

RE-BUS



**CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE
20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES:
ART COLLECTIVES,
INSTITUTIONS, CULTURE
INDUSTRY**

**SPECIAL
ISSUE**

VOLUME 1

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EDITORIAL STATEMENT FOR VOLUME 1

For the first volume of the *re-bus* Special Issue “Cultural Production in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Art Collectives, Institutions, Culture Industry” the editorial team has put together four articles that launch a fundamental inquiry into the definition of the art collective and its strained relationship with institutions at large. Implicated in this relationship are distinct matters that run from economic strategies to concrete political statements and demands, leading artists, whether as part of a collective or a wider cultural movement, to adopt tactical measures that consistently bring to bear processes of institutionalisation. Thus, these articles highlight issues of what it means to conceive of production as an extension of collaboration and its opposition to conventional artistic collectivities (L. Mayhew), of the radical endeavour of the mid-century avant-garde and its enduringly profound negation of institutional power (whether academic or artistic) (M. Lang), of autonomy and the pressures of the art market (D. Mantoan), or the measures taken by artists to make concrete a modernising project through commercialisation and its support of art’s delimitation into a professional field (A. Fast). In short, the authors of these articles prompt a relational conception of the collective/movement that is very close to the institutional, whether it is held in contempt, seen as part of a positive element in artistic production, or simply, pragmatically utilised to further the artists’ ideas.

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re-bus Issue 8 Co-editors

With special thanks to Christopher Collier

On Top of the Art World: Clark Beaumont and the Rise of Artist Girl

Gangs

Louise R. Mayhew

Abstract

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach's selection of Clark Beaumont, for the exhibition 13 Rooms (2013), prompted a murmur of surprise in the Australian art world. The artistic duo, formed by Sarah Clark and Nicole Beaumont, were largely unknown and had no experience in major exhibitions or endurance performance. However, their selection signposts a collaborative turn and the rise of artist girl gangs in contemporary Australian art. The following article discusses Clark Beaumont alongside five further groups: Alexandra Clapham and Penelope Benton, Hissy Fit, OK YEAH COOL GREAT, Show Us Your Teeth and zin. In keeping with methods of enquiry established by key collaborative theorists, I ask: 'what motivates collaboration?', 'how is collaborative production understood and performed?' and 'what are the implications of group authorship?' before turning to the final question: 'what contextual circumstances are encouraging and nourishing the formation of artist girl gangs?'



Figure 1: Clark Beaumont, *Coexisting*, 2013, Live performance, 13 Rooms, Kaldor Public Art Project #27, Pier 2/3. © Clark Beaumont. Courtesy of the artist

Nicole Beaumont and Sarah Clark (Clark Beaumont) began collaborating in 2010 while still at university. The pair were both studying fine arts at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, and were encouraged to collaborate by a teacher, Michelle Xen, who noted their overlapping interests.¹ For their first work, *Undress*, the two wore plain black clothing, bundling themselves together with thin white thread. The performance took the form of unravelling each other and themselves.

After uploading their performances to YouTube, the pair caught the attention of New York-based curator Simon Castets and, consequently, curators Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach. The latter two included Clark Beaumont in the one of the most significant Australian art events of the decade, the 27th Kaldor Public Art Project, 13 Rooms (2013). The young duo performed in a constructed white cube as students, performers and volunteers (re)created live art works by internationally-renowned artists, including Marina Abramović, John Baldessari, Damien Hirst and Santiago Sierra, in 12 further rooms around them. Reproducing the intimacy and cooperation of their first collaboration, Clark Beaumont

produced *Coexisting* (2013) (Figure 1). Over the course of eleven days, for nine hours each day, the artists negotiated a shared small space on top of a plain white plinth.² The piece spoke simply and starkly to the difficulties, endurance and dedication required of collaborative practice.

The circumstances by which Clark Beaumont came to represent Australian performance in this exhibition are oft-repeated, imbued with the mythic overtones of chance and luck. In *Art Asia Pacific*, *Raven Contemporary* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the duo were referred to as ‘unknowns’, ‘edg[ing] out established performers’, ‘propelled from obscurity into a giddy art world’.³ Among this flurry of arts journalism, one article provided a different perspective. Curator Nina Stromqvist demonstrated Clark Beaumont were not as obscure as the myth implied, writing:

Despite an artistic practice that spans little more than four years, Clark Beaumont have maintained an impressive and active career. They have been included in multiple group exhibitions, held two solo shows and presented a number of live performances . . . there is a grassroots art world well aware of these early-career artists and the immediacy and honesty contained in their practice.⁴

In this paper, I want to echo and extend Stromqvist’s sentiment. Clark Beaumont’s selection and rise to prominence hinges not only on their inclusion in 13 Rooms, nor on the promise and integrity of their practice, but also on a wide-spread collaborative turn in contemporary Australian art.

Evidence for this turn can be found in a generation of female artists forming collaborative groups, including: Alexandra Clapham and Penelope Benton, Hissy Fit, OK YEAH COOL GREAT, Show Us Your Teeth and zin. Noting strong correlations between the collectivism of Clark Beaumont and these other groups, this article attempts to understand, position and articulate these correlations via the term, created for this purpose, “artist girl gangs”. The following paragraphs provide an introduction to these groups, an outline of the terms collective

and collaboration and an explanation of my use of the phrase “artist girl gangs” before turning to the questions set out at the start of this project: ‘what motivates collaboration?’, ‘how is collaborative production understood and performed?’, ‘what are the implications of group authorship?’ and ‘what contextual circumstances are encouraging and nourishing the formation of artist girl gangs?’

Clark Beaumont are interested in screen culture, identity and the complex reality of artistic collaboration. Their works are amusingly deadpan and lo-fi as the two artists play-act different roles. Alexandra Clapham and Penelope Benton also began collaborating in 2010, developing a practice that combines temporary architecture, endurance-performance, elaborate costumes and the baroque banquet. More recently, the duo have turned their attention to their relationship as creative collaborators and romantic partners. Hissy Fit (Jade Muratore, Emily O’Connor and Nat Randall) and Show Us Your Teeth (Kate Bobis, Bailee Lobb, Amy Claire Mills and Monica Rudhar) operate predominantly in the realm of performance using live art and video to explore femininity as deviant, sexualized, objectified and idealized. Emulating the energy and aggression of female punk icons, Hissy Fit’s performances are choreographed and costumed, high-production value events. By contrast Show Us Your Teeth prefer the spontaneity of unrehearsed performance. Their works engage audiences in conversations and acts related to everyday experiences of femininity. zin is the collaborative practice of Harriet Gillies and Roslyn Helper. The art partners set up unusual scenarios—party scenes and dance lessons (Figures 2 and 3)—to explore the ethics and power dynamics of audience activation. Finally, OK YEAH COOL GREAT, formed by Anna McMahon and Kate Beckingham, is a sleek and witty image-based practice. The artists employ photography, installation, banner-making and competitive performance in a practice that combines their shared interests in the image, art

history, design and fashion aesthetics.



Figure 2: zin, *Take A Shot*, 2014, interactive performance, Parramatta Opening Party, Sydney Festival, Photography: Jack Toohey © zin. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 3: zin, *Each Other*, 2015, live performance, Liveworks Festival, Performance Space, Photography: Alex Davies. © zin. Courtesy of the artist

Writers on collaboration, such as Michael P Farrell, Maria Lind, Susan Sollins and Nina Castelli Sundell, often categorise and discuss collectives according to the shape of their collectivism: their size, fluidity or specificity of members, longevity, artistic or activist

concerns and relationship to the establishment.⁵ As the concise descriptions above suggest, the six artist girl gangs of this article vary in terms of concerns, aesthetics and media. Nevertheless, they are remarkably similar in terms of their collectivism. They all have a small and specific size of two, three or four artists; they formed while at university or shortly thereafter and their members are relatively young (in their 20s or 30s). They all operate within the established art world and they share a professionalism, commitment and persistence in their collaborative practice. The similarity of their collectivism underwrites their inclusion in this article.⁶

The terms collaboration and collectivism have unique overtones: the former suggests the act of making together while the latter implies the act of *being* together. Despite this, there is little consensus among art historians on the two words. Authors' commonly take the terms' meanings as assumed, using them interchangeably and, furthermore, as replacements for scenarios more traditionally understood as influence, advice, assistance, cooperation or participation.⁷ Consequently, there are (at least) two distinct ways of understanding collectivism and collaboration, firstly as significantly different terms, and secondly as remarkably fluid terms exchangeable with a suite of diverse and diluted models of influence or participation. In my own writing I operate between these two extremes, reserving my use of the terms collectivism and collaboration to indicate practices where authorship—conception and creation—is deliberately and overtly shared. I use the two words reciprocally, opting to flip between them according to subtle differences suggested by context or required by grammar. This usage correlates with popular understanding of the terms, and is reflected by the artists in this article who, similarly, switch between using the terms collectivism and collaboration when discussing their own and similar practices.

Two issues frustrate research into women's collaborative activity. The first is the lack of literature dedicated to female collectivism, not just in art history, but in every tangential field

dipped into for this project: cultural studies, literary studies, criminology, sociology, psychology and biobehavioural science.⁸ The second is the lack of collective nouns suitable to describing female or feminist groups. The exercise of brainstorming a list of collective nouns—alliance, band, club, congregation, crew, faction, fraternity, squad, troupe—and then reflecting on these terms, reveals the masculine roots (criminal, organisational, military and religious) of most terms. By contrast, feminine collective nouns—coven, giggle, impatience, sorority—are too specific, too obscure and too sexist to use. With these twinned frustrations in mind, this research charts new territory, by necessity, in attempting to articulate women's collective art practice and to use a collective noun for this purpose.

Co-opting the phrase girl gang from its original role as a means to describe group female juvenile delinquent behaviour acknowledges the anarchism inherent to collectivism and the survival strategies of functioning while female in the contemporary art world. This act builds on Farrell's articulation of collaborative circles as delinquent and locates contemporary artist girl gangs within a history of subversive feminist activity.⁹ More immediately, in contemporary pop-cultural usage, "girl gang" means a group of female friends. Applying the term to artist groups serves to highlight similarities in how women-only activity is framed by pop-cultural figures and artist groups as deliberate, supportive, aspirational and (potentially) feminist.

There are important limitations in my use of the term: artist girl gangs do not share in the criminal activity or socio-economic circumstances of female gang members; I draw no correlation between women's creative collectivity and women's violence. Similarly, connotations of "girl gangs" as girly, infantile, appropriative, exclusive, image-obsessed, male-pandering or white feminism are not productive here.



Figure 4: Show Us Your Teeth, *Venus*, 2016, Mixed media, dimensions variable, Photography: Snatch&Grab GIRLTHING © Show Us Your Teeth. Courtesy of the artist

What motivates collaboration? Amy Claire Mills of Show Us Your Teeth made the decision to recruit fellow female classmates for a feminist art collective in 2014.¹⁰ She states clearly: ‘My main motivator was to be in a collective. It wasn’t to make art; that wasn’t my end-goal. My end-goal was to learn from other women’.¹¹ In these brief sentences, Mills conveys an extraordinarily positive understanding of collectivism. Group practice is pictured as desirable (I wanted to be in a collective) and practical (I wanted to learn from others). Kate Bobis, Bailee Lobb and Monica Rudhar flesh out these motivators, explaining they wanted to join a collective to share skills, perform, make installations, apply for exhibitions and work on a larger scale.¹² Envisaging collectivism as exciting and supportive the three took up Mills’ invitation.¹³ The gangs’ decision to form a women-only group reflects their understanding of collectivism as a safe space, a space of intimacy and trust where experiences of sexism and insecurities can be shared.¹⁴

In remarkably similar foundation stories, the members of the remaining four groups (Benton and Clapham, OK YEAH COOL GREAT, Hissy Fit and zin) knew each other, initially, as colleagues, partners and friends. Following conversations and the identification of overlapping

interests, each group can trace the beginning of their collaborative practice back to a specific moment when they decided to apply for an exhibition or residency. For Benton and Clapham, this interest resided in the shared connotations of working with the banquet. Benton explains: 'I was making queer baroque works with desserts and Alex had done a series of dinner performances. We talked about pulling our two approaches together and doing a performance piece . . . Next thing we knew we had a show at The Paper Mill'.¹⁵ For Beckingham and McMahon of OK YEAH COOL GREAT, collaboration provided an alternative to the intense theory-driven solo practices of their Honours year.¹⁶ Beckingham describes their collaboration as a way to do 'something quicker, more fluid'.¹⁷ The duo note it was both their shared aesthetic interests and their different life experiences that drew them together, with McMahon hailing from the regional town of Toowoomba and Beckingham growing up in Sydney.¹⁸ They held their first exhibition in McMahon's hometown. Nat Randall of Hissy Fit describes the trio as exploring 'similar territories' in 'different media'.¹⁹ The group's successful application for a Stephen Cummins Bequest Residency, a program for mentoring queer performance artists at Performance Space, enabled the development of *I might blow up someday* (2014–16). zin were similarly interested in the possibility of an art practice that brought together their distinct backgrounds, in their case art and theatre. With an idea in germination that involved performance art, audience activation and a show conducted over the telephone, the two applied for a creative lab for one-on-one performance pieces.²⁰

Curiously, women-only collectives formed just a few years prior to these groups, between 2000 and 2010, stress the unintentional and spontaneous elements of their foundation stories, suggesting a felt-need to explain, or justify, the accident or *aberrance* of collaboration.²¹ Contrary to those formation stories, the tendency towards considered collaboration suggests a contemporary art world environment that is much more conducive to, and supportive of, group practice.



Figure 5: Hissy Fit, *Episode*, 2014, Live Performance, Day For Night, Performance Space, Photography: Lucy Parakhina © Hissy Fit. Courtesy of the artist

How is collaboration understood and performed? Theorists and artists alike employ metaphors to explain collaborative authorship. Here one may think of Charles Green's popularization of the concept of a "third hand", that is, the idea that the creative outcome of collaborative exchange cannot always be neatly traced back to individual input, that the creative process of collaborative exchange may be experienced as generating an excessive authorial presence or "other" contributor.²² Bailee Lobb of Show Us Your Teeth hints at the groups' experience of this phenomenon, explaining sometimes the act of taking leads, unknowingly and unconsciously, to starting a new project.²³ 'It's quite a bizarre way to work', she says, 'because sometimes there is no conscious decision-making'.²⁴ Alternatively Harriet Gillies reveals, in her experience of collaboration, the two artists never 'transcend' themselves.²⁵ Favouring the image of the Venn diagram over a third hand, Gillies suggests: 'The strength in our partnership is that we are always very much ourselves and we're totally different . . . We have a really strong and . . . important connection where the Venn diagram of our practices connect'.²⁶

Just as these allusions may be useful for understanding and discussing collaboration after the fact, metaphors also play a role in guiding collaborative processes and thinking through the attendant ethical implications. Susan J Leonardi and Rebecca A Pope demonstrate the usefulness of metaphors, in this sense, in their collaboratively-authored article, 'Screaming Divas: Collaboration as Feminist Practice'.²⁷ Their conversation wanders through the implications of collaboration as: conversation, resistance, pleasure, seduction, lesbianism, intercourse and giving birth. Quilt-making, they agree, provides a particularly useful metaphor, allowing one to think about the visibility of individual contributions, the multiplicity of voices and style, the inclusivity made possible by works with no predetermined size or end and, finally, the possibility for hiding or highlighting individual contributions according to the metaphor of seams.

The performance of collaborative authorship is often hinted at by naming practices. In this respect, Nicole Beaumont and Sarah Clark's subsumption into the singular (and masculine) *nom de plume* Clark Beaumont indicates a collaborative practice of blending and erasure. Queried about this, the duo responded with a mixed answer, explaining sometimes it's possible to identify their individual contributions, strengths or aesthetic style in a work but this belief is undone by the reality that neither artist has an established on ongoing solo practice.²⁸ There is no reference point to confirm this belief. This shifting clarity and movement between collaborative models is hinted at by the duo's adoption of multiple and diverse roles in their works, where they appear, alternately, as themselves, as each other and in blended forms. *Crossing Over* (2010) and *Heroics and Mateship* (2014) provide two distinct examples. In *Crossing Over* Beaumont stands directly behind Clark as the duo face a wall. A bright spotlight, placed behind both of them, produces a single overlaid shadow of their figures on the wall. Slowly the two move. As they attempt to keep their shadows within the boundaries of one another, they lose themselves and mistake the other's shadow for their own. In their more recent

performance, *Heroics and Mateship*, the duo re-enact and extend a moment from a group bushwalk, when Beaumont grabbed Clark by the ankle, preventing her from sliding down a precipice. Here the artists present themselves, concurrently, as Clark Beaumont, the artist, and perform as Beaumont and Clark, the individuals.



Figure 6: OK YEAH COOL GREAT, *Battle Royale*, 2014, Live performance, SafARI Live, Wellington St Projects, Photography: Hayley Megan French © OK YEAH COOL GREAT. Courtesy of the artist

In their performance work *Battle Royale* (2014) (Figure 6), OK YEAH COOL GREAT present collaboration as competition. The artists, dressed in protective and padded outfits, were presented with a selection of 25 images from art history. After 5 minutes of study, they drew the images from memory. Two fellow artists, Harriet Body and Jodi Whelan, functioned as judges while a surprisingly raucous audience screamed on: ‘Anna should have won!’, ‘Kate was robbed’.²⁹ Envisaged as commentary on the art world’s competitive nature, Beckingham and McMahon also note the work’s relationship to collaboration. According to McMahon: ‘The idea that collaboration is a competition was quite sad, [as though] you are fighting against yourself. [The work] was also about the idea of making decisions, someone being on top, [the] push and pull that we feel within our practice.’³⁰ The two make all of their decisions together in

a process that can be agonizingly slow.³¹ They provide the example of spending four hours in IKEA deciding on a table top. There were two retreats to the IKEA café and an entire bar of chocolate was consumed before the pair settled on a table top that one of them already owned.³² This practical performance of collaboration follows OK YEAH COOL GREAT's firm understanding of collaboration as 'an *other* thing'.³³ While it exists "independently" from the duo, it cannot exist without the two.³⁴

Emily O'Connor of Hissy Fit suggests a triangle as a means to think about their practice, with each of the artists occupying a specific point.³⁵ Nat Randall continues: 'The triangle, as well as being a yonic symbol, has become an important symbol for us in the way that we navigate work', with one of the three leading an idea or an aesthetic approach at different times throughout their working process.³⁶ O'Connor clarifies the triangle of their practice is flat, non-hierarchical and non-pyramidal, its points are capable of movement and change.³⁷ One can imagine the triangle shifting through equilateral, isosceles and scalene forms as ideas, power and relationships ebb and flow between the artists. This triangular movement plays out in their work *Heat* (2014), a black and white, multichannel video work that casts Hissy Fit in a choreographed three-sided brawl.

The metaphor of a triangle speaks equally to the space that is created when the three artists meet and the continued significance, and visibility, of each individual artist. Whereas collaborating groups like Clark Beaumont may disappear into one another, Hissy Fit experience themselves being reflected and amplified in the process of collaboration. Commenting on this experience, Randall shares the following: 'When we're in the creative development stage it's terrifying because we really see each other, intensely, it's a really exposing process . . . we are so visible as individuals when we are making that it's really confronting for all of us'.³⁸ The reflective component of collaborating, O'Connor adds, also

produces ‘a really quiet bond’.³⁹

As collaborators and partners, Benton and Clapham refute the common understanding of collaboration in relation to a Venn diagram and the creation of a shared or overlapping space where collaboration occurs. Envisaging the overlap of their life and creative process as a singular circle, Clapham explains:

We never go away from it. We make work about ourselves and we are in it . . . It’s interesting the idea of space in the middle that other groups have spoken about; that’s where they’re meeting to make the work. What I’m trying to say is that there is no space in the middle for us. We’re entwined in so many ways. We’re coming from the same point.⁴⁰

This very different visualization of collaboration allows a creative practice where individuals remain distinct and complete. This sense is visible in their credit line: Alexandra Clapham and Penelope Benton. It’s further borne out by their deliberate and visible decision to split tasks. The suggestion of working on everything together ‘drives us crazy’, says Benton, ‘because we can see how inefficient it is’.⁴¹ The artists say to each other: ‘I’ll just start on this, you start on that, when you need a hand on something we’ll reassess’.⁴²

Their recent works *Self-Portrait in a Room* (2014) and *United Walls* (2015) provide their most extreme examples. In the first, Benton and Clapham split the gallery space of Wellington St Projects into two distinct lounge rooms, furnishing each according to their individual, and distinct, aesthetic and leisurely preferences. Over three weeks, the artists performed themselves alone in their separate spaces. Later during the planning of their next work, the artists found they were unable to agree or start on a project. Using this impasse as inspiration, the two elected to create a series of solo-authored works for *United Walls*, each one a response to an earlier work made by the other. In these acts of ‘work[ing] together separately’ Benton and Clapham foreground the hurdles of disagreement and possibilities of dialogue made possible by collaboration.⁴³

What are the implications of collaborative authorship? McMahon muses ‘Maybe its sexier for the economic value of your work to be making work with another female artist . . . [Maybe] two females are better than one’.⁴⁴ Collaboration interacts with gender and identity in interesting ways, operating simultaneously to heighten and erase the two. John Roberts suggests the possibility of erasure occurs when ‘the individual artist’s identity is dissolved into the collective-artist’.⁴⁵ In the practice of the Guerrilla Girls, through the use of masks, identity is erased in order to achieve anonymity. Irit Rogoff describes the literally ‘masked’ identities as a simple, theatrical and effective method for guarding the confidentiality of members.⁴⁶ She continues, however, this device is:

far more interesting as a radical strategic gesture against the invisible reconstitution of the artist as “subject” and the extreme ways in which women artists, in particular, have been subject to demeaning narratives which equate biography with the work produced . . . [The Guerrilla Girls] resist the traditional way in which they could be incorporated.⁴⁷

Beckingham and McMahon continue this argument. Frustrated with artworld sexism ([When I hear about] our male peers and friends winning awards I’m always super happy for them, but I also think to myself: “What the hell? Again? Really? Again?”) Beckham suggests collaboration as an alternative to the gendered implications, and inequality, of solo practice. She muses:

Beckingham: I think “Fuck you, we’re just going to go and do what we want”. We’ll have failures and have successes and have a good time and operate outside of our own solo stuff as a way to see if this works—

McMahon: Like not have a specific gender—

Beckingham: Yeah, OK YEAH COOL GREAT is like an object rather than a gender.⁴⁸

Conversely, Hissy Fit struggle against the simultaneous gendering and anonymising effects of collaboration. Randall and Muratore explain:

Randall: I don't know if we would be branded with a similar brush—all-girl collective that does feminist queer performance—if we just used our names or had a different name. There is a certain branding that happens with collaborations. We have acknowledged that and are trying to work against that in some ways. People have an idea of what we do but we don't know what we do. There's a risk when people think: "That's a Hissy Fit work; they do that kind of work". If we were Jade, Nat and Emily maybe we would retain our own identities and not be transformed into this marketing beast. It's difficult when you are writing copy for a work and people want to market you in a certain way. We struggled with that when we were doing our work at Performance Space. There were lots of articles coming out about us. I think we have to continue to be wary about the way we're represented under the banner of Hissy Fit because it doesn't necessarily represent our identities . . . Sometimes the idea of Hissy Fit is restricted. It's not as expansive and malleable as ourselves. We're constantly checking that and making sure that we're changing and challenging our identity as a collective . . . Part of that is making sure that our own identities are visible in the collaboration, and that's what we were working on, to make sure we don't get lost.

Muratore: There's a significance in us having our voices, from a feminist perspective, not quieting our voices or masking them under this guise of collectivism . . . [The Guerilla Girls] don't have an identity . . . They are anonymous and in gorilla suits . . . What we're trying to do is really different. It's about the feminist strategy of having your own voice and not being silenced but being supported by other women.⁴⁹

Here, Hissy Fit reveal the implications of group authorship operate beyond an artist's control.

Finally, what contextual circumstances are nourishing artist girl gangs? Beckingham states: 'You see people doing it and think "I could do that"'.⁵⁰ With the growing number of artist girl gangs forming, women-only art collectives in Australia are currently highly visible. This includes both the groups discussed here and a slightly earlier generation of collectives formed throughout the first decade of the 2000s. These groups are embedded in the local art scene: they participate in ARIs, fringe festivals, prizes, major exhibitions and biennales. They're networked and knowledgeable about each other's practice. Kate Beckingham continues:

My friend and I talk about it all the time. “Why don’t we do this third hand project, this other project, this other entity and put it out there?” You see zin or Brown Council making really interesting work, do you think that’s what’s happening? People are seeing their work and thinking “we could have this other practice and still maintain our own thing”.”⁵¹

Penelope Benton echoes this point, stating: ‘Seeing other women working together well inspires you’.⁵² References to one another and to earlier collectives, including Brown Council, Catherine or Kate, The Kingpins, Soda_Jerk and Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano, litter conversations with contemporary groups. This connection is particularly heightened for Show Us Your Teeth who share Emma Price, a member of The Kingpins, as one of their university tutors. Bailee Lobb conjures Price as a figure who makes collaboration sound addictive, intoxicating and exciting. In her words:

[Price] said: I started in this collective, then I was in this one, then this one, and we all still work together but in different ways . . . She says when you start collaborating it's a whole new way of working. Some people really thrive and other people, it's not for them.⁵³

In a manner that is both self-perpetuating and surprisingly sincere, artist girl gangs inspire, support, influence and motivate one another.

Related to this, broader contextual support for girl gangs may be located in the art world’s renewed engagement with feminist art history and practice. Internationally, evidence for this claim can be found in a suite of major international exhibitions.⁵⁴ In Australia, this resurgence has taken form in artistic practice, curatorial initiatives, seminars and specially-themed publications.⁵⁵ Within this context, one of the most persistent topics of discussion has been gender inequality in the arts, prompted in large part by data collected, pie-charted and posted on The Countess blog.⁵⁶ Tuning in to this sentiment, Mills of Show Us Your Teeth reports:

When I came to COFA [College of Fine Arts] I thought: “Woah, shit, there are so many women [here]; it’s like going to an all-girls school”. But then when you leave COFA it’s a whole other world. The art community is dominated by men . . . I’m shocked by that. Where do all the women go after uni?⁵⁷

A subset of feminist initiatives, including Down Hemi Fem Net (Facebook discussion group) JANIS (curatorial project), LEVEL (artist-run initiative) and The Ladies Network (curatorial team) have recently formed specifically to address gender inequality, with all of these women-only affirmative action groups visibly carving out space to exhibit, sell, support and discuss women artists. In this context, members of artist girl gangs are hyperaware of the challenge being a woman presents to artistic practice. Emulating the model propagated by the feminist art movement, women-only collaboration is offered as a legitimate and effective tool for navigating this challenge.

In 2010, via a controversial leadership spill, Julia Gillard became Australia’s first female Prime Minister. Throughout her three-year leadership, Gillard’s appointment was touted as a feminist victory, and yet, her position in the media spotlight also stirred strong sexist undercurrents in the Australian media and the Australian public. In October 2012, Gillard delivered her famous “misogyny speech”. In reference to Tony Abbott, then Leader of the Opposition, Gillard stated: ‘I will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man’.⁵⁸ The speech went viral and discussion of sexism, gender and feminism re-entered the Australian social consciousness with vigour. Following a second leadership spill and subsequent election, far-right conservative Abbott was elected as Prime Minister. Under Abbott, swift and drastic budget cuts were made to education and the arts.

Writers including Farrell and Okwui Enwezor have identified “social upheaval”, “political uncertainty” and “cultural turmoil” as periods when collectives form.⁵⁹ Enwezor writes: ‘Such crises often force reappraisal of conditions of production, re-evaluation of the nature of artistic

work, and reconfiguration of the position of the artist in relation to economic, social and political institutions’.⁶⁰ Diverting momentarily to the field of biobehavioural science, recent research has shown in addition to the stress response of fight or flight, women are more likely than men (due to higher levels of oestrogen) to follow a pattern of tend and befriend (nurturing their young and establishing friendships) in moments of stress and crisis.⁶¹ Consequently, the gendered nature of Australia’s recent political upheaval may provide another environmental explanation for the recent surge in female collectivism.

Internationally, this local resurgence in feminist consciousness and collectivism has been reinforced by a suite of “celebrity feminists”, including: Miley Cyrus, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Pussy Riot and Emma Watson and it’s here, in this context of pop-cultural feminism, that we return to the phrase “girl gangs”. Lena Dunham’s *Girls*, Beyoncé’s collaborations with Nicki Minaj, Amy Poehler’s bff Tina Fey, Swifts’ “squad goals” and the aspirational hashtag #girlgang promulgated in their image, provide a cultural context for the rise of artist girl gangs, for celebrating female kinship, creativity and collaboration.⁶² Just as feminist art collectives of the 1970s were nurtured by the Women’s Liberation Movement, in the new millennium, pop-cultural feminism lends its language, accessibility and cultural cache to women’s artistic collaboration, enabling and easing the act of women working together.

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collaboration and collectivism in Australia, c. 1970–2010. Her continued research on feminist and collaborative practices has been published in the edited collection *Collaborative Art in the Twenty-First Century*, and in *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, *Art Monthly*, the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, *The CoUNTess* and *Imprint*.

Notes

¹ Nicole Beaumont and Sarah Clark, interview with the author, 24 November 2014.

² The artists took three 10-minute breaks per day.

³ Kate Britton, ‘Clark Beaumont – Heart to Heart’, review in *Raven Contemporary*, 29 May 2014, <https://ravencontemporary.wordpress.com/>, (accessed 18 December 2015);

Andrew Taylor, ‘Unknowns edge out established performers’ in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November 2012, <http://www.smh.com.au/>, (accessed 18 December 2015); and

Michael Young, ‘Artist duo Clark Beaumont selected for 27th Kaldor Public Art Project’ in *Art Asia Pacific*, 3 January 2013, <http://artasiapacific.com/>, (accessed 18 December 2015).

⁴ Nina Stromqvist in conversation with Danielle Robson, in “Meet Clark Beaumont”, *Das Superpaper*, issue 26 (March 2013): 44–47.

⁵ See, for example:

Michael P. Farrell, *Collaborative Circles: Friendship dynamics and creative work* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001);

Chris Gilbert, ‘Art & Language and the Institutional Form in Anglo-American Collectivism’ in Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (eds.), *Collectivism after Modernism: The art of social imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 77–94;

Maria Lind, “The collaborative turn”, in Johanna Billing, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson (eds.) *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On contemporary art and collaborative practices* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007): 15–33;

Marc Neelen and Ana Dzokic, “Balkanisation—Beyond the Subject Lost Highway Expedition”, in Johanna Billing, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson (eds.) *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On contemporary art and collaborative practices* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007): 60–67;

Nikos Papastergiadis, “The Global Need for Collaboration”, in Mark Dunhill and Tamiko O’Brien (online curators), *Collaborative Arts: conversations on collaborative arts practice*, 2005, <http://collabarts.org/?p=201>, viewed 5 May 2010;

Susan Sollins and Nina Castelli Sundell, “Team Spirit”, in Mark Dunhill and Tamiko O’Brien (online curators), *Collaborative Arts: conversations on collaborative arts practice*, 2005, <http://collabarts.org/?p=198>, viewed 5 May 2010.

⁶ An auxiliary suite of collectives formed in the past few years fall into a different shapes of collectivism. These groups, including The Ladies Network, Sleepover Club and Down Hemi Fem Net, mirror the collectivism of Australian’s 1970s Women’s Art Movement, forming in order to direct their energies towards the discussion, support and sale of women artists rather than for the purpose of collaborative art practices.

⁷ For example, Robert C Hobbs and Howard S. Becker argue for an understanding of normal artworld functions—influence, advice, audience reception, etc. as forms of collaboration, see: R.C. Hobbs, “Rewriting history: artistic collaboration since 1960” in C.J. McCabe (ed.),

Artistic collaboration in the twentieth century, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1984) and H.S. Becker, *Art worlds*, 25th anniversary edition, ed. & rev, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁸ See for example: “Until recently, the role of girls in youth violence was largely ignored”, Finn-Aage Esbensen, Elizabeth Piper Deschenes and L Thomas Winfree Jr., “Differences between gang girls and gang boys: Results from a multisite survey” in *Youth & Society* vol. 31, no. 1 (September 1999): p 28;

‘this paper will serve as an attempt to redress the benign neglect or direct obfuscation of women’s experience relative to friendship relationships and relegitimize an emphasis and study of women’s friendships’. Nicole Knickmeyer, Kim Sexton and Nancy Nishimura, “The impact of same-sex friendship on the well-being of women”, in *Women & Therapy* vol. 25, no. 1 (2002): 37–59; and

‘A little-known fact about the fight-or-flight response is that the preponderance of research exploring its parameters has been conducted on males, especially on male rats. Until recently, the gender distribution in the human literature was inequitable as well’. Marion Toepke McLean, “Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight”, in *Midwifery Today* vol. 107, issue 3 (Autumn 2013): 412.

⁹ Farrell, *Collaborative circles*, p. 14 and 272.

For example: Sydney Women’s Art Movement’s coordinated attack on Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, during an exhibition of art by Playboy employees, December 1980; or the 500-strong picket line of feminists asking: “Where is Ana Mendieta” at the opening of the Guggenheim in SOHO, New York, 1992, an act re-performed for the opening of a new wing at the Tate Modern, London, earlier this year.

¹⁰ Show Us Your Teeth study at UNSW Art & Design, previously the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. Universities are fertile ground for collectivism, providing a meeting space for all of the artist girl gangs except Hissy Fit, with O’Connor and Randall meeting even earlier in high school.

¹¹ Amy Claire Mills, interview with the author, 21 January 2016.

¹² Kate Bobis, Bailee Lobb and Monica Rudhar, interview with the author, 21 January 2016.

¹³ Bobis, Lobb and Rudhar, interview.

¹⁴ Bobis, Lobb, Mills and Rudhar, interview.

¹⁵ Penelope Benton, interview with the author, 31 January 2016.

¹⁶ Kate Beckingham and Anna McMahon, interview with the author, 17 January 2016.

¹⁷ Beckingham, interview.

¹⁸ Beckingham and McMahon, interview.

¹⁹ Nat Randall, interview with the author, 22 January 2016.

²⁰ Gillies and Helper, interview.

²¹ This finding, in relation to earlier collective’s foundation stories, is from my doctoral thesis: Louise R. Mayhew, *A history of women-only collectives and collaboration in Australia, c.1970–2010* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2014).

Charles Green describes collaboration as aberrant, reasoning if the conventional image of the artist is one of a ‘passive’ and ‘lonely’ individual, ‘waiting for inspiration’s light bulb to be turned on’, ‘then the deliberate, careful construction of authorial alternatives . . . must be aberrant’. Charles Green, *The third hand: Collaboration in art from conceptualism to postmodernism* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001): ix– x.

²² See Green, *The Third Hand*.

²³ Bailee Lobb, interview with the author, 21 January 2016.

²⁴ Lobb, interview.

²⁵ Gillies, interview.

²⁶ Gillies, interview.

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- ²⁷ Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A Pope, “Screaming Divas: Collaboration as Feminist Practice” in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 259–270.
- ²⁸ Beaumont and Clark, interview.
- ²⁹ Beckingham and McMahon, interview.
- ³⁰ McMahon, interview.
- ³¹ Beckingham and McMahon, interview.
- ³² Beckingham and McMahon, interview.
- ³³ Beckingham, interview.
- ³⁴ Beckingham, interview.
- ³⁵ O'Connor, interview.
- ³⁶ Randall, interview.
- ³⁷ O'Connor, interview.
- ³⁸ Randall, interview.
- ³⁹ O'Connor, interview.
- ⁴⁰ Clapham, interview.
- ⁴¹ Benton, interview.
- ⁴² Benton, interview.
- ⁴³ Artist statement, *United Walls* (2015), 107 Projects, Sydney, 2015.
- ⁴⁴ McMahon, interview.
- ⁴⁵ John Roberts, “Collaboration as a problem of art's cultural form”, in *Third Text* vol. 18, issue 6 (November 2004): 557.
- ⁴⁶ Irit Rogoff, “Production lines”, in Mark Dunhill and Tamiko O'Brien (online curators), *Collaborative Arts: conversations on collaborative arts practice*, 2005, <http://collabarts.org/?p=198>, viewed 5 May 2010.
- ⁴⁷ Rogoff, “Production lines”.
- ⁴⁸ Beckingham and McMahon, interview.
- ⁴⁹ Muratore and Randall, interview.
- ⁵⁰ Beckingham, interview.
- ⁵¹ Beckingham, interview.
- ⁵² Benton, interview.
- ⁵³ Lobb, interview.
- ⁵⁴ These include: *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Bilbao (2007); *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; *Global Feminisms* (2007) and the opening of the Elizabeth A Sackler Center for Feminist Art, purpose built to permanently exhibit *The Dinner Party*, at the Brooklyn Museum, New York; and *elles@centrepompidou* (2009) at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.
- ⁵⁵ These include: Brown Council's Remembering Barbara Cleveland project (2011–ongoing); The CoUNTess blog (2008–ongoing); ‘Australian Feminist Art Timeline Wikipedia entry (2010–ongoing); LEVEL women-only artist-run initiative (2010–ongoing); Feminism Never Happened forum, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2010); The View from Here: 19 perspectives on feminism exhibition and publication, West Space, Melbourne (2010); A Different Temporality: Aspects of Australian Feminist Art Practice 1975–1985' Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne (2011); Look. Look Again, exhibition and seminar Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth (2012); Contemporary Australia: Women, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2012); Backflip: Feminism and Humour in Contemporary Art', Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne (2013); Re-Raising Consciousness (2014) exhibition and event, TCB Art Inc, Melbourne (2014); Curating Feminism, exhibition and seminar, Sydney College of the Arts

(2015) and special issues of *Artlink*, iss 33, no 3, September 2013, *Art Monthly Australia*, iss 286, December 2015 and the *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol 15, iss 2, 2015.

⁵⁶ See: “CoUNTess: women count in the artworld”, <http://countesses.blogspot.com.au>.

⁵⁷ Mills, interview.

⁵⁸ Footage of the speech is available here: “Gillard labels Abbot a misogynist”, ANC News, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihd7ofrwQX0>>.

⁵⁹ Michael P Farrell, *Collaborative circles: friendship dynamics and creative work* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 72.

⁶⁰ Okwui Enwezor, “The production of social space as artwork: protocols of community in the work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes”, in Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (eds), *Collectivism after modernism: the art of social imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 225.

⁶¹ See for example: Shelley E. Taylor, “Tend and Befriend: Biobehavioral Bases of Affiliation under Stress”, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* vol. 15, no. 6 (December 2006): 273-277.

⁶² While acknowledging that Australia’s artist girl gangs operate in continuation of the rich history of women-only collaboration in Australia, this history is largely unknown and provides little in terms of inspiration or support.

Counter Cultural Production: A Militant Reconfiguration of Peter Bürger's "Neo-Avant-Garde"

Martin Lang

Abstract

This article re-examines Peter Bürger's negative assessment of the neo-avant-garde as apolitical, co-opted and toothless. It argues that his conception can be overturned through an analysis of different sources – looking beyond the usual examples of individual artists to instead focus on the role of more politically committed collectives. It declares that, while the collectives analysed in this text do indeed appropriate and develop goals and tactics of the 'historical avant-garde' (hence meriting the appellation 'neo-avant-garde'), they cannot be accused of being co-opted or politically uncommitted due to the ferocity of their critique of, and attack on, art and political institutions.

Introduction

Firstly, the reader should be aware that my understanding of the avant-garde has nothing to do with how Clement Greenberg used the term.¹ I am aligning myself with Peter Bürger's position that the 'historical avant-garde' was, primarily, Dada and Surrealism, but also the Russian avant-gardes after the October revolution and Futurism.² These are movements that Greenberg saw as peripheral to the avant-garde. Greenberg did, however, share some of Bürger's concerns about the avant-garde's institutionalisation, or 'academisation' as he would put it.

I borrow the term 'neo-avant-garde' from Bürger, but with some trepidation. In *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974 – translated into English as *Theory of the Avant-Garde* 1984) he describes

the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s as movements that revisit the historical avant-garde, but he dismisses them as inherently compromised:

The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions. This is true independently of the consciousness artists have of their activity, a consciousness that may perfectly well be avant-gardiste. It is the status of their products, not the consciousness artists have of their activity, that defines the social effects of works. Neo-avant-gardiste art is autonomous art in the full sense of the term, which means that it negates the avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life.³

Bürger's highly influential negative assessment of the neo-avant-garde as apolitical, co-opted and toothless has tainted our assessment of neo-avant-gardism. His pejorative assessment builds on Renato Poggioli's *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (1962 – translated into English as *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* 1971) which asserts that, as the avant-garde is necessarily radically new, it is unrepeatable. Such assessments of the neo-avant-garde can be overturned and neo-avant-gardism can be understood as a major influence on contemporary, politically committed, art activist practices, but only if we reconceptualise them, distinguishing them from these earlier understandings.

Criticisms of Bürger's theory are well documented. Hal Foster, for example, takes issue with the characterisation of a singular avant-garde and how Bürger envisages a neo-avant-garde based entirely on his reductive conception of the historical avant-garde.⁴ My main argument with Bürger concerns his examples. As David Hopkins correctly points out, Bürger's book, which has so heavily defined the terms 'historical avant-garde' and 'neo-avant-garde', tends to focus on 'French Nouveau Réalistes and Andy Warhol' for examples of the neo-avant-garde.⁵

For example, Bürger questions the political efficacy in Warhol's silkscreens:

The painting of 100 Campbell soup cans contains resistance to the commodity society only for the person who wants to see it there. The Neo-avant-garde, which stages for a second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positioning of any meaning whatever.⁶

Bürger is right to criticise such examples as being weaker and institutionalised manifestations of the historical avant-garde, but if he is looking for radically political practices that seek to fuse art and life, he is simply looking in the wrong place. Alongside Nouveau Réalisme and Pop, other post-war movements that have been termed ‘neo-avant-garde’, such as Neo-Dada, Minimalism and Conceptual Art, similarly contain institutional critique and inherit the radical political project of the historical avant-garde ‘only for the person who wants to see it there’ – if at all. Bürger’s examples, and indeed line of inquiry, run entirely contrary to my expectation of a neo-avant-garde. He completely overlooks the examples that I will shortly propose. My position is aligned with that of Hal Foster, who accuses Bürger of failing to ‘recognize the ambitious art of his time’ and who speculates that, had he been more aware of more radical art of his time, his conception of the neo-avant-garde might have been different.⁷

Foster and Benjamin Buchloh attempt to re-evaluate Bürger’s notion of the neo-avant-garde by proposing Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers as examples of artists who apparently better exemplify a return to praxis through their critique of art’s institutional conditions.⁸ Foster divides the neo-avant-garde into two different phases. He claims that the first neo-avant-garde phase merely acts out the anarchistic attacks of the historical avant-garde. For Foster, this first phase, of the 1950s and ‘60s, includes artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Allan Kaprow. Foster’s second phase of the 1960s and ‘70s apparently only goes so far as to laboriously develop such attacks – his examples here include Buren and Broodthaers.⁹ Bürger, Buchloh and Foster all focus on individuals for their examples. Buchloh even goes as far as to name Yves Klein the ‘quintessential neo-avant-garde artist’.¹⁰ Bürger, Buchloh and Foster ultimately share a pessimistic view of the neo-avant-garde propagated by their own choice of examples, which, with the exception of Kaprow, I do not recognise as avant-garde at all.

Gavin Grindon describes an ‘other neo-Dada’ that emerged from European and American social movements ‘through groups such as the Provos, Kommune 1, Diggers, Yippies, Black

Mask, and Chicago Surrealists.’¹¹ Movements such as these, according to Grindon, have inspired ‘contemporary art-activist “interventionism” practiced by collectives such as the Yes Men, Reverend Billy, and the Church of Stop Shopping, Etcétera, the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, and the Centre for Tactical Magic.’¹² My position is that Grindon’s assessment is correct, but not complete. In the following section, I will explore one of Grindon’s ‘other neo-Dada’ groups, Black Mask, as well as the affiliated collectives Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and King Mob. I assert that these groups follow the avant-garde’s anti-institutional stance and revolutionary politics more closely than Bürger’s, Buchloh’s or Foster’s examples and that they are the overlooked true successors to the historical avant-garde. Later on in the paper I will turn to two of Grindon’s contemporary examples, the Yes Men and Etcétera, and add Voina as a third example of contemporary art collectives that continue the avant-garde project.

The ‘Other Neo-Dada’: Militant Neo-Avant-Gardism

Black Mask, Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and King Mob are interconnected art collectives from the 1960s and ‘70s. My assessment of Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker has only been made possible by recent publications such as the PM Press anthology *Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: the incomplete works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*.¹³ A history of Black Mask is also available online in the form of an autobiographical thirteen-page pamphlet.¹⁴

My assessment of King Mob has been possible thanks to Tom Vague’s compilation of the original King Mob Echo publications (2000)¹⁵ and the Tate article ‘The Mob who Shouldn’t Really be Here’ (2008).¹⁶ In 2013 Donald Nicholson-Smith deposited some King Mob related materials in the Mayday Rooms (London), an initial cartography of which is available online.¹⁷

This builds on David Wise's autobiographical 'A Critical Hidden History of King Mob', which he published on his website from 1999-2003 and which is now available as a book.¹⁸

Black Mask and King Mob were both included in the recent exhibition Art Turning Left (Tate, 2014) and there was also a recent exhibition examining anarchism through counter-cultural artistic practices, which featured an accompanying text entitled 'Black Mask: Revolution as Being'.¹⁹ Aside from the compilations of original publications by these groups and their own autobiographical histories, there is very little research or scholarship about these groups.²⁰

New York-based radical anarchist art collective Black Mask (1965-1968) came from a street and gang, rather than middleclass art school, background.²¹ They gained notoriety for their eponymous broadsheet, which has recently been republished in its entirety by PM Press, as well as for their public actions and demonstrations, which I argue render Bürger's critique of the neo-avant-garde inadequate. The front cover of the first issue of *Black Mask* (November 1966) begins with an assault on art and on culture:

DESTROY THE MUSEUMS - - our struggle cannot be hung on walls...
Goddamn your culture, your science, your art. What purpose do they serve?²²

They go on to announce their disgust at a society where the rich stockpile art while there is war and oppression. The fact that they say damn 'your art' implies not a call for an end to all art, but an end to a particular bourgeois art. They proclaim that there are people seeking a new world and that:

The machine, the rocket, the conquering of space and time, these are the seeds of the future which, freed from your barbarism, will carry us forward. We are ready... Let the struggle begin.²³

This clearly expresses Futurist sympathies and tone. Founding members Ben Morea, Dan Georgakas, Ron Hahne were inspired by the apparent science, elegance and violence of Futurism and stories such as Marinetti beating up Wyndham Lewis in a toilet before hanging him by his coat collar on some spiked railings.²⁴ Black Mask have cited Futurism and Dada as

their only artistic inspiration, although in a 2007 interview Ben Morea also acknowledges Surrealism as an influence.²⁵ It is clear then, that Black Mask – from the outset – saw themselves as an extension of the historical avant-garde art project.

Bürger would presumably admit that Black Mask possesses ‘a consciousness that may perfectly well be avant-gardiste’ but he would tell us to examine ‘the status of their products’ which, according to Bürger, as part of the institutionalised neo-avant-garde, would be found wanting. Let us examine some of their actions and determine whether or not they were institutionalised. Black Mask’s first act was to call for the closure of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). An account of this action, along with correspondence with MOMA is published in *Black Mask* issue one. They were successful: MOMA closed temporarily through fear of what they might do.²⁶ Thereafter they disrupted and sabotaged dozens of art lectures, exhibitions and Happenings. The art world fought back; a panel of experts on Futurism, Dada and Surrealism advertised, throughout the underground press, a trap for Black Mask – in the form of a debate about the true revolutionary meaning of modern art. Black Mask responded by distributing thousands of plausible, well printed, invitations to a free party with free music, food and drink at the same time, place and date as the ‘ambush’. They issued the invites to the homeless and ‘the hardest bastards they could find’ in Harlem and the Lower Eastside shortly before the ‘ambush’ was scheduled.²⁷ Such actions are hardly the typical behaviour of a group that has been co-opted into the art world.

One of Black Mask’s most infamous stunts, the ‘mill-in’ at Macy’s (1967), involved organising large numbers of people to enter the store in small groups posing as regular shoppers or staff. Their aim was to cause maximum disruption during the store’s peak business hours in the build-up to Christmas. Activists systematically moved stock around, stole and broke items, gave objects away and released animals, such as dogs and cats, into the food department. Even a buzzard was allegedly seen terrorising staff in the china section. Decoy activists identified

themselves with flags and banners but made sure to stand alongside regular shoppers, who were subsequently roughed up and chucked out by security and floor staff. In another action, they shot the poet Kenneth Koch (with blanks) as a symbolic assassination of the bourgeoisie.²⁸

I am uncertain that actions such as these negate 'the avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life', as Bürger claims. Far from it: Black Mask rejected traditional art media and took as their practice forms of performance that exist outside the gallery system and in opposition to the gallery system. They also embraced a dematerialised art practice that fused art (performance art) with life (protest). I claim that this is a suitable candidate to inherit the avant-garde moniker and a counter-example to Bürger's criticism. In the last statement of the last issue of *Black Mask* (April/May 1968) the group proclaimed:

We are thru being assimilated: we will no longer make objects/our Art is Life/our medium revolution/& in a world based on repression our only message is Liberation. Our function is to make the Left hip & to make the "Hippies" left/to bring the body & mind back together/the unification of social consciousness & body consciousness/the creation of the Total Man.²⁹

In late 1968 Black Mask went underground and reformed as Up Against the Wall Motherfucker (henceforth UAW/MF).³⁰ The statement above can therefore be read as a declaration of UAW/MF's intentions: intentions that embody everything that Bürger claims cannot exist in the neo-avant-garde. Going underground and the complete departure from making art objects can be seen as a deliberate attempt to avoid being co-opted into the art world. Note, however, that the foundation of UAW/MF was based on a declaration about art and life: from the outset UAW/MF was themselves as artists.

UAW/MF's first action was to dump garbage on the Lincoln Center of Performing Arts (1968).³¹ New York was in the middle of a garbage collection strike and, although the richer areas were able to hire private contractors to clear up the mess, the poorer neighbourhoods were in an increasingly desperate state. UAW/MF saw cultural production as somehow masking such uncivilised practices present in US foreign and domestic policy. In their words

‘America turns the world into garbage, it turns its ghettos into garbage, it turns Vietnam into garbage.’³² They therefore proposed a ‘cultural exchange’ of ‘garbage for garbage’. In doing so they aimed to put an end to a situation where the garbage strike mess was excluded from sterile palaces of culture that distract from America’s cultural attacks in Vietnam and on its own black and indigenous peoples.

It was not long before MOMA became their target again, when they objected to an exhibition called ‘Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage’ (1968).³³ For UAW/MF, the likes of Rauschenberg lacked the revolutionary and militant credentials to merit inclusion in such an exhibition. This offended UAW/MF enough to inspire them to organise four hundred down-and-outs to storm the exhibition on the night of the private view, screaming obscenities, hurling paint, flour and smoke bombs.³⁴ Other actions included organising free parties and cutting the fence at Woodstock to allow people free access.³⁵

UAW/MF’s chief goal was the integration of art into the political program of anarchist revolution,³⁶ but they petered out after many of their members were arrested and imprisoned for terms ranging from ten days to ten years. Fleeing New York City UAW/MF spread across the States attempting to form their own, independent cells (much like the Weather Underground in their later days).

Across the Atlantic, there was an affiliated and similar English radical art collective. King Mob were based in London in the 1960s and ‘70s where they sought to emphasise the cultural anarchy and disorder that they saw as being ignored in Britain at the time. Brothers David and Stuart Wise (who had studied art in Newcastle) developed a combination of hard-edged politics derived from Russian nihilism with the disruptive anti-art potential of Dada and Surrealism. Hari Kunzru explains that ‘they found fundamental questions being asked about value, politics and the (lack of) social function of art’ in texts such as Dmitry Pisarev’s *The Destruction of Aesthetics* (1865).³⁷ After they moved to Notting Hill the brothers came into contact with the

Situationist International (SI) – two of whose members (Chris Gray and Donald Nicholson-Smith) later became King Mob members.

King Mob used a variety of techniques, which could be categorised as either propaganda or direct action. Examples of propaganda included, graffiti, distribution of flyers, posters and their publication *The King Mob Echo*. Their most famous graffiti slogan appeared as a message, agitating commuters on a stretch of the Hammersmith and City line. It stayed there for several years, surviving until the 1990s, it read:

Same thing day after day- tube - work - dinner - work - tube - armchair - TV -
sleep - tube - work -how much more can you take? - one in ten go mad, one in
five cracks up.³⁸

In fact, King Mob took their name from a piece of graffiti that appeared on Newgate prison during the 1780 Gordon riots. Rioters smeared the walls of the prison with the phrase ‘His Majesty King Mob’ after having gutted the prison itself. As well as graffiti, King Mob used posters and their publication *The King Mob Echo* to disseminate their political beliefs. These publications advocated violence by applauding murderers such as Jack the Ripper, Mary Bell, and John Christie. They even went as far as to celebrate the 1968 shooting of Andy Warhol by Valerie Solanas (an act also defended by Black Mask) and to include a hit-list of several celebrities including: Yoko Ono, Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Richard Hamilton, Mario Amaya (who was also shot by Solanas), David Hockney, Mary Quant, Twiggy, Marianne Faithfull, and *International Times* editor Barry Miles.³⁹

Some of King Mob’s ambitious, but unrealised, Dadaesque plans included blowing up a waterfall in the Lake District, hanging peacocks in a London park and painting Wordsworth’s house with the slogan ‘Coleridge Lives’. One infamous stunt that was executed was a critique on the ownership of public and private space that saw the group, dressed as gorillas and pantomime horses, storm a private west London park and tear down its gating in order to open

the park up as a children's playground.⁴⁰ Three of the four members from the British SI were expelled for their connections with Black Mask and went on to form King Mob.

A strong case can be made that Black Mask influenced King Mob's use of direct action. In the 1960s King Mob spent time with Black Mask's Ben Morea and co-signed at least one statement by UAW/MF.⁴¹ Inspired by Black Mask's 'Mill-in at Macy's', twenty-five members of King Mob stormed London's Selfridges, with one member dressed as Father Christmas, to distribute the store's toys to children: the police were called and forced the children to return the toys.⁴² King Mob was often an unwelcome presence at student events. For example, during the famous Hornsey Art College occupation they were thrown out for mocking the level of debate. At the LSE occupation, student leaders removed their sexually explicit posters.⁴³ Their legacy includes their effect on Malcolm McLaren, who claimed to have been at the Selfridges event, and who was allegedly influenced by Situationist models in his promotion of the Sex Pistols. Bürger's example of Pop Art is indeed only superficially political in content. Foster and Buchloh's examples (Minimalism and Conceptual Art) only really serve to compound the problem, as they fall foul of Bürger's accusations institutional recuperation. My examples used protest as part of their performance practices causing havoc in shops and invading private spaces to fill them with rubbish or convert them into public spaces. They were also committed anarchists. The fact that they attacked art galleries, art schools and were expelled from the SI is evidence that these groups were no tame version of protest co-opted by the art world; contra Bürger, they provide examples that protest can still be authentic in 'neo-avant-garde' practices and it is they who form the prototype for future militant forms of art activism. It is irrelevant whether they later became recuperated by the art world – in this they do not differ from the historical avant-garde. While it is true that, for example, posters by King Mob and materials by Black Mask have been included in a major art exhibition (Art Turning Left – Tate 2014), this does not differentiate them from historical avant-garde artists, who displayed artworks in

galleries more often than the examples of neo-avant-garde art that I have cited. Display of documentation does, to some degree, recuperate the radical potential of the groups' original actions – as it implies that the work belongs in a gallery and that the material on display *is the artwork*. However, it could equally be argued that display of materials by collectives such as King Mob and Black Mask introduces their radical actions and intentions to new audiences. In this case the art gallery acts like a museum displaying artefacts that evidence that there was, in the 1960s and '70s, a radical neo-avant-garde that continued the intentions of the historical avant-garde.

Avant-Garde Legacy in Contemporary Art Activism

I have argued that when Bürger wrote his account of the neo-avant-garde he overlooked the more radical, politically committed variants. Foster, Buchloh and Hopkins equally overlooked this narrative when they sought to redress concerns about Bürger's negativity towards the neo-avant-garde. I will now give two examples of contemporary art activist collectives that I consider to continue the avant-garde project: Grupo Etcétera and Voina.

Etcétera is an Argentine collective that strongly cites Surrealism as an artistic influence. They have come to public attention having recently won the International Award for Participatory Art (2013).⁴⁴ In the same year they spoke at *The Politics of the Social in Contemporary Art* conference, (Tate 2013), before touring various venues in Europe. While Etcétera appear to have no qualms about accepting art prizes or speaking at mainstream art venues to promote their actions – they do not exhibit artworks, or make performances in galleries.⁴⁵ Despite their recent reception into the art world, there is very little written about Etcétera and most of the texts on their website are only available in Spanish; in my research I have translated several of these texts myself.⁴⁶

Etcétera became known for their development of ‘*escraches*’ with the group H.I.J.O.S. and for their *Mierdazo* (*Shit Storm*).⁴⁷ *Escraches* are acts of public naming and shaming of corrupt political and corporate figures in their homes or places of work in order to influence government policy. Etcétera have named political members of Argentina’s military Junta, who are exempt from prosecution: this includes launching paint bombs at their houses and erecting street signs saying ‘mass murderer, 200 metres’ followed by their address.

The *Mierdazo* (2002) was an infamous performance where participants were asked to deliver their own excrement to the gates of the Argentine National Congress while the government debated the budget inside. The event began with a performance where a member of Etcétera, while dressed as a sheep, sat on a toilet on a red rug and publicly defecated. Other protestors, who also felt the need, later imitated this act. The performance, which was widely reported on Argentine television, culminated in the public angrily hurling their faeces at the Congress building. At *The Politics of the Social in Contemporary Art*, I heard founding member, Federico Zuckerfeld, explain how he initially struggled to gain support from local art groups, having to contextualise the act by citing Piero Manzoni’s use of excrement as an art historical precedent. In reality the act had more in common with UAW/MF’s garbage dump at the Lincoln Center, described above. On another occasion UAW/MF dragged a toilet to St. Marks Place and:

... held a community “shit-in” which proved highly popular until a squad of infuriated; blushing, highly Protestant fuzz arrived and, perfect symbolical [sic] end of a perfect symbolical evening, literally beat it to pieces with their nightsticks...⁴⁸

The Voina collective (founded 2005 or 2007 according to different sources) is an anarcho-absurdist collective that operates ‘very much in the Dadaist tradition, mixing anarchism, the absurd and art’.⁴⁹ They are based mainly in St. Petersburg but have cells all over Russia with a fluid membership, which has included as many as two hundred people.⁵⁰ Its core members are

husband and wife Oleg Vorotnikov and Natalia Sokol, Leonid Nikolayev and Alexei Plutser-Sarno.⁵¹

Examples of their performances include: a live public orgy at the State Biological Museum to mock the election of Dmitry Medvedev; a 180-foot-high projection of a skull-and-crossbones on the exterior of Russia's parliament; theft of a supermarket chicken by inserting it into a member's vagina; shoplifting while dressed in a priest's robe with a policeman's hat; flipping over police cars; setting fire to a prison transport van; and painting an enormous phallus on a drawbridge facing the state security services (formerly known as the KGB) in St. Petersburg. Most of these actions have been filmed and are available on Voina's website.⁵²

When Russian curator Andrei Yerofeyev, was arrested for 'inciting religious hatred' in his exhibition *Forbidden Art* (Sakharov Museum, Moscow 2009) Voina stormed the courtroom under the persona of a punk band called Cock in the Ass.⁵³ Also in 2009, Voina expelled husband and wife Pyotr Verzilov and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, accusing them of being informers. Verzilov, Tolokonnikova and Yekaterina Samutsevich went on to form the Moscow faction of Voina. Tolokonnikova and Samutsevich would also create the feminist punk band Pussy Riot that gained widespread international sympathy when three of their members, Tolokonnikova, Samutsevich and Maria Alyokhina, were imprisoned for performing 'Punk Prayer - Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!' in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (2012). All three were sentenced to two years in a penal colony (after more than five months remanded in custody), but were then released before the Winter Olympics in Sochi, 2014. Verzilov became Pussy Riot's unofficial spokesman during their trial. 'Punk Prayer' clearly bears more than a passing resemblance to Voina's 'Cock in the Ass' courtroom intervention. In November 2010 Vorotnikov and Nikolayev were arrested for their role in *Palace Revolution*, where they up-turned Police cars in St. Petersburg. Vorotnikov's wife and son were not detained but Sokol's ID card and passport were confiscated, preventing them from travelling

or accessing healthcare. Vorochnikov and Nikolayev were released in March 2011 after Banksy raised their £80,000 bail money from an online auction of his work.⁵⁴ Vorochnikov subsequently skipped bail and managed to escape further imprisonment despite later being arrested for assaulting a police officer at a political rally. On July 2011 an international arrest warrant was issued for Vorochnikov, and subsequently for Sokol.⁵⁵

Despite the unresolved arrest warrants, Voina co-curated the seventh Berlin Biennale (2012). Chief curator, Artur Żmijewski, organised political actions apparently supporting causes including freeing Belarus' political prisoners and the Occupy Movement: he invited Voina to co-curate. Voina were clearly cautious of being recuperated by the art world. They issued a statement clarifying that they would play no part in exhibition management, as they consider exhibitions to be harmful to contemporary art.⁵⁶ They claim that artists are too infatuated with having exhibitions and therefore the fewer artworks there are in the biennale the better. They also stated that they would not leave Russia during the biennale, as that is where their 'front line' is.

In 2011 Voina won one of Russia's most prestigious art prizes: The Ministry of Culture and the National Center for Contemporary Art's 'Innovation award'. Voina's reception of the award was featured in *Flash Art* (July – September 2011). Voina did not attend the prize-giving and they later issued the following statement:

We want to make a type of art that no longer inspires anyone to the idea of awarding us an art prize. But if the museums and institutions can't let go and continue to suggest us for their idiotic competitions, they are going to regret it.⁵⁷

Since the biennale, Vorochnikov, Sokol and their son have fled Russia to Venice where, in July 2014, Vorochnikov was arrested. At the time of writing, reports have emerged that he has been bailed with the condition that he reports to the Venice Police twice a week. For now, he will not be extradited to Russia.⁵⁸

Voina follow in the avant-garde tradition of resisting institutionalisation by producing politically inflected anti-art. For example, *Crazy Leo on top of Feds* (2010) follows in the Dada absurdist tradition. 'Crazy Leo' (Leonid Nikolayev) runs across a busy main road in Moscow with a blue bucket over his head. The bucket symbolises the total impunity enjoyed by anyone with a blue light on their car, which is used not only by police officers but also increasingly by VIPs.⁵⁹ Nikolayev 'crashes' into a Russian unmarked police car (identifiable by the light on the roof) and proceeds to run onto the roof. A secret service officer gives chase and removes the blue bucket, only to reveal another blue bucket underneath. Voina surely provides proof that, whether or not the historical avant-garde became institutionalised, its tradition can be continued and it is possible to return art to the praxis of life.

Etcétera and Voina both require the reaction of 'authorities' to validate their actions as politically potent. The police (on the street) and the media (online) confirm that, far from being recuperated, institutionalised or toothless, their actions make real interventions into everyday life. Oliver Johnson has noted that 'Voina's physical actions are the starting point for a networked performance that emerges from and depends on the mass participation of its online audience'.⁶⁰ He deems Voina's physical actions a precursor for an open ended online participatory presence, 'a digital icon in an era of internet-based activism'.⁶¹

Gene Ray warns of the dangers when culture jamming and hacking become substitutes for 'the politics of the streets'.⁶² However, the relationship between the streets and cyberspace is not so divided and online action can have real life effect. For example, Hacktivist group Anonymous (founded 2003) have attacked government, corporate and banking websites causing real disruption and damage to business. In 2011 they played a role in the Arab Spring by helping Tunisian agitators protect their Internet connections from government surveillance, while at the same time attacking the government website and taking it offline. In 2012 they retaliated against Israel's incursion into the Gaza strip by taking down hundreds of Israeli

websites and most recently they have declared war against ISIS.⁶³ WikiLeaks also reminds us that national security is vulnerable at the level of a cyber-attack – especially now that armed forces are so heavily computerised. The US drone programme is particularly sobering in this regard. It is in such moments as the August Riots, the Iranian ‘Twitter revolution’, or the Tunisian ‘WikiLeaks revolution’ when the use of social media is manifested in actual physical action, that such digital tactics achieve their full political effect. It therefore stands to reason that avant-garde artists might also incorporate such methods.

Today’s artists have at their disposal a range of tactics including: culture jamming, tactical media, hacktivism, subvertising, and brandalism that can have real effect. These tactics are all derived from Situationist *détournement* and have recently facilitated high-profile acts of playful subversion by groups such as The Yes Men and the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination. The SI describe *détournement* as:

Short for “*détournement* of pre-existing aesthetic elements.” The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.⁶⁴

Simon Ford, in *The Situationist International: A User’s Guide*, traces *détournement*’s legacy though punk to ‘culture jamming’.⁶⁵ Culture jamming has been defined as when ““pranksters” deploy the tools of the mass media and marketing in order to take advantage of the resources and venues they afford’ and as ‘the act of resisting and re-creating commercial culture in order to transform society’.⁶⁶ *Détournement*-derived tactics can now be implemented on the streets, online or a mixture of both.

The Yes Men employ a form of culture jamming, called ‘identity correction’, which they define as: ‘Impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them, and otherwise giving journalists excuses to cover important issues’.⁶⁷ The public humiliation element in identity

correction shares much in common with Etcétera's *escraches*. Like Etcétera and Voina, the Yes Men use humour, which could be mistaken for mere MTV-style pranks. In fact, upon closer inspection, they operate in the same mould as Dada absurdist performance and Surrealist tactics. Examples include the *Dow Acceptable Risk Calculator* (2005), 'a new industry standard for determining how many deaths are acceptable when achieving large profits...' and *Vivoleum* (2007), 'a new renewable fuel sourced from the [corpses of] victims of climate change' and the recycling of human waste to produce hamburgers.⁶⁸ Aside from being absurd products and services, the performances, presented to academic or corporate groups in deadpan and slick presentations, assume a surreal yet serious political edge. Elaborate props, such as the *SurvivaBall* (2006) marketed to Halliburton to protect managers from the effects of sudden climate change, are reminiscent of Dada puppetry.

The Yes Men pranks operate on the edge of legality, but they are carefully orchestrated with the intention of avoiding litigation. However, the fallout of one of their pranks caused actual fiscal harm. In 2004 the Yes Men impersonated the Dow Chemical Company by setting up a fake website: DowEthics.com. The BBC contacted them, asking for a representative to comment on the twentieth anniversary of the world's worst industrial accident: the Bhopal disaster (1984). Over half a million workers were exposed to dangerous gases and chemicals in Bhopal (India) with thousands of deaths and long-term injuries. Worse still, the ground and water supplies were contaminated – reportedly causing a further one death per day. The company that owned the plant, Union Carbide (purchased by Dow in 2001), refused to accept responsibility, instead settling out of court for \$470 million dollars, which equates to \$500, or one year's medical care, per surviving victim. A Dow spokesperson subsequently called the amount of compensation 'plenty good for an Indian'. Posing as a Dow representative, Andy Bichlbaum (one half of the Yes Men), announced live on BBC News 24 that:

Dow will accept full responsibility for the Bhopal disaster, and has a \$12 billion dollar plan to compensate the victims and remediate the site. (Dow will raise the

\$12 billion by liquidating Union Carbide, which cost them that much to acquire.) Also, to provide a sense of closure to the victims, Dow will push for the extradition of Warren Anderson, former Union Carbide CEO, to India, which he fled following his arrest 20 years ago on multiple homicide charges.⁶⁹

Dow stock subsequently plummeted by two million dollars and the company was forced to announce that they would not, in fact, be paying any compensation. A prank that can affect share value differs little from violence against property and in this regard the action should be considered militant. Next, the Yes Men issued the following statement, clarifying ‘Dow’s’ position:

Dow will NOT commit ANY funds to compensate and treat 120,000 Bhopal residents who require lifelong care.... Dow will NOT remediate (clean up) the Bhopal plant site.... Dow's sole and unique responsibility is to its shareholders, and Dow CANNOT do anything that goes against its bottom line unless forced to by law.⁷⁰

The Yes Men humiliate, mock, and name and shame in order to expose contradictions and flaws in free market capitalism. They do not call themselves artists, but they clearly employ Situationist tactics, such as *détournement*, and one half of the duo, Igor Vamos (who works under the pseudonym ‘Mike Bonanno’), has an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of California. Voina, Etcétera and the Yes Men all produce challenging, politically committed works that sit on the boundary of art and activism, which challenges traditional definitions of art. I have chosen these three collectives for this reason and because they have all recently won major contemporary art prizes.⁷¹ To my mind there is little doubt that these art activists qualify as contemporary examples that follow the politically committed tradition of neo-avant-gardism set by groups such as Black Mask, Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and King Mob.

Conclusion

Let us return to Bürger’s assessment of the neo-avant-garde. In 2010 he attempted to answer some of the criticisms of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (English translation 2011). In section five,

‘The Debate over the Neo-Avant-Garde’, he provides a succinct summary of his original condemnation of the neo-avant-garde from 1974:

The argument of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* runs as follows: the neo-avant-gardes adopted the means by which avant-gardists hoped to bring about the sublation of art. As these means had, in the interim, been accepted by the institution, that is to say, were deployed as internal aesthetic procedures, they could no longer legitimately be linked to a claim to transcend the sphere of art.⁷²

This summary of Bürger’s misgivings with the neo-avant-garde differs from his original point which stated that, ‘The neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-garde intentions’.⁷³ So which is it? Have the means of the historical avant-garde been institutionalised in an interim period (before the neo-avant-garde came into existence), or is it the neo-avant-garde itself that institutionalises the historical avant-garde as art? That is to say, is the neo-avant-garde, in Bürger’s eyes, to blame or is it a victim of circumstances? This point raises questions regarding whether we are to assess a kind of movement that Bürger has identified, or whether we are to assess a theory, against which we can pit counterexamples. I will address these two positions in turn.

If we accept that the neo-avant-garde was a movement characterised by Bürger – who decided which artists were to be included and excluded – we might accept his assessment: *that it was the neo-avant-garde itself that institutionalised the avant-garde as art*. Still, does this necessarily prohibit other artists from successfully continuing the avant-garde project? Can we not propose that there are different kinds of neo-avant-gardes, overlooked by Bürger, that are capable of institutional critique and praxis? The art collectives that I have described in this article cannot be said to institutionalise the avant-garde as art. Neither their intentions nor their actions institutionalise avant-garde objectives. On the contrary, they instigate institutional critic – sometimes even attacking art institutions. In this case my contention with Bürger’s theory is sustained: his understanding of the neo-avant-garde is incomplete because he is unaware of the more radical and successful instances. This brings us back to Grindon’s ‘other

neo-Dada’ – that we might characterise as an ‘other neo-avant-garde’ – and to my point that Bürger is looking in the wrong place for politically committed artists who take up the mantle of the historical avant-garde.

In this first instance, Bürger’s dismissal of the neo-avant-garde is based on a narrow conception of what constitutes the neo-avant-garde. I have argued throughout this paper that there are ‘other neo-avant-gardes’ that Bürger has overlooked: neo-avant-gardes that succeeded in merging art and life, that did have real social effects, beyond the art world. Bürger directly responds to accusations that he has a limited awareness of more radical practices. For example, Buchloh’s allegation that he lacks knowledge of ‘1960s progressive art’ is swiftly disregarded as ‘casually dismissive’.⁷⁴ Bürger tells us that, as he wrote a theory (not a history) of the avant-garde (including the neo-avant-garde), he answers to ‘different criteria’. He does not state what these criteria are, but invokes Adorno (without citation) who apparently said that ‘first-rate aesthetic theory could be developed at a great distance from the work as well as in close proximity’.⁷⁵ For me, this is at least equally ‘casually dismissive’.

Alternatively, we could read Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* as just that, a theory. Bürger’s clarification from 2010 is clear, before the neo-avant-garde even tried to ‘transcend the sphere of art’ it was doomed to fail because the means adopted by the historical avant-gardes had already been institutionalised. So here, for Bürger, all ‘neo-avant-gardes’ (all attempts to resurrect the avant-garde project) are futile. This thesis can therefore be disproved if we can find an example of a radical, politically committed neo-avant-garde capable of institutional critique and, in Bürger’s own words, subsuming art and life – by having social effects in the ‘real world’ outside of art, for example. This paper has put forward several such examples. My contention with Bürger’s theory is sustained in this second instance in a parallel manner to the first – through counter-examples – only in this case rather than proposing an

‘other neo-avant-garde’ the examples serve to disprove the theory that the neo-avant-garde is necessarily a toothless version of its historical antecedent.

Bürger, however, is unperturbed by such counter-examples and he is happy to concede that there are examples of art, of which he is (or was) unaware, that are ‘not covered’ by his theory:

I am happy to concede that not all artists who have endeavoured to resume the program of the avant-garde are covered by my polemically constructed concept of the neo-avant-garde (as Beuys essay tries to show). Whether there are more artists who elude my verdict is not a theoretical question, but a question of evaluating the artistic work.⁷⁶

This paper contends that neo-avant-garde practices *per se* cannot ‘be linked to a claim to transcend the sphere of art’ asserting that there are indeed more examples from the 1960s, and from today, that do exactly what Bürger claims they are incapable of doing. This goes beyond ‘a question of evaluating artwork’ to reveal a serious hole in Bürger’s theory. Bürger fails to acknowledge the neo-avant-garde examples from the 1960s and ‘70s laid out in this paper, even in his 2010 defence of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* in which he gives attention only to the kinds of neo-avant-garde examples proposed by Foster and Buchloh that I have described above. A theory that is unaware of counter-examples that are capable of invalidating the theory is incomplete, to say the least.

Bürger calls for a clearer distinction between ‘unconscious repetition and conscious resumption’ of the avant-garde project.⁷⁷ This appears at odds with his call to ignore intentions and focus on actions of neo-avant-garde artists – or ‘the status of their products’. Black Mask, UAW/MF and King Mob made performances, outside of the gallery system, that provoked the public and art institutions. Voina, Etcétera, and the Yes Men are contemporary collectives that have all made interventions into everyday life that have been acknowledged by the police and the media. Whether these examples are an ‘other neo-avant-garde’ beyond Bürger’s awareness (which he would accuse of unconscious repetition), or whether they are a continuation of the

avant-garde project (a resumption) makes little difference: either way, they raise questions that Bürger's theory is unable to answer.

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Notes

¹ In *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1939), Greenberg cites artists such as Picasso, Kandinsky, Klee, Cézanne or Mondrian as avant-garde. He later refers to Abstract Expressionism as a post-war avant-garde. This is most definitely *not* what I mean by the neo-avant-garde.

² Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [Theorie der Avantgarde], trans. Michael Shaw, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): 109, note 4.

³ Ibid., 58.

⁴ Hal Foster, 'What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?' *October*, no. 70 (1994): 11.

⁵ David Hopkins, ed. *Neo-Avant-Garde*, Avant-Garde Critical Studies (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006): 2.

⁶ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*: 61.

⁷ Foster, 'What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?': 14.

⁸ 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?', in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1996); Benjamin. H. D. Buchloh, 'Theorizing the Avant-Garde,' *Art in America*, November 1984; *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture*

Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975 (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 2000).

⁹ Foster, 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?': 29.

¹⁰ Benjamin. H. D. Buchloh, 'The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde' *October*, no. 37 (1986): 45.

¹¹ Gavin Grindon, 'Surrealism, Dada, and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde' *The Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 1 (2011): 95. There is no mention of these 'other neo-Dada' groups in Hopkins' compendium of the neo-avant-garde.

¹² *Ibid.*, 96.

¹³ Ron Hahne and Ben Morea, eds., *Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group* (Oakland CA: PM Press, 2011). This publication made materials previously published by Unpopular Books (1993) more widely and readily available.

¹⁴ Chris Gray, Dr. Zoidberg, and The Daybreak Collective, 'Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Story of a Small, Underground 1960s Revolutionary Group in New York City' (2001).

¹⁵ Tom Vague, *King Mob Echo: From 1780 Gordon Riots to Situationists, Sex Pistols and Beyond: Incomplete Works of King Mob, with Illustrations, in Two Volumes* (London: Dark Star, 2000).

¹⁶ Hari Kunzru, 'The Mob Who Shouldn't Really Be Here,' *Tate Etc.*, Summer 2008. Available: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/mob-who-shouldnt-really-be-here>. [Accessed 24 January 2016]

¹⁷ David Wise and Stuart Wise, 'A Hidden History of King Mob (Posters/Cartoons),' <http://www.revoltagainstplenty.com/index.php/archive-local/128-a-hidden-history-of-king-mob-posterscartoons.html> [Accessed 24 January 2016].

¹⁸ David Wise, 'A Critical Hidden History of King Mob,' <http://www.revoltagainstplenty.com/index.php/archive-local/93-a-hidden-history-of-king-mob.html>. [Accessed 24 January 2016]; *King Mob: A Critical Hidden History* (Unknown: Bread and Circuses Publishing, 2014).

¹⁹ The exhibition entitled 'If I Can't Dance to it, it's not my Revolution' (March-May 2014) was curated by Natalie Musteata at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford USA. See: Nadja Milner-Larsen, 'Black Mask: Revolution as Being,' (2014), <http://exhibits.haverford.edu/ificantdancetoit/essays/black-mask-revolution-as-being/>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

²⁰ The exception is Hari Kunzru's article. Stewart Home's book *The Assault on Culture* (1988) does refer to all three of these groups. Chapter 12 briefly mentions Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and Chapter 15 references David and Stuart Wise in his assessment of the influence that Situationism had on Punk. However, these groups are peripheral to the book's main themes and the references are only in passing – there is no analysis.

²¹ I acknowledge that Ben Morea and Ron Hahne were both members of Aldo Tambellini's "Group Center". While this was an art group it sought to display art from outside the mainstream. The fact that Morea and Hahne were members of an art collective (that was not gang affiliated) does not change the fact that Morea did not attend art school, but from the age of ten grew up among black and Puerto Rican street gangs in New York as they explain themselves:

The two original animators of the group, Ron Hahne and Ben Morea, came straight from the streets, not middle class dropouts. Morea had been mixed up with the delinquent street gangs, been on H and done a stretch In Sing-Sing

before he turned to painting and discovered the Futurists. Gray, Dr. Zoidberg, and The Daybreak Collective, 'Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Story of a Small, Underground 1960s Revolutionary Group in New York City' (2001): 2.

²² Hahne and Morea, *Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*: 4.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Vague, *King Mob Echo: From 1780 Gordon Riots to Situationists, Sex Pistols and Beyond: Incomplete Works of King Mob, with Illustrations, in Two Volumes*: 104. First published in King Mob Echo 3 in 1969 these stories about Marinetti evolve into pure fantasy.

²⁵ Hahne and Morea, *Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*: 153.

²⁶ Ibid., 154.

²⁷ Gray, Dr. Zoidberg, and The Daybreak Collective, 'Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Story of a Small, Underground 1960s Revolutionary Group in New York City' (2001): 2.

²⁸ Hahne and Morea, *Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*: 157.

²⁹ Ibid., 80.

³⁰ Early UAW/MF members included those from Black Mask plus John Sundstrom, Alan Hoffman, Alan Phillips and Herbert Marcuse's stepson Tom Newmann.

³¹ Original footage and discussions regarding the action can be seen on YouTube here: Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, 'Garbage,' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDic0pFoZh4>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

³² Hahne and Morea, *Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*: 80.

³³ The original press release and wall texts can be seen online: MoMA, 'Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage,' news release, 1968,

https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/4009/releases/MOMA_1968_Jan-June_0026_26.pdf?2010. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

³⁴ Gray, Dr. Zoidberg, and The Daybreak Collective, 'Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Story of a Small, Underground 1960s Revolutionary Group in New York City' (2001): 8.

³⁵ Hahne and Morea, *Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group*: 164.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Kunzru, 'The Mob Who Shouldn't Really Be Here.'

³⁸ Timothy Scott Brown, 'The Sixties in the City: Avant-Gardes and Urban Rebels in New York, London, and West Berlin' *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 4 (2013): 833; Kunzru, 'The Mob Who Shouldn't Really Be Here.'

³⁹ Brown, 'The Sixties in the City: Avant-Gardes and Urban Rebels in New York, London, and West Berlin': 832.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 823; Kunzru, 'The Mob Who Shouldn't Really Be Here.'

⁴¹ 'The Mob Who Shouldn't Really Be Here.'

⁴² Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011): 405; Sam Cooper, 'The Peculiar Romanticism of the English Situationists' *The Cambridge Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2013): 25.

⁴³ The Tate Gallery would later purchase the same posters.

⁴⁴ The Emilia-Romagna Regional Government (Italy), in collaboration with LaRete Art Projects and La Pillola, created the biennial award in 2010. Pablo Helguera won the inaugural prize in 2011. e-flux, 'Etcetera Wins the International Award for Participatory Art,' *e-flux* (2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/etcetera-wins-the-2013-award/>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

⁴⁵ At the Tate conference, Etcétera spoke of how the prize money enabled them realise their ambitions to travel and network in Europe.

⁴⁶ e-flux reviewed the group when they won the International Prize for Participatory Art (see footnote 43). The only scholarly work on the group that I have found is: Ana Longoni, 'Crossroads for Activist Art in Argentina' *Third Text* 22, no. 5 (2008). Since 2005 the group has dedicated its time to the *Internacional Errorista* movement that it co-founded.

⁴⁷ H.I.J.O.S. – *Hijos por la Indentidad y la Justicia contra el Olvidado y el Silencio* – Sons and daughters for identification and justice for the forgotten and silenced (my translation). *Mierdazo* can be translated literally from Spanish as 'big shit'. It has been referred to descriptively as 'poop attack' but I feel that 'shit storm' is more appropriate.

⁴⁸ Gray, Dr. Zoidberg, and The Daybreak Collective, 'Black Mask & up against the Wall Motherfucker: The Story of a Small, Underground 1960s Revolutionary Group in New York City' (2001): 8.

⁴⁹ Robert Klanten et al., eds., *Art & Agenda: Political Art and Activism* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2011): 146; Nato Thompson, ed. *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, Illustrated ed. (New York; Cambridge MA: Creative Time Books; MIT Press, 2012): 242. The entries in *Art & Agenda* and *Living as Form* both state that Voina were formed in 2007. Oliver Johnson, who has corresponded with Voina and translated many texts from the original Russian claims they were founded in 2005, see: Oliver Johnson, 'War on the Ru-Net' *Third Text* 27, no. 5 (2013): 591. The period between 2005, when Vorotnikov met Sokol, and 2007, when Voina first started their actions, has been referred to as their clandestine training period: Free Voina, 'What Is Voina?,' <http://en.free-voina.org/about>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*: 242.

⁵¹ Klanten et al., *Art & Agenda: Political Art and Activism*: 146. In November 2015 Voina reported that Leonid Nikolaev (Leonid Nikolayev) had died on 22 September 2015 at 31. See: <http://en.free-voina.org/> [Accessed 17 January 2016].

⁵² Alexei Plutser-Sarno, 'The Voina Art-Group («War»). Actions 2006-2012.' In *Plucer live journal*, 2012. <http://plucer.livejournal.com/266853.html> [Accessed 24 January 2016].

⁵³ ARTINFO, 'Police-Baiting Penis Graffiti by Radical Voina Collective Wins \$14k Russian "Innovation" Prize,' <http://uk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/37437/police-baiting-penis-graffiti-by-radical-voina-collective-wins-14k-russian-innovation-prize>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

⁵⁴ Tom Parfitt, 'Banksy Pledges £80,000 to Russian Radical Art Group Voina,' *Guardian*, Sunday 12 December 2010. The BBC report that the figure was even higher, at £90,000 BBC, 'Banksy Supports Voina, Controversial Russian Art Group,' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11982984>. [Accessed 2 May 2016].

⁵⁵ ARTINFO, 'Russia Places Voina Member on International Wanted List,' *BLOUIN ARTINFO* (2011), <http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2011/07/22/russia-places-voina-member-on-international-wanted-list/>. [Accessed 2 May 2016].

⁵⁶ Voina, '7th Berlin Biennale: Statement by Voina,' <http://en.free-voina.org/post/22267051835>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Free Voina, 'Oleg Released!,' <http://en.free-voina.org/post/94522307001>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].

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- ⁵⁹ Russia Today, 'Bucket Head Attacks a Vip Car on Kremlin Quay,' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWtQDz-WIUM&feature=player_embedded. [Accessed 24 January 2016].
- ⁶⁰ Johnson, 'War on the Ru-Net': 591.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 606.
- ⁶² Gene Ray, 'Art Schools Burning & Other Songs of Love and War' *Left Curve*, no. 30 (2006).
- ⁶³ Andrew Griffin, 'Paris Attack: Anonymous Launches 'Biggest Operation Ever' against Isis,' *Independent* 2015.
- ⁶⁴ Situationist International, 'Definitions,' in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006): 52.
- ⁶⁵ Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog, 2005).
- ⁶⁶ Christine Harold, 'Pranking Rhetoric: "Culture Jamming" as Media Activism' *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 189; Jennifer A Sandlin and Jennifer M Milam, 'Mixing Pop (Culture) and Politics: Cultural Resistance, Culture Jamming, and Anti-Consumption Activism as Critical Public Pedagogy' *Curriculum Inquiry* 38, no. 3 (2008): 323.
- ⁶⁷ The Yes Men, <http://theyesmen.org/>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].
- ⁶⁸ Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*: 254.
- ⁶⁹ The Yes Men, 'Dow Does the Right Thing,' <http://theyesmen.org/hijinks/bbcbhopal>. [Accessed 24 January 2016].
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ The Yes Men, The Leonore Annenberg Prize for Art and Social Change (2009); Voina, the Ministry of Culture and the National Center for Contemporary Art's 'Innovation award' (2011); Etcétera, International Award for Participatory Art (2013).
- ⁷² Peter Bürger, 'Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*' *New Literary History*, no. 41 (2011): 707.
- ⁷³ *Theory of the Avant-Garde*: 58.
- ⁷⁴ 'Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*': 707.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 713.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 710.

Diverging Collectives: Artist-Run Spaces versus Warehouse Shows

Comparative models of art production and cooperation among young British artists

Diego Mantoan

Abstract

The paper addresses the case of artist-run spaces and warehouse shows in the United Kingdom between the 1980s and 1990s, a time when autonomous group shows and independent artist collectives sprawled particularly thanks to the engagement of a new generation of artists, among whom were found later celebrities such as Damien Hirst and Douglas Gordon. It will be argued that both artist-run spaces and warehouse shows were feasible solutions for young authors against art market barriers and economic crisis, although they held structural and organisational differences that would affect aesthetic outcomes and present art history with a shift in the model of the art collective.

1. A Tale of Two Cities and their Artists

The increasing centrality of exhibitions in the late twentieth century – particularly group shows and solo retrospectives intended as a principal tool to display an artist's oeuvre – have had a lasting impact on the way practitioners understand artistic production and cooperation.¹ As far as early-career artists today are concerned, participating in a collective show or joining an artist-run space has come to offer a unique opportunity to share creative dialogue with their peers; offering mutual support and pooling chances of a breakthrough.

Still in art school during the 1980s, a whole generation of UK artists indeed resorted to organising independent exhibitions or running a communal venue as tools against art market

barriers and the lingering British economic crisis.² Although it probably did not revolutionise art history, the ways they found to cooperate brought about a shift in the way today's art collectives operate. It particularly affected the practice of cultural production, presenting aspiring artists with feasible answers to the dire circumstances of their career outset. The crucial role of autonomous shows or independent venues as a means to foster communal chances of early recognition can hardly be denied. However, it is important to attempt to pinpoint constitutional differences between the various forms and organisations of artist collectives, typologies which can be well observed in the late twentieth century UK.

Two main types of artistic cooperation will be considered, namely warehouse shows and artist-run spaces. The geographic extent and high number of artist-initiated projects or venues in the UK during this period suggest that they were in fact a common and effective means of exhibition. Their main use was apparently contrasting the market-driven art system, which was perceived to have stopped offering opportunities to aspiring artists due to a prolonged crisis.³ Although warehouse shows and artist-run spaces blossomed simultaneously, the two forms of cultural production differ from one another in temporal scope, specific objectives and cooperative practices. To elucidate this, a set of diverging examples will be analysed. The specific cases examined have the wider relevance of having paved the way for the emergence of a new generation of practitioners commonly referred to as the Young British Artists (YBAs).⁴

The temporal scope of the research only covers the years 1988 to 1992, because the events taking place during this short period were later proved ground-breaking in terms of the development of successful strategies for overcoming entry barriers to the local art system. The geographic scope is concentrated on the cases of London and Glasgow, the latter having risen to prominence as the only true counterpart to the English capital's art scene according to several

commentators.⁵ With respects to London, the centre of attention is the group of Goldsmiths graduates revolving around the art celebrity Damien Hirst, whilst the Scottish city's climax is represented by the independent gallery Transmission, led amongst others by future Turner Prize winner Douglas Gordon.

Utilising a variety of sources from this period – including exhibition catalogues and specialised magazines, reviews and interviews, a rich art historical bibliography as well as artist papers – the paper will follow the initiation and growth of warehouse shows in London, and the concurrent rise of artist-run venues in Glasgow, as well as in Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Belfast. The genesis and subsequent effects of these two experiences will be explored with regard to their inner dynamics, exterior appearance and impact on artistic practices. In fact, a divergent response to similar challenges may confirm the proposed diversity of organisational approach and artistic production, further suggesting a structural difference between warehouse shows and artist-run spaces.

2. The 'Mother' of Warehouse Shows

London is presently amongst the most prominent cities within the international art world and can be said to dominate the art scene of the entire European continent, as far as the art market is concerned.⁶ Looking back to the 1980s however, the English capital was then somewhat marginal and parochial as far as the contemporary art scene was concerned. Secluded from the strong axis that connected New York to Cologne, young art students and aspiring artists of the time could look at just a few landmark institutions in their city to catch up with international trends. Amongst those were Anthony d'Offay and Nicholas Logsdail, the latter patron of Lisson Gallery, who had established themselves as leading London dealers for over two decades and

were associated with edgy or sophisticated styles, such as minimalism and conceptual art.⁷ By the late 1980s, in their respective galleries, they would house exhibitions showcasing international art stars such as Gerhard Richter or home-grown celebrities like Julian Opie, although with a rather traditional mode of display.⁸

A completely different approach to the exhibition of contemporary art was provided by the Saatchi Gallery, planted in the elegant borough of Saint John's Wood, and which represented an early attempt to reconvert an industrial building into an art facility. This venue was all about the character of advertisement tycoon Charles Saatchi, acting simultaneously as an engaged private collector and a determined art dealer, who used to buy everything he liked in a bulk and then tenaciously promoted his own artists stable as an investment.

Towards the end of the 1980s he had abandoned any enthusiasm for neo-expressionist painters and shifted towards provocative though blue chip American artists, disclosing his new collection in a two-part exhibition organised between 1987 and 1988. NY Art Now introduced the British audience especially to the works of Jeff Koons, which would have an indelible impact on a whole generation of London art students and young graduates.⁹ In the eyes of aspiring artists, the Saatchi Gallery thus reached a point of innovation and sophistication any other British institution could just dream of. Two decades later Damien Hirst himself remembered with colourful language the genuine shock effect that these exhibitions and the enormous space provoked in him, as it proved suitable for sensational installations, completely disrupting the equilibrium of a dull local art scene:

Saatchi was just there at the perfect point with a huge fucking space. [...] And then Saatchi did the New York Show. I remember walking in and going, "Hey, my eyes!" The whiteness of it! It just blew me away. And it was so not British. And that just totally inspired all the students. We wanted to show at the Saatchi Gallery immediately. And then we started making work really to fit in there. And that's when I realized we wouldn't fit into the art world the way it was. So I just went and got a warehouse, and we did that show.¹⁰

Hirst states that the direct impact of Saatchi's new gallery drove him towards the organisation of Freeze in the Summer of 1988, the first warehouse show ever to be held in London's Surrey Docks. Indeed, many aspiring artists suddenly hoped to attract the tycoon's attention, so for instance by mimicking his exhibition space or by deliberately adapting to the style of the works he seemed to like.¹¹ The influence this venue and the collector's recent artistic choices had on young art students can hardly be overstated. Indeed, various observers such as the curator and critic Gregor Muir, who was in art school at the time, confirm this impression:

It would be difficult to underestimate the impact of the Saatchi Gallery and its effect on all those who attended exhibitions such as NY Art Now [...]. The Saatchi Gallery was everything that the boring institutions were not. It provided an excellent space for the display of fresh talent while being so awesome that it literally took your breath away.¹²

The kind of work presented and its peculiar mode of display in this huge space inspired especially Goldsmiths students, who had been encouraged by teachers like Jon Thompson and Michael Craig-Martin to abandon medium specificity, instead advocating a revised version of conceptual art. Jeff Koons' works displayed for NY Art Now, like the basketballs floating in a vitrine (*Three Ball Total Equilibrium Tank*, 1985), were in fact the incarnation of these principles, looking minimal and cool, provocative and irresistible. Such works taught young practitioners like Hirst the relevance of a dramatic presentation, considered as both an artistic value and an effective way of self-promotion, as he expressed in his own words later on:

I remember realising that you can't just have a studio and paint, and put the paintings in a corner and wait to be discovered. [...] And I just wanted things that were irresistible, things that you couldn't ignore, that you couldn't avoid and you couldn't challenge. [...] Saatchi was doing that in advertising, I remember thinking, 'I want to make art that does what that does'. [...] Once the gallery had opened, I was making art for there.¹³

Indeed, the second part of NY Art Now had not yet closed when three Goldsmiths students set out to imitate the trends and reproduce the display circumstances seen at Saatchi's exhibition. In early 1988 Damien Hirst encountered Angus Fairhurst and Abigail Lane at an autonomously

organised group show called Progress by Degree. It was organised in the rooms of Bloomsbury Gallery, a few yards off Russell Square, where they showed early works together with college peer Mat Collishaw.¹⁴ After this experience the trio set out to plan a much more structured event for the summer, which they wanted to be a truly professional group show with marketing efforts eventually exceeding the attempt to achieve a unitary curatorial approach.¹⁵ News that the three bachelor students intended to curate an independent group exhibition, soon after the pretty successful Goldsmiths graduate show,¹⁶ caused rumours about the prospective contributors, as well as broad press and art world interest in the chosen venue, a disused London Port Authority building on Surrey Docks.¹⁷ Titled Freeze,¹⁸ Hirst's activity proved essential in organising this ambitious three-part exhibition: he provided curatorial guidelines, chose the participating artists, suggested the works to display, found the venue and secured a small endowment from the London Docklands Development Corporation.¹⁹ Thanks to the sponsorship agreement the young students could afford the venue for two months, restore the inner spaces, mount the three shows, send out invitations and produce a stylish catalogue.

From 6 August to 29 September 1988 about twenty Goldsmiths matriculates and graduates displayed their works in three separate groups,²⁰ after carefully painting and fitting the deserted warehouse, such that the installation would be reminiscent of the Saatchi Gallery. According to commentators, the result was rather brilliant with interiors resembling the aesthetics of a proper Kunsthalle [fig. 1], the catalogue edited in a smart and minimal design and the mailing list for the opening event audaciously drawn up from different London galleries.²¹ Working as a receptionist at the d'Offay Gallery, Hirst had gained a sufficient understanding of art system dynamics, thus being aware of proper organisational requirements for the success of an exhibition, beyond simply focussing on displayed works alone.²² In fact, the level of contributions was surprisingly good for a student show, yet it was the spatial quality of the

venue as well as the entire organisational dynamic that turned out to be absolutely unprecedented.



Fig. 1: Freeze, 1988, installation view with works of Simon Patterson on the rear and Angela Bulloch to the right. Surrey Docks, London.
[source: <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com>]

Even in the opinion of an unsympathetic critic such as art historian Julian Stallabrass, the success of Freeze was not mere luck, since the organisers had intentionally sought to mount a professional-looking exhibition with an impressive catalogue and to get people who mattered in the London art world to attend the opening.²³ Michael Craig-Martin providentially assisted the three curators throughout the organisation process and later attracted art heavyweights to the opening, amongst those the recently appointed Tate director Nicholas Serota and the ambitious German dealer Karsten Schubert.²⁴ In doing so he effectively contributed to the acceptance of this event and supported his pupils, realising artist-run-shows made a good strategy for aspiring artists, carving out an alternative space in the local art scene:

I had always tried to help my students in any way I could, particularly in those first years after art school. I knew from personal experience how difficult it was – I never had things come easy. I did the same with Damien [Hirst] and Freeze. I encouraged people to go and see the work. I would never have done this, if I hadn't

believed the show was of exceptional interest [...]. It amuses me that so many people think what happened was calculated and cleverly manipulated whereas in fact it was a combination of youthful bravado, innocence, fortunate timing, good luck, and, of course, good work.²⁵

Although visitors did not queue at the exhibition entrance, Freeze would later prove to be a crucial event for recent art history, which established new standards of practice and a particular care for display conditions amongst aspiring artists. As for the presented pieces, the influence in style and genre these students had been exposed to at Goldsmiths drove them towards a revised version of conceptual art that borrowed a lot from minimalism and sought to look cool or provocative.²⁶ Many works included in the show – such as Gary Hume's Door Paintings, Angela Bulloch's RGB light bulb installations or Simon Patterson's text pieces²⁷ already revealed some of the main features pivotal for the generation later labelled the YBAs.

Rather than confronting established styles like neo-expressionism, these young artists tried to catch up with emerging trends, further referencing mass media culture and heading for a shock-effect approach. At this stage, Hirst's curatorial leadership, albeit in constant discussion, had a strong impact on his peers. He took his curatorial role very seriously, setting tight aesthetic restrictions or advising his colleagues about pieces to show. Anya Gallaccio recalls the kind of direction and support provided by the Leeds-born artist, which helped her to adjust to the venue and find maturity in the work she proposed:

I was feeling pretty despondent, but then I started to work on Freeze with Damien [Hirst] and all of a sudden I had a space and a set of parameters, so I had another opportunity. [...] I was showing with Gary [Hume]'s paintings. And he was making door paintings and they hung very low, virtually on the floor. I knew that I couldn't make anything high that would interfere visually with what he'd done. The more restrictions Damien imposed, the clearer my choices became.²⁸

Despite the contributors' young ages, the reaction of the art system to this first warehouse show was rather enthusiastic. A lot of personalities dropped by to visit the venue, while most works

on display were sold and several exhibitors even found a dealer's representation.²⁹ Such an outcome emphasises the ambiguity of Freeze: originally conceived as an opportunity for outcasts, with a distinct oppositional character, it resulted in an attempt to get in touch with the London art establishment.³⁰ Except for Craig-Martin, Goldsmiths professors were overall struck by the promptness of some dealers in absorbing Freeze contributors, completely sidestepping the long and impoverished apprenticeship that young artists were expected to serve before gaining entrance to a commercial gallery.³¹

Indeed, critics argue that Freeze and later warehouse shows were far from rebellious, on the contrary they appeared to be rather system-friendly and quite conventional regarding the presented artworks.³² Although cleverly devised as entry strategies, it is important to note that such artist-run shows were, however, very risky. They could have destroyed any of newcomer's career ambitions, hence professional self confidence and bravery were needed to embark in such activities.³³ Furthermore, in the advent of 1989 recession, self-organisation became a last resort of material survival for young artists. Self-promotion and an entrepreneurial attitude were basic means to outlive the economic crisis. The only resource left was the real estate crash, which provided low cost venues initiating an era of artist-run spaces and warehouse shows in the UK.

3. Rebirth of an Artist-Run Space

The competitive and engaged spirit permeating London's art schools and students was rather at odds with the situation of aspiring artists in the rest of the UK. Far north in Glasgow, for instance, young people who wished to start a career in the visual arts were confronted with a city lacking any art market influence or structured institutions that could support them.³⁴

Hence, in order to survive they had to design quite different strategies and would resort uniquely to genuine group solidarity. The professional approach that Goldsmiths students had demonstrated with Freeze was a significant change in attitude that affected young artists around the UK. This rising tide even struck Glasgow, but artists there did not have access to a comparable infrastructure of media contacts or commercial galleries. Despite common social backgrounds and shared thematic issues, London-based and Glaswegian aspiring artists lived worlds apart.³⁵ The former were almost like entrepreneurs showcasing immediateness and a more opportunistic working ethos, the latter were rather scavengers, their work being more lyrical and reflective.³⁶

The most resourceful group among young Glaswegians turned out to be several graduates of the newly founded Environmental Art Department at Glasgow School of Art. Charismatic professor David Harding, who presided over the courses, had introduced them to the principles of public art, contextual engagement, visual democracy, performance and conceptualism.³⁷ His students were trained in reacting to their environment, trying to make art for non-institutional spaces that would instead speak even to non-expert viewers. Among the first group of department graduates were Christine Borland, Douglas Gordon, Craig Richardson and later also Martin Boyce, Katrina Brown, Roderick Buchanan, Nathan Coley and Elsie Mitchell. They had grown very affectionate and helpful to one another, thus deciding to embark on a joint venture to foster communal chances of survival and progressive emergence.

The artist-run Transmission gallery fulfilled exactly their purpose of giving a chance to the city's young artists, feeding an alternative art scene, apart from art market concerns.³⁸ The premises were opened in the early 1980s and modelled like Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery, in order to provide the Clydeside area with a venue for newer generation artists and overcome the lack of exhibition opportunities in Glasgow. Resembling a free association, Transmission

was open to all artists residing in the city for just a small entrance fee, while an elected board of directors was responsible for organising exhibitions and inviting outside artists. Interestingly the charter further compelled directors to drop out after serving two years, while the new committee members had to be younger than the previous ones, hence allowing constant renewal at the top.³⁹

On the occasion of Transmission's relocation to new premises on King Street, in the summer of 1989, the board was to be newly appointed and it was passed over to the first cohort of graduates of the Environmental Art Department, who even renovated the venue in Merchant City [fig. 2]. The link was made to Douglas Gordon and Craig Richardson, who still as students had staged an early performative work at Transmission in 1987.⁴⁰ The new board of directors consisted of Dave Allen, Christine Borland, Billy Clark, Douglas Gordon and Craig Richardson, although Martin Boyce, Katrina Brown, Roderick Buchanan and Elsie Mitchell were soon involved in the gallery activities. These young artists brought about a true change of direction, since they were convinced that Transmission should be used to approach the international art system, rather than remaining in the local or alternative art scene. In fact, they focused on works that would not normally find place in Scotland and carefully avoided the Glasgow-centred obsession of former committees. For this purpose they alternated group exhibitions of young graduates and invitations to older artists with an international scope, who agreed with visual democracy and public art.



Fig. 2: Transmission Gallery, 1989, interior with Douglas Gordon and another committee member refurbishing the space. Transmission Gallery, Glasgow.

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The six directors did not solely use the premises to show their own works or to exchange it with other artist-run spaces around the UK and Europe. Quite the contrary, they exploited the gallery as a chance to get in touch with established artists that could become mentors to the newer generation of Glaswegian artists.⁴¹ While serving on the Transmission board, Gordon, Borland and Richardson indeed approached several older Scottish artists of international renown, such as Alan Johnston and Thomas Lawson, plus an American art star like conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner. Later Turner Prize winner Richard Wright maintains that this committee intentionally used the venue to foster a new leading group in the city and progressively connecting Glasgow to the international art scene:

In the early '90s what really changed, when Douglas Gordon, Christine Borland and Dave Allen were involved, was that there was a much more conscious attempt to engage with an existing art world. [...] That was a really new thing, and I think the model of Transmission being an agent of attraction and a bridgehead into other situations is still in place.⁴²

Furthermore, the new Transmission team consciously tried to create a coherent grouping, both in attitude and possibly also in style, exploring upcoming trends that could appeal to an international audience. Thus the committee members learned to operate together providing mutual support, sharing the gallery as a communal studio and discussing each other's creations. One of the first exhibitions they planned on a joint basis was the Festival of Plagiarism in November 1989 [fig. 3]. Debates among directors immediately led to a studied decision to turn from the kind of neo-expressionism that had granted some fame to the so called New Glasgow Boys a few years earlier. Instead, they intended to follow what art magazines such as *Artforum*, *October*, *Art Monthly* and *Variant* were promoting, since group exhibitions like the widely criticised Magiciens de la Terre (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989) convinced them that future developments in the arts were drifting away from late modernism, in favour of neo-conceptual practices.⁴³ Christine Borland recalls the way they decided to manage Transmission, in order to disseminate these ideas and attitudes, as well as to overcome obstacles that lay in the way of young artists in a cast away city:

I think the Transmission Gallery is a key part, and it continues to be. It's a gallery, so of course it's structured, but really it's about empowerment of artists; they're working and curating shows, going abroad, having exhibitions, telling people about Transmission in Glasgow, asking people to come over – just spreading the wave, spreading the circle of friends wider and wider. No doubt about it, that's what's kept me going.⁴⁴



Fig. 3: Transmission Gallery, 1989, installation view of the Festival of Plagiarism. Transmission Gallery, Glasgow. © Studio lost but found / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016. Courtesy VG Bild-Kunst

Thomas Lawson, a well known Scottish artist and writer, and Nicola White, a respected curator who ran the important Glaswegian venue Tramway, were amazed by the achievements of the new gallery committee. They were particularly impressed by the competence, which characterised the young Transmission members, as well as by their ability to turn a small artist-run gallery into a showcase for the international art world, rather than clinging to the alternative scene.⁴⁵ Gordon, Borland and their peers were committed to build a strong network of relationships amongst the art world, which might in turn offer them new exhibition opportunities. At the climax of their systematic efforts they achieved the possibility to organise two group shows in relevant venues, which would finally draw attention on the so-called Transmission Generation. These were the group shows *Self Conscious State* at Third Eye Centre in Glasgow (1990), [fig. 4],⁴⁶ now housing the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), and *Guilt by Association* at the Modern Art Museum in Dublin (1992).⁴⁷ Richardson's comments on communal approach to artistic practice applied on these occasions reveal the differences between Glaswegians and their London counterparts:

In our case it was the presentation of what we would have termed post-conceptual art by young artists from Scotland that we wanted to address collectively. [...] In

the end the gallery became a type of studio, and the two-week installation period a time for investigation. [...] at the time in Glasgow artists' initiatives were continuing to grow in ambition and self critical success. The identity of a work is different when generated from within a self-generated group. All the competing ideas offered up by the artists in the group supply a context as dynamic as place or site. In this climate works completed and still-planned are always under discussion, responses requested and negotiated.⁴⁸

Borland confirms that they were particularly aware of examples that interested them, in order to find the right artistic current for a successful beginning:

I'd say that most of my friends or artists I hung around with were also working like this. I suppose earlier on we used the language of conceptual art and minimalism more self-consciously.⁴⁹

Apparently, young Goldsmiths students and those at the Glasgow Environmental Art Department rediscovered conceptual art practices simultaneously for almost the same reason, though with slightly different aims and particularly diverse approaches. Referencing a style that seemed post-conceptual and post-minimal was a conscious attempt to catch up with the latest global trends, since London was rather at the fringes of the contemporary art system at the time, Glasgow being completely off the map. In both cities, young artists understood that appropriation of these international paradigms was the best way out of periphery. For this reason, at a first glance, their early artistic production showed a sort of common aesthetic and ideological ground.⁵⁰



Fig.4: *Self Conscious State*, 1990, installation view with *List of Names* (1990) by Douglas Gordon to the right. Third Eye Centre (today Centre for Contemporary Arts), Glasgow. © Studio lost but found / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016. Courtesy VG Bild-Kunst

However, while young artists in London oriented their creative stances towards the primacy of the art market, in Glasgow such concerns were completely absent, which resulted in an essential difference between the two cities. Indeed, Glaswegians could resort only to group solidarity, whereas London's art system was well structured and could guarantee success to artists who gained access to local key players. As a consequence, the milieu of aspiring artists was highly competitive in the English capital and congregating with peers appeared to be rather aimed at one's individual interests, more than to create shared projects.⁵¹ Despite a comparable reference to conceptual art and minimalism, in London the target was meta-artistic, hence producing artworks that were generally self-referential and elitist, while in Glasgow social engagement was the main stance, as it would have been pointless to reference the underdeveloped local art system.

4. Warehouse Shows Spreading, Artist-Run Spaces Growing

While artists at Transmission were giving birth to a lively art community around the facility, which focused international interest on Glasgow, various Goldsmiths graduates and Freeze contributors engaged with a new series of warehouse shows that would stress the relevance of London's alternative scene as truly paramount. Indeed, the ferment stirred by events in the English capital between 1990 and 1992 served to the general advantage of an entire generation of newer artists in the UK.⁵² Recession was biting and dealers had picked only a few Freeze contributors, hence the majority of aspiring artists kept on producing their own shows to draw attention. To their advantage, however, they simply needed to replicate the process that had proved effective in summer 1988. In fact, all that was necessary to stage a warehouse show was finding an empty industrial building – which the Docklands were overabundant with at the time⁵³ – negotiate a free rental period, find a few thousand pounds to produce a stylish catalogue, put together some talented friends and send out invitations. This happened to be the exact method applied also to Building One (Peak Freans Factory in Bermondsey, 1990), curated by Hirst, Carl Freedman and Billee Sellman, and East Country Yard Show (South Docks, 1990) by Sarah Lucas and Henry Bond.

Building One became home to three separate group shows: Modern Medicine in March with Hirst still in the curatorial role, Gambler in July, and finally, Market in October, which really was a solo exhibition of Michael Landy. The Building One exhibitions repeated the success of Freeze eventually confirming the potential effectiveness of do-it-yourself shows and ordaining Hirst as a rising star in the local art scene.⁵⁴ For the first show he displayed some early *Medicine Cabinets* (1989-90), which were immediately bought in a bulk by Charles Saatchi and his wife Doris.⁵⁵ For Gambler the young Leeds artist dropped any curatorial ambition for good and engaged instead in his first spectacular animal installation addressing the lifecycle theme.⁵⁶ Titled *A Thousand Years* (1990), it was a large glass case divided in two adjoining parts, where breeding maggots turned into flies, which then entered the second compartment to feed

themselves over a rotting cow's head and finally died by electrocution. In seeing this installation, Saatchi is said to have stayed open mouthed and offered to fund Hirst's next animal installation, which would result in the famous pickled tiger shark called *The Impossibility Of Death In The Mind Of Someone Living* (1991).⁵⁷

In comparison, East Country Yard Show with almost sixty square meters for every exhibitor did not bring much appraisal to its initiator Sarah Lucas, although it counts today as one of the YBA's germinal moments.⁵⁸ Passing rather unnoticed, the latter group exhibition's fate proved that warehouse shows did not automatically lead to acceptance into the established art world. On the contrary, their true nature emerged: a quite fatiguing one-shot attempt, which might well miss the target. However, the stack of alternative events organised between 1988 and 1991 finally drew the attention of several experts and critics that progressively backed up this newer generation of artists. Sacha Cradock of *The Guardian*, Sarah Kent of *London Time Out* and Andrew Renton of the weekly review *Blitz* supported the emerging authors. Even columnists Kate Bush, David Batchelor and Adrian Searle on specialised magazines such as *Artscribe* and *Art Monthly* started to take a closer look at these self-initiated exhibitions. An authoritative example of positive critical reception is an article of summer 1990 by Andrew Graham-Dixon in *The Independent*:

Goldsmiths graduates are unembarrassed about promoting themselves and their work: some of the most striking exhibitions in London over the past few months – The East Country Yard Show, or Gambler, both staged in Docklands – have been independently organised and funded by Goldsmiths graduates as showcases for their work. This has given them a reputation for pushiness, yet it should also be said that in terms of ambition, attention to display and sheer bravado there has been little to match such shows in the country's established contemporary art institutions. They were far superior, for instance, to any of the contemporary art shows that have been staged by the Liverpool Tate in its own multi-million-pound dockland site.⁵⁹

Far beyond the influence of sporadic yet effective warehouse shows, as the 1990s recession started to hit hard, the true backbone of the rising art scene in the UK was instead characterised by artist-run spaces. Although several were founded in the previous decade, many more spread across the UK and assumed a crucial role for the survival of newer groups, especially when far off from London. Rather than mere exhibition spaces, such venues acted as catalyst for a thriving community, places of relative freedom, to exchange opinions, mature artistic practices and build a network of relationships. Besides Transmission, influential artist-run spaces of the time include the Collective and New 57 in Edinburgh, Catalyst Arts in Belfast, Locus+ in Newcastle upon Tyne and The International 3 in Manchester, while venues in London included City Racing, Clove near Butler's Wharf, Cubitt near King's Cross, Infanta of Castile, Matt's, Milch Gallery in Bloomsbury and Nosepaint (later Beaconsfield).

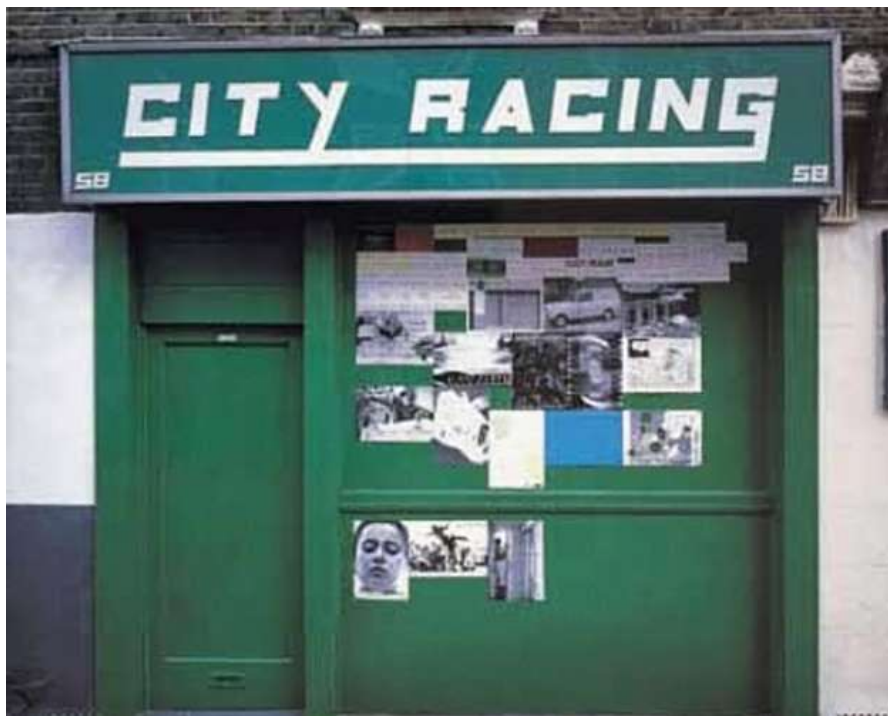


Fig.5: City Racing, 1993(?), front entrance. City Racing, London.
[source: <http://archivesoftheartistled.org/projects/city-racing>]

City Racing [fig. 5] is an interesting example to compare with Transmission, to evaluate the common logic of such alternative venues for rising artists. In fact, the former stayed active in the English capital from 1988 to 1998 housing a significant number of the first ever solo shows

for women artists such as Sarah Lucas, Fiona Banner and Gillian Wearing. Founded by Matt Hale, Paul Noble, John Burgess, Keith Coventry and Peter Owen, the venture was simply the result of their exclusion from available exhibition spaces, hence leading them to open their own premises in a former betting shop:

None of us would have even considered running a gallery on our own but as a collective we found the strength to do it. [...] That we did was because we created opportunities out of the little that we had – a bit like turning our cul-de-sacs into a roundabout!⁶⁰

In the first five years City Racing's founders fought hard to raise financial capital for the gallery activities, but in 1993 they managed to get City Council funding for another five. Started as a place to display their own unrecognized works, the venue resulted in a valuable asset to make durable relationships with local artists and cross-country links with similar ventures. Critic Stuart Morgan has cynically, though effectively, described the logic of artist-run spaces, which fed the alternative art scene or kick-started young artists' careers, when private galleries or public institutions gave them no chance at all:

Setting up as a curator to “curate” friends so that in due course they may “curate” you or you will be able to curate yourself into an exhibition you have curated. In retrospect these were all ways of trying to look like Mother Theresa whilst secretly wanting to be Anthony d'Offay.⁶¹

Following this pattern, City Racing got in touch with Transmission via Douglas Gordon and from 1992 onwards, the two galleries exchanged shows, as well as exhibitors.⁶² The basic difference between the two ventures, however, was their attitude towards such exchange-programs: indeed, they were constitutional for the Glaswegian artists, in order to systematically raise network capital, while their London counterparts embarked in this project accidentally and had Transmission as sole partner venue.⁶³



Fig.6: Milch Gallery, (1994), installation view with *Substance Sublimation Units* (1992) by Hamad Butt. Milch Gallery in Bloomsbury, London.
© free licence of GanMed64 on flickr

Again in 1992, another symbol of the London alternative scene would open up in new premises on Great Russell Street, this time feeding the city's underground milieu. Housing both an exhibition space on the first floor and a nightclub in the basement, Milch Gallery [fig. 6] had an ambiguous character, which was the direct result of its manager's own personality. A Canadian homosexual, Lawren Maben presented as an anarchist skinhead and funded his activities with rave and disco events for the gay-punk scene, as well as from occasional prostitution.⁶⁴ After being open for five months between 1989 and 1990, the little group show *A Modest Proposal* (1992),⁶⁵ featuring Simon Patterson and Douglas Gordon, celebrated its final reopening. The two artists displayed a collaborative installation composed of pyramids of paint buckets, grouped according to their colour family and named after British, Scottish and American dynasties, which experts considered one of the best London underground events of the year⁶⁶.

Several other rising artists later exhibited at Milch Gallery, such as twin sisters Jane and Louise Wilson, but soon after the premises were sadly shut down following the death of Maben in 1994. Despite the very short activity of this independent venue, its force and eccentricity in

supporting rising London artists was paramount at a time when warehouse shows appeared to have completely exhausted their effectiveness.⁶⁷ Indeed, the geographic extent and number of artist-initiated spaces in the UK around the year 1990 suggest they were last resorts in contrast to the market driven art system, which had by then stopped offering opportunities to the younger generation. Although they probably did not constitute a radically new departure in art history, artist-run spaces of the 1990s turned out to be crucial for the young British artists to start a collective path and engage with other like-minded communities around the UK and beyond.

5. A Direct Confrontation and Subsequent Conclusions

Almost prophetically, the first official issue of *Frieze* in September-October 1991, a very ambitious London-based magazine that gradually became a key player of today's international art world, provided a first comparison between rising artists in London and Glasgow. The pilot issue cover that summer had displayed a detail of Hirst's *Butterfly Paintings* (1991), immediately showing the editors would take the stance on the newer generations in the capital. The autumn edition instead offered wide coverage and several warm reviews for the comprehensive Glasgow group show *Windfall 91* (1991), organised by Transmission artists with several foreign contributors.⁶⁸ Indeed, it was the third station of a cross-national project, which linked various European artist-run initiatives, especially between the UK and Germany.⁶⁹ Led by Douglas Gordon, Martin Boyce and Nathan Coley, they occupied the former Seamen's Institute in Clydeside to host a few dozen young artists. As they were mostly Glasgow based, it turned out as a perfect opportunity to crystallise the energy of the new local art milieu.



Fig.7: Windfall 91, 1991, preparatory works for the group exhibition. Seamen's Institute, Glasgow.
© Studio lost but found / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016. Courtesy VG Bild-Kunst

Despite lacking a common theme, the general trend was informed by neo-conceptual practices and inclined to bypass the gallery system, rather focussing on dead spaces with no commercial purpose. The final result was a number of ideas and installations, rather than completed works, which could, however, effectively represent the unrest and vitality of young artists in Glasgow's rising alternative scene. Even though it emerged as a sort of warehouse show, Windfall 91 was instead the product of a proper artist-run gallery method, which gained much critical appraisal exactly because of this different attitude [fig. 7]. Frieze accorded seven full pages to the group show, including a long interview with the three artists who had curated the event, plus very encouraging opinions of several London dealers and critics. Windfall 91 was described as the Glasgow reaction to the independent initiatives in London of the previous year, namely the Building One exhibitions. The title of Matthew Slotover's leading article was interestingly *Northern Lights*, presenting Glaswegians as the true and only response to the thriving community of the English capital. Comments by James Hall of *The Independent* explicitly praised the Glaswegian approach, freed from art market concerns and much more sincere with

regards to team spirit. Andrew Cross of James Hockey Galleries also unmistakably eulogised the event:

What I liked about the Windfall project is that although the work individually may not have been the best pieces by each artist, the whole event had a freshness, a relaxed attitude which I found very positive. Dare I say it, in some of the most recent initiatives in London there has been an over-emphasis on presentation. Which there wasn't in this case. [...] Up there, there was a greater willingness to all work together.⁷⁰

Furthermore, critics did not seem to care that the rooms of the Seamen's Institute had been left almost in desolate conditions, which marked another difference with London's refurbished and whitewashed warehouse spaces [fig. 8]. This loose attitude towards the venue was in fact a studied decision to cut free from the kind of aesthetics that would recall a commercial gallery, as Douglas Gordon plainly explained:

We were encouraged by events like Building One and the East Country Yard Show, but at the same time, attention was placed on the spaces and the events more than the work. We wanted to get away from that by choosing a bland space.⁷¹



Fig.8: Windfall 91, 1991, installation view with works by Elsie Mitchell. Seamen's Institute, Glasgow. © Studio lost but found / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016. Courtesy VG Bild-Kunst

Even Stuart Morgan, writing for *Frieze*, appeared to like the Glaswegian approach, proving that in 1991 attentive critics had certainly noticed structural and aesthetic dissimilarities with

the London art scene, despite comparable social background and education.⁷² Taking artistic practices into consideration, in Glasgow conceptualism became part of a working method that connected various practitioners into a coherent grouping. Londoners, on the contrary, rather appeared to exploit conceptual art as a way to address trendy high art, hence without being ideologically affected by its methods. As regards the organisational model, autonomous galleries such as Transmission were based on a persistent and communal commitment from initiators, to build a stable point of attraction in the art system, often without paying heed to the art market. London warehouse shows, instead, were played as one-shot opportunities that directly referenced the local establishment and commercial galleries in an attempt to make an immediate big splash. Even beyond geographical limitations, such structural differences between warehouse shows and artist-run spaces necessarily had an effect on the time and efforts spent on artistic research. In fact, autonomous galleries all over the UK generally offered a more conducive environment for artistic research and maturing production due to a relative distance from commercial concerns. London's warehouse shows, on the other hand, were meant to instantly attract dealers and collectors that could foster the contributors' careers, though leaving little time for trial and error.

To understand this duality of attitudes and outcomes, evident in the opposition between London and Glasgow, warehouse shows and artist-run spaces should be brought back to their constitutional features. Indeed, the latter usually arose out of utter interdiction to structured art facilities. Hence, the best way to survive was to bring ideas and works out by keeping together among peers and building a network of international relationships that might later provide official endorsement. In London instead, even at the climax of economic crisis around 1990, there was a structured art market full of dealers and collectors – some parochial and conservative, other newer and cunning. In order to rise into prominence, young artists in the English capital needed to intercept these players thanks to impressive creations that would earn

them immediate public recognition. The fundamental difference between rising artists in London and Glasgow – as well between warehouse shows and artist-run spaces in general – appears then to be what these young practitioners were really looking for: in the first example they directly aimed at dealers and patrons to enter the local art market, while in the second instance they looked for mentors to approach the international art scene.

Despite all these differences, the previous examples have stressed the importance that both warehouse shows and artist-run spaces held for art historical developments in the UK between the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the various ways in which they affected art production by a newer generation of British artists. The years considered above in particular demonstrate an unprecedented burst of vitality and initiative from emerging practitioners across the country, led by a growing competence with regards to art system dynamics, which in turn granted a relative freedom to young artists, helping them to steer their career autonomously. Although different in aims and scope, organisation and outcome – one should not underestimate the relevance that these artist-run spaces and warehouse shows hold as models and catalysts of cooperative artistic practices for today's aspiring artists, as well as for future generations.

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at Venice Biennale, while he later established a career as art archive curator and developer in Germany, working among others for Douglas Gordon (Berlin), Julia Stoschek Collection (Düsseldorf) and Sigmar Polke Estate (Cologne). He is Journal Manager of the scientific magazine *Venezia Arti*, being further member of the scientific committee of Roger Loewig Gesellschaft (Berlin) and of the *Yearbook of Moving Image Studies* (Kiel). His most recently published *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Vernon Press, 2015), which entered the long-list of the Berger Prize 2016 awarded by *The British Art Journal*. In 2016 he has been among speakers at the Centennial of Kunsthalle Bern, as well as at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome.

Notes

¹ Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art. A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

² Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2006): 57.

³ Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 16.

⁴ Cfr. Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011).

⁵ Cfr. Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991).

⁶ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2006): 294-295.

⁷ Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 14-15.

⁸ Bruno S. Frey, *Arts & economics: analysis & cultural policy* (Berlin: Springer, 2000): 15.

⁹ Kate Bush, 'Young British Art: Kate Bush on the YBA sensation', in *ArtForum* (October, 2004).

¹⁰ Cit. Damien Hirst in Anthony Haden Guest, 'Damien Hirst – fresh from auctioning more than 200 pieces of his work', in *Interview Magazine* (December, 2008): 155.

¹¹ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2006): 57.

¹² Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 19.

¹³ Cit. Damien Hirst in Nicholas Serota, 'Nicholas Serota interviews Damien Hirst', in Anna Gallagher (ed.), *Damien Hirst* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012): 92.

¹⁴ On this occasion Damien Hirst displayed an early pan work titled *8 Pans* (1987), which displayed regular cooking pans of different sizes painted with household gloss in bright colours and hung up the wall in a line.

¹⁵ Kate Bush, 'Young British Art: Kate Bush on the YBA sensation', in *ArtForum* (October, 2004).

¹⁶ The traditional graduate exhibition at Goldsmiths, held in June 1988, drew remarkable attention for the first time in a number of years, since the press highlighted several surprisingly good creations on display. Furthermore, before the opening Craig-Martin had invited Karsten Schubert for a preview, who after assisting Nicholas Logsdail at Lisson Gallery had opened his own space in April 1987 and was gaining relevance day by day on the London art market. The German born dealer snapped up three young graduates who appeared most promising and offered them an exhibition later that year: they were two painters, Gary Hume and Ian Davenport, and the installation artist Michael Landy. Cfr. Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 18.

¹⁷ Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art. A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 54.

¹⁸ The name Freeze seems to refer to a type of salad, which Abigail Lane had once left on the kitchen table where the three students held regular meetings. However, it may also derive from the technical meaning of the term, understood as a still image, In fact, the piece by Mat Collishaw they intended to exhibit was truly a still frame from an autopsy seen in a medical encyclopaedia, which they thought might cause broad sensation. Cfr. Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 23.

¹⁹ Jeremy Cooper, *Growing up: the Young British Artists at 50* (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2012): 24.

²⁰ Among the contributors were graduates, such as Sarah Lucas and Anya Gallaccio, and several students who were finishing their Bachelors, for instance Fiona Rae, Angela Bulloch, Ian Davenport, Michael Landy and Gary Hume, while most were only at their second BA year as Damien Hirst, Angus Fairhurst, Abigail Lane, Mat Collishaw and Simon Patterson.

²¹ Francesco Bonami and Michele Robecchi, *Sarah Lucas* (Milan: Electa, 2007): 8.

²² Michael Craig Martin, 'Damian Hirst: The Early Years', in Anna Gallagher (ed.), *Damien Hirst* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012): 38.

²³ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2006): 53.

²⁴ Cfr. Michael Craig-Martin in Brian Sherwin, 'Interview with Michael Craig-Martin', in *Art Space Talk* (August, 2007).

²⁵ Cit. Michael Craig-Martin in Brian Sherwin, 'Interview with Michael Craig-Martin', in *Art Space Talk* (August, 2007).

²⁶ Following sources are useful to analyse the works by Freeze exhibitors:

Francesco Bonami and Michele Robecchi, *Sarah Lucas* (Milan: Electa, 2007): 8-9.

Jeremy Cooper, *Growing up: the Young British Artists at 50* (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2012): 25-26.

Rebecca Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 2-3.

Jessica Lack, 'Artist of the week no 1: Mat Collishaw', in *The Guardian* (23 July 2008).

Tom Morton, 'Definitely, Maybe', in *Frieze*, no. 98 (April, 2006).

Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 21-22.

Nicholas Serota, 'Nicholas Serota interviews Damien Hirst', in Anna Gallagher (ed.), *Damien Hirst* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012): 93.

Alastair Sooke, 'Gary Hume: the doors that unhinged the establishment', in *The Telegraph* (14 June 2008).

Leon Watson, 'Spot the difference: Damien Hirst painted only five of the 300 'spot paintings' in his latest collection', in *The Daily Mail* (13 January 2012).

²⁷ Gary Hume displayed *Mint Green Doors I-III* (1988), three pieces belonging to a series he had started that same year, which replicated the exact pattern of hospital doors and were painted in household gloss on medium density fibreboard. Hirst's then partner, Angela Bulloch participated with a light installation consisting of large coloured light bulbs stuck on the wall and lit at casual intervals that anticipated her *RGB Spheres Series* she would become famous for in the next decade. Besides some whitewashed canvasses named after celebrities – such as *John John* (1988) and *Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton* (1988) – Simon Patterson displayed a mural text piece titled *The Last Supper Arranged According to the Flat Back Four Formation (Jesus Christ in Goal)* (1988), which showed the apostles names written in typewriter typeface and organized as a football team. Cfr. Diego Mantoan, *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2015).

²⁸ Anya Gallaccio in Rebecca Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 2. Acting on site, in fact, introduced the young sculptor to a different set of variables and she eventually decided to pour a lead mould into a rectangular structure on the floor, which was then left to cool down naturally leaving a stirred and monochrome surface that resembled Jackson Pollock's dripping method. Cfr. Diego Mantoan, *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2015).

²⁹ Angela Bulloch found the support of Maureen Paley, the American founder of Interim Art Gallery, while German dealer Karsten Schubert picked Gary Hume, Michael Landy and Anya Gallaccio. The real big splash was made by painters Ian Davenport and Fiona Rae, who were chosen by a much more established and traditional gallery such as Waddington, eventually ending up as Turner Prize nominees in 1991.

³⁰ Kate Bush, 'Young British Art: Kate Bush on the YBA sensation', in *ArtForum* (October, 2004).

³¹ The teaching staff even felt obliged to summon a school assembly in the aftermath of Freeze, in order to reprimand students and persuade them an art career needed a long apprenticeship, rather than premature self-promotion. Cfr. Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 25.

³² Matthew Collings, *Blimey! From Bohemia to Britpop: the London artworld from Francis Bacon to Damien Hirst* (London: 21 Publishing Ltd): 31.

Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2006): 53.

³³ Michael Craig Martin, 'Damian Hirst: The Early Years', in Anna Gallagher (ed.), *Damien Hirst* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012): 39.

³⁴ Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 131.

³⁵ Family background and working attitude among art students across the nation can be said to have been analogous at the time, since higher education underwent the same demographic and structural transformation in the 1980s all over the UK. One may notice an enrolment boom throughout the decade, which led many women as well as working class students into art schools, while art education was gradually shifting towards non medium-specificity. Cfr. Diego Mantoan, *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2015).

³⁶ Charlotte Higgins, 'Glasgow's Turner connection. Why does Glasgow keep producing so many Turner prize winners? Could it be all down to this man?', in *The Guardian* (17 October 2011).

³⁷ Diego Mantoan, *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2015): 83-111.

³⁸ Following sources are useful to analyse the origin and development of Transmission: Thomas Lawson (ed.), *Guilt by Association* (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992). Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 117-139.

Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011): 133-156.

Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991).

³⁹ Cfr. Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991).

⁴⁰ Under the collective name of Puberty Institution, Gordon and Richardson were allowed to present the installation and enactment titled *Antehyperaesthesia* (1987), which exploited British performance art – for instance Stuart Brisley, Alistair MacLennan, Gilbert and George – and Italian arte povera, however playing on a kind of physical coldness that tried to shift nostalgic gloom towards meditation on illness and destitution. Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011): 146.

⁴¹ Cfr. Diego Mantoan, *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2015): 159.

⁴² Cit. Richard Wright in Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 138-139.

⁴³ Cit. Craig Richardson in Thomas Lawson (ed.), *Guilt by Association* (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 9.

⁴⁴ Cit. Christine Borland in Anne Barclay Morgan, 'Memorial for Anonymous: An Interview with Christine Borland', in *Sculpture Magazine*, Vol.18, No. 8 (October, 1999).

⁴⁵ Richard White in Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 118-119.

⁴⁶ Following sources are useful to analyse the group exhibition *Guilt by Association*: Thomas Lawson (ed.), *Guilt by Association* (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992). Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 150.

Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011): 156.

Ross Sinclair, 'Museum keys', in Douglas Gordon (ed.), *Déjà-vu: questions & answers. Volume 1. 1992-1996* (MARC, Paris). 40-43.

⁴⁷ Following sources are useful to analyse the group exhibition *Self Conscious State*: Graham Fagen, 'The exact vague history', in Douglas Gordon (ed.), *Déjà-vu: questions & answers. Volume 3. 1999-2000* (MARC, Paris): 75.

Rebecca Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 10-11.

(Harding, 2001a),

Thomas Lawson (ed.), *Guilt by Association* (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 9.

Thomas Lawson, 'Unrelating Jet Lag and Iron-Hard Jets', in Richard Cork, Rose Finn-Kelcey and Thomas Lawson, *The British Art Show 4* (London: The South Bank Centre, 1995): 57.

Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 140-141.

Stéphanie Moisdon-Trembley, 'Attraction-répulsion', in Douglas Gordon (ed.), *Déjà-vu: questions & answers. Volume 1. 1992-1996* (MARC, Paris): 121.

Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011): 148-149.

Simon Sheikh, 'Art is merely an excuse for communicating', in Douglas Gordon (ed.), *Déjà-vu: questions & answers. Volume 1. 1992-1996* (MARC, Paris): 16.

⁴⁸ Cit. Craig Richardson in Thomas Lawson (ed.), *Guilt by Association* (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 9.

⁴⁹ Cit. Christine Borland in Rebecca Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 11.

⁵⁰ Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011): 147.

⁵¹ Charlotte Higgins, 'Glasgow's Turner connection. Why does Glasgow keep producing so many Turner prize winners? Could it be all down to this man?', in *The Guardian* (17 October 2011).

⁵² Dan Fox, 'Then and Now, British Art and the 1990s', in *Frieze*, Issue 159 (November-December, 2013).

⁵³ Following source is useful to analyse the geographic and historic background of the warehouse shows in the former Docklands: <http://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/art-and-regeneration/art-empty-southwark-industrial-buildings/>.

⁵⁴ Dan Fox, 'Then and Now, British Art and the 1990s', in *Frieze*, Issue 159 (November-December, 2013).

⁵⁵ These are the first works Hirst declared to be ever content with and which directly referred to the particular installation mode of Jeff Koon's vitrine hoovers. They consist of small white cabinets – either open or shut in glass cases – with shelves full of various pharmaceutical bottles, boxes and containers placed in absolute random order to fit Hirst's own aesthetic choices. Serota, 2011, p.93

⁵⁶ Jamie Anderson, Martin Kupp and Jörg Reckhenrich, 'The Shark is Dead: How to Build Yourself a New Market', in *Business Strategy Review* (London: London Business School, Winter 2009): 42.

⁵⁷ Don Thompson, *The 12 Million Dollars Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art* (London: Aurum Press): 68-69.

⁵⁸ David Lillington, 'The East Country Yard Show', in *Time Out* (18 June 1990): 55.

⁵⁹ Andrew Graham-Dixon, 'The Midas Touch? Graduates of Goldsmiths School of Art dominate the current British art scene', in *The Independent* (31 July 1990): 13.

⁶⁰ Matt Hale, Paul Noble, John Burgess, Keith Coventry and Peter Owen, 2002, *City Racing: The Life and Times of an Artist-Run Gallery* (London: Black Dog Publishing): 1.

⁶¹ Stuart Morgan, *Art au Lait!*, in *Art Monthly*, No. 156 (May 1992).

⁶² The link was created through Gordon over some German friends from the *Windfall* Project that managed the *Galerie Gruppe Grün* in Bremen, where he had exhibited with Simon Patterson in 1992. Ross Sinclair and Roderick Buchanan then took over contacts with City Racing leading to a number of exchange shows which included Glaswegian artists such as Annette Heyer, Andrew Lockhart, Julie Roberts and Sinclair himself in early 1992, then Richard Wright in October 1992, Dave Allen and Buchanan in March 1994 and Jonathan Monk in 1996.

⁶³ Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 161.

⁶⁴ Diego Mantoan, *The Road To Parnassus. Artist Strategies in Contemporary Art* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2015): 264.

⁶⁵ Following sources are useful to analyse the group exhibition *A Modest Proposal*:

Kari J. Brandtzaeg, *Glasgow: A presentation of the art scene in the 90's* (Glasgow: ForArt). (Dingle, 2010),

Robert Dingle, 'Interview with Simon Patterson', in Robert Dingle (ed.), *The Gathering: Building the Arts Council Collection* (Yorkshire Sculpture Park: Longside Gallery, 2010).

Gregor Muir, *Lucky Kunst. The rise and fall of Young British Art* (London: Artum Press, 2011): 118.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, '(P)ars pro toto', in Douglas Gordon (ed.), *Déjà-vu: questions & answers. Volume 1. 1992-1996* (MARC, Paris): 173.

Ross Sinclair, *It doesn't matter who I am, I just want to talk to you. The sociable art of Douglas Gordon* (Glasgow: Tramway 1993): 14-15.

⁶⁶ The work is titled *Framework for Colour Co-ordination for Building Purposes (House of Windsor & House of Stuart)* (1992).

⁶⁷ Stuart Morgan, *Art au Lait!*, in *Art Monthly*, No. 156 (May 1992).

⁶⁸ Following sources are useful to analyse the group exhibition *Windfall 91*:

Thomas Lawson (ed.), *Guilt by Association* (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 8.

Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene* (Glasgow: Luta Press, 2010): 63, 146.

Ross Sinclair, *It doesn't matter who I am, I just want to talk to you. The sociable art of Douglas Gordon* (Glasgow: Tramway 1993): 18.

Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991): 36-46.

⁶⁹ The first group exhibition of the series had been prompted by Scottish artist David McMillan and was held in London in 1988, while the second one was staged in Bremen the year after, where Douglas Gordon had participated thanks to his acquaintance with McMillan made while a student at Slade in the capital for his MA.

⁷⁰ Andrew Cross in Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991): 41.

⁷¹ Douglas Gordon in Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991): 40.

⁷² "A much better question would be to ask why the energy the Scottish artists had to do this is not present in London. It has to be said that the core members of Transmission make very good links with the artists abroad – links which are not made here [in London]." Stuart Morgan in Matthew Slotover, 'Windfall: Northern Lights', in *Frieze*, no. 1 (September, 1991): 41.

Printmaking and Professionalism in Early 20th Century Calcutta

Adrienne Fast

Abstract

This article examines a group of special edition books of artists' prints published in the early decades of the twentieth century by artists in and from Bengal. Usually privately commissioned from small printing houses in limited runs, and combining short texts with collections of black and white images in wood engraving, linocut, drypoint or other printmaking media, these artists' books emerged at a time when intense intellectual debates had been percolating for decades regarding the "correct" mode of modern Indian expression in the visual arts. Artists, nevertheless, still struggled with the daily realities of trying to earn a living through their art practices. In their circulation and distribution, these books were a means by which artists promoted themselves to new forms of urban patronage, and in their visual imagining of village Bengal, they intervened in the ambiguous relationship between the urban and the rural in the experience of Indian modernity. This article examines how artists, especially those associated with the Government School of Art in Calcutta, used these books as a tool in the establishment and furtherance of their professional artistic careers.

Forging a professional career as a modern Indian artist was not an easy undertaking in the early twentieth century. Focusing particularly on the city of Calcutta during the last few decades of British colonial rule, from approximately 1920 until Independence in 1947, this article seeks to shed light on how certain artists took advantage of the opportunities that were inherent in

printmaking and printed media in order to carve out spaces of economic opportunity and cultural capital for themselves. Within this environment of radically shifting patterns of artistic production and patronage, in which there were limited options for the exhibiting and marketing of modern art, this article suggests that an engagement with printmaking techniques and a fluency with print media gave a meaningful advantage to those attempting to live and succeed as modern Indian artists. In short, this article is about the intersection between printmaking and professionalism in early twentieth century Bengali art history.

Thankfully there is a robust body of existing scholarship on the art history of late-colonial India, indeed on Bengal specifically, into which the present study can be usefully situated. In fact, many of the Bengali artists of this period who produced extensive bodies of printmaking work, such as Mukul Dey, Chittaprosad, Haren Das, and Ramendranath Chakravorty, have already been discussed at some length in the existing literature.¹ However, the fact that these artists each maintained an interest and engagement with printmaking media specifically, often over the course of their entire careers, has not yet garnered a great deal of discussion or analysis. Instead, their work has tended to be situated, along with work in a variety of other media, in relation to larger narratives of nationalism, globalism, primitivism and religious identity that the established scholarship has successfully dealt with. What remains open to further study is the significance of media-specificity in this historical context; therefore, as an exploratory study this article will suggest how printed images may have functioned in a unique way and will explore what advantages printed media may have offered to professional artists at this time. This analysis will look closely at one specific type of printed image as a case study—those contained in a group of limited edition artists' books of prints—in order to push forward some of these ideas and to suggest issues to be explored in future research. But first, it may be useful to establish something of the precarious nature of the professional art world in Calcutta

in the early twentieth century, in order to better understand the urgency of the opportunities that printmaking and print media could offer to those artists who took advantage of them.

It is important to note how few opportunities there were for living artists to promote their work in the early twentieth century in Calcutta, or indeed in India more widely. This was a period when earlier systems of courtly artistic patronage had largely disappeared, new systems of colonial patronage were still nascent, and there was still limited interest on the part of the general public in new forms of modern art.² There are many period examples that appeared in both text and image that illustrate how difficult it was to earn a livelihood as an artist at this time, but here I will offer one particular quote and one cartoon which together offer a useful illustration of general public opinion regarding modern art and artists in late colonial Bengal, and which together effectively bracket the time period under discussion here. The quote appeared in Calcutta's *The Englishman* newspaper on 24 December 1920 in a review of the annual exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art (ISOA). In it, the anonymous author complained that the only reason this routinely average show attracted the attention it did was because there were virtually no other exhibitions held regularly in the city to compete with it. Nevertheless, he suggests that given how few people actually attended the exhibition, there was no reason to ask for more. The author then goes on to explain that 'strange as it may seem, the citizens of Calcutta get on—they have, indeed, got on all this time—without employing any artists. In the big schemes of life the artist has not been able to secure any place. Of late, he has been putting himself in the way, rather obtrusively, whether he is wanted or not.'³ The author's complaint about the emptiness of exhibitions is underscored by two surviving photographs that depict the exhibition he refers to, which were published in ISOA's own journal, *Rupam*. The grainy black and white photographs convey an atmosphere of ghostly abandonment and are notably lacking any human figures.⁴

The second example is a satirical cartoon by the Bengali artist Deviprosad Roychowdhury, which first appeared in the journal *Swatantra* in the 1940s and later in *Ironies and Sarcasms*, a collection of Roychowdhury's illustrated work (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Deviprosad Roychowdhury, *Modernism in Art*, c. 1940s, cartoon, published in *Ironies and Sarcasms* (Calcutta: General Printers, 1951). Courtesy of Rakesh Sahni, Rasa Gallery, Kolkata.

In it, an Indian man is depicted moving awkwardly through the space of an art exhibition, scratching his head and confusedly peering over his shoulder at a selection of images hung on the wall behind him. His jaw is dropped open as he gazes at the art and he rests his right hand on a cane, suggestive of a weakness in the knees as he contemplates the abstract shapes and

repurposed folk art on display. From the title of the cartoon we are given to understand these images represent 'Modernism in Art.' The accompanying caption makes the frustration and aversion that characterizes this situation explicit: the man is identified as an 'innocent spectator' (again, suggesting that some form of victimization or physical assault has occurred) and when he is asked the question, 'what are you looking at?' he replies with a resolute 'nothing!' The final editorial comment adds: 'We admire his judgment.'

These two examples are intended to establish the precarious nature of professional employment as a professional artist in early twentieth century Bengal. The remainder of this article is situated within this environment of general public disinterest in modern art, and focuses on a very particular set of images/objects that circulated within this context. The images under consideration are those contained within a group of special edition books of artists' prints, published in the early decades of the twentieth century by artists in and from Bengal, which were usually printed by small printing houses in limited runs of around one to two hundred copies, privately commissioned by the artists themselves. These books typically combined short texts with collections of black and white images of predominantly rural subject matter done in wood engraving, linocut, drypoint or other printmaking media. The texts contained in these books were most commonly short introductory or dedicatory passages at the front of the book, as well as caption information for subsequent pages containing individual images. But occasionally lengthier texts were also included, such as collections of poetry, biographical sketches, and even travel narratives. The images in these books most commonly depicted rural or pastoral subject matter; landscapes and scenes of idyllic village life are the most common, but some examples of cityscapes, portraits and genre scenes also appear. The titles tend to be enumerative and descriptive, and were usually media- or subject-specific. Examples include

Twelve Portraits by Mukul Dey (1917), *Twenty-Five Linocuts* by Rani Dey (1932), and *Ten Wood Engravings by Students of the Government School of Art Calcutta* (1944).

It is worth noting that the titles and texts of these books appear to be almost exclusively in English, strongly suggesting that they were designed and intended for an audience in Bengal that was elite and English-educated. However, these books were also sold at moderate prices and embodied certain material characteristics and stylistic qualities that would have rendered them compelling for wider, non-elite audiences as well. Indeed, I suspect that it was possible for these books of artists' prints to be effective career-building tools for the artists who created them in large part because they were affordable to a wide audience. While in some cases the original prices of these books cannot be retraced, in several instances the price is printed on an inside cover or a colophon page. In several other instances, the price is mentioned in surviving newspaper or journal advertisements for, or reviews of, individual books. Amongst those examples where the original prices have been recorded or preserved, the vast majority were situated between three and five rupees.

It is useful to compare these prices to those paid for paintings by well-known Bengali artists during the same period. Luckily a small archive of such information survives in the documentation preserved by the artist Mukul Dey. Over the course of the first few decades of the twentieth century Dey amassed a large personal collection of works by well-known contemporary artists such as Rabindranath and Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, and others. In the 1940s Dey attempted to sell large portions of his collection and he published several catalogues of works for sale for this purpose. These catalogues record that in the mid-1940s, Dey was asking between 2,000 and 4,000 rupees for paintings by the famous Rabindranath Tagore, and between 750 and 2,000 rupees for his drawings.⁵ Such sums were

enormous amounts of money at the time, and would have necessarily positioned such objects as luxury goods inaccessible to any but the smallest percentage of upper end of the socio-economic system. As a point of comparison, Dey mentions in his autobiography that as the Principal of the Government School of Art in the early 1940s he was earning a gross monthly salary of about 1,000 rupees which, after deductions, came to about 500 or 600 rupees that he took ‘in hand.’⁶ Meanwhile, the average salary at the time for someone in a clerkship position, such as an office worker at a post office, was approximately 30 rupees per month.⁷ It seems clear that whatever art market existed at this time for paintings by well-known Bengali artists priced in the thousands of rupees, this was necessarily an elite niche market. On the other hand, books of artists’ prints were priced affordably to appeal to a much larger segment of society. It is important to note that these books of artists’ prints did not necessarily seek to reject or alienate elite audiences, and indeed their almost exclusive use of English testifies to the fact that their public was obviously a socially-aspirant one. But at an average price of five rupees, these books would have reoriented the art market away from the elite salons of the aristocracy and instead towards a middle-class, urban audience. In their appeal to a wider socioeconomic range of audiences, these books would have been beneficial for artists seeking to make a professional living at the time.

It is also noteworthy that these books of artists’ prints tended to be advertised in newspapers and journals and sold directly from artist to buyer. There are many examples of instances where works of art were sold through classified ads in local newspapers throughout this period, but for artists who specialized in printmaking rather than painting or sculpture this would have proved to be a particularly useful strategy. Such prints were usually characterized by sharp, bold contrasts of black and white space, meaning that their visual impact and material characteristics were (largely) maintained intact through the commercial printing processes that

were then available in Calcutta (figures 2 and 3). By advertising their prints in newspapers and journals, artists who specialized in printmaking were not only able to bypass the inadequacies of the local exhibition circuit, they were also able to reach out to new urban patrons who might think it perfectly common to read an English language newspaper but who would not consider entering the few existing spaces of fine art exhibitions, which were welcome only to the most socially elite.



Fig. 2: Mukul Dey, advertisement for *Festive Season*, in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 5 August 1945. Courtesy of Mukul Dey Archives, Santineketan.



Fig. 3: Mukul Dey, *Festive Season*, drypoint etching, 35 x 25 cm. Courtesy of Mukul Dey Archives, Santiniketan.

That books such as these were in a position to be able to assist artists in earning a living at all owes a great deal first of all to the particular history of printing in Bengal. These books have an obvious connection to the tradition of Battala woodblock printed books and images that emerged from the numerous small printing presses and publishers in north Calcutta during the course of the nineteenth century (figure 4). This suggests that audiences in Calcutta were already familiar with and primed to accept images in book form, particularly when those images were woodcuts and linocuts. But by the 1920s, the Battala woodblock printing industry had largely been supplanted by cheaper lithographic technologies, while a new generation of artists was emerging from the art schools and colleges with new training in relief printing techniques and practices that emphasized the agency and mark-making of the artist and the

creation of so-called unique prints that were individually signed and numbered and thus imbued with something of the prestige of the modern, independent artist-creator. Thus, when these artists' books emerged in the 30s, 40s and 50s, these kinds of relief print images occupied a unique social position at a distance from (yet still connected to) a street-level popularity, but also overlaid with new connotations of reified art practice.

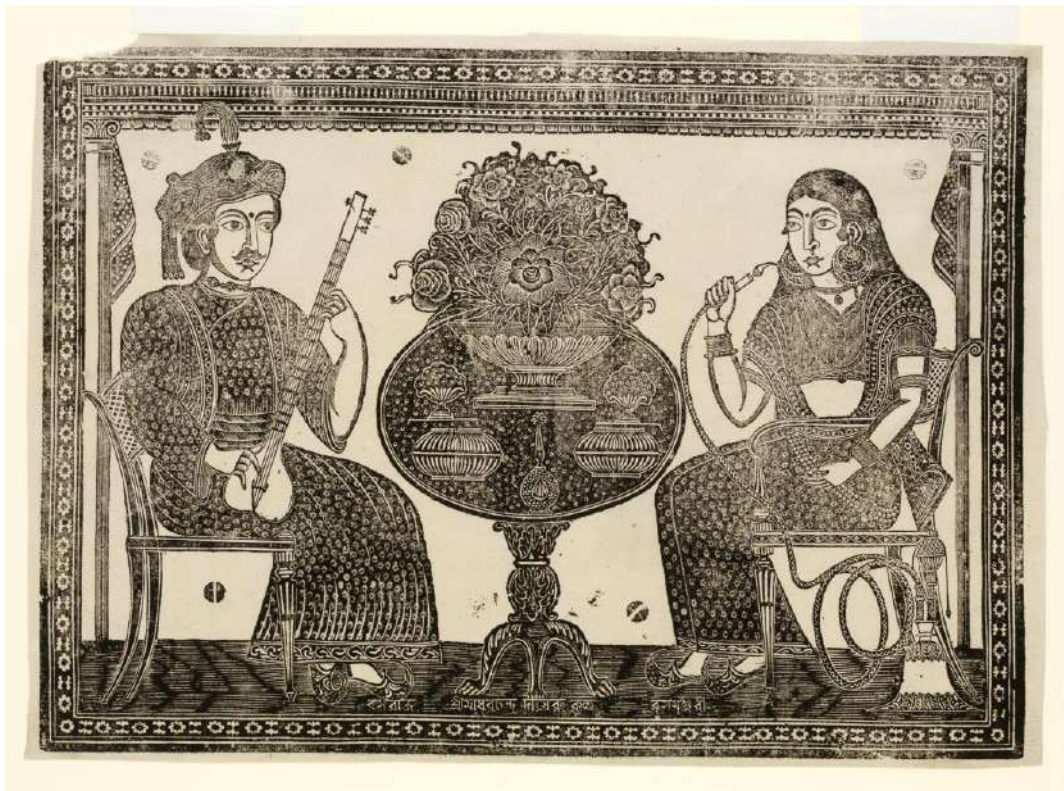


Fig. 4: Battala woodblock print by Madhav Chandra Das, *A Pair of Ideal Lovers*, c. 1870, woodcut print on paper, 28 x 39.2 cm. Image courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

The connection between this new form of artist printed books that emerged in the early twentieth century and an increased appreciation for fine art printmaking is indelibly tied up with the particular history of the Government School of Art in Calcutta. Originally founded as a private Institute of Industrial Art in 1854, the school later came under the direct control of the British colonial administration and was renamed the Government School of Art. In the early twentieth century it was one of the largest and most prestigious institutions of art education in

India and it attracted enrolments in large numbers. It had included courses in wood engraving and lithography in its curriculum from very early on in its history, but in the nineteenth century these courses were tied to the 'Industrial Arts' section of the school, separate from the 'Fine Arts' stream. Printmaking was then considered more a reproductive process than an independent art form, and those students who trained as painters often simply turned their designs over to technicians who translated their work into printed media. However, beginning in the late 1920s and continuing into the 1950s, certain developments at the Government School of Art made possible the emergence of new kinds of artistic production related to original, fine-art printmaking. To a large degree this involved the staffing of the school with artists who had received training in professional, fine-art printmaking, either abroad or in India. The beginning of this shift can be seen in the appointment of Mukul Chandra Dey as principal of the School of Art from 1928 to 1943. Dey had studied printmaking in the US and the UK, and is often referred to as the first pioneer of drypoint etching in India. During Dey's tenure the Head Teacher was another professional printmaker, Ramendranath Chakravorty, who became principal at Dey's retirement. Other notable printmakers who staffed the school throughout this period also include Somnath Hore and Haren Das. Collectively these men influenced several generations of students who studied at the school, and through their curriculum changes and personal and professional examples would very likely have had a significant influence on the status of printed imagery in the Bengali art world.

In addition to their claims to fine art status made available to wide audiences at reasonable prices, these books of artist prints were also successful in large part because they tapped into the centrality of literature, books, and the written word to Bengali cultural identity, then as now. Indeed, at a time when an audience for art scarcely existed, these books reached out to a nascent *readership* for art by connecting to the immense cultural capital enjoyed by literary

celebrities of the day. For example, in his book *Fifteen Drypoints* published in 1939, Mukul Dey paired each of his images with a poem on the same subject by the famous Bengali poet Harindranath Chattopadhyay. But the most usual way that these books connected to the high-brow literary world was by securing a suitably impressive guest author for the introductory or dedicatory text, and there was no one more sought-after in this regard than the Nobel prize winning Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. When such a text was forthcoming, both the artist and the publisher made sure to promote the fact when selling the book. Interestingly, both Rani Dey's book *25 Linocuts* and Ramendranath Chakravorty's book *Woodcuts* were both advertised on the same page of the September 1932 issue of *Our Magazine*, a brief Calcutta publication of the 1930s, and both ads make sure to point out that the books include introductory texts from Tagore.

In fact, in his autobiography Mukul Dey talks about the high demand for Tagore's endorsement that characterized these publishing endeavours, and he recounts how once during this period he playfully confronted Tagore about his habit of writing dedications for every Tom, Dick and Harry (in the autobiography it is written as 'Tom, Diken Hyari' in Bengali script). But of course, Dey's real complaint is that Tagore had written these texts for everyone else, but not for him. He reports that Tagore immediately blushed at this accusation and replied, 'Since when are you concerned with such matters? You are a creative man whose head is in the clouds, you are above such mundane things.'⁸

This anecdote is particularly revealing because it highlights the very difficult social space that had to be navigated by artists in Calcutta at this time who, on the one hand, had to hustle and negotiate and wheedle and self-promote in order to survive by their art, but at the same time in order to be socially accepted as a 'true artist,' one could not appear to be concerned with

mundane, material matters such as earning a living. At this time the culturally aspirant in Calcutta society tended to subscribe to the notion that the creation of art and literature was something that occurred, in the words of historian Niharranjan Ray, ‘within a space beyond necessity and outside the limits of the requirements of human livelihood.’⁹ It was in fact during this period from about the 1920s onwards that the Bengali literary elite, spearheaded by Tagore himself, sought to more clearly distinguish between the terms *kristhi* and *sanskriti* – between cultivation and culture – where the former had connotations of worldly matters and, worse yet, physical labour, while the latter implied a more spiritual or cerebral endeavour of personal improvement and encompassed the worlds of art and literature. This movement was instigated in response to what was seen as the crass monetization of human relationships and values that characterized the modern, urban experience more globally.

This contentious relationship between art and labour, and between labour and leisure, leads to a discussion of one additional characteristic of the books of artists’ prints under consideration. In their visual imagining of village Bengal, the printed images contained within these books offer a unique insight into the contentious and ambiguous relationship between the urban and the rural in the experience of Indian modernity, which would have rendered them particularly appealing to a growing middle class audience in colonial Calcutta.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of the images in these books represent the Indian countryside seen as bountiful, peaceful and reassuring. It would be easily possible to consider these images as participating in a unique Indian manifestation of a more globally felt primitivist discourse of the period, something akin to Picasso’s obsession with African masks or Gauguin’s work in Tahiti. Certainly, these images do appear at a time when many Bengali artists such as Jamini Roy, Ramkinkar Baij and others were increasingly turning towards tribal and rural

subject matter as a way of seeking alternative visual vocabularies with which to explore the experience of Indian modernity. In the South Asian context, this primitivism charted unique and local trajectories that connected at times to both a Gandhian veneration of village life and with an Orientalist search for a primitive Other amongst South Asia's tribal communities, but it shared with nativist and primitivist movements elsewhere in the world a sense of, what Partha Mitter has described as, 'the romantic longing of a complex society for the simplicity of pre-modern existence.'¹⁰ However, when we turn to the images themselves, I believe we arrive at something rather more complex than can be neatly summed up with this primitivist argument.

The images in these books are, first of all, incredibly striking. There is a very real visual strength which is evident in the energy of sharp contrast and the intense rhythms and patterns of black and white space in the images that appear in this group of artists' books. Representationally they all combine landscape and human figures and human and animal figures. The surrounding space appears to be exclusively rural, but this easy association is complicated somewhat by the fact that there is often only minimal articulation of any kind of perspectival, comprehensible space in these images. For example, consider the linocut print by Sudhir Khastgir, titled 'Harvest Time' done in 1946, and which was included in his autobiography 'Myself' published in 1955 (figure 5).



Fig. 5: Sudhir Khastgir, *Harvest Time*, linocut, 1946. Courtesy of Rakesh Sahni, Rasa Gallery, Kolkata.

The title of the piece immediately locates the scene in the cycles of agricultural production of the countryside and village, and the small scythe-like knife held forward by the woman in the lead of this small procession makes clear that that this is a scene of the all-important autumn rice harvest in rural Bengal. But rather than offering the viewer a vista of reassuring, fecund landscape, instead geometrically energetic marks and patterns are used to simply suggest or imply the field of ripened rice. There is a strange kind of no-space that exists, on one level, as the lack of specificity or detail regarding any particular scene or location: this is no specific harvest, this is the idea of ‘harvestness.’ The figures in the landscape are interchangeable and anonymous types rather than individuals, their very forms mimic the shape and the textures of

their surroundings, dissolving the figures into the land they are ideologically bound to. At this level, the sense of no-space is indistinguishable from that conjured in rural or tribal subject matter across different media like painting that emerge from about the same time and place, and speaks to the way that the harsh realities of rural life at this time, with its vulnerability to disease, famine and poverty (consider that Khastgir's image was created just a few years after the Bengal Famine of 1943 that killed millions), all such detail had to be evacuated in order to make images of rural India palatable to an urban audience. This is the dark underside that needs to always be remembered when dealing with the primitivist argument.

However, there is another sense in which these images evoke a no-space (or how they evoke no space) which is peculiar to the medium of relief printing, and which seriously complicates the primitivist vision of both the peasant and of the artist. Space in these images feels flattened against the picture plane, as the lines, marks and inked surfaces push forward, emphasizing the surface of the image on the page, and becoming as much the subject of the picture as any specifically rural symbolism or narrative. This is particularly true when holding the prints themselves; because these images circulated in books, they were meant to be held in the hand and viewed very closely to the eye and body. When you do so, you are confronted with the subtle undulating waves of a page that has passed through a printing press; it has the ability to push the marked surface forward as the subject of the picture, and to remind one constantly of the carved block that created it, and the hand of the artist in carving that block. John Ruskin's famous aesthetic analyses of wood engraving emphasized the plow-like nature of the wood engraver's tools, and compared the carving of a woodcut to the creation of furrows in fields. Ruskin's theories have long been out of fashion in academia but his ideas were particularly relevant in late colonial India, where the influence of the Arts & Crafts movement has long been acknowledged.¹¹

Thus, by drawing the viewer's attention to the labour of the artist and in doing so also redirecting us back to the labour of the peasant, printed images like these are able to subtly subvert the primitivist, anti-modern impulse to deny the connection between art and the material, physical world, and the tendency to idealize the rural as a serene utopia. Just as in their circulation and marketing on the open market these books denied the social pressures on artists to appear disinterested with their own livelihood, so too do these images' very materiality and visuality deny the idea that art is somehow not 'real work.'

A majority of the art historical literature dealing with late colonial Bengal has tended to reproduce a trope of primitivism and reinforces an elitism that focuses on a small number of avant-garde painters from privileged social backgrounds, none of whom depended exclusively on the living they could make as professional artists. Alternatively, another branch of the literature tends to focus on the spiritual ashram-like environment at the art school at Tagore's rural university in Santiniketan where students were not encouraged to consider paths to professionalization. But by drawing attention to alternative strategies and artistic practices such as those encapsulated by these books of artists' prints from the 1920s to the 1950s, we gain a greater insight into the role of art in the experience of Indian modernity at this time. This was a period of intense social transformation, when the social role of the modern, urban, middle-class, working artist was still only newly available and in a state of constant flux. I believe that in this environment, books of artists' prints such as these were an extremely valuable tool for anyone wishing to embody the particular stylistics of existence that such a social role implied, and to be able to do so with an improvisation, hustle and flair that characterizes the Indian modern more generally.

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Notes

¹ The scholarship on the art history of late colonial India is extensive, but a solid grounding on the topic can be found in Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-47* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007); Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930-1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

² Ratnabali Chatterjee, *From the Kharkhana to the Studio: A Study in the Changing Social Roles of Patron and Artist in Bengal* (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1990).

³ *The Englishman*, 24 December 1920, n.p.

⁴ *Rupam*, no. 6, April 1921, n.p.

⁵ File 012, Mukul Dey Archives, Santiniketan.

⁶ Mukul Dey, *Amar Katha* (Kolkata: Visva Bharati Press, 1995) : 35.

⁷ *Statistical Abstract Relating to British India from 1910-11 to 1919-20* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1922): 215.

⁸ Mukul Dey, *Amar Kotha* (Santiniketan: Visva Bharati Press, 1995).

⁹ Niharranjan Roy, *Krishti, kalcar, sanskriti* (Calcutta, Jijnasa, 1978), quoted in Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion, 2007): 33.

¹¹ See, for example, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 148-149.