

The hospitable institution?  
Researching participation in a gallery youth  
collective

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction and context.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Rationale: Why research a gallery youth collective now? .....	9
The emergence of the gallery youth collective .....	13
Research context: Collaboration and Covid-19 .....	15
Research aims.....	18
Research questions .....	21
Introducing the research .....	22
Competing narratives of the gallery youth collective.....	27
The guiding principles of this thesis .....	43
The structure of this thesis.....	46
<b>Interlude 1: Introducing 1525 members and gallery workers .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2. Methodology: Participatory ethnography.....</b>	<b>53</b>
Approaching ethnographic research at NC.....	54
<b>Exploring the methodological literatures .....</b>	<b>58</b>
Early anthropological ideas about participation.....	58
Representation, power, and the museum .....	60
From the crisis of representation to affect.....	62
Beyond the “field” .....	69
Epistemic counterparts .....	71
<b>Imagining collaborative ethnography .....</b>	<b>75</b>
Constructing a collaborative ethnographic methodology for this study .....	78
Planning the research.....	88
Answering the methodological question .....	92
<b>3. Theory: The cruel optimism of hospitality .....</b>	<b>95</b>
Introducing hospitality .....	96
The paradoxical ethics of hospitality.....	97
The cruel optimism of hospitality.....	107
Hospitable participation beyond blind hope: implications for this research.....	109
<b>Interlude 2: Records of 1525 and research activities.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>4. The offer of the gallery youth collective .....</b>	<b>116</b>
Mapping this chapter .....	116
The elements of the offer.....	117
a) Routes into work in the arts .....	118
b) A caring community .....	138
c) Youth voice .....	145
The hospitable offer of the gallery youth collective .....	150
<b>5. The expected guest: The gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts .....</b>	<b>154</b>
Mapping this chapter.....	154
a) Young people as arts workers in the making in the gallery youth collective .....	155
b) The production of optimistic investments in arts work in the gallery youth collective .....	164
c) The impasse and beyond .....	172
The conditional hospitality of participation as routes into work in the arts.....	185
<b>6. Theory: Rupture, rhizome, and tree .....</b>	<b>187</b>
a) The arrival of Covid-19 .....	188



b) Rupturing my attachment to idealised participation .....	192
c) Deleuzean hospitality: The rhizome and the tree .....	194
Minor Writing .....	199
And (...and...and).....	202
<b>7. A caring community: The gallery youth collective-as-coven .....</b>	<b>204</b>
Mapping this chapter .....	205
a) The welcoming witch.....	206
b) Invoking the coven: Embodied practices in the gallery youth collective.....	212
c) The white institution? Race and minoritarian becoming in the gallery youth collective .....	223
d) “It continues to paralyse me”: Safety and risk in the gallery youth collective .....	239
Necessary limits: Rhizomatic hospitality in 1525 meetings.....	243
<b>8. The Oil and Water project: the hospitality of “voice” in the gallery youth collective .....</b>	<b>245</b>
Mapping this chapter .....	246
a) Introducing the Oil and Water project .....	247
b) Exhibition making as hospitality.....	257
c) Going public: the riskiness of youth voice.....	272
<b>9. Cruel optimism and hospitality: Participatory research methods .....</b>	<b>283</b>
Mapping this chapter .....	283
a) Participatory research as hospitality .....	284
b) Attending to affect as collaborative knowing .....	299
<b>10. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>309</b>
RQ1: What does participation in Nottingham Contemporary’s 1525 youth collective involve, and what does it do for young people, staff, and the gallery? .....	311
RQ2: What does participation in ethnographic methods based in close, sustained relationships involve, and what does it do for those involved, in the context of a gallery youth collective? .....	318
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>326</b>
Appendix 1: Participant information sheet .....	326
Appendix 2: Participant consent form.....	330
Appendix 3: Research Collective Shared Principles.....	333
<b>Reference List .....</b>	<b>336</b>

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## Abstract

In recent years, the youth collective has become a widespread feature in UK contemporary art galleries, based on sustained, regular participation, which often espouses the aim of positioning young people as institutional insiders. Within the cultural sector, participation in the gallery youth collective is often claimed to render elite institutions more inclusive, democratic, and porous, and to benefit young people professionally, personally, and politically.

This thesis interrogates what participation in one gallery youth collective – 1525 at Nottingham Contemporary – involved and did for young people and relevant gallery workers, based on collaborative ethnographic research carried out between 2019 and 2020. The research involved participant observation in gallery youth collective activities and attempts to activate participatory methods. A parallel methodological inquiry considered the affordances and limitations of participation in the research alongside the substantive inquiry. The analysis of the gallery youth collective identifies three key elements of the offer that it made to young people – routes into work in the arts, a caring community, and youth voice – and examines how they and gallery workers took up each part of the offer.

Theories of hospitality – including the work of Ahmed and Derrida and Dufourmantelle – are brought together with Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism to consider the ways which the idealised rhetoric of participation is at odds with – and often complicit in – the continued reproduction of the elite position of the host institution, in both the gallery and research methods. The cruel optimism of hospitality is used to examine the events that unfolded in both 1525 and the doctoral research when the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the UK in spring 2020. This thesis presents the crisis of the pandemic as a rupture that unveiled the latent contradictions of trying to enact hospitality in a fraught institution in which participation was simultaneously espoused as a central activity, and - under the challenging conditions of neoliberalism - frequently positioned at the precarious edges.

This thesis argues that the precarity of the gallery youth collective, and the dominance of notions of impact and deficit in regimes of neoliberal audit, amplified the hostility of the gallery-as-host, leading participation-as-hospitality to often emerge as hierarchical

domination. Nevertheless, this research shows that in the intimate collective meetings, the facilitator invoked a more radical and fluid form of collective hospitality. Taking up the work of Deleuze and Guattari allows a theorisation of how collective meetings invoked a rhizomatic mode of participation-as-hospitality that enabled young people's divergent becomings and supported the emergence of youth voice beyond cliché.

The methodological strand of this thesis also takes up the cruel optimism of hospitality, arguing that the idealisation of participatory research methods can be similarly complicit in reinforcing and concealing the dominant position of the host (in this case the institution of academic research) rather than furthering the often-espoused emancipatory aims. However, this research suggests that taking up a more affective mode of ethnography can resist a conditional mode of hospitality which depends on participants' assimilation into adult norms, by instead attending to young people's everyday modes of participation as valid forms of collaborative knowledge production.

This thesis contributes to an emerging body of knowledge about the gallery youth collective and has a wider significance to other participatory contexts including universities, schools, and third and public sector organisations. The research is also significant for theoretical literatures, as it demonstrates the affordances of combining hospitality with cruel optimism and suggests the value of conceiving of hospitable relations beyond fixed, binary positions of host and guest. By surfacing the complex and contradictory hospitable relations involved in participation, this research disrupts the idealised accounts that commonly circulate in practice and academic literatures alike and illustrates that sustained critical engagement with the underlying power relations is an essential part of maximising participation's ethical potential.

## List of Figures

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Timeline for the proposed research activities from the Confirmation of Status (CoS) paper (May 2019)	91
2. 1525 sessions attended and co-research activities held with 1525 and gallery staff	111-114
3. Interviews undertaken	114
4. Screenshot of NC website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2022b)	123
5. Screenshot of NC website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2022a)	123
6. The main entrance of NC (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a)	124
7. Screenshot of Gallery Zero from NC website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019a)	135
8. Photograph of 1525 manifesto (1525 Collective, 2019)	141
9. Photograph of 1525 manifesto (1525 Collective, 2019)	141
10. Photograph of the table during Ellie's dumpling cooking activity (21.8.19).	225
11. Photograph from the Oil and Water workshop on 2.10.19, from the 1525 Instagram account	248
12. Sketch from my research records of collective members co-writing the Oil and Water catalogue (23.10.19)	258-259
13. Photograph of the curated vitrine of protest artefacts in Gallery Zero (30.11.19)	266

## 1. Introduction and context

The youth collective has emerged in recent decades (Silva, 2017; Sim, 2019b) in response to critiques of contemporary art galleries as exclusive and hierarchical (Sinker, 2008). The gallery youth collective is a distinctive form of participation, based around sustained involvement in regular group meetings and peer-led programming (Silva, 2017; Sim, 2019b; Vainker, 2014). This opening chapter introduces my doctoral research about the gallery youth collective, explaining what I set out to achieve, and why I believed this research was timely and important. I will explain how the study was designed around an in-depth examination of the practice of one such group at Nottingham Contemporary gallery (NC). The collaborative doctoral inquiry will be situated in both the emerging academic literatures and the practice of the gallery youth collective. This chapter will introduce and justify the research as follows:

- **Rationale:** I will articulate why this study was a timely contribution to the debates surrounding the practice of gallery youth collectives, situating the research in questions of the ethics and relations of participation.
- **The emergence of the gallery youth collective:** I will briefly discuss when and how the gallery youth collective came about.
- **Research context:** I will lay out what this inquiry sought to achieve, as a collaborative study between Nottingham Contemporary (NC) and the University of Nottingham, and touch upon how the Covid-19 pandemic shaped this doctorate.
- **Research aims:** I will explain what this research sought to achieve, in terms of both academic knowledge, and to inform practice.
- **Research questions:** I will outline my research questions and explain how and why they were selected.

- **Introducing the research:** I will introduce NC, the 1525 youth collective, and my own position within the research.
- **Understanding the gallery youth collective:** I will outline and discuss three narratives of participation found in the literatures – as democratisation, marketisation, and exploitation – situating my approach to this study within the literatures and the sector.

Rationale: Why research a gallery youth collective now?

The model of the gallery youth collective has existed in the UK in its current form since at least the 1990s (Silva, 2017; Sim, 2019b, p. 164; Sinker, 2008) but has proliferated in recent years to become a widely-accepted norm of good practice within public contemporary art galleries, believed to render institutions more inclusive of young people, and to offer young people insights into professional gallery practices (Miller, 2019; Sim, 2019b, p. 164). However, despite the growing uptake of the gallery youth collective, understandings of how these groups operate are still emerging in the academic literatures (Sayers, 2015; Silva, 2017; Sim, 2019b; Sinker, 2008; Vainker, 2014). Whilst some of the emerging literatures offer useful guidelines for practice, the widespread adoption of the youth collective by UK galleries indicates a need to further explore what these programmes do – or might do – for young people, staff, and institutions, with the aim of supporting their most effective realisation. Considering the need for further research, this thesis seeks to engage with the participatory mode of the youth collective: how does it function and what does it do for young people, gallery staff, and the institution? In this chapter, I will situate this doctoral study within the emergent research into gallery youth collectives, and relevant wider literatures.

In order to understand the function of the gallery youth collective, it is important to recognise that relations between young people and contemporary art galleries are marked by specific forms of inequality and domination (Sim, 2019b). Young people face everyday disempowerments based on age discrimination (B. Davies, 2010, p. 4), the often-oppressive structures of formal education and precarious transitions into employment, and the construction of youth as a 'risky' period subject to multiple forms of social intervention and control (Hickey-Moody, 2013b). Some young people also face other forms of oppression based on social divisions including class, race, gender, and sexuality (Young, 2011). Contemporary art galleries act as sites of enormous 'privilege, wealth and middle-class values' (Sim, 2019a, p. 41), encounters with which can be uncomfortable and excluding, or even symbolically violent for some people. Whiteness and coloniality underpin the logic of the museum (Bennett, 1995; Carroll, 2016; Turner, 2020) and have thus shaped culture and practice in contemporary art galleries, with powerful consequences for the experiences of participation of racialised bodies (Brook, O'Brien, & Taylor, 2020; Puwar, 2004). It is also important to acknowledge that many – indeed, most – young people in the UK do not take up the offer of participation in contemporary art gallery youth collectives. For those who do engage, participation in contemporary art galleries is not experienced equally. Any study of young people's gallery participation must acknowledge the powerful constraints that social inequalities create in terms of how participation in the gallery unfolds, and on the affordances offered by research produced therein.

In the face of the powerful inequalities surrounding participation in contemporary art galleries, the allure of the collective is clear. Participation suggests an appealingly democratic and inclusive set of relations (Barber, 1984). However, participation is not ethically



straightforward. It can involve conflict and even ‘tyranny’ (Cooke & Kothari, 2001b), and may, at times, be complicit in ends quite at odds with its espoused aims (Bell & Pahl, 2018). The notion of an institutionally initiated collective is perhaps even more perplexing, given the inherent tensions between hierarchical organisational structures and the diffused structure implied by collectivism. Despite the multiple complexities involved in its practice, the model of the collective has gained traction in contemporary art, far beyond youth participation.

In the UK’s publicly funded contemporary art galleries, the collective is in vogue. In 2021, all five Turner Prize nominees were artist collectives, with the chair of the judging panel – and inaugural Director of NC – Alex Farquarson claiming that the shortlist selection: ‘captures and reflects the mood of the moment in contemporary British art’ (Lloyd-Smith, 2022). One of the nominated collectives, Black Obsidian Sound System (B.O.S.S.), released a statement regarding their nomination in which they highlighted the fetishization of the collective in the art world and identified several ‘inconsistencies’:

It is evident that arts institutions, whilst enamoured by collective and social practices, are not properly equipped or resourced to deal with the realities that shape our lives and work. We see this in...the industry’s in-built reverence for individual inspiration over the diffusion, complexity and opacity of collaborative endeavour...The urgency with which we have been asked to participate, perform and deliver demonstrates the extractive and exploitative practices in prize culture, and more widely across the industry – one where Black, brown, working class, disabled, queer bodies are desirable, quickly dispensable, but never sustainably cared for. (Black Obsidian Sound System, 2021)

In the above account, contemporary art’s focus on the collective is presented a way of powerful institutions appropriating the ethical qualities associated with the collective, without making the substantial changes necessary to shift the underlying dynamics of the sector. The B.O.S.S. statement paints the gallery world as a sector poorly equipped for the slowness and care needed for meaningful forms of collaboration. It suggests that the art industry is defined

by an unsustainable pace of production which too-often uses and abandons those it claims as collaborators, disproportionately reproducing harms on certain sorts of bodies. The B.O.S.S. statement has implications for this research as it points to a challenging set of contradictions involved in attempts to enact collectivism in contemporary art galleries, it indicates the potential for participation to do harms at odds with the supposed underlying ethical motives, posing serious questions about the function of youth collectives and the relations they might afford. Examining the youth collective in this moment is thus important in identifying the opportunities that this mode of participation could provide in making galleries more socially just, and to resist unwitting complicity in the harmful and unequal systems it seeks to challenge (Bell & Pahl, 2018).

## The emergence of the gallery youth collective

In response to challenges of the art museum's hegemonic, colonial and elitist position (Bennett, 1995; Pringle, 2020), from the mid-1990s onwards many contemporary art institutions activated a form of self-critique through a mode of practice known as 'New Institutionalism' (Doherty, 2004; Ekeberg, 2003) which proposed to reform galleries from within by opening them to a wider variety of voices (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013; Mahoney, 2016; Mouffe, 2007). The rise of New Institutionalism led to a proliferation of participatory and relational modes of gallery practice, which from which the youth collective emerged (Allen, 2008; Sinker, 2008). Rebecca Sinker – former Head of Young People's Programmes at Tate Britain – has explicitly positioned the development of the peer-led approach of the gallery youth collective as a strategy for combatting exclusivity in galleries and museums, by offering young people a position as institutional insiders:

Recognising that museums and galleries have sometimes served to perpetuate exclusivity, the learning department sees art as a way to examine, challenge and transgress notional boundaries. One way to do this is by getting young people actively involved in gallery culture. (Sinker, 2008)

Whether or not the gallery youth collective has been a successful inclusion tactic is a matter of significant debate. As I detail later in this chapter, the debate about the ethics of gallery participation can be considered in terms of three narratives. One account – proposed, for instance, by Mouffe (2007), Mouffe (2013), 64 Million Artists and Arts Council England (2018), Matarasso (2019), and Ekeberg (2003) – maintains that the participatory turn affords a powerful form of institutional democratisation, which offers publics more agency and reforms institutions from the inside. By contrast, another narrative – for example found in Eräranta, Moisander, and Penttilä (2019) Mader (2013) – positions the participatory turn within the growing marketisation of the gallery sector under neoliberal capitalism, whereby publics are

afforded a passive position as consumers (Rodney, 2015) or as subordinated 'beneficiaries' (Lynch, 2017). In contrast with gallery participation's commonly espoused aims of empowerment, some suggest that the narrowly instrumental lens of New Public Management (Belfiore, 2007, 2012; Dreschler, 2005; Sercombe, 2015) has activated it to manufacture consensus and neutralise the radical potential of art (Bishop, 2012; Miessen, 2010). A third account positions participation as an exploitative relation between powerful institutions and various publics, through which galleries appropriate cultural resources whilst reinscribing forms of social inequality (Brook et al., 2020; Zukin, 1989) at odds with the interests of local communities and their own workers alike (Graham, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Lieberman, 2019; Mathews, 2010). Considering the potential harms and benefits attributed to arts participation in the literatures, it is important to interrogate youth collectives in ethical terms. Namely, there is a need to investigate what relational offer is made to young people by the gallery youth collective, and to thoroughly examine how participants and workers take the offer up in practice.

This thesis is not only positioned within the academic literatures, but also in the gallery education sector. Dominant modes of assessing the value and success of gallery participation within the sector involve bureaucratic regimes of audit (Belfiore, 2007; Power, 1994, 1999), which are often at odds with the espoused values of youth collectives, such as collaboration, youth-led approaches, and democratic decision making. This research sought to interrogate the tensions involved in the current structures and practices of the sector, informing debates in the sector surrounding the policy and practice of gallery education. The study set out to uncover and unpick the contradictions involved in the practice of the gallery youth collective,

by examining what participation did for young people involved in one such group and associated gallery workers.

Research context: Collaboration and Covid-19

Given the centrality of participatory approaches in this study, it was important that the research plans emerged collaboratively from a partnership between NC and the University of Nottingham. NC had an interest in investigating the affordances of their educational programmes. The initial proposal for this doctorate was developed by Professor Pat Thomson at the University of Nottingham, and Dr Janna Graham, the Head of Public Programme and Research (PP&R) at NC at that time. As the PhD was funded through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) scheme, some other staff at NC were also involved in developing the initial proposal and undertaking recruitment of the doctoral candidate, and the study was designed to be co-supervised by the gallery's Head of PP&R. The gallery's education programmes included various projects with local schools as well as the youth collective, 1525 (introduced in more detail later in this chapter), which was selected as the focus of the study by a research team including me, my supervisors, and relevant gallery staff.

Once I was appointed as the researcher, given the co-produced orientation of the 1525 youth collective and my own attachments to this ethos (as explained in Chapter Two), I was keen to undertake the research using a collaborative methodology. I was placed on a 1+3 doctoral programme which included a master's degree in educational research methods, which allowed me to trial some ethnographic approaches in the NC schools programme for my dissertation study, generating some methodological insights which informed the doctoral

research design. The PhD research began with an initial consultation period with 1525 members and Ellie – the facilitator of 1525 – in spring 2019, after which it was agreed that I would undertake collaborative ethnography in the group over a 12-month period, with interested young people offered opportunities to become co-researchers<sup>1</sup>. Alongside regular informal research conversations with Ellie, it was agreed that the wider research team of me, relevant gallery staff, and the academic supervisors would meet regularly to discuss the research.

Despite being compelled by academic oversight procedures to repeatedly pre-imagine how this doctorate would unfold, at the outset of the research process I could not have imagined the events that have subsequently come to pass. As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, there were institutional challenges involved in carrying out the research. The membership of 1525 was fluid and new members often changed the group dynamics and sparked new approaches, just as some members stopped participating in the group or the research, ending collaborations before they had produced the outcomes I had anticipated. Staff at the gallery came and went, shifting institutional strategy and influencing the direction of this research. I lost two gallery-based doctoral supervisors and gained another at the university.

Amid the ongoing challenges of the research, the global Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the UK in spring 2020, during my field work period. The pandemic disrupted social connection in ways many of us had never experienced, or perhaps even imagined. Covid-19 presented significant difficulties for cultural institutions like NC, who were responding to rapidly changing advice

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Two deals with substantive questions of ethnography

from the government and significant uncertainty about the implications of a looming lockdown for their business models. The crisis of the pandemic presented a hugely disrupted context in which to complete collaborative ethnographic doctoral research. Despite the upheaval of researching through the Covid-19 pandemic, researching through this period generated powerful insights that have informed and framed this thesis. In the face of such an enormous, unexpected social shift, I was confronted with a new awareness of the world as highly mobile, unpredictable, and arbitrary. Whilst isolated from my co-researchers, collaborators, and friends, I developed deeply personal insights into the significance of relationships in my own life, and I came to appreciate the interconnectedness of the world in a new way. Furthermore, the rupture of the pandemic surfaced underlying dynamics and contradictions at play at NC, and in my own research practice, which became an important part of the results that I will present in this thesis<sup>2</sup>. Had I done this research at a different time, I cannot be sure whether these insights would have emerged as they have.

As disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic settled and I began analysis and writing, I came to understand this doctorate as the story of a moving landscape of multiplicity. As I will explain, this thesis is the story of a network of relationships over time, that changed and grew; that were constraining and generative; that sometimes endured, but often did not; and that occasionally spat out moments of utter magic which I have often struggled to evoke in writing. This research story is sometimes about relations of care, pleasure, and growth; but it is also about the dynamics of conflict, discomfort, and oppression. Indeed, this thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the two were often deeply entangled. Undertaking this

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Nine for a detailed exposition of this part of the results.

doctoral research affected me; in ways I will perhaps never fully understand and do not claim to be able to “capture” in this thesis text. Doing this research repeatedly unsettled the attachments I brought to it, as a gallery education practitioner and as an emerging researcher. The unfolding of this account is steeped in multiplicity, as I seek to evoke a fluid context which morphed as I sought to understand it, entangled with my changing relations with the gallery, workers therein, and members of youth collective. This thesis is one possible account of many. This thesis is more than one account.

### Research aims

This doctorate afforded an opportunity to investigate the affordances of the gallery youth collective as a participatory mode, by exploring the complex tensions which drove and constrained its realisation in one site. Many, often-contradictory claims are made within the cultural sector about the value of youth participation in contemporary art galleries, as explained in more detail later in this chapter. This thesis acknowledges the multiplicity of ways in which young people encountered the youth collective, allowing new insights into the ways in which such groups function, and what they do – and might do – for those who get involved. In this thesis, I explore the everyday practice of one gallery youth collective in detail, aiming to understand what participation involved and did for young people and staff. This research set out to develop nuanced understandings of the value of gallery youth collectives beyond dominant sector narratives that often default to simplistic accounts of impact and linear transformation (Belfiore, 2009, 2012; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007).

This research highlights the complexities of participation. I have sought to avoid reproducing over-simplified, idealised narratives about young people’s experiences within the research as



well as the youth collective (Kill, 2022). I could not tell a simplistically celebratory story about the gallery youth collective in this thesis, as access to the arts is still unequal and participation arguably perpetuates ongoing inequalities (Brook et al., 2020; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Puwar, 2004; Sim, 2019b). However, it would also be insufficient to tell a wholly negative story about the youth collective, as arts participation can afford opportunities for self-expression, relaxation, ways of relating differently to the world, and many other affordances and pleasures (Hickey-Moody, 2013b; Matarasso, 2019; Thomson & Hall, 2021). Considering the contradictions of arts participation, ethnography promised to offer a suitable methodology which would allow me – and the young people and staff at NC – to grapple with the complex practice of the gallery youth collective.

The capacity to deeply understand others' perspectives is a key strength of ethnographic methodologies<sup>3</sup> (Geertz, 1974; Mills & Morton, 2013; Okely, 2012). In carrying out this doctorate, 1525 members and gallery staff welcomed me into the group for an extended period, allowing me to gain rich insights into their experiences of participation. Notions of hospitality provided a central theoretical framing for this doctorate<sup>4</sup>. The ethnographic hospitalities that I received from NC and sought to generate with 1525 were complex relational experiences which were at the heart of the production of this research<sup>5</sup>. Whilst my research relationship with the gallery was not a straightforward experience, having been hosted nevertheless created an ethical responsibility for me to strive for an empathetic disposition in interpreting the programme: to try and understand how young people and gallery staff understood participation in 1525, and to show compassion for the challenges they

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<sup>3</sup> The affordances of ethnography are discussed further in Chapter Two.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Three for more on hospitality in my theoretical framework.

<sup>5</sup> Research relations are discussed in detail in Chapter Nine.

faced. Given the collaborative aspirations of the research, I have felt a particularly strong responsibility not to become an ungrateful guest, whilst remaining open to the many, complex truths I have encountered along the way.

As a collaborative endeavour, it was important that the research contributed to the host institution, as well as to academic knowledge. I began this study with significant experience as a gallery education practitioner (see page 24) and my professional knowledges, along with my pilot research in my Master's dissertation, and early encounters with NC's staff, suggested that many gallery educators were interested in reflecting more deeply on their work with young people. Thus, the research was designed with a view to informing practice at NC and beyond. At the outset of the study, it was agreed by the core research team (me, my supervisors, and relevant gallery staff) that the contribution of this study to practice could have two key strands:

- Informing and improving policy and practice around the gallery youth collective by deepening understandings of the relationships afforded and what these offer the young people and staff involved.
- Creating an evidence base to support advocacy for the value of longer-term youth participation in galleries, supporting NC to make a more informed case for the value of 1525.

These practice development aims sat alongside the academic contribution that I hoped the research would make.

## Research questions

This research focussed on investigating what participation in the youth collective at NC involved, and what it did for young people and relevant workers. Given the focus on what participation did, the core research team decided that it was important to have a second research question which examined participation in the research itself and explored what this did in practice. The parallel methodological inquiry reflected our shared desire to avoid unquestioningly reproducing mainstream extractive and hierarchical research practices which can render the researcher invisible; what Haraway (1988) has critically referred to as ‘the God trick’. This study was thus based around two research questions:

- 1) What does participation in NC’s 1525 youth collective involve, and what does it do for young people, workers, and the gallery?
- 2) What does participation in ethnographic methods based in close, sustained relationships involve, and what does it do for those involved, in the context of a gallery youth collective?

The research questions were not positioned as static boundaries for the study. Rather, within the flexible research design they provided a framework that could evolve and shift in relation to the emergent insights, theory, and the relationships I considered to be at the heart of the methodology. Nevertheless, the formative research questions were important as they directed the initiation of the research relations and framed the offer to potential participants in 1525. I thus understood the research questions as a ‘generative ethnographic bud’ (Mills and Morton, 2013: 50) from which the research could unfold<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Two for more discussion of the research design.

## Introducing the research

I will briefly introduce the gallery, before moving on to the youth collective, and myself and my positioning in the research.

### *The gallery*

We've been described as “the most inspiring gallery in the UK” (*Guardian*). We're here to offer international art, for everyone, for free. (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a)

Based in the city centre of Nottingham, a large city in the Midlands region of the UK, NC's gallery building includes five exhibition spaces, a shop, a café, staff offices and several event and meeting rooms. The gallery opened in 2009, and – according to its website – ‘has welcomed over two million people and presented more than 50 exhibitions’ in the years since (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021b). Entry to the exhibitions is free to the public and the galleries are open from Tuesday to Sunday, throughout the year. NC curates a programme of research-driven temporary exhibitions, taking up a model of gallery practice which the institution frequently names as an ‘art centre’ or ‘kunsthalle’ (Rito, 2020). I will return in more detail to the participatory offer that NC makes in Chapter Four, but for now, it is sufficient to introduce the gallery as the host of a wide-ranging programme of events for various audiences, including:

- Open talks, workshops, and lectures.
- Music, film, and social events.
- Educational activities for families, schools, colleges, and universities.
- Various community engagement programmes.

Some spaces in the building are available for private hire by external organisations. At the time of this research, Nottingham Contemporary employed around 35 office staff, plus a pool of casual Gallery Assistants, retail staff, café staff and cleaners.

### *The 1525 youth collective*

The youth collective at Nottingham Contemporary began life in 2013 as Collabor-8. Collabor-8 was a youth programme that was part of the national Circuit programme. Funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation over four years, Circuit sought to ‘connect 15-25 year olds to the arts’ (Circuit., 2019, p. 28). The initial Circuit programme involved 10 galleries in the national Tate Plus network. When this scheme came to an end, NC secured funding from the Garfield Weston Foundation – alongside contributions from internal budgets and smaller funders – to continue this regular work with 15-25yr olds. Shortly after this reiteration of the youth collective began, a new staff member came into post to facilitate the group, and the collective rebranded as 1525, creating a new manifesto for their activities.

When the research began, 1525 was meeting weekly at Nottingham Contemporary on Wednesday nights from 5pm to 7pm, generally in the Studio. A workshop room at the heart of the gallery, the Studio was filled with tables and chairs, a TV, and flanked with cupboards full of craft materials. Taking part in the 1525 collective offered young people the opportunity to co-produce a programme of group activities and to plan open workshops and public events for their peers. Meeting activities also included:

- Regular social and cooking sessions.
- Creative activities led by Ellie, 1525 members, and visiting artists.
- Specific arts-related professional training sessions, for instance on applying for funding or developing a creative CV.

Young people in the collective were sometimes paid as Artist Facilitators for running workshop activities for their peers as part of the programme or offered casual work at the gallery’s public

events. The wider youth programme also involved open-access sessions for young people which those outside of 1525 could attend without any ongoing commitment, and closed sessions in partnership with targeted youth services, such as a refugee group and a group for young people with special educational needs. An introduction to individual members of 1525 and gallery workers who feature in this thesis will come in the section Interlude: Introducing 1525 members and gallery workers, at the end of this chapter.

### *The researcher*

My relationship to this research has been shaped by my professional background in arts education. From 2014 to 2015, I worked at Site Gallery in Sheffield as the Young People's Programme Manager. Site Gallery was small by comparison to many of the UK's contemporary art galleries, but I had spent most of the previous decade working in a local, under-resourced, participatory art charity, so to me it felt like a large, elite organisation. I was tasked with creating a new youth programme, so I recruited a cohort of 14-18yr olds and invited them to form a regular collective alongside a programme of commissioned, short-term artist's residencies in the gallery, which were called Platform<sup>7</sup>. The Platform residencies took place within the gallery, so the public was able to experience – and often take part in – contemporary artists' working processes, rather than only viewing the finished product as a performance or exhibition. Working alongside gallery-based residencies presented a specific set of pedagogic and participatory affordances to me, and the young people involved in the collective, as we were often able to take up an active role in various stages of artists' projects and in the production of exhibitions and events.

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<sup>7</sup> The Platform programme at Site Gallery should not be confused with the radical art organisation of the same name.

I came to my role at Site Gallery with a strong investment in the value of arts participation as a way of amplifying young people's voices, which I considered to be a route to individual and social transformation. Throughout my time in this post, I sought to extend young people's involvement and influence across the gallery, by creating opportunities for them to create and host exhibition tours, to be involved in selecting artists, to influence the redesign of the gallery building and – with support a specially commissioned artist – to research and curate an exhibition. I loved creating a space for collaboration between the young people and the artists in weekly sessions where we ate pizza, made sculptures, created YouTube videos, and produced 'zines. It seemed to me that the participatory offer of group meetings afforded some interesting opportunities for young people to come to understand themselves and others differently through talking, thinking, making, and doing, as well as affording them some – albeit small – influences on decision making at the gallery. At the time, I found working with artists and young people in a sustained, participatory way to be an inspiring opportunity to learn about relational practices in contemporary art, and it fuelled my curiosity about these relationships.

Whilst I loved working in gallery education, over time I found elements of my role at Site Gallery contradictory, leading me to question the popular narrative which positioned youth arts participation as a simplistically emancipatory phenomenon. Despite my investments in youth participation, I began to suspect that to be heard by the gallery, young people were required to conform to the timelines, norms, and assumptions of the art world, which did not always feel inclusive or empowering. The programme was reliant on competitive, short-term grant funds, which drove a dogma of success and constrained meaningful critical reflection on

our work. Despite widespread talk of the centrality of rigorous evaluation in the youth arts sector, it seemed to me that 'failure' was largely seen as a dirty word (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021) and reflection was almost exclusively produced in the form of audit against a set of pre-determined goals. Narratives of impact and transformation were a central part of the performance we were required to construct for the funders who had resourced our precarious work, and to whom we would usually return for another round of funding in future. We knew that the programme - and our livelihoods - depended on us presenting a compelling account of our measurable achievements, and there was hot competition for the scant resources available. As we clamoured to present the most impressive image of the youth collective, I eventually started to believe that some of claims we made about its impact continually expanded in response to the precarity of the programme.

As my time coordinating the youth collective at Site Gallery continued, I maintained my passion for youth arts, despite my growing awareness of the contradictions involved. The chance to undertake doctoral research about gallery education practices offered an appealing way to engage critically with the inconsistencies I had encountered as a practitioner. Whilst I already had considerable professional knowledge of gallery youth practice, undertaking the doctorate generated a new set of specific knowledges. Doing this research profoundly disrupted and changed my investments in participation and gallery education – which was, at times, deeply uncomfortable – and these unsettling experiences are part of the story of this thesis. The beliefs I had at the outset of the doctorate were framed by wider narratives about participation, although as I began the research, I did not fully understand this.



## Competing narratives of the gallery youth collective

The gallery youth collective has emerged within a wider rhetoric about arts participation as a social good. However, as discussed on pages 10-11, the emancipatory value of participation in the arts is not universally accepted. The participatory turn in art galleries is contiguous with the rise of New Institutionalism, a mode of practice in contemporary art galleries which became prominent in the mid-1990s (Doherty, 2004; Ekeberg, 2003). New Institutionalism has been claimed to represent a shift in understanding and practice in public contemporary art galleries, defined by an institutionally self-critical stance and an expanded field of practice. Institutions which used to be designed around the display of art objects in a 'white cube, top-down organization' to 'insider audiences' (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013, p. 5) were instead positioned as 'a place of production, a site of research and a space for debate' with 'viewers...usually accorded an active role' (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013, p. 6). The New Institutionalism movement articulated itself as an endeavour of social justice with wide-ranging powers to transform institutional dynamics 'from within' (Doherty, 2004, p. 1), but the validity of this interpretation is contested (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013; Milevska, 2016).

An evaluation of the politics of New Institutionalism and the participatory turn must be contextualised within of the rise of neoliberal systems of government and management in the UK. Neoliberalism flourished in the UK with the arrival of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 (Harvey, 2005). Harvey writes that:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free market and free trade. (2005, p. 2)

Neoliberalism positioned the proper role of the state as enabling free markets, which would serve as the governing system for all elements of life, including public services (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). The free-market logics of neoliberalism have had a profound, ongoing effect on how publicly funded institutions, including galleries, provide public services. The enactment of participation in public institutions has thus been powerfully shaped by the rise of neoliberalism.

In this section, I will explain three key readings of the participatory turn: first as democratisation; then as marketisation; and finally, as exploitation. Whilst the three narratives I will outline here often overlap in the literatures, an exposition of some important strands of the debate at this early stage of this thesis provides crucial context about the gallery youth collective. By discussing three common narratives surrounding gallery youth collectives, I will also situate the approach that I take up in this doctorate within the existing literatures about gallery participation.

#### *a) Democratisation*

New Institutionalism has positioned participation as a democratising practice, capable of disrupting the hierarchies of the contemporary art museum (Doherty, 2004; Farquarson, 2013). Barber (1984) argues that increased participation produces a 'stronger' form of democracy. Similarly, within the New Institutionalism movement, many cultural institutions proposed that they could become more democratic by including wider publics and constructing spaces for debate. As Kolb and Flückiger explain, under New Institutionalism, the exhibition was:

[C]onceived as a social project and operated alongside discursive events, film programs, radio and TV shows, integrated libraries and book shops as well as journals, reading groups, online displays, invitation cards, posters and residencies.  
(Kolb & Flückiger, 2013, p. 5)

A more participatory approach was said to enable a reformulation of relations between galleries and communities, away from a hegemonic hierarchy, towards a diverse and democratic public sphere. In 2001, Charles Esche launched the Rooseum in Malmö with a speech, saying:

Now, the term 'art' might be starting to describe that space in society for experimentation, questioning and discovery that religion, science and philosophy have occupied sporadically in former times. It has become an active space rather than one of passive observation. Therefore, the institutions to foster it have to be part-community centre, part-laboratory and part-academy, with less need for the established showroom function. (Esche, quoted in Doherty, 2004, p. 2)

As Esche's speech illustrates, New Institutionalism was founded in the belief that increased participation could reform elite institutions into hosts of a democratic public sphere (Doherty, 2004, p. 1; Kolb, Flückiger, & Ekeberg, 2013, p. 23). Nicola Sim has argued that the expansion of participatory approaches with young people should be accepted as an effective move towards a more democratic model for the gallery, writing that:

This extension of the civic function of the gallery... implies a reimagining of the role of the art institution, where the focus moves away from a didactic, viewership model, and towards a communal, 'usership' model, which conceives of the institution as an 'interested building' that is part of people's everyday lives (Sim, 2019b, p. 201)

New Institutionalism's cultural democratisation draws on Chantal Mouffe's "agonistic pluralism" (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013; Mouffe, 2007, 2013), by rejecting the idea that democratic institutions should seek to construct a unified consensus based on rational deliberation. Rather, Mouffe contends that democracy today demands space for 'the pluralistic nature of the social world' (Mouffe, 2007, p. 2), which involves elements of unresolvable conflict, suggesting that any apparent consensus will have inherently dominating consequences.

Mouffe (2013) thus argues that democratic institutions should aim to create and maintain a mobile sphere of contestation and struggle.

Youth participation is one way in which galleries have attempted to reformulate institutional relations to be more democratic (Hodby, 2018; Sim, 2019b; Sinker, 2008). Galleries' inclusion of children and young people as a democratising strategy reflects a wider shift in the policy landscape since the late 1980s. Children's active involvement was enshrined in law by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), catalysing wider shifts in policy which sought to raise young people's prominence as participants (Arnott, 2008). Arnott (2008) argues that young people's participation has been positioned as a way of 'renewing democracy' (p356). Understandings of the gallery youth collective as a peer-led and democratising mode of cultural participation suggests that it resists the 'banking' model of education that has been critiqued for producing oppressive relations (Friere, 1972). Hodby (2018) argues that gallery participation activities 'represent democracy in action, evidencing a complex and potent site where issues including politics, community, control and creativity are at stake' (p4). She argues that pedagogies in gallery education are often based on values of 'dialogue and participation' (p.4), claiming that this ethos represents a powerful legacy of New Institutionalism. Similarly, Sayers (2015) suggests that the gallery youth collective rejects the position of the gallery as dominant over participants and constructs a more pluralistic approach to art.

Understanding the democratising potential of the participatory turn in galleries requires an engagement with the wider context of the development of gallery education. According to Allen (2008), the development of gallery education practices as a way of enacting more

democratic relations was influenced by both the women's liberation and community arts movement (De Bruyne & Gielen, 2011; Dickson, 1995; Kelly, 1984). In the 1970s, the women's liberation movement in the UK centred a practice of 'consciousness raising' (Allen, 2008, p. 3), in which the personal was considered to be highly political, and it was believed that social change could be brought about through 'dissent and disagreement' and 'self-reflection' (Allen, 2008, p. 3). Allen (2008) suggests that the political ethos of the women's liberation movement manifested in the practices of many women contemporary artists, which informed the emergence of gallery education. The political influence of the women's liberation movement on gallery education is tangible in descriptions of youth participation as a 'pedagogy of dissent' (Sayers, 2015) and in approaches which validate and empower young people's opinions about art, rather centring than a singular "correct" account of art's meaning (Sayers, 2011).

The community arts movement in the UK in the 1970s and 80s challenged the elite position of art galleries, taking a 'rights-based approach characterised by an aspiration for emancipatory social engagement' (Matarasso, 2019, p. 48) and 'the notion of empowerment through participation in the creative process' (Dickson, 1995, p. 18). Writing in 1978, Braden argued that:

The truth is that people make culture. They make it in towns and cities, in villages and hamlets, on housing estates and in suburbs...It is to do with self-expression and social needs. It is active not passive, it is neither a sub-culture nor an alternative. It is active and to be lived, rather than passive and to be appreciated. (Braden, 1978, cited in Dickson, 1995, p. 8)

However, community arts gradually gained more mainstream recognition (Dickson, 1995; Kelly, 1984; Matarasso, 2019) and disagreements within the community arts movement dissipated its power (Dickson, 1995). Over time, increases in formal funding for community

arts led to a demand for more formalised management and audit systems (Kelly, 1984), and the participatory art practices championed by grassroots movements were increasingly taken up by powerful cultural institutions (Kelly, 1984; Matarasso, 2019). Matarasso makes a distinction between community art and participatory art, writing that:

Participatory emphasises the act of joining in, and implies there is already something in which to join. Art exists, and the goal is to help people take part in it. This is not just consumption, but it may not always be very far from it. Community, by contrast, suggests something shared and collective. It imagines art not as a pre-existing thing, but as the result of people coming together to create it...the first might be seen as a form of cultural democratisation (giving people access to the arts) while the second aspires to cultural democracy. (2019, p.45)

He argues that participatory art has been successful, in the sense that it has become 'normal' and 'it is now everywhere' (Matarasso, 2019, p.21) but he suggests that this process can be seen as a form of appropriation by elite institutions with profound implications for the relations on offer. As he puts it:

The growing acceptance of participatory art in centres of power risks making it another arm of institutional control, its purposes, goals and methods dictated from outside rather than negotiated between the people concerned. (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 25-26).

Matarasso's (2019) account of the shift from grassroots community arts to gallery based arts participation suggests an underlying difference in power relations, and troubles popular claims made for gallery participation as a route to reformed institutional dynamics.

New Institutionalism sought to bring about more democratic relations within powerful gallery institutions but Kolb and Flückiger (2013) suggest that as it was 'dislocated and reintegrated' (p. 15) across the sector, its most radical potentials were appropriated and neutralised:

Institutional approaches...are always subject to the danger of being instrumentalized for the reproduction of the very hegemonial logics of production they critique, and it can be criticized that the rhetoric of politicized institutional acting was nothing more than a "flirtation" which was not able to trouble existing conditions (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013, p. 15)

Milevska (2016) argues that democratising aims of the participatory arts practices initiated by New Institutionalism were often 'difficult to evaluate' (p. 19) and 'overrated' (p. 19). She points out that 'art's elitist and intimidating social construction... can't be overcome by individual projects' (Milevska, 2016, p. 19), arguing that short-term participatory projects, based around existing institutional exhibition cycles, were particularly poorly equipped to overcome these powerful constraints. Similarly, Doherty suggests that short-term encounters risked producing 'a new set of conventions – the convention of role-play or prescribed participation – in a wider socio-political context of impotent democracy' (2004, p. 2). Graham (2010, 2017c) more radically suggests that participation runs the risk of merely providing a spectacle of democracy, rather than leveraging meaningful institutional change, arguing that participation and inclusion initiatives enable institutions to portray themselves as righteously ethical, whilst maintaining their own dominance and interests.

#### *b) Marketisation*

Dwindling public funds in recent years have created significant institutional precarity for public galleries, which have, as a result, been subject to 'the spreading logic of the market' (Mader, 2013, p. 39) and have often adopted more commercial organisational approaches in response (Eräranta et al., 2019; Sercombe, 2015). Marketisation generates profound institutional pressures, at odds with the relational ethics underlying the democratisation narrative (Mader, 2013; Sercombe, 2015). Within the entrepreneurial refiguring of galleries, relations with the public have often involved a more consumerised approach to visitor experience (Rodney, 2015, p. 2) as a commodity. Further, the rise of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005) and the dominance of New Public Managerialism as a mode of organising public services (Clarke &

Newman, 1997; Pollitt, 2007; Power, 1999) have constrained the emergence of democratic participatory relations in cultural institutions (Lynch, 2017). The effects of marketisation have limited the capacity of participation to authentically transform gallery-public relations into the more multiple and horizontal forms espoused within New Institutionalism as offering institutional democracy.

As public funds for the arts have been repeatedly slashed (Dempsey, 2016), museums and galleries have come under pressure to diversify their income streams. The resulting proliferation of commercial activities within public galleries, such as cafes, gift shops, event ticket sales and private hire, has positioned visitors as consumers. The need for higher footfall to ensure sufficient spend – alongside a need to increase audience share to justify access to the remaining public resources for the arts – has focussed gallery programming on a ‘drive to make bigger and better attended spectacles’ (Graham, 2017a, p. 187). The management of galleries as free market leisure businesses has positioned exhibitions and activities as a commodity and transformed institutions into enterprises. (Alexander, Alexander, & Decker, 2017; Eräranta et al., 2019). Marketisation centred the production of a positive experience for audiences as an institutional concern, through ‘the idea that success and survival of the organization depend upon customer satisfaction and the ability of organizations to become market driven and customer-led’ (Eräranta et al., 2019, p. 11). The view of the gallery as a customer-pleasing enterprise is in stark contrast to the supposed capacity of galleries to create a pluralist space for conflict and debate (Mouffe, 2007, 2013).

In the face of declining state investment (Dempsey, 2016), cultural institutions have been heavily shaped by the demands of constant competition for social funding (Graham, Graziano,



& Kelly, 2016; Rito, 2020) and near-constant regimes of audit (Belfiore, 2007; Power, 1994, 1999). With the growth of free market principles in the public and third sectors in the UK, New Public Managerialism (NPM) has become a dominant form of management (Dreschler, 2005; Sercombe, 2015). NPM requires institutions to constantly demonstrate their “value for money” (Power, 1994, 1999; Sercombe, 2015) understood in terms of ‘measurement of outputs’ (Pollitt, 2007, p. 110). With public services transformed into a competitive marketplace (Pollitt, 2007; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004), education became subject to a regime of ‘performativity’ (Ball, 2003; Lyotard, 1979), within which the activities involved in demonstrating success often became more important than the educational activities themselves. Participants were often reduced to beneficiaries, and relationships were only valued in terms of measurable impact and transformation. In response to increased demands from government and grant funders to measure the “impact” of participatory activities, the cultural sector often adopted a narrowly instrumental understanding of the value of the arts (Belfiore, 2007, 2009, 2012; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). In an austerity context, the regimes of audit in the cultural sector (Power, 1994, 1999) – which supposedly provide rigorous evaluation of the benefits of participation – can, paradoxically, limit the scope for meaningful reflections on failure (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021), or even promote ‘bullshit’ (Belfiore, 2009) and ‘deceit and fabrication of results’ (Sim, 2019b, p. 195). Under powerful neoliberal regimes of audit and pressures of precarity, and free market competition for scant funds, significant institutional self-critique and reflective learning has often been impossible (de St Croix, 2018; Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021; Mahoney, 2016; Sanderson, 2001; Vainker, 2014), at times leading to participatory programmes which operate in ways quite at odds with their espoused values.

The temporality and structure of gallery participation activities – and therefore the relations on offer – have been shaped and limited by neoliberalism and NPM. Vainker (2014) suggests that NPM is inherently opposed to the liberatory and youth-led ethos that gallery youth collectives espouse, arguing that NPM's focus on service 'delivery', 'is fundamentally in conflict with a co-produced approach, as it leaves little space for activities to be developed with participants in an emergent and flexible fashion' (Vainker, 2014, pp. 64-65). Indeed, the production of an organisational orientation as 'primarily a deliverer of predefined services' can be at odds with 'the lifeworlds of young people' (Clark & Percy-Smith, 2006, p. 5). Freeman, Nairn, and Sligo (2003, p. 67) have gone further, suggesting that under heavily bureaucratic management systems, even the most 'progressive' organisations, often manifest participation in 'problematic' ways. Furthermore, the rise of neoliberalism and NPM has often involved short-term funding, whereby participatory activities are viewed as 'projects' (Vainker, 2014) with limited, measurable goals, making the establishment of long-term relationships difficult (Dickson, 1995, p. 26). Participatory arts projects in galleries are often further constrained by galleries' fast-paced exhibition cycles (Milevska, 2016), despite the fact that short-term interventions are generally less able to develop deep relationships with communities:

Long term participatory projects that do not function only for the duration of the exhibitions, but are planned well in advance in terms of structure, organisation, projected aims, and also secure funding for all project participants have much better chances of achieving their expected goals or declared promises. (Milevska, 2016, p. 23)

However, even Milevska's description of long-term participatory work in galleries still relies on the assumed format of the project, in which the institution formulates the concept, and sets out the aims, activities, and timelines before interacting with the intended participants. Whilst Milevska's critique of short-term participatory encounters suggests that long-term initiatives

such as gallery youth collectives may offer significant affordances, larger structural issues are harder to overcome. From a critical perspective, attempts to include young people as participants in galleries may be seen as merely institutional rhetoric, which often fails to correlate with the material relations of such projects.

Since the New Labour government was in power, the notions of the 'active citizen' (Arnott, 2008; Clarke, 2005; Clarke & Newman, 2007; Vainker, 2014) has been a dominant element of the value of participation, and thus how galleries have been compelled to narrate their programmes in order to secure funding. Despite the rhetoric of empowerment and equality which often surrounds participation, the concept of the 'active citizen' has been activated as a way of governing populations, rather than liberating them (Clarke & Newman, 1997). New Labour's notion of active citizenship sought to position social rights as dependent upon the fulfilment of social responsibilities (Davies, 2012; Marinetto, 2003). Levitas (2005) further argues that the concept of social exclusion approached inequality as an individual failing, understood as 'pathological and residual rather than endemic' (2005, p. 6). Dominant ideas of active citizenship as the solution to social exclusion have sought individualistic solutions to structural social issues (Bragg, 2007), and – especially under the pressures of marketisation – have encouraged institutions to understand participation as a way of governing and "improving" young people, seeking to transform them into the "right" sort of productive citizens.

According to Bishop (2012), the demands of marketisation have catalysed a worrying form of populism in galleries, creating a 'hell' in which the disruptive political potential of art is neutralised (Bishop, 2012). Concerns about the repressive power of participation within

marketized organisations has led Miessen (2010) to describe the rise of the participatory imperative in contemporary art as a 'nightmare'. A focus on instrumental outcomes has damaged the relational potential of arts participation as a horizontal space for multiple knowledges, by activating hierarchical approaches, which assume participant deficit (Lynch, 2017). Impact-based arts programmes have been critiqued ethically, for seeking to transform individuals and communities according to predefined social agendas without gaining their informed consent (Goldberg & Matarasso, 2021, p. 6). Participation in galleries can serve to manufacture an oppressive consensus, stifling the conflict necessary for meaningful democracy, such that, 'demands which challenge the hegemonic order are appropriated by the existing system so as to satisfy them in a way that neutralizes their subversive potential' (Mouffe, 2013, p. 73). Far from positioning galleries as the pluralistic spaces of debate and democracy mooted by New Institutionalism, the marketisation critique paints a picture of a disempowering institutional landscape dictated by the demands of financial survival under neoliberalism, in which the voices of participants are tokenistically activated in the service of institutional status.

### *c) Exploitation*

Far from the democratic image proposed by New Institutionalism, participation in contemporary art galleries can serve to reproduce institutions' dominant position and their complicity with social elites (Graham, 2017b, 2017c). In the exploitation analysis, galleries' engagements with young, working class, and Black<sup>8</sup> collaborators are seen as extractive and

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<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, I have chosen to capitalise Black, where it refers to a racialised group. By contrast, I have not capitalised white, in order to indicate the differential set of power dynamics available to each group, and their relational histories.

harmful, as discussed earlier in this chapter<sup>9</sup>, through discussion of the critiques of the sector made in the statement by 2021 Turner Prize nominees, B.O.S.S. (Black Obsidian Sound System, 2021). Understanding the power dynamics surrounding gallery participation – and how these are experienced differently by different people, according to their relational position (Ahmed, 2012; Young, 2011) – requires consideration of relevant structural factors, including galleries' position in the urban economy and the arts labour market.

In contrast to ideas of participation as a powerful democratising force (Barber, 1984), practices of institutional inclusion can act to define those being welcomed as outsiders (Ahmed, 2012) and participation can, even enact the 'subordination' of participants (Cooke & Kothari, 2001a, p. 9). Graham (2017) suggests that the realisation of the liberatory ambitions often espoused by galleries' participatory projects are often constrained by the 'cacophony' of institutional rhetoric, which she found to be:

Both democratizing and paternalistic, socially orientated and market produced, full of idealism and concession (Graham, 2017a, p. 194)

Graham contends that the positioning of those at the sharp end of social inequality and oppression as merely participants in these projects tends to frame them as "other", enacting a further level of oppression that one of her community collaborators scathingly described as a 'brutal and violent mode of cultural production that is utterly dehumanising' (2017a, p.198). She suggests that 'this management of demands and desires is a central feature of neoliberal governance strategies' (2017a, p. 195), whereby taking part in cultural institutions acts to reinscribe social hierarchies, rather than to resist them.

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<sup>9</sup> See page 11-12

Close relationships between galleries and social elites can implicate cultural institutions in maintaining – rather than challenging – social inequality. Galleries often develop relationships with powerful businesses and individuals, in pursuit of status and financial resources (Lieberman, 2019). Elite individuals often take up influential roles in cultural institutions such as becoming members of the Board of Trustees, which affords them opportunities to shape the development of institutional strategies and programmes (Graham, 2017a, p. 191; Lieberman, 2019). The involvement of elites at the top level of cultural institutions supports the reproduction of existing hierarchies and allows powerful people to “artwash” their image by presenting themselves as creative and philanthropic. As one article puts it:

Museum boards are crowded with the worst of the moneyed elite, permitting them to launder their reputations or plunder and pelf as they impress their rivals with lavish tax-deductible donations, reap prestige, and celebrate themselves with galas (Lieberman, 2019)

Close relationships with the wealthy and institutional entanglements in profit-driven initiatives can make galleries complicit with entrepreneurial interests, at odds with the interests of local communities. For example, artists and cultural organisations often collaborate in urban regeneration programmes which drive gentrification, enabling profit for developers but ultimately driving out less wealthy groups from “up and coming” neighbourhoods where they may have lived for generations (Denmead, 2019; Deutsche & Ryan, 1984; Foster, 2016; Graham, 2017a, 2017b; Zukin, 1989). Participatory youth arts programmes may themselves be part of the process of gentrification, thus contributing to production of material conditions at the expense of the young people involved (Denmead, 2019). Galleries’ participatory programmes can also enable institutions to project an image of themselves as socially just organisations, whilst doing little to materially reform the conditions of their production (Graham, 2017a, 2017c). As Ahmed (2012, 2020) argues, institutional

initiatives that pertain to enable greater inclusion may ultimately serve to maintain structural conditions, rather than to change them, for both participants and workers alike.

Gallery youth collectives often claim to render institutions more democratic by offering participants a position as institutional insiders and opening routes into work in the sector to more diverse emergent workers, beyond elite groups<sup>10</sup>. However, working in the arts often involves high levels of precarity and poor working conditions (Allen, 2020; Belfiore, 2022; Brook et al., 2020; Graham, 2010; McRobbie, 2016; Szreder, 2021). The precarity and individualisation of work in the arts compels creative workers into neoliberal entrepreneurial dispositions (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; McRobbie, 2016) which involve ‘constant self-monitoring and improvement’ (Lee, 2018, p. 108). McRobbie (2016) argues that complex drives and desires are invoked in the production of a ready supply of enthusiastic arts workers, prepared to take a ‘leap of faith’ (Christiaens, 2020, p. 1) and enter a sector defined by precarious conditions. Graham (2010) suggests that art education has a role to play in the production of passionate arts workers, as she argues that it is now responsible for ‘the tasks of profit making, spectacle enhancement and training for a highly flexible and economically stratified “creative class” of workers’ (p2). As I will explore further in Chapters Four and Five, gallery education practices may thus be complicit in the continual production of a ready supply of new, enthusiastic arts workers, willing to be exploited by the sector.

Whilst many gallery education workers share a commitment to goals of social justice, they often find themselves within institutional structures at odds with this ethos (Graham, 2015).

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of the contradictions involved in diversity and inclusion work in the arts.

In considering the 'hidden curriculum' of participation, Graham (2017a) draws attention to inequalities in working conditions and a lack of transparency about production processes, as one moves from senior management to workers and participants. The unequal working conditions involved in participatory projects also divide gallery workers, creating an environment which McRobbie has argued, 'militates against an ethos of solidarity and collectivity' (2016, p. 3). In the face of workplace divisions, gallery staff are distracted from:

The ways in which their work is used to support processes which run counter to emancipation...leaving under-practiced and under-theorised the affinities that might be aligned beyond job descriptions and based on common commitments to emancipatory social change (Graham, 2017a, p. 188).

Despite her powerful critique of the exploitative function of participation in galleries, Graham suggests a political potential in the figure of the para-site as a 'non-heroic but critical and resistant agent' (Graham, 2017a, p. 200) who occupies an ambivalent position in the institution, whereby they are variously complicit with institutional power, and use the organisation's resources to work against the dominance of their host. As Graham puts it, institutional para-sites are:

Those who sustain work within cultural institutions through ongoing and embedded relationships, those who "sit at the tables" with those at the helms of hegemonic processes, all the while committed to the project of social justice, somewhere else, in direct contact and negotiation with critical social agents. (Graham, 2015)

Graham describes the activation of para-sitical tactics by the sex worker collective x:talk in relation to the Serpentine Gallery:

Working in opposition to their host organisation, they refuse its logics, and therefore do not try to reform but rather to antagonise, drawing resources to engage in social change of a more radical nature. (Graham, 2017a, p. 200)

Whilst participation's relationship to oppressive power structures can often be oversimplified, here Graham articulates a nuanced analysis, whereby participants are shown to have the potential to occupy exploitative projects in a resistant way, using the status and resources of



the gallery to further their own political ambitions, and thus pursuing radical ends that are simultaneously within, against, and beyond (Bell & Pahl, 2018) the institution. Graham (2017a) argues for pedagogies of art participation to be understood as an 'and': not as an affirmative logic which reproduces current conditions but as 'a force of becoming multiple' (p. 201) which allows many different things to happen. A multiple approach to understanding gallery participation is also taken up in Silva's doctoral account of youth collectives (or forums, as she calls them), which argues that young people in these groups are at once 'connected to and separated from museums' (2017, n.p.). She argues that youth collectives involve a 'myriad of experiences, feelings, ideas, and decisions' (p254). Likewise, this thesis is based in an approach to institutional participation as often complex, contradictory, ethically ambivalent, and always more-than-one.

The guiding principles of this thesis

In this study, I sought to engage with the complex politics of participation as they emerged within one youth collective. Through considering the multiple narratives surrounding gallery youth collectives, I developed a series of principles which guided my approach to this doctoral research. I approached the youth collective seeking to:

- 1) Understand how the gallery youth collective at NC functioned, in context.** This study sought what Graham has called an 'anatomical understanding' (2017a, p. 201) of the gallery youth collective in the context of the institution, the sector and wider society, in order to better understand how the group functioned and what it did for those involved. My aim of generating a contextualised understanding of the gallery youth collective informed the ethnographic methodology that I developed, as discussed further in Chapter Two.

- 2) Approach the gallery youth collective as multiple.** In the hope of going beyond simplistic, idealised accounts of participation that often dominate the sector, I approached the youth collective as likely complex, and founded on contradictory logics. I was interested in how NC made an offer to young people with the youth collective, and how this offer was taken up by various young people and gallery workers<sup>11</sup>. The principle of multiplicity informed the development of my methodology (see Chapter Two) and my theoretical framework (see Chapter Three).
- 3) Consider the practice of participation in the research alongside the practice of participation at NC.** Given the shared focus of 1525 and this study on participation, the methods employed in this study were selected through careful consideration of the relational dynamics involved in enacting participatory ethnography. As I will explore in detail in coming chapters, this project's activation of notions of participation engages with the crisis of representation (see Chapter Two for more on my approach to ethnography and representation) and the risk of authorial domination bound up with the ethnographic tradition (Clifford, 1983; Rosaldo, 1993; Thomson, 2018) which mirrors concerns about the hegemonic position of galleries. In seeking to resist dominating relationalities, I understood that this research was not separate from the site I sought to explore, but rather part of 'the *enactment* of those realities' (John Law, 2004, p. 45). Across the various levels of this research, I have found multiple mirrors for the complexities of the field. As an attempt at co-production, my own research practices have always come to pass within, against, and beyond (Bell & Pahl, 2018) the narratives they sought to challenge.

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<sup>11</sup> My interest in the collective as an institutional offer which was taken up by young people and workers also informs the overall structure of this thesis.

**4) Improve the ethical practice of gallery youth collectives, and participatory ethnographic methods.** Considering the dissonance identified in the literatures between the liberatory rationales espoused around participation, and the power relations enacted in practice (Cooke & Kothari, 2001b; Graham, 2017c; Miessen, 2010), it was important that this research sought to attend to ethical matters, with a view to informing the future practice of the gallery youth collective. By co-producing a detailed examination of what one gallery youth collective did for various young people and staff involved, I believed that the study could inform the practice of participation at NC and beyond. I believed that a methodology based on close and enduring relations (see Chapter Two) would centre young people's experiences and enable deeper practitioner learning than that commonly enacted by regimes of audit in which open reflection on failures might be experienced as threats to precarious programmes (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021; Power, 1994, 1999). I believed that carrying out a parallel inquiry into the participatory ethnographic methods I activated could inform the future development of more ethical research practice with young people.

**5) Produce a text which evoked the complexity and contradictions of participation.** In writing this thesis, I have considered the relational offer to the reader (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 34), and the complex dynamics of ethnographic writing as representation (Thomson, 2018), as discussed further in Chapter Two. The structure and style of this thesis reflects the process of its production, especially my shifting affective relation to participation in the gallery youth collective and research. As a result, this text does not entirely conform to the conventions of a standard doctoral

thesis (Honan & Bright, 2016), instead partially textualizing the answer to my second, methodological research question, as it unfolds.

#### The structure of this thesis

The rest of this thesis is organised into nine chapters, which explain how knowledge about participation was produced over the course of this doctorate, changing my investments in both the gallery youth collective and participatory research methods. Chapter Two deals with substantive questions of ethnography; justifying and situating my second, methodological research question within the relevant literatures. I outline my initial research design through a discussion of the troubling, colonial history of ethnography and review various attempts to overcome the ethical and relational constraints of the methodology through participatory techniques. An account of the specific research activities undertaken and the methodological insights they generated will come later, in Chapter Nine, as part of the answer to the methodological research question.

Chapter Three lays out the theoretical framework I developed for the research, using Derridean notions of the paradox of hospitality to account for the potential relational tensions underlying participation in the gallery youth collective. I extend notions of hospitality with affect theory – including Sara Ahmed’s work on inclusion (2012) and queer use (2020), and Lauren Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism (2011) – to further theorise the ways in which the practice of participation-as-hospitality has the potential to involve – and conceal – complex power relations quite at odds with its espoused ethical ambitions.

Chapters Four and Five lay out some of the experiences involved in my research with the youth collective at NC and show how they generated insights about what participation did for those involved. In Chapter Four I outline the ways in which the gallery both explicitly and implicitly welcomed young people to take part in the youth collective, through the architecture, the promotion of the group, and the induction to 1525, constructing an offer that was as contradictory as it was compelling. I identify three key domains of the offer of 1525: routes into arts jobs; a caring community; and as a form youth voice. Chapter Five will show how the first part of the offer was materialised in the youth collective, as I explain how young people were taught to be arts-workers-in-the-making at 1525, and surface the paradoxes involved in optimistic investments of this form of inclusion as a mode of empowerment.

In Chapter Six, I return to theoretical matters, as the rupture of the pandemic arrival of Covid-19 in the UK during the period of the research is presented as a rupture to the rhythm of participation in the 1525 collective. I explain how the disruption to the rhythm of participation challenged and ultimately undid my optimistic attachments in idealised participation. I will discuss how, after the rupture, I took up a more Deleuzean understanding of participatory relations, which helped to me analyse hospitality beyond binary notions of host and guest.

In Chapter Seven, I return to empirical matters with the addition of the theoretical tools presented in Chapter Six, exploring how the offer of 1525 as a caring community was affectively enacted in group meetings, allowing the emergence of more fluid hospitable relations. In Chapter Eight, I discuss how the offer of 1525 as youth voice was taken up, by focussing in on Oil and Water – a public exhibition and event produced by young people and gallery staff about a youth protest movement in an Asian country – illustrating how young

people used exhibition and event production opportunities at NC to speak to wider publics, and exploring the multiple, contradictory things that taking up institutional time and space did for young people, gallery workers, and the institution.

In Chapter Nine, I discuss how, beyond the disruption of the pandemic which overturned my optimistic investments in idealised participation, I was able to engage more critically with the cruel optimism of participation as hospitality, and ultimately took up a more expansive, affective approach to participation in research.

Chapter Ten is the final main chapter, in which I reflect on the insights produced by the research and suggest some implications for gallery practitioners and researchers.

## Interlude 1: Introducing 1525 members and gallery workers

Various 1525 members and gallery workers will feature in this thesis, who I will briefly introduce here, as a reference point for the rest of the text. All names have been changed to support the anonymity of participants, except Luisa, who chose to be named, so she could be identified as the producer of her artwork<sup>12</sup>:

- **Helena** was a 1525 member who was 20 years old when she took part in the research. She had joined 1525 at 18 years old, when she arrived in Nottingham as an international student, to study a bachelor's degree in art at a local university.
- **Alex** was a 1525 member who was 18 years old when I met him, and he was studying an art foundation course at a local further education college. He had found out about the group from his college tutor who had recommended it to the class as a way of developing their practice.
- When I first met **Anna**, she was 17 years old and was doing her A-levels at a local further education college. She had joined the 1525 collective after undertaking a week-long work experience programme at the gallery with a group of other school and college students.
- **Emily** was a member of 1525 who was in her early twenties when she was involved in the research. She had grown up in a nearby city and had recently completed a bachelor's degree in fashion at a local university.
- **Gwen** was a member of 1525 in her mid-twenties and had been intermittently involved in the youth programme at NC for a few years when I met her. She had a

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<sup>12</sup> The nationalities of participants have also been removed here, to support their anonymity further and minimise other ethical risks.

master's degree in fine art and had moved to the city with hopes of pursuing a career in contemporary art.

- **Shania** was a member of 1525 who had joined the collective whilst studying an art foundation course at the local further education college.
- **Callum** was a 1525 member who had come to Nottingham as an international student, to study art at a local university.
- **Lucy** was a recent graduate of a local university, who was undertaking a paid internship at NC during the period of the research. Her role involved – in part – supporting Ellie's activities with the gallery youth collective.
- **Zoe** was a member of 1525 who had come to the city as an international student at a local university.
- **Lady D** was a member of 1525 who had come to the city as an international student at a local university.
- **Mr K** was part of the local activist group who collaborated with 1525 on the Oil and water project. He had come to Nottingham as an international student of a local university.
- **Ray** was a 1525 who joined the group after coming to the city as an international student.
- **Gudrun** was an undergraduate photography student in Nottingham, who joined the group after being involved in a schools' project at NC as a mentor.
- **Helen** was student in Nottingham, who joined the group to make friends and build creative skills.
- **Mia** was an undergraduate student in Nottingham, who joined the group after being involved in a schools' project at NC as a mentor.



- **Siobhan** was an undergraduate student in Nottingham, who joined the group after being involved in a schools' project at NC as a mentor.
- **Aria** was a fine art master's student who had come to the city from the USA to study.
- **Emilio** was an art master's student who had come to the city from Spain to study.
- **Ellie** was a gallery worker in the Learning team who facilitated the gallery youth collective meetings. She was in her mid-twenties and had grown up in the city, attending the local further education college where many of the collective members went. She studied art history to masters' level and worked providing a pastoral support to undergraduate students, before coming back to Nottingham and securing a role at NC.
- **Maura** was a gallery worker in the Learning team at NC. She was Ellie's manager and had little direct contact with 1525. Her role included fundraising for learning activities and overseeing their monitoring and evaluation, as well as having responsibility for risk assessment of learning programmes and safeguarding of participants.
- **Verity** was an external trainer that the gallery booked to deliver the CV workshop (see Chapter Five). She was an experienced arts professional, lecturer, and curator.
- **Sam** was a member of NC's pool of regular 'Associate Artists' who worked in the Learning programme.
- **Alice** was a member of NC's pool of regular 'Associate Artists' who worked in the Learning programme.
- **Hannah** was a member of NC's Exhibitions team, who attended a few 1525 meetings in winter 2019, to support the development of the Oil and Water exhibition.
- **Luisa** was an artist who delivered a public workshop at NC.

- **Carla** was a worker at NC who supported Luisa's workshop.
- **Albert** was a curator at NC, who sometimes visited 1525 meetings.

## 2. Methodology: Participatory ethnography

This study sought to generate insights into the nuanced affordances and limitations of participation at NC, beyond the dominant notions of “impact” active in the sector, which tend to reduce participants to data. From my professional experiences and initial explorations of the literatures, I understood that a complex landscape of paradoxes and pressures surrounded the practice of art gallery youth collectives. I sought a methodology which would allow me to sensitively navigate this challenging context to explore how young people and associated workers enacted the youth collective at NC, and to gain detailed insights into their understandings of participation in both this group and in my research. In this chapter, I will explain why I believed, at the outset, that ethnography was well-suited to this study, through a discussion of the methodological literatures that I read in preparation for the research, and an explanation of how I used these texts to plan and imagine my research unfolding. I will discuss some critiques of ethnography – including its role within colonialism and the reproduction of epistemic hierarchies – and explain the more collaborative, participatory approach that I believed could minimise these potentially dominating traits. Overall, this chapter will also further situate my choice to pose a second, methodological research question, in parallel with the substantive inquiry of the study.

## Approaching ethnographic research at NC

In this doctoral research project, I wanted to understand what participation in 1525 did for young people involved, associated staff, and the gallery. The research was funded by an ESRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, which – as explained in Chapter One – was initiated by a partnership between NC and the University of Nottingham. Long before I was recruited, the research was immersed in – and catalysed by – a complex web of institutional relationships, demands, and values, both at the gallery and the university. As an experienced arts educator, I came into the study with an understanding that sustained participation initiatives such as youth collectives were usually precariously funded and that keeping such programmes afloat could involve navigating between often-conflicting demands from funders, publics, and various stakeholders. The pilot study I had undertaken about NC's schools programme for my Master's dissertation project combined with initial conversations about the doctoral research with the gallery staff to provide some initial insights about the Learning programmes at NC. I thus approached planning the doctoral research with a sense that what workers and participants valued about learning activities might not be the same thing that funders valued, and the elements of 1525 promoted publicly by the gallery might be different again. The insights I brought to the doctoral study contributed to my hunch – also informed by the literatures and my professional experiences – that there were some powerful contradictions involved in the enactment of gallery participation at NC. In this context, I sought a methodology that could generate layered understandings of the practices involved in 1525 and the multiple local understandings at play.

As I thought ahead to my forthcoming research, I began to imagine a methodology that would be well-suited to researching the power-laden and often-contradictory landscape surrounding

the youth collective at NC. My professional experiences and early conversations with staff at NC resonated with certain literatures which suggested that the rise of powerful regimes of audit in the youth sector and beyond (de St Croix, 2018; Power, 1994) left little time or space for staff to meaningfully reflect on the complexity of developing sustained relationships with young people. As Jancovich and Stevenson (2021) have argued, the current landscape in the cultural sector 'is not conducive to honesty or critical reflection' (p. 1) and 'without this it will persistently fail to learn or to deliver the scale of change required to create the equity it professes to desire' (p. 1). A specific methodological approach was needed which could surface what was happening in the gallery youth collective, beneath powerful sector narratives of success and transformation. As I delved into the methodological literatures, I saw that an ethnographic methodology would offer some powerful affordances for exploring these complexities. I was compelled by Mills and Morton's claim that:

If education is always risky, always unsettling, then ethnography is the perfect method to capture its dynamism and power (2013, p. 2)

Ethnography can generate deep insights into practices and their local significance through the twin practices of participation and observation, producing fine-grained results with strong interpretive power (Okely, 2012). Ethnography's characteristics seemed to offer useful affordances in terms of my aspirations for the study to go beyond dominant understandings of the gallery youth collective, to produce a more nuanced account.

Given the possibility that open, critical reflection on precarious programmes might be difficult (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021; Vainker, 2014), I understood that developing trusting relationships with staff and young people would be crucial in generating meaningful insights. Research planning conversations with gallery workers indicated that the 1525 collective was

based on the formation of long-term, intimate relationships and a set of carefully nurtured internal dynamics. In an early meeting, Ellie explicitly and firmly stated that the research needed to prioritise protecting the group dynamics, affirming my belief that I needed to take up an embedded methodological mode that integrated into the practices and relations of the collective. This was not the context for heavy-handed interventions. Carolina Rito – who, in the early stages of this study, was Head of PP&R at NC and my institutional research supervisor – has explicitly advocated for research partnerships with cultural institutions to be based on an ongoing mode of collaboration, suggesting:

[A] more balanced dialogue between sectors and models of knowledge production, wherein cultural partners take part in formulating research questions from the outset and continue to contribute to research practices throughout the investigative process.  
(Rito & Balaskas, 2020a, p. 13)

As I reflected on gallery workers' views about the research, I further invested in the belief that ethnography's long-term, naturalistic approach, which foregrounds the development of relationships, was well-equipped to navigate the dynamics surrounding the youth collective and produce the deep insights that I sought.

I understood from the outset that the 1525 programme was based on an ethos of participation, and I started to think about what participation in an ethnographic methodology would involve. Today, ethnography is widely understood as both a practice of participant observation and a set of representations. Mills and Morton explain ethnography as a triad of practices: 'being, seeing, writing' (2013, pp. 1-5). However, the way in which these practices are composed has been subject to significant contestation (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Okely, 2012). As Mills and Morton (2013) highlight, pinning down the details of ethnographic practice is often 'troublesome' (p. 52) and can invoke 'strong feelings' (p. 52). I

wanted to carefully consider the relations that the methodology would generate with my participants, to ensure that it was as ethical as possible, and to avoid simplistically reproducing dominant accounts of the gallery youth collective. I thus embarked on an exploration of the practice of ethnography – particularly the relations, ethics, and role of participation – through reviewing the methodological literatures, to support the construction of a collaborative ethnographic methodology for this study.

## Exploring the methodological literatures

### Early anthropological ideas about participation

Like the museums with which they were inextricably linked (Turner, 2020), early anthropology was an integral part of the colonial project of empire. As this chapter will show, anthropology's recording and categorising of "other cultures"<sup>13</sup> constructed and naturalised the dominating relations of imperialism, by working to, 'reinforce the authority and integrity of scientific colonialism' (Turner, 2020, p. 5). Early anthropologists largely eschewed participation as part of their research, often employing methods of distanced observation and documentation alone (Okely, 2012). Okely suggests that detached methods were frequently 'conflated with objectivity' (2012, p. 76), as they were considered to reduce the influence of the researcher on natural behaviour, and thus give the results scientific rigour. By contrast, she asserts that,

Distanced surveillance constructs the outsider as threat. Paradoxically, the detached observer may be *more* likely to transform contexts. She or he may be threatening precisely because she or he is not involved, appearing as voyeur or critic. (Okely, 2012, p. 77)

The work of Bronislaw Malinowski was a turning point for participation in ethnography. Malinowski argued that researchers must take part in local customs as much as possible, claiming that this enhanced the effectiveness of the research and provided deeper insights. He suggested that ethnographic research should have three parallel elements<sup>14</sup>:

- Recording precise observations about 'the organisation of the tribe (sic), and the anatomy of its culture' (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25)
- Filling in everyday details of 'the imponderabilia of actual life, and the type of behaviour' which should be 'collected through minute, detailed observations, in the

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<sup>13</sup> The phrase "other cultures" in this context is problematic and colonial, hence the use of scare quotes here.

<sup>14</sup> Malinowski's language to describe those he researched is colonial and oppressive. I have chosen to include it here because confronting and reflecting on the colonial relations invoked by anthropological relations is a key aim of this chapter.



form of some sort of ethnographic diary, made possible by close contact with native life' (sic). (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25)

- 'A collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulæ' which act as 'documents of native mentality' (sic) (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25)

Malinowski contended that the three methods could be combined to give anthropologists a deep understanding of what was happening within a community and – crucially – what it meant to those involved. He argued that the point of ethnographic research methods should be 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world' (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25). Despite the obvious sexism and racism in Malinowski's account, his work was important in establishing how nuanced understandings of the lives of those he researched could be produced through combining the practices of participation and observation.

Malinowski was not the only early anthropologist who advocated for developing sustained, close collaborations with members of the communities they sought to study. The collaborative relationships involved in early ethnography were often unequal. Franz Boas developed close relationships with several local interlocutors as part of his research into Native American cultures, developing a long-term collaboration with Kwakiutl Indian George Hunt (Lassiter, 2005, p. 27). Whilst the relationship between Hunt and Boas was an early example of long-term ethnographic collaboration, it was 'more hierarchical than egalitarian' (Lassiter, 2005, pp. 27-28). Lassiter argues that:

The Hunt-Boas collaboration was less about equalizing the relationship between ethnographer and native collaborator than it was about serving Boas's objective of

augmenting anthropology's scientific authority to represent the Other's point of view. (2005, p. 28)

Briggs and Bauman go further, suggesting that the collaboration with Hunt was used by Boas specifically to give his account more authority, by producing a greater sense of scientific authenticity, and that he actively sought to conceal the relations involved in the research (Briggs and Bauman, 1999, p. 520).

A widespread critique has been made of the way, as part of a drive to give anthropology a sense of scientific credibility, early ethnographic practices often made a relational switch from 'observation into objectification' (Ingold, 2017, p. 23), which is 'deeply troubling' (Ingold, 2017, p. 23). The use of participatory and collaborative approaches in early anthropology was innovative. However, whilst anthropological participation may superficially, appear to offer a solution to epistemic domination, it was often complicit in the same hierarchical and oppressive relations it was claimed to resolve. In common with other modes of participation (see Cooke and Kothari (2001a), Miessen (2010), and Tisdall (2008)), anthropological collaboration has thus been critiqued for both perpetuating and silencing domination. The dominating relations of early anthropology were inherently tied to the representations they were used to create in museums, and this has important implications for this research.

#### Representation, power, and the museum

The colonial foundations of ethnography are entangled with the history of museums, and thus the contemporary art gallery. Early anthropologists often arranged their observations and items – including objects and bodies – that they had seized from the groups they studied into museum exhibitions, creating representations to publics at home. The practices of

representation and categorisation – such as the vitrine and the catalogue – which underpinned anthropology and museums served to create as “other” those on display and have thus enacted and justified colonial hierarchies:

Collecting practices abroad were an inherent part of colonialism, and by displaying these collections under Western classification systems, British museums also offered a public justification for expansion and imperial rule (Giblin, Ramos, & Grout, 2019, p. 471)

Museum practices including documentation, categorisation, and representation offered ways of reproducing and naturalising the dominance of the West, through the construction and performance of a form of scientific authority (Turner, 2020). Representing cultures in museum displays changed the meanings of the items, which had previously been vibrant, living objects; and indeed collections often included actual remains of people and creatures<sup>15</sup>. The form of the museum exhibition was thus created to fix the position of the people and cultures represented as “other”. The anthropological museum was also designed to have certain effects on visiting audiences.

Museum visitors “at home” were subject to cultural power through viewing exhibitions of anthropological artefacts. Bennett (1995) has argued that:

The museum's formation - whether understood as a developmental process or as an achieved form - cannot be adequately understood unless viewed in the light of a more general set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power. (Bennett, 1995, p. 19)

The “high culture” of museums was activated to govern and control ‘the habits, morals, manners and beliefs of the subordinate classes’, understood as ‘something in need of both

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<sup>15</sup> I will return in more detail to discussion of what museum exhibitionary modes do in Chapter Eight, when I discuss the Oil and Water exhibition produced by 1525 members.

transformation and regulation' (Bennett, 1995, p. 19). Bennett suggests that the birth of the museum rested on the belief that,

'(T)he works, forms and institutions of high culture might be enlisted for this governmental task in being assigned the purpose of civilizing the population as a whole' (1995, p. 19)

Bennett illustrates that museum practices of exhibiting people and things – many of which were collected (or, more accurately, stolen) by anthropologists – were involved in 'simultaneously ordering objects for public inspection and ordering the public that inspected' (Bennett, 1995, p. 61). The anthropological museum exhibition had a powerful message for visitors about their place in the world:

[T]heir central message was to materialize the power of the ruling classes (through the collections of imperialist plunder which found their way to the Victoria and Albert Museum, for example) in the interest of promoting a general acceptance of ruling-class cultural authority. (Bennett, 1995, p. 109)

Bennett argues that the mode of the exhibition allowed museums to bring people and things into powerful, public arrangements, which acted as 'vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power...throughout society' (1995, p. 60-61). The history of the museum is thus a story of anthropological representation being used to enact domination and control.

#### From the crisis of representation to affect

In the early-twentieth century, anthropologists – including many of Boas's students such as Alfred Kroeber, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir (Lassiter, 2005, p. 49) – employed ethnographic methods to compare cultures. Anthropology moved away from historical documentation into the present, often shifting from museums into the academy, in line with a more 'comparativist, universalist, and scientific orientation' (Stocking, 2001, p. 317). The project of cultural comparison brought together researchers from Britain, America and France to strive for a unified 'world anthropology' (Stocking, 2001, p. 319), which was less

focussed on the involvement of “subjects” as collaborators (Lassiter, 2005, p. 50). However, from the 1960s onwards, the fragmentation of empire and the rise of civil rights and feminist movements challenged traditional approaches to anthropology which represented “natives” and women as “others” (Stocking, 2001). Dissenting voices – largely from those within these oppressed groups – catalysed a new, critical anthropology to begin to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century, which proposed to use ethnographic methods as part of an activist approach which sought to surface inequalities and catalyse social change.

A further challenge to traditional anthropology was presented by the posthumous publication of Malinowski’s diaries (1967) which exposed the unpleasant views he held about the Trobriand islanders that he had lived alongside and studied. Clifford Geertz addressed the significance of the diaries in his paper *“From the Native’s Point of View”: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding* (1974), arguing that whilst many readers were morally outraged by Malinowski’s unpalatable views, the text presented a more ‘profound question’ about the foundations of ethnographic knowledge production:

If anthropological understanding does not stem, as we have been taught to believe, from some sort of extraordinary sensibility, an almost preternatural capacity to think, feel, and perceive like a native (a word, I should hurry to say, I use here “in the strict sense of the term”), then how is anthropological knowledge of the way natives think, feel, and perceive possible? The issue the Diary presents, with a force perhaps only a working ethnographer can fully appreciate, is not moral; it is epistemological (Geertz, 1974, p. 27)

Geertz contended that the publication of Malinowski’s diaries enacted a final blow to the fantasy of the ethnographer as a ‘chameleon fieldworker’ (p.27), believed to be endowed with a long list of virtues which enabled them to transparently read subjects’ experiences and fluently translate their internal worlds into a written text. He concluded that,

The trick is not to achieve some inner correspondence of spirit with your informants...The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to. (Geertz, 1974, p. 29).

Geertz (1974) considered the various affordances and limitations of 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' positions to the subject of study, arguing that researchers should be more candid about the basis on which their claims were made: by skillful navigation between insider and outsider positions:

The real question, and the one Malinowski raised by demonstrating that, in the case of "natives," you don't have to be one to know one, is what roles the two kinds of concepts play in anthropological analysis. To be more exact: How, in each case, should they be deployed so as to produce an interpretation of the way a people live which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer? (1974, p. 29)

Geertz asserted the need to move away from assumptions of the researcher as a uniquely neutral and omniscient figure with special interpretive powers that elevated them in comparison to their participants. Instead, he advocated for researchers to identify and actively reflect upon their position in relation to the community of study, and the affordances and limitations this might provide in making an interpretation.

Geertz argued that the development of rapport and the production of deep insights require the researcher to make themselves vulnerable alongside their research participants. In *From the Native's Point of View* (Geertz, 1974), he described the experience of fleeing from a police raid with local villagers, arguing that participating in this shared experience provided deeper access to the inner workings of a culture that was otherwise closed off to him. Geertz claimed that the shared experience of fleeing from the cockfight shifted the relational dynamics between him and his participants, leading to a deeper level of trust, inclusion, and acceptance into the community. He thus suggested that developing more embedded relationships

allowed him go beyond simply producing detailed descriptions of the cockfights, instead also generating insights into their symbolic significance within Balinese culture.

Geertz understood culture as 'a social and semiotic system' (Thomson, 2018, p. 69) and he wanted anthropologists to communicate this in a non-scientised style. His subsequent book, *Works and lives: The anthropologist as author* (1988), advocates for a more literary approach to the practice of constructing an ethnographic account. In that text, he argues that:

[E]pistemological foundations have been shaken by a general loss of faith in received stories about the nature of representation (Geertz, 1988, p. 135).

He asserted that representations were not the same as reality, and that the production of an ethnographic text involved mediation through a human researcher. For Geertz, the ethnographic text was far from a neutral scientific record, and he contended that assuming a scientific voice arbitrarily constructed the author as neutral and made the subject into an object of study. He thus argued that the scientific voice that many ethnographers took up was a power move. As Thomson explains:

The use of a shared vocabulary and writing in the third person in a matter of fact style, piling up fact after fact, conveyed a false sense of authenticity and scientificity. Geertz proposed moving away from writing that had the surface appearance of a scientific treatise towards writing which recognised the differences between material reality and its representations (2018, p. 70)

The rise of debates about the nature of representation and the politics involved is generally seen as part of a broader 'linguistic turn' in the humanities, which involved:

[A] disruptive move which had anthropologists giving up on finding 'law-like' processes in societies and instead embracing their hermeneutic positioning' (Thomson, 2018, pp. 69-70).

The linguistic turn had powerful implications for ethnographic research and writing. The idea that researchers should reflect on their positionality in relation to their subjects as a way of

managing their interpretations and maximising the ethics and effectiveness of their research has since been widely adopted as a norm within qualitative research, but this practice has also been subject to significant debate.

Since Geertz's challenge to the image of the Malinowskian anthropologist, multiple debates about ethnography have continued to interrogate both the epistemological logics on which it relies, and the ethics of the relationships involved in its practice. Whilst ethnography is often idealised as affording unique insights, in practice it is riddled with complexities, and some – such as Clifford (1983) – have argued that it rarely resembles the ideals through which it has been mythologised. In particular, the positioning of the ethnographer as an external authority has been subject to serious challenge, with many – including Clifford and Marcus (1986); Crapanzano (1986); Geertz (1988); Thomson (2018) – arguing that externalisation produces and reproduces an unequal and troubling set of epistemic relations. Ethnographic writing has often relied upon positioning the researcher as an almost-invisible objective outsider, producing a supposedly rational set of observations of “others”, who in the process became objects (Crapanzano, 1986; Geertz, 1988; Rosaldo, 1993).

Clifford and Marcus's edited collection *Writing Culture: The politics and poetics of ethnography* (1986) problematised the act of creating a text from relationships and events. In the book's introduction, Clifford highlighted that:

“Cultures” do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the imposition of a self-other relationship and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship (1986, p. 10)

Clifford and his contemporaries suggested that representation was not neutral but imbued with inequitable power relations of othering. He further argued that:



The critique of colonialism in the postwar period – an undermining of “The West’s” ability to represent other societies – has been reinforced by an important process of theorising about the limits of representation itself. (Clifford, 1986, p. 11)

Clifford advocates ‘noncelebratory histories’ of ethnography’s development, which ‘construe science as a social process’, stressing ‘the historical discontinuities, as well as continuities, of past and present practices’ (p. 11). Ethnography must be understood, he says, as a messy and contingent practice, not a linear teleology.

Beyond the crisis of representation, ethnographic practices have been multiply reimagined, generating diverse and innovative alternatives, drawing on feminist – including Behar (1996); Behar and Gordon (1995); Visweswaran (1997) – creative and visual (such as Pink (2013) and Taussig (2011) – and embodied and sensory approaches – such as Pink (2015). Ruth Behar challenged the scientism of masculine “rational” approaches by advocating for the inclusion of felt sensations more explicitly in research, and for the importance of making explicit links between the research and the researcher’s lived experience. She argued that researcher ‘vulnerability’ (Behar, 1996) was a powerful counterpoint to the dominating authoritative stance invoked by more “scientific” approaches to doing and writing about ethnography.

The very notion of representation, as an metatheoretical concept which seeks to present a static image of a “world out there” has been argued to be at odds with the complexity of the world. As Thomson puts it:

The notion of representation ignores the ways in which words and things coexist, collide, move and combine and detach from each other. Representation is a-temporal (Thomson, 2018, p. 75)

Anderson and Harrison (2010) have considered the ‘promise’ of non-representational theory (or NRT), suggesting that it offers a powerful reframing of research. They begin with

‘an affirmation of life, of existence, as precarious, as active and as unforeseeable’ (p. 1), arguing that research needs to reflect the nature of existence by also being mobile, open-ended, and experimental. They argue that research should focus on the taking place of things, in which multiple diverse elements of the world are considered to exist on an ontological ‘plane of immanence’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). NRT proposes a shift in ontology which challenges the ‘classic Cartesian divide’ (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 6) between the “real world” and the order of meanings. As Zembylas puts it:

[T]he meaning of things comes less from the structure of symbolic order and more from their enactment in practice; action is conceived less in terms of individual or collective willpower and more via embodied and contextual affordances (Anderson and Harrison, 2010). Which is to say that action is understood as being in networks and relations; all action is interaction...and bodies are actualized through practical relations, that is, they are relational bodies. Thus, for example, embodied gestures and actions do not ‘express’ an ‘inner’ reality or cultural meaning and value, but rather they are enactments, of which the symbolic is just a part, not the whole. (Zembylas, 2016, p. 394)

NRT – as proposed by Anderson and Harrison (2010) and Zembylas (2016) – recentres materiality, embraces embodiment, and frames the world as powerfully relational. Anderson and Harrison argue that a radically expanded notion of materiality – in which ‘everything happens, everything acts’ (p. 14) – validates affective forces as an important part of forming accounts of the world. Theories of affect grapple with the role of forces, ‘other than conscious knowing’ (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1) in the world, offering a rich resource for creating a more nuanced account of the relations and investments underlying the social world, and participation in particular.

In an affective approach, the production of research is understood as a constitutive part of the world. As Anderson and Harrison put it:

And so even representations become understood as presentations; as things and events they enact worlds, rather than being simple go-betweens tasked with re-presenting some pre-existing order or force (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 14)

The ontological shift of NRT positions the practice of research and construction of a text to be of the same order as the empirical subject of study: doing research and writing are understood as an active part of the material world. As this thesis unfolds, I will return – in Chapter Six and Chapter Nine – to how the events that took place led me to more fully understand the implications of an affective approach for my research. Notions of affect and the researcher as implicated in the world challenge the assumed binary divisions of research relations.

#### Beyond the “field”<sup>16</sup>

The crisis of representation challenged understandings of the ethnographic site which were dominantly understood through the metaphor of the “field”. The “field” implied that the world existed as a static reality “out there” which could be viewed, interpreted, and represented by researchers. As Clifford puts it:

The predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside – looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, “reading” a given reality. (Clifford, 1986)

Marcus (1995) responded to the crisis of representation by proposing a new definition of the ethnographic site, going beyond a pre-defined and bounded understanding. His multi-sited approach suggested a more mobile ethnographic practice, which followed the relationships participants engaged in, situating them in a wider context. Marcus suggested that a multi-sited approach was ‘oriented to process and connections’ (2011, p19) and that this disrupted the default ‘Malinowskian complex’ (2011, p18) that still dominated anthropological research

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<sup>16</sup> Scare quotes are used here to indicate my discomfort with the notion of the “field”.

with its relations of epistemological othering. Instead, he argued for an approach which went beyond the focus on the 'situated subject', instead recognising that subjectivities and understandings are constructed within a wider 'system of relations' (Marcus, 2011, p. 19).

Marcus suggested that a more mobile ethnographic practice was necessary to effectively research the contemporary subject, as their 'local realities are produced elsewhere through dispersed relations and agencies' (2011, p. 19). A multi-sited ethnography understands people as positions within a relational network, invoking an epistemology which demands a more diffused research design, in which researchers navigate a web of scattered practices, meanings, and experiences. Marcus argues for an 'embedded perspective' in which:

The field is no longer objectively out there, but one networks oneself into a concept of the field through relations of ethnographic research all the way along. (Marcus, 2011, p. 28)

Marcus's reimagining of ethnographic relations resonated with the aspirations of this study as it sought to resist the researcher-subject binary and the dominating and colonial hierarchies of knowledge production by offering an alternative to the notions of the research site as a fixed, geographical field.

Some critics such as Madden (2017) and Willis (1996) have gone further than Marcus (2011) in challenging the notion of the field as a bounded and complete cultural ecosystem that exists "out there" and is capable of "discovery", arguing that it is the ethnographic gaze produced by this researcher disposition that is inherently imperialist and dominating. Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair (2009) argue that ethnographers would do better to entirely abandon the notion of the field as a pre-existing entity, suggesting that:

In exchange for acknowledging that fields are always constructed out of a too-rich reality, we would gain the freedom to determine their boundaries explicitly, in relation to our research questions (Cook et al., 2009, p. 58)

Further disrupting the idea of a clear distinction between the researcher and researched, Clifford and Marcus (1986) disrupted the assumed 'exteriority of the ethnographic gaze' (Thomson, 2018, p. 71) by advocating instead for the researcher to be understood as radically inseparable from the site. The anthropologist, they argued, was not neutral. Rather they influenced and were influenced by the unfolding events that they took part in during the research (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Thomson, 2018). Critiques of the notion of the "field" and the researcher's position in the production of ethnographic knowledge enabled a relational reimagining of ethnography, in which, it was hoped, subjects could be positioned as more equal counterparts.

#### Epistemic counterparts

Marcus challenged the mid-century critical anthropological focus on subordinated groups, which he suggested focussed too heavily on the experiences of 'workers, peasants, the ill, the abused and the markedly marginalized' (Marcus, 2000, p. 1). Marcus argued that critical anthropology still depended on a fundamental relation of othering between researcher and subject. The ubiquitousness of research with marginalised groups had, according to him, become formulaic, and relied on a binary understanding of relations of oppression and resistance, which was 'extremely limiting' (Marcus, 2000, p. 2) in terms of anthropology's ability to produce new insights and tell more complex stories about society.

In contrast to dominant anthropological narratives of the oppressed and their resistant practices, Marcus suggested that contemporary social conditions produced another kind of potential research subject who could not easily be situated as an "other". He described these research interlocuters as:

Subjects who are distinctly not positioned for resistance or opposition (even though their words and perspective may incorporate this rhetoric), who, in their very different occupations, activities and locations, share some of the same privileges and modest empowerments as those of us who interview and write about them, and who are thus those who do not easily fit into the category of marginality ready-made for given critical arguments, but instead are fully inside and complicit with powerful institutional engines of change (Marcus, 2000, p. 2)

Marcus advocated for an alternative modality of anthropology, which engaged in ethnographic research with more empowered and epistemically active 'experts', positioning participants as epistemic 'counterparts', or:

Coproducers of interpretations that we elicit, cajole, contest, or share from the encounters that are reported or represented (Marcus, 2000, p. 2)

Marcus argued that pursuing more equal research relationships with research counterparts freed the accounts produced from the dualistic ethnography authority often constructed by the dominant ethnographic frame of marginalization and resistance, instead leaving the terms of the knowledge production intentionally 'open-ended' (p. 2-3).

Marcus (2000) named his more empowered form of research collaborators 'para-sites'. He intended the term para-site to disrupt the dominance of ethnographic narratives of marginalization and resistance, in which the more simplistic figure of the 'parasite' as a 'wily transgressor within' (2000, p. 7) was widespread. Marcus cites the Oxford English Dictionary definition to argue that the prefix 'para' can mean 'by the side of, beside, whence, alongside of' (2000, p. 6) and 'site' means 'the place or position occupied by some specific thing'. The name para-site is thus used as wordplay on the dominant image of the resistant, subordinated ethnographic subject. Marcus instead seeks to invoke the idea of an alternative space generated within and alongside the site of research, which he suggests is,

Not necessarily (or even usually) a site or work of resistance but a site of alternativity in which anything, or at least something different, could happen (Marcus, 2000, p.8)

Marcus suggests that an ethnography that constructs the relations of the epistemic counterpart has the capacity to afford insights into the nuanced practices active in its context, arguing that:

This work...is largely about forging spaces, sites, and even objects that facilitate alternative thinking by subjects who are deeply complicit with and implicated in powerful institutional processes in times of heightened consciousness of great social transformations (Marcus 2000 p. 5)

This account of Marcus's collaborative ethnography suggests a set of epistemic relations at odds with what had preceded it.

Marcus's notion of epistemic counterparts acknowledges the subjects of research as already engaged in everyday, dynamic modes of knowledge production about their own practices, as he describes them as:

[M]aking complex doublings of institutional environments, not for the sake of reimagining a new self or identity but so as to maneuver more easily in rapidly changing systems and institutional environments, which they simply must understand more effectively. (Marcus, 2000, p. 5)

The para-site in Marcus's account is thus not a simplistically marginalized outsider. Whilst they might engage in moments of resistant knowledge production, they do so as part of an active and mobile navigation of their context. Marcus argues that the para-sitical subject is 'ambiguously committed' to the 'exercises of social power' (2000, p. 5) at work in their institutional environment. Para-sitical collaborators are thus already engaged in an everyday practice of institutional critique, which can provide a rich ground for collaborative knowledge production.

The para-ethnographic approach proposed by Marcus has been developed by Estalella and Criado (2018), who further explore the methodological implications of imagining researcher-subject relations beyond a 'dichotomy between informant and observer' (p. 6). Estalella and Criado (2018) argue that the para-ethnographic modality transgresses much of the dominant ethnographic canon by challenging the necessity of researcher distance, instead advocating for a shift to 'a more engaged and interventionalist practice' (p. 2). Like Marcus, Estalella and Criado argue for the value of ethnographic engagements with more empowered counterparts. They suggest that these research encounters typically involve intense relationships, made up of fluctuating experiences of alignment and conflict. They contend that,

In these situations, the ethnographic method is re-equipped with new infrastructures, spaces of knowledge production, relationship forms and modes of representation...[the process] unsettles the observational convention of ethnography and reveals other epistemic practices in fieldwork. (Criado & Estalella, 2018, p. 10)

The para-ethnographic mode they describe involves reimagined practices and epistemologies which resist a detached understanding of observation, instead taking up two central practices: the recentring of experimentation and the conceptualisation of methods as devices.

Criado and Estalella (2018) position experimentation as a central tenet of a reimagined collaborative ethnographic mode. Their experimental practices take diverse forms (Criado & Estalella, 2018, p. 12), but all focus on a core method of activating interventions in the field, which 'sets the stage for the expansion of limits and possibilities' (p. 13). Criado and Estalella argue that the experimental, collaborative approach they propose is not intended to replace participant observation, but rather to sit alongside it, as they articulate:

The multiple and entangled relations between both ethnographic modalities: at times they alternate, at others experimentation replaces participant observation, and very often they coexist in intricate alliances. (Criado & Estalella, 2018, p. 13)



As Criado and Estalella identify, ethnography is generally ‘far removed from applying a recipe’ (2018, p. 3), instead requiring improvisation and flexibility. Nevertheless, they suggest that there is a ‘compelling canon’ (Criado & Estalella, 2018, p. 3) which demarcates certain ethnographic practices as acceptable, and labels others as too involved, or insufficiently rigorous. Their work suggests that resisting traditional research relations may involve disrupting traditional academic norms and protocols.

A revisioned collaborative ethnographic methodology interrogates the notion of methods as ever being neutral, instead reframing them as ‘devices’ (Criado & Estalella, 2018; John Law & Ruppert, 2013). This shift allows a focus instead on what methods *do* to generate certain knowledges and relationships, recognising that they always have a ‘social life’ (John Law & Ruppert, 2013) of their own which needs to be acknowledged as part of the research practice. Writing in the foreword to Estalella & Criado’s (2018) book, Marcus has argued that the most effective collaborative research devices are often found in collaborative acts of ‘making something together’ (2018, p. xiii) that emerge from the practices already active in a site. At the outset of my doctoral research, I was excited to encounter literatures which described collaborative, experimental research devices. These alternative ethnographic approaches seemed to offer a way to transcend the dominating and colonial research relations I sought to resist, and to forge more egalitarian epistemic relations with young people and workers at NC.

### Imagining collaborative ethnography

This doctoral research project sought modes of collaborative research that went beyond the hierarchical and extractive relations of traditional modes of ethnography. Instead, I wanted to develop methods that reflected the participatory and co-produced ethos that was espoused

by the youth collective at NC, and in which I was also deeply invested, as a gallery education practitioner and emerging researcher. The empirical focus of my doctoral research was on participation at and beyond NC. The methodological texts that I read to inform the research design helped me to interrogate the politics of representation and the power dynamics involved in doing ethnographic research. I was concerned about the relations that researching and representing might enact with my intended collaborators, by positioning them as the objects of study, rather than equal counterparts. Engaging seriously with critical perspectives on ethnography and representation seemed especially necessary in the context of research about a form of youth participation which itself sought to generate more democratic institutional relations. In context of the parallel histories of domination surrounding ethnography and museums, I sought more equal forms of knowledge production. However, the complexities I encountered were not easily resolvable. Indeed, any attempt to claim purity or resolution might arguably act as yet another move of authority and dominance (Pillow, 2003). Nevertheless, my engagement with critical methodological accounts raised my awareness of the complexity of ethnographic relations in my research planning and suggested the need for a carefully considered approach. I started to think about the ways in which the rise of ethical and epistemological concerns about ethnographic practice had stimulated the emergence of diverse alternative ethnographic modes. I started to think about how I might activate a more collaborative mode of knowledge production at NC, to counter the assertion of 'rhetorical distance' (Lassiter, 2005, p. 5) constructed by the binary relations of ethnographic authority.

As I continued planning my doctoral research, I sought a form of collaborative ethnography which recognised the active knowledge production practices already taking place at NC and

acknowledged 1525 members and gallery education staff as epistemic counterparts rather than as marginalised outsiders. My early experiences at NC and my professional background in gallery education suggested that staff and young people in the youth collective were likely variously complicit within and in conflict with idealised institutional rhetorics surrounding the gallery youth collective. As I approached the research, I believed that a methodology which built collaborative relations with young people and relevant workers at NC – mirroring the espoused dynamics of 1525 itself – might be able to generate new insights into the complexities of trying to enact participation in the gallery youth collective.

A more experimental and co-produced approach to research methods was germane to the concerns and practices active at NC, as a site of artistic knowledge production. Artists' epistemic practices often involve experimentation, unknowing, and emergent design (Cocker, 2013; Fisher & Fortnum, 2013). Drawing on the account provided by Criado and Estalella (2018), I understood that experimentation might offer different and complementary affordances to participant observation in my study, and that the ways in which these modes should be composed together might be emergent and unpredictable at the outset. I was also compelled by the contention made by Criado and Estalella (2018), that found devices could provide a powerful space for meaningful collaboration to emerge as a more equal and situated mode of knowledge production. The image of research based on existing practices resonated powerfully with the ethos of the 1525 youth collective, Ellie's desire to avoid disrupting the carefully constructed relational dynamics of the group, and my own orientation as a participatory arts practitioner. Indeed, Carolina Rito (my institutional supervisor at NC whilst I was developing the initial research design) has argued that:

It is worth noting how many cultural workers increasingly question the validation protocols of knowledge production in academia, which are based on the concepts of universal evidence, peer-review evaluation, and neutrality of the researcher. (Rito & Balaskas, 2020b, pp. 13-14)

Influenced by the literatures and my collaborators who worked at NC, I began to imagine a research design in which collaborative research devices would emerge from the existing practices active in 1525.

I approached the empirical research with the sense that this study might need to divert from traditional ethnographic approaches, but the details of how this experimentation would unfold remained necessarily unforecasted, as they demanded a degree of uncertainty. Nevertheless, there were several key implications for the study that had emerged from my critical reading of various methodological literatures. Methods texts provided some guiding principles at the outset of the empirical research, which offered some support for me as a novice researcher, who found myself enmeshed between a desire to embrace substantial methodological uncertainty and the research management protocols I encountered within the university, as I now explain.

#### Constructing a collaborative ethnographic methodology for this study

By contrast to the relationships on offer in many traditional forms of ethnography – which position participants as informants or subjects – this research demanded the construction of a more collaborative mode of knowledge production, in which gallery staff and 1525 members were understood as counterparts. Whilst the early planning with NC foregrounded the establishment of a strong partnership with the gallery as an institution and the development of relationships with relevant workers, collaboration with 1525 members was also a central

part of the research plans. I planned to spend time participating in 1525 sessions over several months, developing trust and relationships with young people and staff. I anticipated that young people's participation as co-researchers would emerge out of trusting relationships with group members, over time. I imagined that I would offer training and support to young participants which would enable them to become co-researchers, using tools and practices we found in the site to develop a shared plan to research their own experiences and those of their peers collaboratively, as a group.

To understand the wider affordances of participation in the youth collective in the lives of young people and gallery staff, I believed that it would be necessary to view the 1525 collective from a wider viewpoint than just the action taking place within the formal weekly meetings held at NC. Taking a 'multi-sited' (Marcus, 1995, 2011) approach led me to imagine the boundaries of the research as emergent from within the collaborative processes with the youth collective, rather than understanding the focus of the ethnography as a bounded location, or pre-defined entity. I anticipated that I might be invited into spaces at NC beyond 1525 meetings, and that I might be invited into spaces in young people's lives beyond their participation at the gallery. I hoped that these wider perspectives would provide more knowledge of the significance of 1525 in the organisational networks of the institution, and in young people's lives.

Marcus (2000) argued that the construction of para-sitical relations could produce knowledge of nuanced practices, and I hoped that adopting a collaborative and experimental approach to research design would create opportunities for this study to gain critical and complex insights into the affordances of the youth collective. Seeking to take up the reformed mode of

collaborative ethnography in this research had several key implications. I will outline each implication in turn, showing how the resultant methodological approach resonated with the aims and demands of this project. They are:

*a) Ontology and epistemology*

The twin research questions driving this study focussed on various relationalities at NC: the relations produced between 1525 members and staff in the collective, and the relations produced between me and my collaborators in the research. Focussing on relationships reflected an ontology which understood the world as processual and ever-unfinished. This metatheoretical standpoints had implications for the construction of research plans.

I approached the 1525 collective as set of practices, emerging through a networked constellation of people engaged in various relationships. My meta-theoretical framing for the research was thus based on a relational understanding of society. As Crossley puts it:

Society is constantly in the making, always becoming...it is wholly dependent upon what happens 'within' it for its identity, form and existence. Relational sociology...[refuses] to treat society as a solid object with fixed properties. It focuses upon the relational dynamics which make and remake societies continually. Society is not a 'thing' for the relationalist but rather a state of play within a vast web of ongoing interactions. (2011, p. 13)

A relational approach thus moves away from the question of what social structures "are" towards a focus on what they "do" in practice. Social action is considered to emerge from an interlinked network of relations, which continually move as researchers try to observe and understand them. A relational approach therefore departs from a notion of subjects as bounded, sovereign individuals that can be considered outside of their social context. Instead, people are understood to occupy differing positions within the network, which offer them different affordances and do different things to and for them. A relational ontology informed

my understanding of the gallery as an institution, and the status and significance of the methods employed.

My collaborative and experimental approach to this study shaped my understanding of the gallery, my position within the research, and the practice of research methods. I do not understand myself as radically separable from the gallery, and I do not conceptualise the gallery or the youth collective as pre-existing and stable “fields” that exist “out there”, ready to be “discovered” or “captured” by research methods. An ontological conception of the research site as a static “field” is entangled with colonial epistemologies and resisting this conceptualisation is therefore both a philosophical and ethical standpoint. Instead, I suggest that what unfolded in this research was shaped by a network of people and practices, including my attempts to enact research methods at NC; just as my emergence as a novice researcher was shaped by participating in the gallery and the research experiences. I acknowledge that me and my research methods were part of the relational network of NC and therefore position myself as a situated ‘modest witness’ (Haraway, 1988). In the rest of this text, I have thus avoided using the words “field” and “fieldwork” to refer to the research undertaken in this study, as these terms imply a binary epistemic stance at odds with my metatheoretical approach and ethics.

#### *b) Activating methods as devices: finding collaborations with epistemic counterparts*

A collaborative ethnographic approach constructs a more equal form of epistemic relations which enacts participants as counterparts rather than passive “others” to be represented (Estalella & Criado, 2018; Marcus, 2000), challenging the commonly-assumed epistemic hierarchy of “researcher” and “field”. In this study, the desire of gallery staff to resist being

positioned as a passive case, and the co-productive values and practices of 1525 demanded a careful interrogation of the power relations involved in knowledge production. I needed to not only do collaborative research, but also inquire into what the collaborative research practices themselves did in terms of the knowledge generated, and as a constituent part of the gallery.

I imagined that ethnographic research based on collaborative experimentation (Criado & Estalella, 2018) would emerge with young people and gallery staff through the found 'acts of making something together' that Marcus describes (2018, p. xiii), with 1525 members and associated gallery workers. I anticipated that the creative modes that could become research methods would easily be found within the existing practices of the group, which I knew included 'zine making, curation, cooking, event management, visual arts, and creative writing. I considered the creative practices at 1525 to be active sites of knowledge production and therefore as making collective members suitably engaged epistemic counterparts. As relationships in the group developed, I planned to offer interested young people the opportunity to create a co-research collective, which would use these creative devices to further investigate their own and their peers' experiences of the affordances of 1525. By collectively activating creative devices to produce knowledge about NC with young people, I anticipated producing new insights into what the group was and did for members, staff, and the gallery. I envisaged that creative experimental devices would sit alongside more traditional ethnographic methods, such as interviews and participant observation, to create a rich picture of the affordances and constraints of participation in the collective.



### *c) Practicing relational ethics*

In this study, I understood relationships as central to the research, and therefore positioned ethical considerations as a key part of the ongoing, everyday interactions with young people and the gallery staff. However, under university research oversight procedures, I was required to undertake an institutionalised ethical review process at the outset of the research, which demanded that I outline in detail a specific set of pre-planned methods in advance. Some have problematised such fixed oversight protocols in participatory research, arguing that, ‘collaboration and the conventions of research methodology are uneasy partners’ (Dodson, Piatelli, & Schmalzbauer, 2007, p. 823). Indeed, the demands of the doctoral ethical review process conflicted with my desire for the research activities to emerge through collaboration with members of 1525 and gallery staff.

The formal institutional ethical review process has been critiqued for implying that research ethics can be contained within a short initial stage. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) have referred to the ethical review process as a form of ‘procedural ethics’ (p. 263-264), arguing that this fails to account for the importance of an ongoing ethical practice in responding to the often-unpredictable interactions which emerge in the everyday experiences of qualitative research. Their emphasis on the significance of momentary social interactions in research emphasises that ongoing important ethical moments might be overlooked by the dominant construction in university oversight processes of ethics as a short-lived and bounded “stage” of the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Matthiesen, 2020). Positioning consent as an ongoing activity taking place throughout the study was, for me, an essential component of a collaborative methodology (Renold, Holland, Ross, & Hillman, 2008), as I knew that it would not be possible to gain fully informed consent at the outset for methods that later emerged from collaboration

with collective members. As well as an initial assessment of ethical risks in the formal review process, I sought to develop a sensitive dialogue in my relationships with young people and gallery workers, in which an ongoing process of continual, responsive ethical reflection was a crucial part of the emergent methodology.

*d) Critically engaging with the practice of reflexivity*

From the outset of the research, I believed that careful consideration of my position and practice would be important in this study, as I had a deeply rooted background in arts education. I knew that I was not a neutral researcher but rather brought considerable professional knowledges and dispositions, which had potential affordances for the research as well as presenting potential challenges. I hoped that my professional gallery education background would allow me to easily integrate at NC and support me in sensitively constructing insightful, close relationships with staff and young people. Nevertheless, my involved relationship with the research area demanded that I regularly interrogate my own understandings of and assumptions about gallery youth collectives to ensure that the research was able to challenge the simplistic narratives about them that were dominant in the sector. Ethnography has a tradition of considering relational and epistemic complexities through regular reflective practices on researcher positionality (Campbell & Lassiter, 2015). Reflective practice is often considered essential in the adoption of the double hermeneutic: the idea that the research insights always reflect the researcher's understanding of local understandings of practices (Mills & Morton, 2013). Taking up a critical, reflexive ethnographic practice seemed germane to the need for my position in the research to be actively considered throughout the process. However, the revisioned approach that I had developed for this study required me to engage more critically with the notion of reflexivity.

The more equal collaborative research mode that I sought in this project demanded a more involved researcher subjectivity. As Criado and Estalella (2018) have argued, an experimental collaborative approach is often in conflict with the traditional ethnographic canon which informs researcher training, which tends to advocate for a more detached relationship with participants. As Marcus (2000) has argued, collaborative research with epistemic counterparts requires a more critical form of reflexivity, in which the complexities of research experiences are made visible. However, Pillow (2003) has critiqued the doctrine of reflection in qualitative research, arguing that it has become complicit with continued reliance upon traditional notions of validity, truth, and essence. Pillow contends that reflection can, paradoxically, be activated to reiterate researcher dominance, when it is positioned as if it were able to undo the researcher's subjectivity through simply thinking hard enough. The desire for reflexive practices to resolve the situatedness of research accounts can, therefore, ultimately reinscribe and conceal the same old researcher authority that such practices claim to address. By contrast, the approach proposed by Marcus (2000) positions the unfolding of the research and various subjective experiences involved as an important part of the inquiry. Positioning the contradictions and conflict of the research process as important forms of knowledge production demands that researchers make themselves visible in their ethnographic accounts, sharing their emotions and affective experiences in their writing (Behar, 1996; Stewart, 2017). In this inquiry, I have sought to consider the shifting 'I who writes' (Thomson, 2018, p. 73), such that my own emergent subjectivity is also subject to consideration and critique. In writing this thesis, I have sought to make visible the contingency of the methodological entanglement from which knowledge emerged. My second, methodological research question responds to this demand.

*e) Generating a methodological research question: para-siting ethnography*

It was clear from the planning phases of this study that gallery staff wanted to be positioned as active collaborators in the process of knowledge production, so the pursuit of a more equal research relationship was central in the development of the doctoral partnership with NC. It seemed that gallery workers were far from disempowered or marginalised, as they were situated within a powerful, elite institution and had instigated the research by advocating for a more equal positioning. It seemed that, as Marcus (2000) described, they were subject to the 'same modest empowerments' as me. I also wondered if young people in 1525 could be understood similarly, given their positioning at NC which seemed to offer some of the privileges of insider status. From my early visits to 1525, it appeared that young collective members were indeed engaged in self-research about their own practices and their place at NC, for instance the generation of a group manifesto 'zine, which described the group as follows:

A space for critical engagement combined with invention and playfulness....Together, we move to reimagine the arts in a broadening experimental practice. (1525 Collective, 2019)

Discovering that 1525 members were critically reflecting on the affordances of their own activities and institutional position furthered my belief that they too might be suitable epistemic counterparts.

The development of a collaborative relationship with NC emerged in the context of Rito and Balaskas's work on cross-sector research partnerships between academia and the cultural sector (Rito & Balaskas, 2020a), which positioned cultural sector workers as already engaged in active knowledge production. Rito and Balaskas argue for more equal modes of co-research,

which embrace a broader definition of methods, beyond the image of the neutral researcher and scientific notions of validity. Their account – alongside my own professional experiences and early encounters at NC – compelled me to acknowledge NC workers and 1525 members as research counterparts who brought their own complex and ambivalent institutional positions and linked epistemic practices. Young people and gallery workers were not disempowered informants or marginalized yet resistant participants, but para-sites, as described by Marcus (2000) and Criado and Estalella (2018).

A revisioned collaborative para-ethnography offered more complex insights, primarily through a dialogic approach, which gave readers ‘access to the complicities, negotiations, limitations, as well as social qualities of the eliciting situation’ (Marcus, 2000, p. 3). Marcus thus suggested that exposing the conditions, practices, and conflicts involved in the collaborative research was an important part of generating powerful insights into the practices of more ambiguously positioned subjects. Marcus’s approach resonated with my emerging belief that my study ought to engage with the research relationships at play, as well as the relationships in the empirical site under study, if I wanted to produce a more layered and epistemically equal account of youth participation at NC. Thus, adopting a para-ethnographic position demanded the inclusion of a methodologically orientated research question:

- **What does participation in collaborative ethnographic methods based in close, enduring relationships do, for those involved, in the context of a gallery youth collective?**

*f) The practice of analysis*

Ethnography often blends inductive reasoning and theory to construct a cyclical approach to theory making (Madden, 2017). In this study, analysis and theory work were thus understood to be an ongoing process, taking place throughout the research. I did not plan to carry out a formal process of coding or thematising, as I was wary of the boundedness implied by such types of categorisation (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012b), and their potential to retrospectively generate a sense of researcher separation. Rather, I understood analysis to involve a process of ‘thinking with theory’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012a), in which theory promised to;

Get in the way: to offend and interrupt. We need theory to block the reproduction of the bleeding obvious, and thereby, hopefully, open new possibilities for thinking and doing. (MacLure, 2010, p. 277)

Following Maclure (2010), I imagined a theory-led analytical practice which valued not-knowing and disrupted taken-for-granted understandings. I understood critical reflection, writing, and dialogue with my collaborators and supervisors as central parts of the ongoing analysis, which would allow me to gradually construct collaborative interpretations. I understood writing as an important part of the analysis and in particular, the practices of ‘in-between writing’ (Coles & Thomson, 2016) to allow theory and practice to be iteratively entwined. Analysis has been described as a messy and unpredictable process:

Data analysis was putting different and unrelated data into relation with theory in unplanned and unexpected ways. Analysis was not simply coding data but the intermingling of data and theory after focused reading and copious amounts of writing. (Augustine, 2014, p. 7)

Reflecting on the methodological literatures, I imagined analysis as a somewhat emergent and unforeclosed practice, much like other elements of the research process.

Planning the research

The first year of the doctoral programme involved reviewing methodological and empirical literatures to inform the study and developing a more detailed plan for the proposed research. This stage of the research was to be assessed by the CoS paper at the end of the first year of the PhD, the success of which was necessary to allow me to progress in year two of the PhD and to begin the fieldwork proper. Alongside producing the CoS paper, I was required to make an application to the university's ethics committee, outlining the specific methods and "instruments" involved in the study. The practice of these twin research oversight protocols assumed (indeed, demanded) that the research made a predetermined offer to participants. As I prepared to write these papers as an aspiring collaborative researcher, I felt compromised. It seemed that specifying exactly what the collaborative research would involve was at odds with my aspirations for an emergent and co-produced methodology. However, these university protocols were mandatory and seemed to offer me little flexibility, so I proceeded as best I was able to within the limits of the process, attempting to hold these initial plans in my mind as simply one possibility for how the research might unfold.

In preparation for writing the CoS paper, I attended several 1525 meetings in spring 2019. I hoped that this initial period of interaction with the collective would offer insights into the culture of the group, help members and staff to develop an understanding of my research plans, and allow me to build rapport with members and Ellie. Through informal discussions about the group and the study, I intended that the voices of young people and staff would inform my initial plans, allowing this early iteration of the research to be somewhat co-produced. I imagined the early sessions would allow 1525 members to build an initial relationship with me, to help them decide whether they wanted to be involved as collaborators in the research. In these informal consultation and development sessions, I took

part in 1525 activities and – where there was interest – I talked to members about my aspirations for the PhD study and listened to their initial thoughts and ideas. After discussion with Ellie, I also led some activities in 1525 meetings to explore and discuss some of the practicalities and ethics of doing ethnography, believing that this would equip group members to make more informed choices about participation in the research.

In preparing the research plans for the CoS paper and ethics application, I drew upon a set of practitioner knowledges and investments generated by over a decade's experience in the arts education sector. My professional disposition shaped my expectations and hopes about participation, and informed what I imagined participatory ethnographic research might be and do. Prompted by my supervisor, Pat, I had written a manifesto whilst working on my master's dissertation about what I thought "good practice" with young people looked like. Pat had suggested that explicitly articulating my professional values might help me reflect on the ways in which they were informing my research position. In this text, I argued that:

For me, the didactic, hierarchical nature of many traditional educational approaches is inherently problematic, politically, pedagogically and artistically. The value that I see in youth participation in contemporary art comes from giving power and voice to young people. I believe that art made with young people in this way is likely to be much more innovative and exciting, as the process challenges traditional roles and can therefore enable new ways of thinking, seeing, making and being in the world. (Master's dissertation research journal, July 2017)

The above account reflects an idealised view of the potential of participation as a mode that can transcend – or even resolve – power and oppression through activating youth "voice"<sup>17</sup>.

My attachment to idealised participation framed the offer of the research that I imagined at the outset of the doctoral research.

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Eight for a detailed discussion of the complexities of youth voice and power. I use scare quotes here to indicate my ambivalence about the way the rhetoric of voice is used and imaginaries of youth agency it often invokes.



In the CoS paper, I proposed a methodological approach in which participatory research relations with young people and NC staff would develop in a linear way as the study progressed. I suggested that ethnographic immersion in the group’s meetings would allow greater trust to develop between me, young people, and gallery staff. Once trusting relationships were established, I planned a phased research methodology, in which 1525 members would be offered training as co-researchers, before agreeing and embarking upon a piece of research together:

My PhD study should invest in creating genuine epistemic collaborations. . .Drawing, in its phased approach, on Thomson and Gunter’s (2011) description of their work with young co-researchers, I currently envisage an iterative process of experimental methodological development. This will begin with a training session, in which I share some perspectives on ethnographic practice. Those young people interested in undertaking research roles will be work with me to develop some tactics for ethnographic interventions with the rest of the group to explore their experiences. The young people would trial these methods in practice, followed by some collaborative analysis and review of the methods and a re-activation of the second phase of methodological experimentation. (CoS paper, May 2019)

Date	Activities	
June 2019	Ethics application	
July 2019	Observe 1525	Research training workshop for young people & collaborative methods design
August 2019	Annual leave and OsloMet conference	
September 2019	Interviews with young people	Young people trial research methods in the group
October 2019	Observe 1525	Collaborative review and refine of methods and continue research
November 2019	Observe 1525	Collaborative research using refined methods
December 2019	Observe 1525	Collaborative interpretation of emergent findings with YPs
January 2020	Observe 1525	More collaborative research drawing on emergent findings
February 2020	Developing creative outcomes of research	

March 2020	Planning sharing/public event
April 2020	Share/public event for research outcomes

Figure 1: Timeline for the proposed research activities from the CoS paper (May 2019).

The process of writing and being assessed through the CoS paper called on me to construct an offer of young people’s participation in the research as a unified and consistent shared inquiry. I imagined that participatory ethnography would overcome epistemic oppression by successfully generating consensus in the inquiry, planning the methods with young people, undertaking a coherent, shared analysis, and creating a collective creative outcome that could publicly disseminate a set of collective “findings”<sup>18</sup>.

#### Answering the methodological question

Despite feeling compelled to create a tidy imagining of the research methodology to succeed in the CoS assessment process, the research was always more complex and expansive than a linear design suggested. Given the inter-related nature of my research questions and my emergent research design, I decided that it was not suitable to assign specific methods neatly into the two research questions. In preparing the CoS paper, I wrote that I found the idea of assigning methods to individual research questions to be ‘unhelpful and over-simplistic’. I wrote that:

The collaborative methods...will generate knowledge about 1525 in their content (RQ1), but their form will provide insight into the collaborative methods used (RQ2). Likewise, the reflection I will undertake through journals and blogs will contribute in its content to answering RQ2, as it will unpick the developing methods and their affordances. Nevertheless, this process of reflection will also involve consideration of the empirical data

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<sup>18</sup> Scare quotes are used here to indicate my discomfort with the language of research results as “findings”, as this suggests a pre-existing, fixed, and true world that the researcher discovers, and is thus aligned with an essentialist ontology and invokes a problematically colonial set of research relations.

and allow me to better answer RQ1 through an iterative process of reforming the methods.  
(CoS paper, May 2019)

In imagining the research, I drew on Ingold's (2015) theorisation of lines as process to conceptualise my methods as dynamic threads that would interweave over time, arguing that 'they are becoming, not being' (Ingold, 2015, p. 15). I imagined that making research records and journal reflections with theory during the research process would support me to attend to the collaborations involved in the unfolding of the study. At the outset of the empirical work, I understood that the inquiry might demand that I challenged traditional methodological conventions, but I did not yet fully understand how or why. I did, however, understand that keeping reflections on my experiences of the research was likely to be useful to answering both my research questions, so I began a process of regular reflexive journaling, alongside keeping records of the development of the research partnership with NC and my unfolding ethnographic experiences with 1525. Despite this range of record-keeping practices, it seemed very possible that there would be aspects of the research that would ultimately be important in answering the methodological question that were not apparent to me at the outset. I tried to stay open to the possibility of this emergence, despite the fact not-knowing was uncomfortable. Not-knowing was at odds with my experience of the university research protocols which, it seemed, sought to develop novice researchers' academic subjectivities by reproducing the certainties assured by researcher dominance. At the outset of this doctoral research, attempting ethnography beyond these dominant academic procedures and hierarchies was an unsettling prospect. The methodological results that will unfold in the rest of this thesis will include:

- Documenting the ethnographic and participatory methods enacted in this study.

- Reflecting on the complexities involved in attempting participatory ethnographic research methods and the affects invoked in the process.
- Explaining how my understanding of the research changed over the course of the study, in particular in the light of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, before embarking on the results chapters, I will, in Chapter Three, present the central theoretical lens through which I came to understand the research.

### 3. Theory: The cruel optimism of hospitality

This chapter presents a set of theoretical resources which enabled me to engage more critically with participation in the gallery youth collective and my own research practice. I will outline the overarching framework that I developed for this research, bringing together notions of the paradox of hospitality (Ahmed, 2012, 2020; Bulley, 2015; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) with the affective dynamic of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), which ultimately allowed me to attend to the contradictions of participation and the powerful investments which often serve to maintain and conceal them. The theoretical framework presented here also provides a partial rationale for the structure according to which the forthcoming results chapters will proceed: beginning with an analysis of the institutional offer made by NC, followed by an examination of the ways in which the various parts of this offer manifested and were taken up by young people and relevant gallery workers. As the results chapters unfold, I will explain and activate several other relevant theories and concepts within this overarching theoretical frame, which have allowed me to interpret various elements of 1525 and my participatory research practice therein. The unfolding of the argument about the offer of the gallery youth collective and its enactment in the results chapters will be interrupted – as my research was – by the arrival of Covid-19. In Chapter Six, I will discuss how the rupture to the rhythm of the research was able to overturn my optimistic investments in participation, opening me up to other ways of understanding participation in the gallery youth collective and my research. At that point, I will outline some other conceptual resources which provided new ways of understanding hospitality, before I go on to show the insights they provided into how hospitality manifested at NC – and in my research – beyond dominant binary understandings of host and guest, in the subsequent results chapters (Chapters Seven,

Eight and Nine). Whilst having two, shorter theoretical chapters may not conform to mainstream conventions of doctoral writing, this textual structure reflects the fundamental shift in my relation to participation underlying the insights of this doctorate, and the ongoing role that theory had in my research practice.

### Introducing hospitality

In this chapter, I outline how the paradoxical ethics of hospitality provided a guiding principle in this study for thinking about the complex practice of participation in gallery youth collectives and in research. Drawing on Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000), I suggest that the enactment of inclusive ideals is always contradictory. Approaching hospitality as a paradox affords an understanding of participation in which the ethical responsibility to be unconditionally welcoming to outsiders is shown to destabilise the position of the host and therefore to be at odds with the possibility of hosting (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). Considering the innate tensions that may be involved in enacting institutional hospitality, I suggest that it is important to attend in detail to how participation-as-hospitality is enacted and the relations it invokes. In the first part of this chapter, I will outline three challenges to the realisation of ethical hospitality: the welcome, sustaining hospitality, and regimes of oversight and audit, explaining in each instance how participation can, paradoxically, act to reproduce rather than challenge the dominant position of the host and the subordination of the guest.

To extend the framework of hospitality, I employ Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism (2011) to argue that widespread attachments to the ethical promise of unconditional hospitality have often hidden and sustained the complex power relations involved in enacting

participation. Cruel optimism is also germane to my own research story, which unfolds through this thesis as I answer the methodological research question (see Chapter Six and Chapter Nine for more on the cruel optimism of my investments in participation).

### The paradoxical ethics of hospitality

The concept of hospitality as an ethical, yet paradoxical, relational ideal offers a generative overarching framework for understanding the contradictions of participation. The theory of the paradox of hospitality is commonly drawn from Derrida's work, who holds that participation in an institution is based on welcoming an outsider in (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Still, 2005). As Still puts it:

Hospitality in theory and practice relates to crossing boundaries ('Come in, come in') or thresholds (even seuils de tolérance sometimes) including those between self and other, private and public, inside and outside, individual and collective, personal and political, emotional and rational, generous and economic (Still, 2005, p. 85)

Hospitality can be understood as the core of ethical responsibilities to outsiders. As Derrida puts it, 'ethics is hospitality' (Derrida, 2000, p. 17). However, he deconstructs the ethics of hosting and being hosted, laying out the complex politics involved in attempts to enact hospitality as an everyday practice.

Hospitality can be enacted in various ways, which Derrida divides into modes of conditional and unconditional hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). Forms of hospitality mandated by the law or reciprocal agreements are inherently conditional because they establish fixed limits to the host's responsibility to the guest. Derrida suggests that the conditional mode of hospitality is ethically insufficient, as it constrains the hospitable relation in the act of invoking it. As he puts it:

[It] is at once what makes hospitality possible, or the hospitable relationship to the foreigner possible, but by the same token what limits and prohibits it. (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 25).

Derrida suggests that a conditional mode of hospitality is inherently dominating. For instance, when guests arrive at the border, a conditional mode of hospitality means that their credentials must first be interrogated, to discover if they are eligible to enter. Derrida argues that the enactment of this conditional threshold is the 'first act of violence' (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 15) that guest is subjected to by the host, as it 'imposes on him translation into their own language' (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 15). He suggests that a more ethical, unconditional mode of hospitality would involve holding back from questioning the guest at the border in this way:

We have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other. Shouldn't we also submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, where he comes from etc.? Shouldn't we abstain from asking another these questions, which herald so many required conditions, and thus limits, to a hospitality thereby constrained and thereby confined into a law and a duty (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 135)

Derrida advocates for the possibility of unconditional welcoming of any guest, without limit. He argues that we should seek, 'unconditional hospitality that dispenses with law, duty or even politics' (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 135). The notion of unconditional hospitality as an ethical aim sits at the heart of Derrida's ethics of hospitality.

Whilst Derrida positions unconditional hospitality as an ethical ideal, he contends that there is an inherent paradox involved in attempts to enact this in practice. The host's ability to enact hosting is dependent on their position as 'master' (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 55) of their home. However, as the guest is an outsider, they have the potential to disrupt the host's position. According to Derrida:



The question of the foreigner is a question *of* the foreigner, addressed *to* the foreigner...As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question. But also the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question. (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 3)

Derrida contends that the disruptive capacity of the guest can undermine the potential for hospitality, writing that:

Anyone who encroaches on my “at home”, on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty at home, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage’ (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 55)

Striving for unlimited hospitality can thus ultimately generate hostility. When the host occupies a threatened and precarious position, they can become hostile towards the guest. Hospitality includes an ever-present risk of the host slipping into violence towards the guest, which Derrida describes as ‘an always possible perversion of the law of hospitality’ (Derrida, 2001, p. 17). Derrida’s conceptualisation of the ethics of hospitality thus involves both an ethical duty and the continual threat of violence, as the host’s responsibility to the guest can easily distort into modes of domination and control.

Addressing the paradox of hospitality in education, Claudia Ruitenberg argues that what is morally desirable is ‘necessarily impossible’ (Ruitenberg, 2016, p. 533), because, ‘all acts of hospitality are shown to rely on the absence of hospitality in some way’ (Ruitenberg, 2016, p. 533). She argues that an ethic of hospitality is inherently imperfect:

It might appear that hospitality in its perfect form would throw the doors open, leave all space to the guest, and put the host in the service of the guest in a complete reversal of the traditional hierarchy of the autonomous host and the dependent guest. But instead, such absolute and unconditional hospitality would no longer be hospitality. (Ruitenberg, 2016, p. 533)

The assertion that that pure, unlimited hospitality is impossible acknowledges that hospitable relations will always emerge as somewhat contradictory or compromised in practice.

Ruitenberg concludes that the ethical demand on educators is thus to continually strive to be as hospitable as possible, without allowing the host to collapse. Whilst unconditional hospitality may be unattainable, it remains at the heart of ethics. As Derrida writes:

[A] politics that does not maintain a reference to this principle of unconditional hospitality is a politics that loses its reference to justice. (2002, p. 101)

His analysis of the paradox of hospitality suggests that the most ethical approach to participation is to notice the challenges presented by its contradictions and to attend to them, to minimise the potential for violence and harm to the guest.

### *The welcome*

The paradox of hospitality demonstrates that institutional inclusion may enact oppression in subtle ways, that are quite at odds with the surface-level offer. Sara Ahmed contends that the act of extending a welcome can act to reproduce the host as normal, at home, and therefore dominant, situating the guest as “other” from the start. She explains:

To be made welcome by an explicit act of address works to reveal what is implicit: that those who are already given a place are the ones who are welcoming rather than the welcomed, the ones who are in the structural position of hosts. (Ahmed, 2012, p. 42)

Ahmed argues that the welcome can set up a hospitable relationship which demands that the guest is fully integrated into the host institution. Despite the domination of institutional assimilation, the presence of the guest is used to justify and celebrate the host’s righteousness. As she puts it:

Conditional hospitality is when you are welcomed on condition you give something back. The multicultural nation functions this way: the nation offers hospitality and even love to would-be citizens as long as they return this hospitality by integrating, or by identifying with the nation...People of color are welcomed *on condition* they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organisational culture. Or by “being” diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate that diversity’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 43)

Although the act of extending a welcome to outsiders may ultimately affirm the host's dominant position, the process of assimilating guests also creates a problem for the host. The host's dominant position is based on their being able to show themselves as hospitable, which creates an ongoing need for more outsiders to become guests on whom they can perform hosting. A cycle of hospitality and domination can emerge, made up of a welcome from the host, a dominating process of assimilation of the guests, and a compulsion to generate more guests, producing the appearance of the host as ethical, egalitarian, and porous, without ever disrupting their underlying dominance.

Ahmed has argued that institutional diversity work enacts a binary of host and guest which makes certain people at home and others strangers:

The logic exercised here is one of "welcoming", premised on a distinction between the institution as host and the potential employee as guest. To be made welcome by an explicit act of address works to reveal what is implicit: that those who are already given a place are *the ones who are welcoming* rather than the welcomed, the ones who are in the structural position of hosts (Ahmed, 2012, p. 42)

Whilst here Ahmed is discussing institutional hospitality specifically in terms of diversity and inclusion initiatives in worker recruitment, the conflicting logic she describes likely also applies to wider relations of hospitality, such as those of participation. Ahmed identifies the way in which binary relations of host and guest can serve to reproduce hierarchies and paradoxically "other" those that are supposedly the subjects of inclusion (Ahmed, 2012, 2014). In particular, she describes how inclusion and diversity activities can enact racialised hostility in tacit and affective ways, such that 'whiteness is often experienced as an atmosphere' (2014). Racialised atmospheres, as Ahmed describes them, are transindividual but far from universal:

An atmosphere can be how we inhabit the same room but be in a different world. Some might be more attuned to some things, some bodies, some sounds. Attunement helps us to explain not only what we pick up but what we do not pick up... A stranger is created, I have suggested, as the body to whom we are not attuned. When a body to whom we are not attuned arrives, it can create a disturbance. (2014)

According to Ahmed, affective atmospheres and attunement have an important role in how the relations of hospitality are experienced. Zembylas (2020) has similarly argued that hospitality is enacted through atmospheres, suggesting that it should be understood as a 'spatial and affective relational practice' (p. 43).

Elsewhere, Ahmed has activated notions of 'queer use' to consider the relational dynamics involved in attempts to make institutions more inclusive, arguing that 'those deemed strangers can be welcomed as a way of *not* modifying an existing arrangement' (Ahmed, 2020). Following Ahmed, it is reasonable to conclude that a lack of change in institutional power relations might be disguised by a mode of hospitality in which a host repeatedly performs and idealises participation, to disguise the underlying dominating relations and justify and sustain their own elite position. The superficial performance of inclusion and diversity create an optimistic allure to institutional participation, without the 'world dismantling effort' needed to stop 'what usually happens from happening' (Ahmed, 2020). My research seeks to understand what participation in galleries and research does in practice. Engaging with Ahmed's account of the complex paradoxes involved in hospitality, and the role that atmospheres might have in their enactment, allowed me to better attend to the power relations potentially involved in the practice of participation in the gallery youth collective and research, and thus offered useful affordances to this study.

Whilst cultural institutions often engage publicly with matters of social justice, the underlying relational dynamics that they make available do not always match up with these ideas (Graham, 2017c). Graham (2017c) has used the term ‘thinking without conditions’ to describe the way in which the activation of radical ideas has allowed elite art institutions to appear ethically virtuous to wider publics whilst continuing to enact violent hierarchies within their organisations. Not all forms of participation are equal, as Podd suggests:

One needs to be clear whether the ultimate aim of participation is enfranchisement i.e. helping young people make the most of opportunities available to them, under existing systems and structures? Or is it about ‘empowerment’ which recognises that young people may demand to change the current systems and structure? (Podd, 2012, p. 24)

Empowering young people as participants can present a potential challenge to hosting institutions, as young people may subsequently challenge the position of the host (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). The gallery youth collective and my research both sought to sustain young people’s participation over time, and to engage them in making decisions about the terms of their involvement, creating a set of conditions under which the threat to the host was likely to increase.

### *Sustaining hospitality*

The youth collective is often unique within gallery learning departments in offering a sustained mode of participation to young people. Bulley (2015) suggests that, whilst Derrida examines the ethics of the ‘the step of hospitality’ (2000, p. 75) at length, he fails to thoroughly consider how the relations of hospitality develop over time. Bulley argues that sustained hospitality poses particular ethical challenges, writing:

[W]hat becomes of the power of hospitality once this threshold is crossed? Once inside, both host and guest are destabilized. Both will perhaps seek in various ways to assert their sovereignty, but neither can successfully do so without *ending* the hospitable relation and casting the other out (2015, p. 10)

He contends that hospitality is a 'spatial, relational practice with affective dimensions' (2015, p. 5), which is activated to constitute the host and the boundaries of their home, in opposition to the guest and the world outside. Like Derrida, Bulley argues that unconditional hospitality potentially puts the position of the host in question, unsettling the possibility of hospitality (2015, p. 9). However, Bulley's account goes further, suggesting that attempts to sustain prolonged hospitality – as demanded by ongoing participatory relations – amplify the threat to the host's sovereignty and therefore escalate the host's desire for domination and control, to maintain their position. According to him, ongoing participation can involve a complex pattern of practices that serve to manage, reproduce, and silence the underlying tensions, in the service of maintaining the host's dominance, including seemingly oppositional relations of 'care and control' (Bulley, 2015, p. 14), which can enact 'modalities of violence and power' on the guest (Bulley, 2015, p. 10). Paradoxically, modes of institutional oversight which are often claimed to minimise these relations of domination can be part of their reproduction and concealment.

#### *The problem of regimes of audit*

Regimes of audit are frequently central to the practice of both gallery and research participation programmes, under the rationale that monitoring and reviewing participation ensures ethical relations and the effectiveness of programmes (Belfiore, 2007; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Pels, 2000; Power, 1999). However, Derrida (2000) suggests that practices of oversight are, in fact, likely to undermine the possibility of ethical hospitality. In Derrida's account, privacy and sovereignty over the home is crucial to the emergence of ethical hospitality. Considering the example of phone tapping, he argues that surveillance

technologies destabilise the threshold between the private and public spheres, heightening hostility, and undermining hospitality:

Nowadays, a reflection on hospitality presupposes, among other things, the possibility of a rigorous delimitation of thresholds or frontiers: between the familial and the non-familial, between the foreign and the non-foreign, between the citizen and the non-citizen, but first of all between the private and the public (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, pp. 48-49)

Derrida contends that the delineation between public and private spheres is crucial in the capacity for hospitality: oversight can be damaging to the production of a private home from which hospitality can be extended. He suggests that the use of surveillance technologies violate the host's home, amplifying hostility to guests, arguing that:

From the moment when a public authority, a State, this or that State power, gives itself or is recognised as having the right to control, monitor, ban exchanges that those doing the exchanging deem private but that the State can intercept since these private exchanges cross public space and become available there, then every element of hospitality gets disrupted...the intervention of the State becomes a violation of the inviolable, in the place where inviolable immunity remains the condition of hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 51)

Derrida contends that when private, intimate interactions cross a public space and become subject to scrutiny, hospitality is seriously damaged:

[O]ne can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one's own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one's own hospitality. (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 53)

Understanding oversight and surveillance as at odds with the possibility of ethical hospitality has wide-reaching consequences for participation work.

Institutional procedures of oversight in both gallery and university participatory activities – which often claim to ensure ethics and the safety of participants – frequently require both gallery educators and researchers to pre-imagine and risk assess forthcoming relational encounters (Pels, 2000). As Pels (2000) suggests, adherence to a pre-determined, fixed set of

rules around how relationships should proceed takes the emphasis off the negotiation of 'emergent ethics' (p163) *with* participants, and is focussed on allowing practitioners to perform themselves as moral and low-risk to their sponsors. As discussed in Chapter Two, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argue for the importance of 'ethics in practice', which, whilst it can be informed by the reflections demanded by 'procedural ethics', will always exceed our imaginings. Further, risk assessing participation in advance demands that practitioners pre-imagine the unfolding of relations in advance, which seems likely to limit the possibility of programmes being developed collaboratively with participants. Once programmes begin, practitioners in both galleries and universities are often called upon to constantly track and seek to "capture" the value of participatory work in terms of "impact", which frames value in terms of measurable change according to pre-defined goals (Belfiore, 2012; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; de St Croix, 2018). The positioning of participants as the subjects of impact frames their development as a linear transformation governed by the intervention of an elite host, which again seems likely to constrain hospitality, by constructing their subordinate positioning through a deficit lens, as the passive subjects of improvement (Friere, 1972). As Derrida (2000) suggests, regimes of audit demand that complex relational experiences are recorded and extracted to transform them into "data", making the private public, which can become a mode of violence which limits the possibility of more equal and ethical relations. An understanding of how regimes of audit might constrain the emergence of ethical hospitality informed my research, leading me to examine how the embeddedness of practices of audit shaped participation in the gallery youth collective and my research.

The ethics of hospitality as explained above offer a powerful framework for understanding the relational contradictions underlying participation. The paradox of hospitality articulated by



Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) troubles the idea of participation as a ‘positive, unquestionable means of engagement’ (Miessen, 2010, p. 60), instead suggesting that whilst an openness to outsiders may be an ethical goal, the practice of participation necessarily involves a complex landscape of power relations, with particular sticking points emerging in the welcome, attempts to sustain hospitality over time, and through regimes of oversight and audit. In this research, I activate concepts of hospitality as theoretical tools which allow me to consider in detail the ways in which the enactment of participation invokes a contradictory and complicit set of relations. Expanding notions of hospitality with concepts drawn from affect theory allows me to further examine how the contradictions of participation-as-hospitality are maintained and silenced, as I will discuss further in the next part of this chapter.

#### The cruel optimism of hospitality

Attempts to initiate and sustain the paradoxical relations of hospitality are complex and invoke often-unconscious affective forces, such as fears and desires. As discussed in Chapter Two, notions of affect offer a rich theoretical resource which grapples with such forces, and therefore provide a generative tool with which to examine participation. In this section, I will explain Lauren Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism (2011), and outline how and why I use it to extend my overarching conceptual framework of hospitality. Finally, I will consider the implications of combining cruel optimism and hospitality for my research about participation.

Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism (2011) draws on affect theory to explore how people invest in ‘genres’ (p. 6) of relating in the world. Berlant argues that attachments are often based on ‘a cluster of promises’ (Berlant, 2011, p. 23) which invoke an optimistic orientation. Whilst an optimistic attachment may not always feel positive – in fact it can ‘feel like anything’ (Berlant,

2011, p. 2) – it acts to sustain an investment in things which might, ultimately, be detrimental. As Berlant puts it, cruel optimism is a relation in which ‘something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing’ (2011, p. 1). Cruelly optimistic attachments are often sustained through the promise of future transformation:

The affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of the fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. (Berlant, 2011, p. 2)

The alluring promise of cruel optimism allows commitments in the world to be sustained, despite evidence of their repeated failures. However, Berlant argues that, over time, an affective ‘impasse’ (2011, p. 4) can emerge from the contradictions between optimistic attachments and the realities of their failures to gain ‘traction in the world’ (2011, p. 3), whereby people frantically seek ways to maintain their investments, in the face of evidence of their failures. Under the precarious conditions of contemporary life, they argue that the impasse is:

[T]he space where the urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again, without assurances of futurity (Berlant, 2011, p. 200)

In this research, it seemed that optimistic attachments might potentially have an important role in how participatory relations unfolded, and the ways in which the tensions involved were maintained and concealed (Bell & Pahl, 2018; Kill, 2022; Zembylas, 2020).

Participation-as-hospitality often invokes a powerfully hopeful future orientation (Kill, 2022). As outlined in Chapter One, in contemporary art galleries, participation has been positioned as the route through which institutional ethics can be ensured, by overcoming the elite position of the gallery and resolving institutional domination. As discussed in Chapter Two, in research, participation has been positioned as a way of overcoming the oppressive, colonial

roots of ethnography, by positioning those studied as collaborators, participants, or even ‘epistemic counterparts’ (Criado & Estalella, 2018; Marcus, 2000) rather than passive subjects. In this doctorate, Berlant’s (2011) notion of cruel optimism provided a theoretical tool with which to attend critically to the idealised nature of dominant narratives about participation in both gallery youth collectives and my research methods. However, my own powerful attachments to participation as an idealised, unconditional mode of hospitality meant that I was unable to engage fully with the complexities involved in its affective function at the outset of the research. It would take the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic – and the suspension of both the gallery youth collective and my doctoral research – for me to fully sever my own ‘iron-clad investments’ (Stewart, 2017, p. 195) in idealised notions of participation, as I discuss in Chapter Six and Chapter Nine. However, it was necessary to introduce the idea of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) here to allow me to discuss, in the forthcoming results chapters, how it shaped what participation did in the gallery youth collective and my own research practice.

#### Hospitable participation beyond blind hope: implications for this research

Approaching young people’s participation as hospitality invokes a complex and ethically ambiguous set of relations. The “turn” to youth participation emerged, in part, as a reaction to children being ignored, exploited, and positioned as passive objects by adults (Cockburn, 2005; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hart, 1992, 2008), and indeed, ‘co-production has an important role to play in rethinking and remaking the world for the better’ (Bell & Pahl, 2018, p. 105). However, participatory approaches cannot be universally assumed to lead to positive ethical outcomes, and notions of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) and hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) suggest that participation might potentially allow the host to celebrate

their own righteousness, rather than actually leading to meaningful change (Ahmed, 2012, 2020). As Bell and Pahl highlight:

This is an approach that demands constant attention to shifting relations of power and domination. (2018, p. 106)

They suggest that co-produced approaches have, at times, offered powerful tactics in striving for social justice goals. However, they show that co-production can easily become complicit with dominant social forces, such as the reproduction of existing hierarchies and the logic of capital, arguing that neoliberalism can easily ‘capture and domesticate co-production’s utopian potential’ (Bell & Pahl, 2018, p. 107). To maximise the ethical potential of participation, they argue that:

A utopian co-production must structure itself around a critical understanding of ‘hope’ rather than a ‘confident’ or ‘optimistic’ faith in co-production. (Bell & Pahl, 2018, p. 108).

Taking up Bell and Pahl’s (2018) provocation, I seek to critically engage with the hopeful affects surrounding participation in my attempts to examine and enact it in this research. Employing the notions of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) and hospitality (Ahmed, 2012; Bulley, 2015; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) enables careful and critical attention to the enactment of participation-as-hospitality, both in 1525 and my own research methods.

Taking up the paradox of hospitality in my theoretical framework suggested that welcoming in young people as guests – in both the gallery youth collective and my research – was likely a complex and contradictory phenomenon, which might well involve domination and control as well as the potential empowerment and liberation that are often publicly espoused. Blending hospitality with the notion of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) suggested a need to attend to the powerful attachments that structured the affects surrounding participation, carefully

examining what participatory relations actually did, both with and beneath the dominant, idealised rhetoric, which promised institutional reform and a resolution to oppression.

As I began my empirical research, I was not fully aware of the contradictions potentially involved in doing participatory research, because I too was heavily invested in hopeful imaginaries of participation as a reforming force that could transcend or resolve power. In the rest of this thesis, I will demonstrate how my optimistic attachments in participation were disrupted, enabling me to attend to and trouble a simplistically idealised understanding of participation, in which space for understandings of the value of participation – both in the gallery youth collective and my research methods – can emerge ‘against’ and ‘beyond’ (Bell & Pahl, 2018) neoliberal notions of participation as individual voice, impact, and top-down transformation, which serve to reproduce the same hierarchies they claim to challenge.

## Interlude 2: Records of 1525 and research activities

In this interlude, I briefly pause the account of the research to present details of the youth collective and the research. Firstly, Figure 2 lays out the 1525 sessions that I attended as part of this research and summarises the activities involved in each one, alongside detailing the co-research meetings that took place and brief information about what they involved. I have chosen to present the activities of the group and my research activities together in one chart, as a reflection of my meta-theoretical stance, within which I do not understand the research and group activities as two, radically separable realms but rather as entangled and inseparable.

**Figure 2: 1525 sessions attended and co-research activities held with 1525 and gallery staff**

Date	Time	Who	What
17.04.2019	5-7pm	1525	Cooking mushroom risotto, planning exhibition closing party, folding zines.
01.05.2019	5-7pm	1525	CK leading a discussion of ethnography and drawing activities about observation, uncertainty, collaboration.
15.05.2019	5-7pm	1525	Artist workshop: web of yarn to make installation between the group.
26.06.2019	5-7pm	1525	Photos for Nottingham post, planning Lis Rhodes closing party.
15.07.2019	6-8pm	1525	Poetry cut-up session with an artist.
31.07.2019	5-7pm	1525	Planning Lis Rhodes exhibition party including making posters. Planning NC 10th birthday party: discussion of possible activities.
21.08.2019	4-4.45	Ellie	Discussion of research plans, her evaluation needs and possible value of the research to her/NC/funders.
21.08.2019	4.45-5.10	Maura	Chat about Paul Hamlyn Foundation project plans.
21.08.2019	5-7pm	1525	Making vegetable dumplings.
03.09.2019	5-7pm	1525	Live self-portraits with Jude & interviews for report with Ellie.
11.09.2019	5-7pm	1525 and Arts Council staff	Arts council consultation for new 10yr strategy.
18.09.2019	5-7pm	1525	Making Thai green curry and developing a personal statement.

23.9.2019	12.- 2.30pm	Supervisors, Maura and Ellie	Staff conversation about the research.
25.9.2019	5-7pm	1525	Viewing Bauhaus exhibition "Still Undead" and discussing.
26.9.2019	4.30-6.30	Learning Preview	Talk in studio, look at resources, visit exhibition with associate artists.
30.9.2019	12-1pm	Ellie	Meeting about research and planning open workshop in November.
2.10.2019	5-7pm	1525	Country X <sup>19</sup> protest discussion with Callum & social session with Anna cooking sadza.
9.10.2019	1-2pm	Ellie	Discussing meeting about planned events and research.
16.10.2019	5-7pm	1525	Sam (associate artist) leading experiments in gallery and discussion of her practice and objects.
23.10.2019	5-7pm	1525	Alice (associate artist) and Lucy (intern) facilitating session on Country X protest curation and cataloguing.
30.10.2019	5-7pm	1525	Alice and Lucy facilitating the group in making the display about Country X protests and putting vitrine on, finishing catalogue.
6.11.2019	5-7pm	1525	Meeting in gallery zero, discussion of para-site approach and spatial tensions
20.11.2019	4-5pm	Ellie and Maura	Meeting about paperwork and data.
20.11.19	5-7pm	1525	CK cooking soup and young people planning closing party.
27.11.2019	5-7pm	1525	Planning closing party for Still Undead exhibition in meeting room.
30.11.2019	3-7pm	Open group of young people	CK delivering a session on creative methods.
02.12.2019	1-4pm	Engage regional group	CK delivering a session on creative methods.
04.12.2019	5-7pm	1525	Ugly Art Club: mono printing with Callum leading.
05.12.2019	5-7pm	1525 members and open	Personal statement session.
04.01.2020	5-10pm	1525 public event	Urgh...Nott another party! Event in Café with costumes and character sheets.
08.01.2020	5-7pm	1525	Word association and unmapping.

<sup>19</sup> In this table, and elsewhere in this public version of this thesis, I have anonymised the country that was the subject of the exhibition by referring to it as Country X, for ethical reasons relating to the potential political sensitivity of this topic.

15.01.2020	4-5pm	New 1525 members	Observing new member inductions.
15.01.2020	5-7pm	1525	Vision boards activity.
29.01.2020	5-7pm	1525	Film screening.
05.02.2020	3-4pm	Lucy	Initial co-research meeting.
05.02.2020	4-5pm	Siobhan and Mia	Initial co-research meeting.
05.02.2020	5-7pm	1525	Cooking chilli and artist crit with professional photographer documenting the session.
07.02.2020	5-6pm	Public event	Exhibition opening with Jay, Gudrun and Siobhan working.
12.02.2020	3.30-4pm	Ellie	Discussion of exhibition opening, film screening, cynicism about social claims for youth initiatives.
12.02.2020	4-5pm	Siobhan and Mia	Talking about interview methods and ethics.
12.02.2020	5-7pm	1525	Visiting NC's new exhibitions (Denzil Forrester, Sung Liu and Diane Simpson) and discussing content.
19.2.2020	4-5pm	Co-research meeting	Siobhan, Mia, Gudrun, Jay discussing possible methods, ethics and research ideas.
26.2.2020	4-5pm	Co-research meeting	No attendance.
26.2.2020	5-7pm	1525	Arts council England funding application training meeting.
26.2.2020	7-10.30	Lucy	Cassie attending Lucy's poetry gig at a local venue.
4.3.2020	5-7pm	1525	Visiting Children's Society popup exhibition (hire) about childhood today and discussion of issues arising, including chair swapping speaking as a group exercise.
5.3.2020	1-2.30pm	Co-research meeting	Helen and Gudrun - planning photography of objects research idea.
11.3.2020	5-7pm	Ugly art club	1525 member facilitating cardboard sculpture activity.
18.3.2020	3-4.30pm	Co-research meeting (online)	Discussion of change to online, implications of covid for the research and 1525.
18.3.2020	5-6pm	1525 meeting (online)	First Zoom session - discussion of the change and planning online activities.
27.3.2020	3-4pm	Co-research meeting	Creative writing as research method trial workshop. Held over Zoom, led by Lucy.
1.4.2020	3-4pm	Co-research meeting	Planning photography as creative method workshop with Gudrun.
2.4.2020	5-7pm	1525 meeting (online)	Bob Ross video and cut up poetry activity.



7.4.2020	10-11am	Co-research meeting	Planning discussion of possible creative methods activities with other 1525 members.
7.4.2020	3-4pm	Co-research meeting	Desk photography creative method trial led by Gudrun
8.4.2020	5-7pm	1525 meeting	Final Zoom session. Ellie explaining being furloughed and pausing regular meetings.
12.5.2020	2-3pm	Co-research meeting	Re-establishing principles and plans as agreed with NC staff in response to Covid pandemic restrictions.
19.5.2020	2-3pm	Co-research meeting	Low attendance so not possible to do much.
26.5.2020	2-3pm	Co-research meeting	Low attendance, decided to stop meeting due to low engagement.

Figure 3 documents the interviews that I carried out with gallery workers and young people towards the end of the research period.

**Figure 3: Interviews undertaken**

Date	Time	Who
12.5.20	12pm -1pm	Aria
12.5.20	1pm-2pm	Lady D
18.5.20	1pm-2pm	Emilio
18.5.20	3.30pm-4.30pm	Jude
19.5.20	3pm-4.15pm	Jay
26.5.20	1pm-2pm	Alex
26.5.20	3pm-4.15pm	Shania
2.6.20	10am-11am	Callum
29.6.20	10am-11.20am	Anna
8.7.20	10am-11.45am	Ellie (session 1)
16.7.20	2pm-3.30pm	Ellie (session 2)
28.7.20	4pm-5.30pm	Maura
10.7.20	1.30pm-2.45pm	Alice
16.7.20	10.30am-11.30am	Sam

## 4. The offer of the gallery youth collective

### Mapping this chapter

NC instigated relationships with young people by inviting them to participate in the youth collective in certain ways, shaping and constraining the hospitable relations that could be enacted in the programme and invoking a particular set of affects around the programme. In this chapter, I present an analysis of the complex and contradictory offer that NC made to young people. The offer was made at various levels, including an explicit offer performed at the surface level, an affective offer which invoked wider sentiments about the arts, and an implicit offer by which a set of relations were made available to young people. In this chapter, I will navigate across the various modes in which NC made the offer to young people, including:

- **Space:** the built environment of NC.
- **Place:** narratives and affects surrounding the gallery and its position within the city.
- **Media:** how the collective was communicated on the gallery's website<sup>20</sup>, to recruit young people to the programme.
- **Organised relational encounters:** the induction meeting which acted as the threshold of young people's membership of 1525.

The empirical content presented in this chapter comes from multiple sources, including:

- **Research records** I made from participant observation of induction meetings between Ellie and new members of 1525.
- **Institutional documents**, including relevant parts of NC's website, social media, the funding bids, and the manifesto 'zine of 1525.

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<sup>20</sup> The gallery used multiple print and online media to recruit young people to the collective, but I have chosen to focus on the website as an example of the language and imagery used across the different channels.

- **Public documents about NC**, including newspaper articles and books.
- **Interviews** I carried out with gallery workers about the youth programme.

#### The elements of the offer

On the ‘Young People & 1525’ page of NC’s website, an introductory text described the youth collective as follows:

Nottingham Contemporary's programme for 15–25 year olds is for anyone wanting to be creative, gain experiences, take part in social events or get your voice heard about the things that matter. (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b)

The initial statement explicitly proposed the group as a radically open offer, ‘for anyone’, but – as the rest of the sentence shows – the ‘anyone’ addressed by the welcome to participate was implicitly limited and specific. In this chapter, I will show how the figure of the imagined youth collective participant was constructed through three main elements of the offer, which were present even in the brief initial statement about the collective on NC’s website:

- ‘Be creative’ and ‘gain experiences’ indicated the collective was presented as **a route into work in the arts**.
- ‘Take part in social events’ suggested the collective was positioned as **a caring community**.
- ‘Get your voice heard about the things that matter’ showed that the collective was understood as offering **youth voice** and agency at, and beyond, NC.

In this chapter, I mobilise Ahmed’s (2012) work on the implicit paradoxes of institutional inclusion as a form of hospitality to explore the three elements of the offer made to young people at NC. As she argues,

‘[T]o be made welcome by an explicit act of address works to reveal what is implicit: that those who are already given a place are *the ones who are welcoming* rather than welcomed, the ones who are in the structural position of hosts’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 42)

Activating my theoretical framework of the cruel optimism of hospitality, I also draw on Berlant's notion of cruel optimism (2011) in this chapter, to discuss how the dominant offer of the youth collective mobilised and reinforced young people's optimistic investments in the arts and concealed the contradictions and power relations involved in institutional participation.

As I discuss the three elements of the explicit offer made by NC – routes into work in the arts, a caring community, and youth voice – I show that they each rested on a specific set of ideas about the value of young people's arts participation, which often relied on conflicting logics about the underlying hospitable relations, and what participation could (and should) do for those involved. Overall, this chapter examines how the offer of the gallery youth collective lay the ground for a contradictory set of hospitable relations, before the subsequent chapters explore how young people and gallery workers took up and responded to the offer.

#### a) Routes into work in the arts

The gallery youth collective at NC was dominantly positioned as a source of valuable skills, networks, and knowledges which could support young people to gain careers in the arts. The offer of 1525 as a professional development opportunity involved an explicit claim that participation provided increased employability. The offer of the group as routes into work in the arts activated a wider set of positive narratives and affects surrounding the arts, which made participation in the collective an exciting and desirable prospect for many young people. However, producing the offer of participation in 1525 in terms of the accumulation of

employability resources<sup>21</sup> relied on a banking notion of educational relations (Friere, 1972), which implicitly proposed a cultural hierarchy in which young people were passive beneficiaries of participation, an approach quite at odds with the idea of an egalitarian, co-produced collective. In this section, I will:

- i. Describe how and where NC made the offer of 1525 in terms of routes into work in the arts to young people, explaining how this called to young people and invited them to take part in the youth collective in specific ways.
- ii. Explore how NC acted as a powerful object of desire in Nottingham, considering both the spatiality and aesthetics of its building, and its place in a wider social context of optimism about the arts.
- iii. Discuss how the temporalities of arts funding and audit practices influenced the manifestation of the gallery youth collective in terms of routes into work in the arts, shaping the programme and imaginaries of participatory relationships between young people and the gallery.
- iv. Analyse how the offer of the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts generated a specific set of implicit relations between young people and the gallery, using the lens of the cruel optimism of hospitality to highlight the tensions involved.

*i) Recruitment: the offer of 1525 as a route into work in the arts on NC's website*

The gallery's initial statement on their website about the offer of the 1525 collective first defined it as 'for anyone wanting to be creative, gain experiences' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b). The welcome to 1525 thus constructed participation according to the logic of the

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<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, the idea of this accumulation of cultural resources might be approached through a Bourdieusian notion of 'capitals', although I have chosen not to use this framework in this thesis.

group as a route into work in the arts. Firstly, the idea that the group was for anyone who wanted to 'be creative' called to young people who associated with a creative disposition, signalling that membership of the group was specifically for young people who identified as so-called emerging "creatives". Angela McRobbie's book entitled 'Be Creative' (2016) describes the compulsion for young people – and particularly women – to take up careers in the arts sectors. She illustrates how the positive and aspirational construction of work in the cultural industries as "creative" has linked it to notions of freedom, personal fulfilment, and vocation, concealing the often-exploitative nature of arts labour markets. The construction of the offer of 1525 as for 'anyone wanting to be creative' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b) invoked and reinforced these wider social narratives. The offer of 1525 thus hailed to young people who were already invested in a set of wider positive affects around the arts and creative work. The gallery's statement about who 1525 was for also constructed an imagined participant as arts-orientated, compelling young people who wanted to join the group to take up this investment and relate to themselves as future arts workers.

The offer of 1525 as a way to 'gain experiences' was superficially quite vague but suggested an underlying notion of professional experience and employability. As McRobbie asserts, 'there is...the need to constantly enhance their CVs in order to have any chance in the job market' (p. 2). The idea of youth as a period of acquisition of professional skills, experience, and networks is prevalent within neoliberal ideas of the ideal worker (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007), which have been especially powerful within the risky creative industries (McRobbie, 2016; Szreder, 2021). The recruitment materials for 1525 responded to the wider set of narratives and demands experienced by young people approaching the labour market, by

positioning participation in the group as a powerful and desirable source of professional resources.

NC's recruitment webpage provided contact details for Ellie, before describing the offer of the collective in more detail:

1525 Collective (formerly known as Collabor8) is a group of young people that meet up regularly at Nottingham Contemporary. They shape and help run programmes of events, courses and projects, developing useful skills along the way. Their ambition is to connect with people across the city, develop new and exciting ways of working together, and to take on the issues that matter to young people.

We want to hear from you. As part of the group you can develop your own creative practice and knowledge of the arts sector, and build your collaborative and leadership skills and experiences. (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b)

In this account, the regular weekly meetings of the collective were presented first, positioning regular, ongoing participation as a defining feature of 1525. The collective was described as a way by which young people could become hosts and insiders at NC, creating events and activities, and developing skills. The text indicated that being part of the group would allow young people to develop networks in Nottingham and offers to maximise their agency through collaboration. It also outlined some individual benefits that members could expect to gain from participating in 1525, including 'knowledge of the arts sector' and transferrable skills including collaboration and leadership. The list of benefits associated with participation in 1525 consolidated the idea of the group as source of resources for employability, including professional skills and routes into creative work.

The offer of the group as a space to connect with other like-minded young creatives was, at times, presented as a professional opportunity. On the gallery's website, the youth collective is portrayed as offering the chance for creatively orientated young people to connect and form

a network of “young creatives”, in part by the image chosen to represent the youth programme. It is a colourful photograph of a group of people seemingly of various ethnicities and genders, standing in front of a geometric digital projection. Each person is holding a vinyl record, and they are dressed informally, in denim jackets and baseball caps. Some people are laughing, and DJ decks and a bottle of beer stand on a table in the foreground. Out of context, it could be a bar: it has an informal and friendly feel and looks fashionable, cosmopolitan, and youthful.

A disposition based on continuously striving to develop networks, connections, and projects is an important part of how neoliberalism constructs the ideal worker (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007), and the offer of 1525 reflects this ideal. Sim (2017) argues that the peer-led approach of the gallery youth collective is often based on a logic in the gallery sector of the value of instilling ‘the disposition to be professional’ (p. 216), which she acknowledges provides ‘opportunities for CV enhancement and employment’ (p. 216) which were a ‘major incentive’ (p. 216) for many young people involved in her research. However, as I will explain later in this section, the offer of participation as learning professional dispositions also had the potential to be dominating and excluding; and to be complicit in young people’s exploitation as workers.

Throughout the recruitment part of NC’s website, the offer of the collective was repeatedly addressed towards young people with an orientation to the arts, but it was addressed towards young people as outsiders; to those who did not already have access to the art world, through family, social networks, or an elite educational background. The address made by the recruitment materials for 1525 thus invoked a hospitable relation in which the welcome was conditional on young people being guests, and outsiders. As Ahmed (2012) argues, this



paradoxical mode of hospitality is at the heart of much institutional inclusion work. As she suggests, the set of relations summoned by the hospitable address to outsiders serves to reproduce the dominance of the host and subordination of guests, by laying the ground for the host to perform and celebrate their righteousness as a welcoming and ethical host. However, as the welcome to young people suggested that participation would involve them becoming institutional insiders by being transformed into arts workers, it laid the ground for the possibility of a cycle of assimilation, in which young people were allowed into the institution on the condition that they integrated into institutional norms, leaving the institution in need of recruiting new participants on whom to perform hospitality, in order to maintain their position as host.

In the next part of this section, I will explore how the offer of 1525 was mediated through the implicit offer of the gallery – both locally and in terms of wider social narratives and affects surrounding the arts – further shaping the specific mode of hospitality made available to young people.

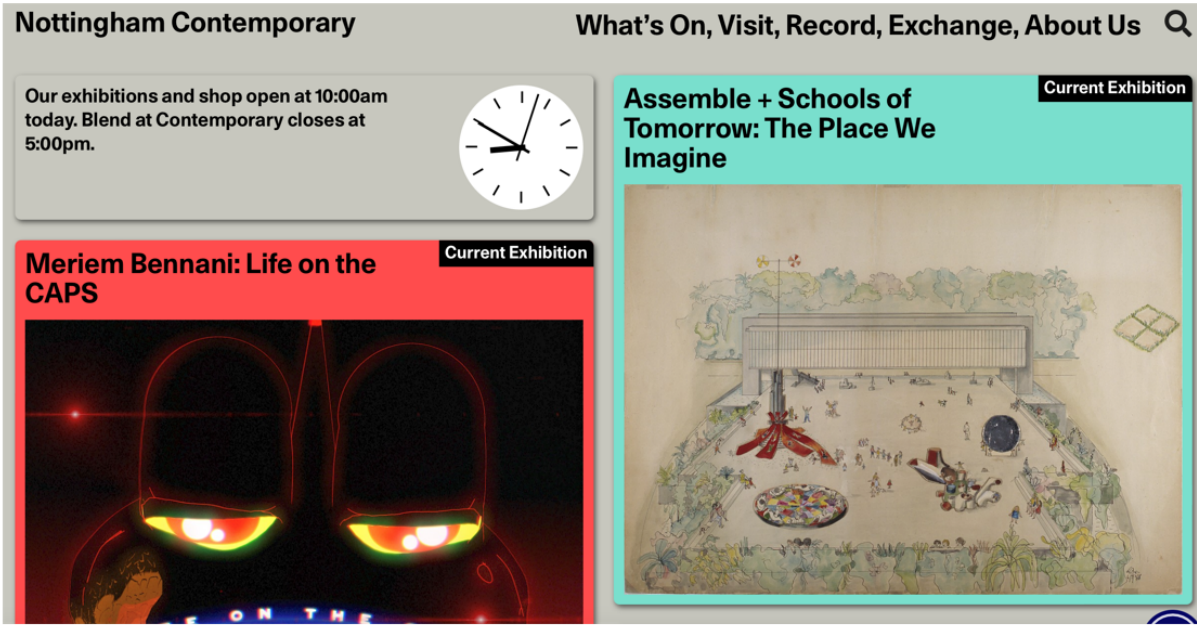


Figure 4: Screenshot of NC website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2022b).



Figure 5: Screenshot from NC Website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2022a).

ii) *The cruel optimism of the hospitable art gallery*



Figure 6: The main entrance of NC (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a).

For a visitor to the city, the gallery first appears on a hill above the station. It is on a boundary where the compact urban centre unravels into infrastructure, where dense blocks of commercial buildings, punctuated with a church or two, give way to road intersections and elevated tram tracks. Positioned on the route into or out of town, it plays the role of a gatepost or a portal.

At this standpoint, the building looks important, but you're not sure why. Its blocky shapes and repeating verticals make it stockade-like, and there's no doubt this is something serious, but then its greenish pre-cast concrete and gold-top pieces and trimmings have a touch of 'Vegas' or 'a 1950s American cinema feel' as the architects put it. (Rowan Moore, 2010)

NC's building makes a powerful public offer in Nottingham, which is an important part of how young people encounter the youth collective. Situated in the Lace Market area of the city

centre, the gallery was first conceived in the early 00s, with the building specifically constructed to house the gallery, which opened to the public in 2009. Various publics have had a wide range of responses to the building's aesthetics (Rowan Moore, 2010), but nevertheless its brutalist design is – as Moore (2010) identifies – undeniably striking, set against the surrounding landscape of sandstone cliffs and redbrick Georgian buildings. Despite the visual contrasts between the gallery and the neighbourhood, the gallery's website describes the building as embedded in Nottingham's geography and history:

Celebrating Nottingham's heritage, our building takes inspiration from the historic Lace Market quarter of the city. It references the bold, elegant design of the warehouses that serviced Nottingham's famous lace industry. The concrete facade is embedded with a mid-19th-century cherry blossom lace design by Richard Birkin, which was discovered in a time capsule buried on our building's site. (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a)

This statement suggests the gallery as open, civic, and responsive to the city. Whilst art galleries are often understood as elite and exclusive spaces, NC has been positioned by policy and discourse to be an open and permeable institution, as discussed in Chapter One.

The gallery proclaims its public offer with its bold motto: 'International art, for everyone, for free' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a). NC's motto reflects the ethos established by the gallery's inaugural Director, Alex Farquarson, who has argued that hospitality was a founding tenet of NC:

Work on the assumption that everyone is invited, and what you do is for anyone at all; that art, and the thinking it gives rise to, cuts across the ways societies are segmented as markets, bracketed by class, known by power. I try to work from the assumption that the reception of art, at its best, undoes forms of identity overly determined by power, whether corporate or governmental; that it gives rise to new subjectivities and conditions of inter-subjectivity (Farquarson, 2013, p. 57)

In Farquarson's account, the hospitable gallery is assumed to be unconditionally inclusive. His image of unlimited institutional hospitality suggests that contemporary art can transcend

social divisions to generate a utopian public space, in which power relations are neutralized or resolved. However, as I have discussed in Chapter Three, the idealized image of unconditional hospitality is a myth (Ahmed, 2012; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). The built environment of NC materializes some of the latent contradictions involved in institutional hospitality.

The gallery has many large doors and windows, which create the image of a porous and permeable institution. Taking the building's design at face value, NC can be read as a generous and welcoming space:

Outside the usual run of decent-but-predictable modern architecture... It is a public, civic building that makes a contribution to its city. (Moore, 2010)

The café and the shop are situated at the two public points of entry to NC and both are also highly visible in the gallery's website and social media, presenting the institution as integrated within the commercial city centre: a place for shopping, socialising, and eating, as well as visiting the exhibitions and taking part in programmed events. NC's inaugural Director, Alex Farquarson, has described NC as an attempt to translate the participatory ethos of New Institutionalism onto a larger scale, 'engaging larger and more diverse publics with varying degrees of knowledge of art and its intellectual contexts' (Farquarson, 2013, p. 56). Farquarson explicitly argues that the offers of a shop and café are a central part of this endeavour, writing that:

It...means devoting considerable energy to the more mundane areas of a larger institution's infrastructure. It means running a shop or a café well; it means efficiently communicating quite basic visitor information, as well as keeping a large building clean; it means publicizing what you do in and around your city; it means seeking sponsorship, building partnerships, responding to the reporting regimes of the political structures you are accountable to – all the everyday functions of larger scale institutions; the essential operating system on which the artistic, discursive and participatory work of the institution constantly depends. (Farquarson, 2013, pp. 56-57)

Farquarson's account of the gallery's inception suggests an ideology in which widespread access and democratic participation can be achieved by managing a gallery as a commercial business. In this context, the positioning of the shop and café indicates the centrality of income generating activities at NC. The gallery's design tells the visitor that anyone can come in, as long as they are a consumer.

The architecture of NC reflects the time in which it was born, and the position it occupies within the wider neoliberalisation of culture in the UK. The gallery was created as part of a dramatic scheme of economic and cultural regeneration that has taken place in Nottingham since the 1970s (Powell, 2006), which was couched within a wider, national programme of 'culture-led regeneration' targeted at declining post-industrial cities in the UK (Hesmondhalgh, Oakley, Lee, & Nisbett, 2015, p. 53). New Labour's cultural policy agenda positioned the arts as a powerful driver of urban revitalisation and invested heavily in the idea of cultural institutions as key to regeneration in post-industrial cities like Nottingham.

New Labour's cultural policies were important in the construction of both the open, public offer of NC and the targeted offer of its youth collective. New Labour governed Britain from 1997 to 2010: a period which includes the inception, development, and public opening of NC. This New Labour government 'placed great emphasis on culture and the arts in their political self-presentation and also to a certain degree in policy practice' (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, p. 1). In 2007, Tony Blair gave a speech to arts leaders at the Tate Modern gallery, in which he argued New Labour's cultural policy had been a great success:

Blair claimed that New Labour had resolved the supposedly false dilemma between 'access' and 'excellence' that had haunted cultural policy since the origins of significant state arts funding in the mid-twentieth century (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, pp. 36-37)

New Labour made two parallel claims about the arts: that public expenditure in this area could catalyse a 'more internationally competitive and therefore prosperous Britain' (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, p. 38) and that widespread participation in the arts was important in developing a flourishing populace (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, pp. 38-39). New Labour's cultural policies sought to increase access to the arts by everyone, including the working classes (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, p. 37). New Labour cultural policies and their rationale were entangled with an optimistic narrative in wider society about arts and culture, understood as the harbingers of happiness and prosperity in 'post-industrial' (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, p. 39) urban settings. Optimistic narratives have been a powerful force in shaping the youth programme at NC, and in how publics understand and feel about NC.

Optimistic rhetoric surrounding the arts is tangible in Farquarson's (2013) account of his founding approach to NC, as an offer of idealised unlimited unconditional hospitality. The idealised New Labour narrative of cultural regeneration (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015) catalysed a wider public sentiment of optimism and possibility around the arts which has had an enduring legacy (Brook et al., 2020; McRobbie, 2016). The idealised image of the arts has shaped public understandings of the significance of NC and imbued it with a desirable, affective power. Invoking wider sentiments of desire and possibility around the arts was an important part of how the gallery invited young people to participate in the 1525 youth collective.



Although my research took place long after the New Labour era, a set of idealised narratives still dominated public representations of the gallery. Around the time I started my research at NC, an article in a local newspaper described the gallery as, ‘a much-loved institution that sits right at the heart of our community’ (Nottingham Post, 2019). The powerful affects of opportunity and desire associated with the institution in the city were tangible in the article, when it stated:

The fact the Contemporary is free to enter brings an opportunity for local people that is almost unrivalled. The gallery’s connections with the Tate network of art museums and other national institutions open doors most local museums can only dream of. (Nottingham Post, 2019)

The presentation of the gallery in the article is hyperbolic, bubbling over with positivity and enthusiasm about NC’s benefits for local people. After extolling the benefits of the gallery for the local economy, the author went on to discuss the gallery’s participatory and educational work:

The outreach work that the Contemporary’s creative and enthusiastic team undertake with local schoolchildren, care home residents and many other people who are struggling to get by, is deeply impressive. (Nottingham Post, 2019)

This description of the gallery’s work positioned participants at NC in terms of deficit as they were defined as ‘struggling to get by’ whereas the gallery’s programmes were claimed to be ‘deeply impressive’. The polarised positions occupied by the gallery and the participants in the article assumed and reproduced a powerfully hierarchical and philanthropic participatory relationship. The continued dominance of idealised rhetoric about the arts in public representations of NC suggested that the contradictions underlying the idea of culture-led regeneration had not been widely surfaced. A set of idealised narratives around the hospitable offer of NC – and the lack of public consciousness of the underlying contradictions – framed the offer of the gallery’s youth collective.



The relational offer of the gallery youth collective was also manifested through a series of temporalities involved in its production.

*iii) Organisational temporalities*

The dominant temporalities of the arts sector – manifested through dominant practices of funding, audit, and creative production – informed the relational offer of 1525 in important ways, which I will address in this section. Firstly, the funding structures involved in generating resources for the programme demanded a certain sort of pre-imagining of the programme in terms of impact, deficit, and linear transformation, which was continually reinforced by linked regimes of audit. Secondly, the notion of the collaborative project was a powerful norm in the gallery world, which was embedded in the offer of the gallery youth collective, organising the group's activities in ways which shaped the relations on offer.

NC's youth collective was conceived before it was produced. The funding application for 1525 was written by gallery staff, and it shows how they were called upon to pre-imagine the group to gain resources. Whilst the process of writing funding applications probably involves a degree of conscious rhetorical performance by workers, the repeated demands on practitioners to enthusiastically perform instrumental accounts of participation invoked particular imaginaries of the gallery youth collective, the relations involved, and a logic of value in terms of measurable impact, which had an enduring life beyond the application document.

Gallery workers wrote a funding application to The Garfield Weston Foundation (GWF) in 2018 (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b), the format of which required them to pre-imagine the youth programme as an 'effective solution' to 'helping those most in need' (The Garfield Weston Foundation, 2022). NC's application to GWF sought funding support for the gallery's wider youth programme including 1525 which was described through four central strands: 'The Residencies, the Core Collective, the Project Space and the Skills Courses' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b). In the application, gallery workers made a case for support from GWF, constructing an argument about 'the need we are addressing' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b) for young people in the city, before articulating a planned programme which set out 'How we will address this need, what we will do' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b). Ylijoki (2014) suggests that 'project time' has become a widespread norm, arguing that it is completely at odds with the more emergent, messy mode of 'process time':

[T]he tightly scheduled, linear, decontextualized, predictable and compressed project time and the unbounded, multi-directional, context-dependent, emergent and timeless process time embody opposite temporal logics (2014, p. 94)

The process of creating funding applications demands gallery workers to imagine and validate the temporalities of project time over process time, which is quite at odds with what is needed to work in an emergent, collaborative way (Facer & Pahl, 2017).

In the funding application to GFW (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b), gallery workers presented young people in Nottingham through a lens of deficit and deprivation, positioning NC as the active agent in supporting and empowering young people to escape or transcend their current circumstances. The application described Nottingham as 'one of the most deprived cities in the UK' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b), arguing that the intended programme addresses 'the urgency of the situation we see in Nottingham today' (Nottingham

Contemporary, 2018b). The Midlands was described as ‘providing the worst opportunities for social progress for those from disadvantaged backgrounds’, with gallery staff writing that ‘half of the city’s residents are among the most-deprived nationally.’ The application stated that, ‘against this desperate backdrop, young people are growing up facing multiple disadvantages’ including the supposed ‘crippling lack of self-esteem and the high levels of poor mental health’. Further, the application identified a rise hate crimes in Nottingham ‘by an alarming 75%, placing Nottinghamshire as the 2nd highest county in the country for racially driven crime’(Nottingham Contemporary, 2018b). The application concluded that, ‘young people are often trapped in cycles of deprivation with few opportunities for social progression, to gain qualifications, training or employment.’

The language used to describe young people in NC’s GWF funding application repeatedly portrayed young people in the city through a powerful deficit lens. Young people were positioned as lacking in multiple ways: as facing complex social disadvantages, using heavily stigmatising language like ‘crippling’ and ‘desperate’. Whilst recognition of social inequality is an important part of doing participatory work well, the construction of the funding application in deficit terms positioned young people firmly as passive beneficiaries of the gallery’s programme, rather than as equal counterparts and collaborators. A deficit view of participants is common in gallery education (Lynch, 2017), especially perhaps in fundraising practices. Funding applications expect that organisations will lay out the future programme in full, pre-imagining a predictable, linear model of how they will enact the benefits on the participants, in terms of impact. The competitive nature of funding processes further compels workers to create an optimistic account of top-down, linear transformation of participants, even if this is at odds with their wider approach and collaborative values. Elsewhere in the GWF application,

NC workers framed the youth collective as co-produced, writing that it would be ‘led by young people in response to the situations they are facing growing up in Nottingham’(Nottingham Contemporary, 2018a). However, the espoused aim of a co-produced programme is in tension with the demands of the application, which compelled staff to predetermine its form and outcomes. Another key element of how the youth programme was pre-planned and imagined at NC – and therefore how the gallery made an offer to young people to participate – was through the idea of the collaborative project.

The youth programme at NC was one of several strands within the gallery’s learning programme. The 1525 ‘core collective’, positioned at the heart of the programme, described the committed group of 15–25-year-old members of 1525, which met weekly. Becoming a member of the group came with the expectation of regular attendance, and was proposed to offer young people a form of institutional insidership, and with it agency and influence at NC:

“So there's the 1525 collective, which they're kind of part of the family of Nottingham Contemporary. They have agency and they influence the public programming... there's a 1525 core collective, which meets every Wednesday. And that's quite a big commitment to ask of young people to give up two hours of their week” (Ellie interview, 16.7.20)

In return for their sustained participation, 1525 members were offered institutional time and space at NC. NC had a small space within the public galleries that was earmarked as a ‘project space’ – Gallery Zero – which was managed by a group of staff from Learning, Communities, and Public Programmes. Gallery Zero was devoted to local collectives, of which the 1525 youth collective was one:

“It has residencies of different collectives, and 1525 is a permanent resident of that project space, which is a small space off the gallery...They do research and present their research in this space.” (Ellie interview, 16.7.20)

Time and space to speak publicly at NC, including Gallery Zero in particular, was presented to young people as part of the offer of 1525.

Through the offer of time and space at NC, 1525 positioned the project as a 'core pedagogical text' (Thomson & Hall, 2021). Thomson and Hall (2021) argue that the art project offers more expansive opportunities to do, relate, feel, and learn differently compared to dominant modes of formal schooling. The offer of working on collaborative, creative projects at NC was an alluring element of 1525 which was at odds with mainstream school pedagogies. The project is an organisational norm within the ever-changing cycle of exhibitions and the drive for the new at the heart of the modern, marketized gallery. As Szreder explains, the 'curatorial mode of production' is far from neutral:

[E]verything moves so that nothing can change. Projects roll over, one after another, some of them with a leftist twist, following yet another fashionable turn in post-modern, post-colonial, post-Marxist, post-feminist, post-human discourse. Independent networkers, entrepreneurs of the self in everything but name, privatise radical ideas as their own capital. This situation is favourable for artistic institutions, who can create a semblance of criticality through entirely tokenistic action. (Szreder, 2021, p. 67)

As a central neoliberal mode of work – and a particularly powerful norm of creative labour – the project organises people and their labour in problematically precarious ways, exploiting workers and deploying radical ideas in order to bolster the elite position of the institution (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; Szreder, 2021).

Young people were drawn to participate in 1525 through invocation of popular affects of desire around creative work (McRobbie, 2016), so the idea of working on creative projects in a real-life arts institution was a compelling offer. Working on projects in 1525 claimed to offer young people insider status, as a group of arts workers in the making. However, the hospitality

invoked by the committed mode of participation demanded by the 1525 collective was not an open and inclusive offer, but a heavily conditional offer. The gallery youth collective could only accommodate those young people who were able to take part regularly, and who could assimilate into collaborative project making and wider norms of creative work. Other young people – who did not want to or were unable to integrate into the expectations of the collective – were not able to take up the offer of time and space in the institution, as this was only available through 1525 membership.



Figure 7: Screenshot of Gallery Zero from NC website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019a).

*iv) The induction: the affective offer of NC*

Across the gallery's various recruitment channels, young people were directed to arrange an induction meeting, as a necessary step in taking up membership of the collective. Before the

induction meeting made an explicit, verbal offer about collective membership, the embodied experience of entering the gallery space for the induction made an affective offer to young people joining the youth collective. I described this experience in the research records I made after attending an induction:

Ellie begins: “So, I am Ellie here at Nottingham Contemporary, and this is Cassie, who is doing some PhD research with us”. “Hi” says Rita with an awkward smile, which I return, enthusiastically. We walk into the gallery’s café together and Rita sits down opposite Ellie, who is clutching a bundle of colourful brochures and printed documents, which spill out onto the table, revealing images of smiling young people taking part in the gallery’s programme. The café space is open and lively, with an enormous, glazed façade providing a light source for a wall of verdant house plants. There is a long, well-stocked bar and a counter display of perfectly formed cakes, lined up in neat rows. A waiter in a striped jumper greets Ellie with a welcoming nod of familiarity, as he brings Rita an oat milk latte in a small, ceramic cup. (Research records, 5.1.20)

Acting as the threshold of participation, attending the induction immersed would-be 1525 members in the polished and highly classed space of the gallery. Walking into NC’s café instantly conveyed an elite cultural atmosphere: from the huge windows and high ceilings to the abundance of well-tended plants; from the perfect pastries on display to the polite performances of the waiters. Through immersing young people in the atmosphere of the gallery building, and presenting a collage of images, atmospheres, and relations, the induction invoked a ‘cluster of promises’ (Berlant, 2011) about an anticipated creative “good life” on offer to young people through participation in the collective: imagined careers filled with creativity, pleasure, and a desirable, polished coolness (McRobbie, 2016). Optimistic sentiments about creative work are often inflected with the belief that that the cultural sector is based on a meritocracy which transcends wider social inequalities, despite significant evidence to the contrary (Brook et al., 2020; Denmead, 2019; McRobbie, 2016; Taylor & O’Brien, 2017). The induction to 1525 invoked optimistic affects by immersing young people in the gallery, producing an alluring offer of participation. Whilst entering the institution

produced powerful affects of desire for certain young people, the affective atmosphere of NC was not inclusive of everyone, but often highly classed and racialised. An atmosphere of elitism and whiteness (Ahmed, 2014) was part of what made the gallery alluring to many young people, but could also potentially feel unappealing, unachievable, or intimidating for some young people (Sim, 2017). Despite the contradictory affects potentially invoked by arriving at NC for the induction to 1525, the way in which Ellie carried the induction out produced another, rather different element of the offer, which was at odds with the notion of the group as the transmission of professional dispositions, as I will discuss in the following section.

#### b) A caring community

Whilst the offer of the 1525 collective as a route into work in the arts framed the relations on offer as a powerful professional network, Ellie activated a very different relational logic, as she proposed the group as offering a caring community. She valued the collective as a way to offer young people mutually supportive, intimate relationships with one another. In this section, I will:

- i) Show how the offer of the group as a caring collective was initially made on the gallery's website,
- ii) Show how Ellie used the induction meeting as an initiation to the collective, to expand and deepen new members' understandings of the group as an intimate, caring community.
- iii) Explain how the offer of 1525 as a caring community was founded on a very different relational logic to the offer of routes into arts jobs, offering young



members a contrasting mode of hospitality as they crossed the threshold into collective membership.

*i) Testimonials of community*

On the 1525 page of NC's website, the opening testimonial spoke in the voice of a member of the collective, who wrote that participation had offered them access to a wider, queer community:

"If I hadn't come to 1525 Collective, I wouldn't have known about 'Queer Noise Club,' and because of that I now know all of you so I'm forming connections [...] community for any marginalised group is a necessity."  
(Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b)

This testimonial positioned the collective as offering a caring community, not only within the gallery's walls but through providing access into a wider network of groups in the city that provided support and solidarity. The next testimonial saw another member recount the experience of joining the group at a low point in their life:

"I joined 1525 Collective after losing my job. I wasn't feeling good about my last job as it didn't make me happy. [...] Joining the collective made me happier as I needed more friends and do more of what I love, art. 1525 Collective is great exposure to people and culture. It helps enlighten one towards new people, new ideas, and new mind-sets. I have improved my skills, feel better in moods and made great relationships."  
(Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b)

The collective was portrayed in this testimonial as a caring creative community, which directly improved the member's wellbeing. Participation was thus positioned as a positive activity that young people could take up to support their mental health and wellbeing. Whilst in these two website testimonials, the idea of the collective as a community was portrayed superficially, as a set of impacts, it was translated into a deeper offer through the induction meeting.

*ii) The induction: crossing the threshold into 1525 membership*

Here, I return to research records I made after attending a young person's induction meeting. I will show how Ellie used the induction meeting as a chance to reconstruct the offer of the collective beyond the institutionally dominant idea of it as a route into work in the arts, instead portraying it as a caring collective, based on meaningful, intimate relations. I will then analyse the hospitable offer this made to young people, as an initiation ritual which created them as members of the collective: as both institutional insiders and, paradoxically, as guests.

**Research records: the induction (5.1.20)**

"1525 is a collective, so it's about offering a social network" Ellie explains, smiling across the table. "But there are also opportunities for collective members to get under the skin of the gallery, through paid experience or attending meetings. Other gallery staff sometimes come to our meetings, so you can learn about their different skills. We also collaborate with other collectives and explore the local art scene by going on studio visits and trips. I'd say the group is very peer-led, so people bring their own energy. You get out what you put in, really. The collective as a non-hierarchical group, based on principles of generosity and care, which I think is really important in the current climate. The university ethos is so competitive, you know, so I want 1525 collective to offer people other ways to develop."

Rita sips her drink as Ellie asks her what she hopes to get out of joining the group. She replies that she recently moved to the city to study for a Chemistry degree, but she has always enjoyed art. She hopes that 1525 can give her a creative outlet and help her meet some interesting people outside of her course. "Yeah, I get that" replies Ellie, explaining, "I grew up in Nottingham and went to Nottingham College, just around the corner. Then I did a Fine Art degree, and an MA in Curation at The Courtauld." "Oh, that's cool!" says Rita, smiling as Ellie continues: "Sometimes we make things in group meetings, but it's also about mutual support and building a sense of community. Sometimes we cook for each other too; it's pretty wholesome!"

Ellie unfolds a paper 'zine about the collective onto the table, printed in shades of red and blue. The pages are filled with photocopied collages, overwritten with phrases from the collective's manifesto; screenshots of the group's social media chats; and photographs of smiling young people and busy events. On the back page she points out a typed copy of the full manifesto, explaining that it was written collaboratively by the group and telling Rita that this gives a good overview of what the collective is about. "I want 1525 to open up routes into the art world. It can be so hostile to young people!" says Ellie. She explains that 1525 is a way of supporting "youth voice" at Nottingham Contemporary, which can "spread across the organisation". She explains that the group has a safer spaces policy, developed from a workshop with Notts Trans Hub, which is about "protecting vulnerable groups from harassment", saying that this supports the collective "to have more open discussions on difficult topics". Ellie introduces the current project that 1525 is working on, which is about the Country X democracy movement, telling Rita that "you can bring your ideas to that". Passing two documents across the table, she shares a list of upcoming events at the gallery and asks Rita to complete a monitoring form with some personal details. Finally, she says that she will add Rita to the group's Instagram message thread, which the collective uses for keeping in touch between weekly meetings.

"I think that's about it!" Ellie says, grinning widely. "Do you have any questions, Rita?". Rita is keen to know more about my research, and I eagerly talk through the infosheet I have prepared, explaining that there are opportunities to become a co-researcher in the project if she is interested. I hand her the research forms, pointing out the consent section and asking her to complete and return the form once she has read everything. "That's great, thanks" says Rita, turning back to Ellie, who is gathering her things. "OK then, we'd better get going!", says Ellie, as she gets up from her chair. Rita and I follow behind her, making our way to the lift. She holds her staff pass out ahead of her, in her hand, ready let us through the door, into the 1525 meeting.

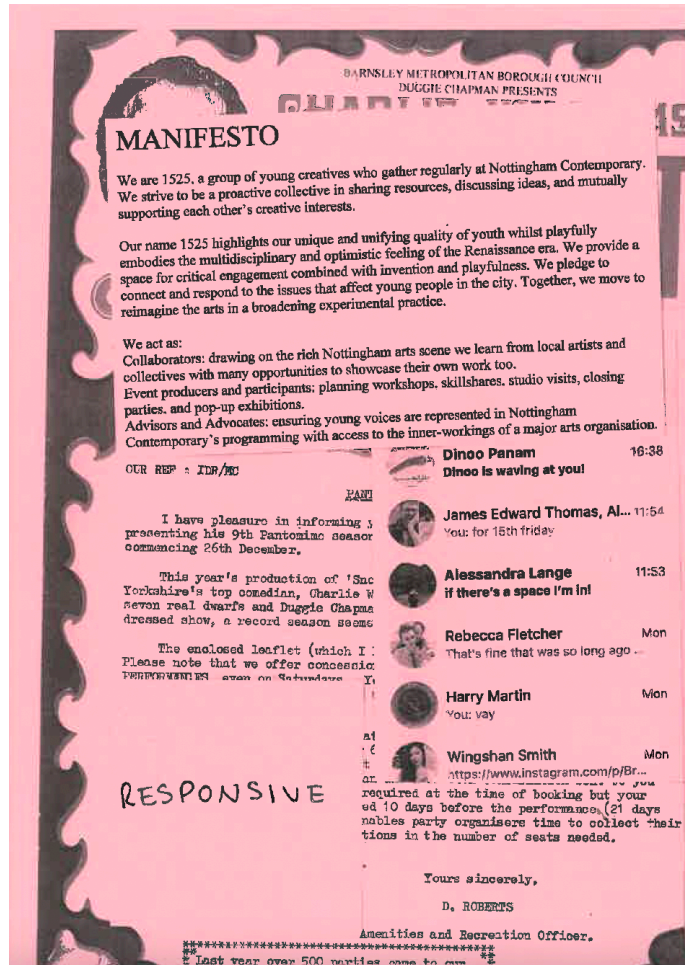


Figure 8: Photograph of 1525 manifesto (1525 Collective, 2019).

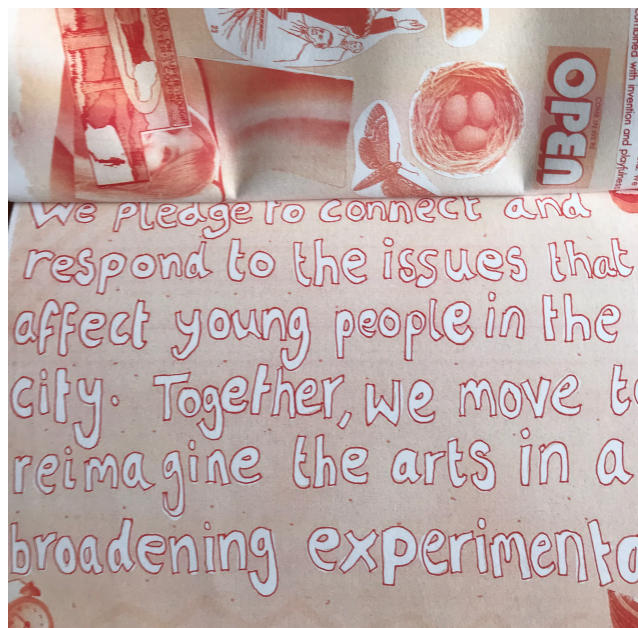


Figure 9: Photograph of 1525 manifesto (1525 Collective, 2019).

*iii) The hospitable offer of the collective as a caring community*

In the induction, Ellie welcomed young people into the collective, by speaking through and beyond the manifesto text, to construct the group in terms of a meaningful set of intimate relations. She emphasised an offer of care and connection, positioned as a counterpoint to the wider relational dynamics of the sector and society more broadly. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven, the offer of the collective that Ellie produced in the induction meeting reflected her value-driven practice as a socially engaged artist, a feminist, and a witch.

Witchcraft – as Ellie practiced it – was based on a feminist, non-hierarchical belief system (Beth, 1990), and invested in the belief in the immanence of the divine, interconnection and community (Starhawk, 1999/1979). Drawing on these witchy principles, an orientation to collective and non-hierarchical relational modes was an important part of Ellie’s value system and pedagogy, which was tangible in how she presented the offer of the collective as a caring community in the induction. Witchcraft positions care for the world as a powerful spiritual practice (Beth, 1990) and thus prioritises the enactment of social justice (Starhawk, 1999/1979), and these values underlay Ellie’s values in the enactment of 1525. Witchcraft also involves the belief in the power of ritual to transform the world (Amsler, 2020; Beth, 1990). As I will discuss further in Chapter Seven, Ellie’s witchy pedagogy in 1525 involved performing organised relational encounters as collective rituals. The rituals enacted in 1525 generated different relational positions and embodied affects for young people and staff, which intervened in their ‘living realities’ (Amsler, 2020) by producing different ways of knowing, thinking, and feeling about themselves, one another, and the world. The induction to 1525 was positioned at the threshold of membership of 1525, marking this mode of participation

as distinct from the unlimited hospitality that Farquarson (2013) or the gallery's motto<sup>22</sup> proposed for the institution more widely. The induction meeting was a ritual of initiation into the group through which Ellie summoned an offer of the collective as a caring community and invited young people to participate in a collective mode of mutual hospitality.

The induction to 1525 invoked an offer of an egalitarian and intimate set of relations, which was at odds with the dominant relational offer of the group as a route into arts jobs. The offer of the group as a caring community did not overturn the offer of the group in terms of professional skills and knowledges, but it generated another offer which sat alongside the dominant offer and unsettled its assumptions. By creating a ritualised threshold to group membership, the induction meeting allowed Ellie to ensure that those who participated in the group had experienced this alternative offer of participation in the collective: as a set of intimate relations of mutual care, which worked against the hostility and competition of the wider arts and education world, and, implicitly, resisted the dominant, elitist logics of the institution within which the collective was situated. On the threshold of collective membership, the ritual of the induction proposed a different sort of hospitality in the gallery youth collective, which did not invest in the fixed, binary positions of the gallery as a dominant host and the young people as subordinate guests, but instead proposed a more circular, egalitarian set of relations: those of the coven<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> 'International art, for everyone, for free' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a)

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Seven for a detailed discussion of how young people and workers took up the relations of the collective as coven.

In addition to the offer of the collective-as-coven, the gallery proposed to offer young people the opportunity to speak to wider publics, by offering them voice at, and beyond, the gallery, as I will discuss in the next section.

### c) Youth voice

The final part of the offer made to young people by NC suggested that participation in the collective would allow young people to have voice within the gallery, and to take up time and space at the gallery to speak to wider publics. In this section, I will show how and where the offer of 1525 as youth voice was made. I will argue that youth voice was the part of the offer of the youth collective through which the gallery offered young people a chance to take up a position of hosts to wider publics, by creating exhibitions and events. In this section, I will explain what offer of participation as youth voice did, as follows:

- i) The offer of youth voice in recruitment to 1525
- ii) The offer of youth voice in the 1525 manifesto
- iii) The paradoxical hospitality of the offer of youth voice at NC

#### *i) The offer of youth voice in recruitment to 1525*

Whilst the idea of participation as the production or amplification of youth voice is often idealised, this concept has been shown to conceal a complex and contradictory set of practices and relations (Batsleer, 2011; Bragg, 2007; Mayes, 2023; Papadopoulou & Sidorenko, 2022; Thomson, 2011). NC's website explicitly positions the group as a way for young people to '[g]et your voice heard about the things that matter' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b). However, the offer of youth voice as being generated by participation in 1525 implies that young people

do not already have a voice that can be heard. The offer of the youth collective as a way of “giving voice” to young people assumes a hierarchy in which the gallery transforms them and gives them agency. Furthermore, understanding youth agency through the notion of voice can rely on a metatheory of fixed, individual subjects, which may itself be constraining and oppressive. I will demonstrate how and where the offer of the collective as youth voice is made and show how it invokes paradoxical relations of hospitality in young people’s participation at NC.

The offer of 1525 as youth voice is tangible in the final participant testimonial on the 1525 page of the NC website, which is also the only one that is not anonymous. This account of participation in the collective is from ex-collective member, and the Labour Member of Parliament for Nottingham East, Nadia Whittome. Whittome is openly socialist, queer, and vegan, and was elected in 2019 at the age of 23, making her the youngest MP in the House of Commons. Her inclusion as a named example of a 1525 alumna calls to a specific group of left-leaning, activist-inclined young people. Her testimony on the 1525 website page reads:

“I am alumni of Nottingham Contemporary’s youth programme. At a time that I was going off the rails as a teenager, I credit this programme for keeping me in education, giving me the space to be creative, explore social issues, and grow the voice I needed to use my feeling of anger and disenfranchisement to make a difference.” – Nadia Whittome MP (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b)

The use of the quotation from Whittome relies on a rather binary image of “good” and “bad” youth voice, as here she suggests that participation in the programme transformed her from a troubled youth, into a successful activist and politician. The phrase “going off the rails” draws on notions of a single, linear pathway for young people into successful adulthood, and positions participation in NC’s youth programme as bringing Whittome back onto the right trajectory. Whittome’s testimonial positions the 1525 youth collective as a way of the gallery



giving young people voice and agency. It suggests that the group diverted her anger into institutionalised modes of creative self-expression – positioned here as legitimate and positive forms of youth voice – providing a better route to make real change in the world. The gallery’s choice to use this testimonial in a prominent position in their recruitment materials thus makes a powerful offer to young people about participation and voice: reinforcing linear and binary notions of youth trajectories, and telling young people that joining 1525 can transform feelings of disempowerment and anger into powerful, institutionally legitimised modes of agency.

The notion of gallery participation and voice in Whittome’s testimonial relies on a widespread narrative of youth as risk. Notions of youth as risk have been linked to a dominant mode of ‘adult-led’ youth arts (Hickey-Moody, 2013b), and a narrowly defined image of youth voice, relying on the image of the “good citizen”. By contrast, Batsleer argues that:

The analysis of ‘youth voice’ needs to recognise how the discourses or codes of youth are shaping participation practice and delineating what can and cannot be spoken. Several analyses have demonstrated how the homogenising of ‘youth’ which writes out power and salient social divisions such as gender, ‘race’, class and disability produces a discourse of riskiness or trouble. This discourse offers powerful codes of communication which shape what will count as ‘voice’. (Batsleer, 2011, p. 423)

As she points out, youth is far from a universal category, and approaching voice as a unified phenomenon can dominate and exclude certain young people. As Hickey-Moody (2013b) has argued, young people often desire dominant forms of subjectivity and take pleasure from fitting in with stereotypes, so a testimonial from a well-known and powerful young person in their city may well act as an alluring and aspirational image of what participation in the 1525 collective could do for them. The prominent use of Whittome’s testimony is thus one way in which the multiple possibilities of youth participation and voice are foreclosed by the offer

made to young people by NC's website, creating a limiting set of assumptions about what young people's participation in 1525 might be and do for them. The image of youth as a risky transition is at odds with the possibility of multiple youth becomings, on their own terms. Understanding young people's inclusion in a powerful institution as of value based on the idea that it amplifies their voices in legitimate ways involves relations of power and control, as I will discuss further in the next part of this section, through an examination of the 1525 manifesto document.

*ii) The offer of youth voice in the 1525 manifesto*

The 1525 manifesto was a 'zine which was co-produced by 1525 members and Ellie before I began my research. It was used as part of the induction meeting, and it thus framed the offer of the collective. It proposed roles for young people as:

- 'Event producers and participants' at NC
- 'Advisers and advocates' to the gallery, offered 'access to the inner workings of a major arts organization'.

The twin explicit offers of 1525 here invoked the idea of the group of offering routes into work in the arts (as discussed earlier in this chapter), but they also powerfully positioned youth voice as emerging through the offer of time and space at NC – which could allow young people to speak to wider publics from a credible, institutional platform – and by young people taking up relations of institutional insider-ness.

*iii) The paradoxical hospitality of the offer of youth voice at NC*

The offer of the youth collective was conceived and communicated at times as a peer-led, co-produced programme. The group offered young people the chance to collaboratively influence and develop activities in meetings according to their interests, and to collectively prepare events and exhibitions for their peers. The offer of the collective as centring young people's voices reflected recent policy and rhetoric about "good practice" in arts education (Arts Council England). Whilst youth voice superficially appears to be positive and empowering, it can be highly contradictory<sup>24</sup> (Bragg, 2007; Mayes, 2019, 2023; Thomson, 2011). As I will discuss further in Chapter Eight – when I explore how the offer of youth voice was taken up in a specific 1525 exhibition and event project – the offer of the gallery youth collective at NC included conflicting imaginaries of voice as variously something that the gallery simplistically gave to young people; and as a more complex, collective phenomenon that might emerge within a community of young people, by supporting them to speak to each other and wider publics (Hickey-Moody, 2013b).

The offer of voice as time and space at NC suggested young people would become hosts to other publics. The offer of a form of hospitality in which young people – originally positioned as institutional guests – move to become hosts potentially threatens to destabilise the gallery's status as a dominant host, which – as Derrida (2000) would suggest – is necessary for the possibility of hosting. The paradox of hospitality involved in offering young people time and space at NC suggests that participation as youth voice might manifest through a complex

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<sup>24</sup> I will discuss the contradictions of the notion of youth voice further in Chapter Eight

combination of empowerment and control, especially, perhaps, when sustained over time (Bulley, 2015).

#### The hospitable offer of the gallery youth collective

The offer of 1525 was constructed across multiple sites and on multiple levels. The three central elements of the offer – as a route into arts jobs, as a caring community, and as youth voice – variously imagined participation according to contradictory logics of hospitality.

The offer of the gallery youth collective as a route into arts jobs was dominant in how the youth collective was communicated in the recruitment of members. This offer was highly desirable for many young people because of the widespread rhetorics of idealised creative labour (Brook et al., 2020; McRobbie, 2016; Taylor & O'Brien, 2017), and as such was a powerful way of drawing young people into participation. Whilst the explicit offer of the group as a route into the arts claimed to render the gallery more porous and inclusive, the underlying, implicit rationale relied on a deficit view of young people, positioning the gallery as superior to young people, and understanding the value of their participation in terms of impact and improvement. The hospitality generated by the offer of routes into work in the arts was heavily conditional, as it was based on young people's assimilation as arts-workers-in-the-making. As Ahmed (2012) describes, the conditional hospitality of inclusion as integration implicitly justifies and reproduces the hierarchical relations. The gallery youth collective claimed to challenge institutional domination, but by naturalising the idea of the gallery as culturally superior to young people, the offer of the collective as a route into work in the arts reinforced NC's fixed position as a dominant host and offered young people a subordinate position as passive beneficiaries. Funding structures in the arts shaped the

hierarchies of assimilation involved in the offer of the collective as a route into work in the arts, as funding applications and regimes of audit demanded the gallery to pre-imagine impact, to measure its successes in these terms, and to continually perform and celebrate its achievements to gain further funding. The affective relations invoked by the offer of the gallery youth collective as a route into arts jobs generated a hospitable welcome that laid the ground for the relations of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) in young people's participation in 1525, as it suggested that taking part in the collective would support a more diverse group of young people to access idealised future<sup>25</sup> careers, without acknowledging that the arts labour market was exploitative, discriminatory, and dependant on a continual supply of new, passionate workers (McRobbie, 2016).

The offer of the gallery youth collective as a caring community was expressed in instrumentalised ways in the recruitment of young people to join the 1525 collective. However, in the induction meeting with new members, Ellie extended a more intimate relational offer to young people, which was quite at odds with the dominant offer of the group as a route into work in the arts. She drew on her practice as a feminist witch to enact the induction as an initiation ritual that invoked the group as an egalitarian and intimate collective, founded on mutual care: as a coven. The offer of the group as a coven was very different to the dominant offer of routes into work in the arts, but these elements sat alongside each other, as young people crossed the threshold of participation.

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<sup>25</sup> Berlant (2011) argues that a future orientation is central to relations of cruel optimism.

The offer of participation in the gallery youth collective as youth voice was commonly imagined in terms of young people taking up time and space at NC. The offer of institutional time and space to host their own exhibitions and events appeared to make a powerfully hospitable offer, in which young people could become hosts to various publics, rather than remaining as passive guests at NC. However, the way in which the offer of youth voice was imagined at NC was ambivalent, at times summoning ideas of youth as risk and the gallery as a legitimising force which could “give” young people voice or translate their voices into the “right” form of youth expression. Considering my theoretical framework, the offer to young people to become institutional hosts to other publics suggested two relational possibilities:

- That in making young people into hosts, the gallery would completely integrate young people at NC, so that they were no longer guests or outsiders at all, but rather became part of the host entirely and spoke with the same voice . As discussed in Chapter Three, hospitality as violent and complete assimilation would suggest an ongoing cycle of hosting, in which the gallery would subsequently need to identify further guests on whom to perform hospitality, to continue to justify their status as host.
- A mode of hospitality in which young people were allowed to speak without translation, and to activate the gallery’s platforms to host other publics. Allowing young people as guests to take ownership of the gallery’s presence in this way could produce a paradoxical form of hospitality, which would risk threatening the gallery’s status as a philanthropic host. If hospitality emerged in this way at NC, the enactment of youth voice might slip into relations of hostility and control (Bulley, 2015; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). The offer of youth voice at NC therefore had the potential to enact hospitable relations as cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), as it proposed to offer young people a powerful position as hosts, but contained an implicit threat to the

gallery's position which could produce institutional hostility, and the desire to constrain, govern, and control young people.

In the ensuing chapters, I will return to each of the three central elements of the offer of 1525 that I have identified in this chapter in turn, showing how young people and relevant staff took them up in practice:

- In **Chapter Five**, I will explore how young people and gallery workers took up the offer of the collective as a route into work in the arts, discussing the paradoxical mode of hospitality involved in the enactment of this offer.
- After a discussion of the rupture of the pandemic and an introduction to some additional theoretical resources in **Chapter Six**, in **Chapter Seven** I will discuss how young people and workers took up the offer of the collective as a caring community in group meetings, explaining what the different relations this mode of hospitality generated did for those involved.
- In **Chapter Eight**, I will how collective members and gallery staff enacted youth voice and agency in practice, by examining an exhibition and event at NC that 1525 members produced in partnership with local activists.

## 5. The expected guest: The gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts

In this chapter, I will explore how young people and relevant gallery workers took up the first, dominant part of the offer made by NC, as identified in Chapter Four: the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts. 1525 members were often strongly attracted to participation in the youth collective as a source of knowledge, connections, and skills for imagined future careers in the arts. However, this chapter shows how taking up the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts was more than instrumental: it was in fact highly affective. Drawing on Berlant's (2011) notion of the impasse, this chapter also explores what happened when some young people and gallery staff encountered the contradictions between their optimistic investments in work in the arts, and the challenging realities of the arts labour market. Overall, this chapter identifies a series of latent paradoxes and contradictory logics underlying the notion of the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts as an ethical form of institutional hospitality shows how young people and relevant gallery workers responded to encountering this complex landscape of participation.

### Mapping this chapter

In this chapter, I will draw on multiple sources to show how young people and associated staff at NC took up participation in 1525 as a route into work in the arts, and what this did for them. I will begin by introducing some specific literatures about work in the arts which provide context to my account of how 1525 was enacted as a route into creative work. The chapter will also include different sorts of empirical material, as follows:

- Research records I made from participant observation of 1525 activities,
- Narratives about the experiences of various 1525 members, produced from research records and interviews.



In this chapter, the literatures and empirical material will be combined to show:

- a) How participation in 1525 taught young people to become arts workers in the making, by cultivating specific habits and dispositions.
- b) How participation in 1525 as a route into work in the arts invoked and deepened young people's optimistic attachments to imagined futures in work in the arts.
- c) How - for some 1525 members and gallery workers - participation in 1525 ultimately produced an impasse (Berlant, 2011) in their investments in work in the arts, as they were confronted with the tensions between their optimistic attachments to the arts, and the challenging realities of the arts labour market.

- a) Young people as arts workers in the making in the gallery youth collective

The literatures about work in the arts provide context to the enactment of the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts, as they show the relationship between the risky and individualised conditions of the arts labour market, and idealised sentiments around work in the sector. To illustrate how participation in the youth collective at NC taught young people to become arts workers in the making, I will then give an account of two 1525 activities that I attended: a CV workshop and an exhibition launch event.

### *Contextualising work in the arts*

As introduced in Chapter One, neoliberal capitalism has led to the breakdown of universal social welfare systems, a proliferation of free market logics, and the rise of precarious modes of work. Contemporary work in the creative industries is risky (McRobbie, 2016; Szreder,

2021), and that risk is highly individualised (Beck, 2000). Whilst the post-war period in the UK saw universal welfare provision which provided self-employed artists with some financial security, since the Thatcher era, many of the traditional securities of being in and out of work have decreased (McRobbie, 2016, p. 35). Under these more individualised working conditions,

The normal work situation— normal both for individual lives and for company policy— has begun to break down, and a political economy of insecurity and differentiation has developed in place of an economy of state-guaranteed social security. (Beck 2000: 53).

The creative industries were an early, powerful example of the set of wider labour market changes, including the individualisation of risk that many forms of employment now demand (McRobbie, 2016; Oakley, 2014). The arts labour market compels workers to relate to themselves as autonomous, volitional subjects, constantly accumulating skills, knowledges, and experiences, which can - somewhat paradoxically - act as a constraining form of self-governance (Lee, 2018). Under the risky conditions of the creative labour markets, workers must 'seek personal solutions to systemic contradictions' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: xxii):

Individualization is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 28-29)

The precarious and individualised conditions of the contemporary arts labour market can cultivate a highly entrepreneurial disposition in creative workers, within which performing oneself as a business becomes the central activity of life:

For a majority of people, even in the apparently prosperous middle layers, their basic existence and lifeworld will be marked by endemic insecurity. More and more individuals are encouraged to perform as a 'Me & Co.' selling themselves on the marketplace. (Beck, 2000, p. 3)

The prevalence of insecure modes of employment, and its profound social effects, has led Standing (2011) to argue that the 'precariat' now represents a whole new class of workers. Whilst insecure self-employment is not a new phenomenon in the arts, according to Foucault (2008), the proliferation of precarious worker relations has led to the dominance of a competitive, individualised worker disposition. Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) argue that the effects of heightened entrepreneurial dispositions can come to define how people relate to others, as:

[T]he activity par excellence is integrating oneself into networks and exploring them, so as to put an end to isolation, and have opportunities for meeting people or associating with things proximity to which is liable to generate a project (2007, p. 110).

Neoliberal capitalism is so pervasive that its logics can permeate even supposedly resistant activities (see Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) and Graham (2017c)), so even supposedly radical institutions may enact organisational practices that are complicit in exploitation. Despite the pervasive difficult working conditions of the arts, many young people are keen to pursue careers in the sector, which raises questions about how workers understand the labour relations they face (Christiaens, 2020; Oakley, 2014).

The labour market in the precarious creative industries can be seen a heightened example of the conditions of contemporary work more widely (Christiaens, 2020). Christiaens argues that the arts sector demonstrates the multiplicity of modes by which workers relate to the labour market, including – but not limited to – an instrumental disposition:

Neoliberal subjectivation is not the monolithic promotion of utility-maximizing agents, but the generation of a multiplicity of modes for entrepreneurs to relate to oneself and the market. (Christiaens, 2020, p. 493)

He suggests that creative worker subjecthood often involves a more 'risk-loving' disposition:

Precarious workers in the creative industries...are encouraged not merely to rationally manage their human capital, but also to take a leap of faith to acquire unpredictable successes (Christiaens, 2020, p. 493)

The production of young people's 'euphoria of imagined success' (McRobbie, 2016, p. 4) in approaching careers in the arts – whereby taking professional risks feels compelling, regardless of the realistic prospects of success – is a highly affective matter, involving the generation of strong investments in arts work as a passionate vocation which promises creative freedom at odds with the constraints of traditional working lives (McRobbie, 2016). However, in reality, the risky working conditions that frequently define the arts often offer less autonomy for most workers, as precarity and intense competition for work heavily limits workers' freedoms (Oakley, 2014). McRobbie (2016) argues that the passionate subjectification of workers in the creative industries is particularly powerful for young women (and, as she identifies, women constitute the vast majority of workers in these sectors, except at senior levels), who have been subject to wider social conditioning into 'conventional feminine practices of self-management and planning' (2016, pp. 87-88). Gendered dispositions around work can intensify young women's investments in supposedly more "free" and "creative" modes of work, understood as 'aspirational labour' (Duffy, 2017). McRobbie suggests that the power of positive rhetoric around arts work has shaped young women entering the creative labour market in recent decades into workers primed to serve the needs of the sector.

A constant supply of passionate and risk-loving workers is an important asset for the arts labour market, as Oakley suggests:

A distinctive, if not unique, feature of cultural labour markets is the degree of enthusiasm, even love that workers show for their job, which helps ensure that even casualised,

insecure and often exploitative as these labour markets are, they are continually oversupplied with labour (2014, p. 150)

Workers' powerful optimistic investments in creative labour, and their seeming enthusiasm for risky modes of work, enables and sustains precarious – and often exploitative – modes of employment in the sector (McRobbie, 2016; Szreder, 2021, pp. 89-91). The tension between the positive, future-oriented affective disposition surrounding work in the arts, and the exploitative labour relations potentially enabled and concealed by optimistic attachments to creative work suggests that work in the arts is likely to generate relations of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). The importance of passionate, optimistic working dispositions in maintaining the exploitative conditions of work in the arts raises questions about whether young people's early experiences of arts participation might have a role in developing and sustaining their powerful attachments to work in the sector. In this research, the literatures discussed above led me to wonder whether inclusion schemes such as the gallery youth collective might act to cultivate and reproduce young people's potentially cruelly optimistic investments in work in the arts. In the rest of this section, I will present and analyse two research records which explore how enactment of the gallery youth collective as a route into jobs in the arts unfolded. In each instance I will explain how the activities enacted young people's institutional participation by positioning them as arts workers in the making, exploring the affects and attachments that this cultivated.

### **Research Records: The CV development workshop (19.2.20)**

Today's session is an open workshop for young people about CV writing in the arts. The workshop is a partnership between 1525 and a local enterprise organisation called The Work Shed<sup>26</sup>, which is an EU-funded initiative based at another local arts centre. The

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<sup>26</sup> Name changed for ethical reasons.

primary aim of the enterprise initiative is to develop new creative businesses and support emerging entrepreneurs in the Midlands region. The worker from The Work Shed – Henry – is friends with Ellie and they make playful banter with each other before the session starts. I spot some “core” 1525 members taking their seats, but there are also a lot of unfamiliar faces in the room. These other young people have booked onto this workshop as a one-off activity. Verity is leading the session today, and she presents her own CV and LinkedIn page to the group, explaining ways in which young people can present the types of experience they already have in ways that maximise their value to arts employers. Verity explains the strategic career choices she made, telling us that she did an internship in finance in an arts organisation as this was less competitive than trying to get into creative departments, and was later able to move across into curation. She discusses how to prepare for interviews, giving examples of the kind of questions commonly asked by arts employers, and explaining how young people should answer to maximise their likelihood of success. Some young people ask Verity questions, before going into smaller groups with laptops and phones out to work on their own CVs, if they have brought them along.

I go to make a cup of tea and Henry catches up with me in the kitchen. He explains that his organisation has funding to give young people 12 hours each of business mentoring. Their EU funders have set targets for the number of young people they need to involve in the programme, and he has found it hard to engage enough young people to achieve these goals. Running sessions like this with partner organisations offers him a way to build networks with young people, and to reframe their activities in these terms. He hopes that some of them might subsequently take up the business mentoring offer. We talk about the diverse activities young people in 1525 are engaged in that have been discussed in the session and whether these “count” as creative enterprises. Jay used to run a band fan page with over 30,000 followers, and Henry argues that this is an example of entrepreneurial “content generation” that she should frame on her CV as a “freelance role”.

As we return to the Studio, the young people in the workshop are being given a free workbook which tells them it is ‘designed to help kick-start your business’. The text inside

promises that if they complete the exercises in the book, it will ‘transform your creative ideas into your dream job’.

The underlying message of the CV development session was clear: if you want to become successful “young creatives”, you must strive to acquire resources that will maximise your future employability. Employability was implicitly communicated as a constant process of young people instrumentalising their interests, hobbies, and life activities in terms of resources for their career, and by taking up an entrepreneurial approach that framed them as work, and often sought to monetise them. As emerging creative workers, young people in the youth collective were taught that they should see themselves and their creative practices as businesses. McRobbie argues that:

There is both the need constantly to enhance their CVs in order to have any chance in the job market, as well as the long-term need to find a decently paid job... Many will consider the idea of self-employment or of setting up some sort of small creative business as a realistic option, not because young people like this are natural-born entrepreneurs, but because, when weighing up their options, this emerges as a hope for a more productive and perhaps exciting future (2016, p. 2)

The risks involved in taking up insecure modes of self-employment are concealed by the invocation of hope that McRobbie describes. Young people are taught to invest in the belief that the leap of faith (Christiaens, 2020) will come good in the end, ultimately offering them an idealised happy mode of work: “your dream job” as the booklet suggested. As Allen and Finn (2023) have argued, the entrepreneurial ‘side hustle’ has become a normalised part of working life for many young people – women in particular – which is now frequently legitimised within higher education curricula. However, as they show, the glamourisation of self-employment often becomes a form of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), in which an idealised image of creative freedom and high earnings are used to conceal the riskiness of precarious modes of work and silence the fact that they commonly reproduce existing social

inequalities, such as those of gender, class, and race (Allen & Finn, 2023). Optimistic worker subjectivities in the arts can limit critical reflection on labour conditions, as '[w]ork becomes akin to a romantic relationship' (McRobbie, 2016, p. 2). The next research record that I present further illustrates how the romanticisation of creative work happened in the gallery youth collective.

### **Research Records: The Exhibition Launch (7.2.20)<sup>27</sup>**

A few weeks ago, Ellie announced in a 1525 meeting that the gallery needed three people to work at the upcoming launch event. She told us that she would "give it to the first three people to put their hands up". Hands swiftly shot into the air and three names were recorded.

On the day of the event, I meet up with Jay. She is in the first year of an art degree and she is about to do her first paid shift at the gallery. We get a coffee in NC's café and sit down for a chat. Although she is not quite sure what it will involve, Jay is buzzing with anticipation about working at the exhibition launch. She tells me she is excited to about being linked to a powerful arts institution like NC:

"I was part of another youth arts group at home, but it was much less structured and had less money. We had to go and talk to the council to convince them to keep funding the group. It's not like that here."

Jay explains that taking part in the previous youth arts group had helped her to get a place on her current art degree without having to complete an Art Foundation course first, which showed her that these informal opportunities were valuable for her progression in the arts. She tells me that taking part in 1525 and getting to know people at NC "opens doors"

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<sup>27</sup> This event is included in my published paper (Kill, 2022) so there may be some similar phrasings here as in that article, as both pieces of writing were generated from the same research records.



that will help her to secure work in the sector. She grins as she points out that getting this paid opportunity proves that the approach is working.

Later in the evening, I return to the gallery to find the launch event in full swing. A couple of 1525 members are standing at the threshold of the gallery welcoming people in. Jay and Ellie are holding clipboards, each with a list of invited private view attendees. There is little to distinguish the casually employed 1525 members from regular gallery workers. Jay has been on her feet for a while, so I ask if she is getting tired. Ellie responds, “At least it’s paid!”. Jay nods and tells me that she volunteered at another local gallery, which involved her standing outside a performance for over an hour in silence, with no chair, while people inside watched the show. Ellie grimaced as Jay recounted the story, before interjecting “And it was a *volunteer* role” with a raised eyebrow.

Taking up casual, paid work at NC was understood by young people and gallery staff as providing valuable professional networks, insights into events management in the cultural sector, and credible work experience to add to their CV. Many young people valued and desired the paid experience they took up through 1525 and strongly believed that these roles would support them in gaining future employment in the sector. But – as I have argued previously – experiences of paid, casual work at NC offered collective members more than a set of surface-level, instrumental affordances:

They also learnt what it feels like to be on the periphery of something; the awkwardness of not recognizing someone important; or that they should be grateful for getting paid to be there. These moments induced a wide spectrum of feelings: excitement at just being part of it; suddenly feeling so close to the creative “good life” that you can taste it; fun and desire and shame all squashed up close together, marking out specific positions in this time and space. (Kill, 2022, p. 64)

When I attended to the affective, tacit learning produced by the professional experiences that young people had at NC, I noticed other professional norms, affects, and dispositions that they took up and internalised. For Jay, doing casual paid work at the gallery involved learning to feel grateful for getting paid to be there, even if the work was boring, poorly paid, and

based on insecure terms. Understanding casual employment opportunities as a valuable experience invoked and deepened her sense of work in the arts as desirable and reinforced her own understanding of herself through the lens of employability. It felt good to Jay to take up casual work at NC, even if the role was not inherently satisfying and the working conditions were poor, as it felt like a way of inching closer to success in the creative labour market. Jay's experience of taking up casual work at NC demonstrates that the production of young people's professional dispositions as emergent arts workers – including sentiments of passionate vocation and hopeful investments in precarious modes of labour – is an important part of what participation in the gallery youth collective did.

b) The production of optimistic investments in arts work in the gallery youth collective

In this section, I will explore in more detail how members of 1525 took up optimistic attachments to the idea of being future arts workers, through discussion of three collective members' - Helena, Alex, and Anna - accounts of participation in the group.

*Helena: "It's really useful for us, I think"*

Whilst she had initially joined the group to find friends with similar interests, Helena told me she valued participation in the 1525 collective as a way of finding out how to get into the "inaccessible" arts industry in the UK:

"The events that they did was like...workshops, where they invited like, artists, and they did workshops about their art, how to make things...how to connect with other artists, and things like that. So they were like, really useful for young people who want to get into art, which is really confusing. Because we don't know how the industry works. And when people come and talk about how they got where they are, it's really useful for us, I think."  
(Helena interview, 1.6.20)

Helena was not alone in finding the art sector "confusing". Many 1525 members expressed similar feelings and believed that participation in the collective could help them overcome a

lack of knowledge about how to get into work in the arts. Helena explained that meeting gallery staff and other artists allowed her to learn about professional trajectories in the creative sector and to gain professional knowledge, skills, and experiences that she thought would be valuable additions to her CV:

“I think [taking part in 1525] is useful because sometimes I asked them about how it is working there and where they come from. And yeah, I'm really good at asking stuff. So I just asked them lots of things all the time. And they're always willing to tell me like, "Oh, yeah, I come from here. This is what I did. Then I worked here, and now I'm here". And I didn't know what a curator was, so the curator made a workshop about that that was really useful... I came back [again and again] because I think it's useful for my CV”.  
(Helena interview, 1.6.20)

Helena repeatedly described participation in 1525 as a “useful” opportunity. She sustained her participation in the group because she valued it instrumentally as offering a set of professional resources that she perceived to have value for her imagined future career in the art sector.

Helena’s account of why she was involved in 1525 reflects the way that the offer of participation as a route into work in the arts was dominantly made to young people in the explicit offer of 1525, as discussed in Chapter Four. Helena related to her interactions with gallery staff as having instrumental value in enhancing her knowledge, skills, and professional networks, and therefore maximizing her employability in the arts. She wanted to learn from gallery staff so she could become more like them, as she conceived of and valued her participation as a way of becoming an emerging arts worker. The hospitable relation that Helena took up in the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts generated the conditional hospitality that Ahmed (2012) describes, which enacted a form of assimilation into the practices and norms of the art sector. The mode of hospitality as assimilation positioned her as a guest and cultivated her desire in being integrated into art world norms,

which seemed to offer a career full of promise. Whilst young people's disposition towards participation as assimilation seemed, on the surface, heavily instrumentalized, it also depended on powerful affective investments, as I will discuss next in Alex's account of taking part in the collective as a route into work in the arts.

*Alex: "It's about getting that chitter-chatter but it's like a release"*

Alex wanted to do a bachelor's degree in fine art after his art foundation course, and he came from a working-class background which had provided him with little knowledge of what to expect from studying art in higher education or how to progress into a creative career. For him – like Helena – relationships with gallery staff (and, for Alex, older collective members) were understood as “useful” sources of knowledge, networks, and skills to navigate an emergent career in the arts. However, for Alex, these relationships also offered an important source of reassurance and emotional support which helped him manage his sense of risk about stepping into a daunting sector:

“I think it can be really useful, because you can talk about things. I know that I've met people that are doing a fine art course, and I've never really met anyone that is on a fine art course. It's good to know about what's on the course. I've met artists...and talked about what err, what's it called? A residency. Yeah, and it's just to talk about people from different areas that are a bit ahead of you, so you can understand what's next. And no one else really talks about that really, except from there. So it's about that, getting that chitter-chatter but it's like a release.” (Alex interview 26.5.20)

The possibility of pursuing a career in the arts often felt uncertain and scary to Alex, and professional trajectories in the sector had been a mystery to him until he joined the collective. However, he felt that the informal “chitter chatter” in 1525 meetings with other members – who were, as he put it, “a bit ahead” of him – allowed him to gain insights about what his desired career path might involve. The informal conversations about education and work in

the arts that he took part in at 1525 meetings quelled some of his fear of the unknown, which he found deeply reassuring. The emotional value of taking part in 1525 as a source of insights into arts work was powerful for Alex as it allowed him to “release” some of his anxieties about his desired future in the arts.

Developing a relationship with Ellie had also had an important role in countering Alex’s fearful sentiments about a future career in the arts. Their relationship made professional success in the arts feel more attainable for someone like him:

Alex: I've been able to talk to [Ellie] a lot. I'm normally quite scared about my future, like, in the creative industry, and she just tells me about opportunities and how I could progress a lot.

CK: Has that helped with that sense of things being a bit scary?

Alex: Yeah. Because I think she's the only success, like from being in 1525 I now know that people can be successful in the arts. Previously, all of the people that I've known that are in creative industries are teachers and they teach photography and art and stuff. And it's good to see that there's a career outside of teaching. Cos I'm not, I don't really want to be a teacher, I wanna do something else and it's good to see someone achieving it.

(Alex interview 26.5.20)

Alex’s relationship with Ellie was central to his developing identity as an emerging arts worker. She offered Alex specific opportunities for professional learning, such as signposting opportunities in the arts, and giving feedback on his portfolio before a university interview. Moreover, his relationship with Ellie felt different to those with his with college tutors, specifically because he understood her to have a successful career in the arts. The connection with “real-life” arts professionals that Alex took up through membership of 1525 supported Alex’s growing confidence in his own ability to gain a career in the sector and deepened his investment in imagined professional future as an arts worker.

The affective value of the gallery youth collective was central to Alex's account of participation. Taking part in the group as a route into arts jobs provided reassurance and confidence about his imagined future as an arts worker, providing a source of optimism about work in the arts, but cruelly so (Berlant, 2011), as these idealised investments silenced the reality that the arts were – as he had initially feared – a risky and exploitative sector. Alex gained deeper attachments to idealised notions of work in the arts from developing relationships with arts workers and other young people in 1525. For Alex and many other members, participation in the gallery youth collective thus acted to deepen and sustain optimistic attachments to an exploitative form of work. The optimistic affects about work in the arts generated by participation in the gallery youth collective were not individual but transpersonal, as they emerged in relation to other collective members, workers, and the gallery as a hospitable institution. For some members of 1525, their attachments to work in the arts went further, becoming a form of 'euphoria' (McRobbie, 2016) or even 'love' (Gill & Pratt, 2008), as I will illustrate in Anna's account of participation in the gallery youth collective.

*Anna: "It pushes you and it inspires you"*

Like Alex, Anna had initially approached the gallery with some trepidation. She described how taking part in NC's youth programme had completely changed her relationship with art galleries:

"I think when you're going into an art space, or that kind of thing, you think a lot of people are gonna be quite pretentious sometimes. And it can be quite scary as somebody that like, I consume a lot of art; I do create art, but I'm not, like, "professional" in it. So a lot of the time it can be very scary. I think that's one thing I think I was really, really wrong about." (Anna interview, 29.6.20)

For Anna – much like Alex – NC and the arts more generally had felt exclusive and daunting. However, taking part in the gallery's youth programme had transformed Anna's

understandings of the arts, and her understandings of her own future career options. Anna grew up in Zimbabwe and told me that her family had always emphasized the value of traditional professions. Doing the work experience programme at NC had allowed her to imagine other professional possibilities for herself, which she felt strongly about:

“At the end [of the work experience scheme] it was my favorite part of the whole thing, when we went and we had a meeting with everybody for the first time. And it was like the most amazing thing ever, like, "Oh my God look at all these people! So cool!" And, erm, yeah, that was the first time that we'd ever had a conversation with like the Director. And it was just really, really interesting to hear their perspectives of the art world because I think that when everyone's like pushing you, like, "Be a doctor, be a lawyer!", it was nice to have that conversation with those people... I think it's really, really important to kind of teach young kids that there's more to the world than just these three jobs that people were telling me to go into.” (Anna interview, 29.6.20)

For Anna, undertaking work experience at NC induced a set of powerful desires around the arts, offering a form of institutional hospitality which made her feel that she could become an insider in the elite artworld, transforming her sentiments about the arts from fear and exclusion to excitement and even love. The powerful affects generated by the one-week work experience programme at NC led Anna to join 1525 and became a committed member of the collective.

Anna talked about 1525 passionately and expressed a deep investment in participation at NC, which was in stark contrast with the discomfort and exclusion that she had associated with galleries previously. In her account of the group, taking up a positive relationship with Ellie was a crucial in changing her feelings about the gallery, and producing her emergent identity as an arts worker in the making:

“I think what makes it feel safe is just the fact that we have such an amazing person in Ellie, kind of like, leading the group. And she's kind of almost like a mother figure. And we have like kind of an inside joke, where it's like, she's our mother. And it's kind of that warm environment, and literally, if you have any problem, and you want to talk about literally anything, you can just speak to them about it.” (Anna interview, 29.6.20)

Like for Alex, experiencing a caring, warm, and supportive relationship with Ellie had been a crucial part of Anna's transformed relationship with the arts and the generation of her newfound investments in a professional future within the sector.

Anna's experiences at NC were saturated with powerful feelings. Taking part in the group had affectively compelled her towards careers in the arts in a way that transcended any rational consideration of how far participation in the group might (or might not) offer her access to this sort of work. She told me:

"Sometimes you don't even need to have all these qualifications, that everyone's telling you that you need to have, you just need to have that will to do it. And it pushes you and it inspires you. Literally, I felt so inspired when I met these people." (Anna interview, 29.6.20)

Developing close relationships with staff at the gallery and undertaking regular, sustained participation in the youth collective made Anna feel like an insider at NC. Taking up a new relation to the institution gave her a sense of excitement and confidence about her own imagined future in the arts. Anna's imagined future self as an arts worker was so desirable and thrilling that it invoked the powerful affect of 'euphoria' (McRobbie, 2016), which allowed her to disengage from calculated considerations of her employability (Christiaens, 2020), or reflections on the challenging labour market conditions that arts jobs might realistically involve (McRobbie, 2016).

In Chapter Seven, I will discuss in detail how the development of intimate relationships in 1525 meetings enacted other forms of hospitable relations, beyond the assimilation involved in enactments of the group as a route into work in the arts. However, the close relationships that young people developed with Ellie in the gallery youth collective did more than one thing.



In the context of participation as a route into work in the arts, the intimate relationship that Anna developed with Ellie was an important part of the affective shift in her relation to the institution, which enabled the generation of Anna's optimistic investments in an idealised notion of work in the arts, and was therefore complicit in the generation and maintenance of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011).

### *Becoming optimistic in the gallery youth collective*

Across the three accounts of Helena, Alex, and Anna, I have illustrated some of the different yet connected ways that 1525 members took up participation in the collective as a route into work in the arts. In common with many 1525 members, Helena understood participation in the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts as a "useful" way to assimilate into the art world and thus maximise her employability in the sector. Despite superficially appearing as a heavily instrumentalised disposition towards participation, Helena's compulsion to seek resources for arts careers was underpinned by a set of powerful attachments to arts work, which were even more tangible in Alex and Anna's accounts of being members of the collective.

Like many other members of the gallery youth collective, Alex and Anna had both found the art world daunting and exclusive when they joined 1525. However, participation in the gallery youth collective translated their negative affects of fear, hostility, and exclusion into an optimistic set of affects, including a sense of excitement and possibility about their imagined futures as arts workers. Developing relationships with "real life" arts workers – especially Ellie but also other gallery staff – offered a form of assimilation into the arts. Becoming arts workers in the making was a dominating and cliched mode of subjectivity, but one which felt

good to many 1525 members (Hickey-Moody, 2013b). The generation of a feeling of newfound confidence from institutional participation seemed to be especially profound for those young people who, like Alex and Anna, had not previously felt welcomed by elite arts institutions.

Whilst taking up a set of resources for future work in the arts from participating in 1525 may have enhanced some young people's opportunities to progress into work the arts, it also involved a process of optimistically investing in arts work, which often encouraged young people to overlook the risky – and even harmful – labour conditions commonly involved (Christiaens, 2020; McRobbie, 2016), and was thus a cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011) mode of hospitality.

#### c) The impasse and beyond

##### *Young people*

1525 offered young people a form of sustained participation, and some members had been involved for several years. As the group was open to people up to 25 years old, some of the older members had left formal education and were seeking work in the arts. In this section, I will discuss the experiences of Emily and Gwen, whose accounts show that the positive affects surrounding work in the arts that were produced by participation in 1525 were challenged by their experience of the realities of the arts labour market. After discussing Emily and Gwen's stories, I will explain how part of the labour of gallery education workers Ellie and Maura involved holding conflicting ideas and sentiments about the collective as a route into work in the arts. I will show that they too were often invested in optimistic sentiments about young people's participation in the collective as a route into work in the arts but were sometimes

uncomfortably confronted by the failures of these narratives. Further, gallery learning workers sometimes encountered contradictions between the logics they were required to activate to leverage resources for the programme, and the relationships involved in delivering activities with participants. In this section, I analyze how the young people's experiences and those of the gallery staff who worked with them can be understood as an 'impasse' (Berlant, 2011) in their optimistic attachments to the collective as a route into work in the arts, which, for some, eventually led to the painful severance of their investments in work in the arts.

Emily: "Nothing really came of that"

As Emily talked about pursuing a career in the arts alongside and since completing her Bachelor's degree in fashion, there was a clear expectation that the various opportunities she had taken up should have built into a linear journey, which went somewhere, or added up to something. However, as Emily described volunteering for an arts centre in the local city where she grew up, it was clear that her experiences of pursuing work in the arts had often ultimately been anti-climactic:

"They took on loads of volunteers mainly for invigilating the exhibitions around the city. So you were just kind of stuck somewhere for like hours on end. And then it was kind of in the winter, so it was like, really cold and stuff. I just felt like that wasn't really like what I'd signed up to do." (Emily interview, 27.10.20)

"I just kind of wanted to, like, make some contacts there...because they did say that there would be, like, more opportunities coming out of it. But I did meet some good people there that work there, erm, but it wasn't exactly what I thought" (Emily interview, 27.10.20).

Emily described getting some small positive input from people who worked for the festival, such as curators giving her feedback on her portfolio. However, overall, these small positives didn't really "go anywhere" compared to her expectations. She had expected volunteering to support her development as Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007) ideal neoliberal worker who

develops networks, which produce projects, but no such outcomes had emerged for her. The repeated phrase “nothing really came of that” as Emily described her experiences of pursuing the arts as a career conveyed a profound feeling of disappointment. The rhetoric of the creative “good life” had not reached fruition for her. Emily’s experience of pursuing a career in the arts resonated with McRobbie’s analysis of the ways in which young women’s hopeful investments in education and creative work are often doomed to failure:

On the one hand there is a sheer determination to make something of a working life and to come up with a viable business plan; on the other hand...conditions...also precipitate a sense of acute crisis of identity for a generation of young women who sought gender equality through acquiring what once were the risk-proof kind of qualifications linked with degrees and post-graduate training. Unfailingly the spreadsheet mindset of the life-plan, such a recurrent feature of neoliberal everyday life, shows itself to be implausible (McRobbie, 2016, p. 3).

The ‘crisis of identity’ (McRobbie, 2016, p. 3) that Emily experienced in pursuing a career in the cultural industries was, in Berlant’s (2011) terms, an impasse in her optimistic attachments to work in the arts, in which, ‘the urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again, without assurances of futurity’ (Berlant, 2011, p. 200).

Whilst Emily’s early experiences of work in the arts suggested an ambivalence in her investments in work in the arts, some members of the gallery youth collective entered the arts workforce but were repeatedly confronted by the failures of these modes of labour to live up to their “good life” fantasies, which presented an even more severe challenge to their optimistic attachments to work in the arts.

Gwen: “Wow, this is meant to be fun!”

Gwen had moved to Nottingham as a master’s graduate, as she believed there to be many well-resourced arts institutions in the city who could, potentially, offer her work. She was

initially enthusiastic about working in contemporary art, but she found herself in a series of low-paid and boring roles which failed to capitalize on her substantial art related knowledge and skills. Over time, she became increasingly cynical about working in galleries and secured a teaching job at in an art institute at a local university, but she continued to look out for the gallery jobs that she had always hoped to secure. Eventually, Gwen got through to the second round of interviews for a gallery job that she had long desired, and one that she felt would involve more creativity and freedom than the menial tasks involved in entry level gallery jobs. However, during the recruitment process, she came to feel that even this job offered little meaningful scope for professional agency, saying that it turned out to be a “more admin-based role”. After this experience, she was left frustrated and deeply disenchanted with the idea of working in galleries and found that her pleasure at participating at NC was tarnished, saying;

“I don’t know, it became a bit weird after that. And I think as well, like that, interview was very serious, too. I was just like “Wow, this is meant to be fun”, like this [laughs], “I’m meant to be learning and it’s meant to be fun” (Gwen interview 10.6.20).

Gwen’s experience of reaching a state of disillusionment about working in galleries represented the severance of some of her optimistic attachments. Having her investments overturned was a painful experience, but one that led her to a more critical perspective on the promises that youth collectives make, as a route into work in the arts, as she told me that she ultimately found them “misleading”:

“They were kind of saying, “Come on, we’ll show you how to get into the arts industry”. And then it was like, “This is all the stuff we do, and it’s exciting!” But then realistically, how are you going to get into it? Because that wasn’t covered. And even going for a more high up role, like I did, even that ended up being an admin role. So, I just thought, you know, “You’ve told me all the fun stuff that you as a Director, and you as a Lead Curator get to do but then not like showed me a way to get into it”. And that was quite... like, it was quite demoralizing, I think cos setting something up as if, you know, “Oh, it’s easy to get into this industry”, when it’s not, it’s not really fair, because even if you want to be a

curator, they expect you to do so much free unpaid curation before you can build up your portfolio and apply for a job there, you know?” (Gwen interview, 10.6.20)

Through her persistent pursuit of resources for work in the arts, such as her educational qualifications and her involvement in the Nottingham arts scene – including participation in 1525 – Gwen had ultimately secured work related to the arts but found that by moving sideways out of cultural institutions, into higher education, she was able to access better working conditions. As she repeatedly encountered the challenging realities of work in the gallery sector, Gwen came to feel that the way that work in the arts had been portrayed by NC’s youth programme as “fun” and “exciting” was over-idealised and unrealistic. She experienced the promises the youth collective made about idealised work in the arts as ‘cruel’, leading to an impasse (Berlant, 2011), and ultimately the severance of her optimistic investments in the idea of participation in the gallery youth collective as a route into work in galleries.

Young people were not alone in taking up optimistic investments in 1525 as a source of professional resources for work in the arts, or in being confronted by the failures of this enactment of the collective. Ellie and Maura’s roles often involved holding space for the contradictions involved in the group as a route into work in the arts, as I will discuss in the next section.

### *Gallery workers*

Like 1525 members, some staff at NC were confronted by conflicting experiences of the youth collective which challenged their optimistic investments in group as a route into work in the arts for a more diverse group of young people. Ellie sometimes described feeling worn down

by the contradictions of her work in this regard. She described the painful realization that the elitism of the arts meant that most of the young people in the collective would be still excluded from the creative careers they sought, despite her best efforts. Her struggles to grapple with the contradictions of her job were compounded by the precarity and poor working conditions of her role, which was insecure, low paid, and involved a heavy workload and high levels of stress (Kill, 2022). For Maura, the demands of managing precarious learning programmes often involved tacking between conflicting accounts of the value of participation, which produced a sense of dissonance, as I will describe later in this section.

Ellie: “We are stand-ins for...the rich kids' fancy curator auntie”

Ellie was passionate about her ambition for the collective to support young people in pursuing arts careers, and felt that her embedded position – and that of the gallery youth collective – within the working life of the institution was crucial to achieving this aim:

“A big part of the group is demystifying the art sector and part of that is meeting members of staff and realizing that they're just people. And I can do this, and I can ask them for advice, I can ask them for help. And I really do encourage members to reach out to those staff members. And generally, staff are happy to help”. (Ellie interview, 8.7.20)

This notion of relationships with gallery staff as a way of “demystifying” the art sector for young people encouraged 1525 members to invest in imagining their futures as art workers. Ellie’s investment in creating opportunities in the collective for young people to develop relationships with gallery workers suggested that she believed that in meeting other arts workers, young people would realize that they are “just people” and would be able to find out about their roles and professional trajectories, and even ask them for advice. Ellie believed that these interactions would help young people to develop more confidence about

their own ability to attain work in the arts, and to acquire a more informed sense of the resources they would need to do so.

Ellie was invested in the belief that participation in the collective could offer less privileged members valuable professional resources for their future arts careers, which she believed would help equalize some of the class-based disparities of the sector and thus diversify the arts workforce:

“We are, you know, a brand - I suppose - of credibility and legitimacy, that if you're associated with that, it can help you get ahead. In the same way that if your parents had a friend who was... you know, a fancy curator, it would help you get ahead, I'm hoping that programs like this that are free and accessible, are kind of... bridge that a bit more, because we are stand-ins for...the rich kids' fancy curator auntie” (Ellie interview, 8.7.20)

Ellie also spent time 1:1 with young people, helping them prepare for university or professional opportunities:

“A lot of it is guidance, you know, so another element of 1525, which I forgot to mention was that we do do one to one sessions, reading over CVs, reading over applications, we did a lot of work helping our members get into university, we wouldn't have, you know, necessarily had that help talking through those options.” (Ellie interview, 8.7.20)

Maura identified that developing routes into arts work was a key part of how Ellie had taken up the collective and made it her own:

“I think what's interesting about the collective now... is...the work that they do as young creatives in their own right...about support, mutual support, and pathways into the creative sector. That seems a much sort of stronger strand and theme than in the original bid to...Garfield Weston, than I think was envisaged then.” (Maura interview 28.7.20)

Ellie was motivated by a strong ethos of social justice around equality of access to careers in the arts which was informed by her own educational experiences, having attended a state school in Nottingham and a local further education college, before gaining a place at the high-status Courtauld Institute. Ellie's Art History tutor at college in Nottingham had been an important role model and source of guidance when she was a young person embarking on a



career in the arts. She felt that the supportive relationship with this tutor had been a crucial factor in enabling her to access a career in the arts, and this experience informed her work with the collective.

Like many 1525 members, Ellie was invested in the idea of the youth collective as a way of young people accessing routes into work in the arts, although she was positioned and invested in this outcome differently, as a gallery worker. She described the wider arts sector as actively “hostile” to young people and understood the youth collective as a way of countering the exclusiveness of the cultural industries. Ellie believed that the gallery youth collective could diversify the arts sector workforce, by offering alternative forms of credibility for work in the arts, that were not dependent on wealth or elite family connections to the art world. She thus understood the collective as a way of using the gallery’s status and resources - as well as and her own time, support, and care - to “raise the aspirations” and professional outcomes of working-class young people, which she believed challenged the elitism of the arts sector by widening access to careers in the arts. Graham argues that social justice motives like Ellie’s are commonplace amongst arts workers, who are often invested in values at odds with the elite systems that support their institutional hosts:

In everyday parlance, far away from the annual reports, conferences, and glossy brochures, such practitioners, be they educators, artists, curators, or “community participants,” often describe themselves in jest as “para-sites” or as engaged in acts of para-siting: living off the wealth of their hosts—their material resources and symbolic capital—attempting to redistribute cultural funding, reallocating cultural resources, and reorienting cultural projects toward progressive social and political outcomes (Graham, 2015).

Ellie’s view of herself as leveraging the resources of the institution to support young people to achieve “better” educational and professional outcomes was another optimistic

investment at play in 1525, which guided and motivated her day-to-day practice with young people at the gallery, but it was founded on contradictory logics.

Whilst Ellie was invested in the collective as a way of widening access to higher education and work in the arts as a route to greater equality, the underlying logic of this belief relied on the idea that broadening inclusion in elite institutions could resolve the dominating power relations underlying such institutions. In fact – as Ahmed (2012) argues – diversity initiatives such like the gallery youth collective, which are founded on institutional inclusion, can serve to reproduce the dominance of the institution-as-host by allowing them to perform and celebrate their own ethical righteousness, which conceals and reproduces the underlying power structures and hierarchies. Further, the enactment of the gallery youth collective as routes into work in the arts generated a mode of hospitality as assimilation, which assumed that young people's lives were improved by being made more like their dominating hosts, rather than seeking to validate and value their existing cultural knowledges and ways of being, and therefore challenging the underlying assumed hierarchy of cultural value. When the collective was enacted as a route into work in the arts, Ellie related to the institution as a 'parasite' (Graham, 2015; Marcus, 2000): she was ambivalently engaged with the structural power of the host institution she was within. Part of her parasitical labour involved holding and managing the contradictions of the collective as routes into work in the arts, and therefore striving to sustain the impasse this variously produced for both her and members of the collective by avoiding and concealing the contradictions involved. Ellie was not the only gallery worker who was sometimes confronted with the contradictions of the gallery youth collective. Her manager Maura was also called upon to hold inherent tensions in the programme, as I will discuss next.

### Maura: The criteria in the cupboard

The form of hospitable participation imagined by offer of the youth collective as a route into work in the arts was in stark contrast with the offer of the group as a caring community that I identified in Chapter Four<sup>28</sup>. At times, Maura identified the discomfort of holding the contradictions between various accounts and enactments of the collective. When I interviewed her towards the end of the research, she described being confronted by the pejorative language used in the funding application for 1525, when she returned to it later:

“I remember the bid and it was very much about you know...looking back at it, you know, I didn't write it, but I sort of was involved in shaping it in the stage when it was first made, and then you, you don't look at something for a while you reread it, and it's just so heavy with the kind of, you know, language of deprivation, that you're really going "Urgh" reading it, you know, reading it back, and I think just I think as a sector, our awareness of that, and what that means has really sort of changed and shifted, and, you know, we need to be a lot more careful about using, you know, the language of poverty and deprivation, I think.” (Maura interview 28.7.20)

Maura suggested that the framing of young people through a deficit lens was created by the practices of the sector, and explained some of the ways in which she and other workers in NC's Learning team navigated and managed these contradictory ways of imagining the relations on offer to participants in their programmes:

“I think it was part and parcel of kind of bid writing, in every kind of charity sector, I think that kept using those ONS statistics. And you know, the indices of multiple deprivation, I think, you know, but I think that has been more of a shift and more of an awareness. I'm thinking about training that I've been on, you know, something very close to my heart, around... social class and working class people's experiences of, you know, the art sector, just about, you know, there's been, Jerwood did a lot of work around language and the use of language, and this idea of deprivation, and being deprived, and, you know, young, predominantly young people saying, talking about how they experienced that language. It's also something that we struggle a lot within [one programme]. So, for example, it's funded by [organisation], well, it's managed by [organisation] and funded through [a funder], and [another funder]. And they're really, really strict about how you know that

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Seven for a full discussion of how the offer of the collective as a caring community was taken up by young people and gallery workers.

the logo has got to be exactly right, that this wording, that it's got to be word for word. And they use words like, you know, "multiple and complex needs", and they talk about poverty. And, you know, it's just something that we've felt less and less comfortable with. We have to put this this wording up in the workshop room, and we've found, you know, we've, we've ended up putting it inside the cupboard door, you know. Just kind of "Oh, it's here", if something sort of, because we have sort of spot checks on things like that and try to find ways to avoid it. And we've just been more and more uncomfortable about that kind of language. Because it, you know, if you read something back, and you actually think "I wouldn't want the young person or the woman going to [this programme] to actually read this", you know, "I'd feel really uncomfortable, if I was in their company, and they read this, and they were having to kind of make that match between themselves, that language and themselves" (Maura interview, 28.7.20)

I was compelled by the story of the criteria in the cupboard. I returned to it again and again, relistening to the interview and re-narrating the story to my supervisors, as I started writing about the gallery youth collective. Over time, I realised that this anecdote was so powerfully resonant because it acted as a synecdoche for the wider contradictions of attempting participation at NC. Maura's account of the criteria in the cupboard highlights that there was a paradox involved in espousing participants as equal collaborators whilst being dependent on financial resources from a system that demanded people to be positioned as beneficiaries and the gallery as benefactor, and for the programme to be pre-imagined in terms of the gallery's ability to transform and improve participants. The paradox identified in Maura's anecdote resonates with Derridean notions of hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) as, whilst the core ethical motive was for the host (NC) to be inclusive, the host's stability (in this case, their charitable status and ability to generate income to fund staff salaries to carry out participatory work) was reliant on them maintaining their hierarchical position over participants.

My analysis of the enactment of the collective as routes into work in the arts has illustrated that the dominance of a set of binary and hierarchical hospitable relations in arts funding

practices is part of the cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) of gallery participation programmes. Gallery education workers were compelled to repeatedly invest in an optimistic narrative about arts participation as linear impact, to sustain programmes. They were called upon to repeatedly tell a story in which working class and otherwise “deprived” people could “benefit” from being involved in the elite arts, which were claimed to improve people’s lives in a whole variety of ways. However, the account of participation as improvement paradoxically positioned participants as beneficiaries and therefore put them in a deficit position, relative to the gallery, from the very early imaginings of the programme, and at repeated moments of audit throughout its enactment. The repeated reproduction of participants’ subordinate positioning in fundraising practices, and linked monitoring and evaluation, embedded this set of imagined relationalities within the subconscious organisational atmosphere, even if, workers would be – as Maura was – somewhat consciously uncomfortable with this account of participants. However, as I will discuss further in Chapter Seven, a deficit account of participants was often at odds with the everyday practice of participatory work. As Maura acknowledged in the story of the criteria in the cupboard, she was aware that the way the gallery framed participants to leverage funding would be uncomfortable reading for participants, as it was at odds with the relational dynamics that gallery staff and artists enacted within participatory activities.

Gallery workers were called upon to hold the contradictions of a contradictory form of hospitality produced by the participatory offer of 1525, which both suggested that participants are risky and deficient subjects, who might be saved and improved by taking part in the elite gallery; and that they are equal counterparts, being brought into the gallery to contribute as collaborators. Holding the contradiction of the optimistic offer of the group

as a linear mode of transformation alongside the felt inadequacy of this approach to resolve the paradox of hospitality in relational terms constructed the conditions for an 'impasse', in Berlant's (2011) terms. The embodied discomfort that Maura described when imagining how it would feel to be in the company of a participant, reading the terms in which they were described within funding bids and audit regimes, can be interpreted as the manifestation of an impasse. Gallery education staff were called upon to sustain their commitment to the value of participatory work both in the instrumental terms of impact and in terms of more radical social justice aims, despite being repeatedly confronted by these contradictions, and the fact that participation was not actually able to fulfil its optimistic claims of resolving the elitism and exclusion of the art world.

Maura's story about the uncomfortable tensions in how she was called upon to talk about the gallery youth collective attested to the wider contradictions of doing participation work at NC. The narrative that Maura presented resonates with Ahmed's (2012) account of the conditional hospitality that is often invoked by attempts to do institutional diversity and inclusion work. As Ahmed argues, institutions ostensibly welcome "diverse" people in, and might even offer them love (2012, p. 43), in exchange for their integration into a 'common organisational culture' (p. 43) and for allowing the organisation to publicly perform and celebrate itself as ethical. Likewise, the language of deficit, impact, and philanthropy was invoked in funding bids, audit practices, and publicity to allow the gallery to position itself as an ethical, civic benefactor. However, by being enacted through hierarchical, fixed relations of host and guest, institutional participation was complicit in ends at odds with its espoused purpose of equality and empowerment. Whilst gallery workers strove to maintain the different, dissonant versions of participation they had to perform as institutionally

separate domains, ongoing demands to demonstrate, capture, and evidence the impact of the work mean that – in the terms of Maura’s anecdote – the criteria always threatened to fall out of the cupboard. As Derrida (2000) contended, the constant threat of oversight – amplified by the precarious position of the host – eroded the possibility of hospitality.

#### The conditional hospitality of participation as routes into work in the arts

In this chapter I have analysed the enactment the gallery youth collective as a route into work in the arts, showing that it enacted a mode of conditional hospitality (Ahmed, 2012, 2020; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) which was cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011). Whilst young people desired participation in the gallery youth collective as it promised access to the elite art world, the mode of hospitality this produced rested on the logic of assimilation and therefore reproduced the gallery’s dominance as host, and young people’s subordination as guests. Young people’s subjectification as arts workers through participation in 1525 reproduced and deepened their professional subjectivities as emerging arts workers, which contributed to maintaining ongoing cycles of exploitative cultural work (McRobbie, 2016), reinforcing rather than challenging the status quo of inequalities and elitism in the sector. Enacting institutional hospitality as young people’s assimilation into the gallery-as-host produced a fixed, binary set of relational positions in which the gallery was reinscribed as a powerful, institutional benefactor-host, and young people as passive beneficiary-guests.

As this chapter concludes, the unfolding of the empirical results chapters will now pause, just as the process of this doctoral research was interrupted by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, in Spring 2020. Through an account of how the pandemic disrupted the everyday life of both the gallery youth collective and my research practice, in the next chapter

I will show how my own optimistic investments in participation were ultimately overturned, allowing me to take up alternative ways of thinking and feeling about participation in both sites. In Chapter Six, I will introduce some theoretical resources which allowed me to understand the other forms of hospitable relations that were possible from participation, enabling me to attend differently to both the participation produced within the collective meetings (see Chapter Seven), and that which was active in my research with 1525 (see Chapter Nine).



## 6. Theory: Rupture, rhizome, and tree

In Chapter Five, I outlined how young people took up the dominant offer of the gallery youth collective, becoming the expected guest by occupying the position of emerging creative workers. However, the period in which I carried out this research was also marked by a series of jarringly unexpected events. In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the UK, creating a significant disruption to the activities of the 1525 collective, and to my planned participatory research methods. This chapter deals with the events of the pandemic at NC, and the ensuing series of ruptures that it provoked in this research. In this chapter, I will:

- a) Outline what happened at NC when the pandemic arrived, both in terms of the activities of 1525, and my participatory research therein.
- b) Describe how the 'unforeclosed experience' (Berlant, 2011, p. 5) of the pandemic challenged, and ultimately severed, my optimistic attachments to idealised notions of participation, allowing me to attend more deeply to the complexity of hospitable relations in 1525, and those of my research therein.
- c) Explain how the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980) provided tools to think about hospitable relations differently, beyond the hierarchical relations that are dominant in both academia and gallery education. I will also discuss how Anna Hickey-Moody's (2013b) activation of Deleuzian ideas to understand youth arts offered a new way of understanding collective voice and agency in the gallery youth collective.
- d) Consider the ways in which the arrival of the pandemic and a set of theoretical tools catalysed a shift in my approach to participatory research methods.

#### a) The arrival of Covid-19

Despite the multiple complexities of negotiating participatory research, in March 2020 the co-research collective and I were planning several research workshops. The planned sessions – due to take place in April 2020 – were designed around using the young people’s creative skills and interests - including photography and creative writing – to investigate the experiences that they and their peers in 1525 had of taking part in the collective. However, in March 2020 Covid-19 numbers and hospitalisations rose across the UK, and arts institutions faced ever-changing advice from the UK government about whether they could remain open and, if so, under what conditions. The prospect of closing the gallery building threatened NC’s business model, which depended on income-generating activities (including the café, shop, and room hire revenue) to survive. In the face of the pandemic, Ellie initially worked with group members to move the collective’s activities online, but after only a few weeks, she was informed at short notice that senior gallery management had decided to furlough her, which she later described as “a shock”. Despite NC often describing 1525 as a democratic, peer-led collective, in the face of the Covid-19 crisis – and the perceived financial implications for the institution – the group’s activities were suspended without consultation with members.

#### *Disruption to the youth collective*

##### **Research records: The final 1525 meeting (8.4.20)**

The final meeting of the 1525 collective took place online. As they each looked into screens on their tablets, laptops, and phones, members were informed that Ellie was to be furloughed and that the group’s regular meetings would pause indefinitely whilst this was the case. Ellie explained that the gallery’s responsibilities to its staff were a priority, saying

that, “NC wants to set an example to other arts organisations about paying all staff through the lockdown, including people on zero hours contracts”. She went on to tell us that, “The gallery has also missed out on sources of income, such as Frieze art fair, which normally generates £30k, so they are concerned about their ongoing financial situation and how this might progress.” Ellie explained that the current grant funding that supported the group was ending in September, and that furloughing her during the pandemic would offer the gallery time to apply for other sources of income to support the activities of the 1525 collective. She concluded, “It is in the best interests of the group, although it is disappointing not to meet”. She looked drained as she added, “I have found Wednesday meetings quite comforting”. Ellie peered into her camera and asked the group members, “How do you feel? Sad? Angry?” One young person responded, “I’m sad because I have missed a few meetings as it was hard to get here in time due to traffic. So I was pleased it had gone digital as that was easier for me to come to. I’m worried I am going to forget how to socially interact with people”. Another member added: “You get used to seeing people. It is weird, what am I going to do on a Wednesday 5-7pm?”.

1525 members were advised that whilst the group was paused, they should not communicate using their regular social media message thread. Ellie would not be allowed to work at all whilst furloughed, and she explained that this meant she would not be able to oversee members’ communication. She explained: “If you guys want to keep in contact with each other you can, just don’t do it on 1525 group chat, I’m sure you’d prefer that anyway, so we aren’t snooping on your conversations. I’m sure nothing weird would happen, but if it did, I wouldn’t be able to moderate the discussion or deal with any conflict, so it’s best not to use this thread”.

The gallery’s desire to oversee the collective members’ online communication during the pandemic reflected an ongoing institutional concern about the need to manage a perceived set of safeguarding risks to young people from within the collective. Considering almost all group members were over 18 years old, and the fact that the collective had been repeatedly espoused as an peer-led network, extreme institutional anxieties – and the idea of suspending

established modes of communication within the collective as an appropriate solution – seemed to me to be quite infantilising. It appeared that senior gallery managers were primarily concerned with taking up the government funding for furlough to ensure the organisation’s financial stability, ensuring that workers were paid, and minimising any potential risks to their organisational reputation. In practice, the guidance given to 1525 members meant that their established channel for communication had been labelled as “unsafe”, limiting their capacity to take up potentially valuable peer support from one another during the challenging, early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this time of crisis, the institutional value of the collective seemed to have been deprioritised, as the hospitality extended to 1525 members was withdrawn, in order to secure the position of the gallery-as-host.

#### *Disruption to the research*

During the pandemic, most operational gallery staff were furloughed alongside Ellie, so a message was relayed to me from the gallery’s Director, suggesting that all institutional research should be paused during this period too. However, as a collaborative ethnographer, I was concerned about the idea of stopping my research in this time as it felt unethical. I was concerned that young people in 1525 might feel unsettled or even abandoned by the suspension of their weekly collective meetings, and I did not want to compound these emotions by also stopping my research meetings with them. I also felt that the ethnographic research was now, in part, about what happened to the collective in the face of the crisis. Despite the suspension of the gallery’s programme, I believed that I had an ethical responsibility to engage with and document young people’s experiences of the events of the pandemic, to give a full account of what happened in the youth collective in the crisis, and to consider the ways in which this could be seen to surface the underlying dynamics of

participation. Furthermore, it was unclear at this time whether I would receive a funded extension to my doctoral studies from ESRC – and if so, for how long – so the idea of simply stopping the research indefinitely presented a potential threat to my ability to complete the research successfully.

In the face of the institutional crisis presented by Covid-19, the anxieties that some gallery staff had about the research seemed to escalate exponentially. Several weeks of renegotiation and reassurance about the research plans were required, in which my supervisors and I had to return to long-established agreements about the aims, methods, and approved ethical protocols involved. Despite the high levels of institutional anxiety about the research continuing in the pandemic, the practical changes required to adapt were minimal. Co-research collective meetings were to move online, but as the collective had always used digital media to keep in touch, and 1525 meetings had already been moved online, this was not a new practice for me, the young people, or the gallery. My supervisors advised that this small amendment to my research methods simply required an email checking whether participants (and their parents if they were under 16 years old) wanted to continue with the research digitally. However, in the discussions about continuing the research whilst collective meetings were paused, some gallery workers repeatedly expressed concerns about safeguarding. The conversations became quite circular at times and started to feel hostile and obstructive to the research proceeding, regardless of the carefully considered ethical rationale behind the plans.

I reflected on this time in my research journal:

The way the research has unfolded has seen a number of moves by the institution to resist, obstruct, delay and refuse access to this research process, whilst simultaneously claiming to welcome it. Attempts have been made to position research as something that should be under the control of the institution, and to narrate me as a researcher as inexperienced, not competent, ethically dangerous, a lone wolf (i.e. denying the university's credentials

in supporting and guiding the research) and ultimately obfuscating the progress of the project such that the reality of the relations – and perhaps in particular the response to CV19 – have been harder to access. (Research Journal, August 2020)

After extended negotiations between me, my supervisors, and Maura, the research with young people resumed. However, after the enforced hiatus of around a month, and the other changes to collective members' lives in this time (including, importantly, the indefinite suspension of the regular collective meetings) the co-research process had lost momentum.

b) Rupturing my attachment to idealised participation

The events that unfolded at NC during the pandemic affected me, my view of the youth collective, and my relationship to my research deeply. As I have previously written, my experience of these events can be framed in terms of Berlant's (2011) notion of cruel optimism:

This enforced pause and subsequent changes to the research plans acted as an "unforeclosed experience" (Berlant, 2011, p. 5), profoundly unsettling my investment in an idealized vision of co-production. Amidst the broader anxieties of the pandemic, I experienced a perturbing loss of identity. At times, I struggled to imagine how I would complete the research at all, now the collaborative process I had envisaged was impossible. If I did complete the research, I was concerned that the outcome might not reflect the ethical ideals of co-production with which I wanted to be associated. These experiences were deeply unsettling to my embedded investments in co-production. (Kill, 2022, p. 63)

The events of the pandemic ultimately disturbed my investments in participation as an idealised relational mode. The experience of the arrival of the pandemic acted as a rupture to the everyday rhythm of participation in 1525 and my research practice, which surfaced the contradictions in my belief that doing collaboration "right" could somehow resolve power, once and for all. Instead, in the crisis of the pandemic, I was confronted with the fact that the paradoxical relations of hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) meant that power was ever-present, and continually in flux.

Bearing witness to the events that took place at NC as the pandemic arrived was a jarring experience for me, emotionally. The closure of the collective, young people being told not to independently communicate, and the imposition of barriers to the research all revealed a set of underlying institutional relations at play. When Ellie suggested that postponing the group's meetings in a time of crisis was a useful opportunity to generate more funding, and even implied that young people should be pleased about this turn of events, the precarious and contradictory position of the collective at NC became highly visible to me. Despite NC publicly narrating the group as a central part of the gallery's life in funding bids and press releases and suggesting that members were offered insider status at NC, the crisis of the pandemic revealed that institutional security and paying staff were priorities, and the agency of the collective could always be suspended to protect the gallery-as-host. In this moment, it became clear to me that learning at NC was, as Graham argues, an institutional "and":

It is often narrated as the reason for galleries to exist and yet, it is the first program to go in budget cutting measures. (Graham, 2017a, p. 187)

The contradictions that had always been lurking, latent within the notion of an institutionally hosted (and, importantly, funded) collective, were surfaced when financial concerns led to the sudden suspension of 1525 meetings. Under the conditions of crisis, the rhetoric of safety was repeatedly invoked by NC to justify top-down, institutional decision making in both the supposedly peer-led context of 1525 and the supposedly collaborative research relations they had with me, enacting a violent, paternalistic mode of care-as-control (Bulley, 2015). Underneath the positive rhetoric of welcome and inclusion at NC, the hospitable relations of the gallery youth collective were revealed to be highly conditional. In a time of crisis, it was apparent that both members of the collective and I were merely institutional guests, and the gallery was a powerfully dominant host.

### c) Deleuzean hospitality: The rhizome and the tree

Under the conditions of crisis, my investment in idealised narratives of youth participation as unlimited hospitality were revealed to be a form of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). After the rupture of the arrival of the pandemic, I started to reflect further on the features of idealised imaginaries of participation as unlimited hospitality. I noticed that, as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) suggest, idealised notions of participation relied on a limited, individualised notion of the subject and a linear idea of young people's development according to a narrow trajectory towards adulthood. I sought theoretical tools to help me account for how these limited ideas of participatory relations enacted a conditional, dominating mode of hospitality, ultimately serving to reproduce the hierarchies that they claimed to challenge.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) notions of the 'rhizome' and the 'tree' offered a way of thinking about the hospitable ethics of institutional collectives, and to imagine these relations beyond the binary logic of host and guest. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) argue that humans tend to default to linear, hierarchical ways of understanding and organising the world, which they describe as a tree-like or arboreal logic. However, they suggest that the tree is only one possible way of organising the world. They employ the notion of the 'rhizome' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) from the natural world to offer a model for a more multiple, flat set of relations. As they put it:

A rhizome as a subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with roots and radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether: the question is whether plant life in its specificity is not entirely rhizomatic. Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply movement, evasion and breakout. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 7)



A rhizomatic system is quite different to the dominant, arboreal arrangement, but Deleuze and Guattari nevertheless stress that the rhizome and the tree should not merely become a new oppositional binary. Instead, they contend that the two structures can, and often do, exist within one another:

There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome...A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, a crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscopic element of the root-tree (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 16)

In the face of the rupture of my optimistic attachments to idealised participation, Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) idea of the rhizome and the tree provided me with a new and nuanced way of conceptualising how a youth collective within a powerful host institution might function. A rhizomatic approach to the gallery youth collective offered a way of attending to the other affordances of participation-as-hospitality beyond, against, and within (Bell & Pahl, 2018) fixed, hierarchical binaries of host and guest.

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) argue that the rhizome affords many more possibilities than the tree, because it is ever-unfolding:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 27)

The rhizome can produce differential becomings, through a movement away from fixed identities and established categories, towards a state of continual flux and change. According to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is not a determinate teleology, but rather an open-ended, emergent process of experimentation, invention, and creativity, away from the major. The major, in their account, is not necessarily a majority, but the dominant form or norm in terms of power relations. Deleuze and Guattari position becoming as counterpoint to constrained traditional ideas of identity and subjectivity, which, they argue, affords a mode of 'resistance

to the present' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 108). In their account, becoming is strongly situated within power relations, which they discuss in terms of the major and the minor. Becoming is inherently a minoritarian phenomenon: it is a process of moving away from what is centred, and therefore constructed as 'standardised' through 'the power of man' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 291). They write that:

Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labour of power (*puissance*), an active micropolitics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 322).

The concept of rhizomatic, mutual becomings offered an alternative way of thinking about collective hospitality which resisted dominant, neoliberal ideas of the value of participation-as-hospitality in both arts and research which – as I have shown in this thesis – commonly activate ideas of value in terms of linear impact, done by a host to a guest.

Notions of the rhizome and the tree allowed me to consider of how dominant ideas of participation at NC as a route into work in the arts (see Chapter Four and Five) positioned young people's lives as linear trajectories with a narrow vision of adult subjecthood centred as an end goal, reproducing a binary division between the gallery-as-host and benefactor and young people-as-guests and beneficiaries. The arboreal mode of participation as routes into work in the arts loudly welcomed young people in at NC, but in doing so – as Ahmed (2020) suggests – it often reproduced the position of certain people as already at home and (classed and racialised) others as always precarious. It only ever offered young people-as-guests conditional hospitality, which allowed the gallery-as-host to perform their own virtuousness and could never become too disruptive to the status quo. Nevertheless, my experiences of 1525 group meetings led me to believe that more was going on in 1525 than was suggested by dominant enactments of participation as arboreal hospitality. The notion of the rhizome

suggested a different form of hospitality in which young people's multiple becomings occurred collectively and resisted dominating hierarchies, opening new possibilities for understanding participation-as-hospitality's ethical potential in more inclusive and expansive terms. Seeking to better understand how a Deleuzian, rhizomatic approach to understanding participation-as-hospitality might be applied to the practice of youth arts, I turned to the work of Anna Hickey-Moody

*Anna Hickey-Moody: Youth arts and rhizomatic, minoritarian becoming*

Anna Hickey-Moody takes up a Deleuzian approach to consider the 'micro-politics of youth arts projects and the processes of subjectivization they effect' (Hickey-Moody, 2010, p. 203). Challenging the dominance of impact in accounts of the value of young people's arts participation, Hickey-Moody activates notions of becoming, arguing that:

Because reality is primarily in flux, a creative affirmation of this becoming is a resistance to our acceptance of a determined world around us. (2010, p204)

Hickey-Moody suggests that youth arts can be enacted in dominating, adult-led ways which govern and control young people's lives. However, she argues that another mode of youth arts is possible, which, through creativity, can challenge clichéd modes of normative subjectification (Hickey-Moody, 2010, p. 210). She suggests that valuing young people's diverse cultural knowledges produces an atmosphere of belonging in which young people are attended to, and thus allows new modes of youth voice to collectively emerge (Hickey-Moody, 2010, p. 210). However, like the rhizome and the tree, she suggests that these enabling and limiting practices often happen alongside one another: youth arts are often both/and (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 212).

In Hickey-Moody's account, the power of rhizomatic creativity to enable differential becomings is dependent on the intermingling of bodies, as this can produce affect and thus enable change. As she puts it:

The individual nature of the affect as sense – the change registered in a body – is determined by the mixture of subjectivity and art created when the performance is witnessed and felt. Bodies need to 'mix with': to experience and respond to aesthetic affect as nonhuman becoming of the human in order for affectio to occur, for bodily composition to change. (Hickey-Moody, 2013a, p. 91)

Whilst Hickey-Moody often focuses on youth dance as an example of a creative practice that affords young people's differential becomings, I wondered whether the other embodied practices I had observed in 1525 meetings might be considered to have similar capacities.

In Hickey-Moody's account, the value of youth arts is not understood to emerge from unlimited institutional hospitality, but from the powerful affordances of new 'configurations of young community' (2013b, p. 4) that participation enables. She writes that:

Publics, then, are always/already multiple. A theory of little publics captures the political agency of minority that is inherent in this multiplicity. (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 13)

Hickey-Moody suggests that the intimacy, trust, and connectedness that can emerge in a 'little public' (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 21) - or closed group of young people - can allow their differential becomings to emerge, beyond the dominant, major construction. Little publics have powerfully political affordances, such as the capacity to generate agency, which – mobilizing Deleuze and Guattari – Hickey-Moody understands not as the capacity of a bounded individual but as emergent from the collective. Hickey-Moody argues that the public performance of youth arts that emerges from little publics can be a mode of 'aesthetic citizenship' (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 13), which can generate new ways of thinking and feeling about young people and places amongst wider communities, through the speculative potential of aesthetics. As she puts it:

Art works as a materialist technology for the creation of community and a means through which individual and group subjectivities are reassembled. People know themselves in place differently through art. (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 148)

Hickey-Moody (2013b) thus argues that youth arts participation has multiple affordances, both major and minor. It can reproduce dominant ideas about young people, and it can govern and control their lives. However, when it avoids cliché, youth arts participation can enable young people to feel differently about themselves, and it can allow wider publics to think and feel differently about them.

Hickey-Moody's (2013b) account of young, collective becomings offered a way of thinking differently about how participation-as-hospitality unfolded in the gallery youth collective and in my research. The idea of 'little publics' (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) provided a way of conceptualising how a youth collective might generate a different sort of hospitality within a powerful host institution, as a minor space within the major. If the gallery youth collective could be understood as a little public – a rhizomatic minor space within the major – it seemed to be potentially threatening to a powerful institutional host, as it would have the capacity to undermine its dominant position.

#### Minor Writing

I suggest that attempts to do produce collaborative knowledge beyond hierarchies must challenge the logics of ethnographic representation (Thomson, 2018) and instead focus on the affective capacities of the text (Hickey-Moody, 2013a). As Deleuze put it, this involves a turn from 'what the writing is, to what the writing does' (1995, p. 21). Honan and Bright (2016) consider how a thesis might be written differently, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1986) to argue that, 'a minor literature is not that which is written in a minority language' (Honan &

Bright, 2016, p. 734); rather it is ‘a process of minorization, a becoming-minor’ (Honan & Bright, 2016, p. 734). Elsewhere, Deleuze argues that in producing a minor text, writers:

[I]nvent a minor use of the major language within which they express themselves entirely; they minorize this language... they make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch’s line, ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms (Deleuze, 1998, p. 109).

However, writing a doctoral thesis differently is not an easy matter. As Honan and Bright (2016) acknowledge, the thesis occupies a ‘long, sticky period’ (p. 741) within an emerging writer’s academic life, in which the final document is required to conform to textual conventions enough to ‘provide the writermachine a space to “pass”’ (p731). The major language of the doctoral thesis tends to depend on limited notions of representation (Thomson, 2018), which tend to render the researcher invisible and reproduce the organisation of ideas in a linear form. Honan and Bright (2016) describe this dominant mode of academic writing as follows:

This vehicular language – logical, precise, clear, direct and concise – is replete with “order words” that implicitly carrying a whole history of “qualitative” educational research within them, each with its own “little death sentence” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 76). (2016, p. 736)

By contrast to the dominant academic mode of writing, Hickey-Moody (2013a) has argued that academic writing should turn to art’s powerful affective affordances to create a text that can do different things. She argues that the capacities of aesthetics to reassemble public sentiments through affect is not only applicable to youth arts but can also expand the potential for research to create new sentiments in the world. As she puts it:

Research needs to better understand and illustrate how *affectus*, the rhythmic trace of the world incorporated into a body-becoming, makes new geographies of meaning (Hickey-Moody, 2013a, p. 93).

Thus, Hickey-Moody’s notion of ‘aesthetic citizenship’ (2013b) can also be activated in research by mobilising creative and evocative ways of writing that allow people to feel differently about the world. To resist dominant, simplistic ideas about participation, I must

strain against the constraints of the major language of research. I understand writing differently as seeking to produce the minor within the major, a new rhizome within the tree (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980).

As I consider the possibility of rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) modes of participation emerging within the tree-like structures of contemporary art galleries, I likewise consider how the possibility of rhizomatic modes of writing have implications for how this thesis text will unfold, albeit within the tree-like structures of the university. The notion of the rhizome challenges the assumption of the text as a single, teleological progression to a conclusion, instead offering multiple, messy points of entry. As MacLure and Pearce suggest, rhizomatic writing can produce a text that acts as a cabinet of curiosity, describing such texts as:

Fragmentary writings that practice juxtaposition, collage or montage rather than the propositional logic and well-formed syntactic structure of conventional prose. (2009, p. 256)

Honan and Bright (2016) argue that rather than seeking to replace one linguistic norm with another, they must be understood as multiple elements in a textual assemblage, arguing that:

This might result in a thesis text that acknowledges the limitations of representation, that is neither vehicular nor non-vehicular, but is always already vehicular and ... and ... and ... (Honan & Bright, 2016, p. 737)

Following Honan and Bright's (2016) provocation to write a thesis differently, the remaining chapters of this thesis will unfold not as a progressive series of chapters making up a linear, single argument, but rather as several interconnected points of entry which use montage to evoke some of the often-contradictory complexities of the unfolding of the youth collective, and my attempts to do participatory research therein. The rhizomatic text is always multiple and not teleological, unfolding according to the stuttering 'logic of the AND' (Deleuze &

Guattari, 1980, p.28). A more rhizomatic text is better equipped to account for the complex nature of collectives as a mode of participation in both galleries and research, and indeed to seek ‘the witch’s flight’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 41) within this thesis, hoping to find ways of interrupting dominant imaginaries and thinking about the world differently.

And (...and...and)

In her discussion of the fact that gallery education activities are often positioned peripherally in art institutions, Janna Graham invokes Deleuze to discuss the affordances and constraints of occupying the institutional position of “and” (2017a). She explains that occupying this organisational position can be awkward and uncomfortable and acknowledges that education is often caught in the middle of wider contradictions of practice, situated between optimistic narratives and neoliberal organisational logics. Nevertheless, Graham illustrates that occupying the “and” can be a generative position:

Gilles Deleuze made the distinction between two kinds of AND. One was the AND that affirms What is on either side of the conjunction, that which affirms naturalized concepts of the inevitable and the status quo. The other is the AND of a “creative stammering”, the “and (... and ... and)”, that is a force of becoming multiple, “of living and thinking”, to see the boundaries and surpass them. (Graham, 2017a, p. 201)

It is Graham’s second sort of “and” which I take up in the rest of this thesis. The overflowing, rhizomatic “and”, whereby participation is acknowledged to always exceed institutionalised narratives of hospitality as a binary set of relations in which old, philanthropic hierarchies still refuse to die. Even within these ongoing forms of domination, other things were always happening; always growing. In the chapters to come, I bear witness to this multiplicity; this messiness; this magic.



In this chapter, I have shown how the rupture of the pandemic severed my optimistic attachment to idealised, linear notions of participation-as-hospitality and led me to reconsider the ethics of hospitality through a Deleuzian lens. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome and the tree offered a framework for understanding two different modes of participation that might exist within and alongside one another, providing different affordances in terms of young people's becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). A Deleuzian approach has powerful implications for understanding the collective as a mode of hospitality in both youth arts (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) and research (Hickey-Moody, 2013a). Activating the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), suggested that understandings of participation-as-hospitality must not be reduced to yet another binary, instead opening ways of considering whether the gallery youth collective might be both arborescent and rhizomatic; major and minor at once. **Chapters Seven and Eight** will mobilise a more Deleuzian approach to understanding the gallery youth collective, rejecting simplistic binaries and teleological understandings, as I lay out two other, divergent enactments of the youth collective, which offer alternative entry points into understanding hospitality-as-participation in 1525. In **Chapter Nine** I will return to my methodological research question, to consider the hospitable affordances of a more affective understanding of participatory ethnographic methods.

## 7. A caring community: The gallery youth collective-as-coven

In this chapter I will explore how the gallery youth collective was enacted according to the second part of the offer identified in Chapter Four: as a caring community. The youth collective at NC was based around a core programme of weekly meetings of members, facilitated by Ellie, that usually took place in the gallery's main education space, the Studio. During group meetings, Ellie's witchy pedagogical practices supported the emergence of a caring and inclusive set of relations and affects. In Chapter Three, I theorised how hospitality can be enacted through atmospheres, and in this chapter I discuss how the 'distinctive...atmosphere' (Thomson & Hall, 2021, p. 600) of group meetings was in contrast to that which young people encountered in the wider gallery, and often in the rest of their lives. As this chapter will show, participating in the time/space of collective meetings was a powerful affective experience for many group members, which generated a set of hospitable relations at odds with dominant understandings of the instrumental value of the group as a route into work in the arts, which I discussed in Chapter Four and Five.

In this chapter, I will show how the enactment of the collective as a caring community was manifested through Ellie's practice as a witch, including the activation of several embodied practices which produced the collective as a coven, within 1525 meetings. The practices that Ellie activated in group meetings were – like the induction to the group that I discussed in Chapter Four – forms of affective and relational energy work (Starhawk, 1999/1979) in the gallery, which produced an atmosphere that enabled young people's differential becomings. The group meetings thus enacted a transformative practice of change (MacLure, 2022); not in the top-down sense of impact which positioned the gallery as host and benefactor (which was

manifested when the group was dominantly enacted as a route into work in the arts<sup>29</sup>) but as a co-hosted mode of collective action. In this chapter, I will explain how hospitable participation in the collective-as-coven was enacted in group meetings, what it did for young people and gallery workers, and why it mattered.

### Mapping this chapter

In this chapter, I will present several different sorts of empirical material about the collective as coven, including:

- Research records of workshop activities in 1525 meetings,
- Research records of group meals cooked in 1525 meetings,
- Narratives of the experiences of group members, constructed from research records and interviews.

I will combine the various sources above to show:

- 1) How Ellie's practice as a witch influenced the enactment of the collective as coven, producing a different set of hospitable relations
- 2) The way in which embodied practices of care and connection in 1525 meetings – including the circle and commensality – generated the collective-as-coven at NC, explaining how this produced more fluid positions of host and guest.
- 3) How the enactment of the collective-as-coven produced a minor space at odds with the major space of NC in terms of racialised atmospheres, explaining what the production of 1525 meetings as a minor space did for young people and some gallery workers, and how this produced a different sort of hospitable relations.

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Five.

- 4) What happened when Ellie's practice of the collective-as-coven came into conflict with dominant, arboreal modes of hospitality at NC.

a) The welcoming witch

As discussed in Chapter Four, Ellie had a practice as a witch, which informed a set of values, dispositions, and pedagogical approaches in her practice with the youth collective. In this section, I will situate and unpack her witchy approach, and the affordances it offered in producing a more collective mode of hospitality.

The witch offers a route into a specifically feminist mode of collective hospitality, as a historically situated 'rebellious subject' (Collard & Dempsey, 2018, p. 1361) that has been long associated with the domain of embodied and affective knowledges (Amsler, 2020; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2004). She is skilled in beyond-linguistic 'divination' (MacLure, 2022, p. 4), and is caring yet powerful facilitator of collective action, carried out through relational energy work (Starhawk, 1999/1979). As MacLure puts it:

I understand the work of the witch as seeking not simply to transgress but to transform, to give birth to the new through spiritual, material and incantatory experiments with the forces of the cosmos. The witch cultivates occult knowledge that lies outside the ambit of "official" State or patriarchal knowledge and can therefore be used against it, and uses this knowledge both to craft her cosmic experiments and to tend to the needs of the planet. She practices an ethics of relationality with all living and non-living things that acknowledges her affinities with matter and the more-than-human (2022, p. 3)

The witch is thus associated with the practice of experimental energy work and embodied ritual, mobilized to resist domination and challenge hierarchies. Amsler suggests that:

[W]itchy learning doesn't happen as abstract concept or imagination but through embodied, relational and sensorial experiences that intervene in living reality (2020, p. 65).

Rae Beth suggests that the witch is orientated to transcending binaries, writing that ‘the true aim of witchcraft is reconciliation of opposites’ (1990, p. 12). In terms of hospitality, a witchy pedagogy potentially has capacities to transcend the dominant enactment of participation in terms of the binary relational positions of host and guest. As Amsler puts it, invoking the figure of Sycorax, the witch from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*:

By attuning to the Sycoraxes in our needs and desires, we may sharpen our sensitivities to trashed and exiled possibilities that, while real, are unintelligible from within prevailing critical identities, paradigms, imaginaries and horizons of hope. (2020, p. 65)

A set of witchy dispositions had a profound influence on Ellie’s pedagogy in 1525 meetings, and the way in which she summoned desires beyond the dominant relational offer of NC.

In 1525, Ellie’s practice as a witch shaped her non-hierarchical, collaborative disposition, which was at odds with the dominant, arboreal mode of participation at NC<sup>30</sup> which invoked hospitable relations as a fixed, hierarchical binary of host and guest. Ellie’s wider artistic practice included curating an artspace that explicitly positioned magical practices as a cooperative ethical strategy in the world:

The space is named after ‘Chaos Magic’ a belief system which aims to change reality through ritual practice. Members of the space view chaos magic as a tool through which a fairer world can be manifested through cooperation and inclusivity. (Chaos Magic, 2021)

Ellie’s practice in 1525 meetings was shaped by the belief in group ritual practice as a way of changing the world. In contrast to the dominant way that the gallery youth collective was understood and valued at NC – as young people’s assimilation as arts workers<sup>31</sup> – Ellie’s artistic and spiritual practice as a witch gave her a grounding in a more radically collective approach to generating participation-as-hospitality.

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter Five.

Ellie's approach to participation was informed by a feminist-activist strand of witchcraft, which – whilst connected to an ancient set of pagan beliefs – has a contemporary lineage in the women's rights and eco-activism movements of the 1970s. Starhawk – an American witch and activist (Starhawk, 2002) – describes her mode of witchcraft as a 'Goddess religion' (1999/1979, p. 38) which is based on three core principles: 'immanence, interconnection and community' (Starhawk, 1999/1979, p. 38). The principles of immanence, interconnection, and community each influenced how Ellie enacted participation-as-hospitality in the 1525 collective, as follows:

### **i) Immanence**

The spiritual principle of immanence considers the divine as materially present in the here and now. According to Starhawk:

Immanence means that the Goddess, the Gods, are embodied, that we are each a manifestation of the living being of the earth, that nature, culture, and life in all their diversity are sacred. Immanence calls us to live our spirituality here in the world, to take action to preserve the life of the earth, to live with integrity and responsibility (1999/1979, p. 38)

An immanent approach to educational participation suggests the validation of young people's diverse, embodied existing knowledges (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), rather than understanding learning as the transmission of elite knowledges (Friere, 1972).

### **ii) Interconnection**

As Starhawk puts it, interconnection means:

The understanding that all being is interrelated, that we are linked with all the cosmos as parts of one living organism. What affects one of us affects us all...So interconnection demands from us compassion, the ability to feel with others so strongly that our passion for justice is itself aroused. (1999/1979, p. 38)

The principle of interconnection suggests an affective pedagogy which develops a powerful form of attunement between a group of participants, invoking shared sentiments of social justice through radical empathy.

### **iii) Community**

Starhawk explains the principle of community as follows:

Goddess religion is lived in community. Its primary focus is not individual salvation or enlightenment or enrichment but the growth and transformation that comes through intimate interactions and common struggles (1999/1979, p. 38)

The principle of community suggests a pedagogy based on the collective power of coming together in intimacy and solidarity, resisting the individualism inherent in notions of participation in terms of impact or improvement.

Ellie's witchy disposition manifested in 1525 through a deep investment in principles of immanence, interconnection, and community as powerful routes to ethical transformation. I will show how she enacted these principles in the next section, through describing two important practices that she activated with 1525 members in group meetings: the circle and commensality. In the rest of this chapter, I will illustrate how Ellie activated her witchy pedagogy through a set of embodied pedagogies in the meetings of the 1525 collective. These embodied, collective practices acted as rituals, which intervened in the world, at and beyond the gallery. I will explain how these witchy practices summoned new, relational spaces in 1525 meetings, generating particular affective atmospheres, which enabled new and transformative forms of young community (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) for young people, staff, and me as an emerging researcher within the group. The affects and relations of 1525 meetings were at odds with what the major space of NC, and – for many young people – what was

available to them in other parts of their lives beyond the gallery, and, for some, they generated powerfully differential becomings.

*The collective-as-coven: Rhizomatic hospitality*

The coven offers a feminist theorization of the agency of the collective, as an assemblage that becomes more than the sum of its parts through activating relational practices of attunement, affect, and interconnectedness. The coven is a relational mode in which a group of marginalized people can come together within a dominating host institution to resist their oppression and take up agency. The coven thus activates a minor space within the major, affording differential becomings for those involved (Smyth, Linz, & Hudson, 2020). Writing about the coven as a collective practice of feminist solidarity in the face of the misogyny of the academy, Smyth et al. (2020) argue that:

The coven is not a formal group or an institutionalized entity that seeks recognition from the university. The feminist coven is a pack, a band, a swarm: something admittedly imperfect itself, which carves spaces out of larger structures for alternative conventions to incubate (Smyth et al., 2020, p. 855)

The power of the coven does not come from being given status by the dominant, major institution that hosts it. The coven's agency instead emerges from a collective practice of mutual care: from producing solidarities and intimacies within which speculative possibilities can be nurtured.

The collective-as-coven can be generated through the practice of attunement, as a radical and potent practice of collectivism and rhizomatic care. D'Emilia and Andreotti (2019) describe attunement as a mode of 'radical tenderness' that involves 'engaging with each other beyond desires for consensus, coherence and control'. The coven is rhizomatic arrangement in which bodies inter-mingle and affect one another, even if it exists within a powerful, tree-like



institution. Like the pack of rats that Deleuze and Guattari describe, swarming over each other (1980, p. 7), the attuned coven is not fixed but members constantly move, occupying ever-changing positions in the collective. The coven resists arboreal logics of hierarchy and linearity, and instead produces multiplicities and supports diverse becomings, which diffuse in different directions away from – rather than towards – a standardized norm.

The notion of the coven offers a way of understanding how rhizomatic collectives can emerge within the tree-like structures of both the gallery and the university. As Deleuze and Guattari (1980) assert:

To be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange, new uses. We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. (p. 17)

The minor space produced by the coven is based on care between the collective of members, but it is potentially threatening to the stability of the major space it occupies. Smyth et al. (2020) argue that the caring relations of the coven can produce a minor space within the major space, which has a wider, transformative potential:

As we change minor spaces, we transform the major along with them...As both a theoretical space and real, material relationships, the coven cultivates a caring and threatening force powerful enough, we hope, to challenge the dehumanizing practices of the academy. (Smyth et al., 2020, p. 874)

The idea of a rhizomatic coven within a powerful institution provides a way of understanding the affordances of minor spaces in the paradox of institutional hospitality. Minor spaces can allow the generation of a set of rhizomatic, collective, caring relations in which participants do not occupy fixed, arboreal positions of host and guest but instead take up more fluid, egalitarian relations in which they interchangeably host one another. However, the emergence of rhizomatic relations can also threaten to disrupt the position as of the powerful institution

as host, and therefore contains the potential to generate hostility (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). In the rest of this chapter, I will explore how Ellie enacted the gallery youth collective as a caring community through invoking it as a coven and discuss the affordances this offered as a rhizomatic mode of hospitality.

#### b) Invoking the coven: Embodied practices in the gallery youth collective

In this section, I will show how Ellie mobilized embodied and ritualized collective practices in 1525 meetings to summon a 'distinctive atmosphere' (Thomson & Hall, 2021) of belonging in the group as a caring coven. I will include research records from group meetings, alongside relevant literatures, to illustrate the importance of two practices: the circle and commensality.

##### *Summoning the circle*

In this section, I will show how the circle ritual was practiced in group meetings and discuss the mode of participation-as-hospitality it enacted, which generated intimacy, the validation of diverse identities, and a felt sense of interconnectedness. Ellie had a wider practice as a witch, including a 'side hustle' (Allen & Finn, 2023) business, which included an online coven and witch subscription box service. On the website for her business, she described how she facilitated the practice of the circle:

I will open the circle. One by one, I will call out your names and you may share or pass if you choose. Family, friends, and acquaintances sometimes try to fix, advise or shift what we express. Here in the circle we simply listen. After each person has shared I will close the circle.<sup>32</sup>

As a form, the circle has no top or bottom position. Circles are used in a variety of witchcraft ritual practices (Starhawk, 1999/1979), and more widely in society to bring people together, as identified by India Rakusen in the recent BBC podcast series, *Witch*:

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<sup>32</sup> I have not cited the website here for ethical reasons of anonymity.

Draw a circle in the air with your finger. Isn't there something very satisfying about a circle? Its unending nature; its constant symmetry. And think of all the times we've stood together in circles: in playgrounds and schools; in sports and teams; in meetings or in prayer. When people come together, its often in a circle. Everyone in an equal position. (Rakusen, 2023)

In the 1525 youth collective, Ellie used the ritual practice of the circle to bring everyone together at the beginning of each meeting as equals, arranging them in a community without hierarchy, and giving each person an equal chance to speak and be heard. I will share some research records about the practice of the circle in 1525 meetings, before analysing what this practice did for those involved, in terms of participation-as-hospitality.

### **Research Records: The circle (12.11.20)**

Ellie wedges open the Studio door, and 1525 members begin to drift into the room. Bowls of crisps, biscuits and fruit are spread around a large table, surrounded by chairs. People sit down and start chatting in small groups. Someone flings their portfolio into the corner of the room and wet coats are tossed onto the rack. The only window in the room overlooks another indoor space, so there is no natural light, creating a feeling of insulation from the outside world. The Programmer suggests a round of introductions, asking the group for ideas about what to share today. Someone suggests we tell each other about our favourite garment, and the Programmer says, "OK! So tell us your name, your current favourite item of clothing and your star sign. We always need star signs!". She laughs as a few group members nod with delight. The Programmer goes first, telling us about her new coat that arrived today: how it makes her feel professional yet glamorous and that it was a bargain in the sale. Group members listen and smile as she tells her story. Regular members already know her star sign, but they still enjoy the familiar ritual, watching and nodding as she speaks. We proceed in turn around the circle. Each member tells us about their most-loved clothes: an old pair of jeans that has worn into the contours of their body; a designer charity shop find that made them feel beautiful; the jumper they stole from their ex-boyfriend that still smells good. Each of us shares a little slice of our life, and each time the group witnesses and affirms, witnesses and affirms, conjuring a space of friendship and togetherness. When my turn arrives, I tell the group about my new linen top: that it was handmade, and how wearing it makes me feel comfortable in my recently

postnatal body. The other group members watch and listen. I tell them that I am a Taurus, and a few members smile knowingly. Someone says, “Bet you love your little luxuries then!” and I laugh as I confess that this is true.

The circle that opened each group meeting was a collective ritual, informed by Ellie’s practice as a witch, which offered powerful affordances to those involved. The collective participation ritual of the circle summoned a powerfully collective atmosphere, at the threshold of the time-space of weekly meetings. The structure of the circle gave each person a turn to speak whilst the others listened, generating a quality of attention, and encouraging unconditional listening without intervention. The circle produced an atmosphere of radical attunement (D’Emilia & Andreotti, 2019), producing a non-hierarchical, caring and interconnected relation between those involved. We may have arrived at the Studio door separately, but the ritual of the circle invoked the meeting as a bounded space in which we came together, as an intimate and connected collective. The circle was at odds with dominant notions of young people’s participation in the gallery as impact or transmission. Being heard and witnessed in the round instead produced an affective, atmospheric threshold of the collective-as-coven, summoning it as a rhizome within the normal, arboreal life of the gallery, in which different things could happen.

The topics selected for the circle drew on youth work and anti-oppressive education practices which resonated with the principle of immanence that informed Ellie’s educational practice as a witch. She encouraged group members to choose popular topics relating to youth culture topics for the circle discussion, which validated young people’s existing knowledges as important. The circle also often included discussions of star signs and tarot, which allowed for young people to make themselves vulnerable within the coven, supporting them to develop

intimate relationships and to explore their own identities within the collective-as-coven. The circle thus supported young people's divergent becomings, by validating diverse identities and knowledges in the group, rather than focusing on assimilating members into a narrow image of successful adulthood. The rhythmic, weekly practice of the produced an atmosphere of equality, closeness, and mutual care that welcomed difference in group meetings on a deep, affective level.

### **Research Records: the elastic dance (16.10.19)**

The main gallery is showing an exhibition about the Bauhaus movement. An artist called Sam is leading a workshop for the youth collective in the main exhibition space. She is keen to try out some new gallery resource packs before they are released as a public resource. The group members walk around the space in twos and threes as Sam prepares for the activity. Their voices are hushed, and their movements are controlled.

Sam unpacks the kits, which include long wooden sticks, elastic strips, and shiny hula-hoops, selected to offer users ways to change the shapes of their bodies and explore different movement styles, reflecting the artworks in the room. Sam gathers the 1525 members together and asks them to play with the items in small groups. I work with two teammates without much discussion, exploring how the sticks fit inside a sleeve to make arms more rigid and feeling how the elastic wraps around eyes and mouth. We notice how the objects can enforce bodily restrictions. Our model looks strange and provocative, as she is twisted and made vulnerable without sight or full movement. We giggle at the awkwardness of the situation.

In another group, two young members – Zoe and Lady D – have used strips of thick, resistant elastic to bind their wrists and ankles together. They are playing with the device in interactive performance, as they improvise a collaborative dance. They are in constant motion, responding to the tension and flex in the cords drawing lines between their limbs. The projection above their heads plays an Oskar Schlemmer ballet performance. Their

experiment echoes the background video piece, as the women twist and turn in a stylised movement conversation. They are stretching out what is possible in their new configuration; finding ways of variously cooperating, following, and directing each other. Through the silent performance, they merge into a unified being, synthesised with the simple construction the elastic bands have afforded. Their creation is much more straightforward than the other two in the room, but the performance is powerful and resonant.

The elastic dance, like the practice of the circle at the start of group meetings, invoked a mode of embodied, collective care and attunement, producing a relational space that was quite at odds what was available to young people through the dominant offer of participation at NC. When I watched young people walk through NC's exhibition spaces in quiet, awkward reverence, the relational offer was loud and clear. They were subordinated institutional guests, and the gallery was a powerful, elite host. Young people-as-guests were invited in as an audience of passive learners, to receive and benefit from elite culture. In funding bids and press releases, and in the dominant enactment of 1525 as a route into work in the arts, young people were positioned primarily as "beneficiaries" of the gallery. By contrast, the enactment of 1525 as coven through embodied and affective practices generated a set of more egalitarian, collective relations between group members, in which their diverse voices were acknowledged as valuable and important.

The intimacy, trust, and solidarity that was summoned in group meetings depended on the bounded mode of hospitality that was offered in collective meetings. The threshold of the group was managed carefully by Ellie, through the induction process as initiation and the regular ritual of the circle. The mode of rhizomatic hospitality invoked by the collective-as-coven was not the unlimited welcome announced by the gallery's wider mission of "International art, for everyone, for free", but instead was a closed and intimate form of

collective hospitality, which had powerful affordances for many young people. In the time and space of meetings, young people were able to move from being subordinated guests at NC, to fluidly taking up various relational positions from which they hosted and cared for one another. In the next section, I will explain how collective practices of cooking and eating supported the emergence of more fluid positions of host and guest in 1525 meetings.

### *Commensality*

When I walked into my first 1525 meeting, in mid-2019, Callum was unpacking the ingredients to cook mushroom risotto for the collective. He began preparing the meal whilst another member jotted down the recipe, illustrating the words with eye-catching typography and bright colours. The other members of the group sat around the long table, chatting as they compiled and folded printed copies of their recently produced 'zine manifesto. At the end of the meeting, each member of the collective was served a plate of the hot food, which we ate together before everyone left for the day.

I remember feeling a little perplexed that cooking and eating were positioned as such central activities in a gallery youth collective. At the time, I could not quite understand the importance or relevance of this practice to a gallery youth collective. As the weeks went by, I noted that these shared cooking and eating sessions were a semi-regular occurrence. Gradually, I started to notice the subtle, relational affordances this practice offered to the collective. Cooking and eating collectively – or commensality – was an act of mutual care. It was emotionally and culturally evocative, allowing the diverse cultural knowledges young people brought to be centred and valued. Commensality was able to invoke different relations to those dominantly

afforded to young people at the gallery – in which they were positioned as viewers, learners, or beneficiaries – and instead positioned them as hosts, as knowers, and as an intimate coven.

Cooking and eating together is an embodied practice which has powerful relational and affective affordances with a long history in youth work and art. As Doherty and de St Croix put it:

The memory of sharing food with young people lingers like the image of a time or place sometimes invoked by a particular scent; sometimes difficult to identify as to the exact time or place or indeed the specific trigger; but there nonetheless - physical, remembered, and profound. (2021, p. 8)

Doherty and de St Croix (2021) highlight the position of commensality as an established and important youth work practice but argue that its relational capacities have often been under-recognised. They suggest that youth workers use commensality as a nurturing practice that goes beyond the literal provision of sustenance:

[C]ommensality is used in youth work to elicit trust, a sense of ownership, community and wellbeing. And an important aspect of this is about abundance, not only literal but metaphorical; the safety and care young people felt allowed them to open up. (Doherty & de St Croix, 2021, p. 7-8)

Their account of commensality as a relational youth work practice highlights the affective significance of cooking and eating in participatory work with young people. As they put it, the affordances of commensality include:

Being valued enough to have access to more than enough; food as pleasure, joy, and experience; learning about the self and developing deeper understandings of differences in taste and appreciation; young people making connections between self-care and their potential to care for others (Doherty & de St Croix, 2021, p. 9)

Commensality is a powerful relational youth work practice, which activates embodiment to perform relations of hospitality.



Well beyond youth work, the practice of cooking and eating together can be an important part of the enactment of hospitality. Julier argues that:

Domestic sociability operates through ideals of hospitality, which is generally defined as the practice of welcoming in strangers and offering them food, shelter, and companionship. It is, in its ideal instance, the site where people encounter the other and literally familiarize that encounter through shared meals. (2013, p. 168)

The practice of commensality can thus foster an atmosphere of intimacy in which the other is warmly welcomed and can even change the relational dynamics of a group. However, norms and preferences around food are not the same for each person, catalysing differing memories and embodied responses, even as we taste the same combination of ingredients, prepared the same way, at the same time. Cooking and eating together can thus be a synecdoche for the complexity of wider embodied and affective experiences; generating transpersonal – but not entirely identical – embodied experiences, which have the capacity to change how people feel, relate, and behave in the collective and the wider world beyond. As Doherty and St Croix explain:

Young people and youth workers will bring a diverse range of cultural, social, and personal associations to their interactions with each other and with food, not all of which will be positive, and youth workers may use food as an activity or as a topic to kickstart discussion about wider issues. However, the essence of recognising the relationship between food and youth work, and articulating it as commensality, is about extending the notion of a 'shared table' to include young people and their experiences. (2021, p. 8)

Cooking and eating have the potential to enact collective hospitality as a practice of embodied becoming within the collective-as-coven: to embrace and validate a diverse range of lived cultural knowledge, and – as Doherty and de St Croix (2021) suggest – to welcome all young people to take a seat at the table, not just as guests but as hosts to one another. The practice of commensality thus has the potential to enact a mode of rhizomatic hospitality, within a collective-as-coven.

Next, I will expand my account of how commensality enacted hospitable relations at NC by telling the story of the cooking unit at NC, the Wandering Womb, explaining the role that that this piece of equipment had in producing institutional relations between young people and workers at NC.

### The Wandering Womb

At the centre of all the various cooking and eating activities I experienced in 1525, one thing stayed the same: the gallery's mobile cooking unit, known as the Wandering Womb. The phrase 'wandering womb' originates from ancient Greek theories about women's bodies, which postulated that the uterus could move around the body. Notions of the womb as an animate organ influenced enduring notions of hysteria that was activated in misogynistic notions of women as fleshy, irrational, and naturally suited to reproductive labours, ultimately understood in contrast with the more valuable productive labours of capitalist labour (Federici, 2004).

Whilst I was researching with the youth collective at NC, I do not recall anyone ever explaining the origin of the Wandering Womb cooking unit that we often gathered around, or its unusual name, but many months later I found out where it had come from. The Wandering Womb at NC was designed and produced by artist duo, Manual Labours (Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards), as part of an artistic research project called Building as Body that took place at NC in 2017 and 2018. The Building as Body project engaged in institutional critique at NC, through a process of co-research with gallery staff – mainly including those outside of senior

management – over several months. The project generated a manual, which states that it offers:

a perspective of an organisation from those looking up the hierarchy, a bottom-up discussion on how workplaces and their structures affect working bodies' (Hope & Richards, 2018, p. 5).

The manual explains how the project activated the metaphor of the Building as Body as a way to surface organisational struggles and contradictions at NC, including issues experienced by gallery staff in the gallery's social reproductive systems (Hope & Richards, 2018). The research indicated that the gallery's ways of working did not adequately accommodate practices of care for the staff, as adequate time and space were not designated for activities needed to sustain workers, such as eating, going to the toilet, and socialising. In particular, the manual draws attention to the lack of a proper staff room, in which gallery workers could heat up their food, eat in comfort, rest during breaks in the working day, and interact socially with their colleagues. Further, Hope and Richards's (2018) research illustrated that the people and practices necessary to sustain the gallery building were not always properly valued within the institution, as they argue that certain types of labour were valued more highly than others. Hope and Richards (2018) suggest some the structural reasons why the issues they identify emerged, including the fact that the gallery was not originally planned to be occupied by anywhere near the number of staff that were later employed. They highlight that the Learning team in particular had grown significantly since the building was planned. Hope and Richards (2018) also draw attention to the fact that changes in arts policy and funding between 2000 (when the gallery was conceived) and 2017 (when their research began) created ever greater pressure on institutions to generate income from activities such as private hires and ticketed events. The changes demanded in the gallery's activities shifted how the space was used, leaving less time, space, and resources available for social reproduction activities, which they

found were often labelled as lesser, feminised forms of labour (Federici, 2004; Hope & Richards, 2018).

My research with 1525 began in April 2019, around five months after the Building as Body project had concluded. I saw the ways that the Wandering Womb began to be integrated into the everyday life of the organisation, as structural pressures began to exert a creeping influence. The Wandering Womb had begun to be assimilated into dominant “productive” elements of the institution’s activities, such as being used to provide hot soup for private hires and high-status meetings. These uses were, at times, prioritised over its original intended function: to provide a facility for workers at the gallery to prepare food during their working day. As gallery life got “back to normal” after the critical intervention of the Manual Labour’s project, caring for staff was once again dominated by the demands of generating income for the gallery as an institution.

Despite the powerful structural forces that drew the Wandering Womb into the institutional hierarchies at NC, it still had powerful affordances in certain contexts. Like the notion of the uterus as an animate organ, believed to have a life of its own within a woman’s body, the Wandering Womb at NC had a life of its own at NC. Just as the uterus was believed to have capacities to disrupt the smooth functioning of the body by producing troublesome affects, within collective meetings, the Wandering Womb supported affective disruptions to dominant modes of institutional life. New ways of feeling at, and beyond, NC were forged around the pot, which the Wandering Womb brought to life. Within the time-space of 1525 group meetings, the intentions of the artists who had created the Wandering Womb came back to life, gestating a circular space that centred around collective labours of mutual care and

allowed young people to host one another. Cooking and eating produced an embodied practice in group meetings in which physical needs were met, collective attunement was deepened, and new relational positions were taken up. The process of cooking and eating was thus another potent witchy pedagogy which intervened in living realities at, and beyond, NC. The development of these witchy solidarities around the Wandering Womb kept threatening to disrupt the hierarchies on which the gallery's position as a dominant host depended. In the next section, I will discuss how the atmosphere of whiteness (Ahmed, 2014) was part of the major space of NC, and how the intimate relations of collective meetings produced a minor space which 'dewalled' (Zembylas, 2020) these atmospheres, generating an alternative mode of hospitality.

#### c) The white institution? Race and minoritarian becoming in the gallery youth collective

As discussed in Chapter Four, the atmosphere of NC was dominantly elite and white. As discussed in Chapter Two, galleries are rooted in and uphold the colonial relations of the museum (I will also return to these matters in Chapter Eight), but beyond this, in this chapter, I will discuss how NC's position as dominant host was complicit in the maintenance of white supremacy. In this section, I will:

- a) Discuss how NC responded when the Black Lives Matter movement came to mainstream prominence after the murder of George Floyd, exploring how these events surfaced the major space of NC as institutionally racist.
- b) Present some research records about Ellie cooking dumplings with 1525 members, analysing this activity as an embodied ritual which produced a minor space, which disrupted the default racialised relations at NC.

- c) Share some research records about Anna cooking Sadza with 1525 members, discussing the alternative hospitable relations generated in this session, and exploring what this did for her and others involved.
- d) Discuss Shania's story of participation in 1525, explaining how the alternative modes of hospitality produced in gallery youth collective meetings supported their minoritarian becoming.

*i) A "toxic environment": racialised atmospheres at NC*

During the period I was researching with NC, many organisations in the art world and beyond were making statements about race and social justice, in response to the rise to mainstream prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. After NC made a statement in support of BLM on its website (Nottingham Contemporary, 2020), a group of anonymous current and ex-workers at the gallery published an open letter to senior gallery management, publicly criticising the gallery:

We write to you as past and present staff of Nottingham Contemporary in response to your statement on anti-racism published on 8th June 2020 to formally voice our distrust, exhaustion and rage, at a statement that we feel comes too late and says too little. ("OPEN LETTER TO NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY," 2020)

The authors of the letter argued that the gallery's choice to engage with the BLM movement only once it gained mainstream prominence 'suggests that you have only just learnt of the systemic racism from which you benefit and which you perpetuate' ("OPEN LETTER TO NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY," 2020). The authors challenged the gallery's performance of its own innocence, arguing that:

Now is the time for senior staff members of Nottingham Contemporary, as well as those at arts institutions everywhere, to take responsibility and become accountable not just for their inaction but for how they have collectively resisted and blocked change. ("OPEN LETTER TO NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY," 2020)

They identified the ways in which the gallery's organisational structures supported institutional elitism and racism:

Nottingham Contemporary's systemic racism lies in its very structure, the board and staff make-up, internal culture and lack of transparency which serve to maintain it. There are disproportionately more PoC staff in precarious lower paid, visitor-facing jobs of Gallery Assistants. There have been many cases of bullying and discrimination that have been silenced without any repercussions. The high staff turnover at Nottingham Contemporary is a clear consequence of the toxic environment that has been allowed to perpetuate since its creation. It is clear that Nottingham Contemporary's employment practices contribute to and uphold systemic racism in the institution and it is time that these cease. End zero-hour contracts, end fixed-term contracts, stop privileging applications of only those who have attended elite London universities, bring the cleaning staff in-house so you are responsible for the treatment of everyone working within your building, offer training and progression to members of staff. ("OPEN LETTER TO NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY," 2020)

The open letter powerfully evoked the anger and frustration that many gallery workers felt, at watching the gallery position itself publicly as an arbiter of racial justice. As Ahmed (2012) suggests, the institution-as-host activated the language of diversity and inclusion to perform and celebrate its own righteousness, and therefore reinforce its dominant position in a hierarchy in which people of colour remained merely guests. The letter suggests that whilst NC was keen to position itself as an arbiter of racial justice, it had not been prepared to undertake the 'world dismantling effort' needed to stop 'what usually happens from happening' (Ahmed, 2020) within its own walls.

The open letter ("OPEN LETTER TO NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY," 2020) surfaced connections between the gallery's elite position as an institution; its dependence on hierarchies of racism and elitism; and the experiences of people of colour who worked at NC. In the statement, institutional racism at NC is identified as operating on more than one level. It materially manifested in contracts, rates of pay, organisational structures and staff demographics. It was also tangible in an overall set of racial relations that the authors

described as a 'toxic environment' ("OPEN LETTER TO NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY," 2020). The 'toxic' racial dynamics at NC permeated the organisation in relational, affective, and material ways: it was, in part, an atmosphere of institutional hospitality (Zembylas, 2020). Everyday feelings and experiences were an important part of the production of the major space of NC as a racialised, 'toxic environment' in which whiteness was experienced by gallery workers as an atmosphere, in which Black and brown people were positioned as guests (Ahmed, 2014) . In the next section, I will discuss a workshop in a 1525 meeting, in which Ellie cooked dumplings with collective members, to illustrate the way this generated an atmosphere at odds with the default atmosphere at NC.

## ii) Ellie's dumplings

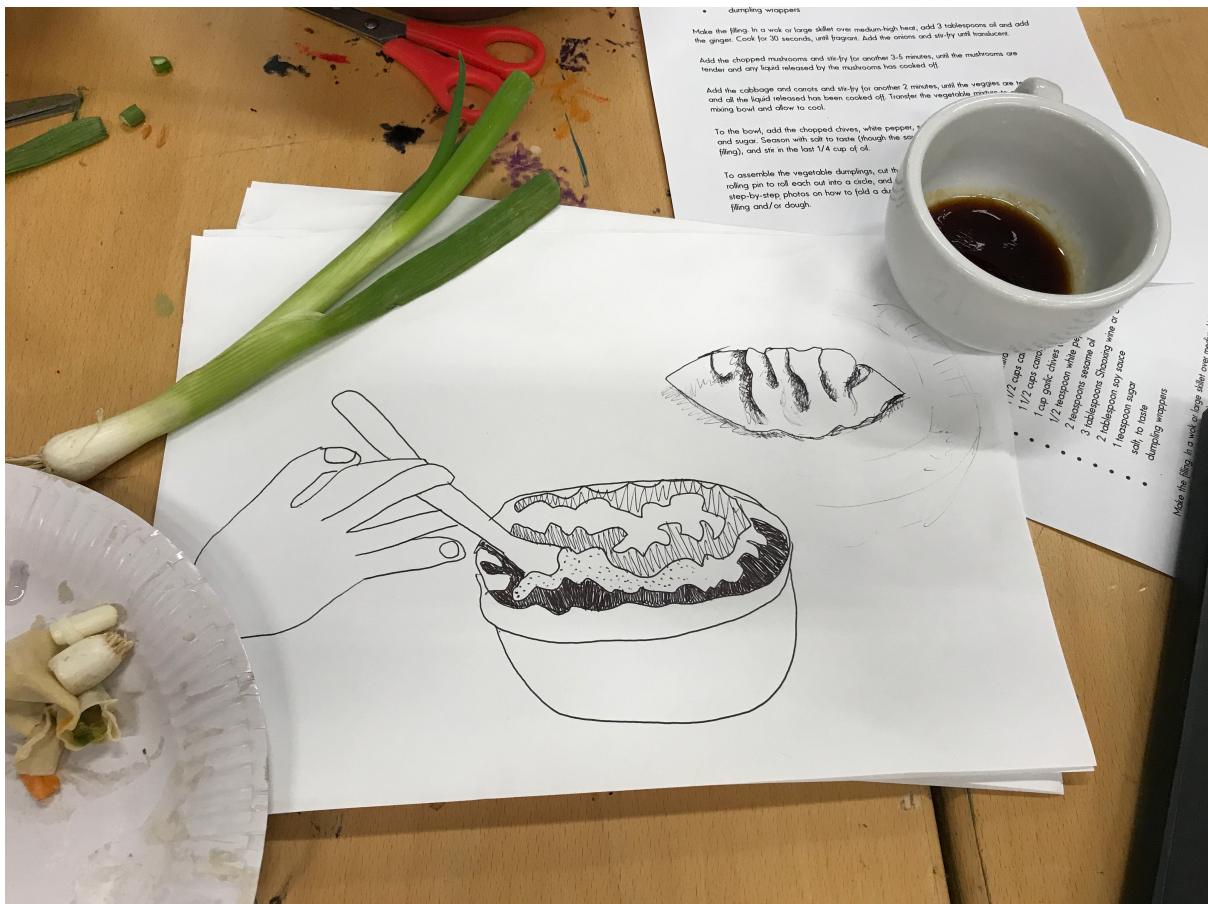


Figure 10: Photograph of the table during Ellie's dumpling cooking activity (21.8.19).



### **Research records: Ellie's dumplings (21.8.19)**

Ellie passed around a typed recipe for the vegetable mix and a series of photos illustrating how to fold the skin into a neatly parcelled dumpling. Group members gathered around the table, chatting and laughing whilst they chopped the vegetables, before dumping them into large Pyrex bowls ready to be fried with ginger and chives. The ingredients crackled in the pan, emitting a rich-smelling steam which billowed up in a heavy plume, filling the windowless studio with rich, damp flavours. When the filling was cooked, we each scooped some vegetable mix into a ready-made dumpling skin, wetting the edge before attempting to manipulate it into a series of neat folds that adhered together firmly. Many of us found that the photos and demonstrations that Ellie had given us were only of limited use. In my clumsy hands, the dumpling skins seemed to fight back. They were either too wet and became weak, or too dry and would not stick. Getting the right amount of filling and forming the folds neatly was a matter of feel, not conscious thought. Ellie told us that her Mum had taught her how to make them, but she struggled with the task now her hands had started shaking. The strange shapes of our inexperienced dumplings elicited laughter from many members, as we considered their lumpy tummies and odd protrusions. Regardless, they were all fried in the skillet, the hot oil spitting out onto the countertop as they turned golden and crisp. Some fell apart, their unruly innards spilling out into the pan. Those that survived were served with a salty dumpling sauce for dipping, as we messily scooped them into our mouths with greasy fingers or chopsticks.

For Ellie, cooking dumplings in a 1525 meeting was a way of bringing people together in a mutually caring relation, and an act of collective resistance to the default whiteness of the gallery. This encounter had different affective affordances for different collective members. For some young ESEA<sup>33</sup> young people in the group, cooking dumplings made their everyday knowledges valid and central, and legitimised these knowledges in an elite institution, which – at odds with the major, white space of NC – positioned them as at home rather than as guests. For other young people of colour, this session enacted 1525 meetings as not

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<sup>33</sup> ESEA stands for East and Southeast Asian

exclusively white, disrupting and destabilising the position of the gallery as an elite white host and opening space for another mode of hospitality in which they were not positioned as “other”; as necessarily guests. For white young people, the dumpling cooking session de-centred their knowledges, skills, and experiences at NC; putting them in the position of guests and learners at the gallery, rather than being constantly positioned as always already at home in the gallery (Ahmed, 2012). The atmospheric disruptions that the dumpling cooking session produced unsettled the dominant mode of hospitality at NC – as fixed, binary, elite and white – and instead opened a minor space. The minor space of 1525 meetings thus, at times, practiced a more rhizomatic mode of collective hospitality, in which young people’s diverse becomings were validated as they fluidly shared the positions of host and guest.

For Ellie, racialised atmospheres were a powerful part of the everyday experiences of working at NC. The back-of-house design at the gallery – especially the lack of a staff room space – amplified some powerful cultural dynamics for her, as an ESEA<sup>34</sup> person:

"It's things like foods, like food is a big thing, and growing up and this is, I think, a white and non-white difference in experience and how you grew up. So, at school, I would always be bullied for like bringing in smelly Chinese foods like fried rice and stuff and, like, smelly noodles and stuff. And so, as an adult, I'm so hyper-conscious of bringing in smelly foods to a space; a shared space. And, you know, a lot of white colleagues don't and will bring in like...ethnic-type foods. And I'm like, I feel like I couldn't get away with that. Obviously, I could, but it's almost it's that difference in experience that feels, that's the thing with not having a staff room; it reveals these kinds of things. Not that I think people shouldn't be bringing in these foods, because you should be eating what you want to eat. But I find that quite interesting in terms that, that I, growing up, would just not do that. Maybe I should, but it's quite interesting". (Ellie interview, 8.7.20)

For Ellie, the spatiality of NC – in which staff did not have a private area to eat and relax at lunchtime – combined with her lived experience of racism, and the dominant white

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<sup>34</sup> ESEA stands for East and Southeast Asian.

atmosphere at NC, to mean that she would not feel comfortable preparing “smelly Chinese foods” at work, even though she acknowledged that white colleagues frequently did so.

Ahmed describes the affective labour involved in assimilation at work:

The body that causes their discomfort (by not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness) is the one who must work hard to make others comfortable. You have to pass by passing your way through whiteness, not by becoming white, but by minimizing the signs of difference. I have called this labor “institutional passing.” (Ahmed, 2014)

By contrast to the labour of “institutional passing” that Ellie felt compelled to perform in the office, when she taught us how to make dumplings in the 1525 meeting, a different set of relationalities was enacted. The dumpling workshop produced a minor space in which there was a different affective atmosphere for Ellie too, at odds with many of her racialised everyday experiences of preparing and eating food at NC. As we shaped the dumplings, smelt them sizzle in the pan, and ate them together, we collectively enacted a rhizomatic mode of hospitality. As an embodied ritual, commensality intervened in ‘living reality’ (Amsler, 2020, p. 65) for young people and workers in 1525 meetings, through the production of a minor space in which a different set of racialised atmospheres emerged.

In the next section, I describe a 1525 meeting in which a young person, Anna, prepared a meal with and for the collective, to show how the practice of commensality in 1525 meetings enabled the position of host to fluidly circulate within the group, and discuss what this did for those involved.

### *iii) Anna’s sadza*

#### **Research records: Anna’s sadza (2.10.19)**

Anna switched on the Wandering Womb. Over the preceding weeks she had made plans to cook her favourite meal for the group. Ellie had explained that she could be reimbursed

for the ingredients, but Anna had firmly insisted she did not want any money, saying, “We have tons of this stuff at home, it’s fine!”. As the rest of the collective discussed their upcoming project around the table, Anna tipped the cornmeal into a large pot and added water. She roughly chopped the green, leafy vegetables and garlic, and stirred the wet corn mix as it rose to a simmer. As the smell of food crossed the room, a few people wandered over. The dish was sadza, a staple dish in Zimbabwe, where Anna grew up. Elements of the meal were familiar to some other group members who were also part of the African diaspora: “We have a similar thing, like a cornmeal porridge” one member piped up. Recognising a potential helper, Anna passed her a spoon with which to stir out any emerging lumps, whilst she began frying the leafy veg and garlic mix. A few more group members were drawn over as the smell of softening garlic developed. They sat and watched the young women stirring the thickening porridge, as they told stories of family and food: “My parents always offer me seconds and thirds. They just want me to get thick but it’s never going to happen!” laughed Anna. “God, my family love a BBQ so much!” “Mine too!”. They laughed and chatted as the food slowly cooked, invoking the warmth of the domestic memories they shared.

I thought back to Anna telling me about her recent college art assignment. She had rolled her eyes as she recounted her tutor suggesting that she use “African prints” in her artwork, telling her “I want to see more of the *real* Anna”. Months later, I would watch a video of Anna reading the poem “Black Girl Magic” aloud with such intensity in her soft voice, as she said: “See honey, your gold is worth more than silver so when they try and strip it from you, Black Queen, wear it like no other model on a runway”. I would hear her powerful statement on the Black Lives Matter movement, in which she railed against everyday racism, telling us that, “Every platform I am given, whether it be in a political panel or posting on social media, or even creating my photography work I try to disarm these narratives”. Seemingly unaware of these many, potent Annas, the art tutor’s request that Anna perform her Blackness in cliched terms had called for a neatly packaged stereotype of African identity, served up comfortably for a white audience. Back in the 1525 meeting, I watched as Anna served each of us a portion of sadza and a spoonful of the vegetable mix and we sat quietly together, as guests at her table.

In the 1525 meeting, Anna was offered an opportunity to make a meal that was deeply familiar to her, for her fellow collective members at the gallery. When Anna made sadza for the group, her knowledge was centred, and she became the host of the meal. Feeding the collective gave Anna a relational position which was quite different from the dominant relations on offer when the gallery's youth programme was enacted as a route into work in the arts<sup>35</sup>. When she cooked sadza, Anna was not merely a beneficiary of the gallery as an elite cultural space, which sought to improve her and thus positioned her as a deficient beneficiary. She was no longer simply a guest, being welcomed in by the gallery as host. Instead, cooking sadza with and for the collective – and teaching other members how to make it – positioned Anna as a knower and a teacher and validated her everyday skills and knowledges. Given Anna's identity as a young, Black woman from Zimbabwe, occupying the position of host at a contemporary art gallery had a specific set of political resonances. Although contemporary art exhibitions often engage with global cultures, this is often enacted through colonial modes of display in which "other cultures" are represented for a white gaze or as a dominating mode of philanthropy in which visitors and learners in the gallery have been constructed as beneficiaries (Bennett, 1995; Turner, 2020)<sup>36</sup>. As discussed in section (c) part (i) of this chapter, NC even activated the language of anti-racism to reinscribe its own righteousness, and deepen its own position as a dominant host, thereby avoiding making meaningful change to institutional relations (Ahmed, 2012). However, Anna taking up the position of host by cooking sadza challenged the default atmosphere of whiteness at the gallery, which might otherwise position Black womanhood as the

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Five

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of the colonial relations of the museum. Chapter Eight will also discuss this further in terms of the youth programme at NC.

object of a white gaze, in the way her art tutor had sought to do. By cooking for the collective, Anna took up a rhizomatic mode of hospitality in which positions of host and guest were fluidly shared between various workers and young people. By cooking for the group, Anna used the embodied ritual of commensality to enact a ‘little public’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013b), generating a minor space in which she was the host, and could produce new ways of being a young, Black woman, beyond stereotypes. The act of cooking sadza thus produced what Zembylas (2020) calls ‘dewalling atmospheres’ (p. 45), which supported Anna’s differential becoming through participation in 1525.

In the next section, I share Shania’s story of participation in 1525, discussing how their experience of being part of 1525 powerfully enabled their differential becoming, as a young, Black, queer person, and an artist.

#### *iv) Shania’s story*

##### **Research records: Ellie’s end of year evaluation meeting with Shania (3.9.19)**

“What were your first impressions of 1525?” asks Ellie. “That you weren’t White” responds Shania, without missing a beat. Her answer cuts through the default whiteness of the gallery like a hot knife through butter. The voice recorder on Ellie’s phone traces a red chart, mapping the sounds in the room. Ellie has been asked to capture young people’s words about the collective to add to her annual evaluation of the programme for the programme’s funder, so she has arranged interviews with three members that she thinks have taken up different affordances from participation. I have been invited to observe the conversations, as part of my research at NC. I wonder if Ellie finds Shania’s answer uncomfortable. I cannot imagine these words being written in an evaluation report.

Shania was doing an Art Foundation course when they first got involved in 1525. They needed something else to do; it was a club of sorts. The location was convenient for them, which was

important. The social space provided by 1525 was valuable to Shania because it brought together a different collection of young people than those they encountered in other areas of their life, such as at school, work, or college. They later told me, "This is kind of the only thing I had. I didn't have other friends who were arty" (Shania interview, 26.5.20). As a Black and queer young person, they experienced art college as "very white-washed" (Shania interview, 26.5.20), saying "I just felt very out of place there, it was very sad" (Shania interview, 26.5.20).

The whiteness of art college was an odd and alienating experience for them:

"It was kind of just like 97% white people and just like two Black girls - one being me - in the class, and like that was it was weird to go through, because it's kind of like, "Oh, okay, I've lived in central Nottingham all my life, and this is not what Nottingham looks like."" (Shania interview, 26.5.20)

Being confronted with the whiteness of art college had catalysed their increasing political consciousness, which they explored through their art practice, creating a 'zine about these experiences.

A feeling of being different was also present in other areas of Shania's life: within the working-class Black community in which they had grown up, art was often not accepted as a valuable career route. Shania found out about 1525 from their college tutor, who had previously taught Ellie. Arriving at the group was a powerful experience for Shania:

"When I got to the collective it was kind of like, "Oh, Ellie is half Asian." And like, she understands that like, I guess that kind of... I guess, POC, like, struggle where it's kind of just like, "oh, like, you're either too white" - or well, quote-unquote "white" - or too, like, you just don't really fit. Like, that kind of quirky, artsy person is kind of just like, "Ooh, well", you can't really get along with these people. But, it's kind of like, this whole big kind of like, this whole big kind of collective, which is, which is exactly what it is." (Shania interview, 26.5.20)

The racial and class oppression that Shania had experienced at art college as a young, Black artist were complex and pernicious. However, their experiences of art college sat in stark contrast to their experiences of 1525 meetings.

Being involved with the gallery made Shania feel important. They had “bragged” to their Grandma about “working” at NC (Shania interview, 26.5.20), and they felt good about knowing gallery staff. Shania had been a panel member at a public event at NC, which was “quite anxiety-invoking” (Shania interview, 26.5.20), as it surfaced their uncertain sense of belonging in spaces, especially – they told me – as a queer person. However, they had found it “freeing” (Shania interview, 26.5.20) to come to 1525, where they felt accepted. In this regard, 1525 collective meetings offered something very different to their home life, where they did not feel their queer identity was embraced or welcomed.

Shania was part of a voguing event programmed by 1525 as part of a project about the Paradise Garage queer club in New York, which had taken place in early 2019, before I started my research with the group. The project had an powerful role in their life beyond the project, as they told me, “People still recognise me from the voguing event and the panel session” (Shania interview, 26.5.20). Voguing gave Shania a newfound and free mode of physical expression. They articulated a complex relationship with their physical body and movement, animated and performed through voguing, telling me that, “Gay guys will be like “tits, tits, pussy” when they are voguing” (Shania interview, 26.5.20) – their hands moved around their body as they spoke, performing an echo of the remembered choreography – “but it’s a different thing if you’re female, or woman-presenting” (Shania interview, 26.5.20). For Shania, voguing was a powerful embodied practice of healing from embedded oppressions based on



race, class, and queerness that had made them fearful of being perceived as too loud or too visible (Shania interview, 26.5.20). Nevertheless, they asserted “But I do have a point to make and I didn’t want to be spoken over” (Shania interview, 26.5.20). Shania’s becomings as a queer, Black, person, and an emerging artist, were in part related to the positive relationship they had developed with the guest facilitator of the voguing sessions. She described him as “very calming” (Shania interview, 26.5.20), explaining that this relationship had spawned other connections within the local queer community for them, which had endured way beyond the time and space of 1525 meetings.

Shania talked to me about speaking at the open mic event at one of 1525’s exhibition closing parties; about the vulnerability of sharing their personal journal entries publicly (Shania interview, 26.5.20). They described how the experience making themselves vulnerable at this event, alongside other young artists of colour, had ultimately been powerful and liberatory for them. They told me that the frequent discussions of star signs and tarot in collective meetings were, for them, a valuable tool for self-reflection, relationship building, and emotional self-awareness. For Shania, the witchy practices that Ellie activated in 1525 meetings were part of a journey to increased confidence, and an ability to speak out with less anxiety. Witchy pedagogies were an important element of how participation in 1525 supported Shania’s minoritarian becoming.

When I interviewed Shania, towards the end of my research with 1525, they had left the collective and begun a Bachelor’s degree in fine art at a university in another city. As we spoke, they reflected back on what participation in 1525 group meetings had done for them.

Their account is overflowing with a sense of how the intimate relations afforded by 1525 meetings produced a generative affective atmosphere:

**Shania:** [Ellie] kind of like had this energy where she wanted you, she wanted to push you to be your very best self. And it wasn't like a push where it was like "Go on! Go on!". It was sort of like a reassurance where it was like, like, you can do this, that kind of energy from her kind of just how we like cooked for each other and stuff like that. It was kind of like, very like, Kumbayah-esque. Yeah, but everyone kind of like had this warmth towards each other as well, where you wouldn't really get that many places, or like some groups, like, they don't really have that aspect. It's kind of just like, "Oh this is this group that I'm part of" or it's like a group task thing but it was kind of like everyone cares for each other there, so I guess that's what the family aspect was. Also just like, the fact that we would talk about mundane things, or just like, just just the fact that we cook for each other and stuff like that, like, that's not a very... it's not a big thing that many groups or collectives will do for each other. So I guess in that sense, it's a big family.

**Cassie:** Were there ever any times where somebody didn't kind of fit in with that vibe, or way of behaving in the group? Or, perhaps said something that was not inclusive? Was there ever any time where someone didn't behave in a way that fit in with that kind of family inclusive feel of the group?

**Shania:** Once or twice, where someone kind of came in and thought it was like, it was just something that it wasn't, and didn't really align with, like, what we kind of was looking for in a person I guess, like very ignorant, very, like controlling...I think there was one person like that I saw in one meeting and the next meeting was gone. Other than that it was kinda like, oh, well, okay. I guess in that sense, it could be kind of excluding, but like, I don't know, like when you think about it, like, this guy was kind of an engineer, and like everyone in the group was kind of like, very artsy creative, even if you weren't doing art, typically you're doing some type of art related. Oh, you're into something already art-related. So that was kind of like, "Oh, okay". (Shania interview, 26.5.20).

In this conversation, Shania centred the importance of mutual care between members, and their account evoked the warmth and intimacy they felt in the collective. The collective was not open to everyone, and that the boundedness of the group was integral to the powerful affordances that Shania took up from participation. The configuration of people brought together in 1525 was important to Shania as it did something specific for them. The group included an ethnically and culturally mixed group of local young people, which was in stark contrast to the almost exclusively white cohort they had encountered at art college. The group was not open to everyone, and this was part of what Shania valued about it: it was an intimate

space built on trust and familiarity. The fact that many other group members were Black and brown, and that Ellie was also a person of colour, were part of what made 1525 feel welcoming, inclusive, and safe to Shania. Embodied practices – including the circle and commensality – were important part of the distinctive atmosphere (Thomson & Hall, 2021) of care, validation, and intimacy that they experienced in 1525. The relational time/space of 1525 meetings nurtured and validated Shania, creating a space for their minoritarian subjectivity as a young, queer, Black artist to emerge, that was quite different to the relational spaces offered by their home life, or at art college.

Shania had lived a life in which they had been repeatedly marginalised in multiple social contexts, which had given them a powerful attunement to how they were received by others. Shania was highly attuned to the atmospheres of the relational space of 1525. When a photographer came to document a 1525 event, they felt he was “just here to do a job” (Shania interview, 26.5.20), which they experienced as jarring rupture to the intimate dynamics of the group meetings. They had found another collaborator “pretentious” and explained that “When I don’t vibe with people, I shut off” (Shania interview, 26.5.20). Like Ahmed (2014) explains, ‘what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival’. Shania’s attunement to the atmosphere of 1525 meetings was a manifestation of their complex lived experiences of racism, classism, and queerphobia. As Ahmed (2014) argues, strangers are created by a lack of attunement. When new people entered 1525 meetings who did not engage in the intimate dynamics of the time/space, the hospitality of the collective-as-coven was sometimes disrupted, for Shania.

Despite the complex relations involved, forms of young community available in the 1525 collective produced different becomings for young people like Shania by producing a minor space within the major space of the gallery. The coven formed in 1525 group meetings acted as a 'little public' (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) which created space for young people to speak and be heard by one another and Ellie. The intimacy and mutual attunement of 1525 members in group meetings allowed for the more fluid mode of rhizomatic hospitality to be enacted in collective meetings, which supported young people's minoritarian becomings, not as a fixed, linear trajectory but in messy and divergent ways. In part, this was about resisting the major space of the gallery which was coded as white and middle class (Ahmed, 2014). The dominant offer of the collective as route into work in the arts produced an 'atmospheric wall' through the conditional offer of hospitality that it made, which depended on young people's assimilation into the gallery. A space that 'does not receive you' creates a stranger, according to Ahmed (2014). By contrast, in group meetings, a closed group – or coven, or 'little public' (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) – of young people and Ellie fluidly shared positions of host and guest, attuning to one another responsively, to generate a different sort of collective hospitality. Shania's story is a powerful example of how a minor form of rhizomatic hospitality emerged in 1525 meetings, and what participation in this mode of hospitality to enabling the differential becomings of some members.

The intimate hospitable atmosphere of collective meetings which enabled Shania's becoming as a young, queer, Black artist depended on the group being welcoming, but also being bounded. The relations enacted in group meetings were not the unconditional mode of hospitality mooted by the gallery's motto – 'International art, for everyone, for free' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a) – but a more intimate collective space that acted as a

coven or a 'little public' (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) – producing new ways of relating, feeling, and becoming for those involved. Like the dominant enactment of the collective as routes into work in the arts<sup>37</sup>, the enactment of the collective as a caring community which was produced in group meetings also produced a conditional mode of hospitality. However, the conditional hospitality of group meetings was rhizomatic rather than arboreal, and thus resisted rather than reinforced the domination of young people by the gallery as a powerful, elite host.

Ellie's witchy pedagogy actively 'dewalled' the dominant atmospheres of hospitality (Zembylas, 2020) at NC – including, importantly, the institutional whiteness and elitism of the gallery – within 1525 meetings. However, Ellie's practice in this regard was not universally understood and valued at NC. At times, her enactment of the collective-as-coven came into conflict with the position of the institution-as-host. The tensions in the practice of hospitality in the gallery youth collective often emerged – and walls were sometimes reinstated – by the deployment of a rhetoric of safety, as I will discuss in the next section.

#### d) "It continues to paralyse me": Safety and risk in the gallery youth collective

My regular research activities with 1525 members concluded in Summer 2020. After a heavily disrupted year of research due to the pandemic<sup>38</sup>, I met with Ellie in August 2021 and discussed some emergent results. As we talked, she reflected on some of the contradictions of her role at NC. She recounted having met up with Callum and inviting him to dinner with her and her Mum:

"I met up with Callum through some freelance work elsewhere. I was offering mentoring, which included a tarot reading. It was a really emotional moment. I met him in Freshers'

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter Five

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Six and Chapter Nine for a detailed examination of how the disruption of the pandemic affected the research.

week, right at the start of his journey, and now he's graduating. He isn't going back to Country X now because of all the political changes there. He has a passport and is looking for a job in the arts here, but it is a difficult time for him, and he is quite isolated in some ways. So I invited him for Dim Sum with me and my Mum. She's doing some work with other people from Country X who are trying to stay in the UK at the moment, so I wanted to help him connect with that community. But I'm sure people at work would shudder if they knew I had done that!" (Ellie research conversation, 3.8.21)

Given the powerful role of cooking and eating together as a mode of hospitality in her practice, Ellie's story of inviting Callum for dinner illustrated her expansive sense of care for collective members. Her feeling of responsibility for group members was personal, political, and spiritual, and this commitment went way beyond the work she was paid to do within the confines of the narrow, funded programme, and its notions of linear, measurable impact. Belfiore (2022) has argued that relations of care for participants which expand beyond the borders of the formal programme is a common feature of social arts practice, and a way in which workers are commonly exploited by institutions, as funding and programmes are boundaried, but practitioners' ethical commitments are often expansive. Indeed, Ellie's relational practice was often at odds with the ways in which the gallery conceived of her role, and dominant notions of "good practice" at NC, which sought to limit her relationships with collective members to group meetings, and to manage perceived risks of close relationships with young people through heavy-handed institutional oversight.

Ellie's intuitive practice in the collective often conflicted with the gallery's bureaucratic systems for managing institutional risk. She told me how invasive and impractical these risk management expectations could be, when she was already extremely busy:

"I am at capacity and then I'm told that if I want to take young people for a walk, I have to go out first and count the crossroads. If I want to take them to a community garden, I have to go first and check for needles" (Ellie research conversation, 3.8.21)

The formal institutional risk management practices demanded by Ellie's manager often felt excessive to her, considering she was working with a group of independent young adults. Furthermore, she was expected to audit and document the youth programme, but the demands of the audit regime, and the constraints of institutional risk management sometimes came into conflict with each other:

"We are encouraged to document the workshops we do because we need to capture more of what we do in the programme. But the other week I got in trouble for just taking pictures of hands and what people had made. Apparently, I can't take any pictures on my phone, I have to use a camera, but all the cameras at work are rubbish. And then I put some of the pictures on social media anyway, so they have to go on my phone at some point!" (Ellie research conversation, 3.8.21)

The risk management demands that Ellie experienced at NC were often framed in terms of safeguarding, but she experienced this as a powerful contradiction, telling me:

"Safeguarding is about care, but it is also a barrier to that. It continues to paralyse me." (Ellie research conversation, 3.8.21)

Ellie felt a deep responsibility to care for group members, but she sometimes felt that the restrictive form of safeguarding practice that, at times, were enforced by her manager were an obstacle to enacting the sort of responsive and caring relations that she felt were central to the group. She explained how she related to group members in a more fluid way:

"I'm not very good at having boundaries. It is something I've always struggled with. Sometimes young people need a hug, and if I feel like it's OK, then I will give them one...Maybe I shouldn't do it, but I do." (Ellie research conversation, 3.8.21)

The institutional boundaries that Ellie experienced were primarily from within the Learning team, and often felt extremely jarring to her. She told me:

"It's not really curatorial or public programme that I worry about, it's other people in the Learning team. I feel like if my boss saw how I am in meetings sometimes, I wouldn't have a job any more". (Ellie research conversation, 3.8.21)

Risk-averse institutional notions of "good practice" were at odds with the way Ellie developed intimacy with young people. The competitive and precarious funding environment

surrounding the gallery youth collective generated institutional risk aversion at NC, by compelling the gallery to engage with impact and audit regimes to maintain funding and its position. Rigid ideas of “good practice” centred the idea of safety as emerging through infantilising sets of top-down, inflexible rules about how, when and where it was appropriate for care to be enacted.

Regimes of audit were also tangible when Ellie told me she was asked to document the activities in the group to “capture” more of what they did. The demands of institutional audit repeatedly reinscribed young people’s passive position as beneficiaries and thus restated a relational hierarchy of arboreal hospitality, in which the gallery was in a fixed position as host and benefactor. The pressure to constantly attempt to measure the collective’s activities in terms of impact – under the threat of losing funding – produced a sense of precarity, leading to institutional risk aversion within the Learning team, which emerged, at times, as a stifling mode of care-as-control (Bulley, 2015). In terms of hospitality, Derrida (2000) suggests that practices of monitoring and audit can act to undermine the potential of hospitality. Like the toxic practice of phone-tapping that he describes (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000), the demands for the youth collective to be planned, measured, risk assessed, documented, and monitored constantly was at odds with the emergence of a hospitable and intimate atmosphere in – and beyond – group meetings. The institutional risk aversion produced by the demands of oversight and audit at NC was in profound conflict with Ellie’s practice as a witchy educator in 1525.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the time-space of 1525 meetings often operated in ways at odds with the dominant norms of the gallery, and the relationships that were forged in this



setting had a life of their own which often transgressed the boundaries of group meetings. Ellie knew that practicing expansive, mutually caring relationships with group members was in conflict with the risk-averse and infantilizing practices of safeguarding as they were often imagined at NC, but she was invested in another set of more expansive hospitable ethics in her relations with the collective members (Belfiore, 2022). Part of Ellie's practice in this regard involved nurturing the collective as a hospitable rhizome within the institutional tree (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). As Smyth et al. (2020) suggest, when they compel readers to '[a]bandon appropriate behavior' (p. 874), enacting the relations of the feminist coven within a dominant host sometimes demands transgression, as Ellie sometimes discovered. Enacting a rhizomatic mode of hospitality in 1525 required her to transgress some of the constraints of the dominant mode of hospitality, in which the gallery was fixed as a powerful host, and young people remained as passive guests.

#### Necessary limits: Rhizomatic hospitality in 1525 meetings

NC's motto of 'international art, for everyone, for free' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a) publicly proclaimed an offer of unlimited hospitality. However, 1525 meetings were instead a bounded time/space, and Ellie carefully managed the threshold to produce meetings as a minor space. In meetings, Ellie's witchy pedagogy involved the use of embodied ritual practices to construct an atmosphere in which young people felt validated and safe. Practices of the circle and commensality encouraged members to attune and make themselves vulnerable to one another, producing the collective as a coven. The atmosphere produced in meetings as an intimate, closed, and attuned time/space produced hospitality in the coven as a fluid, rhizomatic set of relations, in which Ellie and group members flexibly shared positions of host and guest. The rhizomatic hospitality of group meetings generated a minor space, at

odds with the White, elite atmosphere of the wider institution. The hospitality on offer in the minor space of group meetings was powerful for group members who were minoritized in terms of class, race, and queerness, as it supported and validated their differential becomings. The enactment of the gallery youth collective-as-coven resisted the domination of minoritarian young people within a powerful host, and thus supported the emergence of new modes of youth subjectivity and expression. In the next chapter, I will explore how 1525 members took up the final part of the offer made by 1525 – institutional time and space at NC to produce public exhibitions and events – discussing what happened when they sought to activate their voices beyond the boundaries of the collective’s meetings.

## 8. The Oil and Water project: the hospitality of “voice” in the gallery youth collective<sup>39</sup>

In this chapter, I will address how young people and gallery workers took up the final part of the offer that NC made with the youth collective: participation as youth voice. In Chapter Four, I explained how NC proposed that participation in 1525 could transform young people into empowered and active citizens, able to effectively make change in their communities. The offer of voice at NC was largely made in terms of giving young people in 1525 access to institutional time and space, which was understood at the gallery as a way they could be heard by wider publics. The rhetoric of institutional participation as a powerful mode of youth voice was an important part of how NC proposed the gallery youth collective as a hospitable practice, which – it was suggested – could augment young people’s agency and reform the institution into a more democratic and inclusive place. In this chapter, I focus in on one 1525 project – Oil and Water – in which collective members collaborated with a local activist group to produce an exhibition and event about the 2019 democracy movement in Country X. NC frequently claimed that 1525 was co-produced by the young people involved, for instance when they wrote that young people ‘put on their own events and exhibitions and work with us to respond to the issues affecting their lives’ (Nottingham Contemporary, 2018a). Whilst Learning staff at NC were often called upon to pre-imagine the youth programme in detail – and commonly in terms of relations of impact and deficit – for funding applications and linked regimes of audit<sup>40</sup>, the Oil and Water project itself was quite unanticipated by gallery workers. It emerged unexpectedly from the political events that occurred in Country X in 2019 and was catalysed by one 1525 member – Callum – who made a collection of protest artefacts when

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<sup>39</sup> Parts of this chapter have been redacted from the public version due to the potential political sensitivity of the topic. The Asian country in question is referred to as Country X for ethical reasons.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Five.

he went home to the region to spend the summer holidays with his family. The Oil and Water project seemed to me to enact the co-produced approach that the gallery often espoused as central to 1525 and was therefore particularly resonant with the focus of this study, which sought to interrogate participation-as-hospitality in the gallery youth collective. The analysis of the Oil and Water project in this chapter allows an exploration of the ways in which young people took up the offer of voice at NC, discussing how it manifested in practice, as a complex and ambivalent mode of hospitality.

#### Mapping this chapter

I do not claim that this chapter provides a complete account of the Oil and Water project. Instead, I will discuss how the project was co-produced by young people and gallery staff and explore the multiple ways in which young people's participation in Oil and Water emerged as a mode of hospitality. As part of this analysis, I will critically engage with 'the prevailing models of voice' (Batsleer, 2011, p. 426), demonstrating that dominant imaginaries of youth agency in these terms acted to reinscribe particular modes of hospitality in the gallery youth collective. This chapter will include some additional literatures of specific relevance to its contents, in particular:

- The theoretical complexities of youth voice.
- The political events in Country X in 2019.<sup>41</sup>

It will also include material from different empirical sources, including:

- Research records generated from participant observation in 1525 activities, the resultant exhibition, and the public event.

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<sup>41</sup> This section has been redacted for ethical reasons.

- Extracts from interviews and research conversations carried out with young people and gallery workers.

The chapter will unfold in three main parts:

- a) Introducing the Oil and Water project.
- b) Exhibition making as hospitality.
- c) Going public: the riskiness of youth voice.

#### a) Introducing the Oil and Water project

Supporting young people to create exhibitions and events at NC was an important part of how Ellie facilitated 1525. She positioned the production of the Oil and Water project – and the resultant exhibition – as part of a series of 1525-led work hosted in NC’s Gallery Zero space:

“[T]he first one was on Paradise Garage in New York, and queer club culture from the 80s and 90s, and how that influences now. And the second iteration of that was on young voices and activism and politics. And so the first section of that one was on the Country X, [protest movement], but also kind of the recent protests now, which a member of the group bought back lots of archived material that was really interesting that we just felt like, you know, the group really wanted to share”. (Ellie interview, 16.8.20)

Both the Paradise Garage exhibition and the Oil and Water project allowed Ellie to connect 1525 members to global moments of youth cultural resistance, and she believed that participation supported members to creatively activate their voices and mobilise their own lived experiences to tell these stories to wider publics. In both projects, marginalised young people in 1525 – first queer people, then migrants from Country X – were invited to represent the experiences of their communities – initially within 1525 meetings and ultimately to wider publics – raising questions about the sort of hospitable relations generated by youth-led exhibitions and events at NC. Oil and Water was especially interesting in terms of questions of participation and hospitality, because it was initiated and curated by a member of 1525.

In this first section of the chapter, I will introduce the Oil and Water project, by:

- i) Presenting some research records about how Oil and Water was initiated in 1525.
- ii) Discussing some literatures on youth voice, demonstrating how it is commonly conceived in narrowly individualistic terms and interrogating what the dominance of imaginaries of youth agency in these terms does to the enactment of participation-as-hospitality.
- iii) Introducing the 2019 Country X protests which inspired the Oil and Water exhibition.

*i) Encountering Callum's Country X Protest Collection*

**Research Record: 1525 meeting (2.10.19)**

It is the first 1525 meeting of the academic year, and The Studio at NC is much fuller than it has been since spring. Many familiar members are now back from their holidays and sit alongside several new people. As is often the case, the meeting begins with a round of introductions. Ellie then turns to Callum, who has recently returned to university in Nottingham after spending the summer break at home with his family in Country X.

During his visit home, Callum witnessed the unfolding political conflict between the government in Country X and a growing movement of pro-democracy protestors. He was deeply affected by the events he witnessed and felt compelled to document them by gathering a collection of political artefacts to bring back to the UK. Making and exporting the collection was a risky act. Callum hid the objects in the lining of his suitcase, fearing that if they were found, they would be confiscated at the border, and he would be harshly punished. The items in the collection are diverse, including books, stickers, t-shirts, hand-made posters, and pieces of political art. With encouragement from Ellie, Callum has decided to share the artefacts with the collective members in tonight's meeting.

As members pass the artefacts around the table, Callum gently unfurls a paper scroll. It reveals an unfinished pencil-drawn illustration that he is working on, inspired by the protests. He

describes the artwork as a reflection on the cyclical forms of the violence and conflict he has witnessed in Country X. Ellie grew up in Country X so has her own experiences and views on the issues raised in the discussion, at one point interjecting to point out that “Before we were colonised by Country Y, it was the British!” with a wry chuckle. Whilst Callum is keen to position himself as a neutral documenter of the current conflict, Ellie tells us explicitly that she supports the protestors.

A discussion begins about different youth political movements around the world and 1525 members talk about the generational and cultural differences in how people feel about youth activism. Group members contribute experiences from their own lives, families, and geographical and cultural backgrounds. Helena tells us about the history of political protest and feminist activism where she grew up in Chile, commenting that many political events in her country do not get reported in the UK “Because it’s South America”. Another member draws parallels with the youth climate strikes and environmental activism of Greta Thunberg, arguing that whilst the older generation tend to dislike her, many young people support her. Callum passes around the objects he has collected, and 1525 members ask questions to better understand the situation in Country X that preceded the current wave of protests. Ellie asks if members would be interested in developing Callum’s collection of artefacts into an exhibition curated by the collective, to be displayed in Gallery Zero, and members nod and collectively agree to pursue the project further next week.

Figure 11: Photograph from the Oil and Water workshop on 2.10.19, from the 1525 Instagram account<sup>42</sup>

*ii) Troubling youth “voice”*

Youth participation has often been imagined in terms of young people’s rights to activate their voice (Mayes, 2023; Thomson, 2011). However, the exact meaning and underlying theoretical implications of understanding young people’s participation through a mode of agency which is conceived as a “voice” are often not explicitly addressed (Bragg, 2007; Fielding, 2007; Thomson, 2011). In this section, I will examine some of the multiple, conflicting ways in which participation is understood as youth voice, arguing that the dominant rhetoric of voice as the volitional self-expression of a pre-existing, individualized subject has the potential to be cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011). Instead, I will advocate for a nuanced, relational notion of voice as a form of collective agency that emerges from an assemblage of people, things, and practices, as a useful framework for understanding the emergence of youth voice through practices of exhibition and event making that took place in the Oil and Water project. Further, I will explain how the notion of voice in individualistic terms did something at NC.

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<sup>42</sup> This image has been redacted for ethical reasons.



The rise of youth agency in terms of “voice” has been entangled with the history of liberatory political movements (Thomson, 2011). The rhetoric of youth voice emerged in response to a past in which children and young people were often viewed as ‘incompetent’ (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 499) and therefore has often sought to position young people as already ‘competent social actors in their own right’ (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, p. 499). However, in attempting to revalue young people’s capacities, dominant imaginaries of youth voice have often involved narrowly individualistic understandings of agency, invoking ‘neoliberal accounts of voice and choice’ (Batsleer, 2011, p. 419) at the expense of attending to the complex relational dynamics involved (Mannion, 2007). As Papadopoulou and Sidorenko (2022) assert:

This image of the child as a social actor fails to acknowledge the structural, contextual and relational conditions that can afford or restrict opportunities for children’s agentic action. It conceals the multi-faceted, multi-dimensional properties of power that shape children’s (and adults’) contributions and ‘voices’. (p. 354)

Contrary to common invocations of youth voice as a resolution to power relations, investments in idealised accounts of voice may act reproduce and conceal underlying power relations (Bragg, 2007; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008), and can even enact further violence by excluding certain young people from taking part at all if they cannot or do not want to participate according to dominant, adult ideas of voice (Batsleer, 2011).

In the arts, the notion of “giving voice” is often claimed as part of the philanthropic value of participation. However, Bernadette Lynch has argued that:

A culture of ‘giving’, doing ‘for’, ‘on behalf of’, still, I maintain, runs throughout the cultural sector, infecting both curatorial and educational practices alike (Lynch, 2017, p. 255)

As Lynch suggests, the notion of participation in terms of a benefactor “giving voice” to participants implies that young people were previously voiceless, and thus silences and devalues their existing, everyday modes of expression. In terms of hospitality, the notion of participation as “giving voice” to participants reinforces a fixed, binary set of relations of host and guest. Whilst – as Hickey-Moody (2013b) argues – taking up dominant forms of so-called voice by assimilating into adult-led cliched modes of expression can feel good to young people, the rhetoric of voice in youth arts can paradoxically enact an implicit hierarchy of value between the institution-as-host and young people-as-guests, maintaining a set of relations which reproduce – rather than challenge – the dominant position of the elite, host institution.

In contrast to simplistic notions of host institutions “giving” young people voice, Hickey-Moody’s conception of how the arts might support young people’s agency (see Chapter Six for more) validates young people’s collective creative modes of expression as deeply political and agentic, writing:

The ways in which young people consume and make art articulate their voice...when a young person makes a work of art they effect a political statement, call the public to attention and invest in particular ideas about identity, community, and belonging. (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 1)

Hickey-Moody’s account of the value of arts participation as agency resists positioning voice as something that adults give to young people. Instead, she suggests that young people’s arts participation offers opportunities for them to come together in new arrangements, taking up new relations with objects, spaces, and practices, which can have generative affordances:

Production and consumption of art and music through popular culture are practices of belonging to community for many young people. It is also a reason why new communities can be formed, and original voices articulated, through atypical arts practices. While youth arts practices and popular cultural representations of these practices generally reproduce stereotypical ideas about socially marginalized youth...they also have the capacity to

create new figures of young people and to rework community sentiments surrounding youth. (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 13)

Forms of arts participation which involve sharing an outcome with a wider public can thus be powerful in terms of youth agency, but understandings of youth agency as the voice of a pre-existing individual subject, or as something which is “given” to young people by adults, can paradoxically act to reinforce young people’s subordinate positioning.

At NC, the enactment of participation as youth voice through giving young people time and space, had the potential to emerge as an ‘assemblage of governance’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 41) which controlled young people; or as a more creative, collective expression of youth voice, which could change how 1525 members and wider publics understood and felt about young communities. Before I discuss what took place in the Oil and Water project in detail, I will give some context about the 2019 activist movement in Country X, which inspired the exhibition and event at NC.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> A large part of the next section is redacted, for ethical reasons, related to the potential political sensitivity of the topic.







The political art and protest objects involved in the 2019 Country X protest movement had the potential to connect with people and places to form new and powerful modes of voice, both in Country X and at NC. When Callum brought the protest objects back from Country X and shared them with fellow 1525 members at NC, new relations were manifested within the gallery, as I will explain in the next section.

#### b) Exhibition making as hospitality

Throughout the final months of 2019, young people in the 1525 collective worked together in the group's weekly meetings to produce an exhibition from Callum's collection of protest objects. In this section, I will show how the practices of collaborative exhibition making enacted in this project positioned Callum differently in group meetings, creating a new arrangement of people, spaces, practices, and the protest artefacts, which made new ways of thinking and feeling possible for Callum and the other young participants. However, I will also

explain how taking up public platforms at NC also brought 1525 into contact with the major space of the gallery, which produced a mode of hospitality at odds with the emancipatory image of youth “voice” surrounding the offer of institutional time and space in the gallery youth collective.

The pedagogy of the initial Oil and Water session in 1525 – in which Callum shared his artefacts and discussed the situation in Country X (see section (1a)) – produced a particular form of hospitality, in which Callum moved from being a guest to being a host in 1525 meetings. He began as a guest: he was not a gallery worker, but a member of the youth collective. He was also a migrant and person of colour, at odds with the dominant whiteness of the institution (see Chapter Seven). In Oil and Water, Callum was supported by Ellie to bring knowledges and objects from his other cultural context into the institution. Like when Anna cooked sadza for the collective (see Chapter Seven), Ellie supported Callum to become a host to his peers’ learning, which disrupted the gallery’s dominant positioning relative to the youth collective – as host to young people – as a young person instead became host to his fellow group members. Again, the fact that this was a young person of colour and a migrant gave this act a deterritorializing potential within the dominantly white space of NC. However, the Oil and Water project went further than collective practices of commensality in 1525 meetings in terms of youth agency as, from the start, the project included the aspiration to take up the institutional offer of public time and space at NC to communicate with a wider set of publics.

*Research records: Writing the Oil and Water catalogue (23.10.19)*

This week, Alice – an Associate Artist at NC – has agreed to run the 1525 meeting as Ellie is on holiday, and Lucy – an intern at the gallery – is helping her. I go to make drinks and a



collective member, Helena, joins me in the kitchen. She has been spending a lot of time watching the protests in Chile unfold on TV, saying: “I’ve been saving the videos on my phone off YouTube because they keep deleting them”. Helena is from Chile, and has been shocked to see the unrest unfolding, telling me “I never thought she would see this in my lifetime. My mother is very stressed about what’s happening and the dangers to my family”.

Shortly after 5pm, Lucy goes to fetch Hannah – who works in NC’s Exhibitions team – who is going to talk to the group about how to create a catalogue and a vitrine display for the Oil and Water project. Alice begins the session with the regular circle, as Ellie usually does. This time she suggests a simple round of introductions: our name, preferred pronoun, and a sentence about our interest in the Oil and Water project. When it is my turn, I explain how this project resonates with my research, saying:

“My research is ethnography, by which I mean that I get involved with groups to find out how they work and what things mean to them. In a way, you are all acting as ethnographers of the Country X protest movement in this project, just as I am acting as an ethnographer of this group in my PhD, so that is really interesting to me. It’s all very meta!”

The intern Lucy chuckles, and the rest of the group nods with understanding. I feel myself warm with delight at having made a meaningful connection to my research for young people in the collective. As we progress around the circle, Helena says she is keen that the exhibition encourages people to “take a position” on the protests. As she speaks, the tightness in her face attests to the personal resonance this project has for her.

Alice explains that aim of today’s session is to write texts for a catalogue to accompany the vitrine of protest artefacts to be installed in Gallery Zero. Hannah gives some tips about how she curates vitrines and writes catalogues, before the young people break off into pairs to work collaboratively on generating the texts. Callum circulates around the room, working with each pair to support their writing. He translates the writing on the artefacts into English, and provides extra information, context, and insight into their meanings from a Country X local’s perspective. The political discourse and aesthetics of the protest movement are heavily symbolic, using colours, images, and linguistic references to Country X’s culture and history, which would have been impossible for most 1525 members to

comprehend without Callum's interpretation. Through talking to him, other group members come to understand more about the complex meanings the protest artefacts had in their original context and start to write texts which can communicate something of their significance to gallery visitors.

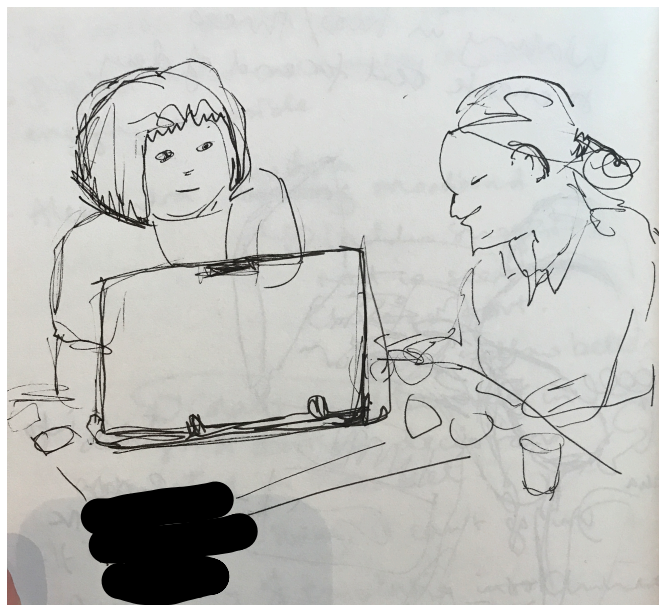


Figure 12: Sketch from my research records of collective members co-writing the Oil and Water catalogue (23.10.19)

### *Minoritarian becomings in Oil and Water*

Exhibition making in the Oil and Water project did multiple things for Callum and other young people involved. For Callum, gaining work experience in the arts was a powerful motivator for participation in 1525:

“I think I get more experienced, like, running, running coordinating events and programmes really... I was interested in the logistics of non-government organizations, like museums, how they function, and I wanted to know more, by getting involved, in some ways, like the other workshops, because I haven't had much of those in Country X. So that just that's like the force pulling me back.” (Callum interview, 2.6.20)

Ellie activated her witchy pedagogy of immanence in the group meetings in Oil and Water, which the positions of host and guest were fluid and mobile (see Chapter Seven for more on this). She positioned Callum's cultural knowledges as epistemically significant and took his production of the collection of protest objects seriously as an artistic and political act. When

Ellie reflected on the emergence of the project, the affective significance it had for her was apparent:

“I think what was really beautiful about that was that it happened really organically when a member went to Country X during the summer and brought back loads of archive material...And they told the story to the members, and the members were really inspired and thought it was brilliant. And it was really touching to watch...They put together this kind of this exhibition, this mini-exhibition and researched it together. And so yeah, [Gallery Zero] is just another lovely space to experiment and practice and find what they're interested in.” (Ellie interview, 16.8.20)

She understood the value of the Oil and Water project in terms of the process it involved, as an emergent, youth-led activity, in which young people took up the offer of time and space at the gallery to work collectively towards a shared public outcome. Ellie believed strongly that hosting events was an important avenue for 1525 members to enact youth activism, which was an important part of how she sought to amplify their agency:

There is an activism element to everything we do at 1525. So it will be, you know, we've held panel discussions, the screenings and queer club culture in Nottingham and beyond, inviting panelists down to talk on the panels with 1525 members. So sometimes within these workshops or you know, the involvement of 1525 is necessary in a strictly leadership role, but it's about having their voices heard. (Ellie interview, 16.8.20)

The way young people took up the offer of time and space at the gallery in the Oil and Water project, with Ellie's support, opened a relational space in the group which allowed Callum to take up the position of host, which had powerful affordances for both him, for other group members, and for wider publics.

When Callum shared his collection and his knowledges of the political events in Country X with 1525 members, he became a host to his peers. Callum later explained how he initiated the idea of the project:

“So the project was initially all the posters and memorabilia I have gathered from protest events last year. I accumulate that collection and share to everyone. Then, Ellie asked me what I'm going to do about the collection, and I suggest we can do, we can use this as the

next project in Gallery Zero. That's the idea I was on. And I thought because...by the time we were making the exhibition not very much British people really know the full scope of what's going on with Country X, I thought it would be a good opportunity to educate on the whole scenario and also we could be like, one of the first ones to do an exhibition full scope in England." (Callum interview, 2.6.20)

Callum wanted to make an exhibition from the collection of protest objects to inform and educate the British public about the political events taking place in Country X. When he took up a role leading Oil and Water, a new set of hospitable relationalities emerged, which were at odds with the idea of young people as passive recipients of improvements or impact. Instead, in the Oil and Water project Callum became an instigator, a knower, a curator, and a host in the group.

In the Oil and Water exhibition-making sessions that took place in 1525 meetings, Callum's collection of protest objects was brought into an encounter with a group of people, places, and practices. In writing the catalogue, 1525 members sought to tell stories with the objects, hoping to inform a wider public audience about events in Country X and change their sentiments about what was happening. Telling stories with objects can create new ways of knowing and feeling. As Pahl puts it:

The object itself acquires agency in this process. Rather than simply existing as an adjunct to the linguistic processes occurring around it, the object in some way "speaks" in the linked set of communicative practices. This in turn requires a shift to an understanding of the material object's role in the meaning-making ensemble. No longer passive, it becomes potentially dialogic, speaking with a number of voices. Objects themselves are also vibrant and potentially magical, rich with enchantment (Pahl, 2017, pp. 33-34)

The collection of protest artefacts that Callum brought to 1525 was, as Pahl suggests, magical and agentic, and it too had voice. Young people and gallery workers' encounters with the objects were often powerful and moving, enabling relational transformations for Callum and the rest of the collective. Oil and Water became a space of youth activism at NC, in which 1525

members developed a collective voice about Country X which resisted their passive positioning as guests within a dominant institutional host. For Callum, the project was also powerfully transformative, as sharing the collection of objects and talking about the events in Country X powerfully enabled his political becoming.

In 1525 sessions, group members worked collaboratively to produce the interpretation catalogue, but they nevertheless continued to acknowledge Callum as having a position of epistemic privilege within the collective. Alex – a fellow 1525 member – later described the collaboration between members on the project:

“It was about Country X protests... And [Callum] led it...I don't think it was like, necessarily, he *led* it. But like, really, we were relying on the person that knew best.” (Alex interview, 26.5.20)

Here, Alex explicitly positions Callum as epistemically privileged in informing the exhibition and catalogue, as “the person that knew best”, explaining how he took up this role of host, without detracting from the collective dynamics of the group. Alice – the artist facilitating the catalogue writing session – later described how Callum took up a role as host to his peers in the Oil and Water project:

“Yeah, it was great...he really led on the sessions, but in a really humble way...I remember he was sat there and was working on the same level as everyone else...He was so approachable that anyone could ask him questions about anything, especially because some of the [artefacts] he had were in [another language]... And so he was translating them for people and kind of really taking a step back and allowing, you know, everyone to make decisions. And then we asked him for kind of the final say, so there was about there was this positive recognition that it was his project, but he wasn't kind of, you know, dictating it. It was a collective”. (Alice interview, 10.7.20)

When Callum acted as host in 1525 meetings, he was called upon to explain the Country X political situation to other members, which catalysed a powerful shift in his views and feelings.

When Callum shared his collection of artefacts with the collective, the intimate relations

afforded by the collective-as-coven allowed Callum to experiment with new ways of talking, thinking and feeling about the Country X political situation in relative safety, to a small group of trusted peers. The long-term relations of friendship, mutual care, and intimacy in the group supported him to undergo a relational process of self-reflection and political becoming enabled – in part – by the rhizomatic relations of hospitality in 1525 meetings. Thus, the hospitable relations of the Oil and Water project generated Callum’s minoritarian becoming. Callum’s agency did not emerge in the adult-led narrow way of “giving voice” suggested in the offer made on the NC website (see Chapter Four), but through modes of collective youth creativity, in which new forms of youth voice emerged relationally and collectively (Hickey-Moody, 2013b).

Alongside developing the Oil and Water exhibition in 1525 meetings, Callum made connections with a group of local activists in Nottingham who ran public events, petitions, and campaigns to raise awareness of the situation in Country X. The relationships he developed with the activist group further enabled his emergent political understanding of events in Country X to develop. Callum took up a position in between 1525 and the youth activists, and ultimately connected the activists as collaborators with NC. With support from Ellie, the activists worked in parallel with 1525 to create a public event as part of the Oil and Water programme. Through the shift in Callum’s position in 1525, and the new connections with local activists, the Oil and Water project created new ‘configurations of young community’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 4), which enabled a new mode of youth voice to emerge. These experiences generated powerful changes for Callum and his various collaborators, as well as allowing the wider public audiences of the gallery to hear them in new ways. Callum’s shift in political sentiments was supported and enabled by the youth-led, collective pedagogy that

Ellie employed, which made a space in which he could be heard by his peers and forge connections with other young people in the activist group. Through participating in creative activities at and beyond NC, he experienced a political becoming, away from the major understandings of the protests as hooliganism that was being promoted by the Country Y state.

*Minor hosting: becoming a rhizome within a tree*

The assemblage of people, practices and things in the Oil and Water project was generative of new relational positions and enabled new becomings for other group members as well as for Callum. Learning about the Country X democracy protests provided powerful insights to fellow collective members (and to me, as an embedded researcher taking part in the sessions) about the political events taking place there – which few members had been aware of previously – and generated wider conversations about global youth activism. Anna told me about her experiences of the project:

“With the Country X project it was literally just to bring awareness of the situation. And to help people talk about the issue... I think it was... fun, I think, something that I had never done before. And I think I really did enjoy doing it, because it made me aware of other issues that are going on. And this sounds so silly, but I watch this programme... and one of the people that are in it, they always talk about having like humility, and being able to understand other people's cultures. And I think when I learned about it, it allowed me to have that perspective, and gave me a sense of humility, and understanding other people's cultures and seeing that, like, just because I'm not from Country Y, and I'm not from Country X, doesn't mean I don't, I shouldn't know about the problems and I shouldn't try to help out where I can be so and I think that's why I felt like it was important for me to participate, and for a lot of other people to participate as well. Because, again, it allows perspective and like the world's problems aren't just going to end by one person who's trying to talk about it. It's about a collective talking about it and being open to that conversation and open to learning.” (Anna Interview, 29.6.20)

Being hosted by Callum in the Oil and Water project gave Anna different knowledges and sentiments about the world and her place in it. Participation enabled her to understand the political events in Country X from his perspective, which gave her new insights and political

feelings.

Taking part in Oil and Water allowed Anna – as a young, Black woman and a migrant – to experience herself differently in relation to the arts, through being hosted by Callum – a young ESEA person and a migrant – to collaboratively produce a public exhibition and event. Being part of the project offered Anna a different experience to the intimidating and exclusionary dynamics she had previously experienced in art galleries:

“We did...one that was like the Country X project, which is, like, you're learning about a whole other set of like, culture, and the values that they have over there, and the politics over there. And that's like a really, really diverse thing, because we had somebody that was actually from Country X community, like teach us; he was a part of the group. And it was just, I think that's why it's important to have that sort of diversity cos I don't think you get that a lot in a lot of art spaces. Because I think [in] the majority of them, that's why it can also be quite scary. But because we have a lot of different people from different backgrounds, from different like areas in Nottingham, different places in England, I think that in itself is a very unique thing, that it's so inclusive.” (Anna Interview, 29.6.20)

The learning in 1525 from somebody who was also a young person of colour and a migrant had been a new and generative experience of participating in a cultural institution for Anna. In this relational arrangement, she experienced a mode of hospitality which was new to her, in which young people of colour from different global cultures tangibly took up more powerful positions, rather than remaining as passive audiences, learners, or beneficiaries. The pedagogy of the collective-as-coven<sup>44</sup> was important in Anna's experience of the Oil and Water project: the fluid, rhizomatic relations of hospitality in the collective were experienced by minoritarian collective members as welcoming because they resisted the default whiteness of the gallery.

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Seven.



Ellie's pedagogy – and the similar approach that Alice took up in her absence – was an important part of Callum being able to take up a position as leader in the Oil and Water project. Building on rhizomatic hospitality of the collective-as-coven<sup>45</sup>, she repeatedly positioned Callum's lived experiences of the protests as a valuable resource for the collective, encouraging him to share the collection and his knowledge of the movement with the group, and to develop them into a public exhibition. Ellie understood the gallery's time and space as resources that young people could use collaboratively and experimentally. She could not have pre-imagined or planned for the events that led to Oil and Water, but she responded to the ideas and objects that Callum brought with openness and fluidity. Her responsive approach enacted a powerfully open, hospitable pedagogy within the group, which allowed young people's interests and ideas to direct what took place, as she enabled their crossing into becoming hosts of the collective and supported the atmospheres of the gallery to be 'dewalled' (Zembylas, 2020). The dewalling of the atmospheres in the gallery in Oil and Water had profound consequences for those who were involved, including Callum, Anna, other collective members and the activist group who collaborated with them. Nevertheless, the production of the exhibition was not free from the arboreal relations that dominated at NC, as I will discuss in the next section.

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Seven.

Figure 13: Photograph of the curated vitrine of protest artefacts in Gallery Zero  
(30.11.19)<sup>46</sup>

The production of the Oil and Water exhibition involved Callum and the other 1525 members being taught by gallery exhibition staff to make a display of selected protest artefacts in a vitrine. They were also supported by gallery workers to write a catalogue of the collection, which described and interpreted the significance of the artefacts in the vitrine. Together, the vitrine and the catalogue made up the exhibition about the project, which was held in Gallery Zero; a small exhibition space at NC which was often used to display community projects.

Documenting and presenting the 2019 Country X democracy movement through the modes of the vitrine and the catalogue at NC was not a neutral act. Sharing the protest objects and giving information about what was happening in Country X through the exhibition

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<sup>46</sup> This image has been redacted from the public version of this thesis for ethical reasons relating to the potential political sensitivity of this topic.

allowed a wider audience to gain insights about the events in the region and positioned young members of 1525 as having valid political and creative voices. However, the exhibitionary modes of the vitrine and the catalogue also reproduced colonial and extractive ways of presenting “other” cultures that are dominant in art museums (Bennett, 1995; Turner, 2020). As Boycott-Garnett, MacRae, Tamsho-Thomas, Hackett, and Holmes (2020) argue, exhibitions which present ongoing colonial relations can enact complex dynamics of hospitality.

As discussed in Chapter Two, museum practices of displaying and narrating artefacts via vitrines and catalogues have deeply colonial roots, and served to justify imperialism (Giblin et al., 2019, p. 471). The vitrine is a way of organising and representing “other” cultures in the museum or gallery, which ‘petrifies living cultures’ (Tolia-Kelly, 2016, p. 896). According to Carroll:

Materializing historical classificatory practices, the vitrine is constitutive of suspended transits for material objects. A glass case was never the origin of ethnographic display things from the world. The glass between the artefact and the viewer is the epistemic membrane crystalized around an object. In the vitrined relationship between us (modern, civilized, cosmopolitan) and them (ancient, primitive, immobile), there is an alienation of cognition from identification and embodiment. (Carroll, 2016, p. 24)

Carroll concludes that, ‘[g]lass walls are the most insidious kind of alienation: transparent but impenetrable’ (p. 24). The practice of cataloguing objects in the museum also has colonial roots, pinning lively, living objects to fixed meanings, and positioning the represented people and viewing audiences as both subordinate to the institution. Turner identifies two ways in which the assumptions inherent in museum cataloguing practices enact power:

[F]irst, that the museum is the authoritative source of information about these objects...and, second, that this authority is produced by regulated and, to some extent, standardized systems. (Turner, 2020, p. 8)

The practice of the catalogue – presented as a powerfully neutral, objective, and scientific source of information – acts to inscribe the museum as an authoritative host. Cataloguing and vitrine display practices are thus potentially at odds with the espoused aims of empowering young people through offering time and space at the gallery. Assimilation into the mode of the vitrine and the catalogue reinforced colonial relations, including the dominant position of the gallery-as-host. Nevertheless, by taking these exhibitionary modes up in a different relational arrangement, young people did something different with them. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high co-efficient of deterritorialization. (1986, p. 16)

The practice of creating the exhibition was a conditional mode of hospitality which required young people to take up the gallery's major language. However, the relational arrangement in which this took place involved a minoritized group being centred in representing themselves to wider communities.

Despite the troubling histories and power dynamics of the catalogue and the vitrine, the relations involved in producing the Oil and Water exhibition were unusual. Gallery education has often encouraged young people to form their own meanings and interpretations of collections (Allen, 2008; Sayers, 2015), but nevertheless youth participation is usually positioned after (and below) the centralised institutional activity of creating and presenting exhibitions (Graham, 2017a). By contrast, in Oil and Water young people were the instigators and leaders of the project, with gallery staff acting as advisors and supporters. Crucially, Callum – as host and curator – was from Country X and the exhibition drew on his lived

experience. The collaborations he created with local activists meant that young people involved in the movement that was represented were actively involved in the project. Traditional binary distinctions between “us” and “them” created by museum exhibitionary practices were thus troubled in this project. Museum practices of display and cataloguing were so ingrained in institutional culture at NC that young people were integrated into them in this project, more-or-less without question, or consideration for their affordances and limitations as a mode of youth voice. To access time and space in the gallery – often presented by NC as a mode of youth voice which demonstrated their practice as a democratic and porous host<sup>47</sup> – young people in 1525 were required to comply with translation into the language of the gallery-as-host. To be allowed to speak at NC, young people had to be integrated into the accepted voice of the institution, which positioned the gallery as dominant. The hospitality produced by making the exhibition was thus conditional in the way that Ahmed (2012) describes, as young people had to assimilate in order to be included. Whilst young people’s participation in *Oil and Water* enabled new forms of collective youth voice and created new ways for wider publics to think and feel about them through exhibition-making as aesthetic citizenship (Hickey-Moody, 2013b), the exhibition was also a performance in which the gallery demonstrated and celebrated its righteousness as a diverse, open and democratic institution (Ahmed, 2012). Taking up institutional time and space through the *Oil and Water* exhibition thus also exhibited young people’s participation, reinscribing them as passive guests at the same time as making them active collaborators. Exhibition making in *Oil and Water* was both rhizome and tree (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), enacting a mode of paradoxical hospitable participation.

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<sup>47</sup> See Chapter Four

In the next section, I will discuss how the public launch of the Oil and Water exhibition at NC and the public 1525 event co-hosted with local activists as part of the project's public programme further enacted the paradoxical relations of hospitality in complex ways.

c) Going public: the riskiness of youth voice.

In Oil and Water, NC offered young people in 1525 institutional time and space, espousing this as a powerful way by which young people could 'get their voices heard' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2019b), as discussed in detail in Chapter Four. However, in the run up to the Oil and Water exhibition opening in late 2019, institutional concerns flared up at NC about the controversial nature of the exhibition content, and the perceived threat of retaliation from the Country Y state and its local supporters. In this section, I discuss what took place in the Oil and Water project as follows:

- i) Discussing NC's institutional risk management practices involved in making the Oil and Water exhibition public, and how Ellie navigated this.
- ii) Describing the event that the activists hosted in collaboration with 1525, and their experiences of participating at NC, including an incident of political conflict that took place at the event and discussion of how gallery workers and young people responded, including how safety was enacted.
- iii) Analysis of how youth voice in Oil and Water enacted an ambivalent mode of hospitality.

*i) "Everything we put on is political": institutional risk management in Oil and Water*

The Oil and Water project involved young people using the gallery's platforms to communicate with the public about a highly controversial political subject. Ellie had a particular approach to ensuring young people's safety in the project, which was not always aligned with the wider institutional approach. In the final stages of preparing the exhibition and event Ellie handed the group over to Alice, an experienced Associate Artist at NC, and went on holiday. Ellie described taking annual leave at this time as an active choice to be absent during the final stages of the project. She felt professionally compromised by her personal emotional investment in the topic of the exhibition, as she had links to Country X. By going away when the exhibition and event were being finalised, she separated the project from her personal sentiments about Country X, and thus felt able to provide a more neutral mode of institutional protection and care, once the project went public in the gallery:

"[W]hen I came back, it was easier for me to have that more impartial voice to those disagreements from the public...[I]t's almost like that teacher role, in which putting yourself in-between...and protecting is really important." (Ellie interview, 16.8.20)

Here, Ellie describing her tactic of taking up a more "impartial", institutional position, which she believed would allow her to protect young people from "disagreements from the public".

Ellie went on to describe the gallery's institutional risk management processes in the Oil and Water project:

"It was very important to, to think about [protecting young people] and to consult, you know, we tried consulting with university professors and things about the situation and our Head of Audiences. And yeah, it was it was difficult, it was really tricky." (Ellie interview, 16.8.20)

The process she outlined included "consulting with" both "university professors" and "our Head of Audiences" (Ellie interview, 16.8.20) which suggested a very top-down approach, in

which high-status adults were positioned as the experts on the safety of young people, over and above the young people themselves, even when those young people had more lived experience of the political situation in question. As Callum and the Country X activists were all over 18 years old – and therefore adults – at the time of the project, the choice to centre other voices in making decisions about their safety was a rather disempowering and infantilizing move by gallery workers, quite at odds with the supposed egalitarian ethos of 1525. The gallery’s process of risk management in Oil and Water thus enacted a dominating mode of hospitality as care-as-control (Bulley, 2015), which, at times, seemed to prioritize the protection of the institution’s reputation over positioning young people as active collaborators.

By contrast to institutional modes of risk assessment in Oil and Water, Ellie had chosen to mobilise a practice of institutional care in the project, in which she positioned herself and NC as protective hosts to young people. Her description of the experience of navigating institutional risk management procedures in the project as “difficult” and “tricky” (Ellie interview, 16.8.20) suggests underlying ambivalent feelings about how safety was institutionally enacted by NC. Ellie told me that NC had to abide by institutional protocols that demanded that the institution could not appear to have political allegiances, but she felt conflicted about the enactment of this policy:

“We can’t come across as [if] we're supporting one political side or another at the gallery and our political affiliations, but art is political. Everything we put on is political” (Ellie interview, 16.8.20).

In the face of the tensions involved in enacting youth voice and safety at NC, Ellie strove to ensure that participation in the project would allow young people to speak anonymously, and thus make it safer for them to articulate controversial political views:



"We did have threatening messages through Instagram, and very kind of abusive messages through Instagram about the project. So first of all, it was really important that the identity of the member was as protected as possible. So when this started happening, we said to all of the collective "Please, you know, if people ask questions don't reveal any names". That was very important, it was very important that it was a position from the collective itself, the power behind the collective as well, it's that it was a research project, that the group that we brought in was an external group. And we just offered the space. Yeah, so...I guess, for me, as a facilitator to stand in and just respond to them just kind of in that way of protecting the identities" (Ellie interview, 16.8.20)

The "threatening" and "abusive" messages that the gallery received on social media about the young people's political expression in the project show whilst hospitality is often romanticised (Zembylas, 2020), it was not always a 'space in which comfort will be bounded' (Zembylas 2020, p. 43) in the gallery youth collective. The enactment of young people's political voices at NC provoked uncomfortable affects for some of the gallery's wider communities.

Gallery workers' fears about young people speaking about the events in Country X meant that the publicness and content of the Oil and Water exhibition and event were sometimes curtailed in ways that frustrated the young people involved. Callum told me that gallery workers restricted representations of violence in the exhibition:

**CK:** And overall, was there a particular view from the gallery on how to kind of communicate the politics of the show?

**Callum:** I think what I, what I've observed from this whole project, is that you can say what you want, what you think is important, but you have to say, like, more of like a family friendly way, and not too aggressive, even though it might seem like the situation's very bad, you have to try to be as, like, really PG as possible to avoid being too violent, because I suppose because some audience cannot take in something that is too violent in nature.

**CK:** How do you feel about that?

**Callum:** I'm a little bit disappointed because the nature of the project is to show them the full scope, which includes that the brutality, the brutality between police and protesters, we have to tone it down because of the policies. (Callum interview 2.6.20)

Institutional concerns about audiences not being comfortable with violent content limited the ability of the young people to express the reality of the events in Country X. The police

brutality in the videos that Callum had gathered was shocking: that was the point. Without being able to show documentary footage of the violent events, the full meaning of the protest artefacts and their affective significance could not be fully conveyed to audiences.

In addition to the launch of the exhibition, Ellie and Callum worked closely with the local activist group to plan a public event about the Country X protest movement. The public event that the youth activists collaborated with 1525 to produce also highlighted the complex institutional hospitality involved in young people's political expression at NC.

*ii) The limits of hospitality: the petition in the doorway*

In late 2019, Callum and the group of local activists held an event in NC's Gallery Zero about the Country X democracy movement. I was unable to attend the event, but later found out about the event through conversations with those involved. Mr K, a member of the activist group, told me about his experience of planning and delivering the event at NC:

"In the planning process, we don't have any restrictions and guidelines for us mainly this what we can do and what we want to do is based, based on what we think. Nottingham Contemporary doesn't have any restrictions and guidelines for what kind of artwork can be included. It's mainly the creativity of us." (Mr K interview, 24.9.20)

Mr K's account of the project aligns with what Ellie had described when I interviewed her: that in collaborating with the activists as an "external group" NC "just offered the space". Mr K explained how the creative freedom the activists were offered by NC allowed them to create a temporary creative intervention which was powerful and affecting for those involved:

"[T]his experience was really good in transforming, like, a room of a small exhibit space in a quite creative expressions of the Country X ideas... Also, the room has big glazing facing street and facing the tableau. This is a really good, a really, really special exhibit room because usually exhibit room doesn't have a big window. So we transformed the way we did some decorations for example, to put a [protest art] Wall, a Country X style [protest art] Wall, which is the post-it notes of different colours, and we stick on the glazing and we

decorate the place and also glazing some afternoon sun low laying sun we put all the post-it notes on to the glass and in the afternoon time the room start changing in different colours. And all this is happening because basically Nottingham Contemporary given us a freedom to choose, and freedom to do anything in the room.” (Mr K interview, 24.9.20)

Mr K’s description of the event is powerfully evocative. The room slowly filled with different coloured post-it notes to resemble the protest art walls which had enabled such a powerful expression of collective resistance in Country X. The light filtering through the individually contributed pieces of paper gradually illuminated the room up in different colours, like a stained-glass window. For Mr K, it was very important that the room was visible to the street through a large window, as it gave a sense of publicness to the activities. Participation being institutionally performed was, at times, a way of the institution-as-host celebrating its own righteousness. Nevertheless, being publicly hosted by a credible institution was important to the Country X activists involved in the event as it allowed them to show that their cause was institutionally legitimised and supported their voices to be heard by new people, who attended to them differently when they were hosted by NC.

As part of the public event, the activist group brought a petition to NC, hoping to gain more public signatures in support of their campaign. As the event progressed, a woman who supported the Country Y<sup>48</sup> state confronted the activists about the petition:

“We did a petition group in front of in the front door of Nottingham Contemporary on that day that they have a lady also from Country X, but she has a different, opposite opinions. She argues with us also complained with Nottingham Contemporary and she...was very, very angry and she started crying with the manager of Nottingham Contemporary and afterwards Nottingham Contemporary told us, the petition group, to move further outward to the street outside Nottingham Contemporary.” (Mr K interview, 24.9.20)

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<sup>48</sup> The name of the country has been redacted and it is referred to throughout as Country Y for ethical reasons.

Whilst an important part of the hospitality that Ellie sought to enact through the Oil and Water project was about providing space for young people to safely express their views, when the activists' right to express their political views within the institution was called into question, the institutional protection and hosting was somewhat revoked as they were asked to leave the building. It seemed that the hospitality offered to young people to express their political voices at NC was only available if it did not threaten to disrupt the reputation or position of the gallery-as-host (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).

Despite the withdrawal of hospitality at the event, the activists still found occupying a new relation to NC to be generative, as it enabled them to take up new relationalities with local people:

“An interesting point...about this experience is one of the incidents in the moment of the argument with that lady. There's a couple of local, native British people, a British couple...They came to us and start talking with that lady and communicating and arguing with her. I think the native people in Nottingham have a really...strong sense of helping Country X people and the couple started talking and arguing with that lady. I think this experience is quite interesting. I never, I never experienced something like this...outside of Nottingham Contemporary”. (Mr K interview, 24.9.20)

The experience of being defended by members of the public was new for Mr K, which generated a powerful sense of connection and belonging for him. He attests that this experience was very different to what happened when they usually carried out political actions in the street in Nottingham, and it produced a powerful feeling of solidarity from the people of Nottingham, for him.

Young people activating political voice through taking up the offer of institutional time and space in the Oil and Water project was, at times, difficult and disruptive to the position of the gallery as a host. The politically controversial issues raised by the project were perceived by

some gallery workers as threatening to the gallery's institutional position as a powerfully civic and ethical host, in which – as their motto suggested – they sought to extend equal hospitality to 'everyone' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2021a). However, as the events which unfolded at the Oil and Water event demonstrated, unlimited hospitality was not, ultimately, possible, as the voices of some guests came into conflict with those of others. The sense of precarity which hung over the Learning programme at NC further amplified the institutional desire to welcome everyone, thus encouraging institutional censorship of material or activity which might surface conflict or provoke discomfort.

The Oil and Water project illustrated the ways in which the enactment of hospitality through providing young people access to institutional time and space at required an understanding of young people's agency as relational. Unlike access to institutional time and space, power is not a resource that can be given out volitionally. Simplistic understandings of participation as a powerful host "giving voice" to young people concealed the complexities involved in its practice. In Oil and Water, the gallery often understood safety as a top-down, institutionally implemented mode of care-as-control, enacted through adult-led risk assessment procedures and censorship of young people voices. However, for young people, institutional safety was more valuable when the powerful identity of NC allowed them to speak from a credible platform to a wider public and shielded their identities, making it less dangerous for them to speak on political matters. When local activists took up time and space at NC through collaboration with the gallery youth collective, the complexity of voice as an emergent, relational phenomenon was tangible. Even for the young activists who had strong commitment to a specific political message, speaking through NC's institutional platform

brought them into a new relation with different publics, producing a new set of affects, including a sense of solidarity from the people of Nottingham.

*iii) The ambivalent hospitality of institutional time and space as youth “voice”*

In the Oil and Water project, young people and gallery workers took up the offer of the gallery youth collective as “voice” through institutional time and space. Callum took up a new position in the project as curator and host, which enabled his political becoming, and did powerful things for some other young people involved. However, the offer of time and space at NC was an act of hospitality and therefore involved some powerful contradictions (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). The new ‘configurations of young community’ (Hickey-Moody, 2013b, p. 4) produced by the project enabled Callum’s political becoming as well as those of other 1525 members, and members of the collaborating activist group. However, the hospitable offer of time and space in the gallery enacted in the Oil and Water exhibition was nevertheless conditional, as young people were required to assimilate into dominant institutional modes of expression – in this case the vitrine and the catalogue – which enacted colonial logics of representation (Carroll, 2016; Turner, 2020) and reinscribed the position of the gallery as a dominant host, to be able to take up the institution’s platforms. A paradoxical mode of participation-as-hospitality was also enacted when the activist group collaborated with 1525 to create a public event for Oil and Water, as it allowed them to take up valuable agentic affordances, saw institutional hospitality being rescinded when it became too risky for NC, and allowed for powerful relations of solidarity to emerge with local people.

Examining Oil and Water as a form of participation-as-hospitality disrupted dominant rhetoric which circulates within the arts, in which young people taking up institutional time and space is often portrayed as a “pure” form of youth voice and agency. Instead, Oil and Water surfaced the complex dynamics involved in exhibition and event making in the gallery youth collective as forms of participation-as-hospitality. It showed that the construction of youth voice in

idealized terms concealed and reproduced the underlying relational dynamics of the gallery as an institution, which were sometimes at odds with the emancipatory aims espoused. As such, idealized understandings of participation in terms of voice – understood as an unlimited mode of hospitality – were, at times, cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011). The complex power dynamics of voice and representation that were surfaced in the Oil and Water project also had applications for my understandings of participatory research. In the next chapter, I will turn to my second research question which focuses on methodological matters, as I discuss how the ‘unforeclosed experience’ (Berlant, 2011, p. 5) of the pandemic as rupture<sup>49</sup> – alongside my complex experiences of participating in the gallery youth collective NC – surfaced some of the contradictions inherent in participatory research methods as a mode of hospitality, as I had imagined them at the outset of the study, and enabled me to reframe participation in research in a new, more expansive and hospitable way.

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion of the rupture of the pandemic.



## 9. Cruel optimism and hospitality: Participatory research methods <sup>50</sup>

In this chapter, I will explain how the research experiences I had in 1525 produced knowledge about participation in research methods, and discuss how this answered my second research question: **What does participation in ethnographic methods based in close, sustained relationships involve, and what does it do for those involved, in the context of a gallery youth collective?** As discussed in Chapter Six, the rupture of the arrival of Covid-19 in the UK unsettled my 'iron-clad investments' (Stewart, 2017, p. 195) in idealised participation, surfacing latent paradoxes in both 1525 and my research practice. I will now more fully examine the contradictions that were surfaced in my understandings of participatory research, through an analysis of the research relations of this study as a cruelly optimistic form of hospitality. I will explain how, beyond the rupture, and through my becoming-with young people and gallery workers in 1525, I reimagined participatory research in an expanded, affective mode, which offered a more inclusive mode of hospitality.

### Mapping this chapter

This chapter unfolds as follows:

- a) Participatory research as paradoxical hospitality.
  - i) The optimistic offer of participatory research.
  - ii) Hospitable research relations: Safety and care-as-control
  - iii) The conditional hospitality of participatory research methods.
- b) Attending to affect as collaborative knowing.

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<sup>50</sup> This chapter draws on elements of the doctoral research that are also published in Kill (2022) and in my CoS paper.

The chapter includes material from various sources:

- Research records from my participant observation in a 1525 session and a public event at NC.
- Excerpts from my CoS paper.
- The proposal for the collaborative doctoral study, generated collaboratively by university and gallery staff.
- Literatures of relevance to the methodological inquiry.

a) Participatory research as hospitality

*i) The optimistic offer of participatory research methods as hospitality*

My methodological research question considered the affordances and limitations of participation in the ethnographic methodology that I pursued in this research, which – like 1525 itself – sought to generate close and enduring participatory relationships. Like in 1525, enacting participation in this study involved the production of a hospitable offer. Firstly, the university and gallery produced a hospitable offer to me, welcoming me into the gallery. In this set of relations, I was a novice researcher, positioned as an institutional guest by the invite from the gallery as host to undertake embedded ethnographic research. From the very start – even as I attempted to cross the threshold into NC – occupying the position of institutional guest involved taking up a complex set of relations with NC. Secondly, I invited young people into the research, as co-researchers. I will discuss how both sets of research relations unfolded further in section (ii). For now, I will explain how my investments in a ‘cluster of promises’ (Berlant, 2011, p. 23) about participation shaped my understandings and enactment of the research.

At the outset of the research, my understanding of collaborative research was informed by my practice in the participatory arts sector. My subjectivity and understandings of participation had been shaped by this environment, generating an investment in a vision of co-production as empowering, transformative, unified, and linear. My belief in an idealised image of co-production was reinforced by my reading of some of the methodological literatures about ethnography (for instance Barke, Thomas-Hughes, and Howard (2020), and Campbell & Lassiter (2015)), which seemed to suggest a relational teleology to ethnographic research (Matthiesen, 2020), which – if it was “done right” – promised to create unwavering trust, unity, and an egalitarian set of relations, free of conflict or epistemic oppression. As I imagined carrying out research at NC, I was optimistic that my experiences of participatory approaches in the arts education sector would equip me well to achieve this outcome, if I just planned the research carefully and invested sufficiently in my relationships with my collaborators (Kill, 2022).

At the outset of this doctoral study, my research approach was heavily informed by an embedded practitioner subjectivity which had been developed by over a decade of work in arts education. This practitioner subjectivity was rooted in a set of powerful investments in an idealised image of arts education in which co-production was believed to be able to resolve power relations in education by centring young people and maximising their voices (Allen, 2008; Mörsch, 2011; Pringle, 2020), in ‘an attempt to challenge historical hierarchical relations between institutions and young participants’ (Kill, 2022, p. 59). In imagining the research, I drew on widespread notions of co-production that were understood as “good practice” in gallery education. As I have written elsewhere,

In practice, the relation of young people to the galleries they participate in is far from simple (Mörsch, 2011) but the ideal of these participatory relations is often seen as an “unquestionable good” within the sector. (Kill, 2022, p. 59)

My attachment to idealised co-production was powerful. In the face of the complex pressures at play in gallery education – including the demands of regimes of fundraising, constant audit practices, and the expansive ethical demands of caring for participants that often spill over beyond the roles workers are paid for (Belfiore, 2022) – these powerful, optimistic attachments had allowed me to manage and overlook the uncomfortable contradictions inherent in my practice. The trace of my optimistic investments in a fantasy of idealised co-production is tangible in my master’s dissertation reflective journal, when I wrote:

For me, the didactic, hierarchical nature of many traditional educational approaches is inherently problematic, politically, pedagogically and artistically. The value that I see in youth participation in contemporary art comes from giving power and voice to young people... Generally, I would argue that gallery projects with children and young people should aim to give as much power to young people as possible. I see this as providing a counterpoint to the disempowered roles young people are often restricted to in their mainstream educational experiences. Contemporary art can be a space where traditional hierarchies are challenged and I believe that looking at the world differently creates new, exciting perspectives; both artistically and pedagogically.  
(Master’s dissertation research journal, July 2017)

In Berlant’s (2011) terms, my affective position at this time could be seen as optimistically attached to idealised notions of participation: my powerful investment in co-produced modes of art education allowed me to remain engaged in them and to overlook the contradictions involved. The above text reflects the normative offer of gallery education that I was invested in, when it describes ‘giving power and voice to young people’ as if they were tangible commodities that could be volitionally handed out at will, ignoring the complex relational and often unconscious affective aspects involved (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Zembylas, 2020).

After the rupture<sup>51</sup>, I realised that my optimistic attachments had supported my ‘endurance in the object’ (Berlant, 2011, p. 23) of participation, both in gallery education and in research methods. My attachments to a narrow and idealistic mode of co-production in the research involved many of the same contradictions that I could identify in the gallery youth collective. In the rest of section (a), I will discuss how the research unfolded in ways that challenged linear notions of research as method, before discussing, in section (b), how I came to embrace an expanded mode of affective participation in the research, which enacted a more inclusive mode of hospitality.

*ii) Hospitable research relations: Safety and care-as-control*

After the rupture, I came to notice how attempting to enact participation in research with NC and young people and gallery workers itself provided an experience of hospitality at NC which challenged idealised notions of participation as unlimited hospitality. In this section, I will address the parallel sets of research relations which emerged – with gallery workers and young people respectively – discussing how the enactment of safety demonstrated that, like participation in the gallery youth collective itself, attempts to sustain participation in the research methods often emerged as a paradoxical and conflicting mode of hospitality (Bulley, 2015; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).

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<sup>51</sup> See Chapter Six

## Research relations with gallery workers

Relations with gallery staff were instigated by the production of the proposal for the collaborative research, produced by my initial academic supervisors and selected gallery staff, some time before I was recruited as the researcher. Like the youth programme at the gallery, the research existed in a sector landscape in higher education, within which, to secure funding, it was necessary for workers to lay out how it would function as a linear project (Ylijoki, 2014). The proposal for this collaborative doctoral research (Thomson, Hall, & Graham, 2015) was not neutral documentation of how workers at the university and the gallery wished to collaborate, but instead was created as part of the application for a UKRI-funded studentship, which demanded it was presented in terms of a set of pre-determined outcomes and impacts on those involved. In the proposal document (Thomson et al., 2015), 'evidence' of the 'impact' of educational programmes was positioned as a powerful resource for NC, which could help the gallery to advocate for the ongoing case for the value of their educational work. Well beyond the way that notions of impact and measurable evidence were instrumentally activated in the funding application, notions of the research as offering the Learning programme resources which could shore up its value in terms of impact on young people – and the value that this sort of 'evidence' seemed to offer in the face of the high levels of precarity facing education programmes in contemporary art galleries – were enthusiastically taken up by some gallery workers. As the plans for the study developed, it was decided that the focus would be on the gallery's youth collective, but the value of evidence about the impact of the gallery's youth programme on participants remained central in conversations with Maura.

An account from my research journal of an early experiences of doing research at NC illustrates the complex hospitality of the relational offer I encountered at NC.

I was reminded of my first proper conversation with Maura at NC several years ago. We went for a coffee in the café discussing the MA pilot research I was starting to plan. Maura asked me if Nottingham Contemporary could pull out if they didn't like what my research found. I didn't really know what to say, so said I would have to refer... back to Pat...Maura told me about a piece of research another researcher had carried out with them and that it had described the programme as having "no impact", and how problematic this had been for her as it went against what she wanted to illustrate to her funders. Maura's position demonstrates a powerful risk aversion and desire for control in the relationships the institution makes with researchers. She seems extremely motivated to direct these engagements to reinforce their institutional notions of the value of their programmes, rather than acknowledging that these ideas of value might actually be part of the subject of research. Perhaps this sort of research itself feels too risky, too critical for a team which seems to feel vulnerable and undervalued. (Research journal, 14.7.20)

Maura's desire to maintain the possibility of withdrawing from the research collaboration indicated a set of tensions underlying the research partnership with NC which were far removed from the idealised mode of collaboration that I had imagined. Maura desired the participation in the research for the results it might offer to support the programme. However, she also viewed it as a possible threat, in terms of its potential to surface interpretations of the programme that did not align with sector narratives of impact and transformation. The hospitality offered to me as a researcher at NC was always paradoxical and conditional.

Despite the complex interrogations I had made of power and research in planning the study, I had nevertheless hoped that relationships with my collaborators would emerge as a progression towards an idealised state of unity. My teleological imaginary of the research relations reflected common narratives of co-production in the arts education sector, as well the dominant accounts of ethnography which construct access as a stage (Matthiesen, 2020). As the research unfolded, trust and intimacy did indeed develop in my relationships with some gallery workers, and I came to count Ellie as a trusted friend. Nevertheless, anxieties and

moments of hostility kept recurring in my relations with NC. I often struggled with the gallery's seeming withdrawals and withholdings of access as they felt like impediments to the progress of the research "proper". I often felt anxious that the failure of the research to develop according to the linear trajectory I had outlined and imagined in advance reflected my own failures to do collaboration "right".

In terms of hospitality, I arrived at NC believing myself to be an invited institutional guest, as the doctoral research had been collaboratively proposed by NC and the University of Nottingham. However, once I crossed the threshold of the institution, my experience of becoming a guest at NC involved feeling variously welcome and, at times, profoundly unwelcome. The conflicting affects invoked by doing research with NC gave me an embodied sense of the complex, entangled relations of hospitality and hostility (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) that operated at the gallery. Whilst my relational positioning was not the same as that of 1525 members, my affective experience of institutional dynamics was nevertheless generative. As an outsider, I – and the research I sought to produce – had the potential to disrupt the dominant position of the gallery-as-host, which relied on it being understood as a civic benefactor, narrated in terms of impact and transformation. Despite multiple discussions in which my supervisors and I reiterated that this study did not seek to assess whether the programme had met a set of pre-defined impact goals, the spectre of audit and evaluation seemed to constantly haunt NC, generating a felt sense of precarity which powerfully shaped what it was possible to do, say or feel therein. As Derrida (2000) has argued, oversight is at odds with hospitality, and at NC, powerful regimes of audit constrained the hospitality I could take up as a researcher-guest.



In discussing experiences of relational discomfort, tension, and shame in my doctoral experiences at NC, I am conscious of the risk of becoming an ungrateful guest. However, I also feel a strong ethical responsibility as researcher-as-guest to understand and empathise with the position of gallery workers, and to be compassionate about the difficult conditions they faced at work. In this vein, I have sought to engage with moments of hostility and discomfort in this research as a set of affective insights about the conditions which shaped NC's position as host, and what relational environment these produced, for me, young people, and workers.

Reflecting on my experiences of institutional hostility after the rupture, I came to attend differently to my experiences of the research relations with NC as a hospitable atmosphere (Zembylas, 2020), which produced knowledge about the institution. Gherardi argues for a more affective mode of ethnography, in which an understanding of 'affective placeness' and atmospheres is crucial:

[A]ffective placeness as the collective capacity to feel and to produce affective atmospheres that enable and constrain the array of activities and practices potentially enactable within a place. (Gherardi, 2018, p. 743)

Once my optimistic attachments to traditional understandings of participatory methods were severed by the pandemic, I was able to think differently about my research experiences at NC. My experiences of institutional atmospheres of hostility produced powerful embodied and affective knowledges of what was 'enactable' at NC, supporting my understanding of the institution, and the development of insights into the experiences of workers and young people at the gallery. Embracing more expansive ways of knowing-together does not always align with traditional academic understandings of participatory methods but can, nevertheless, produce in-between affective knowledges. As Matthiesen (2020) outlines, the process of navigating access – not understood as a teleology but as an ongoing and multiple relational process –

itself offered a powerful set of insights about participation in NC, once I reframed this mode of knowledge production as valid. Firstly, I came to understand that the existence of my collaborative doctorate at NC produced knowledge about what the gallery valued. As I began the research, awkwardness about where in the gallery's open-plan office I should sit, and tense silences in meetings conveyed organisational tensions between Learning and Research staff. I realised that the affective atmospheres in the everyday life of the gallery were evidence of the peripheral positioning of Learning, as what Graham (2017a) has called an institutional "and". At times, the peripherality of education at NC, combined with the pressures of constant cycles of fundraising and audit, resulted in Learning staff adopting a mode of 'defensive instrumentalism' (Belfiore, 2012) and, at times, enacting infantilising and controlling modes of risk aversion in their approach to the research. Reframing the everyday events – including moments of challenge, conflict, discomfort, and refusal – of the research process as part of an affective ethnographic methodology allowed me to take them up as powerful insights into the institutional relations on offer at NC, and the affordances and limitations of participatory research methods more generally.

Whilst the gallery was, in many ways, a powerful, elite institution, the Learning programme was far from secure in terms of resources or status. Many Learning staff that I spoke to were on poorly paid, temporary contracts and were engaged in constant cycles of fundraising to continue their own posts. Worker insecurity meant that their success in ongoing processes of audit was essential to continuing their roles, and thus ensuring the continued existence of the any educational activity at NC. As some gallery workers reflected in informal conversations with me, the precarity of Learning at NC sometimes limited the potential for meaningful dialogue about the programmes (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2021), saturating any critical

discussions with fear and hostility. Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) argue that oversight practices reduce the potential for hospitable relations to be manifested unconditionally. Under the conditions of audit and precarity that the Learning programme faced – whereby any perspective that challenged the account of the gallery as a powerfully civic and impactful host was understood as a threat to the survival of the programme – the welcome extended to me as a researcher was often limited by institutional anxieties driven by audit cultures. As Bulley (2015) argues, once the outsider has crossed the threshold, sustaining hospitable relations demands that they be managed. The relations of hospitable control that Bulley (2015) describes were often present in my research experiences, as gallery staff sought to edit my consent forms, asked for access to full interview transcripts, or demanded oversight of conference papers before I was permitted to present them. Questions of hospitality and safety also emerged in my research relations with young people at NC, as I will now explain.

### [Research relations with young people](#)

As discussed in Chapter Two, the processes of CoS ethical approval compelled me to write a proposal for the research, as part of the university's research oversight procedures. Despite my initial reservations – as an aspiring participatory researcher – about pre-defining the offer of the research, as I repeatedly discussed the study with 1525 members, it sometimes seemed that an outline proposal was a useful tool in discussions with young people. I began to wonder if it was necessary to articulate at least some elements of what young people could expect from getting involved the research, to enable them to make informed choices about their participation. In these early conversations with young people, they were interested in knowing tangible details of the offer: how much time would be expected of them, what sort of roles were available, and what empirical focus the study would have. I realised that establishing and

expressing some details of participation was important in 1525 members being able to understand what the offer from me was, to help them make a meaningful initial decision about whether to get involved. Pre-determining the details of the research felt rather at odds with my ambitions to co-produce the research, but it also seemed important to respond to young people's requests to clarify the offer.

The dilemma I faced about articulating an offer for the participatory research methods reflects the paradox of hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). Ruitenberg (2016) employs a spatial metaphor of hospitality, in which she argues that the host's home needs walls, windows and doors to create a defined space, into which a guest can then meaningfully be welcomed. Likewise, it seemed that young people could not meaningfully know whether they wanted to be part of a research project if it was presented as totally open and undefined. Furthermore, presenting a doctoral project as completely open and flexible would have been disingenuous as I knew there were some quite specific perimeters to the study, defined by the university. In producing an offer of the collaborative research to young people, I drew on my professional experience as a gallery educator and the investments, approaches, and values this offered me.

At times, my relationship with the university felt like another barrier to the progress of the research. Neoliberal oversight regimes of funding and audit were pervasive here too, which limited the capacity of my research processes to be open and hospitable to my collaborators at NC. The CoS upgrade process was an important educational landmark for me, but it was also a powerful institutional risk management strategy and mode of control which demanded I lay out the methodology in detail, before it had unfolded with my participants, limiting the

hospitality on offer to them in the research, in the way Bulley (2015) suggests. Like many of the regimes of monitoring at NC, this practice assumed a linear progression of events that were fully knowable in advance. Neither this upgrade protocol, or the process of applying for ethical approval, were designed to accommodate the emergent ways of working that were central to the more hospitable and open mode of co-production that I sought. Further, institutional research oversight practices relied on and reproduce positivistic notions of the researcher as separable from the research relations of the “field”, understood as a separate and fixed world “out there”. My experiences of becoming-hospitable in this research involved questioning and ultimately undoing my investments in many of the dominant assumptions about what co-produced research involved and did. I too was in-becoming through the events of this research.

### *iii) The conditional hospitality of participatory research methods*

#### *Participatory research relations with young people*

Regularly attending 1525 meetings at the start of the research allowed me and 1525 members to get to know each other and to build intimacy and trust. In these meetings, I took up the position of guest, participating in activities and building relationships. After several months, I invited any members who were interested in taking part in the participatory methods to start meeting with me outside the 1525 weekly sessions. We established a co-research collective in which we talked about research ethics, explored some different possible research methods, and discussed the various skills and interests that members of 1525 could bring. We also outlined a set of shared ethical principles for researching together<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix for a copy of the principles agreed by the co-research collective.

At the time, I understood setting up a co-research collective as a powerful opportunity to support young people to become 'epistemic counterparts' (Marcus, 2000) in the research. However, the collaborative relations of the participatory research were never as straightforward as I had imagined them. Young people often suggested divergent ideas which went beyond the scope, resources, or timescales of my doctoral study. They were often inconsistent in attending meetings, forgot what we had previously discussed or changed their minds about what they wanted to do. I was anxious about whether the fragmented and ever-shifting approach that was unfolding would lead to a coherent set of results that would add up to a successful doctoral project. However, I felt ethically uneasy with the idea of directing young people towards the sort of unified and fixed co-inquiry that I had imagined in the CoS paper, when the events of the research seemed to repeatedly diverge from this. At times, people sometimes defaulted to wanting me to make decisions about the research. To my great dismay, one young person reassured me that they would just "do whatever you need to get your funding". Sometimes young people's desire for me to take the lead in the research seemed to offer insights into how they were used to being positioned relative to the adults they encountered at school, college, or university. We openly discussed the relations involved in the research the meetings, and I tried to encourage them to become decision makers in the study, despite the complexities involved. At other times, young people and gallery workers at NC understood participation in the research as a source of skills and status for employability and, whilst I was keen to support young people's learning in areas of interest, enactment of the participatory research as a banking mode of education (Friere, 1972) was ultimately complicit in a relational hierarchy which suggested that predefined academic ways of knowing were superior to young people's existing, everyday ways of knowing.

Gallacher and Gallagher argue for a form of ‘methodological immaturity’ in participatory research, whereby:

‘Participatory’ approaches can be said to extend and enhance, rather than replace, ethnographic approaches: they attempt to engage with children’s embodied, and performative lives...Success lies in the ethnography, but only in so far as ethnography is understood as more than a straight- forward ‘interview, focus group, participant observation’ package. (2008, p. 506)

They suggest that ethnography should be expanded within a ‘wider movement to unfold children’s everyday experiences by ‘listening’ to their many ‘voices’’ (2008, p. 506). Many approaches to participatory research – understood as the pursuit of a fixed, linear method – can, in fact, limit what is attended to in the research encounter. Instead, considering a much wider spectrum of relations and experiences that take place in research, includes the more subtle and unexpected forms of everyday participation that children and young people engage in with researchers. For instance, Gallacher and Gallagher suggest that:

The children in our projects not only appropriated our research tools; they often appropriated us too. Children would find all kinds of inventive ways to turn our presence in their classrooms and play areas to their advantage. We found ourselves used as play-things, props, or even stooges to children’s activities. (2008, p. 509)

Whilst the young members of 1525 were not children, many of the critiqued raised by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) can be applied to my research experiences with the collective. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the young people were always already pushing against the implicit boundaries in my research, when they resisted working in a unified way, or wanted to take up new ideas along the way. My experiences of the rupture of the pandemic allowed me to turn towards a more expansive notion of young people’s agency as emerging from ongoing affective encounters, rather than as the expression of an intentional and individualised form of voice. From this new standpoint, I started to think of participatory research as an unfolding encounter rather than a pre-determined linear method, as Gallacher and Gallagher put it:

Not as the outcome of predetermined, prescriptive techniques, but as a spontaneous and unpredictable process of tactics, counter-tactics and 'making do' (2008, p. 509)

The rupture of the pandemic thus led me to reassess my experiences in 1525, and ultimately to more fully embrace an affective, unforeclosed mode of ethnographic research, in which participation was viewed expansively, as emerging through the everyday activities that took place in the youth collective.

The shift towards a more expansive, affective mode of participation is significant in terms of hospitality. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) argue that notions of affect and becoming demand a rethinking of subjectivity and redefine what counts as participation:

Rather than seeing actions as produced by the conscious intentions of pre-existing subjects, we would suggest the reverse: that subjectivity is performatively produced through the continuous unfolding of action... To think in terms of 'becomings' is to reject understandings of humans – adults and children – as singular, autonomous agents: identifiable subjects imbued with agency (p. 510)

Rather than demanding young people assimilate in pre-defined academic research methods to be heard, a broader understanding of participation involved attending to the ways young people already expressed themselves beyond the fixed modes that were methodologically familiar to me as a researcher, or an arts education practitioner. A more rhizomatic understanding of participation allowed me to reimagine "voice" and participation in a more inclusive, and relational way; as emerging from the process of participation in an agentic assemblage rather than as the expression of an essence of a pre-existing individual subject.

The idea of participatory methods as a pre-defined technique was a form of conditional hospitality in the research which had an assimilating tendency in my relations with young people and gallery workers. Ahmed (2012) has argued that diversity work can often become



merely a practice of reproducing and justifying the status quo, as inclusion is conditional on the translation and assimilation of those who take up the position of guest. When I imagined participation in research in terms of young people taking up academic techniques, I enacted a conditional mode of hospitality. Ahmed (2014) argues that a stranger is created when someone is not received, and when I did not attune to young people's everyday voices, but instead conceived of participatory research only in terms of young people's assimilation into a narrow, existing set of academic techniques, I created a set of relations in which they remained guests in "my" research. Expecting young people to assimilate in academic research methods relied on their assimilation into cliched, adult norms of youth voice (Hickey-Moody, 2013b), in terms of narrow, linear academic research methods (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Whilst some young people and gallery staff desired assimilation into academia as it seemed to offer a set of elite resources, it was nevertheless dominating as it overlooked the fact that their existing, everyday forms of participation already acted as a mode of collective voice. Embracing a more inclusive mode of participation had a powerful ethical element, in terms of the hospitality generated, and expanded the sort of knowledge that could be produced. In the next section, I will discuss the more expansive mode of participation I took up after the rupture.

#### b) Attending to affect as collaborative knowing

After the rupture, I became aware that I, and the research, were an active part of the life of the gallery, and I began to attend to the ever-shifting negotiations with the gallery as valuable insights into institutional dynamics. After my optimistic attachments to participation were severed, I became able to attend to what Gherardi calls,

[T]he power of affect in performing the agencement of all the ethnographic practice elements: from the bodily knowing to the material-semiotic-affective staging of events

and/or provocations in writing that 'make things happen' and in so doing question, provoke, interrupt us, and what counts as ethnographic 'data'. (Gherardi, 2018, p. 743)

The rupture of the arrival of the pandemic – and the shift in attachments and theoretical perspective that I took up in this time – enabled me to better attend to relational shifts in the research as an important part of the knowledge production available to me at, and about NC. The hospitable relations and affects available at NC – to me as well as staff and young people – produced a landscape of ever-shifting relational dynamics which shaped my emerging researcher subjectivity and the unfolding research.

The experience of researching through the pandemic, and my engagement with Deleuzian notions of affect and becoming, combined to disrupt the linear approach to participatory research methods that I had had at the outset of the study. Taking up a Deleuzian approach to ethnography affords a radical flattening of research relations by positioning researcher and participants alike constantly in process, and thus as ever unfinished (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Similarly, Kathleen Stewart argues that an ontology of the world as affective and mobile demands a different sort of ethnographic practice:

Affect studies helped propel anthropology out of the mental habit of describing its objects as if they were fixed...The ethnography of such things has to be both nimble and patient, jumping with the unexpected event but also waiting for something to throw together. The ethnographic reals it approaches are not flat and incontrovertible but alchemical, traveling in circuits of impact and reaction. In this world things happen. Analysis trains itself on an effort to describe the iterations, durations, and modes of being taking place. (2017, pp. 196-197)

In this research, things certainly happened. The profound rupture of the pandemic violently confronted me with the uncertain and eventful nature of the world, and therefore of participation in research (Duggan, 2020). The embodied and affective experience of the events of the pandemic catalysed this understanding on a deeper level than the methodological texts that I had read when designing the research. Notions of becoming thus allowed me to take up

a new understanding of participation in research, beyond linear approaches that had limited what was considered active participation, which had ultimately reproduced my own dominance, as the adult researcher. An ethnographic disposition which considers the affective landscapes of both researcher and participants has generative affordances when applied to the optimistic promise of participatory research methods. I will now present an early experience of NC, before the formal research of this study began, which demonstrates the fact that affective modes of co-knowing were immanent in the research, long before I was able to attend to them.

*Prelude: the immanence of affect*

**Research records: “If the Cacao Allows it” (20.1.19)<sup>53</sup>**

*This Rabbit is Looking Up.* By Luisa Ungar and Milena Bonilla

“This Rabbit is Looking Up” is a performative gathering based on the Columbian tradition of reading chocolate from the grind left at the bottom and sides of a cup, which like tea or coffee traces, can turn into visions and conversation. Staged as dialogue, for each reading, the participants of the performances are invited to take a sip of the hot Cacao, so that their futures may be implicated in the reading. After putting the cup upside down, leftovers occupy their place and spirals of meaning begin to appear; their inapprehensible character might play around anxieties, affections and expectations. (Interpretation handout, Gathering at Who Would Be Free, Themselves Must Strike the Blow, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> January 2019, Nottingham Contemporary)

The Cacao smells like rich hot chocolate, but the taste is vastly different. Bitter and earthy, slightly gritty from the grounds, the expressions from the women around the table are mixed. Some love it straight away; some are keen to add honey or sugar from the bowls on the table. Spices are on offer too, including vanilla to scrape straight from the pod, cinnamon, cloves, and a potent chili powder that Luisa warns us about (cue giggling and eye-watering around the table as her concerns are proved correct). The experience of 20-odd women together at a table blending, mixing and tasting invokes a sense of excitement

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<sup>53</sup> This research record was also included in my CoS paper, but with a different analysis.

and magic from the start: we are like little girls making potions from leaves and petals. We're waiting to see what will happen and what we will find out. We are already squeezed in, but more chairs have to be found as women keep arriving. Who wouldn't want to come to a hot chocolate tasting, after all?

Luisa uses traditional Colombian wooden utensils to stir the Cacao as she serves each woman in turn from large metal jugs. She speaks in a soft voice as she tells us about the history of the Cacao. How she would drink it with her female relatives on a Sunday afternoon and they'd read the grounds afterwards. How the Spanish invaders described Cacao as "a drink for the pigs", without knowing that the symbol of a similar animal had a special significance in Mayan culture as a spirit guide. There are many strange coincidences surrounding the Cacao, she tells us.

We are each asked to decide on a question - or an intention - that could relate to the day, or to things prominent in our minds at that moment. Her voice is slow and gentle. Luisa tells us to rotate our cups seven times, in an anti-clockwise direction, and turn them over onto the saucer. The shared movements generate a sense of performance or ritual, as we collectively begin to communicate with the Cacao. "This is an experiment" Luisa explains, "Normally I do this with another artist called Milena, so it works a bit differently, but I am interested to see what will happen today". So am I, I think.

Carla works at the gallery and suggests that we do a round of names and introductions, but that is not the mode of this workshop; it is a more intimate setting. The artist gently guides the session onwards, away from this suggestion, but without hostility or awkwardness. Instead, Luisa asks Carla to share her intention and she reveals that she was thinking about a romantic situation; she is seeking insight into a long-distance relationship. Luisa asks her to open her cup and slowly examines the dried grounds inside. She takes her time looking and thinking, turning the cup in her hands, and asking Carla more questions about her life and the intention she proposed. We are a collective audience to an intimate moment.

The quiet attention that Luisa pours into the cup draws us all closer. Carla has made herself vulnerable in revealing her question – it has moved from a professional moment to an intensely personal one and we feel connected to her; entangled in her openness. Eventually Luisa spots something; “I can see a heart” she says. She invites Carla to look and, slightly astounded at the clarity of the symbol, she agrees. Luisa suggests that the heart appears isolated in the image. The area around it is clean and void of grounds. They discuss what this could mean for her intention.

Tenderly, the artist opens the discussion to the group. She connects her iPhone to a large TV screen and zooms in on the heart. “Do you see it?” she asks the room. Women start to speak out: “Oh yes!” someone says. “It’s down there! It’s really clear” we exclaim. “Hmmm...I can see a turtle, I think?” another person quips, uncertainly. “Wait, isn’t that a fish?”. Luisa sensitively encourages these contributions. Her gentle pace and soft nods assure us that our readings are valid, as she validates with interested questions rather than asserting “right” and “wrong” readings. She includes different women as assistants though operating the camera and makes us each feel that we might see something special. We can ask and we can give, between one other. Someone cries, “Ooh look, I can see a hipster guy with a big beard and glasses, and a sort of receding hairline” and we all giggle at the idea of this mystical, balding man. More laughter bubbles up as we uncover the breadth of the topics that have been asked: most relate to romance, but also questions and frustrations about the contemporary feminist movement, the art world, and financial difficulties. Luisa reflects that perhaps the intentions are the source of the real insights in the workshop, offering knowledge of our deepest thoughts and anxieties.

As people share their visions and interpretations, Luisa invites us each in turn to open our cup. When the time comes for me to open mine, I am a little hesitant to reveal my intention. Most people have asked the Cacao for advice about quite personal matters: Will I ever find love? (Is it with my ex?); How to find the financial resources to make my art? (Will I ever?). My question seems guarded, instrumental: almost clinical by comparison. “Ummm...” I begin, excited to take my turn, but a little embarrassed, “I just asked mine about my PhD methodology. I thought maybe it could do some of the hard work for me”, I shrug, with an awkward smile. The group laughs. Luisa smiles and asks me to say more

about my question. The time has come to make myself more vulnerable. It all sort of comes out at once: “Well, I’m doing a PhD here at the gallery and my supervisor suggested I take field notes of this weekend, you know, to practice, but then I’ve been reading, and thinking about how to actually do that and it would feel weird, or inappropriate or whatever, to do research about a feminist event in a non-feminist way”. The woman next to me turns her head and asks, with a tone of genuine curiosity, “So what would a non-feminist way of doing research be?”. I question myself internally, and I feel my face pull a weird grimace. I bite at the hard skin on my thumb and catch a taste of the thick, fragrant vanilla-seed paste I scraped out earlier with my nail. “How long have you got?” I think. Before I can fully process my response, words burst out of my mouth. “Too objective!” I hear myself cry, with an animated hand flail. The person sitting opposite me raises her eyebrows and nods.

When I returned to this account of my experience of the Cacao workshop later in the research, I realised that affective modes of embodied co-knowing were always active in my experiences at NC, but I was not always able to attend fully to them. In the next section, I will explain how my experiences in 1525 supported my becoming as a participatory researcher and my ability to take up an expanded mode of affective co-research, which more fully surfaced once my optimistic investments in linear participation were severed by the rupture of the pandemic.

### *Becoming participatory in 1525: Witchy research methods*

My participation in 1525 meetings changed me, through my experiences with young people and Ellie. I will now share some research records about my experience of making soup for 1525 members, which demonstrates how becoming part of the collective-as-coven was an important part of my embodied becoming as a hospitable researcher.

#### **Research records: Making soup in 1525**

A few weeks ago, Ellie had asked for volunteers to cook and as no-one else put themselves forward, I offered to do it. After much deliberation about what recipe to choose, I had

decided to cook a spicy tomato and vegetable soup. It was something I knew we could make in the time available, that was affordable in terms of ingredients and met all the dietary requirements in the group. I love making soup, and it was one of the first things I learnt to cook as a child. While I did the initial food preparation, the group members talked about the upcoming closing party. As the soup simmered, I talked to the members about the ethics of participating in my research and we discussed collaborative possibilities. Helena and Ray helped chop courgettes and we discussed the strong flavours of the chilli and garlic we were adding to the soup. Ray likened this to Middle Eastern flavours he is familiar with in the Jordanian food he grew up eating. Helena explained that despite the name of the country, the food she grew up eating in Chile does not often include actual chilli. We laughed as she told us that ironically, she was, in fact, intolerant to it.

As the soup was being served, Albert came in - as he often did – keen to find out about the plans for the upcoming event and to eat some of the soup. The dynamic of the space changed as he walked in. Many group members were excited to gain a connection to a staff member that had a role many of them coveted: he seemed to offer routes into the rest of the gallery and an exciting artworld beyond the collective. Helena joked with him about internships at the gallery, which had been mentioned many times but never seemed to materialise, teasing: “Are you gonna give me one or not?” and pretending to threaten him about it. The laughter seemed to hide a lack of answer: an uncomfortable lack of responsiveness. As he tucked into the meal that I had prepared, I was struck by a wave of uneasiness. From the gallery’s office, he could always push open the door and enter the collective’s meetings, transgressing the boundary and helping himself to the care they had forged for one another. Indeed, they were excited and grateful that he would do so. But without having been given a key card, neither me nor the collective members could go the other way without a staff member letting us across the border.

The food finished, Albert and all the group members gradually drifted out of the room. I hung back to clean up with the Ellie and Lucy. As we wiped tables and tidied away the room, I chatted to them both about the research. I found myself feeling a new sense of ease with them and admitted that I had been quite stressed about the PhD recently. They reassured me and shared their own anxieties about work and home life. As the

conversation moved on, we talked about our ex-boyfriends, and I realised we were becoming friends.

Making soup for the collective involved me taking up a new position in 1525 meetings, beyond being an observer, or even a guest, to becoming part of the collective-as-coven. Commensality, as an embodied ritual in 1525, allowed me to commingle with the collective and enabled me to feel some of the relationalities of participation, and their affects, with them. The embodied, affective experience of making soup in 1525 also enabled me to forge new intimacies with gallery workers, in which they understood me beyond the dominant institutional positioning of my research as valuable “evidence of impact”. I became vulnerable and attuned to affect in the research in this session by co-mingling and becoming part of the collective-as-coven.

An understanding of the attuned researcher as deeply entangled in the becoming of the world that they encounter resonates with MacLure’s activation of the image of the feminist researcher as witch. MacLure argues that,

(T)he post-qualitative witch-researcher would cleave to a belief in the power of the body, affect and matter to act as a counter to the privileging of abstract reason. Her “methods” would be akin to divination rather than coding: a matter of trying to tap into the forces and intensities that compose events in order to craft something new, instead of looking for generalisations or “themes”. (MacLure, 2022, pp. 4-5)

Mixing with others in a coven can require vulnerability (Grossman, 2019): a mutual tenderness (D’Emilia & Andreotti, 2019) that has the capacity to do new things and thus change the world (MacLure, 2022). Just as Ellie’s witchy disposition valued young people’s everyday knowledges, when I took up a more witchy disposition as a researcher, I attended more deeply to the value in young people’s everyday actions as already producing embodied co-knowing. Immanent,



affective co-knowing was not a linear, unified technique towards knowledge production but rather was, as Duggan argues, eventful and speculative:

[E]ventful co-production orientates the research to the practices and processes related to the realisation of events: co-producing new thoughts and feelings that create new possibilities in the world. (2020, p. 364)

Understanding participatory research as eventful and affective opened other hospitable possibilities for the research, beyond the reproduction of existing hierarchical power relations.

Affective attunement in ethnographic research is a powerful practice of mutual becoming. I came to understand attunement as a rhizomatic mode of collaborative co-knowing, which resisted linearity and the default set of hierarchical relations between researcher and participants. As Gherardi explains, affective ethnography:

[R]elies on the researcher's capacity to affect and be affected in order to produce interpretations that may transform the things that they interpret. (Gherardi, 2018, p. 742)

In a more affective mode of ethnography, the researcher is understood as equally unfinished as the participants. Participatory ethnographic research is thus understood to involve an opening up, mixing-with, and a process of mutual change:

I am interested in data that move as we move in doing fieldwork as a joint 'becoming-with-data' in the intra-action of what can be lived and sensed by researchers, and how data make us as researchers. (Gherardi, 2018, pp. 742-743)

My becoming-with 1525 influenced me to take up a witchy disposition in the research. I came to understand participation in research as having the potential to generate a minor space with collaborators-as-coven, through embodied and affective practices. Later in the research, I was able to understand this in a deeper way than when I had participated in the Cacao session, although it had always been there.

Despite its rich affordances, becoming researcher as witch did not “solve” the ongoing tensions within the practice of participation in research but rather generated new possibilities for understanding its potential. MacLure asserts the open-ended trouble of trying to go beyond the constraints and over-optimisms of traditional qualitative research ontologies:

As Derrida (1989) once wrote: “Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: ‘here are our monsters’, without immediately turning the monsters into pets” (p. 80). I feel kind of the same way about claiming the appellation of bad girl. The gesture of emphatic self-definition refutes that which is deconstructive, liminal or destabilising in the concept. I have always had an uneasy feeling that we may not be as bad as we think; that things are never as ruined as we hoped (MacLure, 2011); that the edge is necessarily somewhere other than we think it is. In claiming the name of bad girl of theory, I worry that I might misrecognise the nature and amplitude of any shreds of efficacy I may have possessed. (MacLure, 2022, pp. 2-3)

The participatory researcher-as-witch was ever at risk of falling back into domination or becoming another mode of uncritical blind optimism. Much like the constant slippage involved in attempts to enact ethical hospitality, any hope to transcend the cruel optimism of participatory research must be understood as an ongoing project. There may, as Deleuze and Guattari (1980) would have it, always be a new tree within the rhizome, as much as a rhizome within the tree.

In the next, final chapter of this thesis, I will summarise the claims of this research across the two, parallel inquiries, before discussing its significance and implications.

## 10. Conclusions

This research set out to examine participation in NC's gallery youth collective, 1525. My sustained ethnographic research design sought to activate participatory approaches with collective members and gallery workers, and I examined the affordances and limitations of participation in the methods alongside the substantive inquiry. Catalysed by the rupture of the Covid-19 pandemic, my analysis showed that despite participation in the gallery youth collective being dominantly understood as an idealised mode of unlimited hospitality, 1525 often enacted a highly conditional mode of hospitality, which demanded young people's assimilation into narrow, linear identities as arts-workers-in-the-making. The precarity of the gallery youth collective heightened demands for it to be continuously performed in terms of notions of impact and deficit, positioning the gallery firmly as a host-benefactor and young people as guest-beneficiaries. Drawing on theories of hospitality (Ahmed, 2012; Bulley, 2015; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) and Berlant's 'cruel optimism' (2011), I have argued that optimistic narratives of the gallery youth collective as a practice of unlimited institutional hospitality were ultimately cruel, as they were complicit in continually reinscribing and concealing the dominance of the gallery-as-host. However, despite the contradictions of attempting to enact hospitable participatory relations within a powerful institution, young people and workers at NC sometimes came together in more intimate, collective ways in 1525 group meetings, which supported young people's differential becomings. Although the alternative relations sometimes produced within the gallery youth collective meetings were not a resolution to young people's domination at NC, they nevertheless produced powerful affects and agency, especially for minoritized collective members. Finally, I have argued that by taking up time and space at NC, young people were able to express new forms of collective voice (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) about political struggles. Creating exhibitions and events at NC

sometimes demanded that young people were translated into institutional norms of expression, but nevertheless, I have shown that it provided powerful opportunities for them to speak collectively to wider communities, opening the possibility of changing public sentiments about young people (Hickey-Moody, 2013b).

The analysis of my attempts to enact participatory research methods with young people has shown that they also generated a constrained and contradictory mode of hospitality. My initial approach to participation in the research – informed by my professional disposition as a gallery educator, the methodological literatures, and the university's research management procedures – relied on a limited conception of young people's active involvement and framed valid knowledge production as a teleological and unified process, and I have argued that this reflects a limitation of many mainstream understandings of participation (Duggan, 2020; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). However, I have shown how the rupture of the pandemic unsettled my investments in the dominant, adult-led norms of participatory research, allowing me to attend more fully to the plethora of everyday affective knowledges that were co-produced through my shared experiences with young people and workers at NC. I have argued, therefore, for the adoption of a more expansive, affective understanding of what constitutes participatory methods in ethnographic research with young people.

This chapter explains how the results of this thesis constitute a significant contribution to knowledge and practice by discussing each research question in turn.

RQ1: What does participation in Nottingham Contemporary's 1525 youth collective involve, and what does it do for young people, staff, and the gallery?

*a) My claims about the gallery youth collective*

In this research, I brought together notions of hospitality and cruel optimism to consider how idealized sentiments about institutional participation allowed investments in the gallery youth collective as an empowering and democratic unlimited mode of hospitality to be sustained, despite the contradictions involved in its practice, and its repeated failure to achieve the relational outcomes it proposed. Here, I will retrace the specific ways in which I have argued that institutional participation in the gallery youth collective enacted a complex and contradictory mode of hospitality:

**i) NC made an idealized, tripartite offer to young people through the gallery youth collective, which welcomed them in by invoking and reinforcing wider optimistic attachments to the arts:**

- ***Routes into work in the arts:*** NC activated wider positive affects and discourses around the arts to call young people in to participate in the gallery youth collective by presenting the group as a route into an alluring, elite art world and an opportunity to access desirable careers in the arts. However, the dominant imagining of the offer of 1525 was based on young people's assimilation, constructing a hierarchical and dominant mode of hospitality.
- ***A caring collective:*** The gallery presented the collective variously as an instrumentalized network of other young creatives and as a meaningful source of friendship and support. Ellie used the induction meeting to create a threshold of participation in which the offer of more intimate relations was furthered.

- **Youth voice:** NC offered time and space at the gallery, positioning this as a way in which young people could be empowered; gaining voice and making change in the world. However, the offer of the collective as voice suggested that young people did not have an existing voice, positioning the gallery as host-benefactor and setting up hospitality as institutional assimilation.
- ii) **Taking up the youth collective as a route into work in the arts produced a cruelly optimistic mode of hospitality as it generated passionate dispositions in young people as arts workers-in-the-making and concealed the exploitative realities of work in the sector.** Many young people took up skills, networks and knowledges which provided valuable affordances for jobs in the arts, but the collective also produced and deepened optimistic attachments to forms of work that offered poor working conditions. The positive affects involved in taking up the collective as a route into work in the arts sometimes reached an impasse (Berlant, 2011) as older members and staff were confronted with the repeated failure of the narratives of equality and inclusion that surrounded the collective to manifest in the arts labour market.
- iii) **In the closed space of 1525 meetings, Ellie and group members enacted participatory relations at odds with the dominant relational atmospheres of the gallery, which were intimate, trusting, and shared the position of host and guest fluidly.** 1525 meetings acted as a bounded time/space which was within, against, and beyond (Bell & Pahl, 2018) the hostile, fraught conditions of the wider gallery and surrounding art world. Ellie's witchy pedagogy centred and validated young people's existing knowledges and everyday practices, activating embodied practices which allowed new subjectivities to be taken up, relationally. Young people's becoming in collective meetings went beyond the narrow, arboreal (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) pathways to

adulthood imagined by gallery workers in funding bids, as diverse subjectivities were welcomed through a more collective, rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) mode of hospitality which challenged the default hierarchies active at NC.

- iv) **Taking up time and space at the gallery enacted a paradoxical mode of hospitality as it allowed young people to become hosts to wider publics, but also demanded their assimilation into the gallery-as-host, reinscribing dominating institutional hierarchies.** Institutionalized modes of display such as the vitrine and the catalogue translated young people's voices according to the colonial representational logics of the art museum. Nevertheless, through making exhibitions and events at NC, 1525 members and their collaborators were able to collectively speak to wider communities, in ways that had the capacity to change public sentiments about young people and thus generated a powerful form of youth agency (Hickey-Moody, 2013b).

The gallery youth collective at NC was enacted under a specific set of conditions, which had an important role in shaping participation-as-hospitality to emerge in the above ways. The youth collective at NC was reliant on precarious short term grant funding, creating difficult working conditions for education workers, including heavy workloads and insecure contracts. Powerful regimes of audit which framed the value of participation through narratives of impact and improvement continually reinscribed binary, hierarchical relations of host and guest. Therefore, the structural conditions surrounding the gallery youth collective limited the hospitality produced in the programme. Nevertheless, Ellie was committed to a more radical mode of hospitality in the youth collective, and the combination of her pedagogy and the collective agency of group members produced a different set of hospitable relations in group meetings, which resisted the dominant and dominating norms on which the host

institution relied. Whilst 1525 was specific and situated, many of the conditions surrounding participation that I have described are not exclusive to NC, or even to gallery education. In the next part of this section, I will discuss the wider contexts in which similar conditions exist, identifying some other communities to whom my research is significant.

*b) The significance of my research on youth participation in, and beyond, the gallery youth collective.*

The claims I have made about participation-as-hospitality in the gallery youth collective have significance for several communities:

- i) Firstly, **my research is significant for NC**, for workers who develop and carry out participation programmes, and for senior gallery managers who direct the position of these programmes within the institution. In part (c) of this section I will discuss some of the plans in place with NC for the implications of this research to be acted upon.
- ii) Secondly, although the conditions surrounding participation at NC are situated and specific, they are not unique but rather reflect wider structural issues found in education in the cultural sector. While there is critical discussion of the difficulties of participation in galleries per se (for instance Ekeberg (2003), Bishop (2012), and Matarasso (2019)), there is much less related specifically to their education programmes. Therefore, **my research is significant within the wider field of gallery and art education, both for academics and practitioners**. My research builds on Sim's (2017, 2019b) doctoral research about the Circuit programme, which – although it focuses on partnership between youth work organisations and galleries – identified some of the complex issues around class and power involved



in seeking to do participatory work of this sort. My research also develops some of the claims made in Graham's work (2015, 2017a, 2017b), which identifies many of the contradictions and easy complicities involved in doing participatory work in contemporary art galleries. However, within the academic literatures about arts education, there are limited examples of long-term research like this (Thomson & Maloy, 2022, p. 21). Considering the limitations of the literatures in this regard, the claims I have made about participation in the gallery youth collective are significant to the research community, as they provide deep insights into the complexity of sustained youth arts participation in practice.

- iii) Thirdly, many of the conditions I have described facing participatory work at NC can be found in a much wider range of settings, meaning **my research is significant in many institutions and contexts beyond the arts**. A growing reliance on short-term funding, demands to expand income-generating activities, and the rise of dominating regimes of audit and risk management are features of many sectors under neoliberalism, far beyond gallery education. The conditions of neoliberalism can also be found in a wide variety of educational contexts, including schools (Ball, 2003), universities (Webb, 2018), and youth work settings (de St Croix, 2018), as well as in the participatory activities often carried out within public and third sector organisations, such as youth councils and steering groups.

In the next section, I will outline some implications of the knowledge produced by this thesis about youth participation.

*c) The implications of this research for youth participation.*

The research has implications for practice development and future research:

**i) My research has implications for the practice of the gallery youth collective at**

**NC.** I have fed back a summary of the research results and am writing a report that will inform practice development, reinforcing the positive elements of the gallery youth collective and supporting advocacy for long-term ways of working with young people, for instance to funders. Gallery workers are interested in sharing the results of the research in several ways, including:

- Staff development workshops sharing and discussing some of the results of the research to inform workers' practice,
- Public events in collaboration with gallery workers and past and present collective members to generate further conversation about the practice of the gallery youth collective with those involved,
- Supporting advocacy for the value of long-term modes of participation beyond simply impact and measurable transformation, both within the gallery and in planning and fundraising for future youth participation schemes.

Despite the receptiveness of gallery education workers at NC to the results of this research, there is significant affective complexity around gallery workers really accepting the dissonance and discomfort invoked by my analysis of the gallery youth collective as a paradoxical mode of hospitality. I do not claim that all the insights of the research have necessarily been fully taken up by all workers at NC, but I do believe that the research has influenced practice and developed worker understandings of the complexity of youth participation,

and I hope to continue to develop the influence of the research at the gallery further beyond the submission of this thesis.

- ii) **My research has implications for supporting practitioners - in gallery education and beyond - to engage with the complex contradictions of their participatory work.** Framing and valuing youth participation in terms of impact and deficit may be, to an extent, a necessary evil in ensuring organisational survival in the current system of publicly funded arts in the UK. However, surfacing the contradictions between idealised narratives of participation, the espoused emancipatory aims, complex structural conditions, and institutional power relations involved in running participatory youth programmes is an important part of countering the oppressions that they can enact on both young people and workers. Fundamental changes to arts funding structures and wider neoliberal modes of government would be necessary to completely change some of the structural issues I have described. Until such time that radical social and political reform is achieved, by surfacing some of the contradictions of participation-as-hospitality, my research can be mobilised to help educators and managers to better attend to the ever-shifting complexities involved in their work. Whilst many gallery education practitioners have a deep investment in values of social justice (as Graham (2015) identifies), they are often very busy, with little time to reflect deeply on their practice and the contradictory investments often involved. Arts funding and audit regimes tend to focus a lot of educators' time and energy on producing optimistic accounts and seeking to measure impact. My research suggests a need for interventions that refocus practitioners' attention, supporting them to attend to other ways of valuing participation, beyond dominant ideas of impact and deficit.

Whilst I would not argue for a set of specific techniques for doing hospitable participation – as I suggest that they inevitably become limiting and can act to constrain co-production and hospitality – I argue that providing critical tools to support deeper practitioner reflection could be an important part of supporting gallery education workers in pursuing the hospitable process of ‘dewalling atmospheres’, advocated by Zembylas (2020).

### **Future research opportunities**

Future research into the affordances and constraints of institutional participation could further the insights produced by this doctorate by undertaking comparative work looking at attempts to do democratic participation work in various institutional contexts. Whilst I have argued that large-scale structural conditions shape how participation-as-hospitality emerges, the results of this thesis also illustrate that it is not universal. Rather, the ways in which structural conditions are translated into practice are situated and subject to the complexities of micro-level dispositions, relationships, and practices. Both within and beyond the arts there are multiple possible sites for a study of this nature which could identify more of the nuances of how hospitable participation is and could be done, including – as identified above – schools, universities, and third and public sector participation initiatives.

RQ2: What does participation in ethnographic methods based in close, sustained relationships involve, and what does it do for those involved, in the context of a gallery youth collective?

*a) My claims about participatory ethnographic methods*

My four claims about participation in close, enduring, collaborative ethnographic methods are:

- i) **Attempts to enact participatory methods in ethnographic research as a fixed set of techniques was a mode of conditional hospitality based on young people's assimilation, which was cruelly optimistic (Berlant, 2011) in terms of the aims of empowering young participants.** I have argued that whilst participatory methods are portrayed in some methodological literatures as idealized solutions to unequal power relations in research with young people, they often imagine participation in terms of a narrow set of pre-defined techniques into which researchers must induct young people. My early attempts to enact participation by training young people to be co-researchers ultimately reinscribed a fixed binary hierarchy of researcher-as-host over young person-as-guest. Like gallery participation, participation in research as young people's assimilation - here into the institution and norms of academic research - enacted a heavily conditional form of hospitality (Ahmed, 2012). I argue that using narrowly defined participatory methods in ethnographic research with young people can thus serve to perform the righteousness of the researcher and conceal the ongoing epistemic domination of a limited academic conception of knowledge production.
- ii) **The hospitality produced by participatory methods in ethnographic research with young people was shaped and constrained by the power relations, funding structures, and management systems of the university-as-host.** Like the gallery, the university was situated within neoliberal systems which made research dependent on precarious funding. The aspirations to extend open and inclusive participatory relations in research were – as at NC – limited in part by the surrounding regimes of funding and audit which relied on notions of impact and

deficit and required the research team to pre-imagine and articulate the research in these terms. Institutional risk assessment procedures at the university, such as the ethical review process, largely served to protect the institution not the participants. At times, academic oversight protocols constrained the emergence of ethical relations with young participants by reinscribing hierarchies through care-as-control. Despite the dominating relations involved, opportunities to be assimilated within academia through participating in research was sometimes appealing and even pleasurable (Hickey-Moody, 2013b) to young people. Nevertheless, enacting hospitality in participatory research as young people's assimilation into fixed research techniques was heavily conditional and ultimately cruelly optimistic as it reproduced the dominance of the host and affirmed participation in terms of binary positions of host and guest, generating an arboreal mode of organizing participation in ethnographic research.

- iii) **Rethinking participation in ethnographic research beyond notions of young people as self-aware subjects offered new approaches to collaborative research that mobilises affect.** Dominant imaginaries of participatory research optimistically invest in the idea of young people as “experts in their own lives” (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008) – but the idea of individual, self-conscious voice underlying this approach to participation assumes a self-aware, fixed, and bounded subject. In this study – particularly after the rupture of the Covid-19 pandemic – it became clear that for both young people and gallery workers, their affective attachments were a powerful force in their choices, beliefs, and feelings at and beyond NC, and that they were *not* always fully conscious of their material realities and how their understandings were shaped by their investments.

Understanding participants as affective subjects who were not necessarily fully self-aware presented a potential challenge to my ethical aspirations to work equally with young people as epistemic counterparts in this study. However, I have also argued that I – as researcher – was not fully self-aware of my own investments, that I was unfinished, and that I existed not as a bounded subject but in relation to human and more-than-human entities in the research.

- iv) **Affective ethnography offered a rhizomatic mode of participation in research methods.** Affective ethnography, in my use of the term, blurs the distinction between ethnography and participatory research (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008) as everyday modes of participation in young people's lives are validated as forms of affective co-knowing. I was in becoming with the young people and Ellie in 1525, shaped my becoming as a witchy researcher (MacLure, 2022), which embraced embodied, emerged, collective modes of knowing, by positioning me, workers, and young people in 1525 as collaborators in a knowledge production coven. Rhizomatic participation in research has the potential to support divergent (minoritarian) becomings in knowledge production and to therefore allow collective youth voices to collectively emerge beyond cliché.

However, creating any fixed formula for how to do participatory research risks becoming a new form of domination. In avoiding hospitality slipping into hostility, it is important to remain alert to the rhizome becoming a tree (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Like in the practice of the youth collective, what is needed is not a set of pre-determined techniques for doing participatory research methods, but ways of researchers continuing to attend critically and deeply to their practice and investments.

*b) The significance of my research about participation in close, enduring, collaborative ethnographic methods.*

- i) The claims I have made in this study are significant to researchers seeking to do participatory ethnographic work with young people, and with other, wider groups. The dynamics that I have identified around doing participatory research are not defined by age but by power relations and I have argued against the idea of framing adults as more “finished” subjects than children and young people (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). Therefore, my methodological claims may also be significant to those working with other groups that may be in a lower power position relative to the research institution. The risks of domination in participatory ethnographic research that I have highlighted are also significant to those researching with a wider range of minoritized groups beyond young people, for instance those socially subordinated because of their class, race, gender, disability, or queerness, or at various intersections of these identities.
- ii) My claims have significance for those supporting novice researchers trying to work in participatory ways during their doctorate. I have demonstrated the complexities of trying to do participatory ethnographic doctoral research, illustrating the constraints of the university as an institutional host for this sort of research. Doctoral funding programmes, such as the ESRC Collaborative Doctoral Award scheme that supported this research, are intended to help novice researchers achieve their research goals and attain high ethical standards in their collaborations with participants and partner institutions. My claims about the challenges of doing participatory research within university oversight protocols



are thus significant to university and funder communities who develop and lead such programmes.

*c) The implications of my research for close, sustained participatory ethnographic research methods.*

The research opens opportunities for practice development and future research:

**i) Practice development opportunities**

- a. The research has implications for developing the practice of hospitable participatory ethnographic research methods in future. It adds to a body of literatures – including Duggan (2020); Gallacher and Gallagher (2008); and Bell and Pahl (2018) – which suggest that participatory research practice needs to go beyond simplistic, superficial forms of inclusion, and avoid easy, self-congratulatory claims to have shared power with young people by assimilating them into fixed research methods as our co-researchers. My argument about the affordances of affective ethnography as a mode of co-produced knowledge extends the claims made by Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) that academic thresholds between what is considered to be ethnography and what is considered to be participatory research are often unhelpful in attempting to produce more inclusive and ethical research relations. Instead, my research suggests value in more experimental and liminal modes of research, which resist fixed methodological techniques and boundaries.
- b. My research has implications for ways in which universities could better support doctoral researchers seeking to use participatory approaches. Methods training included in doctoral programmes can too often be based on training novice researchers in fixed, pre-imagined research techniques. Whilst

methods training has many affordances, a heavy focus on teaching techniques can leave insufficient focus on inexperienced researchers developing a deep understanding of how emergent research design works in practice, and the ethical complexities involved in co-creating specific, situated participatory approaches.

- iii) My research contributes to a body of literatures which indicate ways of improving ethics protocols and research oversight procedures to accommodate the cultivation of more open and hospitable participatory research relations. It indicates that to enable researchers to enact more hospitable participatory methods, universities should seek to reduce risk-averse anxieties about emergent research methods, and the desire for institutional methodological oversight rather than trusting researchers and supporting them to enact responsive ethics. My research thus adds to literatures – for instance Guillemin and Gillam (2004); Simpson (2011) – about the limitations of current dominant approaches to ethical review, which might collectively inform the future development of more hospitable ethical policies and procedures for participatory research methods.

## **ii) Future research**

Future research could extend the insights of this doctorate by undertaking more methodological experimentation with embodied, affective, and multiple modes of participatory ethnographic research with young people, considering further how participation might unfold in fragmented and divergent ways. I have argued that participatory research should be expanded, not to seek ethical purity but to pursue new, embodied ways of knowing together. The study outlined in the first section could be developed in this way.

I have ambitions to develop ways of writing and sharing this research that better resist dominant modes of academic expression. Academic writing can act to translate young people's voices into the dominating norms of the host, in a similar way to the critique I made of young people producing exhibitions and events with NC. Whilst I sought to create this text as more hospitable and affective than a traditional thesis, this ambition was hard to fully realise within the constraints of a thesis (Honan & Bright, 2016) and with the time and resources I had available. However, in future I am keen to publish elsewhere from this research in formats that enable more textual experimentation and different sorts of written knowledge production, which may offer the potential to destabilise my authorial domination further, to produce more affective outcomes for the reader (Hickey-Moody, 2013a), and host my collaborators more fully in the text. In future research, I want to produce research outcomes beyond written, academic texts, exploring the ways that other modes might enable different forms of collaboration with co-researchers and audiences.

To conclude, my research shows that attending to participation's potential complicity in institutional domination is never done with. In seeking more hospitable forms of participation, we must, as Berlant (2022) suggests, continually seek to 'loosen the difficulty'.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Participant information sheet

Dear 1525 member,

I am doing a PhD research project in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham.

I want to find out about what is happening in the 1525 collective at Nottingham Contemporary and the gallery's broader learning programmes. I'm particularly interested in the ongoing relationships that people are involved in and their related learning experiences.

#### **Participating in the Research**

If you decide to take part in this research project, I may interview you about the group, individually or in small groups. I will be there in some of the 1525 events and meetings, taking field notes and sketches to record these observations and taking photos/videos of those people who have given consent for this to happen, and talking to people about what is happening. We might also make creative things together in groups like videos, zines or podcasts, to help me understand your thoughts and feelings about the group. The research would happen between now and Autumn 2020, and most of the research would happen in your normal session meeting times, at the gallery, or at a time and place convenient to you.

There is also the opportunity for some participants to be co-researchers in the project, which would involve carrying out interviews with other people involved in the learning programmes, observing other activity and making creative outcomes together, using video, audio, visual or written formats, as well as helping to analyse the findings of the research. There will be

training in research ethics offered for co-researchers and any extra travel or food expenses would be covered.

### **Anonymity**

The things you say to me in the research project will be kept confidential, so I wouldn't tell people who said them. I will use this information in my project, including writing about it in my PhD thesis, and in articles I write, which may be published in journals and online. I might talk about this project at conferences and public events. To keep you safe and protect your privacy, I will ensure that you have the choice of whether to be anonymous in my writing and any talks, so your name can be changed if you like, and people won't be able to tell who you are from the details I give. If you say anything sensitive to me along the way, I will discuss further with you whether this is included.

### **Use of Data**

I will use the information you share in my research, including writing about it in my PhD thesis (the writing I have to hand in to the university) and in any articles I write about this piece of research, which may be published in journals and online. I might also talk about this project at conferences and public events. Any particularly sensitive information that comes up could be anonymized further or taken out of public versions of the research.

I will be gathering photos or videos, which may include images of you. You can decide whether you are happy for me to use your image in articles or talks or in my PhD, and you can review this decision as the project progresses. Some of the things I find out in this research project

will be shared with the staff at Nottingham Contemporary. I will make any sensitive comments in a general way, so they are not specifically attributed to an individual speaker.

Any paper notes that identify you will be stored securely, with all digital files from the project being saved on the university's cloud-based system, secured with a password. This information will be kept for up to 25yrs and you have the right to request to see it at any time in this period. Please see GDPR information sheet for more on data storage and access.

### **Right to Withdraw**

Your involvement in this research project is completely voluntary, so you have the right to say no, or to change your mind about being involved at any point. Whether you're involved or not won't affect how you are treated by me or staff at the gallery, and it won't stop you being involved in the group or other projects with the gallery or university. If you have been involved in creating collaborative work with other people it may not be possible to remove your individual contribution from the overall work.

### **Benefits of the Research**

I hope this project helps people understand more about young people's lives and how they feel about being part of youth arts groups like this. By taking part you would be helping improve projects like this for other young people in future. The co-researchers will gain significant skills in social research and those who make a significant contribution to the outcome will have the opportunity to be named on any articles or papers I publish from the research. I also hope that you will enjoy being involved and I hope to include your opinions and views in what I do and write about.

If you want to find out more about what I'm doing, you can email me on [cassandra.kill1@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:cassandra.kill1@nottingham.ac.uk), or you could contact my supervisor Pat Thomson on [patricia.thomson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:patricia.thomson@nottingham.ac.uk). If you want to make a complaint about me or my research, you can contact the University on: [educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk).

If you have any questions, please raise them with me before signing the consent form (or after, if you come up with more!) or you can email me at any point in the project. If you are under 18, parent/carer consent is needed for you to be involved.

Best wishes,

Cassie Kill

Doctoral Researcher, School of Education, University of Nottingham

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Project title** The Place of Learning: pedagogies of enduring relationships at Nottingham Contemporary

**Researcher's name** Cassandra Kill

**Supervisors' names** Professor Pat Thomson, Dr Sarah Amsler

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will be able to choose whether to be identified and my personal results will remain confidential. I will be given the opportunity to discuss the findings and any highly sensitive data may be withdrawn from the published findings if I feel it puts me at risk.
- I understand that I will be audio/video recorded during interviews and activities.



- I understand that digital data will be stored securely on the university's password-protected cloud-based system, and that paper copies will be stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed after use.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.
- This research acknowledges that people's preferred pronouns cannot be visually assessed, so all participants who sign a consent form are being asked to select their preferred pronouns, so they can be accurately described in the research.

**Preferred pronouns:** She/her    They/them    He/him    Other (please specify).....

I consent to be observed and written about in the field notes of observations and findings of the PhD research about this group.

I am interested in being a participant in the research and would like to find out more about being interviewed as part of this project.

I am interested in being a co-researcher in this project and would like to find out more about this role.

I do/do not (**delete as appropriate**) consent to being photographed and video recorded for this research and for these images to be used in the PhD thesis, at conferences and in published articles (print and online)

Research Participant Name .....

Signature .....

Contact email:.....

Parent/carer name if under 18yrs .....

Signature.....

Date .....

**Contact details:**

Researcher: [cassandra.kill1@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:cassandra.kill1@nottingham.ac.uk)

Supervisor: [patricia.thomson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:patricia.thomson@nottingham.ac.uk).

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

[educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk)

### Appendix 3: Research Collective Shared Principles

The following principles were developed with the young people from 1525 who chose to participate in the research, during a series of online video meetings that took place in March 2020. The notes from all the online meetings were stored on a Googledoc with access shared between members.

- The purpose of these meetings is to research the relationships young people have with Nottingham Contemporary: through 1525, other roles they might take on at the gallery, the way they conceptualise and imagine the gallery as an institution, and the role it plays in their social networks beyond the gallery (as a physical and imagined entity). The Research Collective has been established to plan ways of going about this research and carry it out with 1525 members.
- Working as a collective in the research means: everyone having the opportunity to contribute to key ideas, each getting a voice, and people being able to contribute in different ways at different times. It doesn't mean members having a responsibility to "get things finished" or carry the research to completion. If you don't want to take on a task, if it feels like too much effort or isn't of interest or anything, it is always fine to say so.
- People are free to withdraw from the research at any time or leave during a session as they wish. This won't affect their role in the group or 1525, and they can come back again at any point. The only possible limit to this right of withdrawal is that it may not always be possible to remove an individual contribution to a group piece (e.g. a collaborative piece of writing or art).

- The Research Collective is not the same thing as 1525. It is not part of Nottingham Contemporary's youth programme, which is currently on pause while staff are furloughed. However, the insights of the research will inform future work at the gallery. This project is a PhD study in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham.
- Confidentiality is important. Things people say in the meetings and the research should be kept confidential. This means people will be able to speak more honestly and feel safe to do so.
- Meetings are normally open-ended (i.e not a set finish time) to allow flexibility and authentic collaboration. However, we will be mindful that long video meetings can be particularly draining and people may have other commitments to meet.
- Notes will be written up after each meeting and added to the Googledoc so people who couldn't be there can see what happened if they want to.
- We are conscious that under Covid-19 lockdown conditions, people may be more likely to be dealing with complex emotions. With this in mind, we will begin sessions with a round of check ins, so we can be conscious of others' emotional states and respond to this in our interactions.
- Those who participate in the research will be kept anonymous as far as possible (i.e. their name will be changed to a pseudonym and I will try to avoid giving identifying details in the written outcomes of the research). However, some people might want to be named in order to have their contribution to the research properly attributed (e.g. as a co-author of an article). This can be discussed towards the end of the project, when coresearchers can consider the outcomes of the research.

- Further information on the full ethical principles of the research are included in the consent form signed by participants. Please contact me for a chat if you have any questions or concerns about this.

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