly found in Germany and Austria) and community-led commissions (following the system originated in France of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*). My rationale for this focus follows in the next chapter.

More specifically, this study looks at the experience of people involved in these systems, whether joining my research investigations or closely linked with the established versions in other countries. Their voices are central to my ethnographic approach. Just as I felt changed by my visit to the *NOW* exhibition, I am interested in the experiences of others in their encounters with art as mediated within these systems. Probing those experiences forms part of the central enquiry of this study. Its complement is understanding what can be learned by the wider art sector from examining these experiences.

The other reason for focusing on this exhibition is to claim all types of contemporary art as potentially part of these systems. Some of my discussion turns to socially engaged practice because there are many parallels in terms of techniques, methods, values and, even, criticism; but this practice is not the only style of work found in the *artotheks* and community commissions I have studied. In other words, if a Picasso can be borrowed from an art library in Berlin, why can't a work by Paterson be borrowed or commissioned by a community or collected by a group in Scotland? In this study the processes are social or relational, but the artworks might not be, potentially being created through traditional studio practice. It is by exchanging ideas and experiences within a process that understanding, relationships and, arguably, solidarity is built. In referring to experiencing

the gift of time I am intentionally recalling Marcel Mauss' influential work, *The Gift. The form and reasons for exchange in archaic societies* (2002, [1925]) and subsequent gift theory. In this study, I will explore how Mauss' insights on the gift can both guide and conceptualise the cultivation of social collecting
practices.

Starting to create a route map through this study, as it moves from methodology and literature review to three central case studies and conclusions, I want to acknowledge what is within and outwith its scope. To aid this process, let me interrogate my title; something I have been doing for quite some time. The opening question is reasonably straightforward and positions this research within the realm of visual art. While referencing Picasso may suggest a focus on Modern Art, the scope of work discussed in the case studies is primarily contemporary. Linguistically, the use of the definite article might imply that there is a particular Picasso that can be borrowed. Moreover, it might suggest that I am addressing that question to some particular person or organisation. For the sake of clarification, while there is a particular work by Picasso that is available for loan from one particular *artothek*; my question is simply intended to arrest the reader, while perhaps raising more questions in their mind and mine. Is it possible to do this? Who grants the permission? How and where might such actions be feasible? And, perhaps more importantly, if the answer is no, then the immediate repost is why not? These micro-questions run, like slaters from under a lifted stone, throughout my study. Although my second case study focuses particularly on the *artothek* system of lending artworks, these questions recur throughout.

The second part of the title – cultivating social collecting practices- highlights particular dichotomies, which in turn indicate where this study sits within academic disciplines. I settled on the choice of the verb *cultivate*, after rejecting many other possibilities. The choice matters in that it implies the question, what is this study setting out to achieve? I am using the word cultivate in a metaphoric sense. Literally, cultivating suggests a fostered and worked connection between humans and the rest of the natural world; where not only

plants, but also soil, invertebrates, animals, weather and so on must be taken into account. In this case I am using the verb to imply a relationship between the researcher and the reader. This will not be a prescriptive study culminating in a manual for replicating the practices discussed. Rather, the study will offer a starter seed-box for future growth: it is about not telling the reader or participant how to do something. Instead it reflects on specific case studies of particular instances of each practice and extrapolates observations, and reflections which contribute knowledge and insights to the experiences of being involved within each approach. In turn these are synthesised into a set of points for consideration (the seed-box) which readers may then adopt. Positioning this attitude within the title of the study indicates the values the researcher has attempted to bring to it, which resonate with the stated values of at least two of the practices studied.

The metaphor of cultivation is useful in another aspect too. Just as growers (gardeners, farmers, foresters, etc.) must deal and work with the unforeseen, so too must those considering the practices discussed. While undertaking this study a range of elements not entirely within my control caused plans to be revised; from weather preventing travel, to the pandemic; from financial limitations to unexpected human behaviour. The last of these, of course, provided additional material for analysis, while the others remind both reader and researcher that in any analysed situation "disembodied scientific objectivity" may not only be a false goal, but also subject to greater external forces (Haraway, 1988: 576).

For anthropologists my choice of title may raise questions around the term *social* in the phrase social collecting practices. As an adjective, it reiterates the focus of one particular field of anthropology, that is being about people, the groups they may or may not form and the interaction between those. Each of my case studies examines a practice in which people come together and I situate these discussions in terms of social exchange using thinking on gift exchange to further understand what each practice involves. Primarily I use the term *social* in its more general sense as widely used within contemporary art and

elsewhere- *social* meaning with other people. Consequently, I see the title of this study implying the exclusion of individual collecting and focusing on group activities.

In Chapter Three I will go on to discuss in more detail the contemporary art term socially engaged practice also referred to as social practice. A brief summary at this point may further highlight the differences in disciplines. While generally all art could be regarded as social because it is encountered, experienced or communicated to others (Helguera, 2011; Bourriaud, 2002), I will describe what makes socially engaged practice distinctive from other approaches to art-making. This will include a discussion of artists' motivations and processes within an understanding that social practice specifically focuses on other people be they active or passive participants in longitudinal projects or fleeting events.

What this demonstrates is that, while bringing differing disciplines together is no longer a seismic collision of distinct tectonic plates, there are nuanced differences which need to be navigated. As Roger Sansi observes,

> One of the common problems of the dialogue gap between artists and anthropologists is the use of misnomers: sometimes [. . .] we are not exactly talking about the same things (Sansi, 2015: 17).

What is of interest to this study, in spite of this caution, is the acknowledgement that art and anthropology are seen to be fields of interest to each other, methodologically as well as thematically, with artworks, workshops, conferences and publications all providing evidence of this. One attempt, if not to resolve, then at least to better understand these differences, was an intensive workshop entitled *Connecting Art and Anthropology* (2007). Led by anthropologist and artist Amanda Ravetz, this three day event brought together artists, anthropologists and curators, focusing on approaches to practice (MMU, 2007). Reviewing transcripts of the sessions, it is clear that the workshops were lively, even heated at points. Of course, conflating what individual artists and anthropologists do practically when asked to collaborate with more general disciplinary differences would be a mistake. Unlike initiatives such as CAA, and others, this study is not about co-creation or

collaboration, instead it will follow ethnographic methodological and theoretical arcs to better understand social systems surrounding engaging with, rather than producing, art.

Balancing between two disciplines could be uncomfortable for some researchers. I imagine someone who has developed an academic path within one field becomes dedicated to it and intimately familiar with all its shifts and turns. I am not that researcher. My first post-graduate field of study was Adult and Continuing Education and two particular legacies of that are relevant to this current study; a belief in life-long learning and my focus on popular education and popular theatre. While the former is embedded in the process of this study itself, the latter has informed much of my professional practice. Perhaps like many adult learners, encountering the work of key thinkers (in my case, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal) consolidated my own beliefs and allowed me to make sense of my (then) emerging practice. This flowed beyond my professional life, into community activism and negotiating and delivering a community land buy-out (the Carbeth hutting community).

Figure 1: Our Carbeth Hut, Carbeth, Stirlingshire

Community land ownership brought my focus not only to community or the travails of ownership, but to the land itself and the ecology of a place for which I was now jointly responsible. Through photography, foraging and other activities, I came to know this terrain in detail. These more environmental concerns led me on a perhaps surprising path to a second post graduate study in History of Art: History of Collections and Collecting. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, the spark and momentum for this current study started then, building on and combining my earlier experiences and interests. With this eclectic background, spanning across academic fields, for all its challenges, feels more comfortable and appropriate than being boxed into a single discipline.

Considering *collecting,* this term too might initial appear straightforward. Certainly collecting is an activity widely discussed, across discourse on art, art history, consumer behaviour and beyond. In Chapters Three and Four, I extract and discuss some of the common themes and tropes that emerge from scholarship and more general literature on collecting and collectors. Anthropologist and museologist Sharon Macdonald reminds readers that collecting is a common practice, with some research estimating that one third of people are involved in some collecting activity (Macdonald, 2006: 90). However, she is cautious of claims that collecting is a "basic urge or instinct and [. . .] a fundamental and universal human (and, indeed, sometimes also animal) activity"(2006: 81). Doing so, she suggests, not only lacks nuance, but undermines the serious purpose of museum collecting.

Considering institutional collecting may be where the concept of collecting *practice* emerges. Macdonald suggests "the idea of the museum has become fundamental to collecting practices beyond the museum" (2006: 81) explaining that being recognised as a practice, suggests collecting involves intention, forethought and even discipline, rather than mere habit or hoarding. Macdonald continues,

> While in everyday language we might use the terms "collecting" and "collection" loosely to cover a wide range of practices (for example,

> collecting tax), it is analytically useful to distinguish "collecting" as a self-aware process of creating a set of objects conceived to be meaningful as a group (2006: 82)

In joining *collecting* and *practice* together in my study title, I am following Macdonald in seeing collecting as an intentional and often systematic activity. To some extent I am also positioning collecting as a practice within the contemporary art context. Both art-making and curating are widely spoken about in terms of practice, but this is less common (particularly outwith institutional contexts) for collectors and collecting. Making the case for collecting to be considered seriously, *Collecting as Practice* is an ongoing initiative by the Delfina Foundation in London which "unpacks how artists and collectors alike are redefining the critical discourses of collecting in a global context" through joint residencies for artists and collectors (Delfina Foundation, 2017). Echoing perceived feelings of nervousness or ambivalence to the motives of those who collect, Irene Panagopoulos, an early Delfina collector-in-residence commented, "There was always a perception that artists don't like collectors at least that's how I felt, but now I have a different feeling" (Panagopoulos, 2018). In Chapter Three, I will discuss further media narratives and wider perceptions around collecting contemporary art briefly focusing on collector tropes including the polarities from high-spending egoists to serious aesthetes. This will lead to discussion of how such images contribute to constructing invisible barriers around contemporary art, distancing the wider public from interaction and, even, collecting.

I am also aware that not all the systems and practices I examine in this study do involve collecting. In fact of the three, only one involves the act of collecting, with one other (the art library) utilising a temporary collection. Why then, group them together and how to describe this grouping? Examining the systems together clarifies that they share concepts of sociality as being central to art-orientated activities. In the search for how to describe these three concurrent systems several option are possible. They could be perceived as a socially engaged arts practice, although it might be said that there is no artistic production nor artist's intention driving the process. Alternatively, it could be said that artworks are

being consumed, but the absence of financial transactions and, in two out of three cases, ownership render consumption inappropriate. Other ways of grouping and describing these activities could be using terms such as accessing or engaging groups, but these not only seem over-used jargon, but also could suggest a passivity for those taking part.

The advantage of the term collecting practice is that is implies agency. If collecting involves making choices, selections and defining categories as Macdonald suggests; then all of these require active involvement. Using the expression *collecting practices,* suggests a gentle re-distribution of power; with people involved in the systems studied exercising choice and demonstrating agency. I have already referenced the influence of Freire's thought on my own practice and I will discuss more of his thinking in Chapters Four and Six. At this point it is relevant to note that one of his early works was entitled *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1972b). While the cultural processes and activities examined in this study are different from those actions envisaged by Freire, it could be seen that micro-liberations occur through the exercise of agency within the projects discussed. Consequently, despite some of the limitations identified I will adopt the term social collecting practices to group the activities and processes central to this study.

Before moving on, it is worth discussing one alternative way of positioning this study; framing it within discourse around the sharing economy. While this suggestion is highlighted briefly in Chapter Five there are reasons why I reject this approach. Financial information website Investopedia describes the sharing economy as,

> an economic model defined as a peer-to-peer (P2P) based activity of acquiring, providing, or sharing access to goods and services that is often facilitated by a community-based on-line platform (Investopedia, 2020).

As the site goes on to explain, sharing assets is not a new phenomena, but what has made the current sharing economy a financial force is the expansion of internet, mobile phone technology and big data, which allows those who want to share to find each other (Investopedia, 2020). Examples abound of simple sharing schemes and ideas (e.g. couch

surfing), which are then monetised to become profitable business (e.g. Airbnb). It is both the central role of technology in this version of sharing and the drive to generate funds, "to make money from underused assets" (Investopedia, 2020) that lead me to conclude that the lens of the sharing economy is not appropriate for my study, even if there are some examples of sharing economy schemes which involve art (see, for example www.peoplewhoshare.com; www.artiq.co; www.dot-art.co.uk). With the potential exception of some collecting groups, the systems I have studied are intrinsically not-for-profit.

This study could be considered as a test of transferability of three systems at present uncommon in Scotland. However, that singular focus could be considered as setting up the project to fail; the scale of endeavour needed to thoroughly research and pilot transferability being beyond this scope of this individual researcher. More specifically, at what point is transferability proved: when there is one of each project operating fully in Scotland or when there is one of each project in every area of the country? While cultural contexts are specific- and to an extent discussed in the relevant chapters- Scotland's connections to the wider world suggest that ideas and systems from elsewhere can easily be accommodated and adopted here.

Instead, I have assumed that these models are transferable and, as a result of the case studies and my experiential learning, I have produced a companion document (Appendix 1), which functions as a set of considerations for other individuals or organisations interested in cultivating, or even adopting, any of these social collecting practices. Creating this companion document can certainly be considered as one of the outcomes of this research. Its style has been as seriously considered as its content; representing an ethos of dialogue rather than instruction as outlined in the preceding discussion of the term *cultivating*. The content will be of interest and, hopefully, use to Scotland's multi-faceted Contemporary Visual Arts community. In greater detail the wider study aims to create an ethnography of the experience of taking part in the three social collecting practices discussed and to explore how Mauss' discussion of gift-exchange can guide and

help conceptualise social collecting. The study achieves this by bringing three systems together for detailed scrutiny through fieldwork and case studies; highlighting what is exchanged; and investigating and understanding relationships generated.

To conclude this introduction, it is worth noting that, as my field research for this study was coming to an end, the COVID-19 virus was spreading across the planet. Seeming artworld certainties such as record auction room sales making popular press headlines, suddenly seemed less certain. More precarious still, existing fragilities around the funding for public collections became starkly apparent. Loathing the arrival of Brexit, I have endeavoured to maintain an internationalist gaze. If there was ever a moment for what economists Lonergan and Blyth think of as a "digital reset" then surely it would be now (Lonergan & Blyth, 2020). I would like to think that the approaches I discuss here could be part of the reset.

Chapter Two: Methodology

> *To learn anything we must revitalize arts of noticing and include ethnography...* (Tsing, 2015: 37)

Introduction

On an earlier course of study, reading about the early years of Tate and its collecting policy I came across a biting accusation, "The tendency of all committees is towards mediocrity" (Manson, nd: 165). Amused and intrigued I subsequently created a proposal to my fellow students and tutor that we:

> form a committee, the purpose of which is to select a work of art for purchase. This can either remain a hypothetical exercise where we speculate what we might buy at a selected auction or from a commercial gallery if we had unlimited funds (along the lines of fantasy football) or (and this is, for me, the more interesting option) we pool equal amounts of our own money and actually buy a work (Gregor, 2012).

I wanted the historical reference from Manson to inspire action and exploration of mediating taste and group decision making. If we were a class studying collecting, I wanted to know if we could collect. The experiment was not particularly successful. Two of us bought three art bonds - total price £4.50 - from Art & Economics Group at their first Scottish event in 2013 at the CCA, Glasgow. We kept one each and intended to send the third to a class-mate who had moved overseas. But it did introduce me to the concept of group collecting, which opened a pathway to this current study.

That class tutor was Dr. Tina Fiske and the report she created with Wendy Law for Arts Council England entitled *Funding Contemporary Art Collections and Collecting in the Regions: Models, Partnerships and International Comparisons* (2008) brought the work the work of *Fondation de France* and *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*, as well as the German *Kunstvereine* groups to my attention. Exploring *Kunstvereine* in more detail, I became interested in *artotheks* (art libraries) which often flourish in the same locations. My direct introduction to formal collecting groups came in 2014, with a visit from a London-based collecting group to Glasgow School of Art.

Inspired by these three diverse approaches to encountering contemporary art I formulated this study to explore if these practices were transferred to Scotland what the experience of being involved might be for the wider public, artists and facilitators. In part it is an enquiry into the effectiveness of alternative practices in extending audiences for and collecting of contemporary art.

Methodology

There are many lenses through which I might have approached this study: including, for example, curatorial theory or art history. Despite reading across these and other disciplines, as outlined in Chapter Three, methodologically one lens proved appropriate. In order to explain its selection let me provide a brief rationale for rejecting others.

Curatorial theory would have directed the research towards a curatorial voice (from an overview of such voices see Obrist, 2008). However, as I discuss in Chapter Five, my interest is not in curatorial questions around collection-making. The closest parallel comes in Chapter Six in the discussion of the mediator role within the study of community commissioning but, as will be discussed in more detail there, although the two roles are similar, different (arguably additional) skills are required. Additionally, Chapter Three contains discussion of socially engaged art practice. In that instance, while drawing on art writing about the practice, I use this as a concomitant to my approach.

The shortcoming of researching social collecting through an art historical framework would be to direct focus to the objects being collected, borrowed or commissioned and/or the individuals making the collections (see, for example, Gombrich, 1984; Blom, 2004, Aronson, 2015). Potentially each of the artworks encountered through the systems I discuss does merit further consideration in its own right, but this is not what is unique about the systems studied. Following those lines of enquiry would have moved the balance of discussion into areas around the artist's process and context, the collector's biography, or artwork provenance. Other avenues could have included the study of collection making

or patterns and impacts of object circulation. Although this is interesting territory and I will touch on some of these questions in subsequent chapters, my focus is not on the artworks themselves. What interests and motivates this study is not particular to the specific works involved, rather it is the less documented social encounters and experiences around the works within the systems that is paramount here. Observing and being embedded within processes suggested that the lens of an active and engaged ethnography was more apt, moving the focus to the experience of establishing and participating in these systems.

The meeting of art and ethnography has proved fertile territory for many academics, anthropologists and artists. My aim in this selection is to capture participatory experiences from various perspectives. Following the quotation from anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing as the beginning of this chapter, I consider part of the ethnographic process to be the art of noticing; giving visual (and other) sensory attention to the activities in hand. In giving significance to participants' experiences I have attempted to reflect the values at the core of each project within the research methodology itself. Although this study may not be politically orientated engaged ethnography, I have considered the reflection of George E. Marcus (2010) that critical anthropology "tries to speak the truth to power [. . .] but also tries to understand power and its agencies" (2010b: 90). Consequently this study is an attempt to produce an active document with scope both in and beyond the academy.

While Giampietro Gobo cautions emergent researchers that "the term 'ethnography' has just become highly fashionable" (Gobo, 2008: e2.3). I feel justified in adopting an ethnographic methodology because my specific field of enquiry relates to the social interaction of groups of people as they experience art within a variety of systems.
I also take inspiration from Mary Douglas' foreword to Marcel Mauss' influential text *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* in which she praises Mauss' methodology, moving from specific ethnographic studies to create a broader social and political argument, despite questioning the strength of his conclusions (Douglas, 2002 [1990]). Douglas credits Mauss with both expanding the scope of ethnography to include

study of exchange, gift and economics, while simultaneously taking a scientific, or positivist approach, to producing evidence-based sociology. Further discussion on scientific objectivity follows below, but the arc from ethnographic case studies to conclusions for another field is one that this research will follow.

In *Making: Archaeology, anthropology, art and architecture*, Tim Ingold reminds readers that ethnography literally means 'description of the people' from *ethnos* meaning people and *graphia* meaning description (Ingold, 2013: 4). He discusses how, in his opinion, ethnography differs from anthropology; the former involving observing, recording and reflecting, while the latter involves observing, learning and doing. A central element of both is being "in the field", which could also be described as "on site" or "being with" a group of people who will be the focus of study. As many scholars note, in decades past this customarily involved a researcher from an industrialised/colonising country making excursions to "distant" lands or communities (Burgess, 1984; Gobo, 2008; Reeves et al, 2013). Since the 1960s, fieldwork has moved beyond this historical model, with groups studied being specific communities within the same wider society as the researcher (Burgess, 1984) and more recently with collaborative and experimental approaches in writing and practice becoming common (Marcus, 2014).

In his introduction to field research, Robert G. Burgess provides further detail on the conflicting opinions around a precise usage of "ethnography". In particular he notes that "ethnography" is sometimes reduced simply to mean methods used (Burgess, 1984 : 16). Reeves et al agree that "Ethnography can [. . .] be seen as a toolbox of methods," but add that these are "integrated into a multifaceted methodological approach (Reeves et al, 2013: e1367). Writing from a field outwith anthropology, they perceive ethnography as a methodology, which can be transferred to other disciplines (Reeves et al, 2013: e1367). For Gobo, ethnography can also be regarded as a methodology, as it has a cognitive mode (primarily, but not exclusively, visual because of the central role of observation) in addition to implying a theory of knowledge underpinned by an accepted set of assumptions,

offering a set of stratagems for addressing a research problem and having an established set of steps to follow in carrying out the research (Gobo, 2008: e6). However, he also acknowledges that ethnography is difficult to define (Gobo, 2008: e11).

Within contemporary visual art, "ethnography" is also a debated term. In his noted essay, *The Artist as Ethnographer* (1996), Hal Foster reflects on the aspects of ethnography he perceives to be utilised by artists. Above all, he regards the inherent focus on alterity (or otherness) within ethnography to be attractive to artists. Additionally, he notes that culture as the subject of study, attention to context, interdisciplinarity and self-critique all add to the appeal (Foster, 1996: 182). He questions cross-disciplinary borrowing of methods, while positing that, "In our current state of artistic-theoretical ambivalences and the cultural-political impasses, anthropology is the compromise discourse of choice" (1996:183). In conclusion, to avoid the compromises inherent in too much or too little critical distance between the artist and the represented "other" he advocates for,

> parallactic work that attempts to frame the framer as he or she frames the other. This is one way to negotiate the contradictory status of otherness as given and constructed, real and fantasmatic (1996: 203).

While wary of cycles of excessive and inward reflexivity, Foster concludes that active critical distance is desirable, even if a problematic process in itself.

This essay can now be seen as a reflection of the era in which it was written, as Fiona Siegenthaler points out (2013: 738). She argues that Foster reduces artists' interest in ethnographic methodology to a fascination with "the other" and critique of how that other is represented (2013: 471). She suggests that a different conception of "ethnographic aesthetics" is required to account for current social practices organised outside of museums and galleries (2013: 738). Seeking to answer the question, "Can artwork based on extensive research, travel and social involvement be judged on the basis of its presentation in an exhibition space?" (2013: 747) she suggests that art writers need to adopt an ethnographic approach, by embedding themselves within the artists' projects.

> If artists seek new places, relations and audiences, the researcher, in order to understand their aesthetic relevance, must adapt and move beyond the museum walls into the social and cultural context in which these projects take place. Process-based and relational art practices, then, require methodological adjustments borrowed from ethnology and other social sciences (2013: 747).

She continues with what I read as a call for engaged, active, ethnographic research,

> Once art takes place in social exchange [. . .] art scholars need to expand their questions and consider participation, observation, long-term cohabitation, interviews and informal conversations as part of their research methods. Without this, these art practices are not sufficiently perceived, received, or acknowledged (2013: 749).

This resonates with George E. Marcus' focus on the need to move beyond the classic Malinowskian “scene of encounter” field work and his encouragement of “apprentice ethnographers” to explore new directions in ethnographic writing and practice (Marcus, 2010 : 267). He highlights multi-sited studies; suggesting dynamic fields, which reveal connections through juxtaposed observations of diverse contexts (Marcus, 2010a) as well as following design-inspired prototyping approaches (Marcus, 2014). It is in this sense that I will adopt an ethnographic methodology in this study. However, returning to Ingold's distinction between ethnography and anthropology, there is a frisson of doubt around my declaration. While on one hand a case study approach, with significant levels of participant observation might appear to fit perfectly into Ingold's categorisation of ethnography, this study contains another element which is less likely to be found there; action research.

Typically, action research takes the form of co-learning projects with the aim of bringing about some aspect of social change, while embedding the values of equality aspired to by the enquiry within the process itself. As Mike Kesby reflects,

> Participatory approaches aspire to reduce and circumvent the power relations normally involved in research and development and to take the notion of giving the marginalized a voice to new levels by facilitating their involvement in the design, implementation, and outcomes of programs (Kesby, 2005: 2037).

In Chapter Six, I describe the Young Commissioners case study where I echoed a

participatory action research approach in the bespoke project I designed and delivered. Following the model of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* and their position of changing the relationship between citizens and the artworld, my case study also had a philosophical position with regard to social change. In order to bring about that change, certain democratic principles needed to be embedded within the project and thereby the research practice. In essence this includes valuing contributions through listening, which procedurally involves creating mechanisms to give every participant a voice and negotiating decisions as a group, not simply taking votes on choices. Consequently, participatory democracy was central to the project. However, this participation also had its limits, which is where the strategy in this instance cannot be regarded as a paradigm of action research. The limits were that the participants, although working towards a common goal, were not co-researchers. The goal they shared with me was realising the project, not completing the research. Where the study came closer to more typical action research was in its practical nature and the cycle of action-reflection-action (see for example, Denscombe, 2014; Genat, 2009). Further reflections on this are detailed within the case study itself.

Does the action research involved in this case study exemplify, an anthropological approach, in Ingold's terms, rather than an ethnographic one because it actively seeks to bring about change? I see it as falling into "an art of inquiry" where activities or experiments are tried out in real time to "see what happens" and how people are altered (Ingold, 2013: 6). It could be argued that this would sit well with my case studies; part of an iterative process, with me as researcher learning during the project and refining my actions and inter-actions as a consequence of that learning. Thus not only would the participants be altered, but the researcher too. And while this almost inevitably occurs, I do not want to position myself and my learning process as central to this study beyond the inevitability of authorship. In other words, I do not want to write about me, in a self-reflexive style - I would find that far too specific and self-referential. I would rather reflect on the roles and practices I adopted and, most importantly, the perspectives of other people on them.

Is it possible to avoid, Ingold's sharp distinction between anthropology and ethnography, but at the same time avoiding the pitfall of Hal Foster in simply conflating the terms? While acknowledging the tensions Ingold raises, I would like to think that from a methodological point of view, following the expansions and innovations in the discipline described by Marcus (2014), Siegenthaler (2013) and Monahan and Fisher (2010), I can adopt ethnographic methodology which can encompass active elements as well as field work and participant-observation. Taking further encouragement from Marcus' interest in experimentation with authorial engagement, collaboration and even advocacy (Marcus, 2010a). Following both Siegenthaler and Marcus in an expansive ethnographic approach allows me to encompass a range of sites, methods, encounters and actions: from online materials and interviews in my first case study to creating on-site projects in the Carbeth hutting community and Rothesay Academy for the second and third studies. This approach also enables me to navigate past Ingold's distinction between ethnography and anthropology, freeing me to be both writer/observer/researcher and involved project instigator /researcher.

Research Strategy

In selecting the case studies for this thesis, I intentionally directed my gaze towards schemes and initiatives which are open to non-specialists and are collective and/or collaborative. Inevitably, some projects which could have been considered as within my field of interest were set aside. These can be categorised as historic examples, finance schemes, artists' projects and institutionally focused initiatives. To an extent these examples give a context for the studies I did pursue and moreover discussing them briefly clarifies the distinct focus of my research.

Of historical interest, Manchester Art Gallery's current collection includes artworks collected and donated by Charles Lambert Rutherston (1866-1927). His gift was conditional on the artworks being lent to educational organisations and in the decades following his

death this evolved into a public art-lending service. My request for further information on the scheme from the Gallery went unanswered, but documentation in the public domain notes that the scheme was "abandoned in the 1990s due to budget and staff cuts"(Jesson, 2019: 21). Its demise, the somewhat predictable reasons stated for it and the lack of response all mitigated against me pursuing further investigations. Moreover, like Glasgow School of Art's own lending scheme which I discuss in Chapter Four, as historic examples the data which is central to this study- qualitative material of the participatory experience - could not have been directly generated and gathered.

Another notable twentieth century initiative which met with a similar fate of budget cuts as the Manchester lending service was the Circulation Department of the V&A. Active from 1947 to 1977 it lent museum-quality art and design works to museums, libraries and art schools across the UK (Weddell, 2012). While echoes of the programme can be traced to local Open Museum initiatives (see, for example Glasgow Life, 2020) these schemes differ from the ones examined in this thesis as control over what is collected, toured and shown is maintained institutionally.

For different reasons, Own Art was another scheme I chose not to study. Financially focused, Own Art provides interest free loans for individuals wanting to buy art. Started in 2004 by Arts Council England and running in Scotland since 2008, Own Art is a project operated by Creative United, an entrepreneurial community interest company (Creative Scotland 2021, Creative United, 2021). Designed to support galleries, the scheme encourages the public to buy art and craft objects and thereby stimulate the art market. Own Art makes a service charge on each loan made of between 2.5% - 8.5% to the galleries which participate (Own Art, 2021). Although there are claims that the scheme makes collecting or buying contemporary art more accessible (Creative Scotland, 2021, Creative United, 2021) it states the following eligibility criteria;

- Working at least 16 hours a week (employed or self-employed)
- A retired person in receipt of a pension

- A person in receipt of disability allowance (Own Art, 2021).

Before adding,

> If you do not meet one of these criteria but are married to or living with a partner who does, then you may still apply provided that your partner is happy for their income details to be included on your application form (Own Art, 2021).

Creative United report that approximately 64,000 customers have used the scheme to purchase £56,000,000 worth of art and craft items. (Simple arithmetic could be used to indicate that customers spend £875 each. Although no doubt the actual situation is more varied, the figure suggests those using the scheme can afford to spend not insignificant sums on art.) This model clearly concerns financially facilitating individuals to buy artworks. While it may benefit those using the scheme, including the galleries involved and ultimately the artist represented, it lacks the community basis and ethos central to the projects I explore. For the same reason I have also turned away from studying other schemes through which members of the public support galleries (such as Friends or membership groups), philanthropic organisations (Outset, Art Fund, Contemporary Arts Society) or specific artists projects (through online crowd-funding platforms such as Patreon). Although some of these initiatives may try to foster collegiate or even community feelings the primary reason for their existence is to generate financial support for artists or institutions from individuals.

I also considered, but rejected a detailed exploration of the work of artists which could be considered to have similarities to the schemes I discuss. My choice, rather, was to capture and reflect on the experiences of artists involved in differing capacities in the projects I did select. Had I chosen the former path my consideration would have included the *Art Lending Library* (2012) commissioned by Glasgow's Market Gallery and realised at Glasgow International (Gi) by Walker and Bromwich. As presented at the festival, the work had notable performative aspects including; a street procession through the city, costumed “librarians” and sculptural structure for containing the artworks and “mapping” what was

borrowed (British Council Arts, 2012). Additionally Sophie Dyer and Sebastian Gorton Kalvik were commissioned to create a "live map" tracing the borrowed works as they travelled around the city (Market Gallery, 2012). These elements layered on top of the core task of "creating an egalitarian space where art can be borrowed and enjoyed by all sectors of society" (Market Gallery, 2012). Installing the *Art Lending Library* within Glasgow's famous Mitchell Library, may have enhanced the concepts of accessibility all those involved had hoped for, but as a visitor I sensed a tension between the differing layers of the project. Framing it within the Gi Festival, three day loan periods as well as tracing, delivering and collecting the borrowed objects, positioned the library itself as an artwork, with an added suggestion of monitoring the security of the works borrowed, rather than a long-term public service. Had Market Gallery established a permanent art-lending library within its space on Duke Street in the Dennistoun area of Glasgow, it may have made an excellent case study for this discussion. However the three week Gi iteration of the *Art Lending Library*, as well as subsequent temporary events, had a transitory, art-world focus in contrast to the embedded community-facing approaches I will examine.

I also decided not to focus on initiatives which are sector-specific and focused towards organisations. Again these models run most closely in parallel with *artotheks*, as broadly they are some sort of art-lending scheme. However, rather than being open to the general public they focus on institutional borrowing. Examples include; Art in Hospitals, which lends its collection to not only hospitals, but other medical facilities including GP surgeries; the Sculpture Placement Group, which encourages organisations to "adopt" or give a long-term home to a work which the artist is struggling to store; The Argyll Collection, which lends its collection of paintings, prints, textiles and ceramics to schools across the local authority. An historic example of institutionally focused circulation was the School Prints scheme organised by Brenda Rawnsley (1916-2007). She and her advisory panel commissioned artists to make large edition prints, which were then bought by schools on a subscription basis (Artmonsky, 2006). Two series of prints were issued between 1946 and

1947. However, a third more ambitious series including the the work of leading European artists “proved too radical for their time [. . .] with schools withdrawing their subscriptions” (Bristol City Council, 2021). From 2018 The Hepworth Wakefield revised a version of the scheme for their local area, seeing prints by contemporary artists been given to primary schools while the project was funded by the sale of the same prints to the wider public (The Hepworth Wakefield Shop, 2021). Regardless of the many positive sides to these initiatives, lending to institutions makes them distinct from the three case studies I have pursued where individual participants make their own choices with others about what the art they collect, borrow or commission.

Having selected three practices (group collecting, art library borrowing and community commissioning) to study closely and to gain a holistic understanding of how the practices operated, I decided to create projects mirroring the processes as closely as possible using documentation available in print and online. By embedding myself in these projects I generated multiple strands of data; my personal experiences and reflections, my observations of participant behaviour, participant commentaries and project documentation. Additionally, I was able to demonstrate the transferability of the models into a local context and to communicate with others who had been or continue to be involved with the international projects.

Distinct studies allowed me to approach each practice in a slightly different way depending on their unique criteria. In practical terms, this project-based approach was also feasible for me as a part-time researcher and full-time employee. Adopting a case study approach also allowed me to compare findings from each study.

An alternative strategy, might have been to carry out an international desk-based overview of three contrasting models. While it may not have been entirely beyond my scope, I believe that would have had several shortcomings:

- The question of differing cultural contexts would not have been addressed. Numerous examples of projects in France, for example, may be of interest, but an underlying question of transferability would remain.
- Relying on published data may have produced a rather bland picture of the practices studied. Not only is little reflective information available (especially in English), but authorship tends to be by those with direct involvement and therefore interest in promotion of a system. (See for example, https://www.fondationdefrance.org/en/culture). Direct experience has, however, led to richer, more complex findings.
- Similarly, a statistical study on an international basis may also have merits, but would have lacked the narratives that emerged, which provide insights to lived experiences.

One other alternative practical approach may have been to spend time with each of the models I was interested in. However, personal issues such as employment and level of language skills made this an over-ambitious proposition. I did visit one *artothek* in Germany and had hoped to make a similar visit to France, but time available confounded this and alternative strategies were deployed.

Literature

Despite having turned my back on desk research as a primary research strategy, I will contextualise this study by reviewing existing literature. As will be seen in the following chapter, this has not been an exercise in a systematic review of recently published literature in the field, consequently it does not properly constitute a research method. I intend to avoid the pitfall of confounding, "literature review articles for publication (reviews of research) with dissertation literature reviews, which are primarily reviews for, rather than of, research" (Maxwell, 2006: 28). Additionally, a systematic review of literature would not have been suitable in this particular field, as writing on the specific locus of study remains uncommon.

Methods

While a selection of methods were used in these case studies, the scope does not strictly merit the term mixed methods, which might more usually imply a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques (Denscombe, 2014:172). This study is rooted firmly in a qualitative approach and reflects Denscombe's view that,

> Decisions about which methods to use should, instead, be based on how useful the methods are for addressing a particular question, issue or problem that is being investigated. The crucial consideration is how well the research tools work rather than how well they fit within a specific research philosophy. (2014:184).

Methods of Data Capture

Following Denscombe (2014: 277), figure 1 below indicates the range of data generated, captured and analysed, as well as how it can be categorised with reference to methods involved. It is these broader methods, that I will now discuss in some more detail, although it is worth noting that specific discussion of the data generated is presented holistically within the case studies themselves.

Within my practice-based approach, the most prevalent methods were participant observation and interviews. Questionnaires could be regarded as a subset of interviews, but will be treated separately for reasons which become apparent. In this instance I use the term *documentation*, distinctly from *literature* reviewed, referenced and consulted throughout the study. The documentation discussed here is that specifically generated as part of the research activity.

Source of Data	Research Method	Format
Field notes and reflections	Observation	Text, photographs
Questionnaires: ARP lenders at a distance YCP participants, Base-line anonymous -ARP Open questions in correspondence on Summary Report	Questionnaire	Text
Face-to-face interviews: (in person & online); Transcripts ARP borrowers Commissioned artist- project specific YCP adult- project specific NC artist- wider context NC mediator – wider context Group collector Group collected artist Gallerist	Interviews	Recorded speech, transcripts
Catalogue	Documents	Text
Project materials generated- including timelines & photographs	Documents	Text, image, timelines, notes, emails
Online information	Documents	Text, images, films

Figure 2: Methods of data capture

Participant Observation

In discussing research methods in the social sciences, Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg observe:

> Good method is supposed to guarantee reliable research results. In the conventional view, research methods do not contribute any social features, such as culturally local values or interests, to the phenomena they map or to the maps themselves; good research methods are supposed to be culture free, value free. Yet it became clear to feminist scholars that this standard had not been and could not be met in practice. (Harding and Norberg, 2005: 2009)

While Harding and Norberg make this comment with particular regard to the challenges feminist research approaches make to traditional academia and wider society, it is echoed in Torin Monahan and Jill A. Fisher's discussion (2010) of ethnographic research in general

and of participant observation in particular.

Two of the three case studies presented in this thesis involved fieldwork in the broadest sense, with the third seeding elements of fieldwork (subject interviews) into desk-based research. As participant observation provides a significant element of the data gathered it is worth reflecting on recurring questions around this technique.

My attraction to this method was not only that I was an eye witness to events, but also that it would enable activity sessions to run (by and large) as planned, without self-conscious, artificial or, in the case of some participants onerous, interruptions to elicit feedback and commentary. For example, when hosting the Artothek Research Project (Case Study Two), I wanted visitors to have time to enjoy the art, make selections and ask questions, rather than asking visitors immediately to give me information about themselves and their relationship to contemporary art. I could make observations and carry out follow-up activities with individuals demonstrating particular interest.

Monahan and Fisher (2010) challenge what they have found to be the common assumption that qualitative research findings are in some way secondary to quantitative studies. They suggest that far from being the sole provenance of ethnographic and other humanities research, that any research from laboratory to factory floor, is instigated by human hands and therefore subject, not to human fallibility, but by its very initiation to human choices and therefore biases,

> All knowledge is contingent on the interests of the scientists creating it, the tools and procedures they use to measure the phenomena under investigation, and the analytic frameworks they use to interpret their results [. . .] it means that the beliefs and expectations of researchers or scientific communities have powerful effects on the ability to measure and interpret the world (Monahan and Fisher, 2010: 359).

They continue to explore in further detail the merits and demerits of participant-observation as a research method. The widely recurring criticism of the method is that being observed influences how people behave. The “Observer's Paradox” is attributed to

linguist William Labov, who noted,

> the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation (Labov, 1972: 109).

Similarly, the "Hawthorne effect", based on a series of studies of employee behaviour under varying conditions in a Chicago factory from 1924 to 1933 suggests that studied behaviour will cause the people studied to alter their actions (McCambridge et al, 2014). However, McCambridge et al pose the question: does this effect really exist and if so, how is it realised? Their research comprised a systematic review, comparing published findings which included "quantitative data on the Hawthorne effect on a behavioral outcome" mainly in the field of health care (McCambridge et al, 2014: 268). While their study suggests that the effect has on occasion been used to explain unexpected or disappointing results (McCambridge et al, 2014: 268), their primary conclusion is that there is no single Hawthorne effect, "Rather, the effect, if it exists, is highly contingent on task and context" (McCambridge et al, 2014: 275). Instead they suggest that focus should turn to research participation effects and

> Giving attention to precisely what we invite research participants to do in any given study seems a logical precursor to examination of whether any aspect of taking part may influence them (McCambridge et al, 2014: 276).

Reaching a not dissimilar conclusion and in a field more closely aligned to this study, Adair et al examined studies of the Hawthorne effect within education research. They noted,

> The concept of a Hawthorne effect originated in an attempt to summarily account for a complexly determined set of effects in a classic study. It became reified as a major artifact of concern in the behavioral sciences by a sequence of citations by prominent methodologists [. . .] and authors of methods textbooks. [. . .] The data presented in this study clearly indicate that there is no artifact that should be labeled [sic] *the* Hawthorne effect. There was also no evidence to support any of three distinctive subtypes of Hawthorne effects as the source of the artifact (Adair et al, 1989: 224).

However, they continue, cautioning, "Should educational researchers take solace in this review and now conclude that there is no artifact that they need be concerned with?

Definitely not!" (1989: 226). So, how will this study approach both Labov's paradox and any potential Hawthorne effects?

In the first instance, it is worth noting that, the sentence following Labov's formulation of the Observer's Paradox, states, "The problem is of course not insoluble. . ." before going on to suggest additional steps that could be taken to encourage participants to use their most authentic or least "performed" language registers (1972: 109). A more recent paper exploring managing the Hawthorne effect reflects the experiences of a field study within the Scottish construction industry. Oswald et al suggest six specific steps, to encourage rapport between researcher and research subject, in order to "handle" (as in mitigate) any potential changes to behaviour arising from being observed (Oswald et al: 2014). The six step protocol, while potentially useful to an emerging field researcher, should already be familiar to an experienced socially engaged practitioner or even to any polite individual meeting another person or group for the first time. (Unless, of course, the intention of the encounter is to start an argument or intervene in an emergency.) They created a diagram summarising their protocol, which I re-present horizontally

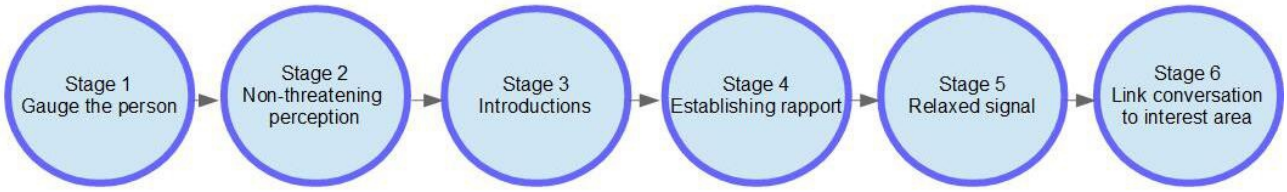

Figure 3: From: Oswald et al, 2014: 59 Six stage protocol for Hawthorne effect mitigation

While the protocol may help establish conducive relationships, which in turn may lead to improvements in the quality of the data by relaxing participants and thus reducing any Hawthorne effect (Oswald et al, 2014: 63), it does not address Monahan and Fisher's argument that any research intervention will have some effect of the subject of study. Their argument is not that being observed has no effect on subjects, but rather that any effect that is manifest is not necessarily a bad thing. It is simply an additional piece of data, to be sensitive to, before it is analysed and discussed. Thus, embracing all aspects of participant observation – including any behaviour that might be considered performative - adds to the

richness of data to be interpreted and understood. As they explain,

> Meaning is not out there to be found by the researcher; it is continuously made and remade through social practice and the give-and-take of social interaction, including interaction with the researcher (Monahan and Fisher, 2010: 363).

Here Monahan and Fisher's discussion shifts from simply observation to interaction. This point is particularly relevant for this study. It cuts to the issue of participation and the social interaction at the heart of it. It highlights, in methodological terms questions of etic and emic perspectives and questions of how I attempt to balance these grounded in my understanding of participation and agency.

The duality at the centre of participant observation - both being in a situation and observing or reflecting on it - is not unique to ethnographic field studies. Rather, I would suggest it is a duality that is reasonably common in daily life; whether at a time of extreme emotion (e.g. being overwhelmed with the sadness of grief, but noticing an absurd detail of the priest's costume), or in a professional role (the teacher who swallows laughter at a language learner's innocent mistake), or in daily activities such as playing sport, where question arise such as; Am I faster today? What's my next move? The balance between action and reflection is not specific to any one field of research, nor methodology. Significantly in this study, in addition to the researcher role balancing action/reflection and intervention/observation, these polarities also have to be balanced by the mediator role explored in Case Study Three.

One further element of participant observation highlighted by Monahan and Fisher is also worth considering:

> informants have agency and will exercise it to make sense of and influence researchers and research results. The responses of communities to researchers are important data in and of themselves, revealing a great deal about the communities being studied (Monahan and Fisher, 2010: 362).

In other words, just as researchers balance this duality of observation and reflection it would be naïve to consider that participants might not be doing the same. This is where

some elements of subjectivity might arise, with participants telling the researcher what they think they might want to hear or performing for the researcher (Monahan & Fisher, 2010: 362-3). In this study there were at least two instances where I consider this was a strong possibility (Gina in Case Study One and Jan in Case Study Two). Both of these instances occurred during interviews, which allowed me to probe the statements being made. The specific details will be discussed in within those studies.

Two further factors related to observation are relevant to how I deployed this method. First, it is important to note that observation was done in conjunction with other techniques, all of which ensure that the direct voice of participants is documented and included. (Discussion of the other methods used follows below.) The project participants were not signing up to be measured and observed as if they were taking a pill or carrying out a series of tests. From their view point, although made completely aware that this was part of a research study, their participation was primarily in a particular project, with participating in the research a secondary consideration. To an extent, this project-specific focus may reduce any of the possible observer effects discussed above, but arguably more importantly, this study provides snapshot documentation of the participant's experience and voice. This balances the etic observer's perspective and emic participant's view, a balance which is important because of the underlying principles and values underpinning the systems being investigated.

Second, the locations of each case study and the cultures within those micro-communities are notable factors in the observation process. While the significance of location in these instances is specific, it echoes the suggestion of Mike Kesby that, “participation and empowerment must be conceived as embedded in material space” (Kesby, 2005: 2054). The context of both my case studies “in the field” implied certain modes of behaviour and relationships and, to an extent, these given norms aided relaxed participant observation. To expand, within a school setting (Case Study Three) young people are used to meeting with adults and often to being observed, scrutinised and monitored by them. This is part of the

daily relationship they have with teachers. Consequently, even a visiting adult (the researcher) is assumed to more or less fit into the same mould.

In the instance of Case Study Two, which took place at the hutting community of Carbeth, my membership of that community facilitated establishment of the project. Of course, dangers of over-familiarity with place and people, as well as being too close to the project and its material, could be seen as the mirror view of Labov's paradox. The observer stops observing clearly.

For me, although both the school and hutting settings were familiar, both projects were new, especially instigated for the research; thereby I believe that the novelty value of each project enhanced my ability to maintain a fresh observational gaze. Whenever possible, I made notes during sessions and used these to write-up more reflective notes within as short a time period as feasible. These notes in turn become a data source to be interrogated and, as appropriate, compared to other data sources.
Another method of assuaging what has traditionally been considered to be researcher bias, particularly with observational field notes, was not to be the only voice recorded. To the extent that there was one researcher and a variety of participants and that this study is written by the researcher, it could be seen to have an etic perspective. However, in order to have as rounded a study as possible I sought to capture participant voices, giving some emic insights. This can also be positioned as a movement towards adopting the collaborative research process described by Marcus as "committed collaboration" with

> reflexive subjects who stimulate a politics of collaboration necessary for ethnography to proceed in a way quite different from the way anthropologists have in the past enrolled subjects in their projects (Marcus, 2010a: 268).

Furthermore, as Bill Genat suggests within participatory action research, there is a methodological imperative "to bring forth multiple perspectives and reveal the multi-vocality and complexity of the social arena of the research" (Genat, 2009,106). In this respect, the primary method of capturing these perspectives was through interviews.

Face-to-face Interviews

This study does not involve large numbers of participants and consequently the number of interviews carried out has been quite small. Over the three projects there have been ten interview occasions with twelve respondents. It was important that the interviews were carried out with those central to the projects or those with direct experience of the relevant models elsewhere. Specifically, for Case Study Two around half of the library borrowers were interviewed. (I say around, because one respondent replied to the questions by email, as highlighted below in the discussion of questionnaires.)

Just over half of the interviews were carried out in the conventional sense of face-to-face, while the others were carried out through online video calls. In two instances this was due to the overseas locations of the interviewees and in the remaining case because of the 2020 travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To an extent the online video interview can been seen as a positive development in terms of research; distance becomes no object, costs are minimal, subjects can choose a comfortable location of their choice, even time frames can be tightly controlled. However, they are not without problems; one of my overseas interviews nearly didn't happen at all because of technical issues and scheduled meetings can still be forgotten. More broadly, the intangible sparks and frissons of face-to-face encounters, themselves additional research material, are at best diluted and at worst lost online.

Both versions of the face-to-face interview offer the advantage over a paper questionnaire of being able to engage directly with the interviewee, which can support the development of a relaxed and open atmosphere, as well as providing opportunities (for both parties) to clarify meaning or to pursue a particular comment or observation. For my interviews, I adopted a semi-structured approach, with prepared questions, moving towards “interviews as conversations” (Burgess, 1984, 101). I wanted to listen to respondents and encourage them to talk about their experiences, but I felt that having prepared questions would provide structure for the meetings and ensure that emerging points of interest were

addressed.

The timing of these interviews in relation to the project as a whole also became important. With some respondents, my access to them was open and ongoing, meaning that I could schedule interviews at any stage of the project. By contrast, with most interviewees I was aware of relying on their generosity with their time and would only have one opportunity to engage. Had I interviewed certain subjects too early in the practical project process, the conversational aspects of the interview, in which I could discuss problems that had arisen during the project process, would have been an opportunity lost.

Burgess notes that, "personal interviews are costly in both time and money" (1994, 259). The face-to-face interviews I carried out involved an average round-trip travelling time of three hours, while the interviews themselves lasted between thirty minutes and an hour and a half. Additional time was needed to transcribe the interviews. Nonetheless, given the importance I place on including the participant's voice and analysing their experiences and perspectives, this time (and money) has been wisely used, as it contributes to the distinctive findings of the study.

Dividing the interviews into the case study sub-sets highlights particular issues. With Case Study Two: Artothek Research Project, I had approached more borrowers for interview, but, as discussed in more detail within that study, the "holiday" nature of the library location and the pattern of library opening, meant that arranged meetings did not always take place. A hope to interview non-borrowers also was unrealised due to time and travel constraints, consequently only a snap-shot of these potential views is represented in the comments of library visitors who elected not to borrow.

With Case Study Three, there were interviews with professionals and no interviews with the young participants. The young people all declined to be audio recorded, making interviews a challenge for the researcher in terms of accurate recording. As will be discussed at

greater length, these young participants were also naturally quiet, again making an interview not an ideal method of capturing their voices. Consequently, other techniques were deployed; including written answers, ipad survey, word fields, timelines as well as group discussion and informal conversation.

Following the advice that for action research in particular, "It is critical the researcher records emic descriptions of phenomena through direct quotations" (Genat, 2009: 111), I wanted to ensure that transcriptions of interviews were as accurate as possible. To this end in addition to producing the transcripts as soon after the interviews as practical, I drew on my experience of working with actors and theatre scripts to capture as many nuances of speech as possible, through use of punctuation, pauses and emphasis. I found creating transcripts a valuable process, not simply for having useful data, but, as Denscombe points out, it brought the "talk to life again", bringing me closer to the material and allowing moments of reflection as well as the mechanical task of typing (2014: 310). Quotations taken from interview transcripts were subsequently checked and approved by the named interviewees.

Questionnaires

There were three distinct reasons for working with questionnaires in addition to interviews; anonymity, soliciting a response and subject preference.

In addition to understanding the extent to which *artothek* borrowers had previously experienced "the artworld", I chose to attempt to capture the socio-economic background of participants in Case Study One. I knew that by using Carbeth as a base, there would be a socio-economically diverse group of potential borrowers, but I wanted to be able to demonstrate this by focusing on actual borrowers and with information they supplied. Accordingly, I wanted to pose some direct questions about income, level of education and residential area and thus I considered two approaches to make it easier for people to share this information, which might be regarded as highly personal. The two strategies were for

the surveys to be completed anonymously and the second that while the questions were unambiguous, I included scaled responses. For example, with regard to annual income, I created bracketed sums; £10,000- £18,000; £18,000-£25,000, etc. I wanted an overall picture of income band. I felt the specifics of someone's income was none of my business and that people might have been more likely to leave that question blank if the question were posed directly.

Questions of participant sensitivity were also behind gathering opinions from the young participants in Case Study Three by questionnaire. As became apparent and will be discussed in more detail, the young people were more expansive when sharing opinions on paper both through specific questionnaires and project materials.

For another set of participants, there was a stated preference to completing answers by questionnaire. In order to capture the views of the artists who lent to the *artothek*, I suggested either online interview or questionnaire. This was principally because I was in contact with them during the COVID-19 lock down, making face-to-face meetings and interviews impossible. Both chose to respond to the questions I sent in writing, one noting that she found she had more time to consider her answers in this way. One Carbeth participant responded to pre-sent interview questions by email too, possibly the convenience of answering online was easier for her than arranging a meeting for a face-to-face discussion.

The advantage for the researcher in having answers on paper, is of course, the time saved in transcribing. The approach however ran the risk pointed out by Bernard that, "If respondents can interpret a question differently from the meaning you have in mind, they will" (Bernard,1994: 268). While I tried to make questions unambiguous and with a bespoke register of language, in one instance at least, a respondent began a reply with "I'm not exactly sure I understand this question" (Glasgow Lender, May 2020). Nonetheless, for all the potential pitfalls of emailed questionnaires, it was important to record the views and

include the voices of these project participants. If the circumstances of the time meant that this was the only means practical for them to share their thoughts, on balance this was the best method at that moment.

One technique I did deploy in the lender questionnaire was to ask if the respondents had any questions for me. I felt this not only demonstrated that I was open to dialogue, but that questions arising would provide another reflection on the case study itself.

Documents

Case Studies Two and Three both generated project-specific documentation. Some of this provided useful additional means of gathering data and providing research insights (e.g. good luck cards for the project artist), while other pieces were simply useful to the project processes (e.g. catalogue of library artworks).

Some documentation straddled both categories, such as surveys created by or at the request of the artist. For example, in Case Study Three, the commissioned artist wanted to elicit ideas and views from the participant group and others within the school community on two separate occasions. In the first instance as project mediator, I worked with the group to generate questions, which could be used to survey others. The process of collecting the data and the material gathered illustrates that one piece of documentation may have multiple functions. The creation of the questionnaire was a group activity and the findings were of interest to me in terms of the wider research project. However, the findings also provided information for the artist and then I used the findings as the basis for further discussion and activity with the group.

By contrast, the second survey, created by the artist, sought material for her process, which had little direct impact on the research project, although it fed directly into the final artwork. Consequently, the case study includes no discussion of responses to the second survey about staff and students' favourite foods, emojis and other personal favourite items.

Methods of Analysis

Discussing the role of documentation in this study highlights a potentially problematic aspect of qualitative research identified by Denscombe; how to deal with a large and varied quantity of material. He suggests,

> To deal with this challenge, qualitative researchers need to come to terms very quickly with the fact that it is not feasible for them to present all of their data. They need to be selective in what they present and acknowledge that they have to act as an editor – identifying key parts of the data/analysis and prioritizing certain parts over others. (Denscombe, 2015: 328)

Editing may not be a tool for analysing data, but it is part of the process of working with and presenting data. In trying to create space for the participant's voice, I was conscious of balancing their recorded experiences with my reflections.

Working within this parameter, it was natural that I would analyse most of the gathered data with a grounded approach. In a way, it was part of the unstated "contract" I was making with the interview subjects; I would not be hostile to them (or subsequently the material they had provided) and they would be honest with me. This is not to say, that I suspended all critical faculties in analysing data, simply that I would treated what was said as it the speaker meant what they said and I was not trying to "catch them out."

In one instance I did ask participants to describe their role in the project, in order that I could discover if they understood what was being asked of them, which is indirect rather than direct questioning. In my opinion this does not constitute either typical content analysis or typical discourse analysis, which might have seen me probing further into patterns of language usage or deconstructing the texts from one particular theoretical standpoint. Rather, in practice, I found the rigid categories of methodological text books fusing slightly. To this end, it was inevitable that in contextualising research findings within existing scholarship and suggesting new directions, I would take into account wider cultural contexts.

More specifically, I did undertake one piece of data analysis, which in a limited way was similar to content analysis, using a basic online word count tool to identify frequently used words common to all respondents. However, as will be discussed in Case Study Two, this provided limited insights, often simply reflecting words used in the questions or common speech patterns. At its most useful, it provided further evidence for observations based on other processes. In a wider comparative approach, also in Case Study Two, I used existing national statistics on involvement in the arts to ascertain the extent to the research sample was typical of the wider population.

The primary method of analysing data was the identification of recurrent themes. The amount of data gathered was not so large that a complex coding system was necessary, especially as the majority of data was either my own field notes or interviews or questionnaires with given questions. Being closely connected to the material, through its generation and capture, allowed me to identify key themes with relative ease. Additionally, I found spending time working on two case studies over a period of time concurrently, enabled me to identify common threads across the studies. Re-visiting material over time was also useful in creating a distance to the data, which had the dual advantage of bringing a quasi-external eye to the material, while also reviewing key points initially missed.

Potential flaws and solutions

In more positivistic research terms, a perceived drawback with case studies is that they are too specific to the case being studied - that findings are not replicable nor can generalisations be made from what is demonstrated. However, I believe that in this instance there is a high degree of transferability from the findings, indeed one of the rationales for carrying out the studies was to learn how models common elsewhere might be replicated in a Scottish context. In the final section of the study, I will demonstrate how the learning contained here could be transferred to other settings. This is not to say that I have formulated a step-by-step guide, after all, as I believe I will demonstrate, in creating

social projects, which involve social systems, specificity and flexibility is vital in projects reaching fruition. Rather, I will identify processes, approaches and considerations which could be adopted to replicate these models successfully.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I referenced a comment made by anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, encouraging the ethnographic art of noticing. I find this "art of noticing" appealing as it implies attention to the detail of life around us. I have endeavoured to bring this art to this study.

Additionally, I have explained why I find an ethnographic methodology appropriate and further reading of current thinking and practice in anthropology as described by Reeves et al (2013), Marcus (2010a, 2010b and 2014), Siegenthaler (2013) and Monahan and Fisher (2010) add weight to my selection.

I have also touched on the question of validity as being more significant to this type of study than the paradigm of reproducibility which might dominate studies in other fields. In order to present valid findings, I will analyse a combination of my own observations beside testimonies from a range of voices. Ranging from those who have engaged with the research processes in differing roles to those who have written reports, documents and articles in similar and overlapping areas. I will highlight the latter in the Literature Review which follows.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

> *. . .Christie's is big into extravagant sales: In 2013, it hyped, with a high-profile media campaign, a sale that included Francis Bacon's* Three Studies of Lucian Freud, *1969, which became the most expensive artwork ever sold at auction. That record was then beaten twice in 2015, by Christie's. In 2017, that record was beaten by Christie's again, with the sale of a painting very dubiously attributed to Leonardo Da Vinci, called* Salvator Mundi, *ca. 1500. [. . .] Such are the benchmarks and expectations of the auction market* (Dillon, 2019).

Introduction: Collecting Contemporary Art

In considering collecting contemporary art, the general discourse in the UK press and media focuses on high end, record breaking sales. Annually, the Turner Prize shortlist may be the subject of ridicule or indifference. For the general reader or viewer this may be where the discussion of art stops.

In this study I want to explore alternatives to this recurrent image of the artworld and simultaneously examine how general discussion might be broadened. Initially I plan to do this by using this media trope as a portal to further enquiry; exploring the world of high end art collecting to identify what it brings to light about the position of contemporary art in wider society. I have chosen to start at this point because if one is considering upsetting a table, it is useful to know what is on it first. To some extent, this approach echoes the process of "studying up", which Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg describe as "studying the powerful, their institutions, policies, and practices instead of focusing only on those whom the powerful govern" (Harding and Norberg, 2005: 2011). They continue,

> By studying up, researchers can identify the conceptual practices of power and how they shape daily social relations. Understanding how our lives are governed not primarily by individuals but more powerfully by institutions, conceptual schemes, and their "texts," which are seemingly far removed from our everyday lives, is crucial for designing effective projects of social transformation (Harding and Norberg, 2005: 2011).

For the functioning of the headline garnering artworld, Adam Lindemann (2006) identified seven key figures: artist, art critic, dealer, consultant, collector, auctioneer, the museum

professional (director and/or curator) as necessary. His publication *Collecting Contemporary Art*, included interviews with people falling into each of the categories, except artists, who were notably absent. My wider study will include discussions with and about artists and others, but in the first instance, this chapter will consider those for whom the artist creates his/her work the wider public, and specifically that subset of an audience who currently buy work and consider themselves collectors.

In considering collecting, many studies commence with the history and lineage of what can be recognised today as collecting practice (see, for example, Altshuler, 2013; Belk, 1995; Hodgkin, 1992; Rigby and Rigby, 1944). While it is not the intention of this study to replicate these histories, it may be of interest to highlight where further information can be found and to extract even fleeting references to more collective approaches to collecting.

Collecting History- Ancient China to WWII

Lock Stock and Barrel; The Story of Collecting by Rigby and Rigby (1944) remains a comprehensive overview nearly three quarters of a century after its publication. The Rigbys document the earliest examples of what can be described as collecting within the ancient civilisations of China, India, Sumeria, Persia, Egypt, Crete and Greece (1944: 93ff). They follow this with chapters on collecting in Roman and Medieval periods. Joseph Sax, in his discussion of the stewardship of artworks, reminds readers that debates around public display of artefacts date back to the time of Cicero (106-43 BCE), naming warriors Lucius Mummius and Servilius amongst those who publicly displayed artworks plundered during military campaigns, while criticising Gaius Verres for keeping his spoils for personal enjoyment only (Sax, 1999: 72).

The Rigbys are expansive in their geographic scope, which is echoed in the work of more contemporary scholars. James C. Y. Watt states that the archaeological record provides evidence for collecting as early as 1200 BCE in China, through tombs filled with objects from earlier centuries. He concludes that tomb excavations demonstrate, "that collecting is

an activity as old as civilisation itself" (Watt, 2012: 97). Others, however, caution that grave goods can be interpreted in differing ways (Pearson, 1999) and that it is the intention of collecting that is the first step to making a collection, in turn imbibing the object with an altered significance (Macdonald, 2006; Rujivacharakul, 2011).

Swann's observation that during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE- 221 CE), "A civil servant and man of culture was expected to have an interest in the arts in the broadest sense; he might be a painter, a critic, a poet, a collector or an historian." satisfies the criteria of intention and suggests a wider collecting culture (Swann,1963: 36). Indeed this cultural aspect of Chinese collecting is what makes it of interest for the purposes of this study. Across centuries and dynasties, references are repeatedly made (such as Swann, 1963: Egan, 2008; Ebrey, 2008; Moser, 2012; Halperin, 2020) to collecting not only occurring, but having some communal aspects such as collegiate discussion and in some instances sharing; causing Holzwarth to conclude that, "The treatment and collecting of art differs greatly from European traditions" (Holzwarth, 2005: 41). In discussing more contemporary collecting, Paul van der Grijp (2006) considers that the bonsai collectors of Japan, where clubs, meetings and competitions occur could be seen as antecedents of earlier Far Eastern discursive collecting traditions.

Amongst the lurid, amusing and overwhelming stories of collecting through the ages in the West (as found in Blom, 2004; Muensterberger, 1994 and Rigby and Rigby, 1944) focused scholarship on collecting generally starts with the Renaissance and *wunderkammers* followed by a particular emphasis on the Enlightenment as laying the foundations for what would become public encyclopedic museums (Belk, 1995; Cardinal and Elsner, 1994; Macdonald, 2006; MacGregor, 2007; Pearce, 1992). Primarily, examples of collecting in this era focus on individuals - usually wealthy, titled and male (see, for example, publications listed by The Society for the History of Collecting, 2020). By contrast, it is worth noting that van der Grijp observes a lack of scholarship on group approaches to collecting and suggests that more research is needed in this area (van der Grijp, 2006).

With the rise across Europe of the nation state, powerful rulers used national collections to confirm “their identity and indeed very existence" a pattern which then extended to individual cities (Macdonald, 2006: 85). As large scale national or civic museums developed, the question of contemporary institutional collecting became pressing; especially with regard to work by living artists (Altshuler, 2005). If as E. H. Gombrich noted by the end of the nineteenth century, “artists....were increasingly dissatisfied with the aims and methods of art that pleased the public” (Gombrich, 1984: 425). Then it is perhaps inevitable that tensions between institutions, acquisition committees, artists and the public grew. One such instance occurred with the Chantrey Bequest, the aim of which was to acquire “Works of Fine Art, of the highest merit”, but which in reality “has often been severely criticized” (Manson, n.d: 165). Serving as a seed collection for the Tate, the legacy of these early purchases favouring fellow Academicians over arguably more challenging work (Manson suggests Millet, Constable and Reynolds, for example) became a problem that is “ ever more pressing as the pictures increase and the space does not” (Manson, n.d.: 168).

Into this impasse come private collectors. The wealth generated for some with the rapid industrial expansion for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not, of course, unique to Europe. As fortunes were made in the United States, collecting grew with “accusations that the money bags of the New World were shamelessly robbing the 'art loving' Europeans of their cultural treasure” (Rigby and Rigby, 1944: 281). These new collectors were unlikely to be the aristocratic descendants (and beneficiaries) of those who had made collections while on Grand Tours and further still removed from those who had fostered artists within a system of patronage centuries earlier. Controversial collectors such as J.P. Morgan (1837-1913) and W.R. Hearst (1863-1951) had the spending power to buy whole collections, rather than just one or two items at auction, earning them notoriety as “robber barons” or even calling into question their status as genuine collectors (Rigby and Rigby, 1944; Belk, 1985). Indubitably, for those in the US with the disposable income, collecting art became fashionable. In the midst of the press furore that met the 1913 Armory Show of

French and American contemporary art, sales were reasonably strong including works by Redon, Derain, Matisse, Cezanne, Signac, Gaugin, Bonnard, Kandinsky and Duchamp (Pach, 1913). That particular touring exhibition is widely credited with transforming collecting of contemporary art by awakening the spending power and taste of wealthy US citizens and shifting the axis of the contemporary art market from Europe to the United States (Begley, 2013).

Moreover, Europe was on the brink of what became the First World War and as Rigby and Rigby point out, "incidents born of war are more significant for collecting than, at first glance, they might appear" (1944: 486). Changes arise in availability of objects with resulting alterations in price, due to either scarcity or sudden flooding of the market. Items kept within families for generations, suddenly become traded as liquidity becomes imperative. Additionally as people move, they take their tastes and traditions with them to new to host nations. Equally importantly, artists respond to the times and situations in which they find themselves; the rage and senselessness of World War One giving the impetus for Dadaism, for example.

Rigby and Rigby highlight attempts made during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) to protect both private and civic art collections from destruction (1944: 487). Given the date of their own publication, there is an added poignancy to their observations and predictions that restitution for war time looting “will be a long time unraveling [sic]” (1944: 488). Emerging from the conflict was arguably easier in the US than in Europe resulting in, "The mood in the country that had suffered least from the war [being] defiant, violent, haunted" (Berger, 2015: 367). Artists who had escaped the Nazi regime settled in the US and contributed to the sense that centre of the art world had moved away from Europe (Horowitz, 2011: 10). This complex post-war culture in turn gave rise to a frenzied art market where,

> The competition, however, was ruthless and aggressive. The latest was always at a premium. Gallery fashions changed quickly.

> Recognition (being featured in *Life*) was dramatic but short-lived. The risks were high and the casualties many (Berger, 2015: 367).

It was also the era of the first blue-chip artists; those whose names were so well established they could be traded like blue chip companies or gambled with, as with the eponymous highest-value blue chips in poker.

Collecting Context- Art Fairs and Art Markets

As the gap between average earnings and those of the super-rich started to grow, those in the top 1% of annual income tables had funds available to spend. From the 1960s to the present the increasing disposable income of the financial elite has run concurrently with shifts in buying and (arguably) collecting patterns; moving from established masters to the thrill of the new and the quest to be "ahead of the curve" (Horowitz, 2011: 9).

Before returning in greater detail to the sums required for high end collecting, it is useful to consider the simple question of how works may be purchased. To those "inside" the art world this may be obvious, but for "outsiders" it may appear impenetrable. One of the participants in this study described works in the research *artothek* as, "art you wouldn't see in a shop" (Donna, 2019) having previously expressed nervousness about going into a gallery (Donna, 2018). Note her differentiation between shops and galleries. Donna's discomfort was confirmed by an experienced gallerist when discussing barriers to collecting art; barriers which could be described as attitudinal, but could also be seen as structural. She observed,

> commercial art galleries are invisible to them [the public]. I hear a lot of people say they just wouldn't know where to go to buy [. . .] prices not being displayed is another barrier (Fleming, 2020).

I will reflect on my own perception of similar barriers in the discussion of Art Fairs below.

Two elements of the high-end art world which fuel demand and boost an accompanying social scene are the art fair and the prestigious dealer. As if to illustrate the stoking effect

of the busy fair Louisa Buck and Judith Greer wryly observe,

> Dealers often comment that a collector will purchase the same piece from an [sic] fair booth that they turned down back at the gallery a few weeks earlier (2006:139)

While both the art fair and the art dealer can trace legacies from earlier eras (Horowitz, 2011; Koerner, 2017) expansion (as with the sums involved) was triggered by economies fostering individual wealth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first modern era art fairs in the 1960s occurred in cities where there was a critical mass of people rich enough to consider buying art, but few commercial galleries and little sense of a network; Cologne and Basel (Morgner, 2014). As Christian Morgner details,

> The linking-up of the different art dealers meant that they would not only pass their reputation upon each other, but also to the event itself. Art Cologne or Art Basel became labels of their own bringing greater attention to the location and attracting an international clientele. The dealers can multiply their efforts by networking with other dealers and acquiring new buyers. For instance, buyers that would come for a particular gallery, could also discover artists of other art dealers. (2014: 328)

Examining the role of the dealer, the importance of a network is further emphasised by Derrick Chong in his discussion of the rise of the "powerhouse" dealers, where relationships can be the source of both "cooperation and competition" (Chong, 2011:433). He references Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's model of The Art Eco-System, where the dealer is positioned absolutely in the centre of the art trading network (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2004:6). Clearly there are historical precedents for powerful and influential dealers (for example, Alexander Reid (1854-1928) in a Scottish and European context, Joseph Duveen (1869-1939) more internationally), what interests Chong, however, is the emergence of dealer "brands", who use proven marketing methods to work the network of artist, collector and even museums, while maintaining their own positions of influence (Chong, 2011: 432). Dealer influence can be measured, not only in terms of which artists are represented or the value of works are sold, but in stark architectural terms at major art fairs; square footage and location of space assigned.

The intimate relationship between fairs and dealers, perhaps unsurprisingly has led to the model spreading, initially to other art cities (Paris, Bologna, London, New York) and then to satellite fairs such as Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Basel Hong Kong and stand-alone models across the world such as Cosmoscow, Art Dubai, Art021 Shanghai and Art X Lagos. Leading Morgner to observe that, "As a result of its adaptability, the art fair became a global institution" (Morgner, 2014: 331). Of course, it is also significant that the more recently established fairs or satellite fairs are found in major cities in countries with "emergent" economies, where home-grown High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) or Ultra High Net Worth Individuals (UHNWIs) have cultural (if not residential) roots.

Until 2017, I had never attended a major international art fair. Only vaguely aware of their existence, it seemed that my income bracket would automatically preclude me from entry. Being in London for work, I learned that purchasing a ticket at a cost of £40.85 would give me admission for one day. Signing up I pondered the Important Information section of my ticket, points one and three noted,

- Frieze London is a **cash-free** event
- Please remember that Frieze London is an event for galleries to conduct business.

(Frieze London, 2017)

While appreciating the precautions against money laundering the first point was no doubt intended to make, I was amused by the irony of businesses disdaining cash, as if suggesting a challenge to those who regard the purchase of art as any sort of ordinary shopping, rather to maintain a cultivated differentiation, "which has been the basis of high aesthetics since Kant" (Bourdieu,1984: 6). Charles Saatchi, collector and eponymous gallery owner, dismisses such sensibilities; "the snobbery of those who think an interest in art is the province of gentle souls of rarefied sensibility never fails to entertain" (Saatchi, 2009: 49). While Noah Horowitz finds the artworld populated by

> an intoxicating mixture of speculators, fashion seekers and newly curious aficionados for whom collecting is often but an extension of a broader social and/or financial agenda (Horowitz, 2011: 7).

In the case studies which follow, I consider Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias with

regard to the most suitable site for an art library. In his discussion of the demarcation of human spaces, the fifth principle is particularly apposite to the art fair,

> Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures.
>
> (Foucault, 1986, 26)

With the entry fee and instructions provided I may have submitted to the relevant "rites", but I felt that not only was I being warned not to get in the way of the business in hand, but also as if I were there on sufferance; one of "yoo scruff" from Tom Leonard's poem *Six O'Clock News* (Leonard, 1976). If you are not one of us, why are you here? In considering equality of cultural access; obvious barriers such as costs and location must be considered beside less tangible barriers such as unwritten signals, habits and attitudes associated with admission.

More recent encounters with art fairs were online due to COVID 19 (Frieze New York in May 2020 and Frieze London in October 2020). VIP dates were still reserved, but after those "access" was free. Intriguingly, unlike the live version I had attended, prices, or at least price ranges, were on display.

Considering purchasing, whether in a fair, auction or gallery suggests another line of enquiry: are artworks commodities like any other, since they can be bought and sold? On one level a simple answer is, yes. In general discourse, the prevalent current equivalence of art object to price achieved at auction is indicative of artworks being regarded simply as tradable goods; as if price can be used as a short-cut for a wider understanding of value. (See press headlines such as, "£48m: Gustav Klimt's Bauerngartern becomes third most expensive painting in European history after auction at Sotheby's," *The Telegraph* 1st March 2017 or specialist websites such as www.artnet.com)

Those involved in the art business might talk about it as if it were no different from selling (or even trading) other commodities. Artist and writer Martha Rosler once noted, “The invisible motto above the gallery door reads, 'Abandon worldly concerns (except if you are buying) ye who enter here' ”(Rosler, 1984: 323). For Rosler, although wrapped with charm and good manners, the high-end art world is simply high value buying and selling, where taste-makers tend to have vested interests. Buck and Greer, in their guide to owning art, exemplify the attitude Rosler challenges. On one hand they suggest, “The art world has finely-tuned antennae for those who put financial considerations before a genuine empathy and enthusiasm for the art itself" (Buck and Greer, 2006: 31) before going on to point out that, actually money does matter; "Serious collectors always follow values of both the artists they collect and those they don't" (Buck and Greer, 2006:108). With direct experience of trading in art, auctioneer and art-historian Maurice Rheims observed,

> Art lovers' feelings are ambivalent [. . .] It breaks their hearts to sell anything: they tell you [the auctioneer] they'll never get over the sacrifice [. . .] Which do they really prefer, the thing itself or the profit they make out of it? Ambiguous pleasures, compounded of passion, pride and love of money (Rheims,1980: 100).

This binary of monetary attachment to art being both unmentionable and endlessly discussable is arguably resolved by Arjun Appadurai's observations (1986) on commodity status. Seeking to move beyond Marxist production-centred definitions of commodity to a point where consumption is equally important, Appadurai rejects, “an excessively positivist conception of the commodity, as being a certain *kind* of thing, thus restricting the debate” (Appadurai, 1986: 13). He argues that things may find themselves in commodity situations at some point in their lives; as their exchangeability comes into focus (1986: 13). In other words, if an object is or can be or has been bought and sold or traded, then it has both commodity status and a commodity context. The commodity state refers to the moment in the object's social life when it comes to sale. For example a painting from a private collection on loan to a national museum suddenly gains commodity status, if the owner decides to sell. The commodity context is the social arena in which the exchange takes place - the auction room, for example.

Commodity status may or may not be the defining feature of the object's social life. Even in the case of artworks, the commodity status can vary considerably; with one work being created by an artist, then purchased to stay on the wall of the new owner for the rest of their life while another work may circulate much more widely; being bought by a gallery, sold to a collector, consigned to auction and so on.

Horowitz, who probes the entangled relationships between globalised wealth, international commercial galleries, auction houses, art fairs and public and private museums, argues that "strictly speaking artworks cannot be classified as commodities" (2011:18). He cites a range of reasons why this is the case; the supply to market is not steady, the concept of perfect substitutes is atypical, artworks do not generate income, rather they cost money to keep, there is no derivatives market in art and finally there is no clearing house overseeing transactions.

These reasons are not without their pitfalls; could waiting lists with dealers be seen as potential derivative markets? Art works do generate income; loaned works may gain in commodity value by being shown in prestigious exhibitions and related micro-economies flourish around insurance, transport and merchandise. Whether lenders own copyright outright, make copyrighted photographs or simply have licensing agreements with living artists or estates, Korn and Weinand are of the opinion that,

> museums and galleries need the revenue generated from copyright to meet the cost of core activities, as well as to fund investment in new ventures designed to bring their collections before new audiences.
>
> (Korn and Wienard: 2002, 228)

As an illustration of the point, in 2009 the City of Glasgow was so concerned that it was losing income through unauthorised reproductions of Salvador Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross,* that the city hired a legal firm to issue "cease and desist" letters to suspected copyright infringers across the world (Carrell, 2009).

Considering the possibility of art as commodity, gives rise to further enquiry on the nature

of an artwork. Christopher B. Steiner suggests that there are other realms in which the definition of an artwork can be measured or tested beyond the economic (Steiner, 2001). His particular interest is in the legal identity of artworks, where "objects are removed (both physically and conceptually) from their original cultural contexts and examined in the harsh light of legal discourse" (Steiner, 2001:207). One of his cases in point is the 1926 dispute, Brancusi vs United States, where the artist and his supporters defended the sculpture *Bird in Space* against the U.S. Customs Service's claim that as a manufactured item import tariffs were due to be paid. In this and other cases, the cold gaze of customs and tax officials regarded the work suspiciously; not as art, but as manufactured objects at best and at worst as base materials or components. Steiner suggests the legal view strips objects of their cultural context and leave them "voiceless" as arguments focus on standardised terms; "Art, by definition, is a contested terrain, and when it is dragged through the halls of justice its indeterminacy is bound, as it were, to shine" (Steiner, 2001: 229). Again Appadurai's analysis of the social lives of things changing how they are regarded seems both pertinent and to accurately reflect a variety of different situations that objects may be found in. Steiner's contribution is straightforwardly to add another facet (or facets) to that object biography.

In his book *Art and Value : Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics,* Dave Beech cautions against the "red herring" of over-emphasising the importance of the art market (Beech, 2015: 19). In his discussion of the production of art and why this leads him to classify art as economically exceptional, he observes,

> Market mechanisms are certainly present in the art world, but other mechanisms are also present. I will not assume that market mechanisms will always dominate over discursive mechanisms or state mechanisms or scholastic mechanisms (Beech, 2015: 2)

adding that, "The existence of art dealers, collectors, auction houses and art asset managers does not say anything about art's mode of production" (2015: 8). If this corollary to the preceding discussion on market and commodity is the case, then it raises the question why, especially in a study of less commercial approaches to encountering art,

discuss art-economics at all? My answer is twofold; firstly, while I agree with Beech that the market is by no means the whole picture for artists and audiences, I return to the media headlines, which perpetuate a market-based view of art and artists thereby creating an obstacle to wider engagement. In the experience of curator and gallerist Patricia Fleming, people, "see/hear about how much contemporary art sells for and this is a general bench mark" (Fleming, 2020). Ironically, given the lack of transparent pricing, it is as if a horribly adhesive price label is so large and misplaced, that it obscures the majority of the object. Rather than ignore the label and try to see what remains visible, I have attempted to pick at it, not because it can be discarded completely, but in order to reposition it, to one side, rather than at the forefront of the object/discussion.

My second point is that consideration of market and economics lead me to wider discussions around exchange. I will expand on this shortly as I come to discuss gifts, exchange and the work of Marcel Mauss. Beforehand it is worth noting that in this thesis, the art-engagements I explore demonstrate a range of attitudes to and situations of commodity status. Artworks are purchased or borrowed or commissioned. As I will discuss, collecting groups have a financial relationship with art. This of course is not the entire story, but a finance-model is required to purchase works collectively and agreements and systems provide a baseline when things go wrong.

Questions around commodification may seen remote from everyday borrowing from *artotheks*. However, establishing and expanding a library collection requires artworks to be purchased and issues of insurance and risk could turn the cold eyes of loss adjusters to artworks. Likewise, community commissioning may not initially seem to involve commodification, but this very much depends on the nature of specific projects, in particular regarding the initial finance and any on-going maintenance of the commissioned artwork. The question for both mediator and community commissioners arises of how to fund the project and who will do the fund-raising. It could be seen that having a mediator-producer who generates the project finance professionalises the process and excludes the

commissioners from a key aspect of the process. Alternatively, it might be useful to delegate the task to someone with the appropriate experience and dedicated time.

These examples reflect some of the economic questions underpinning this thesis. Adopting Appadurai's view on commodification creates fluidity allowing objects to be commodities at the point of sale, while having different status at other moments; touchstone of story, souvenir, collected item, loan, community symbol and so on. At times the commodity is sharply defined and at others it fades out of view. For confirmed collectors this flow creates scope for polyvalent thinking; an awareness of market, commodity and value balanced by considering the object aesthetically. Russell W. Belk, whose work will be discussed further below, refers to this position as “the double nature of collecting”, embracing potentially contradictory positions of materialism and anti-materialism (Belk, 1998).

Collecting, consumption and identity

Belk has observed that collectors could appear to be perfect consumers: the collection itself requiring additions and development in, potentially, a quest towards completion. A state avoided by further refinements to the collecting criteria (Bianchi, 1997: 277). Consequently the collector, “joyfully and passionately engages in a continuous shopping mission and is ever alert for new desired acquisitions" (Belk,1998: 9). The true picture, Belk suggests is more complex, with collecting forming a pattern of human interaction, determined by established customs and practices. In his analysis, even when a collected object is purchased it is transformed by entering a collection; an “act of sacralization” (Belk, 1998:14). In this respect he sees a parallel to gift giving and suggests, “gift-giving and collecting present more laudable and even noble ways of coming to own and possess objects" than other forms of consumption (1998:15). However, he concludes that,

> collectors do not always live up to this ideal, and the materialistic aspects of collecting persist as well. At its worst, collecting becomes little more than compulsive shopping... (Belk, 1998:17).

Thus the “double-nature” Belk refers to in his paper's title occurs when collecting oscillates

between “both sacred and profane; both opposing and celebrating the market; both materialistic and anti-materialistic” (1998: 8).

Marina Bianchi (1997) regards collecting not as atypical consumer behaviour, but rather a paradigm of it. If collecting is a way of selecting and organising purchases, then this is no different from more general patterns of consumption; organising and navigating choices in the midst of an endless array of goods. In a similar vein, Daniel Miller has argued repeatedly that consumption is not an activity that victimises individuals, rather a creative vehicle for people and communities (2002, 2008, 2012). In particular, in *Consumption and Its Consequences* (2012) he stresses that this view is the result of qualitative fieldwork, allowing him to reject more theoretical dismissals of consuming behaviour. He writes,

> For the likes of Baudrillard people are merely the mannequins
> who wear the clothes which ensure that the fashion system can
> continue to perpetuate its drive into constant profitability. But
> whenever I go with an actual shopper down an actual high street.
> I see something very different from this assumed passivity (Miller, 2012: 54).

Miller wants to explain the world as he finds it and sees consumption as too prevalent and too complex to be understood through a more traditional Marxist lens.

Belk, Bianchi and Miller share an acknowledgement that there is an element of creativity and enjoyment in shopping, purchasing and consumption. Whether this is intensified for the collector might vary from individual to individual although the prevalence of the metaphor of the hunt as being part of the appeal of collecting is perhaps indicative (Belk, 1995; Formanek, 1991; Yoxhall ,1908). Buck and Greer warn that without a chosen focus collectors "can run the risk of [. . .] undisciplined shopping, or badly focused trophy hunting" (2006: 38); raising polarities of good/bad or systematic/uncontrolled collecting. These dualities may favour the organised collector, but in defence of the more acquisitive approach as epitomised by Andy Warhol it has been noted,

> Pop is about quantity, and Andy was about more more more [sic].
> He wasn't the kind of collector obsessed with filling the gaps.
> On the contrary- while not undiscriminating, he was essentially

> nondiscriminatory: interested in anything and everything (Aronson, 2015: 213).

In this instance, rather than being undisciplined spending or bad collecting, the relationship between collecting practice and creative practice is important. Aronson's reading of Warhol's approach is supported by Bianchi's observations on the role of novelty and choice in collecting (Bianchi, 1997). She suggests that,

> Choice [. . .] is forever dynamic, never at rest. It is a learning/search process, where emotions, in the form of failure and reward, pleasantness and unpleasantness, play a role (Bianchi, 1997: 284).

The collector exercises their choice in making new purchases for the collection, discerning patterns which emerge, grouping and displaying objects and remoulding the collection rationale.

The significance given to shopping is not without its critics. Bjørnar Olsen (2010) laments the anthropological focus on the consumption of goods, defending instead study of the materiality and experienced utility of an object. With regard to collecting art, although paradigms exist at fairs, in galleries and at auctions to make a "shopping" experience distinctive, even exclusive, one might expect the material art object to be the primary focus. However, this may not always be the case. I have already noted how observers (Horowitz, 2011 and Saatchi, 2009) cast doubt on the interests and motives of some art event attendees. Additionally free-port storage facilities are filled with artworks which are rarely seen (Velimirović, 2018, online) and may be traded while remaining under lock and key. The question could be asked, if not simply for the joy of living with the artwork, what is gained by describing oneself as an art collector?

Many scholars have explored the relationship between collecting activities and self-image (Muensterberger, 1994; Olmstead, 1991; Belk, 1995; Macdonald, 2006; Smith, 2007; Miller, 2012). Focusing foremost on the collected object, Jean Baudrillard noted that, "An object no longer specified by its function is defined by the subject" (Baudrillard, 2005: 92). In other words, if a carpet is not used simply as a floor covering, but is "re-purposed" by its

new owner, particularly for Baudrillard into a collection, the owner/subject controls its new function/non-function. He suggests, "through collecting, the passionate pursuit of possession finds fulfilment and the everyday prose of objects is transformed into poetry, into a triumphant unconscious discourse" (2005, 93). The architect of this transformation is, of course, the collector and ultimately the power to transform an object through collecting it becomes the power to transform the self through the collection. While the actions of high-end art collectors can be seen in this light; as a collection grows, so do power, influence and an accompanying self-identity of artworld success, Macdonald cautions against one dimensional readings of collectors' motivations. In discussing correspondences between individual and museum collecting, she suggests that the lived experiences of individuals illustrate a "rich mix of factors at work in the activities of any one collector" (2006, 90).

Another consideration in these questions of identity is the potential tension between individual and social identity. In this study of social approaches to collecting and engaging with art, this merits further exploration, which follows below and in Chapters Four and Six.

Considering the individual identity in relation to consumption, Monica L. Smith observes,

> Roles and identities are developed early in life, but they are also highly changeable and can be modified by the individual. The use of material culture is the most straightforward way of expressing these shifts and subtleties of identity as they are selectively created and afterwards displayed to others (Smith, 2007, 414).

Following the arc of the individual wealthy collector of contemporary art illustrates her point. It is possible to trace the self-image of an art collector being confirmed through purchasing art, being seen at openings and auctions, before even bolder steps such as building museums, commissioning and developing international loans and partnerships . The media trail of just one collector demonstrates this development. In 2013 Budi Tek was described by Art Collector magazine as, "a Chinese-Indonesian entrepreneur and collector whose fortune, [was] amassed through poultry and processed foods...." (Woodard, 2013).

Previously, the New York Times noted, Tek had been "largely unknown" in the art market prior to 2012 when he was placed eighth on *Art and Auction Magazine*'s list of most influential figures (Kolesnikov-Jessop, 2012). Three years later, with two private museums open, loan arrangements with internationally respected partners and a seat on the Tate's Asia Pacific Acquisitions Committee, Tek was described as a "collector and museum director" (Gaskin, 2015). He stated, "Collecting would be like my second job, or now it's become my main job I think for the rest of my life" before responding to a question about his business interests by saying, "I'm retired already. I don't talk about it" (Gaskin, 2015). When interviewed by the *Financial Times*, Tek acknowledged that he enjoyed the recognition his collecting brought, "It's what makes me excited; it's what makes me satisfied" (Wrathall, 2015). Also adding that he hoped it would be how he was remembered. Diagnosed with cancer and given between six months and a year to live, Tek has not only survived, but continues to realise his recent goal of operating his private Shanghai Yuz Museum as a public institution. In 2019 he reflected,

> We'll be establishing the kind of legacy that can actually benefit *every member* of my family—because the name Yuz, the name Tek, would benefit them more in the future than an extra dollar would (Goldstein, 2019).

The trajectory from rich business man to influential art collector to museum owner to philanthropist is not only complete, but is future-proofed too; with the media covering and thereby endorsing the evolving narrative.

Successfully performing the identity of a high-end collector may help in being viewed as such and coming to be such within high-end circles, but could these identities in some way present a barrier to engaging with contemporary art for a broader community? The central problem in this instance is not what rich people chose to do with their money, but the consequences this managed aura has on the relationship between art and artists and the wider majority of the population.

In considering identity as a social or individual construct, the writing of Erving Goffman is

useful. In his work *Stigma, Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, he discusses how perceived "difference" from dominant "norms" impacts on individuals and groups resulting in stigmatisation (Goffman, 1968). He argues that, "the nature of an individual, as he himself [sic] and we impute it to him, is generated by the nature of his group affiliations" (1968: 137).

His observations on "the wise" (non-stigmatised members of stigmatised groups) are also of interest, suggesting that individuals not of one group can gain acceptance into that group through familiarity or insight and, crucially, acceptance (Goffman,1968: 41ff). Reflecting on the cultivated identity of a high-end collector, such as Tek, this analysis is useful - although clearly I am extending the notion of "the own" beyond stigmatised groups, to other, arguably elite groups.

While Goffman discusses extensively social identity, he acknowledges the need to account for personal identity which, he suggests,

> has to do with the assumption that the individual can be differentiated from all others and that around this means of differentiation a single continuous record of social facts can be attached [...] to which still other biographical facts can be attached (1968: 74).

He clarifies the inter-relationship between individual identity and social identity, noting, "It is plain that in constructing a personal identification of an individual we make use of aspects of his social identity" (1968: 84).

This dynamic relationship between the individual and society is one that anthropologist Tim Ingold describes through the metaphor of a rope made of many strands,

> A whole that is made up from individual parts is a totality in which everything is articulated or 'joined up'. But the rope is always weaving, always in process and–like social life itself–never finished (Ingold, 2015: 11).

Reflecting on the work of Marcel Mauss and in particular his influential text, *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Ingold finds Mauss' reference to "the

octopuses and the anemones" of the sea apposite (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 102). Expanding on the phrase, Ingold envisages an underwater world where differing entities maintain their distinctive qualities, but nonetheless intertwine. In a similar vein, an earlier reflection on Mauss' text, combined with her own fieldwork, led Marilyn Strathern to observe, "Life is not imagined to be without supports: one acts to create the supports" (Strathern, 1988: 314). This goes to heart of one of Mauss' central points which is relevant to this study; relationships and understanding are created and bound through exchange and interaction.

Before expanding on this, it is useful to recall Mauss' project. He hoped to gain insights to and understanding of economic and societal exchanges in the West by reviewing the ethnographic record of gift exchange in other world cultures. He concluded,

> These facts [of gift exchange] not only throw light upon our morality and help to direct our ideals. In their light, we can analyse better the most general economic facts, and even this analysis helps us dimly to perceive better organizational procedures applicable in our societies
> (Mauss: 2002 [1925], 91).

While some (Douglas, 2002 [1990]: xix) have questioned the validity of Mauss' conclusions on the functioning of social democracy in the West, the text is most widely remembered and referenced for its analysis of gift exchange. Arguably, this text brings discourse on "the gift" to anthropological and philosophic thought.

The significance of Mauss' work can be seen in the discourse it has generated through subsequent decades and across disciplines. Writing the entry on *Gifts* for the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* Yunxiang Yan suggests that although Mauss may not have been the first to write on gift exchange, his contribution was to offer "the first theory on various gift-exchange systems in non-Western cultures that continues to provide inspirations for the study of the gift" (Yan 2020: 4). Further contextualising the impact of Mauss' work across diverse fields of study, Mark Osteen notes;

> ...*The Gift* is not just a synthesis of anthropological research: it is also a history of culture and a work of oral philosophy. Scholars with diverse disciplinary and political allegiances have emphasized different passages

> and drawn different conclusions from it, so that *The Gift* bears within it the seeds of virtually every important study of gift giving that has succeeded it (Osteen, 2002: 3).

In his comprehensive introduction to *The Question of the Gift. Essays across disciplines* Osteen traces considerations on gifting from the fields of anthropology, philosophy, sociology and literary theory. While my scope here is not as broad, it is useful to reflect on key works of scholarship most immediately relevant to this study. In spite of Osteen's caution that "gift practices do not follow rules: they seep outside of our categories" (2002: 25). As Yan's observes this major form of social exchange "encompasses multiple domains of social life" (Yan, 2020: 12). The position of gift-exchange in creating networks and relationships makes it an area of key interest to this study.

Returning to Mauss' text, I want to consider two particular differing exchange systems; the *kula* and potlatch. It is worth detailing these practices, not only because I reference them throughout the case studies that follow, but also because, as Yan highlights,

> ...although gift exchange exists in all human societies, the form it takes varies greatly depending on the particular culture within which it is rooted (Yan, 2020: 8).

Thus, when drawing parallels between gift-exchanges and social collecting practices (and how the former is a lens through which to consider the latter) I aspire to being clear in highlighting which particular system I have in mind or if I am drawing broader conclusions. Just as Mauss is both specific and also draws parallels between systems.

In discussing the *kula* system of the Trobriand Islands (now part of Papua New Guinea) Mauss credits Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) as his primary, but not uncritiqued, source of information. Mauss details three practices in this section of his text: the *kula,* an exchange between chiefs; the *gimwali*, a more economic style of exchange of practical items and the *Uvalaku*, which involves significant sea journeys and begins with "the rule to leave without having anything to exchange" (Mauss 2002 [1925]: 28). In that last instance, the cycle is completed the following year "when the visiting tribe plays host [. . .] to the

fleet of the tribe that has been visited [and] the presents [are] reciprocated with interest" (Mauss 2002 [1925]: 28). Central to these exchanges are esteemed objects collectively known as *vaygu'a* which are bracelets (*mwali*) and necklaces (*soulava*). These are exchanged around the islands in opposite directions. Mauss explains "One can and should keep them from one *kula* to the next and the whole community is proud of the *vaygu'a* that one of its chiefs has obtained" (2002 [1925]: 30). Mauss also notes that the *kula*

> is only one element [. . .] in a vast system of services rendered and reciprocated [. . .] The *kula* merely gives concrete expression to many other institutions, bringing them together (2002 [1925]: 34).

He uses Malinowski's expression "impregnated" to describe how *kula* exchanges permeate the islanders' lives and culture (2002 [1925]: 37).

Reflecting on *kula* exchange, Yan notes

> On the surface, gift-giving in [. . .] the Kula ring [. . .] is an obligatory act with specific expectations about the time of return and the volume of the returning gift that takes place between persons as representatives of their own familial/kin groups. These gifts serve sociopolitical functions while forming an important part of the local economy, motivating economic behaviour and 'making the world go around' (Yan 2020: 3).

It is this capacity of *kula* (and other types of gift) exchange to build and bind relationships that are of particular interest to this study. Reflecting on gift giving within Western capitalist societies, Lee Anne Fennell regards gifts as "conceptual misfit[s]" (Fennell, 2002: 85). Nonetheless she concludes that gifts facilitate "empathetic dialogue" and that a successful gift can "create or solidify a relationship" (2002: 99). Also situated within industrialised societies, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's exploration of the economies and social anthropology of matsutake mushroom harvesting draws a parallel with *kula* exchange and the role of the *vaygu'a.* Considering the precious and valuable nature of the matsutake she observes,

> Almost no one buys a fine matsutake just to eat. Matsutake build relationships, and as gifts they cannot be separated from these relationships. Matsutake become extensions of the person, the definitional feature of value in a gift economy (Tsing, 2015:123).

In this study, I seek to draw similar parallels between gift exchange practices and the practices I detail in my case studies. I will go on to demonstrate how in social collecting practices while the objects of focus, exchange and circulation are artworks (rather than necklaces, bracelets or mushrooms), what subsequently develops are relationships between artists and others.

At this point it is worth noting anthropologist Marilyn Stathern's caution that the term "relation" (and its associated terms, relationship, relations, etc) is too often used as if it is inherently positive (Strathern, 2014). In considering gift-exchange, Osteen's overview is useful at this point as he highlights two distinct positions within the discipline of sociology. One, as I have outlined above, emphasises "gifts' capacity to forge or solidify social bonds" while the other position highlights gift exchange as a mechanism for acquiring and exercising power (Osteen, 2002: 17). Lewis Hyde is described by Osteen as a "wholehearted champion" of the first approach and before expanding the discussion on gift exchange, I want to outline why for all its persuasive, literary arguments and alignment with some of the concepts of social bonds I have discussed, I feel that Hyde's position strays into territory which does not concord with either my research findings or wider observations.

In his work, *The Gift. How The Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (2012 [1979]) Hyde describes artists as being in possession of "an inner gift, a talent [which is also] a mystery" (2012[1979]: 283). Through discussions of folk stories, ethnographic accounts, lives of literary figures and "much more" (Atwood, 2012: x) he explores the relationship between artist and their work, their audiences and markets. Concluding that,

> the primary commerce of art is a gift exchange, that unless the work is the realization of the artist's gift and unless we the audience, can feel the gift it carries, there is no art; I still believe that a gift can be destroyed by the market place (Hyde, 2012 [1979]: 276).

Would it be too forthright to suggest that had Hyde carried out fieldwork with living artists

he might have reached different conclusions? That being an artists does not rely on waiting for inspiration to strike - the gift to arrive - but rather that any artistic practice involves just that, practice which includes study, reflection, research, critique, work, acquiring new skills, learning from mistakes and more. Chapter Six of this study describes one example of an artist's process; exploring materials, carrying out research, making a site visit, engaging with commissioners before making works and final presentation.

In subsequent sections of this chapter, I highlight some of the financial disparities in the artworld and the harsh economic realities for many artists. Hyde acknowledges that artists may have to take "second jobs" to support themselves because earning a living from making art is not easy (especially if one disdains the market). However, he suggests that any commercially orientated work will be of lesser merit,

> It may be hard to formulate a rule of thumb by which to know when an artist is preserving his[sic] gifts and when he is letting the market call the tune, but we know the distinction exists (Hyde, 2012 [1979]: 280).

This raises more questions than answers; one of which might be, which marketplace? A commission- either public or private? Selling work through a gallery? Selling work from the studio or an exhibition? Any of those situations could be understood as commercial. Would serious artists place works in those domains which they felt were secondary? Hyde's example is of Edward Hopper (1882-1967) making magazine illustrations for money as he built his reputation as a painter. Hyde describes these drawings as "commercial art" (2012[1979]: 280), which of course they were; it does not necessarily mean they were poorly made illustrations.

In summarising *The Gift. How The Creative Spirit Transforms the World* Osteen considers that Hyde has wide appeal because he,

> makes creation and interpretation sound noble, even holy; he provides a powerful defense of the moral and social value of art [. . .] He also depicts artists and critics as valiant defenders of aesthetic value and truth hedged about by philistine merchants (Osteen, 2002: 29).

However, he continues, "Alas, his analysis is fraught with problems" (2002: 29). In addition to concerns of the "romanticised" view of the artist as I have suggested above, Osteen finds further problems in Hyde's view that, "*The gift is property that perishes*" because the gift in circulation "must always be used up, consumed, eaten" (Hyde, 2012 [1979]: 8). Hyde expands, "the gift perishes *for the person who gives it away*. In gift exchange the transaction itself consumes the object" (2012 [1979]: 9). Osteen rejects this view by countering that,

> gifts retain a vestige of inalienability and thereby encourage connection because in some sense they are *never* really passed on, but retain the imprint of the original giver (Osteen, 2002: 29).

In other words, something of the giver is retained in the gift, the view adopted by Mauss through his analysis of the Maori concept of *hau*,

> the thing itself possesses a soul, is of the soul. Hence it follows that to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 16).

Returning to the context of the arts, Osteen demonstrates an application of the concept,

> Whoever reads a book with close attention or masters a piece of music incorporates some of of that artist's identity, insight, or skill. In this regard, art works are gifts that never cease to belong to the first owner: they are property that *never* perishes (Osteen, 2002: 29).

A further example of the application of this aspect of Mauss' thought will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In positioning Hyde's work within one of the two ways of considering gift-exchange, Osteen notes "Hyde barely acknowledges that gifts can also widen power differentials or promote hostility" (Osteen, 2002: 28) and it is towards this other facet of the gift that I now turn my attention. Osteen chooses an interesting label for this aspect of gift exchange; "The *Godfather* Paradigm" (after Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 mafia dynasty film) and explains it as "when I give more to you or perform extravagant favors for you, I both enhance my prestige and engender deep obligations" (Osteen, 2002: 18). This paradigm is, of course, based on the potlatch as practised in communities of the Northwest coast of

North America.

While Mauss identifies commonalities between potlatch and other gift exchanges practised in other parts of the world, he sees as distinctive both “the violence, exaggeration and antagonisms” arising from potlatch exchanges (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 45) and ideas of honour and prestige linked to extravagance and destruction (2002 [1925]: 47-48). From a First Nation perspective, reflecting on colonisers efforts to outlaw potlatch, curator Candice Hopkins describes these exchanges as,

> competitive gift-giving, for which the guest of a potlatch was then expected to respond with an even greater display of wealth during the next ceremony, essentially bankrupting the chiefs and the host community. However, the social contract – the reciprocal bond of ceremony – ensured that this debt was paid back in the future *with interest* (Hopkins, 2016: online).

In her view it was the separate social structures and systems of governance arising from potlatch that colonisers “could not countenance” and led to attempts to ban the practice (Hopkins, 2016: online).

Considering the impact on social relations of the potlatch, Mauss finds that this exchange consolidates social position and hierarchy. Mauss writes,

> what is noteworthy about these tribes [of the American Northwest] is the principle of rivalry and hostility that prevails in all these practices. They go as far as to fight and kill chiefs and nobles (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 8).

Osteen describes this exchange system as “the gift as poison” and sees the echoes of the inherent antagonism in other general, Western gift-making (Osteen, 2002: 18). In Chapter Four, I will discuss how the lens of potlatch can be used to examine an aspect of social collecting.

The aggressive and even violent elements of potlatch are also central to Georges Bataille's reflections in his work *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (1991[1949]). He considers the potlatch to be a "strange but familiar institution" in which “*giving* must

become *acquiring a power*" and the giving or destruction is done ostentatiously "for others" (Bataille, 1991[1949]: 69).

Beyond its original cultural context, potlatch as described by Mauss and later by Bataille, is credited with influencing the Situationist movement (Sansi, 2015: 31). Bataille's thoughts on consumption and prodigality being echoed in the movement's rejection of art markets, rather bringing playful, disruptive situations to daily life. Started by the Lettrist movement in 1954, before being taken over by the Situationist in 1959 (at issue 30) the association between the potlatch exchange and the European cultural movement is consolidated in their free-at-the-point-of-distribution bulletin *Potlatch.* Heralded in its first edition as "the most engaged publication in the world: we are working toward the conscious and collective establishment of a new civilization" (The Lettrist International, 1954).

The intentionally provocative content of *Potlatch* and the fact that the paper was given away embodied an understanding of potlatch as a combative system of exchanging objects and ideas. In the first Situationist edition of the bulletin a reprinted telegram exchange, entitled *Taking Out the Intellectual Trash,* provides an example:

> The SI to [Hans] Platschek: After your second offense in Panderma, the Situationist International considers you a definite cretin. Go off and court Hantaï.
> Platschek to the SI: We must eradicate the Parisian gossip mongers whose controlling spirit has infected the revolutionary intellectuals. Their royal we is detestable.
> The SI to Platschek: The individualist Platschek is too kind. One is a revolutionary intellectual if one does not control. But control has been far too easy. It's over. The 'I' without 'We' falls back into the prefabricated mass
> (The Situationist International, 1959).

The movement embraced the seemingly disruptive nature of potlatch seeing this quality as aligned with their wider aims of laying bare the seductive appeal of capitalism through antagonistic interventions. In the opinion of Keir Martin this took the form of asserting power over commodities through destruction or their transformation into gifts (Martin, 2012: 134). He cites the example of,

> Their [Situationists'] analysis of the revolutionary power of the transformation of commodities into gifts and de-commodification is best illustrated in their response to the Los Angeles riots of 1965 (Martin, 2012: 134).

He goes on to reference one of the movement's co-founders Guy Debord's response to the riots, in which Debord celebrates the removal and destruction of property and of people exerting their power over commodities (Martin, 2012: 135).

The movement was, of course, more than one of revolt even if a gradual shift of focus moved away from art practice towards cultural theory and politics (Sansi, 2015). As art historian Thomas F. McDonough describes it, "an early aesthetic position that evolved, by 1968, into a political vanguardism" (McDonough,1997: 9). He goes on to argue that despite most artists leaving or being expelled from the movement by 1961, the division between practice and theory has, at times, been over stated (McDonough,1997: 9). The relevance of the movement to this study goes beyond the title of the bulletin and other arts practices (including considering city as a site, creating situations to disrupt daily life, *détournement*) but in the legacy their activities and thinking have on the relations between audience and artists. The discussion of which follows in the next section, however before leaving the discussion of Mauss and the gift, there is one further aspect to discuss; the duality of the gift.

One theme which recurs in *The Gift* is the "hybrid" nature of gift-exchanges (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 93) meaning that gift practices are "both disinterested and obligatory" (2002 [1925]: 42); they appear free and generous but there is an understanding of return. While some theorists (Osteen notes Derrida and his essay *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*) contest that the gift becomes logically impossible at the moment when a return is imagined, Osteen replies that "human beings are quite capable of simultaneously entertaining conflicting ideas" (Osteen, 2002:16). For him "perhaps the primary truth about the gift [is] its essential ambiguity" (Osteen, 2002:14). This ambiguity allows him to suggest "human behaviour and the stories with which we dramatize it [. . .] require that theorists become

flexible enough to embrace and emulate the gift's own elasticity" (Osteen, 2002:16). In this study, the research, fieldwork and stories that unfold explore how using the gift elastically helps to understand and see the value in the practices described.

In pursuing this path, I will be following in the footsteps of Roger Sansi, who in his work *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (2015) considers gift exchange in relation to socially engaged practice. Where I diverge from Sansi and, I would argue, make a contribution to knowledge is in looking at processes not of art-making but of art-encounter and art-collecting following considerations of gift exchange.

Sansi has commented, "Mauss opened the door to imagine other ontological possibilities to Western individualism" (Sansi, 2016: 427), while anthropologist Antonio Marazzi suggests that by studying *kula* exchange "we also enter into it [...] we see in action a gift given to us by the Trobrianders. The object given is, in this case, the idea of giving itself" (Marazzi, 2001: 281). He continues to reflect that this expansion of exchange opens opportunities for potentially more equitable dialogue. Focusing on group activities, this study turns away from theories of the individual to position itself within social, equitable and almost symbiotic, models of exchange.

Ownership and Community

Exploring ideas of social identity in turn leads to questions of community. In his discussion on similarity and difference in relation to the field of anthropological enquiry, Ingold ponders how dull life would be if everyone were the same. He argues,

> We belong to communities because each of us, being different, has something to give. Identity in community is thus fundamentally relational: who we are is an index of where we find ourselves, at any moment, in the give and take of collective life (Ingold, 2018: 27).

I will return to questions of community shortly; firstly in regard to concepts of community ownership. Later I will explore community within the realm of art-making; expanding on social practices, relations and questions of participation.

Prior to those discussions, I want to examine ownership through the question posed by Joseph Sax why can't you throw darts at your Rembrandt? (Sax,1999: 1). Sax, probably most widely known for his innovative work on environmental law, championed shared resources and public access to them. His question on the limits of ownership and resulting considerations of stewardship suggests wider concerns around the collective benefit from the dissemination of knowledge, including access to artworks.

Sax argues that while legal title does give an individual rights of ownership over artworks, buildings, papers and collections, it is in society's interests for these rights to be mediated. In the case of artworks he argues particularly that a level of compulsion is required and should take primacy over ownership to ensure that an artist's work is protected from wilful destruction by a disenchanted owner. (Examples he discusses include Graham Sutherland's portrait of Winston Churchill and Diego Rivera's mural for the Rockefeller Centre.) Additionally, he suggests that along with papers and collections, access to artworks should not unreasonably be denied to scholarship. In essence, Sax aims to promote the concept and values of stewardship as inherent to ownership of cultural objects.

Of course, Sax is neither alone nor the first in championing stewardship; he cites Cicero (106-43BCE) and Pliny (23-79AD) arguing for public access to cultural spoils of war. Rudmin (1991: 89) credits St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas with developing the concept, although the latter is building not only on the former, but also on other early Christian thinkers (in particular, regarding property, Basil and Ambrose). As Salsich points out these early scholars claim their orthodoxy from Biblical sources and he highlights various examples of stewardship in those texts (Salsich, 2000: 22).

Outwith the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in the fifth century BCE, Plato recommended that the guardians of the ideal republic should have no personal property “beyond the barest essentials”, with houses and stores being held in common and a prohibition on even

touching gold and silver. (Plato, 2003:118/416d ff). The rationale was that without material distractions, the guardians would be better placed to act in the interests of the whole community. While Plato's ideas of common property clearly focus on fulfilling basic needs rather than acquiring property to be shared, it could be argued that there are echoes of the Platonic guardian in the role of the steward. Looking forward to my three case studies, I will observe the manifestations and degrees of stewardships which arise.

Considering differentiable categories of property Bailkin writes,

> normal definitions of unqualified ownership are not adequate to describe cultural objects, because an entire community may have a stake in protecting these objects (Bailkin, 2004: 2).

She, like Sax, believes that with limits to (mis)use of private property, cultural objects can be "future-proofed" for generations and scholars to come. Of course, the practical detail here implies discussion around which objects should be preserved and by whom. Owain Rhys (2011) has demonstrated that knowing which items of contemporary culture to collect can be a challenging if ultimately creative process, echoing the discussion of Tate's Chantrey bequest, I highlighted in the previous chapter.

Arguably, it is in the field of cultural heritage the concept of stewardship is particularly contested. From the ownership and display of antiquities and ethnographic objects to provenance and contemporary cultural relevance debate is current, often passionate and sometimes divisive.

As the great Western encyclopaedic museums continue to expand with satellite museums at home and abroad (eg. Louvre Lens and Abu Dhabi, The Hermitage Amsterdam and across Russia), their champions (including MacGregor, 2008 and Appiah, 2009) continue to argue that they are best placed to be the stewards (or trustees) of objects from across the world and centuries. Doing so, they argue allows "collections to provoke people from one part of the world to think about the world itself" (MacGregor, 2008: 54). Controversy

intensifies when these museums not only host long-standing contested acquisitions, but continue to be active in acquiring antiquities and objects from other cultures. Supporting the position of encyclopaedic museums, James Cuno (art historian and current CEO of The Getty) has challenged both UNESCO and individual national governments' protocols on acquisition and movement on artefacts, calling for fewer restrictions (Cuno, 2008). While Kwame Anthony Appiah (2009) has noted examples of these protocols and processes resulting in artefact destruction in Afghanistan.

Others, however, see greater dangers in any protocol relaxation, questioning whether these "venerable" institutions are necessarily best placed to ethically acquire artefacts, when provenance may not be scrutinised, when illegal trade is common and dubious acquisitions continue to be made (Renfrew, 2003 and 2008; Brodie and Renfrew, 2005; Gill and Chippendale, 2008; Proulx, 2013). Concurrent with recent publications on the looting of Benin bronzes (Hicks, 2020 and Phillips, 2021) some aspirations to repatriate artworks and antiquities stolen during colonial expansion are gradually being realised. In 2021 Aberdeen University Museum became the first to formally agree to return a Benin bronze sculpture with similar, larger returns scheduled from the Humboldt Forum, Berlin and Musée du Quai Branly- Jacques Chirac, Paris later in the year (Oltermann, 2021; Rea, 2020; University of Aberdeen, 2021).

Despite arguments about the best means of protecting cultural heritage across the world, fundamentally these disputes arise because it is agreed that certain objects, artefacts and sites are of value to all humanity. In the existence of UNESCO and its steps to protect world heritage Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett finds evidence of a global public sphere, akin to a global cultural commons. However, she also notes a tension at centre of the UNESCO mission; to preserve human diversity for the benefit of common humanity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). A recent illustration of such tensions and competing interests can found found in the case of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, which in 2020 was reclaimed by the Turkish Government as a functioning place of worship, where previously it had been

considered a museum within a UNESCO World Heritage Area (UNESCO, 2020). National and international politics, religion and world heritage collide, with no obvious resolution.

More relevant still for the purposes of this study, folklorist Dorothy Noyes raises questions around the definition and practical realisation of concepts of community within the framework of UNESCO cultural designations (Noyes, 2006). She finds the term "community" used as a panacea which disguises many shortcomings:

> "Community" is the magic word around which consensus can take shape in international tensions over the uses of tradition. "Community" speaks to the moral concerns of the larger publics to whom policymakers must answer indexing both the metropolitan romance with authenticity and subaltern demands for justice and agency (Noyes, 2006: 31).

Through the discussion, she indicates that she sees "community" being used as a belittling term, whereby the powerful can romanticise and/or patronise; "a verbal gift from the rich to the poor" (Noyes, 2006: 29). She concludes, "Where there is economic and political agency, culture can take care of itself" (Noyes, 2006: 45). In the case of community commissioning, I will discuss the relationship between community, mediator and artists and explore the degree of agency experienced by all parties.

I am also aware of falling into a trap of romanticising community and to this end a range of studies on community ownership are useful in highlighting the practical, everyday successes and stumbling blocks. As there has to date been little research on community collecting and ownership of art, writing on intangible heritage, wind farms, land and other built assets is worth consideration. Within Scotland, although in different fields, building on this existing research and specifically created organisational structures, could be useful for building a case for Governmental support for new models of community commissioning or supporting community art libraries.

The 2015 Scottish Government *Impact Evaluation of the Community Right to Buy* Report analyses how communities have been affected by and how they perceive aspects of

community ownership. The analysis reflects on community land acquisitions made possible under the 2003 Land Reform (Scotland) Act. While not all the communities surveyed currently own land or built assets, all had engaged to some degree with the process of enacting the community right to buy as established by the Act. Positive impacts of participations were seen as:

- helping to bring the community together to form a community organisation,
- helping to increase understanding of community needs,
- showing that the community could take control over some aspects of its future.

Other factors such as some increase in community action, the acquisition of new skills by individuals and groups, some increase in community cohesion, benefits to the local economy and improvement and increased use of the local area were also noted (Mulholland et al, 2015: 5.10-5.96). Negative impacts were "mainly down to disappointment at being unsuccessful at acquiring the land or asset, opposition from landowners, and a sense of frustration at the process" (Mulholland et al, 2015: 5.11). As I will discuss within the following case studies, it is worth noting that the exchange of ideas, skills and even purpose can be seen to contribute to building community.

Of the main positive outcomes, bringing the community together to form an organisation is worth considering as it raises a series of further questions. Noyes asks "how community may be represented under modern legal and administrative regimes" (2006, 34). The answer in Scotland is that a community body (a designation specified in the 2003 Land Reform (Scotland) Act) is formed. These legislatively recognised bodies can be registered charities, companies limited by guarantee or community benefit societies. While Noyes cautions that, "a fuzzy-edged network of variably positioned persons may in practice end up under the control of a twice-removed and very small subgroup, whose representative status is unclear" (2006, 34). In the context of community buy-outs in Scotland positive relationships and levels of engagement by community members have been determined by action required. Mulholland et al write:

> Feedback from case studies suggested that interest and support

> from communities was at its strongest at certain stages in the process. Firstly, during the process of submitting an application to register an interest, community members became involved as a result of awareness-raising measures carried out by community bodies (e.g. public events, newsletters, posters and flyers). Secondly, community bodies generally felt supported by the wider community when the right to buy had been triggered, particularly during the community ballot stage. However, this level of interest and support has not always been sustained. For those that have attempted to purchase an asset but have been unsuccessful (because land had not come up for sale, or because they were unable to raise funds) interest from the community decreased since the purchase fell through. Case study feedback suggests that where successful community buy-outs have taken place, communities have become directly involved in the process by making use of the community assets that have been secured (Mulholland et al, 2015: 5.36-5.37).

Not everyone wants to spend their evenings and weekends filling in funding applications, for example, and of course practicality dictates that not every community member can be involved at every stage of a group purchase. Delegating to committees or representatives is a well-established organisational principle, for all its potential flaws as noted by Noyes (2006, 34-36). Analysing community energy projects, Gordon Walker notes,

> Apparently similar communities can have different capacities to take on the responsibilities [. . .] Experience has shown that key committed individuals or entrepreneurs can be essential to success..." (Walker, 2008: 4403).

In the context of community collecting, the relationship between the wider community and key activists also arises, as well as the motivation required to realise long-term projects.

Purchasing Power

In terms of Scottish community land buy-outs the sums involved can run into millions causing fund-raising challenges even where there is some Governmental support. Juxtaposing these costs to prices for contemporary art, it is interesting to note Andrea Fraser's observation that in 2008 to be in the income bracket of the top 1% in the US an individual needed an annual income of $380,354, which she wryly reflected was, "hardly the makings of a significant collector" (Fraser, 2013: 78). Rather, she suggests that

membership of the “patron class” starts with an income of $1,803,585 annually. No longer are there simply High Net Worth Individuals, but there are Ultra High Net Worth Individuals. Being in the minority who earn the most is not enough to collect major pieces of contemporary art; one has to be the minority of the minority.

A parallel situation exists with museums and galleries with a remit to collect contemporary art. In 2015/16, Tate purchased artworks worth £7.8 million and received donations of a further £6.6 million worth; the major purchase by Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (GOMA) in 2015 was Douglas Gordon's *Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now*, for the sum of £450,000 (Tate, 2016; Glasgow Life, 2015; The Michael Marks Charitable Trust, 2015). In May 2017, a single painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat sold at auction for $110.5million; more than seven times Tate's entire acquisition budget for the previous year (Gerlis, 2017).

Available funding is not the only challenge for public collections; within budgets there can be debate around acquisition policies. Some, for example, may have considered GOMA's purchase of work by Gordon long overdue (Collecting Contemporary, 2016) and more widely, debate continues over the representation of female artists, Black artists, non-Western artists and other “minority” artists; in essence anyone not a white Western male (Le Brun, 2015; Holmes, 2017; Nochlin,1971).

In answer to these challenges Howard Fox has suggested that museum-based curators need to be more experimental; returning to the impulses of the *wunderkammer* collectors; exploring and puzzling over the new, rather than falling into the post-Enlightenment pattern of definitive claims of longevity and orthodoxy for every contemporary work selected with the imprimatur of high auction room prices (Fox, 2013).
From both financial necessity and philosophical outlook, many museums at this point in time are taking account of the developments within social movements, art theory and

practice and re-assessing their relationships with their collections and their public. Owain Rhys has written about the issues around contemporary collecting within a museum context; highlighting the need for collecting policies to determine which objects are selected for acquisition and what is the process, if any, of de-acquisition. He also discusses the relationship between the public and the museum, referencing the *Welsh Dresser* project, in which various community groups installed significant objects in a traditional dresser (Rhys, 2011).

Questions of what should be collected today, inevitably give rise to other policy issues, arguably summarised in the title of at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales' 2017 exhibition; *Who Decides?* In this instance works for the exhibition were selected by a community group of people who experience homelessness, with an additional element where the general public could also select works to be shown (National Museum Wales, 2017).

Such an approach to collections and public engagement illustrate that some curators and museum directors are considering how best to involve the public in display, exhibition-making and even programming. Clearly this relates to collecting, even if it does not extend to democratising acquisition. This study explores other alternative models of engaging with art, which go further still in de-coupling art from overblown finance.

According to the Scottish Artists Union, the majority of artists in the country, even those with established careers, do not live within the luxury bubble. For example, in 2017, following a six year trend, their annual survey showed that 81% of artists responding earned less than £10,000 per annum from their practice (SAU, 2017). Clearly there is also a dissonance between the average income of artists, average general incomes (in Scotland in 2016, £22,918) and the spending power of UHNWIs.

While it is common practice to talk of *the* artworld, it is more realistic to follow Howard S. Becker (1982) and recognise the existence of various artworlds. From a sociological perspective, Becker considers artworlds to consist of "all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art" (Becker, 1982: 34). He continues,

> Art worlds do not have boundaries around them, so that we can say that these people belong to a particular art world while those people do not. I am not concerned with drawing a line separating an art world from other parts of a society (Becker, 1982: 35).

From populist painters who make significant sums from royalty agreements for products as diverse as jigsaws and umbrellas; to recent graduates balancing delivering workshops, invigilating exhibitions, admin jobs, applying for residencies with making work and building CVs; to established artists teaching part-time or freelance to maintain regular income; to international high earners and household names, who themselves are HNWIs. Each of these worlds, while not necessarily entirely distinct, suggest contrasting lived experiences for the artists at the centre of them.

The worlds to which Becker gives greatest scrutiny are those where other people with particular skills or attributes are pulled into the orbit of the artist. From collaborative processes such as theatre or film-making to seemingly more individualistic work by poets or visual artists, Becker suggests that all artists need others within their world to produce work. As a sociologist, he understands art-making as a social process.

As with the work of Dave Beech discussed earlier, Becker's primary focus is on artistic production. His expandable and shifting art-spheres can account for and include critics, the public and academics however, within his discussion of how "conventions" can be used to aid communication and understanding within these spheres, he observes, "People who do not know the conventions on which an art work depends cannot cooperate in its production" (Becker, 1982: 348) returning to the emphasis on production. This is not to

disagree with Becker's central conclusion that art-making is a social process, but rather to explore how “The discussion of art as collective action reflects a general approach to the analysis of social organization" (Becker, 1982: 369) can be extended. And how this relates to my earlier discussion of networks, exchange and solidarity suggested by the work of Marcel Mauss.

Where I find Mauss' thinking useful is in social networks beyond artistic production; such as the ones I will explore in the case studies that follow. These could be categorised as post-production networks (completed works are borrowed from art libraries or purchased by collecting groups) and pre-production networks (community commissioning). These types of networks can add to, but are slightly distinct from production networks. I will focus on what participating in these networks looks like and what impacts they have on relationships between artist and wider communities. A question for future consideration, is whether these practices are in themselves artistic practice.

In moving away from customary collecting patterns it might be useful to consider Andrea Fraser calls for “a long overdue splitting off of the market dominated sub-field of galleries, auction houses and art fairs” into the “luxury goods business” she perceives it to already be (Fraser, 2013: 81). If this division were realised, might there then be more space for new relationships between artists and the public as collectors, commissioners and borrowers? Might social collecting become wide-spread through the increased buying power of pooled resources, the short-term loans from art libraries and citizen commissioning; potentially re-aligning the paradigm of artist and individual collector/patron. Challenging the assumption that serious contemporary collecting can only be done by those wealthy enough to have staff, who need be concerned that "Cleaners and housekeepers are a notorious source of damage to artworks” (Buck and Greer, 2006 :177). Rather, it might suggest that cleaners and housekeepers can also enjoy, appreciate or even damage their own art on their own walls.

Extending Encounters

What might an artworld without the high-market-value sector look like? This study will examine in detail three options all of which operate currently in varying relations to the elite artworld, but which can also be viewed within the context of wider artistic (and social) movements. Having explored the market-driven artworld, I will now direct my attention to alternatives and in particular to socially engaged practice, which Pablo Helguera views as, "specifically at odds with the capitalist market infrastructure of the art world: it does not fit well in the traditional collecting practices of contemporary art" (Helguera, 2011: 4).

As curator and author Nato Thompson explains the move towards the social in art includes a range of practices and nominative categories; education, relational aesthetics, dialogic aesthetics, social practice, new genre public art, socially engaged practice, social aesthetics (Thompson, 2015, 19). He traces the origins of these approaches to art-making through the twentieth century; from Dadaist performances at Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, to the social sculptures of Joseph Beuys; from the Happenings of the 1950s to the Tropicália movement in 1960s Brazil and on to United States feminists in the 1970s. Other individuals and movements could also be included such as; Arte Povera, the institutional critiques of Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke, Situationist International and many more.

Examples of what might currently be considered within these categories are plentiful; from Rirkrit Tiravanija's *untitled 1990 (pad thai)* where gallery visitors were invited to share a meal to Assemble's Turner Prize winning *Granby Four Streets,* where Assemble continue to collaborate with a threatened community through building-renovation and other projects. One common thread is the involvement of other people, not simply the artist, with "discursivity and sociability" being central (Foster, 2003: online). Models of what that participation may involve vary from project to project and artist to artist. Possible processes include; providing material, becoming the material, engaging with the material

and, according to Helguera can be voluntary, non-voluntary or involuntary (2011,16).

Is this sufficient to make an art movement distinctive? In discussing contemporary writing on social art practices Hal Foster poses the question,

> when has art, at least since the Renaissance, not involved discursivity and sociability? It is a matter of degree, of course, but might this emphasis be redundant? (2003, online)

Advocates for the social approach to art certainly would not disagree that art is social and perhaps always has been. Theorist of relational aesthetics Nicholas Bourriaud proposes that "Art is a state of encounter" (Bourriaud, 2002: 18). Similarly for artist and educator Helguera, "All art, inasmuch as it is created to be communicated to or experienced by others, is social" (Helguera, 2011:1). Given this is the case, what makes this current movement distinctive? Nato Thompson suggests the following answer, "The task of socially engaged artists is the deployment of cultural forms and the production of political change" (Thompson, 2015: 52). While practitioners in other fields (education, architecture, etc.) may share similar aims and use of cultural forms, here Thompson is making the case for a distinctive movement within contemporary visual art. Identifying the aim of political change highlights an area of contention within and around socially engaged art practice: not so much what political change is needed (the typical answer to that lies in specific local issues) but how it should be achieved.

Claire Bishop notes "unrealized political potential' in some social artworks (Bishop, 2006a:13), while Foster expresses concern that "happy interactivity" can lack a clear political context with people "simply getting together sometimes seems to be enough" (Foster, 2003: online). Thompson recognises this situation and sees it as part of a recognisable paradox, where socially engaged art is too didactic for the artworld and too ambiguous for the activist/political world.

Foster's critique of relational aesthetics in particular, contrasts recent social artworks with

those created in the 1980s and 90s at the time of AIDS activism. Driven to respond to a particular crisis situation I identify three key points arising from works made at that time, which continue to have relevance today: urgency, imperative and solidarity. To expand, at a time of crisis a response was required; there was an urgency and immediacy to making a response, the idea that intervening artistically (as well as in other ways) might create change and make a positive difference. The imperative came from a sense of danger that standing by and letting events unfold might simply be to become a double victim – once in the instance of the illness and a second time to the culturally dominant voice of response from governments, media and organised religion which saw AIDS patients as culpable in their own illness. The final point of solidarity is about choosing a position and building alliances.

For any socially engaged practice if one is in and of a place, a community or set of challenging circumstance, there may be no choice about making an action- it is crucial to either physical or psychological survival. Interventions from outwith that circumstance must proceed with caution and ensure means of engagement have embedded values and methods to acknowledge and work with those differences. As Thompson recognises, critics of socially engaged work often, "point out that an artist is going into a troubled corner of society only to perform some sort of 'good' deed and then ride off with bags of social capital" (2015, 98). The criticism, as Thompson acknowledges, is not necessarily fair to artists, as the true situation may be more complex. Indeed in discussing relational aesthetics and the social situation of artists, Neil Mulholland observes,

> Relational aesthetics in London were as much a means of survival for artists as curatorial proclivity. This way of working with information and mobile infrastructures was partly related to the problems of securing and maintaining permanent spaces in London, and partly an aesthetic reaction against the object-based spectacular big budget work of the earlier 1990s (2004, para 4).

As Mulholland indicates and as previously discussed, the art world can look very different depending on where one is situated within it.

Further criticism of socially engaged arts practice is that it has celebrated the “hit and run techniques of the gesture” (Thompson, 2015, 153) implying that campaign tactics of shock, immediate impact and generating (social) media coverage have been fore-fronted at the expense of deeper longitudinal social interaction. Thomson describes this as a tactical approach and cites the work of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) as an example. Formed in 1987, CAE's practice and concerns are diverse, exploring “the intersections between art, critical theory, technology, and political activism” through exhibitions, performance and publications (Critical Art Ensemble, 2020). Focusing on one event from over thirty years of practice may seem reductive, however, *Keep Hope Alive Block Party*, 2013 arguably illustrates Thompson's concept of the tactical; a “lighthearted” party in the street with soup, beer and a raffle. Concurrent with the party, however, was an exhibition *Acceptable Losses,* 2013 which presented data on causes of death and statutory responses to those, within the context of an increasing suicide rate among US combat veterans. In discussing combining both approaches, CAE member Steve Kurtz reflected,

> We'll do a more depressing and pessimistic show like the statistics show, but we'll then couple it with something like the *Keep Hope Alive Block Party* where we can be much more lighthearted. Even if it is kind of a gallows humor, we still get to have an approach that's a lot more playful, and that creates existential territories that mobilize so many varieties of encounters, conversations, and relationships that are counter to the limited sources of pleasure and sociability allowed by capitalism. Dancing in the streets has always been an emergent resistant form of behavior disturbing to authority (Abernathy, 2013).

The form of a street party may itself be anti-authoritarian, but questions raised by Foster and Bishop remain. After all what is being discussed at the street party over beer; how to dismantle capitalism, how to challenge the authorities' handling of tragic untimely deaths or the weather and what was in the soup? Balancing intention and realisation; working within an potential echo-chamber of like-mind people or risking accusations of selling out by seeking unaligned, wider audiences are just two of the tightropes socially engaged artist may have to navigate, whether part of an evolved “scene” (Burrows, 2010: 158) or

planning projects with specific communities and institutional support.

Here I see a parallel with popular education where polarities emerge between cultural activity and cultural action. The former being social or cultural events bringing (sometimes disparate) groups of people together with a common purpose or concern (eg a sharing lunch for differing communities). The latter, although possibly also involving lunch, not only identifies a problem or issue, but moves beyond to explore effective means of addressing it within a group research project and active campaign. As educator Liam Kane cautions,

> it is [. . .] important to guard against [. . .] the assumption that 'participatory techniques' are, *de facto*, popular eduction: they can be used by different educators for entirely different purposes (Kane, 2001: 250).

How might a socially engaged art practice avoid such pitfalls? Thompson calls for a strategic approach, which deploys organisational structures to effect change, referencing the work of Rick Lowe and project Row Houses in Houston, US and Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency in Palestine (Thompson, 2015: 153ff). Within the artworld structure, an equally strategic approach is suggested by Andrea Fraser, addressing the future direction of art institutions,

> Supposedly progressive cultural institutions have an opportunity to rebuild democracy, starting with their own organizational structures. Protest is an indispensible [sic] element of this, but transforming organizational governance can't just be about getting a few toxic trustees off boards, which implies that the system is okay without them. It has to be about demanding a seat at the table (Fraser, 2020:114).

Specifically she suggests that institution boards should include both staff representatives and that the (US) expectation that board members should be significant financial donors is broken.

The projects examined in this study balance similar tensions through embedding values in the way they are structured, while keeping focus on particular activities. These values include: recording the voices of those involved as a means of ensuring agency; adopting participatory methods; respecting differing roles and according each person equal respect.

The study then reflects on the experiences of those involved in the projects.

Critiquing institutions is familiar territory for Fraser, as for others. For this study, such critiques are interesting to note as the models discussed here already suggest alternative approaches, moving beyond reviewing what is wrong with the institutional system to carrying out change.

One response to the perceived problem of museums which has already been highlighted is to question and re-formulate their *raision d'etre.* In the UK, Alistair Hudson has championed the "useful museum" at Grizedale, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art and, more recently, Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth through collaborating with the *Arte Util* movement and network established by artist Tania Brugera. The movement states that to be an *Arte Util* project, work should;

> 1- Propose new uses for art within society
> 2- Challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic, etc), responding to current urgencies
> 4- [sic] Be implemented and function in real situations
> 5- Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users
> 6- Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users
> 7- Pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions
> 8- Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation
>
> (Museum of Arte Útil, 2020).

While each of these points could lead to further discussion, point five raises questions particularly pertinent to this study. Claire Bishop's 2006 article *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents* laments artists being judged by the quality of their interaction with the wider public (Bishop, 2006b: 180). She calls for aesthetics not simply ethics to be the lens through which artworks are viewed. She is concerned that socially engaged works too often demand that an artist sacrifices his/her "authorial presence in favour of allowing participants to speak through him or her" the consequence of which lead to works which lose an aesthetic dimension and complexity in favour of concrete outcomes (2006b, 183). Citing a selection of works, including *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001)

by Jeremy Deller and Phil Collins' *they shoot horses* (2004), she concludes

> The best collaborative practices over the past ten years address this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work *and* in the conditions of its reception (Bishop, 2006b: 183).

While both artists and Bishop navigate these balances according to their own judgements, it is also worth recalling Siegenthaler's view (discussed in the previous chapter) that new engaged methodologies should be adopted in research and writing about social art (Siegenthaler, 2013). This study will explore social collecting practices which bridge common polarities, where systemic changes maintain the agency of artist, members of the public and researcher and which facilitate all parties moving closer together, through emergent solidarity.

Conclusion

In this broad ranging review I have endeavoured to establish the context in which the subsequent case studies are positioned. In this emergent field of social collecting and commissioning, it has been necessary to reflect on literature from a wide range of sources and disciplines. This has involved what could be described as a "creative collection of data" (Snyder, 2019, 336) and brings to mind Walter Benjamin's note that "Collecting is a primal phenomenon of study: the student collects knowledge" (Benjamin, 1999 [1927-40]: 210). Many of the themes arising from the diverse literature examined will be found in the subsequent chapters, including; identity, exchange, consumption, ownership, community, collecting, participation and education.

The discussion of the history of collecting provides an overview and introduction to the subject, while laying foundations for observations on historical precedents for the models discussed in detail in the case studies and on common behaviours across the centuries. Moreover discussing collector behaviour links discussion of market, wider public perception of art and its market with challenges encountered in institutional collecting. This study will now expand on social collecting practices, suggesting approaches which, if

adopted, could significantly expand the ways in which the public encounter contemporary visual art. I return to my metaphor of the ugly price label obscuring a beautiful object. I consider I have examined and "picked at" elements of the exclusive art market (the ugly label) and re-positioned it to one side of the discussion. This has cleared the way for examination of community, collective ownership, exchange and social art practices. With this basis established, through the following chapters and three case studies, I will go on to examine how social collecting practices might be cultivated: starting with self-directing collecting groups.

Chapter Four: Collecting Groups: Case Study One

> *"And what is that ?" Räsänen asked, pointing his cane at a brown parcel they had put down on a rock.*
> *The woman explained quickly that it was a work of art they had picked out and paid for. It was the first painting they had ever purchased and so of course they had to celebrate* (Jansson, 2012: 18).

Introduction

This case study is somewhat different from the two following it; to some extent because of the approach I adopted in the investigation, but primarily because the subject of study; collecting groups. Of the three systems studied, this is the most closely aligned to traditional collecting models. This case study describes and compares the activities of collecting groups on opposite sides of the world using sources which include interviews and documentation. I situate the groups' activities within a spectrum of collecting practices, probing what makes collecting as a group distinctive. In conclusion I evaluate their potential as models of engaging with contemporary visual art.

For years, I have heard rumours that there is a contemporary art collecting group which operates in Glasgow or, maybe, across the country. Two artists have separately told me that they think, maybe, perhaps a group once bought a work of theirs. I've been trying to follow those leads ever since, names have been mentioned, suggestions of opportunities maximised, but group art collecting in Scotland remains essentially a private matter.

By contrast, in 2014 members of the London-based The Collective visited GSA to give a public talk about their approach to collecting. Their group collecting model had worked well and they were happy to communicate their successes and interest to others in replicating their scheme. The first group became known as The Founding Collective and their approach has been reproduced by other groups in London, as well as groups in Bristol, Cambridge and Birmingham. Information about The Collective is available online through their website and a blog written by one of their members. Neither seem to be

updated particularly regularly and the website especially feels out-of-date; with no news or events posted after May 2015 (The Collective, nd,a).

Attending the GSA talk, I was intrigued and even a little inspired. Around the same time, a friend from New Zealand told me that such collecting groups were common there. Although enquires at that time led me nowhere, a subsequent meeting and working relationship with a New Zealand artist reiterated this view. Moreover, this artist had not only sold work to such a group, but offered to put me in contact with one of its members. That collector's insights combined with additional material available online provide an overview of how group collecting operates in New Zealand at present.

Art Stalkers and Others

Gina Walker (not her real name) is passionate about art. So enthusiastic that, after speaking to her, I contemplated changing my plan of making this study desk-based and creating a third empirical project. Only after constructing several hypothetical scenarios did I recall the major practicalities of time-scale and finance, as well as many other logistical and ethical considerations. This had to be a desk-based case-study, albeit encompassing on-line interviews wherever possible.

Practicalities then, might seem a good place to begin describing how these groups function. At its simplest, art collecting groups operate through people coming together and pooling their own money to buy works of art. Groups decide broadly on what the collecting remit might be and how much the regular contributions are. The works in the collection rotate around the homes of the group members.

Gina has experience of three different groups, two of which are on-going. For ease, I will names these; Original Group (12 members), The Art Stalkers (6 members) and New Group (4 members). All of them have been based in Wellington and she credits the relatively compact layout of the city to facilitating the organisational aspects of group collecting. In

general, the groups seem to be exceedingly social, with “wine and nibbles” being a key feature at quarterly meetings.

Her Original Group, comprising of twelve women, has been running for eleven years. A significant length of time for relationships to be cemented and trust to grow; as Gina reflected, during that time “we've seen divorces and marriages and babies; all sorts of things” (Walker, 2019). Artworks move from home to home on a quarterly basis, with a key role in any group being “roster co-ordinator”; someone who will work out which work should be where and then contacting everyone regarding delivery and pick up, as well as maintaining a catalogue of all works purchased.

Groups in New Zealand and England delegate buying choices to small sub-committees, the membership of which may or may not rotate on a regular basis. This smaller group is responsible for making purchases after a period of research, which might include studio and exhibition visits.

Each group sets its own monthly contribution level, the suggestion for The Arts Stalkers was NZ$ 2,000 per person per annum (just over £1,000 at time of writing). In conversation Gina noted that currently she is involved with one group which has a combined budget of NZ$ 3,000 every three months, equating to NZ$12,000 pa (approx £6,000). It seems that these sums are not spent annually on one more costly work, rather they are divided into four smaller amounts for quarterly purchases (Walker, 2019). Reported contributions to The Founding Collective are £35 per month, with purchases averaging between £500 and £1,000 (Groves, 2014).

While having these amounts in a dedicated art fund will seem like a luxury to many, in some circles the budget would seem very modest. A brief visit to the online gallery site Artsy (2020) demonstrates a range of current prices. From Glasgow-based gallery, Patricia Fleming, £1,080 would purchase a digital photographic print by Jacqueline Donachie, while

an original pencil drawing by the same artist is priced at £6,000. Moving up the financial scale, at London based gallery Hauser & Wirth, for example, a screenprint by Nicolas Party is available for US$15,285 (approx. £12,264) as part of a hospital fundraising initiative (Artsy, 2020). Using these prices as indicators, it is clear that the sums involved demonstrate that while the group collectors studied may have disposable income, they are not the HNWIs or UHNWIs described in Chapter Three.

One of the significant differences between the English and New Zealand groups in this case study, is that from the outset in New Zealand the group agrees that after a set period of time the artworks bought will be re-distributed amongst the group members (Walker, 2019; The Art Stalkers, 2012). Ownership shifts from the collective to the individual. As the draft constitution of Art Stalkers states,

> At the end of 3 years the group will place options on the art pieces which will result in each member getting 2 pieces of artwork at the end of 3 years (The Art Stalkers, 2012).

The final number of works an individual will gain is determined when the group is established. While this could be seen as limiting the scope of the "collective" or "sharing" aspects of the project, it neatly circumvents one of the issues encountered by The Founding Collective (and arguably any collector); space. What do you do with works when all your walls are already full?

At the high-end of the art world, I have already alluded to purchased artwork remaining in freeport storage; perpetually "in transit" and thus side-stepping tax requirements. The question at the more domestic scale is where and how do you hang an ever expanding collection, while still enjoying the more intimate experience of living with a work of art? Is a re-hang necessary every time works swap around? Illustrating the point, in December 2018, Marie-Louise Collard of The Founding Collective wrote in her blog,

> The fact is, we've reached an interesting hiatus where physical space has started to constrain how much more art we can accommodate in our homes (Collard, 2018e).

Early that year the group had taken tentative steps to publicly exhibit the collection with an exhibition and discussion at Workplace Foundation in Gateshead (Workplace Foundation, 2020). This initiative could be seen as paving the way for further loans or touring exhibitions.

The time-limited approach adopted in New Zealand allows groups themselves to continue, while at the end of the agreed period they "tally-up" the collection. This is preceded by an "expression" or mini-exhibition of the entire collection, to which group members invite family, friends and in some instances artists, advisers or gallery owners.

Reaching this point can be expressed by the simple formula: $\frac{C}{P} = N$,

where C=Number of pieces in the collection

P= Number of people in the group.

N= The number of artworks each person receives.

Knowing that she would take sole ownership of only three pieces from the 36 work collection allowed Gina to feel relaxed about the range of works in the collection, "you don't need to love every single piece of artwork because you are not going to be getting all the pieces". With good humour she continued, "And some you find that grow on you and some you just... actually....leave in the closet....or in the spare room...or you leave it in the packaging" (Walker, 2019).

To those not involved in such a group, an initial thought might be, but what if someone wants to leave the group, moves away, falls on financial hard times or even dies? It appears that groups are organisationally quite formal with founding documents (such as a constitution), banks accounts and Annual General Meetings. While participants enthuse about the art and the social interaction (Walker, 2019; Rea, 2017) exchanging hard cash is central to the project's success and so a degree of, at least initial, formality is prudent. Each group may have a slightly different approach, but in general;

- if a member leaves they might be asked to find a replacement member (The Art

Stalkers, The Collective),

- They may have some funds returned to them, but not the jointly owned artwork (The Art Stalkers)
- If no other compromise can be found the collection may be sold and the funds distributed among the members (The Collective)
- If a member needs to take a contribution break, they are simply not listed as co-owner of the joint works purchased during that period (The Collective)
- In the event of a member dying, the collection remains the property of the surviving members (The Arts Stalkers).

While Walker's Original Group and London's Founding Collective continue without time limit, recommendations for newly established groups are that they operate within a specified timespan (Walker, 2019; The Collective, nd,c). This allows everyone involved the ability to walk away at the end of the period on equal terms; either sharing out artworks or cash.

A sense of fun and sociability strongly came across in the discussion with Gina, but the important theme she returned to repeatedly was a love of art. She was scornful of collecting groups which seemed motivated by financial gain and recounted two examples. One of these she reported as putting the works into auction at the end of the collecting period, she explained,

> Some people are doing it as an investment. [. . .] you know there are some high brow investors and they are doing it from the point of getting in early with some artists (Walker, 2019).

Her comments were scathing; “Yuck!” and “I think it's crazy. I'd say it's not the point” (Walker, 2019). More specifically, she was critical of The Art Stalkers group she had been involved with. Brought in to support the establishment of the group and build its size, she felt this group had also been run “too much as a business meeting” and after the initial three year period The Art Stalkers dissolved (Walker, 2019). Gina's displeasure could be regarded as another example of the dissonance in artworld attitudes towards hard cash highlighted in Chapter Three. Positioning her as spurning all talk of commerce with an

almost Kantian disdain for anything other than intellectual aesthetic appreciation. However, Gina was actually very matter-of-fact in discussing (unbidden) group finances and the sums involved. Perhaps understandably due to the private/public nature of documents The Art Stalkers' constitution clearly states the sums group members will be expected to contribute, while The Collective's website simply states, "The starting level of contributions and a start date should be agreed and, ideally, paid into the account by monthly standing order" (The Collective, nd, c).

The same web-page also indicates another slight difference between New Zealand and English approaches. While Gina has been involved in more than one group, and is probably known for her involvement, these New Zealand groups are essentially private for the benefit of the participants. The Collective, at least at some point during its existence, had the ambition to create a network of groups. A brief comparison of the stated aims of The Collective and The Art Stalkers clarifies the differences;

The Art Stalkers	The Collective
2. Purpose of Group The purpose of the group is to deepen our love and enjoyment of art by: • Building a collection of original unique art works for the collective enjoyment of the group • Learning more about art buying, collecting, hanging, storage, value • Building relationships with artists and galleries	Aims: • Nurture the collection of contemporary art for domestic and workplace contexts • Make collecting a more affordable, socially inclusive activity • Encourage adults, young people and children to build their knowledge of contemporary art by living with it, meeting artists and visiting exhibitions • Build bridges between new audiences, the art market and artists • Grow a larger, culturally diverse constituency of collectors • Provide support for emerging artists and curators

Figure 4: Comparison. Sources- The Art Stalkers Constitution Draft, 2012; The Collective, nd, a

The ambition and scope of the two sets of aims is noticeably different. The Art Stalkers highlight the enjoyment of the group, their learning and then building relationships with

artists and galleries. They use an active tense. With a more formal register of language The Collective uses a more passive voice to describe a broad reach of goals beyond simply buying, enjoying and learning about contemporary art. They embrace a desire to change how and by whom contemporary art is collected.

So why would anyone with an interest in contemporary art consider joining a collecting group, which after all, could be fraught with potential disagreements about taste, conservation, value and money? The main advantages seem not to be increased spending power, but rather sharing the pleasure of learning about and actively acquiring contemporary art. This is no power-point show-and-tell programme of talks, where artists and even artworks are discussed one step removed. Seen as a learning project, collecting groups shift from storing knowledge to using knowledge. For Gina, learning is an active process which extends beyond discussing works and artists within the group, it includes attending exhibitions, going to lectures and meeting artists on studio visits. She points out that the collecting group allows her "to keep up to date with what's going on [in contemporary art] throughout New Zealand" (Walker, 2019). To an extent collecting groups could be seen as reigniting the legacy of ancient collecting circles, such as the collecting scholars of the Song Dynasty; who showed, lent and discussed their collections with others (see earlier discussion, including for example, Egan, 2008).

Although collecting groups do buy from galleries, relationships with artists are regarded as more important for two reasons; the quality of the interaction and the growing popularity of buying directly from an artist. Gina reflected,

> when you are buying directly [from] an artist - it's very personal when you go into their studios and they do a reveal about themselves and the work and the places in which they make their work. And I find that that is a really lovely...it just makes that connection more intimate and real with the artists. (Walker, 2019)

She continued that "artist direct" not only is her preferred means of buying art, but was also becoming increasing popular across the country. What appeared to be prized was not

any financial benefit, but the opportunity to meet the creator of the work and to have them discuss it. Gina contrasted this with a gallery situation where, “sometimes they don't have that much information on the artist or the work that you're looking at” (Walker, 2019).

Nonetheless these New Zealand collecting groups do also have relationships with dealers and their galleries. Gina's attitude seemed a little ambivalent; at one point she explained that a gallery might get in touch if they were hosting an exhibition by an artist who the group had previously collected, which strikes me as straightforward marketing. But she was also a little critical of dealers not being sufficiently interested in collecting groups. The impression she gave of the New Zealand artworld ecology was one of varying tiers; high-end collectors courted by high-end galleries, with collecting groups with smaller purses most often preferring to approach artists directly. In a country with a relatively small population, these hierarchies are, of course, not rigidly maintained. Gina recalled suddenly being taken seriously as a group by dealers at an Art Fair, “you're not just time-pickers, you are actually buying art” (Walker, 2019).

Each group seems to have its own set of collecting criteria, sometimes determined by practicalities. The Art Stalkers determined that works collected must be able to fit into an average-sized car (2012), while another New Zealand group, The Ellipsis Collection, only want works which can be hung on walls, as members with children feared sculptures might be too vulnerable (Rea, 2017).

Practicalities aside, there are more aesthetic considerations as to what might be collected. While most groups suggest that encountering differing tastes is one of the intriguing aspects of the group collecting approach, most established groups set some parameters (Rea, 2017; The Collective, nd, c). This might include specifying edition sizes (The Art Stalkers) or stipulating a range of other measurable criteria such as,

> artwork from emerging and mid-career New Zealand artists,
> who are qualified or have gained a recognised art award, have

> been featured in articles or had reviews of their work published, have work in public collections, have done some exhibitions or have representation, or simply show future potential (Rea, 2017).

For Gina's Original and New Groups, she said their approach to criteria was “low brow and and it's fun”, which I interpreted from other comments as meaning they took an non-elitist approach to collecting; enjoying meeting together, having a drink, discussing all aspects of art, attending exhibitions and events and buying works. Art collecting as a group gives busy people a reason to make time to come together.

Although Gina did not come across as the type of person who lacked confidence, she commented on another potential benefit of group collecting; it brought people with different levels of existing knowledge and confidence together. She described one group member who is a sculptor and has brought and shared specialist knowledge of that medium to the group. Additionally by visiting fairs and galleries together, any nervousness of not knowing where to begin can be overcome, as well as knowing that any purchase has been discussed. Consequently, as Gina observed,

> if your knowledge is a little low on things it can be a bit intimidating and when you're going with a group of people and buying collectively - it does make you think about what you are buying and also have confidence in what you are purchasing (Walker, 2019).

Typical or Atypical Collecting?

Having explored how collecting groups operate and how practices diverge, I will now position how they sit within the range of more common collecting practices.

Collecting

The 2015 exhibition *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector* at the Barbican, London brought together a range of artist's collections, including that of Howard Hodgkin. Hodgkin's collection of Indian paintings was already well known, with previous exhibitions and the artist reflecting on the tradition of artists making collections. His comment that

collecting, “represents the human desire to get near works of art" builds on the notion of learning from a collection, by being in regular proximity to it (Hodgkin, 1992: para 1).

Hodgkin contrasts the creativity of making a genuine collection, with super-rich shopping. He derides the latter,

> A collection of extremely expensive French Impressionist pictures, recently bought and put in very grand Louis XV frames with little lights on top of them and very expensive price tags is obviously not a work of art. It’s a work of self-aggrandisement. It’s a way of saying look how rich, or how glamorous I am (Hodgkin,1992: para 3).

While Hodgkin clearly prized learning from and studying with collections, he placed utmost importance on the “art-zap” or “shock to the heart” that a newly encountered artwork should give as a criteria for entering the collection (Hodgkin, 1992: para 13). This spark of visceral appeal has been shared by group collectors too. Reflecting on the process on acquiring an artwork, Gina Walker recalled,

> You've negotiated, you've researched and you've fallen in love with a piece of art from an artist. You know you're doing it because you want to have it for yourself. You want to live with the thing, you want to have it and take care of it (Walker, 2019).

At the same time she disdained of investment-oriented collecting groups believing they represented “a disconnection of emotion” (Walker, 2019).

With The Founding Collective too, the idea of following the “art-zap” is not unfamiliar. Marie-Louise Collard writing in memoriam of her friend and fellow group member Bob Lee remembered,

> he always had an eye out for the next purchase – often succumbing to what became known as a “side order” – a purchase for his own personal collection if he couldn’t persuade the Collective’s purchasing panel of the moment that we should buy a particular work. “*it was an excellent opportunity – it would have been crazy to miss it”* he would be heard exclaiming (Collard, 2019b).

Perhaps because of this habit, The Collective's website page advising new groups suggests,

> In the experience of the first London Group, members who

> like the work of a particular artist tend to buy other work by the same artist as part of their personal collection, in addition to the work they share with the group (The Collective, nd, c).

Of course, it would be surprising if the “art-zap” affected all group members equally, and as has a already been discussed not all committee purchases are met with universal group approval or enjoyment. However, is there another question raised by Hodgkin's comments; are collecting groups making genuine collections? Clearly, group members consider themselves to be collectors and perhaps that suffices. However, if, as in the case of Gina Walker's groups, the intention has always been that after a period of time the collection will be broken up, can the works gathered in the preceding years be accurately described as a collection? This paradoxical situation leads to further questions; is group collecting simply an interesting art-finance scheme? Is it dangerously close to the shopping spurned by Hodgkin (1992) and Buck and Greer (2006) ?

If "collecting is as much about creating a rationale as filling it" as Sharon Macdonald (2006: 82) claims, then the resolution to these questions might lie in the agreed focus for each collecting group collection. If this is sufficiently strong and clear then, even with rotating purchasing committees, a collection can be formed. (And of course this is the *modus operandi* for large public galleries and organisations, including, for example, Tate and Arts Council Collection.) Aligning with Macdonald's view on the intentions of collecting, Marina Bianchi reflects on the relationship between collecting practices and consumption. Probing the similarities, she concludes that "the activity of collecting reveals a cognitive framework for organizing choice that operates also in consumption." (Bianchi, 1997: 280). Suggesting that the two activities are not as oppositional as Hodgkin, Buck and Greer might suggest.

As previously noted, most collecting groups will set some parameters for purchasing committees; from medium to time period, from national base of artist to physical dimensions of works. Emma Jacobs references one collecting group with a focus on Indigenous Australian art (2010). Although these parameters seem broad, perhaps this is

necessary for the group to function, as they explore and come to know contemporary art. If the limitations were too narrow, opportunities for new encounters (which are commonly lauded) could be lost at an early stage.

Contemplation

Earlier I made comparisons with collecting circles in Song Dynasty China and current collecting groups. This also suggests that while collecting is often portrayed as a individual pursuit, precedents for sharing knowledge and pleasurable reflection, if not pooling finances, exist. While contemporary commentators have complained that on occasion the high-end art-world can seem excessively social, with being seen at an opening becoming more important than seeing the art (Saatchi, 2009; Horowitz, 2011), collecting groups appear to balance sociability with learning. As Gina Walker reflected,

> I think we've all benefited from it from the discussions we've had, the connections we've made [. . .] I think we've all broadened our outlook, the way that we see art (Walker, 2019).

From London, Marie-Louise Collard echoes those sentiments in her summary of her group's intentions,

> to appreciate art in our homes, share experiences and engage in discussion with artists whose works started to appear in our homes (Collard, 2018c).

As described by both Walker and Collard there is a manifest delight in sharing the consideration and contemplation of the artwork, even if this is more usually considered the solitary pleasure of an art collector who "attains to an unequalled view of the object" (Benjamin,1999 [1927-40]: 207). Archetypal scholarly contemplation may be replaced by lively discussions fuelled by "wine and nibbles" but the passionate attention persists (Walker, 2019).

Learning

Living with and learning from the collections are significant common aspects within group collecting and they may echo the attitudes of more singular collectors. Photographer and

collector Hiroshi Sugimoto arguably typifies the learning experience of an individual collector. Reflecting on his wide-ranging collections, which include anatomical drawings and optical prosthetics, he observes "My collection is my mentor. I've learned a lot from my collection" (Yee, 2015:195).

The relationship between study and collections recalls the purpose of collections created specifically for schools and Art Schools. The original rationale of the Argyll Collection of paintings, drawings, ceramics and textiles, for example, was for it to be “a learning resource for the young people of Argyll and Bute” (The Argyll Collection, 2020). Prior to this, from 1914-1939, Glasgow School of Art administered its own study collection, not simply making works available for full time students, but also establishing a Lending Museum Scheme for schools. Inventories of works available range from pages of illuminated manuscripts (GSAA/ISE/4/1) to cases of Craft Works (GSAA/ISE/4/6 and, for example, NMC/1625). Initially created in collaboration with the Glasgow Corporation, it aimed to raise standards of taste and knowledge by disseminating a range of stimulating works (GSAA/ISE/4).

Although parallels exist with these individual and institutional study-collections, I consider collecting groups to have a different learning relationship to artworks. Their primary focus is not on technical understanding, rather they are interested in the artist's practice and concepts contained in the work. Moreover, this learning is a shared process with other group members. Gina Walker, for example, considers participation has “broadened everybody's knowledge” (Walker, 2019).

Considering learning, Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, in his influential text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, outlines the pre-requisites for emancipatory learning, based on the values of mutual respect,

> Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the

> point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only men [sic] who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know (Freire,1972a : 63).

An attitude reflected in Walker's comment that "What's different is our levels of knowledge [. . .] like RR, an amazing sculptor [. . .] and just listening to her stories [. . .] helps us to share our understanding" (Walker, 2019). Discussing the processes and potential problems in action research, Bill Genat suggests that the method,

> includes not only applied action that makes a difference to the situation of a particular group of participants, but also the production of local knowledge regarding how these participants interpret and understand their own situation (Genat, 2009: 103).

While collecting groups are not involved in creating formal research outcomes, they are producing knowledge local to their particular sphere of enquiry. Their sphere - the appreciation of contemporary art - may be far removed from the grass-roots issues customarily the subject of participatory research (or, for that matter, of socially engaged art practice). Nonetheless, strengthened social ties appear to be a by-product of the specific knowledge acquisition involved in group collecting activities. This echoes outcomes of "collective thriving" noted by Embury et al as "foundational to the action research process" (Embury et al, 2020, 129). Moreover, within these informal, art-orientated, learning projects, the group members in at least two instances involve and celebrate intergenerational learning between family members (The Collective and The Ellipsis Collection).

Challenging Works

As noted in Chapter Two, collecting committees do not always please everyone, so how do groups deal with unpopular works? Regularly quoted as an example (Barnett, 2014; Collard, 2017) The Founding Collective's purchase of Martin Creed's *Work No. 233* (which contains the words Fuck Off- Figure 4 above) could be seen as challenging to have hanging in a domestic setting. However, it appears that group members enjoy being challenged and find all works a starting point for discussion, debate and learning. Writing in *The Guardian*, Laura Barnett observed,

> In practice, of course, this means that members are sometimes

> forced to live with art they don't care for, or that they even actively dislike. [Group member Sarah] Allen admits that this can sometimes be difficult. "There have been a few pieces that I've taken an instant dislike to," she says. "There was one I couldn't bring myself to put up on the wall at first. But over time, it grew on me. That's part of what makes The Collective so interesting: it raises questions about what art is, and how it makes you feel (Barnett, 2014).

Unlike Gina Walker's groups in New Zealand, both The Collective and The Ellipsis Collection have a rule that whatever the work, it must be hung (Jacobs, 2010; Rea, 2017). One Australian group member is reported as finding discussions with visitors about the current shared work more honest because there is no risk of insulting a host's personal taste (Jacobs, 2010).

Another work potentially fraught with challenges, albeit of a practical kind, was *Home Suite*, a performance work by Katharine Fry (2008), which took place in the homes of the Founding Collective. Logistics and aesthetics aside, what sparks my interest in this particular work is that it was commissioned by the group, with support from the Arts Council England. Marie-Louise Collard describes the commission as "One of our most memorable works" (Collard, 2018c) and in her blog captures the upheaval and joys of a year-long development process, followed by rehearsals with a large team, before a week of performances, one in each member household (Collard, 2015). Arguably, moving from purchasing completed artworks to commissioning them demonstrates a deepening familiarity with artists, their work and art-networks. It also develops a philanthropic attitude.

At Home with Art

What is most commonly reported (Barnett, 2014; Groves, 2010; Jacobs, 2010; Rea, 2017) is that with time group members come to appreciate works, although as Gina Walker pointed out the reality, on occasion, may be less definitive.

The benefits of living with work in a domestic setting are well-documented and a theme which recurs in the writing and interview analysed here. As Susan M. Pearce has noted,

> Each of our homes is a unique collection of objects which constitutes our framework for living [. . .] Our rooms, once arranged more or less to our liking, constitute an important self-defining statement in a way which is paralleled only by the clothes which we choose to wear (Pearce,1992: 24).

For those involved in art collecting groups, this collection of objects includes the shared artworks. In a precise echo of Pearce's writing, Gina Walker commented,

> the longer that you stay in a place the more you put things that you love around you and it becomes like a nest, a nest full [. . .] They are like your clothing they are part of who you are and your identity really (Walker, 2019).

The link Walker makes with identity is also implicit in Pearce's comment and will be explored shortly.

Spending time with art recalls an unprecedented project initiated by art historian T. J. Clark, in which he visited the same two paintings, almost daily, for over 18 months and recorded his impressions after every visit. At the beginning of his account he notes, "Many of us, maybe all of us, look at some images repeatedly, but it seems we do not write that repetition...." (Clark, 2006: 8). Clark continues,

> certain pictures demand such [considered] looking and repay it. Coming to terms with them is slow work. But astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again: aspect after aspect of the picture seems to surface, what is salient and what is incidental alter bewilderingly from day to day..." (Clark, 2006: 5).

Although Clark was making gallery visits to view works by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), his experience of repeated, detailed looking is shared by group collectors living with contemporary art. Australian art dealer and supporter of group collecting Dick Bett believed that living with art gives people a different perspective on the work, “The experience of having a work in your home is invaluable. You learn so much about the piece” (Jacobs, 2010). In agreement, Marie-Louise Collard, sums up what is gained by living

with artworks at home over a period of time as, “Pleasure, insight and knowledge” (Collard, 2019a).

Another facet of repeat viewing is that, even in a gallery setting, conditions as well as the viewer, can change. On one occasion Clark happily notes, "The conditions [of light] this morning are extraordinarily helpful" (2006: 87) while more expansively Collard reflects,

> You see it [the artwork] in morning light. You see it at night, or when a visitor asks you about it on a weekend afternoon. You see it through a range of different emotions, through the peaks and troughs of your daily life and through the different seasons (Collard, 2019a).

In a group collecting context, as Jacobs (2010) notes, the changes are even more extensive as the artworks travel from home to home and wall covering to wall covering; creating an intriguing exception to Pearce's view of self-definition and objects in the home. Surely the scope of one's self-definition through household objects is challenged by the presence of objects one has not chosen, but has agreed to display. Possibly this explains Dick Bett's advise to group collectors to have one wall specifically dedicated to the rotating collection, to allow the collection to stand alone (Jacobs, 2010).

Clark raises another relevant question; not how to view a painting, but from where. Re-iterating that this is more than an exercise in following the rules of perspective, he suggests,

> certain paintings do create specific 'places' from which they are to be viewed - places meaning imaginative distances, particular forms of closeness or stand-offishness or intimacy or remoteness (Clark, 2006: 143).

The luxury of spending time with an artwork, is that the viewer can take advantage of these possibilities, even playing with seeing works from unexpected angles, particularly an advantage for sculptural works.

This is simply one element of the interaction that group collectors can have with their shared artworks. More socially, the physical exchanges of the works, the discussions about them as well as the visits and viewing leading up to purchase, bring an element of

animation to the collections. Storytelling and memory appear significant to group collectors too. Marie-Louise Collard reflects,

> More than just a collection of art works it has been an integral part of our homes, our memories and our family lives for the best part of two decades (Collard, 2018b).

For Gina Walker, re-visiting the stories and memories associated with making the collection is part of a more formalised group process. Once the collection has built to a certain size, the group will work towards the "tally-up" and exhibition. At that stage the group collectors,

> can see what we've got and we can talk about it and have a bit of a session. Invite our partners and sort of "ooh and aah" at the way the collection has grown. And also just reminisce about the journey (Walker, 2019).

In her discussion of souvenirs, Susan M. Pearce describes the role they have,

> They are an important part of our attempt to make sense of our personal histories, happy or unhappy, to create an essential personal and social self centred in its own unique life story... (Pearce, 1992: 73).

While she is specifically referring to what might usually be considered souvenirs (holiday mementoes, ephemera from special events, etc.) I suggest that for group collectors, the artworks bought function in the same way, recalling the French origin of the word; to remember. remember. Furthermore, these shared stories and histories surrounding the circulated art objects echo the role of the sacred *vaygu'a* in binding people, making community and manifesting culture. As Mauss describes in his discussion of *kula* exchange, not only are the objects exchanged never fully detached from the people making the exchange, but the ties made through these exchanges are "comparatively indissoluble" (Mauss, 2002[1925]: 42). The insight Mauss' work provides to group collecting goes beyond the bonds strengthened through circulation of exchanged items. Mauss' term "comparatively indissoluble" suggests that rupture can happen and, as discussed earlier, this is something that collecting groups prepare themselves for in creating legal frameworks and other membership agreements for both smooth function and its opposite; falling out.

Concluding her thoughts on living with contemporary art, Marie-Louise Collard writes,

> We can agree that "art in the home" is not a new concept. But *the way* it is introduced in to our domestic spaces and our consequent interactions with it, is constantly evolving giving it a new meaning on each occasion (2018b).

It is a perceived added richness, through shared memories and stories, in addition to the privileges of contemplation, that make living with artworks special for group collectors, including Collard. It is a connection to the work, but it is a shared connection and those social bonds intensify the experience. Reflecting on these ties in light of gift-exchange, when the jointly owned works are exchanged other social interactions also take place, all of which cultivates relationships and bonds. In the section below, headed The Artworld Gaze, I will consider relationships beyond the collecting group itself to explore how expanded exchange informs other relationships beyond the micro-community of the collecting group.

Identity

Another way in which collecting groups might be compared to traditional individual collectors is in a consideration of identity. If, as I suggested previously, high-end art collectors may build their identity within the artworld in tandem with building their collections, to what extent can the same be said of those involved in group collecting? I have already alluded to the bolstering effect on confidence levels being part of a collecting group can have when attending art fairs or gallery openings. Might a group membership enhance or hinder being identified as a (serious) collector? To answer the question, one can turn to the views of those involved, but additionally, I would like to trace, as far as possible, the gaze the established artworld directs towards collecting groups.

On the reflexive level, Gina spoke directly about her identity, as noted above. She compared her art collection to her choice of clothing as an expression of her identity; indicating intimate, purposeful and even creative acts of self-expression (Walker, 2019). Marie-Louise Collard's online blog, makes only passing references to identity in differing

contexts. Arguably, the decision to publish on-line reflections on the experience of being a collecting group member, is in itself a public performance of that identity. Both instances recall Monica L. Smith's observations on the use and acquisition of objects to consolidate projected identity (Smith, 2007: 416).

Ascertaining how one's identity is viewed by others is, as Robert Burns succinctly noted, challenging, "O wad some Power the giftie gie us/To see oursels as ithers see us!/ It wad frae mony a blunder free us, /An' foolish notion:" (Burns, *To A Louse*, c 1785). In a similar vein, Smith's analysis suggests that

> The realization of a social role has three components: that which is intended and projected by the individual; that which is intended and acted upon by others; and that which is developed by others independent of the individual's volition (2007, 415).

For both poet and scholar the conclusion is similar, other people may read an individual's situation differently from how s/he perceives or intends. This dissonance could account for the nervousness of an individual gallery goer, who may be anxious about how they appear or how to behave under the gaze of gallery staff. A feeling potentially overcome by visiting in a group. Remembering Goffman's analysis of identity, this group confidence could be seen as the stigmatised feeling more powerful as a group. This is not to say that collecting groups should be thought of as "huddle-together self-help clubs", but rather the principles of "the own"- a group of similarly disposed people- is useful in understanding both the barriers to certain cultural activities and the means of overcoming those barriers (Goffman,1968 : 34).

Revisiting Goffman's work nearly four decades after its first publication, Bruce Link and Jo Phelan (2001) articulate insightful refinements to the application of Goffman's work. Highlighting that although stereotyping can operate in all directions between different groups, it is the underlying power relationships that creates stigma. For example, both criminal gangs and police have their own circles and may stereotype each other, but the power structure that gives the police authority transforms their stereo-types into

stigmatising of certain groups, which can have life-changing consequences. Following this usage, considering stigma in the artworld may seem to exaggerate the actual situation, however, issues of power and stereo-typing can be traced throughout the three case studies in this research and contribute to the understanding of barriers faced to engagement with contemporary visual art. The alternatives discussed suggest how exchange can lead to more nuanced understanding and relationships which can either dismantle or circumvent the barriers.

Roles, as well as identities, may be vital to success within a self-organising collecting group. While successful operation may be enhanced by the willingness of specialists to share their knowledge (Gina highlighted what she had learned from the sculptor), smooth functioning also depends on roles within the group;

> There's no one clear leader or anything like that, we each have our roles. Like, one woman does the metrics, to organise how the art gets moved around and who gets what. And then I do the photography and the details of each painting or each art work, so that we've got an accurate listing of the collection. But everyone does their piece to organise... nibbles, dinner or whatever. . . (Walker, 2019).

Operating for eleven years suggests that the group members are accustomed to and content in their roles.

With the New Group of four women what may have been lost through well-established understanding of roles was compensated for by the simpler logistics of smaller numbers. Gina admitted that with the larger group and a rotating buying committee, there were artworks in that collection which she didn't like; whereas with the newer, smaller group the four members would all buy together, leading to Gina's reflection that, “I love every single piece” (Walker, 2019).

The Artworld Gaze

The artworld's perceptions of collecting groups, can be traced by following the trajectory of the collecting groups over time. From beginning as six (some accounts suggest seven)

households in London in 2002, The Collective has developed its profile through;

- events and talks, including the 2014 GSA talk, organised by the philanthropic arts organisation Outset;
- reports in the national press (including *The Financial Times*, 2010; *The Independent*, 2010; *The Guardian*, 2014);
- features on BBC radio (2010) and television programmes (2011);
- involvement with Arts Council England (Barnett, 2014);
- and in 2017 an exhibition of works from their collection at Workplace in Gateshead, *The Collective.*

An arc which demonstrates, at the very least, recognition within the established artworld circles.

Underpinning this type of affirmation is the business of hard-cash purchases. Certainly this could bring collecting groups to the attention of commercial galleries. As discussed previously, Bett Gallery in Australia, where they have an established history of collecting groups, actively supports the creation and management of collecting groups (Bett Gallery, 2018). However, given the sums of money involved, purchasing power alone is unlikely to position collecting groups on the radar of galleries representing established, internationally renowned artists. Thus alternatives such as buying directly from artists, interest in early career artist and collecting print editions are attractive. This in turn informs artists about collecting groups; the route which brought New Zealand group collectors to the centre of this case study.

What then of an artist's perceptions of collecting groups? Discussing being collected by groups with artist Cat Auburn, it was clear that these were social as well as financial transactions. She commented, "I got a lot more joy or found it interesting to be collected by people that I got to meet. That was a far more interesting experience [than having works sold by a third person]" (Auburn, 2020). That experience involved being invited to dinner and giving a talk about herself and her work. Echoing Gina Walker's comments,

wine and nibbles also featured.

Although Auburn and Walker established and built a continuing friendship, it was also clear that the majority of the groups members were from a different socio-economic sphere to the artist. She describes them all as successful professional women who had “surplus income that they could invest” while she “was a lot younger than them and living quite a different life” (Auburn, 2020).

Auburn gave the impression, at that early stage in her career, of enjoying meeting these unfamiliar people and observing their lifestyles as much as being observed. However, she did recall that in one group, some members seemed more focused on catching up with each other, than talking to her or discussing the work they had just bought from her. This is where scholarship on social transactions becomes pertinent. In discussing the obligations associated with gifts, and by extension traded goods, Marcel Mauss suggests two points of particular relevance to this exchange network; firstly that the gift retains something of the giver and secondly that relationships can be created or ruptured through exchange (Mauss, 2002 [1925]).

In my analysis both outcomes are possible; a network grows because an artist sells her work to a group. Although she is paid for her work, there is an invitation and expectation that she will also give a talk and go to dinner. It could be seen that her company and her time is also part of what is being bought, recalling Derrida's consideration of time in the essay in *Given Time: The Time of the King.* There he probes the question what is is to “have time” and whether it can be given to or taken from another person leading to his reflections on the (im)possibility of the gift (Derrida, 1992). Alternatively, in Cat Auburn's case it is simply an obligation of the original exchange of money for artwork. To return to my question of positive or ruptured relationships- the evidence of this could be seen in the continuation (or otherwise) of the connections made. In this particular instance the artist maintained a relationship with one group member, she explained,

> So I got to know [Gina] from bumping into her at several different events. I probably didn't become more personally friendly with her until after the collecting had happened. So it was through the art collecting and bumping into her at different events that I got to know her on a more personal, friend basis (Auburn, 2020).

A passing acquaintance was transformed into friendship, but what solidified the relationship was the exchange of the artwork. By contrast, Auburn did not remain "in the orbit" of the majority of group members and in those cases any connectivity at the moment of exchange was not continued. That is not to say the relationship was severely ruptured, unlike other instances Auburn recalled where "pretty horrible experiences" had led her to instruct her gallery not to sell her work to a particular collector (Auburn, 2020). For a less confident artist, the obligation to give time and something of oneself (in terms of an entertaining talk and dinner company - in addition to the artwork itself) to a collecting group could be seen as excessively onerous or even oppressive. Engendering an unwelcome obligation much like a power-building, "monstrous" potlatch described by Mauss (2002 [1925]: 54) in which the exchange of gifts and associated obligations can become exaggerated and violent (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 45).

Conclusion

The elusive Scottish collecting group I discussed at the start of this chapter may have been inspired by The Collective's Glasgow visit. Preferring to remain discreet, the group has not taken up an evangelical role and the group collecting model has not become commonplace here. Indeed, even in England there seem fewer active collecting groups than in New Zealand. What then are the strengths, weakness and outstanding questions about group collecting within a Scottish context?

Arguably one strength of collecting groups is building confidence and knowledge of art, artists and the artworld. By coming together with like-minded co-investigators in a genuine spirit of enquiry, these groups become trusted circles of (recalling Goffman) "the own", where people learn about art and become confident in accessing, purchasing and

collecting it. Bonds and relationships may also extend beyond group members to relationships with artists through exchanges, purchases and encounters. Moreover, group members may also experience many of the same thrills and pleasures as individual collectors; sharing these in addition to the artworks.

However, does the system simply perpetuate existing art market practices, even if it brings a few more people into the fold? Being a commercially orientated answer to the issue of broadening access to contemporary visual art, it re-enforces the message that art is simply a consumable good (whether the price tag is low, medium or high) and more importantly, it frames engagement with art as being financial.

At the beginning of this chapter I noted that several factors from timescale to logistics and even ethical questions around asking people to use their own money in a research project, had prevented me from creating a collecting group as an active research project. One of the unexplored areas in this study is the socio-economic background of those involved in group collecting. While assumptions could be made about the lifestyles and privileges of those with time, finance, inclination or even the cultural capital to join such groups, with limited personal contact (one online interview with someone from New Zealand) my observations were not sufficiently embedded to draw unequivocal conclusions.

Consequently, areas for further enquiry could be twofold; first of all an analysis of the socio-economic status of those currently involved in group collecting and secondly to explore how groups might operate among and between differing socio-economic groups. Intriguingly, Glasgow gallerist Patricia Fleming has considered the idea of creating an art-menage. A menage (sometimes also spelt menoj or menodge) is a traditional self-starting group finance scheme, traditionally associated with working class women in tight-knit communities and/or workplaces (Biosca et al, 2020: 19; Williams, 2021). While for some informal saving schemes, where money is withdrawn by taking turns, could be seen as exposing oneself to fraud (McGivern, 2010), more nuanced research suggest that menages

continue to be seen by those using them, as useful ways of coping with financial pressures when more formal credit options are unavailable (Biosca et al, 2020: 20). By using this term at the start of her explorations, Fleming could be seen as consciously positioning her idea within a working class, female, West of Scotland context. If this positioning were realised it could make for an interesting area of further research.

As a working gallerist, Fleming is in a strong position to identify and understand the practical and attitudinal hurdles experienced by potential art buyers in the West of Scotland (Fleming, 2020). She perceives only a small percentage of local people have sufficient disposable income to collect contemporary art, and this is further exacerbated by a lack of clarity about where and how to make a purchase. Moreover, and paradoxically for the gallerist and individual artists, as an artist's international reputation grows and prices inevitably rise, fewer local people can afford the work. Adding another layer of nuance, Fleming also considered there were complex and contradictory attitudes around buying and/or collecting art - almost as if those with sufficient funds had socially-conscious mindsets warning against “getting above yourself” or “spending all that on a painting, when people are sleeping on the streets.”

In Fleming's view, the challenges of collecting contemporary art go beyond the financial. If this is the case, while group collecting can build confidence and knowledge, as a self-organising approach it cannot tackle attitudinal barriers. In other words, it can only operate for those with a pre-existing suitable attitude, as well as interest, time and ready finance. Not that the financial barriers should be readily dismissed. The potential pitfalls of the areas for further study noted above are manifold. Most particularly there is something ethically uncomfortable about creating a research project on group collecting and forming a group of people with limited finance or who might not usually buy art for various reasons including their financial situation. While on one hand such a project could be seen as a liberating encounter with what is possible when groups pool resources, in reality the pressure to contribute regularly towards buying an artwork with people who experience daily financial pressures seems a completely unreasonable research approach.

A further conceptual leap inherent in the group collecting model, is that of joint ownership or sharing. Contrary to models of individual consumption, competitive collecting and tropes of possession, shared ownership appears egalitarian and aligned with alternative economies. This is a not insignificant shift in thinking towards possessions if, as Belk (1988) and Pearce (1992) suggest, we regard our possessions as an extension of our selves. In this regard it is worth noting that The Founding Collective in London comprises four households of relatives, with the other two households being "life-long friends". Within this network, as Collard acknowledges, informal relational sharing already exisited (Collard, 2018a). Belk finds that people are seen to be both proprietorial about certain possessions and very generous with others, he suggests,

> The boundary between these two opposite practices seems to define family and friends versus strangers, but we can also be generous with strangers sometimes. (Belk, 2014)

Thus one of the questions around art collecting groups remains: how do you start a group, not in terms of the formal aspects, but who do you invite to join such a group? If the answer is simply trusted friends and family members, then The Collective's stated aims of making collecting "a more affordable, socially inclusive activity" and growing "a larger, culturally diverse constituency of collectors" seem over-ambitious, at least (The Collective, nd, a).

In conclusion, what appears to be most highly prized by those involved in group collecting is two-fold; jointly owning contemporary art and the social and learning processes involved in becoming owners. Arguably, for the New Zealand groups which divide up the collection after an agreed period of time, the social aspects are more significant than the collection as a unified entity.

Clearly these groups are actively engaged with contemporary art, where they may not have been as individuals. Nonetheless the model sits within the dominant financially orientated art market model and neither attempts to nor succeeds in challenging or even running

parallel to that model. “Socially inclusive” group collecting appears to be an unrealistic ambition in the face of actual financial disadvantage, embracing shared ownership and spending time enjoying art with others. The following chapter focuses on a more radical approach looking beyond the market: where art collections are lent and borrowed.

Chapter Five: Artothek Research Project: Case Study Two

Introduction

> *Am I doing the right thing by telling stories? Wouldn't it be better to fasten the mind with a clip, tighten the reins and express myself not by means of stories and histories, but with the simplicity of a lecturer, where in sentence after sentence a single thought gets clarified, and then others are tacked onto it in the succeeding paragraphs? . . . As it is I'm taking on the role of midwife, or of the tender of a garden whose only merit is at best sowing seed and later to fight tediously against weeds.* (Tokarczuk 2019, 219).

Today is the 14th Dec 2018 and I'm in my old home city feeling like an alien, wearing my rucksack, ski jacket and bobble hat as people flow past in party sequins and high heels. A white double decker bus rolls by, converted into a party zone. Every passenger is wearing a Santa hat and drinking- two look out and wave. I'm waiting outside an underground station for a car to pull up and hand over a painting. I have plenty to ponder as I wait.

I'm here because of my Artothek Research Project. For the last five months I've been running an art library, styled on the *artotheks* of mainland Europe. The concept is beautiful and simple; instead of borrowing books, as in a conventional library, anyone can become a member and borrow a work of art. In terms of my over-arching exploration of broadened collecting of and access to contemporary art, this model is undoubtedly attractive.

The origins of *artotheks* are hazy, occasionally attributed to the Scandinavian countries in the 1960s. Today they are most commonly found in Germany and in Austria. The *Artothekenverband Deutschland*, a support and promotion network for German Artotheks, currently maps 117 art libraries across throughout the country (Wesnigk et al, 2013 and Artothekenverband Deutschland, 2021).

While *artotheks* differ from place to place in terms of collection, administration and structure, they are often associated with *kunstverien* networks; flourishing in cities and

towns with publicly owned collections and active civil society (Berlin, Meppen, Köln, for example). Elsewhere they may be associated with traditional libraries and other cultural institutions (such as in Jena or Potsdam). In Hannover, the *artothek* specialises in Outsider Art (artothek Hannover, 2020).

Organised similarly to standard book-lending libraries, it is typical to encounter catalogues, classifications, memberships and conditions of loan. The significant difference being that art is borrowed. By its nature this brings additional considerations; storage and display may require more space, the value of works is likely to be higher than a lending book copy, and conservation issues may vary widely (Patz, 1988; Otto, 1988; von Schaper, 1988). Focusing on one *artothek* exemplifies how some of these issues are resolved and suggests some considerations for my research project. As with the collecting groups described in the previous chapter, artworks become circulated objects and echoes of gift-exchange practices such as *kula* can be considered.

Focusing on one *artothek* exemplifies how some of the practical issues are resolved and suggests some considerations for my research project. The Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) was created in 1969, with the aim of presenting contemporary fine art to the wider public. The following year the organisation created one of the first *Artotheks* in Germany (n.b.k., 2018). Today n.b.k. is situated on Chausseestraße; a busy thoroughfare on the edge of the gallery district, with a history of manufacture and commerce in the nineteenth century and divided by The Wall from 1961-1990. The organisation considers itself "a significant institution for contemporary art and discourse" (n.b.k., 2020a) and champions "the democratic idea of cultural education for all" (n.b.k., 2018).

The library is on the first floor above a gallery space and *videothek* (where artists' films can be viewed). n.b.k. also uses the gallery exterior as an exhibition space for invited artists. The *artothek* resembles a small gallery or even gallery shop: there are displays of works, there are offices, a meeting room, a space with a kettle and sink.

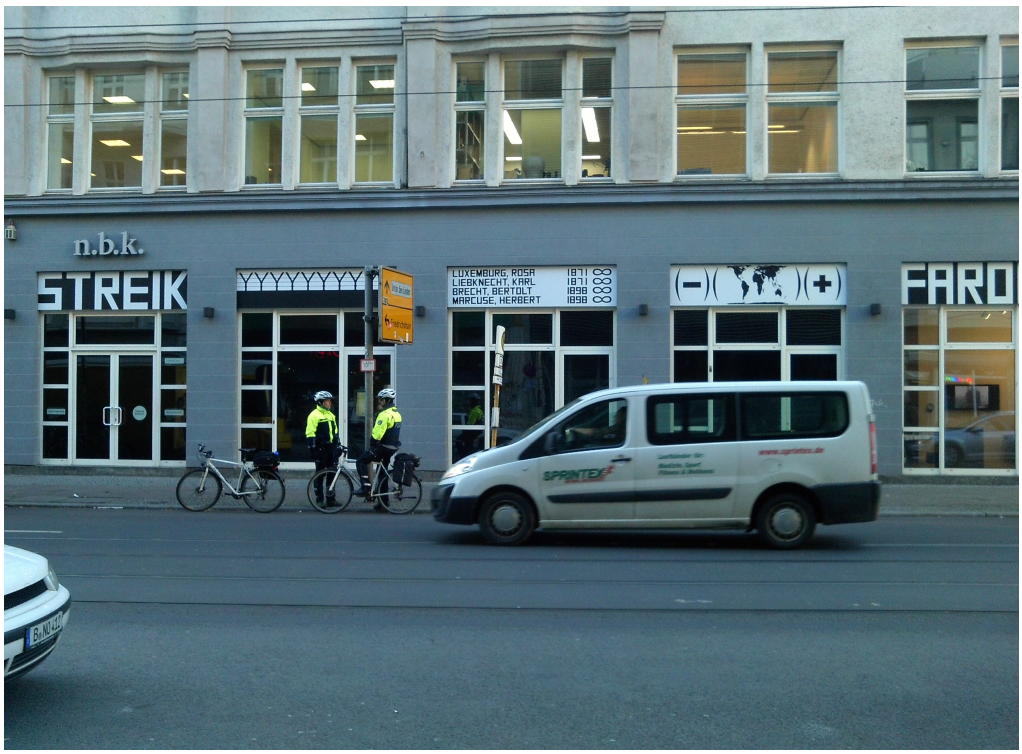

Figure 5: Exterior n.b.k. December 2017

The n.b.k.'s longevity means that its collection is large and therefore storage space is at a premium. Understandably, the storage area is somewhat complex as the collection includes sculpture and framed works by a wide range of artists in various media. The need for precise classification and cataloguing arises not simply to organise the collection, but to ensure that it is described in a way to encourage borrowers to visit and to aid efficient retrieval when visits occur.

An online catalogue of works is designed to help borrowers to refine requests from a collection of approximately 4,000 works (n.b.k., 2018). At home borrowers can browse works by artists from Marina Abramović to Klaus Zylla and including works by Pablo Picasso, Gerhard Richter, Roy Lichtenstein, Douglas Gordon, Mona Hatoum and Hannah Höch.

The popularity of certain works means that while pre-booking could be seen as attractive, it is not encouraged; the rationale being that works by well known artists could be booked

years ahead, making both the management of bookings complex and the length of waiting time for new borrowers a disincentive (n.b.k., 2020a). The possibility also arises of works by less familiar artists, being overlooked and left on the shelves as borrowers chase stellar pieces.

The notion of a population rushing to get its hands on n.b.k.'s work by Picasso or Richter might set many a conservator's heart racing. Risk of damage to all works is mitigated by insurance and conditions of loan explicitly state,

> The borrower is responsible for treating loaned works including the frame with care and to protect them from damage. The works must not be removed from their frames, must be protected from water damage and sunlight, and should not be hung above radiators or furnaces (n.b.k., 2014).

Insurance provided by n.b.k. covers works while in transit, although it is imagined that borrowers will have their own insurance for works once in their homes. Packaging is also carefully considered and works have to be returned in the packaging n.b.k. issue. Framed works are stamped on the reverse to discourage opening and re-framing. Insurance costs are covered by modest loan fees for each work borrowed (3 Euros for a three month loan, at time of writing).

This low level charge does not contribute to other aspects of *artothek* funding and as with any public collection, finance is a very much a live issue. Staffing and building costs aside, there is the challenge of making new acquisitions in an era when prices outstrip funds available. n.b.k.'s budget today buys fewer works than it did in the 1970s and yet the imperative to keep the collection contemporary compels purchasing. The questions of what and how to collect discussed by Rhys (2011), Macdonald (2006), Altshuler (2013) as applying to museums are equally relevant to *artotheks*.

Figure 6: n.b.k. Interior. December 2017

n.b.k.'s solution to acquisition is to do so annually by means of inviting artists and commercial galleries to submit works for an exhibition, with galleries being advised of the working price bracket. This event is jointly organised with ZLB (Zentrale Landesbibliothek Berlin), another city *artothek* (n.b.k., 2020a). A committee including experts, staff and a borrower-representative select work for the *artotheks* to purchase. In 2019 twenty-eight works were added to the collection (n.b.k., 2020b).

Apart from the small fee per work to cover insurance, borrowing from the *artothek* is free and open to all residents of Berlin over the age of sixteen (n.b.k., 2014). The organisation's central tenet is making cultural education accessible to everyone and it sets out to achieve this, not only through the loans themselves, but associated activities such as talks, screenings, publications and the *artothek* mobile, which lends to schools, hospitals and other institutions (n.b.k., 2020a). New borrowers are attracted through exhibitions as well as associated press and social media coverage.

Embedded within the Berlin artistic community, n.b.k. sees itself as supporting artists through purchasing works for library lending (Babias, 2017, np). Additionally, selling selected originals and editions generates funds for the organisation itself, while acting as a further outlet for artists. Accordingly, if a borrower wanted to take a work home permanently and had the means, it could be possible if the work were an edition available for sale at n.b.k. Prices range from several hundred euros to several thousand (with a discount for n.b.k. members) and include, for example, works by Thomas Hirschhorn or Rosemarie Trockel (n.b.k., 2021).

Research Context

The focus of my research is to explore not only if, but how this art library model might transfer from the streets of Berlin to Scotland and what the experience of using the library would be for borrowers.

On a modest scale this project has been inspired by n.b.k. and other German and Austrian *artotheks.* In creating the project, I considered the lessons I could learn from these established organisations including; attracting users, building the collection, cataloguing, storage, security/risk (conservation, insurance, framing, packaging), presentation of works, loan agreements, communication, transport and location. In order to do this I established my own version of an *artothek*, the Artothek Research Project.

The process started in February 2018 and was operational from July 2018 to September 2019. It may continue in the future, depending on interest within the community where it operated and other logistical factors. The finite research period of fifteen months was sufficient to gain an impression of a range of possibilities and problems inherent in the system.

I made field notes as I established and operated the library in addition to gathering data

on works borrowed. An initial base-line survey was carried out with borrowers at the point of first loan, in order to have some information on the demographic of library users.

Towards the end of the research period in Autumn 2019, I carried out three reflective interviews with five borrowers. One interview was with a married couple and another was with a mother and young daughter. One additional response was via a questionnaire. I had approached other borrowers regarding interviews but travel and other logistical reasons prevented these from happening. The face to face interviews all took place at within the community where the library operated. The interviewees were representative of the spectrum of borrowers in terms of age, socio-economic and educational background.

The mother and daughter had borrowed one work at the time of the interview, the couple had borrowed two works and the final interviewee had borrowed three works. The online respondent had a slightly different relationship with the library and this will be detailed below.

In creating the questionnaire, I wanted to set a framework for discussion, but I was prepared for the conversations to branch into unforeseen areas. There were fifteen questions and interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. I was interested to find out why people had engaged with the library, if they could recall what they had borrowed and try to find out how they had lived with the works as well as what had influenced their borrowing choice(s). To an extent I was trying to find out what sort of impact, if any, borrowing the works had had on the borrowers and their households.

I included three questions about the operation of the *artothek*. This was not because I wanted feedback on the efficiency of the system, but rather because I was interested in the broader relationship between the research project and the community. If the research project was in some way about new types of relationships and ways of participating in the artworld, it was important that I should adopt a genuinely inclusive and democratic

approach. This would mean that library members should have input (at least in theory or potentially in the longer term) as to how it should be managed and run. Hence, towards the end of the interview, I included questions about the suitability of the venue and possible flaws in the system.

Given the small scale of the interview data, I rejected using qualitative data analysis software packages to identify arising themes. However, the element of objectivity such packages could offer interested me, especially as I was both interviewer and researcher. Consequently, in addition to reading, comparing and analysing the material generated, I ran the interview transcripts minus my questions and comments (ie responses only) through a readily available word cloud programme, as one approach to identifying themes (Zygomatic, 2019).

In addition to creating pictographic representations, this programme also provided a statistical breakdown of individual word repetition. Using this breakdown for each interview set I compiled a chart of the words used in each interview. I then identified the words that were used across all interviews, as this could indicate themes common to all the borrowers. One concern, however was that this approach would only reveal common speech mannerisms. The fields of sociolinguistics and philosophy of language suggested terminology and analysis of wider patterns which may be useful for developing the broadest possible understanding. For example, the words *like, think, just* and *good* (among the seven most frequently used words) can all be used as intensifiers or punctors or even terminal tags rather than affirmative verbs or adjectives. Taking each of the seven most widely used words in turn, I compared the sentences in which they occurred, regardless of speaker, in order to draw conclusions about usage and any trends or themes arising through the borrowing experience. While this data was of secondary importance to more rounded commentaries such as field notes and interviews, it did reveal some interesting usages which are discussed more fully below.

Process Narrative: Establishing the Project

Initially, I considered operating the library online with a regular (monthly) meeting point when works viewed on-screen could be exchanged. I set up a blogspot with the idea of using it to both attract participants and showcase the works available for loan. Almost immediately I began to have concerns; the blog (www.artothekresearchproject.wordpress.com) didn't appear on google searches, and I quickly learned that this would be unlikely unless it received a vast increase in traffic. The images of works didn't do them justice. And most troubling of all, I was concerned about reaching borrowers from a range of backgrounds, not just those who might look for an art project online. Furthermore, if I did find a broad mix of borrowers, where would we meet? Considering Foucault's observation that, "space itself has a history in Western experience" the challenge of locating a public, neutral space without the embedded connotations and barriers might seem impossible (Foucault, 1986: 22). Spaces that came readily to my mind (a quiet cafe in a gallery or a room at the Art School) could be regarded, in Foucault's terminology, as heterotopias; delineated spaces, not completely free, open or welcoming to all. Alternatively, commercial cafes (which by intention and design also project certain social ideals and aspirations) might be very busy, thus putting the works in potential danger. A crowded cafe, a bag strap here, a cup of hot coffee there; a recipe if not for disaster, then certainly for damage. Moreover, in a commercial space, how would I manage a flow of potential borrowers? Would they all meet at once or would I need to issue time slots? How could I ensure they all had equal access to the works? And, prosaically, how much would it cost me in coffee?

And then I had a moment of clarity. For the last twenty years I have been part of the non-resident community of hutters at Carbeth, ten miles north of Glasgow. United by a shared history and common purpose, this community is formed of approximately 300 people from Clydebank, Glasgow and places further afield, who spend their recreational hours off-grid in wooden huts. Its members include children and grandparents, musicians and builders,

Figure 7: A Carbeth Hut, Carbeth Clachan

social workers and ex-bank robbers; it is probably the most socially mixed place I have ever encountered. And it has a community hut, which everyone uses and where meetings, meals and other activities take place. It became a solution to my initial concerns, both practical and conceptual, all at once.

It could be argued that organising an *artothek* in such a quirky community is a very different task from running a successful organisation in the cosmopolitan German capital. While this is certainly the case, I did not endeavour to measure the success of my research project against n.b.k. Rather I wanted, as far as possible to emulate practice from a successful institution. My research was not about scalability, but rather the experiences of the people involved; an attempt to understand what an art library might mean to them. Moreover, with strong "alternative" cultures, WWII legacies and heterogeneous populations the two locations might have more in common than is initially apparent.

Logistically, having the ARP in one place was sensible. Additionally, within this familiar

space, I could arrange the works and to some extent the rest of the setting in what seemed to me to be a suitable style. The space is no white cube, rather more domestic with an assortment of tables, chairs, book cases, kitchen counter and some random “useful” bits and pieces. I wanted the space to be familiar enough to be non-threatening, but altered slightly to feel just a little different from usual; the presence of the artworks themselves doing most of the latter transformation. More Foucault's fairground of marvels, than universal museum. (Foucault, 1986: 26). I hoped that this homely environment would also encourage borrowers to envisage having a work within their own domestic settings.

For ease of a quick install and de-install and to encourage borrowers to handle the works, I presented them on chip-board table-top lecterns. These raised the works a few centimetres off the height of the large central table and were only seen behind the smallest works.
I did try to tidy away any clutter lying around on other surfaces. If the great museums of the nineteenth century shared display techniques with emergent department stores (Macdonald, 2006: 86), then this display aesthetic was that of the contemporary pop-up shop.

Figure 8: Artothek Research Project at the Carbeth community hut

Having settled on both a location and its associated community I embarked simultaneously

on attracting borrowers and building a collection. Being a Carbeth hutter myself meant that I was familiar with how to reach other people; there is an established email newsletter and I was given permission to circulate invitations to ARP though it. However, many hutters do not use email and so I also created posters and hung those in familiar spots for notices. On these I purposely didn't use the term *artothek,* considering that "art library" would be a clearer expression. Word of mouth and facebook also amplified the invitations. While primarily aimed at hutters, many other people both access Carbeth social media and walk the grounds; consequently there was the potential for all forms of communication to reach an even wider public.

The initial invitation, as well as explaining a little about the project, offered "light refreshments"; an added incentive for people to come along as well as an echo of what might be customary at an exhibition opening.

Figure 9: Poster for the art library at an entrance to Carbeth

The bigger challenge was building a collection with neither a dedicated budget nor a body of works acquired over decades. I was also determined that there should be no curatorial narrative to the collection beyond it being of contemporary visual art. In particular, I did not want to limit the collection to works I particularly liked or ones I imagined my audience would like. The aim was to have as broad a collection as possible, without compromising on its contemporary nature.

My first step was to consider what I currently owned, but had little concern over any potential loss or damage. There was one appropriate work; *Bond* by Art & Economics Group with Bill Drummond. It is a text piece on paper and literally an art bond, which theoretically could be redeemed. Given the nature of the work, it seemed a suitable start of a collection, which also interrogates established art market practice. There was a pleasing synergy in using this work; as I mentioned earlier I had bought it in my first explorations of joint ownership.

Clearly, the library needed more works, and I issued an open call around GSA, asking for works on loan. I felt that if I gathered works from both students and staff, I would have a variety of work which was self-selecting. I received a loan of one work. It was suitably interesting, even intriguing, but unfortunately I did not receive the range of responses I'd hoped for. Other strategies were called for.

I bought a couple of multiple works: The Guerrilla Girls' *Dear Collector* handkerchief and Ross Sinclair's *Real Life* 7 inch single. I came across the handkerchief for sale in an online museum shop. I confess, it amused me and I could foresee living with it in the future. Additionally, not only could I afford the price-tag, but if it did go astray I wouldn't have lost a huge sum (less than £20 including postage). Moreover, the message was pertinent to collection-making, with its focus on the under-representation of female artists in private collections.

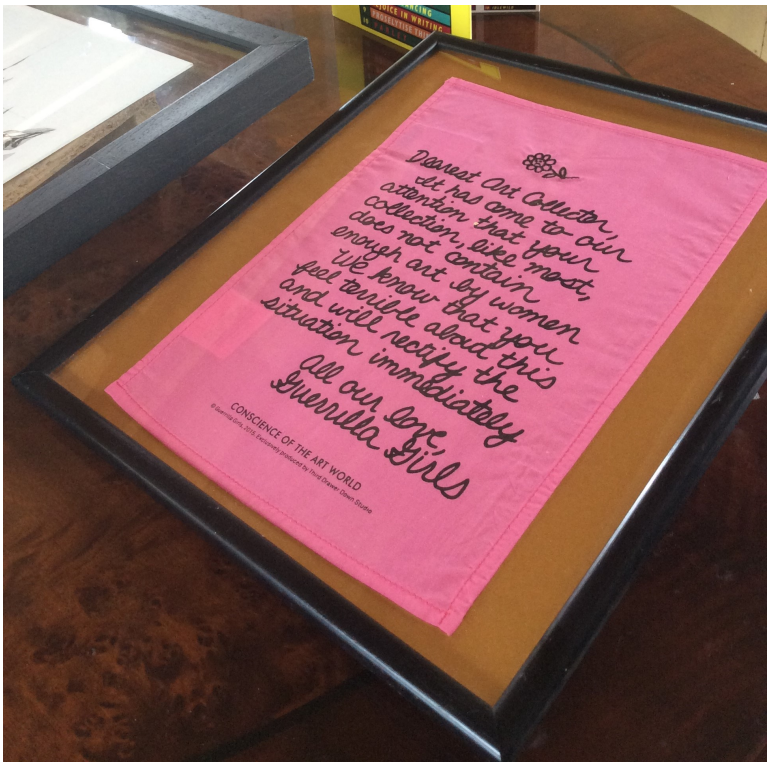

Figure 10: The Guerilla Girls, *Dear Collector* handkerchief at ARP

I came to Ross Sinclair's work by another route. I'd heard him play at an opening, enjoyed the performance and noted that other people did too. A short time later, Patricia Fleming Projects organised an Art Car Boot Sale and among the stalls was one selling *Real Life* singles for £10. The appeal of this work, was not limited to the music, it was an interesting object to be considered an artwork and I envisaged it stimulating discussion at the *artothek*. Its inherent fragility might also stimulate dialogue around trust, care and liability.

The most productive collecting strategy however, was the direct request. I approached individual artists, collectors and curators I know and asked if they would lend work. Half those approached made loans, with others intending to but stalled by logistics or personal reasons. Only one person directly declined to make a loan, as he had previous experience of loaned works going missing only to be found subsequently for sale at auction.

From the outset I had to be clear to all lenders that there was an element of risk inherent in the project. I wasn't anticipating the extreme situation as described by the non-lending

artist above, but it is central to the library concept that works are circulated despite conservators acknowledging that, “The most common time for a work of art to be damaged is when it is being moved” (Kinsella, 2015). Attempting to mitigate this danger, loan agreements with borrowers at n.b.k. state,

> The following insurance is guaranteed: During the transport to and from the Artothek: against damages resulting from transport accidents, circumstances beyond our control theft, and water damage. The contract will not insure damages resulting from the negligence of the borrower (n.b.k., 2014).

Nonetheless, in expanding the lending collection, n.b.k. considers which works are most suitable for repeated handling, with factors such as size and fragility taken into account (n.b.k., 2020b).

Not all *artotheks* do insure transport or any other part of the loan; arguing that having any insurance in place makes borrowers less careful with works and taking a deposit for at least an initial loan provides the library with greater security (von Schaper, 1988).

Due to limited funds and the *ad hoc* growth of the research collection I did not take out insurance, but did initially consider taking deposits. In the ARP borrower terms I clarified that there was no insurance provided for the artworks and broadly described the standard of care expected. Although the precise legal position for non-return of loaned items is debatable, I stated that non-returns would be reported to the police (see, for example, Scottish Law Commission, 2012).

All the lenders to ARP were relaxed about the non-insurance of works, nonetheless I clarified this in the loan agreement I made with them. I drafted this loosely on gallery loan agreements used professionally. Rather than store the works on-site at Carbeth, I took them there and home again after every library event. While the number of works grew over the period of the project, as long as I had access to a vehicle, transporting them was possible. I felt they would be safer where I would see them daily (ie at home) rather than in an all-welcome community hut, where one person's treasure is another person's junk and

no-one is present constantly to regulate the integrity of objects.

As the artists were under no obligation to lend work to me I perceived that their willingness to lend without insurance reflected their own attitudes to risk, and probably familiarity with handling their own work. (A perception intensified when works being lent were handed over to me unframed and/or very slightly wrapped.) In preparing works for loan I framed any that were unframed and followed n.b.k.'s protocol about works not being taken out of frames; even stamping the reverse with the initials ARP. While assuming that the frames would prevent most damage to works on paper, I packaged works with bubble-wrap or jiffy foam and put them in hand-embroidered cotton bags with a ARP logo for ease of borrower carrying. My intention was to indicate that the objects had dual status; domestic, yet of value; portable, yet delicate. As the "steward" of the works , I was attempting to demonstrate care and gallery-style "good practice", and so enact the intrinsic value of the objects in light of the observation that, "In art, creative people—makers and consumers—care about the product" (Bianchi, 2015: 139). Practically, the more appropriate the packaging I provided, the less likelihood there would be of damage to the works in transit.

Process Narrative: The Artothek Research Project

Being responsible for borrowed works, rather than owning them, added an extra dimension to the research project; creating a role for me which was one of very real stewardship and an arms-length facilitator between artist and borrower as well as librarian. This situation of facing two ways (to the artist/lender and to the borrower) has echoes of the mediator role examined in my third and final case study.

The common factor among borrowers was that they, like me, are all Carbeth hutters; some of whom I already knew. My initial base-line survey sought to understand who the borrowers might be in terms of socio-economic background and involvement in the arts. I felt this would provide useful context of the project and potentially lead to insights about

access to the library in comparison to other art venues.

While n.b.k. could not share detailed information on the background of individual borrowers, there was a perception that most do not work in the arts and are "predominantly middle-class". The wider outreach Artomobil project engages with a broader demographic through loans to organisations including kindergartens and old people's homes (n.b.k., 2020a).

My sample was taken from an initial group of ARP borrowers who agreed to share the information for the benefit of the research project. There were seven respondents. The survey confirmed my impression that Carbeth hutters are socially diverse in terms of income, education and habits.

Of those responding to a question about annual income one third live on less than £10,000 per annum, while another third live on over £35,000 pa. A median income is in the £18,000- £25,000 bracket.

More broadly, using postcode analysis via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, the extreme ends of the index spectrum were represented by those giving complete data; including one borrower from what the index describes as an area experiencing, "Deep-rooted deprivation [. . .] consistently among the 5% most deprived in Scotland since SIMD 2004." (Scottish Government, 2016: 10). By contrast, one other borrower came from an area experiencing the least deprivation.

Some participants chose to give only partial postcode information and while this was sufficient to identify the broad areas of Maryhill and Clydebank (neither of which are generally regarded as wealthy) the SIMD offers analysis on even more specific areas. Of those supplying complete information nearly two thirds are resident in the 20% most deprived parts of Scotland.

SIMD analysis can not provide details about individuals or individual households. Its purpose is to collate factors such as employment levels, income, housing, education, crime rates and access to healthcare to create an overview of quality of life in small geographic areas. Perhaps unfortunately, not included in these measures is access to the arts, thus excluding cultural life from quality of life measurements. For nation-wide data on participation and engagement in cultural activities the annual Scottish Household Survey has a chapter on Culture and Heritage, which includes measuring attendance at cultural events or places and participation in cultural activities (Scottish Government, 2018). Findings also include information on attendance and participation by age, gender, level of education, SIMD area and long term health condition.

Recent data indicates that,

> In 2017 there was a 16 percentage point difference in cultural attendance (including cinema) between the 20 per cent most and 20 per cent least deprived areas (77 per cent compared with 93 per cent). This gap has narrowed since 2014 when the gap was 20 percentage points. When cinema attendance is excluded, the difference is even greater, with 65 per cent in the most deprived areas and 88 per cent in the least deprived areas. (Scottish Government, 2018: 218)

The report gives more specific information on which type of cultural venue people attended with 33% attending museums, 21% attending galleries, 18% attending exhibitions and 29% attending libraries (participants selected more than one option). Although these statistics are further broken down by “level of education”, the report does not compare attendance at different cultural events by SIMD. Consequently, there is no comparative data provided on gallery, exhibition or other artform specific attendance between areas of contrasting deprivation. Nor does the SHS detail whether events attended feature contemporary visual art or more traditional art or design or other exhibitions.

The Artothek Research Project, with almost two thirds of participants living in the 20% most deprived areas, follows the SHS finding that the majority (65%) of people from those areas attend cultural events. What is unknown from the readily available data is how often

contemporary visual art features in cultural events reported on a national basis.

Where the Carbeth sample is atypical is in the percentage of borrowers from more affluent/least deprived areas. The number is smaller than those experiencing greater deprivation, reversing the national picture. This in itself could be explained by the wider demographic of Carbeth hutters not living in the most affluent areas, but it could also be argued that the concept of an art library, based where borrowers regularly visit for other reasons, increases opportunities for participation for those from typically less well represented communities. I will return to considerations of location shortly.

Continuing to examine my survey data, in terms of highest level of educational qualification, over half of respondents had a degree or post-graduate qualification. Others had Highers and no-one selected Standard Grades as their highest academic achievement. Respondents with Highers feature in both the highest and lowest income brackets; as did those with degrees. The SHS report concludes that, "adults with degrees or professional qualifications were most likely to attend cultural places and events; whereas attendance was lowest for those with no qualifications" (Scottish Government, 2018: 217). In this instance the Artothek borrowers seem to conform to national finding. As with some of the other survey questions, it should be remembered that not all borrowers chose to answer every question.

None of the borrowers worked in the arts full-time, with the majority stating their daily lives did not involve art at all. The significant exception was Jill who said more than half her daily life involved art. When asked if they bought art, just under half replied that they did, but none of them described themselves as a collector.

Curiously, buying art was not related to income, with borrowers across the survey income brackets stating that they bought art. One responded who said she didn't buy art, "Just stuff for flat-arts & crafts [like furnishing & ornaments] not [from] a gallery" commented

she liked the idea of the library as concerns around cost made her nervous of going into an art gallery (Donna, July 2018). Nonetheless she came from the second highest income bracket. Her caution is interesting and arguably reflects the influence of media coverage of auction room prices (described in Chapter Three) and the barriers to art collecting described by gallerist Patricia Fleming in the previous chapter (Chapter Four).

All but one of the respondents stated that they attended galleries or exhibitions between one and three times a year. In the questionnaire there were six alternative answers provided ranging from "every week" to "never attend." The most common response of one to three times a year was the second lowest frequency of visit provided. The conclusion can be drawn that either participants replied honestly or they did not want to define themselves as people who never attended galleries and this was the most suitable alternative. This statistic is similar to, but slightly lower than, the national attendance rates at museums, galleries and exhibitions documented in the SHS 2017. The remaining Carbeth respondent, Jill, visited exhibitions and galleries once a month and perhaps unsurprisingly, she described herself as being professionally involved in the artworld to some extent.

One other comparative statistic of note from the SHS concerns typical book-lending libraries. Although these were not the most visited venues in terms of total footfall, they were, "the most frequently attended cultural place or event, with one in five people (20 per cent) attending at least once a week, and almost double that number attending at least once a month (36 per cent)" (Scottish Government, 2018: 221). Perhaps suggesting that the relationship users have with a library is different from other cultural venues. Inherent in their structure is at least one return visit and this could be regarded as forming a pattern of regular return, whereas attending a concert, exhibition or performance is itself a one-off activity, no matter how much the institution or venue may foster returning visitors. It is not unimaginable that *artotheks* also benefit from this intrinsic return-borrower relationship.

Figure 11: Visitors at the Carbeth Artothek Research Project

While building-based central European *artotheks* have regular set opening hours, with late-nights designed to suit workers, weekends suiting families and afternoons for those that prefer to be out in the day-time, my research project had a more limited scope. I aligned my model more with a travelling library van, making monthly visits, rather than a major lending or reference library such as The Mitchell or the National Library of Scotland.

During the research period, this set-up functioned reasonably well; some months were relatively busy, others quiet with only one person making a brief visit to return a work. The busiest session was in September 2018, when nine people attended, of whom three borrowed works.

Each month I put out publicity and reminder notices at least one week prior to the library being open. On the day I set out the works, laid out some biscuits or cake, opened the doors and waited. I remember the first month being rather nervous wondering whether anyone would come at all, only to be surprised to see, at the exact time of opening, a car drawing up and three people marching out, as if determined to be first over the threshold. The most discouraging month was October, although there was one visitor who dropped in briefly to return a work, two other works due back were not returned. My notes from the day stress how physically cold I felt on a damp Autumn day in an unheated hut, I admitted to feeling "a little bit disappointed", but sure the non-returns were due to "either forgetfulness or circumstances." Without borrower contact details to hand, I could only make enquiries once back at my desk.

I had ensured that all borrowers indicated their preferred means of communication and gave me contact details. One late-returner, Eilidh, had given me a phone number and asked to be texted, while the other late-returner, May, preferred to be contacted by email. I reached out to them both. Eilidh did not reply and May sent a message explaining she had been "very busy" (May, 2018a).

Here I have to acknowledge that the nature of the works overdue did influence my levels of concern for their late return. Eilidh had borrowed the *Dear Collector* handkerchief, an inexpensive multiple, which I own. May had *Memories of Geology*, an original watercolour by an established Glasgow artist; in monetary terms it was probably the most valuable piece in the library and was lent directly by the artist. I would feel a little annoyed if the handkerchief was lost or damaged, but as a commercially available multiple, I could easily replace it if I chose to; undoubtedly it has a known commodity status; being bought at a set price from an online gallery shop.

By contrast, I felt a huge sense of responsibility for *Memories of Geology,* embodying the observation that artworks are "particularly trust-intensive" (Bianchi, 2015: 135).

Intentionally, I had not looked into its monetary value, although I did have some sense of prices of other works by the artist, but what troubled me was the intertwined notions of trust (placed in the project by the artist) and the status of the art object.

Regardless of whether all artworks are technically positional goods or more generally commodities, the status difference between these two overdue works is that one is highly differentiated and the other is part of an unnumbered edition (Bianchi, 2015; Horowitz, 2011). In short, I would never be able to replace the watercolour if lost or damaged. Exploring the "special role of trust in the art exchanges" from the standpoint of economics Bianchi places relationships at the centre of the web of trust and confidence required to make the business of art possible,

> Relational trust, that trust which, as we have seen, comes from reciprocated fairness and the sharing of knowledge, and which can emerge from within a relationship, must also play a role (Bianchi, 2015, 139).

I was acutely aware of the trust the lenders had placed in the concept of the *artothek*, but I also understood there was a relational component too, as the loans had come through personal contacts and the subsequent emails, discussions and cups of coffee while completing loan agreements and handing over work were all part of the "trust built on shared values and reciprocity" (Bianchi, 2015: 135). The significance of the trusting relationships was re-iterated when in response to the lender's questionnaire, Danielle Banks noted, "I would not be so willing to lend art to someone who had a different way of working or values that I disagreed with", clarifying that the loan she made was specific to this project, this researcher and relationship nexus (Banks, 2020).

Consequently, when works were not returned, and in particular the one loaned to me, I was concerned that I could be in breach of the trust placed in me. While I was not in the position of losing prestige equating to losing one's soul described by Mauss within the potlatch system of gifts and reciprocity, I was acutely aware of my obligations, my duty of care to the artworks and the artist (Mauss, 2002 [1925], 50).

Of course, I reminded myself that it wasn't actually me who had an overdue loan, the network of trust included the borrowers.; what were they thinking or feeling? To discover that I needed to make contact.

Eilidh didn't reply to my text. I knew her a little and that electronic communication wasn't a big part of her life and so I simply contacted a mutual friend and asked if he would pass on a message that the work was overdue and I'd be grateful if she could return it at the next monthly library. The message relayed to me was that she sent her apologies and would be there next month. And the following month, just as I was arriving to set up the *artothek*, I met Eilidh leaving the community hut, where she had "dropped off" the picture. She was in a car and in a hurry, so any nuanced discussion about what had happened was not possible.

How would the n.b.k. or other established, building-based *artotheks* have responded? If it is the case that trust "involves forms of social orientation such as a preference for fairness, equality, and reciprocity, or, conversely, an aversion to inequality and betrayal" (Bianchi, 2015: 136) is it possible that in Germany and Austria, where *artotheks* flourish, there are more socially orientated citizens than Scotland ? I will answer each of these questions in turn.

The short answer to the first question is that n.b.k. would also have communicated with borrowers and implemented their fine (or late fee) system. For Eilidh that would have cost 30 Euros, curiously, more than I had paid for the object itself (n.b.k., 2014). An additional factor at n.b.k. which may cause the organisation concern, but which also operates as a lever to late returners, is that n.b.k.'s insurance for the artworks does not provide cover after the due date. This means that all liability during a late return would rest with the borrower. n.b.k. note that this information is communicated "often and transparently to our borrowers" (n.b.k, 2020a). Although I had initially considered a fine system, I was concerned both about the ethics of collecting fines from a research perspective and the

deterrent effect it might have on borrowers. Within both public and academic traditional library settings, the question of fines is a matter of debate. While fines can be seen as encouraging responsibility and timely return (as well as institutional income), they are also regarded as creating a barrier to users, diminishing goodwill and disproportionately affecting those on low incomes, who may made need free access the most (Reed et al, 2014; Sung and Tolppanen, 2013; McMenemy, 2010). In 2019, Chicago Public Library, followed others in the US going "fine free" and within weeks noted a 240% increase in returns (Leahy, 2020). Although I was concerned about having works returned, implementing a fine system may not have produced any more prompt returns. n.b.k.'s regular communication with borrowers ameliorates such concerns for them.

Had both the overdue works been returned one month late, these questions of trust might not have loomed so large. However, *Memory of Geology* was not returned that month. After a brief email exchange, an additional reminder and another art library opening, the work was still not returned; it was now two months overdue. Discussing loss of trust within the art market Bianchi observes that,

> the breaching of an implicit or explicit promise does more than material harm, causing people to react with more negative feelings than if there were equal damage but no betrayal (Bianchi, 2015: 145).

I consciously suppressed any negative feelings, responded politely and tried not to over-react, acknowledging that there was no mention of material damage. I adopted a different approach and suggest that on one of my next two visits to Glasgow, we could meet and I could collect the work. The reply I received alarmed me,

> Sorry I keep missing you I have been carrying the art work in my car for weeks now. If I new [sic] where your hut was I would have delivered it to you, but as I am now carrying a lot of stuff up and down to Carbeth I was frighten it would be damaged so have left it with RB at C Road for safety (May, 2018b).

Should it have alarmed me? The borrower was clearly aware of keeping the work safe, but her approach did not align with my view of safe art handling; keeping it in a car which is carrying "a lot of [other] stuff"; considering leaving it for me in my hut, even if I am not

there; leaving it with RB, who although known to me, has agreed to nothing in writing about borrowing artworks.

I could reflect that I should have given more detailed instructions about how to and how not to keep and transport art library loans. I could also wish that the work had just simply been returned at the arranged times and place. What I did, however, was to put myself into exactly the position that I'd hoped to avoid by hosting the art library at the central location of the Carbeth community hut, chasing around possible meetings at other Carbeth venues or in the city.

Finally, eighty-four days after the work was lent, on the 14th December I was standing outside a Glasgow underground station. As I waited to meet borrower May I mentally replayed scenes from Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch,* in particular the climactic attempt to retrieve the eponymous painting when cars, art, bullets and betrayal are frenetically exchanged.

> In the same instant Martin- distracted with the painting, directly across from me- looked up, and I was still looking at him blankly across the roof of the car when I heard it, to my right, three fast cracks..... (Tartt, 2013: 677).

Although I genuinely experienced a disjunction between my purpose and that of the jolly revellers around me, the Glasgow reality of *Memory of Geology*'s return was more mundane than the novel's denouement. Ten minutes later than agreed May's car pulled up and the passenger door opened. I didn't get in. She had the painting wrapped and in a bag. We had the briefest of chats- "I really liked having it," she said. The traffic queued up behind the car. Our conversation faltered. May asked if was travelling to where she was going. I was going in the opposite direction. We said goodbye. I got on the underground and, still out of synch with pre-Christmas party-people, travelled to where I was to spend the night. I couldn't help smiling when I discovered that my Airbnb host had an East European accent- just as I image Boris' voice in Tartt's novel. Finally, rucksack off, I unwrapped and "condition checked" the artwork. All was well. Of course.

Library Stories

Mentally playing with the parallels to *The Goldfinch* amused me, but it also suggests the common urge to use an existing narrative to make sense of an experience. It made the story "play the part of conceptual thinking" as Lévi-Strauss described it in his reflections on of the role of myth (Lévi-Strauss, 2001: 8). Correspondingly, I found that visitors to the art library appreciate stories as routes to engaging with the artworks. In the words of one visitor, "I wouldn't normally have a piece of art - but now I see there's a story to it, it would be something to talk about. I like that" (Rona, 2018). Given the narrative nature of much of pre-twentieth century painting and its dominance in civic collections, perhaps it is unsurprising that audiences, even of contemporary art, are reassured by an accompanying narrative; whether artist's biography, notes on practice and methods, research interests or philosophical approach. The value of background information is also acknowledged by Bianchi who links an increased availability of information to enhanced trustworthiness and transparency between dealers and collectors (Bianchi, 2015: 139). One ARP lender concurred,

> I know from my own experiences of sharing and showing work, people always enjoy knowing the story both behind a piece of work (what led to it) as well as that work's history (where else has it been shown, commissioned through, etc.) (Glasgow Lender, 2020).

As discussed in the previous chapter, living with artworks encourages story-telling as Marie-Louise Collard explains,

> For members of the Collective there is an added layer to the story of each art work. A layer that comes from the process of purchasing it, the interactions with the artists themselves and the reactions of the people who pass through our homes as we exchange or purchase new works. We re-tell the stories of our experiences within and outside the Collective just as our children recount theirs and their friends reactions to some of the works (Collard, 2018d).

At the Carbeth art library, other, more renegade, social tales unfold. While Rona's comments were made in response to the intentionally narrative screenprint, *Verdigris* by

Danielle Banks (Fig.12), stories grew around other works when people gathered. For example, *Bond*, made in collaboration with Bill Drummond, led to a discussion of his music career and some amusing anecdotes about one visitor attending gigs by his band, KLF, in her rave days. In one sense, even if it was not borrowed and did not depart on a physical journey, the work had had a "social moment". Was it simply fulfilling, in Igor Kopytoff's terms, its "biographical expectations" (Kopytoff, 1986: 67)? An expression which suggests

Figure 12: Danielle Banks, *Verdigris* (detail) screenprint

that objects, like people, have multiple histories and ways in which they can be considered beyond anticipated functions. In this instance the work was certainly fulfilling the expectation to be seen and enjoyed. Alternatively this work was a bond, a concept and not particularly intended to be framed and displayed: the integral expectations for it may not have included viewing. Moreover, who could have anticipated that it would lead that particular visitor to share memories which surprised her friends? It is possible to conclude that beyond the intention and control of the artist, the art object is enlivened by the viewer's associations.

In the instance, a social situation had triggered the story telling. The artwork became a stimulus for social interaction, reminiscence, autobiography and, in general, conversation.

Reflecting on the social aspect of her artwork in the *artothek* Danielle Banks, expressed delight in responses to her work and for the possible consequences of these exchanges,

> I'm amazed and grateful for the different ways people can interpret one image. So I'm interested in talking about art and art as a medium for seeing the world and each other differently (Banks, 2020).

Examining art from an economic perspective, Arjo Klamer identifies four ways in which artists and their work can be valued. One of these is social value where people come together, relationships develop and both artists and audience benefit from "The arts [being] good for conversations, for sharing with others" (2014: 281). He continues,

> People become 'shareholders' in such a [social or shared] good only when they contribute in some way, whether it be by introducing work, by supporting or financing others, by organising exhibitions and so on. In this way, they become part of a social setting (Klamer, 2014: 281).

By extension, in terms of the Carbeth ARP, simply attending is a form of contribution: particularly when the conversation is lively and everyone present becomes focused on the work . In Klamer's terms this may mean participants become "shareholders" by the simple act of engaging with the artwork and the library.

The ARP did not set out to become a social space or discussion group, (rather like the Berlin model, simply a place where loans occur, with other outcomes entirely secondary) but being sited in an existing social space has encouraged social activity of which borrowing and discussing art have become part. This location is a major advantage. Embedded within a community, the ARP visits and uses the community hut alongside meetings, gala days, breakfast clubs and so on. It is already a social and civic space. In the terminology of the 2017 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's *Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations*, it has the advantage of being "hyperlocal" (CGF, 2017: 39).

While footfall to the art library has not been statistically large, many casual visitors have welcomed the idea of the library and the community space being used for art. One visitor

commenting, “I like the idea of it. It's built on trust. Not everyone can afford to own [art], so this way you get it for free” (Sandie, 2018).

On another occasion, the space was double booked, with a discussion forum and the art library both planned. Rather than re-schedule we agreed to share the space. The result was an informal amalgamation of discussion on hutting history and issues with artwork viewing and borrowing. If, in reality not quite a great festival like those described by Mauss, where celebrations and exchanges occur in tandem, this was an opportunity for unexpected social encounters (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 101). It led to conversations developing and information being exchanged. Borrowing followed, with two loans being made that afternoon.

Social situations were not limited to the *artothek* or community hut events. All the borrowers interviewed stated that other people had seen the works during the loan period. In one case this was extended family members and with other borrowers it was their wider circle of visitors. Eilidh recalled that one work in particular, the Guerilla Girls handkerchief did “provoke a discussion”, which I understood to be about the words of the work itself. Jan was the most expansive and I had the impression she had the busiest household,

> loads of people commented on it. We've got regular visits [. . .] and they all noticed it [. . .] The girl that comes in she sits, like that, usually facing me, she said “oh what's that?” And...was really curious as well. [. . . Most] people noticed and mentioned it. “What's that? Where did you get it?” (Jan, 2019).

The impact of an *artothek* extends beyond the library space, with borrowers' homes becoming micro gallery sites, where the presence of the artwork creates opportunities for conversation about the work, art and the library concept.

Trust

Returning to one of the more problematic aspects of the Artothek Research Project; what happens when the story goes wrong? When the artwork has an unplanned extended loan? To be fair to borrower May, subsequent loans were also for longer periods than the stated

four weeks, and with time I became more relaxed about this happening, as long as I maintained communication with the borrower. Nonetheless the question raised earlier of comparative social orientation between Scotland and Germany or Austria is worth discussion.

Although I am wary of ascribing national traits, research carried out by Jan Delhey and Christian Welzel for World Values Research proved useful, as it analyses data from fifty countries "covering for each world region the societies with the largest populations and biggest economies" and included China, Brazil, Germany and Nigeria (Delhey and Welzel, 2012: 53). They maintain there is evidence to indicate that levels of trust found within established groups, such as families, friendship circles or gangs (known as ingroups) are related to levels of trust these same individuals demonstrate to others in society at large (outgroups). They go on to state that this is a global pattern and not specific to individual nations, although the ways in which this trust develops may differ, "it seems that both traditional and modern societies have ingroup-trust and outgroup-trust but modernization changes the nature of their relation" (Delhey and Welzel, 2012: 66).
Relevant to this study is the observation that:

> one's outgroup-trust depends less on one's own cooperative experiences; it depends more on the cooperative climate that diffuses through the prevalence of these experiences in one's surrounding society (Delhey and Welzel, 2012: 64).

In other words, trust at large breeds trust on a more personal level. By this logic, the presence of a large number of *artotheks* in Germany and Austria could explain why they flourish, as they add a net benefit to the cultural life of the those countries and are normalised both as institutions that function on trust as well as being part of everyday cultural life. In this reading what was happening at Carbeth with the over-due loans was simply an unfamiliarity (potentially at a personal as well as cultural level) with the reciprocity involved in the lending project. The novelty of the Carbeth *artothek* simply meant that cultural expectations and trust paradigms have not yet been established.

At this point it is worth recalling Mauss' observations on obligation within systems of gift exchange and the social consequences of failing to meet obligations to either give, receive or reciprocate. He explains that within the potlatch "to lose one's prestige [through not meeting obligations fully] is indeed to lose one's soul" (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 50). Clearly within the Carbeth *artothek* the culture of borrowing was not as sophisticated or developed as the cultures described by Mauss but the correlation with Delhey and Welzel's evidence-based research is interesting; societal expectations and experiences have weight in determining behaviour. Furthermore, an interesting corollary to this is worth noting: at least one visitor to the ARP declined to borrow anything as she was worried that it would get broken or damaged, even although at that time all works were either in frames or would withstand handling. In this instance she did not trust herself (or to be as specific as she was, her family) to take sufficient care of the work. Paradoxically, by her choice not to borrow she demonstrated she understood the need for care to be taken and chose to remain outside the exchange network.

Within the broader context of an established trusting relationship, once Danielle Banks had decided to lend a work, she was pragmatic about which work to select and any risks to it. She considered the possibilities of damage or non-return and subsequently chose older print edition works. However, there were other aspects to her selection, she hoped to accentuate the difference between mass produced reproductions and a hand printed work,

> I wanted to give something that felt hand made and unique and that held a sense of value [. . .] Printed works have a completely different quality when seen in the light and one of the pieces I gave had a metallic ink on it and a coloured layer that isn't immediately obvious (Banks, 2020).

Another related facet to the question of trust emerged in the borrower interviews. While the majority of respondents used the word *art* in the widely accepted sense and to discuss the matter in hand i.e. borrowing works of art, one respondent, Neil used the word in a markedly different sense. He used *art* in the sense of the craft or skill involved in making an artwork. For example, "I find it quite difficult sometimes to recognise the art in certain

things" (Neil, 2019). There was a feeling of questioning; what was the artistry in the object? Arguably this reflected his own considerations on the nature of what art is or can be or is recognised to be. It recalls the reaction I have encountered with those either unfamiliar with or antagonistic towards contemporary art. Neil was far from hostile, more puzzled. He echoed a wider uncertainty since art has been,

> No longer confined solely to the gallery wall or to the painterly frame,[and] avant-garde art moves to embed itself, across a variety of social locations, in the material and symbolic fabric of the world (Roberts, 2010: 91).

John Roberts clarification that there is no decline in artistic skill, rather that artists' skills have changed, continues to present challenges for the non-specialist, potential art borrower (or buyer or collector) such as Neil (Roberts, 2010: 92). While some may feel those conversations were exhausted in the early twentieth century, the figure of the the traditional connoisseur scrutinising and appreciating the craft of the painter, draftsman or sculptor retains a powerful presence.

Connoisseurs come in all shapes and guises of course. Some would like to see them as the last bastions of tradition;

> Connoisseurs are the intellectuals of the art market, animated by the history, subtlety, and attribution of objects. They buy methodically and rarely as an investment. At their best, they slow the world down and force us to stop and contemplate (Beard, 2018: online).

While for others they epitomise the problem with the current artworld as defenders of privilege;

> In the early 1800s there was still a pervasive conception of the Useful Arts [. . .] This was soon subsumed by the emerging Romantic modern paradigm of art for art's sake that was complicit in a growing market for art objects and connoisseurship. The consequence of this has been the creation of an art world purposely and increasingly removed from most sections of society. While this has not always been deliberate, it has certainly been driven by those intent on maintaining the ideology of autonomy for art, outside the messiness of daily concerns and politics (Hudson, 2017b: 20).

Writing in the *Financial Times* and reflecting on the unexpected auction room auto-destruction of *Girl with Balloon* by Banksy in 2018, Jan Dalley, highlights the importance of trust in the artworld. She considers if a system built on trust is threatened by Banksy's action of a work shredding itself at point of sale. More typically the art market trusts that a painting will not auto-destruct, that the auction house is honestly unaware of the planned event and, perhaps most importantly, trusts that work is genuine and original, whether claimed to be so by a living artist (eg Bansky) or authenticated by connoisseurs (Dalley, 2018).

Did the question of trust lie at the root of Neil's struggle to enjoy works? Could he trust the artist to have made the effort he expects, if he hadn't seen the process either directly or embodied in the brushstrokes of the work? Perhaps a more detailed explanation of, for example, Danielle's print-making process would have been both satisfying and of interest to him. Equally, he may have enjoyed discussing how Ross Sinclair approached making a portrait of a city through 45,000 objects including the 7 inch single now in the *artothek*. For some, more spontaneous approaches are possible although these too may require if not trust in oneself, then confidence, possibly even "art-confidence". Artist Thomas Hirschhorn has written on his own work *24h Foucault*,

> I don't know Foucault's philosophy, but I see his work of art.
> It permits me to approach it, to not understand it but to seize it,
> to see it, to be active with it. I don't have to be a historian,
> a connoisseur, a specialist to confront myself with works of art.
> I can seize their energy, their urgency, their necessity, their density
> (Hirschhorn, 2004: 154).

"Art-confidence" similar to Hirschhorn's was demonstrated by Eilidh, who was much more direct and comfortable about discussing art, what she believed it should do and what she liked. For example,

> The Bond one, well that's that whole debate about art [. . .]
> I do like art that provokes thought and I had a few thoughts
> about what is art when I was looking at it (pause) and the
> commercialisation of art, the whole thing (Eilidh, 2019).

Another trait noticeable in conversation with Neil was his use of the word *people* to replace a more direct pronoun such as "me" or "I". It suggests an attempt to generalise an observation. For example, " I wonder if it would be more significant to some people if there were more local artists involved" (Neil, 2019). The generalised *people* who would enjoy local artists, may well have included Neil himself. Possibly in this instance language is being used to make general observations or to evade a more personal reflection or perhaps an amalgamation of both reasons. It adds to the picture that Neil was not completely at ease discussing art and/or personal preferences. This might echo findings of socio-linguistic research in the West of Scotland context that, "the middle-class speakers spoke more about their thoughts and feelings, while the working-class speakers were more reticent about themselves" (Macaulay, 2014: 24). However, as my base-line survey indicates to an extent, class definitions within the Carbeth community do not sit within straightforward categories; questions of identity, heritage, accent, education, employment and economic status all combine to provide a complex picture. Thus other factors need to be considered. Arguably, there is an underlying question of familiarity, engagement or education in art; elements which might combine to build "art-confidence." Eilidh has an Arts degree, whereas Neil had no degree-level academic education and had worked professionally in unrelated fields. In an article titled *No, Germaine Greer, Art Does Belong in Schools – it's the Foundation of Healthy Public Cultural Life,* Dan Fox combatively defends the need for arts education in schools, seeing its value in developing young people with "curious, critical minds regardless of their class background or individual talents" (Fox, 2018: para 6). In doing so, he notes that,

> Art materials cost money, and there are many families who are unable to give a creative young person what they need in order to develop artistic skills. Schools, if they have the funds, can provide art supplies, tools, skills and books from which aspiring young artists can draw inspiration; resources that may not be available in their home situation for a number of reasons, resources they may not even know exist in the first place (Fox, 2018: para 2).

In this he echoes the findings of sociologists Brook, O'Brien and Taylor who in their exploration of class and culture suggest that "the education system is crucial for those who

do not have the same sort of cultural resources at home" (Brook et al, 2020: 129).

Fox and Brook et al point towards the same conclusion that the political and cultural *status quo* sees:

> the production and administration of art in the UK [continually handed] over to those who have been educated in the private school system, where the arts remain well-funded, and where artists whose experiences of life reflect comfort, privilege, and the monoculture of canonical art and literature, can be trained for cultural leadership roles (Fox, 2018: para 6).

Negotiating a route between hegemonic education, re-enforcing dominant, approved cultural values embodied within "the canon" and an arts education which fosters and inspires the creative enquiry Fox champions, is a challenge for all those involved in arts education and arguably reflects wider societal attitudes towards the role of the arts within wider culture as peripheral rather than central to daily life.

It is appealing to consider alternative "lived" relationships to art found in societies as diverse and distinct as Japan, India, the Yoruba, Navajo and aboriginal Australians where, "art was thought to be the sole means by which human well-being could be attained or maintained" (Anderson, 2004: 326). The *artothek* itself provides a model for building art-confidence, experience, knowledge and even a relationship to art and artists. In part, it offers a role for typical information-sharing about processes, methods, materials in addition to concepts, biographies and stories; a point identified by Donna, "I liked reading about art pieces and what inspired the artist" (Donna, 2019). More significantly, through the exchange of artworks, information and narratives the potential for experimentation within a financially risk-free environment is secured. The questions around opportunity raised by Fox and Brook et al are inherently answered by the *artothek* itself.

Taste, Choice, Novelty

Considerations of choice and taste cannot afford to overlook the work of Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique in the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Bourdieu despairs of

"ontological promotion" which categorises choices, thinking and discussion of art as more legitimate and sacred than choices, thinking and discussion about hairstyles, sport or food (Bourdieu, 1984: 7). He accuses Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) of creating a concept of aesthetics that differentiates between pleasure of the senses and purer intellectual pleasure, thereby fulfilling "a social function of legitimating social differences" (Bourdieu, 1984: 7). It is interesting to note that, several decades after its initial publication in France, researchers in neuroaesthetics have concluded:

> One of the major insights [of neuroaesthetic research] that emerge is that the valuation of art, music, and other cultural objects [. . .] relies on the same neural mechanisms that mediate reward derived from food or drink, thus contributing to the notion of a "common currency" for choice (Pearce et al, 2016: 274).

Within the social setting of the Carbeth community hut, as noted previously, the conversations, stories and discussions varied widely; occasionally featuring the biscuits offered as well as the art. Tastes merged.

In addition to discussing works with me, as researcher/librarian, borrowers have often attended with other people and discussed works with them. Some borrowers appeared to actively enjoy the process of making a choice, verbalising their considerations, should they borrow this or that. Wary of falling into the role of a taste-maker (Petterson, 2014), I listened to considerations of size, fragility and potential positioning as well as the mood and style of work. Not wanting to with-hold information either, and to facilitate the investigation sparked by the initial appeal, I verbally shared the information I had about the artist and the works. The final choice, even if socially shared or endorsed, rested with the borrower. Moreover, as a library, no choice had to be final. A work left behind one month, could be borrowed subsequently.

In the face-to-face interviews, I asked borrowers about their own thinking on selecting artworks. Responses to the direct question, "Can you explain why you chose those works?" gave further indication of a nuanced picture in terms of eagerness to discuss personal

Figure 13: Frank Rudiger, *Untitled*, photograph at Carbeth ARP

preferences. In most cases answers varied depending on the work borrowed. Eilidh, for example, selected *Untitled* a landscape photograph by German artist Frank Rudiger (Fig.13) because for her it was,

> just a pretty view I enjoy landscape, I enjoy landscape (pause)
> I enjoy the feeling of it, it reminds me of the Western Isles.
> The amount of water that's in this picture, the big sky, the low
> lying landscape, it's very Hebridean actually, apart from the trees.
> And it brought back fond memories for me, so that's a wee trip
> down memory lane (Eilidh, 2019).

Other choices reflected different facets of her personal biography. On choosing *Dear Art Collector*, she commented, "I like things because [of] my own political past and my fondness of posters and making statements and having things that reflect my political views. I'm fond of that. I like tae make a statement" (Eilidh, 2019).

The third work Eilidh borrowed was *Bond*, which led her to reflect, on the scope and nature of art, "it can be powerful, it can inspire people and thought and that's what's good about this" (Eilidh, 2019). Clearly Eilidh connected to the individual works she borrowed. Having initially "accidentally bumped into" the *artothek*, rather than intentionally visiting, Eilidh articulated her guarded approval the project as a whole, " I thought a lot about this and I do think it's a good thing" (Eilidh, 2019).

Mother and daughter, Angela and Dot had borrowed one work at the time of interview, the oil painting by Fouad Mimi, *Spring Scene*. This work had been lent to the library by a curator friend and was a painting she had purchased while living in Jordan. It was the only oil painting in the library and one of the few unique works, rather than an edition.

The circumstances of this interview were particular in that Dot was about eight years old and like many bright children of that age, keen to demonstrate her knowledge. For example, my first question as standard; "what attracted you to the art library?" was met with the following exchange,

> Angela: Because, I'm an artist myself. . .
> Dot: So am I.
> Angela: So are you...we were both interested to see what there was and I just really like the idea of it. It's a really nice thing.
> Dot: So do I. (Angela & Dot, 2019)

This is not to imply that Dot interrupted the discussion, but rather the nature of it changed somewhat as her mother (and to some extent the interviewer too) sought to encourage the young girl's responses, thinking and keep her interest on the discussion despite the distracting presence of a new puppy.

In fact, Angela had deferred to Dot's choice of work. When asked to explain her choice, Dot said that "it reminded me of my favourite artist"-Vincent van Gogh. She added, "Because he never has drawings that look identical to the thing [. . .] it reminded me of the sunflower one, because the *Sunflowers* have the same kind of colour [as *Spring Scene*]" (Dot, 2019). Angela added,

> When we got it back [home] we were chatting more about the feeling of the landscape, rather then how it looked and how it made you feel. I was saying I liked it because it reminded me of warm sunny days, so it made feel quite comforted (Angela, 2019).

It seemed to me part of Angela and Dot's daily family life focused around art and art-making. As late subscribers to the art library, their baseline data did not feature in the original analysis of borrowers. They were also atypical, as some difficult personal

circumstances occurred while they had the work on loan, which meant that a period of several months elapsed between their library visits.

Reflecting further on the function of the *artothek* and the work they had borrowed Angela observed,

> It was really nice having it it in the house . It's just interesting looking at a different kind of painting [. . .] I won't usually choose. Because if you are going to choose to buy something, to have it there permanently, so you're probably a bit more discerning and choosy about what you're going to spend your money on and what you'll have permanently. It would be more interesting to maybe choose something that wasn't quite your taste or different because it's only for a little while and then see where that takes you or does it make you think, actually I do like that because you've sat with it for a longer period of time. I think sometimes that's one of the downsides of being in a gallery, because you just walk past things so quickly and it's so easy to do. You go "nah I don't like anything in here". Whereas when you actually spend time with things it can change it completely. I don't know, maybe not everyone would do that, but I would be drawn to take something that I wouldn't normally be drawn to (Angela, 2019).

Prompted by the question of whether if it had been possible, would she have bought this work, Angela had identified one of the central benefits of the *artothek*. Her reflections echo the sentiments of the group collectors who find themselves living with works which they haven't chosen and may even find challenging; sharing the common feeling that spending time with a work can be beneficial. More particularly, what she clarified was the advantage of the *artothek* system in allowing self-challenge or experimentation without financial risk.

During the conversation both mother and daughter used one of the most commonly used words across the data-set, in a specific and notably different way. They both used the verb *to think* in the passive,

> "It made me think of walking through a field" (Dot, 2019).
> ".... does it make you think,..." (Angela, 2019).

In both instances, the subject is the artwork. Concisely, these examples illustrate the power perceived to be within an art object as a thing that can arouse thoughts. Such expressions are, of course, part of everyday speech - but contained within them is the understanding or expectation that an artwork has a power to communicate with or influence the viewer.
In Chapter Three, I considered whether artworks, were simply commodities like other objects and cited examples of when this had been the case not solely economically, but also legally. However, I also explored the view that while the materiality of an artwork re-enforces its "thingness" there is another dimension to an artwork. Mick Wilson notes the "discursive construction" of artworks; reflecting on the artist's intention and even opening of discourse in making the work (Wilson, 2003: 48). While the artist's intention may give the work power, there is perhaps another sense in which art objects are perceived to be powerful in themselves; if not for their "thingness", then for their "artness". Art works, including what might be termed cultural objects, have been used to connect with the divine for centuries, if not millennia, and debates continue to rage about the misappropriation of these objects if removed from cathedrals or communities and aestheticised in museum or collectors' cabinets. Even today, within the artworld, reviews of exhibitions use the expression "powerful" in a complimentary sense, for example,

> Many precious sculptural representations of Lamassu were infamously destroyed by ISIS at the entrances to sites such as the Mosul Museum, Iraq, but in Akhavan's sculpture they are resurrected, more powerful than ever. (Jansen, 2018)

Through using the passive voice to describe what an artwork has made them think, Dot and Angela have given agency to the artwork itself. The fact that this is not an unfamiliar usage could suggest that even today within Western culture that agency continues to be vital and significant.

Probably the greatest impact of the *artothek* as a site of experimentation was experienced by Jan and Neil. A couple who lead busy lives, Jan and Neil were also infrequent visitors to the ARP, consequently the impact they attributed to it surprised me. During the research period, the couple borrowed two works; *Memories of Geology* by an established Glasgow

artist and Catherine M. Weir's *Song Thrush* (Fig.14). When asked to recall what they had borrowed, Jan responded,

> Well I think we've been twice and borrowed. I think it's a great idea. It was nice to take home something that was completely different from anything that I'd seen. That's what I liked about it. There was quite a good choice, depending on your taste as well. So, that wee first one I think it was the drawing of a shell or a stone, that we took home. I just loved that one because it was so different from anything that I'd seen. . . So it introduced me to new things that I liked, that I didnae know that I liked (Jan, 2019).

Figure 14: Catherine M. Weir, *Song Thrush*, photograph. On removable lectern, Carbeth ARP

In considering *Song Thrush*, Neil stated, " I just like it and it was nice to have around for a wee while. I like the stone as well. . ." (Neil, 2019). He also referred to another work which he had seen and hoped he might borrow in the future,

> I thought, I'd come back and get that one. I think the thing for me was that they were things I wouldn't normally choose, that are quite different from the rest of things that we've got in the house (Neil, 2019).

The interview then took an unexpected turn, as Jan clarified,

> Jan: Well it used to be different from the other things we have in the house, because it's opened up a new....
> Neil: It has a bit....it used to be....
> Jan: ....we used to have just your usual prints that you saw everywhere in every house and when we decorated about three years ago, we took it all away, so we had nothing on the walls and since then I think we've got seven different ones. We bought them in wee galleries and things (Jan and Neil, 2019).

I was keen to clarify the extent to which borrowing from the *artothek* had influenced this change of focus. Jan re-iterated, "I want things that are different, rather than run of the mill." The exchange continued,

> MG: So you think the art library put you on that trail?
> Jan: I think so.
> MG: Is that putting it too strongly?
> Jan: No, I just think that it's changed my mind about what I want on my wall.
> MG: OK, that's interesting. That's really interesting because, I suppose, you get confidence by trying something different don't you?
> Neil: Aye, yip, it was probably more IKEA prints and things before.
> (Jan and Neil, 2019).

They both described some works they had recently bought from among other places an "an art gallery pop-up" in Glasgow and adding "we've actually, gone out our way now to look for things. We were in, you know, those stalls in the Merchant City a few weeks ago, so as well we ended up buying prints from a guy there" (Jan, 2019).

One common thread I observed when borrowers selected works was an immediate focus on the work which would be borrowed, as if it was calling to the person. Even if other works were viewed, the intense initial call demands further attention. On some occasions it was an immediate, quiet decision, other times a buzz of interest surrounded a work and more than one borrower was interested. Once, a couple individually identified the same work as the one they wanted to borrow. The borrowers seemed to experience the same "art-zap" that Hodgkin (1992) attributed to collectors.

Furthermore, the echoes with classic collecting attachments and object connection, moving in for "the kill" or "sweats" of desire, are evident (Yoxhall, 1908; Roy, 2016). These patterns of attraction and interest co-incide with findings from the field of neuroaesthetics where aesthetic judgements have been found to "involve two distinct stages: an early impression formation and a subsequent evaluative categorization" (Pearce at al, 2016: 273). Re-framed by Bianchi, she attaches novelty appeal to highly differentiated artworks; seeing the viewer as responding to new, unfamiliar, ambiguous or complex objects with a triggered desire to explore or investigate, furthering a pleasure response as understanding or codification is reached (Bianchi, 2015:138).

While the pursuit of novelty in the high-end artworld may lead to collectors and galleries questing for "hot" talent; there was evidence of delight in novelty in the *artothek* too. Clearly Jan and Neil had valued the *artothek* for presenting them with difference, which led to new purchasing habits, but they were not alone. *Different* was one of the seven most frequently used words across the survey responses being used to describe the art available at the art library. For example, "I think the art is different but I think that is what is good about the art library" (Donna, 2019) and "It's just interesting looking at a different kind of painting" (Angela, 2019). Importantly, being *different* was regarded as being a positive attribute.

The desire for novelty impacted the *artothek* in another way too as I felt compelled to expand and vary the collection as far as possible. Unless "pipped at the post" to borrow a work or overwhelmed by possibilities on an early visit, if a visitor has not borrowed during an initial visit and if all the works remained the same on a second visit, then there might be little point in returning if there is nothing new to see.

Alternatively, for the well-stocked art library a desire for change and novelty could be seen as one reason why borrowers repeatedly use such a service. Not risking a purchase facilitates experimentation and if an initial novelty expires, then returning the work is no hardship.

One other factor which may have influenced borrowers, but did not feature in depth in discussion, was whether the physical dimensions and materiality of the object influenced choice. I linked this with concerns of caring for the work borrowed. Jan and Neil were very relaxed claiming that dimensions of the work had no effect on their selections and in terms of responsibility, Jan disclosed that they had "good house insurance," which made her feel the works would be safe (Jan, 2019).

Angela did express some concern about caring for the work while it was with her and she attributed this to "being a creative person, I know what goes into that [. . .] the time involved" (Angela, 2019). She was unsure if other people would feel the same sense of responsibility. To ameliorate these feeling she displayed the work in a place where she felt " it wouldn't get knocked over" (Angela, 2019).

Only twice were loans returned with slight damage. In one instance, the frame of *Bond* broke while on loan to Eilidh, who commented, "I didn't actually consider the fragility." Not only did I own this work, but I had placed it in the second-hand frame. Only when the frame came back broken, did I realise how cheaply made it had been. In the other case, Danielle Bank's screenprint had come loose from the backing within the frame, while on loan to Jill. The artist had lent me the work directly and I knew that she had bought the frame second-hand especially. Consequently, I had no qualms about opening the frame and re-positioning the work, carefully adding to the original masking tape loops.

In the *artothek* there were works which I considered more fragile; two ceramic works and one drawing with a small tear all of which had been lent to me. Of these, I never offered the drawing for loan, not primarily for reasons of fragility, but simply because I was unable to find a suitable frame and I felt that even transporting it unframed would lead to further damage. Both ceramic works were offered and while no-one borrowed *untitled,* a vase by

Figure 15: Lorna Fraser, *Botanic*, ceramic.

Imogen Guy, Lorna Fraser's large boxed-framed work *Botanic* (Fig.15) was borrowed by one very enthusiastic library member, who demonstrated a huge passion for the work.

As one of my initial decisions in creating the *artothek* was not to impose a curatorial framework, once the invitation to participate was accepted, lenders made their own choices regarding selection of works. While practical considerations such as, "they are well framed and quite sturdy (they have survived a number of house moves)" (Lender Curator, 2018) were to be expected, lenders also embraced the idea of the library and considered how borrowers might experience the works, "it is a piece that is a nice domestic and accessible scale, so could easily find a place in someone's home" (Glasgow Lender, 2020).

How to Measure Success

Had this project been funded by an external agency or trust, it might not have been regarded as hugely successful; visitor numbers were low, given the period of time the project ran and borrowing patterns erratic. Return visits and repeat loans did occur, but not with noticeable regularity. Some works were never borrowed.

One factor which intensified the irregular visitor figures was also the fact that made running the library possible in the first place: Carbeth. While the advantages of running the library there have already been stated, there were disadvantages too, primarily that Carbeth is a non-resident community. Consequently, the population (and thereby potential borrower pool) is fluid. It varies with time of year, weather, transport issues and other life events. While for many Carbeth is an essential weekly escape from day-to-day concrete city or town dwelling for others it is a journey to another space, which might have to be passed up due to pressures of work, family-member demands or simply other social engagements.

These pressures are exemplified by Donna's engagement with the project. She was one of the first people to attend on the first day the *artothek* opened. A deeply committed youth project manager, Donna immediately saw the potential benefit of the library for her group. They had recently completed work on the first hut to be used by an organisation, rather than a family. A significant change for Carbeth and a major undertaking for the youth project. Reflecting on what had attracted her to the *artothek*, she wrote,

> I thought it was a really good idea – I liked the idea of borrowing art and then being able to change it, making it affordable and accessible, also think it is a good way of being introduced to local artists & supporting their work (Donna, 2019).

At that initial visit, she had already identified works which she thought her group might borrow, believing that they might challenge and inspire discussion or expand thinking. However, she didn't borrow anything as she preferred to let the young people themselves make a selection.

That initial visit was on 28th July 2018, but it was not until 8th June 2019 that the group eventually visited the *artothek*. Unforeseen events from additional alterations required to the young people's hut for reasons of fire safety to a break-in and theft all contributed to altered priorities and infrequent visits. In addition the young people involved with the project all brought their own needs to it and as the *artothek* was invariably on at the weekend there was also the question of staff availability for support, supervision and

transport.

All the same, the one-off visit did highlight some interesting considerations. The group comprised an interesting mixture of confident and quieter individuals. With time the quieter voices joined intriguing conversations; was the landscape photograph of Loch Lomond? What was *Prettier* made of? And how do you hear a 7 inch single? They didn't want to borrow anything there and then, but they did take photographs of the works, in order to further discuss them with their wider group and to make a selection. (As an aside, it was affirming to see democratic principles I aspired to for the case studies in action in the youth group's own processes.)

In Berlin, n.b.k. lend art to organisations as well as individuals and specifically have *artothek mobil* for outreach. In the longer term, building a relationship with this youth group could have followed that model or developed its own path. While to some extent Carbeth may have been an imperfect location, being there connected the library and this organisation, as it had done with the range of individual borrowers.

In her survey responses, Donna suggested possible future activities the art library could undertake, "just an idea but it might be good to invite out [a] guest artist to talk about their work, Q&A, or run a workshop" (Donna, 2019). She also speculated about the possibility of buying a work from an artist after having had a work on loan,

> I think if I really liked something and it was a good fit with our hut, and the feedback was really positive, we would defo buy if the price was right in our budget (Donna, 2019).

Had Donna or I been working full time involving the young people in the *artothek*, I know we would have deployed a range of techniques, activities and events to expand opportunities for exchange and engagement. And while unfortunately neither of us had that capacity, it does suggest an outreach or activity based pathway for a future or continuing *artothek.*

Conclusion

Like all the interviewed borrowers, Donna was enthusiastic about the *artothek*, "I think it's a really good model, a good fit with Carbeth [. . .] Hope the library continues and grows ☺ " (Donna, 2019). As her comment demonstrates, this appreciation was two-fold; it was seen to be beneficial for the Carbeth community as well as being what another borrower described as, "a wonderful idea and a brilliant opportunity" (Jill, 2018). In conversation during her initial visit, Donna highlighted how the art library surmounted barriers she perceived to exist in more traditional gallery settings by uncoupling artworks from price.

Recalling the analysis of the socio-economic background of ARP borrowers, it is worth reflecting that no single factor determined purchases of art or even attendance at galleries or events. Disposable income was not necessarily a determinant, even amongst those attending the *artothek*. A more complex matrix, in which arts education, art-confidence, trust and ease of access (geographic and attitudinal) is in operation. The significant strength of the *artothek* is that it allows experimentation with no financial impact. Indeed it can be conceived as part of an alternative economy where individual private ownership becomes redundant; an example of the "sharing economy" that pre-existed the internet.

In response to my question to artists if they would like to use an art library and what it might contain, Danielle Banks' response was clear,

> I would love if it had some grand works that normally cost the earth that normal people could host in their living rooms and spend time with. Living their everyday lives alongside something they find incredible (Banks, 2020).

If, at present, beyond the scope of the Carbeth Artothek Research Project, then the model of n.b.k. in Berlin demonstrates that such loans are possible. If in Berlin, I could imagine Danielle enjoying works by Auguste Rodin, Sonia Delaunay or Marina Abramović.

Looking at commonly used words provided another means of analysing interviews and identifying recurring themes. It reinforced the base-line survey findings that participation

in the project has primarily been by people who are not part of an artworld and do not regularly come in to contact with contemporary visual art (exemplified by the use of the words *art* and *different* in the ways discussed above). It demonstrated that those who did borrow considered the project to be positive (use of *good*). More particularly it also indicated that the actual experience of encountering types of work that were unfamiliar was also positive (use of *different*). Borrowers experimented and that for at least one couple it led to a change in their tastes and actions. This change of taste could exemplify the trap Alistair Hudson describes:

> The relevance of contemporary art as we know it – well, it's completely irrelevant. At best it's a kind of escape, for those who know how to use that material – for which you need to be educated. And so it becomes a kind of brainwashing exercise: 'learn to like contemporary art and you'll be okay, a better person'. This is the old language of the museum.
>
> (Hudson, 2017a: para 11)

The intention of the Artothek Research Project was certainly not to brainwash people, rather it had been an exercise in blurring boundaries, where the project created an occasion for people to encounter, discuss and to *think* about art. In the words of n.b.k., with *artotheks* there is a "low threshold" in encountering art, which allows borrowers to spend time with, rather than money on, art (n.b.k. 2020a). The approach could be seen as echoing the social practice of contemporary artists, where, recalling Helguera's classification of participatory modes, borrowing could be described as voluntary participation (Helguera, 2011: 16). Parallels to artists' practice are manifold, including *Martha Rosler Library* (from 2006), which targeted diverse audiences through localised adverts, bringing people together in unfamiliar environments, or Clegg & Gutttmann's *The Open Public Library* situated in outdoors in the town of Gratz (1991). More similar still, as discussed in Chapter Two was *Art Lending Library* by Walker & Bromwich in collaboration with Market Gallery (2012-2018), which had its first iteration at Glasgow International 2012, and tracked artworks as they were borrowed during the festival.

This case study leads me to conclude that *artotheks* offer an innovative form of cultural

encounter. At heart, they promote the values of shared resources and public access championed by Sax (1999) discussed in Chapter Three. In comparison with Tania Brugera's model of the useful museum, there is a parallel in that art libraries also shift visitors from “spectators” to “users.” However, I suggest a significant difference lies in the type of “usage”. In *artotheks* people not only attend an institution to participate in wide-ranging activities, conversations or practices *in situ*, but they are entrusted to take work out of the collection and into their homes, where further conversations await, whether with others in the household or metaphorically with other objects already present. (Collard, 2018a, 2018b). A borrower's agency is further affirmed in their opportunity to make selections and to experiment with choice-making.

If borrowing artworks from an *artothek* can be seen as active involvement with art, the subject of the next case study, community commissioning, can be seen to expand this involvement further still offering a yet more radical form of engagement.

Chapter Six: Young Commissioners Project: Case Study Three

> *Everyone in the village who is old enough to know names at all knows the name of Frau Kranz. She's already painted so many of them and so much of them* (Stanišic, 2015: 85).

Introduction

What could a doocot, a national park and a fast-food van have in common? In this instance, not some collision of interests regarding use of and access to the public realm, rather these and many other projects have benefited from interventions by artists under the auspices of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires.* This programme of community-led commissioning of contemporary art started in France in 1991 with a manifesto created by artist François Hers. The idea was simple – that community groups would commission art by the very best of contemporary practitioners - and the ambition expansive; to open "a new chapter in the history of art" with the citizen at its core (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2020a).

Hers' protocol was developed into a practical scheme with support from the funding organisation *Fondation de France*. Consequently, pigeon fanciers faced with an ageing membership and declining interest in their hobby, worked with artist matali crasset and "mediator" Bruno Dupont to create a 21st century doocot (Mengual and Douroux, 2017: 220). When *Réserve naturelle géologique de Haute Provence* wanted to create a new walking route through the park to encourage visitors to explore the area, they worked with Sylvie Amar to commission Andy Goldsworthy to create a series of works. The result included converting abandoned buildings into spaces of rest and reflection (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2019a). When Radouane Nidam's micro business start-up fast food van was required to re-locate, he garnered the support of local organisations including Eternal Network, which led him to work with mediator Eric Foucault and artist Julien Celdran to commission a radically re-decorated van, embracing symbols of unity and diversity across religious communities (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2019b).

This approach to art, community, engagement, practice and society is of particular relevance to this study as it re-visits the power distribution in the creation of public art. Regardless of whether the ambition to reconfigure a relationship between the citizen and the artworld is completely successful, the ambition is clearly present in placing the community at the centre of the process. This is about a distinctive type of participation from those outlined by, for example, Helguera (2011) and discussed in Chapter Three. This participation is one of directing, not following an artist's vision. This case study will look at the practical questions arising from a test project mirroring the French process and consider evidence-based outcomes relevant to alternative models of accessing and owning art. Methodologically, the approach is the same as the one I adopted in Chapter Five, following an existing art library model.

The standard process of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* is that a community group, institution or organisation seeks a solution to a local issue or problem by commissioning an artist to make an intervention. Documentation, in the form of their online archive and DVD of short films, highlights the range of problems addressed. From, for example, a public square over-crowded with parked cars (Xavier Veilhan, *Le Monstre*, 2004) to the creation of a suitable memorial for local teenagers killed in a traffic accident (Steven Gontarski, *Obélisques*, 2007). Just as issues vary, so do communities and local structures; consequently there may be some that are highly organised, aware of the *Les Nouveaux commanditaires, Fondation de France* or a local mediator and able to make a direct approach and express a "need for art". Others may follow a less direct route where a chance encounter introduces the working practices of the organisations to an individual or group who can see its potential within their social setting. Mediator Amanda Crabtree of artconnexion describes, for example, a casual tai chi class conversation which eventually led to a dynamic project with students from *Lycée Pasteur*, Lille and artist Hugo Kostrzewa (Crabtree, 2020).

Depending on the pathway followed, the community group will be introduced to or

already be in contact with the appointed mediator for their geographic area. This person, or curatorial organisation, will discuss the request with the community, before going on to suggest an artist who might be interested in working on the outlined project.

Funding for the projects to date has come primarily from *Fondation de France*, a national network of philanthropic trusts, foundations and individuals, which in 2018 provided €22,200,000 (approx 12% of its expenditure) on cultural projects (Fondation de France 2017a). Securing this funding can assist in the process of generating additional funds from other sources such as local authorities and the European Union. Significant levels of funding has ensured production budgets adequate for large scale projects, attractive to established, international artists.

One criterion at an early stage is that the envisaged project will be of interest to the wider community and not solely the commissioning group. To secure its involvement, groups and mediators present the project formally to the *Fondation de France.* This is not to approve the artist or their work, but rather to ensure that funds are equitably distributed across France, types of communities and concerns. As one interviewee with first hand experience of working for *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* observed, "if it's run by the *Fondation de France* it's quite a high profile thing" (Hunter, 2020).

Once an artist has been identified and expressed interest, dialogue between the commissioners, the mediator and the artist begins. At this point it might be worth noting that *commanditaires* is most often translated as "patrons". However, I find that term loaded in two respects, firstly with the concept of donating funds: as in "patron of the arts" (see, for example, Cooke 2015). And secondly the language of patronage implies many uncomfortable aspects around power and gender. Therefore I prefer to translate the term as commissioners, a word having its origins in the Latin *commissio*, a bringing together.

Within this process the role of the mediator is most distinctive. The original protocol states

that mediators,

> establish connections between the works and the public, the possibility also to be mediators between the artist and the patron in person, and, beyond them, among all the players who happen to be involved. The mediator organizes their cooperation (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2020b).

In other words they select the artist and they support both the commissioners and the artist to realise the project. The role is of interest not only because of the importance that *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* place on it, but its very existence delineates space for discussion, dialogue and power-sharing. In this case study I will scrutinize this role directly by putting myself in that position.

Research Context

This research project was carried out in collaboration with Rothesay Academy on the Isle of Bute and Mount Stuart Trust. I live on Bute and work full-time for Mount Stuart Trust as their Education Officer and Visual Arts Programme Co-ordinator. Undertaking this research project would not have been possible without their support. In addition to agreeing time for me to carry out the practical aspects of the project, Mount Stuart Trust provided a budget of £1500 to realise it. Initial discussions with the school began in 2018, but the project started fully in May 2019. As it neared completion in March 2020, the COVID-19 virus arrived causing schools to close, research to be suspended and an instruction to work from home. The project was within days of its finale, consequently although this was not the anticipated end of the project, in research terms it was successfully concluded with the significant elements of the project completed. The artwork had been completed and delivered to the school and the final instalment of the artist's fee had been paid. Further discussion of the sudden end of the project follows below.

I came to think of the educational context of the Young Commissioner's Project as a Russian doll: one whole complete project containing several educational facets each of which could stand alone as well as joining together. Rather than being problematic

through competing approaches and aims, these layers united to achieve a common goal; the doll functions because each one respects the integrity of the other while maintaining its own position.

The distinct “dolls” in this instance were: the formal school setting of Rothesay Academy; my role as Education Officer at Mount Stuart Trust; action research and learning through the case study; my PhD. Before describing each of these in a little more detail, it is perhaps worth noting one broader context: recent events in the island community.

In Summer 2018, eleven months prior to this research starting, there had been a particularly troubling crime on the island, resulting in overwhelming media attention and a senior school pupil charged. While life on the island and at the school continued, all the students would have been aware of those events. In early 2019, the criminal trial brought the events to national media attention again, as did a sentence appeal in September 2019 (see, for example, BBC, 2018; O'Hare, 2019; Horne, 2019). Visiting the school regularly throughout this period in my professional capacity, I had noticed an expansion of its pastoral care initiatives to support pupils. A staff member hesitantly reflected:

> I think what we need to do is to have forward thinking and we need to be the inclusive school that we want to be. And just try and involve all pupils and create that message that this is a safe place to be, you know. That this is a place where you will be listened to and you can come and access all sorts of services from here (Laura, 2019).

Clearly, this teacher was was concerned about the entire school community. I had only broached this subject with her, after considerable consideration as none of the pupils I worked with referred to these events at all. Moreover, when we discussed her rationale for selecting the commissioning group members, she had made no reference to the incident nor to these pupils being affected by it. I was aware that although I had a good working relationship the school I was not actually within the school community, I was a visitor.

Over the ten months of the project, there was only one instance when I felt there was any

reference to the impact of the events specifically. This was the survey that took place across the school at the beginning of September, just as the media was once again focusing on the crime, the perpetrator and the sentence appeal. In answer to the question, *What could the artwork improve about your school or the wider world?* One of the eighteen respondents wrote, "Could explain what we have been through as a school." In discussing the survey findings with the commissioning group, when we came to this response, I felt a subtle shift in attention, as if the atmosphere suddenly became more charged. I wondered if what I was reading really meant what I thought it did; no-one expanded with further comments. Laura quickly talked about the need to look to the future and shifted the conversation to the positive.

In considering this as a context of the research project, I feel it would be wrong to see these events as the hidden dark centre at the core of the project - or Russian doll. Following the analogy, it was more an outer layer that could be removed and left aside, in much the same way as other local, national or international events: Brexit or UK Parliamentary elections, for example.

Rothesay Academy is part of Rothesay Joint Campus, a sprawling building on the outskirts of the island's main town. Built in 2007 under the auspices of Argyll and Bute Council, the campus includes a Pre-5 Learning Centre, Primary and Secondary Schools and an FE College with links to the University of the Highlands and Islands. The roll of the Academy is around 300 and a high percentage of school leavers go to higher or further education. Being an island, this means that many young people move to the mainland on leaving school, echoing patterns across rural Scotland. Island life can also have an impact on staffing levels and retention. The 8am boat arrives on week days with several of the teaching staff; an issue of concern come the inevitable winter weather cancelled sailings. However, the most recently inspection report records "the care and commitment shown by staff across the campus in building positive relationships with children and young people" as a key strength (McDonald, 2013: 3).

The Academy's relationship with Mount Stuart Trust is formalised in a partnership agreement. Through this students have bespoke work experience opportunities across a wider range of areas and can access learning opportunities on site and in school and have been supported to take up other opportunities elsewhere. Laura, as a member of the Academy senior staff team, and I are the main contacts for this and we meet formally each term to share news of developments and opportunities. Within my Education Officer role I have scope to instigate projects and workshops. Generally these aim to complement and extend subject-base learning in-school using the collections, archive and the contemporary visual arts programme of Mount Stuart as a resource.

While this research project extended in duration beyond my initial plan, I was fortunate that both Mount Stuart and Rothesay Academy were flexible in allowing the project to unfold. For Mount Stuart the project not only continued the relationship with the local school, but it sat within a brief of developing civic responsibility, by having the young people engage in a project for the wider benefit of the school and coming to understand what might be involved in that process. Moreover, following the *Nouveaux commanditaires* model, if this was an exercise in democratising the artworld then the commissioning group would be experiencing a democratic process at first-hand. Additionally, for the school it was an opportunity for a group of young people to develop social skills and attributes, co-inciding with the ambitions of the Scottish Government's Curriculum for Excellence for students to be confidence individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (Scottish Government, 2021a). Furthermore, the school would be the recipient of a specially commissioned work of contemporary art.

I did not conceptualise the project as a formal, institutional educational or pedagogical one, but rather as a participatory experience. One of the elements of the *Nouveaux commanditaires* protocol which attracted me initially was its addressing of power-relationships and a re-balancing of cultural hierarchies. Moreover, I understood as Wilson and O'Neill have observed that,

> Education is a perennially contested apparatus of social production and reproduction. It is caught in a paradox (or for some a 'dialectic') between emancipatory potential and critical empowerment on the one hand, and disciplinary conscription and subordinated individuation of the learning subject on the other (Wilson and O'Neill 2010, 179).

With a background in practising popular education and popular theatre, in the *Nouveaux commanditaires* approach I immediately saw echoes in the theory and practice of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Was this new art-democracy, cultural action for freedom, within the artworld? Radically repositioning teacher-learner relationships within the framework of literacy education in Latin America in the1960s, Freire was concerned with empowering learners through dialogue, reflection and placing their lived experiences as the central subject of investigation. The practice of exchange is a cornerstone in the pedagogy of the oppressed, an approach which became central in my own research project. Freire argues that,

> the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his [sic] reflections in the reflection of the students. The students - no longer docile listeners - are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (Freire, 1972a: 54).

Theatre-maker Boal applied these principles to performing, going on to create *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (the title itself an homage to Freire). I see the principles of equality, exchange and the quest for a genuine democracy espoused by Freire reflected in the founding principles of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*.

Certainly for this case study, my intention was not to create an educational "banking" project, where one person makes deposits of knowledge into appreciative vessels, where an adult speaks and pupils passively listen (Freire, 1972a). Nor was it Alistair Hudson's "brainwashing exercise" where the masses were to be educated into liking contemporary visual art (Hudson, 2017a: para11). If it was an educational project then it rested within the broader interpretation of the term where, following Freire, embarking on a process of group enquiry and mutual learning could be emancipatory.

Consequently, some session content was planned inspired by Freirean concepts and

methods. For example, one of the earliest group sessions used codification and generative themes. I wanted to learn a little more about the group, their interests, concerns and ideas. I wanted the group to "read" their world and tell me its story and I wanted to go about this in a more creative way than simply asking them. I also believed that a task-based activity might lead to freer thinking. In Freirean terms I had hoped that we could create a code, which the artistic process would in turn de-code (Freire, 1972a).

By sitting in parallel but outwith the school curriculum, this project enjoyed a degree of freedom. There was no institutional pressure for the participants to gain examinable credits through the project, for example, an issue identified by Mulholland (2013, np) as limiting the scope of tertiary art schools in adopting experimental group learning processes.

Nonetheless there was a degree of fragility in the project's viability, with sliding timescales, erratic attendance and competing demands on participants' time and attention. Within a system reliant on attendance figures, for example, the project may have been cancelled. Fortunately, this project followed a less draconian approach, the benefits of which extended beyond the development of the individual participants to an expanded appreciation of education in its broadest sense. Thus the project can be seen to sit within more radical educational traditions; where enquiry is fostered, where risk and even failure are tolerated and expected.

To that extent it echoes the approaches adopted those connected to the educational turn in contemporary art practice. Within the projects A.C.A.D.E.M.Y and SUMMIT, for example, Irit Rogoff sought to create

> a space that generates vital principles and activities—activities
> and principles you can take with you and which can be applied
> beyond its walls to become a mode of life-long learning (Rogoff 2008, np).

Where, "More importantly, it must always include within it an element of fallibility—the possibility that acting will end in failure" (Rogoff 2008, np). With particular regard to SUMMIT she considered education to be a platform where people from diverse

backgrounds could come together to create “small ontological communities propelled by desire and curiosity, cemented together by the kind of empowerment that comes from intellectual challenge” (Rogoff 2008, np). This study aimed to both embody and promote similar values.

The final figure in this educational Russian doll is, of course, this study, a formal PhD project within an Art School. In discussing the educational turn in contemporary art, it is perhaps inevitable that commentators, especially those connected to academia, will reflect on teaching and research within Art Schools (Mulholland 2013; Rogoff 2008; Wilson and O'Neill 2010, for example). More specifically, projects such as the European Artistic Research Network took a pan-European approach to investigating the scope, status and purpose of doctoral research in the visual arts (Slager et al, 2011). However, this study, sits within an existing institutional framework and the critique of that is beyond the scope of this study.

Within the Glasgow School of Art context, the project proposal and methods used in this case study, as with the preceding ones, were submitted to the GSA Ethics Committee. To ensure good practice and institutional compliance, I gained consent from the participants and ensured that they were aware of my wider study and that I would be writing about them and the project.

Research Process

My action research study involved mirroring the protocol and process of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* to create a commission for the school, with a group of students and staff as commissioners. By putting myself in the role of mediator, the project became a piece of action research; I was understanding through doing. I could have taken a less practical approach, simply contacting, possibly visiting, and interviewing participants in other projects. However, there were strong reasons not to do this, some were logistical, others more conceptual; gathering and analysing data on a completed project focuses the

research on what is recalled and remembered. With the passage of time, hindsight tends to smooth narratives; an orthodox story emerges. As novelist Olga Tokarczuk cautions,

> Describing something is like using it - it destroys; the
> colours wear off, the corners lose their definition, and in
> the end what's been described begins to fade, to disappear
> (Tokarczuk, 2019, 75).

By carrying out this active research, with my own project notes on each session, I felt I was closer to real time perceptions. The more quickly I made follow-up notes, the less likely I was to be making reflections in light of new developments and working in the belief that the descriptions continued to be valid.

I had put myself into the role of mediator and I felt it carried a certain responsibility. *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* have established curators, arts managers or gallerists in this role and I was interested in understanding the nuances of the role through adopting it. Although I had moments of wavering that as mediator I should select the project artist, rather than involve the commissioning group in that decision, *Les Nouveaux commanditaires'* protocol states, "[The mediator] provides the necessary knowledge for the choice of the medium and the artist" while the website further clarifies, "The choice of the artist is made by the mediator" (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2020b & 2020c).

In addition to following the protocol, there were certain practical constraints that I had to take into account. A limited budget implied that the selected artist would most likely be at an early career stage. I also considered that having a younger artist who was excited about making work in their school and on their island might be more inspiring for the students than someone who appeared similar to the majority of the other adults they encountered. Through my professional experience I had a few candidates in mind; I either knew their work, their experience of working with young people or both. Depending on the nature of the group's interests I was prepared to research other individuals too. I was aware of not wanting to simply bring in an artist I knew and who might be considered a friend.

Additionally, by being the mediator, I was also in the position to generate and gather material from all the other parties in the project. Process material became data and data became process material. further discussion of this will also follow.

Creating a research project within a limited amount of time, with a pre-selected group stretched a standard *Nouveaux commanditaires* model to some extent. Unlike their commissions, this project was formed especially for research purposes with a group who had been selected rather than coming together because of a unified concern. What did unify them was their school year group, place of residence and place of education. There was no indication that they were a group of friends, but they were all known to each other.

The "false-start" of the project in 2018 enabled me to modify my subsequent successful approach. Initially, I had pitched the project as an opportunity for students studying Art in Fourth Year and discussed with one class public art in nearby towns and cities that they might have seen. I invited them to become commissioners for an artwork in the school, possibly contacting former students who had gone on to Art School. There was no obvious interest and with end of term approaching little energy. Consequently, when revisiting the project months later, I made three key changes: selected students did not have to be studying art, my initial session was a practical invitation to the group to take me on a physical tour of the school, and I dropped the idea of selecting a former pupil to be the commissioned artist.

One other significant factor in 2019 was the participation in the group of the teacher, Laura. As well as being a subject teacher, she had a management role within the school. While other staff members occasionally visited the project, she was a key figure. She could arrange for students to attend sessions and help with other organisational issues. At times pressure of work meant that she attended only part of the sessions, a loss which was ameliorated by her exceedingly positive attitude and her willingness to participate on equal terms with the young people as a group member, a key strength in fostering a

collaborative project.

I had a pre-existing good working relationship with Laura and I put my trust in her to select a group of students to participate in the project. I also felt that if I was going to be in the role of mediator, I should not also form the group. Giving the school staff the task of creating the group was one small way of enacting the power-sharing approach embedded in this commissioning process. My only directive was that the group did not need to be studying art, in fact I thought it might be more interesting if they were not as this might emphasise that the project was not part of curricular studies. Apart from that I was in Laura's hands. She selected five young people, all of whom were in Fourth Year when I first met them, towards the end of the school year 2018-19. Some of the group I recognised from other events or workshops, but I did not know any of them well. Subsequently, when I asked Laura about her selection criteria she replied,

> Just a very broad spectrum with a broad spectrum of interests, with a wide range of thoughts and ideas about things. One of the participants is very set in his ways and will have a definite answer for everything, whereas the rest perhaps are a wee bit not so sure and their involvement maybe would have brought up their self esteem a wee bit as well. They are a group of students that need to have a wee bit of leadership, a bit of self-esteem raising (Laura, 2019).

She went on to outline her desire to see the individuals assuming leadership roles within the school setting, “to showcase this and present this to staff and the rest of the school body” and for them to become more confident in expressing opinions and having their voices heard (Laura, 2019).

While I interviewed Laura, the young people all refused permission to be audio recorded, thus with them, in addition to collecting process materials as data, I carried out paper (and in one case device-based) questionnaires. In the case of one student who was less literate, these were done face-to-face with answers scribed. I found that at least half of the group were more expansive (and possibly comfortable) expressing views and thoughts on paper. Group discussions were captured subsequently in my session notes. One other technique

used as data was photography and further discussion of this as a process tool and as data follows below. In addition to capturing views of the commissioning group, it was also important to record the selected artist's perceptions of the project.

While logistically time, finance and Brexit all played a part in turning me away from direct contact with and analysis of existing projects by *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* on mainland Europe, I did contact one of the two artists based in Scotland who had been commissioned through this system. In 2015, Kenny Hunter completed a commission for Maison du Site des Deux-Caps, in the village of Audinghen, Nord-Pas-de-Calais. It was titled *A place is a space remembered.* His insights and reflections are threaded through this chapter. Another viewpoint on the process was provided through dialogue with Amanda Crabtree of artconnexion in Lille, France. In addition to working on *Nouveaux commanditaires* projects as a mediator, she is also course director for the MA programme Art and Society at the University of Lille.

The names of all the participants have been changed, except for the artists. The commissioning group comprised Laura, the teacher and five students who I will call Kim, Maria, John, Luke and Andrew. The sessions primarily took place in school and were accommodated around the timetable. The standard session lasted between 30 minutes – 1 hour, although extended sessions were arranged when the artist visited or when there was an outing.

Process Narrative

Sessions 1 - 4 : May 2019

The first four sessions allowed me to meet the group and establish the project with them. The first meeting focused very practically on the school building as this would be the site for the final commissioned work. Together we toured the building and the students mapped and photographed it as we walked through, discussing where people met, ate, spent time, entered and exited. Subsequently we noted both problem spaces and ones

which would be good locations for an artwork.

The majority of students thought that the best place for a work of art was outside, in particular around an area they called the “astro”; a large white external wall, facing a stretch of grass and leading to playing pitches. Subsequently speaking to Laura, the teacher, she was initially surprised that an outdoor space had been selected, but reflected that the students did often use that particular space.

As this project group had not approached me with an issue to be resolved through a commission, the second week focused not on where, but what an artwork might be about. As the mediator I had the responsibility of selecting an artist and as researcher I hoped to complete the project within a reasonable timescale. Consequently, I had to form an idea of the group's interests and concerns in order to approach a suitable artist reasonably quickly. I created two exercises to generate some discussion of theme or topics, which we might present to an artist. The most important of these was based on a Venn diagram with four overlapping circles. Outside the circles I asked the group to note ideas and activities which were of interest to them personally; to their friends; to the school teachers and to wider society. They then had to place these concepts within the overlapping circles where interests were shared. In the centre of each diagram there was a “sweet spot” where a concept was of interest to all constituencies. I was especially interested to see what each person would place there.

The least predictable and therefore most interesting response was very clear cut; right in the middle of the chart, where all circles overlap was the word “tea.” I was fascinated and my instinct told me this unexpected response would be attractive to an artist and even who I would approach.

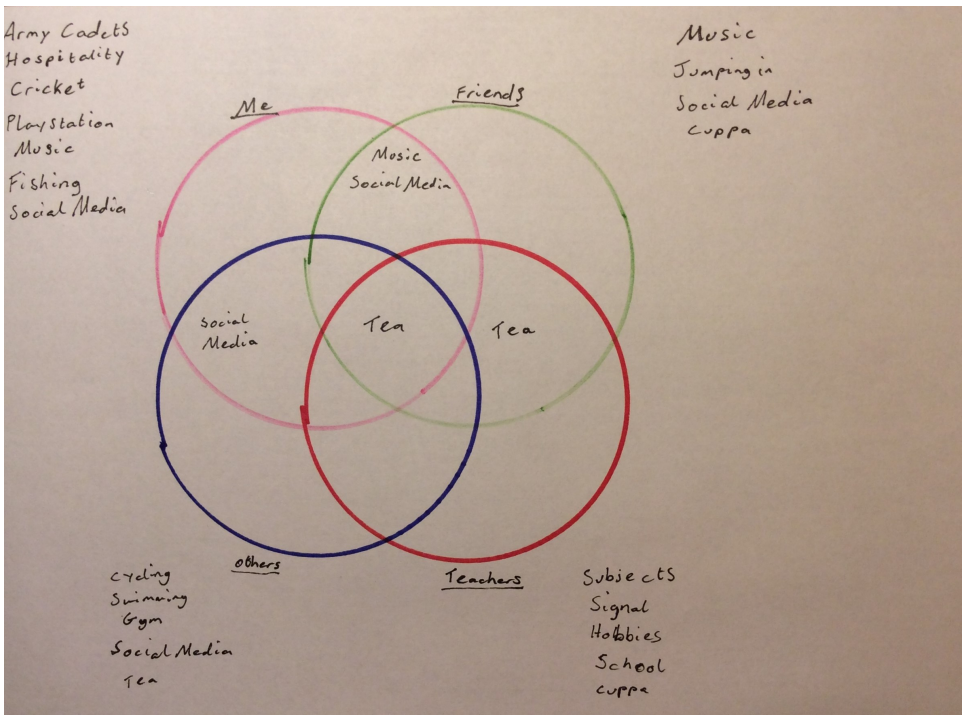

Figure 16: Overlapping interests exercise

I decided I wanted to introduce the group to Sally Hackett. I had worked with Sally previously in community settings and seen her practice grow and develop; what particularly made up my mind that she was the ideal artist for the project, was her fresh thinking within an awareness of popular culture. I also knew she could work across media and had made work for outdoor and indoor settings. I was confident the “tea” thinking - a contrast to more predictable fuzzy ideals - would appeal to her. I just had to ask her.

As I waited for Sally's reply, I continued with the weekly sessions, using the next one to focus on very practical aspects of the project. Not only did I need some direct questions answered, but if the project had wider learning benefits I considered this type of experience would be useful for the group too.

The school building is run by the UK-wide facilities management company Mitie, which controls any interventions to the fabric of the building. Laura reported that working with them would not be too onerous in terms of permissions and paperwork and Mitie staff on site gave some early indicators of what might and might not be possible. A sculpture in the grounds or anything free-standing in the grassed area would be declined. However, they

would be happy with something on the external wall. During this session we also discussed budgets, pay-scales and with increasing enthusiasm a launch event.

The final session in May was a visit to the then current exhibition at Mount Stuart, Martin Boyce's *An Inn For Phantoms Of The Outside And In.* I was interested in introducing the works to the group and observing their responses to a large scale piece of contemporary art. By this time Sally had agreed to be the artist on the project, replying, "Sounds really really exciting and definitely up my street. I am interested for sure!" (Hackett, 2019).

Sessions 5 - 8: June 2019

Following the field trip, the subsequent de-brief session continued the project momentum of regular weekly meetings and instigated a very general discussion on contemporary art. It was also salutary to be party to how artworld outsiders and non-artists respond to a work, with the majority of feedback expressing puzzlement, confusion and even actual, physical discomfort. In terms of this research project it was both a cautionary note and a point of interest. How might the group experience the work they would commission?

That same week I announced Sally Hackett as the artist who the group would commission and that she would visit the following week. In preparation for the visit, as a group we considered questions to ask the artist, reflecting on interview styles and types, before settling on agreed list.

The initial visit from Sally was successful. I knew she had a lot of experience in working with diverse groups and is also very personable, so had not anticipated any problems. She had prepared a slide show of previous projects and works and talked it through with the group; including *A Weakness for Raisins*, CCA, Glasgow (2018) and *The Fountain of Youth*, Edinburgh Art Festival (2016).

The group were very keen to show Sally around the school and to the places we had

previously identified. Watching both the group and the artist I saw them interact freely. After the tour Sally had some questions for the group to think about: What do you want the work to do? What does it say? Why is it there - does it have a purpose or a message - does it have a function?

Figure 17: Sally Hackett's first visit to the school. Discussing spaces and ideas.

As the end of June approached and the count down to end of term gathered momentum, I was keen to push things as far forward as possible, rescheduling meetings as necessary. In this instance, instead of meeting at the regular time on a Friday, the session took place on a Monday morning. I especially wanted to gauge responses to the meeting with Sally the previous week and to find answers to her questions; in order that she might have time to develop ideas or have more direction and be able to use the summer holiday period to develop works.

An exercise to reflect which of Sally's previous works had made an impression on the group highlighted *The Fountain of Youth* , *Get Over Yourself* and *Crisp Art*. All of which were described in shorthand (cake, clouds, crisps) rather than by title. Further discussion

identified the fountain being memorable because of its shape and the inclusion of ceramic work by children - which was particularly popular with Laura. *Get Over Yourself*, was seen as being visually attractive, while its dark humour appealed to at least one of the teenage girls. I was encouraged by these responses as although I felt there was some nervousness or unfamiliarity in describing the work (arguably indicated by words like *strange* and *weird*) they homed in on elements that I considered to make this the correct artist for the commission; a seemingly child-like, colourful approach cut through with (dark) humour.

In terms of answering Sally's specific questions, the group were more reticent, telling me that it was Monday morning and no-one had high energy. Staff had also said that everyone was very tired by this time, coming to the end of the school year. The major thing everyone agreed was missing from the school was colour and to some extent creativity. There was some concern that people might not like the work as the realisation grew that it would not be a framed painting that could be taken down. Some of the group felt the work should be motivational and have a message; such as encouraging a healthy life style or participation in sport. I asked what they found motivational; the simple answer - caffeine. After the group left I caught up with Laura, I put the questions to her. She was, of course, more discursive and wanted the artwork to be a talking point, something bright and fun for all ages, while also encouraging self-confidence.

The next session was the final one for that school year. Three of the group were in school. I did an exercise that I hoped would give me an insight on their thinking on the project to date. I gave each person two postcards and asked them to write one as a good luck card for Sally for her RCA Degree Show and the other to share their perceptions of the project. In turn I wrote each of them a short message, thanking them for their contributions. Their responses really touched me; they were kind, generous and more positive than I had expected. This one was typical:

> Dear Sally, Good luck on your show, you will do great! Also thanks for giving up your spare time to work with us and create something important for my school.

Of the two cards commenting on the project, both said that they had enjoyed it. The third student found writing more difficult and didn't have enough time to complete his second card. Their comments boosted my hopes about the future of the project after the holidays.

Sessions 9 - 13: August & September 2019

The first two weeks after the summer holidays are always a busy period for schools, with fine-tuning details for the new academic year. Consequently the sessions started again at the end of August. From then to the middle of September, the group were involved in creating and carrying out survey questions to continue to build the brief for Sally and share more information about the school and the people in it. Attendance varied and the survey response rate, given the school setting, surprised me by being very low; less than 7% (based on a school roll of approximately 300 plus teaching and other staff). It was what I described as a "sticky patch" for the project, as the momentum stuttered.

Laura had carried out the majority of the data-collection and had printed out an overview of the result. She also gave me the original completed forms too. On further analysis, approximately half the pupil respondents only answered the final question, which was from a given list and asked which of the following statements about art do you agree with. With respect to other more open questions, often one respondent gave multiple responses, thus making it appear as if there was a greater variety of distinct voices than was actually the case.

Taking an overview of all the pupils responses to the whole questionnaire it seemed that there was a desire for kindness and tolerance, which possibly arose from the perception that the school had a bad image, which needed improved. One wider conclusion that could be drawn was that those responding felt that art should be interesting and colourful. Co-incidentally, the three staff respondents, echoed the desire for a colourful artwork, which would brighten the school building and lift spirits. One staff member wrote, " It could improve the look of the school and morale of our pupils and staff for having a

beautiful artwork as part of our building" (Anon., 2019).

By the middle of September, I had passed on the survey to Sally and as there were no further requests from her, I used the following session as another one aiming to animate the group, while still hoping to generate thematic or insightful material. Accordingly I decided that we would have a practical session on a confidence-building theme - my secret talent. I had access to a badge-maker and had previously experienced how the badge-making process could be used to aid relaxed reflection.

Figure 18: Badges by John and Laura

Three students and Laura embraced the task and seemed to thoroughly enjoy it. The talents disclosed ranged from history to food, from swimming to humour. As Luke left he pinned his badge on to his school tie, while Andrew pinned his to his bag; I read this as signs of approval. John's enthusiasm was even more evident as he prepared several badges, all of which demonstrated both an eye for design and a sense of humour. As time ran out on the session he had to be encouraged to leave. Taking his mini-artworks away, he said he would give some to friends and pinned the one of a chocolate biscuit onto his jacket.

Figure 19: My secret talent badge-making exercise.

I relished their enthusiasm and it was fascinating to see these group members being so active and focused. This session was the first of a series of significant turning points.

Building on the previous week, the next session also had a practical focus and I noticed that the group "came to life" as I pulled out materials. Sally had started to ask about slogans and so I printed out a range of collaged texts and cut outs from early Dada to the Sex Pistol's 1977 album, *Never Mind The Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols* as inspiration for making slogans as a haptic process. The group embraced the task; John and Luke used some quotes from the survey section about messages people would like to share with others, while Kim contributed her own idea, which is a quote from the 2003 Disney film *Finding Nemo*, "just keep swimming." She surprised me by asking if she can finish her cut-out the following week.

Later in the conservation with Laura, I was reminded that building the self-esteem of the young participants was important to her, as she felt that individually this group are often not heard, because of more dominant voices in their class groups. Although not a research target, I hoped that participating in the commissioning project could be useful in this area and that I had a role to ensure that works and other contributions made were valued. To this end I determined that during the next session, I would make sure Kim had time to finish her slogan.

When I ask Laura for her reflections on how the young people were finding the process she replied, "I'm not 100% sure what they are getting out of it, just yet." At this stage I was not sure what they thought of the project either; getting the whole group there was rare and they were very shy of giving verbal feedback. When I explained this to Laura, she added, "they're not used to putting their opinions out there because someone else is maybe always jumping in before them" (Laura, 2019).

Sessions 14 - 15: October 2019

There was a marked contrast in the two sessions in October. School holidays and other issues meant the was a pause between sessions and the next group meeting only took place on 24th October. This meeting did not go well from my perspective, only two students attended and one of them, Andrew, decided he wanted to pull out of the project. Luke and I continued alone, which works for him as he experiences challenges on staying focused and abstract thinking; together we completed a new slogan exercise. I left somewhat dispirited, especially as the next session was already planned with Sally for her to visit with initial ideas.

I needn't have worried, when Sally and I arrived at the school Kim, Maria and John were all already waiting for us along with Laura. Luke joined shortly afterwards, but it seemed that Andrew had definitely withdrawn. The group was excited to see Sally.

Sally had prepared nine watercolour sketches of possible ideas; all colourful, energetic and brimming with fun. The designs included; a bin for bad vibes (2 sketches) a series of alcoves or shrines around the building, each with a slogan and perhaps spaces for"offerings", Poo emojis, Hollywood-style walk of fame, an alternative Roll of Honour Board- naming everyone, an alternative trophy cabinet, an enhanced entrance and nice faces.

Figure 20: Sally Hackett, Sketches for Young Commissioners Project, 2019

The group were as quiet as ever, but I tried to read their expressions as Sally showed her work. I wanted to support her, while also not driving or dominating the conversation. They seemed quietly interested; flickers of amusement, curiosity or recognition in their eyes as they looked at the works. We discussed which options appealed and what could be suitable for the school. Individual preferences became apparent; Maria liked the walk of

fame stars, John liked all the options and Laura liked the shrines. In general, the shrine idea was popular, as was the alternative Roll of Honour and the walk of fame. The Poo emojis weren't particularly popular. I liked the bin and said so, but the general feeling about it was mixed. We agreed that the works would be more likely to be inside rather than on the external wall, due to the size of the wall and the scope (in terms of budget, time and personnel) of the project.

Figure 21: Sally Hackett discussing options with the commissioners

Gradually the group relaxed, while Sally explained that she would still like more material and more slogans. John, Maria and Kim were particularly responsive; they especially enjoyed Sally asking them for their favourite memes and demonstrably relished being invited to get out their phones and search for examples. Typically at school they are not allowed to used their phones.

We also talked about food, which generated lively discussion; favourite take-away meals,

favourite dishes and tea. The most popular food seemed to be from The Sea Dragon, Chinese restaurant and take-away with each group member having a favourite dish. It was the most easy-going, free flowing conversation that we've ever had. During the conversation, I learned that tea and in particular “spilling the tea” was slang for gossiping. The group explained this as talking while you drink tea and immediately offered to make cups of tea. As we enjoyed the drink, we discussed the positives and negatives of gossiping.

This was another significant turning point session; it was fun and the group were bright and chatty. Factors such as length and timing of session, group dynamic and, most significantly, seeing concrete sketches, all contributed to its success. At one point we discussed generating more material for Sally and someone suggested involving the pupil council. While I understood the logic of the suggestion, I made a point of reminding everyone, that this group was the commissioning group and that they would decide how to instruct Sally to proceed. I got the feeling they were pleased to be told that.

Session 16 - 19: November 2019

Sally wanted more material from the young people and the first half of the month was spent generating this, using a questionnaire she created. Its nineteen questions could be broadly be categorised as: inspiration, food, school life and pets. For this survey, we gathered the data during the sessions, with Kim, Maria and Luke approaching other students, staff members or completing the forms themselves. I noticed Kim in particular enjoying the task. After two sessions I typed up the responses and shared them with Sally.

By the second half of the month, both Sally and I knew that we needed a decision to be made, so making could start. For session 18, I developed an exercise to aid selection and discussion of preferences using colour coded post-it notes and coloured scans of Sally's watercolours.

For what I had thought of as the decisive session, only two students and Laura attended. Luke felt compelled to join another group taking place at the same time in the same space, quickly giving his opinion and moving on. Laura and Kim completed the exercise and Laura also invited the head teacher to give her opinion.

Discussing the options from the contributors present that morning, there were three popular options: the stars of fame, the bin for bad vibes and the positive shrines.
With the stars we discussed the practical possibilities of inclusion and exclusion, with no agreed solution as to how star names are selected.

We discussed the bin for bad vibes further. Primarily I was interested in the response Laura had found from the "naughty" pupils, who in her canvas of other students had particularly enjoyed this work. I wondered if we responded positively to their opinions, they would connect to the work. Questions also arose around the colour and, more significantly, the function of the bin; would it be an ordinary rubbish bin or intended to be simply metaphoric.

Later that day Sally and I discussed the session. As always good humoured, Sally was clear about not wanting to go ahead with the stars of fame. Artistically, they were simply uninteresting to her and to use her own word "predictable." She was also concerned that it would become another way of celebrating "the great and the good" and produce the very opposite result that her roll of honour for everyone and alternative trophy cabinet would have had.

We spoke about the bin for bad vibes and the possibility of having a different colour palate, Sally agreed that this wouldn't be a problem. Although I understood that Sally still was interested in the alcoves/shrines. We agreed that at present the bin had a lot of potential, especially if it was popular with the "naughty" children.

With one session left in November, we were narrowing down the choices, but there was still no clear answer for which work would go ahead and which one Sally should start making. The timescale had already slipped beyond my plans, although I consoled myself by thinking this was only in terms of weeks, rather than years as some of the projects under the auspices of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* experienced.

Of the original group, half had been at this important session and a third had chosen the one concept Sally now completely rejected as their favourite option. If the artist no longer wanted to make that work, I felt we had to respect that decision. It may be a group commissioning project, but surely the artist still had to have some autonomy about the work made. After all, it was a commission and not a collaboration and it would be her name on the work. For the first time this highlighted to me a central question about community commissioning; where does the power lie and how are potential conflicts resolved? Further reflections follow below but in essence this moment was when more weighty discussions needed to start; so that positions did not become entrenched and space for dialogue remained open.

The last session of November had a low turn out with only Luke and Laura present. Consequently, the session simply evolved into a chat. I had decided that I would be less direct than Sally had been with me during a personal call on her feeling about the star walk. I simply explained that the star walk was something the school could do itself and that it did not need the input of an artist to create it. Laura quickly took up this idea, relating it to the school's production of *The Wizard of Oz,* which would be happening in 2020 and she suggested that the musical's famous yellow brick road could be used as a named walkway. I was glad there seemed to be a workable resolution.

Sessions 20 - 21: December 2019

On 4th December I travelled with the excited group to Glasgow to meet Sally at her studio in the Glasgow Sculpture Studios. There was a full complement of group members,

including Andrew, and one member of support staff. Without wanting to over emphasise the rural context of day-to-day school life for the group, I later learned that three out of the group of seven had not been to Glasgow for at least a year. One had been the previous week and the other three had been within the last month or two. Rothesay is approximately two hours away from Glasgow on public transport. Clearly this outing had significance even before we left the island.

At the Sculpture Studios Sally took us to her workroom, where she discussed how she organised her working space and showed us some recent works; including a sculpture of a poodle made from tissue and toilet roll, which was very popular. I asked who might like to be group photographer for the day and Maria volunteered. Primarily she focused on examples of artworks, but also some shots of different workrooms and the group.

Figure 22: Sally Hackett, Poodle and Dinner Plate, 2019. Photographed by Maria

We returned to Sally's studio and started talking about the commission. This had to be decision day, so that Sally could start to make the works. We looked at the sketches again, ruled some out and focused on what would work about which ones. Collectively we agreed on the shrines as they could incorporate different elements; including pet dogs, which was

a firm favourite with the group. Those who had not already done so, shared dog photos with Sally there and then.

On the journey home I passed around an instant survey on an ipad, which everyone completed. In response to a scale of 1 to 10 asking “how happy are you with the art you are commissioning” out of a total of 70 maximum points, the answers from the group total 69.6, with all but two students marking their happiness at 10.

When asked specifically about the Sculpture Studio and what had been the highlight there, responses varied with artworks, especially the ceramic plates of food being repeatedly mentioned. Other observations were that the people were friendly and one person wrote, “Fantastic, loved the space and the different people working there.”

One final comment, I suspect from Laura, summed up the mood and her highlights of the day, “The company, and listening to everything at the sculpture studio, listening to pupils' ideas. How interesting the studio was, the company and how relaxed a trip it was.” My impression was that the visit was a third signifiant turning point, as well as the general excitement of being out of school and in the city, the visit made the whole project real, special and important.

During the final session before the Christmas holidays, Laura advised me that the students would be sitting their prelim exams as soon as school returned in January.
Having done lots of surveys to gather information for Sally, in this session I wanted to gather the participants views and feeling about the commissioning project and the end of term seemed like a useful point for reflection. Andrew had now re-joined the group and the only Maria was absent.

My first question was about what they remembered of the project from the start. I had identified key moments and turning points that had been apparent to me, but I was

interested in having the group identify their own highlights. Both outings, to Glasgow and to Mount Stuart, were listed by everyone answering that part of the question. While I would have anticipated the Glasgow trip being identified, I was surprise that the visit to Mount Stuart also featured. Clearly, regardless of initial impressions of the artwork and the awful weather, that visit had also been memorable.

The next question I asked was about what the group felt they had learned by participating in the project. The answers appeared to come from opposite ends of a spectrum. Two of the group felt they had not learned anything, in the words of Andrew, "I don't think I have learned anything that I didn't already know." While at the other end of the range, the comments indicated that the project had given the participants an insight into how an artist might work and approach a project. Kim, for example, wrote: "Process of ideas - how that transforms into an artwork idea" and Laura commented "That any information [is] useful for an artist to make an art work, all ideas are good."

While Andrew's comments could be seen as full of youthful arrogance, from someone who had not fully committed to the project, the actual picture is more nuanced. Previously Laura had described him as being, somewhat inflexible and when he withdrew (temporarily) from the project, she had told me that he had trouble sticking with things, especially a process that doesn't have an immediate outcome (Laura, 2019). I had realised that the project had taken all the group out of their default comfort zones, but the others were certainly open to working through any feelings of uncertainty, particularly in response to more concrete developments. At that time I wondered if Andrew had only ever taken part because one of his favourite teachers was involved. The timing of this comment however, was surprising, Andrew had been as engaged as any of the group just the week before on the trip to Glasgow, I pondered if the others were perhaps giving neurotypical polite responses, while his were more direct and less constrained by social mores. There might be an element of that, but it would be unjust to the "positive" responders to imply that they were not being genuine.

I asked how they would describe the project to someone else; I was curious about how they would articulate the process and their role in it. None of the responses used the word commission or described themselves as commissioners, but their role was alluded to in different ways. Kim wrote, “Mount Stuart decided to sponsor an art work in our school and few of us were chosen to work with an artist to create the art work.” Other comments described, “working with an artist” and John wrote that the project involved “an artist coming to the school to make an art piece about various things that mean a lot to us.” In addition to including the artist in their responses, two out of the five made reference to Mount Stuart as supporting the project financially and Andrew added, “The Art project is a gift to the school.” Only Luke answered the question differently, saying he would not describe the project to anyone who asked, rather he would show them the artwork. He added, “It'll be a nice piece of artwork for the school.”

The shortest answers were to the question, how do you feel about the project. Again responses could be sequenced from the non-committal to the enthusiastic. Arranged in this way they read;

-Alright
-I feel like it will benefit me and the school in many different ways
-I don't know. It feels like we're giving something that future generations will look at and be like that is amazing.
-I quite like it, it will be something different for our school and something new
-Fantastic, excited, privileged.
There were no overtly negative or critical feelings expressed.

The final question was whether the participants felt they had benefited in any way for being involved in the project. With the exception of Andrew, who answered “No, I don't think it has,” all of the others felt they had experienced some benefit.

A notable common theme that emerged was to do with expanding perceptions with phrases such as “opened my mind”, “ widened my understanding” and “expanded my mindset” being used. These changes were attributed to various factors; “to see an artist studio“, “different things”, “the process of an artist thinking about her work“, “art and

Glasgow". On the evidence of this survey, the majority of the group clearly felt that participating had given them an insight to how an artist might work; there was an appreciation that this had been a special "opportunity" and that it had altered their understanding of what art could be. As Luke succinctly put it, "[I] thought she [Sally] might do painting - but now [I] know [art] can be something else."

Another personal benefit was described by John who felt that, "the experience of organising and going away has helped with my confidence." Laura added one final comment, "The process has been brilliant overall."

Session 22: February 2020

In early February I met Laura at an out-of-school event and was surprised to learn that the prelims had been completed quite early in January and that all the young people had been asking about the project. I was pleasantly surprised. She expanded, "even John who is normally reticent" had been asking. The event was a mini-careers fair open to parents and young people and I was present in my working role. Shortly after it opened, Andrew and Luke appeared and made a bee-line to come and chat to me. Again I was surprised. I reflected on the time it takes to build relationships between adults and teenagers, and time for them to understand the project. After 20 sessions there was clearly an active interest in the project and probably an understanding that after the studio visit, Sally was going to start making the work they had commissioned and that the culmination of the project was in sight.

There was another holiday due, but I arranged a meeting of the group for the first week back. Laura and I had to play with dates and time a little, as the whole year group had to attend another event at our usual time and on our usual day. I had had the growing realisation of how important the project had become to Laura. Her determination to arrange extra time out of class on this date for the group demonstrated the significance the project had acquired.

The whole group was present and I updated them on developments over the last months. At this stage I did not have any images to share, so it was a verbal progress report. Sally had finished making the shrine dedicated to pet dogs and was currently working on the Chinese restaurant shrine. They seemed quietly delighted.

Sally and I had agreed a schedule for delivery of the works, which I shared with the group; works completed by the end of the month; install 9/10th of March and launch on 20th March. With the group I discussed a schedule of what tasks we needed to have completed in order to be ready for the arrival of the works. This included checking possible locations for the artworks, any permissions required from Mitie and the details of the launch events.

Planning the launch animated everyone; John made us all laugh by saying we should have Chinese food and invite dogs. They were all really excited by the prospect of catering for the event themselves, with access to the school's classroom kitchen. I asked if they were sure they wanted to do it all themselves, after all they were the commissioners and perhaps the launch should be a treat for them. But they were adamant. As Laura pointed out later, they really were taking ownership of the whole project; another significant milestone in the development of the project.

I said I wasn't sure if I'd be able to go to the school the following Thursday, but Laura suggested they would meet anyway, share plans and update me by email. This was an exceedingly positive step it had become a school project, not simply something I was driving. Ownership was shifting.

Session 23: March 2020

Against a backdrop of COVID-19 Virus being declared a pandemic and institutions responding in a variety of ways, Sally completed her artworks and arranged to bring them to Bute. It was a very exciting day for everyone, the commissioning group, the artist and the mediator.

Laura had previously told me that not all the group could attend, as some were on a sports trip, but as the schedule suited Sally and she had made the necessary travel arrangements, we continued without John, Maria and Kim. I felt it was important to not only have the works completed, but also to get them to the island and into the school.

We took the works into the Hub, where we usually met and laid them flat on table tops, so everyone could see and comment. As well as Laura, the support worker, headteacher, deputy head, art head and two other members of staff came at varying times to see the work.

Figure 23: Sally Hackett, *Dogs of Bute* (detail), 2019

There was a buzz of delight and energy. The initial focus was on the *Dogs of Bute* work, with everyone keen to identify their dog. Sally discussed each dog with each owner. This work seemed to me to already be doing its magic; generating feelings of warmth and joy. *Spilling the Tea* was perhaps in some ways the most challenging work, being more abstract, but because the commissioners understood its genesis, it was easy for them to grasp and explain to others. In fact it was wonderful for me to see Luke without prompting

or encouragement explaining the works to other staff members. In front of my eyes he was taking and demonstrating ownership of the works he had co-commissioned.

Jade Garden and Sea Dragon, were also immediately loved; almost everyone seemed to have eaten in one or other place recently or was planning to eat there later in the week. As Sally pointed out and described each dish, their enthusiasm, laughter and recognition increased.

Staff came and went to let others visit while they supervised classes. In between these visits, we had a little chat about the launch event, which again everyone seemed excited about. Spring rolls seem to be on the menu. With the young people saying they would make them. The Art teacher and Luke wondered if they could invite the “therapy” dog that visits the school. I was looking forward to the launch as much the the young people

I was delighted for Sally and the whole commissioning group at how well the session had gone. Not only they were pleased and excited, but everyone else seeing the works, seemed to respond positively too. Some other young people in the Hub for another activity couldn't resist having a look and also made positive comments. If part of the brief for the work had been to make people feel positive or comforted, then it seemed to be doing that and more already.

Non-Session

From Friday 13th to Tuesday 17th March, everything changed. From a wonderful delivery of art work and looking forward to the reactions of other students and a launch event to complete standstill; school closure, restrictions on work meetings; the very harsh reality of the moment.

My planned session, on Thursday 19th, when I would have shown the rest of the group the work, captured their reactions and got them to complete a reflective timeline exercise had

to be cancelled as my employer stopped all external meetings and visits on Tuesday 17th. The following day, I spoke to Laura on the phone and asked if she would complete the timeline exercise without me, if I emailed her the schema. On Thursday 19th as Laura was sending the completed work back to me, it was announced that all schools would close.

The timeline exercise didn't come back with much information other than descriptions of the photographs. I had mentioned captioning was one way to approach it, but I was hoping for something more reflective having read Sheridan et al (2011), who found it an expansive tool. Of course me not being there meant that I was unable to lead discussion to more personal territory. Having said that, it still strikes me as a useful technique and I completed my own, thinking that it might aid our future reflective discussion.

I concluded my field notes for the period with the following observation; my own disappointment at the time is evident.

> Throughout my lifetime I can remember days off school for miners' strikes and/or fuel shortages in the 1970s and the teachers' strikes of the 1980s, not to mention snow sending us home for a couple of days. But this closure from mid-March to August really is incredible.
> The impacts for this project are not life threatening, but I find it hugely disappointing, just as the project was nearly complete and the group were really gearing up, it's frustrating. Sure we can re-visit (and whatever the research implications I will see the project through), but that momentum & possibly spurt of enthusiasm will have dissipated. If I'm scunnered how must the kids and the artist feel?

Working Relations. Mediator: Artist: Community.

Mediating is usually thought of as bringing two differing parties together. Within the *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* this is taken to mean between the world of contemporary art, and wider society. In France mediators are from a network overseen by *Fondation de France* based in different geographic areas. Currently they are organisations of art producers and curators or arts centres with the capacity to deliver projects (Eternal

Network, 2020 and Fondation de France, 2017a).

At the outset I speculated that my role as mediator might not be typical as I had instigated the project for research purposes. Additionally project requirements ranging from research activities, project initiation and project animation seemed beyond a standard role of mediator as producer. However, just as communities and projects vary, so do the demands on mediators; at times the range of tasks involved may weigh more heavily in one direction than another. The distinct element of this project was combining project realisation with research.

One of the first mediator tasks was to select an artist. Helmut Draxler cautions, "the mediating actors, even with the best individual intentions, always remain bound in their own standpoints to the structural dimensions of hegemony and violence." (Draxler, 2017: 272). I have described in Session 2 some practical, primarily budgetary constraints, that encroached on which artists I might have approached. Another potential constraint was my own network of contracts, personally I knew a only handful of early career artists who might have been interested. I was clear that following the *Nouveaux commanditaires* model, I should avoid making an open call, and for reasons of time and overlap with my professional role, I very much wanted to avoid that process. I was however, prepared to do research and seek assistance through other networks if necessary.

While I was interested in understanding the process of selection it ultimately became quite straightforward, as during the second session with the group, one of the exercises sparked a response, which I knew immediately would appeal to one of the artists I already had in mind. Experienced mediator Amanda Crabtree acknowledges that there is a role for instinct in mediation, especially in selecting artists. She describes inviting matali crasset to work on the pigeon loft commission just at the right time when crasset was a “very up and coming young designer,” who had not yet worked on large scale architectural projects (Crabtree, 2020).

One of the benefits of working with someone I already knew was that issuing an invitation was straightforward. We simply exchanged emails. After a preamble, I asked "might you be interested in being commissioned by a group of S4 students to make work?" (Gregor, 2019a). After discussing possible timelines, Sally agreed to become the commissioned artist. On reflection this was the most straightforward part of the role; the task was clearly defined and, in this instance, uncomplicated.

Where more questions about the nature of the role arose were at later stages of the project, often co-inciding with what I thought of as "sticky patches." The first of these came shortly after the summer break when, over three weeks, I was working with the group to generate survey questions and responses to provide information for the artist. I felt there was little interaction between what had clearly become two factions within the group
If I had been facilitating group work, I would have worked to bring the group together more and tried to boost their confidence and communication. However, this was not the primary point of the project, either in research or on-the-ground terms. I reminded myself that if I were a typical *Nouveaux commanditaires* mediator, I would most likely be working with a pre-formed group who would be presenting an idea to an artist. If I had been carrying out standard observational fieldwork I could be simply observing how the group did or did not function. If I were a socially engaged artist, I would be running the whole project without necessarily trying to generate research quality data and create project outcomes. As experienced mediator Amanda Crabtree has observed even within the *Nouveaux commanditaires* system, "It sounds as if projects are easy, but they're not, they are very difficult and sometimes they are so difficult, they stop, they don't happen in the end" (Crabtree, 2020).

I also had to appreciate that there was a difference between generating research material for the artist and research data for the case study. And while the two sets of material might overlap I would have to avoid letting time constraints make me anxious if they didn't. This duality of active research may be unlikely in a more traditional mediator role, but it was not

without precedent. Writing on the *Nouveaux commanditaires* mediation process in a project in Finland, Annukka Jyrämä described a complex and lengthy project which involved an artist from the United States, a French mediator and Finnish commissioners. (Jyrämä, 2008). She worked on the project as both a researcher and project manager, a position not dissimilar to my own. Reflecting on her position she wrote;

> I did not usually reflect on how a particular action created outcome, new talk or ideas, rather I reflected more upon my feelings towards the people in the group and towards the progress of the project. The actions were not consciously planned to create any specific outcome but to advance our main aim – coming up with the proposal and finding out what we wanted the artwork to tell. Thus, I did not make conscious interventions with the research in mind, which can be perceived as a lack in the research process (Jyrämä, 2008, np).

Her last point reflected my concern about generating sufficient data for the research. In particular, although working with young people in a school setting had benefits, the young participants' blanket rejection of recording discussions or interviews and their general "teenage reticence" closed down some possible data capture methods. Additionally, the kind of contact I could have had with an adult group in terms of email or other social media was also not possible. To navigate my route through these different approaches, it helped me to realise that I was in a nexus position, combining many of these potential roles and that my task would be to balance these.

To move through my "sticky patch" around the September survey, I called on my background in social engagement to create an activity, which would aim at positive re-enforcement of the participants' individual interests, keep the project momentum alive, while also changing the style of task. Although planning and carrying out surveys might have appealed to more confident young people, this group needed a change of direction. As described in Session 12, this badge-making new style activity was enjoyed by those present. As the project came to a halt in March 2020, the group completed the timeline project. Although this was not done as comprehensively as I might have hoped, what was

noteworthy was that in the timeline the badge-making session (prompted by an included image) was described by two of the five respondents as a “small pre-project”. The shift to actively making something themselves had gained “project” status. Perhaps only in this situation, but possibly equally useful in others, my experience suggests that being flexible and knowing when a new or tangential approach is required is important in working with commissioners. As Amanda Crabtree pointed out the hands-on group work aspects of mediation can be both time consuming and labour intensive (Crabtree, 2020). However time spent in developing suitable materials and activities can contribute to cultivating participation and ultimately in delivering successful results.

Another pitfall for potential mediators was highlighted during the November sessions (17). In the middle of the month I received the following email from Sally,

> I am going to start physically making some stuff in the studio next week as would be great to get the project almost finished by Christmas! Do you know if there's any more feedback on what idea they are swaying towards? It seemed when I was there that it was predominantly the wee shrines around the school that they were liking? (Hackett, 2019b)

The following Monday we spoke by phone and agreed in our impression that the shrines had been the leading option. I had sent some images of Mexican *nichos* (display boxes), suggesting those as a possibility for presenting the shrines around the school. It also meant that elements of other options could be included in the shrines and possibly that they could be added to or altered by students and others in the school. We discussed materials that might be required and the source of ready-made or bespoke alternatives.

However, after the phone call, I realised that Sally and I had effectively decided what the work was going to be. I pulled myself up short. I wasn't being the perfect mediator, I was working with the artist as if it were my commission. The young people had to commission the work. It was so easy to slide into a more familiar role, especial with an artist I know well. I felt as if I had woken up just in time.

I emailed Sally,

> On reflection, I'll get the group to choose the work this week. We've said they are the commissioners, so they really need to make the final decision - give them the power. Sorry I should have thought of that this morning. Of course I can explain that the shrines (which I think we both felt were the firm favourite) can have some little elements of some of the others- would that be alright (Gregor, 2019b)?

Her response was swift.

> Yes I agree about the young people choosing, sounds good! Let me know what they say (Hackett, 2019c)!

Fortunately, we both had an understanding of the project, not only in terms of its research aspect, but the underpinning focus of the investigation being about giving a group of people the power to commission - even if it noticeably meant some shifting of the customary power structures in decision-making. I hoped we had avoided the trap Émilie Hache observed in the commissioning of a redesigned well-being centre in Bordeaux where she found, "a kind of distance between those who speak about the work and those *for whom* it is intended" (Hache, 2017: 242). She goes on to suggest that by not involving centre users in the commissioning process there may be a subsequent barrier to future centre usage.

As previously discussed in Chapter Three and in particular relationship to large scale community ownership projects such as land buy-outs, no community is ever heterogeneous and there are feasibility issues to involving large numbers of people at every stage of the process. Reflecting on the *Nouveaux commanditaires* project *Sharawaggi* at *Lycée Pasteur* , where the school bell was replaced by a variety of specially designed soundscapes, Amanda Crabtree recalled,

> Not all the teachers were happy, you know, a school is a microcosm of society.. not all the teachers were particularly delighted that there was no school bell but ...anyway... [the artwork is] still there (Crabtree, 2020).

In Rothesay Academy by involving staff members and students, as well as conducting surveys with other students and staff, I hoped that our commissioning process had balanced being consultative and practicably manageable with giving attention to and

empowering the members of the commissioning group.

The following Session 18 (21st November 2019) took the question back to the group. As noted in the session description, only three of the group were present. Laura's feedback was also influenced by conversations she had had with other pupils.
The matrix of responses is represented by the chart below:

	Bin for bad vibes	Shrines	Trophy cabinet	Star street	Nice/not nice faces	Poo emoji	Grand entrance	Amazing roll
Luke			maybe	yes		no		
Laura	Definitely yes	Verbally liked it		maybe		no		
Kim	A bit stupid and people might bin their rubbish instead of bad vibes	Kinda like it but not sure where to put it and what to do inside [the alcove/ shrine]	A bit interesting , but not sure, is kinda interesting	Cause I like it and it looks really interesting and stylish	I like it but it looks a wee bit childish	It's a bit rude and weird	A bit pointless	
Head-teacher	maybe	yes	maybe					no

Figure 24: Watercolour matrix

As described previously, on feeding these findings back to the artist, she was clear she did not want to proceed with the star walk option; raising questions about the autonomy of the artist and where the loyalties of the mediator are siutated. To reiterate my earlier question: where does the power lie? The process is surely redundant if artists are commanded to create standardised, dull, unoriginal or derivative works. And if only some of the commissioning group is present, is any decision really representative?
In my subsequent interview with artist Kenny Hunter, when asked about this scenario he

replied,

> the conditions you are describing to me are very familiar and I've been in plenty, plenty of these situations. I mean when you are asked for maybe a collection of possible proposals or indications of directions of travel they often pick the one that you are least happy with because it has a function. It was described to me as it has a functional interactive side to it. So that the non-art people would think; I can relate to that. Because they can think of them doing that, but maybe they weren't so confident in saying; how do we talk about art. Whereas they say, well it's a game of snakes and ladders on the ground and you'll hop round it and you think, well, what do you want an artist for. I've been in plenty of commissions like that and it's been really, really closed off too quickly (Hunter, 2020).

My feeling was that this is the exact point where the mediator is needed, especially if the artist is based at any distance from the group and cannot be always on hand for immediate dialogue. The mediator needs to keep the exploration and negotiation alive, not to create or impose their own solution, but to be the midwife to a solution created by all parties. As Crabtree reflects, "everyone is at the same level. We don't know where we are going but we all want the same thing**"** (Crabtree, 2020).

Reflecting on the mediator role, philosopher Isabelle Stengers sees it as being integral to the practice and approach of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* (Stengers, 2017: 303). She acknowledges that while their founding protocol places the mediator in a central role "Each time, the mediator has to become engaged as if it were the first time" (2017: 304). For her, the clarification of all roles within the process aids more than successful project delivery, it furthers wider aims by allowing different parties to come together in distinct but equal positions (2017: 308). Bruno Latour, in conversation with J. L. Koerner, also acknowledges the importance of the mediator role,

> their interest is to reconnect where the mismatch is such that the people don't know they would be interested [in contemporary art], and the artists, fully "autonomized" and "marketized," don't know and even feel slightly ashamed of being actually interested in working with a [community] demand. So that's why you need a third party... (Latour, 2017: 216).

Comparing this model of community commissioning with much older models of patronage from church, crown and guilds, Latour suggests that the third party mediator is needed today because there is distance between artists and communities.

As I puzzled over why artists might feel uncomfortable with this type of commission, Amanda Crabtree reminded me of the French context of the majority of these projects, where she felt that until recently there had been little value given to socially engaged practice, where grassroots organisation were only beginning to have a voice and the Establishment has been seen to be very much in control of the artworld.

In their discussion of precedents for community commissioning, Latour and Koerner consider an historical overview of the autonomy of artists. In addition to accusing the German Romantics of creating and fostering the ideal of the lonely and misunderstood artistic genius, they discuss if there has every actually been such a position as the autonomous artist, with guilds and patrons all creating demands, requests and commissions. Reflecting on Albrecht Dürer's desire to move away from patronage to exercising commercial freedom through, for example, print-making Latour concludes, “So, autonomy is a word which might not be very meaningful, because actually, it is anticipating another type of demand [that of the market]” (Latour and Koerner, 2017: 211).

In her consideration of the *Nouveaux commanditaires* protocol and approach, Margit Rosen compares its methodology with the1960s Paris-based collective Groupe de Researche en Arts Visuels, known as GRAV (Rosen, 2017). In both she sees a shared desire to alter the relationship between the artist and the wider public. For GRAV this included making pubic installations encouraging audience discovery and play. For GRAV this included making pubic installations encouraging audience discovery and play. Contemporaries of the Situationist International discussed in Chapter Three, despite broadly similar intentions, the artists associated with the two groups were regularly at loggerheads (see, for example, The Situationist International, 1963). Focusing on the

comparison with GRAV alone, Rosen notes, "While GRAV addressed the individual as spectator, the [*Nouveaux commanditaires'*] *Protocol* from the outset addressed the individual in all his/her potential roles" (Rosen, 2017: 116). In other words, an expanded idea of what "participation" can involve; not simply "taking part" as a subject, but commissioning as an active agent. Rosen continues, "the ingenuity of this concept was to move the inclusion of the public from the level of perception to the level of production" (Rosen, 2017: 116).

This refined relationship between artist and public, addresses some of the questions which arise around what is usually described as socially engaged practice. As Dave Beech highlights a typical invitation to participate,

> always involves a specific invitation and a specific formation of the participant's subjectivity, even when the artist asks them simply to be themselves. The critique of participation must release us from the grip of the simple binary logic which opposes participation to exclusion and passivity. If participation entails its own forms of limitations on the participant, then the simple binary needs to be replaced with a constellation of overlapping economies of agency, control, self-determination and power (Beech: 2008, n.p.).

In my opinion, the *Nouveaux commanditaires* approach addresses Beech's concerns and creates this constellation by re-configuring participation as direction. With power being balanced, open exchange between artist, commissioning community and mediator flourishes, forming what Stengers describes a rhizome-like network of connected people and interests (Stengers, 2017: 314).

In discussion, Kenny Hunter described how such connections can be useful to the artist,

> as the artist you've got to be responsible at the end of the day for the artwork, but sometimes the engagement builds confidence in the idea, it also builds a community around the idea, so they start to lobby for it as well. And I think for me the biggest impact the community has is often in the information gathering or research stage. I take responsibility for the artwork, I'm not asking everybody, "what do you think, should this be blue?" I'm choosing the colour

> of blue and if at any point the community turns round and says we don't like this, I'll happily take my tools and pack up and go home . But I am open to them influencing me about who they are, obviously, and what the community needs or what are the opportunities around the artwork (Hunter, 2020).

As the mediator on this project for Rothesay Academy, I aimed to balance the participatory process, the wishes of all the commissioners and the integrity of the artist. Asking Kenny Hunter about his experience of working with a mediator in France, he confirmed this balancing of interests,

> They were trying to support the artist, obviously they wanted it to go well for them and the community. [. . .] Everyone's got a skin in the game, if you know what I mean (Hunter, 2020).

While focused on the specifics of her challenging project and her feelings of being an "invisible" mediator, working on the project but not officially appointed to that role, Jyrämä expands the discussion on the multiple roles involved in being a mediator, noting its existence across disciplines from sociology to psychology to marketing. She notes: "Mediating, hence, always implies the intersections of two worlds, communities or fields, a context where differing values, norms, languages, or cultures meet" (Jyrämä, 2008, np).

Developing the practice of cultural mediation, Lille University's Diploma course within the *Nouveaux commanditaires* system aims to develop and share information about a range of relevant skills and outlooks. Reflecting some of Jyrämä cross-disciplinary examples, course director Crabtree considers mediators need to have an understanding of; psychology, administration, contracts, budgets, fundraising, politics, legal requirements in addition to supporting the artist and the community. Put succinctly, she observes that successful mediators "have to like people" while cautioning that it is not a role for everyone,

> there are some people who are great curators, because a lot of people have tried to do these projects, they are fantastic curators, they can curate an exhibition in a museum, no problem, but they cannot facilitate that dialogue between artist and normal people Because it's a different language. It's different, you know, you have to change your language (Crabtree, 2020).

Clearly being a mediator is a socially orientated task, a useful description of which is "a kind of triangular formation of reciprocally balancing relationships" (Draxler 2017, 277).

To work through the specific issue that arose in this case study of differences between artist and (at least part of) the commissioning group, I arranged two things: an alternative option for the star walk and further engagement with the artist, including a studio visit. The latter, with all the group present allowed a selection to be made and the commission to be finalised. The visit gave the group a context, which they had not previously experienced of seeing how and where the artist worked. It also meant that they could see, handle and enjoy other examples of her work. It made all the previous work and discussions real. The success of the day echoed Kenny Hunter's observation that:

> I often find that if the artist is able to articulate the idea and
> work in negotiating an outcome, and that's probably the right word,
> you know it's not forcing your will on people it is a trust thing,
> you can, given time, make that connection with people. You can
> make an artwork that nobody knew at the start, not the artist either.
> (Hunter, 2020)

In this analysis, the artist provides the solution. In this case study the mediator worked with both parties to establish trust and was able to provide a buffer when needed between them. This involved giving time and processes in order to find mutually satisfactory outcomes.

Considering her experience of the mediation process as the project artist, Sally Hackett saw the role as a “bridge” between herself and the commissioners. She explained, this was not only because I had met the group before she did, but rather gave the example of the visit on which she showed her sketches of possible projects for the first time. She remembered feeling vulnerable about showing her work and felt that if she had been alone with the group having any subsequent conversation about the options, would have been challenging. Having a mediator there to facilitate responses was “really really helpful” (Hackett, 2020).

Sally's nervousness may have been heightened by the fact that she felt a sense of responsibility in fulfilling the commission. She commented,

> I was really conscious of making something that they actually liked and that they felt involved in.. and I think when you get another commission, that's just you doing your own artistic work... (Hackett, 2020).

She attributed this difference to,

> the people in this project who were commissioning the work, are not usually the people who make contemporary art commissions, so [. . .] I was really conscious that I didn't want to make something that they didn't understand or they didn't feel involved in or they didn't feel connected with them (Hackett, 2020).

Her observation is echoed by Amanda Crabtree, who has had experience of artists being reluctant to accept community commissions because they considered the responsibility too great, particularly with respect to groups who live with daily pressures. She discussed one example (*Tenir* by Françoise Pétrovitch commissioned by Le comité de la dalle, Lens) where the artist was uncertain about accepting the commission,

> because she was confronted with people who were a long way away from the artworld, [it was] not reasonable to expect that they should engage with the artworld, when they had other things to worry about (Crabtree, 2020).

It seems likely, however, that artconnexion approached Pétrovitch because she "is particularly interested in individuals at the margins, whose [...] fragility, anxieties and aspirations [she grasps]" (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2020d). In particular the subject matter of the commission - a monument of resistance to the pressures and misery of life, dealing with poverty - had echoes in her existing body of work. Consequently, through the mediation process Pétrovitch accepted and completed the commission.

Again, the possibility of discussing methods and strategies made the project viable. This social aspect of the process, Draxler's triangulation of exchange, is what enables successful projects to unfold. Kenny Hunter spoke of the value of discussions and Crabtree discussed "taking people as far as they were prepared to go", giving the example of matali crasset's *Capsule* project when crasset:

> presented two projects, one more ambitious than the other. Saying basically I will take you as far as you want to go, like ...it's up to you- how far do you want to go. And they basically went for the more ambitious project and they went for it (Crabtree, 2020).

It would be wrong to think of these discussions as artists or mediators pushing an unfamiliar agenda on "outsider" commissioners. (Pursuing the metaphor of triangles, the ideal would be a equilateral, where all lengths/relationships are equal.) Not only do artists such as Hackett and Pétrovitch evidently feel the weight of the responsibility of the commission, but the social aspects of the process can be viewed positively by the artists too. Sally Hackett reflected,

> this was a project that was kind of like working in a social way but not through this element of physical making – as in the group physically making something- in a way that was more about concepts, talking about content and then me interpreting that. Which for me, I think was really interesting. It was a really nice way of working (Hackett, 2020).

Isabelle Stengers quotes one anonymous artist on a *Nouveaux commanditaires* commission displaying the tension that some artists might feel around autonomy:

> "I am the one through whom the oeuvre arrives"- but adds straight away that "it's in my interest not to kid myself!", thereby recognizing that even if the position of the author has not been annulled, it has nonetheless been modified (Stengers 2017: 308).

For an artist familiar with working in social contexts, such as Sally, this commissioning process actually balanced the best of both situations, although she described herself as "the vehicle for expressing something from them [the group]" she enjoyed the social aspects of the process, as a contrast to isolated studio practice and considered that,

> It didn't feel that I was just making this thing for them, it did feel that there was a lot of me in it. There was a lot of my hand in it and my thoughts and my interpretation (Hackett, 2020).

In her case authorship is not diluted, rather positioned in a social context. Discussing *A place is a space remembered*, Kenny Hunter described his conversations and research with the commissioning group and wider community of Audinghen, and how those varied accounts and memories influenced the form of the final work, "a collection of inter-related

fragments" (Hunter, 2020). He summed up the value of the process,

> the negotiation phase can be very productive, positive thing. Especially as an artist because you don't know everything, you don't know everything about them, about their neighbourhood, their area, their culture, history; it's got to be a collectively arrived at, but you also have to bring your bottle to the party... (Hunter, 2020).

Ultimately, the commissioners engage an artist and the artist makes the work, with the mediator doing whatever is required to enable that to happen. The work emerges from a context of exchange. Exchange of everything from cups of tea to ideas, from pictures of pets to words on paper, from jokes shared to journeys made. Through such exchange solidarity founded on understanding grows. I perceive parallels to other considerations of exchange; particularly its central role in Freire's approach to teaching (1990) and Mauss' discussion of layered systems of gift exchange, which bind people in ways beyond economic transactions (2002 [1925]). Writing on popular education, Archer and Costello record a Nicaraguan programme where university students spent time in rural communities, teaching literacy and working alongside small-scale farmers. In a parallel to Kenny Hunter's reflections, one volunteer summed up the approach based on exchange of skills and labour, "My students learned how to write machete and I learnt how to use one" (Archer & Costello, 1990: 31).

On becoming commissioners

Having reflected on the process of mediating I have experienced "from the inside", I will now turn to what I have observed of the commissioners. In essence, this was a trajectory from an uncertain group to proud commissioners. Part of this path has been a non-statutory educational experience; one of personal growth, new experiences and, to some extent, enquiry. It is acknowledged by both student and adult participants through reflections on "widening" and "opening" understanding and echoes observations of "a whole opening up of worlds" by Amanda Crabtree (2020). Participating in an unfolding process, intertwined with a creative process was also for the participants an atypical learning process. Interviewing Laura at the end of the thirteenth session (approximately

half way through the project) captured both her reflections and hopes,

> I think it's an interesting process, I'll be interested to see the way it goes and the way it comes up. And to be thinking about art not just as somebody paints something and that's it. But to be thinking about it as a process which involves (pause) thinking about words (pause) thinking about the school as a whole, thinking about what people think about the school. Doing the survey and actually looking at some of the responses that have come back from that. That has been **very** interesting. (Laughs) So I just think it's an interesting journey (pause) we'll just go along with it and see where it takes us (Laura, 2019).

Laura's ability to travel hopefully was both trusting and enabling.

Her comment also reveals that an artist's process was completely unknown and unconsidered prior to this project. Clearly, given the opportunity, it was a subject of great interest. To an extent it can be seen as being in accord with one of the observations and ambitions of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*,

> Citizens remain absent and silent in art. They seem satisfied with anonymous relations with artists and limit artworks to having a role within a heritage that is managed by markets and institutions whose criteria and values could not stem from a political, let alone artistic project.
> In order to give a voice to these great absentees and enable them to finally play a role, the actions of the *Nouveaux Commanditaires* take place on the art scene without walls (Les Nouveaux commanditaires, 2020a).

Laura has described the shift from being "silent in art" to "playing a role."

The journey Laura describes was not always smooth for all the participants; attendance was not regular, Andrew withdrew for a spell and there was competing demands on everyone's time. Maintaining group momentum is not unique to this research project, but it does raise questions for any group endeavour, especially lengthy ones. Some of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*' projects have taken years to realise; when problems arise it takes focus, determination and energy from all those involved to continue the commitment. A simpler path is to walk away or another option, is not to get involved at all. I noted earlier that I felt some survey responses were low. Laura elucidated the position amongst the staff group,

> when I've been saying to people, I've actually physically went round, rather than just emailing the entire staff body; could you do that for me, could you do that for me. The wider body of staff that maybe think, that doesn't relate to me or doesn't apply to me (pause) so I've being going round saying, but it does because you're in this school as well. I think they see it, but I think they are maybe thinking that it's just something that this group of students are doing and their thing, rather than no, it's a whole school thing (Laura, 2019).

I wondered if this could be indicative of how the final work would be received, but, possibly trying to reassure me, Laura denied that this would be the case. This low level of engagement could be regarded as further evidence of the "silent citizen" in the artworld or perhaps it simply indicates that school staff have many and varied demands on their time and attention.

As I have previously noted, Andrew did re-join the group and continued to participate. In the December questionnaire, when asked to describe or explain the project to someone unknown, he identified it as "a gift to the school" describing his feelings as, "like we're giving something that future generations will look at and be like that is amazing". In considering the artworks as a future heirloom, Andrew could be seen to meet Derrida's challenge to the idea of gifts; having to be given with no expectation or even conception of return, as referenced in Chapter Three (Derrida, 1992).

Reflecting on the question of long term gifts and time, it is perhaps salient to ask if the community built around the artwork through the *Nouveaux commanditaires* process can endure beyond the process itself. The answer, no doubt varies from project to project and the need or demand the original commission was established to address. To return, for example, to Amanda Crabtree's discussion of the pigeon loft, *Capsule,* in Caudry; its position, purpose and reputation have ensured that it continues to be maintained by the community. Within this case study and its real-time outcomes and perhaps other projects in the same mode, these are, arguably, the risks attached to "the gift". Not so much the risk of the giver being forgotten nor the risk of any obligation not being fulfilled, but the risk

that when the exchange stops, networks dissipate and the intention of the artist (and commissioners and mediator) become unclear.

Working within a range of traditions of gift-making and hospitality, artist Lee Mingwei acknowledges that each invitation to participate in an artwork centring on a gift-exchange carries risk for artist and recipient; resulting in "works [which] are co-produced moment to moment" (Molotch, 2020: 51). But for larger scale, less transient works such as those realised by *Nouveaux commanditaires* which also depend on exchange, how are risks to be considered? Isabelle Stengers acknowledges the *Nouveaux commanditaires* approach is a "gamble" (Stengers, 2017: 299). She observers that for every new project "the natural opposition between the probable and the possible has to be replayed" (Stengers 2017: 313). She continues, that by siding with the possible, ambitious and risky projects are fulfilled. She suggests,

> All that matters is experimentation and (this is what the New Patrons were able to do) the creation of stories, examples that activate the sense of the possible, awaken the appetite that is necessary for this "work to be done"... (Stengers, 2017: 313)

concluding that the experience of participating in such a project allows those involved to carry with them the experience and knowledge of being active (Stengers, 2017: 314). If this is the case, then the Rothesay Academy group will continue to recall their experiences of realising the possibility of commissioning an artist to produce work. Moreover, with a member of staff continuing to work at the school, even after this cohort of students have left, opportunities to continue dialogue, encounters and opportunities for all types of exchange and interaction around the artwork and the project remain possible.

The possibilities embedded in the Rothesay project were evident in the responses during what transpired to be the final project session. I managed to capture photographically the reactions of the group and other members of staff as as they saw the three works for the first time. Previously I might have simply done this as a matter of simple event documentation , but I noted Jan Dubiel's article about how images of children focusing on

activities and in unposed moments could be used to provide evidence for learning, concentration, enjoyment, etc. For example, tongue sticking out in concentration can demonstrate focus on an activity, rather than a cheesy grin for the camera. Although the article discussed images of younger children, I felt some of the same principles might apply (Dubiel, n.d.:4).

I was aware of the numerous caveats to the uses of photography as "evidence"; that in itself it is not neutral, and authorial editing, where necessary should be balanced. None-the-less by recording moments photographically, I was trying to capture instant, initial reactions. Simply concluding that pointing, smiling or staring indicated interaction, enjoyment and attention respectively.

Figure 25: Artist Sally Hackett with three of the commissioners

For example, Figure 25 above depicts Sally (first left) talking through the detail of the Chinese restaurant shrine. The four other people in the foreground are looking intently at the artwork and at least two are smiling. (The figure in the background was Sally's driver and although not actively involved in the project he is looking at one of the other shrines.) Other images depict earlier even more spontaneous reactions and while they are less "framed" photographically, the gestures and expressions once more indicate attention,

interest, recognition and pleasure.

Figure 26: Commissioners seeing the works for the first time

Using photography as a research tool is not uncommon. In the disciplines of art, anthropology, media, popular education, photography has a well-established role as both a tool and a text. One observation from the field of psychology, clarifies its advantages

> in being able to present findings in both visual and verbal modes we can produce a piece of research that enables a wider experience or understanding. By changing the 'voice' we can bring in other ways of understanding and representing our findings; the visual can evoke and engage with emotions in a way that verbal presentations of findings often do not (Frith et al, 2005: 191).

While these images were taken by me, at other times group members were appointed photographer, thus giving them the power to create the record of an event or part of the process; a further extension of "changing the voice." In this instance two factors mitigated against anyone else taking the photographs; firstly the group was small that day and I did not want those involved to be distracted from what was a key moment. I wanted the commissioners to enjoy receiving the works and I wanted Sally to have their full attention. I did not want to "pull focus" onto the task of taking photographs. The other factor was simply that I knew what sort of images I wanted to acquire; expressions on seeing the works. In turn this may raise questions of researcher bias, but this tension had been embedded throughout the project as a work of action research with me framing activities

and the process. My self-imposed caution was not to anticipate what the facial reactions might be while taking the images and to be aware of editing out negative expressions when selecting images for inclusion.

Throughout the case study, embedding the principles of democracy celebrated by *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* had been one of my objectives, while coming to understand the differing roles of commissioners, artist and mediator. Extending this balance to the research side of the project was always going to have some limitations, given that the research was my project that the others were supporting through their participation, actions and observations. However it was ameliorated, the group were not co-researchers, they were my subjects.

In relation to democratic practices, Isabelle Stengers questions if the *Nouveaux commanditaires* model could be extended to other spheres of public life, such as commissioning research. She concludes that disinterest may be the answer in some instances, but that the opposite response among those whose have or can acquire an active "sense of the possible" allows unique and particular experiments to take place, which can result in change at least at local level (Stengers, 2017: 305).

Reflecting on the community and the commissioners where his project was based, Kenny Hunter observed both the local "sense of the possible" and a desire to affect wider societal change,

> The community, I think could see a benefit to their offer.
> I'm talking in purely economic terms here in a way, the people were effectively the people who owned the businesses; the hotel, the restaurant or the gift shop and the bike hire place and the local authority had a stake in it as well because they were present in that building. So they could all see the importance of having a vital and distinctive place for people to go and start their exploring of their community. And actually they were also noticing what was happening in England with the Folkestone Biennial, you know Margate and all these coastal towns that were starting to go OK wait a minute, we want to start getting into this art thing you know. But at a good level. Challenging the hegemony of

> Paris and London to dictate visual art. You know why should we expect all the good things to be things that happen in the big metropolises (Hunter, 2020).

While this case study can not claim to provide evidence of wider societal change, it does demonstrate the process of becoming a commissioner has taken place. A not insignificant achievement for five school students not particularly interested in art and one teacher who "had not given it a thought since doing Higher Art" (Laura, 2019). As for changes within France, in addition to numerous community commissioned artworks being realised across the country, there are further individual and local impacts. Amanda Crabtree reflected on the continuing local engagement with *Capsule*,

> the mayor of Caudry has always defended the project and now his son, is now the mayor, father to son, and they have just renovated the pigeon loft. Last year the pigeon loft, after fifteen years, was renovated, at their expense. So that is proof that it serves a purpose (Crabtree, 2020).

Moreover, on an individual level, she described one of the commissioning group of pigeon fanciers who, before the project, had never travelled to Paris or engaged with art, as now being matali crasset's number one fan, who attends any project event she does in the area.

Early in the project (Session 5) I wanted to make sure that the group would be happy to act as champions of the work. From short films made by *Fondation de France* and *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* it was clear that the commissioners they engage with are both advocates and cheerleaders for the works. I wanted to be sure that the group understood their role. Building their personal relationship to the works and to the artist would be crucial in them assuming a public or more "civic" aspect of the project.
During that session and as the responsibility became clearer, Maria asked, "But what if we don't like the artwork?" I clarified our respective roles, that although I had selected an artist who I felt matched their interests and aspirations, that they would be involved in discussions with her about the work itself. As commissioners, they would be in a process of working with the artist, coming to make informed choices from options she might give. Indeed this had been another reason for inviting Sally to be the selected artist she had the

right combination of artistic vision, self-worth and determination married to experience of working with young people and negotiating results. Simply and practically, I was sure that there would be choices for the group to make about the work.

The discussion took two subsequent directions; clarifying who the work would be for and "spreading the choice". The answer to the first query was straightforward, the whole school community would see the work: ranging from pre-fives to secondary pupils. Maria in particular was keen that if all students (and other visitors and staff) would see the work, then their ideas should be taken into account too. I felt that this democratic approach had two benefits; it expanded the ethos of democratisation, but it would hopefully embolden the group members and consolidate their choices. By talking to others (class-mates, staff) about the work they would be enhancing or developing skills in talking about art, as well as more generally building confidence in communicating to audiences of different ages. I did advise that not everyone would be 100% for whatever choices they made, but the group understood that and even joked about certain people who might be "difficult."

According to Margit Rosen, it is the individual, localised approach that makes *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* significant. The commission will be specific to one group and one set of people and this is the reach of its democratic principles. She writes:

> [The Protocol] shows that an alternative to an art reserved for an elite is not necessarily an art for the masses. The works that are created for the New Patrons by artists from all over the world are not comprehensible for everybody. In fact, they might be appreciated only by a tiny community- those individuals that commissioned the work and thereby gained a profound understanding of the oeuvre. What is created with every commission is not only a work of art, but also its context (Rosen, 2017:119).

While her comment recalls my opening wish in discussing the exhibition *NOW: Katie Paterson*, that all types of work should be included in art libraries or consider by group collectors and community commissioners. It also highlights that this commissioning process will result in works specific to a local population and they will be reflected in it. Her

emphasis on bespoke, local solutions can also be seen to reflect Bourriaud's concept of micro-utopias within his writing on relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002: 31). As Blanes et al highlight, these are not simply unattainable conceptual utopias, but rather they look towards "community and neighbourhood as spaces where utopias can be actualised" (Blanes et al, 2016: 9). Within this framework, the Rothesay group had realised a micro-utopia resulting in a commissioning process and final artwork specific to it. Rosen's observations are further exemplified in the works Sally Hackett produced for this case study: ceramic dogs inspired by participants' pets, favourite meals and restaurants and a realisation of local slang. Each work closely relating to its commissioning community. Rosen's observations are exemplified in the works Sally Hackett produced for this case study: ceramic dogs inspired by participants' pets, favourite meals and restaurants and realisation of local slang.

Within the locale of Rothesay Academy, this particular group of students had been identified as needing encouragement to find their voices and have them heard. At times during the process their reticence was a challenge to both the artist and mediator. Sally felt that the presence of a teacher could both further inhibit, but at other times encourage the group (Hackett, 2020). She emphasised the need for a rapport with the group, which may develop more slowly with quiet teenagers, than say a group of confident adults. The commissioning teenagers gradually accepted artist and mediator, as if, recalling Goffman (1986), we were granted status of "the wise". Individuals "accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan" (Goffman,1986: 41).

Previously I have referred to key turning points in the project, with the studio visit being the significant catalyst for increasing motivation. However, smaller steps, different for each individual, occurred at various points and were signified for some by more relaxed conversation and for others by more regular attendance. Tracking such changes can be challenging, better eye contact or a smile are fleeting, while writing slightly longer answers to questionnaires is also a development easily missed. For each student, however, I noticed

versions of these tiny markers throughout the duration of the project.

The photographs illustrate how one of the group on the day of the works arriving quickly moved from being an amazed spectator (Figs. 25 and 26) to a “tour guide” discussing the works with visiting staff-members (Fig 27).

Figure 27: Commissioners introducing the artwork to others.

As the artwork started the process of being handed over to the commissioners and the school, it seemed to me more important than ever that their “voices”, their role was recorded and made accessible to others. Two members of staff, not closely involved in the project, asked about interpretation for the artworks and suggested that photographs taken could be used to explain the process to others, possibly as a handout for the launch. This was another indication that the ownership of the project was moving. If the next planned phase of the project was making “interpretative materials”, then as with the launch event and invitations, I could step back and let the commissioners deliver.

On discussing public art more generally, while considering questions of advocacy for the commissioned work, Hunter commented,

> People say that public art is initially loathed, then accepted, then loved. Even the worst of them become, “I hate that thing, get rid of it” then someone comes to take it away it's, “you can't take that away, we've

> had that for thirty years." And there's an ownership that happens over time as well (Hunter, 2020).

Arguably by having communities working directly with artists as commissioners the initial loathing might be side-stepped. Contrasting *Les Nouveaux commanditaires'* model with more prevalent models of public art commissioning, Hunter continued,

> ambiguity can be a positive thing because ambiguity produces engagement. And ambiguity is not a thing that most public art commissioners want to embrace. They want to say, well what does it mean, what does it represent, who is it for, they want clear demographics and box ticking. But we had an enlightened client here [the commissioners of Audinghen] who could see the benefit of the structure of what I was talking about, which was the series of images, which may or may not be related (Hunter, 2020).

Towards the end of our conversation I asked Kenny Hunter as an experienced practitioner with numerous commissions and exhibitions to his credit, if *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* did what it aspired to, in terms of altering relationships and how it differed from public commissions within Scotland. Kenny was clear in pointing out that he only had experience of one commission of this type, but he felt it had worked well for him and enabled him to take some risks. In the wider sense he identified "a structure that attempts at communality" as being distinctive to the French process. Echoing Rosen's reflections on particularity, he remarked,

> the structural thing of the Foundation of France, I think is quite re-assuring to the artist that there's something that Foundation of France have thought about [.....] the needs of the local, what they have there, particularities of an area; that they have a voice. The structure negates against a top down art or roundabout art, that just appears out of nowhere. It puts negotiation at the core (Hunter, 2020).

Conclusion

Very rarely, I suspect, are there perfect systems or perfect research projects. The negatives of the *Nouveaux commanditaires* approach that have become apparent to me are simply; time, commitment and human frailties.

This project took regular input over a number of weeks to near completion within 10 months. If it had been a volunteer group of busy adults, that time commitment might have been too long or like several of the French projects, nowhere near long enough. Commitment, of course, refers not just to time that could be spent on other things with other people, it requires mental energy and determination to realise an ambition. In conversation, Sally Hackett observed " I think you were driving it really [...] that you were in a prominent position" (Hackett, 2020). Initially, this comment caused me a little alarm; should a mediator be driving a project to completion? Perhaps, typically, no, however this was both a time-limited research project and not a group of adults who had formed independently with a common aim. Reflecting on my discussion on community ownership in Chapter Three, I recall Walker's observations on community energy projects that "committed individuals" can be crucial to success (Walker, 2008, 4403). At the same time hoping to balance this commitment with an awareness of over-dominant professionalisation. In another situation a mediator might be a constant presence, but other people could be the driver(s).

While artists are familiar with taking creative risks as well as being unafraid of putting effort into making work, within the community commissioning process, the commissioners must also take a range of risks and make effort to make projects successful. As *Nouveaux commanditaires* founder François Hers notes,

> One does not emerge from one's privacy and expose oneself unless there is a goal that is worthwhile. Becoming responsible for the emergence of an artwork which reinvents one's relation to the world [. . .]that is worthwhile (Hers, 2013, 20).

Within this project, risk could have been perceived as fourfold; participating in a new and unclear process; sharing opinions and feelings; making choices; and taking responsibility.

Another potential issue with the system is, who puts themselves forward to become a commissioner? People used to committees, or with preconceptions about art, or professionals creating an intervention on behalf of others? Those already comfortable with

taking risks? Moreover, bringing a disparate group together could become subject to the same emotional stresses and strains that any voluntary enterprise can experience. An artist and a mediator will also have their own feelings and frailties too.

But on balance, all these negatives could be overcome and no doubt have been by *Les Nouveaux commanditaires.* The fundamental strength of the approach seems to be that it has clearly defined founding principles, that are adhered to by all parties. Following these as closely as possible in this project I note that areas of success have been:

- Having a mediator at the least brings artist and commissioners together. The role can be expanded as the needs of the project, artist and group dictate.
- Trusting relationships can take time to build, but will enrich the process and therefore resulting work.
- Exchange re-aligns power relationships.
- This is not an "educational" process in the sense of selling taste or proselytising on behalf of contemporary visual art rather it about empowerment, democracy and "changing the voice."
- The mediation techniques and approaches used are key to setting the tone for a genuinely democratic and open process.
- Significant artworks can be produced at the behest of community commissioners with supportive mediators.
- Artists can benefit from a process which balances both social engagement with individual studio time.

And distinctive to this project I have found that:

- People can grow into being commissioners.
- Learning about process demystifies, but does not detract from, enjoyment of an artist's work.
- Tangible activities, including studio visits can help commissioners build trust, envisage final outcomes and take risks.

In essence this process is about mediation in its most fundamental sense; bringing two

different parties together (Jyrämä 2008, np). Within this commissioning system the parties may have complementary rather than contrasting aims, but nonetheless, the process is what is valuable. As Kenny Hunter suggests the process, in all its facets of discussion, visits, drafts, plans, exchange, developing trust, empowerment builds a sense of community and confidence in and around the artistic concept (Hunter, 2020). The answer to the recurring question of where the power lies can at last be clarified; it may constantly be shared between the three parties of artist, commissioners and mediator or it may shift, but ultimately the process delivers the power to the the idea itself. The idea becomes the commissioned artwork.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion: Can I Borrow the Picasso?

Imagining living in Berlin, I can envisage myself borrowing the Picasso lithograph *Jeu de la cape zu "A los torros"* (1961) from the n.b.k. *artothek*. Of course, I might have to be patient, as the work is popular and often on loan, but as I waited I could enjoy borrowing and living with works by a variety of artists. I might start with names familiar to me, but before long I might become much more knowledgable about contemporary German art. Returning to reality in Scotland, the short answer to the question "can I borrow the Picasso?" is simply, no. Projecting more optimism, I would like to alter that answer to no, not yet.

That question in conjunction with its corollary "why not?" has been central to this research. To develop answers I have unpicked three social collecting practices through case studies. This element of the discussion elucidates the processes and experience of cultivating the examined practices and my Summary Report (Appendix One), described below, aims to detail and disseminate this learning.

Another aim of this study was that it should not only capture my learning about processes, but also reveal the experience of others as they encountered art and art practice through the systems investigated. This has been detailed in Chapters Four, Five and Six through an ethnography created by listening, observing, gathering and interacting. In essence, I conclude that these encounters provide conditions for social exchange which bind individuals, artworks and artistic practice and further discussion of this, with respect to contribution to knowledge, follows shortly.

In the spirit of exchange, which both permeates this study and the practices described in it, I circulated my stand-alone Summary Report in draft form to a limited number of trusted individuals for comments and consideration. The intention was not yet to disseminate findings, but to capture and expand the range of voices, roles and organisations my

observations and reflections represent. To an extent, it once again suggests the influence of popular education and action research in terms of ongoing cycles of action-reflection-action and, in particular, follows Liam Kane's invitation to include chapter reviews by Latin American practitioners in his overview of popular education there (Kane, 2001).

The content of my report furthers these principles and reflects the concept of cultivation introduced in my first chapter and included in the complete thesis title by balancing the sharing of information with an attitude of dialogue; posing questions for consideration as opposed to prescriptive instruction. The Summary Report provides a pathway for the optimistic answer to the borrowing question, as a document which both encourages and clarifies steps to be considered in the wider adoption of social collecting practices. Potentially, it changes the central question to: how can I, with others, set about borrowing/buying/ commissioning a Picasso or a work by Katie Paterson or Kenny Hunter? and provides answers.

The functional details of each practice documented in the case studies and summarised in the report provide answers to such running questions as: are these practices possible, what permission or other frameworks are required and how and where do these practices operate?

However, the detail of these seemingly systematic matters can shed light on new channels for further enquiry. One specific example is curatorial decisions about *artothek* content. In creating the research Carbeth *artothek*, while suggesting physical limitations, I opted to let chance rather than a pre-selected curatorial lens determine the library content. However, as demonstrated in Hannover, specific curatorial directions can be followed, while questions at Carbeth around “local artists” suggest other possibilities for further study. Also in terms of future research, testing the response to contrastingly curated collections available to the

Figure 28: Young Commissioners visit Martin Boyce's *Partial Eclipse II* at Mount Stuart, 2019

same population could be of future interest, as could measuring any impact of using an *artothek* to champion works by artists from under-represented groups. Discussion and decisions around what is acquired for *artothek* collections and how these processes are managed return to the issues of participation, agency and power highlighted throughout this study. Therefore exploring the democratisation of a curatorial process might be an additional area for future investigation.

Exploring financial mechanisms has not featured prominently in this study. While in Scotland there is no present financial support for any of these initiatives comparable to the dedicated support provided through the *Fondation de France*, Creative Scotland do manage funds which could be applicable, some of which are supported through the National Lottery. In addition other public funding is available and targeted at dedicated

projects (for example Visit Scotland's themed years, Cash Back for Communities). Moreover large private funding bodies often change their focus and priorities on the basis of commissioned research, as demonstrated by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's 2016 inquiry to the civic role of the arts resulting in a new award for civic arts organisations first presented in 2021 (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2021). One avenue that could be explored more fully is the extent to which the model of community land-ownership supported by the Scottish Land Fund (Scottish Government, 2021b) suggests a template for dedicating personnel and finance to a nation-wide initiative such as that developed in France. Channelling politically action towards this direction could be strengthened through reference to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, 2021c) and in particular to the indicators and outcomes focused on Community and to a more limited extent on Culture. While measured cultural indicators focus on attendance, participation, economy and employment in the sector; community indicators include community ownership of assets, perceptions of local area, places to interact and social capital. This last list resonates with many elements of the projects described in this study whether established overseas or revealed in my case studies.

While one of my ambitions for this study is that these practical recommendations will be applied in various settings, this is clearly an ongoing process. However, I can highlight communication to date regarding application and potential impact of my findings.

I have entered preliminary dialogue with Argyll and Bute Council regarding a pilot project for community lending using the print collection from The Argyll Collection. While many works from the collection are placed in schools across the area, others are not. In response to the Summary Report an Argyll and Bute Arts Officer wrote,

> we are looking to invest in the Argyll Collection and to develop access to the collection so the recommendations and points for consideration are so useful as planning and evaluation tools to analyse how we might do this, particularly in considering the three models you have outlined (Arts Officer, 2020).

This potential future project has been envisaged partially due to concerns regarding current storage arrangements of the print collection. Despite best efforts, not every collection resides in perfect storage facilities. Circulation would not necessarily cause more damage, even if the type of work suitable for loan might be carefully considered.

Previously I noted how GSA historically had a school lending collection and The Argyll Collection already lends artworks to schools across that local authority. In Glasgow, the Open Museum continues to actively take objects to groups across the city. Art in Hospitals lends its collection to healthcare settings, and the Sculpture Placement Group has placed works with a range of institutions. While these models involve lending to organisations, clearly it is perceived that not only is there a benefit for borrowers, but that there are objects which are sufficiently robust to be in circulation, displayed in various settings and even handled.

Museums closing in 2020 as a consequence of COVID-19 highlighted how interaction with museum visitors is a customary control factor in stabilising humidity within collections (see, for example, The British Museum, 2020 and AP Archive, 2020). While the conservation science is more nuanced, the wider communication is that "Visitors are the living breath of our objects" according to Sandra Smith, Head of Collection Care at the British Museum (Abgarian, 2020). The question of balance of risks therefore arises in considering transforming existing, stored collections into art libraries. Potentially, additional measures including giving handling and display advice, providing adequate packaging for transit, giving transit advice and clarifying any insurance provision and limitations would all mitigate against damage. Furthermore, these concerns suggest an area for future study; a longitudinal comparison of the degradation of works in stores and in *artothek* circulation.

Developing an accessible list of points for consideration was partially as a consequence of an online conversation with a voluntary organisation. I was introduced to an Edinburgh community centre undergoing building renovation work and hoping to create an *artothek*

once the re-development is complete. In this instance the champion of the initiative is originally from Germany and had been an art-borrower in his home city. After sharing suggestions and answering practical questions, I felt that creating a list of considerations might be a useful tool for him and his group. Since sending this initial document along with a model loan agreement and due card, I have no further communication as yet. However, it inspired me to replicate this approach for each of the models I have explored, again enacting principles of dialogue and exchange.

During summer 2020 within the international context of Black Lives Matter, considerations of Scotland's role in the Atlantic slave trade and community campaigns against statues of contentious historical figures, I decided to contact a key staff member at Creative Scotland about community commissioning. I have known this person for a long time and had seen her activism and commitment to equalities on social media. She was clearly considering personal actions and responsibility. My feeling was that she might be interested in community commissioning as an approach to working with communities and artists in exploring and understanding these issues. Conversations were tentative, but it was acknowledged that this approach offers a potential method for interrogating local and national issues artistically.

In total I sent the complete draft Summary Report to six individuals working in a variety of roles across the visual arts and design. From the responses received to date, one common theme that emerged was an awareness of sectoral questioning of the relationship between museums, collections and curators and wider society. This included concerns around de/centralisation, institutional introspection and physically confining spaces. It was felt that the findings and recommendations within the Summary Report could usefully contribute to these discussions and even provide, “guidance and a framework to analyse cultural participation in the arts, provide inspiration and outline best practice in community collecting/curation/lending” (Arts Officer, 2020).

Beyond creating the Summary Report and knowing what these collecting practices entailed, I aspired to record and understand the practices as experienced by those involved in them. In doing so, I endeavoured to focus not only on those who might customarily be considered as participants, but to include others, especially artists, whose works were central to these activities. As became clear, the nature of the relationships between the different parties was significant. This led to further discussion of the social exchanges and emergent systems which support, enable or grow around these collecting practices. Methodologically, I wanted to guard against Siegenthaler's caution that in many social art projects the people involved, "become invisible in the museum's representational space" and the "long-term social and aesthetic consequences completely slip from sight" (Siegenthaler, 2013: 746). Rather, I embraced not simply traditional, observational field research, but reached forward and reflected more contemporary ethnographic practice and, following Siegenthaler, art writing practice, which could encompass elements of action research and make space for a range of participants' accounts.

Mauss' theory that gift exchange has the capacity to build connections has provided this study with a useful framework for examining ways to bridge gaps and overcome barriers between artists and the wider public. Roger Sansi examines how this can be applied to socially engaged and/or relational art projects. My conclusion is that the extended practices discussed here also build informed and sympathetic relationships between artist and audience, following an arc that begins with group collecting and moves to other forms of active engagement such as borrowing and commissioning. This developed solidarity is a firm basis for building understanding, co-learning and mutual respect thus overcoming issues of hierarchy. It enables ongoing cycles of exchange of knowledge, experiences and works to flourish.

I have presented a range of evidence for this possibility arising from these case studies. Within collecting groups where the exchange involved is financial, there is also a strong pattern of social interaction. I considered how this could tip into a demanding "constant

tournament", but found no evidence of that within my case study (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 49). Rather, the outcome was that social connectivity between artist and collecting group varied. For some group members it was time-limited or event specific, while between others relationships flourished. While the former limited relationships might theoretically sway back towards Derrida's observations on the impossibility of the gift (Derrida, 1992), the flourishing relationship brings focus back to actual exchange and lived relationships.

Taking a broader view, however, collecting group members all remain committed to engaging with contemporary art. While that may or may not result in specific friendships with individual artists, as long as they are actively involved in a collecting group they are actively involved with the world of contemporary art in a range of ways, from attending openings and studio visits to discussing and living with newly acquired artworks to making purchases from fairs, galleries or directly from artists. Furthermore, if as Gina Walker believed, that in New Zealand buying directly from artists is becoming a more popular means of purchasing art, then Mauss' concept of something of the giver being retained within the gift seems particularly relevant (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 59). Walker explained

> if you go straight to the studio direct you are getting the full story of what's actually gone on and then you can put it into context, the artist's life (Walker, 2019).

Before adding that such visits intensified the desire to acquire a work and these connections lasted throughout the circulation period to influence choices (and arguably negotiations) made when the time to divide the collection arrived. Sansi explores this intertwining of person and object, clarifying what it is of oneself one gives with a gift: not one's actual bodily self, but rather part of one's socially constructed self. Citing the work of Marilyn Strathern, Sansi reflects, "These relations do not simply renew existing social bonds but they create the very identity of the partners in the exchange" (Sansi, 2015: 99). In approaching an artist directly, Walker could be seen to both give of herself and gain something additional to an artwork, from the artist.

I have already noted that collecting group exchanges are purchases that occur within a Western commercial system, so is it legitimate to consider if gift exchange relationships are applicable? In her introduction to Mauss' text, Mary Douglas identifies the challenge of fulfilling the author's wish that his insights were applied to "contemporary, industrial society" (Douglas, 2002[1990]: xix). In this case study, the evidence would suggest that, at the least, bonds can grow from the point of (even) monetary exchange to bring people together in an expanding network including the artist and the artwork.

In contrast, my second case study illustrates layered forms of exchange none of which are financial. At the Carbeth *artothek* artists and borrowers did not meet, which could be seen as a lost opportunity to build connections between both parties. However, through the exchange process, relationships evolved in other ways and in other directions. For example, storytelling revealed relationships to the artworks themselves. And as with collecting groups, the repeated encounters occurring when living with the artworks further intensified these connections. Ties were also formed with the librarian and by extension the library itself, as a prototype institution. Moreover, the creativity of the artist is embodied in the artwork, so even where there is no direct contact, the borrower is by definition encountering that person through their work. A type of encounter described by Mauss when discussing the giver being present in the gift (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 59).

At the Carbeth *artothek*, echoes of the extended systems of exchanges around *kula* exchanges are also played out. Mauss notes,

> First, the exchange of *vaygu'a* themselves during the *kula* forms the framework for a whole series of other exchanges, extremely diverse in scope, ranging from bargaining to remuneration, from solicitation to pure politeness, from out-and-out hospitality to reticence and reserve (Mauss, 2002 [1925]: 34).

In Carbeth, the library framework overlapped with days when another event was happening in the same the space and we all carried on together. As well as occasions when personal stories were told along with narratives embedded within or about the artworks;

information and gossip was shared about other aspects of the Carbeth community; drinks and cakes were consumed; and people visited and borrowed or visited and did not borrow. The social life of the artwork is intertwined with the social exchange between borrowers and librarian and among borrowers and other visitors.

The third case study demonstrates more clearly still how positive relationships between public and artist, artwork and art-ecology can be realised. As with the librarian at the art library, this project also involved a third party; the mediator. In this instance a triangular relationship was created. The ongoing dialogue and exchange between these three parties allowed power to shift and slide, while keeping us united in our common aim. At its best, equilaterally, we participated on equal footing. This partnership of equals, where each person brought their own skills, led to expanded understanding of each other and process.

Within this process and case study there were clear echoes of Roger Sansi's description of the ethnographer in the field,

> The progressive engagement of the ethnographer in the everyday life of the field, his [sic] progressive transformation from a radical other to a friend, a partner or an associate (if it ever happens) is built upon everyday acts of interpersonal exchange, from chatting to exchanges of information from shared play and commensality, to giving actual gifts on special occasions, etc. (Sansi, 2015 : 143).

More particularly, he suggests,

> In fact it could be said that the theme of gift emerges out of fieldwork not just because it is prevalent in the fields of study of anthropology, but also because it is consubstantial to field work practice itself (Sansi, 2015:143).

Moreover, he concludes by suggesting that this animating of relationships embodied in “the gift” (whether an actual trade or present or the more conceptual gifts of shared experiences, interaction or involvement) can be found within art as well as anthropology,

> Fieldwork in anthropology and art inevitably led to the (re-)discovery of the "gift"; a form of exchange dedicated to the construction of social relations instead of the production of objects, making people out of things instead of things out of people. In the gift, artists and

> anthropologists have encountered the proof and the promise of a different form of life (Sansi, 2015: 162).

In this study, and perhaps most obviously within the commissioning project, the manifold "gifts" exchanged were not tangible objects. Rather ideas, inspiration, insights, experiences, knowledge and practice processes all flowed in the triangular relationship between artist, commissioners and mediator. Recalling Kenny Hunter's observation that "engagement builds confidence in the idea, it also builds a community around the idea" (Hunter: 2020). I would argue that this confidence could also be described as a bond resulting from established trust, which leads to solidarity with the artworks as well as between all those participating.

Adopting an ethnographic methodology in conjunction with reflecting on theories of the gift as expounded by Mauss and more recently Sansi, has allowed me to examine three initiatives which aim to alter public encounters with contemporary art. The contribution of this study is to extend Sansi's thinking on participation, art and the gift towards collecting and these other active encounters with art and artists. My exploration has revealed how they could be adopted in Scotland and the benefits that could bring for artists and others. I have also demonstrated a range of strategies for addressing problematic issues of hierarchy often arising within socially engaged art practices. These are often inherent in the systems described, but in my view further consolidated by underpinning principles of common humanity, mutual respect and shared learning found in the practices of popular education and action research as envisioned by Paulo Freire. As discussed in Chapter Six, I see parallels in the concepts of exchange and the development of solidarity in the work of both Mauss and Freire.

I see my contribution to knowledge also extending in other directions beyond academia and I am hopeful that these conclusions will have broader applications for artists and other arts practitioners, as well as arts and various community organisations. François Hers, the founder of the system that became *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*, argued that this

approach could facilitate “a new era in the history of art”; one where “art without capitalism” could flourish (Hers, 2013: 17). Wrestling with the institutions of capitalism and even challenging the market-led artworld, have not been the immediate goals of this study. However, I have shown that alternative means of engaging with art can flourish both within and beyond the market model, while simultaneously broadening and deepening opportunities for those typically outside it. These approaches can also side-step some of the recurring concerns around participant volition in socially engaged practices.

What I have also revealed, through developing projects based on these schemes and observing and interacting with the participants, is that solidarity, a corollary to the rampant individualism of capitalism, can be fostered between artists and non-artists through exchange. The result is expanded mutual awareness and understanding of the other's lived experience and practice. This study has shown there is scope for the “serious and demanding activity” of art to involve the wider public in ways which cultivate agency and create space for “our common humanity [to be] played out” (Hers, 2013: 21/19).

In conclusion, let me dream a little of a future Scotland where all three of these systems co-exist. Artists and their work become more understood and valued by the wider public as numerous projects flourish. Undoubtedly, people will still enjoy being participants in artist-led projects, but the other approaches championed in this study will also be resourced and widespread. All new public buildings will include a community commissioned work of contemporary art. Every local library has an art library, including mobile library vans. Commercial galleries support both collecting groups and art libraries. Unseen collections become the core of *artotheks.* Visitors travel to off-the-beaten-track communities to see and experience breathtaking art, which local people commissioned. And community groups call for commissions to answer their perceived need and are supported to realise their projects.

Appendix 1

Can I Borrow the Picasso? Cultivating Social Collecting Practices

Summary Report
Morven Gregor

Summary Report Contents

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Introduction

As my field research for this study was coming to an end, the COVID-19 virus was spreading across the planet. Seeming artworld certainties such as record auction room sales making popular press headlines, suddenly seemed less certain. More precarious still, existing fragilities around the funding for public collections became starkly apparent. If there was ever a moment for what economists Lonergan and Blyth think of as a "digital reset" then surely it would be now (Longergan & Blyth, 2020).

My research interest lies in positioning atypical models of accessing, encountering and collecting contemporary visual art in relation to socially engaged practice. I also suggest how such models can deepen understanding and build solidarity through exchange; with additional lessons that may benefit social artistic practices.

Traditional collectors may object that these models are not all collecting practices *per se* and my discussion of traditional collecting indicates not only what these differences are, but also why only substantially different approaches can re-align a wider public involvement with art as part of daily life.

These aims are achieved by investigating three diverse systems, presently under-represented in Scotland. The research explores the social impacts these approaches have through case studies, where participation is integral. The first case study is a desk-based comparison between private collecting groups in England and New Zealand. The second study created and examined a community-based art library, modelled on the *Artotheks* of Germany and Austria. And the third study replicates and examines community commissioning, following the system created by *Les Nouveaux commanditaires* in France.

This summary document includes an overview of each study, recommendations for the cultivation of each approach and a user-friendly set of questions based on my research experience and conclusions, which could be used as a checklist for implementing future projects on similar lines.

Overview of Case Study One: Collecting Groups

Collecting Groups seem to be a lot of fun for those in them. A member can enjoy immersion in the world of art with the additional security of being part of a supportive, social group with whom one can discuss and learn about works, meet artists and attend exhibitions underpinned by the additional spending power that pooled resources bring.

Being a member of a collecting group parallels more traditional collecting in certain aspects. Collectors enjoy living with art; building intimate relationships with works on the basis of repeated viewing at home. This particular pleasure was widely experienced by group members and echoed the writings of T.J. Clark (2006). It involved collectors spending time with works and becoming intimately acquainted with them, perceiving variations in the works with changing light and viewpoints, and in other circumstances of the home; from the mood of the viewer to the occasion of looking to social occurrences around the work. Having artwork at home allowed collectors to build relationships with the work.

Group collectors may experience what solo collector Howard Hodgkins described as an "art-zap" on finding works to add to the collection (Hodgkins, 1992: para 13). Additionally, group members develop their identity as art collectors both through performing it and being recognised by others.

Where this collecting practice varies lies in its collective nature. Contemplating, learning and being surprised or challenged by the collection is a group activity. The experience of having the work; researching it, buying it, displaying it, discussing it and sharing it builds relationships among the group members.

The groups studied here are highly social; meaning that being part of the group can give a focus to and reason for busy people meeting with each other. Becoming actively involved in the social networks associated with the artworld (attending openings and exhibitions, studio visits, art fairs and so on) can widen the network still further.

I see this sociality as extending to the artworks collected. They gain an additional layer of animation (and biography) by being physically moved from home to home; re-displayed in different homes; in different juxtapositions and in the case of some groups being redistributed after an agreed time period. Concurrently, the social, human world of stories, memories and experiences connected to the works add layers to this animation.

Within this circulation of artworks and experiences, I wanted to understand an artist's perspective on collecting groups. While sales at fairs or through galleries can remain at arm's length, artists are inevitably involved in studio visits and direct sales. One artist's experience drew her to a collecting group even more closely with invitations/expectations to give a talk and to have dinner; this pattern of exchange and obligation recalls Marcel

Mauss' theory of the gift and the solidarity and trust that grow through exchange (Mauss, 2002).

Collecting groups can be an enjoyable, educative, social experience for those who join them. Of course, some groups may have greater longevity than others and issues of spacial capacity and financial contributions need to be considered. At best, they can be a gateway for inexperienced collectors, who would like to experiment with buying contemporary art and build confidence and knowledge with the support of like-minded people.

Nonetheless questions remain in terms of participation and extending engagement with contemporary art. The case study reflected on attitudinal barriers which this model of engagement does not overcome- in other words, to establish or join a collecting group one needs both disposable income and at least a seed of interest in contemporary art. It assumes a baseline of interest, awareness and relevance. Tied with this is the framing of involvement with contemporary art as being financial and while the scale of financial involvement remains small on an international scale, the tropes of high-end collecting, as widely presented, permeate this collecting model.

Recommendations

Essentially these are private groups, which can be considered self-financing co-operatives as well as private learning projects. Two distinct models see collections either growing without limit or divided up on a fair-shares basis after an agreed period of time. The latter provides a safety net for groups of people who don't previously know each other.

Commercial galleries in Scotland could foster collecting groups, although it would take time and possibly additional personnel. In addition to group sales galleries may benefit from “side order” individual purchases (Collard, 2019b). With larger groups and collections, cataloguing and co-ordinating where works are and who should have them is a necessary task. Potentially, this could be a paid-for service, provided by a gallery.

Commissioning live art or film works adds a wider sectoral and/or philanthropic role for groups. Once commissioned, the work and remains the property of the artist and it could be re-presented in other contexts, extending the reach of the work. The commission would become a gift to future audiences.

At the micro-level, the key principles for success seemed to be having pre-agreed organisational rules. Smaller groups can be lighter of foot in terms of making arrangements for meetings and circulating works, as well as finding common ground for selection. A simple formula can determine how many works each person will receive at the end of a given time period.

Points for Consideration

Questions for people interested in forming a collecting group

Forming the Group

Who would you like to share artworks with?
Who might you like to spend more time with and would enjoy focusing on art when you do meet?
Who would you trust to be in a financial relationship with?
Is there a particular type of art or approach to art-making that you would like to collect?

Organisational matters

How much will each member contribute? How often will payments be made?
Who will oversee the monetary aspects?
How often will the group meet? What will be the format and rationale for those meetings?
Will you invite artists to talk at meetings?
Will you organise group visits, outings or viewings?
Who will co-ordinate group activities? Circulation of works? Cataloguing of the collection?
Will you adopt a formal constitution?
Will that take account of potentially problematic issues such as; leaving the group, missed financial contributions, unexpected illness, hereditary, dislike of a purchase, damage, sudden increase in value of an artist's work.

Art Collecting

How often will you purchase works?
Will you have a buying committee or some other process?
How often would a purchasing group rotate? How long do they have to select works?
Will you keep all the works or divide the collection after an agreed period of time? What might that period of time be?
Will there be a practical constraint on the size or type of work collected?
Will there be a practical limit to the size of the collection?
How and where will you buy works?
Would you consider commissioning performance or film works?

Overview of Case Study Two: Art Libraries

The title of this study takes its name from the fact that the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.) *artothek* in Berlin has a Picasso lithograph available for loan. This simple library model lends out artworks to the public, as one might more usually borrow a book, and is primarily found in Germany and Austria. For this study I tested how such an art library might operate locally by creating an *artothek* research model in a small West of Scotland community.

Certain themes emerged in the discussion. While for some an art library could be seen as a model of an alternative economy, where goods (artworks) are owned centrally and borrowed rather than purchased, the picture that emerged was rather one of social interaction and cultural experimentation.

Even with limited means, the research *artothek* successfully attracted visitors. Borrowers engaged with the art library because they liked the idea of it and in at least one instance because they were curious about what would be available. The library became an opportunity for various moments of social exchange. During opening times visitors discussed the works; hearing and telling stories inspired by them.

Selecting a "hyperlocal" (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2017: 39) location for the project enabled an overlapping of encounters, as more than once, the venue was used for other activities and the two events collided into broader exchanges. Furthermore, it ensured that the socio-economic diversity of the community was evident in the people who visited a familiar and welcoming space; albeit slightly transformed.

The national surveys examined here (Scottish Government, 2018) show that those from the most affluent backgrounds typically attend more cultural events than those from the least affluent backgrounds; however, this pattern was reversed at the art library. In other words, while there were people from more affluent areas who did attend, they were in a minority. One lesson being that to be successful art libraries should be close to where people feel comfortable meeting. In essence this is what the move for the "hyperlocal" advocates.

So, if being close to where people congregate is useful in operating an *artothek*, what are the advantages of establishing art libraries? This research has highlighted a lack of trust or perhaps more accurately a lack of faith in contemporary art among some sections of the population. On one hand I describe this as a lack of art-confidence, but it could also be attributed to a lack of cultural education.

If the case study raises this question, it also inherently points to the answer. *Artotheks* themselves allow for experimentation and relaxed exploration. Borrowers in the research project

- borrowed works that they might not usually be interested in
- were relaxed about borrowing atypical works because there were no financial implications
- enjoyed spending time with works they might not usually give time to
- were positive about being introduced to new types of art
- started to engage with art differently

It is interesting to note that the aim of n.b.k.'s *artothek* is to encourage discourse and "cultural education for all" (n.b.k., 2018).

In addition to offering risk-free experimentation, borrowing from a contemporary *artothek* empowers borrowers with agency, as they exercise choice in selecting works to enjoy at home. They are actively using the collection, not simply viewing. Moreover as, has been demonstrated this "using" is activated through storytelling and conversation both at the library and within other social circles in the home- in much the same way as collecting groups. Future developments of borrower involvement in buying panels (as at n.b.k.) would further extend involvement in *artotheks* at all organisational levels.

Recommendations

Existing collections could be opened up for lending, including;

- university & art school collections
- local authority collections
- private collections
- and perhaps others

Previously I noted how GSA historically had a school lending collection and that The Argyll Collection lends artworks to schools across that local authority. In Glasgow, the Open Museum continues to actively take objects to groups across the city. Art in Hospitals lends its collection to healthcare settings. And the Sculpture Placement Group has placed works with a range of institutions. While these models lend to organisations, clearly it is perceived that not only is there a benefit for borrowers, but that there are objects which are sufficiently robust to be in circulation, displayed in various settings and even handled.

The recurring question of conservation, is answered in part by asking, where are they stored now? Despite best efforts, not every collection resides in perfect storage facilities. Circulation would not necessarily cause more damage, even if the type of work suitable for loan might be carefully considered. Additional measures including; giving handling and display advice; providing adequate packaging for transit; giving transit advice and clarifying any insurance provision and limitations would all mitigate risk.

The possible risk of works not being returned or sold-off online could be managed by ensuring that full contact details and proof of identity given at time of loan. Deposits are

another possibility, but sums which might cover any losses could be prohibitive for many people. Library staff should also maintain contact with borrowers.

Existing collections would, naturally, utilise the works they already own. In an ideal world collections could be expanded or new lending collections could be established. From my case study experience I found that the library should have a range of works and, where possible, to continue to add new works. De-acquisition should be considered as well as purchasing new works.

Curatorial decisions about content is an interesting area for further study. My approach was to be as open as possible within my practical scope and within my personal working definition of contemporary art. I was struck by one artist's request for "grand works" to be included in an ideal *artothek* . To that I would add that the works should be exciting, take risks and, where possible, be by established as well as emerging artists.

Operating a system of loans from artists could become complex on a larger scale, moreover as the majority of freelance artists live financially precarious lives (SAU, 2017), future *artotheks* should be seen as places which support and promote their work. Moreover, that support could extend to invitations to undertake paid workshops, lectures, talks, etc. which add to the engagement between artist, borrower and librarian/library leading to further learning, exchange and solidarity.

At the micro-level my recommendations are that regular opening hours are advisable; information on the works and/or artists should be widely available; and communication with borrowers is essential for continued, smooth functioning.

Points for Consideration

Questions for organisations or community groups planning an art library.

Location

Does the library have premises? Is the library physically accessible? Is it welcoming to people who might not usually go to art galleries? Is it welcoming to people who do go to art galleries? Is it in a place where people already meet?

Content

- What's in the collection?
- Is there a particular remit? Eg promoting works by Art School students/ respected, established artists/ artists from a particular social group/ artists from a particular locale.

- Will all the work be contemporary? Are you hoping to surprise, challenge, inspire or educate borrowers?
- What medium will the work be in: limited edition prints, original paintings, photographs, small sculptures, etc.
- What size of works will be manageable for people? A3 can be carried reasonably comfortably if someone walks to the library.
- How does the collection grow? Like any library new works are needed to refresh the collection; will this happen ad hoc or on a regular basis; bi-monthly? Annually?
- Who selects the work for the collection? An individual? A curator? A committee? A rotating group? Will you encourage diverse opinions or look for consensus?
- What will be your attitude to donations?
- How will the library support artists? Will you purchase their works? Will you promote their other works not in the library collection?
- Where will you source works? High-street commercial galleries, specialist private galleries, print & sculpture studios, not-for-profit galleries which sell editions, artist-direct through open studios and studio visits, online, art sales, auctions.
- How will you fund this?
- Who will catalogue the collection? And how?

Borrowers

How will people see the work to make their choices?
Who will facilitate the loan/be the librarian?
How will you advertise and promote the library?
Will people become library members?
What information will you need about borrowers? Address, Proof of ID, Email, phone no., preferred means of communication? Will this all be GDPR compliant- i.e. stored safely.
Will you arrange associated events and activities? Might those involve the artists? Would you pay fees to artists for talks or workshops?
Will you provide some information about each work and/or artist? This could be written or online or from chatting to the librarian.

Loan conditions

Will you ask borrowers to sign a loan agreement? Will this be for each loan? Or will it cover a set period? (Sample available on request.)
This should outline the care required to keep the work safe. It may reference the need or recommendation for house insurance covering the value of the work.
You might consider a deposit system for each loan. Or nominal fee to cover your own costs. (Euros 3 in Berlin, for example).
How long will the loans be for? Will you send reminders prior to return date? Who will do this?
How will you deal with over-due loans? Insurance expires? Fines?
Pre-booking of individual works: best avoided

Storage & conservation
As well as having enough space, you'll need to know where the works are, which links with cataloguing. If all works are in frames, then alphabetical arrangement by artist would be a simple system, for example.
Below is a link to some introductory notes on conservation requirements. In summary try to keep temperature constant and neither too hot nor too cold. And check through the collection every few months.
https://www.conservation-design.com/basic-guidelines-for-preservation
Remember the works will be circulated, so investing in good frames also protects works.
Consider insurance for the works while they are in storage (or on display with you) and while in transit.
Any catalogue number and/or ticket with return date can be attached to the back of the frame. Also consider a branded ink stamp which can be marked on the tape on the back of the frame to deter any removal of the work form the frame.

Packaging
Recommend to borrowers that the work is transported and returned in the packaging provided.
Demonstrate your care for the work with good packaging. Attractive packaging could also help promote the library (eg branded cloth bags). This is likely to be a recurring cost.

Administration
It goes without saying, but keep a note of who has borrowed what and when it is due back! This could be a spreadsheet or even a simply diary. Expect that borrowers will need reminded before the due date- it's easier than chasing after the date has passed.

Finally, not what you'd want to hear at this stage, but what if you wanted to stop operating the library, who would the works belong to? Would you sell them and use the funds elsewhere? Raffle them? Use them to decorate the premises? Not something to get tied up with at the outset, but just a point to have in mind.

Overview of Case Study Three: Community Commissioning

This study was inspired by the work of *Les Nouveaux commanditaires*, which since 1991 has aimed to reconfigure relationships within the artworld; in particular to bring artists and citizens closer together through creating commissioned artworks in a process supported by a mediator. As with the *artothek* study, I wanted to learn if the model was transferable to Scotland and to experience and understand the role of the mediator by placing myself in that position. Often this approach is translated as New Patrons, in the study I explain why I prefer to use the term commissioners instead of patrons.

Working with my local secondary school from May 2019 to March 2020, I met regularly with a group of five senior school students and one teacher to create and realise the commission. Meetings, discussions, information gathering, practical activities, relationship-building and excursions all took place to develop the artist's brief and to provide her with materials to develop the work. The commissioned artwork was delivered one week before schools closed because of COVID-19.

With regard to future strategic or organisational adoption of community commissioning, this case study highlighted potential challenges of timescale, commitment, communication and drive. These risk factors were balanced by notable benefits; individuals and groups growing into new roles; taking responsibility; experiencing alternative learning; seeing changes realised; encountering an artist's process and, more significantly still, becoming "present in art".

All of this might suggest that the benefits are all perceived as being only for the participating-commissioners, but this is not the full picture. The artist who worked on this case study described the project as combining the best of two practices; community engagement and studio practice. Other interviewees also spoke of the process being a positive experience for artists.

As for the mediator role, as one experienced mediator in France commented to be successful "you have to like people" (Crabtree, 2020). From within that position, I found the very essence of the meditation (bringing two different parties together) a rewarding process for two reasons; the act of bringing people together like a match-maker and forging the emerging relationship on contemporary visual art.

Within this commissioning process, ideas, inspiration, insights, experiences, knowledge and practice processes all flow in the triangular relationship between artist, commissioners and mediator. As one artist observed, "engagement builds confidence in the idea, it also builds a community around the idea" (Hunter, 2020). I would argue that this confidence could also be described as a bond resulting from established trust, which leads to solidarity with the artworks as well as between all those participating.

Recommendations

This model has a proven track record in France and elsewhere and could be easily replicated successfully in Scotland. A parallel in Scotland for future development both organisationally and financially is that of the Land Fund and community buy-outs.

This process takes time, commitment and skill to be successfully realised. In particular, building trust between commissioners, mediator and artist or in the artistic concept needs a tailored programme of activity and opportunities for interaction over time. Adequate funding is needed to ensure the scope of the work fulfils the ambition of the project, secures the involvement of established artists and give the process the time it requires.

Artists invited to fulfil these commissions need not have prior experience of working in social practice. It helps, if they too “like people”, but this process should not be seen to exclude gallery-orientated artists. If the ambition demonstrated in France is to be fulfilled in Scotland, then the most respected artists ought to be approached.

The mediator role should be seen as an equal partner and properly resourced as it sets the tone for power relationships and enacting democratic principles. Among other skills the mediator may need to motivate commissioners and the artist over long time period and assist in navigating through non-art procedures, such as fund-raising, building permissions and other local regulations. In France, mediators (often producers or curators) are registered within specific geographic areas. If this were replicated in Scotland, groups could contact mediators in their area.

If it is desirable to have stronger and wider engagement with contemporary art, then community commissioning offers a means of achieving this. Being a commissioner re-balances the power relationship of being a participant or audience member through creating an empowered role while simultaneously respecting the autonomy of the artist. Community commissioning results in significant, bespoke artworks in diverse locations and in increased public understanding of an individual artwork and the artistic process.

On the micro-level, establishing a group of commissioners is crucial and ideally this group would be self-selecting. The French insistence that the scope of the project should have broader community-wide support safeguards against vested interests manipulating the system for private benefit.
Activities need to be planned into programmes to keep focus and enthusiasm. Practical activities such as visits on-site, to artists' studios or exhibitions can be inspiring and motivational.

Points for Consideration

Questions for organisations or community groups interested in community commissioning

Commissioners

Who has formed the group? What unites them?
Why does the group want to commission an artist?
What is the kernel of the project-to-be?
How does their interest relate to the wider community? Will the wider community be involved?
Are there other outcomes desired by group organisers (eg teachers within a school setting may wish for increased confidence or communication skills for students)?
Will everyone in the group commit to seeing the project through?

Mediator and Artist

Once mediator and group start discussions, the mediator will select and then approach an artist.
The mediator is responsible for setting the tone for group interaction; embedding participatory and egalitarian working practices; including being open, while also respectful. This can involve making sure all the commissioning group have their voices heard and designing interactions to suit diverse personalities and styles of communication.
The artist does not need to have prior experience of working with groups.

Process

What funding is available? Who will make any applications necessary? What it the timescale for this being in place?
A community brief is refined by mediator and commissioners and presented to the artist.
The artist may then wish to make site visits, meet the commissioners, meet the wider community and research the wider context of the commission.
The artist presents a response (possibly two or more options) to the commissioners. These are then discussed fully and over time.
Finally decisions are made, the nature of the commission is finalised and the artist begins production.
It is not expected that the commissioners will be involved in the artist's process.
If necessary, the commissioners and/or mediator organise any necessary permissions regarding building consent, etc.
Mediator and commissioners work on Health and Safety requirements for the installation and conservation requirements for the work.

Motivation

The mediator will keep communicating with commissioners and artist throughout the process.

The commissioners will become champions for the finished work- is that confidence growing through the process?
The group and/or mediator may wish to programme activities such as studio visits and outings to exhibitions to maintain group interest and cohesion. Unusual activities may rejuvenate a long process.
Planning a launch event can focus can give focus to the final project stages.

Longer-term responsibility
Who will continue to look after the work?
What might be involved?
Will a booklet or other information about the work and the process be created?

Research interviews, questionnaires, emails & other responses

Interviews

Angela and Dot (2019) 'Artothek reflections'.
Auburn, C. (2020) Interview
Crabtree, A. (2020) 'Reflections on mediation'.
Eilidh (2019) 'Artothek Reflections'.
Hackett, S. (2020) 'Reflections on community commissioning'.
Hunter, K. (2020) 'Reflections on community commissioning'.
Jan and Neil (2019) 'Artothek Reflections'.
Laura (2019) 'Project reflections'.
Walker, G. (pseudonym) (2019) Interview.

Questionnaires

Anon (2019) 'Process Questionnaire'.
Banks, D. (2020) 'Lending to ARP'.
Donna (2019) 'Artothek Reflections-Questionnaire'.
Glasgow Lender (2020) 'Reflections on Artothek Research Project'.
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