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**GH0STSPACE:  
LIVING AND WORKING THROUGH  
AN IDEOLOGY OF PRIVATISATION**

**A FROST**

**PhD**

**2020**

**GH0STSPACE:  
LIVING AND WORKING THROUGH  
AN IDEOLOGY OF PRIVATISATION**

**ALEX FROST**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Research undertaken in the Faculty of  
Arts, Design & Social Sciences**

**June 2020**

## Abstract

Gh0stSpace describes a life under the rule of capital in the capital. It defines the inter-relational and consuming spaces of the global city (Sassen, 2005) of the global north. These are spaces where work merges with life (Beck, 2014); the public and the private become indistinguishable (Minton, 2012); the collectivity of the city becomes a space of individualisation (Sennett, 2008); where place (Dean and Millar, 2005) and non-place (Augé, 2006) lose their distinction and where virtual space blurs with physical space (Bridle, 2018). I have given this space the brand name Gh0stSpace to highlight the haunting effects of a boundless form of consumption within an ‘ideology of privatisation’ (Bauman, 2008).

Gh0stSpace defines the discourse between specific objects, external space and internalised behaviours. In a Gh0stSpace, the physical spaces and products of the global city meet a pervasive, implicating and controlling atmosphere that is ‘carried within us’ (Fraser, 2006) or exist within a ‘pervasive atmosphere’ (Fisher, 2009). Gh0stSpaces are therefore inter-relational spaces that are both absent, present and appear to have no outside. This thesis will ask, can art practice be used to explore and define this Gh0stSpace? Focusing on three contemporary art projects that I have initiated within Gh0stSpaces: *Love/Work* an exhibition in a live/work apartment, a space where work meets life; *Things Ground Us* a series of exhibitions in a privately hired self-storage unit acting as a proxy gallery space and *Wet Unboxing* a series of videos that primarily circulate through the privatised domains of online social media. In order to investigate the validity of these spaces as Gh0StSpaces each project employs a range of exploratory methods: collaborative/individual, anonymised/authored, virtual/physical which circulate through artistic and non-artistic networks. In each instance, I am working *through* life as an artist in contemporary London. An equivalent sense of boundlessness is explored in the writing which crosses academic, narrative, and personal styles, and which depict actual and speculative realities within the household, workspace, the city and wider cultural infrastructure. This range of writing styles mirrors the layered and reflexive character of the visual outcomes.

The enveloping nature of a privatised context may seem to offer no clear edges or externality. Yet I want to ask, is there a possibility of an outside to Gh0stSpace? Could an understanding of the way Gh0stSpace consumes offer a space of artistic agency within the city’s ideology of privatisation?

## **List of Contents**

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. Gh0stSpace in Residence</b>	
Pervasive Atmospheres in This Live/Work Life	19
The Tilted Arc	26
Wages for Living	30
Love/Work	41
A Creative Residency	48
<b>2. Gh0stSpace of the City</b>	
The Making of a Liquid Materiality	57
A Very Creative Occupation	66
Driving to a Gh0stSpace	70
Gh0st Place	79
<b>3. The Gh0stSpace Within</b>	
The Blurred Museum	91
Can You Own Your Implication?	94
The Gh0stSpace of Appearance	103
Wet Unboxing	119
The Gh0stSpace Outside	130
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>139</b>

<b>Gh0stScript</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	
Transmission and the Ideology of Privatisation	<b>153</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	
Wet Unboxing Press Coverage	<b>162</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>173</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).....	19
Figure 2 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).....	20
Figure 3 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).....	21
Figure 4 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).....	22
Figure 5 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).....	23
Figure 6 Salmon and soft cream cheese on brown bread, no mayo (Waitrose)/ prawn mayonnaise on brown bread (Tesco) set in clear cast resin with mirrored acrylic (2017). .....	25
Figure 7 Plan of Alex Frost's live/work apartment with a proposal for The Tilted Arc, 2017.....	29
Figure 8 Alex Frost, Baked frozen cheese and tomato pizza (Pizza Express) with mood crystal topping (yellow citrine) set in clear cast resin with mirrored acrylic (2018). ....	39
Figure 9 Alex Frost, Papa John's 'The Works' in clear cast resin with black acrylic (home delivered on 21st November 2017).....	40
Figure 10 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).....	44
Figure 11 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).....	45
Figure 12 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).....	46
Figure 13 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).....	47
Figure 14 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018). ....	48
Figure 15 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018). ....	50
Figure 16 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018). ....	52
Figure 17 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018). ....	53
Figure 18 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Luke McCreadie's exhibition A lie for a sculpture (2018) <a href="http://www.gh0stspace.uk/luke-mccreadie/">http://www.gh0stspace.uk/luke-mccreadie/</a> (Accessed: 24th April 2019). ....	74
Figure 19 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Debora Delmar's exhibition Private Property (2018), <a href="http://www.gh0stspace.uk/debora-delmar/">http://www.gh0stspace.uk/debora-delmar/</a> (Accessed: 24th April 2019). ....	75
Figure 20 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Alex Frost's exhibition The New Work (2018), <a href="http://www.gh0stspace.uk/alex-frost/">http://www.gh0stspace.uk/alex-frost/</a> (Accessed 24th April 2019). ....	76
Figure 21 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Laura Yuile's exhibition Objects for the street (2018), <a href="http://www.gh0stspace.uk/laura-yuile/">http://www.gh0stspace.uk/laura-yuile/</a> (Accessed 24th April 2019). ....	77
Figure 22 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Paul Johnson's exhibition First-degree-separation (2018), <a href="http://www.gh0stspace.uk/paul-johnson/">http://www.gh0stspace.uk/paul-johnson/</a> (Accessed 24th April 2019). ....	78

Figure 23 Instagram Story screen capture: London City Island, London (July 2019)....	84
Figure 24 Instagram Story screen capture: Deliveroo Editions kitchens at Blackwall, London (June 2019). .....	88
Figure 25 Alex Frost, the complete series of Wet Unboxing videos, <a href="http://www.youtube.com/alexfrost_whytho">www.youtube.com/alexfrost_whytho</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).....	109
Figure 26 Bryan, C. (25 September 2018) I am pleasantly horrified by these 'wet unboxing' videos, Available at: <a href="https://mashable.com/article/wet-unboxing-videos-alexfrost/?europa=true#MBt4u0It6Pqp">https://mashable.com/article/wet-unboxing-videos-alexfrost/?europa=true#MBt4u0It6Pqp</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).....	110
Figure 27 Cole, S. (22 August 2018) <i>I Can't Stop Watching These Disgusting 'Wet Unboxing' Videos</i> Available at: <a href="https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/zmk7ke/watch-wet-unboxing-videos-underwater-youtube">https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/zmk7ke/watch-wet-unboxing-videos-underwater-youtube</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019). .....	111
Figure 28 Knowyourmeme. <i>Wet Unboxing</i> (excerpt), Available at: <a href="https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wet-unboxing">https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wet-unboxing</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).....	112
Figure 29 Anderson, P. (10 September 2018) <i>The underwater art of 'wet unboxing'</i> (excerpt), Available at: <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/shortcuts/2018/sep/10/wet-unboxing-underwater-art-videos-emotional">https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/shortcuts/2018/sep/10/wet-unboxing-underwater-art-videos-emotional</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).....	113
Figure 30 Alexandrov, Daniil (22 August 2018) <i>Wet Unpacking. New YouTube phenomenon: so disgusting that it's impossible to break away</i> (excerpt), Available at: <a href="https://medialeaks.ru/2208dalex-wet-unboxing/">https://medialeaks.ru/2208dalex-wet-unboxing/</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).....	114
Figure 31 Hong-Shik, K. (3 October 2018) <i>Alex Frost, a veiled freelance artist</i> , Available at: <a href="http://visla.kr/?p=81464">http://visla.kr/?p=81464</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019). .....	115
Figure 32 Basoni, S. (17 September 2018) <i>Open Food in Water, 'Wet Unboxing' Becomes the Latest Trend</i> on YouTube, Available at: <a href="https://food.detik.com/info-kuliner/d-4215620/buka-makanan-dalam-air-wet-unboxing-jadi-tren-terbaru-di-youtube">https://food.detik.com/info-kuliner/d-4215620/buka-makanan-dalam-air-wet-unboxing-jadi-tren-terbaru-di-youtube</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).....	116
Figure 33 Anon.(24 August 2018) <i>I saw "Unpacking", but "Unpacking the Water" is the first time</i> . Available at: <a href="https://read01.com/LdA6R25.html#.XXi5zShKiUl">https://read01.com/LdA6R25.html#.XXi5zShKiUl</a> (Accessed: 29 May 2019). .....	117
Figure 34 A Russian Instagram account set up (without permission) in tribute to the Wet Unboxing series Alex Frost devised (Accessed: 29 May 2019). .....	118
Figure 35-39 Alex Frost, Wet Unboxing (Gucci ACE Sneaker), 2018 and courtesy of Alex Frost and Guccio Gucci S.p.A. Available at <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/B0QYc-Wi2XE/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet">https://www.instagram.com/p/B0QYc-Wi2XE/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet</a> (accessed 23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2019).....	124
Figure 36 Video Commission: Alex Frost, Wet Unboxing (Gucci ACE Sneakers), 2019. ....	128
Figure 37 Video Commission: Alex Frost, Wet Unboxing (Gucci ACE Sneakers), 2019.....	129
Figure 38 Facebook posts relating to Alex Frost's 'Opening a Big Mac underwater - Wet Unboxing' an online exhibition with Cosmos Carl - Platform Parasite (2018). ...	137
Figure 39 Alex Frost's Pexels profile page 'Opening a Big Mac underwater - Wet Unboxing' Cosmos Carl Platform Parasite, an online exhibition (2018). .....	138

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 41,739 words

Name: Alex Frost

Signature:

Date: 18 May 2020

A tiny bit of all of us is also somewhere inside the Thatcherite project. Of course, we're all one hundred per cent committed. But every now and then — Saturday mornings, perhaps, just before the demonstration — we go to Sainsbury's and we're just a tiny bit of a Thatcherite subject.

Hall, 2017.

## Introduction

Gh0stSpace defines the life lived under the shadow of capital in the capital. Through Gh0stSpace, London's logic of privatisation is consumed and disseminated. It haunts objects and institutions in the global city of the global north, and yet Gh0stSpace is also present in less tangible space, like language, signs, behaviours and in what Terry Eagleton would surmise as the discourse between them (1994, p. 9).

The name Gh0stSpace suggests a commercial brand. Like a brand, Gh0stSpace takes both a present and haunting form. Gh0stSpace is not just the physical product, it is also the logo or product image *and* the pervasive values of the brand seen in adverts and slogans. This Gh0stSpace-as-brand demonstrates the complicity and implication that is at the root of all life in the capital and so this project is embedded within this condition, taking on all the conflicts and contradictions of this position.

Like a ghost or an ideology Gh0stSpace can be both absent and present. Gh0stSpace describes the all-encompassing character of privatised life, a life that offers no escape from its haunting. This haunting acts like an ideology, a natural order of things or a common sense, a set of behaviours that we consciously or unconsciously abide by. Together these behaviours form into what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman called an ideology of privatisation (2008) where consumption rules all life:

It re-presents the world as a warehouse of potential objects of consumption, and individual life as a perpetual search for bargains; its purpose is presented as maximal consumer satisfaction, and life success as an increase in each individual's own market value.

Bauman, 2008, p. 21

To call this an 'ideology of privatisation' is not to disregard or try to reinvent neoliberalism. There is an interchangeability between an ideology of privatisation and neoliberalism. Both terms refer to a context where the individual lives with perpetual insecurity and is burdened with all personal responsibility. Both terms describe a space where previously solid terms like collectivity, place, security and public space have become fluid. However, in naming this an ideology of privatisation I am foregrounding the ideological character of Gh0stSpace. Ideology is like a ghost within neoliberalism, a ghost that we (its subjects) are told does not exist. The privatisation of things and personal experience are neoliberal characteristics that have been rendered natural or inevitable rather than the concern of politics. Under neoliberalism there is no alternative

to the privatisation of social services, the individualisation of all responsibility and a life of perpetual insecurity. By using the term an ‘ideology of privatisation’ in place of neoliberalism, I am leaving the lights on in the ideological bedroom. This ideology of privatisation also suggests a neoliberalism 2.0 – an amplification or evolved version of the neoliberal context, one where mobile digital devices and networks have enhanced further the interests of capital. Another reason for supplanting the term neoliberal with the ‘ideology of privatisation’ is its casual use, resulting in a depletion of the term to the point where it has lost much of its critical clarity and has become a term that can be too easily contested. This loss of clarity can be sourced back to neoliberalism’s wide range of historical roots that go back to the early 20th century and the way it can be applied to a range of global contexts from the hyper-capitalism of the UK and USA to the authoritarian capitalism of Singapore.

Echoing the haunting effect of Gh0stSpace this thesis adopts a methodology that mirrors the haunting effect of ideology. I will be working *through* practice. Throughout this thesis I will be my own case study, revealing the shape of Gh0stSpace in my life and work. This includes an exploration of new contexts in addition to the pervasive, implicating and controlling atmosphere of Gh0stSpace and the dialogue between physical and non-physical contexts. The work itself attempts to work within, delineate and occasionally be its own Gh0stSpace.

In spite of the illusory shape of Gh0stSpace this thesis attempts to use art practice to reveal the shape of Gh0stSpace. Can practice be used to reveal the illusive character of Gh0stSpace? What are the objects and spaces through which Gh0stSpace materialise? I will be exploring Gh0stSpace through a range of objects, contexts and across a selection of specific practice-based approaches. A singular practice would be insufficient to capture or delineate the blurred edges of such a shapeless entity, one that speaks of the interrelation of public/private, the virtual/physical, the internal/external and the collective/individualised. My artistic exploration will take on an equivalent sense of inter-relationship through collaborative and individual, anonymised and authored, virtual and physical approaches and I will circulate these approaches through artistic and non-artistic networks.

There will be an equivalent and complimentary relationship between the research as artworks, and research as texts. The range of practical approaches extends to the variety of writing processes I will use. The aim here is to explore and mediate the

space between the artwork and its interpretation. In addition to the dominant exploratory writing style I use narrative styles of writing that introduce a speculative reality. These narrative texts venture through the particularities of each chapter's haunted context. Another style of writing I employ is conversational and yet these conversations are 'ghostings' with a mute respondent. They are conversations that seek to frame the only partially present artwork through a ghostly other.<sup>1</sup> These conversations exist in a space between the artwork and its interpretation. The artworks, their context and the texts are in dialogue. The representation of the artworks in this thesis in mediated form, in social media posts or in their press coverage, highlight this dialogue. In this mediated form these artworks take a digested or consumed appearance that is echoed in the work itself and by many of the texts within this thesis.

The root of this exploration of Gh0stSpace dates back to the summer of 2014 when I was still living in Glasgow. I had just crossed a personal boundary in my life when the time I'd lived in Glasgow had elapsed the 19 years I'd spent growing up in London. That summer was no celebration instead it was dedicated to the artist administration of writing statements, updating my CV, cataloguing images and filling in forms. I sent out applications for residencies, grants, commissions, circulating as many as possible as though each application held within it the promise of an immaculate scratch card. Looking back, I realise that I was attempting to force a change in my life and I was fortunate that this speculative work paid off. I was offered a four-month residency in London at Flat Time House which was due to start in November that year. In the period I'd lived in Glasgow I felt that I'd lost any understanding of what life was like in London and I looked forward to getting to know the city again through this residency. Moving from Glasgow to London in 2014 was against the flow of arts professionals who had moved from London to Glasgow in recent years. On noticing this recent trend, I joked about being the first London-born artist ever to move to Glasgow (I wasn't). Of course, I'd heard the horror stories of London life with its high rents and long commutes and so I could understand why anyone would want to escape London, not that Glasgow didn't have its own issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a problem-solving methodology where a thing or person becomes a sound board for a problem like the 'cardboard programmer' or 'programmer's dummy' technique used in tech companies.

In those few months of residence in London I tried to gather some understanding of the city, especially in terms of its contemporary art scene. The most significant issues that came up in conversation with artists living and working in the city were the effects of the recent cuts in the arts through the 2010 coalition government's austerity policies (Harvey, 2016); the effects of rampant studio and domestic rent rises (We Made That, 2014) along with the perpetual 'side hustle' of life in London. For arts organisations the austerity cuts presented themselves in the form of an increasing and compromising influence of corporate sponsors within larger institutions (Rustin and Arnett, 2015). Whereas for smaller arts organisations the rising day-to-day costs of running and renting a space in the city made them vulnerable and more money focussed. It seemed that austerity had amplified certain privatising pressures on art spaces in the city.

Some conditions of artistic life in London were more visible than others. There seemed to be a philosophical conflict between the image of the city as a 'Creative City' (Florida, 2014) that welcomed artists and the financialised life that the city demanded of its inhabitants. It was as though all lives and space in the city were ultimately ruled by the perpetuation of a flow of digital money, and where every second of time and inch of space within the city had already been priced-up. In those first few months back in London I'd gathered that for many artists in the capital living and working as an artist meant maintaining a mobile and fluid practice or suffering the costs otherwise.

Following the residency at Flat Time House I resettled more permanently in London, moving into a live/work apartment at Acme Studio's The Fire Station. This experience of living and working in the same space generated a whole set of new relations within my life and work which seemed to have some relationship to the enveloping privatisation of London life. Whereas the residency experience offered some protection from the city's privatising influence, the new experience of living amongst my work tested my previous conceptions of how my work could and should relate to my life. Initially, I sought to explore live/working as a generalised concept (not just within London). I met researchers who studied live/work architecture and other people who experienced this live/work life in London yet the people I met were either well-conditioned to the adaptability needed for London life or they were working in a different UK context that had a completely diverse set of pressures. This made me realise that the process of adaption to life in London could be the focus of my research. Although living and working in the same space was a traditional way of working

(Holliss, 2015), I realised that this inter-relational lifestyle embodied the contemporary condition of a blurring of life and work, which was a wider condition of daily life in the city. The pervasiveness of contemporary work meant that, for many people, there was no space that was free of work and this had been formalised in co-working spaces, live/work apartments, homeworking and app-based work.

Living as an artist in London, I was now embedded in the city's contemporary corporate identity. I was living and working in an individualised and financialised space, where work was atomised and where cultural institutions had become implicated in the city's privatisation. This conception of commercialised city life has its historical root in the idea of urban life (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 2009) as a commodified spectacle (Debord, 1990). This image of the city was also a space where consumption (Veblen, 2005) was in the service of a dominant ideology (Adorno and Bernstein, 2005). This city was the landscape of the Culture Class (Rosler et al., 2010) and the Creative Class (Florida, 2014), a contemporary context I was now implicated in. It made sense that I would live *through* this context as my own case study. I should live and work *through* this project just as an ideology runs *through* life.<sup>2</sup>

It was clear that London was a whole new context that would shape my practice. Something in the conditions of life in the city also challenged all my previous conceptions about an art in context. My previous understanding of an art in context had considered space to be clearly delineated, where the public was distinct from private, the virtual had little overlap with the physical world, and where work had been protected from the perils of blurring into life. Perhaps I had held onto the solidity of these terms for too long? However, this shift in my conceptions of space had a direct influence on my work and gave me some hope that the new spaces that my experience of London had opened up could and should be explored through practice and not limited to one practice. A range of approaches was needed to explore and delineate the edges of Gh0stSpace.

---

<sup>2</sup> Inevitably attempting to capture living and working through a first-hand experience means that some contexts will be omitted because I do not have experience of them. Some examples of such contexts include the privatisation of education through the increase of student fees; the commodification of dating/sex through dating apps like Tinder/Grindr and the experience of gaining public/private funding in London.

In chapter one, I will be exploring the line between life and work, primarily through my own live/work context within London. My evaluation will be based on my experience of this lifestyle and my relationship to the objects and materials I live and work with and the character of life and work as it occurs within the space. My research looks into the ways that an artistic life has been the laboratory for the broader context of post-Fordist work (Hardt et al., 2007; Virno, 2010) where personality and knowledge are part of an increasingly dispersed workplace (Lazzarato, 2010). This research explores a range of other spaces where the breakdown of boundaries between work and life has been facilitated by creative work (co-working spaces, artist residencies and the mobile work done through apps). I will be investigating the ways that these spaces can be considered Gh0stSpace, spaces where inter-relationality (in this case the space between work and life) is represented and privatised. This research will look into the proposition that Gh0stSpace contains within it a contradiction where an open plan, creative and informal life and work meets, what the writer and cultural theorist Mark Fisher called, the pervasive atmosphere of Capitalist Realism (2009) a space where an invisible barrier creates a uniformity, which ‘constrains thought and action’ (Ibid., p. 16).

In the second part of this thesis, I will look beyond the limitless workplace to other points within the city where the contradiction of openness and uniformity emerges as Gh0stSpace. I propose that living and working in London perpetuates a liquid (Bauman and Haugaard, 2008) form of urban life. Yet there were also times when the city demanded a mobility from its resident artists which put certain art practices in conflict with city life. The city haunted by capital (Fisher, 2014) shaped practice and this was represented in the figure of the ghost as it appears in the city. Furthermore, there will be an analysis of the ways that the virtual space has its own spectral effect where context is collapsed (Marvin and Sun-ha, 2017) and where physical space is bound to virtual space.

The third chapter focusses on the possibility of an outside within the Gh0stSpace of cultural institutions. How do these spaces privatise, and could there be a possibility of an outside to the all-encompassing contexts that Gh0stSpace produces? I will speculate on ways of practicing within, and ways of working through, the privatising milieu of the cultural context within an ideology of privatisation.

The atmosphere of competition and implication that I first saw around me in London appeared to offer no escape. From within this enveloping ideology of privatisation I will seek to identify, outline and investigate the Gh0stSpace that life in the city generates. I will seek out Gh0stSpace through artistic life and artistic practice, in the hope of finding some agency, autonomy, or externality in contemporary London.

Echoing the inter-relational spirit of this project at the beginning of each chapter I will prompt you to consult a different page of a website I have built to host my artworks. Each page relates to the artwork that each chapter addresses. The main landing page for this website can be found at <http://research.alexfrst.com/>

## **Chapter 1**

### **Gh0stSpace in Residence**

**Please now view**

**‘Gh0stSpace in residence’**

**at <http://research.alexfr0st.com/>**

## Pervasive Atmospheres in This Live/Work Life

In my live/work home, the bed is sometimes an office; the kitchen and bathroom are intermittently used as workshops; the studio area can be an occasional dining room, and the sofa moonlights as a study. As I sink further into this hybridised live/work situation, a strange contradiction materialises. Encapsulated within the solid walls of my live/work apartment is a boundlessness and blurring of life and work. It's as if my live/work home, despite its physical solidity, is the embodiment of something more pervasive.

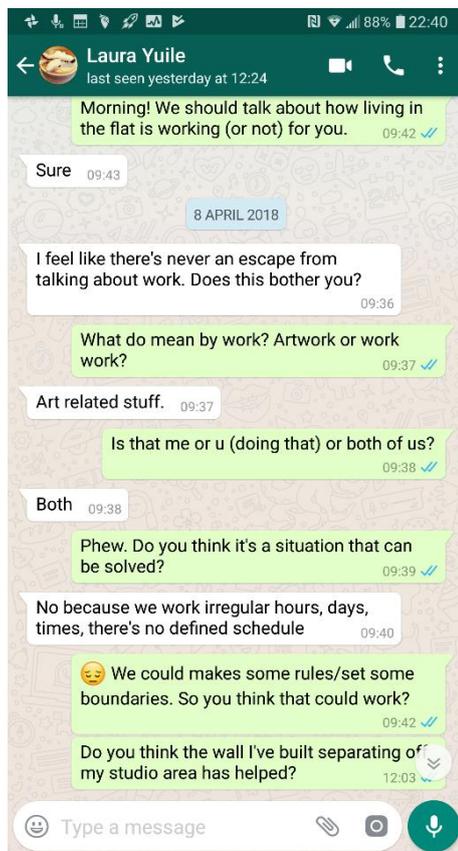


Figure 1 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).

This space represented a boundlessness akin to, what Mark Fisher called in his book *Capitalist Realism*, a 'pervasive atmosphere' (Fisher, 2009). An atmosphere that conditions 'not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action' (Fisher, 2009, p. 16). I saw this 'pervasive atmosphere' in the shapelessness that had consumed my life since I have moved into my live/work apartment. Instead of being a liberation, my live/work existence had many of the constraining characteristics Fisher described. Where, like an ideology, the conditions of my live/work life exist within broader atmosphere. I had the sense that the pervasive conditions of my live/work apartment made it a form of Gh0stSpace, it was present and also illusory –

open plan and yet also under the forces of a pervasive form of control.

The relations between an artistic life and the climate of a pervasive atmosphere were alluded to in 'The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude' by the Dutch sociologist Pascal Gielen (2010). In this text, Gielen proposes that the direction of these effects is from artist to society that 'the social logic of the artistic world has reached the heart of society' (2010, p.31) Gielen proposes that the artistic world has been the laboratory for

the post-Fordist world of work and life (Virno, 2010; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Where the Fordist world of work and life was centred around rigid hierarchies formed by the social and economic effects of industrial production, the post-Fordist world of work and life increasingly resembles an artistic life: it is mobile, often working project-to-project, using communication and knowledge as its primary skills. However, the boundless post-Fordist life I was living out actually existed in tension with the live/work space I was occupying.

Many aspects of my live/work life in London were new to me. Until moving to London, I had managed to keep a distinction between my workspace and home-space; yet, this

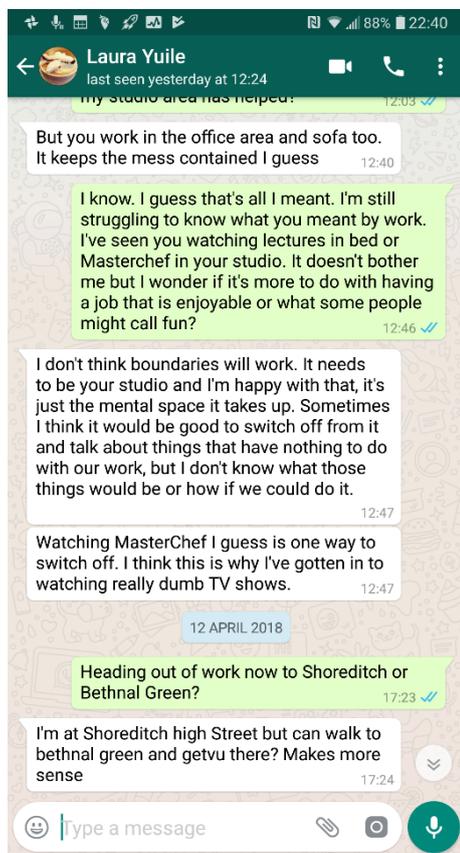


Figure 2 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).

seemed impossible in London where every inch of space was measured and valued. The notion that the city was a space where time was under constant pressure seemed to be a given whereas the live/work space as a space that embodied this life seemed to be worth more in-depth exploration. Just as there was no spare space in the city there was none in the live/work unit. Its compression of work and practice into the household seemed to be the quintessence of a rationed and compromised space.

Living in a live/work apartment in London gave me a rare opportunity to note down the character of this barrierless life. I wanted to try and understand the new relations that had formed around me. In the words of the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall 'To analyse or deconstruct language and behaviour in order to decipher the patterns of ideological

thinking which are inscribed in them' (Hall, 1985, p100) and to look at these in 'discourse' (Eagleton p.9).

My 5-year live/work tenancy was a rare security in London in an era when I have seen many friends pushed either to the periphery or entirely out of the city by rent rises or to



Figure 3 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018)..

make way for the next urban redevelopment project.

Despite the security offered by my live/work apartment, it still managed to represent the pervasive atmosphere of Capitalist Realism. This security was not without its complexities. It was a complexity that had shades of precarity, as political theorist Isabell Lorey (2014) suggests ‘Precarization is not an exception, it is rather the rule’ (2014, p.1). Precarization concerns everyone, and it acts as a form of self-governance.<sup>3</sup> In place of state governance, we have precariousness, uncertainty, insecurity and a life lived in contingency. All of these factors are operating together to form the ‘pervasive atmosphere’ of Capitalist Realism. A life of illusory qualities where nothing feels entirely certain, solid or secure.

One of the ways that this uncertainty represents itself within Capitalist Realism is as a permanent state of mobility and flexibility. In my live/work apartment this is evident in the constant preparation for a more unsettled life that I anticipate will follow this tenancy. The apartment came unfurnished and through a combination of purchases, hand-me-downs and swaps I have gathered a selection of items that fit the flexibility and durability I need to work and live within. Much of my furniture is cheap, ugly and straightforward: wooden slabs serve as tabletops, old plinths and artworks become shelves and cabinets. In the first few years of living here, I continually swapped and moved furniture around in the space. I tried to settle into an arrangement that minimises redundant items and maximises on the limited space. What is left, after four years of

<sup>3</sup> The notion that precariousness effects everyone became clear to me when I moved to London and would find myself installing artwork in the homes of the super-rich or High Net Worth Individuals (HNWi). Their homes would be fitted with surveillance systems and often they would live with their security or domestic staff. These HNWi lived in a perpetual state of being under siege, a version of precariousness.

modifications, is mostly a combination of mobile, foldable and transportable furniture. I am, though, particularly conscious of the few items that ossify and fix my life like the large furniture I have. In addition to a sense of perpetual readiness and mobility there is a fluidity in the dynamics between life and work in the apartment.

Within the apartment, the relationship between workspace and living space is fluid, it is

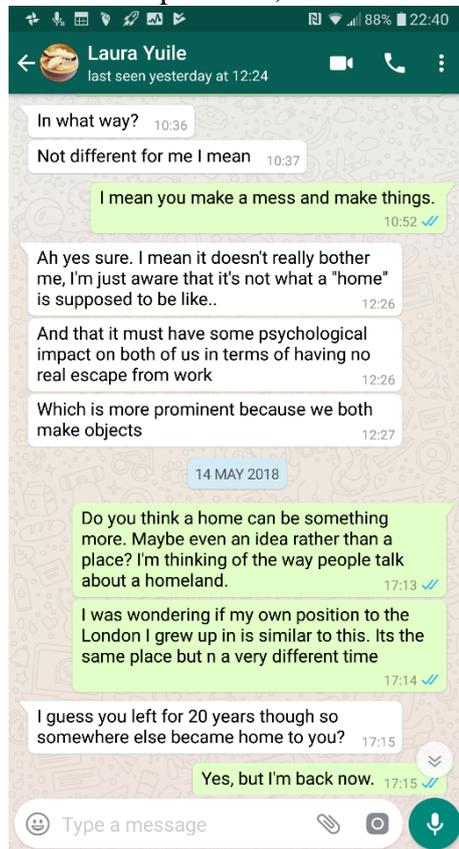


Figure 4 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).

an open-plan lifestyle. The apartment is roughly broken up into sleeping, admin, studio and dining zones which overlap and change. The main area is a single open-plan room with a separate bathroom and kitchen. The kitchen is too small to eat in, so we often eat at a table shared with the studio space it adjoins. In this space, clothes and books mingle with tools and fixings, and toothbrushes share a sink with paint brushes. My artwork isn't fixed to one process or material, and so I require a substantial library of tools and equipment that fill shelves meaning the house always looks like a workshop. From the beginning of my residency, there has been an often messy interplay of work and living space.

Even our cat plays a role in the Capitalist Realist atmospherics of the apartment. A pet broadly represents permanence and stability. However, within the building I live in, pets are not permitted; our cat, and the other cats in the block, become symbols of resistance. Having a cat makes us adult and responsible despite the infantilised condition that being a short-term tenant can engender. Nevertheless, it is not clear who the real pet is in this situation. Am I the pet? The pet of the institution that selected and now hosts me? The cat exercises a power, which is visible in the patches of fur shed around the house, where she chooses to sit or sleep becomes her space exclusively; this house is as much her nest as mine. The question is: should I feel guilty about having a pet and breaking the rules? Or do I accept that a life spent bending the rules is a characteristic of living within the pervasive atmosphere?

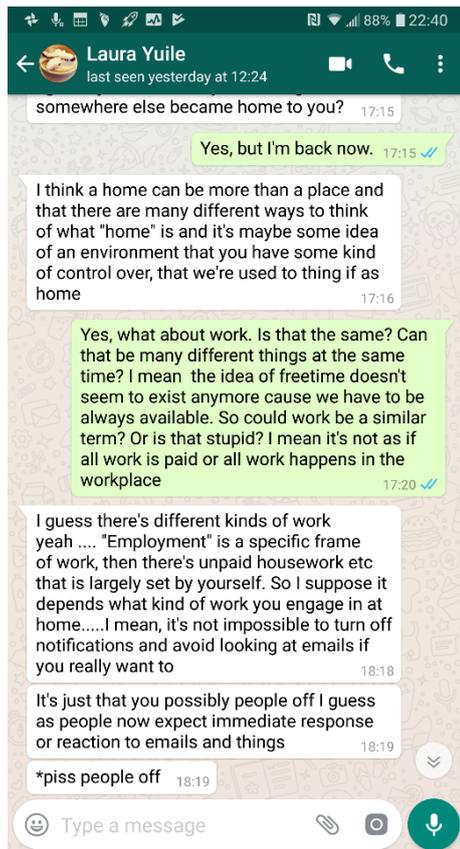


Figure 5 WhatsApp conversation with Laura Yuile, (2018).

My landlords describe my live/work space as a *residency*. I sense that this is a terminology that is profoundly uncertain; whereas a *tenancy* comes with solid legal rights, a *residency* is an unregulated combination of workspace or living space. An ‘artist residency’ can take a range of forms and happen in a number of places: domestic or institutional, placements and self-directed. It is a term that often determines situations that have a tenuous connection to permanence; a short-term teaching position can be a residency as can an ‘Instagram takeover’. An artist residency is a term with no fixed definition whether spatial or not, it implies perpetual flexibility. This flexibility has the effect of leading artists and their practices into an increasingly nomadic lifestyle. The terms ‘residency’ has none of the fixing in place of a

legally defined concept like ‘tenancy’. In recent years, the residency has become a key component in any artists career profile and yet it is a term so shapeless that it sits comfortably within the pervasive atmosphere of Capitalist Realism.

The language and discourse around live/working can also suggest a particularly individualised relationship to a work and living space. Although there are some examples of collective live/work spaces the term ‘live/working’ commonly refers to a single occupant. I have found that even though I live with my partner, I have unconsciously had an individualising effect on the apartment. Officially, my apartment was offered as a single occupancy home. Although several other couples live together in the building our unofficial status unsettles and has, at times, a disquieting effect on all of our relationships. Making objects at home as I do, I am aware that I am unconsciously individualising the environment. I am making it mine. This colonising effect is something I’m aware of and something I need to consciously resist to protect the relationship. This creeping and individualising effect is evident in spaces I use in the production of artworks. This includes not just the studio area of the apartment but also the study/sitting area, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. This use of regions beyond the

studio within my practice brings the whole house into the frame of my production and development. Even as a study space the house is subsumed by a different form of work but one that is equally significant. The sofa becomes a reading area; a desk becomes a writing area; a pile of books grows ever larger on a coffee table and reading in bed becomes an act of work. Maintaining our relationship within an active live/work space means we are both casually exposed to the precarization<sup>4</sup> that occurs when the home becomes an individualised space.

My role as a full-time PhD student plays a part in the degree of my precarity. The PhD demands that I spend more time working from home and the funding that comes with the course means I can afford to spend more time at home working. My PhD work, both practical and academic, now fully ‘co-occupies’ my living space and PhD funding translates as a substitution of payment for work, or the time spent applying for funding if I wasn’t on the course. One could also say that the non-commercial nature of the PhD offers me a protected zone, a security yet it is not one without its own metric of ‘annual progressions’ and ‘project approvals’. There is also an issue of whether the protection of this academic context prevents me from having an objective position. It offers me a temporary sense of security although I cannot fully rely on it.

Living and working within the Gh0stSpace of a live/work context has led to many parts of my life losing their solidity. A host of factors within a live/work unit fall into a fold of precariousness: the interchangeability of my studio and domestic possessions; the open and boundless use of the space; the unregulated form and informal language of my tenancy; the individualised experience of this residency; and my financial security. This live/work space holds within it a collection of strange paradoxes. It is a physical space in which ‘language and behaviours’ blur the boundaries between life and work. This live/work life may resemble the artistic and inter-relational character of post-Fordist life however it is also contained within a physical space. My live/work apartment is a Gh0stSpace, a space where physical space operates in tension with a pervasive atmosphere.

*Text messages (2018) used with permission.*

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<sup>4</sup> I use this term to distinguish from the idea of the ‘precariat’ which Guy Standing (Standing, 2016) defined as a new unstable underclass.

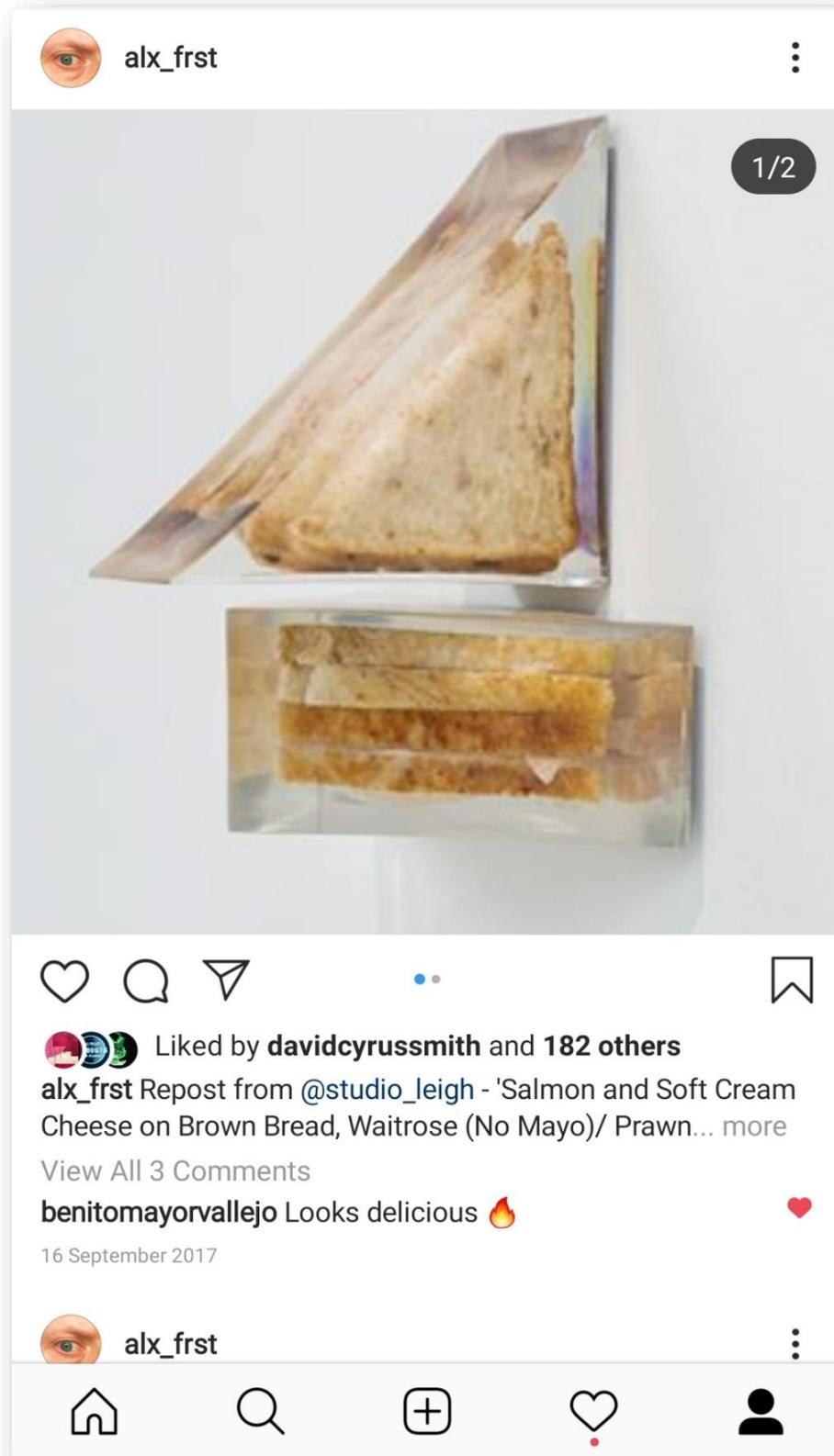


Figure 6 Salmon and soft cream cheese on brown bread, no mayo (Waitrose)/ prawn mayonnaise on brown bread (Tesco) set in clear cast resin with mirrored acrylic (2017).

## The Tilted Arc

All that separated the single expanse of his studio from Alex Frost's sleeping area was a silver/grey polyester curtain. It extended from floor to ceiling. Alex Frost had installed the curtain himself when he'd moved into the live/work unit two years previous. Alex rolled onto his side facing the wall that flanked his bed. He thought back to when he painted the wall its familiar hue of brilliant white matt emulsion. He reached down to the floor for his phone which was still plugged in and checked the circuit of news, sport and the reel of social media feeds that formed his regular pre-shower ritual. This could last between 3 minutes to an hour but today it was a modest 15 minutes. Today was a Wednesday but for him it was a weekend because he had the day off work, yet he still felt a nervous pulse within him as if he was late or had forgotten something. He eased himself up and onto the bottom edge of the bed, sliding on his back and leading from his heels.

Sitting on the bed he looked at the curtain which had initially been a temporary division of the room. The curtain draped across the floor and was now quite grubby. Perhaps, he thought, he should have put up the stud wall of plasterboard and CLS timber after all? Then he'd have a door, a door he could shut at night! If only to better keep out the cold and the light that usually flooded in at night from the streetlamp that stood outside his window. But his tenancy was due to end within a year which was not long enough to warrant making any more alterations to the apartment. As the room came into focus the first thing, he saw were the screws protruding from the surface of a shelving unit at the foot of his bed. The shelving had been cannibalised from some MDF plinths a friend had given him after using them in an exhibition.

Alex Frost noticed that there was something strange about the way that the light was permeating the curtain this Wednesday morning. From his side of the curtain it seemed darker than usual. Too dark for this time of day and it seemed even colder than normal. Too cold for this time of year. He coughed, the sound didn't echo through the apartment in its usual way, instead it was deadened. There was a strange metallic smell in the air, and it tasted to him like a nosebleed.

Alex Frost parted the curtains, walked blindly through them and hit a wall of hard steel banging his head. As the pain rushed through him, he held a hand to his skull and pressed down as if he was trying to both hold and suppress a graspable throb of pain. He

looked up and saw a continuous wall of oxidised sheet steel butted neatly together to form a smooth curved wall that towered over and across him. The steel wall was so cold it seemed to beam a chill at him. He knew this material and as an artist his curiosity in these matters of materials left him pondering whether it was actually Cor-Ten Steel. It must be at least 5 centimetres thick, he thought. The steel wall almost touched the rooms' ceiling, it stretched right across the studio and down the corridor that led to the front door of his apartment. It split the singular expanse of his live/work unit, dividing his lounge and sleeping areas from the areas he used as a studio and kitchen space. With all the windows and exits on the other side of the wall he realised the wall had trapped him in one half of his apartment.

Over on the other side of the wall he could hear his neighbour Liza dragging furniture out into the hallway that they shared. He could hear her drop something and hiss sharply. This shuffling in the hall had become a morning ritual for Liza. It seemed obvious to Alex Frost that she had some issues with hoarding as she found it so hard to see things go to waste. Liza was always leaving things on the street with notes stuck to them that said, 'Please Take' or 'Still Working' or 'Free to a good home!' and if they weren't taken she would drag them back along the corridor and into her home. On the occasions that Alex Frost had something that she thought Liza would like, he would have to reflect on the fact that he might be adding to her problems.

The curved shape of the wall reflected noise from inside and outside. The sounds combining and disorientating as if it was a parabolic mirror. Alex Frost could hear a muted conversation in the hall. Liza was speaking to someone. He thought, was this the person who'd installed the steel wall? Alex Frost wondered if his landlord, the London Studio Company had built this wall. It would have surprised him but then it was soon to be 'open studios' weekend and it was possible that this was a part of their plan for the annual fiesta. Surely not! He thought. The wall had narrowed the access into the apartment, and they would not have approved such a hazardous construction if he had proposed it.

The bathroom was fortunately on his side of the wall and so he looked at the bump on his head in the mirror. It was reddening as it filled with blood. He soaked a flannel in cold water, he folded it in half twice and held it against the bump that was forming. He came out of the bathroom and could hear a faint fidgeting squeak of rubber on urethane

paint that suggested someone was standing in an agitated fashion on the other side of the wall.

‘Hello?’ said Alex Frost.

‘Yes? What do you want?’ said a man on the other side of the wall.

‘What do I want? This is my flat! How did this wall get here?’ said Alex Frost.

‘This is not a wall. It’s a site-specific sculpture.’ said the man.

‘But why is it in my house?’

‘Well my fellow, I am the curator and I commissioned this sculpture as part of “The Walk”. You know “The Walk”?’

‘I think so, is that the reason sculptures have been popping up along the road?’

‘Yes, that sounds about right,’ said the curator.

‘Well, why have you chosen my house as a location?’ Alex Frost asked.

‘This commission has been in the making for several years.’

‘Then why has no one told me? I’ve lived here for 2 years,’ said Alex. ‘Did you speak to my landlords about this?’

‘Yes, your landlords have been in the negotiations for the past year, along with officers from the council and several well-known members of the local community. I am as baffled as you are, and I can’t see why nobody mentioned that you lived here. The unique topography of this site determined the shape and location of this sculpture and we were obliged to install the sculpture last night to cause the minimum amount of disruption on the roads,’ said the curator. Alex Frost could hear what sounded like the unfolding of a large piece of paper. ‘You see the sculptures that make up “The Walk” are placed according to a set of coordinates and it would seem that your house sits squarely within these coordinates.’ Alex Frost was confused and the pain from the bump on his head added to this.

‘Can you at least move this thing, so I can get out?’

The curator made a nasal mewling noise that seemed to express disappointment and then replied, ‘I’m afraid the artwork cannot simply be shifted along like some piece of furniture. To move this sculpture would be to destroy it.’

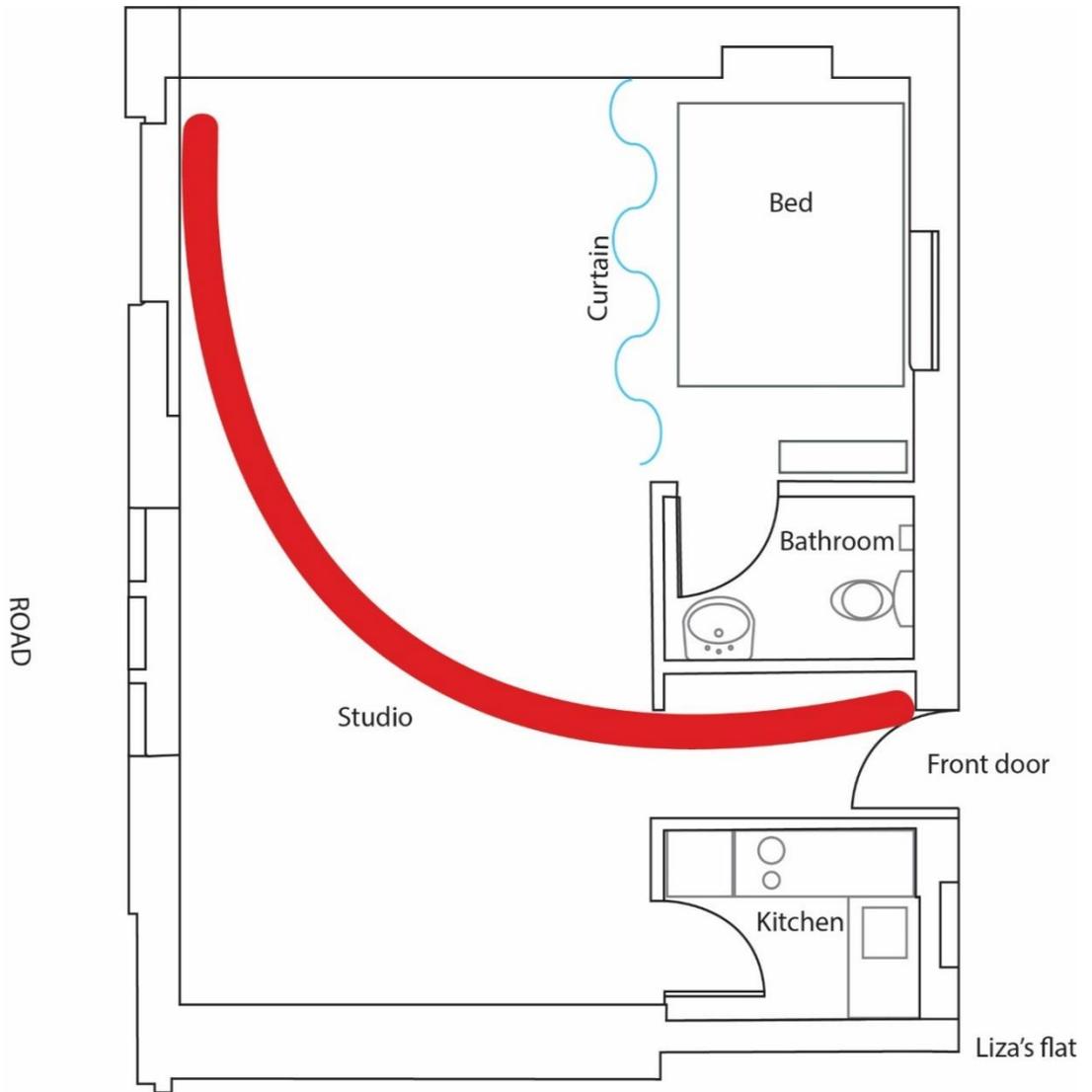


Figure 7 Plan of Alex Frost's live/work apartment with a proposal for *The Tilted Arc*, 2017.

## Wages for Living<sup>5</sup>

Second Home is a stimulating work environment of curved glass walls and sixties sci-fi style furnishings. These furnishings and modifications smooth and distort the building's rigid concrete structure which is essentially a former industrial warehouse just off Brick Lane in East London. This location is at the epicentre of London's creative quarter. An area that today is more likely to be occupied by Airbnb tenants and tech start-ups, than by artists, who have been priced out of this part of the city in recent years. Second Home's tenants range from innovative companies like Kickstarter, Institute of Imagination, and Artsy to blue-chip corporations like Ernst & Young. In addition to being a home for these companies, Second Home offers artists an opportunity to respond to this workspace, through an artist residency. In 2016 Pilvi Takala was artist in residence at Second Home (Takala, 2017). For her residency Takala devised the fictional company 'Personal Touch' and produced the film 'The Stroker'.<sup>6</sup> In the film, Nina (played by Takala) the founder of 'Personal Touch', walks through the corridors of Second Home where she awkwardly greets the people she meets: 'You OK?' or 'All good?' each phrase uttered as she wanders between the building's glass meeting rooms and offices.

**AS I SIT DOWN TO WRITE, I SET A TIMER ON MY PHONE FOR 35 MINS HENCE. I HAVE Poured A COAT OF CLEAR CAST RESIN INTO A SILICONE MOULD. EACH LAYER OF RESIN NEEDS TO REACH 'GEL STAGE', A FIRM JELLY CONSISTENCY BETWEEN LIQUID AND SOLID WHEN THE RESIN IS AT ITS MOST ACCEPTING OF A NEW LIQUID LAYER. THE AIM IS TO CATCH EACH LAYER BEFORE IT FULLY SETS.**

Takala's residency and film playout and parody sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato's concept of 'immaterial labour'. The central skill of this immaterial work is communication and interaction which Takala's film transmits through touch and

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<sup>5</sup> This title subverts the 'Wage for Work' slogan used by 'Working Artists and the Greater Economy' (W.A.G.E.) a New York based activist organisation founded in 2008 'to establish sustainable economic relationships between artists and the institutions that contract our labour, and to introduce mechanisms for self-regulation into the art field that collectively bring about a more equitable distribution of its economy.' (source: <https://wageforwork.com/>)

<sup>6</sup> Her film 'The Stroker' was later exhibited at Carlos/Ishikawa, London in July 2018.

recognition. This softening of the workplace is not necessarily freeing, it is instead authoritarian ‘one *has* to express oneself, one *has* to speak, communicate, cooperate, and so forth’ (Lazzarato, 2010, p.134). A creative workplace like Second Home becomes a uniformity. In the film ‘The Stroker’ this uniformity is mirrored in Takala’s stilted and robotic (although smiling) interactions.

**MY PHONE GURGLES TO THE SOUND OF A WHATSAPP MESSAGE FROM WORK ASKING ME TO WORK A SHIFT LATER IN THE WEEK. I CHECK MY DIARY AND REPLY THAT I AM FREE TO WORK THAT DAY. LOOKING AT MY DIARY REMINDS ME THAT I AM SCHEDULED TO GO TO THE BARBERS THIS WEEK. EACH TIME I GO I AM ASKED ABOUT MY JOB BUT I CANNOT REMEMBER WHICH JOB I TOLD THEM I DID THE LAST TIME I WENT.**

The placement of an artist residency within the ‘creative context’ of Second Home brings to mind the approach of the Artist Placement Group (APG).<sup>7</sup> APG’s placements of artists in a waged-work context were distinguished by their historical context, a time when waged-work had clearer edges. APG were operating in a moment when work was more commonly bonded to Fordist industrialised working practices, work which came with securities like a fixed place to work, a job with career progression, sick pay, holiday pay or collective bargaining through union power. Yet to use APG’s placement strategy today within a post-Fordist, immaterial, individualised and boundless context like Second Home generates a contradiction. A contradiction where the artist is invited to reflect on a workplace which has an artistic form (Gielen, 2010). This artistic style of work is project-based, prioritises communication skills, is wholly individualised and entrepreneurial. Having an artist respond to the ‘creative context’ of Second Home creates a haunting effect of an artist returning to a context that has its origins in artistic values. Personal Touch and the film ‘The Stroker’ respond to this residency within a creative workplace through the haunting figure of the residency artist who reflects on the strange interplay of feelings and work in today’s workplace. Second Home is a space that uses creativity and openness to mask an inherent uniformity and

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<sup>7</sup> The Artist Placement Group (APG) was an experimental art organisation that emerged in London in the 1960s. APG facilitated artist placements within industrial and commercial institutions primarily during the 1960s and 1970s.

restrictiveness. This is a paradoxical and illusory context symptomatic of the ideology of privatisation.

The broad contemporary context of the relationship between work and life in the global north<sup>8</sup> is also a post-industrial context. Since the 1970s, the global north, a social, political and economic division of people and place, experienced a period of de-industrialisation, where the messy business of industrial production was outsourced to the global south.<sup>9</sup> The jobs that have come in place of the lost Fordist industries have a very different character. Post-Fordist work's character 'requires cooperation and interactivity' (Hardt et al., 2007, p. 48). Immaterial waged work in the global north demands an emotional, knowledgeable and creative workforce that use 'soft skills'. Jobs where 'being' is a partner of 'capital' or as Michel Foucault puts it:

The stake in all neo-liberal analysis is the replacement every time of homo oeconomicus as a partner of exchange with homo oeconomicus as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.

Foucault, 2012, p.226

Within this 'being as capital' entrepreneurial, creative and immaterial attributes become part of any job description regardless of their relevance to the work at hand. This is an ideology that has dispersed out into the wider field of work to the extent that today, a nurse or a cobbler are both expected to be creative and show entrepreneurial flair in their work regardless of its necessity to the work at hand. This entrepreneurial character is evident in the freelance dynamism expected of participants in creative work environments like Second Home. These environments are spaces of individualisation and are central to the ideology of privatisation. Such spaces hold within them a feeling of being 'set free' as British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) would say. This is the spirit of individual personal responsibility that shapes so much of life within the ideology of privatisation where social responsibilities are increasingly placed on the individual rather than on the state, family or wider community.

In addition to being fixed within spaces like Second Home 'immaterial labour' is also unbound from a distinct workspace. This is what German sociologist Ulrich Beck

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<sup>8</sup> The global north includes states that comprise of an economic and political establishment such as United States, Canada, Europe, Israel, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan as well as Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>9</sup> The global south includes Africa, Latin America, and developing Asia including the Middle East.

(2014) ominously calls the ‘brave new world of work’. A world where work has dismounted from the physical bounds of the singular and distinctive workplace. This new world is a place where you know the sense of humour of your Uber driver before they arrive or where an inappropriate Facebook post can get you the sack. Within this brave new world of work, it is harder to distinguish where working life begins and ends. This immaterial work has a slippery way of permeating through contemporary life. This can be seen in the way home-space and the workspace have lost their distinction and become Gh0stSpace. Where feminist scholars (Crain et al., 2016; Delphy, 2016) redefined the household as the place of unrecognised and unpaid work, today many new forms of work find themselves in this domain of unvalued and unpaid labour. Work today increasingly operates at the edges of life within a Gh0stSpace of undervalued and unpaid labour.

**I GET UP AS THE ALARM SOUNDS AND PICK-UP A SANDWICH. I PUT ON A MASK, GLOVES AND MIX UP A NEW BATCH OF RESIN OUTSIDE. I SOAK THE SANDWICH’S UNDERSIDE IN RESIN AND CAREFULLY LOWER IT INTO THE STICKY MOULD WITH TONGS. I THEN POUR THE REST OF THE RESIN ONTO THE SANDWICH. I BLAST THE RESIN’S SURFACE WITH A HEAT GUN WHICH SUCKS THE BUBBLES OUT OF THE RESIN. I PLACE THE MOULD INTO THE PLASTIC BOX WHICH I CLIP SHUT AND REMOVE THE GLOVES AND MASK. I RESET THE CLOCK AS I RETURN INDOORS TO WRITE, THIS TIME MOVING TO THE SOFA.**

Through ‘shadow work’ (Illich, 1981) work takes an invisible form. Shadow work is most evident today in the self-checkout or self-check-in culture of contemporary consumerism where labour is increasingly deferred to the customer in a trade-off for a shorter queue or cheaper ticket. Nevertheless, shadow work is not limited to physical interactions. Shadow work extends to the statuses, posts and comments we share through social media. This posting and commenting culture has become an economy, where (through the traffic that generates advertising revenue) playing a part in this culture generates a profit for a new generation of multinational corporations and in reaction to the huge profits that Facebook was accumulating from the publicising, hoarding and filtering of our personal details, curator and writer Laurel Ptak set up the website WagesForFacebook.com. At the core of the website’s statement is a demand to reconsider our relationship between ourselves (as content providers) and social media.

‘They say it’s friendship. We say it’s unwaged work’ (Ptak, 2014). Ptak suggests that contributing a ‘post’ or a ‘like’ should be considered an act of work, exploitation and a more pervasive example of shadow work than any self-checkout.<sup>10</sup> Shadow work, an unwaged work, appears as a haunting ghost work within physical and virtual life.

Gamification describes another haunting and insidious way that work has lost its distinction from life. Instead, through gamification, work happens in a diffused play-space. The term gamification: ‘the use of game design elements in non-game contexts’ (Walz and Deterding, 2015, p. 9) masks the authoritarian space that it produces. The obligation to play along at work creates its own form of invisible and oppressive control. Gamification often masks the game-like working processes of workplace competition with rewards, league tables and group meetings. In gaming work and life, work is disguised as ‘fun’ leading to an oppressive work-life relationship where there is no escape from a job. Today even ‘fun’ becomes hard to distinguish when work has invaded all zones of life. Why go home when the workspace provides a social space, with games, food or even alcohol? This feeling of no escape from work exists in a pervasive atmosphere of games and shadow play as its location grows harder to see and feel.

Gamification inverts the historical relationship between work and entertainment. In the 1940s philosophers Adorno and Horkheimer discussed in ‘The Dialectic of Enlightenment’ (2002) how ‘entertainment under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanised work process so they can cope with it again’ (p. 109). Adorno questioned just how enjoyable fun could be if the activities we do in our free time have no distinction from work yet where entertainment once impersonated work, today work mimics fun.

Today there is no sanctuary from work, work and play exist in Gh0stSpace. Free time, once consolidated in the concept of the weekend, has been effectively eliminated by the melding and merging of life and work. Adorno would say that free time has always had a semblance of work as it is connected to a work ethic and has an industry surrounding it (Adorno and Bernstein, 2005, p. 189) yet in the contemporary dispersed workplace

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<sup>10</sup> The ‘United Voices of the World’ is a union set up to support and empower ‘the most vulnerable groups of precarious, low-paid and predominantly migrant workers in the UK’ (source: <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/>).

free time has become either enmeshed in work or broken up into fragments that we attempt to capture on a commute, in-between appointments, a daydream or an alcoholic (or otherwise medicated) stupor. The inter-relation of work and fun space creates a sense that there are no spaces (or states of mind) that are work-free.

Many digital devices, as a half toy/half tool, seamlessly facilitate the contactless flow of digital data. Digital networking technologies may have advanced the process of mobile working where work slips into life, and where work feels like a game. However, like the curved and eccentric furnishings that sit within a former industrial block at Second Home, networked technologies mask the traditional capitalist accumulation, that consolidates wealth into the hands of the few, that is at the heart of these new digital technologies.

The contemporary Gh0stSpace of 'live working' also facilitates and speeds up these processes of digital accumulation. Software-based home working like that offered by Airbnb (the global platform for renting accommodation) or Vrumi (an online platform for the temporary hire of office space) or marketplace platforms like eBay and Etsy bring the shop into the home, as do crowdsourcing marketplaces for online labour like the Amazon Mechanical Turk (a platform facilitated by Amazon for outsourcing jobs and processes that computers cannot yet do from a pool of human workers) or Fiverr.com (the market for piecemeal jobs)<sup>11</sup> which employ a distributed and often homebound workforce in piecemeal work. Using these consumer-to-consumer web platforms or crowdsourcing marketplaces, working from home can be an entire business: a point of distribution where workers must store or produce their own shop's stock and manage their own customer relations and administration. This home-based app-working has consolidated the household as another commercial workspace, a commercialisation which further implicates the household in the ideology of privatisation where waged work takes an increasingly ghostly form.

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<sup>11</sup> There is the feeling that our online life has become integral to our work-life. Enter any workplace today, and you are likely to catch a reflected glance at the permanently open browser window of someone's Facebook feed on their work computer screen. This use of social media in the workplace is either because today's worker sees Facebook as a tool in the workplace (using it to ask questions around their work or to field opinions) or this stream of personal content is the perfect 'sidebar' to maintaining a connection between the workplace and the personal.

New technologies facilitate a mutation of capitalism that increasingly resembles the colonising patterns of capital accumulation seen in earlier eras. This is a space where the work of a Deliveroo rider or an Uber driver resembles a ‘market of day labourers - agricultural workers, dock workers, or other low-wage workers’ (Srnicsek, 2017, p. 78).<sup>12</sup> The writer and academic Nick Srnicsek (2017) calls this rapid and increasing domination of a new generation of digital monopolies ‘Platform Capitalism’. Platform Capitalism describes the strategies of digital platforms like Uber, Amazon, Deliveroo, eBay, Taskrabbit who seek to concentrate wealth into that hands of a small group of individuals who maintain an arms-length relationship to their workforce who receive few workplace securities (Harris, 2018). This consolidation of wealth is a pattern of behaviour that is inherent within capitalism. It is summed up in the Communist Manifesto as the bourgeoisie’s need to be ‘constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society’ (Marx and Engels, 1967). Despite the playful styling of this Platform Capitalism it is not a creative liberation from capitalism, it is a restyling of wealth accumulation and consolidation.

**AN EMAIL ARRIVES IN MY INBOX FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY WITH THE HEADING ‘CALLING ALL ENTREPRENEURS, ASPIRING ACTORS AND FASHIONISTAS.’ IT IS PROMOTING ‘SET FOR LIFE’, A CHANCE TO WIN £10,000 EVERY MONTH FOR 30 YEARS. AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND CREATIVE BEST SELF.**

In answer to the new digital super-rich formed by Platform Capitalism, Srnicsek together with Alex Williams wrote ‘Inventing the Future’ (2016) which conceives of a future beyond the insidious new forms of wage-slavery. They map out the new labour relations of a fully-automated society where robots do the bulk of the labour and the working week is minimised (or eliminated). Among Srnicsek and Williams’ proposals is a Universal Basic Income (UBI). In a future world where robots take on a greater share of the jobs a UBI from government to citizen, replacing or supplementing wages and welfare support, could offer a liberation from work towards realising our full human potential. A UBI re-appropriates the use of play and the forces of creative and immaterial work that have become negative factors within the ideology of privatisation.

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<sup>12</sup> This work culture of short term, piecemeal work or ‘micro work’ is what’s come to be known as the ‘Gig economy’.

Play and self-fulfilment in this future world instead replace work as the foundation stone of society. Srnicek and Williams counter the tradition within leftist politics to fight through what they call the ‘folk politics’ of protest for worker’s rights, instead they propose a ‘post-work society’ - a world free from work - rather than one where unions try to unpick the mechanisms that make work unfair. This post-work society does not envisage ending the processes of work instead it suggests ending the labour relations which selectively validates jobs as worthy of payment or not (such as the unpaid labour of care-work in the household or the labour put into social media). Life lived on a Universal Basic Income demands a redefinition of work where the fluid forms and spaces for work, like domestic work, home-working, co-working and shadow work, can all achieve a degree of paid recognition. A UBI suggests a way around the processes of rampant capital accumulation. However, Srnicek and Williams miss out the issue of asset inequality. Without addressing asset inequality a new Gh0stSpace will form where invisible public and private assets create invisible advantages between citizens. A privately owned house or inheritance becomes an advantage as does access to public assets like schools, transport or cultural infrastructure. A Universal Basic Income needs to be tethered to a redistribution of private and public assets, what the ‘Institute for the Future’<sup>13</sup> call a Universal Basic Assets. After all, it is not just wage income that generates inequalities it is our relationship to space and possessions.

**I APPLY ANOTHER LAYER OF RESIN TO THE MOULD AND RESET THE TIMER. I BRING THE TIMER INTO THE KITCHEN, PROP MY LAPTOP ON THE KITCHEN UNIT AND SET IT TO AUTOMATICALLY READ OUT THIS ESSAY AS I DO THE WASHING UP.**

Today, the relationship between work and life is haunting. The space where work begins, and home ends appears as Gh0stSpace which occasionally materialises only to then disappear through processes like shadow work or gamification. Through immaterial and entrepreneurial work this process of consumption can contradict itself by giving the appearance of freedom while also being authoritarian. In Gh0stSpace work consumes all life a condition that has been facilitated through the use of mobile networked technologies. Mobile technologies are increasingly providing a facility for

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<sup>13</sup> The ‘Institute for the Future’ is a futures organisation offering global forecasts, custom research, and foresight training to businesses, governments, and social impact organizations. <https://www.iftf.org/uba/> (Accessed 18 May 2020).

capitalist accumulation to mutate into new spaces like our Facebook data. The boundless Gh0stSpace is a space free of workplace securities like a prescribed space to work in, sick pay and holiday pay, and one where a solid idea like free time, no longer has any weight. This Gh0stSpace resembles the space of unrecognised and unwaged work that is often centred around the home, like reproductive or care work. Through a Universal Basic Income in combination with a Universal Basic Assets (albeit a UBI and UBA that are moderated and protected from the excesses of digital capital accumulation) there is a means to re-evaluate work and see beyond the Gh0stSpace. To move from the impasse of trying to correct the inefficiencies of waged work to a more equitable wage for living.



Figure 8 Alex Frost, Baked frozen cheese and tomato pizza (Pizza Express) with mood crystal topping (yellow citrine) set in clear cast resin with mirrored acrylic (2018).



Figure 9 Alex Frost, Papa John's 'The Works' in clear cast resin with black acrylic (home delivered on 21st November 2017).

## Love/Work

*This dialogue discusses the collaborative exhibition 'Love/Work', with Laura Yuile, held within our apartment in Acme Studio's Fire Station, London, in September 2017.*

I sit on a chair in the corner of my live/work apartment invigilating our exhibition 'Love/Work'. Between my feet lies a baby on a patterned plastic mat. The baby is staring up at me as I gaze down. Together we invigilate this exhibition which doesn't look much like either my studio nor like a home anymore. Around the room objects from home and work are propped in adhoc displays and are set within a diorama of brown paper lined walls giving the effect that we are sat in a giant inside-out parcel.

Within these parcel-like walls objects punctuate the space. Things have been taken from across the space and its range of uses as a home and studio. From the home we've taken the TV that is normally used to watch programmes that look nothing like this life - reality tv that represents a reality so unfamiliar that it's comfortingly unfamiliar despite being labelled as 'reality'. Other items from home have been brought out of their usual spaces to decorate the space like the used fly papers that now decorate the space or the freezer, microwave, spices and coffee taken from the kitchen. From the studio space, there are objects that I've made here, like the sandwiches and sushi encased in clear-cast resin which suggest a lunch eaten hastily at work, and fake bronze casts of cat flaps which are their own portal between inside and outside worlds. Other inter-relational objects were brought into the exhibition from outside, like our bikes; the courier boxes usually seen around the city strapped to the back of a motorbike; the anti-climb spikes and the dummy CCTV cameras. Within this live/work space, Gh0stSpace is an apparition embodied in inter-relational objects.

Yet the Gh0stSpace is not merely represented in objects. It is there in the relation between an exhibition in a home and an exhibition in a studio. I think back to before I moved into this live/work apartment, a time when I had been able to keep my life, artwork and jobs separate. Since living here, a newfound boundlessness has been generated in my life. It is a boundlessness that resonates into my emotional life. Within this exhibition there is a silent partner, my partner and collaborator, who plays her own muted role in this exhibition. We have made our lives together as we have made this exhibition together. As a representation of life and work within this space it would be dishonest to leave her out. She lives here. She is an artist too and so without her this

exhibition would be a fiction. I wonder if there has ever been a more human justification for an artistic collaboration?

A handwritten list is scrawled in purple Sharpie on the wall beside me. I bend over to rub the baby's belly and make some vaguely melodic noises that sound like conversation.

'Hello, Albert... welcome to our exhibition... Are you wondering where your daddy's gone? He's gone to see Aunty Liza next door. He'll be back soon... Don't worry... Shall I tell you about this exhibition while you're waiting? Well, it looks like it could be a show in my flat, but this isn't just a home is it? It's also my studio space and a living space that I share with Aunty Laura.'

Albert smiles, he mumbles back in approval as I speak.

'You see the fly papers? Well, they're covered in real flies. The flies come from the bin depot next door. I've been collecting these fly papers for a year and I decided to dust them in coloured flock, so they look soft and furry. Isn't that clever?'

Albert squeaks as I swoop down to pick him up and put him on my knee. I point up to the fly papers on the ceiling.

'What's that, Albert? The courier boxes and sandwiches? What are they doing here? Well, the studio is where I work. Can you see where the studio ends and begins Albert? I can't either. When you grow up who knows what it will be like but today everyone is moving around all the time. Like your daddy, who drives a scooter for work, hey Albert?'

Yes, the walls are all wrapped up like a parcel. It makes the room look like a present. Have you even had a birthday yet, Albert? Well, you will soon. In August, I think. Is that right? Well, in August you'll get lots of presents, but they'll look a bit different to this. This is more like you're the present, all wrapped up inside a parcel. Isn't that lovely?'

Aunty Laura lives here, but it's just me that works here. We've worked together to make this art exhibition cause Aunty Laura's an artist too. So, it's an exhibition about our life together. The exhibition is called .... Oh, hold on, I'll get a tissue.'

I walk to the bathroom to get some tissue and wipe the drool off Albert's face and chest. I nearly trip over the cat and Albert makes another squeal at the sight of the cat. I walk with Albert out of the bathroom and bend down so Albert can look at the cat, who looks sceptical, its ears curling around.

'This is Fluffs. This is her home too.'

At this point Albert's dad, Charlie, comes through the front door, and Albert's face lights up.

'Hello?' He greeted Albert almost singing the word, and Albert replicated the sound.

'Thanks,' Charlie said to me as he plucked Albert out of my arms.

'How's he been? ... The show looks great.'

'Cheers Charlie.'

'Had any interesting visitors? Apart from Albert, of course.'

Charlie stared directly into Albert's eyes while I spoke.

'Well, yesterday someone came in while I was pouring a cup of tea in the kitchen. I waited because I didn't want to frighten them. It's strange how quiet it can be in this flat even with the A12 rumbling along outside. As I took the teabag out of the cup, I tapped the side of my mug with my teaspoon to give them some sort of signal. I then opened the kitchen door and saw this man on one knee with the fridge door open pouring orange juice into his mouth from the carton. We both looked at each other. He stands up, closes the fridge door and leaves the flat, planting the carton on the bookshelves in the hallway.'

'The cheek of it!' Charlie said and we all laughed as he strapped Albert into his Baby K'tan swaddle carrier.

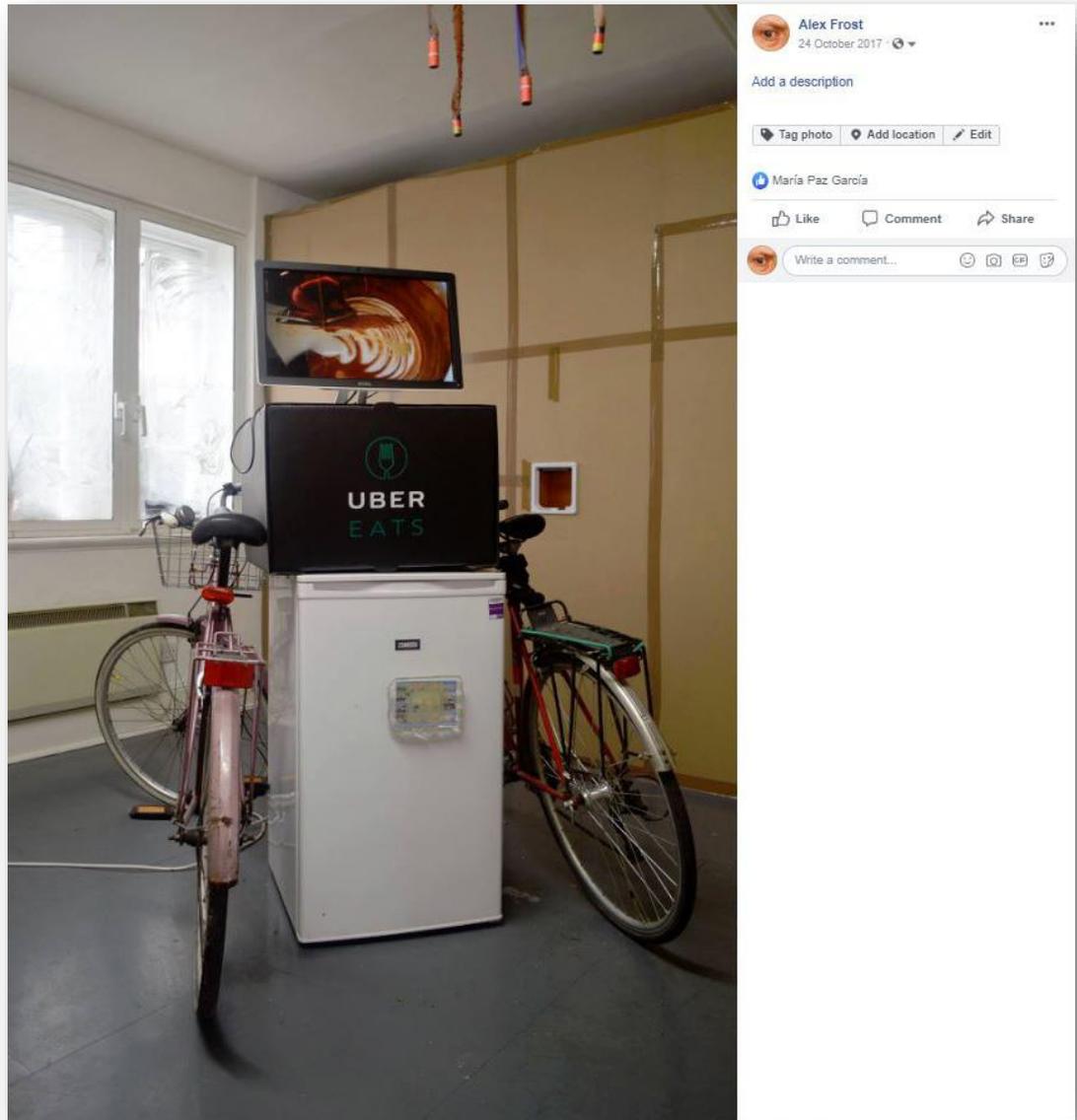


Figure 10 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).



Figure 11 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).



Figure 12 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).



Figure 13 Alex Frost and Laura Yuile, 'Love/Work' an exhibition at The Fire Station, London (2017).

## A Creative Residency

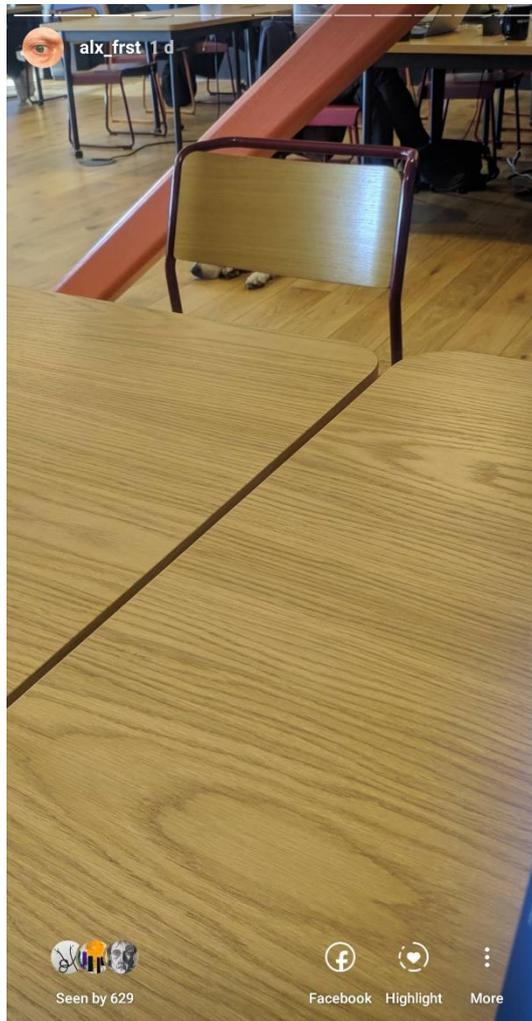


Figure 14 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018).

Working from home had become a constant flicker of distractions. An email would come in, and I would feel impelled to answer it immediately. A chore would start to look urgent, and many other trivial tasks became vital. So, I realised that I had to get free from all these distractions. I tried working at the local university library which was quiet and was a short cycle from my house. I would go there in the morning and write until lunchtime. Working in the university eventually became impossible once the students returned from their holidays as it became harder to find a space amongst the banks of desks in the library.

Sitting at a desk in the crowded library I searched online for co-working spaces nearby. ‘Servcorp’ and ‘WeWork’ came up as sponsored links in my search. The slick styling and simple website of WeWork drew

me to their messaging window and I sent them a request to visit a co-working space that is a 15 minutes cycle away. In the seconds between sending the message and receiving an answer, I considered whether a spell at WeWork could be a self-imposed artist-residency. In their instant reply, WeWork offers me an appointment for 1pm that day with Alex in London Fields. I cycled to the building that registers as Hackney Community College on Google Maps, which suggests that the building had only recently changed use. Walking into the WeWork complex, I was confronted by a street-food van. The side of the van was folded open, and two people sat focussed on their laptops. I stood at the open hatch, and one of the seated people eventually looked down at me while simultaneously and affectedly striking their return key. I explained that I

was there to be shown around and I was pointed to a gathering of leather sofas and style magazines, which is overlooked by a group of men who were playing table tennis and discussing their latest project. I was eventually greeted by Alex, a bearded man who walks me around the building. As he takes me through the different floors the décor switches styles that suggest variants on Manhattan loft-living: ventilation ducts trail across the ceilings, lamps flood small banks of tables, roller-blinds mask the stream of the sun that shoots through the building, across the columns and I-beams that divide rooms. Colour schemes suggest an aesthetic of worn utility in light beige (the colour, without the taint, of a tobacco-stained ceiling), dark teal, peach, tractor red and natural wood. On some floors, seating varies between desks in rows, diner-style booths and clusters of sofas. People scatter themselves across the rooms or collect in small groups, working together, muttering over the tops of their screens or talking on their phones. A separate area through a glass door contains glass-walled offices. These glass booths remind me of an animal rescue centre I once visited, in each one people stare intently at their screens giving the appearance of work being done. In these rooms, more permanent tenants have desktop computers and personal possessions. As we pass the permanent office users are peeling out to use the kitchens as it is lunchtime and the atmosphere of the whole building changes noticeably within minutes into something more boisterous. Alex tells me how each WeWork has its own mood or style, and this location is more relaxed and not so corporate. ‘It is mostly used by creatives,’ he says. He tells me how WeWork has flexible office spaces across London with several in the City of London. After the tour, I decide to rent a hot-desk,<sup>14</sup> which entitles me to use any one of several desks across the four floors of the building, until the end of the month. Alex gives me a card like an oyster card which I activate with the WeWork app and Alex explains how the app is a social network for all the WeWork spaces.

The next day I cycle to the WeWork building, I have skipped breakfast and arrive at 8am. In one of the many kitchens I fix myself a coffee using one of the mugs that are printed with the slogan ‘Do What You Love’. The coffee is free, as is the beer (although the taps aren’t turned on until the afternoon) and a fridge full of milk means that some

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<sup>14</sup> I took up a WeWork membership for two weeks from 16th October – 30th October 2018.

people come into the kitchen with cereal in Tupperware pots which they add milk to and then sit eating at a desk while looking at their laptops.



Figure 15 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018).

The WeWork building is on a street that runs between the headquarters of SPACE studios on Mare Street<sup>15</sup> (Harding, 2018) and is adjacent to Beck Road, the street in East London that Acme Studios acquired in the 1980s. Beck Road had been a street of derelict houses that Acme acquired and rented to artists who were given a small grant to make the buildings into live/work homes. The artists' tenancies were initially temporary yet when the street was saved from demolition towards the end of the 1980s some artists stayed on. There was also something caustic in the positioning of the WeWork building so near to Beck Road, a case study for live/working in London and one that used live/working as a way for artists who may otherwise have been pushed out of the city to continue working in London.

That morning I take a seat on the first floor which gradually becomes saturated with the smell of cooking waffle batter. Daily events are listed on posters stuck to the doors across the building, and today there is a launch event for an app called Wingman which is happening in the kitchen on the floor I'm working on. At this launch, freshly made waffles are being given away for free. The Wingman app allows people in relationships to play matchmaker to their single friends. I am lured in, having missed breakfast that morning. It is a set-up, where I am the singleton, and this team of waffle-makers and app promoters are my matchmakers. As I queue-up, I feel the pressure to interact with

<sup>15</sup> Founded by artists Bridget Riley, Peter Sedgley and Peter Townsend in 1968.

the app promoters who stand alongside the waffle-makers. A woman in front of me in the queue initiates a conversation with the chattiest of the app promoters. Their conversation affords me some space, and I use the woman in front as a social buffer. The conversation has turned into a promotional spiel, I can see that the woman in front of me has lost her initial enthusiasm and has turned her body as if to somehow disengage from the app promoter's chat-up lines. I give the waffle-maker my order and then stand aside. I take my waffle and sit on a highchair at a breakfast bar eating my waffle which comes on a stick, loaded with toppings, which makes it both difficult to eat and a more portable snack. As I'm eating, I notice cards that have been left scattered across the room. The Wingman logo is printed on one side of the card and the phrase 'You ok hun?' is on the other. This bartering of treats for attention feels sticky. I sense that there's been an inflation in the price of my attention since I walked into the building that morning and it is measured in a freshly toasted waffle.

This strange transaction of attention-for-waffle resonates in a host of other social events that happen across the building from cocktail nights to mindfulness classes, and local businesses sponsor each event. The WeWork app promotes these events and encourages communication across all the WeWork buildings. The app hosts the business profiles of the WeWork occupants and includes a feed of messages and requests between WeWork tenants and staff. The app allows 'creators' to sign up, cancel, register visitors and book meeting rooms. This app works together with the gloss black on matt black oyster-style RFID card that serves as a key for each member. WeWork promotes a contactless form of possession or a flexible idea of ownership, echoed in the way the toilets, kitchen and reception are not signposted. This lack of signalling reinforces the effect of a private club shared between strangers.

**BE BOLD MAKE IT HAPPEN 24 HOURS A DAY CREATE YOUR LIFE'S WORK  
NEVER SETTLE HUSTLE DO WHAT YOU LOVE 365 DAYS A YEAR DARE  
MORE FEARLESS FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD START TODAY NEVER  
SETTLE MAKE IT HAPPEN HUSTLE HARDER NEVER STOP GETTING  
BETTER<sup>16</sup>**

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<sup>16</sup> A text taken from the wallpaper in the bathrooms at WeWork, London Fields, 2019.

I find myself wandering to another floor to find a toilet which had a shower in it, and more curiously, a dispenser filled with mouthwash. I pour some mouthwash into a small

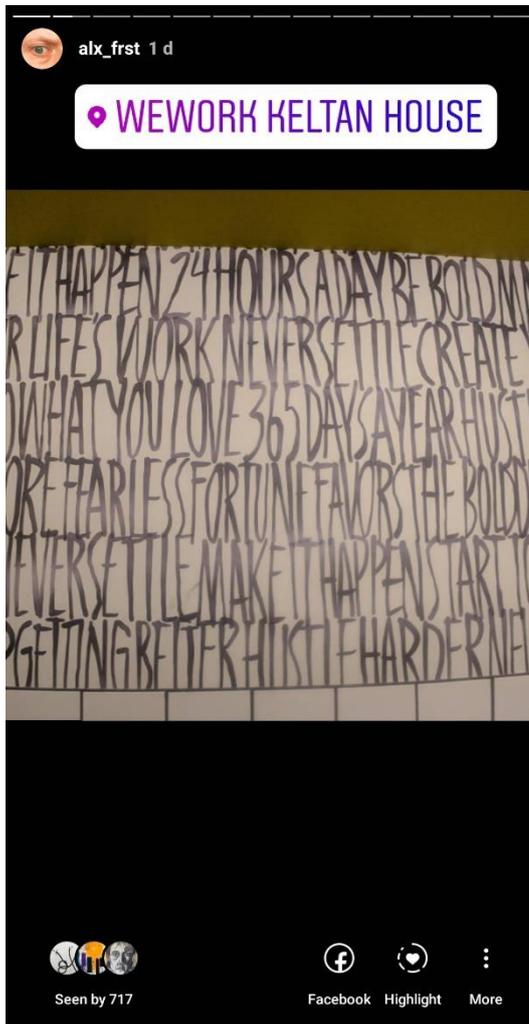


Figure 16 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018).

sample-sized cup and slush the mouthwash around in my mouth. I think about the breath tainted by free coffee that I'm erasing and the overlaying of my free coffee breath with a more personable free minty freshness.

The spaces WeWork offer are flexible, adaptable, super-individualised and dynamic. The WeWork brand of co-working space is becoming a familiar sight in cities across the world (Correspondent, 2018). These new workspaces are occupied by a contemporary middle class. They are a Creative Class who are not solely defined by a job in the arts. In urban studies theorist Richard Florida's conception of the Creative Class (2014), 'everyone is creative' and that creativity means using innovative ideas and methods to complement the new economy that was forming in cities across the world in the 1980s and 1990s. Florida framed the new

working practices of the Creative Class as a liberation from the rigid and formalised working practices of Fordism. Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie specifies this Creative Class as a new middle class who work in a mobile and flexible way. For McRobbie the Creative Class is an:

expansive sector of the middle classes who can be described as creative but whose ranks also include accountants, engineers, teachers, hairdressers indeed just about everyone who does not do a manual job working on the factory floor, or a low-grade service job in fast food or cleaning. McRobbie, 2016; p.45.

This broader definition of creative work was made clear to me as I met the ‘digital nomads’ who filled the desks at WeWork. These were not arts graduates but were instead professionally mobile people living an open plan life of freelance work.

The individual freedom or self-expression that spaces like WeWork offer comes at a price. Freedom from institutional constraints, like having a boss or working to set hours, results in the erosion of workplace securities that were achieved through union action. Constructs like a weekend, time off, a pension or space away from work were born from collective action. This erosion of securities has happened not through force, instead it has occurred through a hegemonic culture; one that is persuasive and enacted voluntarily through what

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci would call a ‘common sense’ (as cited in Green, 2011, p. 48). A common or universalising sense where ideological values are held to be natural or inevitable and where workplace securities or boundaries are limiting. For example, in the kitchens at WeWork a beer tap is turned on in the afternoon and as the sun goes down co-workers fetch pints of beer, bringing them to their desk. I can’t help but read this as another example of the working day drilling into social life, and genuine free time (away from work) is no longer possible.

Linked to this idea of personal freedom co-working spaces take this idea of individualism a step further by reproducing an illusory form of collectivity. Whether it is the ‘we’ of WeWork or WeTransfer, there is a sense that the illusion of the prefix of ‘we’ is usurping the ‘I-’ of iPod or iPad. However, this is a privatised ‘we’. A quick glance around my house and I see my printer is made by Brother whose slogan is ‘at



Figure 17 Instagram Story screen capture: WeWork, Hackney, London (November 2018).

your side’, the Zoom recorder that my partner has just bought says ‘We’re for creators’ on the box. This is what writer and academic Oli Mould calls in ‘Against Creativity’ (2018, p.28) the inherent contradiction of the narrative of creative work which ‘often extols collaborative, “agile”, collective and co-operative working practices, but only rewards insular, atomised, self-interested and individualised work.’ The development away from the super-individualised office to the open-plan or networked office (a kind of space that WeWork has opened-up to include many new freelance mobile workers) has led to a culture of what Mould sees as ‘performed’ collaboration. This is the posture of a staged creative collectivity that is increasingly present in products and services today. The language of creativity or the more subtle shifts that lead to a prefixing of a word with ‘we’, has generated a symbolic collectivity which seems to be compensating for the removal of hard-won securities like job security, holiday pay or sick pay.

WeWork embodies the corporatisation of creative work. Today, this creative ethos resonates beyond co-working spaces like WeWork. WeWork may be a seductive and familiar environment, but it was also a materialisation of Gh0stSpace. One where a ‘creative ethos’ of performed collectivity met individual self-expression and where flexible working was practically an order. This creative ethos now extends to other working practices which have been ‘liberated’ from rigid working structures in the name of creativity. This can be seen in the broad range of job descriptions that demand ‘creative’ and ‘innovative’ workers. This field of creative work extends to app-based employers like TaskRabbit, Deliveroo, Uber etc. which promote themselves as a natural extension of creative work. Just as with co-working spaces these service jobs are now sold as having been liberated from rigid working practices. This is a freedom that includes flexible working hours, mobile working practices but also lost workplace securities like paid holidays, sick pay, pension contributions or a lack of contracted hours. These app-based employers represent a new jobs market sold on the illusion of creative self-expression, independence and mobility. This creative ethos, and its illusory freedoms, now permeate beyond a creative middle class that operate in the Gh0stSpace of spaces like the co-working office to a creative service class whose flexibility and mobility takes an even more ghostly form. As an artist I consider the ways that ‘creative life’ plays out as a Gh0stSpace in corporate spaces like the WeWork offices. A Gh0stSpace embodied in informal décor and a relaxed version of the work environment.

A Gh0stSpace that transmits through behaviours like a form of common sense. I feel implicated by the artistic character of these Gh0stSpaces and yet this corporatized version of creative life also feels far from anything I, as an artist, would call home or even work.

In this chapter, I have explored Gh0stSpace through my own inter-relational context of living and working in a live/work apartment and through a residency in a co-working office. Both of these creative contexts embody the pervasive character of Gh0stSpace, a space where life and work blur; which is propagated through a form of digital capitalism and where the corporatized creative worker is representative of an ideology of privatisation. Primarily, this chapter has attempted to capture and ossify the objects that are emblematic of the temporality of Gh0stSpace. These are optimised objects that speak of Gh0stSpace as fluid: like the resin encapsulations of sandwiches which would otherwise have been wolfed down over an office keyboard or the capturing of a frozen pizza hastily slung in the oven. These and other objects of Gh0stSpace were brought together in the collaborative exhibition 'Love/Work' which generated a space for dialogue between life-space and work-space. I shall now explore the Gh0stSpace beyond the home and how it colonises the practices of the city.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Gh0stSpace of the City**

**Please now view**

**‘Gh0stSpace of the City’**

**at <http://research.alexfr0st.com/>**

## The Making of a Liquid Materiality

I grew up in London, leaving the city to go to university when I was 20. In the 21 years I spent away from London, I mostly lived in Glasgow with spells in Antwerp, Bristol, Stoke-on-Trent, Luxembourg in addition to more rural locations in Hampshire, Surrey, Argyll & Bute, Aberdeenshire and Föhr, an island in Northern Germany. When the possibility of moving back to London arose, I had some reservations. I thought the activity of living in the metropolis might swallow me up.

On the one hand, London offered its own benefits, from having access to a larger pool of jobs and having family nearby, and on the other hand, I would have to adapt to an increase in the cost of renting a home and the cost of living in London. In terms of my practice, moving to London could mean I theoretically see more art, but I would have to balance that with having less spare time and possibly less space to work within. One major factor I didn't initially foresee when making the move south was how the material complexity of life within an ideology of privatisation could also shape my work.

Although I was familiar with London from childhood, it seems to me that the city has changed since I first left it at the beginning of the 1990s. This change was more than a physical growth of more towering buildings or the burrowing of a new tube line. Living in the city, this time as a freelance artist, tested my previous understanding of how my practice fits with my life. This experience in London contrasted with my earlier spell in the city. A time when I lived with my mother as a single parent family. This was also a testing time but in a very different way. My mother had been unemployed for most of my childhood. We were a family of two with little in the way of extended family support. We lived in a council house where we had to get by on minimal social security benefits. In the run up to Christmas my mother would fill the house with art materials and equipment and in those late autumn months she would set about making jewellery, scarves, and greetings cards to sell at craft markets across London. This faltering business was funded by a training scheme like the Enterprise Allowance.<sup>17</sup> This earlier unstable and freelance life may be the reason I am so at ease with it today and despite the insecurity of an artistic life, my mother, who had been denied the chance to go to art school by her father, was kinder to me when my own chance came up. When I was

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<sup>17</sup> Enterprise Allowance was set up by the Conservative government in 1983 to encourage and support long-term unemployed people to set up their own business providing extra funds, business advice in addition to unemployment benefit.

offered a place on the Foundation Course at Camberwell College of Art, I was fortunate that she allowed me to continue living with her. Despite its insecurity, this earlier time in London seemed to offer a way out or a sense of a 'right to the city' (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 2009), due to the public refuges and escape routes of a free education, a more effective welfare state and higher standards of workplace securities like long term working contracts with sick pay and holiday pay.

On moving back to London in 2014, I expected some readjustment from my time in Glasgow, but I had no idea what shape this would take. As I spent more time in this new London, I began to notice the distinctions of life within it. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman came closest to describing the illusory character of this change as 'Liquid Modernity' (Bauman and Haugaard, 2008). Liquid Modernity describes the cocktail of psychological and social complexity of life today, one where responsibilities are liquified by being increasingly placed on the individual. This liquid society is a globalised and individualised consumer society, where consumption is the main force of life and where control is maintained through uncertainty. As I reflect on my first few years in London, I see how the liquidity of life in the city seemed to suit some artists' practices and not others. Some artists sat comfortably in the nomadic, global, temporal and flexible existence. Life as an artist in a global city like London seemed to demand a particularly 'liquid' existence which also meant a 'liquid' artistic practice.

Life in London, a global city, seemed to be a financialised life, where the flow of capital is mirrored in daily life. The Dutch-American sociologist Saskia Sassen (2005) describes how through the flow of digital finance global cities have led to a dispersal of economic activities through economic globalisation. In Britain, the trigger point for this change in relations was the digitisation of money that took place, just a few years before I left London, on 27 October 1986. This was the day of the 'big bang' when Britain's financial markets became instant and global, unfettered by time or distance. This global immediacy was something I felt most acutely in terms of an everyday materiality and my day-to-day relationship as an artist to objects and production.

Now I understand that the strange uncertainty I felt in the first few years back in London was my way of learning to adjust to the conditions of this liquid modern global city, yet it was through my practice that I felt it most acutely. Since being back in London, my practice has become more entangled in my life. I first thought this was the consequence

of living and working in a single open-plan room or the way the PhD experience itself has an enveloping effect where time spent working and the space used for work penetrate my leisure time and space. However, I also saw how this enveloping effect was common amongst other artists I met in London. This fluid interlacing of life and work seemed to be related to the specific way time, money and people flow unbounded in a global city. This eclipsing of solid boundaries, most significantly between life and work, is a characteristic specific to the fluid character of living in the global city.

One way that I tried to address this change in context initially was to try and resist some of the liquid effects of the city. When I first moved back to London, I felt a need to take on a studio outside of my live/work studio. I wanted to try and replicate the division of life and work that I had had in Glasgow. I felt the kind of space I needed should be quiet, have ventilation and be a space that I could make a mess within. I soon realised that any studio that came close to my needs would be costly and would ultimately limit the time I would have to spend on my work. The limitations of having a studio weren't just related to the rent but other costs like the time and money for the commute to the studio and the materials that I needed to do the experiments that might become artworks. Finding a studio became a challenge of its own (beyond doing the work) where I had to join huge waiting lists or visit numerous run-down empty studios within my price range. I soon realised that I would need to adapt to the new working conditions if I wanted to live in London.

When I began to reflect on the art practices of other artists in the city, I realised many had gotten around the practicalities of studio space by changing how they produced their work and reducing their reliance on studio space. Some made smaller things; some only did their artwork 'to order', rehearsing, planning and testing during the install of an exhibition, I spoke to many artists who had stopped making artworks that had no intended exhibition and others who made objects that were mobile either by breaking down to a fraction of their original size or by adding wheels. I reflected on the distorting effect of London on art practices from my own flat, which was in a block with other artists, many of whom had already figured out in time how to work within the city's systems. I think back to the interview for this live/work residency when I was asked how I will manage to work in a live/workspace. I wonder whether this question fed me the idea that my practice would eventually have to adapt from object-based to

something more fluid. That the city could shape practices was also visible throughout the first year of my move to London when I regularly found myself in a gallery where someone read from a piece of paper or delivered a solo-performance at spaces like Auto-Italia, Flat Time House, Raven Row, Arcadia Missa. It was as if the London artist was a virtuoso needing no materials.

That the form that an art practice takes could be related to the availability of space completely reversed my understanding of the order of art production. Glasgow had always seemed to offer me opportunities to make ‘things’ that could fill space, inside or outside in the wider cityscape. I had put this down to the artistic traditions of the city which were heavily influenced by the public-focussed Environmental Art B.A. course at Glasgow School of Art. Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art (Glasgow International) from its inception in 2004 also seemed to encourage a similar response from artists. Glasgow International had been responsible for opening-up new and previously unused spaces for art *indoors* and providing the audience for works at scale *outdoors* through a city-wide programme. On reflection it is possible that this opening up of new spaces for art and the encouragement to work at scale may have been a consequence of the time I was there (1995-2014); a period when an art community was in a state of growth and the city’s art infrastructure was starting to take a more confident shape.<sup>18</sup> It was as if the art infrastructure of Glasgow was expanding to accommodate a growing community of artists.

In comparison, the situation in London couldn’t be more different. For example, in recent years, the lack of affordable artist workspaces in London has become an acute problem.<sup>19</sup> The Greater London Authority has commissioned reports and attempted to use its leverage to stem studio closures (‘Mayor calls for continued effort to keep artists in London,’ 2018). One method has been to intercept new planning applications and demand that artist workspace be included in new private housing developments through

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<sup>18</sup> In the period 1995-2014 the major visual art centres in Glasgow were either refurbished or established: Tramway, CCA, The Project Room, Transmission Gallery, Intermedia, Street Level, Glasgow Print Studio were all refurbished in this time. Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (Goma) was established in 1997/8 and Glasgow International was founded in 2004.

<sup>19</sup> ‘67 per cent of sites identified in 2014 as at risk of closure within 5 years had closed by November 2017’ Source: <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018-artists-workspace-study-data-note.pdf> (accessed 11/06/2019).

‘Section 106’ orders.<sup>20</sup> Another method has been through Studiometers, who are led by the Outset Contemporary Art Fund<sup>21</sup> and who ‘broker relationships with the property industry’ (‘Studiometers - making space for artists and creatives,’ n.d.). One of the consequences of such negotiations with the property industry was to place artist workspaces into new residential housing developments. This deliberate placing of artists in residential developments is not an entirely new practice; there are many examples of residential-studio developments in London dating back a number of years and run by artist studio suppliers like Acme.<sup>22</sup> However, the effect of placing art studios within residential buildings have the effect of shaping and contorting artist’s practices, primarily by domesticating art in terms of scale, materials and approach. Such residential studio developments determine that art practices be polite, marketable and at a domestic scale. There was a sense that making objects in the global city was a toxic act. That the global city toxifies art practices that don’t fit comfortably into its fluid and conceptual architecture. This toxicity includes polluting materials, processes and art’s power to challenge authority. These toxic effects lead to art production experiencing a gentrification of practice.

After spending some time practicing as an artist in London, I soon realised that I had no choice but to work more adaptably. It was as if making objects in London disrupted my flow through the city. Sometimes this was quite literal; like when I had to live within an installation that I had built in the house and which blocked my usual routes through the house. I had also begun using new materials which I thought was due to being in a new location which was away from my usual suppliers. Access to new materials and methods had been one of my more positive reasons for moving to London. Yet the type of materials and processes I was using in London were often domestic and therefore more mobile, like melting pewter on the hob in the house or working at a small or

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<sup>20</sup> ‘S106 agreements, are the negotiation a mechanism which make a development proposal acceptable in planning terms, that would not otherwise be acceptable. They are focused on site specific mitigation of the impact of development. S106 agreements are often referred to as “developer contributions”’  
Source: <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/infrastructure/s106-obligations-overview> (Accessed: 11 June 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Outset Contemporary Art Fund provide private funds for new art through the support of patrons, partners and trustees.

<sup>22</sup> Since it was founded in 1972 Acme has provided studio and living space, residencies and awards for artists from their London base.

miniature scale. I had first thought this shift in materials and methods was a consequence of living in a post-industrial city where many of the fabrication resources like metal fabricators or wood merchants had moved to the city's outskirts. Instead of seeking out hard to find fabricators I would increasingly shop online for materials. This reliance on shopping online also affected the work I was making; it made me aloof from the materials I was buying as I was primarily viewing and sampling it through the screen of a digital device. After a while, I got better at ordering online. I would message the seller about the supplies they were selling. At this time, I had also started to use Instagram as a gallery, audience and marketplace. Initially, I had used it as a sketchbook or diary, but it seemed to be more valuable as a medium for feedback on work, as a way of showing new work and testing out ideas. Instagram also seemed to complement the liquid art practice of the global city. It offered mobility, immediacy and interconnectivity that made Instagram posts the antithesis of gallery presentations that were fixed in place, scheduled months in advance and with a limited audience. Instagram has created a liquid relationship between the virtual and the physical for a range of artists practices.

In an article for Artforum the critic Michael Sanchez (2013) discussed the growing influence of digital platforms on the production and distribution of art. The shift that Sanchez identifies was mainly due to the success of art-blog formats like Contemporary Art Daily (C.A.D.) and the smartphone as a more fluid distribution of art. Sanchez identifies 2011, as the year that the smartphone became commonplace, as the start of this new liquidity. Sanchez also notes how the shift from the primacy of the gallery, magazine and biennial to websites like C.A.D. (a reordering that the smartphone has facilitated) has also affected the work produced. It has created a liquid materiality which centred on the image on the screen. The object today is only as significant as its image on an IPS (in-plane switching) LCD screen. I saw sculptures that I'd made, and had disposed of, gaining a renewed life online as an image shared on social media. Sanchez points to two particular recent trends, an art that aesthetically complements the screen format (using soft pastel colours or grey scale tones) offering a rest for screen-weary eyes and artworks that use a mesmeric and blank aesthetic. Sanchez describes that 'logic of circulation' that the smartphone creates as reverberating between the physical and the virtual, with references flowing instantaneously and globally between artists, screens and galleries. For example, an artist or gallery today can post an image that can have an

instant and global influence. Whether through C.A.D. or Instagram, these digital forms of circulation increasingly shape and influence material production within liquid life.

I started to get a sense that many of the artists still working in London had developed a 'utility of dematerialisation' to complement the fluid flows of liquid life within the global city. This 'utility of dematerialisation' is different to the dematerialised conceptual art that evolved out of minimalism in the late 1960s and catalogued in 'Six Years: The Dematerialisation of Art' by American writer Lucy R. Lippard (1971). Originally this dematerialisation was an approach to art production that was a reaction or rebellion against the market where experimental artworks 'emphasised the thinking process almost exclusively' (Ibid., p.255). Today a 'utility of dematerialisation' has found its place not as a reaction but as a complement to the financialised life within the global city: mobile, transferable, liquid and moving as freely as money does today. The global city makes the often noisy, smelly and messy business of object-based contemporary art practices a form of toxic and unwelcome production.

As I looked around me, at the way some artists based in London addressed the practicalities of liquid life, I started to see many of these artists' processes as a form of spatial gameplay. It was as if they were engaging with objects without the constraints of the solid object. As I wandered through galleries in the city, I would carry this thought with me. 'The morning after the night before' (2016) by London-based artist, Rob Chavasse is a sculpture that I read as a version of this spatial gaming. The work is a 4-foot high stack of plasterboard that lies flat on a pallet. This stack has the Alka-Seltzer logo printed along its spine. The press release in the gallery described how these plasterboards came from a factory and that they will be handed on to a hardware distributor when the exhibition is over. The exhibition becomes a meaningful and coagulating interlude in this composite object's life. I read this object as another version of the 'utility of dematerialisation' art where its dematerialisation echoes the flow of capital. I saw the work's context within Condo, a commercial art fair, as relevant to its reading. Condo is a network of commercial exhibitions in existing gallery spaces within a city. A gallery from another city presents some of their artists' work in a host gallery (who may also show some of their own artists alongside the visiting artworks). 'Condo' has replicated their dispersed art fair format across the world after starting in London it now also occurs in New York, Mexico City, Shanghai, Athens and Sao Paulo. It is a

vaporised art fair platform that marries the contemporary logic of the global in partnership with the financial. Condo is an art world version of the platform. It is an art world equivalent to TaskRabbit, Uber and Deliveroo. Within this dispersed platform art fair, Chavasse's dispersed art object has its own temporal and spatial character.

Chavasse's object is a slab of plasterboards presented within an art fair that doesn't require temporary walls and the gallery (The Sunday Painter, London) is a space that the artwork is merely passing through. 'The morning after the night before' within Condo addresses the fluid and temporal character that objects often take in the global city through a 'utility of dematerialisation'.

This practice of gaming space doesn't just concern practices that take up physical space, I saw examples of a similar roleplay at work in virtual sculpture. The 3D modelling software SketchUp, has become one method of testing and experimenting with spaces, either in advance of an exhibition or in lieu of a show. SketchUp software allows users to map out artworks digitally, quickly and simply. It offers a way to experiment at scales that would otherwise only be open to the most privileged of artists. The artist Max Colson's 'Construction Lines' (2017) demonstrates the potential of this software as a form of sculptural projection. 'Construction Lines' is an animated short film that follows a route through a digital 3D plan of an 'iceberg home' (a house with excavated underground levels that exceed the over-ground levels). The rejected planning application of the depicted iceberg house and the narrative of the film is informed by the objections made by surrounding neighbours in Knightsbridge, West London and by the (real and imagined) lives and lifestyles of the super-rich who live in homes like these. In the film, the building is scrutinised like the model of a set. It is rotated, zoomed in on and out of. The effect is dizzying, like watching a Rubik's cube twisted by a pair of invisible hands. The digital model form of this work allows it to be viewed as a single whole, when (if realised) the building would be hidden underground. In this sense it is a 'negative monument', or what the writer James E. Young calls a 'Counter-monument' (1992, p.27-48), a monument to a traumatic event. Colson's film is a memorial for a moment in the dark history of the city, a period when the super-rich was given free rein over London (Dawson, 2015). I view the film online where it is in circulation, globally and perpetually. This film of a digital model addresses a whole set of sculptural concerns which are re-territorialised onto a screen instead of enacting them out in real

space. In a sense, the sculptural object here is occupying negative space, a space that may be bigger than what appears above ground-level.

As I settled into life in the global city, I saw how its liquid networks of capital conflicted with the grounded inflexibility of many types of artistic production. It would be too simplistic to reduce this to the cost and availability of space or the access to materials. In the city, practices take on new immaterial forms that develop out of a range of factors. For some artists, this means working from a mobile, temporal or virtual workspace (that can, as with Rob Chavasse, be the gallery itself). For other artists they experience this pressure to dematerialise as a gentrification of practice where their work is contorted into a domesticated and compromised form that fits into the fabric of the post-industrial global city. Such factors create a situation where only privilege enables certain artists to afford a practice that exists outside of these pressures the rest operate in Gh0stSpace. For the artists that remain in the city they must find a way to practice that best complements the fluid life of the global city. A fluid life that represents the city's own ideology of privatisation, one that is mobile, nomadic and flexible. The pressures on life created by existing within the global city are not exclusive to artists although the situation for artists is particularly contradictory when considering the artistic origins of this fluid lifestyle discussed earlier. The artist may be embedded in the corporate identity of a city like London, yet through London's Gh0stSpace the city shapes artists' practices into a liquid materiality.

## **A Very Creative Occupation**

At the 2017 AGM the director of Art Farm Studios and Gallery scrolled through the images barely suppressing his pride. He was a short man and he hopped from foot to foot as he spoke. He stood on his tiptoes even though he was already towering over the audience as he stood on a raised platform that had been built for him in the studio's kitchen. The screencaps of exhibitions flashed up on the screen each one headlined by the title of a different art-blog: ContemporaryToday.com, ArtTomorrow.uk, RoomsandReviews.art, PracticeMakesPractise.ru. He ended his annual report by switching to a more sombre tone while speaking about the financial solvency of the organisation. Thanks to the high-profile gallery programme he had raised hundreds of thousands of pounds from private sponsors, he boasted. This he said contrasted with the studio rents which barely covered the basic costs of rent, electric bills, and general upkeep. He spoke about the recent rent review with the building's landlord which had not gone well. The landlord wanted to put the rent up which would put the studios in severe debt within a year. The director proposed a fundraising auction but only as a temporary fix. He said long term the studio rents would have to be raised by 70% to break even. You could almost hear the jaws of the attendant artists dropping one by one.

For Gilda, listening to this news was painful. She had been one of the first generation of artist members who had built the studios and latterly she had run the project space within the studio complex primarily for the studio holders to use. In the years that followed the management of the studios and gallery had started to take up more of her time than she could spare, she had her own career, a job and a family to support too. Studio meetings took up 3 hours a week and so together the artist collective that had run the studios and project room decided to appoint a managing director.

At first, the director had fitted in and socialised, laughing along about the strange politics of running a studio complex. He built himself an office, justifying it as a space in which he could comfortably write funding applications and take board meetings around a long table he had built. This office was fitted with a heating system, carpet and new furniture. The director's office was adjacent to the project room which was itself split off from the studios. In his second year, the director announced on the studio's website that he had appointed a curator to 'sharpen up' the exhibition programme. The statement on the website said how this would improve the function of the studios

because it would raise the profile of the organisation across the world. The new gallery programme would bring in its own funding which wouldn't affect the studios. Although none of the studio holders had said anything directly to the director the blunt way this new appointment was made surprised them. Many of the studio holders stopped going to the exhibition previews and the director could point to the fact that the audience figures for the gallery had gone up regardless. The rejuvenated gallery was now drawing people in that hadn't visited before. The studio holders started to make jokes about the director and his curator behind their backs. They called him Napoleon and they called the curator Josephine.

At the announcement of the possible rent rise some of the artists started to cry, others shouted abuse. The director repeated his claim that the rent rise was just one of the options they were looking at but it was clear that the situation was dire.

The studio holders collected together in one of their studios, some still crying, others red faced and angry.

'Right come with me.' said Gilda and they all followed her out of the studios and into the gallery. She stood in the middle and the artists encircled her.

'We have to do something, something to make them see.'

'Yes, but what?' interrupted one of the artists.

'We should occupy the gallery. Are you in?' said Gilda.

'Yes!' shouted the encircling crowd and they split into small groups of three. One group of three collected tools from the gallery store. They sliced off the old locks and drilled and screwed shut the street side shutter doors locking themselves in. Another group went through the gallery store, which was behind an internal door that had been painted with hundreds of layers of a white emulsion. They pulled out a huge box of art handling blankets and several sheets of black crate lining foam which could serve as beds.

Another group collected together food supplies that they found in the small kitchen in the gallery. Graze boxes, Naked bars, Bounce balls, several pots of nuts, numerous boxes of Cuppa Soup, some Pot Noodles, a bag of oranges, rice cakes coated on one side with chocolate, 24 cans of tangerine San Pellegrino, a large bag of pretzels, and a huge stack of bottled beer and wine. They split these into rations for each person which

amounted to enough food that could last 3 days with the soup and noodles as main meals. There were also enough pods for the Nespresso machine to last a year.

One artist sloped off on his own into the gallery office and after a short while he emerged with a smile on his face. He had managed to hack into the gallery's computer and posted a short statement on its Twitter account about the occupation. On the computer's desktop, he had found a list of press contacts and forwarded the statement to them. After telling the other artists about his breakthrough he called the others into the office to see something else he'd found.

They stood around an object that was covered in a black cloth.

'What is it?' someone asked.

He took the cloth off and the group collectively cooed and pointed at the architectural model, some recognising their own homes in the surrounding landscape of the six-story-high pearly white building that was at the centre of the model. It became clear to them that this was a proposal for the future of the gallery which was to be topped with residential houses. Reading the signs on the model it was clear that although the building filled the footprint of their current studios and the gallery; there was to be no studios within this new complex. They moved the model to the middle of the large table in the office and they each took a seat around the table sitting in silence for a while.

'Well, we have to do something,' said Gilda.

The exhibition currently on in the gallery was a private hire for a proposed new building development called 'Pyjama Island'. It was to be built on a neighbouring spit of land alongside the canal where a nightwear factory had once been. The exhibition was a maze of printed boards which had renderings of large buildings in shades of grey and beige which were dotted with bohemian looking figures. These figures seemed to reference the artists who'd been drawn into the area by cheap rents and the numerous empty warehouses. Other businesses had moved into the area in recent years, craftspeople who had seen their city centre rents double were followed by advertising and tech companies who were attracted by the industrial style of buildings that were half the price of anything they could have in the city centre. Then came the businesses that lined the high street each with names that referred to their former use in this former working-class neighbourhood once known for having been the underwear district: a café

called 'Cup Size' and another called 'Uplift', a bar called 'Knickers', a gym called 'The Push-Up' and an old pub that had been refitted and renamed 'The Dog and Gusset'.

As they sat around the table and deliberated their next move. They decided to build a protest version of the new gallery, a ghost or scarecrow of the building. They would build it in the existing gallery using the materials in the exhibition. The boards that made up the exhibition were fortunately backed with a material that had a similar pearly sheen to the proposed building and there was enough surplus wood in the gallery store that could be used for the structure. Together they carefully dismantled the exhibition, placing the boards in a pile and saving the screws and fixings as they went. They scored, folded and reshaped the boards into the angular shape of the new gallery building. The wooden structure they built rose up to fill the gallery, the scale was one fifth where the model was built at one hundredth. Each floor was built as a platform and each room became a bed. Panels that were stuck onto the boards were put into a separate pile. On these panels texts advertised the new development optimistically.

They worked through the night. Posting pictures of their progress on the gallery's Twitter feed. They finished late in the night and went to sleep in the bunks they'd built into the structure. Their structure shone like a phantom in the early morning light that broke through the gallery skylights. They slept soundly until they were woken by the sound of the metal shutter being hit repeatedly from the outside. Roused by the banging and subsequent sound of an angle grinder cutting through the shutter door, they each emerged from their pods within the structure. One of them had made placards from the panels they'd set aside earlier. Repurposed as protest placards the statements on the panels took on a new meaning: 'CREATE A BETTER FUTURE' written on each one. A corporate sales-speak reshaped by the moment and the anger of the artists into something more probing and meaningful. As the angle grinder completed its final slice, they stood in front of their construction holding the placards aloft in defiance.

## Driving to a Gh0stSpace

*This dialogue discusses the series of 5 curated solo-exhibitions 'Things Ground Us' featuring the work of Luke McCreadie, Laura Yuile, Paul Johnson, Debora Delmar and myself. These exhibitions were held within a virtual gallery called Gh0stSpace located within a self-storage unit, in Hackney Wick, London, in May 2018.*

I arrive at the car carrying a black holdall which I put down on the pavement next to the driver's door. I walk around the vehicle checking for damage. I unlock the Zipcar with my phone and throw the bag onto the passenger seat. I pull out of my pocket a phone mount that I clip to the air vent and attach my phone to. Before putting my seatbelt on I lean over and unzip the holdall. I pull out of the bag a huge teddy bear which has been stuffed firmly into the bag. I then strap the bear, which is the size of a child into the passenger seat. I pose the large bear which has a simple internal wire skeleton. I bend back the head, fold its legs over into the footwell and place its hands by its side. I then launch Google Maps and enter the postcode for my store in Foxton, South Cambridge. I am going to collect a small sculpture which should fit in the boot of the car. My store holds most of the remaining sculptures made up until 2011 (when I moved to London). I start the engine, launch the audio recording app on my phone and start recording.

The satnav directs me onto a course northward out of London.

*'Head east on Poplar High St towards Harrow, Turn left onto Cotton St, A1206,'* said the voice from my phone. The indicator ticks and I dip under the sun shield to see the traffic lights.

'Living amongst my work generated an intensity to life and work that demanded I get out of the apartment.' I said "I could no longer see the situation I was in, sitting in a room on my own. I couldn't address a broad context just by making objects and setting them in my own live/work apartment, these objects needed to come up against other lived spaces of the city. Were there other Gh0stSpaces? I needed to know how other artist's with object-based practices were contorted by life in the city. Was this just something I felt? Or was I alone?"

The city is a space where every inch of it is priced, owned or rationed. This led to a situation where there was no space free from commercial implication or pressure. In the city the ghost of commerce was everywhere. There seemed to be no escape from this

culture of privatisation. This matrix of value and flexibility was the only context. The self-storage unit was a space that was locked into this context of objects in exchange, storage and value. Could a self-store, in its 'galleristic' shape of a plain cube of hireable space, be used to explore the issues of making objects in city today? Could the self-store be a surrogate gallery where the object in transition is discussed and where I could discuss with other artists their own conditions?'

I know it must seem a little odd, but I've been using this method to talk through ideas for the past few weeks, and it seems to be working. I came up with this method by accident, for the first couple of years of the PhD I would talk to friends about my ideas, at first, they were interested, but their interest wore off over time. I soon got to the point where I'd bored everyone I knew with my monologues about my work. I'm sure things would have been easier if I'd learnt to 'discuss with' rather than 'talk at' people! And so, I was left with a quandary: I needed an audience to get the ideas out of my head, but I'd run out of people to talk to. So, I thought maybe what I needed was a surrogate person who wouldn't answer back or complain of boredom, so I went on the hunt for a dummy or mannequin and ended up buying a giant teddy from Toys 'R' Us. While driving the bear home, I strapped it into the passenger seat. On that drive home I found I could speak freely, clearly and in a more structured way than I could otherwise. I'd originally thought I'd be doing this in the flat, but something about the house stopped me from talking, perhaps it was knowing that the neighbours might hear me or that someone might come knocking on the door? I was too paranoid about being caught talking to a soft toy. But when I'm driving, it's as if I can live within an illusion possibly because I'm distracted enough by what's happening on the road. When I'm driving, a different part of my brain seems to open up and I start to believe the bear is a listening passenger in the car, one who wants to hear what I have to say.

The satnav directs me onto a course northward out of London.

*'Use the middle lane to turn right onto East India Dock Road, A13, Turn left onto the Saint Leonards Road slip road.'* I flick on the indicator with the third finger of my left hand. *'Merge onto Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach, A12.'* The woman's voice says. On the A12 the traffic picks up speed, and I settle into the pace. I drive past Big Yellow Storage and Attic Self Storage which reminds me of what I'd decided to talk about.

‘These self-storage warehouses seem to cling to the major roads that head out of the city.’ I say ‘In self-storage, objects slip in and out of visibility. Precarious objects like the equipment stored in-between gigs or trading times by musicians or market stall holders, or the possessions of divorcees or students stowed between homes. These self-storage spaces allow people to exist more fluidly within the city, temporarily freeing them from the burden of their objects.’

*‘Take the A406 Northern exit towards M25, West, M11, Loughton...*

*Merge onto N Circular...*

*Use the left 2 lanes to take the M11 slip road to Cambridge and Stansted Airport.’* said the telephone navigator.

‘When I visited one of these storage warehouses, it was a maze of false walls as temporal and hollow as the corridors of an art fair. Except these store walls were made of steel, not wood or plaster. As if the white epidermis of a gallery has been peeled away to reveal a steel musculature.’

A very light rain starts to fall, and I put the windscreen on a low setting that gives a regulating rhythm to my thoughts.

*‘Continue onto M11 ...*

*Keep right at the fork to stay on M11’* says the voice on Google Maps, I indicate and turn into the clear lane to my right.

I see a sign for a turn-off into a motorway service station, and instead of following the route drawn out for me on my phone I take the turn. I slide off course, turning off the motorway, reducing speed as I curl around the corner and as I do this the route on my phone recalibrates. I park the car in a parking bay, disconnect my phone and put it in my pocket. I walk into the service station buying a coffee to-go. I return to the car, reattaching the phone, slipping the coffee into the cup holder on the dashboard and continuing from where I left off, continuing on the M11 for several more miles.

I continue my narration.

‘To be generating objects to go into storage has a grounding effect. It’s a toxic act or a self-polluting process. Living in London worsened this effect, in London making things can feel incompatible with life as the studios, galleries and homes become harder to afford, hold onto and are financialised as assets. Making physical objects can make life

in the city less mobile, they are counter to the immaterial trends of city living, where digital devices replace our possessions, publicise our private spaces, and flows of money replace... replace... replace production. Space has always been relatively expensive and sculptural tools, and materials can be very anti-social (generating mess and noise), but the absurdity of making objects has become, in recent years...more acute.'

As I drive over the city boundary, I stop talking and take several sips from the coffee cup which has sat cooling in the dashboard cup holder.

'I think the answer is a lean and fluid space, something like an artist-run space, but one that would embrace the mobility, flexibility and object focus of life in London and it needn't be viewed in person.'

The rain started to come down with more force. I turn up the windscreen wipers and the heating.

*'At junction 10, take the A505 exit to Royston/Duxford...*

*At the roundabout, take the 1st exit onto A505...*

*Turn right onto Gravel Pit Hill...*

*Continue onto Middle St, keep left to stay on Middle St...*

*Turn left onto The Green...*

*Continue onto Fowlmere Rd...*

*Turn right to stay on Fowlmere Rd.'*

'Your destination is on your left,' says the satnav, and I turn down the lane to my storage unit.

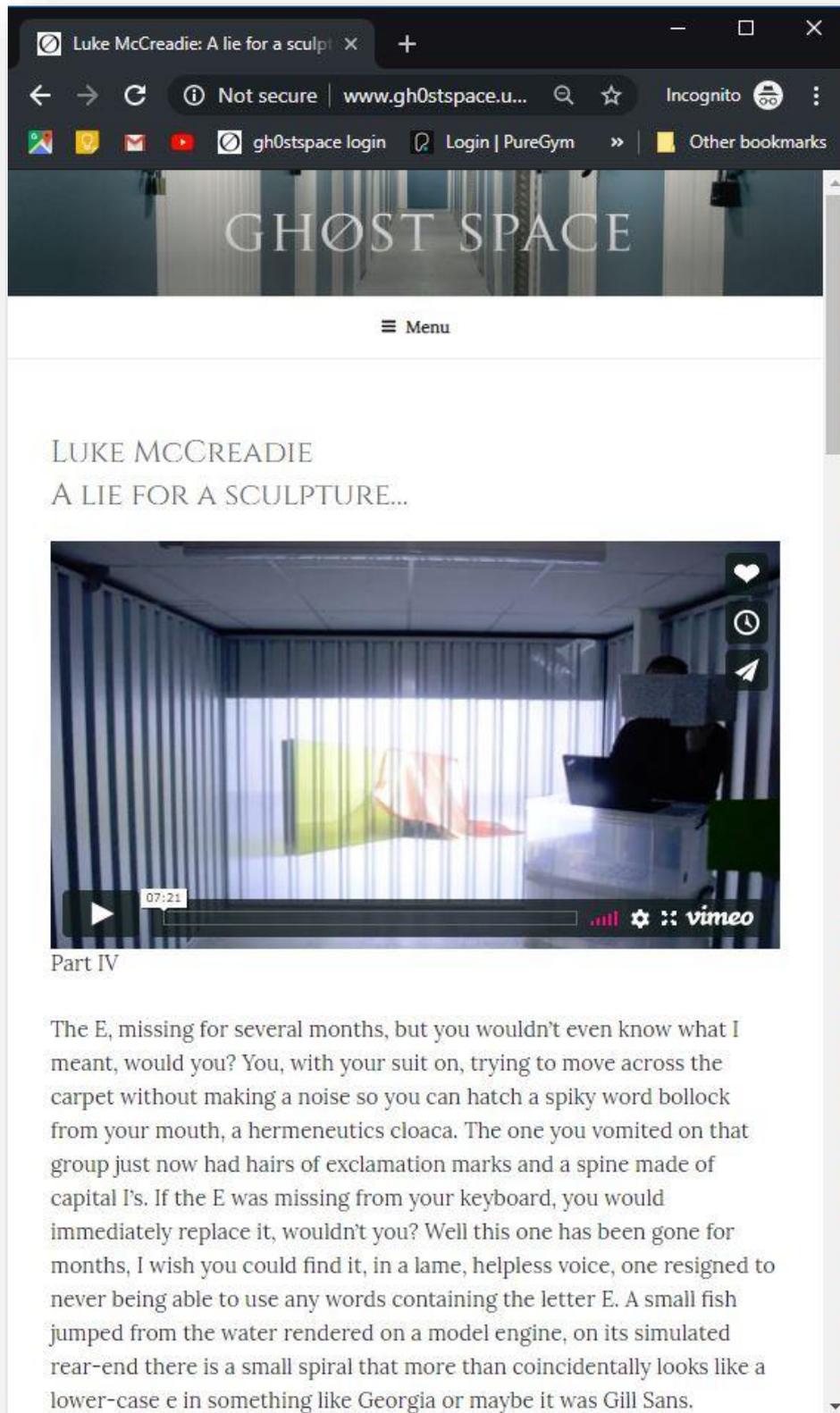


Figure 18 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Luke McCreadie's exhibition *A lie for a sculpture* (2018) <http://www.gh0stspace.uk/luke-mccreadie/> (Accessed: 24th April 2019).

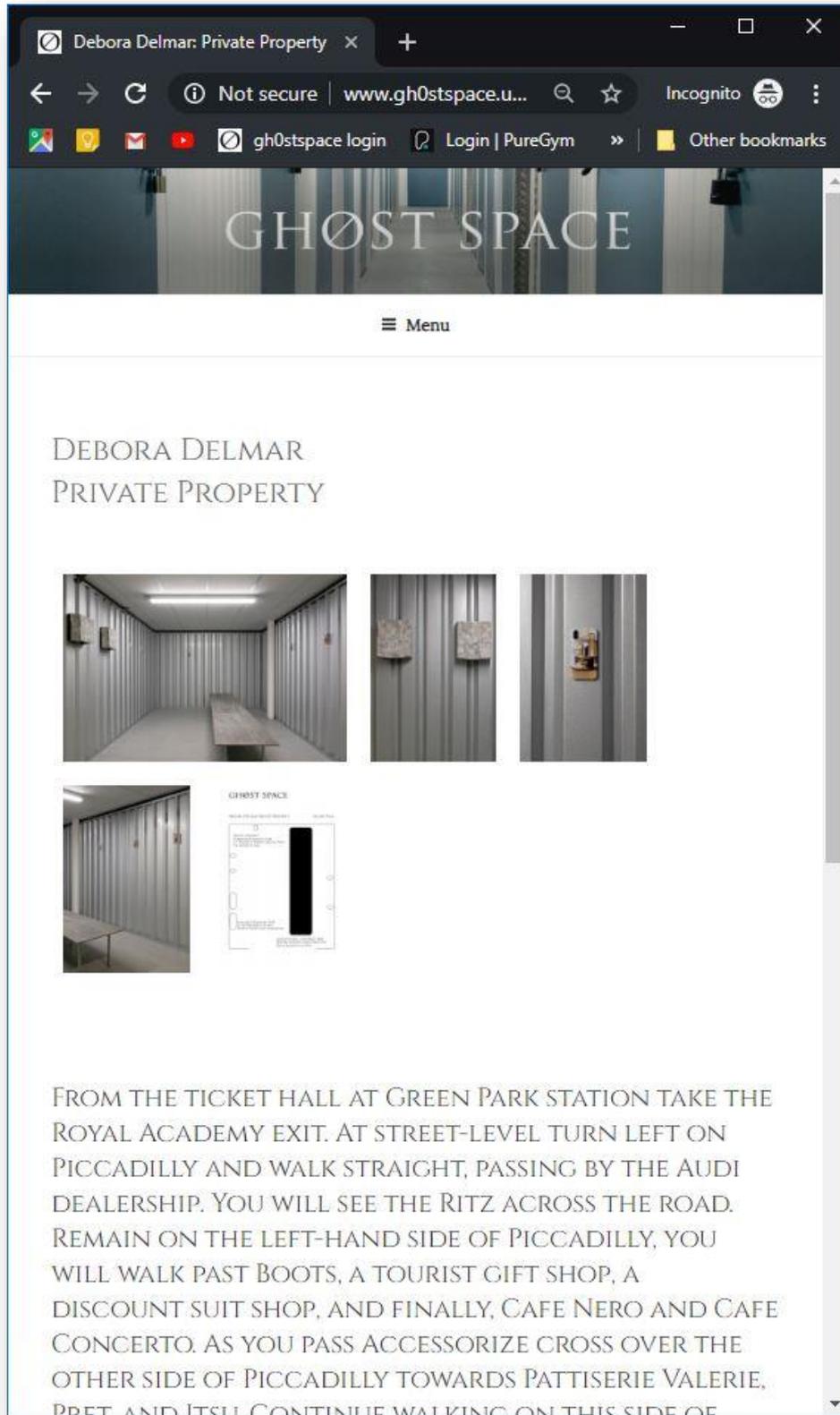


Figure 19 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Debora Delmar's exhibition *Private Property* (2018), <http://www.gh0stspace.uk/debora-delmar/> (Accessed: 24th April 2019).

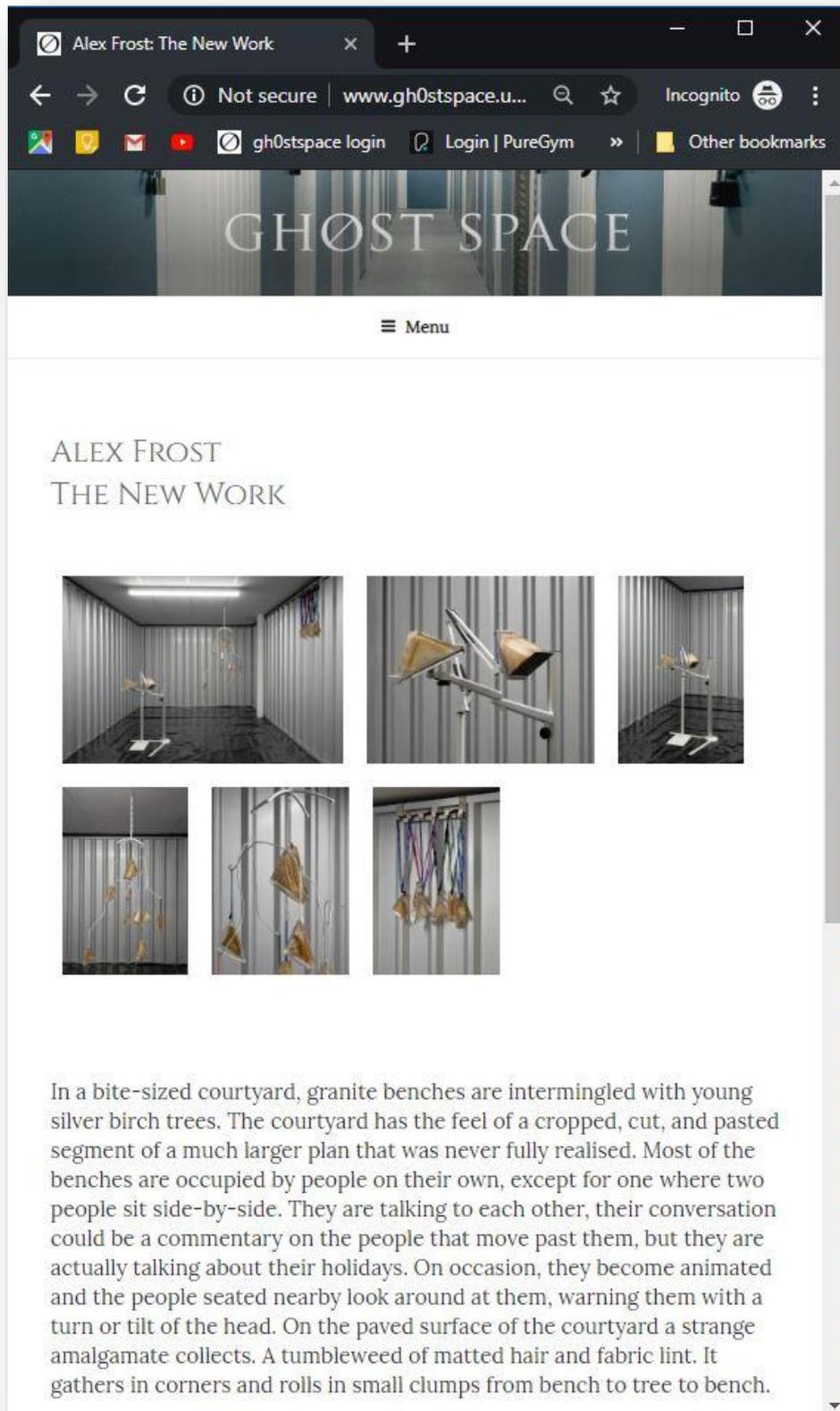


Figure 20 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Alex Frost's exhibition *The New Work* (2018), <http://www.gh0stspace.uk/alex-frost/> (Accessed 24th April 2019).

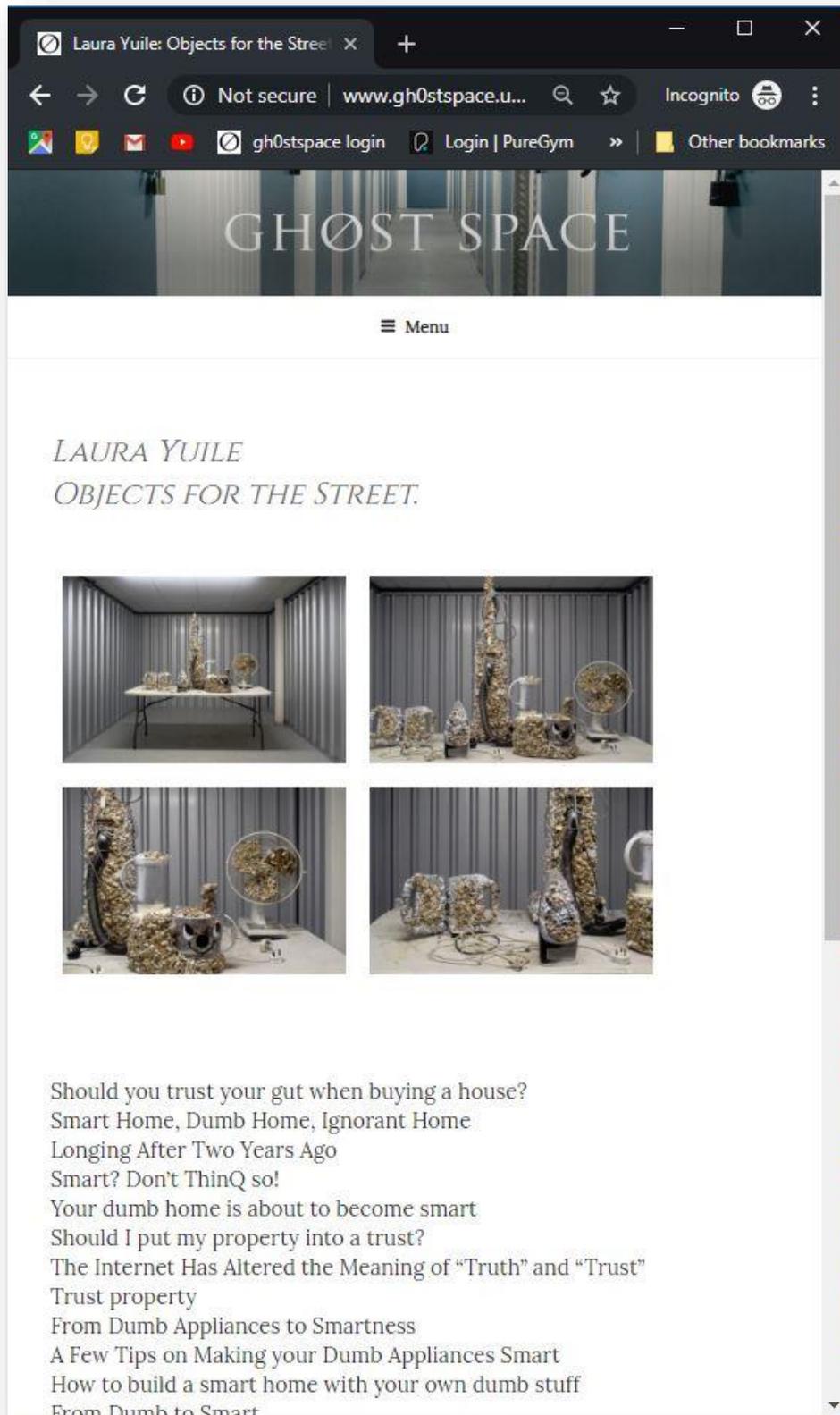


Figure 21 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Laura Yuile's exhibition *Objects for the street* (2018), <http://www.gh0stspace.uk/laura-yuile/> (Accessed 24th April 2019).

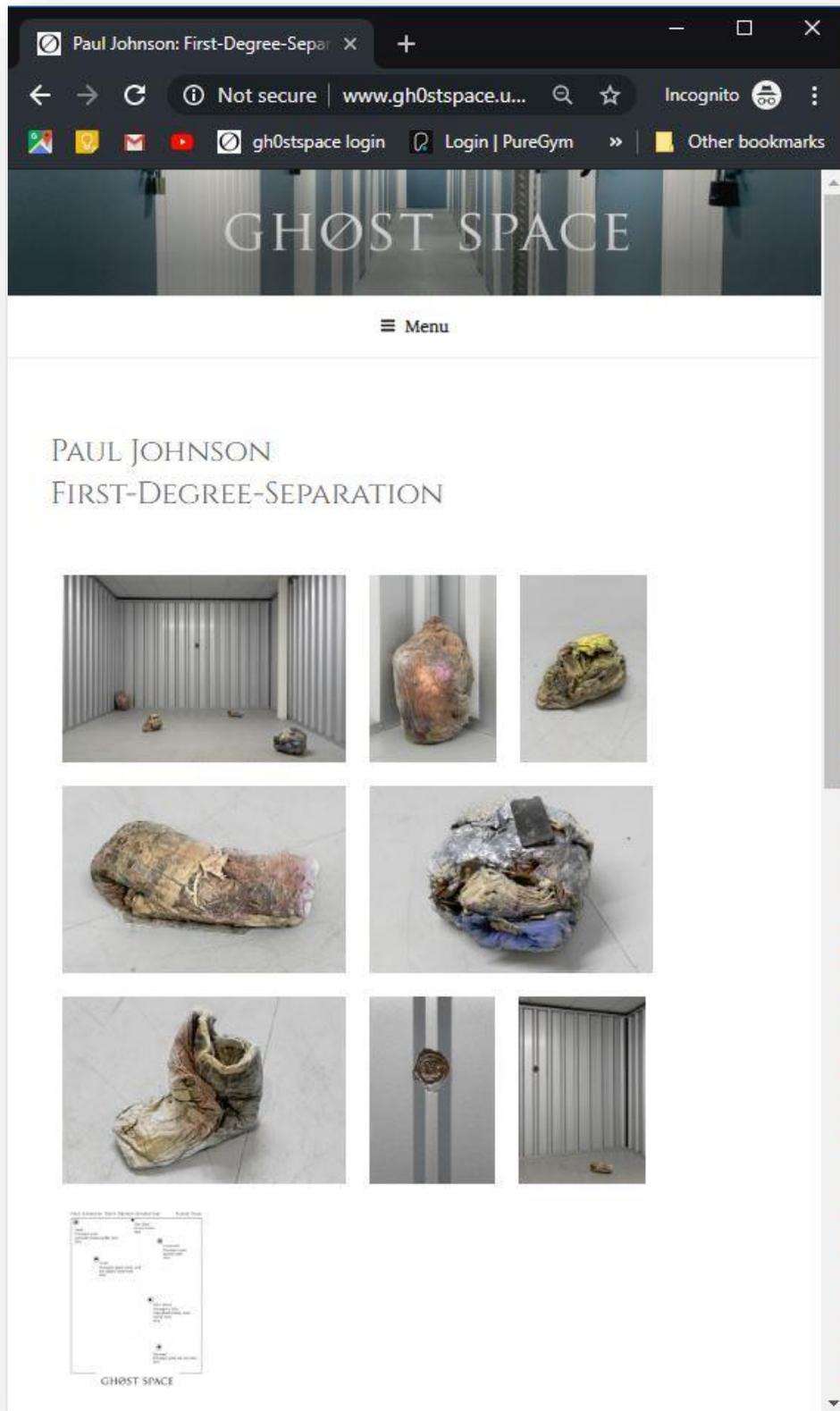


Figure 22 Screen capture of the Gh0stSpace website featuring Paul Johnson's exhibition *First-degree-separation* (2018), <http://www.gh0stspace.uk/paul-johnson/> (Accessed 24th April 2019).

## Ghost Place

I walk to Canary Wharf from my house, it's an unwelcoming walk down a busy road and involves crossing over major junctions and roundabouts which require long waits at crossings. As I cross into Canary Wharf, a privately-owned area of London (Haslett, 2017) that is marshalled by its own police force, I pass a roundabout bracketed on one side by shiny black hoardings which signal a new development. The area that these hoardings contain is Canary Wharf's Wood Wharf district a new neighbourhood of 3300 'luxury' homes with parks and green spaces that is due to open in 2020 and built on land reclaimed from the wharf it sits on. These hoardings have lightboxes within them which illuminate digital renderings of the buildings being built behind them. A sequence of statements printed onto the hoardings spell out the philosophy of this new complex in block capitals in white vinyl on black acrylic plastic:

DESIGN INSPIRES COLLABORATION,  
VISION IS EVOLUTION,  
SOUL CREATES COMMUNITY,  
ART INSPIRES PROGRESS.<sup>23</sup>

These hoardings are a street-side mood-board, connecting love, vision, soul and art to the engine of global digitised financial flows. A ghostly marketisation of place that generates a reflexive version of the non-place.

In the book 'Place', the artist Tacita Dean and writer Jeremy Miller (2005) discuss how place is a sense or remembrance of the past within a landscape. However, today this 'sense of place' has been imbibed by the market, where property developers use place to generate a commodifiable context for life and work. For example, imbuing a financialised area like Canary Wharf (an area defined almost entirely by its relationship to profit) with creative and soulful energy both overlooks the more uncomfortable history of the area (its links to slavery and colonisation) and ties the area into the current

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<sup>23</sup> Since first seeing these billboards I have discovered that these phrases were part of a campaign called #Unpredictivetext. The phrases were 'generated by an algorithm that randomly synthesises noun, verb and noun creating hundreds of unexpected three-word combinations, each with a positive, poetic feel and tangible energy'. The words were taken from the '30-year archive of the Canary Wharf story'. This digital poetry is promoted as 'the perfect analogy for living at the heart of Canary Wharf' a space that wants to be seen as a marriage of finance, the digital world and poetry. When I came across this information, I had to check the date of the local paper I first read it in. It seemed like a plausible April fool's joke especially when I read that the representative from Canary Wharf quoted was called Brian De'ath. Sources: <https://residential.canarywharf.com/unpredictive-text/> <https://www.eastlondonadvertiser.co.uk/news/unpredictivetext-campaign-to-celebrate-canary-wharf-housing-scheme-in-isle-of-dogs-1-5682222> (accessed 10/07/2019).

twisted logic of place. Such a shift suggests that the idea of place and non-place are at an impasse. Place is no longer a *sense* as Dean would have it, it is a calculated strategy for adding both symbolic and economic value to an area. Non-places were defined by French theorist Marc Auge (2006) as a counterpart to places. By definition non-places were absent of place, they were spaces of circulation, consumption and communication and were linked to globalisation. They were visible in the interchanges of airports, train stations or shopping malls. A hyper-modern space like Canary Wharf was once the definitive non-place; a transitory, generic and context-free space. Yet it is as if the non-place today is imbued with a sense of place that is (as the hoardings spell out) emotional, soulful, visionary and even creative. This can be seen most clearly in today's global city<sup>24</sup> where Gh0stSpace is formed. The effect of this Gh0stSpace is to convert *place*, a concept once fixed in social bonds, identity and a collective history; into a tool in the pattern of consumption.

This 'ghost of place' has been partly shaped by the social and physical impacts of commercialised digital networks. In 'New Dark Age' the writer and artist James Bridle (2018) unpicks the illusory image of the digital network as benign and naturally occurring. He shows how digital networks are shaped by the people or the capital that builds them. Bridle describes a host of new network effects that bridge and shape the virtual and physical worlds.<sup>25</sup> For example, he points to the way the map of internet cabling follows old colonial trade routes. Bridle charts the inter-relational bond that has

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<sup>24</sup> This art-focussed placemaking is becoming increasingly common in many cities. In London the most recent iteration of this trend is The Tide (2018). The Tide is what its creators (Diller Scofidio + Renfro working with Neiheiser Argyros and landscape architects GROSS MAX) call a 'cultural park'. It features artworks by Damien Hirst, Allen Jones, Morag Myerscough, Heather & Ivan Morison and GERONIMO. The Tide has been built by Knight Dragon, the Hong Kong-based developer managing the £8.4 billion development of the North Greenwich peninsula. Its linear shape (it's longer than it is wide) emulates New York's High Line. The High Line was a series of art commissions in combination with a greening of a former freight rail track that cuts through Manhattan's West Side. This combination of art and greenery also led to claims of environmental gentrification as the buildings surrounding the development experienced significant increases in property prices (Anguelovski et al., 2019). Other developments include the Nine Elms Development in Battersea, London and the Hudson Yards development in the Chelsea and Hudson Yards neighbourhoods of Manhattan which include the sculpture the Staircase (aka Vessel) and The Shed, an innovative visual and performing arts centre.

<sup>25</sup> An idea illustrated in the description of one of the first general purpose computers (dedicated in 1946 at University of Pennsylvania) the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer or ENIAC. This computer covered three of the four walls of a room. Harry Read, a mathematician who worked on ENIAC said of his experience with ENIAC that 'now we think of a personal computer as one you carry with you. The ENIAC was actually one that you kind of lived inside'. Bridle uses this metaphor to show how we currently live inside 'a vast machinery of computation that encircles the entirety of the globe and extends into outer space on a network of satellites.'

formed between the market and digital technology. But this is not an anti-technological perspective; instead, he proposes a ‘real systemic literacy’ over the blindness that currently prevails. It is as if the phantom-like virtual world is spilling out into the physical world as a ghost of place and this situation seems most evident in a city like London.

In his book ‘New Dark Age’ Bridle rekindles and develops his own version of a hauntology. A hauntology that applies to space as well as time. Hauntology is a term that Jacques Derrida described in ‘Spectres of Marx’ (1993) a text he wrote in response to Francis Fukuyama’s (Fukuyama, 2006) proposition that, after the fall of communism, there would be no further sociocultural evolution, an end of history and an end of ideology. Hauntology described this temporal impasse and it was elaborated on in the mid-2000s by Mark Fisher and Simon Reynolds to define a cultural impasse that was emerging around this time. A cultural impasse where a sense of cultural progress had died, and the past kept returning as a ghost. Although a hauntology has a range of effects it is the way it leaves a weight of the past on our present cultural context that I am interested in. For example, the way the Internet has the effect of seeming like an archive of all original thoughts and with such a comprehensive resource to reference the new stops emerging. The Internet can create the effect of an unproductive temporal-cultural regurgitation, a sense of permanent nostalgia for a lost future. The clearest examples could be heard in the sophisticated music production techniques used to create recordings that could have been made 30 years earlier. This perpetual regurgitation suggests the hyper-revivalism or pastiche that Jameson described in ‘The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’. A hyper-revivalism that I first heard in 2009 in the music of the indie band ‘Bat For Lashes’ whose records had the extravagant multi-layered production of Fleetwood Mac’s Rumours but achieved on a shoestring budget. I would argue that this hyper-revivalism can also work critically, as seen in the ‘post-lo-fi’ and ‘post-retro’ (Jones, 2012) sounds of the musical genre ‘Vaporwave’ (Tanner, 2016). Vaporwave was a musical sound and graphical style of slowed down and chopped up obscure elevator music and mainstream 80s hits that emerged around 2010. It started online as what could be the first globalised music genre. The name combines the terms *vaporware*, a business term to describe hardware or software that is advertised and never released, and the Marxist phrase that highlights the continuous development and obsolescence at the root of capitalist accumulation and is summed up in the phrase: ‘all

that is solid melts into air' (Marx and Engels, 1967 p.3). In its use and distortion of a futurism from the recent past (often 1980s computer graphics and sounds) Vaporwave directly addresses 'the slow cancellation of the future' (Fisher, 2014). Fisher and Reynold's hauntology may not have fully addressed its critical potential, however, they did illuminate through hauntology the slippery moment when clear distinctions and notions of progress turned foggy. Hauntology defines a lack of clarity in our relationship to time, I propose that this foginess increasingly relates to our sense of space and takes on the form of a Gh0stSpace.

The mobility and globalisation of digital networks give place and non-place their ghostly and shifting character. Smartphones make the non-place mobile yet they also suppress engagement with place. The smartphone has the power to be a window into a non-place within a place, and it does this in several ways from distracting its user to generating an addict-like dependency. Recently, I was on the way to a family gathering and my phone sent me to the wrong location. I trusted my phone over my own hard-won knowledge of a place. While at the family party, I got several alerts on my phone each one transported me to a non-place within my phone where I checked a headline or replied to a message. My connection to a place within this temporal and physical shift has been confused by my use of a device that I believed was there to help me. The mobility of digital technology has altered stable notions of place and non-place, and generate a hauntological relation to place. This effect is what's been referred to as 'context collapse' (Marwick, Boyd, 2011) the disorienting effects on a sense of place that social media surveillance has generated. 'The boundaries and thresholds for trust and collective engagement transform when we turn to new kinds of media to render spaces legible' (Marvin and Sun-ha, 2017, p.50). This context collapse materialises in a range of ways from shifts in behaviours due to a recalibration of social groups to a change in self-awareness from living amongst surveillance technologies. Such a collapsing of context has a reflexive and spectral character and is held in tension between the image of the digital world as a singular and open space which serves to mask digital space as an increasingly commercialised, privatised and controlled space. This shift has not happened by force. Our willingness to be technology's subjects brings to mind a comment Bauman made in a lecture on privatisation (2015) that we now freely share more information about ourselves online than the Stazi ever knew about any individual in Eastern Germany.

It is not just the portability of digital devices, and how they keep us connected and controlled, that gives them a hauntological character. Their haunting also comes through in the frequent errors of emotional connection within digital networks. Our online feelings are becoming what artist Tyler Coburn calls ‘virtual subjectivities’ (Coburn, 2012). In ‘I’m that angel’, Coburn’s performance of book readings held within data centres, Coburn attempts to reflect on the ‘material doubles of our virtual subjectivities as data stored in server form’ (Coburn, 2015). Coburn addresses Internet space as an inter-relation between the physical world and our virtual selves. Data centres are the spaces that house the machinery of the Internet and the place where the digital network takes a solid physical form. The performance of a book reading, a temporary and yet concrete act, within these physical Internet spaces conflicts with the fluid form of our virtual subjectivities; our self as we are depicted or choose to be depicted online. How we portray ourselves online is a version of our self, it is our own ghost and it is in a commodifiable, transferable and server form.

The spoken texts of ‘I’m that angel’ develop out of research into ‘content farms’, these farms are pools of freelance writers who are paid to manipulate existing content online to facilitate a maximum amount of automated search engine traffic and generate advertising revenue. Today, this process has morphed into the recommendation adverts often seen at the foot of legitimate news websites. These are the adverts masquerading as news, with headlines like ‘See What Julia Stiles is Doing Now’, ‘The Ten Celebrities Who Died Before Their Time’ or stories about transformative weight loss. This content is generated by writers (mostly writing under aliases) working for companies like Taboola or Outbrain who host numerous web addresses. This is the current form of subterfuge or clickbait which manipulates through teases and click-throughs and gains revenue from the users through the human hunger for listicles and eye-catching headlines. In the episode ‘An Ad for the Worst Day of Your Life’ of the podcast Reply All (Vogt and Goldman, 2018),<sup>26</sup> we hear the tragic story of Matt who lost his wife on the day she gave birth to their child. This story gets consumed by and reproduced by the numerous content farming networks of Outbrain and Taboola. Matt’s painful story, together with images of his wife were spread across several pages and

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<sup>26</sup> Reply All is a podcast produced by New York based digital media company Gimlet. Reply All is dedicated to revealing the stories behind the Internet.

footed the bottom of numerous legitimate newspaper websites. Matt couldn't escape the



Figure 23 Instagram Story screen capture: London City Island, London (July 2019).

story so asked the Reply All 'super-tech support team' to help him get it taken offline. The advertising driven online world trades in our virtual subjectivities. Adverts like those run by Taboola and Outbrain are haunted by a reality that digital networks disembody. In these two examples, the collapsing of contexts relate to the emotional space within our online lives. How we present ourselves online presents us in a commodifiable form.<sup>27</sup> We get the growing sense that our online selves exist in their own hauntological Gh0stSpace within the ideology of privatisation.

The boundless and yet present figure of the ghost consistently reappears in the global city. These spectres are seen in representations of contemporary capitalism like the ghost towers, render ghosts or ghost restaurants. These representations

haunt the strange relationship to place and non-place within the global city. It is as if the

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<sup>27</sup> In the Comedy Central TV programme 'Nathan For You' Nathan Fielder presents his unhinged marketing ideas to struggling businesses. The programme satirises online viral marketing culture presenting it as a process of commercial manipulation. The success of Nathan's ideas can be measured in their contributions beyond the confines of the TV show, stretching out into commercial social media, the wider tv and radio network and news feeds. This has included a viral video he staged of a pig rescuing a goat to promote a petting zoo and which ended up with 10.2 million hits on YouTube; a parody of Starbucks café called Dumb Starbucks that was such a success that people generated their own fake merchandise to sell to customers (its success was put down to the rumour that it was an artwork by Banksy); the song by Bansai Predicament which is listed on Spotify and which features a smoke detector as a musical instrument (a ruse to get smoke detectors through customs on a cheaper tariff); the book *The Movement* that can be bought on Amazon and which features the fictional life story of a man who got fit thanks to an exercise regime based on lifting boxes and furniture, a scheme Nathan cooked up to get free labour for a removals company; and then there is his interview on Jimmy Kimmel which circulates online independently of the programme it is part of. In each instance the boundaries of the tv show extend into the physical and virtual world questioning the integrity of the virtual world as space where viral ideas naturally propagate free of the market.

non-place which in Auge's words is an 'aesthetic of distance' (p. xvi), has taken the form of a Gh0stSpace - haunted by a globalised ideal of the local.

The developers of London City Island, Ecoworld and Ballymore, promote the area as a marriage of finance and creative capital within several colourful towers. Each tower is designed in a loft style, that they describe as a 'mini-Manhattan'. They are feeding off culture's power to impart a symbolic value to those people or things within its field. This is written large in the hardback brochure given to prospective buyers: 'the neighbourhood is woven into the dynamic creative and commercial economies of East London'. London City Island is the name Ecoworld and Ballymore have given to the isthmus of the river Lea that was formerly home to a Pura Foods factory. A factory that once polluted the local air around Canning Town with its greasy odour. The buildings on London City Island are constructed to look like industrial buildings from the previous century with warehouse-style windows on plain cubic blocks which are mostly faced with a decorative coloured glazed brick that also suggests a warehouse aesthetic. This aesthetic of industrial-era styling is offset by the production process of the buildings which uses an innovative factory-built Dutch pre-cast system ('London City Island,' 2016). This industrial style of building is what sociologist Sharon Zukin describes in her study on the development of loft living in Manhattan as an 'aesthetic conjuncture' (1982, p. 13). This is an aesthetic conjuncture that marries well with the creative conjuncture that the artist Martha Rosler discusses in *Culture Class* (Rosler et al., 2010). In this aesthetic conjuncture the industrial landscape has been fetishized by an urban middle class who appreciate the look of industrial buildings. This middle class also appreciate the idea of the industrial past that these buildings represent, yet only once they've been stripped of actual industry. This trend for an industrial style led to a conjuncture where 'old factories became a means of expression for a "post-industrial" civilisation' (1982, p. 13). On London City Island these post-industrial buildings are the ghost of an industrial past. Within London City Island, Ecoworld and Ballymore re-enact what Zukin calls 'modernism's mass production of the individual with an individualization of mass production' (Ibid., p. 40). The development on London City Island appeals to the exclusive, on-trend and contradictory post-industrial-style without the industry. However, it is in its instrumentalization of culture that this property development takes a further hauntological shape.

The London City Island development is hauntological in the way Ecoworld and Ballymore use placemaking not to include but to exclude. The flats on the island are sold both for their proximity to Canary Wharf (a short tube ride away) but also for their connection to the city's creative community (Ballymore Group, 2015). The placemaking at work here creates what the writer and academic Anna Minton calls 'innovation clusters' (Jones, 2018). Groupings of cultural and technological organisations that add 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2013) to an area. Cultural Capital is transmitted invisibly. On London City Island, innovation clusters attract an affluent middle class to a new part of the city and push out long-standing residents. In this case, the effect echoes out from the island, which had no previous occupants, into the nearby working-class community of Canning Town. As the developer's brochure also states 'the word island doesn't just mean a piece of land bound by water, it's also a place which is distinct in some way to the places that surround it' (Ballymore Group, 2015). The fact that this development is an island gives it a sense of being locked away, private and safe from the 'grime' of the surrounding areas. One which also has numerous routes of escape via the Jubilee line, DLR and Emirates Line. The commodified island ethos of this development, a secure, protected space that is also a safe investment, make it ideal for buying off-plan and further enhances the sense that these buildings are not homes but safety deposit boxes.

The central role of culture in this development is underlined in this largely residential complex of London City Island which will be the new home of English National Ballet, the London Film School and Arebyte Gallery and Studios. Arebyte Gallery and Studios were one of the first of these new arts organisations to move onto the island in 2017. Within this development, Arebyte were offered a new gallery space and artist studios to manage. I had followed Arebyte's root through the city. In the run-up to their move to London City Island they had existed on short-term leases, and as precariously as many of the artists they provided studios for. The London City Island space provides Arebyte with the precious stability of a 10-year lease and cheap rent. The 'new media' focussed exhibition programme at Arebyte Gallery complements the financialised and cultural aesthetic that Ecoworld and Ballymore use to promote the island. Naturally enough, for a mostly residential complex like London City Island, there is no provision within the studios for any artist practices that might be deemed anti-social (messy or noisy) and the new media programme of the gallery provides a justifiable excuse for this omission. The helicopter dropped manner of this placement of the gallery into this new development

turns the conventions of art-led gentrification on its head. The typical pattern of gentrification seen in previous decades saw former industrial areas of the city descended upon by artist studios and galleries looking for cheap rent before getting pushed out by newer more affluent communities attracted by the creative neighbourhood environment that resident artists generated. On London City Island a form of ‘hyper-gentrification’<sup>28</sup> is acted out, one where gentrification is a conscious and cultivated act by private property developers together with the resident art organisations. The impact on the arts institutions within this privatised space is that all activity within the complex must happen on the property developer's terms. This makes the island a privatised and illusory space that uses the ideas of placemaking to generate a hauntological version of ‘cultural capital’.

This deeply reflexive and doubling context of London City Island, a privatised zone within the city built to resemble an industrial space in its cleansed post-industrial creative city state, suggests an externalised version of the Freudian ‘unheimlich’ or ‘unhomely’ (Freud, 2003). Mark Fisher gave this externalising of the unhomely two terms: the weird and the eerie (Fisher, 2017). Through the eerie, Fisher showed how a term like the unhomely which primarily defines relations within the home can also define external relations. A space like London City Island falls within Fisher’s definition of the eerie, which is a landscape shaped by capital. ‘Capital is at every level an eerie entity: conjured out of nothing, capital nevertheless exerts more influence than any allegedly substantial entity.’ It is as if technology is not just the ‘architect of our intimacies’ (Turkle, 2017) but that architecture in combination with technology reconstructs our intimacies in service of capital.

This redefinition of place and non-place extends to the representation of people as ghosts within urban developments. Projections of people on hoardings propose, in ghostly form, how and who can use a building. On the street-side hoardings that wrap around new building developments pictures of people carrying shopping, pushing prams and laughing while they stop to chat are pasted into the digital visualisations of a landscaped plaza, office complex or shopping arcade. The people stuck into these new

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<sup>28</sup> Described by Alan Ehrenhalt as ‘a mature stage in the gentrification process when merely affluent residents are displaced by the truly rich, and when commercial real estate properties reach a market value that makes it difficult for anyone but a national or global corporation to pay the asking price.’ Source: <https://www.governing.com/columns/assessments/gov-gentrification-local-business-extinction.html> (Accessed: 23/08/2019).

unbuilt landscape images are ‘render ghosts’. A term coined by James Bridle who launched a search (Bridle, 2012) for these stock-image people. These ‘render ghosts’ are people whose image is often used out of context, shifting them across the globe and through time. Bridle talks in an interview (Chambers, 2017) about how the first set of ‘render ghosts’ were made in 2000 and were copied and shared widely by architects around the world. ‘Render ghosts’ are photographs taken of people who may not have realised their image was being used in this way. The pasting-in of these ‘render ghosts’ into digital projections indicate the use and scale of the building, but they also convert the virtual space (the rendered building) into a virtual place. However, this place is an inter-zone of being and not being. These render ghosts are stand-ins for a public within an image of a virtual and yet spectral future.



Figure 24 Instagram Story screen capture: Deliveroo Editions kitchens at Blackwall, London (June 2019).

On the city streets, this ghostly metaphor continues in the town centres that become ghost towns, and the empty ghost towers (Neate, 2018) bought purely for investment. ‘Dark’ or ‘Ghost restaurants’ (Bandoim, 2019) contribute to the decline of the high street as a public space. Ghost restaurants are virtual or online-only restaurants often housed in inexpensive buildings, like portacabins, and in cheaper locations (like the ‘Deliveroo Editions’ kitchens in a car park at the entrance to the Blackwall Tunnel near my own house). Without a street-side presence and often interacting only through home-delivery apps these Gh0stSpaces save money by not having to provide seating or waiting areas for customers. The home delivery apps, like Uber Eats or Deliveroo, often run the kitchens using the names of existing and well-known restaurant chains.

An inversion of the Las Vegas strip studied by the architects Venturi and Scott-Brown in ‘Learning from Las Vegas’ (Venturi et al.,

1977), where instead of their commercial signage being incorporated into a restaurant building their branding becomes part of the 'app-scape', the virtual market of apps. The commercial signage of the restaurant's brand becomes a pure symbol or avatar that floats through the city in sign form (on advertising hoardings and on the messenger boxes of the couriers). These restaurant brands are both virtual and ghostly presences.

The ghost restaurants, render ghosts and ghost buildings are examples of a spatial hauntology which demonstrates the way place and non-place have been reordered through a post-industrial aesthetic conjuncture that uses placemaking as a market strategy to attract 'the right sort of people' and alienate the wrong sort of people; through the symbolic effect of an island; through render ghosts that give form, purpose and scale to new property developments despite the lack of connection between the actual figures and the place they inhabit; and through ghost restaurants that use an avatar, the restaurant's street branding, as a phantom place. Within this super-modernity, place and non-place lose their distinction, and they do so as a hauntology of place within an ideology of privatisation.

In this chapter I have explored the way capital haunts the city. Primarily, this chapter identifies how the concepts of place and dematerialisation have been appropriated by digital finance. This chapter has explored the ways capitalised spaces of the city privatise life and artistic practice. In the corresponding practice I have sought to bring a collective approach to these privatising effects. To bring together artists and their practices that have also explored the problems of making objects in this city context. To look beyond my own individualised practice to a curatorial practice that brings together other ways that artists have realised and rationalised the object in the city Gh0stSpace. These found their setting within the space of the self-storage unit, a space that aids the flow of objects through the city and keeps objects in a state of fluidity.

Having looked at the Gh0stspace as a space through its objects or as a physical space of the city I will now look at the ways in which Gh0stspace is embodied within a set of internalised behaviours. This will focus on the ghost-like relations within cultural institutions with a view to exploring the possibility of a space beyond the Gh0stSpace.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Gh0stSpace Within.**

**Please now view**

**‘The Gh0stSpace Within’**

**at <http://research.alexfr0st.com/>**

## The Blurred Museum

Alex Frost climbed the tower of tables and chairs that he'd stacked against the steel wall. He waited for the curator's assistant to slide through a pizza in its box, it was a 15" Papa John's 'The Works'. Throughout the remainder of the day, and into the night, Alex Frost slowly ate his way through the pizza. He took each slice in a clockwise sequence, starting at 12 o'clock and before Alex could finish the last slice, he was asleep.

Early the next morning Alex Frost awoke to the sound of engines running. It was an hour before he needed to be up for work. If all these machines were here to take the wall down, he might yet get free and get to work on time, he thought. Half an hour later, as Alex emerged from the shower, the first steel panel came free and Alex slipped through the gap in the wall.

On his way out of the apartment Alex Frost picked up his bag of tools. Alex was filled with dread at the thought of leaving the contractors alone in his house as they'd already done plenty of damage, but he couldn't afford the luxury of skipping a day's work. So, before leaving the building, Alex wrote a note to his neighbour Liza and posted it through her door. The note asked her to keep an eye on the contractors while he was out.

On the way to the station Alex Frost checked his phone. The day's schedule and meeting point had been emailed through from the office at 'Fine Art Perspectives' a sometime fabricators and installation company that he'd worked for since 2015. The heading on the timesheet was written as 'A Space of Appearance - a strange choice of title, Alex thought.

Whilst standing on the train, Alex put his earphones in and started a podcast on his phone to dampen the sound of the train's motions and to give him the comfort of feeling alone amongst the squash of other commuters. As his underground train slipped through the network crossing under the Overground line and into the city, Alex Frost looked through the notes he'd made on his phone over the previous few days. One note said 'Considering that it can take as much money', another said 'Reverberating across boundaries,' another said 'That all the products are useless and so are not wasted,' another note said 'The environmental issue is like the implicated issue: individualism does not solve the problem'. In his current state, stressed from the previous day's

activities, dazed from his early start and not yet having had a coffee, these statements seemed like they'd come from someone else's mind and so Alex Frost returned to focussing on his podcast and hoped that later in the day these words would seem clearer to him.

The meeting point written on the schedule was around the corner from the Institute for Living Arts, a large new museum that showed contemporary art. When Alex Frost arrived at the meeting point, he saw a group in 'Fine Art Perspectives' t-shirts sitting on a bench, each one with a coffee in their hand and a tool bag at their feet. The street which led up to the museum had been blocked off by a twenty-foot tall wall. A small doorway had been cut into the wall and there was a short queue of people filing slowly through it.

Alex Frost was the last of the 'Fine Art Perspectives' team to arrive at the site and so, as he arrived, the group all stood up and joined the queue led by one of them who had been given the full details of the job. When they finally got to the front of the queue they were told to go around to another entrance on the opposite side of the venue. They walked through the surrounding streets and as they did, they noticed that every street approaching the museum was blocked off by an equally large and impermeable wall. Eventually they arrived at the correct entrance and they showed their ID to the security staff. They each had their photo taken and were given a grainy print out of their picture and name and stuffed it into a lanyard.

Crossing through into the site they passed food concessions and merchandise stands that were stocking up. The T-shirts pinned to the stand had text on them, but Alex Frost couldn't make out what was written on them. Together they walked into the museum lobby and were met by someone who took them all up in a lift. It was obvious to Alex that they had been brought in to help finish a job. There was a frenzied air around the whole site.

The group were split up with each of them being dropped on a separate floor on the way up in the lift. On his floor Alex joined in with a group of other technicians who were tidying wires and crimping the ends of cables. The frenzied atmosphere of the installation meant Alex worked through his lunchbreak but at some point, later in the afternoon, a tray of iced cakes in the shape of the building appeared on a table and everyone stopped for a cup of tea and one of the building shaped cakes.

The plan was to test the artwork at the end of the working day, before sunset. The effect would only be visible from outside so as the sun started to go down they all filed outside to witness the test. The artist was standing by a large button in the middle of the plaza at the front of the museum and before she pressed the button, she said a few words to the assembled crowd:

‘I want to thank you all for your work today and also thank the museum for all their help in organising my most ambitious project to date. So now I present to you “A Space of Appearance.”’

The artist clasped the button with both hands as if it contained all the hope in the world and as she pressed down on it there was the sound of several generators coming to life. As their motors ran, the specialist sprinklers that we’d been connecting all day and running along the outside of the building, clicked into action. The fine mist from the sprinklers at precise distances apart gave the whole building the appearance of being blurred. This fuzzy image of the building was beautiful at first. It seemed to magically lift each of the audience into a state of ecstasy but then the sprinklers began to stutter. This stuttering happened for several minutes, no one seemed to know if this was the intention or not. With nothing else to look at and with the building flipping in and out of focus, some of the 40 or so watching technicians started to feel woozy. Eventually, some of them steadied themselves and some sat on the ground. Then someone vomited. Alex Frost tried to look away but the damage had been done. He felt the sugary cake fermenting in his own stomach before he also threw up. Through a nauseous haze he looked around spotting partially digested fragments of the museum in miniature scattered across the whole of the plaza.

## Can You Own Your Implication?

In the midst of the occupy movement of 2011, anti-capitalists protesting at St Pauls were chastised for getting their coffee from a nearby Starbucks (David Wilkes et al., 2011). The tabloid newspaper headlines tried to show that these protesters were hypocritical consumerists, just like the rest of us. However, many people would read between the lines seeing this simple act of buying coffee as an indirect comment on the corporatisation of civic space. The protesters' implication in the forces of capital in the capital was inescapable. Ever since reading this story I have wondered: can you own your own implication?

Since moving to London, I had grown frustrated that there was no way of existing as an artist in the city without being implicated in its problems. This could be seen in the way artists have been implicated in the city's gentrification (Nicklin, 2016) or in the civic and cosmetic values of art being used to 'art-wash' deeper and darker problems away (Pritchard, 2017). This atmosphere of implication possesses everyone in London, as if implication is the primary vehicle for delivering the city's ideology of privatisation.

Artists' implication in the privatised culture of London seems to run particularly deep. My experience in Scotland, where I witnessed a gradual privatising of the contemporary art infrastructure, seems a million miles away from the substantial depth of privatisation within London's contemporary art infrastructure<sup>29</sup>. In London it was as if there was no alternative to an art that was oriented around the art market. The art market shaped all life for contemporary artists within it. My recent experience of London didn't seem to correlate with the image of the city as taking the greater national share of public funding for the arts (Marsh, 2017).<sup>30</sup> There was little evidence in London of a proportionately scaled, secure and sustainable grassroots arts community, like the one I witnessed growing (and eventually reshaping) in Glasgow. I put this down to the large part of the public funding sent to London going toward supporting national institutions, a situation which seemed to have left the city's grassroots to fight it out in an untethered

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<sup>29</sup> For an indepth discussion of privatisation within a Scottish context see Appendix A.

<sup>30</sup> In this article an Arts Council spokesperson said: 'A significant portion of grant in aid funding is used to invest in major national institutions like the National Theatre and Southbank Centre in London. We think it's vital to support the work they do, which represents the very best of our art and culture on a global stage. Because of this commitment it is not realistic to imagine a faster rate of progress in increasing grant-in-aid investment outside London, unless of course we were given a larger allocation from government.'

competitive privatised art world where the main struggle was to pay the rising rents on homes and workspaces. I read reports on the living conditions of artists like in the Arts Council England's 'Livelihoods of Visual Artists Data Report' (2016). This report outlined how the average income for artists in London was higher than in other regions yet since I have been living in London I have seen how the rapid rise of rents (Hutchinson, 2019) and property prices in the city affected the viability of living and working as an artist in the city. I've also seen project spaces, studio complexes ("Making SPACE for art in Ilford," 2019) and artists forced out of the city (Morrison, 2017) in addition to the recent closure of several mid-tier private galleries that operate on tight profit margins (Rea, 2018). It was as if there was a more nuanced perspective on this current condition that continued to be overlooked. I suspected that this condition derived from the way the climate of privatisation within London shaped artists' lives.

This condition seemed to exist most pertinently as a condition of implication. Of the artists whom I knew and had remained in London (those not yet pushed out by rising living costs), many carried their own closely guarded 'implicating factors' that enabled them to stay in the city. These 'implicating factors' could be related to the fact that they owned one or more houses that they either owned outright or paid a low mortgage on (in comparison to high private rents), or maybe they lived off the rental income of another property as rentiers.<sup>31</sup> They might have a cheap studio or have found a way to have an affordable domestic rent; or maybe they benefited from a partner's income or a funded PhD; a well-paid job or two; a private gallery that sells their work or a secret private income. Such 'implicating factors' generate a feeling of impurity, an effect of the ideology of privatisation, where the integrity of life is undermined by privileges that must not be spoken of for fear of being compromised by them.<sup>32</sup> The inescapability from conditions of implication can make it impossible to have anything valuable to say about matters such as the privatisation of the public context because all spaces and actions are implicated in the ideology of privatisation.

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<sup>31</sup> A 'rentier' is a person who lives off rent accrued from a property they own.

<sup>32</sup> I too benefit from my own 'implicating factors': I have a cheap live/work studio in combination with a funded PhD and I have access to part-time work alongside the privileged position of being a white man who at least has the appearance of being middle class.

Yet the implication engendered by an increasingly privatised city echoes out. Implication today presents itself in many forms, such as the way it does through social media. In social media,<sup>33</sup> implication has found its home in the comments entered into the space beneath a post. To pass comment is to play a part in a new economy, what the writer Jodi Dean calls a 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2014) 'a specific convergence of capitalism and democracy' (Ibid., 2017, p.147). This communicative capitalism is a new economy of approval, rejection and implication that Dean believes eats up capitalism's use value. Dean also believes that the 'affective networks' of communicative capitalism are deceptive and commercially rooted. Communicative capitalism consumes and expends democratic energies. This might seem a waste of expressive powers; however, the power of this 'communicative capitalism' cannot be dismissed as a misplaced use of energy. It has genuine and disturbing power. Like the economic power of a protest that drives advertising revenue for the corporations that manage the digital network's infrastructure or the deep and effective political power of this 'comment culture' as documented in Angela Nagel's book *Kill All Normies* (2017). This communicative space is where Pepe-the-Frog memes generated on the right-wing image-based bulletin board '4-chan' can influence a campaign for election as they did during Donald Trump's campaign for presidency in 2016.<sup>34</sup> These posts may seem juvenile in their expression of this 'comment culture' yet they are increasingly powerful whether they say the message we want to hear or not. This is the increasingly contradictory and complex character of online space within the ideology of privatisation.

Online comment culture is also a space of implication. It can take the form of comment or judgement that hangs in the air like the 'hand of the market' (Smith, 2010) or the ghost of the ideology of privatisation. It is both present and absent, an unspoken persuasive and controlling force. This implicated life is synoptical. The synopticon (Mathiesen, 1997) controls through self-moderation rather than by moderation of others. The synopticon reverses the logic of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon or 'inspection-

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<sup>33</sup> The social networks, bookmarking websites, social news sites, media sharing forums, microblogging platforms, blog comments and forums.

<sup>34</sup> In the Netflix film 'The Great Hack' (2019) Cambridge Analytica was shown to have manipulated voter opinion in favour of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Through the use of 'visual advertisements' they sought to change the behaviour of the US voting population using facebook data points from a carefully selected 'persuadable portion' of voters.

house' where the few survey the many. Through the model of the panopticon Michel Foucault made a connection between disciplinary forms of control (Foucault, 2012b) found in prisons and the broader forms of control that he saw within liberal capitalism. Where the panopticon is the mechanism of liberal control the synopticon concerns the wholly privatised regulation of social life. A social life that is fully implicated in the market. The synopticon concerns the many looking at the few. The role models of this condition are celebrities or elites who enact an informal type of control. They are 'a royalty that guides instead of ruling' (Bauman, 1998, p. 53-4). The synopticon's character is more like the 'ultrarapid forms of apparently free-floating control' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4) that were described by Deleuze as 'control societies'. Synoptical control is fluid, unlike the fixed architecture of the panopticon. This is a situation 'rooted in a mutation of capitalism' (1992, p. 5). A mutation that is subtle, liquid, invisible but, like a ghost, also somehow present.

I am not arguing here against holding people to account or that there should be no investigation of the recent corporatization of the arts,<sup>35</sup> or that ingrained sexism, homophobia or racism shouldn't be challenged. These deserve to be brought to light, although in today's freewheeling market savvy climate, I sense that only an individualised sense of equality or moral values pervade. What I am arguing against is implication, Ad Hominem, an implication which attacks the individual rather than the problem. Like the pervasive ideology of privatisation these individualising values are liquid. The revelation of an institution's or person's involvement in the ideology of privatisation as a self-moderating system through implication and holding them to account creates the effect of a ghost of morality. A ghost that resembles the 'big Other' (Žižek, 2006), the ghost that orders appearances in ideologies. The 'big Other' is a symbolic stand-in or virtual representation of ideology. It is a virtual confessor to whom we silently confess our implication, yet the complex and implicating character of today's moral guidance suggests the solid position of a 'big Other' has been given up

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<sup>35</sup> In recent years there have been disputes around Tate's sponsorship from BP (<http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/>), donations from the Sackler family who have links to the opioid crisis to various public institutions (source: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/feb/16/nan-goldin-sackler-gift-oxycotin-national-portrait-gallery>) and Zabludowicz collection's links to the arms trade (source: <https://boycottzabludowicz.wordpress.com/>). The prevalence of the Zabludowicz's financial influence over many major art institutions in London shows how deep the problem is. Amongst the institutions across London (beyond the Zabludowicz's own space) that are sponsored by Zabludowicz Collection are two rooms in the Tate Modern, numerous artworks bought for the Tate collection, Sunday and Zoo Art Fairs and Whitechapel Gallery's 2009 renovation (source: <https://www.zabludowiczcollection.com/about>).

on, creating a crisis (Fisher, 2009, p. 45). A crisis where communicative capitalism and its climate of implication is liquid, unbound from moral guidance of the 'big Other'.

Whatever social form implication takes, either as one physically embedded in the lives of artists through an implication in the privatisation of all life; or as a series of individualising online behaviours through the 'effective networks' of the 'comment culture'; or felt as an atmosphere of control that is guiding and synoptical or as a morally ambivalent space, implication is a space of contradictions and complexity. As Fredric Jameson implies in 'Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (Jameson, 2009) implication is part of the complexity and confusion that shapes all life within late capitalism. To be implicated in the ideology of privatisation can be overwhelming. To be implicated reinforces the feeling that there is no outside from the ideology of privatisation. Implication creates the illusion of a solid and unbreakable ideology. Implication is a Gh0stSpace consumed and this implication is a Gh0stSpace that possesses all in its field.

The roots to the ideology of privatisation are deep and the contemporary art world has not escaped being implicated in it. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017, the writer, curator and sometime artist, Morgan Quaintance's posted the 'think piece' 'The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World's Performance of Progression' (Quaintance, 2017) on 'e-flux conversations'. This article traces the deep and pertinent roots to the privatising logic within contemporary art. Its locus is primarily the London contemporary art world where many of the key figures in the article were educated and many of the institutions he mentions are based. This article offers an implicating perspective on the compromised condition of contemporary art's infrastructure. Quaintance shows how huge swathes of power have been arrested from the hands of artists, the grassroots and community groups. He implicates a new dominant professionalised private-positive curator class as the main perpetrators of a privatisation of public institutions. He suggests that this new private-positive curator class has been propagated through the numerous curatorial programmes that have emerged in the past 30 years. The first of these programmes in the UK was the 'MA in Curating Contemporary Art' programme at the Royal College of Art. This new curator class imbibed the neo-liberal privatisation agenda of the 1980s and the subsequent culture of Private Finance Initiatives (P.F.I.)

that were set up under John Major's Conservative government in 1992 to develop partnerships between private contractors and the public sector. Morgan Quaintance maps out how the current culture of private/public collaboration within the arts has been made acceptable by the wholesale adoption of Public-Private Initiatives (P.P.I.) across the public sector, a process started by the Thatcher governments of the 1980s.

Quaintance points to the way this 'private-positive' inter-networked curator class operates in an illusory space that frees them from direct implication. Through a 'forward-thinking, inclusive and socially conscious' (Quaintance, 2017) approach they give the appearance of being external to the privatisation that they sow. He outlines the role that this new curator class has played in privatising collective institutions that once made up the grassroots. This has been achieved like all effective ideologies through ideological consent that is transmitted in the form of what Antonio Gramsci would call a 'common sense' where effects, like the privatising effect Quaintance outlines, are expressed as natural or inevitable. Morgan Quaintance's account of the privatising logic of the contemporary art infrastructure shows how, like any ideology it is enacted consciously and unconsciously, in both behaviours and in formal structures. In 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' the French philosopher Louis Althusser addresses the dual form that privatising effects take 'Ideology exists in institutions and the practices specific to them. We are even tempted to say, more precisely: ideology exists in apparatuses *and* the practices specific to them.' (Althusser, 2014, p. 156) Meaning a combination of structures and behaviours are essential for the realisation of any ideology.

However, although Quaintance's argument outlines and questions a broad scope of questionable privatising behaviours and the structures that reinforce them, his argument is undermined primarily by its use of participant implication. The dominant private-positive class does bare a great responsibility for a privatisation of the art world yet it is a class that includes not just curators and their institutions but also collectors who only buy from the top tier of galleries and artists;<sup>36</sup> the public and private art funders who

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<sup>36</sup> The elite forming characteristic of contemporary art was explored in 'Contemporary Art, Neoliberal Enforcer' (2019) 'Contemporary Art, Neoliberal Enforcer', a lecture presented at Goldsmiths University, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivQjEBaJh5g> (Accessed: 10 June 2019) a lecture given by Suhail Malik to students at Goldsmith's University. Malik cites Clare McAndrew's 'The Art Market' (2017) to show how recent trends in the art market have led to a polarisation of the economy of contemporary art (2017, p. 236). This polarising effect benefits the formation of elites which leads to a troubling conclusion (especially for emerging and mid-career artists in London today) who are

only fund large and celebrated institutions (Rustin and Arnett, 2015); the art schools that promote a professionalised and commercial model of education (“The Business of the Visual Arts | City, University of London,” n.d.); the critics who are fixated on engaging with the agendas of established artists and large institutions;<sup>37</sup> the elite artists who do not feedback to or support the grassroots<sup>38</sup> and the gallerists and dealers who perpetuate this elite.<sup>39</sup> Other factors in consolidating this new dominant private-positive class are the ending of the welfare state as an unofficial secondary system of funding for the grassroots of contemporary art.<sup>40</sup> Individualising the problem through a process of implication, as Morgan Quaintance does in his article, undermines the much broader character of the problem. A problem that is embedded in a range of institutions and behaviours.

Quaintance’s argument is one I am enormously sympathetic to. The agency it offers to artists should be inspiring yet within the ideology of privatisation we are all implicated. Can any person or institution truly claim to be outside of this privatised condition today? In Quaintance’s case he is a London based art critic, filmmaker and curator who has written for many of the magazines and institutions he criticises. He was also educated on the same course at the Royal College of Art as many of the new

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increasingly locked out from reaching the upper levels. Malik identifies the root of this polarising trend as the financial crisis of 2007/8. McAndrew’s analysis also points to a shift in the recent sales and growth activity of galleries away from the mid-career and emerging artists and middle-sized and small art spaces towards the consolidation of a top tier of established contemporary artists and galleries with little flow between the lower and upper tiers.

<sup>37</sup> In a letter to The Guardian John Keane commented ‘what is lamentable is the limited and predictable attention from critics and arts editors who duplicate precious coverage space and barely step outside the zones of control dictated by the monolithic system of UK state patronage and uber-galleries.’ <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/21/tacita-dean-has-her-space-now-its-time-to-make-room-for-other-artists> (Accessed: 10 June 2019)

<sup>38</sup> Consider the way successful artists rarely look back once they have attained success. How Damien Hirst builds a gallery to house his own collection when he could have provided within it a space for young artists to in work or exhibit in or how when artists do offer some support to the grassroots, like Yinka Shonibare’s ‘Guest Projects’, a space off Broadway Market that artists can propose short-term projects for, it is on a no-strings basis with no funding to develop or run the project.

<sup>39</sup> In an interview in Art Review in 2014, New York gallerist Gavin Brown described the future of the global art market as being increasingly populated by whale shark-like mega-galleries and much smaller sucker fish who feed off them. Source: [https://www.artreview.com/features/jan\\_14\\_great\\_minds\\_gavin\\_brown/](https://www.artreview.com/features/jan_14_great_minds_gavin_brown/) (Accessed: 10 June 2019)

<sup>40</sup> A slow unwinding of secondary support that has inhibited the time artists have to develop their work without commercial pressures or to be engaged in self-initiated or external projects like building studios, running workshops, organising artist-run spaces or to taking an interest in factors beyond their own career development and basic needs.

internetworked curator class he decries. He criticises Open School East ('Open School East,' 2015) despite being billed as a future mentor on the programme in 2014 (before withdrawing). He has also worked for many of the institutions he criticises like Zabłudowicz (Zabłudowicz, 2014), Tate Modern (Tate, 2013), and has written some benign reviews for one of his main targets Frieze magazine (Quaintance, 2011a, 2011b) in addition to presenting some equally benevolent arts programmes on the BBC. In using implication as a strategy he is claiming externality to the privatising context he describes, but it also leaves him open to criticism through his own implication.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that his externalising of his own position is Quaintance's way of creating a professional 'critical distance' but his own position is not bullet-proof. His position is not free of the haunting of implication within the complexity of the 'private-positive art world'. After all his article is building a 'critical capital' that is its own commodity held within the words written and beyond these words, for example, in the teaching opportunities and publishing networks that critical capital produces.

Like many artists and curators in London, Quaintance has his own conflicted relationship to the art infrastructure he works within, yet his proposition that artists should engage in 'collective acts of refusal' is another way that he suggests that there is a true and pure outside, a space free of implication. Calling something a 'refusal' implies that its existence can be denied. Although targeted acts of refusal may have some positive affect,<sup>42</sup> refusal alone cannot address the endemic privatisation of life. Refusal is not enough to alter an ideology. Refusal on its own generates a false sense that there is a pure externality and tries to ignore any proximity to the private-positive world. This lack of externality can be seen in the examples he gives in his article<sup>43</sup> of practices and institutions that have reclaimed some agency. Each of his examples have their own relationship to private sponsors<sup>44</sup> or are relatively protected by geographical

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<sup>41</sup> His implication is frequently mentioned in the comments that follow and supplement his article on e-flux conversations.

<sup>42</sup> For example, the campaigns against Zabłudowicz Collection or LD50 gallery <https://boycottzabludowicz.wordpress.com/> or <https://shutdownld50.tumblr.com/>

<sup>43</sup> The White Pube, an art criticism website set up by Gabrielle de la Puente and Zarina Muhammad, Turf Projects, The Radical Renewable Art and Activism Fund (RRAAF) developed by Elli Harrison, community activist Jain McIntyre, and Curator Cecilia Wee.

<sup>44</sup> For example, The White Pube and RRAAF were set up and are run using support from Patreon.

distance from the harshest effects of the privatising culture (primarily in London) he describes.<sup>45</sup>

Since I have moved back to London, I've found life has become a context of red-hot implication in the privatisation of public life. This is a life which constantly generates its own issues of complicity and implication, one that all art workers must find a way to navigate and one where artists and curators mask or hide their own 'implicating factors'. Working within the privatising effects of London's contemporary art world has become like trying to straddle a puddle in a rain shower; the puddle gradually gets bigger and bigger until we eventually realise, we are up to our knees in it whether we like it or not. To be implicated in the problem makes you part of the problem yet it also simplifies a complex problem that has an amorphous, dispersed and synoptical character. Instead of revealing an outside, to implicate someone or thing in the ideology of privatisation reinforces the feeling of a lack of externality. Implication is its own Gh0stSpace, it haunts, consumes, internalises and privatises. Through implication, the ideology of privatisation can appear to be inescapable. It gives the effect that there are no sanctuaries from its effects. However, I was drawn to the idea that artists could find a way to claim some agency from within the ideology of privatisation. That there are moments when the powers of implication undo themselves, for example, when a visit to a central London Starbucks (David Wilkes et al., 2011) by anti-capitalists demonstrates the depth of the corporatisation of the city.

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<sup>45</sup> The people involved in RRAAF are based in Scotland; Turf Projects are based in Croydon and The White Pube live between London and Liverpool.

## The Gh0stSpace of Appearance

Cultural institutions convey their power through implicating behaviours that permeate beyond their physical walls. Where the artist life was a prototype for the blurred relations between contemporary work and life, the cultural institution (its museums, galleries, magazines, critical structures, funding bodies and sales economy) is its own prototype Gh0stSpace. Through both buildings and behaviours these institutions privatise the public and publicise the private. They internalise privatising powers which reinforce the feeling that there is no externality. I will now attempt to map out this Gh0stSpace and identify some possible spaces of artistic agency within this Gh0stSpace.

As I stand within the exhibition 'I must create a Master Piece to pay the Rent' by the American artist Julie Becker (1972 -2016) at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, I consider the ways public galleries privatise pervasively. As I stand amongst Becker's variously scaled homemade worlds, I project myself into their miniature, life-sized and the oversized spaces where cardboard boxes for transporting fridges in, boxes that are used as homes by the homeless and as playhouses by children, are shown alongside large and small models of *The Shining's* filmset. Becker's work is a merging of life and work through what she called an 'everyday research.'<sup>46</sup> Her interweaving of life and work can be read as biographical, yet lived and fictional realities overlap throughout the exhibition. Her friendship with Chris Kraus implies a connection to 'autofiction', a style of fiction which weaves together fact and fiction. Yet the fictional narratives in Becker's work are continually framed by her own troubled life and create their own personal and haunting effect. There is a sense of the 'unhomely' (Freud, 2003) where the presence of both familiar and unsettling qualities; yet, in the works institutional context the presence takes a spectral form within the ideology of privatisation.

I read the introductory text on the wall of the gallery which tells me that Becker committed suicide in 2016, aged 43 having struggled with drug addiction and mental health issues. It's hard to imagine her personal difficulties being spoken of in such a blatant way if Becker were still alive. As I look around this exhibition, I cannot see the

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<sup>46</sup> As referenced in the exhibition press release.

work without also considering the placement of a dead artist's work within the public institution of the ICA, an institution that was called 'The Institute of Living Arts' when it was first opened in 1946.<sup>47</sup>

I sense that presenting a dead artist over a living one may be a further consolidation of a private market-based logic.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps, dead artists are a more commodified form of artist than a living artist? As if in death an artist's work and life becomes a singular commodity that can be binged upon, like a boxset. The dead artist or 'ghost artist' has a singular and commodified career and 'back-story' where there is little chance that it can be added to, sullied, or spoiled. This may be particularly true when considering an artist like Julie Becker who had personal difficulties and so can no longer interfere in her works display. Perhaps, her personal issues also disrupted the marketability of her work when she was alive? It is as if, in death, the jagged edges of the disruptive living artist with personal difficulties are smoothed out.

In the case of Julie Becker's exhibition at ICA, the life of the individualised artist as troubled genius is reinforced and consumed through the reflexive character of her work where buildings, sets or props stand-in for feelings; where the artist's 'back story' becomes part of a narrative of commodification and is foregrounded in a way it had never been when Becker was alive. Within this exhibition the ghost artist meets the Gh0stSpace, where privatised values commune through walls.

A cultural institution could be defined as a space that extends beyond fixed and existing institutional spaces such as the galleries, museums, magazines and art fairs. In her 2004 lecture 'Why Does Fred Sandback's Work Make Me Cry?' delivered at Dia Beacon, the artist Andrea Fraser explores a more fluid idea of the institution through French sociologist Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'. Habitus is what Bourdieu called (as cited in Fraser, 2006, p. 39) 'the social made body' this is the internalized aesthetic experience

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<sup>47</sup> The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, was initially called 'The Institute of Living Arts' when it was founded in 1946 by Geoffrey Grigson, Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, Peter Gregory, E.L.T. Mesens and Peter Watson (source: <http://corkstgalleries.com/articles/the-other-palace-stefan-kalmar-in-conversation-with-bill-mcalister/>).

<sup>48</sup> One trend since the economic crash of 2008 is for private galleries to increasingly represent the estates of dead artists Alison Jacques Gallery is one such example. Despite being a relatively new gallery (est. 2004) of the 24 artists listed on their gallery website half are no longer alive. Alison Jacques Gallery represent the estates of Birgit Jurgenssen, Lygia Clark, Maria Bartuszova, Robert Mapplethorpe, Ana Mendieta, Roy Oxlade, Gordon Parks, Betty Parsons, Dorothea Tanning, Lenore Tawney, Branko Vlahović, Hannah Wilke. The instituting of Frieze Masters has led to some galleries having booths in both the contemporary and secondary sections of the London art fair.

that is learnt either implicitly in the home or explicitly through educational or cultural institutions. This describes the unique form of possession of the cultural institution. Through it institutional values are consumed and activated through a form of implication. Fraser elaborates:

We carry, in each of us, our institutions inside ourselves. There's a museum in here, inside of me, with Corinthian columns, the grand staircase, and the mezzanine. There's a system of organisation: the way I see things. There's objects and images, and there are texts, and there are voices explaining. There's an archive that also contains my memories. And there's a basement where I keep the things I don't want to show. Just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, I cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as what I am, which is an artist. 2006, p.40

Fraser consolidates an image of the institution, as not just a building but as a set of dispersed objects, understandings, and behaviours. Carried inside us the internalised institution has an implicating and spectral character.

The artist Seth Price's essay 'Dispersion' (2008) would seem to contradict this expansive and consumed model of the cultural institution. 'Dispersion' is a call for a more conservative artistic self-discipline in an unruly, boundless and digital age. Price suggests that art is dependent on the institution as a fixed and refereed space, its rigidity is essential to the clarity and status of art. He advocates for an art made solely for and within the prescribed art institutions and adjudicated on by the official channels. Price says that dispersing art into life 'runs the risk of seeing the status of art – and with it, the status of the artist - disperse entirely' (2008, p.5). For Price, the fixed art institution with what he calls, its 'refereed forums and journals' (Ibid., p.5), provides a safe zone, a focus and a framework for art. For Price any attempt at reaching beyond these recognised institutional domains would lead to an effect akin to a thinning out or dispersion of art or the artist's status. Although, this may be an accurate characterisation of the passive aggression of cultural institutions and their power to set boundaries, Price also seems to be arguing for artistic complacency over artistic agency. Price is very close to saying that conceiving of a space beyond the existing cultural frameworks is to venture into forbidden land.

There is something in Price's conformist outlook that seems to hark back to a notion of the cultural institution as a pure public space, yet today, major art institutions are increasingly conflicted and privatised spaces, where large private galleries like Hauser and Wirth, Gagosian and David Zwirner impersonate museums and where national

museums increasingly court corporate sponsors. Do these ever more privatised spaces actually offer a benign, unimplicated and neutral space that frames an artwork and protect it from the supposedly negative effects of dispersal? Perhaps there was a time when the museum offered what the artist Daniel Buren called in 'The Function of the Museum' (Hertz, 1993)<sup>49</sup> an 'idealist ideology of timelessness'. Buren was referring to the ideology in which the museum offered a shelter, refuge or sanctuary for artwork 'protected from any kind of questioning' (Ibid., p.191). It was from within this idea of museum as a public sanctuary that the practices of Institutional Critique once thrived.

A theorist like Hannah Arendt would have once regarded spaces like museums as a public space, space that is essential for a healthy civic life. Arendt would call the public space of the museum a 'space of appearance' (Arendt and Canovan, 2012) where political freedom and equality can flourish. Today however, the privatising of public and the publicising of private institutions, has led to a proportional disempowerment of this 'space of appearance'. This illusion of the museum as a 'space of appearance' seems to be the model of the cultural institution that Seth Price is referring to and perhaps it also explains my cynicism regarding the Julie Becker exhibition where its narrative of personal privatisation is echoed in the context of institutional privatisation. Today, critique takes its own privatised form that Hito Steyerl called the 'Institution of Critique' (Steyerl, 2001). In this institution of critique, critical acts are given space yet this is a space where critique can effectively burn itself out. Contemporary critique is devoured whole by the cultural institution. Steyerl calls this a 'symbolic integration of critique [...] while keeping up political and social inequality' (2001). As Steyerl remarks, this symbolic representation of critique sits 'on the surface of the institution without any material consequences within the institution itself or its organisation' (2001). Like a Gh0stSpace, this symbolic consumption of critique is what Hannah Arendt might call a 'Gh0stSpace of appearance'. A space where critique exists in a privatised and implicating form that shuts down the possibility of an outside. You are implicated and so can never truly be outside.

Despite the privatisation of the cultural institution is it possible that through a dispersal of practice a space can be found to generate a clear reflection and response to the context of privatisation? It could be argued that only through dispersion can the

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<sup>49</sup> A text originally written in October 1970.

increasingly privatised and implicated space of cultural institutions can be questioned. This is to be bold enough to conceive of an outside or build spaces for what theorist and critic Raymond Williams called an 'emergent ideology' (1977). Raymond Williams (1977) theorised the process of negotiation through which ideologies are reshaped and developed. Williams defined this process as a relationship between dominant, residual and emergent ideologies. Where the dominant culture is the ideology of the dominant class; where residual cultures are the traditional cultures which exist to help clarify the dominant culture (such as the royal family or religion) and the emergent cultures which are materialised as either oppositional (in that they want to change society) or an alternative (in that they have found a different way to live that is less confrontational). An emergent ideology is a form of dispersion. Through an emergent ideology a space can be conceived of for reshaping the Gh0stSpace of dominant culture.

Dominant ideologies are reshaped through a process of emergence that is haunting. Through the production of emergent ideologies, the dominant ideology is influenced by the new and oppositional ideas. Emergent ideologies influence, feed into and become subsumed within the dominant ideology. This abstraction of ideological change describes the haunting or pattern of influence from emergent into dominant. A flow that is negotiated and fluid rather than forced or rigid. The character of emergent ideology suggests a space where an agora can be rebuilt, a space that Bauman identified as between the private (oikos) and the public (the ecclesia). Emergent space suggests an implicated space within the ideology of privatisation. A space where the dominant ideology can be challenged and changed.

This process of negotiated influence from emergent to dominant derives from the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'cultural hegemony' (1992). Through 'cultural hegemony' the dominant class sustains its control through social institutions such as schools, church, cultural institutions and through behaviours such as civil society's shared common sense, a collective understanding that is internalised as natural behaviour. This cultural hegemony, Gramsci surmised, could only be changed through a process more akin to a negotiation between civil, economic and cultural institutions. Gramsci believed that cultural institutions could play a leading role in shaping society. This negotiated process of influence is dynamic and reflexive, and is set against the rigid relationship that Karl Marx (1911) saw between the economic base and the institutions of civil life. Marx's conception of the base (the people and the machinery of

production, and the economy) and superstructure (all other institutions such as the political, family, cultural and legal structures of society) described a flow from the base to superstructure where behaviours were always shaped by economic factors. Cultural hegemony describes a broader field of influence which is negotiated with consent. The irony of the reality of living in the ideology of privatisation, is that it would seem to mimic a rigid Marxist logic where economic factors are deemed to be of primary influence. This is the logic that values the arts purely for its economic impact, the billions of pounds it generates for local and national economies, rather than its fundamental social value which includes the power to lift spirits, to ask new questions and to redefine constructs. The Gh0stSpace of appearance is an economic hegemony in the form of common sense which is carried within us.

The implicating and privatising character of cultural institutions, like a form of dispersion, is represented in buildings, objects and is carried within us. The image of the museum as a benign public sanctuary, a fixed space free of ideology is no longer true. Even critical responses made to these increasingly privatised spaces have been consumed within these institutions leading to an 'Institution of Critique' or Gh0stSpace of appearance, a privatisation of critique, where the institution smothers all acts of critique. This internalisation or consumption of critique is a significant factor in generating a sense that there is no outside. The concept of an emergent ideology offers an externality or a space of influence which can be a space of artistic agency. Through emergent practices could artists begin to reconceive of the public in the cultural institution or as an atomised agora?

To do this means going beyond seeing these institutions as physical or in a pervasive atmosphere but to also question the institution we carry within ourselves, to unbox our own implication, an implication that may be deep and conflicted. Yet in knowing or owning this space of implication it can be undermined. Within this space of emergence artists can rebuild the cultural institution as an agora, to rebuild the ideology of cultural institutions as a space where the artist can once again occupy the institute of the living arts.

**Alex Frost**  
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Opening MacDonald's chicken wrap underwater   W...	270 views	7 months ago
Opening a Happy Meal underwater   Wet Unboxing	390 views	8 months ago
Opening energy mix underwater   Wet Unboxing	173 views	8 months ago
Opening an instant pasta snack underwater   Wet...	206 views	8 months ago
Opening Belvita biscuits underwater   Wet Unboxing	292 views	8 months ago
Opening travel sized shaving gel underwater   Wet...	7.8K views	9 months ago
Opening a coconut and chocolate croissant...	140 views	9 months ago
Opening a chicken wrap underwater   Wet Unboxing	103 views	9 months ago
Opening liquid vitamins underwater   Wet Unboxing	218 views	9 months ago
Opening non-dairy coffee underwater   Wet Unboxing	215 views	9 months ago
Opening sleeping pills underwater   Wet Unboxing	325 views	9 months ago
Opening a packet of Grace underwater   Wet Unboxing	98 views	9 months ago
Opening a non-dairy smoothie underwater   Wet...	81 views	9 months ago
Opening shampoo underwater   Wet Unboxing	801 views	10 months ago
Opening travel sized mouthwash underwater   W...	652 views	10 months ago
Opening caffeine tablets underwater   Wet Unboxing	1.9K views	10 months ago
Opening cannelloni underwater   Wet Unboxing	322 views	10 months ago
Opening travel sized toothpaste underwater   We...	2.9K views	10 months ago
Opening Red Bull underwater   Wet Unboxing	1.8K views	10 months ago
Opening travel size mouthwash underwater   W...	272 views	10 months ago
Opening a can of Nurishment underwater   Wet Unboxing	602 views	10 months ago
Opening a rice snack pot underwater   Wet Unboxing	342 views	10 months ago
Opening a travel sized deodorant underwater   Wet...	1.4K views	10 months ago
Opening Pepto Bismol underwater   Wet Unboxing	2.1K views	10 months ago
Opening a pack of frozen pizzas underwater   Wet...	1.6K views	11 months ago
Opening a pasta snack underwater   Wet Unboxing	2K views	11 months ago
Opening a super-smoothie underwater   Wet Unboxing	1.4K views	11 months ago
Opening a flavoured water underwater   Wet Unboxing	2.5K views	11 months ago
Opening a cold brew coffee underwater   Wet Unboxing	3.1K views	11 months ago
Opening a protein super-smoothie underwater   Wet...	2.2K views	11 months ago
Opening a carton of soup underwater   Wet Unboxing	17K views	11 months ago
Opening a pack of Alka Seltzer underwater   Wet...	1.3K views	11 months ago
Opening a smoothie underwater   Wet Unboxing	3.2K views	11 months ago
Opening a can of coffee underwater   Wet Unboxing	4.5K views	11 months ago
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Opening an iced coffee underwater   Wet Unboxing	582 views	1 year ago
Opening a sandwich underwater   Wet Unboxing	15K views	1 year ago

Figure 25 Alex Frost, the complete series of Wet Unboxing videos, [www.youtube.com/alexfrost\\_whytho](http://www.youtube.com/alexfrost_whytho) (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

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# I am pleasantly horrified by these 'wet unboxing' videos

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**BY CHLOE BRYAN**  
SEP 25, 2018

This is Ode To..., a weekly column where we share the stuff we're really into in hopes that you'll be really into it, too.

Thankfully, the cultural peak of the unboxing video has come and gone. Do you really want to watch another person open a new iPhone or a box from Glossier? But there's still room for **rit's on the genre** — for example, these profoundly disturbing "wet unboxing" clips from artist Alex Frost.

Each video shows Frost opening up a package of some kind of underwater. The stuff, whatever it is, oozes into the water, usually turning it gray and filling it with weird flakes. It's absolutely nauseating. I can't stop watching.

Here is one of the more disgusting clips, for example. It features Frost opening an egg sandwich, peppering the water with bits of egg and sad, floating vegetables. Turn the volume up for the full experience — the sound of the sandwich being dismantled is a damp-sounding squish.

There are also videos starring more liquid-y substances: a chalky dose of Pepto Bismol, or a vaguely foreboding bottle of cold brew. These liquids emerge from their containers slowly, in a foathery trickle, and are generally very pleasant to watch. (You know how pretty long hair looks underwater? It's kind of like that.)

On the slightly gelatinous side of things, there's travel-sized toothpaste, which squirts out of its tube in one long, gloppy snake.

Then, of course, there are the weirder objects. In my personal favorite, Frost unwraps individual tablets of Alka-Seltzer, letting them fizz and dissolve into the water as their packaging floats beside them.

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Figure 26 Bryan, C. (25 September 2018) I am pleasantly horrified by these 'wet unboxing' videos, Available at: <https://mashable.com/article/wet-unboxing-videos-alex-frost/?europe=true#MBt4u0It6Pqp> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

WET UNBOXING | By Samantha Cole | Aug 22 2018, 2:20pm

# I Can't Stop Watching These Disgusting 'Wet Unboxing' Videos

Alex Frost opens packages of food underwater that should NOT go underwater.

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Every once in a while, a phrase or image appears after hours of scrolling the internet that seems like it's going to be something. A proto-meme—a precious, terrifying embryo—of the next new trend.

You've heard of [unboxing](#), the YouTube phenomenon where someone [opens a new package](#)—usually a tech gadget—in front of a camera. You probably don't want to see another unboxing again... but what if it was an underwater unboxing?



Welcome to "wet unboxing."

YouTuber [Alex Frost](#) dunks packaged food and drinks into a clear tank full of water, and opens them. It's disgusting but mesmerizing, in the same sick way that [slime videos](#) and [recordings of people chewing](#) are addictive. And as far as I can tell, Frost is the only one doing it. (If you know someone else doing wet unboxing, please tell me.)

The first item Frost opens for the channel is [a ploughman's sandwich, no mayo, from Tesco](#), and the sight of soaking wet bread and lettuce flopping around in the tank turning the water all brown makes my skin crawl. Frost tears apart [Sainsbury's grocery store sushi](#) underwater and I'm absolutely repulsed, but I can't stop watching. A [Naked-brand green smoothie](#) looks so foul when poured out in the tank.

But it's not just food: There's the can of [aerosol dry shampoo](#) unloaded in there, which is bubbly ASMR goodness. But no, take me back to the horrible foodstuffs please: [The Rustler's double decker](#) (a microwavable burger brand in the UK) is absolutely nauseating. Thanks, I hate it.

How long before we get an underwater iPhone X wet unboxing?



Figure 27 Cole, S. (22 August 2018) *I Can't Stop Watching These Disgusting 'Wet Unboxing' Videos* Available at: [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/zmk7ke/watch-wet-unboxing-videos-underwater-youtube](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/zmk7ke/watch-wet-unboxing-videos-underwater-youtube) (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

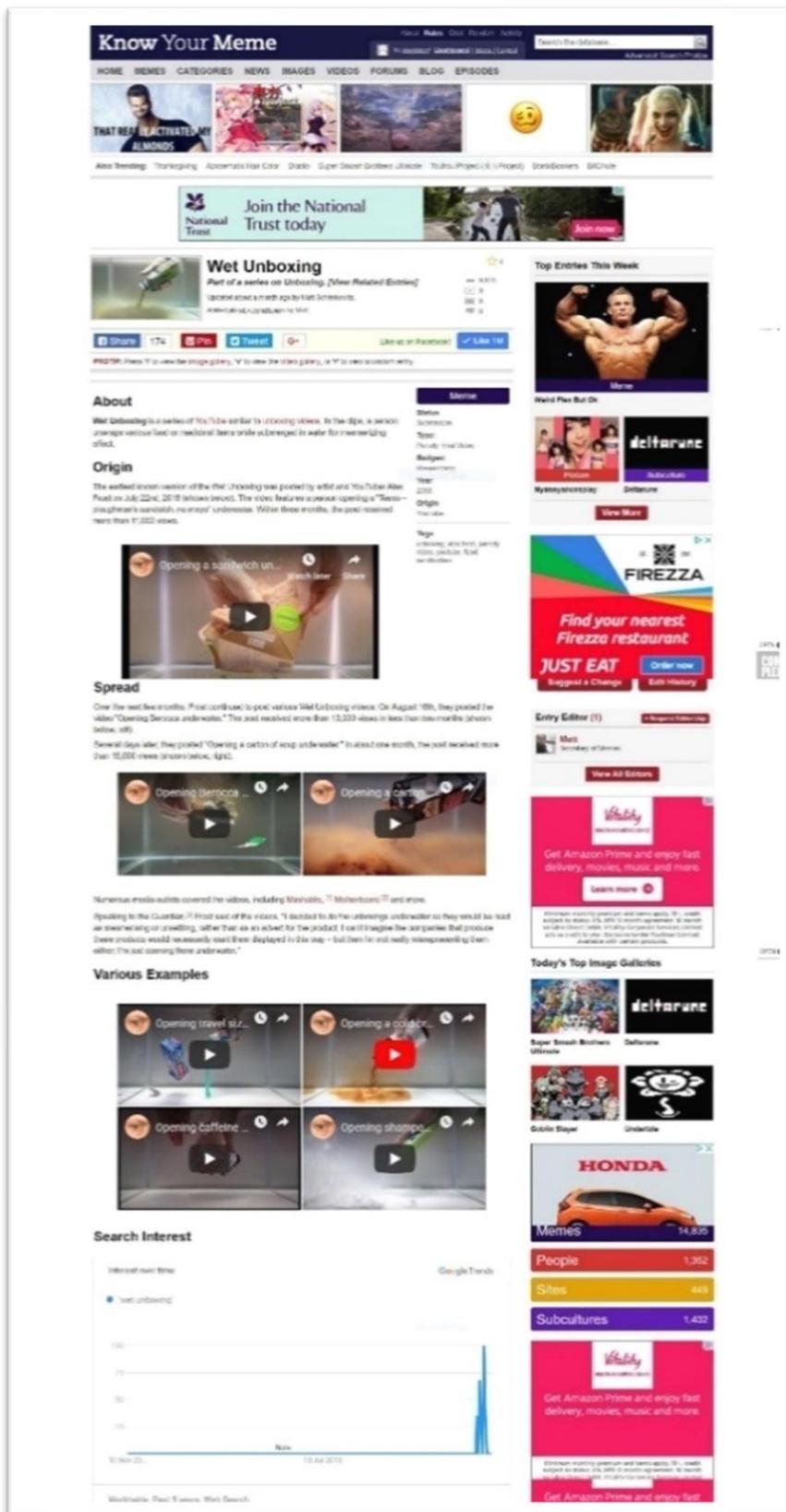


Figure 28 Knowyourmeme. *Wet Unboxing* (excerpt), Available at: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wet-unboxing> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

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## The underwater art of 'wet unboxing': why it's so mesmerising, unsettling and weirdly emotional

From the lumpy carnage of soup let loose to the fizzy clouds of Berocca, artist Alex Frost's video series submerges objects that reflect life on the go

Penney Anderson  
Mon 10 Sep 2018 10:00 BST



& stills from some of Alex Frost's 'wet unboxing' videos. Photograph: @alex.frost/instagram

In a glass tank filled with fresh water, the Glasgow-trained, London-based artist Alex Frost slowly opens consumer products, to strangely beautiful effect. A carton of New Covent Garden soup, for example, produces a glorious and lumpy vision of carnage as the contents slowly and decorously spill out into the water.

Long interested in repositioning packaged products (his mosaic sculpture of a Ryvita carton is in the permanent collection of Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art - GoMA), Frost explains that rather than a statement of anti-consumerism, the video series is redolent of old-fashioned public information films, while the underwater element renders them "emotional, ephemeral and sexy".



Alex Frost's video of a soup carton being opened underwater, one of his 'wet unboxing' series

The objects he "unboxes" reflect a life of transience. Frost moved back to his home town of London four years ago, where, he says: "It feels as if every nanometre of space has been priced up and every second is rationed." Time-limited, he relied on ready-made sandwiches, which feature heavily in this work. Even billowing clouds of dry shampoo reflect life on the go.

A whole tube of Berocca unpacked underwater is the most obviously enjoyable, creating an entrancing fizzy orange cloud. Cold-brew coffee proves dark and menacing, while a tin of Del Monte fruit salad opens to reveal a balletic cascade of fruit lumps. Perhaps inevitably, Gaviscon also features in this buffet, unleashing billowing fluffy pink clouds to settle the results of too many hasty meals.

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Figure 29 Anderson, P. (10 September 2018) *The underwater art of 'wet unboxing'* (excerpt), Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/shortcuts/2018/sep/10/wet-unboxing-underwater-art-videos-emotional> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

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## «Мокрая распаковка». Новый феномен на YouTube: так мерзко, что оторваться невозможно

22 августа 2018 18:54

Видеоблогер из США придумал новое направление на YouTube. Он помещает упаковки в аквариум с водой и там разворачивает, вскрывает и показывает. В основном он делает это с едой, и процесс одновременно раздражает и завораживает.

Канал парня по имени Алекс Фрост открыл миру блог [Motherboard](#). Пока что у него очень мало просмотров, но можно быть уверенным: скоро их будет больше. Потому что выглядит это всё одновременно дико и необъяснимо притягательно.

Фрост начал с сэндвича из Tesco. Хорошо, что в нём не было майонеза. Но менее отвратительным от этого процесс распаковки картонной коробки с хлебом, овощами и сыром не стал.

И это было только начало. Йогурт, молоко, холодный кофе. Наконец, смузи! Распаковка смузи под водой. Жуть.

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Figure 30 Alexandrov, Daniil (22 August 2018) *Wet Unpacking. New YouTube phenomenon: so disgusting that it's impossible to break away* (excerpt), Available at: <https://medialeaks.ru/2208dalex-wet-unboxing/> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

## 베일에 싸인 간편식 예술가, Alex Frost

ART 2018-10-03



어린 시절, 부모님으로부터 “음식으로 장난치지 말라”며 혼난 기억이 한 번쯤은 있을 것이다. ‘음식은 귀한 것’이라는 사고방식이 오래전부터 내려온 우리 문화에서 음식은 오로지 섭취의 대상이었다. 섭취를 제외한 모든 행위는 장난으로 치부되어 금기시되었으며, 이는 어린 시절 밥상 앞에서부터 철저히 교육되어 하나의 관습으로 굳어졌다.

우리나라에서는 지금까지도 교육되고 있는 이 같은 풍습을 송두리째 뒤엎고 있는 유튜버 알렉스 프로스트(Alex Frost)를 소개한다. 특유의 그로테스크한(혹은 역겨운) 영상으로 해외 매체들의 시선을 사로잡은 그는 언박싱(Unboxing) 콘텐츠의 새로운 장을 열고 있다고 평가받고 있다. 그의 영상들은 시중에 판매되는 제품을 개봉한다는 점에서 기존 언박싱 영상들과 동일하지만, 한 가지 부분에서 차별화한다. 바로 제품들이 수중에서 개봉된다는 점이다. 알렉스 프로스트는 이를 웻 언박싱(Wet-unboxing)이라고 칭하며, 그 대상을 현대인들의 ‘간편한 생활 방식(‘On The Go’ Lifestyle)’을 대표하는 제품들로 국한한다.

그의 계정에 게시된 언박싱 영상의 소재는 샌드위치부터 샴푸와 데오도란트까지 다양하다. 현재 구독자 수는 881명(10월 1일 기준)에 불과하지만, 레토르트 수프를 개봉하는 영상은 조회 수가 무려 16,000회에 달하는 등 큰 관심을 얻고 있다. 뽀얀 물속에서 천천히 부유하는 음식들의 낯선 모습에는 눈을 떼지 못하게 하는 기묘한 힘이 있다.

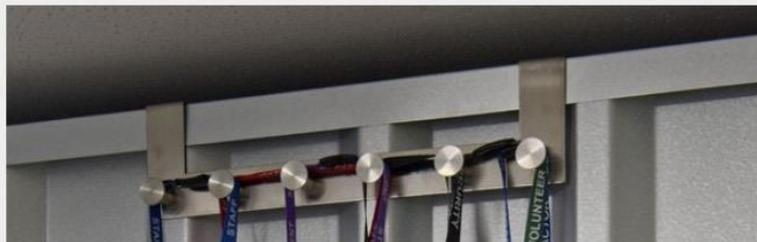


Figure 31 Hong-Shik, K. (3 October 2018) *Alex Frost, a veiled freelance artist*, Available at: <http://visla.kr/?p=81464> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

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## Buka Makanan dalam Air, 'Wet Unboxing' Jadi Tren Terbaru di YouTube

Sonia Basoni - detikFood Senin, 17 Sep 2018 15:17 WIB

0 komentar



Foto: Istimewa

**Jakarta** - Video tentang 'unboxing' di YouTube memang beragam. Berbeda dengan yang lain, YouTuber ini membuka makanan dan minuman dalam air yang disebut 'wet unboxing'.

Dari membuka sup kemasan yang kental, minuman, hingga sandwich. YouTuber bernama Alex Frost berhasil menarik perhatian dengan konsep, 'wet unboxing' miliknya. Jika YouTuber yang lain lebih nyaman melakukan **unboxing** makanan atau barang di atas meja, kalau Alex lebih senang membukanya di dalam air jernih.



Foto: Istimewa

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Figure 32 Basoni, S. (17 September 2018) *Open Food in Water, 'Wet Unboxing' Becomes the Latest Trend on YouTube*, Available at: <https://food.detik.com/info-kuliner/d-4215620/buka-makanan-dalam-air-wet-unboxing-jadi-tren-terbaru-di-youtube> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

## 看過「開箱」，但「水中開箱」還是第一次

2018/08/24 來源：知乎專欄

網際網路好像永遠不缺新奇有趣的東西，所謂的熱門也總是一波又一波地替換。

YouTube 上有一類開箱視頻 unboxing，博主在鏡頭前折開一個新包裝——通常是一些科技產品。

但是一位 YouTube 用戶 Alex Frost 的開箱試驗是在水中完成的，因此也叫 wet unboxing。

Alex 在一周前開始上傳他的各種「開箱」視頻，包括三明治、奶昔、咖啡、洗髮水等等，通常視頻只有1-2分鐘，沒有任何背景音樂，但是看著看著居然有些著迷了，看到各種形態的物品在水裡撞擊，有一種治愈的癡奴(?)。



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壹讀  
說這專再續 2.6 萬 按讚次數  
成為朋友中第一個說這讀的人

Figure 33 Anon.(24 August 2018) I saw "Unpacking", but "Unpacking the Water" is the first time. Available at: <https://read01.com/LdA6R25.html#.XXi5zShKiUl> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

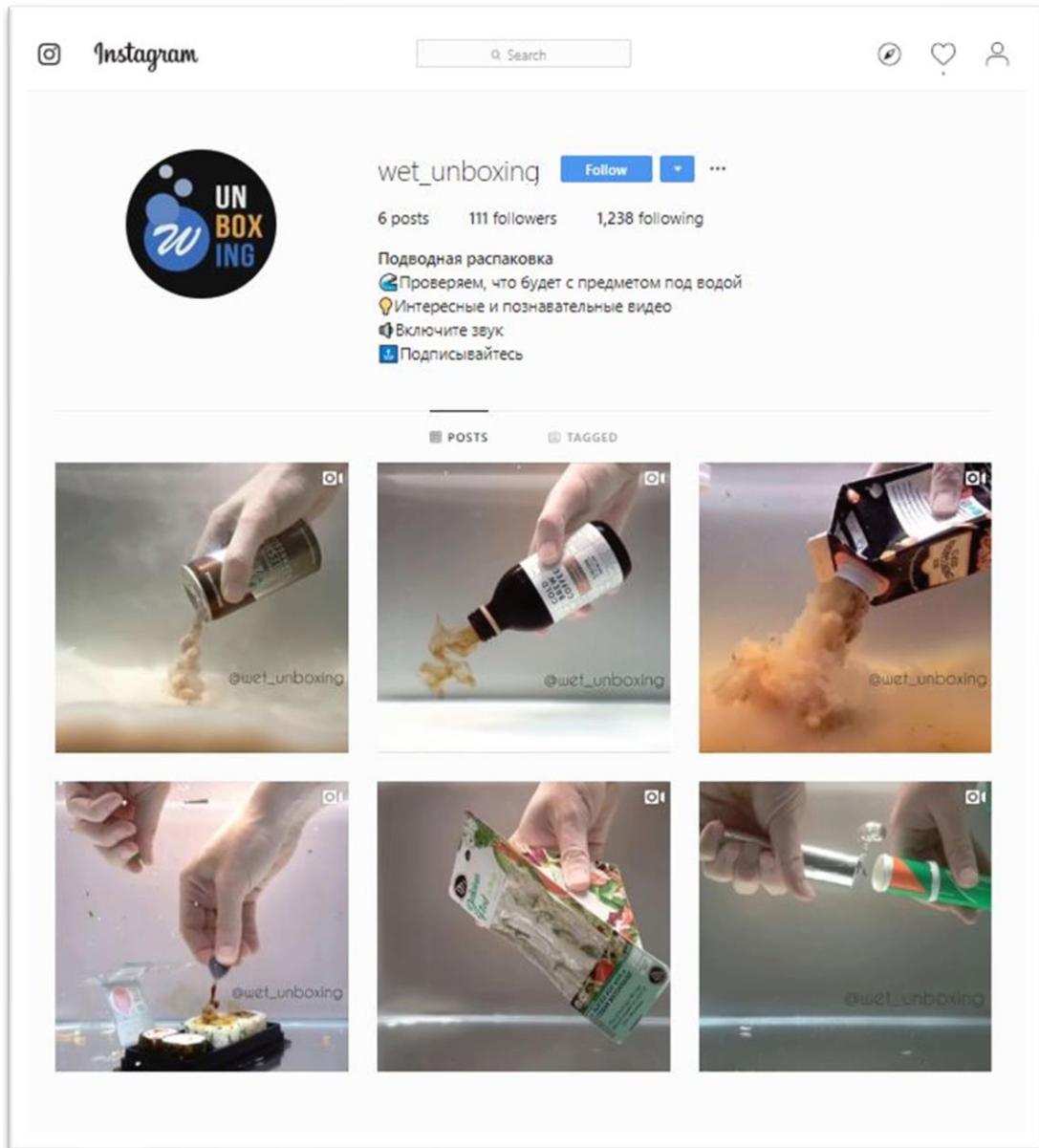


Figure 34. A Russian Instagram account set up (without permission) in tribute to the Wet Unboxing series Alex Frost devised (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

## **Wet Unboxing**

*This dialogue discusses the 50+ 'Wet Unboxing' videos I made between June 2018 and September 2019. These videos were released via a range of social media including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Reddit.*

I press the button to call the Schindler lift. Beyond the lift doors, I hear the lift's leavers crank into action, and I imagine that air displaced by the shifting counterweight. In seconds, a shaft of yellow light from the lift cart slides up through the crack in the stainless-steel lift doors. I step into the white cube of the lift. The doors close and the elevator starts to descend through the floors.

I have my Samsung S9+ in my hand with a pair of Sony WH-1000XM3 headphones connected to it wirelessly. On the phone a conversation has been going on for a while now. Mostly, I have been listening not talking, or rather, scrolling through my phone whilst half listening. I wait for my chance to speak, hoping for a natural space to form in the conversation, an elongated pause which I could slide into.

'Well, the on-the-go lifestyle is also a dual life. Its emblem is the takeout coffee, which can be both relaxing and stimulating. There's a similar contradiction in the on-the-go products that soothe, feed a hunger or ease a pain and yet they also rattle you by speeding you up or making you more efficient. I'm sure we could live without super-smoothies or coffee in a can but I can also see how they might seem indispensable.'

'...'

'The videos were shaped by the character of my life, an attempt at trying to slot my practice within the routines of

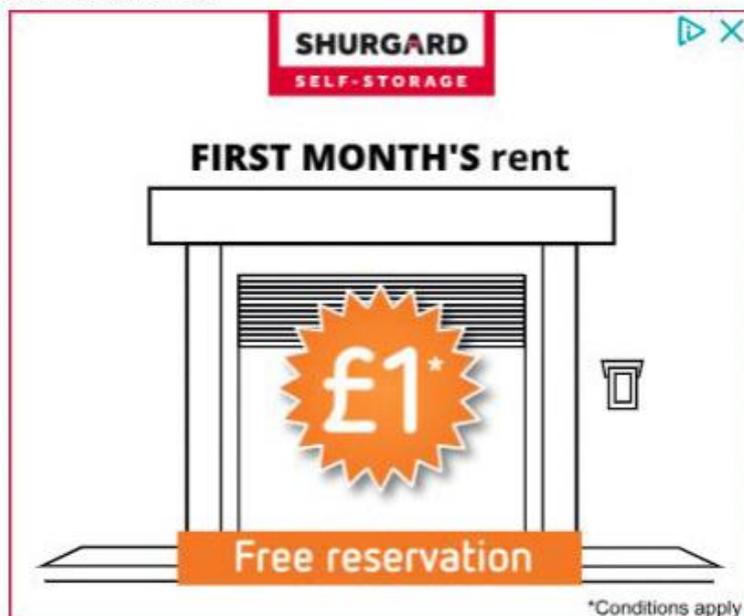
day-to-day life. I'd noticed that there was strange subset of products which you'd see in supermarkets, train stations, airports and chemists, products that help to speed up your life or ease the flow through urban life.'

'...'

'Yes, I know but I liked the fact I could pick up the materials on the way home, make the video in seconds and then have it all uploaded within a few minutes. It's an optimised practice just like the optimised products I unbox.

I couldn't see why I had to wait for a gallery to show them in. Posted online they could take on their own life getting reposted, written about, or commented on. I liked the way social media offered a more direct relationship between the concerns of life and the commercial world. Adverts run alongside a video of your mum walking her dog. The overlapping effects of life today seem to be more clearly represented in Facebook or Instagram.'

ADVERTISEMENT



I bring up my notes on the screen. The most recent note reads:

‘On the screen U bank, U wank, U shop, U talk 2 friends and 2 ppl U will nvr C.

On the screen all forms of economic life happen on a single plane.

On the screen there is a Gh0stSpace: a singular field of consumption.

On the screen all actions are individualised.

On the screen the public and social becomes personal and intimate.’

The lift doors open onto a corridor and I look up. Pipework weaves across the ceiling, visible through the missing tiles in the Armstrong dropped ceiling. The museum grey walls of the passage are scratched horizontally up to waist height. The doors close and the lift continues to descend further down into the building taking me with it.

‘I got the email from Gucci last week. It had a non-disclosure agreement attached. It didn’t have a lot of detail to be honest just that they wanted me to unbox some shoes underwater.’

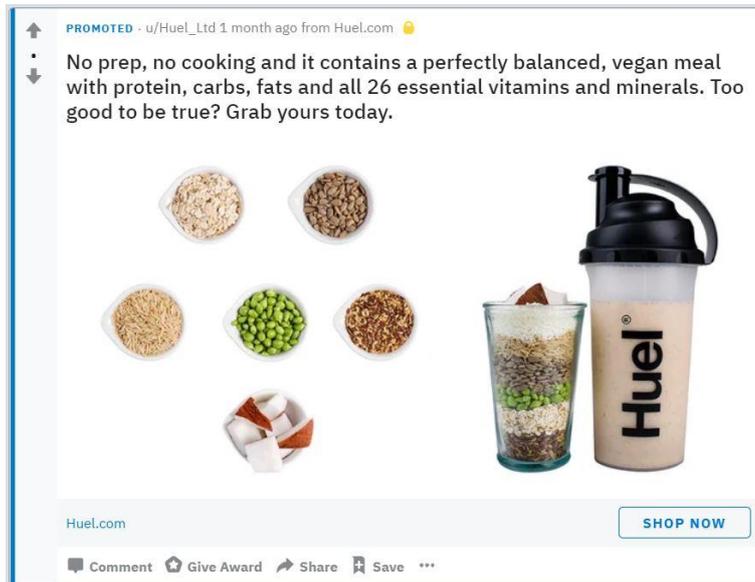
‘...’

‘Yes, it was out of the blue. I would have thought they’d at least call beforehand.’

‘...’

‘I guess the formalities of studio visits are only an art world concern in the age of Instagram and anyway, who

needs a studio visit when I'm posting updates from the studio practically every day?'



'...'

'Sure, I know.'

'...'

I continue to scroll through the list of notes and bring up another note:

'In circulation the vids both lose and gain power. They lose power through their dispersal where they get lost, reposted and reinterpreted, consumed through feeds and stories and where comments hang off them. Can also gain power as they are freely circulated to a wide non-exclusive audience.'

I close the notes app and scroll through some screenshots from the Gucci commission in my phone's gallery:



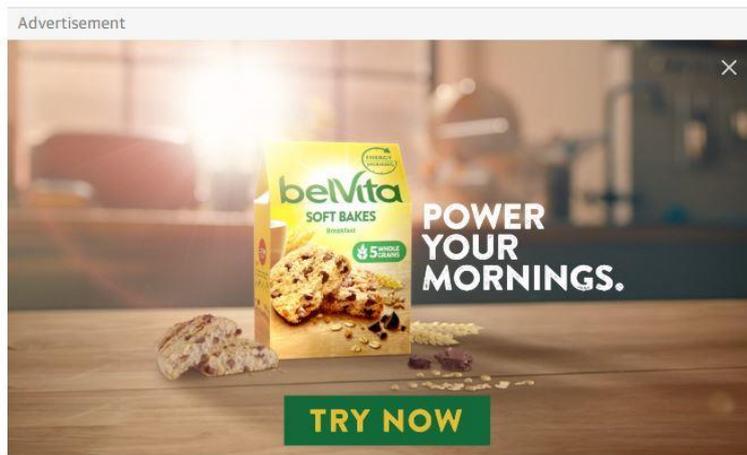


*Figure 35-39 Alex Frost, Wet Unboxing (Gucci ACE Sneaker), 2018 and courtesy of Alex Frost and Guccio Gucci S.p.A. Available at [https://www.instagram.com/p/B0QYc-Wi2XE/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_button\\_share\\_sheet](https://www.instagram.com/p/B0QYc-Wi2XE/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet) (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019).*

‘Of course.’

‘...’

‘Unpacking a £600 pair of shoes changed the whole process. I couldn’t just pop back to the shop and get some more if the recording went wrong. I had to write up a check list of things I needed to remember like focussing the camera, setting the white-balance, or cleaning the tank. I’d learnt the hard way that a stray hair or even a drop of water running down the outside of the tank can ruin a shot. There will always be some things you can’t control though, like if the cat has one of her freak-outs.’



The lift doors open onto the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, revealing a bite-sized courtyard of granite benches and young birch trees bound to stabilising stakes. The yard is a cropped, cut, and pasted space sandwiched between the two towers. On the Horsham stone paved surface of the courtyard, a strange amalgamate collects. A tumbleweed of matted hair and clothing lint. It gathers in corners and rolls in small clumps from bench to bench in the breeze. Most of the seats are occupied by people on their own. Several people have laid out their meal deals ready for eating.

‘Yes, I know.’

‘...’

I look down at my phone again. Opening the notes app again I scroll down to another note I remember writing in bed one morning:

In their circulation through social media these videos are adverts yet they aren’t some compliant public-private partnership. The videos flow through social media like digital money and yet they aim to unsettle rather than comply. The videos are distributed freely and yet there is a price for this free distribution. We, the artists, generate content for a company that offers a platform.

‘...’



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iSeries 165L/240L/290L Aquarium Nano ...

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‘I guess we use these spaces for all sorts of reasons, good and bad. Some make more sense than others: like the sadness you feel when a targeted ad gets your taste so wrong or so right; or the hit that watching an advert or purchase can give you without any need to own the item; even the empty sense of achievement that you get from scrolling through images of white rooms on Contemporary Art Daily.’

‘...’

‘I’ve got three pairs of £600 trainers drying out in my studio. Unfortunately, they’re really not my style. God! I’d be so paranoid walking down the street with that much money on my feet!’



The lift doors open onto a sloping corridor of rusty core ten steel walls. The walls give off a cool air that I could taste. I swallow the chilled bloody metallic air and repeatedly press the button to close the doors as quickly as possible.

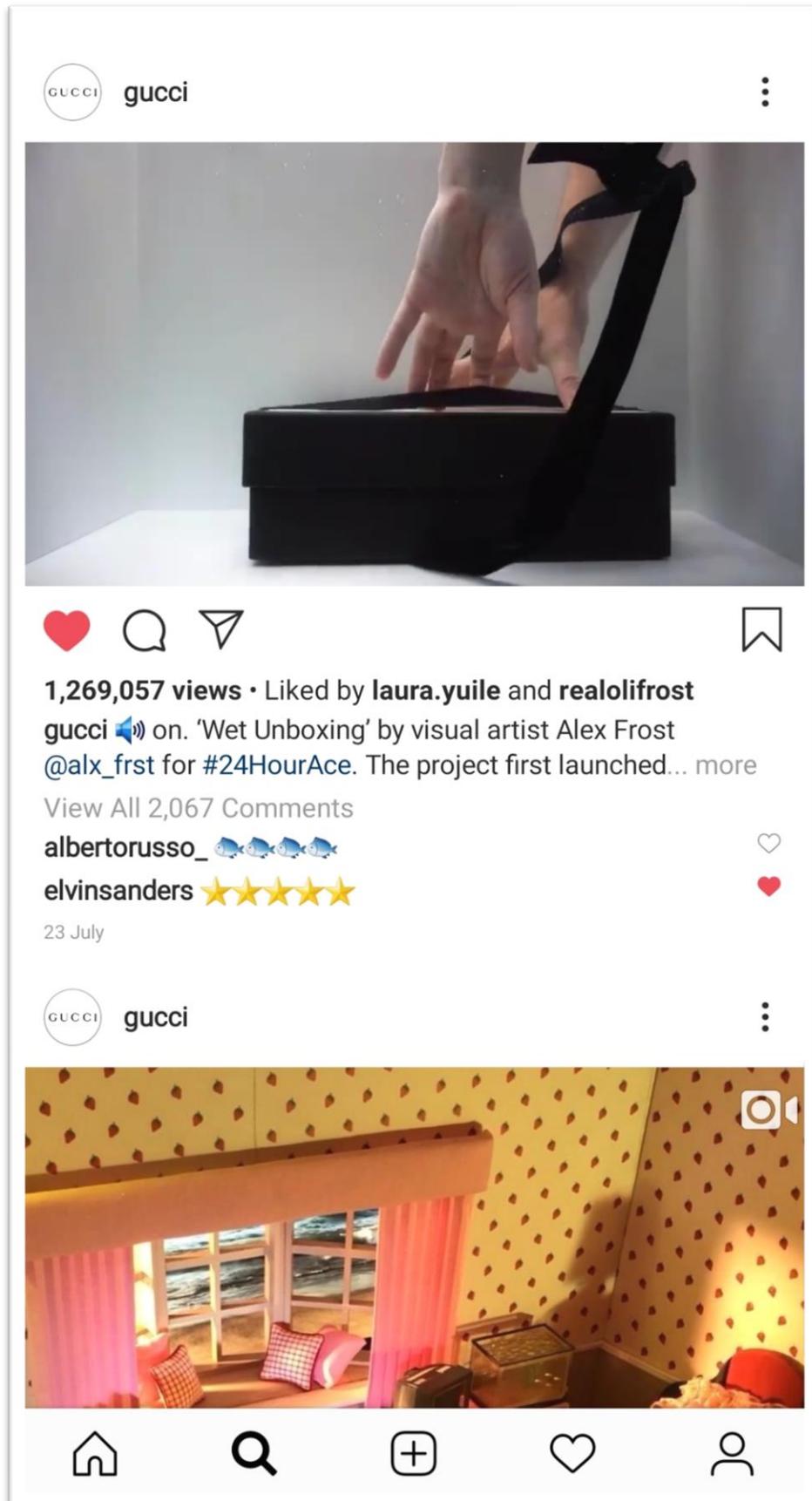


Figure 36 Video Commission: Alex Frost, Wet Unboxing (Gucci ACE Sneakers), 2019.

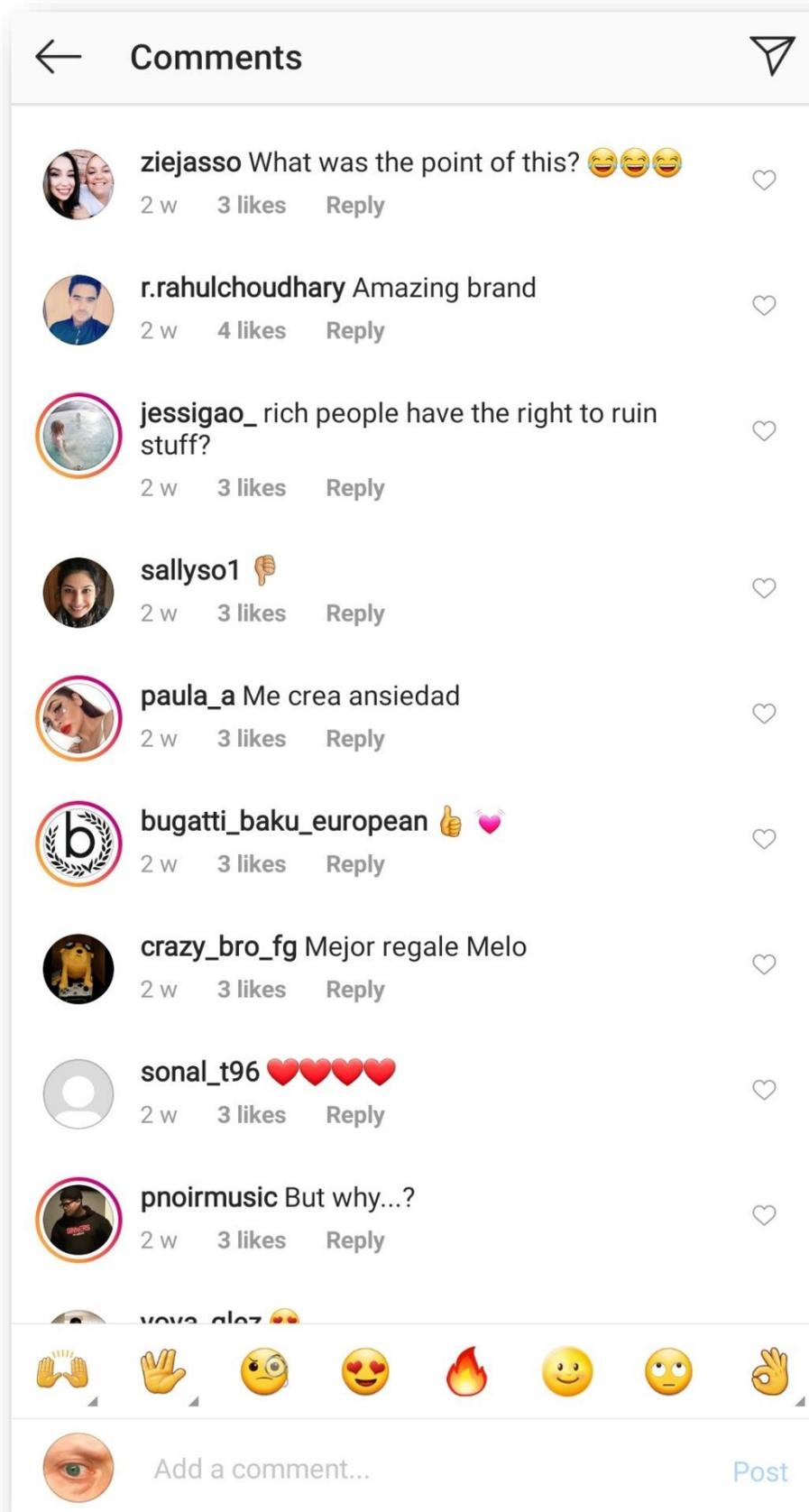


Figure 37 Video Commission: Alex Frost, Wet Unboxing (Gucci ACE Sneakers), 2019.

## The Gh0stSpace Outside

In the video the narrator begs ‘It’s a way to plead for the creation of an online public space!’ (Carl, 2019). At the gallery Banner Repeater in London a film by ‘Cosmos Carl - Platform Parasite’ is running through a selection of the art projects they have linked to online. Each art project exploits a different ‘free’ online service. Commercial online platforms like AirBnB, Ebay, Pinterest, Soundcloud, Tumblr, Kickstarter<sup>50</sup> are free to use and yet users pay indirectly by trading their personal data in place of money. Consequently, these platforms become their own implicated art space.

Cosmos Carl was initiated in London by Frederique Pisuisse and Saemundur Thor Helgason, two former graduates of Goldsmith’s MFA programme now living in Amsterdam. I spoke to them not long after they had moved to Amsterdam. We spoke about how their project stemmed from the limitations of London life. They left London in 2017 after many years of trying to pay rapidly rising rents or trying to manage life living in inhospitable property guardianships. Cosmos Carl had its roots in a fairly typical student activity of wanting to set up a gallery. However, they found it difficult to find the space in London. Cosmos Carl was in many ways an answer to this condition. A counter-exploitation of the free online space that commercial online platforms offer that was typically paid for in personal data. Cosmos Carl went into this context aware of this trade-off. They understood that this was no free lunch yet they could mine the privatised realm of online sociality despite it being a context of deep and dark implication.

In my own project for Cosmos Carl I produced a video of a Big Mac being opened in a glass tank filled with water. I circulated this video via Pexels an archive of free stock photos and videos. As with all the Cosmos Carl projects the artwork was presented as a link to the platform in question with a brief introduction. My hope was that this video would acquire its own social life being viewed and circulated in ways beyond my control. I was embracing unpredictable outcomes rather than fearing the life beyond predictable institutional frameworks. Willingly submerged in this strange privatised

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<sup>50</sup> Some examples of platforms explored are [drive.google.com](http://drive.google.com), [torrent.net](http://torrent.net), [ebay.com](http://ebay.com), [hostmypdf.com](http://hostmypdf.com), [docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com), [pinterest.com](http://pinterest.com), [jsfiddle.net](http://jsfiddle.net), [youtube.com](http://youtube.com), [maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com), [soundcloud.com](http://soundcloud.com), [vimeo.com](http://vimeo.com), [earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com), [aws.amazon.com](http://aws.amazon.com), [tumblr.com](http://tumblr.com), [megaupload.com](http://megaupload.com), [facebook.com](http://facebook.com), [kickstarter.com](http://kickstarter.com), [clyp.it](http://clyp.it), [etsy.com](http://etsy.com), [castingcallpro.com](http://castingcallpro.com), [vodlocker.com](http://vodlocker.com), [airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com), [sketchfab.com](http://sketchfab.com), and [instagram.com](http://instagram.com).

publicising online space this artwork could be said to be owning its own implication. The display of Cosmos Carl's film within a London gallery, demonstrates the possibility of an outside entering dominant culture<sup>51</sup>.

This work demonstrates how the habitus carried within us is also the facility that allows for an outside. Through the concept of habitus or emergent ideology we carry our knowledge outside of the existing rigid cultural institutions. There is an equivalence between this way of conceiving of an outside and the diversification of economies that the sociologists Gibson-Graham proposed in 'The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy' (2006). In this book, Gibson-Graham suggested that the acceptance of capitalism as an all-enveloping system with no escape allows it to flourish. That conceiving of capitalism as a singular entity reinforces its hold. Gibson-Graham's response to this enveloping context was to reveal the non-capitalistic structures that already exist within capitalism. The structures that have been overlooked such as the domestic labour which is not acknowledged as an economic contributor to capitalism. Gibson-Graham's remedy is to add to, diversify and queer capitalism and in doing so it can be unfixed. Producing emerging economies, diversifying existing economies and demonstrating their contradictions can all reveal the possibility of an outside.

As I have shown in previous chapters, it can feel like every inch of space in the global city is priced however, through social media, new virtual communities provide readymade spaces of emergence. Through practices of emergence and diversity there is a possibility of an outside within existing Gh0stSpaces. As Andrea Fraser might say, these practices contain the possibility of an outside because we carry that possibility inside ourselves.

I will now look at some other examples of emergent art practices that employ Gibson-Graham's logic to diversify the *culture* of privatisation. These practices attempt to diversify the commercialising and implicating effects of an ideology of privatisation. In their fluidity between spaces of emergence and domination these practices build new

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<sup>51</sup> It would be a stretch to call a project space like Banner Repeater an exemplar of dominant culture but as a gallery or project space it does provide a root into such spaces.

networks or outsides within existing Gh0stSpaces. These Gh0stSpaces<sup>52</sup> are primarily based in the implicated and privatised space of social media networks.

The following examples do not claim to be complete or ideal but they do set a distinct example. That some of these examples are based in North America should be no surprise. After all this is the privatised arts funding model that England, at least, seems to be moving towards.<sup>53</sup>

One approach to has been for artists to reveal the ideology of privatisation that echoes throughout the Gh0stSpace of online gaming. To question the apolitical context of escapism and to reconceive it as a new public domain. Set up by the artist Angela Washko in 2012 ‘The Council on Gender Sensitivity and Behavioural Awareness in World of Warcraft’<sup>54</sup> researches how ‘real life’ misogyny and homophobia are replicated within the game. Washko had been playing World of Warcraft (WOW) since 2006. She’d found the game to be inclusive in principal, yet the game also supported a misogynistic and homophobic culture. The game had a player base that was 85% male, averaging around 29 years old and who were from a diverse background. WOW is a game that usually consists of killing enemies and collecting equipment. Angela Washko asked players to take some time out from their cybernetic slaughtering to discuss their experience of sexism and homophobia within WOW. In a lecture hosted on Vimeo (Washko, 2016) Washko attempts to replicate the conversations that she’d have one-to-one within WOW. The abuse experienced by many of the gamers she met was often related to the issues of either simulated or real-world relationship breakdowns. Her online performances of these interactions demonstrate a range of ways misogyny and homophobia can replicate within new social systems, like role playing games, which can be considered to be corporatized versions of public domains. This project proposes

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<sup>52</sup> These practices are distinct from the austerity driven space of the micro-gallery. The micro gallery uses its digital sociality (through platforms like Facebook and Instagram) to give a deceptive appearance of an emergent culture yet they are often a compromised version of the full-sized privatised art world. Micro galleries today are increasingly a training ground for a private-positive art world as seen in the spaces once run by established curators like Pablo dela Barra who before working at the New Museum and Guggenheim ran The White Cubicle, a gallery in the ladies toilets of the George and Dragon Pub in East London (Source: <https://www.guggenheim.org/staff/pablo-leon-de-la-barra>).

<sup>53</sup> ‘If you said to me what is the one thing I could do . . . that would make a real difference to the arts, I would say it would be to help foster an American-style culture of philanthropy to the arts and culture here in the UK.’ Culture secretary Jeremy Hunt quoted in ‘Will philanthropists save the arts?’ Charlotte Higgins, 21 Oct 2010. (Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/oct/21/arts-cuts-and-the-philanthropists>)

<sup>54</sup> World of Warcraft, released in 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment, is the most popular multiplayer game of all time.

that roleplaying games should challenge problematic behaviours rather than reinforcing the sexist and patriarchal conditions of flesh and blood reality. This artwork enacts a fairer world within a virtual pseudo-public landscape it does this outside of the conventions of the art institution although it can also fold back into the institution in its afterlife as a performance, lecture or video demonstration.

Working within the field of art criticism Brian Droitcour's Yelp reviews of exhibitions in New York written between 2010 and 2016 reappraised the role of an increasingly compromised art criticism in the direct and informal manner of the consumer review posted online. Droitcour explains the context for his reviews: 'as an art writer, when you write a review at times you feel like it's just giving the gallery something to publicize, another page in the binder, another line on the CV for the artist. I was just super frustrated with reviews,' (Gat, 2013). Droitcour's reviews feed into what Orit Gat calls the 'service review' (Gat, 2015), a commercialised critical culture seen in online customer reviews, that already exists for music, films and books. However, Droitcour's Yelp reviews also manage to critique the objectivity of the critic by working in a space like Yelp that is connected to the gallery but not compromised by the existing privatising character of contemporary arts critical structure. He also managed to do this from within the broader corporatized structures of communicative technology. In one review Droitcour writes 'apexart (sic) is the only non-profit exhibition space in New York that doesn't let visitors use the restroom' (Droitcour, 2014). This line is included in a review on Yelp of an exhibition called 'Private Matters' at Apex Art, an exhibition that explores issues of 'privacy in contemporary life' (Droitcour, 2014). Embedded within a Yelp review Droitcour manages to achieve both a critique of the accessibility of art criticism and the art gallery from within the corporatized space of the Yelp platform. It is implicated within the corporatized space of Yelp and yet also diversifies the cultural space of art criticism.<sup>55</sup>

By using digital social networks as a mechanism in their work, artists have diversified the more rigid relationships between an audience and artwork usually experienced in galleries. These artworks reach beyond the boundaries of art by crossing over from art

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<sup>55</sup> This project brings to mind Joel Holmberg's 'Legendary Account' on the forum Yahoo! Answers (2007-2011). Holmberg's intervention involved asking profound and existential questions like 'How do you occupy space' or 'How does it feel to be in love?' on this user-generated forum. Such phrases hang in the air, some answered, others left without a response, in both instances capturing the nature of art within this online sociality.

into popular culture or from popular culture into art. One example is *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (2008), the artist Jon Rafman's hoarding of freakish moments from Street View. In its circulation this work generates a reverberating relationship of an artwork in circulation. This is an example of an artwork generated through appropriated mainstream culture which then feeds back out into popular culture and then back again into art institutions. The artist collective 'K-hole' produced their own version of a reflexive circulation of art through their trend forecasting publications (Fong et al., 2011). These publications generated a new speak which led to their term 'normcore' (K-Hole, 2013) becoming part of common usage. Normcore refers to a style of dress or being, where the aim is to fit in rather than stand out. Lacking the framework of a fixed art institution Rafman's 9 Eyes project and K-hole's trend forecasting practices both rely on the institution in a more dispersed form, one that is carried 'inside ourselves'. This means that there will be moments when the artwork comes into contact with a non-art audience yet in becoming part of mainstream culture this work can still exist as art.<sup>56</sup> The complexity of these two projects is echoed in the diverse way they've been responded to critically, they have both been reviewed in equal measure by mainstream and official art world press.

Within the privatised context of London, artists today are following the lead of these USA based artists by using and referencing digital sociality as a mechanism for sharing artwork and ideas amongst peers. In one example, F8 residency (Jerrom, 2016), formerly Facebook Residency, was run by the artist Perce Jerrom for the 2 years running up to the end of 2018. This online residency format offered artists access to a collectivised Facebook feed onto which they could upload artworks and research material of their own choosing for a month. These artworks and interventions folded into the Facebook feed of anyone who wanted to follow the F8 account, butting artworks against the posts and comments of friends and family. F8 Residency made use of Facebook as a space that was both private and social, allowing artists to share and test ideas. Jerrom started Facebook Residency when he was living and working between London and Mexico and he told me in an interview (Jerrom, 2019) how his own

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<sup>56</sup> This reflexive publicising relationship is more meme-like than many memes. The meme may have started out as a name derived from gene to describe the flow of an idea through culture. Yet memes today are also under their own system of domination. Meme's today describe a particular image/text relationship, known as an 'image macro'. This prescribed format determines so many of today's memes where an image is combined with a top text and a bottom text.

nomadism inspired him to try and build global networks to other artists. He saw how Facebook was used by artists to circulate news of exhibitions and events without any critical interaction with this new individualised and commercialised social space. Within this communicative capitalist forum this residency format shows how a commercial social media platform like Facebook can facilitate a space in which artwork can address the commodification of these modes of communication and presentation. The negotiation here is between the research and artworks shared and the feedback that the resident artist receives.

These practices all work within and directly address the implicated and privatising context of the socialised and corporatized digital networks of social media. Shaking off the feeling of implication may be impossible, yet within the corporatized social network an implicated context can also be reframed or even owned. Despite their inherent privatisation social media platforms provide a facility for building new communities where new forms of critique and criticism can blossom. These projects use different forms and approaches to make clear and current responses to a implicated, commercialised and rationed Gh0stSpace. They work within the Gh0stSpaces to reveal the ideology of privatisation at the root of online gaming (Washko); republicise a privatised art criticism (Droitcour); to diversify the formalised relationships between an audience and artwork (Rafman/K-Hole); to create a digital sociality with new networks for art and artists (Jerrom) in addition to Cosmos Carl's publicising of private online platforms. These practices diversify the prevailing ideology of privatisation from within. Each one is an implicated practice and yet these practices show how an ideology of privatisation can be diversified opening up the possibility of an outside.

In many ways these are the beginnings of a process that may develop further over time perhaps one day these spaces can be used for even greater good where a collective can be reformed and reformulated, a public realm can be advocated for or even to expose even deeper privatised characteristics of daily life.

The climate of privatisation within London, is a space of implication that shapes artists' practice and their lives. It generates a Gh0stSpace which is carried within. Its institutions haunt. Through the Gh0stSpace of appearance a sense of the public within

the cultural institution has been erased and through the production of a dispersed and emergent culture via social media there is a way to influence, diversify or queer the Gh0stSpace.

In practice this becomes a process of owning the internal implication by circulating ideas outside and inside of existing cultural networks. Gh0stSpace is an enveloping context however there is an outside to the Gh0stSpace. Social media offers an implicated community or agora, a space between the public and private, a space where relations between the public and private can be rebuilt, generating the possibility of an unimplicated outside.

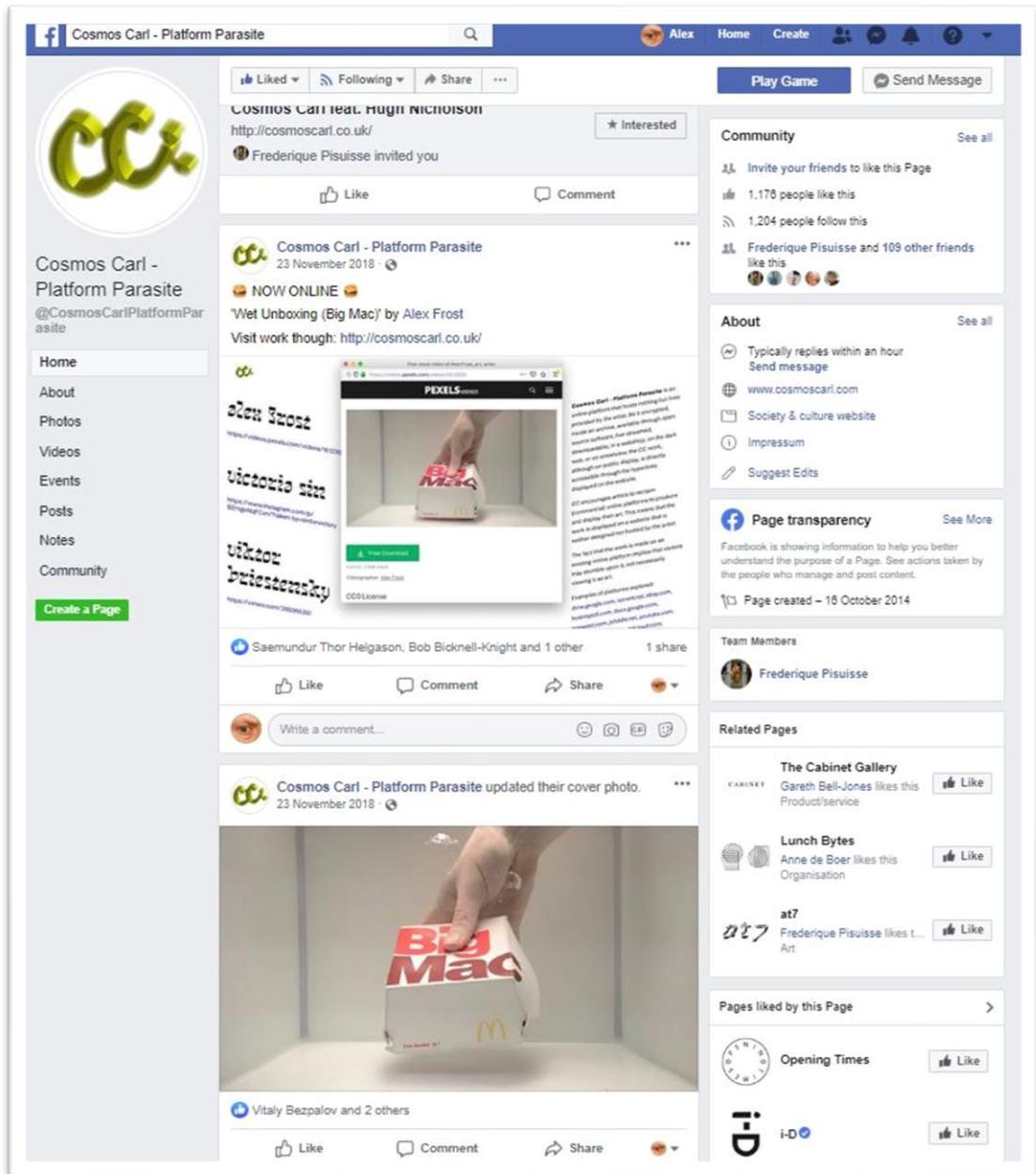


Figure 38 Facebook posts relating to Alex Frost’s ‘Opening a Big Mac underwater - Wet Unboxing’ an online exhibition with Cosmos Carl - Platform Parasite (2018).

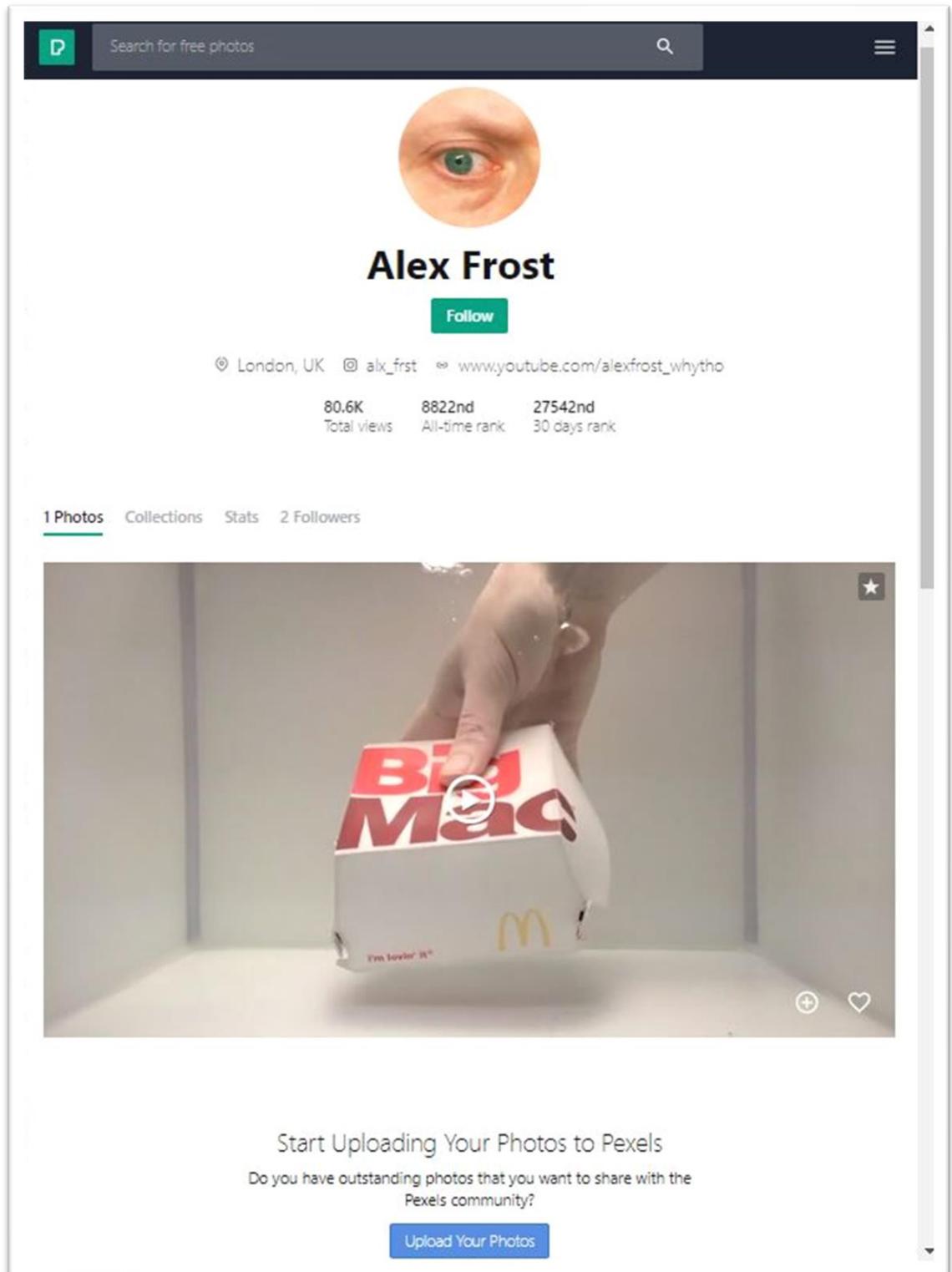


Figure 39 Alex Frost's Pexels profile page 'Opening a Big Mac underwater - Wet Unboxing' Cosmos Carl Platform Parasite, an online exhibition (2018).

## Conclusion

Since moving back to London I had noticed how its status as a financial capital generated its own spaces. Gh0stSpace describes the character of this space, a space that forms within an ‘ideology of privatisation’. This Gh0stSpace was a space where life meets work, where a flexible life is controlled through authoritarian methods; where the public and private become indistinguishable and where the virtual and the physical are no longer divided. This life under the rule of consumption has a boundless and inter-relational character represented in objects, institutions, behaviours, and the discourse between them.

I have explored gaps and contradictions of this Gh0stSpace through my own live/work context, the wider city and from within the framework of art practice in the hope of finding a space of agency within the ideology of privatisation in contemporary London, a space that appears to have no outside.

To call the condition of life in London today an ideology gives it a shape that is deep rooted and complex. For example, ideology can take the form of a common sense that determines that its logic is natural and inevitable. This common sense can even deny any existence of an ideology. Consequently, I realised that to explore an ideology it would need to be worked *through*, consumed even. An answer wouldn’t appear if I attempted to float above it looking down or if I tried to build a new ideology.

The inter-relational combination of art practice and theoretical practice has been an important consideration throughout this investigation. In addition to the academic texts many of the texts herein attempt to operate in their own Gh0stSpace. A space where direct interpretation is problematised, where conversations are only heard from one side, and where narratives depict the materialisation of an externality within a context that can appear to have no outside. The speculative narratives are constructed around a series of catastrophes using my current lived conditions as a starting point. Specifically, the three fictional texts contain a disruptive force (a wall, a protest and a biological reaction) which cuts through each context. These fissures embody the Gh0stSpace in either solid or liquid form within the haunting context of privatisation. They represent aspects of my artistic life (my live/work home, a studio complex and a waged work environment) since I moved to London.

Other texts within this thesis generate a reverberating picture of the overall context of this ideology of privatisation. The fictional transcripts of one-sided conversations with a muted *other* address the issue of interpretation as a form of consumption where half the conversation has been swallowed up or muted or denied an audience.

In the first part of this research, I explored how live/working is both a practical existence and a condition that embodies the pervasive atmosphere of Capitalist Realism. To live in the space that one works or work in the place one lives generated an illusory context or Gh0stSpace, a space which contains aspects of presence and absence. Being an artist meant I understood this ‘open plan’ merging of life and work, yet I also felt a tension between the loose immaterial form of work that I was familiar with and the invisible control that came with it. This control took the form of a precarity that hung in the air and affected everyone. This precarity was its own form of self-governance where nothing feels certain or solid. I witnessed this in my own life through my own position in the insecurity of my own existence, as a resident rather than a tenant; through my relationship; my furniture; my pet and also in the ways I could generate an income.

Looking beyond my own live/work space Pilvi Takala’s artist residency at Second Home in London explored the broader context of the immaterial Post-Fordist world of work. Takala’s artistic labours confronted a ‘creative’ work context (where work has no visible boundary). Second Home is its own boundless, post-industrial and immaterial space. In this space, work is internalised in the form of the entrepreneurial worker. A figure who has been ‘set free’ only to find a brave new world of work where their unpaid/unrecognised work is no longer constrained or restricted to the household. Unrecognised work now finds itself an integral part of work and life where software-based homeworking and online labour are merged together into working life. This has led to the situation within the landscape of the ideology of privatisation where the household has become a more commercialised workspace and where shadow work exists as an invisible ghost work that can be either virtual or physical and where through gamification fun becomes hard to distinguish from work. This current context is a ‘platform capitalism’ where digital devices allow for an insidious form of capitalist accumulation.

The artworks I produced in response to this fluid and murky existence became emblems. Something fixed to hold onto in a liquid on-the-go life, like the ossified pre-packaged sandwich or a frozen pizza. Yet these mass-produced sandwiches and pizzas contained their own individualising character as seen in the range of sandwich filling or pizza topping where choice becomes its own form of personality test. I made a series of works which used mood crystals as toppings for frozen cheese and tomato pizzas and encased supermarket sandwiches in resin. Some of these petrified symbols of transience were shown in the exhibition *Love/Work*<sup>57</sup> a collaborative exhibition with my partner Laura Yuile. This exhibition within the live/work apartment we share was a more fully realised accumulation of parts including art and non-art objects bringing together many of the mundane elements of our lived existence (a fridge, a freezer, a microwave and bikes etc.) into the fold of an exhibition. *Love/Work* was a staging of our separate practices and our life together within a shared living space which was also my workspace in London. This was made literal in the use of items from our shared life as components in the exhibition and our movement through them. It was an exhibition where the professional and lived experience are represented on equal terms and was activated through an inter-relational collaborative practice within a boundless GhOstSpace.

In chapter one I sought out new spaces that contained the inter-relational character of live/work apartments. I initiated an artist residency in the informalized workspace of a WeWork co-working office. I found the WeWork amongst the east end streets where several well-known examples of artist housing and studios had been initiated. I used this self-initiated residency to investigate and report on the behaviours within this dynamic workspace. I found that although this working context was sold as a creative workspace, the term ‘creative’ is used in its broadest sense, referring to people who live a flexible, optimised and mobile working existence. There was a sense that co-working contains a corporatized, symbolic and illusory form of collectivity. Where collaboration existed as a performed and symbolic act, a creative interpretation of collectivity, which was echoed in the ‘We’ of the WeWork brand. These are collective and cooperative spaces

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<sup>57</sup> *Love/Work* was a collaborative exhibition with Laura Yuile (October 2017) held at The Fire Station, Bromley-By-Bow, London and was included as part of Artlicks Weekend.

which are also insular, individualised and atomised. This led me to the realisation that the creative class was not just (as Angela McRobbie surmised), a new middle class who have bought a promise of mobility and flexibility in exchange for an erosion of workplace securities like job security, welfare support or a defined working day. The creative also referred to an underclass who through homeworking and app working (Deliveroo, Uber Eats and Uber) had also adopted the insecure guise of the creative worker.

In the second chapter, I explored the privatised condition of life within the wider global city. It seemed clear that there were other spaces in the city (like the co-working space) that this privatising and boundless logic could be applied to. On moving to London, I noticed that living in an ideology of privatisation was actually shaping my artwork. My previous routines of work didn't seem to fit into this liquid life, where all life was determined by the cost of space and time. The consuming character of life within London was liquid, placing responsibilities on individuals and where control is maintained through uncertainty. I realised that many artists had adapted to sit more comfortably in this nomadic, global, temporal and flexible existence. This liquid life could be said to have generated a liquid artistic practice.

On first moving to London I tried to replicate parts of my life as I'd lived them in Glasgow. For example, I thought I could find a studio outside of my house that suited my needs. I soon realised that replicating the patterns of a Glasgow artist wasn't workable in London. I identified how other artists had adapted to a liquid life by making small things, some made their work to order, rehearsing and planning their ideas during the install emphasising the availability and rationing of space and time. As I looked deeper, I recognised how the availability and conditions of studio spaces in London were deeply politicised and privatised. I saw how artist studios built within residential complexes engendered particular kinds of practice, for example, many artists cultivated a more marketable and domestic scale of work. It is as if the city shaped the practices within it, toxifying certain types of practice leading to a gentrification of practice in London.

I decided to see what adapting to this condition might involve, would I have to start working more flexibly? Would I need to find new methods of fabricating things? Would

I need to start using new materials? At the same time, I started using Instagram which had its own effect on the kind of work I was making, as well as seeing how it was affecting the work of other artists. Recent developments in digital technology had influenced the development of certain styles or colours of artwork like the soft colour schemes which were very effective when viewed on an LCD screen. It had also allowed artwork to flow openly and be exchanged and viewed instantly and globally like digital money.

I wondered whether there was a ‘utility of dematerialisation’ which emerged out of city life complimenting these digitally flowing artworks. This new dematerialised art was of a different order to the conceptual art that placed more emphasis on the thinking process, it was instead a pragmatic dematerialisation, one where the city had forced certain noisy, smelly, messy and object-based practices into a vaporised form. I witness this as I went through the galleries of the city in artworks that seemed to work within the material limits of London. The ideology of privatisation in London seemed to shape artistic practice into a liquid materiality where solid notions of life now occupied a more fluid Gh0stSpace.

In my practice, I looked for spaces that would be appropriate to respond to this liquid materiality; it seemed clear that this would be its own Gh0stSpace, a space between the material and immateriality of life in the city. In the storage unit<sup>58</sup> I found a space that facilitated the fluid character of life in the city. These spaces enabled and denied mobility through solid and bonded objects and so the artists I chose to show in this unit, in a series of solo exhibitions, all had practices that attempted to address a range of issues relating to the object in the city. This was in part a curatorial project where the self-store became a pseudo-gallery. Working in this way the peer group of artists gave me an opportunity to inspect or understand the city context as it effected other artists. Through the self-store we could each test our spatial practice in a private space and as a Gh0stSpace the outcome was shown in gh0st-form online.

Looking further out into the city I saw how the commercial corporate world of property development had created a spectral form of marketisation of place which had combined

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58 ‘Gh0stspace: Things Ground Us’ was a series of 5 x solo exhibitions held in self-storage units in Hackney Wick, London in April/May 2018 and shown online at [www.Gh0stspace.uk](http://www.Gh0stspace.uk). The artists were Debora Delmar, Paul Johnson, Luke McCreadie, Laura Yuile and myself.

with a reflexive version of the non-place. Through a strategy of 'placemaking' a ghost of place had been created. This physical global city was increasingly shaped by the virtual world creating a hauntology. Yet, where a hauntology once described a temporal impasse; today, it exists as a spatial impasse through a sense of place that has been commodified. This can be seen in the 'aesthetic conjuncture' within London City Island, where an industrial style of landscape is built for a new urban middle-class who appreciate the aesthetic of industrial buildings but not the actual business of industrialisation. This is the Gh0stSpace of the city, a globalised ideal of the local where privatised creative zones within the city resemble a cleansed version of the industrial shaped by capital. This is an externalising of the unhomely through an eerie landscape of simulated and domesticated industrialisation. Hauntology also takes a virtual form through 'context collapse'. Where the non-place of mobile communication can suppress engagement with place, and where surveillance and social media has generated ways for our digital devices to haunt our imaginations. We exist increasingly in a virtual form where our virtual subjectivities are saved online as a version of our self. This is our contemporary ghost, yet it is a ghost that is in a commodifiable, transferable and server form. Where advertising increasingly appeals to our virtual subjectivities.

In the third and final section of my research, I explored the privatisation of the cultural institution. My experience of life as an artist in Scotland seemed a million miles away from what I witnessed in London. Artists in London seem to live in a context that was almost entirely at the mercy of the market. This was often expressed in the way there was no escape from the feeling of being implicated in the privatisation of the city. London may have a greater share of public funds for the arts, yet the artistic grassroots seemed to exist in a wholly privatised competitive art world in which artists had to fight it out. This was a condition that had reached a peak following the period of austerity implemented by the Conservative-Liberal coalition of 2010-2015. I'd seen a lot of artists leaving the city, and galleries and studio complexes closing since I'd moved here, largely due to the perpetuation of an inflated property market. Implication in the city's problems cut through everyone's life in the city and, like an ideology, it was evident in both behaviours and institutions. Any security (an income or a cheap place to live) was undermined by its implication in a wider problem within the city. This feeling of implication seemed to also deny anyone the right to comment on this condition. One of the many ways that this implication transmits is through the comment culture of social

media. A new economy of communicative capitalism which 'eats up capitalism's use value'. Yet this new economy had an increasing influence over lives and had a complex character. The comment culture was very much part of the ideology of privatisation in that both share a pervasive form of control that is synoptical. The synopticon describing the 'society of control' where social responsibility is placed on the individual through self-moderating behaviours. This synoptical shape of society reinforces the sense that there is no outside, that there is no externality and implication is part of this complexity and confusion, a condition that shapes all life in the ideology of privatisation.

I wrestled with this problematic issue of implication as I read Morgan Quaintance's article on The New Conservatism. When read from a London perspective his point that a private-positive curator class were the main perpetrators of the privatisation of arts public institutions had some truth to it and yet through its implicating method he also undermined his own point. His article outlined how the pattern of ideological privatisation has evolved over the last 30 years. It involved not just institutional change but also behavioural change. In claiming a critical distance Quaintance left himself open to criticism for his own implication in the milieu of privatisation. His response to the culture of privatisation was also problematic as it argued for artists to engage in 'collective acts of refusal' from the privatised art world which also seemed to suggest it had an outside. Yet his few examples seemed to reinforce the sense of no externality, in their own private implications or geographical distance from the effects of the privatising culture he addresses (with its nexus in London). I proposed that it may be possible to own your own implication as a way of working within the amorphous, synoptical, spectral and implicated context of an ideology of privatisation.

This brought me back to the relationship between the perception of the cultural institution as a public space and the effects of an increasing privatisation on museums and galleries and the art within them. The increasing privatisation of institutions effected the critical power of art placed in them generating a 'Gh0stSpace of appearance' where critique appears in a symbolic form. Within the context of a privatised art infrastructure I took Seth Price's concept of dispersion and repurposed it as a space of agency or autonomy, where the agora can be reconstituted. This was a space between the public and private, its own Gh0stSpace. It exists as a dispersed public sphere or a private sphere in publicity. Andrea Fraser talks about the way that the

aesthetic experience is something that we hold within us, it is a habitus that we carry through our lives and so an institution can equally exist in this dispersed and internalised space<sup>59</sup>. The institution is not just a building but a set of objects, behaviours, understandings and situations.

Within this context of dispersal I attempted to make artworks that would engage with or surrender themselves to an emergent online art space primarily through a YouTube channel. This was an optimised practice where artworks circulated across digital platforms occasionally feeding back into art institutions. In my work I was trying to advocate for a diverse culture to compliment the diverse economy that Gibson-Graham had advocated. Through an online Gh0stSpace of emergent and diverse cultures, there is some autonomy for art practice. This doesn't exclude the possibility of the work entering the institution in some form. It is a space of emergence and agency within an ideology of privatisation.

The tensions between my life and work could be traced back to this 'Gh0stSpace within'. These tensions created illusory contexts, the appearance of an outside, which could be a productive space within an ideology of privatisation. Through a practice-led process I have attempted to represent or work through some of these spaces as art objects, curated projects and mediated artworks. In combination with the writing in this thesis, the artworks explore the depths of this ideology of privatisation. Leaving behind a hope in the autonomy and agency that a diversity of cultural institutions can possibly bring.

Within this project I have sought to employ a diverse range of practices. This diversity of approach is relevant to the slippery context of Gh0stSpace and each approach has a degree of specificity to its context. This range of approaches aims to answer the question whether practice can be used to identify the locus and perimeter of Gh0stSpace.

Throughout this project I chose a range of practice-led methods in the hope of unlocking the diverse and shapeless character of Gh0stSpace. I began by collaborating with my partner on an exhibition within the live/work space we share. By collaborating, I was

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<sup>59</sup> The issue of how we acquire our particular 'habitus' or cultural knowledge will not be explored here as it is already been well explored.

testing the bounds of this individualised space. This exhibition demonstrated the murky reality of live/working where relationships, pets, working methods and the language used to describe it, all disrupt the purity of a privatised life. The image of the fluid life of the individual artist in a live/work space existed in tension with the lived reality. The artworks within this exhibition defined the limits of this live/work Gh0stSpace through objects which ossified this temporal and inter-relational space.

I then undertook a writing residency in WeWork, a co-working space, which allowed me to explore the relationship between the contemporary 'creative worker' and its relationship to my working processes as an artist. The work and spaces of WeWork resembled aspects of the inter-relational life of the artist yet felt more alien than I'd predicted. The feeling was as if artistic life had been corporatized and individualised within these spaces. Following on from this residency I explored other potential Gh0stSpace within the city. Like the self-storage unit where objects exist in a privatised and inter-relational space. I then developed one of these storage spaces as temporary project space. This was a curatorial practice and it afforded me a distance that allowed for an informal exploration of the object-exhibition relationship that other artists in the city were experiencing. It allowed me to not just present my own work but to discuss with other artists their own dilemmas around the GS of the city as it impacted object-making in the city. Together within this programme of exhibitions we were acting out the liquid materiality of Gh0stSpace.

Producing this self-store as Gh0stSpace gallery had given me a greater understanding of the privatising conditions for producing art objects in the city and yet it had also generated a new internalised space. This rigid gallery-form (albeit in a temporary and more fluid form of the storage unit) contradicted the optimised and inter-relational life that I was trying to understand how to work within, a life lived on-the-go. I had generated a Gh0stSpace and what was needed was a practice that would address the contradictions of Gh0stSpace, the new privatised objects and spaces it produces and the fluid life it propagates within a pervasive atmosphere. Within Gh0stSpace there was an appearance of no outside which led to a prevailing feeling of being implicated in the distribution of the ideology of privatisation. The Wet Unboxing videos took the work outside of the solid cultural institution and into an implicated and more fluid digital social space. These videos were a direct response to the privatised and corporatized Gh0stSpace of online social media, they also offered the possibility of an outside. They

circulated in non- artistic networks which peaked when the Wet Unboxing videos were featured in 30 + articles online, were mentioned on Indonesian TV and listed on the meme hall of fame 'Knowyourmeme.com'. They also circulated back into artistic networks through exhibitions but did so with a sense of an outside. The depth and scope of this practice-led work has helped to define Gh0stSpace. Fundamentally, through understanding the way Gh0stSpace consumes there is within digital social space a space of agency for artists within the city's ideology of privatisation.

Gh0stSpace is the contemporary landscape of digital finance. A space where money and power are consolidated into the hands of the few. This process of wealth and power consolidation appears to have its roots in artistic life and behaviours where life merges with work; patterns of gentrification become faster and more extreme; and where implication acts as an invisible form of control. This is most evident in art world capitals like London and may also explain why it art practice can be used to reveal this landscape. The ultimate mechanism for this process of accumulation is the unfettered flow of digital money. It seems clear that the 'laisse faire' approach to governmental moderation has led to the creation of Gh0stSpace, a space that appears to have no outside.

Although the digital networks of social media are by no means a pure and unimplicated space, it can, as a testing ground for an outside, offer a way for artists to arrest some control, to explore new outlets and audiences and to gain some agency. Crucially, the work made in this space needs to work critically within this promotional tool. This work should directly address the privatisation of public life that social media overtly facilitates. This is all in leu of a day when a more equitable and less commercially driven world emerges. A world where Universal Basic Income and a Universal Basic Assets are put in place by a more effective and moderating state one that can temper the rampant powergrab of digital capital. Only through a reinvigorated moderating state can unrecognised labours like domestic labour and recognised labours like waged work, be transformed from a disposable and supplementary form of work to being central to life so *everyone* can be rewarded for maximising their human potential.

## **Gh0stScript.**

**16<sup>th</sup> April 2020, Barking, London.**

Before the virus took hold, I split my life back into its two main parts as my 5-year residency in a live/work space came to an end and my partner and I went back to living and working in clearly defined home and work spaces. Little did I know that within days ‘working from home’ would become the norm. Like my ill-timed move to London from Glasgow I felt that the timing of this separation of my home from workspace was another example of me wading against the flow of behaviours.

A few weeks in and it seems clear that this pandemic will reshape society in perpetuity, but how? It took a while for the gravity of the situation to sink in. Our initial collective disbelief may have stemmed from the timing of the virus outbreak. The virus hit the UK at a point when each day was bright and sunny. A time when flowers were coming into bloom, the leaves of the trees unfurling, and the birds were collecting materials for their nests through the budding foliage. These optimistic signs of spring contrasted with the ensuing gloom. This is no grey skied zombie movie, it is much more eerie and strange, like a ghost story read in bright sunlight.

The post-Covid-19 world is one best suited to the paranoiac. A condition where being obsessive-compulsive is the new standard. Yet this neurotic reality is offered to us in the guise of a Gh0stSpace and is delivered through implication and represented in the term ‘self-isolation’. Even in this time of crisis, we are being offered our own confinement as a choice, an imprisonment-by-free-will. This is a prison not as panopticon but as synopticon, a space of self-moderation through the behaviour of others. In having your isolation offered as a choice there is a sense that all the freedoms of before are still in place or that things will soon return to normal. The Coronavirus has given a name to the pervasive atmosphere that we existed in before. Self-isolation suggests an infection of privatisation where individuals ultimately *choose* how to move and act.

The ideology of privatisation still exist in the form of the contradictions of Gh0stSpace. Where ‘self-isolation’ is both an individual’s choice but is also enacted for the greater collective good. The irony here is that a togetherness is being promoted by governments who have for generations advocated the privatisation and impoverishment of health care, welfare and other social services. The grammar of personal responsibility also includes ‘social distancing’, another phrase during this crisis, which describes the

fracturing of social bonds that were once encouraged by governments. Under the virus, 'social distancing' and 'self-isolation' are the names given to the privatisation of public behaviours: one is an individualisation of personal responsibility, the other a dispersion of the social. Together they generate the invisible Gh0stSpace of this crisis which are expressed in behaviours and that permeate as a new atmosphere of control. Yet self-isolation and social distancing creates a class dynamic, making the disparities of this situation clear. If you can afford to choose to work from home, self-isolate or keep a social distance then you are in a higher class to those that can't, like the delivery drivers and supermarket workers, the medical staff, public transport staff or the police who have little option but to work at this early stage of the pandemic.

The virus has also created physical Gh0stSpace in the queues of people that snake around the car parks of supermarkets. They gather casually dressed in latex gloves and face masks in small clusters around shopping trolleys like characters in a homespun version of The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy. These queues are moderated by nightclub security guards behind temporary metal security barriers. On each of our weekly permitted visits to the supermarket, a new form of crowd control emerges most recently signs at ground-level and eye-level have started to appear to demarcate the required 2 metre spacing between customers, and arrows taped onto the floor direct us through the supermarket on a specific route to avoid overlapping people and trolleys.

What are the objects of this viral Gh0stSpace? Consumption has shown itself to be a fundamental means of self-expression. Our libidinal consumerist instincts amplify, as we reflexively make comfort purchases on Asos, Boohoo Man and Boohoo Girl. The high street is dead! Long live the online high street! The urge to shop doesn't just disappear once physical access to the shops has been denied. Virtual queues form and their length is measured the time it takes to get to the checkout or wait for a delivery. This consumer enthusiasm is echoed in the supermarket where trolleys are filled as if each house was stocking its own nuclear bunker. Consumption is ingrained, it is our way of life and the ghost of consumption is within us. The crisis is leading us even closer to the nadir where our screens are our primary space of consumption. It could be argued that everything that happens across the single plane of a screen is an act of consumption. This includes the consumption of social life, done through social media apps or online conferencing software. On the screen the field of work and play is united. We digest through our screens and the current crisis has consolidated the screen as Gh0stSpace.

For some, the TV has recentred itself as the hearth of domestic life. Under lockdown the TV takes on new roles as a provider of exercise routines or as a space through which we find another reality through gaming or entertainment. On TV or computer screen, consumption takes a ghost form, that is either totally or partially aloof from the actual product. The hit of consumption is delivered before the product materialises. The purchase happens in a ghost state, we click 'buy' and download, or we click 'buy' and then wait for the courier to deliver the product hours or possibly days later. Quarantine has inspired a range of products which monopolise on this new liquid materiality which are algorithmically steered via screens towards their targets, ready to be delivered by courier or downloaded directly: software to learn by or to be 'creative' with; loungewear to feel comfortable in; computer games that take us into a more or less bearable reality or sex toys that help us burn-off our libidinal energies. The increased time spent at home hasn't led people to reflect on their consumerist instincts, instead those instincts have migrated on screen and online.

Whilst the staff of publicly funded art galleries and museums, that haven't already been furloughed, work from home, they produce emails and websites which contain content regurgitated from across the Internet. Conceptual art in the form of children's workshops proves to be particularly effective at being distributed by website and email. I wonder how Sol Lewitt's instructions for drawings would have looked in the age of email? People share their versions of a homespun conceptual art that brings to mind the dog photos of William Wegman, the homemade videos of Guy Ben Nur or the investigations of Sophie Calle. However, there is a disconnect, a Gh0stSpace even, between the celebration of an online creativity that is offered as a distraction for individuals and families and the lived reality of being an artist. Artists who have for years spent their wages or profit on studio rent and art materials risk losing their studios while studio providers offer their tenants a suffocating choice between paying rent, debt or losing their studios. Many of the 'creatives' in this viral context are not enjoying the hedonic pleasures of creating, instead they are stifled by the realities of debt and uncertainty. Many are left to tread water till some certainty arrives. Will this upsurge in art activity at home lead to a boom in artists in the future and will they be treated better than the current crop?

The state has arrested control of public services in a way not seen since 1945 with private rail companies put into government control and state handouts passed to many

businesses and workers. Is this moment teaching us something about the importance of the state as a moderator and protector? How far will this go? Will authoritarian states that enforced immediate, decisive, and brutal lockdowns prove to be effective at stopping this virus or will the liberal democracies which initially tried to present a more negotiated self-orientated solution prove to have the answer? What happens if the other is proven to be more effective?

What could this mean for the future? Will our 'on-the-go' lives continue after this? Will they be played out at home or migrate online? Perhaps, we will feel the need to reassess our relationship to work and life through concepts or ideas like a Universal Basic Income? I fear that in the current context and without an appropriate government moderation, a UBI feels like a great opportunity for a company like Amazon to consolidate its economic power and turn us all into passive consumers. A UBI becomes a way for digital capitalism to consolidate its power. Could this lead to the day when your driverless car will only drive you to one of the 900 KFC's in the UK? Or your personal robotic assistant will only order from Amazon? The American writer and media theorist Douglas Rushkoff for saw some of these issues before the pandemic, arguing that Silicone Valley loves the idea of a UBI. He argues for a more substantial redistribution of wealth 'In a healthy society, every person has the right to resources to safely live, learn, heal, and grow into the best version of themselves. These are Universal Basic Assets.' (Rushkoff, 2018) Only through a redistribution of public and private assets can we avoid seeing a UBI turn into a platform for digital enslavement.

The attributes of Gh0stSpace are as evident today as they were when I first wrote this thesis. The Gh0stSpace is present in the physical spaces, objects, language, and the behaviours of this pandemic. Perhaps now that we have seen how the government can reclaim so much control so quickly it will lead to a rediscovery of the importance of good governance? I would hope that from this moment onward it will be harder for anyone to believe that there really is no alternative to the free-wheeling life lived under the rule of capital in the capital.

## Appendix A

### Transmission and the Ideology of Privatisation

In June 2017 Transmission's committee cancelled their annual members show, an exhibition that was due to open that summer. Instead of this open exhibition featuring the works of gallery members, the committee sent out a statement to their members expressing their frustration with the unsustainability of the voluntarily run gallery model that had been handed down to them. In this statement they said:

Various economic support structures no longer exist and thus a structure that presupposes relative economic stability of the committee must be challenged. If this structural model is not questioned, only a narrow section of society will be able to undertake unpaid work like this.

Sharratt, 2017a

In the following year, the gallery lost its long-term funding (Sharratt, 2017b) and was dropped from the 2018-21 portfolio (Sharratt, 2018)<sup>60</sup> of regularly funded organisations by Creative Scotland.<sup>61</sup> This loss of substantial public support signalled a key stage in the slow creeping privatisation that has been underway in Glasgow since the late-1990s. I want to look at the formal and informal factors that shaped this privatisation in the city. It is my aim to reconsider some of my own experiences of developing a practice in Glasgow in the hope that I can use them to reflect on my current context in London.

Glasgow has gained a reputation in recent years as the city with the UK's second most significant arts community (Judah, 2016). Despite the recent interest in the city's art ecology, this ecology has been a long time in the making. The careful, gradual and fragile development of the city's contemporary art scene has occurred thanks to a largely publicly-funded infrastructure developed over a period since the mid-1970s when the Third Eye Centre opened on Sauchiehall Street (in 1974) and continued through the 1980s with Transmission Gallery being set up in 1983. In 1991 Glasgow hosted the European Capital of Culture which added to and consolidated these earlier developments within the city's existing supportive contemporary art infrastructure. Since 1991 the city has seen the further evolution of this art infrastructure in the form of a broad range of new gallery models with the setting up of internationally recognised

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<sup>60</sup> In 2017 Transmission lost guaranteed support of £210,000 over three years from Creative Scotland.

<sup>61</sup> The main funding body for the arts in Scotland.

spaces like Tramway (first used as an art venue in 1988), Centre for Contemporary Art (established in 1992) and The Common Guild (established in 2006) as well as smaller gallery spaces like the Glasgow Project Room (established 1997), David Dale (established 2009), amongst others that have come and gone. The city has also seen an expansion and upgrade in workshop facilities for artists since 1991 (Glasgow Print Studios, Streetlevel Photoworks and Glasgow Sculpture Studios) and studios complexes (WASPS, GSS, The Pipe Factory and Independent Studios). The success of this arts infrastructure is down to a variety of systems of funding (local and national, formal and informal), together with the community of artists that have stayed in the city to make their artwork, build this infrastructure and live. Many of these artists were educated in the progressive B.A. and M.F.A. departments at The Glasgow School of Art which have produced several generations of Glasgow-based artists working in the on-trend mediums of installation, performance, video, relational art practices, sculpture and conceptual painting. I lived and worked in Glasgow through a large part of this period of development (1995-2014), a period that produced its own version of privatising effects. The most significant effect was on the role of Transmission which for much of my time in Glasgow was at the centre of the contemporary arts community within the city.

Throughout most of the 1990s Transmission Gallery was the professional and social fulcrum, meeting point and critical centre for young contemporary artists living and working in Glasgow. During the time that I lived in Glasgow this humble 10 x 10 metre former shop space on a street corner just east of Glasgow's city centre had a significance for artists that exceeded the limitations of its white walls. I remember anxiously going to my first opening there in the late summer of 1995. I had just moved to the city, aged 22 and fresh from finishing my B.A. in Fine Art at Staffordshire University. I felt younger and greener than anyone in the room. I arrived in the city having had little experience of exhibiting. I'd shown at university in Stoke-on-Trent but what I saw at this first opening at Transmission was different: it was busy, fun and never seemed to end (after the opening anyone still left in the gallery then piled into The Mitre Bar around the corner). It was unlike my previous experience of openings at college which were stiff and unpopular events with acrid white wine and speeches. But at that night in Transmission I saw something different, something with energy, youth, openness and enjoyment. Until that night I had never realised that art could occupy a place that I could be part of, as well as something I could make. This doesn't mean that

entering this public gallery wasn't exclusive or intimidating. The warmth and collectivity of the 'artist's city' that the interviewees speak about in the documentary 'Our Glasgow' (Frieze, 2014) drifted in and out of focus. Walking into Transmission was often like walking into a party at a stranger's house. At that first opening I thought this intimidating atmosphere was because I didn't know anyone in a space where everyone else knew each other. It seemed as if you could fit most of the city's artists in one room and that room was often Transmission, which could get claustrophobic. As I spent more time in the city I learnt how the darkness of winter could feel endless and how gallery openings provided a degree of light. However, this could easily be dimmed: if you fell out with someone it was inevitable that you would have to face them at the next opening. There were many times when I felt I had to take a step back from it all. For many artists these Transmission openings were doubling; both communal and exclusive.

The exclusivity of the gallery was offset by the oversight of the gallery's membership. Transmission's membership each pay a small fee (or invigilate in lieu of payment) to use the facilities within the gallery. Over the years (as technology advanced) this meant using either the phone, typewriter, photocopier or computer; looking physically through the library of books, slides or latterly accessing the digital archive. The members formally and informally had a role in the gallery's development through day-to-day interactions, annual general meetings (AGMs) and at the unselected annual members shows. The AGM is the most formal and structured opportunity for members to feedback to an organisation run by peers. At the AGM I had regularly seen members openly express their issues with the way the organisation was run. The annual open annual members show<sup>62</sup> at Transmission was another of these democratising gestures which would bring into the gallery a new audience of friends and family. This membership model gave the members a feeling of being part of a club rather than a gallery.

This strange interplay of an exclusive space moderated by the agora of its members is echoed in the special power held by the voluntary committee that run the gallery. This is a power shaped by the influence of the committee but in the 1990s when I first moved

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<sup>62</sup> The first of these members shows was in 1996 and called 'Art for People' a title that responded to the recent opening of GOMA which under the directorship of Julian Spalding launched with a programme of exhibitions that were an 'art for people'.

to Glasgow, being a Transmission committee member bestowed a special status upon an individual within the art scene. This gallery model has not changed too much in the 35 years it has been running. Transmission is run by a rolling committee that consists of between 4 and 8 volunteer artists. These artists work for two years after which they are replaced by new members who are selected by the remaining committee members. It is a job that consumes the lives of all who take it on and I saw many people struggle to juggle their personal lives and paid employment with this mentally and physically demanding gallery work. Although it is a demanding role, being a committee member always brought particular benefits with it. I'd seen many friends emerge at the other end of the 2 years as either more informed artists or as curators, even if the commitment often meant having to give up their artistic practice for the two years whilst on the Transmission committee. The committee had substantial powers few other artists in the city could hope for. In the 1990s this meant selecting the gallery's exhibitions which provided an opportunity for working with well-known and internationally recognised artists and curators. The committee would spend time talking, drinking and dining with these curators and artists; they got to choose who's slides went into the carousel that got shown to visiting curators; to visit other cities; to learn about the bureaucracy of running a gallery in addition to selecting each other. Certainly, during the period when Transmission's funding was secure, the power of the committee could easily increase and reduce based on who ran the gallery. This flexibility of the institution was possible because of the perpetual rolling-over of the committee members which meant power relations within the committee could change over time.

As a self-selecting institution Transmission's committee may have seemed closed off in certain ways, however it had inter-relational character where this exclusivity was offset by its open and informal educational model. As a curatorial training experience, it may seem at first glance to have parallels with the Royal College of Arts MA in Curating Contemporary Art (CCA MA) course set up in London in 1992. However, unlike the CCA MA the Transmission committee learnt on the job through an informal process where skills were handed down from old to new committee members. This was a public knowledge that empowered the artists that ran the gallery. This meant that the skills and networks developed on the job were not limited to closed professionalised curatorial circuits and that the influence gained could continue to be repurposed informally by former artist committee members who had formed relationships with art institutions in

and out of the city. Such informal relations are hard to quantify or qualify but it cannot be considered a coincidence that many of Transmission's committee have gone on to have successful careers as artists<sup>63</sup> in addition to the formal curatorial achievements of the artists-turned-curators that emerged from Transmission.<sup>64</sup> Crucially, the experience that Transmission offered (and to a lesser degree still offers) was a powerful set of skills that were shared between artists and curators. This was a special kind of power that curating courses, like the CCA MA, have privatised; partitioning and effectively locking skills away from artists.

Transmission always had a wavering relationship to the professionalism that defines curatorial practices of today. The committee's programme seemed to shift along a fluid axis of professionalism. When I arrived in the city it was at a point when the gallery's committee were in a professional mode. In the mid to late 1990s exhibitions at Transmission maintained high standards. Each show had crisp painted floors and walls, professionally printed posters, creatively written press releases faxed out to press and posted to members, and exhibition guides, which were at an unusually high standard for an artist-run space. The professionalism of this era of Transmission inspired me to generate my own opportunities that emulated some of this knowhow. When I started a fanzine with some artist friends it was an 'artist-run fanzine' and when I set up an art radio station with some other friends in 1999 we called it Radio Tuesday and again borrowed the artist-run model of Transmission applying it to a radio station. These projects were similar to the doubling effect of a space like Transmission. They may not have been fixed to a specific space, yet they had a sense of being a private domain within the public; something that echoed Transmission's character. A character that was not clearly public or private (despite its wholly publicly funded status), it was a dispersed space like the agora Bauman identified as a space between the private (oikos) and the public (the ecclesia) (Bauman, 2005, p.123).

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<sup>63</sup> The list of practicing artists who have been committee members is very long and is contestable due to fluidity of what defines a practicing artist. Some currently practicing former committee members include Douglas Gordon, Martin Boyce, Carol Rhodes, Christine Borland, Roderick Buchanan, Jackie Donachie, Toby Paterson, Sarah Tripp, Lucy Skaer, Sophie Macpherson, Alan Michael, Alex Pollard, Lorna Macintyre, Clare Stephenson, Simon Starling, Eva Rothschild, Clare Barclay, Tom Varley, Giles Bailey, Cara Tolmie, Sophie Mackfall, Michael Stumpf, Morag Keil, Laura Aldridge, Levi Hanes, Adam Lewis-Jacob, Ashanti Sgharda Harris, Jennifer Bailey, Kari Robertson, Carrie Skinner, Amelia Bywater, Rebecca Wilcox, Gordon Douglas.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Dickson, Tanya Leighton, Toby Webster, Kirsty Ogg, Will Bradley, are some of the artists who came out of Transmission and became either gallerists or curators.

In the 1990s, Transmission's model<sup>65</sup> was a rare example of an artist-run space that had managed to grow deep roots. It had been in existence since 1983 and had already seen many generations of committee members. This was in part down to the flexibility of having a rolling committee which could reshape the institution as conditions changed but also thanks to its long-term lease and its secure public funding. This stable and long-term funding allowed Transmission to be a unique combination of an established art institution whilst also evolving independently and dynamically. However, there were also less direct forms of funding, namely the social security payments like in-work benefits such as Working Tax Credits or Housing Benefit or the out of work benefits like Job Seekers Allowance, that enabled Transmission and numerous other art activities in the city to function day-to-day. Certainly, most of Transmission's committee members were legitimately 'signing on' in the 1990s and early 2000s, which allowed them to focus on their role as a committee member. This indirect support for the arts continued into the 2000s, although for me and others this changed and grew in complexity and availability from claims of Job Seekers Allowance and Housing Benefit to a combination of work, Working Tax Credits, Council Tax discounts, Arts Council grants and Housing Benefit (Kirkup, 2010).

Despite spells of unemployment, I always seemed to be busy, even if I didn't have a job. It seemed like everyone I knew was busy, even though hardly anyone I knew had a contracted job. Most of my artist friends worked on projects they'd initiated themselves. They ran a record label, were in a band, ran a gallery, they published books, organised club nights; and often in addition to the art they made at home or in their studio. Working with shoestring (or non-existent) budgets, we had to be resourceful. I witnessed plenty of talented artists stop practicing in order to take on more regular and stable work as not everyone could bare the insecurity of this lifestyle. In spite of the uncertainty of this life, a life that is reliant on training for work programmes, income support, job seekers allowance, housing benefit or latterly a combination of tax credits and part-time work, these combinations of social securities offered a support structure that much of the grassroots activity of the city was founded on.

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<sup>65</sup> A committee run membership model copied in other artist-run spaces like Outpost in Norwich, Catalyst in Belfast, Embassy and Rhubaba in Edinburgh, Generator Projects in Dundee, The Royal Standard in Liverpool.

It seemed to me that the primary focus for many of the projects made in the 1990s was not the market but was a collective and critical space. The emergence at the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of a private gallery network represented a shift in the approach and behaviours within the arts grassroots in the city. This private gallery network would exhibit the kind of contemporary art that had been developing in the city throughout the previous 20 years. That these private galleries were all run by former graduates of the fine art department of Glasgow School of Art masked a significant shift in power and effectiveness from the grassroots; from complex and public focussed institutions like Transmission to private galleries that each represented a small and fixed selection of artists.<sup>66</sup> The Modern Institute (TMI) - the first of this new generation of private galleries - was set up and run by former Transmission committee members Toby Webster and Will Bradley. In the early years of TMI it showed signs of having inherited Transmission's strange blend of exclusivity and publicity.<sup>67</sup> In the years that followed I noticed a naturalising of a private-positive culture as it emerged altering the social complexion of the city's art community. This was a slow and initially imperceptible shift that I witnessed from within, as an artist represented by Sorcha Dallas Gallery,<sup>68</sup> throughout the early 2000s and into the 2010s. During this time I experienced a number of the subtle impacts of this new privatised culture where invitations to dinners for a select few artists and curators replaced more open after-party events; student work at degree shows pandered to the taste of the new generation of private gallerists and a new bureaucracy of artist assistants, gallery technicians, conservators, registrars were created for these new institutions. One of the more dispiriting consequences of this new field of private galleries was Transmission's loss of significance. The visiting curators and artists spent less of their focus on engaging with Transmission and their evolving and revolving carousel of artist slides that captured the breadth of work being made in the city. Instead they went directly to the private galleries who had a more limited pool of represented artists and a minimal turnover of artists.

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<sup>66</sup> The Modern Institute run by Toby Webster and Will Bradley, Mary Mary run by Hannah Robinson and Koppe/Astner run by Kendall Koppe and Sorcha Dallas who ran her eponymous gallery until 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Like organising the outdoor cinema and Thai café experience that was Rirkrit Tiravanija's Community cinema for a quiet intersection (against Oldenburg) in September 1999.

<sup>68</sup> A gallery that I was represented by from 2004 until it closed in 2011.

A privatisation of the civic culture in Scotland occurred with the formation of Creative Scotland and Glasgow Life. Creative Scotland was formed in July 2010 when the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen were amalgamated. It was what Andrew Dixon, the former Chief Executive of Creative Scotland (Jewesbury and Dixon, 2011), called an ‘investment agency’. Creative Scotland’s formation was controversial in its overt attempts at a privatisation and instrumentalization of existing funding for the arts (Lowndes, 2013). Creative Scotland had a distinct difference from the two organisations it had replaced. Its role Dixon claimed was to ‘capitalise things’ by, for example, offering commercial loans based on recoupment clauses, in place of grants. Eventually some of this rhetoric was dampened down, when Andrew Dixon the architect of this business minded arts strategy moved on at the end of 2012. Dixon cited his own disappointment at not having gained ‘the respect and support of some of the more established voices in Scottish culture’ (Johnson, 2012). A similar privatisation of public resources had already occurred in 2007 when Glasgow City Council (GCC) turned its Culture and Leisure Services Department into a private charitable trust that eventually became known as Glasgow Life. Within the city Glasgow Life represented a ‘wholesale takeover of culture by business interests’.<sup>69</sup> This influence of a market-based logic onto public infrastructure has been the model of development across the UK since Margaret Thatcher set about privatising the public utilities (such as British Gas, British Telecom, Central Electricity Generating Board) through the 1980s. The ideology of privatisation that was cultivating itself as a private gallery network was partnered by a municipal network of privatisation.

My first impression of Transmission was that it was a public space that had an exclusive character. Over the time I lived in Glasgow I observed the gradual disempowerment of this publicly funded artist-run gallery. Despite its small size, Transmission was once the fulcrum for much of the city’s art community through its provision of an essential, valuable and equitable space. Transmission’s model offered this through the sharing of professional skills (between artists and curators, committee and members) and through its collectivising and professional model (as an artist-run space). Transmission played an important role as an agora, a space between the private and public within the city’s

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<sup>69</sup> A subject covered by Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt in her article *The New Bohemia* Gordon Nesbitt, R. (2008). *The New Bohemia*. [online] Variant.org.uk. Available at: <http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue32/Variant32RGN.pdf> [Accessed 11 Sep. 2019].

contemporary art scene. Its private and exclusive character was moderated by a degree of public accountability and through its non-commercial programme.<sup>70</sup>

As the Transmission statement at the beginning of this essay suggests Transmission's 'structural model' needs to be reconsidered in the light of current conditions. Where informal forms of arts funding (through welfare support) have been made more difficult to apply for or no longer exist and where formal public funding models like Glasgow Life or Creative Scotland have been privatised. The crisis at Transmission should also be rooted in a broader range of formal and informal privatisations of arts culture in Scotland in recent years. Where the instituting of private galleries (which may themselves have emerged out of the city's grassroots) has led to a number of the privatising effects in social and professional relations for artists in the city. This was one part of a many-sided and creeping form of privatisation.

A combination of factors has led to the eventual decentring of Transmission within Glasgow's art scene. Due to Glasgow's unique topology of contemporary art, its privatisation took a different shape, depth and speed to the one I have been witnessing in London since moving here in 2014. Despite the change enacted within Glasgow I had a sense that Glasgow had not been subject to the same weight of ghostly, insidious and implicating privatising effects that I have since witnessed in London.

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<sup>70</sup> Although Transmission did occasionally show at art fairs it was rarely as a selling space (the gallery takes a 10% share of its very occasional sales).

## Appendix B

### Wet Unboxing Press coverage

The following references are the complete online press coverage of the Wet Unboxing videos (2018) that were circulated online through the YouTube channel:

[www.youtube.com/alexfrost\\_whytho](http://www.youtube.com/alexfrost_whytho)

Alexandrov, Daniil (22 August 2018) Wet Unpacking. New YouTube phenomenon: so disgusting that it's impossible to break away <https://medialeaks.ru/2208dalex-wet-unboxing/> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Anon. (24 August 2018) I saw "Unpacking", but "Unpacking the Water" is the first time. Available at: <https://read01.com/LdA6R25.html#.XXi5zShKiUI> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Anon. (18 September 2018) Unboxing in Water Makes Enchanting and Emotional, This Is the Reason!, Available at: <https://theworldnews.net/id-news/unboxing-di-dalam-air-bikin-terpukau-dan-emosional-ini-alasannya> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Anderson, P. (10 September 2018) The underwater art of 'wet unboxing': why it's so mesmerising, unsettling and weirdly emotional, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/shortcuts/2018/sep/10/wet-unboxing-underwater-art-videos-emotional> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Basoni, S. (17 September 2018) Open Food in Water, 'Wet Unboxing' Becomes the Latest Trend on YouTube, Available at: <https://food.detik.com/info-kuliner/d-4215620/buka-makanan-dalam-air-wet-unboxing-jadi-tren-terbaru-di-youtube> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Big Picture. Disgusting and attractive: will "wet" food unpacking bring millions of views? Available at: <https://bigpicture.ru/?p=1073245> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Bleus, G. (30 August 2018) Nieuwe YouTube-trend: onderwater dingen uitpakken, Available at: <https://p-magazine.be/nieuwe-youtube-trend-onderwater-dingen-uitpakken-video/> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Bryan, C. (25 September 2018) I am pleasantly horrified by these 'wet unboxing' videos, Available at: <https://mashable.com/article/wet-unboxing-videos-alexfrost/?europa=true#MBt4u0It6Pqp> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Cole, S. (22 August 2018) I Can't Stop Watching These Disgusting 'Wet Unboxing' Videos Available at: [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/zmk7ke/watch-wet-unboxing-videos-underwater-youtube](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/zmk7ke/watch-wet-unboxing-videos-underwater-youtube) (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

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Hong-Shik, K. (3 October 2018) Alex Frost, a veiled freelance artist, Available at: <http://visla.kr/?p=81464> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

Knowyourmeme. Wet Unboxing, Available at: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wet-unboxing> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).

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- Maxim. (23 August 2018) A guy opens food and drink packaging in an aquarium with water, Available at: <https://www.maximonline.ru/guide/maximir/article/vlazhnaya-raspakovka/> (Accessed: 29 May 2019).
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