Alternative to what? Alternative how?

A Study of Multi-Public Educational and Cultural Spaces in England since the Late Nineteenth Century

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ABSTRACT

The present PhD is dedicated to the study of the foundational years of three organisations started in East London – Toynbee Hall (1884-present), Centerprise (1971-2012), and Open School East (2013-present) – which have combined the trinal functions of school, community centre, and cultural space. Multi-vision, multi-purpose, and multi-public, these organisations deemed themselves alternative, whether through their pedagogical, cultural, and social engagement and practice; their governance model; and/or their conceptualisation and use of architectural space. Core to their mission were their democratic ideals of togetherness and of equality of access to education and culture, along with a preoccupation with developing participants' agency, rebalancing power relations, and making the experience of education non-alienating and emancipatory.

This study is dedicated to questioning how these spaces understood and situated themselves as alternatives and how they enacted their alternativeness. Moving within and beyond the case studies, it examines the qualities, values, and prerequisites of what I have proposed to name 'multi-public educational and cultural organisations'. By the same means, it scrutinises the hurdles associated with the effort to remain alternative with the passing of time and that which comes with it: processes of habituation; temptation or pressure to scale up; ethos-bending fundraising exercises; long tenure; as well as the plain desire for stability and sustainability.

Drawing on literature from the fields of education, geography, architecture, art theory, and critical and utopian studies, and on empirical and situated research including interviews, the thesis works to assemble genealogies, trans-geographical connections, and narratives of entanglement between education, culture, community, and space, before exploring possible approaches to elude the fate of alternatives morphing into what they originally stood against.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

> The revolutionary agenda of neoliberalism has accomplished a lot in the way of physical and institutional change these last twenty years (consider the dual impact of deindustrialization and the diminution of trade union powers in Britain and the United States, for example). So why, then, can we not envision equally dramatic changes (though pointing in a different direction) as we seek for alternatives? (Harvey, 2000, p. 186)

In the twenty or so years that have passed since geographer David Harvey wrote these lines in *Spaces of Hope*, neoliberalism has led further revolutionary physical and institutional change. Among other significant events that are pertinent to the subject matters of this thesis, England, the geographical focus of this PhD, has witnessed the gentrification of numerous city centres and rural and coastal areas, the commodification of higher education, and, last but not least, withdrawal from the European Union. In the face of the extreme increase in the cost of living and education prompted by these events and of ever-widening socioeconomic inequalities, the need for dramatic changes pointing in a different direction is all the more pressing today.

Reflecting on Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 1980s slogan "There is no alternative" in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), and later in *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), political and cultural theorist Mark Fisher laments over the fact that the dramatic changes that Harvey was hoping for still haven't materialised beyond short-term acts of resistance without lasting legacy. Fisher asks: "Could it be that there are no breaks, no 'shocks of the new' to come? [...] "how long ago did [the last big thing] happen and just how big was it?" (2009, p. 3). Rather than shocking, surprising, or dramatic, the approaches to social change and the production of alternatives that seem to have gained momentum over the last decade have been subtle and less visible, though no less continuous. As I am about to describe, they have been slow, third, decentred.

The slow movement started to gain currency in the last two decades, yet its relevance and appeal have been recognised on a far greater scale since the climate crisis became a daily reality and, in particular, since the beginning of the global pandemic which has simultaneously heightened injustices and marked a shift in our relationship to time, productivity, fatigue, mortality, wellbeing, nature, and food. After the much earlier slow food movement (started in

1986), the use of terms such as slow school (Holt, 2002), slow curating (Arney Johnston, 2009), slow fashion (Fletcher, 2010), slow institutions (Petrešin-Bachelez, 2017), and slow science (Stengers, 2018), to name but a few, is now recurrent in these given fields of practice. Besides opposing accelerationism, slow stands for sustainable, responsible, interconnected, community-focused, small-scale, and holistic. Similarly, permaculture, itself a form of slow agriculture, has increasingly been used as a metaphor and model for differential practices associated with the above-listed qualities as well as with the regeneration, healing, and care of society and of the non-human and more-than-human worlds.

In contrast, the less widespread notion of 'thirdness' has been resorted to in order to designate a set of undefined alternatives, an open-ended trinary that is conceptualised with the view to counterbalancing the dominance of binaries, for instance through selectively drawing from binaries to generate new alternatives (Soja, 1996). This is the case of filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's concept of Third Cinema, a decolonial and anti-capitalist alternative to the two dominant film industries of the 1960s: on the one hand, Hollywood and its numbing blockbusters, and on the other hand, European arthouse, deemed bourgeois and author-centred. It is also the case of Third Landscape, which gardener and landscape theorist Gilles Clément describes as the sum of spaces left by humankind to natural evolution, which express "neither power nor submission to power" (2014, p. 13) and belong "neither to the territory of shadow, nor to the territory of light", but to the "margins" [of both shadow and light] (ibid, p. 17).

In turn, urbanist Edward Soja describes his concept of Thirdspace, which draws from philosopher Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad (1991), as "a term that disrupts, disorders, and begins to reconstitute the conventional binary opposition" (1996, p. 31). The binary opposition being, in this instance, the concrete form (Firstspace) versus the conceptual form (Secondspace) of spatiality. Soja envisions Thirdspace as a place for encounters between "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Soja, 1996, pp. 58-59).

The alternatives that this PhD sets out to explore share a great many characteristics with the notions of slowness and thirdness. Slowness in their local and connection-seeking foci, in their praxis of commoning, and in their aspiration to holism. Thirdness in their resistance to binary thinking, in their bearing of multiple identities, and in their being ambiguous, elusive, fragmented, impermanent, and latent. This PhD is a study of alternatives created in response

to educational, cultural, and socio-economic inequalities since the late 19th century. As I shall explore, and in a nutshell, these alternatives have emerged, disappeared, and reemerged in particular conditions. They have been initially driven and eventually burdened by urgency and the quest to realise the impossible, which have variously led to their dissolution, morphing, or even compliance with what they initially stood against. This PhD is a study of the sporadic and time-limited nature of alternative spaces existing within, but not only, the UK charity and education sectors. Further put to question in this research is those sectors' ability and willingness to support the production and maintenance of alternative spaces.

I- Premise of the Research

The present PhD researches models of educational organisations in the UK, historically and today, that have combined the trinal functions of school, community centre, and cultural space. It does so through the analysis of three main case studies: the late 19th century university settlement **Toynbee Hall** – a residential centre for educational, social, and cultural work among the socioeconomically deprived in Whitechapel, East London; the 1970s community arts space **Centerprise** – a neighbourhood centre integrating a bookshop, a cafe-bar, literacy and publishing activities, and an advice centre in Hackney, East London; and the 2010s independent art school and cultural space **Open School East** in Hackney and later Margate, East Kent. The multi-vision, multi-purpose, and multi-public nature of these three organisations distinguishes them from the more common model by which schools serve students through the means of learning activities, community centres serve members of the local community through the means of social and cultural inclusion activities, and cultural centres serve spectators, viewers, and/or participants through the means of artistic experiences and activities.

In contrast, Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East provide activities and programmes that are simultaneously engaged with learning, social inclusion, and the provision of cultural and artistic experiences, and that concurrently serve people of diverse generations, classes, cultures, and communities of interests; amateurs and professionals; and locals and non-locals. Central to the three case studies' mission is the creation of a space for the cohabitation of diverse uses, publics, and sociabilities. Users converge in one building, perhaps not all at the same time and perhaps in their own, dedicated spaces, but nonetheless with the recognition that they belong, for a time at least, to a community of users of that building, of that organisation. When the organisation does not have a dedicated space for cross-user socialisation, formal and informal occasions are created for users to congregate, interact with one another, and familiarise themselves with the other activities in the building.

As aspiring micro-societies, these establishments evoke or take inspiration from a range of multi-use spaces infused with democratic ideals of togetherness and of equality of access to education and culture. Historically, one may name the early 19th century phalanstery – an architecture imagined by French utopian socialist Charles Fourier to host self-contained communities working for their mutual benefit and sharing property; the late 19th century people's palace – dedicated to the entertainment, recreation, and education of local residents in areas of socioeconomic deprivation in Britain; or the Brazilian Mission of the Social Service of Commerce (SESC) – created in 1946 to contribute to socioeconomic and cultural development in Brazil and enable the exercise of citizenship. SESCs continue to exist to this day and include over 600 centres incorporating leisure, learning, cultural, social, and/or lodging facilities[1]. Moving on to more recently created endeavours, one may point to what are known in France as *tiers-lieux*, physical spaces that have emerged in the past five years to bring under one roof entities and programmes that may include food cooperatives, local manufactures, training, coworking, makerspaces, grassroots social services, social clubs, and cultural activities. Another example one may give are contemporary art centres, an increasing number of which have, in the past decade and this time throughout the world, shifted part of their resources away from exhibition-making and towards cultural, pedagogical, and research projects with tangible social outcomes, as well as given over parts of their space to space-less local groups and initiatives.

By the same token, one could argue that today's forward-thinking contemporary art museum too operates a multi-purpose and multi-public model, working across the arts, learning, research, and, increasingly, the social sphere. Yet, and among other factors, despite the museum's efforts to de-compartmentalise its programmes, tasks and specialisms still remain largely segmented: the curator (expected to be trained in curating, conservation, or art history) principally curates, and the learning officer (expected to have skills in a wider range of fields including education, training, and project management) principally plans and oversees activities connected to learning, engagement, and evaluation which, while meaningful, tend to get little attention from other departments. Similarly, despite the museum's efforts to take a flexible approach to space use in order to accommodate new forms of engagement and community-building, spatial possibilities are often constrained by conservation needs, including climate-controlled spaces and stores, and by consumer activity, be it retail and catering swallowing up space to the detriment of congregation, or ticket-selling blockbusters favoured over experimental and risk-taking exhibitions.

[1] https://www2.sesc.com.br/ (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

In contrast, the organisational model under scrutiny in this PhD tends towards versatility, agility, openness, and contemporaneity, and away from constraint, tradition, and commercial interests. It leans towards an ideal of alternativeness, a determination to operate differently, unexpectedly, holistically, and in a reactive manner rather than by design. Specifically, this model is characterised by: a small staff with generalist and/or multitasking skills; spatial flexibility, with rooms often hosting a number of unconnected activities on different days of the week; an informal and often participant-led approach to programming and delivery; an agenda in flux, responding to needs, circumstances, and events as they occur; and, last but not least, material instability. Put differently, and in a nutshell, the type of organisation this thesis is enquiring into is non-specialist, collaborative, reactive, nimble, and grassroots. Its informal, open-ended, and ever-evolving nature, so crucial to its ethos, can also place a strain on both its human resources and ability to sustain itself financially.

The present research sets out to unpick this model of organisation at the levels of pedagogical, cultural, and social practice and engagement; conceptualisation and use of architectural space; and governance, management, and finance – studying them independently as well as in their entanglements. It further aims to analyse the patterns, potentials, and pitfalls of multi-public educational and cultural organisations, and to weigh up ideals versus reality, intent versus outcome. Through the specific examination of spaces that combine educational, cultural, and community practice, the thesis asks the following research questions:

- How do these spaces understand and situate themselves as alternatives and how do they enact their alternativeness?
- What can a historical analysis contribute to the understanding of educational, cultural, and social practice?

In line with these reflections, this PhD asks two broader questions, which effectively expand the examination of the two principal research questions:

- What makes organisations alternative and what are they alternatives to?
- What does it take to remain alternative or, put differently, what is the lifespan of alternatives?

II- Concepts

The mixed-model organisations that constitute the object of my enquiry have, as hinted above, the particularity of being infused with democratic ideals – in that they are public, aimed at civil society, preoccupied with equality and accessibility, and participatory in form – as well as with utopian ideals of the good life, of collective emancipation, and of togetherness in difference (Muñoz, 2020). Accordingly, these organisations have much in common with what geographer Kurt Iveson describes as a "multi-public model of public space" (Iveson, 2014, p.189). This model is informed by feminist philosophers Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young's critique of philosopher Jürgen Habermas' conception of the liberal public sphere, whereby "good public space is considered as space which is open and accessible to all, with social difference ignored" (ibid, p. 188); a model that Fraser and Young deem exclusionary and bourgeois.

In contrast, multi-public public space is envisioned as facilitating "the interaction of a number of publics" (ibid, p. 189) as well as the emergence of what Fraser calls "subaltern counterpublics", signalling "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990, p. 67). Fraser postulates that the coexistence of multiple publics is a prerequisite for egalitarian societies. In her view, "egalitarian societies […] are classless societies without gender or racial divisions of labor. However, they need not be culturally homogeneous" (ibid: 68). Similarly, Young advocates for a culturally heterogeneous and inclusive model in which difference is embraced, dissension is valued, and "complete mutual understanding" isn't aspired to (Young, 1990, p. 241). Young's proposed model of public space is expressed by a metaphor: that of "an ideal of city life" which operates "as an alternative to both the ideal of community and the liberal individualism it criticizes as asocial" (ibid, p. 237). By city life, Young means the "being together of strangers in openness to group difference" (ibid, p. 256): "Their being together entails some common problems and common interests, but they do not create a community of shared final ends, of mutual identification and reciprocity" (ibid, p. 238).

In this thesis, I use the shorthand 'multi-public educational and cultural spaces' to refer to the organisational model described in the first part of the introduction. **Multi-public** as per the above definitions, that is to say generating interactions and not just simple cohabitation between publics, and expanding discursive space through representation of the margins (Fraser, 1990; Iveson, 2014). As geographer Doreen Massey posits: "Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space" (2005, p. 9). **Educational** for the reason that, if the organisations under scrutiny in this PhD are simultaneously engaged with learning, welfare,

and cultural production, education remains at the core of their plural mission and the main process by which one gets involved with them. Becoming a published writer, a community leader, or an artist; taking part in a campaign for housing rights; attending a lecture series on cooperative economies or anti-racism; or joining a trade union: these are some of the outcomes of one's involvement with Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East, and the direct development of one's self-actualisation, social or political awakening, and choice to self-educate. Lastly, **space**, for the organisations' physical anchorage in their respective locality is key to their identity and narrative. Indeed, all three case studies have developed and adapted their approach and outputs in relation to their neighbourhood's demographics, socioeconomics, and infrastructure. Further to that, their building – in Toynbee Hall's case part-converted, part-purpose-built, and in Centerprise and Open School East's cases barely converted from their original and/or previous uses – has dictated some of the activities, uses, and behaviour that have populated these organisations. As each has developed into a neighbourhood hub, they have in turn affected local social life.

The mutually constitutive nature of spatiality and sociality within these organisations, or what Soja (1980) calls "socio-spatial dialectic", echoes Harvey's conception of space – defined here as "the material forms that processes assume 'on the ground' as buildings, infrastructure, consumption sites and so on" – as "*both* cause and effect in/of social life" (Castree, 2008, p. 183). Multi-public educational and cultural organisations further resonate with Massey's formulation of space as "the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions" (2005: 9); "as the sphere of heterogeneity" (ibid, p. 99); and, last but not least, "as always under construction":

> Precisely because space […] is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far (Massey, 2005, p. 9).

Continuing with the theme of spatial qualities and metaphors, let us turn to institutional space and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's critical analysis thereof. In her study of the misalignment between institutional values and practices, Ahmed considers the institution in its physicality, using the dual metaphor of an organic body and machine: "Both metaphors work to convey an entity that is made up of parts, where the communication between parts is essential to an overall performance" (2012, p. 28). Bearing in mind that Ahmed has dedicated much of the past ten years deconstructing and denouncing structural violence and power abuse in academia (2012; 2019; 2021), the other material components of the institution she turns

towards as metaphors are hard, sharp, and cold. They include: doors – closed to complaints and open for the progression of some, but not others; blinds – spelling opacity and exposure to potential harassment; filing cabinets – standing for institutional closets; and brick walls – against which diversity officers (the subject of her 2012 study) bang their head. Resistant to flows and change, the institutional space discussed by Ahmed is a far cry from Massey's hopeful and poetic, yet purely conceptual, metaphor for space as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far'. Both nonetheless provide perspectives from which to apprehend, study, and critique the idealistic multi-public educational space, and contribute to shaping a version of its future.

III- Intent, Genesis, and Rationale

I began this research in 2016 while directing Open School East, an independent art school and community space, which I had co-founded in London in 2013 and relocated to Margate on the East Kent coast in 2017. Open School East was created by non-specialists – when it comes to the field of education at least – and somewhat hastily and intuitively, rather than as the result of years of work and research in the field. A PhD could afford me the space to undertake retrospective research to map out the genealogy of spaces that Open School East may inscribe itself into, as well as to acknowledge prior achievements in the field, draw inspiration from organisational and programmatic practices that may have proven critical, and, last but not least, learn from past mistakes. Widening my knowledge of organisations which, like Open School East, were not quite school, community centre, or cultural space, but a bit of each, would both fulfil my intellectual curiosity and help develop the organisation's confidence in its own model.

One of the most arduous things about running Open School East in the beginning was that simultaneously to the organisation being made, defined, and redefined, day after day, by staff, participants, and users, rather than following a pre-designed plan, fundraising had to be done in order to secure its existence beyond the initial year of funding granted to the experiment. No substantial fundraising could realistically take place without producing a business plan with a tight mission statement and a Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Needless to say that an organisation's choice to shape itself by collective trial and error doesn't make for a reassuring mission statement, in the same way that porous boundaries between educational, social, and artistic purposes do not make a good USP. I am not suggesting that I undertook a PhD in order to write persuasive funding applications, but certainly the PhD has provided me with a vital reflection space where ideas could brew in the background, at a slower pace than that of running the organisation, yet informed by that very process. Creating a research framework from which to step back, analyse, and in turn feed back into the organisation, and this, with

the theoretical and critical support of academic supervisors, felt crucial not only to monitor and evaluate the organisation's evolution, but also to enrich it with ideas, perspectives, and knowledge that were missing from it. From the outset, one of the aims of this PhD was to create and compile research and analysis that could serve present and future founders of similarly-scaled and minded organisations: a handbook to share trajectories, histories, learnings, leanings, practices, methods, tactics, and approaches; in other words, the handbook I searched for when co-founding Open School East.

When instituting Open School East, each of the three other founders[2] had their own areas of interest and frame of references, which I shall go into in chapter 5. As for mine, two models among several others were on my mind at the time: the university settlement Toynbee Hall (1884-present), which I had researched five years before in the process of holding a symposium there, and the Manchester Art Museum (1886-1953), a multi-public educational and cultural space with tight connections to Toynbee Hall, which is examined in chapter 3. The same month that Open School East opened, I launched an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery (around the corner from Toynbee Hall, which had been responsible for the gallery's establishment in 1901) on the relationship between art and social reform in late Victorian industrial England, with one of the sections dedicated to the Manchester Art Museum. I spent nine months simultaneously researching the exhibition and possible approaches and models for Open School East, and I often felt that they were one and the same project.

In the process of developing what Open School East could be, I met with writer and social historian Ken Worpole whom I knew for his work on East London's working class history and 19th century social movements, to tell him about the school and invite him to come and give a talk when it would open. During that meeting we discussed local antecedents to Open School East, several of which I was not aware of, which led Worpole to suggest that I research East London's 1970s and 1980s community arts movement and its affiliated spaces, and explore Open School East's own position, as a contemporary communal space, within this lineage. Worpole having been involved with Centerprise in the early days, the name rapidly sprung up in our conversation. I did not know it then, but my PhD journey had started. Connections between Open School East, Centerprise, and Toynbee Hall would become clearer and greater as Open School East unfolded, steered by a range of agents and forces including my own curiosity to learn from times gone.

[2] Sarah McCrory, Laurence Taylor, and Sam Thorne.

Other case studies than Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East could have been chosen for this PhD and various options were indeed considered. Open School East was not initially envisaged as a case study, but more as a place to think from and reference, since my position as a founder and director begged questions of partiality and consistency of approach across the three case studies. However, given that the thesis had emerged from my practice, any decision not to subject Open School East to the same scrutiny as the other two case studies felt forced. In chapter 5, I discuss the issue of positionality and how I approached researching and writing about Open School East.

Toynbee Hall, for its part, felt over-researched and yet no substantial study had ever placed it in juxtaposition with organisations outside of the university settlement movement and from different eras. Toynbee Hall's sister organisation Hull House (1889-1965) in Chicago was initially considered, but the decision to stick to a English focus prevented it from forming a case study. In the end, Toynbee Hall was chosen out of a plethora of less trodden university settlements for being more reformist than any of its UK counterparts, for its unparalleled devotion to the subject and practice of education (Kelly, 1992), and for its far-reaching impact on the sociopolitical landscape of the 20th century.

As for Centerprise, it felt in some ways like Open School East's predecessor, having closed a few months before Open School East opened around the corner from it, and with some of its users migrating from one place to the other. Of particular research interest, and what made Centerprise stick out compared to other community arts centres from the period, were its organisational model as a cooperative for some twenty years, its financial model as a community space with a commercial arm – Hackney's first ever bookshop – and, last but not least, its relation to race and politics.

A fourth case study should have been integrated into the PhD, namely Dartington Hall Trust in Devon and, in particular, the Adult Education Centre that fell under its jurisdiction and the Arts and Social Context programme at Dartington College of Arts. The pandemic restricted access to research materials to the point it had to be called off. The missing case study was compensated by an extended second chapter, which touches on Dartington among a number of other examples of multi-public educational and cultural spaces, this time outside of East London and England.

IV- Contributions and Research Framework

This PhD's first research contribution is towards the largely untrodden subject of multi-identity organisations and, more specifically, what I have chosen to call multi-public educational and cultural spaces. The act of naming is significant in that, as intimated earlier and as will be intimated again in future chapters, pluralistic and open-ended organisations are a hard sell not just for funders, but also for users and audiences, both actual and prospective. Giving these spaces a name that crystallises their essence is the first step towards apprehending and appraising them. The present study works to produce a profile of multi-public educational and cultural spaces, study their differential nature, and consider the potential of their model to effect social change beyond their confines. It does so by drawing on literature from the fields of education, geography, architecture, art theory, and critical and utopian studies, as well as on empirical research.

This PhD further contributes new research to the following subject areas: the late 19th century university settlement movement in Britain; the 1970s-1980s UK community arts movement; and the contemporary international independent art school movement. Whereas published research on the university settlement movement is plentiful and updated by recent critical scholarship, literature on community arts is still a long way from providing a broad cross-representation of the movement's forms, manifestations, and reach. The same goes for the contemporary independent art school movement[3], which too is in need of more scholarship.

If this PhD's contribution to the expansion of each of these three individual fields of research is palpable yet modest, the originality and significance of the thesis' contribution to research lies in the act of connecting these very fields for the first time. The relationship between late 20th century community arts practice and contemporary socially-engaged art practice – which encompasses the development of recent alternative art educational platforms – has been investigated in a number of studies (Hope, 2011; Bishop, 2012; Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017); however, neither movement has been examined in relation to the late 19th century university

[3] It is important to note at this stage that the independent art school movement is the only one of the three studied movements that is not UK-specific, but made up of the sum of independent art schools from across the globe. In contrast, while the university settlement movement too was international, it was born in the UK and was a culturally-specific export in the US, Europe, and further afield. This PhD focuses on the university settlement movement in relation to the UK context, all the while touching on its international networks. As for the community arts movement, it too had international equivalents and allies. The present research focuses on the community arts movement as it unfolded and existed in England, and on the local responses and networks created by community arts spaces and, in particular, Centerprise.

settlement movement. Why connect them? Because despite their significant differences, they are bound by a shared commitment to educational access, cultural democracy, and local social change, and by their alignment with socialist politics. The organisations used to represent the three studied movements have strived to provide access to knowledge and culture to those without educational and/or cultural privilege, and all have arisen and/or developed in response to the social, economic, and cultural neglect of a particular geographic area and the disempowerment of particular communities at a particular moment in British politics.

The three case studies are further connected by their locality. All are urban and born in East London where they have remained, with the exception of Open School East which has moved further east to Margate, a coastal town with historic and contemporary connections to East London[4] and a strong urban feel. East London is where I lived for close to twenty years, making me a witness to its changes and raising my awareness of the locality's radical histories and differential spaces. Already in my BA (in Arts Management at London Southbank University), I wrote an assignment on Chats Palace, an iconic community arts centre created in 1976 in Hackney, and still active to this day. The fact that the objects of my interest and study, over the past twenty years or so, all happen to converge in East London is neither down to fetishisation of the locale on my part, nor to chance; in fact, East London has a rich cultural and social history – it has been a place of cosmopolitanism, literacy, popular culture, radical activism, and examination and study, in large part triggered by the poverty and socioeconomic inequalities that have characterised this part of London (Booth, 1886-1903; Gregory and Williams, 2000; White, 2003; Tames, 2004; Wright, 2009). While Toynbee Hall was born in response to the lack of educational, social, and cultural infrastructure in Whitechapel, Centerprise emerged to create Hackney's first bookshop. As I shall critically explore in chapter 5, Open School East was created thanks to the Barbican Centre, which wanted to root itself further east and make its multifarious cultural activities accessible to East Enders.

Among other East London-specific events and ventures that resonate with the movements and organisations studied in this thesis, one could cite the Matchgirls' strike of 1888 in Bow opposing dire working conditions and supported by socialist, theosophist, and women's rights activist Annie Besant; the establishment of the Workers' Educational Association in 1903; the founding in 1914 of the East London Federation of the Suffragettes by socialist, activist, and artist Sylvia Pankhurst; Kingsley Hall, home from 1965 to 1970 to R. D. Laing's anti-psychiatry

[4] Margate was one of East Londoners' favoured holiday destinations between the 1860s and the 1970s, and over the past ten years it has become a favoured relocation spot for priced-out East Londoners.

experiments and famed patient Mary Barnes; and the short-lived Anti-University (1968), home at one point to 300 students and whose socially and politically useful learning was delivered by figures including cultural theorist Stuart Hall, Marxist historian C. L. R. James, feminist psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell, beat poet Allen Ginsberg, and again R. D. Laing.

To conclude, each of the three case studies constitutes both an autonomous research piece and an element serving a comparative study across 140 years. Examining Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East in parallel allows one to start identifying patterns that are helpful to the development of hypotheses on the prerequisites of alternative spaces, their desirability, their flaws, and how one may circumvent these. Together, the case studies allow one to begin answering the questions of this PhD and delineating a model for a functional, multi-public educational and cultural space for the present and the near future.

V- Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised around five main chapters framed by the introduction (chapter 1) and conclusion (chapter 7). Chapter 2 concerns itself with: the notions of the alternative and the utopian with which multi-public educational and cultural spaces are imbued; past and present theoretical and practical approaches to emancipatory and experience-based pedagogy applied to both children and adult education; and the architectural forms assumed by such pedagogy and by the multi-public educational and cultural spaces which embed it. Chapter 2 functions as an illustrative literature review, whereby literature from the fields of critical pedagogy, utopian studies, school architecture, and art education is reviewed and exemplified by organisations and initiatives embodying the theories, principles, and forms highlighted in the review. Being located both in England and in geographies that are physically and/or culturally close – in particular but not limited to France, where some of my research and work are situated – the chosen examples provide an international context to the case studies, helping draw out cross-geographic and cross-historical connections and networks.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are each dedicated to a case study, respectively Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East. The three chapters share a core structure, with each study describing and analysing the following elements: the socioeconomic climate in response to which they have emerged; their signature programmes; how architectural space may have served their vision; and their governance, management, and financial model. Other components and narratives intrinsic to the individual case studies complement the core analysis. The temporal focus of this trinal study is on the organisations' infancy and early

years, considered the most hopeful and radical, when the organisations were still finding their feet, experimenting with formats and practices, and eluding predictability.

Chapter 6 is a discussion that first aims to summarise and compare how each of the three studied organisations enacted their alternativeness through their programmes, governance, and spatiality. The discussion continues with exploring the hidden costs of differential organisations, with the view to better apprehend the changes that may be necessary for institutions to continue enacting their intended alternativeness with the passing of time and ensuing staffing and structural changes – both internal and external. Chapter 6 concludes by examining three different institutional visions and approaches, from varied epochs, which work to divert the common fate of alternatives from morphing into what they initially stood against.

VI- Research Method

I have chosen not to have a separate method section in the thesis, but to include instead, in each of the three case study chapters, a substantial section to account for the methods used to research and analyse them; from the range of materials accessed, to the interview process, through to the question of my positionality and close affiliation with one of the case studies. For that reason, the present part is kept deliberately minimal.

The thesis uses data drawn from archives (see table below), interviews as well as personal experience. Archives have been used to access primary source material (i.e. minutes, drafts of reports, newsletters, correspondence, architectural plans, photographs, visitors' books, publications and pamphlets) relative to the more historical case studies, namely Toynbee Hall and Centerprise. Toynbee Hall is thoroughly documented and has benefited from a wealth of attention from researchers over the decades and centuries even. A substantial fonds is deposited at the London Metropolitan Archives and a smaller fonds is at the Bishopsgate Institute in Liverpool Street, London. The archives of Centerprise are also available from the Bishopsgate Institute thanks to the independent research project 'A Hackney Autobiography'[5] (started in 2014 and completed months after the start of this PhD), which worked to constitute an archive and to carry out an oral history project with former workers and users of Centerprise, leading to the publication *The Lime Green Mystery: an Oral History of the Centerprise Co-operative* (2017). A smaller fonds deposited at Hackney Archives consists of books and pamphlets either published or stocked by Centerprise.

[5] https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/ (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

Archival research table

Topic	Archive	Available content	Browsed content	Visits
Toynbee Hall	London Metropolitan Archives, London EC1R	Toynbee Hall collection: 28 boxes including correspondence; annual and financial reports; minutes of committees meetings; educational syllabuses and evening courses; papers of clubs and societies; visitors' books; press cuttings; pamphlets; plans; photographs and slides.	All boxes, limiting my research to the 1884-1902 period (approximately ¼ of the content of each box)	18/04/19 19/04/19 14/01/20
Toynbee Hall	Bishopsgate Institute, London EC2M	36 items: books written about and from Toynbee Hall; annual reports; newsletters; manuscripts of lectures and public addresses	All available content	08/05/19
Centerprise	Bishopsgate Institute, London EC2M	Centerprise Papers: 13 boxes, 7 oversized posters/pictures, 21 digital folders; as well as 15 items: books and pamphlets published by Centerprise	All available content	17/06/19 18/06/19
Centerprise	Hackney Archives, London E8	96 items: books and pamphlets published by or stocked by Centerprise	A selection of 15 books and pamphlets published by Centerprise	25/06/19 26/06/19

Interviews (see table below) related to the case studies were mostly carried out in relation to Centerprise, with the exception of Toynbee Hall's Chief executive Jim Minton, who was leading on Toynbee Hall's latest capital project and from whom I was interested in finding out how this new phase for Toynbee Hall may or may not relate to the Hall's original mission. As a director, what was his perception of the organisation's trajectory and cycles? When it comes to Centerprise, Ken Worpole, who had first introduced me to the organisation, was the first to be interviewed, followed by Rosa Schling, who had initiated 'A Hackney Autobiography' and whom I had invited to take part in a roundtable discussion at Open School East back in 2013, as she was just starting to develop the project. I also chose to interview Anthony Kendall, one of Centerprise's co-founders, after listening to his interview for Schling's oral history project. His interest in structures and governance, and his engagement in local politics later on in life, would allow me to enquire about aspects that were not covered by 'A Hackney Autobiography'. Further to that, I interviewed Steven Manning, who was an early user of Centerprise and whom I had met and worked with on a great number of occasions at Open School East, for projects and activities he participated in as a local resident. In the process of writing the second chapter, I conducted two further interviews with members of staff from École Domaine du Possible, in the vicinity of Arles, France, namely Jean Rakovitch, director of pedagogy, and Alicia Vaisse, art teacher. I asked them to describe the pedagogical approaches of the school and to give examples of their applications. One final interview was conducted as I was drafting the discussion chapter of this thesis. This was a retrospective interview, over a year after my leaving Open School East, with the former chair of the board, Justin O'Shaughnessy, whose vision for a differential institution felt both important to record and potent when it came to the development of more concrete proposals to elude the fate of alternatives.

Interview table

Name	**Role**	**Date**	**Place**	**Duration**
Jim Minton	Chief executive, Toynbee Hall	29/03/2019	Phone	25 min
Ken Worpole	Former Centerprise worker	03/09/2019	His house, Hackney, London	75 min
Rosa Schling	Centerprise researcher	30/09/2019	Phone	37 min

Anthony Kendall	Centerprise co-founder	07/01/2020	Cafe in Victoria Station, London	66 min
Steven Manning	Former Centerprise user	07/01/2020	Cafe in Hackney, London	52 min
Jean Rakovitch	Director of pedagogy, École Domaine du possible	21/05/2021	Zoom	50 min
Alicia Vaisse	Art teacher, École Domaine du possible	21/05/2021	Zoom	40 min
Justin O'Shaughnessy	Open School East trustee and former chair	20/04/2022	Phone	40 min

As for Open School East, as a co-founder and director until early 2021, I had access to the large majority of the organisation's live documents, archives, and memories. I discuss in more detail in chapter 5 the mechanisms through which my experiences were recounted and interpreted, but in a nutshell, this was done at two different stages: in the thick of it, as a director of the organisation, and a year after I left my position, when I resumed writing on it, having fully separated myself from the organisation.

In broad terms, the present research takes a hermeneutical approach, focusing on the study and interpretation of everyday lived experiences (van Manen, 1990) and "attaching significance to what [is] found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings" (Patton cited in Dangal and Joshi, 2020, p. 3). Through an exploration of social relations; spatial uses, habits, and atmospheres; and meanings and changes generated by pedagogical, cultural, and social programmes, the three case study chapters attempt to interpret how these various behaviours and factors create the conditions for the existence of multi-public educational and cultural spaces.

VII- Summary

'Alternative to what? Alternative how?: A Study of Multi-Public Educational and Cultural Spaces in England since the Late Nineteenth Century' is a thesis that has taken six years to develop and complete. It has emerged from my practice as a curator, co-founder of Open

School East, and educator, and over the course of my studies, the research and practice have continually fed off and informed each other. Meanwhile, over those same six years, social, (geo)political, economic, and public health factors have applied heavy pressure on and gradually transformed, for the worse, the education and cultural sectors in this country. The words of Mark Fisher (2009) resonate strongly here: “Is there no alternative?”

This is a study of alternatives and more specifically of democratic educational and cultural organisational models that have strived to stay clear from the patterns, templates, and standards that are sold as the norm, and yet which fuel the oppressive and unequal system that rules over society. One might have wanted to see big, dramatic, radical, long-term changes, but one might have to hang on to those small, sporadic, time-limited, yet potent alternatives which, in some instances, operate in isolation and in others see their agency and collective influence increased through connection and alliance with other urgency-driven, small-scale alternatives from distinct sectors – be they social, economic, related to environmental and food justice, to mental health, or to race and gender equality, among others. Already in 1977, psychoanalyst and political theorist Félix Guattari advocated for a “molecular revolution”, following his and philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s work on rhizomatic systems as a metaphor for multiplicity and connectivity, as thinking tools to begin to oppose the dualistic and vertical chains of power and influence that make up society (Guattari, 1977). This thesis asks: what can multi-public educational and cultural spaces learn from rhizomes, slowness, and thirdness? And what models to elude the fate of alternatives morphing into what they originally stood firmly against?

CHAPTER 2:
EDUCATION, CULTURAL PRACTICE, COMMUNITY, SPACE

I- Framework

This thesis examines models of organisations from the past 140 years in the UK, which have combined the functions of school, community space, and cultural centre: from university settlements to village colleges, through to arts centres and art schools. Specifically, the multi-function and multi-public organisations under scrutiny in this PhD have been preoccupied with putting forward progressive and intertwined visions for the production and provision of education, social encounters, and culture. They have practised critical and/or emancipatory forms of pedagogy and culture for children, young people, and adults alike, taken an active role in the locale, and advocated for democracy and society's betterment. Their physical shell, indoor layout, and/or outdoor space have formed an important part of their identity and narrative, and have been placed at the service of their vision. Accordingly, the four core themes underpinning this PhD are education, cultural practice, community, and space; in this chapter, I explore their entanglement.

The present chapter functions as an illustrative literature review. Literature from the fields of critical pedagogy, utopian studies, school architecture, land-based education, and art education is reviewed and exemplified by a set of short case studies, which include long-standing, defunct, and recently established educational initiatives, organisations, programmes, and spaces with varying degrees of connection to community, land, art, and cultural politics. Being located not only in England, but also in the US, Canada, and France, they provide an international context to the three main case studies – Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East – and help to highlight webs of connections across both space and time. The schools, programmes, and educational initiatives used as examples here and bringing together, without hierarchy but nonetheless some distinction, children and adult education, have been chosen for discussion for their innovative and experimental pedagogical methods, and for their militant and persistent commitment to making education fairer, more fulfilling, more cooperative, and more agentive than the norm. Although very few of them use the term 'alternative' to describe themselves, the notion of alternative is central to their ethos in so far as they were created in response to, or in reaction against, a set of conditions, factors, policies, processes, or practices in need of change. If it does not make them oppositional for all that, it makes them differential at the very least, and agile sites of resistance, as anthropologists Esther Fihl and Jens Dahl suggest:

> alternative spaces are 'in-between' spaces rather than oppositional structures, and as such both 'inside' and 'outside' its constitutive elements. The in-between position potentially gives the 'members' of the alternative spaces the possibility of controlling their own agenda without engaging in open conflict with the existing dominant structures. [...] As alternative spaces are found to be nurtured by the very power structures that they potentially react against, however [...] [they] are not sites for revolution or rebellion as such; they are, rather, sites of volatile resistance linked to other forms of power that lies in the ability to manoeuvre just outside of the dominant institutions or systems (2013, pp. 2-3).

Writing about alternative education and its tendency to be "pitched as a binarised 'other'" to mainstream education (Kraftl, 2013, p. 5), geographer Peter Kraftl similarly calls for alternative learning spaces and approaches to be both "connected and disconnected from the 'mainstream'" (ibid, p. 3). In their book *Alternative Education for the 21st Century* (2009), educationalists Philip Woods and Glenys J. Woods identify three possible orientations for alternative forms of education, namely "separation, engagement, and activist" (2009, p. 228). The first one entails distance from non-alternative forms of education which, the authors suggest, doesn't preclude mutual influence between educational systems, but nonetheless stresses the creation and maintenance of an autonomous educational environment. The second one indicates an engagement between systems through "pragmatic relationships" (ibid, p. 229); here the authors take the example of a Steiner/Waldorf school entering the publicly-funded sector. Lastly, the third one is about "a wider social aim" (ibid), which is the infiltration of alternative pedagogical approaches, visions, and practices in mainstream education. Woods and Woods illustrate this final activist orientation with the recognition and subsequent use of Indigenous knowledge in Euro- or Western-centric schooling.

The opening up of new alternatives, whether oppositional, resistant, or in-between, and of new avenues for critique, change, democracy, and citizenship development, is what this chapter is concerned with. The chapter starts with an exploration of the attributes and manifestations of critical pedagogy in the last century and a quarter, across a range of, largely Western, geographic contexts. It continues with an inquiry into the utopian and society's desire for its materialisation and replication, in particular in relation to the spatialisation and architecture of education and culture. It then ends with two sites of cultural production – the arts centre and the art school – focusing on their modelling, early aspirations, mutual influence, and connectivity. Following a thematic rather than a chronological logic, the chapter allows for temporal and geographic leaps to occur in order to emphasise connects and disconnects between times and places.

II- Critical Pedagogy

This section examines the subjects of education and pedagogy in their relation to democracy, citizenship, agency, and change, and in their parting with dominant practices and models. If education signifies the process by which knowledge, skills, and values are transmitted and acquired, pedagogy is the theory and practice of teaching and learning. Educationalists Christine Hall and Pat Thomson define pedagogy as:

> the totality of a learning experience: the ways in which relationships are developed and conversations are held; the practice used to sequence, pace and scaffold knowledge and skills; the use of time/space; the monitoring and formative and summative assessment of learning; the ethos of the classroom and school; and the ways in which the everyday lives of students are recognised, valued and used to connect them to what counts in schooling (Thomson and Hall, 2019, p. 75).

The type of education and pedagogy I am to examine here is one that is deemed progressive, critical, radical, agentive, and transformative; one that is conceived as “a social process”, “a process of living” (Dewey, 2015, p. 77), “an atmosphere [...] not an assemblage of piecemeal acquisitions and accomplishments, but the formation [...] of an outlook and an attitude” (Livingstone, 1941, p. 51). If special emphasis is placed on critical pedagogy in this text, pedagogical approaches pre-dating the critical pedagogy movement are also woven into the narrative, not in an attempt to demonstrate a lineage, but rather to draw out commonalities and qualities that will accompany the reader throughout the thesis. Not all of the case studies presented in this research have practised critical pedagogy in the Freirian sense of the term I am about to explore. However, all have contributed to taking a critical view of the education system contemporary to their time, and all have embedded their pedagogy in a broader social, political, and economic context.

1. Critical Pedagogy: Philosophy and Attributes

Critical pedagogy functions on a dual level: on the one hand, it produces a critique of the operation of power in and through education and, on the other hand, it generates and tests proposals for alternatives to this very operation. Accordingly, it is both reflexive and reactive. Core to its mission is the deconstruction of power and dominant knowledge – from the conditions of their acquisition to their modes of transmission – with the view to reshaping education as a transformative apparatus; one that is ultimately concerned with equality and

justice. The production and maintenance of critical epistemologies and of tools for self-empowerment and agency further constitute some of the principal ends of critical pedagogy.

Educationalist Paulo Freire's thinking is fundamental to the critical pedagogy movement, which emerged with the publication of his influential 1970 book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Some of the key principles in Freire's educational philosophy are 'praxis' – the combination of "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 52) – and 'conscientization' – "the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence" (ibid, p. 109); or, simply put, consciousness-raising. These principles, among others, are used to oppose what Freire calls the 'banking concept of education': the process of hindering critical and creative thinking by subjecting the allegedly ignorant student to the rule and knowledge of the teacher in an exercise in social control, which mirrors society's power relations. In *On Critical Pedagogy*, theorist of critical pedagogy and friend of Freire, Henry Giroux, provides the following summary of Freire's pedagogical stance:

> far from being a mere method or an *a priori* technique to be imposed on all students, pedagogy is a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy (2000, p. 178).

According to Giroux, and in line with Freire's thinking, critical pedagogy simultaneously demands and generates a culture of questioning – "who has control over the conditions of learning" (Giroux, 2000, p. 179), what are the power relations at play, and can one practice democracy in the classroom (Biesta, 2016a)?; a culture of analysis, "interrogat[ing] texts, institutions, social relations, and ideologies as part of the script of official power" (Giroux, 2000, p. 2); and, a culture of resistance and agency in order to "curb the excesses of dominant power, revitalize a sense of public commitment, and expand democratic relations" (ibid, p. 88). Self-reflectivity, social responsibility, and critical citizenship are both the means and ends of critical pedagogy which, in conceiving of literacy as a mode of intervention, strives to connect "teaching to the promise of self- and social change" (ibid, p. 2), and "knowledge to power and agency" (ibid, p. 175).

In critical pedagogy, the school is varyingly envisioned as a public space, a "public responsibility" (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p. 53), a democratic community (hooks, 1994), a "polis, a society in embryo" (Thurn, 2011, p. 31), a place of encounter. In critical pedagogy,

the teacher facilitates the autonomy, freedom, and initiative of the learner without attempting to form habits or force methods. “[T]o teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge”, Freire reminds us (2001, p. 9). Accordingly, in critical pedagogy the learner transforms, challenges, and produces rather than consumes knowledge, both individually and in cooperation with others. Placing value on experience, progressive educationalists have demonstrated that connecting what is being taught to one’s reality, surroundings, identity, culture, or social relations makes learning more meaningful and potent (Dewey, 1938, 2015; Freire, 2001; Fielding and Moss, 2011; Illich, 2013; Biesta, 2016a; Giroux, 2020). For this reason, learning cannot be pre-packaged or entirely pre-planned; instead, knowledge is acquired and drawn upon unintentionally, in unexpected places, moments, and situations, outside the stated curriculum (Illich, 2013), outdoors (Earl and Thomson, 2020) as well as in communities and neighbourhoods located outside the institution (Wrigley et al., 2011). Making the experiences of marginalised students central and significant (hooks, 1994; Hogg and Volman, 2020), recognising Indigenous knowledges (Haig-Brown and Hodson, 2009; Battiste, 2017) and practising a pedagogy that is “not only culturally responsive [...] but also culturally sustaining” (Hogg and Volman, 2020, p. 864), are some of the other means by which to make the learning experience vibrant, inclusive, and plural, and, last but not least, to start decolonising education (Battiste, 2017).

Learning as a process of de-construction, co-construction, deliberation, and reciprocal listening (Knowles, 2005; Illich, 2013; Battiste, 2017; Giroux, 2020), and learning as a risk, in openness to unknown outcomes (Fielding and Moss, 2011; Thomson and Hall, 2019), further constitute core values of critical pedagogy. Crucially, critical pedagogy places participatory democracy at its centre: according to educationalists Michael Fielding and Peter Moss ’vision for a school of radical education, democracy should be “both the end and the means, the purpose and the practice, of education” (2011, p. 73). The omnipresence of neoliberal practices in pedagogy however challenges and threatens the values – democratic and otherwise – that define critical pedagogy.

> As a pedagogical practice, neoliberal pedagogy [...] pervades every aspect of the wider culture, stifling critical thought, reducing citizenship to the act of consuming [...] and removing the discourse of democracy from any vestige of pedagogy both in and outside of schooling (Giroux, 2020, p. 7).

Neoliberal or corporate pedagogy is synonymous with standardisation, datafication, and conformity principles, which perpetuate dominant modes of social, political, and cultural reproduction (Biesta, 2016b; Giroux, 2020). A striking example of this was the 2020 Ofqual

controversy in the UK, which saw the algorithmic marking of GCSEs and A-Levels upgrading the results of pupils in private schools and downgrading those of state school students. Against this reality and the commodification of education, educationalists Lyn Tett and Mary Hamilton argue that resistance to neoliberalism in education must both "involve *action* (physical, material or symbolic) and be *oppositional*, in that actors challenge or subvert dominant discourses and practices in some way" (2019, p. 3).

2. A Culture of Opposition

By its very nature, critical pedagogy is positioned against values, models, and practices that are deemed counter-democratic, compromised, and/or outmoded; accordingly, rhetorics of opposition abound. "'Guidance and control' are the catchwords of one school; 'freedom and initiative' of the other", writes philosopher John Dewey in *The Child and the Curriculum* (2015, p. 14). Dewey's creed, which both informed and was informed by the Laboratory School – a primary school he set up within the University of Chicago in 1896 – was in the act of learning through experience, which he contrasted with learning from teachers and texts (Dewey, 1938). Dewey asks: "How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgement and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited?" (1938, p. 26).

When philosopher Alfred North Whitehead asserts that "[e]xcept at rare intervals of intellectual ferment, education in the past has been radically infected with inert ideas" (1955, p. 2) – that is ideas that are untested and disconnected from experience; when Freire points out the "mechanical memorization or the rhythmic repetition of phrases and ideas at the expense of creative challenge" (2001, p. 13); or when Thomson and Hall qualify as "dull" the pedagogies that are "situated in predictability and universality", and in the prioritisation of "coverage" over "understanding" (2019, pp. 75-76); over a period of 125 years, many have called for an end to rote and recitation and have converged in favour of an education with real-life applications involving problem-posing and solving. Progressive and critical educationalists have further concurred in their opinion that the vision and functionings of the learning society are inadequate, unchallenged, and failing, according to their own standards. Social critic Ivan Illich posits that the schooled society "confuse[s] teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new" (2013, p. 8). Some forty years earlier, Dewey lamented the fact that knowledge was not only handed down from the past, but also by textbooks and teachers, who impose "adult standards, subject-matter, and methods", which are "foreign to the existing capacities of the young" (1938, p. 18). On the subject of textbooks, educationalist Célestin Freinet would write in 1925:

> [They] are a means of dulling the mind. They serve official programmes, sometimes contemptibly. But rarely are they meant for children. [...] most of the time, school books prepare children to be slaves to adults and, more specifically, to the [social] class that [...] controls education (cited in E. Freinet, 1981, p. 35)[6].

Critical educators have further deplored the fact that schools exist to prepare young people "for future responsibilities and for success in life" (Dewey, 1938, p. 18; Biesta, 2016a; Giroux, 2020). Dewey argued instead for schools to be conduits "to prepare the young for the future social life" (Mayhew and Edwards, 2017, p. 5). As teacher and theorist Nick Peim notes, today education insists more than ever on future use value in the sense of:

> maximizing competencies and efficiencies. Hence the emphasis at all levels in education on the cultivation of "transferable skills" where knowledge itself is reduced to being a vehicle for more "useful" purposes. Here, the value of activity is in its potential, its capacity to be rendered useful in the future (Peim, 2016, p. 154).

Giroux opposes critical pedagogy to dominant forms of pedagogy that "simply reinvent the future in the interest of a present in which ethical principles are scorned and the essence of democracy is reduced to the imperatives of the bottom line" (2020, p. 88). Giroux supports not the cultivation of transferable skills, but the capacity for judgement to challenge common-sense assumptions and develop critical citizenry.

3. Experience and Education

Acquiring information from a decontextualized body of knowledge has long been viewed as numbing and ineffective by progressive educationalists who, instead, have argued for the necessity to relate learning to the student's experiences. In *Deschooling Society*, Illich recounts an anecdote shared by Freire, whereby he discovered that the process of learning to read as adults could be accelerated if the words being taught related to a tangible issue or struggle, and literacy could lead the learners to take action. Illich confirms it is also his experience when noting:

[6] My translation.

> I have frequently witnessed how discussants grow in social awareness and how they are impelled to take political action as fast as they learn to read. They seem to take reality into their hands as they write it down (2013, p. 27)

Before the critical pedagogy movement, educationalists already promoted the vision that the theoretical knowledge of a subject would be best instilled through the experiencing and practicing of that very subject. In *The Future of Education* (1941), a pamphlet commissioned by the Workers' Educational Association, university administrator Richard Livingstone speaks of young people's wasted years learning under the compulsion of a teacher or examination, and failing to retain information that bears no relation to either their situation or the world around them. As part of a national campaign for education to be made compulsory beyond the age of 14, the author advocates for education to be equally split between school and practical occupation.

> Such a contact with the practical world would both sharpen the appreciation of value and purpose of education, and, especially in the humanistic subjects, make their real meaning far more intelligible. Theory would be illuminated by practice, and practice by theory. At present, the two are nearly always divorced (1941, pp. 38-39).

a- The Laboratory School

As I have touched on earlier, Dewey supported the idea that learning should be attained through direct experience rather than through teacher mediation. Key to his philosophy was the idea that experiences be achieved through an equal share of intellectual and manual skills. Between 1896 and 1903, Dewey put his theories to test at the Laboratory School. Operating under the auspices of the University of Chicago, in the Hyde Park neighbourhood on Chicago's south side, the initially named University Primary School was founded to function as a live research and experimentation project as part of the Department of Pedagogy, also founded by Dewey. At the Laboratory School, learning would be connected to experience gained by doing, whether this be through acts of cooking, weaving, gardening, and other hands-on activities, which led the students to amass "information of practical and scientific importance in botany, zoology, chemistry, physics, and other sciences, but (what is more significant) in their becoming versed in methods of experimental inquiry and proof" (Dewey cited in Tanner, 1997, p. 83).

Interviewed for a book on the Laboratory School published thirty-three years after his resignation, Dewey delves into the specifics of the school's pedagogical approach, which famously integrated science, culture, and craft, and conceived of them "in their social significance", "as methods of living and learning, not as distinct studies" (Dewey, 2012, p. 10).

> Cooking, for example, is a natural avenue of approach to simple but fundamental chemical facts and principles and to a study of the plants as articles of food. Similarly, a study of the materials and processes involved is carried on in connection with sewing, and includes a study of the history of invention, of geography (localities of production and manufacturing, with lines of distribution), and of the growth and cultivation of plants, like cotton and flax which furnish the raw material. Recourse to measurement is had in these subjects (cited in Mayhew, and Edwards, 2017, pp. 27-28).

Drawing, maths, carpentry, and chemistry were some of the other skills utilised and developed for the creation of a sand-table farm that was made to scale, using the school's land as a site for an imaginary complex composed of a barn, a dairy, a chicken coop, and fenced patches of land where corn and wheat would be grown. Problem solving and solution finding took place at different steps of the process, with the pupils spending two full weeks elaborating and improving their model, learning about the art of concentration facilitated by precise, manual activity as well as about cooperative working and the division of labour. At the end of the process, freshly harvested wheat was acquired and transformed by the pupils into flour to then be used to bake a cake. This prime example of Deweyan pedagogy is what the Laboratory School's biographer Laurel Tanner calls learning by "re-enacting the drama of human development" (Tanner, 1997, p. 2). Dewey elaborates:

> When schools are equipped with laboratories, shops and gardens, where dramatizations, plays, and games are freely used, opportunities exist for reproducing situations of life, and for acquiring and applying information and ideas in carrying forward of progressive experiences (2020, pp. 185-6).

The Laboratory School was a unique model in that it was created to test ideas and methods and contribute new research to the academic field of pedagogy. In turn, it was able to benefit from the university's knowledge and facilities (i.e. its land, buildings, and gymnasium). The School's faculty regularly relied on university lecturers to come and explain to the children, for instance, the origin of the solar system and ecological concepts and practices, as well as to cooperate on more practical scientific projects, notably around planting and farming (Tanner,

1997). The school was also noteworthy when it came to its governance and administration. The Laboratory School was conceived as a cooperative venture of not only teachers and scholars, but also parents, making them researchers in a collective experiment. Teachers were given free rein to experiment and improvise, so long as they related their teaching to the general principles and spirit of the school and engaged in weekly reporting to share, in minute details, their activities, methods, and reasons for using these methods, in order "to provide data for the problems studied and discussed at the weekly informal teachers' conference and in University classes and seminars" (Tanner, 1997, p. 65). Meanwhile, parents took an active role in supporting the efforts and research of the school; they ran their own Parents' Association whose double mission was to "promote in general the interests of elementary education" and "to advance the Laboratory School's work" (ibid, pp. 115-16). If the teachers were not members of the Association, they were invited to each meeting and encouraged to partake in the discussions. In addition, some of the parents would financially back the school and fundraise for it, in order to make up for the deficit caused by fees kept low to ensure access (Mayhew and Edwards, 2017) as well as by what would be retrospectively considered poor management (Knoll, 2014).

b- Bar-sur-Loup

Like the Laboratory School, the much more modest, but no less pedagogically ambitious boys' school of Bar-sur-Loup – a working class village in the south east of France, where Freinet began his career in 1920 – would be debt-ridden. When starting his work there, Freinet had not yet encountered Dewey's work, but was developing similar approaches. Freinet initially sought inspiration for his classes in the village and its surroundings, taking his pupils to a weaver, a potter, a blacksmith, a baker, a parfumier, a mechanic, etc. Freinet's collaborator and wife Élise Freinet recalls that the pupils were so enthralled with weaving following their visit, that the group built a makeshift loom in the classroom. These lessons in handicraft and in the anthropology of labour were further opportunities to practice grammar, through writing reports of the visits, and creative writing, through composing poems after each visit (E. Freinet, 1981).

Freinet took these experiences of observation of, and familiarisation with, local life, economy, and environment a step further when undertaking to bring a printing press into the classroom. The press became not only Freinet's main tool to develop and practice what he called a proletarian pedagogy, but also the centrepiece of a pedagogical movement which, in the space of a few years, would see hundreds of schools in France, Belgium, Germany, and

further afield, connected to one another by their common use of the technology. Pupils corresponded daily with a pen pal from another school, learning about their ways of life and sharing their own, while training to master the art of typesetting and printing. From 1932, they started putting out the didactic pamphlets *Bibliothèque de Travail*; this entailed pupils from one or several classes choosing, researching, and experiencing their object of study, before writing about them from multiple vantage points. The themes covered between 1932 and 1975 included life on mountain pastures (no. 4), cork (no. 12), the history of urbanism (no. 19), bees (no. 26), the history of the automobile (no. 36), Cantal cheese (no. 136), volcanoes (no. 153), cooperative dairies (no. 240), and non-flowering plants (no. 254)[7]. Freinet not only gave pupils agency to write and collate their own school books, but also the tools to transform their lived experiences into shareable knowledge for future generations of learners, all the while developing manual skills in the process of understanding their topic (E. Freinet, 1974, 1981; Vergnioux, 2005). Meanwhile, the network of progressive teachers used the press to communicate about the activities of the Coopérative de l'enseignement laïque (Cooperative of Secular Education), which they were a part of; to share tips and techniques on how to improve their modest set up; and to publish *La Gerbe*, a monthly journal on proletarian pedagogy, which pupils would contribute to.

4. Nature-based Education

In both Dewey and Freinet's schools, observing and collaborating with nature was a central activity. The coming together of education and agriculture – philosopher and social reformer Rudolf Steiner defined the latter as including "plant life, animal husbandry, forestry, gardening, and so on" (1993, p. 2) – was not unusual in the early part of the 20th century. While educator Maria Montessori started using gardening as a tool for child development at the first Casa dei Bambini in Rome in 1906, Steiner, in a lecture he wrote about the education of children in 1907, dedicated several pages to comparing the growth of plants with those of human beings (Steiner, 2016). Five years after founding his first school (in 1919, in Stuttgart), Steiner would develop the premise of biodynamic agriculture – sustainable, organic farming, complemented by spiritual and mystical perspectives.

[7] The *Bibliothèque de Travail* pamphlets continue to be published to this day. Only the period from 1932 and 1975 is publicly documented: https://www.icem-pedagogie-freinet.org/archives/bt (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

a- Dartington Hall Trust

Meanwhile, in rural Devon, the philanthropists Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst were preoccupied with effectively bringing together education, agriculture, and horticulture through the founding, in 1925, of Dartington Hall Trust, an experiment in progressive arts, education, and rural reconstruction. An agronomist by training, Leonard Elmhirst had previously worked with and learnt from the poet, social reformer, and 1913 Nobel Laureate for Literature Rabindranath Tagore to set up, in 1921, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction in Sriniketan, in the Indian state of West Bengal (Young, 1982). Educational at heart, the Institute was a by-product of a school that Tagore had founded in neighbouring Shantiniketan twenty years earlier and later transformed into a university.

It was on the model of the Institute that Dartington Hall was based, as well as on Deweyan ideas. Dorothy Payne Whitney (soon to become Elmhirst), an American, had attended Dewey's lectures in New York in 1921, and the Englishman W. B. Curry, the principal who was appointed to run Dartington Hall School, the trust's first major endeavour, had been a student of Dewey. The boarding and co-educational school launched in 1926 with four main principles: (1) The curriculum should flow from the children's own interests; (2) Learning by doing; (3) Adults should be friends, not authority figures; and (4) The school as a self-governing commonwealth (Young, 1982). Dartington's 1,200-acre estate was the classroom and the trust's twelve departments – which included Building, Garden, Forestry, Orchard, Farm, Accounting, and Workshop – were sites of placements for the pupils to work on real-life projects under the guidance of the departments' staff. These included keeping bees, building shelters and garden huts for crop storage, installing ventilation in the quarters for the hens, researching markets to sell their feathers and manure, or undertaking repair work in the farm or garden.

b- School Gardening

If these experiments were bold, they were not entirely new. A century earlier, the pedagogues Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel had resorted to gardening, among other activities, to pioneer ideas around child-centred education, self-activity, and self-expression, which further placed physical exercise and manual activity on the same plane as intellectual labour. While Pestalozzi designed gardens for the schools he created – "individual plots as well as a communal plot materialised his philosophy of interconnectedness, unity and individuality" (Earl and Thomson, 2020, p. 15) – Froebel made a point in complementing

Pestalozzi's focus on technicity with spiritual, moral, and aesthetic perspectives (ibid). "Why garden in school?", ask writer Lexi Earl and educationalist Pat Thomson in their book whose title bears the same question. Learning about nature and environmental science first hand; developing food and nutrition literacy; extending environmental privilege to urban children with the view to enhance their physical and mental wellbeing; and meeting the food needs of some of the children and their families in schools operating in areas of high deprivation, are some of the reasons as to why schools create or maintain gardens (Bang, 2016; Earl and Thompson, 2020).

Learning to care for nature is another important reason, which further has the advantage of developing skills such as attention, observation, and patience. Earl and Thomson see the garden as a potential site "for mediating the relationship between children, culture and nature, for meditation on the Anthropocene and its challenges, for considering alternatives beyond techno-driven dystopias and utopias" (Earl and Thomson, 2020, p. 125). If this mediation is, as we shall see, particularly significant in educational environments that engage with reconnection – whether cultural, social, or elemental – establishing and maintaining a garden in a school, while effectively integrating it into its curriculum, comes with a great many challenges that include, but are not limited to, "funding, space, seasons, maintenance, enthusiasm and voluntary labour" (ibid, p. 116).

c- Al Kennedy Alternative High School

The late Al Kennedy Alternative High School in Cottage Grove, Oregon, had all the conditions in place to practice environmental education, but it faced significant challenges when it came to student behaviour and attainment[8]. The way the school sought to overcome these challenges was through moving beyond the garden walls, into the wider community. In 2007, a special education teacher and environmental activist, Tom Horn, was brought in as principal to reform the school which, beyond failing, was a hotbed of drug use and was perceived negatively by the surrounding communities. His approach was to embed it at the local community level, through environmental and social action. The curriculum was redrawn to focus on five areas of sustainability: "agriculture, architecture, energy, forestry, and community" (Smith, 2011, p. 94). The work of the students started on the grounds of Al Kennedy, through the maintenance of a garden that grew produce destined for the local food bank. It continued further afield through a range of partnerships with, for instance, the city of

[8] Al Kennedy Alternative High School folded at the end of the 2020-21 academic year. Initial research and writing for this chapter took place while the school was still active.

Cottage Grove, which paid the school to clear the wetlands of invasive species. In exchange for their educational labour, which entailed identifying and learning about plants before removing them, the students would benefit from grants to do field trips. Another project involved working with a health organisation to design and build organic gardens for local elementary schools (Smith, 2011). Until the school's closure, Al Kennedy's curriculum continued to be shaped around partnership projects that combined horticultural and environmental research and education, were of mutual benefit to the school and the local communities, and had the objective of bringing positive visibility to young people locally.

d- École Domaine du Possible

A more recent venture is École Domaine du Possible, located in the natural region of the Camargue in the south east of France. The school, which currently welcomes some 100 pupils between the ages of 3 and 16, was established in 2015 on a 336-acre domain. Soon following were an agroecological farm and an ethology-focused equine centre, which have since constituted key learning resources for the school. École Domaine du Possible was founded by publishers Françoise Nyssen and Jean-Paul Capitani, who lost a son to suicide due to maladjustment to, and untenable pressure from, mainstream education. The couple head the influential local publishing house Actes Sud, which has put out several thousand books on, and at the crossroads of, art, ecology, permaculture, and ethology. The same themes infuse the school, which places eco-citizenship at the centre of its pedagogy, along with a transdisciplinary and intergenerational approach. At École Domaine du Possible, subjects are organised around clusters such as the university-inspired 'Humanities', bringing together history, literature, philosophy, sociology, and languages; 'Living soil and nature', encompassing science, geography, permaculture, and ecology; and 'Movement', which includes physical education and sport, music, dance, and equine ethology[9].

Much of the learning takes place through practical projects that often bring together different year groups. For instance, as part of the 'Movement' learning cluster, the pupils organise a public celebration at the end of each year, which brings together live music, choreography, and artistic interventions in the garden. Another example of a transdisciplinary and this time long-term project is the 'Art and Ethology' year-long programme, which the art teacher and the horse-riding instructor co-ran in 2019-20 for primary school pupils. One of the modules centred

[9] As told by the director of pedagogy at École Domaine du Possible, Jean Rakovitch, interviewed on 21 May 2021.

on the social life of animals, with pupils studying practices such as camouflage and courtship dances before engaging in drawing, photography, and land art interventions, and scoping the terrain on horseback for appropriate sites and for inspiration. Another module centred on animal senses: with the help of the science teacher, the pupils studied the vision of varied animals, from bat, rat, and dog, to horse, cat, and bird, and were asked to draw the world around them from these animals' perspectives. They made their own glasses emulating the 285° monocular vision of horses – compared to 200° for humans – and wore them on a hike, as well as on horseback, to apprehend the differences with human vision and better understand the needs and difficulties of horses when ridden by humans[10].

At École Domaine du Possible, learning is both experiential and collective: a further example of this is the Friday morning routine whereby a different class works the land and extracts produce to be used for the communal lunch. After lunch, the class in question discusses with the rest of the school what they have learnt from the process and what the next class on duty may need to be attentive to. Parents too play a significant role in the life and ecology of the school. Not so much financially – 50% of pupils are recipients of bursaries that cover 65% of the annual 12,000 euro tuition fee – but culturally, with a number of them having skills they are willing to share with teachers and pupils. In fact, cultural privilege is prominent among pupils – the city of Arles, a 25-minute car ride from the school, is a major cultural centre where many artists have migrated in recent years – and one of the challenges for the school is to open itself out to a broader demographics beyond artists and creatives, and well-off locals and expats. Interestingly, the *college* years (age 11-14) are accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture. This recent setup has the potential of attracting a different demographic drawn to learning about agriculture in what is a forward-thinking and well-equipped agroecological farm, although, even with bursaries, the costs remain out of reach to many.

5. Indigenous Pedagogy

To address Indigenous pedagogy means to continue to engage with the natural environment at large, for in Indigenous thought:

> "land" is recognized, in the sense of coming to know again, as so much more than a word. The land is physical: people walk on it, they literally put their feet on it, sometimes insulated by layers of concrete, pavement, flooring, and shoes, sometimes barefoot on

[10] As told by the art teacher at École Domaine du Possible, Alicia Vaisse, interviewed on 21 May 2021.

> bare ground. Everyday the land supports us in our journeys. The land is Spirit and if we pay attention, the land speaks to us. It teaches us and all beings ways to live in good relation with one another. If we refuse to listen, the land speaks back with increasing clarity, sometimes returning to us the poisons we insist on feeding it. When we do pay attention, the resilient land heals herself and leads us to heal ourselves. The land is culture: Indigenous thought is built on such understandings (Haig-Brown and Hodson, 2009, p. 168).

Educationalists Celia Haig-Brown and John Hodson write in the context of Canada, a country that spent most of the 20th century sending First Nations and Métis children in residential schools as part of a forced assimilation plan to suppress Indigenous intellectual development (Battiste, 2017). Wildcat et al. argue that deterritorialization was key to this process, in as much as it meant separating Indigenous peoples from their "sources of knowledge and strength – the land" (2014, p. II). Accordingly, "if colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land" (ibid, p. I).

In Indigenous or Aboriginal thought – not just in Canada, but also in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and further afield (Battiste, 2017) – the land is "much more than a word" (op. cit.); it is a link between all aspects of Aboriginal peoples 'existence, namely spirituality, culture, language, kinship, identity, and law. The land is a producer and repository of knowledge; a system of physical, social, and spiritual relations; of ethical practices. The land is healer and teacher. The land is pedagogy (Bang et al., 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014; Freeland Ballantyne, 2014; Betasamosake Simpson, 2014; Battiste, 2017). Thence, Indigenous education tends toward the creation of a counter-hegemonic and plural space where Indigenous knowledges, heritages, and ways of life are acknowledged, accurately understood and represented, and respected (Waitere and Court, 2009; Battiste, 2017; Hogg and Volman, 2020). Battiste lists the qualities of Aboriginal learning as follows:

- Learning is holistic;
- Learning is a lifelong process;
- Learning is experiential in nature;
- Learning is rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures;
- Learning is spiritually oriented;
- Learning is a communal activity, involving family, community, and elders; and

• Learning is an integration of Aboriginal and Eurocentric knowledge

(2017, p. 182).

a- Dechinta Centre for Learning and Research

Learning at Dechinta Centre for Learning and Research is all of the above. Founded in 2010 in Yellowknife, in Canada's Northwest Territories, Dechinta offers education and community programmes for adults, children, and families that are rooted in land-based Indigenous epistemologies. Developed and delivered by a faculty composed of Indigenous academics, Elders, and community leaders, Dechinta's programmes work towards the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being, and the building of culturally-relevant educational capacity and employment opportunities for northern Indigenous youth. In line with Dechinta's mandate to increase access to further and higher education for Indigenous students, its adult, post-secondary programmes are accredited by the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta. Twelve-week long, the on-land courses for up to twelve students include activities such as "harvesting medicines, making dry fish, learning to prepare and tan hides", "sessions on governance, sustainable development, Indigenous language, Indigenous arts, and community-based participatory research methodology", and "academic reading, writing and presenting"[11]. In a 2014 article, Dechinta co-founder Erin Freeland Ballantyne describes the courses offered by the organisation, then known as Dechinta Bush University Centre for Learning and Research, as an intensive, (then) "eight weeks spent in the bush with a small, intergenerational group doing very hard physical, mental and spiritual work, day in day out" (2014, p. 78). She explains how disconnected from the land and unskilled the learners feel at first.

> Deterritorialization has been so effective that kids can grow up in Denendeh having never practiced skills which two generations ago would have been fundamental to survival. [...] Learning these practices evokes the anger of never having been taught, as well as provokes exploring why those teachings were severed and how learning them revitalizes and rekindles (ibid, p. 79).

[11] https://www.dechinta.ca/ (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

b- Re-storying Chicago

Reconnecting with the land – in particular with the knowledges and social and spiritual relations associated with it – necessarily engages a process of deconstruction of Eurocentric epistemology. 2,500 miles to the south east of Yellowknife stand the urbanised wetlands that make up Chicago, previously known as Shikaakwa. The watery ecosystem of the city, hidden under layers of settler-colonial fill, became the subject of an urban Indigenous land-based education project in the late 2000s. The project, which might be termed 'Re-storying Chicago', was initiated by a group of teachers and inspired by walks led by Indigenous Elders to raise awareness of the declining health of the Great Lakes, the largest body of freshwater in the world and home to many Indigenous nations (Bang, 2016). Intergenerational, inter-tribal, and participant-led, the project created informal science learning environments. The medicinal prairie garden of the American Indian Center of Chicago, a local community organisation, became one such environment. Tending the garden, expanding its number of species, restoring its natural habitat, understanding which plants are natives and which are not, what they were used for, and what their names were before they were colonised, were some of the activities that triggered conversations about the ancestry of the land and began a process of "re-storying" Chicago (Bang et al., 2014). When addressing Indigenous erasure, naming and language became central themes that further showed the unbridgeable gap between Western and Indigenous epistemologies. The project's initiators quote an Elder named Sarah:

> in creating this curriculum we also have to use our Indian thought to create our own language of how we're going to express these concepts and what we want our kids to learn, and understand [...] They say recycling and all of these terms whereas we say we're living in harmony and we recognize our relatives [...] But they're not to that point of recognizing any relatives. [...] They're not talking about helping the earth heal. They're not talking about helping our relatives to survive (cited in Bang et al., 2014, p. 10).

Revisiting other denominations such as 'invasive species' and their connection with the arrival of settlers in colonial times, and starting to refer to them has "plants that people lost their relationships with" (ibid, p. 11) was part and parcel of an exercise in reconnecting with the land, in relearning how to "think with" and "become with" the land (Haraway, 2016), and in restoring Indigenous narratives for the present and future.

6. Summary

This first section has presented a set of views, by no means exhaustive, on what constitutes critical, emancipatory and/or change-oriented pedagogy historically and today, in a range of learning environments in England, the US, Canada, and France. Going back to Woods and Woods' three types of orientation for alternative education – "separation, engagement and activist" (2009, p. 228), in other words, autonomous, pragmatically affiliated, and motivated by a broader social goal – the schools, programmes or projects examined in this section engage with one, sometimes two types. As a non-institutional and largely community-led project, yet one that was initiated by teachers with diverse university affiliations, the Re-storying Chicago project adheres to the first type of orientation. Because of these affiliations and the resulting infiltration of Indigenous knowledge in the academic field of research, Re-storying Chicago further engages with Woods and Woods' third orientation. The boys' school of Bar-sur-Loup where Freinet taught in the 1920s could also be said to fall in this category: it created a movement of secular education, unusual for the time, and although it existed under the Ministry of Education, its remote location and supportive local community made its unconventional activities relatively unnoticed and unchallenged, and hence entirely autonomous. This would not be the case for Freinet's next assignment in the neighbouring town of St Paul, which would lead to a witch-hunt against him and to his founding an independent school in 1933.

The Laboratory School, Dechinta Centre for Learning, and École Domaine du Possible all adhere to the pragmatic engagement orientation of alternative education. The former two have direct relationships with higher education institutions: the Laboratory School fed into the University of Chicago and was informed by it at the level of research, and Dechinta Centre for Learning's adult programmes are accredited by the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta which, in turn, outsource part of their decolonial education practice to Dechinta (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014). The integration of Indigenous knowledge into Eurocentric institutions is what makes Dechinta also adhere to Woods and Woods' third activist orientation. As for École Domaine du Possible, it is pragmatically bound by what is known in France as a "simple contract" to the Ministry of Education for the accreditation of earlier school years (age 4-10), and to the Ministry of Agriculture for later ones (age 11-14).

III- Utopia and Blueprint Architecture at the Service of Emancipatory Education

This second section of the illustrative literature review explores the utopian and the evolution of its meaning over the past century, along with its attempted materialisations, notably when it comes to school architecture. Much of the focus of this chapter is on the reconstruction and reformist movement in the post-war period in the UK, a moment of not-quite-utopia but of hope and optimism for the recreation of a society based on new values. In particular, this section examines how certain local authorities and architects sought to provide innovative approaches and spatial solutions for progressive education plans.

1. Utopia as a Process

A growing field of academic scholarship on utopia has developed in the last fifteen years, revisiting and evolving the meaning of the utopian from a fixed projection of the perfect society toward a more abstracted process and thought experiment, which learns from its challenges and failures as much as from its successes (Cooper, 2014). In line with this development, sociology professor Ruth Levitas, one of the leading scholars in utopian studies, postulates that utopia is a sociological "method rather than a goal, and therefore [...] a process which is necessarily provisional, reflexive and dialogic [...] always under revision" (2013, p. 150). Utopia's meaning has been fluid ever since its origins. The term was coined by Thomas More in 1516 to signify "nowhere" or "no place", yet etymologically it is purposefully close to "eu-topos", meaning a "good place". From being widely thought of as a concept in the realm of the fantastical and the unachievable, and if achieved, risking totality and the threatening of individual liberty (Sargisson, 2012), utopia is now considered in the academic field for its prefigurative potential. The utopian Marxist Ernst Bloch opened the way for such thinking, arguing for utopias which "anticipate and reach forward toward a real possible future" (Cooper, 2014, p. 4), while at the same time resisting any form of blueprint. Philosopher Miguel Abensour (2017) argues that utopia also rejects myth, which reactivates the dream of the origins and the golden age, such as Ancient Greece's approach to democracy or matriarchy in prehistoric times. He maintains that if myth belongs to the realm of sleep, utopia aligns itself with the idea of awakening, whose fruits include revolution. Despite its emancipatory intentions, utopianism isn't solely associated with socialist leanings as Levitas and sociologist Erik Olin Wright are careful to remind us: the search of a better life is also to be found in politics and movements that support "exclusion, narrow interests, and the preservation of privilege" (Wright, 2010, p. 93). Similarly, literary critic Fredric Jameson argues that "it is a mistake to approach Utopias with positive expectations, as though they offered visions of happy worlds"

(2005, p. 12). In response to Jameson's assertion, Ahmed suggests that "[t]he Utopian form might not make the alternative possible, but it aims to make impossible the belief that there is no alternative" (2010, p. 163). While being interested in the possible manifestations of utopia, Levitas, whose work builds on Bloch's studies, insists on the fundamentally hypothetical and dialogical character of utopia.

> Bloch posited the existence of a utopian impulse, an anthropological given that underpins the human propensity to long for and imagine a life otherwise. The origins of this impulse lie in the human experience of a sense of hunger, loss and lack: a deep sense that something's missing. Crucially, Bloch argues that this lack cannot be articulated other than through imagining its fulfilment (2013, p. 5).

In fact, one of utopia's most pregnant characteristics is the tension between desire and realisation (Sargisson, 2012), between "imagining and actualization" (Cooper, 2014, p. 36). Utopia may only exist between these spaces, thus remaining in flux, open, uncertain and often "self-consciously flawed" (Sargisson, 2012, p. 26). This tension is also to be found in the relationship between utopia and architecture: while the former promotes indeterminacy, the latter involves a high degree of fixity. One of the questions this chapter grapples with is: how can architectural space translate and maintain the open and mutable character of the utopian inherent in emancipatory education?

2. For and Against the Blueprint

In Utopia (1516), Thomas More depicts an ideal society that denies private property and shares its resources equally, and whose urbanism is built on the idea of modelling and replication. In a chapter dedicated to the urban planning of Utopia island's fifty-four cities, the author characterises the cities as all "large and splendid and having exactly the same language, customs, institutions, and laws" (2001, p. 53). All are equidistant, contained rather than expansive, surrounded by farmhouses, and with dwellings in the inner city. "They have the same layout and they look the same, insofar as the terrain allows" (ibid). If Utopia's blueprint approach to achieving the common good is fictional, it has nonetheless inspired a number of architectural and societal experiments in the 18th and 19th centuries and beyond, from Robert Owen's New Lanark mill in Scotland (built in 1785) and New Harmony in Indiana, US (built in 1814 and purchased by Robert Owen in 1826), to Charles Fourier's self-contained communities known as phalansthères – which he never himself got to build, but inspired others to do in the 19th and 20th centuries – through to university settlements in the UK and the US (in particular between 1880 and 1920), to cite but a few examples. Some of these living

experiments are studied by geographer Dolores Hayden in *Seven American Utopias: Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (1976), which explores the dwelling habits of the Shakers, Mormons, Fourierists, Perfectionists, Inspirationists, Union Colonists and Llano Colonists. The author notes that despite their differences, they shared the belief that "social change could best be stimulated through the organization and construction of a single ideal community, a model which could be duplicated throughout the country" (1976, p. 9). Researching a similar territory fifteen years later in Spaces of Hope (2000), Harvey too emphasises utopia's relationship to replicability:

> As theoretical reformers, some communards called themselves "social architects"; as committed settlers, most of them intended to create what might be called an "architecture of social change," environmental demonstrations of their programs for society. When communitarians began to build a settlement, the contradictions inherent in their strategy – that the model community must be controlled but innovative, collective but voluntary, unique but replicable – became design dilemmas (2000, p. 33).

Cooper and others have noted that the shift from modern to contemporary utopian studies is notably marked by the abandonment of the blueprint to the benefit of anticipatory practices concerned with imagination, invention, improvisation, and human flourishing (Wright, 2010). As Levitas puts it, because "utopia is redefined in a new and critical way, as a journey and not a goal", "this demands an open and indeterminate future, which refuses the 'illusory coherence' of a fully worked out alternative" (2013, p. 109). Wright concurs when arguing that:

> It would be undesirable, I think, for the task of constructing an image of utopia [...] to be seen as an attempt to find definitive institutional answers to various problems. We can perhaps determine what kinds of social institutions negate our goals and which kind of institutions seem to at least move towards those goals, but it would be impossible to come up with detailed plans of actual institutions which would fully embody all of our ideals. Our real task is to try to think of institutions which themselves are capable of dynamic change, of responding to the needs of the people and evolving accordingly, rather than of institutions which are so perfect that they need no further change (2010, p. i).

Fixed institutional designs not only deny the need for versatility as a prerequisite for progress, they also risk being ideological and dogmatic (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Levitas, 2013), or even dehumanising as Hayden reminds us when alluding to the rigid plans proposed by visionary

thinkers and architects such as Jeremy Bentham, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier: “they are designed for imaginary space, not for the life space of communities” (1976, p. 34). Conversely, the anti-authoritarianism resulting from choosing openness and endless possibilities, a position supported by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991), entails leaving “the actual spaces of any alternative frustratingly undefined” (Harvey, 2000, p. 182). Harvey deplores Lefebvre’s “failure to recognize that the materialisation of anything requires, at least for a time, closure around a particular set of institutional arrangements and a particular spatial form and that the act of closure is in itself a material statement that carries its own authority in human affairs” (ibid, p. 188). Equally, by prioritising process over structure and openness over closure, Levitas warns us of the risk “that utopia becomes a vehicle only of critique rather than of transformation” (2013, p. 103).

3. Architecture at the Service of Emancipatory Education Ideals

Levitas proposes three modes – archeological, ontological, and architectural – to map out what she names the “Imaginary Reconstitution of Society”: “the construction of integrated accounts of possible (or impossible) social systems as a kind of speculative sociology” (2013, p. 165). If architecture is meant as a metaphor to approach “institutional design and [the] delineation of the good society” (ibid, p. 224), importantly, as the author reminds us:

> the actual architecture, the physical infrastructure, matters, too. Sustainable, energy efficient and affordable housing, schools, hospitals and the availability and physical character of public spaces are all fundamental to material and social wellbeing (ibid, p. 213).

Kraftl, a key figure in the study of the geographies of architecture – in particular contemporary school buildings and alternative education spaces (Kraftl, 2010; 2012; 2013; Mills and Kraftl, 2016) – has paid attention in his work to the inhabitation and materiality of individual buildings, the effects that buildings have on our daily lives, the affects and emotions they produce as well as the meanings that the inhabitants and users may assign to a building. Kraftl calls to:

> focus not just upon what people think about buildings but what they do in them: how everyday practices such as sitting, walking-through, playing, interacting with others give life to a building – however temporarily – and, commonsensically, how they exceed concepts such as ‘symbolic meaning’ or ‘value’. [...] Rather than view objects like buildings as fixed, one can interrogate the conjoined technologies (pipes, bricks, cabling), practices (construction, inhabitation, even demolition) and regulations (laws,

> building codes, health and safety legislations) that ensure they stand up over time (Kraftl, 2010, pp. 407-408).

The pages that follow focus on school architecture and, in particular, architectural space at the service of progressive, emancipatory, critical, and child-centred forms of pedagogy. They explore the interrelation between modern architecture and modern pedagogy in the decades following WW2, when reconstruction meant the possibility of approaching both disciplines from the ground up, working from the observation of psychological factors to then develop bespoke material responses (Roth, 1957; Burke, 2016).

a- Developments in School Building

Burke and Grosvenor (2008), and Willis and Darian-Smith (2017), have described how Western schools in the 20th century were designed in reaction against those of the previous century, which were characterised by dark, under-ventilated, and under-heated settings, with confined outdoor areas (Donovan, 1921). When schools didn't occupy buildings designed for other purposes (i.e. former lodgings, disused barns, factory annexes, or parts of church buildings), they had their own purpose-built edifices. However, this didn't make schools practical for all that, as architect and writer Alfred Roth argues in *The New School* (1957):

> The period of impetuous industrial expansion and fundamental changes in society [...] was scarcely aware of public education as a social obligation. Consequently, the building of schools necessarily matched the authoritative conception of the period – with blind imitation of historical styles and uncreative architectural thought – being mainly concerned with purely formal problems to the detriment of functional requirements (1957, p. 8).

This led to schools being over dimensioned and "nothing but an addition of layers of class-rooms, each one exactly like the other" (Roth, 1957, p. 26). They not only ignored conditions of hygiene (air and light), but also, and importantly, the scale of the child and their physical and psychological needs. What Roth regarded as "the faulty development of communal school planning" was, according to him, due in part to the "[a]bsence of collaboration between educators, architects, town-planning experts and authorities, and lack of common basic conception of procedure" (ibid, p. 10).

In the early 20th century, a number of largely material factors came together, transforming school buildings and the educational theory landscape in a profound way. One such factor was the recently developed public health and hygiene policies, which demanded better ventilation and access to fresh air and natural light. Landscaping was given serious consideration: trees, plants, and green areas not only served to "renew, cool and scent the air, protect against dust and wind, noise and glaring sunlight" (Roth, 1957, p. 42), they also provided opportunities for physical activities and scientific learning. Other material factors included the commitment of the Modernist movement toward functional and adaptable building and furniture design as well as the availability of new or newly affordable materials – from concrete and plastic to aluminium (Roth, 1967; Burke and Grosvenor, 2008).

> Changes in furniture design were accompanied by new ideas about pedagogy and learning styles. Desks with attached seats (oak and cast iron) were replaced by tables and individual chairs (wood/ plastic and tubular steel), which offered greater scope for group work and pupil interaction. Their introduction reconfigured the classroom space, since tables and particularly chairs could be stacked for more flexible use (Burke and Grosvenor, 2008, p. 213).

Alongside an impulse to break away from teacher-centred learning and spatial arrangements, adaptability, flexibility, transparency, and openness would become leitmotivs in the discourse and practice surrounding progressive schooling in the early part of the 20th century (Donovan, 1910; Roth, 1957; Ree, 1973; Burke and Grosvenor, 2008; Burke, 2013; Willis and Darian-Smith, 2017). Of Freinet's classroom in Bar-sur-Loup in the 1920s, Élise Freinet writes:

> Freinet dreams (dreaming doesn't cost anything…) of mobile tables, foldable chairs, children's shelving, vitrines, aquariums, looms and little workshops in the common room, without doors, in which pupils could settle at will. But the dream is far from reality; therefore, very simply, he makes do with the old school desks, obtains old benches, sets down shelves and modernises his old cupboard, but, to his great regret, he cannot lower the high, prison-like windows to place them at child's height (E. Freinet, 1981, p. 40).

Over the next 125 years, architects would test, perfect, discard, and reignite a range of design principles and plans to best serve the needs of progressive educational practice. From the finger-plan – "ranges of classrooms opening of a single side of a corridor or breezeway" mastered by Californian architect Ernest J. Kump in the mid-1930s (Willis, 2017, p. 4) – to the

cluster plan – a response against the finger plan entailing separate houses of one to several rooms for different activities and classes – through to the open plan, schools have been reconfigured *ad infinitum*. These spatial experiments, coupled with architectural features such as foldable glass panels and partitions, kivas and withdrawal spaces, have served to maximise natural light and the circulation of air, to allow for a continuum between inside and outside, and to move the social organisation of the school away from the single classroom, utilising instead every part of the building(s) as educational opportunity (Burke, 2016). This has enabled greater freedom of movement and, importantly, it has facilitated the emergence of more varied forms of learning – i.e. play, quiet individual work, collective work between different year groups, and outdoor teaching (Roth, 1957; Burke and Grosvenor, 2008; Darian-Smith and Willis, 2017). Regrettably, features like withdrawal spaces would be the first to go as storage needs grew and progressive teaching staff and administration got replaced by less imaginative ones (Burke, 2016). The same would be true of open spaces, where walls would be gradually erected, thus returning to the classical classroom with little scope for movement, flexible learning methods, and encounters between classes and year groups (Burke and Grosvenor, 2008).

The period between the 1940s and the 1960s brought new opportunities with war damage, followed by the baby boom, requiring mass construction of schools. The war had also produced émigrés, some of whom architects who came to find refuge in Britain and became involved in the renewal of school buildings, including Ernö Goldfinger, Carl Franck, Joseph Berger, and Peter Moro, along with Walter Gropius, who had emigrated in the earlier 1930s period. This combination of factors made these decades particularly fertile when it came to the production of pioneering school architecture (Burke, 2011). However, as architectural historian Andrew Saint reminds us, money, materials, and labourers were hard to come by in this period of national reconstruction. In wartime, prefabricated buildings had offered affordable, practical, and flexible solutions, and they continued to be resorted to for some time after. Local authorities were responsible for building schools in their constituency, but did not always have the training, experience, or vision to move school architecture forward (Saint, 1987). There were two notable exceptions: Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

b- Hertfordshire Council and Mary Medd

In 1940, the educationalist John Newson joined Hertfordshire Council as Education Officer and led what would become an internationally influential venture in response to the county's need for 175 additional schools over the next fifteen years. Newsom put together the Development Group, which comprised architects and educators who together would take on

the historic challenge of post-war reconstruction (Burke and Grosvenor, 2008). Newsom called for an architecture that responded to the educational practice of the most far-sighted teachers, and demanded of the architects that they spend at least a week observing classrooms and school activities. Mary Medd was one of them: her approach was to "design schools from the inside out, that is, starting from the observable educational needs of the children and teachers and designing from that starting point" (ibid, p. 133). Her engagement went as far as setting up teacher training to "enhance an interest in the ecological aspects of pedagogy and the management of space for different modalities of teaching and learning" (ibid, p. 163). Furthermore, she conducted post-occupancy evaluation and published reports on her findings for future practice. Burke not only acknowledges the influence of the Development Group on the 10,500 or so schools built in England between 1945 and 1973, she also argues that:

> While the earlier Hertfordshire schools were not notably advanced in their educational practice, by the mid 1960s there was clear evidence, in primary schools designed under the influence of the Development Group, of a move towards realizing progressive practices through the material environment. In this sense, education and architecture grew more interrelated; architects were increasingly knowledgeable and expert in education while some teachers were becoming spacious in their reflection on their practice (2016, pp. 107-108).

Mary Medd's architectural proposal was simple and cost-effective: it was based on a system of prefabricated buildings, which could be arranged according to need, scale, and the given site. The great majority of her schools were one-storey high, allowing for direct interaction between inside and outside. One of Medd's innovations was the insertion of spaces of withdrawal, where pupils could enjoy quiet and individual time undisturbed, alongside spaces dedicated to mess, noise, and dusty processes (Burke, 2016). The simplicity of her buildings and their sincere dedication to serving children's needs before all attracted favourable responses. As architects Richard Llewelyn Davies and J. R. Weekes wrote in their article "Hertfordshire achievement", published in *The Architectural Review* in 1952:

> Most of the normal elements of architecture are missing. There is no recognisable formal element whatever, proportions seem almost accidental, spaces and planes are divided in the most elementary manner… There is an utter and refreshing absence of conscious detailing. There are no materials except glass, steel and plaster (cited in Burke and Grosvenor, 2008, p. 105).

In an echo to modern architect Louis Sullivan's famous dictum "form follows function", Medd's intention was for her buildings to develop according to practice, hence the necessity for them to be structurally simple. Mary Medd's husband David, whom she often collaborated with and who was part of the Development Group, addressed the Architectural Association in 1965, explaining that:

> It is only by talking to and building for those on the frontier of experience, so to speak, that we can design buildings that challenge our best teachers with opportunities rather than limitations. In the passage of time, these opportunities may became limitations, and the stage is then set for further development... thus the shape of the building changes, and such changes are more important than those brought about by design opinion because they are based on changes in the life and activities for which the buildings provide (D. Medd cited in Burke, 2016, p. 147).

Medd demonstrated how architecture might take on the qualities and values of utopia – "provisional, reflexive and dialogic [...] always under revision" (Levitas, 2013, p. 150) – and how a blueprint, in this case a prefabricated building, might achieve modularity and accommodate variation. Her approach responded to architect John Joseph Donovan's earlier vision that:

> standardization is likely to lead to stagnation [...] unless standardization is applied only to the details of construction, which may be standardized without restricting the general development of the administration and instruction within the school. [...] duplication of types at a particular period, and for the same grades of schools operating under similar conditions in the same community, is not at all unfavorable to the progress of school architecture (1921, p. 28).

c- Cambridgeshire and the Village Colleges

In the post-war period, buildings were not only needed for the provision of children's education, but also for lifelong learning. Incentives were created, such as allowing new primary schools to exceed the maximum permissible capital cost, providing they made their building and facilities available for evening classes (Fieldhouse, 2006). The unnamed author of the pamphlet *Citizen Centres for Adult Education* (1944) approved of the idea of rotating space in principle, providing that it was incorporated in the design of the building from the outset or that the school had spaces that lend themselves to multi-functionality, as:

> Schools are built and equipped for children. They do not offer a suitable environment for the individual and social development of adults. Some of their facilities could, without doubt, be used; for example, the school hall in a modernly planned school is admirable for public meetings, lectures, concerts, and dramatic performances; and the school gymnasium might well be used (as it often is) for physical training. But total, or even large, reliance upon schools for the purposes of adult education would invite the failure of the scheme. No doubt an ideal plan for rural areas is the combined school and adult centre such as is to be found in the Cambridgeshire Village Colleges (*Citizen Centres for Adult Education*, 1944, p. 7).

The concept of the Village College was invented by Henry Morris, Cambridgeshire's Chief Education Officer between 1922 and 1954. During his appointment, five Village Colleges were created in the county, and three more were established after his retirement. This number does not reflect the scope of his vision for a far more widespread movement, but institutional resistance and financial pressure were met at every step of his journey (Ree, 1973). Some of the few people who actively supported Morris were the Elmhirsts of Dartington, who shared his belief in the potential afforded by the entanglement of education, agriculture, and the arts, and helped finance the movement early on and, specifically, the building of Impington Village College (Young, 1982). Morris envisioned the Village Colleges as taking:

> all the various vital but isolated activities in village life – the School, the Village Hall and Reading Room, the Evening Classes, the Agricultural Education Courses, the Women's Institute, the British Legion, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the recreation ground, the branch of the County Rural Library, the Athletics and Recreation Clubs – and, bringing them together into relation, [to] create a new institution for the English countryside (Ree, 1973, p. 154).

In his *Village College Memorandum* (1925), Morris delineated the contours of what he hoped would become an expansive movement. It started from the recognition that education in rural zones was deficient. Morris argued that country children had the choice of going to school in towns, but that they came out equipped with skills that bore no relation to working in the countryside. His concerns also extended to the poor provision of adult education in rural areas, the absence of a corresponding movement to the Workers' Educational Association, and the isolation of social agencies. In an article entitled "Institutionalism and Freedom in Education", published in *New Ideas Quarterly* in 1926, Morris shared his vision for education to be "conterminous with life" and to mean "the attempt, critical and constructive, to increase the

sum and enhance the quality of good life" (Morris cited in Ree, 1984, p. 38-40). Associating education with other constituents that make life worth living – "art, literature, music, recreation, festivals" (ibid, p. 39) – and adorning this vision with buildings whose architecture and interior design would be of "permanent benefit [to] our visual environment" (ibid, p. 105) was part of Morris' programme. Morris was after excellence; his "communal space of right living" (Matless, 2016, p. 325) not only required outstanding architecture and art – Morris would lend artworks to the colleges from his own collection as well as commission new works (Matless, 2016) – but also enlightened leadership. His model of a warden responsible for the sum of the college's activity was reminiscent of university settlement practices, as was his vision of the board of directors' service being treated as an exercise in citizenship by the neighbouring community (ibid).

> In such institutions touching every side of the lives of the inhabitants of the town or the village, some unity in the life of the community would be attained, and the duality of education and living abolished. The institutions, and the activities within it, would become a microcosm of life, not merely a place in which instruction is imparted by a body of specialists, but a place where the community endeavours to realize the highest sum of good life. I trust that this does not sound like an aimless and impractical dream (Morris cited in Ree, 1984, p. 39).

Impington Village College was the fourth college to be built. Morris commissioned a major figure of the Modernist movement, Walter Gropius, the former director of the Bauhaus, to build it. Collaborating with British architect Maxwell Fry, Gropius made plans for a one-storey building following the finger plan – thin corridors leading to a number of classrooms and at the tip of the building, a swimming school and a gymnasium, all looking out onto the gardens and surrounding woods. The adult wing was in the north part of the building alongside the hall, and was connected to the main school through a central promenade that functioned both as a passageway and a social space connecting learners and teachers of all generations (Read, 1943; Ree, 1973; Burke and Grosvenor, 2008). The college, which opened in 1939, was described as "a chaste and severe, but intense [...] masterpiece" by Morris (cited in Burke and Grosvenor, 2008, p. 87), and "the pattern of much to come" by architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner (cited in Ree, 1973, p. 77), who further qualified it as "one of the best buildings of its date in England, if not the best" (cited in Burke and Grosvenor, 2008, p. 87).

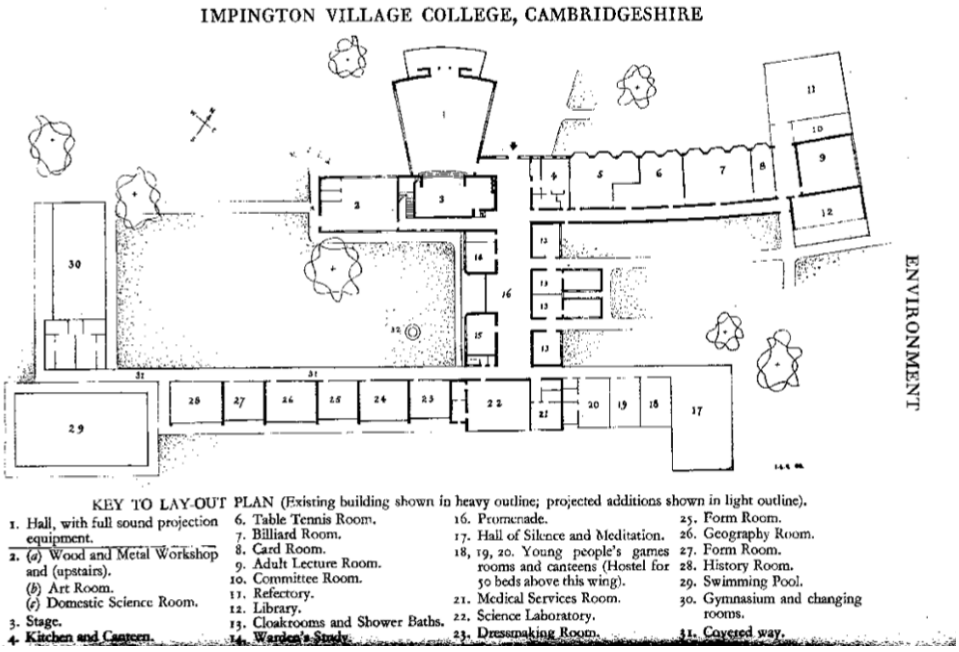

Fig 1. Map of Impington College as illustrated in Hebert Read's *Education Through Art* (1943), p. 295.

In the chapter of *Education Through Art* (1943) dedicated to Impington, art historian and literary critic Herbert Read writes:

> is it possible, not merely to conceive, but to build and introduce into the existing educational system, schools which provide the essentials of an educative environment? The answer is yes: it has been done in at least one instance, and a model perhaps not perfect in every detail, but practical, functional and beautiful, does exist on English soil (1943, pp. 292-3).

Read goes on to describe the general features of the college, which he argues every school, whether rural or urban, should adopt. These include the aforementioned promenade; the hall – "with seating capacity for the whole school together with parents and other members of the regional community"; the withdrawing room – "a place where the pupil can retire to read or meditate undisturbed"; recreation rooms (i.e. table tennis, billiard and card rooms); and "the vegetable garden [and] horticultural and stock breeding stations" (Read, 1943, p. 293). At the risk of repeating himself, Read insisted that "[n]othing in this plan is extravagant or luxurious: everything is natural, functional and practical" (ibid).

Given his anarchist leanings, would Read have written about the Plymouth School of Creative Arts (PSCA), a liberal primary and secondary school and community facility opened at the

initiative of Plymouth School of Art in 2015? Located in the Stonehouse area of Plymouth and designed by the architecture practice Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, the red building of PSCA was originally conceived to place art at the centre of the curriculum and facilitate cross-year and cross-community encounters. This would be manifest in the typically enclosed and identical classrooms being replaced by multi-use open spaces and by professionally-equipped recording, music, dance, editing, and crafts studios. Used by the pupils in the daytime, both the gymnasium and the auditorium were utilised on some evenings for community meetings and events. In addition, community organisations including a youth radio station rented spaces in the building, thus bringing professional practice and extra-curricular forms of youth engagement into the school. Unusual to school architecture, passerbys could peer into the ground floor windows and on some days witness pupils learning to cook while practising French in a typically Deweyan curriculum correlation (Tanner, 1997). When I visited in 2017, I was taken by the fluidity of the space and the pupils' freedom of movement and agency. Children entered the headteacher's office at will and a pupil played quietly in the corner of an administrative office during the break. The atmosphere was so informal in the open spaces that I asked if it was lunch break, but it was just another session where students were working on different tasks, some individually, others with the support of teachers, teaching assistants, or older students. I was told they could choose what to work on and when and that most pupils were largely engaged. On the same visit to Plymouth, I visited a colleague who had recently taken their children out of PSCA; according to them, bullying was rife and poorly handled by the staff. By the time of the school's second and final Ofsted report in 2019, safeguarding had improved, but teaching quality, staff expectation, and learning outcomes were deemed inadequate[12] and the school was closed and later taken over by the Reach South Academy Trust as part of a rescue operation.

4. Summary

The people responsible for setting up PSCA suggested at one point in our meeting that they would be willing to mentor my co-director and I at Open School East, and share their processes with us, should we want to do the same and establish a primary and/or secondary school under the governmental label 'free school'. Their experience would fast-track us and they believed Open School East was well placed to start such an endeavour. Although the motivation was real after such a humbling, stimulating, and transformative visit, the reality of running an under-resourced organisation prevented us from taking the conversation forward. Would PSCA have survived if it had been part of a cluster of schools attempting to do the

[12] See Ofsted January 2019 report: https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50059882 (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

same and sharing practice? Was its vision too incompatible with the free school status? Or did the problems lay elsewhere?

Looking back at the efforts of Hertfordshire, the architecture and pedagogies of these schools were once a mixture of radicalism and establishment. With the proliferation of schools built on the same model, difference became the norm, until the new norm started to resemble the old norm, with the formerly flexible architecture of these schools making space for rigidity again (Burke and Grosvenor, 2008; Burke, 2016). As for the Village Colleges, had Morris not continually hit institutional walls, many more of these schools would have been built and their exceptionalism would likely have been replaced by normalisation. Their uniqueness is what made them worth researching and writing about by scholars in the first place, and why they are given attention here. Being alternative is being non-generic, which begs questions about the replicability and scalability of alternatives, a topic I will return to in the conclusion of this chapter.

IV- Arts Centres and Art Schools

The third and final section of the illustrative literature review explores two spaces of cultural production infused with educational imperatives: the post-war arts centre as it developed in Great Britain, and the international independent art school movement with its origins in the utopian, going back to the 1920s. Neither explorations are exhaustive and, in both instances, the focus is on structure, more so that on content or outputs.

This section starts by examining the architectural and organisational makeup of the arts centre model powered by post-war optimism. If there is nothing particularly alternative about the majority of government-encouraged arts centres, they nonetheless present an interest in the context of a discussion on mass (re)construction and duplication of multi-public cultural and educational spaces. As this section explores, the size of their operation and their capacity-related difficulties echo those of the art education organisations that I then enquire into as well as of the multi-public educational and cultural organisations scrutinised in the following chapters.

1. Arts Centres

a- Plan for an Arts Centre

In the aftermath of World War II, the first initiative of the newly-born Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) was to promote the mass construction of arts centres, in order to provide spaces for leisure and the communal enjoyment of the arts, particularly as men and women were returning from their war occupations to normal life. In 1945, ACGB put out a publication entitled *Plan for an Arts Centre* and developed in collaboration with the Modelling Unit of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. The forty-page pamphlet provides architectural plans for a multi-purpose arts centre for a "town with a population of between 15,000 and 30,000 – a town where it is not economically possible to run a separate theatre, art gallery and hall for concerts" (*Plan for an Arts Centre*, 1945, p. 4). The pamphlet explains that housing estates proliferated in the interwar period and gave rise to the need for community centres to accommodate new forms of social life, since existing communal space provision was rudimentary and seldom made provision for the arts. In the event that a town could not afford to build a special building for cultural purposes, ACGB then strongly recommends that local community centres integrate adequate provision within its premises. It gives the example of three education and community centres that also cater for the arts in Slough, North Kensington, and Impington, the latter being Morris' Village College.

ACGB's proposed plans for arts centres are made up of three components meant to function either as a whole or as independent entities according to the town's need. These are: a 600-seat hall, an exhibition or lecture room of unspecified capacity with adjoining committee rooms, and a 200-seat restaurant, each equipped with ample storage and facilities spaces (*Plan for an Arts Centre*, 1945). The pamphlets offers a wealth of suggestions about what each room and facility could be used for and what dimension they ought to be; how to fit out the theatre, from lighting to movable seating; what construction, insulation, and interior decoration materials to use – "Floors: Wood strip flooring for the hall, stage and bandstand; cork in the exhibition room [...] Ceilings: Generally fibre boards and plywood" (ibid, p. 15) – and how much each of the core components (hall, exhibition room, restaurant) approximately costs to build (£29,500 for the whole building and terrace paving and planting, minus fees and cost of land, based on pre-war prices). Further planning, management, and income generating advice is provided by the ACBG, which is not putting itself forward as a funder, but instead as "a general consultant, from whom information as well as practical assistance may be obtained" (ibid, p. 26).

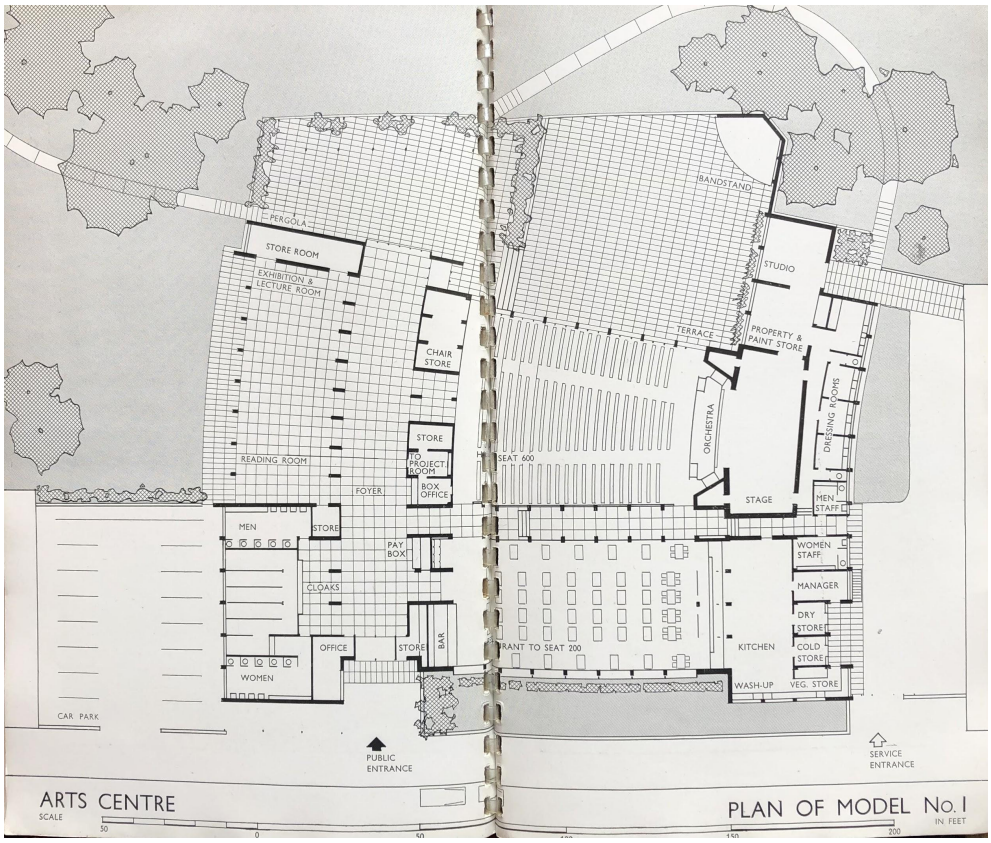

Fig 2. Plan for an Arts Centre, Model 1, p. 28-29.

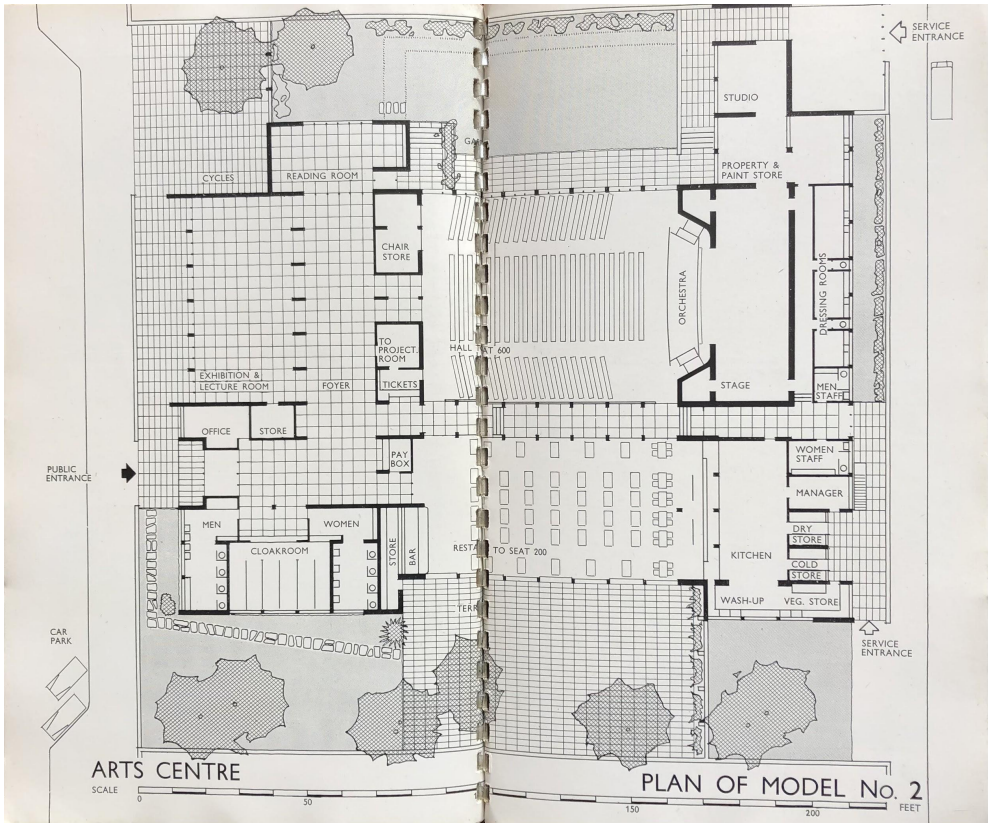

Fig 3. Plan for an Arts Centre, Model 2, p. 32-33.

Some thirty years after the Arts Council of Great Britain published *Plan for an Arts Centre*, a handful of reports, directories, and books on the topic of arts centres in the UK were put out, bearing witness to the success of a movement started and encouraged by the public body. John Lane's *Arts Centres: Every Town Should Have Them* (1978) and Robert Hutchinson and Susan Forrester's *Arts Centres in the United Kingdom* (1987) are two such books that survey the landscape of arts centres in the UK, with one updating the other a decade later. The definition of the term 'arts centre' used in these publications is that given by Lord Redcliffe-Maud in the 1976 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation report *The Future of the Arts in England and Wales*: "a building under the roof of which activities in more than one art form took place and people of different interests and backgrounds came into social contact with one another" (Redcliffe-Maud cited in Lane, 1978, p. ix).

b- After the Plan: Legacy and Challenges

In 1978, 170 active arts centres were listed across England, Scotland, and Wales, "42 of which have been opened since the beginning of 1977" (Lane, 1978, p. 152). This peak coincided with the rise of the community arts movement, which was directly involved in the creation of arts centres such as Centerprise in East London (1971-2012), Inter-Action in Milton Keynes (1975-present), the Luton Community Arts Trust (1978-present), and the Black-e in Liverpool (1968-present), to cite but a few. In 1987, 242 arts centres were said to operate in the UK, with 20% of them being purpose-built and the rest existing in converted buildings such as former churches, libraries, town halls, schools, prisons, and factories (Hutchinson and Forrester, 1987). By the mid-1990s, the movement had started to decline, faced with a growing schism between those that had remained resolutely grassroots and/or struggled to stay open in the face of hardship and diminished or lost support from funders, and those that had chosen and managed to scale up, trading their once local and political focus to become full blown arts institutions or what cultural theorist Andrea Philips calls "beacons of cultural industrial success, rebuilding and rebranding, leading the way for local and national regeneration schemes" (Philips, 2014, p. 215). Arnolfini in Bristol (founded in 1961), Jubilee Arts in Birmingham (founded in 1974 and responsible for developing The Public in West Bromwich, 2008-13), and Chapter in Cardiff (founded in 1971) exemplify this tendency well.

Having surveyed arts centres from a range of angles – their philosophy, aims, building, location, social and cultural context, programming approach, audience engagement, management, staffing, finance, and funding – the two books, *Arts Centres: Every Town Should Have Them* (1978) and *Arts Centres in the United Kingdom* (1987), cast light on the recurring

pitfalls and dilemmas faced by arts centres, the most conspicuous being understaffing and financial precarity. The findings from Hutchinson and Forrester's questionnaires and interviews with the directors, managers, and users of a wide range of art centres show that, more often than not, arts centres have to rely on the energy, perseverance, and multitasking of one individual to hold everything together. Concentrating on the artistic programme and keeping standards high takes time away from managerial tasks and, conversely, giving too much attention to management affects the ability to invest adequate time and effort into building artistic excellence and audiences.

Addressing the question of architectural space, the authors further note that the centres which occupy converted buildings, that is to say the overwhelming majority, are not able to optimise their space as best as they could: they are varyingly hard to navigate, not visible enough to the outside, too small to run a lucrative bar, or too awkwardly shaped to attract a prestigious theatre company (Hutchinson and Forrester, 1987). Without an injection of funds to improve their spatial configuration, their ability to generate income and to broaden their audience remains limited, and the problem is accentuated when there is uncertainty over the tenure. In this landscape, the director or manager has to demonstrate a large spread of abilities including technical, managerial, administrative, fundraising, and political skills; "flair, drive and common sense" (ibid, p. 75); and, last but not least, "a wide knowledge of the arts and the capacity for maintaining a constant flow of dynamic new ideas (so that nothing becomes stale)" (Lane, 1978, p. 63). Setting the stakes high for anyone, Lane comments that "[t]he director must survive a regime of day-to-day pressures and remain as committed and inspiring as on the first day he started work" (ibid, p. 63).

For Lane, a successful arts centre is "a base", "an energy point", a provider of opportunities, and an agent for community development (1978, p. 19). Hutchinson and Forrester further place emphasis on "the hybrid nature of [...] arts centres", which they see as contributing to "their complexity as social organisms and their uniqueness as cultural initiatives" (1987, p. 21). Writing nine years earlier, Lane preempts their observation when choosing, as an example of good practice, the multi-public arts centre Centerprise (1971-2012), which forms this thesis' second case study:

> Centerprise in Hackney, operates as a bookshop, coffee bar and restaurant from premises in a row of shops in Kingsland High Street. A Hackney Play Association and a play-bus, summer and youth projects, a Woman's Aid group, a housing association for the single parent, an advice centre, a food co-operative, local publishing and a community paper, silkscreen, workshops and adult education courses all owe their existence directly

> or indirectly to Centerprise. It is important to remember that existing barriers between 'education', 'commerce' and 'community development', can be broken down [...] Tomorrow the correspondence between 'art' and 'life' may be so close that one will be the simple manifestation of the other (Lane, 1978, pp. 61-62).

2. Art Schools

In searching for correspondence between art and life, I now turn to art schools in the broad sense of the term, starting with historical experimental establishments, which welcomed and protected the avant-garde, and functioned as micro-communities – some open to the outside, some closed in on themselves. I then examine the landscape of present-day independent art schools through the lens of a particular book, *School: A Recent History of Independent Art Schools* (2017) by curator Sam Thorne.

a- From Dartington to Vincennes

Earlier in the chapter I introduced Dartington Hall Trust, focusing on its agricultural remit and the primary and secondary Dartington Hall School. The trust's experiments with living and learning also famously extended to the arts, starting with the invitation to architects to restore, convert, and build edifices to dwell and work in. These included the restoration of the medieval Great Hall by craftsman-architect Wiliam Weir – the Hall would be notably used to accommodate the German dance company Ballets Jooss and the affiliated Jooss/Leeder School of Dance, escaping Nazi Germany, between 1934 and 1940; the erection in the 1930s of a collection of modernist residential buildings by Swiss architect William Lescaze aimed for staff and students; and the conversion of a barn into a theatre by Walter Gropius (Young, 1982; Cox, 2005; Richards, 2015).

Dartington was equally renowned for its engagement with the performing arts. The trust hosted multiple artists and theatre and dance companies in residence, and put on summer schools, festivals, performances, and concerts taught, curated, and/or performed by John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Ravi Shankar, Rudolph Laban, and Imogen Holst, to cite but a few of the artists involved in the life of the Dartington Hall Arts Centre in the 1940s and 1950s. Ultimately, Dartington Hall was close in ethos to the North Carolina interdisciplinary school of art, Black Mountain College, which had been created in 1923 and also claimed allegiance to Dewey's pedagogy – learning by doing, working outdoors and cooperatively, emphasising non-hierarchical relations, and placing students, rather than the curriculum, at the centre of the learning process (Thorne, 2019). Several of the abovementioned Dartington guest

practitioners had previously studied at Black Mountain College, whose faculty was, in turn, partly composed of exiled Germans who had previously taught at the Bauhaus, the other internationally influential art and design school of the period. The Bauhaus had first been established by Gropius in 1919, in Weimar, before moving to Dessau, and ending in Berlin. Gropius who, as I have just noted, was responsible for designing the Barn Theatre at Dartington, would soon after build Impington Village College with the financial support of the Elmhirsts of Dartington. The arts, progressive education, and exile were fully entangled.

In 1961, Dartington College of Arts was founded, formalising the trust as an accredited centre for adult art education. In the first thirteen years, the College of Arts offered teacher training in music, dance/drama, and art. In 1974, the College of Arts shifted its approach and abandoned the teacher training to provide degrees in music, theatre and dance, and, soon after, in art and social context. While different in content and approaches – the teacher training programmes had been referred to as "high-on-imagination—low-on-technique" (Richards, 2015, p. 141), and the artistic degrees were notedly theoretical in content – both types of provision shared a number of characteristics: there were no exams, studies were project-led, students had regular opportunities to programme events and perform to an audience in the Hall, teacher-student relations were informal and non-hierarchical, and because many of the students and teachers lived directly onsite, or nearby, there was a strong sense of community and no strict barrier between life and work or study (Cox, 2005; Richards, 2015).

The Art and Social Context programme was launched in 1977 under the direction of Chris Crickmay, who had previously been part of the Open University team responsible for developing the Art and Environment course. The Dartington programme was informed by the British community arts movement, which had started in the late 1960s and promoted the use of art to effect social change in areas of socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, or educational deprivation (Kelly, 1984). Co-production, co-authorship, collective empowerment, and process rather than finished products, were some of the key approaches of community arts practice and of the Art and Social Context programme, which aimed to "produce a generalist artist-designer, capable of responding to the unpredictable creative challenges that arise in a community setting" (Crickmay, 2003, p. 120). As part of the course, students undertook residencies and projects in settings in which art was not normally practised, for instance an orphanage, a foundry, a weight-watcher's group, a pub, a school, or a biological research centre. The residencies engaged observation, embeddedness, problem-solving as well as visual and conceptual proposals to infiltrate art in the everyday working practices of these sites, in a move that echoed the efforts of the Artist Placement Group (1966-89) founded by Barbara Steveni and John Latham, which sought to position "the role of the artist within a wider

social context, including government and commerce"[13].

On the other side of the Atlantic, the year 1969 had seen the birth of another progressive, community-oriented educational establishment, the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), under the aegis of The Walt Disney Company. As the campus was being erected and the Institute's vision was being defined under the impulse of the enlightened dean Paul Brach and assistant dean of art Allan Kaprow, among other figures, the first two years of CalArts' operation (1970 and 1971) witnessed a proliferation of experimental pedagogical approaches. Alison Knowles, John Baldessari, Allan Kaprow, Myriam Shapiro, and Judy Chicago, to name but a few, contributed to creating a community in which to make art: a school "based on what artists wanted to do" (Knowles, cited in Sarbanes, 2012). Knowles' House of Dust, Baldessari's Post Studio class, Kaprow's Advanced Happenings, and Shapiro and Chicago's Feminist Art Programme and Womanhouse project were simultaneously art works, curricula, and objects of horizontal collaborations with students. Much of these proposals involved leaving the institution and venturing into neighbourhoods, communities, nature, or the city, while doing away with what composer John Cage characterised as having nothing to do with education, that is to say:

> all the business of bureaucracy, which would include forms and the filling out of forms, certification of degrees, prizes, anything that could indicate the manner in which the thing should be accomplished. Education should become a field in which it was uncertain either that anyone would become educated, or uncertain that they were not educated before they entered the experience of becoming educated (cited in Filliou, 2014, p. 114).

At CalArts, art could happen at a butcher's (Kaprow), while doing yoga on an architectural structure (Knowles), through excursions whose destination was determined by a dart thrown at a map (Baldessari); or by transforming an empty property into a centre for feminist empowerment (Chicago and Shapiro) (Bowman, 2011; Knights, 2011; Sarbanes, 2014).

A year before the founding of CalArts, in 1968, a group of radical thinkers and practitioners had started the Anti-University, an organisation existing in East London for less than a year,

[13] https://www.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup/ (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

although its legacy is still felt to this day[14]. Its faculty and contributors included the anti-psychiatrist R.D. Laing, cultural theorist Stuart Hall, Marxist historian C. L. R. James, feminist psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell, beat poet Allen Ginsberg and artist John Latham, whose conceptual involvement was the announcement of a course titled 'Antiknow', which did not happen. Classes were held on Black Power, the decolonial movement, literature, psychology, women's studies, and the sociology of revolution, and were at one point attended by 300 students from varied backgrounds including the arts, regardless of qualification.

A similarly radical venture, yet much larger and longer-lived, was the Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes, a government-sponsored university with trotskyist and maoist leanings. Launched in 1969 in a purpose-built architecture in the Vincennes woods, on the outskirts of Paris, the university would be razed to the ground in 1980 after eleven galvanising and tumultuous years. Like the Anti-University, Vincennes had an open door policy (evening and weekend learning provision was additionally made for working people) and it too attracted high profile philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Hélène Cixous, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Rancière, and Alain Badiou, who ran departments and discoursed on cultural revolutions, the formation of political ideology, the carceral system, workers 'strikes and occupations, and the structure of the far-left, among other topics (Soulié, 1998). The cinema department, the first one to be created in a French university, strived to follow the lead of Russia and China in their use of moving image production to enable, document, and celebrate their cultural revolutions, as well as to represent the condition and humanity of the figure of the worker. It is also thanks to the department's facilities and resources that the activities and atmosphere of the Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes are so richly documented. Unlike the Anti-University, the departments and faculty of Vincennes strikingly failed to address French imperialism in Africa and the Caribbean. The Vietnam war was however not silenced; the serigraphy workshop actively engaged in the production of visual campaigns in support of the Vietnamese struggle, although perhaps more out of anti-American sentiment than of an urge to reflect on France's own imperial policies.

[14] In 2015, the collaborative experiment Antiuniversity Now was "set up to reignite the 1968 Anti University of London with the intention to challenge academic and class hierarchy and the exclusivity of the £9K-a-year-degree by inviting people to organise and share learning events in public spaces all over the country". See: https://www.antiuniversity.org/ (Accessed: 7 April 2022).

b- Contemporary Independent Art Schools

Black Mountain College, Dartington College of Arts, and CalArts, along with Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, which was briefly transformed in the 1960s by the holistic and inclusive education of artist Joseph Beuys, represent key influences for a generation of independent art schools, which have emerged in the last ten to twenty years in response to the conservatism, bureaucratisation, and/or commodification of art education. Thorne's book of interviews, *School: A Recent History of Independent Art Schools*, is examined here in depth as a rare example of literature that has captured the development of the independent art school movement. It portrays a broad range of international alternative schools and programmes, capturing their intentions, pedagogical approaches, modes of operation as well as their uncertainties and difficulties. Thorne lists a number of shared characteristics: "typically small-scale and self-organized", "light and flexible", "self-directed and anti-hierarchical", "not standardized", largely free and unaccredited, "often nomadic", occupying "ramshackle" buildings, and "short-lived" (2017, p. 31, 48). If some of the interviewees qualify their school as a complement to the traditional structures of education, rather than as an alternative to it, Thorne holds the more optimistic and ambitious view that independent art schools "provide modest proposals for what might happen next" (ibid, p. 31).

The author notes that while alternative art schools are frequently set up in opposition to the inflexibility and bureaucracy inherent to larger institutions, many choose to call themselves schools, academies, institutes, and even universities, e.g. The Silent University, The School of Engaged Art, Copenhagen Free University, The International Academy of Art Palestine, School of Missing Studies, Open School East. Discussing designation at a summit of alternative art schools at the Bauhaus in Dessau in 2019, the New York-based The Black School – an experimental and intergenerational art school teaching radical Black history – reasoned that one ultimately needs to make oneself accessible and the term school is unequivocal. "It would be a lot harder to get parents to send their kids every day to something that isn't loosely recognisable as a school"[15]. Similarly, an identifiable and normative name instils confidence in government or higher education institutions, on whose funding, know-how, credentials, and affiliation many rely to exist. For instance, the International Academy of Art Palestine in Ramallah (founded in 2006) has largely survived on funding from the Norwegian government and its Bachelor of Arts is accredited by the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Meanwhile, Cátedra Arte de Conducta in Havana (founded in 2002) worked under the umbrella of Instituto Superior de Arte, which facilitated the procurement of visas for visiting

[15] As told by The Black School's co-founder Joseph Cuillier during the summit.

professors (Thorne, 2017). Each of the interviewees nonetheless insists on the significance of their school's infrastructure being flexible and on the necessity to retain control over their governance, administration, and outputs. Maintaining a small, manageable scale is key to this achievement. As Christine Tohmé, founder of Home Workspace Program in Beirut (started in 2011), professes:

> If Home Workspace Program has done anything as a small institution, it has aroused and pushed universities to reevaluate what they have been doing. We're lighter than universities and can defy all kinds of bureaucracy [...] The more flexible you are, and avoid engraving things in stone, the more freedom you have to change things more rapidly (cited in Thorne, 2017, p. 295).

Being self-critical, so as to nurture one's pliability and reactivity, is another attribute of alternative art schools. Artist Tania Bruguera, founder of Cátedra Arte de Conducta, explains how in 2009 the official art school in Havana, Instituto Superior de Arte, tried to co-opt her school which, by the end, was condemned as disobedient and generative of ideas and forms critical of Cuba's government, policies, and institutions. Her response was to close Cátedra Arte de Conducta.

> My second reason to close it was because it had become an institution. The whole project was about how you can change an institution from the inside, not how you become an institution yourself. I always say that you have to be very vigilant to not turn into what you critique (cited in Thorne, 2017, p. 65).

Bruguera's discussion on co-optation, self-institutionalisation, and self-reflexivity is echoed by economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham who, writing about alternative organisations accepting financial help from governments and bodies with diverging values and purposes, take the following view:

> While recognizing the risk of co-optation that such relationships pose, they refuse to see co-optation as a necessary condition of consorting with power. Instead it is an ever-present danger that calls forth vigilant exercises of self-scrutiny and self-cultivation – ethical practices, one might say, of "not being co-opted" (2006, p. xxvi).

When agreeing to work under the aegis of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), Bruguera's approach was that of pragmatic engagement, according to Woods and Woods 'second type of orientation for alternative education. Indeed, when the relationship between Cátedra Arte

de Conducta and ISA was peaceful, one used the other for administrative support and the other in a self-critical effort to be associated with an initiative that could productively challenge it. In fact, Cátedra Arte de Conducta was started in 2002 at the impulse of ISA's director, who had met Bruguera at a dinner and listened to her scathing attack on ISA before revealing to her that she was the director. Open to Bruguera's criticism, she asked her to come up with a programme. Bruguera's proposal was to set up a physical and discursive space to question the role that art should play in the sociopolitical context of Havana. Operating from the artist's home, the school took the form of a programme of invitations to international practitioners and thinkers to spend two weeks with students, discussing and making useful art. With the arrival of a new, more conservative director a few years later, came a more controlled and suspicious environment that impacted on the programme's autonomy. Political co-optation became inevitable, and Bruguera's self-scrutiny led to the closure of Cátedra Arte de Conducta.

Resistance not just to co-optation, but also to conformity with official institutions further manifests in the reconfiguration of learning forms and expectations, as well as of teacher-student relations. The interviews in Thorne's book reveal a general tendency to mix formal and informal pedagogical methods, with "intensely discursive" and "often collaborative" approaches, "frequently not making distinctions between teachers and students" (Thorne, 2017, p. 48). Symptomatically, students are often called participants, residents, or associates, and are in some cases involved in devising curricula. Meanwhile, the founders, directors, and faculty members tend to have little or no background in education, being instead largely trained and/or working as artists, curators, and art critics. When it comes to curriculum writing, some schools opt to make their loose curriculum anew every year in order to combat calcification. While this reflects an intention to be versatile, the effects of that approach can be unnecessarily challenging for the recipients. As Bisi Silva, founder of Àsiko Art School in Lagos (founded in 2010), remarks: "We do have a few templates, but it's very open – perhaps too open, to the point where participants can feel unstable, with no routine" (ibid, p. 160). Tohmé further admits that because platforms like Home Workspace Program haven't got "a clean-cut program and system", "discrepancies", "inconsistencies" and lack of coherence are risks they lay themselves open to (ibid, p. 295).

These are small difficulties compared to those related to financial and staff capacity. The majority of the independent art schools surveyed in Thorne's book are non-fee-paying and a number of them were partly set up in response to spiralling tuition fees and student debt. Sticking to a free-for-all offer and ethos is however hard to sustain to say the least. These schools' economies are typically mixed and often precarious; they tend to survive on a combination of individual and corporate giving, public and foundations' funding, as well as

earned income when they have the space and capacity to run subsidiary activities such as studio space rental, a cafe, or a shop. Looking at the original list of independent art schools that were interviewed by Thorne in 2015 for his 2017 book, a significant number of those that were still active then are no longer in operation. This is notably the case of International Art Academy of Palestine (Ramallah), MASS Alexandria (Alexandria), Sundown Schoolhouse (Salmon Creek Farm), and Bruce High Quality Foundation University (New York). Increased bureaucracy and over-reliance on volatile funding and on the original founder(s) for their energy and time to keep the school going are some of the reasons why these projects folded. Those that remain are the schools that are financially and logistically light – taking place in the studio, house, or land of an artist or in a host institution – and requiring little management and human resources, because they are embedded in an artist's broader practice and occurring according to a flexible schedule (e.g. Mountain School of Art, Los Angeles; School of Missing Studies, nomadic; and the School of Engaged Art, St Petersburg / Berlin). The other remainers are the schools that have turned into fully-fledged institutions, albeit still small (e.g. Home Workspace Program, Beirut; Rupert, Vilnius; Open School East, Margate; SOMA, Mexico).

In this section, I have observed two types of institutions, the arts centre and the art school, which face similar resilience issues and challenges when it comes to space and staff capacity, in particular over-reliance on a multi-tasking founder, manager or "hyper-committed and self-exploiting workers" (Phillips, 2017) simultaneously busy governing, programming, fundraising, and nurturing the experience of users and audiences. Often small-scale and DIY in ethos, they often face a similar conundrum or fate: whether closure, continued precarity, or institutionalisation which, as will be discussed in future chapters, often comes with a loss of spontaneity, agility, and resourcefulness.

V- Conclusion

This second chapter has delved into the notion of alternativeness and how it adheres to utopian demands for indeterminacy and mutability (Levitas, 2013; Wright, 2010). It has observed a variety of educational models, which are hybrid in function, multi-public, and multi-generational, and are working to give agency to their users, turning around traditional schemes and power relations. Further to that, this chapter has approached the subject of replicability in accordance with the older utopian tendency to engineer blueprints or ideal models for cities, dwellings, and institutional designs, arguing that such models may signal the end of alternatives' exceptionalism and facilitate their admission into the realm of the norm. On the subject of models, Dewey wrote in 1899:

> We do not expect to have other schools literally imitate what we do [...] A working model is not something to be copied; it is to afford a demonstration of the feasibility of the principle, and of the methods which make it feasible (2012, p. 57).

This chapter has also ascertained that alternatives can be variously oppositional or resistant, but that a more favourable position may be in-between (Dahl and Fihl, 2013; Kraftl, 2013), plural (Woods and Woods, 2009), or strategically selective (Soja, 1996). As noted earlier, out of the plethora of examples this chapter has delved into, very few have opted to self-define as alternatives. Artist and writer Julie Ault gives one possible explanation for that choice:

> The very word alternative produces endless arguments. It is provocative and meaningless, and suggests simultaneously an opening up and a closing down. Naming oneself alternative sets up both distance from and bondage to dominant institutions and ideas. It implies both a subordinate and a rebellious, perhaps productive, relationship to power. For critically constructive activities and structures it becomes essential to reject the term as a label. The more radical a group or effort, the more likely it is to resist the tag. “We are not alternative to anything” is a much-echoed sentiment that defies simple binary readings of power and its dynamic. Resisting the label positions margin as center: maybe not center center, but central in a given context (2010, p. 94-95).

Ault’s rejection of the label is sparked by disillusion with the fate of the alternative art movement that took place between 1965 and 1985 in New York (which her research in the early 2000s took her to), and with how spaces – much like those observed in the previous section – have either closed, become institutionalised, or been absorbed by larger or more conforming institutions (Rubinstein, 2010). If Ault recognises the ability for alternative spaces to exist in-between, if only temporarily, she challenges the very discourse around the margin versus mainstream binary, thus joining Soja in his search for new alternatives emerging from the restructuring of the original binary choice. In her case, this exercise has to go through the search for new and neutral terms. Could this approach derail the inevitable fate of alternatives observed with progressive schools, arts centres, and independent art schools? Should alternatives be thought of from the outset as time-limited ventures?

The alternative spaces that have been explored in this chapter were, for the most, time-limited. When Freinet took his ambition elsewhere in St Paul, he hit institutional walls, and his former school in Bar-le-Loup did not pursue his pedagogical vision; when Dewey resigned, the Laboratory School as it was originally conceived became defunct; the schools that Medd

designed gradually lost the spatial features that afforded different pedagogical approaches; Dartington College of Arts was closed and moved to the far more formal environment of Falmouth University; Joseph Beuys was dismissed from Kunstakademie Düsseldorf for allowing an unlimited number of students to attend his classes; Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes was closed by the government; Al Kennedy Alternative High School, Cátedra Arte de Conducta, International Art Academy of Palestine, and others folded; Centerprise closed and the Black-e is hanging by a thread; and so on and so forth. Those that did well for some time and are still going have been financially privileged (e.g. École Domaine du Possible), have remained deliberately small, portable, and independent from external funding (e.g. Mountain School of Art, Los Angeles; School of Missing Studies, nomadic; and the School of Engaged Art, St Petersburg / Berlin), become fully-fledged institutions (e.g. CalArts), or managed to maintain their ethos through pragmatic affiliations (e.g. Dechinta Centre for Learning and Research), renewed energy and leadership (e.g. Open School East), or persistence (e.g. Home Workspace Program), which, no doubt, all come with a cost.

The next three chapters endeavour to start answering the questions of this PhD research and, in particular, to make an in-depth enquiry into the time-limitedness of alternatives through an exploration of the evolution of three multi-public educational and cultural spaces – Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East – from the following perspectives: pedagogical, cultural, and social practice and engagement; conceptualisation and use of architectural space; and governance, management, and finance.

CHAPTER 3:
TOYNBEE HALL

I- Introduction and Research Method

1. Introduction

The first of three case studies, Toynbee Hall was established in 1884 on 28 Commercial Street in Whitechapel, East London, where it continues to operate to this day, albeit in a different form. It was co-founded by Church of England cleric Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta Barnett, as a residential centre for educational and social work among the socioeconomically deprived. Toynbee Hall supplied lodgings to recent university graduates and made provision for a multitude of lectures, clubs, societies, and activities, many of which were delivered or hosted by the residents themselves. These were intended for local working classes and engaged with subjects ranging from political economy to science, through to the appreciation of art. Central to Toynbee Hall's mission was the creation of an environment for cross-class encounters, the expansion of workers' knowledge and skills base, and, last but not least, social reform and campaigning. This chapter critically explores how and the extent to which Toynbee Hall achieved its vision in the early decades of its existence, and what has made it a differential space. It does so by firstly exploring the educational and socioeconomic context in which it emerged, secondly by delving into the socio-spatial dynamics of Hall as well as its educational, political, and artistic offerings, taking a detour into an affiliated space in Manchester, and thirdly by examining Toynbee Hall's legacy in present-day East London.

The main focus of research for this chapter is on the foundational decades of Toynbee Hall, more specifically the years during which Samuel Barnett was the warden, that is from 1884 to 1906. This particular moment in the history of Toynbee Hall is marked by sustained experimentation and adjustments, which, as this chapter will soon explore, were not only radical for the time, but also – in supporting the early development of what would later be known as the Welfare State – dramatically impacted the sociopolitical landscape of the 20th century. Toynbee Hall was not only the earliest model of a university settlement, but also the closest to Barnett's aspiration for an undenominational, progressive, and reformist movement. As such, the Hall would be used as a reference for many university settlements to come, not only in the UK, but also in the US, and as far as Japan. Since this chapter is partly dedicated to understanding the development of the settlement movement and, with it, its achievements, pitfalls, and failures, studying its first iteration seems not only adequate, but also necessary.

2. Research Method

One of the challenges one faces when researching the early days of Toynbee Hall is that relatively few administrative records of the period exist. It is unclear whether this is the result of war damage – the Whitechapel Library, where the records were located, received a direct hit during the World War II, which led to the destruction of parts of the records – or of poor minuting and documentation, or both. One's knowledge of that time is instead accumulated through reading more subjective records, most of which are kept at the London Metropolitan Archive as well as at the Bishopsgate Institute. These include family correspondence (in particular, an abundance of letters exchanged between both Samuel and Henrietta, and Samuel's brother Frank); Barnett's sermon notes; annual reports, which offer pre-digested and narrative accounts of the missing raw information; press clippings; and drafts and typescripts of lectures and public addresses. These records are complemented by a wealth of publications produced about the university settlements and Toynbee Hall at the time of its founding and shortly after, prompted by its novelty and pioneering position.

In addition, both Samuel and Henrietta Barnett were prolific writers; accordingly, they scrupulously recorded the everyday activity of Toynbee Hall not only in personal letters but also in articles and books, published both during and after their involvement with the Hall. While such literature needs to be treated with caution on account of its bias, it nonetheless provides some reflexive as well as critical insights into the early days of Toynbee Hall. Predictably for the era, out of the plethora of writing that was produced on Toynbee Hall and the university settlement movement at the turn of the century, none has been generated by the people supposedly at the receiving end: those whose lives might have been transformed or affected by the presence of the settlers who came, lived, taught, and shared their power, or access to people with power, with them. Instead, those responsible for historicising the movement were the founders, wardens, residents, administrators, and elite visitors of this establishment. It is largely based on the narratives they provided and recorded that researchers from the late 19th to the early 21st century have built what appears to be a largely one-sided narrative.

While it is impossible to write a speculative history of Toynbee Hall from below, and while my aim is far from proposing a revisionist view of the Hall's history, I would like to attempt an alternative reading to the dominant one, which has variously taken chronological and celebratory narrative forms (Barnett, H., 1918; Pimlott, 1935; Abel, 1969; Briggs, 1984) or, conversely, critically acknowledged the moral, social, economic, and geographical colonisation of one class over the other (Parker, 1998; Koven, 2004; Maltz, 2006; Geddes

Poole, 2014), yet always from a dominant perspective. My point is neither to underplay the role and significance of slumming – the Victorian phenomenon by which the well-to-do "were deeply attracted to the sights and sounds of metropolitan poverty and found […] a means to expand their social authority over the poor" (Koven, 2004, p. 183) – nor is it to dispute the fact that Victorian philanthropy – and what historian Derek Fraser names the "torrent of charity raining over the poor" in response to "a fear of social revolution, a humanitarian concern for suffering, a satisfaction of some psychological or social need and a desire to improve the moral tone of its recipients" (1973, p. 117) – was largely responsible for the university settlement movement in the first place.

Instead, I endeavour to write this chapter from no particular perspective and away from the "bedrock of solid and certain knowledge", to borrow the words of American physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad (2010, p. 244). To this end – and in line with Massey's conceptualisation of space as open, heterogeneous, and unpredictable (2005); as "a product of interconnecting flows" (Cresswell, 2004, p. 20), which I will argue Toynbee Hall illustrates to some extent – I am taking inspiration from Barad's theory of dis/continuities, entanglement, and spacetime enfoldings. More specifically, what she calls "joins and disjoins – cutting together/apart – not separate consecutive activities, but a single event that is not one" (2010, p. 244). If the writing that follows isn't exactly disjointed in so far as chronology is largely respected, the text however navigates through distinct places and across various eras in an attempt to shift and expand perspectives. This happens through temporary displacements: whether moving away from East London and into Greater Manchester, or reflecting on Toynbee Hall's engagement with social welfare across different centuries. In order to further position Toynbee Hall within a web of events, specific characteristics are studied and entangled with broader ones, before being eclipsed and reiterated later in other contexts.

II- The University Settlement Movement: Premises and Principles

Toynbee Hall was not only the first institution of its kind, it was also the mothership of an influential movement in adult education, citizenship development, and social welfare, which spanned from the mid-1880s to the 1940s in Britain and internationally, gaining particular currency in the US. The university settlement movement was born out of the work of the University Extension started in 1873 by the University of Cambridge in response to the demand to open up university training to both working men and women. Delivered by university graduates outside of the confines of university in a variety of industrial towns, the movement would reach its peak in the early 1890s, when lectures and classes were taken up by some 60,000 students. In 1877, Samuel Barnett, the incumbent of St Jude's in Whitechapel

since 1873, helped establish the East London branch of the University Extension Society and, in 1883, set the basis of the university settlement movement (Kelly, 1992). Barnett was concerned with propagating "the concept of an organic society as a mixture of classes" (Simon, 1974, p. 85); he grounded the university settlement movement in the belief that universities and their recipients should play a role in the improvement of the living standards of the urban poor in the great industrial centres (Woods, 1891; Addams, 1910; Gilchrist and Jeffs, 2001; Scotland, 2007). As Barnett put it plainly: "university men" should "bear the burdens of the poor" (cited in Scotland, 2007, p. 377) and "serve their generation" (cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 7). The university settlement movement was premised on the idea that interclass understanding – triggered by intercourse, cohabitation, and friendship between the socially and educationally privileged and the working classes – would lead to cooperation in social reform, and build the basis for a fairer society.

> Let University men become the neighbours of the working poor, sharing their life, thinking out their problems, learning from them the lessons of patience, fellowship, self-sacrifice, and offering in response the help of their own education and friendship. [...] This will alleviate the sorrow and misery born of class division and indifference. It will bring classes into relation; it will lead them to know and learn of one another, and those to whom it is given will give (Cosmo G. Lang[16], 1913 cited in Simon, 1974, p. 79).

1. The First Settlements

University settlements, and Toynbee Hall as their first iteration, engaged university undergraduates and recent graduates to come and live for a minimum of three months, and generally up to a year, among deprived urban communities, learn about their lives, share in their privilege, and work together with them to reform society at the educational and welfare levels. Practically speaking, university settlements were multi-function buildings in which diverse classes of people variously lived and ate, learnt and taught, and socialised and organised. Toynbee Hall was established as a centre for adult learning and social and cultural activity as well as a site for the study of social problems[17]. If it was primarily aimed at adults, it also brought children and adolescents within its ambit (Allaway, 1977). Toynbee Hall opened

[16] Cosmo Gordon Lang was an early supporter of the university settlement movement. A student at Oxford, he was one of the Universities Settlements Association's first undergraduate secretaries. He went on to serve as Archbishop of York (1908–1928) and Archbishop of Canterbury (1928–1942).

[17] Charles Booth's 17-volume enquiry *Life and Labour of the People in London* followed a seminal survey of poverty, industry, and religious influences in London, led between 1886 and 1903, and initiated at Toynbee Hall.

its doors on Christmas Eve 1884, but it was not until March 1885 that the Hall would become fully operational with Samuel Barnett as its designated warden and a first cohort of fourteen graduates from both Oxford and Cambridge inaugurating the residential element of the institution (Simon, 1965).

The year 1885 saw the establishment of a second university settlement in the borough of Tower Hamlets, this time of a missionary nature. Oxford House was created under the impulse of Anglo-Catholics at Keble College, University of Oxford, who deemed Toynbee Hall too secular (Woods, 1891; Simon, 1974). If Samuel Barnett was a clergyman, his outlook on social change was more progressive than many of his counterparts who would institute a flurry of missionary settlements in the following years, including the Bermondsey Settlement (1889, Methodist Church), Canning Town Women's Settlement (1892, Congregational Church), the Middlesbrough Settlement (1893, Congregational Church) and the Dockland Settlement (1905, Church of England). In a sermon preached before the University of Oxford in June 1884, Barnett declared that "[g]overning is doing for others, guiding is doing with others. The Established Church [...] fails in its national mission, because it aims at doing good for the people, and not with or by the people"[18]. The majority of settlements would however be undenominational; these included, in London, the Women's University Settlement in Blackfriars (1887) and Cambridge House in Camberwell (1897), and in the regions, the Manchester University Settlement (1895), the Glasgow University Settlement (1897), the Liverpool University Settlement (1898), the Edinburgh University Settlement (1905), and University Settlement Bristol (1911) (*Handbook of Settlements in Great Britain*, 1940). The proliferation of secular settlements in Britain – thirty-six by 1900 and sixty by 1922 (Matthews and Kimmis, 2001) – contributed to fulfilling Barnett's belief that:

> If settlements became so frequent as to cease to seem settlements, if they kept clear of all appearance of a mission, then rich and poor would so know one another that legislation and government would be armed to do the greatest good in the best way (Barnett cited in Knapp, 1895, pp. 65-66).

2. A New Departure for Adult Education

The university settlement movement, as defined by Barnett, proposed to not only move away from "solely missionary purpose" (Simon, 1974, p. 79), but also from patronage, a quality that

[18] Sermon by the Rev. S. A. Barnett of St Jude's Whitechapel, and Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street. Preached before the University of Oxford (Wadham College), on 5 June 1884.

had been strongly associated with previous experiments in adult education, causing resentment and, with it, their demise or reformation (Fieldhouse, 1996). A particular case was the Mechanics' Institutes, which had been established in the early 1820s with "the clear political aim of meeting the growing demand of the working class for education and knowledge while under the control of industrialists who provided the resources" (Simon, 1974, p. 72). As historian E. P. Thompson put it, the Mechanics' Institute brought together:

> the traditions of the chapel and of the Radicals. But the coexistence was uneasy, and not always peaceful. The early history of the Mechanics' Institutes, from the formation of the London Institute in 1823 until the 1830s, is a story of ideological conflict. [...] The crucial conflicts took place on the questions of control, of financial independence, and on whether or not the Institutes should debate political economy (and, if so, whose political economy) (Thompson, 2013, pp. 817-818).

Philosopher Friedrich Engels too sustained the opinion that in the Mechanics' Institutes "[t]he students are taught to be subservient to the existing political and social order" (cited in Fieldhouse,1996, p. 27). The Mechanics' Institutes had seen their membership dwindle and lower middle class users had replaced the intended working class recipients, who went on to set up their own independent institutions instead (Simon, 1974). Another case was the Working Men's Club and Institute Union launched in 1862 by lawyer and MP Lord Brougham, who had played an important role in the establishment of the Mechanics' Institutes and had also instigated the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1826. By 1886, the Working Men's Club and Institute Union was under the direct control of workers and had done away with the office of Vice-President, eradicating the last remnant of upper class dominion. If the Mechanics' institutes at Crewe and Nottingham had played an important part in the establishment of the University Extension movement, by 1900 their day was past. The reason for this was:

> simply that the functions the institutes had formerly fulfilled were now increasingly being taken over by local authorities. [...] Elementary education was provided after 1870 in public day schools, and continued education was available in government-supported evening schools. Technical and art education was provided after 1889 by the Technical Instruction committees; and the provision of public libraries and museums, though still far from adequate, was growing every year. [...] many mechanics' institutes became technical colleges [marking] the origin of [...] technical colleges and university institutions (Kelly, 1992, p. 199).

The 1870 Education Act aimed to spell the end of illiteracy in England and Wales. 1876 was the year education became compulsory for every child until the age of 12 in Great Britain and 1891 the year education became free. The 1944 Education Act would raise to fifteen the minimum school leaving age and introduce the principle of secondary education for all (Kelly, 1992).

3. Literacy Types and Access

Historian Roger Fieldhouse (1996) identifies two types of literacy that emerged in the 19th century: literacy for emancipation and literacy for social control. The former was reformist: it advocated for universal access to education as opposed to access for the privileged few, opening the door to women, lower middle classes, and working classes, though not always fully, as this chapter will explore. This type of literacy was and is still known as adult education, and is characterised by efforts to challenge and transform power structures and equip learners with the tools to become enfranchised. In contrast, literacy for social control ensured the maintenance of the *status quo*, shaping spiritually elevated but politically tame citizens into "responsible, moral and economically productive" individuals (Fieldhouse, 1996, p. 148).

Across the 19th and 20th centuries, adult education was marked by a tension between vocational and liberal education. In favour of vocational studies, the Mechanics' Institutes had been initially created in the 1820s to instruct through the means of lectures and classes, and of facilities such as museums, libraries, and workshops. Creating a better trained workforce and enabling social mobility were some of the early motives behind the Institutes, which were founded by factory owners and philanthropists, and thus operated a "mixture of autonomous working-class enterprise and paternalistic middle-class behaviour" (Fieldhouse, 1996, p. 15). Ultimately, the effort of the various institutes, clubs, and unions to educate the working class, be it to emancipate it or better control it, would not meet its anticipated success: "[i]t had only reached the upper crust of the working class, leaving the great proletarian masses almost untouched. The middle classes themselves constantly lamented this fact" (Kelly, 1992, p. 181).

Access, both financial and physical, is most certainly the main reason for the failure of 19th century adult education in fulfilling its anticipated goal. For instance, with the supposedly emancipatory Working Men's Associations and their affiliated colleges created in the 1850s, women could join for a lower fee to access basic education (i.e. numeracy and literacy skills) or practical subjects such as cooking and sewing, but not social scientific subjects like history or economics (Fieldhouse, 1996). Similarly, University Extension classes were not free of

charge and therefore largely unaffordable to the working classes. Although they had been started at the impulse of the University of Cambridge and later of Oxford, neither university provided funds towards it, leaving the organisers, which included unions and workers' associations, to cover the costs of tuition and other related expenses (Simon, 1974). In the specific case of Exeter, University Extension classes charged the workpeople a lesser fee, but made them enter through a different entrance and sit in a different part of the room from those who had paid in full, maintaining strict socioeconomic distinctions (Fieldhouse, 1996). In *My Days and Dreams* (1916), utopian socialist and poet Edward Carpenter wrote of his disillusioning experience teaching University Extension astronomy classes in Leeds in the mid-1870s to whom he thought would be working people, but were instead what he named the "commercial classes", mainly composed of women who were excluded from the traditional university system and were thus disenfranchised, yet not in socioeconomic terms. Similarly, the Mechanics' Institutes served craftsmen rather than machine operatives (Kelly, 1992).

Those who supported the university settlement movement posited that university men were "not generally wealthy; they do not incur the suspicion of looking upon questions from the capitalist side; they have no object of their own to serve" (Gorst, 1895, p. 16). It was thus hoped that a more equal relationship between founders and users would attract cooperation instead of hostility. Yet, according to educationalist Brian Simon, this relationship, supposedly steeped in social harmony, was in fact neo-feudal in outlook. This did not, however, trouble Samuel Barnett who believed that fundamental values had been lost in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Uncritically contrasting feudal lords, whom he described as being acquainted to their serfs, to the modern-day rich, who secluded themselves from the poor, Barnett called for the reestablishment of lost relationships and understanding between privileged and underprivileged classes, beyond charitable work. Barnett's arguably naive, but well-intended vision for a patronage-free movement would however not stop the founders of certain settlements from holding patronising views, as the statement by Hon J. G. Adderley, Head of Oxford House, testifies: "Colonisation by the well-to-do seems indeed the true solution to the East End question" (cited in Simon, 1974, p. 82).

III- What was Toynbee Hall?

1. Sociopolitical Context

As I have explored earlier, the university settlement movement did not exist in isolation; it drew from a string of previous experiments in adult learning – attempting not to replicate the mistakes of the past, though not always successfully – while responding to a specific sociopolitical context. Firstly, the Long Depression that had started in 1873 was still under way, and factory production, which ruled the industry, was under significant scrutiny from both social thinkers and workers. Designer and campaigner William Morris, who was first inspired by social thinker and art critic John Ruskin and later by socialist revolutionary Karl Marx, played a particularly important role in popularising a redefinition of labour as the result of self-achievement and pleasure, rather than alienation and dispossession. In the 1880s, Morris held lectures in every part of industrial Britain and published a number of articles and pamphlets that were widely read by the working classes, alongside Henry George's social inquiry *Progress and Poverty* (1881) and Robert Blatchford's collection of accessible essays on socialism *Merrie England* (1894) (Hoggart, 2009; Simon, 1974).

The aforementioned Carpenter, who had moved to Sheffield in the mid-1870s and had come in close contact with manual workers, would recall that Morris had made a profound impression on the Sheffield socialist workers (Carpenter, 2016). The textile designer and social activist would not only rely on rhetoric, but also put his theory into action; Morris notably became a member, alongside Karl Marx's daughter Eleanor Marx, of the newly created Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the first organised socialist political party in Britain. Socialism was for Morris the means by which to reconstruct society in a way that would "stir up the lower classes (damn the word) to demand a higher standard of life for themselves, not merely for themselves or for the sake of the material comfort it will bring, but for the good of the whole world and the regeneration of the conscience of man" (Morris cited in Kelvin, 1988, p. 222). Education was, to Morris, an essential part of this process; accordingly, it should be accessed at every level of people's lives, starting with the workplace (Simon, 1974). In his article 'A Factory as it Might Be', published in the SDF's weekly newspaper *Justice* in 1884, Morris advocated for a factory to:

> be pleasant as to its surroundings, and beautiful in its architecture [...] To begin with such a factory will surely be a centre of education [...] [it] will both provide an education for its own workers and contribute its share to the education of citizens outside; but

> further, it will, as a matter of course, find it easy to provide for mere restful amusements, as it will have ample buildings for library, school-room, dining hall, and the like; social gatherings, musical or dramatic entertainments will obviously be easy to manage under such conditions[19].

If such a factory was not to see the day, the Barnetts' settlement in Whitechapel would adopt each of the proposed attributes of Morris' intended factory: from a beautiful architecture to the provision of a library, dining hall, and space for educational, social, and recreational activities.

Another influential actor of the early socialist movement was Tom Mann. A worker himself, Mann too wrote pamphlets that were widely read and cited by the working class. He addressed early on the problem of time, which was needed for workers to engage in self-development and subsequently in politics. In 1884, Mann joined the SDF and started the Eight Hour League, demanding the reduction of labour hours to eight a day. In his 1886 pamphlet *The Eight-Hour Day*, Mann wrote: "[t]he demand, we as workmen, now make, is for leisure, not *idleness*. Leisure to think, to learn, to acquire knowledge, to enjoy, to develop; in short, *leisure to live*" (Mann, 2008, p. 26). Time was not the only issue; space to deliberate and learn outside of the sphere of conservative, religious, and capitalist control was also hard to access as the newspaper *Justice* commented in July 1885:

> The right of free speech for the workers [...] practically depends upon the right to address their fellows in open spaces. They cannot afford to pay for halls and lecture rooms; they are shut out from the Board Schools which they keep out of their labour; they are deprived of the churches and cathedrals which really belong to them. The open air alone remains to them: the chair at the street corner is their sole political platform (cited in Simon, 1974, p. 44).

Here again, Toynbee Hall would respond to the needs of the socialist movement by becoming a key platform for the free expression of workers. Being sympathetic to organised labour, Barnett often lent rooms for trade union meetings, and personally supported the 1889 London Dockers' Strike. In addition, he recognised the importance of the democratically controlled Working Men's Club and Institute Union by engaging with local clubs and helping set up a federation of Working Men's Social Clubs in London (Simon, 1974).

[19] Morris, W. (1884) 'A Factory as it Might Be'. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/justice/10fact1.htm (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

Another widely read publication reflecting on the socioeconomics of the time, this time from a more middle class and puritanical perspective, was congregational minister Andrew Mearns' pamphlet *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883). Generating shock and surprise among well-to-do Victorians and supporters of the university settlement movement, this piece of missionary sociology addressed London's shoddy housing conditions and named overcrowding, squalor, high rent prices, and high tenancy turnover as the greatest epidemic. In his text, Mearns recommended that the State "secure for the poorest the rights of citizenship; the right to live in something better than fever dens; the right to live as something better than the uncleanest of brute beasts. This must be done before the Christian missionaries can have much chance with them" (1883, p. 24). While pointing to the necessity of State intervention in social welfare and fulfilling a necessary awakening function for those who had never set foot in East London or met an East Ender, Mearn's book – which ultimately added little new to Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* published forty years earlier, except for undisguised disdain – only exacerbated class prejudice, all the while preserving the order of the Church. In contrast, and under the scrutiny and conservatism of those who sustained the entanglement between Church and State and the power relations that went with it, Barnett – a clergyman, it is worth remembering – would take it upon himself to disentangle social work from missionary work, and to support the full transfer of responsibility towards welfare from charity to State.

The earlier book *Unto This Last* (1860) by Ruskin, had, for its part, been embraced by both the progressive middle class and the politically-active working class. Though less radical than Morris and Mann's pamphlets, this foundational set of essays on political economy played a substantial role in raising awareness of Britain's class divide and in informing early forms of socialism. The author denounced the profound economic and social inequalities in the industrial age, addressing in particular the contempt, exploitation, oppression, and robbing of the rich over the poor, all the while advocating for fair wages and the fixing of their rate. While polemical in tone, Ruskin's essays advocated for reformation rather than revolution. Indeed, like Barnett, Ruskin believed that the feudal system was morally higher than the capitalist one in its display of so-called "affection" between master and servants, whom he equated to father and son. At an age of growing concern at the size and unity of Britain's working class, which fuelled fear of the political importance it could gain, this view was the dominant one among the reformist middle class. Needless to say that Marx's ideas were neither referenced by Ruskin nor by the numerous writers and supporters of the university settlement movement, except for William Morris, who would openly call for the end, rather than a softening, of

competitive commerce, that "pestilential rubbish"[20], which thrives on the exploitation of workmen. If political economy was a pillar of early socialist thinking, it had in fact been taught ever since the 1820s in places like the Mechanics' Institutes, but as E. P. Thompson reminded us, "whose political economy"?

2. Toynbee Hall: the Beginnings

Imbued with the teachings of Ruskin and described as "outspoken, exceptionally energetic [and] often extremely perceptive" (Simon, 1974, p. 85), Samuel Barnett, with his university background and influential connections, was well equipped to launch the university settlement movement. Furthermore, his first-hand experience of East London, as the incumbent of St Jude's, afforded him both authority and credibility. As early as the mid-1870s, Samuel and Henrietta Barnett had started to invite Oxford undergraduate students to live and work over the summer in their parish in Whitechapel:

> We met men, told them of the needs of the out-of-sight poor; and many came to see Whitechapel and stayed to help it. And so eight years went by our Oxford friends laughingly calling my husband the 'unpaid professor of social philosophy' (S.A. Barnett, in Barnett and Barnett, 1915, p. 123).

It was following the University of Cambridge's interest in helping the Barnetts 'cause in the longer term that Barnett wrote Toynbee Hall's – and by extension the settlement movement's – foundational letter in 1883. In the end, it would be the University of Oxford that would bring Toynbee Hall to fruition and set up, in December 1883, an association to raise the necessary funds to erect and fit out a building in Whitechapel. The University Settlements Association had secretaries in different colleges, who would "arrange meetings, collect funds, interest other students, and generally keep Oxford in touch with the East End" (Simon, 1974, p. 81). At the suggestion of Henrietta Barnett, Toynbee Hall was named in memory of the short-lived economic historian Arnold Toynbee (1852–1883), one of the earliest Oxford students to have come and visited Whitechapel during the summer holidays.

[20] Morris, W. 'Art, Wealth and Riches (1883)', lecture delivered at the Manchester Royal Institution, Mosley Street, Manchester on 6 March 1883. Available from: http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1883/riches/riches.htm (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

a- The Settlers

Recruited by the warden of the settlement, the residents would go and work in the city in the daytime, to earn a living and develop skills and connections, and return to the settlement in the evenings and weekends to assist their neighbours – through friendship, cooperation, and active involvement in teaching, local government, and social administration (Scotland, 2007). During Barnett's wardenship, over 200 men took up residency at Toynbee Hall (Matthew-Jones, 2017). While teaching first took the form of University Extension Lectures, other forms of learning developed around the creation of a great variety of clubs and societies. Besides hosting trade union meetings and recreational activities including concerts, annual exhibitions, social gatherings, and dinners – every resident was encouraged to invite guests for dinner, whether local workpeople or individuals of their own social status from other areas of town – Toynbee Hall was engaged in local initiatives outside of its walls, such as the creation of a public library, an art gallery, and children's play areas (Woods, 1891; Parker, 1998; Simon, 1974). Asked in 1890 to define Toynbee Hall, Barnett answered: "it is in a sense a club, the members of which devote themselves to the duties of citizenship in East London" (cited in Scotland, 2007, p. 42). He would further refer to Toynbee Hall as "a community of men and women associated to spread knowledge […] a co-operative society, in which every member gives as well as gets" (cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 84). Ultimately, Barnett saw in the settlements a vehicle for cross-class understanding and for cooperation in social reform. As explored in the following pages, his hopes for social reform would not take long to materialise; as for his aspiration for reciprocity, it was ingrained in the residents' thinking as this anonymous testimony reveals:

> I find [the working men of the Tower Hamlets] not only glad but proud to come and visit us and be associated with us. They set us thinking about them, and I suppose we set them thinking about us. I only hope they find it as interesting and edifying as we do (*Toynbee Hall Second Annual Report*, 1886, p. 41).

b- Governance and Finance

Administratively, Toynbee Hall was governed by an association named The University's Settlement in East London. At the time of its creation, the association's council was made up of fifteen individuals – university people, noblemen, and Toynbee's warden Barnett – fulfilling the duties of treasurers (one for Oxford and another for Cambridge), secretaries (again one for each university), and members and chairman, a role that would be assumed by Oxford University Press editor Philip Lyttelton Gell for the first twelve years. All council members had

to be donors and annual subscribers of the association. While the council only met once a year, its members were dispatched across and active in the following committees: the Finance Committee, the Library Committee, the Students' Dwelling Committee, the Education Committee, and the Entertainment Committee. Besides representatives from the association's council, Toynbee residents and external experts sat on these committees. Meanwhile, Samuel Barnett, Henrietta Barnett, and Toynbee Hall's sub-warden Reverend Gardiner each sat on one or two committees. Records of these meetings being non-existent, it is unclear how often they took place and how decisions were made and implemented. However, judging from the remarkably succinct minutes of the annual council meetings, it is fair to assume that the great majority of decisions were made by each individual committee.

The initial intention of Toynbee Hall had been to get its users involved in the management, and to eventually hand it over to them; this however never materialised (Allaway, 1977). Toynbee Hall users, and in particular students, would eventually be given a voice when it came to educational matters, but only after Barnett's departure as a warden, thus testifying to the founder's lack of belief in participatory democracy outside of the realm of politics:

> At Toynbee Hall the Council was for several decades the preserve of the class of men which started the venture, and for many years, even in the day-to-day running of the Settlement, direction and control remained in the hands of the warden and residents […] As late, indeed, as 1914 […] there was student representation on the committee which administered the 'Institutions of Popular Education'. In Werner Pitch's *Toynbee Hall and the English Settlement* it was stated that [four] 'students are *allowed* to take part in the organisation of Classes and are ensured consideration of their wishes' (Allaway, 1977, p. 7).

When it came to Toynbee Hall's finances, these were overseen by the council and the Finance Committee under two headings: the Toynbee-Hall Account, related to all public activities, and the Universities' House Account, related to the residential part of Toynbee Hall. The Finance Committee managed the yearly £1 members' subscriptions, £5 donations, and the debenture of the association. Enabled by Henrietta Barnett's wealth inherited from her father, a successful businessman, Samuel Barnett waived his £250 a year salary, redirecting it instead to an endowment for Toynbee Hall. Besides membership fees from subscribers and donations, Toynbee Hall received yearly funds from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and collected rent from residents – room and board were initially costed at 18-19 shillings a week (Koven, 2004). In addition, the settlement initially depended on free labour, with teachers and residents giving their time and effort free of charge (Woods,1891; Scotland, 2007).

IV- Toynbee Hall's Socio-spatial Characteristics

1. Architecture

In setting the foundations for the university settlement movement, Barnett had recommended that the settlements be located in a deprived area and that the buildings be large enough to accommodate the warden and a number of settlers as well as to host local residents and individuals from further afield attending daily classes and gatherings (Scotland, 2007). Toynbee Hall's site on Commercial Street, Whitechapel, was purchased for £6,250. It housed "a utilitarian brick building of two steep double-pitched roofs with clerestory glazing"[21] that had been designed by architect Frederick William Porter (1821-1901) and erected in 1852-3 as a Boys' Refuge and Industrial School:

> The building of Toynbee Hall was essentially a recasting of the Boys 'Refuge rather than a completely new building: when the site was acquired, the buildings were described by Barnett as already 'half-demolished'. Elijah Hoole (1838-1912), the Nonconformist London School Board architect, was tasked with the "object of using them as far as possible"[22].

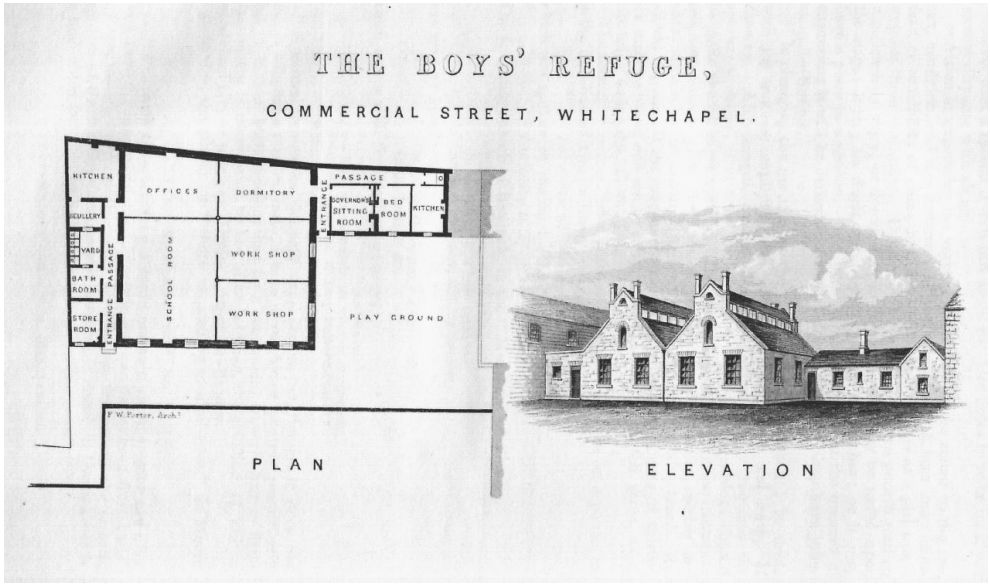

Fig 4. The Boys' Refuge, 1854.
Copyright: London Metropolitan Archives.

[21] "The Boys' Refuge and Industrial School", contributed by Survey of London on 24 December 2018, https://surveyoflondon.org/map/feature/379/detail/ (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

[22] Toynbee Hall, contributed by Survey of London on 24 December 2018. Available at: https://surveyoflondon.org/map/feature/379/detail/ (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

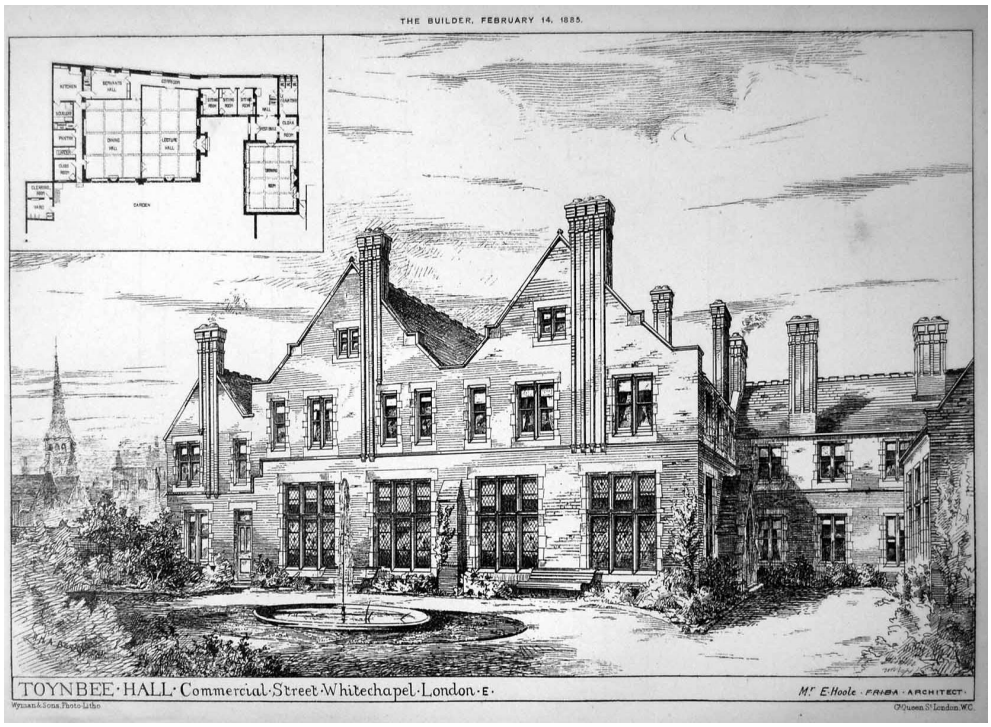

Fig 5. Toynbee Hall's buildings, 1885.
Copyright: London Metropolitan Archives.

Like the Boys' Refuge, which had accommodated a dormitory, a schoolroom, and workshops, the rehabilitated building made provision for individual and two-bed residential chambers for fifteen to twenty residents, a lecture hall and dining room, alongside the kitchen and offices (Smart, 1886). The building's structure was kept almost identical and was adorned to give it a Tudoresque architectural expression: "The style fitted with commonly held romantic ideas of an ideal communitarian but hierarchical society existing in the middle ages, and Hoole was himself, at heart, a Goth"[23]. If Barnett referred to Toynbee Hall as "a manorial residence in Whitechapel", it essentially resembled an Oxbridge college in so far as it was removed from the activity and noise of the streets, accessed through an arch, and equipped with "a court, or 'quad', so dear always to the heart of a university man" (Woods, 1891, p. 86). As Cherry, O'Brien, and Pevsner put it, Toynbee Hall:

> deliberately combined the collegiate style of the Universities with the domestic architecture of the Elizabethan manor house, expressing a characteristically Victorian relationship between the poor of the district and the obliging 'gentry 'at the Hall (Cherry, O'Brien, and Pevsner, 2005, p. 76).

[23] Op. cit.

The fact that Toynbee Hall took the appearance of a manor house in a district otherwise populated by shops, warehouses, and tenement buildings not only generated a sense of difference and separation; it was also a statement about the lost values of the past, so dear to Barnett and other reformists who believed that capitalism and its infrastructures were synonymous with individualism and the cause of society's ills. Accordingly, Toynbee Hall was instituted as a collective space in which the upper classes would care for the working classes and re-establish a sense of justice and civic duty.

£4,000 was spent on the building, interior decoration, and furnishings, which reflected the tastes and aspirations of its founders, with some of the furniture donated by the Barnetts and Samuel's brother Frank. While the lecture hall displayed sober Neo-Jacobean paneling, both the dining hall and the drawing room, which was located in an adjacent building, were furnished in a mix of Arts and Crafts pieces – the latter was decorated by the young architect and designer Charles Robert Ashbee (Cherry, O'Brien and Pevsner, 2005). Ashbee had started teaching classes on Ruskin in 1886 and further drew his inspiration from Morris' ideas when establishing the Guild and School of Handicraft, which was housed in a building next to Toynbee Hall on 34 Commercial Street. Despite the luxury of style and space afforded by Toynbee Hall, Barnett emphasised that the settlement's success wasn't so much infused by having a well-equipped building; instead, it was through the members 'dedication, observation, sensibility, and knowledge of the area that one could formulate a responsive offer and identify one's spatial needs:

> Toynbee Hall is not what it seems. Imitators […] begin by building lecture-rooms and by starting schemes for education and relief […]. True imitation is when half-a-dozen men or women set on social service go and live among the poor. […] Out of their common life various activities will develop, and the needs they discover they will meet (cited in Reason, 1898, pp. 19-20).

2. Toynbee Hall's Organism and Social Dynamics

In 1898, fourteen years after its launch, writer Will Reason described Toynbee Hall's physicality and activity in these terms:

> If a visitor with […] time or perseverance arrives in the evening, he finds, perhaps, the lecture-room filled by Dr Gardiner's history students or Mr Rudler's geology students, the class-rooms occupied by small groups studying English or foreign literature, the principles of science or economics, the laboratory in the hands of a few practical workers, the library

> in the use of its quiet readers, the club-room noisy with the hum of talk about excursions, entertainments, and parties to be undertaken by the Students' Union. […] the next moment, he goes into the drawing-room to find a party of Whitechapel neighbours or of East London teachers in the hands of a host with whom they are making merry, and passes by the tennis-court, which is occupied by an ambulance corps, into the dining-room, to find a conference of trade unionists, co-operators, or friendly society members discussing with leading thinkers and politicians some matter of policy or economy (Reason, 1898, pp. 16-17).

Reason's description invokes a living organism sustained by effervescence, circulation, and multiplicity – of people, uses, rhythms, movements, sounds, and mind-sets. In *Place: An Introduction* (2013), geographer Tim Cresswell summarises geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's understanding of space versus place as the former being about movement and the latter about pause, bond, rootedness, and care. In its early days, Toynbee Hall actively blurred the boundaries suggested by Tuan: it was at the same time rooted and transient, familiar and changeable. While for some it was a social space, a political arena, a classroom, or a dining place, for others it was a home – of thirty years in the case of one of the residents, Henry Ward – as well as a lodge for regional and international visitors – whether friends, family, or associates of the Barnetts and the residents, or even curious minds wishing to study, observe, and replicate Toynbee Hall's model[24]. As such, Toynbee Hall was a local community resource and a centre of national and international interest all at once, made vibrant by the constant motion of people, ideas, and activities.

For all that, the everyday spatial experience and use of Toynbee Hall divided the intended recipients – namely local residents who were referred to as guests – from Toynbee Hall dwellers who were known as residents. The term settler, although fitting to describe those who lived in the settlement, may not have been adopted on account of its connotation with the act of colonising a geographical and social area, which Barnett actively sought to avoid. As interlopers brought to East London at the joint initiative of the warden and the university they graduated from, the residents effectively made the space theirs, inviting East London natives in for a variety of reasons including teaching, dining, and partaking in debates. On the subject of dining, the Victorian studies scholar Lucinda Matthew-Jones notes that "[w]hile hospitality

[24] Toynbee Hall's visitors book from 1885 to 1920 reveals that thousands of people visited from all over the world, with a particularly high percentage from New York, Chicago, Boston, St Louis, Tokyo, the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany. Meanwhile, nationally, Woods noted that "[t]here are few of the leading men and women of England who have not been there at some time to give their help" (Woods, 1891, p. 86).

can display generosity, kindness, and sharing, it can also reinforce a sense of indebtedness between host and guest" (2017, p. 39). She describes how pieces of paper with the letters E. C., standing for Entertainment Committee, were placed under the glass of guests to remind not only the kitchen staff that those dinners were to be paid for by Toynbee Hall, but also the guests that "they were dependent on the generosity of their hosts for their food" (ibid).

As for partaking in debates, in her biography of Toynbee Hall's rooms and domesticity, Matthew-Jones describes the silence observed by the (few) members of the working class who were invited by the residents to converse in the drawing room after dinner. The workers' lack of engagement, which is noted in the autobiography of Toynbee Hall's French tutor Margaret Nevinson, was likely to be synonymous with discomfort and the inability to participate in an environment that was ultimately alien, and the opposite of feeling at home (Nevinson, 1926). The Barnetts' aspiration to merge institutional and domestic qualities into one did not garner full approval among the residents either; lack of intimacy and quiet, even on the bedrooms' floor, was a constant. If the Hall was calm at lunchtime since many of the residents worked in the city and educational activities mainly took place in the afternoon or evening, the flow of visitors was steady and the doorbell rang continually as one of the residents complained (Matthew-Jones, 2017). Space was also tight, and many rooms had multiple functions; for instance, the dining room initially hosted the library, which meant quiet reading was not possible until the late hours of the night. Meanwhile, the drawing room as well as some of the bedrooms also had to be used for educational activities.

Fig 6. In the Quadrangle, Toynbee Hall.
Drawing by Hugh Thomson, from Woods, R. A. (1895)
The Social Awakening in London 'in the collective book
The Poor in Great Cities: Their Problems and What is Doing to Solve Them. London: Charles Scribner's & Son.
Author's own copy.

The fact that Toynbee Hall resembled a university college – providing the residents with familiar surroundings and therefore spatial literacy – would have exacerbated the impression that the local residents were stepping into unchartered territory within their own neighbourhood. In the absence of any record providing evidence of the intended recipients' impressions, one may ponder upon their feelings – of disorientation, discomfort, exclusion, bafflement, or pleasure – when passing through the imposing gate, walking through the elegant quad, and entering Toynbee Hall's spaces. As Matthew-Jones asserts:

> Toynbee was not designed as a classless institution. Rather, it functioned as an elite domestic space that would have been materially and spatially unfamiliar to its working-class visitors, impacting the way in which cross-class friendships developed and were structured (2017, p. 50).

Fig 7. The drawing room at Toynbee Hall, by an unidentified photographer, c. 1908.
Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum.
Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

While Matthew-Jones is clear about the fact that the interiors of Toynbee Hall were “tied to class”, she also acknowledges the Barnetts’ “commitment to sharing middle-class luxury with the urban working classes” (ibid, p. 36). The scholar further argues that Toynbee Hall’s effort to bring together opposing classes was hoped to be facilitated by the fact that it was a domestic space, thereby emphasising “ideals of comfort, security, and sociability” (ibid, p. 34). However, these attributes did not reflect the realities of the homes of the ill-lodged working class, as Barnett himself noted (1918), and was yet another assumption of one class over the aspiring practices of another. Toynbee Hall worked best when treated as an institutional space, separated from its domestic qualities. Instead of coming into the hall through the drawing room, which was one of the ways of circulating through the complex, the so-called guests could directly enter the more sober lecture hall from the quadrangle (Matthew-Jones, 2017), affording them the impression of stepping into a functional and formal room for education, recreation and meetings; a semblance of a democratic space.

Fig 8. Dining Room, Toynbee Hall.
Drawing by Hugh Thomson, from Woods, R. A. 'The Social Awakening in London' (1895) in the collective book *The Poor in Great Cities: Their Problems and What is Doing to Solve Them*. London: Charles Scribner's & Son. Author's own copy.

Matthew-Jones follows historian Seth Koven who, in *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (2004), analyses the few illustrations that exist of Toynbee Hall's early decades. Writing on the images used by the founder of the first settlement house in Boston, Robert Woods, in his article 'The Social Awakening in London' (1895) and drawn by Irish illustrator Hugh Thomson, Koven comments:

> Rather than depicting young university men dining with their East End friends at a communal meal, we see two domestic servants, in their white caps and apron, hard at work […]. The picture of the drawing room […] is crowded with figures, but all of them are ladies and gentlemen. […] The conspicuous absence of laboring men and women within these two public "domestic" spaces, except in the role of servants, provides an ironic critique of Toynbee's failure to establish relations of genuine equality with its Cockney neighbors (Koven, 2004, p. 247).

Looking at the same images, Matthew-Jones points to their careful staging, their focus on furnishings and interiors, on appearance rather than on the people who would have normally populated them. Arguably making assumptions about the class background of the

protagonists in the drawing, she concludes with the hypothesis that the Barnetts may have "believed that including lower-class people in the images would have detracted from the splendor of the rooms" (Matthew-Jones, 2017, p. 38).

Fig 9. Drawing Room, Toynbee Hall.
Drawing by Hugh Thomson, from Woods, R. A. 'The Social Awakening in London' (1895) in the collective book *The Poor in Great Cities: Their Problems and What is Doing to Solve Them*. London: Charles Scribner's & Son. Author's own copy.

IV- Adult Learning: from University Extension to Gallery Education

1. University Extension and Practical Education

As writer Thomas Kelly notes in *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (1992), "[n]o other settlement devoted the same attention to adult education as Toynbee Hall" (p. 242). Indeed, education underlined much of the life of Toynbee Hall from the outset, starting with the settlements' foundational activity, the University Extension Lectures. The University Extension lecturers were Oxford graduates, some of whom residents of Toynbee Hall, who taught East Enders a variety of topics such as history, literature, ethics, economics, and

modern languages as a means to expand the workmen's "imagination, enrich their leisure and help them respect their opponents" (Parker, 1998, p. 41). The aforementioned Woods, who had spent six months at Toynbee Hall before founding his own settlement, Andover House, in Boston in 1895, noted:

> Admission to about half the courses is free; for the rest there is a small charge. Among the most interesting classes are those in political economy. […] A recent course was on the lives and teachings of the leading English economists, in which the lecturer combined economic instruction with biography and personal characterizations. The class was made up of from twenty-five to forty men, mostly artisans. They would listen intently for an hour and a half, often interposing questions. This department has grown so much that the students are in three divisions, a primary course, a more advanced course, and an economic club. The economic club is composed of thirty or more members, about half working men and half university men, and promises to be of great interest (Woods, 1891, pp. 93-94).

Woods himself admitted that despite the observed social mixity, "one would find very few representatives of the two or three lowest grades of society among the students" (Woods, 1891, p. 93). As Kelly would write a century later, many of the students were indeed "lower middle-class rather than working-class, and nearly half of them came from other parts of the city" (1992, p. 241). This would have been in part the result of the small charge, unaffordable to the least privileged. If Barnett was too aware of the limits of the University Extension movement in terms of its appeal and accessibility – be it financial or intellectual – his position on the subject of what should be taught and learnt, and for what purpose, was inconclusive and somewhat paternalistic. On the one hand, he opposed the idea that adult education should be a pastime and, on the other hand, he was against education being vocational or a mere vehicle through which one could access better wages and a higher standard of living. According to him, education was about elevation, but a largely non-material one, and his expectation was that the deprived people of Whitechapel would take a similar stance and partake in learning in order to develop higher citizenship (Gell, 1897; H. Barnett, 1918; Geddes Poole, 2014). Barnett saw in education the means by which to develop "a wider outlook on life" and to "enable the exceptionally brilliant or exceptionally industrious to climb into positions usually thought higher than that of the workmen" (cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 113). Despite believing in universal provision and in universities being ultimately responsible for it, Barnett recognised that the "Extension lectures are suited to the needs of the middle classes, and are generally supported and controlled by middle-class committees" (ibid, p. 114).

The Third Annual Report of Toynbee Hall reveals that it did not take the organisers long to make alterations. In 1887, University Extension tuition was complemented by "special courses of study […] under the immediate direction of the Residents and their friends" (*Toynbee Hall Third Annual Report*, 1887, p. 15). Instruction took place in the following disciplines: language, literature and morals; science; music and craft – the singing classes organised by the Popular Musical Union being particularly well attended; and lastly, technical instruction, of which the different carpentry classes were the most popular and in one case oversubscribed (ibid). Also reported to attract a broader demographic were free, practical classes in areas including electricity, first aid, home nursing, sewing, shorthand, reading, writing, and arithmetic, along with activities ranging from swimming and lifesaving clubs, to a children's country holiday fund and a travellers' club (Pimlott, 1935; Scotland, 2007). Barnett's vision for what the working people should aspire to therefore contrasted with reality, which effectively saw fulfilment and high attendance in learning that was entertaining, practical and vocational in nature. To Barnett's credit, Toynbee Hall's picture exhibitions could however be said to have successfully illustrated the type of elevation he was seeking out, as I shall explore below.

2. Learning Through the Eye

a- Annual Picture Exhibitions

Samuel and Henrietta Barnett were not typical modern art afficionados, for if they valued art for its aesthetic qualities, it was its social and educational dimensions that they primed. As Samuel Barnett wrote:

> Pictures, if they are of any value, are preachers, and their message is to the world. How will anyone who regards the message, justify the solitary confinement of the preacher? (cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 162)

Samuel, who was colour-blind, took particular joy in discussing the themes of the pictures during the annual exhibition and was known to often spend up to five hours a day in the exhibition space talking to visitors (H. Barnett, 1918; Pimlott, 1935). Henrietta, for her part, was more academic: she would select the artworks as well as negotiate loans with the lenders; she would decide on the display; and, last but not least, she would be responsible for writing and editing the catalogue, which compiled descriptions and interpretation of the works, an activity she achieved in a couple of days together with a group of volunteers. Both showed limitless enthusiasm for the annual event, which lasted between one and three weeks, took

place at St Jude's Church in Whitechapel, and started in 1881, that is three years before Toynbee Hall's opening. While the first edition attracted 9,000 people, the sixth edition, which expanded in scope thanks to the erection of three large rooms at the back of the Hall, saw its footfall increase to 55,300 visitors (Pimlott, 1935). In 1901, their dream of a permanent art gallery would be achieved with the launch of the Whitechapel Gallery on 77 Whitechapel High Street, an initiative driven by them.

> 1881—The success of the Exhibition quite surpassed my expectations. The people not only enjoyed a new pleasure, but took lessons of which the things before them were examples. For myself, I must say I never so enjoyed intercourse with my fellows as in my talks with my neighbours over the pictures of Watts, the pottery of De Morgan, and the stuffs of Morris... (S. Barnett cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 162)

> 1885—Exhibition—bition—tion—on. This has been the event of the week. Day after day crowds have come. The spectators have learnt wonderfully. They study their catalogues, remember the pictures of past years and compare their lessons. More and more am I convinced of the education which such an effort has accomplished. If preaching be any good (and perhaps without life it is none), this preaching has been of the best. We have sold 16,000 catalogues… (S. Barnett cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 168)

The annual exhibitions directly embodied the ideas of Ruskin and Morris. Ruskin's belief in art's agency, alongside his theses on the domination of one class over the next, coupled with Morris' conception of labour as a product of pleasure and self-actualisation in defiance of industrial deskilling, resonated strongly with the intellectual impulse behind the annual picture shows. Featuring new and recent artworks by artists including the pre-Raphaelites and symbolists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, Frederic Leighton, Frederic James Shields, George Frederic Watts, and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, alongside political illustrations by Walter Crane and William Morris' textile pieces, the free exhibitions' mission was to broaden the visitors' mind through the means of beauty and exchange. Conversations were indeed central to the experience: visitors would use the catalogue's detailed descriptions and the explanations of the guides – often the Barnetts themselves – as a starting point to develop their own interpretation of the pictures. Writing a review of the 1891 exhibition, the unnamed correspondent of *The Daily Graphic* echoed Barnett's claim of unreserved participation:

> How the East-enders appreciate the exhibition was well shown by an incident that happened on one of the first afternoons the exhibition was open. A lady connected with St. Jude's was taking some of the children round the rooms, was going from picture to

> picture explaining their motive in a few simple words, and point out their various qualities; when the older people, finding they could see a picture twice as well when it was lucidly explained to them, began to attach themselves to the group, till at last the party numbered more adults than children. As soon as one group had had enough, another was ready to take its place (*The Daily Graphic*, 4 April 1991).

In the daily tours and conversations that took place in the exhibition, East End working men and women were encouraged to relate their everyday labour with that of the painters, their everyday surroundings with those portrayed in the pictures, and their everyday sensations with those felt when looking at and discussing art. Through this appreciation and exercise of dis/identification, it was hoped that visitors would develop a critical mind and, with it, a desire to enfranchise themselves from exploitation and poverty – a dogma that some of the exhibiting artists themselves supported. In fact, many of the artists in Toynbee Hall's annual exhibitions were profusely collected by Thomas C. Horsfall, the founder of the Manchester Art Museum and a close friend of the Barnetts, who would visit the Hall on a regular basis and host them in return. During one of their visits to the Horsfalls in 1887, Barnett wrote to his brother Frank:

> We are with the Horsfalls at Swanscoe Park and enjoy them as we always do. His Museum is most interesting and gives promise of much which will be done when people learn to teach through the eye… (cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p. 46).

b- The Manchester Art Museum

Given the mutual influence that the Barnetts' exhibitions and Horsfall's museum had on each other and their shared belief in the educational and emancipatory power of art, which they both articulated through their work, I wish to make an aside to take a closer look at the Manchester Art Museum (1886-1953). A philanthropist and collector, Manchester Art Museum's founder Thomas C. Horsfall had inherited his wealth from his father, an industrialist, and his vision from John Ruskin. Horsfall would dedicate forty years of his life to develop and support a new type of museum for the working men and women of Manchester's inner-city district Ancoats, which had experienced the effects of rapid industrial development in the later half of the 19th century. This was a time of civic pride and patronage, when successful industrialists built monumental, neo-classical, or neo-gothic cultural edifices in the very heart of cities like Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, and Preston (Kidd and Roberts, 1985). In contrast, Horsfall's museum occupied a pre-existing, unpretentious building in Manchester's most deprived area, away from the city centre.

Fig 10. Manchester Art Museum, 1900.
Credit: G. E. Anderton.
Collection of Manchester Libraries.

In developing the premise for his museum, Horsfall wrote:

> The people who live in and near crowded towns have, it seems to me, two states to choose between – one in which beauty of many kinds shall be known and loved by the majority of the people of all classes; the other, the existing state, in which a very large number of the working classes are brutalised by their surroundings, and a very large number of the richer class live in brutalising indifference to their brutality (Horsfall, 1883 a, p. 45).

Bringing social classes together through the appreciation of art was the founding principle of the Manchester Art Museum which, in turn, would pave the way for the establishment, in 1895, of the Manchester University Settlement, the first university settlement outside of London. Horsfall had first started making plans for the Manchester Art Museum in 1877, endorsed by his mentor Ruskin and supported by organisations including the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association, the Ancoats Recreation Committee, the Manchester Literary Club, and the Ruskin Society. Ancoats was a squalid area, filled with smoke and dwellings “in the last stages of inhabitableness”, as Engels had first described them in 1845 in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (2005, p. 97). Thirty years on, the streets of Ancoats showed little sign of improvement. Horsfall set himself the task of ending the brutality of industrial living

through engaging people with art “by means of a sensibly managed art gallery” (Horsfall, 1883, p. 40). He was driven by the firm conviction that by spreading “knowledge and love of art and beauty”, art galleries could instill in the working people the “desire and power to live rightly” (Horsfall, 1883 b, p. 31).

The Manchester Art Museum, which opened its doors in 1886 in Ancoats Hall, had both Morris and Ruskin on its Committee. In 1883, Horsfall had invited Morris to give a public talk on his second visit to Manchester. It was on this occasion that he delivered one of his most famous speeches, ‘Art, Wealth and Riches’, in which he addressed the social effects of industrialisation and deskilled labour. Unlike Horsfall, who believed social improvement would be triggered by the appreciation of art and beauty, Morris maintained that “change must come, or at least be on the way, before art can be made to touch the mass of the people.”[25] Despite their divergences, Morris played a significant role on the Manchester Art Museum Committee, advising with the ‘Model Rooms’ and the ‘Art, Processes and Fabrics’ galleries, which taught visitors about “good” and affordable design made using traditional rather than industrial means of production. The Manchester Art Museum was split over two floors: its collection was organised according to thematic sections such as ‘Local Scenes’, ‘Birds, Flowers and Fruits’, ‘Industrial Arts’, ‘Animals’, ‘Architecture and Sculpture’, and one gallery dedicated to the work of J.M.W. Turner. The collection featured oil paintings, watercolours, etchings, and engravings by the Pre-Raphaelites, including William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriele Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, Frederic J. Shields, and their contemporaries John Ruskin, Walter Crane, Emily Gertrude Thomson and George Frederick Watts, as well as works by Tintoretto, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci.

[25] Morris, W. (1883) ‘Art, Wealth and Riches’, lecture delivered at the Manchester Royal Institution, Mosley Street, Manchester on 6 March 1883. Available from: http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1883/riches/riches.htm (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

Fig 11. The Nature Room, Manchester Art Museum, undated.
Copyright: Manchester Art Gallery.

In *Art and Large Towns* (1883), Horsfall had outlined his vision for his upcoming museum: it would be open on Sundays – largely unusual at the time – so working people could go to the museum on their only day off; and it would also be open one to two evenings a week for the same reason, and host concerts "to induce people to come and to stay long in our museum" (Horsfall, 1883 a, p. 41). The collection would offer a range of art forms and objects relating to different epochs, from casts of antique sculpture to the finest examples of industrial arts, through to contemporary painting. Copies would be commissioned when necessary, for instance, for use during popular lectures or to make up for the gaps in the collection – Ruskin himself would copy drawings by Turner. Interpretation would be key: every artwork and object would be meticulously contextualised, explained, and referenced by means of a label. Furthermore, there would be a significant social history section to engage visitors with the past and present of their locality. Taking place weekly, the popular lectures illustrated by lantern slides would bring scholars from the fields of art and science to discourse on subjects ranging from the migrations of animals, to volcanoes, through to Socrates, sight and socialism, or George Frederick Watts.

While some of the artists exhibited in the museum had close connections to socialism, the majority were detached from politics and comfortably belonged to the establishment. Yet, it wasn't so much artists or the art itself that mattered to Horsfall, as the example of the commissioned copies epitomises; it was what he made of it. In fact, his approach to art was uniquely instrumental in so far as he openly used it for social and educational ends. This known fact did not affect his credentials as a collector and one could argue that while many of the artists he collected were not politically active, they nonetheless supported his endeavour. Whether the Manchester Art Museum succeeded in alleviating "the running sores of working

class life in Manchester" (Horsfall, 1883 a, p. 129) is arguable. If it did, it was less through art than through recreational activities:

> After the initial rush, an average of 2,000 people per week visited the museum – 250 to 300 'real Ancoats people' regularly attended the Wednesday night entertainments, which consisted of music, singing, reading and recitations (Harrison, 1985, p. 134).

The number of evenings for popular entertainment rose from one to two a week following the first annual report, which noted that "the mere exhibition of works of art, even with the aid of written and oral explanation, would not suffice to attract a sufficient number of visitors to the Museum to make it a force in the neighbourhood" (Harrison, 1985, p. 117). Visitors to Ancoats Hall steadily increased throughout its first decade and in 1892 a new concert hall was built to hold 600 people. The year 1895 saw major changes that reasserted the educational aims of the museum, including the opening of the Manchester university settlement and the publication of the new Education Code that Horsfall had helped draft and which stipulated that time in the museum was equivalent to school time. This effort was praised by Barnett in his correspondence with Horsfall and would be instrumental in developing a rationale for the establishment of an art gallery in Whitechapel.

In conclusion, the Barnetts and Horsfall can be said to have not only pioneered gallery education, but also an instrumental use of art for social progress. This would be the first step towards cultural democracy, yet many years would pass before the effective democratisation of culture would come into being. Indeed, if the Barnetts and Horsfall's ambition was to make the arts accessible to the labouring classes, there was no intention to encourage these very classes to create their own culture (Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017). Accordingly, creative classes were conspicuously absent from the programmes and agendas of both institutions[26], which merely fostered appreciation of middle class aesthetics, culture and values – yet, to ends including the raising of awareness of class division and the development of cognitive capacities and, by proxy, of resisting minds. This can be read, again, as part and parcel of a programme committed to teaching the workpeople how to "live rightly", to use Horsfall's words, and "help them respect their opponent", to use those of Parker (op.cit.). Barnett and Horsfall's discourse on art and artists as preachers had clear religious and moralistic undertones; for right means fair, but also righteous, which is far away from the "indulgence of physical

[26] One of the rare exceptions was the work of the Guild and School of Handicraft led by Charles Robert Ashbee, who would cut ties with Toynbee Hall after five years, finding the atmosphere at Toynbee Hall too cloistered and removed from reality.

appetites, which would kill our higher life" (Horsfall, 1883 a, p. 16). Horsfall and the Barnetts' use of art was thus both social and redemptive; as well as being a vehicle for delectation, instruction and empowerment, the appreciation of art represented a potential instrument of civic control and class alignment, rather than opposition.

V- Towards and for Welfare

Toynbee Hall's far-reaching social influence has been the organisation's trademark and what gives it both authority and the determination, after 135 years, to keep "pioneering new solutions for poverty […] while working to influence opinion and to change the systems and policies that affect people today"[27]. Significantly, the settlement was the place where Clement Attlee – leader of the Labour party from 1935 to 1955 and Prime Minister between 1945 and 1951 – "bec[a]me an enthusiastic convert to socialism" (Attlee, 1949, cited in Gilchrist and Jeffs, 2001, p. 12). Attlee had first come to Toynbee Hall as a resident in 1906, before becoming the settlement's secretary in 1909. It was also where William Beveridge – the economist responsible for building the pillars of the Welfare State, which was to be implemented under Attlee's premiership – worked as a sub-warden from 1903 to 1905 and wrote his book *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (1909).

A few decades earlier, Toynbee Hall had been the birthplace of a seminal survey of poverty, industry, and religious influences in London, led between 1886 and 1903 by social researcher and reformer Charles Booth – who invented the concept of 'poverty line' (Fraser, 1973) – and culminating in the 17-volume enquiry *Life and Labour of the People in London*. Accordingly, the Hall was both at the origin and/or supportive of projects, campaigns, and strikes, which effectively affected policy. These included historic strikes to secure fairer wages and better working conditions – such as the Match Girls' Strike of 1888, the Dockers' Strike of 1889, and the General Strike of 1926 – along with campaigns for local amenities including playgrounds, libraries, bathhouses, and the removal of slaughter houses (Woods, 1891; Parker, 1998). In addition, Toynbee Hall's social research and proposals around the improvement of housing standards successfully led Parliament to pass the Housing of the Working Class Act 1890, which granted local authorities the legal power to acquire land and build housing estates and tenements.

[27] https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/our-work/ (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

From the outset, Toynbee Hall was active in informing and educating people about the workings, benefits, and pitfalls of alternative politico-economic practices and acts of social resistance. It held regular conferences on topics including 'Co-operative Credit Banks, Co-operative Difficulties, The Possibilities of Extending Trade Unions, Labour Farms, New Openings for Co-operation, The Unemployed and The Utility of Strikes' (Scotland, 2007, p. 52), and became a vital resource for trade unions which held their meetings there and obtained free legal support as well as advocacy from the residents. Such activity owed Toynbee Hall the reputation of agitator and to be labelled "a house of extreme socialists which it is very difficult to keep in order" (Jowett, 1890 cited in Scotland, 2007, p. 41). Toynbee Hall was at the origin of other significant initiatives and organisations: the Hall's founders and residents initiated The Children's Fresh Air Mission in 1884, later renamed the Children Country Holiday Fund and active until 2018, and supported a group of trade-unionists and co-operators in 1903 in founding the Workers' Educational Association of which Canon Barnett was the first secretary.

VI- Toynbee Hall's Legacy and Present

In line with its original mission and in response to the fact that London Borough of Tower Hamlets, despite encompassing Canary Wharf's financial centre, is still riddled with poverty and inequality issues[28], much of the public work of Toynbee Hall today involves researching and publishing reports on topics connected to the socioeconomics and experiences of London residents and workers. 'Savings for the Future – Solving the puzzle for low income households' (March 2017), 'Is London a fair city?' (June 2015), 'Are young people heard? Our thoughts about young people and politics' (November 2014), and 'Waiting for change: Restaurant workers and the informal economy in Brick Lane' (February 2009) are some of the reports on social and financial inclusion published by Toynbee Hall in the last decade or so. In addition, and in a stated effort to "support people and communities to break down the barriers that keep them in poverty"[29], most of the courses and advice delivered by Toynbee Hall today are geared towards debt management, financial health transformation, and money management learning.

[28] In 2022, the child poverty rate was still "the highest of all the London boroughs, with 56% of children judged to be living in households in poverty, compared to 37% in the typical London borough". https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/tower-hamlets-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/ (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

[29] https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/about-us/our-vision/ (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

In 2017, Toynbee Hall launched its first Participation Action Research project on the experience of older people in social housing and the barriers they face in terms of participation in community activities. Aimed at policy makers and service delivery organisations, the report 'You don't really know people until you talk to them' (September 2018) identified and made recommendations for four priority needs, namely accessible advice support, safer homes and neighbourhoods, local access to technology, and interacting swith people outside of their age groups[30]. The success of this participatory research process prompted Toynbee Hall to start developing, a year later, 'When We Speak', a new programme tackling this time the experience of young people in East London.

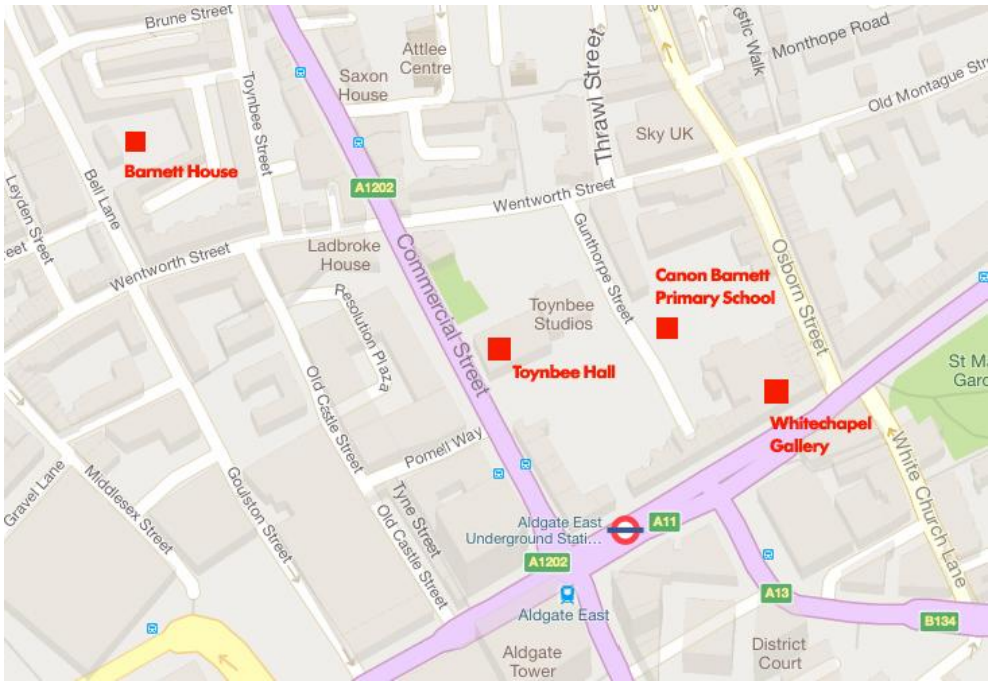

Fig 12. Map of the area showing the influence of Toynbee Hall.

Today, Toynbee Hall's influence is felt across several blocks between Spitalfields and Aldgate in East London. One may stroll along Toynbee Street to find shelter from the traffic and noise of Commercial Street, walk past Barnett House – one of several buildings, which compose the Holland housing estate – and on the way to the Barnetts-founded Whitechapel Gallery, come across Canon Barnett Primary School. Back in 2007, when I first visited Toynbee Hall, unannounced visitors could either ring the bell of Profumo House – named after John Profumo (1915-2006), the disgraced politician turned Toynbee volunteer and chief fundraiser – to access Toynbee Hall's legal centre, or walk along a narrow-gated alleyway along Mallon Gardens, named after Jimmy Mallon, Toynbee Hall's longest-serving warden (1919-54). From

[30] https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/You-dont-really-know-people-till-you-talk-to-them-Older-Peoples-Participatory-Action-Research-FINAL-REPORT.pdf (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

there, one could peer through the windows of the original building containing the rentable wood paneled lecture hall and dining room, or go to the Arts Bar and Café housed in the former drawing room and run by the arts organisation Arts Admin, which leases the space from Toynbee Hall.

Today, a visit to Toynbee Hall takes a different turn. As part of a £17 million capital project – £10 millions of which were procured through the sale of assets to the property company London Square and £2.5 million of which were taken as a loan, with the rest being funded through the Big Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and trusts and foundations – the entire site was redeveloped between 2017 and 2020. The former gated quadrangle has made space for a public square open onto Commercial Street and surrounded by a range of new edifices framing the refurbished Hall. A new building on the site of the former Profumo House now hosts Toynbee Hall's advice and wellbeing centres, which together have the capacity to support 6,000 people a year, along with four floors rented out to charities and businesses[31]. The advice centre, which has been running since 1898 and was first known as the Poor Man's Lawyer service, offers free assistance, five days a week, to a steady flow of advice seekers on matters involving debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment, and consumer rights. The wellbeing centre, a recent addition to Toynbee Hall's services, is free and open six days a week to local over 50s who come to socialise, knit, read, or partake in activities including singing, tai chi, and art classes. As for the original building, visitors can now freely walk around the refurbished ground floor spaces and the string of recently completed classrooms and meeting rooms, when not privately hired, and enjoy a heritage exhibition on the 135 years' history of Toynbee Hall and its achievements. In addition, Mallon Gardens has been redesigned to host wellbeing activities as well as public seating and a play area.

[31] https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/about-us/regenerating-our-estate/advice-faqs/ (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

Fig 13. The main building of Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street, London E1, April 2020.
Credit: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0

London Square's contribution towards the redevelopment has been the erection, on Toynbee Hall's estate, of sixty-three housing units, fourteen of which are affordable housing[32] managed by the housing association Peabody. This has involved the demolition of several buildings, residential and otherwise, which previously included eighteen affordable housing units. London Square Spitalfields is described by the property company as:

> a boutique development of one, two and three bedroom apartments set around the beautifully landscaped grounds of Mallon Gardens and Grade II listed Toynbee Hall. Intelligently designed with a luxury specification, with concierge services and all the apartments benefit from outdoor space in the form of terraces, balconies or winter gardens[33].

When reading this presentation aimed at the wealthy and consulting the prices of the new, non-subsidised flats – ranging from £650,000 for one beds to £1,325,000 for three beds[34] – one cannot help feeling uneasy and, at the same, being reminded of Toynbee Hall's former luxury's collision with the local reality. And yet, Toynbee Hall's consortium with a private developer is far more transparent and true to its word than many of the recent real estate ventures, which journalist and sociologist Anna Minton describes in *Big Capital: Who Is*

[32] https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s80632/DC%20PA1502156%20Atlee%20House.pdf (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

[33] https://londonsquare.co.uk/developments/detail/spitalfields (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

[34] https://www.rightmove.co.uk/house-prices/e1-7bf.html (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

London For? (2017). In her book whose title somewhat echoes that of Toynbee Hall's own report 'Is London a fair city?' (June 2015) published under the umbrella of the London Fairness Commission[35], Minton addresses what she calls "a new politics of place" (2017, p. xiii), whereby the use of property is no longer driven towards a social good, but by profit. Critically, the author sheds light on the doomed partnerships between local councils and property developers to supposedly tackle the housing crisis. These are marked by lack of transparency and consultation, and often end up solely benefitting the corporate partners, which subvert the planning system in order not to deliver on their promises of social housing provision. This notably happens through the notorious performance of 'land banking', the process by which developers sit on land that has planning permission and wait for its value to rise, before often reselling it. In contrast, London Square has duly delivered on the number of affordable housing units stated in the planning application, which was jointly submitted with Toynbee Hall in December 2015.

During our interview[36], Toynbee Hall's Chief Executive Jim Minton explained that despite being a relatively small organisation, Toynbee Hall has a complicated business model, and that for the last thirty years it has largely relied on contracts – with local government, other charities or the financial services industry – to deliver activity. Minton noted that "if this activity is notionally in response to community needs, it is nonetheless driven by the funders' own remits". The projected earned income from renting permanent spaces to charities and businesses across the four floors of the new development, coupled with revenue from the redeveloped classrooms and main hall's hire, will contribute to providing the organisation with greater autonomy when it comes to programming, and allow it to develop, in Minton's words, "a more organic approach to working with communities and a better response to the variety of local needs, playing the role of broker within the community to make it, collectively, a better place". Accordingly, one can expect to see more participant-led projects of the kind described earlier and, by the same means, a reconnection with Toynbee Hall's original aim to support disenfranchised local communities in being agents of social changes relevant to their needs.

VII- Conclusion

Asked whether Toynbee Hall could have been qualified as alternative in its early days and given the postulate that alternative is meant, as per the definition proposed in the introduction

[35] http://212.48.91.208/toynbeehall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/is-london-a-fair-city-2015.pdf (Accessed: 9 April 2022).

[36] Jim Minton, in an interview with the author, 29 March 2019.

to this PhD, as simultaneously resistant and conformant to the main order, as in-between, Jim Minton approved of the label and described Toynbee Hall as:

> organic in terms of the kind of work that went on, and in the way it explicitly sat outside of State provision. […] The leadership straddled those worlds between establishment and community, and was therefore able to influence the State"[37].

Minton talked about the different periods, including the 1970s – a decade that the next chapter will explore – which he described as the moment in which "State corporatism and welfare"[38] peaked:

> Organisations like Toynbee Hall were then freer to do other things, not all of which were universally successful I don't think, but nevertheless different and interesting. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the State withdrew and started outsourcing, we would have become, in reality, much less alternative, and much more of a delivery organisation for debt advice, welfare benefits and other things one might expect to be a function of the State. What we are trying to do today, partly through our redevelopment, is getting an amount of financial independence, better connect with the community around us, tap into the narrative around place-based solutions to problems, and reposition ourselves as being alternative[39].

In *The Cooperative Movement: Globalization from Below* (2007), socio-economist Richard C. Williams identifies eight qualities which, if observed, can make a cooperative successful:

> Open meetings; Deep collaboration; Access to power; Free expression of minority opinions; Shared commitment to the culture of the organization; Fair treatment of one another; Consideration of the individual; Ongoing discussion and reevaluation (remaining open to change) (Williams, 2007, p. 126).

Despite the fact that Toynbee Hall was not a cooperative, in its early decades a number of the above qualities were to be found in the everyday activities and actions of the settlement, which notably made cooperatives a regular subject of enquiry. While open meetings – not so much about organisational matters, but about social and political subjects and events – were a

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

weekly occurrence, cooperation with unions and workpeople, whether in the planning of strikes and campaigns, or in the production of reforms' proposals, was central to the Hall's mission, as was facilitating access to those in power. As for the capacity to self-reflect and reevaluate, this was key to the Hall's functioning. The Barnetts' prolific and reflexive writing played an important part in keeping Toynbee Hall self-aware and alert. This was arguably not a shared process, but one that largely remained in the hands of the founders. The residents, however, had agency over a number of matters and were able to initiate and facilitate necessary changes, for instance when it came to the provision and delivery of education.

Furthermore, as the annual reports and syllabi reveal, Toynbee Hall had the capacity to, overnight, double teaching and space provision if a class was particularly successful; create a club or society relevant to the users' interests and needs; or give space to an union preparing a strike and, on a more permanent basis, to the London Branch of the Co-Operative Wholesale Society and the Southern Section of the Central Co-operative Board, which had lost their headquarters to a fire (*Toynbee Hall Third Annual Report*, 1887). The organisation also had persuasive enough skills and helpful contacts in the press and among the well-off to raise funds to build a library or an art gallery and get given land for that purpose in a matter of a fortnight (Pimlott, 1935). For all these reasons, Toynbee Hall was, organisationally speaking, light on its feet, open to change and willing to make itself relevant to the struggles of the surrounding communities in order to put an end to the deep social and economic inequalities of the time, or at least contribute to it.

For all that, Toynbee Hall was far from flawless. If Barnett disagreed with the patronising depictions of the working classes by the likes of Andrew Mearns and J. G. Adderley, his own views, which largely dictated Toynbee Hall's code of conduct, were highly paternalistic as I hope this chapter will have demonstrated. Like many of his counterparts, Barnett was a passionate Victorian reformer who believed the working classes could only attain enfranchisement through social mobility or, put differently, through "working-class assumption of middle-class ideas" (Fraser, 1973, p. 100). Accordingly, Barnett adhered to the view that self-help should be ameliorative, rather than revolutionary. Pondering upon the effects of the settlement movements, Simon writes:

> It is doubtful whether the Settlement movement ever affected the mass of the working class, even in the areas surrounding the settlement, though its impact is difficult to assess. Many of the activities evidently appealed more to the lower middle class than the workers (Simon, 1974, pp. 84-85).

This reality was openly acknowledged by Barnett himself, more particularly on the subject of the University Extension Lectures, as well as by real-time and retrospective observers of the Hall including Woods (1891), Samuel (1974), and Kelly (1992). This however did not stop the founders of Toynbee Hall from making cross-class interactions and friendship central to the settlement rhetoric, both in the Hall's early days and in hindsight, as if the process of naming these interactions was sufficient proof of their intention and hence of their success. And yet, the effectiveness of the intended cross-class intercourse has been persuasively put to doubt by Matthew-Jones in her aforementioned depictions of the encounters that took place in the common spaces, such as the drawing room.

The last part of this conclusion is dedicated to the subject of gender. Going back to the illustrations analysed by Matthew-Jones and discussed earlier in the chapter, these further depict the gender dynamics at play within Toynbee Hall, a subject that would deserve its own dedicated chapter. In both illustrations women are variously portrayed as servants and passive protagonists attentively listening to the man next to them or, conversely, taking part in a flirtatious exchange. In the early decades of Toynbee Hall, while women – more often than not the wifes and daughters of Toynbee Hall tutors, associates, and members – were allowed in for mundane appearances as the drawing room illustration shows, the residents were all men, as were the learners, except for those who came to follow classes such as nursing and sewing. With some exceptions, including the French tutor Margaret Nevinson, who would later play a leading role in the Women's Suffrage movement, and clay-modelling tutor Miss Williams, most of the tutors were male too. These were arguably early days for first wave feminism and the Women's Suffrage movement, which was notoriously late compared to other countries in Europe and beyond.

Fig 14. Samuel Barnett with a group of men outside the entrance to a building, c.1890s.
Copyright: London Metropolitan Archives.

One significant exception to the quasi male-only rule was the often-unacknowledged co-founder of Toynbee Hall, Henrietta Barnett, whose position as a key enabler and decision-maker might have been deemed sufficient to represent the perspectives, causes, and needs of women. She would retrospectively touch on gender relations at Toynbee Hall, when justifying her husband's comment that "women were many—too many, I think, for the movement" (Barnett, 1897 cited in H. Barnett, 1918, p.150):

> In reference to his words […] it must not be forgotten that when that was written, men, young men, intellectual men, had but recently joined the ranks of the philanthropists. The care of the poor, the children, and the handicapped had hitherto been left to women, or men of mature if not advanced years. Indeed, the novelty of Toynbee was not so much that men lived among the poor, but that young and brilliant men had chosen to serve them in ways based on thought. It was the fear that men, still shy in their new role, would retire if the movement was captured by women that made Canon Barnett anxious to keep the Settlement movement primarily for men. […] But that Canon Barnett had unlimited faith in women, their aims and capacities, he gave many proofs (H. Barnett, 1918, pp. 150-151).

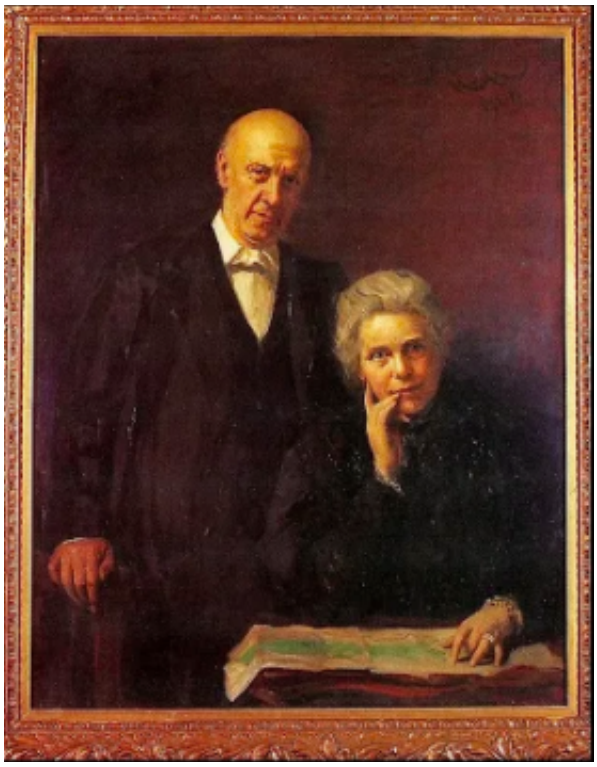

Fig 15. Hubert von Herkomer, portrait of the Barnetts, 1908. Copyright: Toynbee Hall, London.

The fact that Samuel Barnett asked painter Hubert von Herkomer to paint him next to his wife in 1908, two years after he stood down as the warden and took on the role of President of Toynbee Hall, may be one such proof and his way of acknowledging her as the other thinking head behind Toynbee Hall. Henrietta Barnett is portrayed here as cerebral, holding a document – possibly a poverty map by Charles Booth and his acolytes. One may also view her as physically dominated by her standing husband, and accepting of that subaltern role for her and others. After all, she did not stand against her husband's position to minimise the involvement of women at Toynbee Hall. For Koven, the decision was a shared one, which:

> reflected discomfort with a hardened, disengaged bourgeois manliness and their commitment to offering men alternative models of social citizenship. From the outset, the Barnetts sought not only to expand the horizons of the poor, but also to encourage the most talented male graduates of Oxford and Cambridge to think in new ways about their public and private selves. If settlements were explicitly experiments in reimagining class relations, they were also implicitly sites to invent a new kind of man who was manly but capable of deep empathy, public-spirited because he was attuned to the private grief of his neighbors (Koven, 2004, p. 240).

Koven further emphasises the redefinition of masculinity at play in the university settlement movement. He goes on to argue that Toynbee Hall and male settlements in general, through the absence of women and their remote geographical locations – that is to say away from upper classes' conventions – enabled the development of gender and sexual identities considered alternative and deviant at the time (Koven, 2004). If Toynbee Hall failed to abolish intergender prejudice, it informed the creation – by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr[40] – of the world's second most influential settlement, Hull House in Chicago, which established itself from the outset as a feminist organisation, one in which closeted identities also abounded (Jackson, 2001).

To conclude this first case study, while a number of significant flaws have been highlighted – in particular the lack of representation and consideration of minority voices, and the authoritarianism of the founders in the Hall's narrative – the early decades of Toynbee Hall remain politically bold, socially energetic, educationally critical, and organisationally reactive. Toynbee Hall was a nest of often productive contradictions and friction, whereby late Victorian progressive ecclesiasticism met radical left-wing politics, with figures such as Vladimir Lenin visiting the Hall for tea and debate. Ultimately, the first university settlement was able to support numerous transformative campaigns and the foundations of long-lasting initiatives from the Workers' Education Association through to the Welfare State. It used its educational, social, and economic privilege to make visible the social and political research, and ensuing proposals for reform, which it both initiated and enabled. In other words, it exercised a function of mediator between community and State. Critically, Toynbee Hall pioneered the concept of an institution built on the entanglement of educational, social, and cultural work, providing key teachings for institutions to come.

[40] It was after reading an article about Toynbee Hall and subsequently travelling to Europe in 1887 to meet Samuel and Henrietta Barnett that Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr decided to open Hull House in Chicago, in 1889. In their turn, the Barnetts paid a visit to Hull House in 1890 and inaugurated its newly built art gallery, directly inspired by their own long-lasting engagement with art (Addams, 1910).

CHAPTER 4:
CENTERPRISE

I- Introduction and Research Method

1. Introduction

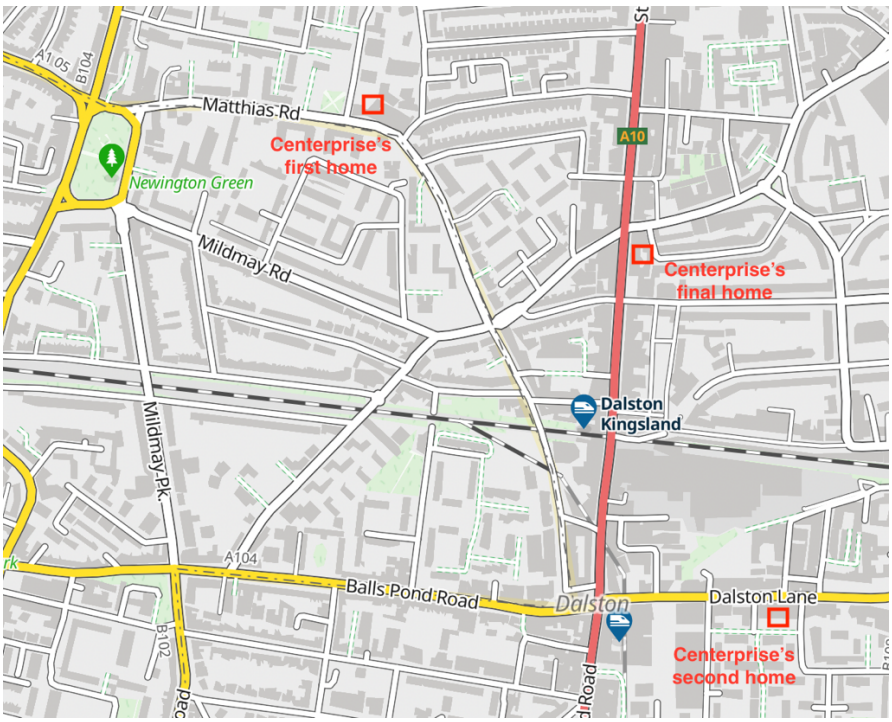

Fig 16. Map of the three locations of Centerprise.

The second of three case studies, Centerprise operated from 1971 to 2012 in the heart of Hackney as a multi-purpose community centre integrating a bookshop, a coffee bar, publishing activities, free meeting rooms for community groups, a reading centre, and an advice centre. For a few decades, it was also home to local associations including 136 Nursery, Hackney Under-Fives, and Hackney Play Association. The first three years of Centerprise's existence were spent first in a small office on Mathias Road, and soon after in an old chemist shop on 34 Dalston Lane. In 1974 it moved to its final home on 136 Kingsland High Street, a former shoe shop occupying two Georgian houses, which came under Hackney Council ownership in 1984. I first encountered Centerprise in 2013, a year after its forced closure by the council, through a meeting with writer and social historian Ken Worpole as I and others were about to launch Open School East (OSE) a few blocks down the road from Centerprise, ironically in another council-owned property: the former Rose Lipman Library and Community Centre.

Fig 17. Facade of Centerprise,1980s.
Credit: Brian Longman.

Following Worpole's suggestion to map out OSE's genealogy, one of the first events to be organised at OSE, on 21 November 2013, was 'Radical community arts centres in 1970s and 1980s Hackney: What Legacy?' A crowded room gathered around writers, researchers, and organisers who had been variously involved with setting up radical community arts centres in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Centerprise and Cultural Partnerships in De Beauvoir; were busy revisiting the unwritten histories of these places as well as the radical decades of the older Chats Palace in Homerton; or were engaged in organising new collective spaces (Common House in Bethnal Green and Open School East in De Beauvoir). The speakers talked about the origins of these spaces, key moments, and challenges in their history, modes of programming and organising, and their struggles in sustaining these spaces. One of the guests was oral historian and Hackney resident Rosa Vilbr (now Schling), the managing director of On the Record, a non-profit co-operative working to uncover untold stories. Schling had visited Centerprise when it was still open and, at the time of the event at Open School East, was in talks with a former Centerprise publishing worker to find out what had happened to the books and archives of Centerprise, and what Centerprise materials former workers might have got in their homes and personal collections. These early conversations would form the basis for a two-year research project led by Schling under the umbrella of On the Record. Titled 'A Hackney Autobiography: Remembering Centerprise' and granted funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund a year later, the project has largely inspired and enabled my own research, as this chapter is about to explore.

This second chapter sets out to critically examine Centerprise in the first two decades of its existence as well as its legacy. Like the Toynbee Hall chapter, it follows a thematic rather than a strictly chronological logic and delves into: the sociopolitical context in which it emerged; how Centerprise positioned itself within the landscape of contemporaneous community organisations and local authorities and funders' policies; its intentions, outputs, programmes, organisational approaches as well as struggles; and its socio-spatial dynamics.

2. Research Method

As hinted above, the oral history and archive project 'A Hackney Autobiography: Remembering Centerprise' has both stimulated my interest in researching Centerprise for this thesis and facilitated my own research. Launched in December 2014, *'*A Hackney Autobiography: Remembering Centerprise*'* started with identifying participants (people who would be inclined to share their stories of Centerprise as well as documents) and recruiting volunteers (people to help On the Record compile, archive, and creatively reactivate and disseminate these stories). In some cases, the participants would also become volunteers. Recruitment was achieved through word of mouth, advertising in local newspapers, flyposting, and a launch event. What particularly helped reaching out, Schling recalls, was running community mapping workshops in Hackney Caribbean organisations and ESOL classes, among other contexts[41]. A number of people with connections to Centerprise, whether former users or workers, came forward as a result. As Schling explains, Centerprise's closure was still raw and few people were prepared to reflect on the later years of the organisation. This naturally dictated the focus of the project, which ended up being on the first two decades of Centerprise, up until the dismantling of the co-operative in 1993.

'A Hackney Autobiography' trained volunteers in oral history to record thirty-four interviews with former workers and users of Centerprise; together, they present a range of viewpoints, sometimes conflicting ones. The interviews are available on the project's website[42] in audio and written form and were used by Schling in the writing of her book *The Lime Green Mystery: an Oral History of the Centerprise Co-operative*, published in 2017 by On the Record. This insightful and amply illustrated book further draws from reports, articles, letters, flyers, and newsletters collected from former Centerprise workers and compiled into an archive fond donated to Bishopsgate Institute as part of the project. The other outputs of 'A Hackney Autobiography' included the production of ESOL teachers' resources inspired by the work of

[41] Rosa Schling, in a phone interview with the author, 13 September 2019.

[42] https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/ (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

the Reading Centre at Centerprise and available for download on the project's website, along with a free mobile app, which offers two audio walks. One of them, 'Food and Frontlines', takes the listener from Dalston Lane to Literacy Pirates (which is located on the former site of the Centerprise coffee bar), through to Ridley Road Market and Sandringham Road. Narrated by volunteers and incorporating testimonies from Centerprise's former users and workers as well as local figures, the audio journey is a contemporary exploration of local buildings, streets, and places of former political and social significance, where food and conviviality mix with memories of 1970s riots and police confrontations. The audio walks share similarities with artist Graeme Miller's 2003 East End sound trail 'Linked', which historical geographer Toby Butler qualifies as a "memoryscape": a gathering of grassroots memories shared by multiple voices (through the use of oral history methodologies) in relation to place, history, and the present (Butler, 2007).

My own research is based on use and analysis of (1) the Bishopsgate Institute archive fond; (2) the interviews recorded for 'A Hackney Autobiography' as well as new ones I recorded in summer 2019 and winter 2020; and (3) of *The Lime Green Mystery* book, which so far constitutes the only published piece of retrospective writing on Centerprise.

(1) Compared with the archives documenting the making and life of Toynbee Hall, the Centerprise archives are polyphonic. The project having run, from 1974 to 1993, as a co-operative involving a broad range of local people, many different voices and forms of expression, both written and visual, are represented in this fonds: from polemical biannual reports to DIY newsletters and playful pamphlets, through to staff papers ringing alarm bells about Centerprise's funding situation and relationship with Hackney Council. What is missing from the archive are socio-spatial materials, i.e. floorplans, photographs depicting the interior, and written traces of spatial reconfigurations, relocations, and decisions on space use. In light of this absence and of the fact that I did not visit the building when Centerprise was still active, there is no socio-spatially focused section in this chapter, in contrast to the other two case studies.

(2) The oral history part of 'A Hackney Autobiography', along with the interviews I carried out, complement and broaden the physical archive's range of perspectives by including the voice of users as opposed to just organisers and co-operative members, while offering the benefit of hindsight. The interviewees recorded as part of 'A Hackney Autobiography' reminisce about themes and experiences as varied as what it meant as a young working class girl to start writing and publishing, Centerprise's institutional whiteness in the 1980s, and the sweet, ambient smell of Caribbean food in Centerprise in the 1990s. Beyond asking questions about

each individual's contribution to Centerprise, my own interviews – with Anthony Kendall (Centerprise's founding group member and trustee in the pre-co-operative years), Stephen Manning (early Centerprise worker), Rosa Schling (initiator of 'A Hackney Autobiography'), and Ken Worpole (Centerprise publishing worker in 1971-74) – further invite the interviewees to discuss their perspectives on the cultural politics of the 1970s, the position of Centerprise within the network of community organisations of the time as well as the organisation's connections with the settlements movement. They further ask the interviewees to reflect on the alternativeness of Centerprise, and what, in their view, made it different to other community organisations active in the 1970s and 1980s.

(3) *The Lime Green Mystery* makes wide use of both the physical archive and oral history part of 'A Hackney Autobiography' to construct its narrative. More specifically, the book exists to give life to On the Record's oral history project and to put into writing the history of Centerprise's first phase of existence as a grassroots and democratic project, as told by the interviewees and revealed by the recently retrieved documents. The author of the book, Schling, is and acts like a historian, remaining as objective and faithful to the facts as possible. While she spent two years working with the project participants and therefore necessarily developed strong connections to Centerprise, she has the benefit of not having been part of it while it was still operating. As such, *The Lime Green Mystery* has a level of detachment and impartiality that is rare to witness in accounts of community projects or spaces from that period, often written by the founders and operators themselves (Bishop, 2012).

My own connection to Centerprise started with Worpole signposting me to Schling in 2013 and has continued with reading her book, listening to the oral history project, familiarising myself with the materials she helped gather and donate to the Bishopsgate Institute, along with visiting Hackney Archives, taking the audio walks, walking in and around the old premises, and interviewing people with further insight into Centerprise, while broaching subjects relevant to my research. While I have followed Schling's every step, the intention of the present chapter is neither to duplicate her thoroughly conducted and funded long-term research, nor to attempt to draft the unwritten history of the second phase of Centerprise's life – the first phase being more potent than the latter, as this chapter shall explore. Instead, the project of this chapter is to critically approach these materials and narratives in order to provide a distanced and analytical reading of the organisation's modes of operation and cultural practices, and put them in perspective with other practices of the time, including at society and policy levels.

In line with my desire to make this PhD a useful resource for existing and future founders and managers of multi-public educational and cultural organisations, while the analysis is key, so

is the detailed information about activities, projects, atmospheres, systems, and pitfalls. Such descriptions further serve as basis for comparative purposes with the other case studies presented in this PhD, and for discussing changing patterns and attitudes within Centerprise's own history towards issues encompassing, but not reduced to, exclusion, inclusion, co-operation, race, and class.

II- What Was Centerprise?

1. Self-description

Two key documents provide meaningful insights into the first few years of the multi-faceted organisation, all the while bearing witness to the collective and versatile spirit of the Centerprise project. These are: *What Is Centerprise?* (1974), a playful and image-rich pamphlet, and *Centerprise Annual Report 1978*, a self-reflexive and aspirational account of Centerprise's work up until 1978.

The landscape format information brochure *What Is Centerprise?* is made up of as many pages as there are facets to Centerprise's work. Written by Centerprise worker Nancy Amphoux and designed by Royal College of Art students, who also took all the photographs, the document demonstrates a confident and whimsical use of language and visual communication, anticipating Centerprise's future publishing adroitness. The didactic pamphlet takes the reader on a veritable journey through the building that Centerprise had just moved into on 136 Kingsland High Street, pushing doors, zooming in and out of rooms, and going up and down the creaky stairs of the three-storey building to explore the centre's multifarious activities. The first in a sequence of fourteen pages or double spreads, each starting with "Centerprise is...", reads:

> Centerprise is a Bookshop
> And, as the cover and first page show, it's a door.
> It is many doors, opening in and out. Come in!
> Behind the first, a bookshop. Why?
> Well, there wasn't one in Hackney (Centerprise is
> in Hackney, by the way, and it's for Hackney, and
> it's now almost entirely by Hackney), and that
> alone was a good reason for the first door
> (*What is Centerprise?*, 1974, p. 1).

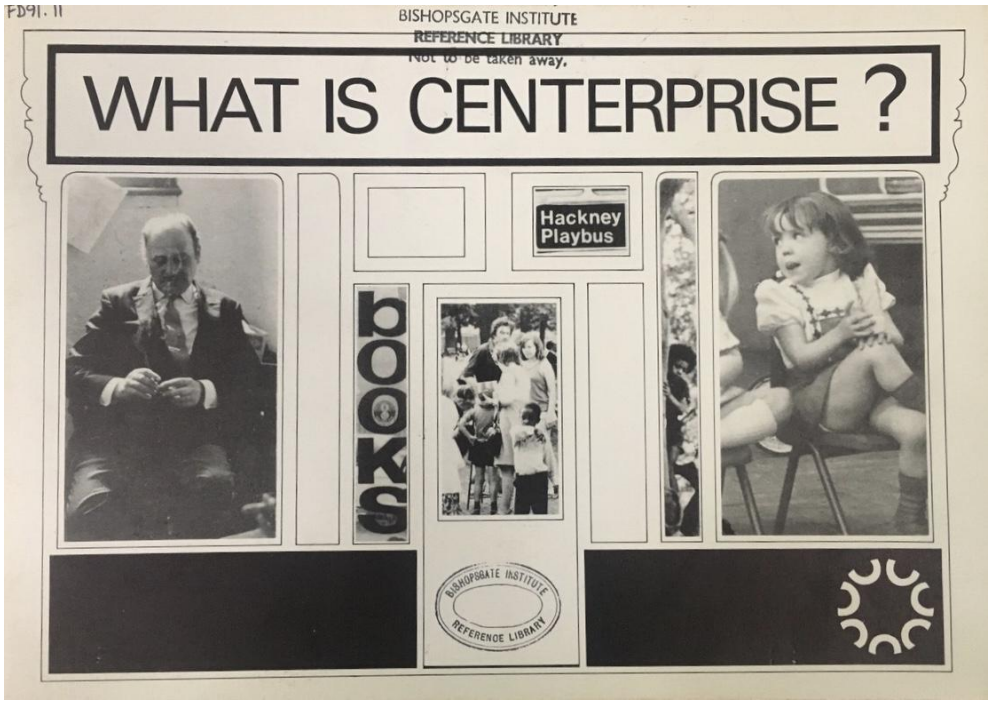

Fig 18. *What Is Centerprise?* (1974), pamphlet cover.

When flicking through the pages, one learns that Centerprise is ... a Coffee Bar, a Meeting Room and Office Space, an Advice Centre, a Children's Bookshop, a Playground, a Playbus, a People's Press, a Publishing Project, a Silkscreen Workshop and a Duplicator, a Community Project, a Summer Holiday, a Street Theatre, a Co-operative, a Future. The playful journey continues throughout the pamphlet, giving the reader practical information such as the bookshop's opening hours, the services of the advice centre, how the charity is funded and run, and who the members of the co-operative are, along with providing insight into activities that may be less visible, such as who currently meets in the two free-to-rent meeting rooms – e.g. the Hackney branch of the Workers' Education Association, the Claimant's Union, the Play Association, and Citizen's Rights – as well as the organisations that Centerprise has helped start and supported in a variety of ways, including the Hackney Playmobile Association and a summer camping scheme. *What Is Centerprise?* further delves into the ethos and aspirations of the organisation – namely to give voice to those "no one else seemed to listen to" (*What is Centerprise?*, 1974, p. 12) – and what the future may look like, with plans for law clinics, art related projects, and publications about Hackney. The pamphlet concludes by voicing the hope that it has established clarity as to what Centerprise is and does for "those in and outside Hackney who can help us financially or are simply interested; those, throughout the country, who are thinking of starting something similar elsewhere" (ibid, p. 19).

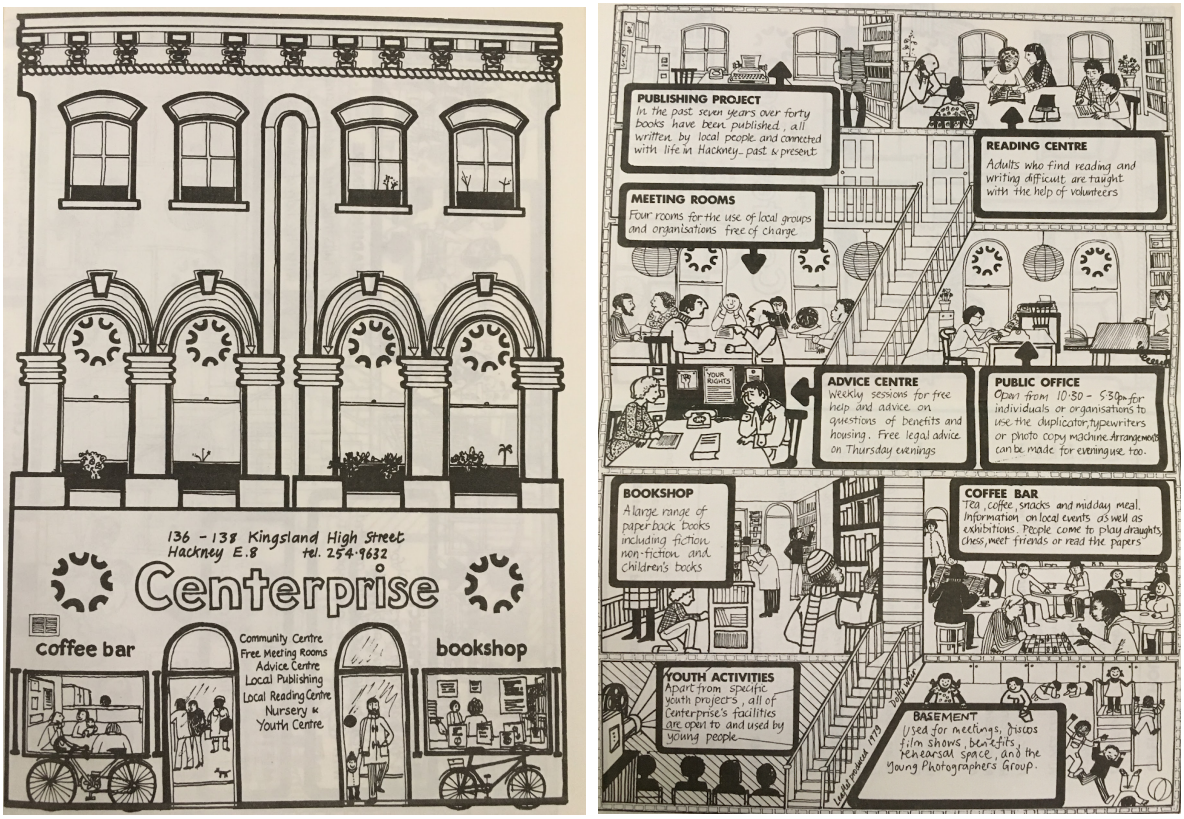

Fig 19 and 20. Advertising brochure, 1979. Front cover and page 1.
Drawing: Duffy Weir.

One of the things one retains from *What Is Centerprise?* is the importance of the building in connecting activities, projects, and people in flows that are physically vertical and conceptually horizontal. Centerprise's physicality would be used as a creative communication tool on several occasions, including on a hand-drawn advertising leaflet from 1979, which represents a section plan of the building, showing its interior room by room. Comics-like, every panel represents a room with its actual fixtures and fittings: one sees children and adults conversing, arguing, typewriting, reading, browsing books in the bookshop, drinking tea, playing table tennis, chess or with a ball, and enquiring about their rights. Each panel has a written description of the possible uses of the room and of the services it provides. The journey-through-the-building model would also be the chosen format of Schling to sequence the narrative of *The Lime Green Mystery* (2017). It should however be pointed that not everyone agreed with the spatial fluidity and the organisational elasticity portrayed in Centerprise's communication tools. With its steep stairs, succession of small rooms and invisibility, at street level, of many of Centerprise's activities, access was a tangible issue, and not everyone who came to the coffee bar, the bookshop, or nursery would venture into the upper floors. Former publishing worker Michael McMillan highlighted the perceived social division between the intellectual and specialist work taking place on the top floor (i.e. publishing activities) and the social and service work taking place in the lower floors (i.e. the coffee bar and the under-five

group and youth work) in what he called "a metaphor for the hierarchy present in the organisation"[43], a subject I will return to later in the chapter.

2. Sociopolitical Context and Genesis

Similarly to *What is Centerprise?*, though not in form, *Centerprise Annual Report 1978* – the first annual report ever produced by the organisation – functions more as a resource for community organisers than as a standard document for stakeholders. It starts with a section on the political and socioeconomic context in which Centerprise, now seven years old, is set. One learns that at the time – and this would remain a reality for decades to come – Hackney was among the most deprived areas in Britain and had the lowest household income of all London boroughs. The report goes on to assert that it "was during the 1960s that urban poverty was rediscovered" and that, until then, "involvement in local politics or local voluntary organisations was seen as a marginal, even if good-intentioned, means of promoting social change" (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 3). This comment makes one hark back to the university settlement movement, which was born in response to late 19th century urban poverty and was actively engaged with local politics and volunteering in the community. By the 1960s, university settlements had mostly disappeared and their field of action was now covered by the work of local authorities. Those that did survive were closely affiliated with councils, which outsourced social and educational services to them, making them largely function like local authority offsprings. In the face of these official efforts, which were deemed insufficient by proactive and socially concerned city dwellers, the 1970s saw a wave of independent, grassroots, political organisations emerging to help citizens deal with a broad range of issues ranging from illiteracy to squalid housing, through to police violence and youth unemployment. Centerprise was one of them. As members of the co-operative described it:

> Centreprise hoped to distinguish itself from charitable or philanthropic social work projects that may have provided similar services, but which seemed to reinforce divisions between the "do-gooders" who ran them and those who were 'done to' (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978. p. 3).

Worpole recalls that when the seed of Centerprise was planted in 1969, Hackney Council – which was traditionally Labour, but had become Conservative in the May 1968 election and

[43] https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/people/michael-mcmillan (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

would remain so until 1972[44] – considered that it could do it all and did not need help from entities falling out of its jurisdiction, a view that was equally supported by Labour which, at the time, wholly rejected the work of charitable organisations. The council owned 80% of Hackney properties and was in charge of providing education, culture, and entertainment for the entire borough. "It was a mix of paternalism and suspicion, with quite strong roots in prioritising good services; for example the libraries were fantastic. The suspicion was directed at outsiders, particularly people who had been university educated. This changed when some of these people became councillors"[45].

Whether or not the authors of the 1978 report had the settlements in mind when writing it is unclear. In fact, as Worpole remarks, "if there was an expression of antagonism towards them, it didn't last long"[46], with Centerprise soon forging connections with settlements including Oxford House in Bethnal Green. Furthermore, Centerprise co-founder Anthony Kendall had himself done a placement at a settlement in Glasgow prior to his engagement with Centerprise. He was thus familiar with these establishments which, in hindsight and according to him, "had perhaps more in common with Centerprise than community centres in that there was a lot going on in them at the same time, rather than a tight range of activities"[47]. Ultimately, Centerprise was an organisation of its time, founded by African American activists rather than Oxford-educated men, and claiming allegiance to the counterculture, black, and women's movements, and their associated activities such as community newspapers, squatting and nursery groups, along with other self-help groups. Against the do-gooders model and in a drive to diminish dependency from funding, Centerprise sought to establish itself as something useful, profitable, and "legitimate", in its own words: a business that was like no other in the borough. Centerprise would be Hackney's first bookshop and be combined with a coffee bar.

The initial impulse behind the founding of Centerprise was given by Glenn Thompson, an African American intellectual and social activist, who had taught himself to read at the age of 10, had a fascination for books, and would go on to develop a career in publishing. To dodge being drafted for the Vietnam war, Thompson had left the US and travelled across Europe. In

[44] Anthony Kendall, in an interview with the author on 7 January 2020, explained that this was an unprecedented moment in local politics, Hackney Council having always been, both before and after, under Labour. Kendall, who after his involvement with Centerprise went on to becoming active in local politics first as a councillor in 1978 and then as the Leader of the Council between 1980 and 1982, explained this as "an extraordinary blip, which was about where the Conservative and Labour parties were at that particular time".

[45] Ken Worpole, in an interview with the author, 3 September 2019.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Anthony Kendall, op.cit.

Denmark he became interested in the bookshop cafe model, which was an established combination in the country. When he came to London, he first worked as a youth worker and joined the Hoxton Cafe Project in 1968. Open in the evening, the Project provided "unclubbable" local youth with hot drinks, a table tennis table, and a place to socialise. Stephen Manning, one of the users, retrospectively defines it as "more than a youth club and more like a caf; the idea was to watch a generation go through their teenage years"[48]. Disillusioned with the model which, according to Anthony Kendall "failed to provide much more than a space and a cup of tea"[49], Thompson, with the hard-won support of the Hoxton Cafe Project's trust, suggested an experiment: to give the running of the cafe over to the young people. The experiment failed and Thompson and the trustees decided to fold the project (Schling, 2017). While at Hoxton Cafe Project, Thompson had worked with a fellow American community worker, Nancy Amphoux, and had started developing ideas for a more ambitious and truly community-led project. A three-day gathering in Newbury, during which "[a] lot of marijuana was smoked, and a lot of Monopoly was played" (Gosley cited in Schling, 2017, p. 17), was organised to brainstorm. It involved Thompson, Amphoux, Manning, Margaret Gosley, a librarian at Hackney Downs grammar school as well as Thompson's wife, community worker Erika Stern, and Kendall, a recent graduate from the Diploma in Social Administration at the London School of Economics (LSE). Thompson, Amphoux, Kendall, and Gosley – who worked to financially support her husband in undertaking Centerprise – ended up forming the core group responsible for developing the future Centerprise.

As Kendall recalls "Glenn [Thompson] had an amazing creativity, a real ambition and an ability to push through very difficult situations, along with a lack of structure and of understanding of the British system, which served him positively"[50]. An example given by him and Manning, and also recounted in *The Lime Green Mystery,* is that of Thompson deciding that the bank Centerprise would open an account with should be the private wealth manager Coutts, which looks after the Royals' finances. "He had no understanding of the class system; he turned up in jeans and sneakers, full of determination, and got what he wanted. An English working class person could not have done that. He had this ability to excite and inspire people of all backgrounds with his vision and ideas"[51]. Meanwhile, both Amphoux and Kendall had social work experience – at LSE, Kendall had gone on placements in probation services, social services, and in race relations. As for Gosley, she had direct access to teachers and pupils in

[48] Stephen Manning, in an interview with the author, 7 January 2020.

[49] Op. cit.

[50] Op. cit.

[51] Op. cit.

her day job, and would write a lot of the funding bids. Together, they made the observation that there was no bookshop in Hackney. As Worpole, in his capacity of first publishing worker at Centerprise, writes in *Local Publishing and Local Culture: An Account of the Work of Centerprise Publishing Project 1972-77*, that Centerprise had "identified a real need in deliberately neglected inner city areas like [...] Hackney, which was a lack of any kind of provision by which working class people could participate in the world of books" (1977, p. 1). Worpole continues:

> We regard education as a right, even if we don't all get the same opportunities and what we get doesn't tell us much. Similarly most of us feel that libraries are a right since it is through books that most aspects of what goes on in society are recorded. The right to buy books is simply an extension of these principles. This is particularly important in areas like Hackney since, ironically, many recent books on politics and sociology have been written about working class people who live in areas like Hackney, and we feel very strongly that people have a right to read what other people, invariably from a different class, are writing about them (ibid, p. 3).

Such thinking was far from isolated: Centerprise was inscribed in a movement about and against social exclusion, which started around the moment of its founding. In his report *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (1979), sociologist Peter Townsend famously argued that inequality of access to basic resources and services excluded people from participation in society (Levitas, 2005). Gaining currency during the Tory government years, the term 'social exclusion' would be defined in *Britain Divided: Growth of Social Exclusion in the 1980's and 1990's* (1997) as "the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the integration of a person in society" (Walker and Walker, 1997, p. 8). The relationship between poverty and citizenship would be further studied in *The Exclusive Society: Citizenship and the Poor* (1990) by social policy researcher Ruth Lister and would, for decades to come, remain a hot and contested topic as well as the object of countless social policy think tanks and reports notably led by the Social Exclusion Unit set up by the Labour government in 1997 and dismantled in 2010 (Levitas, 2005; Hope, 2011). New Labour's social inclusion agenda had less to do with fixing the system that allowed social exclusion to happen, than with making excluded people be "self-administering, fully functioning consumers who do not rely on the welfare state and who can cope with a deregulated, privatised world" (Bishop, 2012, p. 14). Centerprise's support to people in need, through its advice centre, its campaigns, and its cafe that welcomed "people who are unlikely to be welcome elsewhere" (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 10), including homeless

people, did not conform with the New Labour agenda. This would eventually lead it to its demise.

3. Defining Qualities

The premise of Centerprise was set in 1969; the founders gave themselves three years to put the project in place and let it be taken over by the local community or fold. They stuck to their word with support from Centerprise's eight trustees. "Exclusively middle class and professional", the trustees who made up Centreprise's board had been chosen "for the convenience of the project – initially to add respectability to the early stages and later by allowing smooth transition to community control" (*Draft of the Report on the First Year's Work in the New Premises at 136 Kingsland High Street*, 1975, p. 12). In 1974, the charity they had established became a co-operative: a working model, which was "a political statement in itself" (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 6), and would be led according to participatory, grassroots, democratic, and non-hierarchical principles, at least in theory.

Centerprise's philosophy was that "the arts, youth and community work, social work and education itself, are not separate entities invariably requiring separate institutions. They are related and inter-dependent" (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 4). This interdependence is significant in the forging of a multi-public educational and cultural organisation whose essence lies in fluidity rather than fixity, in entanglement rather than separation, and in open-endedness. A project like 'A People's Autobiography of Hackney' (1972-1981), which I will examine in more detail later in the chapter, exemplified the organisation's holistic ambitions in that it brought people together, equipped them with a range of new skills (i.e. recording, writing, editing, designing), and empowered them by giving value to their life stories and making them public through book form. If there were different entities and organisations doing very varied work under one roof, they were following a common objective: to inform, educate, and empower people so that they could, in their turn, inform, educate, and empower others.

Centerprise sought to be a space where people from all generations, backgrounds, and walks of life would coalesce in different ways – through cohabitation, collective sharing and learning as well as publishing projects. Centerprise, whose early outreach work was done in large part by Kendall as well as Stern, started with attracting pensioners and young people, then children, families and teachers through the bookshop – which had a sizable children's section – and soon reached out to a broader range of users through actions like setting up a stall at the nearby Ridley Road Market to promote the work of the advice centre. Centerprise's events and cultural programmes included talks, book signings, and poetry readings by a range of

guests, the most eminent of whom included theorist and writer Raymond Williams[52], poet and activist Linton Kwesi Johnson, and feminist writer and activist Nawa El Saadawi; jazz and rock concerts, film showings, parties, and dances; and monthly exhibitions in the coffee bar, showcasing work by local artists and projects that the various Centerprise groups had worked on. A key feature of the organisation was its encouragement to people to come forward with ideas, develop groups and projects, and take their lead. The Young Black Writers' Workshop, Night and Day Women Writers, Hackney Writers' Workshop, Basement Writers, Hackney Women Writers Group, and Centerprise Young Writers were some of the groups that emerged at Centerprise and enjoyed the space and facilities provided by the organisation.

This open remit was embedded in the organisation's mission from the outset, as the following quote testifies: "the conjunction of activities that we try to hold together is a statement about possible futures as well as a permanently unfinished agenda for the present" (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 6). Embracing the processual nature of utopia described by Levitas as "a process which is necessarily provisional, reflexive and dialogic [...] always under revision" (2013, p. 150), Centerprise conceived of itself as the type of institution that the sociologist of real utopias Erik Olin Wright described as "capable of dynamic change, of responding to the needs of the people and evolving accordingly, rather than [...] institutions which are so perfect that they need no further change" (2009, p. i). As I will explore later in the chapter, its workers further typified the "free-society organizer[s]", whom community activist and political theorist Saul Alinsky advocated should be "loose, resilient, fluid, and on the move in a society which is itself in a state of constant change" (1971, p. 11). The founders' commitment to withdraw from Centerprise after three years and let it be taken over by the local community is one such illustration of the organisers' approach to change.

Perhaps one of the most significant and unique qualities of Centerprise was its investment in literacy and publishing, a subject I will cover in the next section of this chapter. Beyond the publishing work developed by Worpole who, significantly, was an English teacher by training, in 1975 Centerprise started the Hackney Reading Centre, which taught adults reading, writing, and, later, numeracy. This was at the initiative of Sue Shrapnel, who had worked in the adult literacy movement and with *Write First Time*, the national literacy newspaper (Schling, 2017).

[52] William's talk and the experience of his presence at Centerprise are recounted by Worpole in a recent blog piece, which further relates the news of his talk being published in a new book made up of never-published essays: O'Brien, P. (2022) *Culture and Politics*. London: Verso. See: Worpole, K. (2022) 'If on a winter's night: Raymond Williams in Hackney'. Available at: https://thenewenglishlandscape.wordpress.com/2022/02/25/if-on-a-winters-night-raymond-williams-in-hackney/ (Accessed: 26 May 2022).

The Worpole-initiated project 'A People's Autobiography of Hackney' could have been satisfied with making raw local stories into oral history, but it made a point in turning these into book form, responding to Centerprise's dual commitment to give voice to those "no one else seemed to listen to" (op. cit.) as well as to provide access to and full participation in print culture.

4. Financial Modelling and Relationships with Funders

Upon moving to their registered office space on Mathias Road in October 1970, the group of Centerprise workers initially each paid £13 per month on rent and were soon able to raise grants from charitable trusts interested in seed funding new and experimental projects, such as Chase and Gulbenkian Foundations. Despite both its desire for financial autonomy and its financial success when it came to the bookshop – which turned over £39,000 through the sale of approximately 50,000 books in 1977-78 (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978) – Centerprise nonetheless heavily relied on public funding received year by year, making long-term planning difficult. Government funding initially came in large part from the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA)[53], which funded three salaries and rent at 34 Dalston Lane (Schling, 2017), and from the Greater London Council (GLC), notably through its Arts and Recreation Committee, until their respective closure by the Conservative government in 1990 and 1986 (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978; *Draft of Finance Report*, 1983; *Centerprise Annual Report*, 1984-85; Schling, 2017). The Arts Council of Great Britain would too support Centerprise on a project basis until committing to regular funding in the early 1980s, through the Greater London Arts Association and later the London Arts Board. When it came to Hackney Council, if one is to believe Centerprise's reports – which, despite their status as official documents, were polemical in tone and rather subjective – the organisation had a strained relationship with it for much of its existence. Worpole and Kendall however both brought nuance to this narrative in their interviews, with Kendall wittily summing up the relationship between Centerprise and Hackney Council as follows: "it started really badly and ended really badly, and was alright in the middle"[54]. For all that, Centerprise's perspective was that financial support from the council was never sufficient. The 1983 *Draft of Finance Report* called for urgent, serious, and long-term engagement from London Borough of Hackney (LBH):

[53] As described by Fieldhouse, "ILEA adopted a policy of positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged groups of 'second chance' opportunities and courses for the disadvantaged groups and concentrated on outreach provision for those groups" (1996, p. 96).

[54] Anthony Kendall, in an interview with the author, 7 January 2020.

> It is our considered opinion that, for whatever reasons, LBH's actual financial support for Centerprise does not measure up to its verbal support. The local authority should be bearing the major responsibility for long term revenue and major capital funding for a community centre in its area. The benefits to Hackney are clearly evidenced in the work and achievement of Centerprise over the past 11 years and they are complementary to both the statutory role of the local authority and to the objective of the council's elected majority (*Draft of Finance Report*, 1983, p. 4).

Complaints about the council's lack of support would be openly made in other previous and later reports (1978; 1982-83; 1985-86), which omitted to mention that Centerprise was only paying peppercorn rent to Hackney Council and was allowed to charge rent to others who used the building. Indeed, Centerprise permanently rented out some of its spaces to organisations such as Hackney Under-Fives and Hackney Play Association, making a benefit it could reinject elsewhere. In turn, the latter two organisations received monies from Hackney Council, making some of the council funds come full circle. According to Worpole[55], this partly justified why LBH did not give Centerprise what the organisation considered to be substantial direct financial support. This however changed in 1986 as funding from the GLC disappeared and LBH had to step up and become Centerprise's largest single funder (Schling, 2017). Talking about the relationship between Centerprise and LBH, Worpole suggested that "more than conflict there was a degree of indifference"[56]. LBH did warm up to Centerprise at different stages, including in the early period, after LBH had turned Labour again and Centerprise started doing local history work. "The fact that we were interviewing old Jewish communists made us sooner or later be seen as interesting people who were not there for themselves, but wanting to enrich Hackney. This led to the council being more supportive"[57].

Centerprise's financial difficulties would not go away for all that, as each and every Centerprise biannual and annual report testify. These served as active platforms to publicly communicate about the organisation's semi-permanent state of crisis, which was brought about by a variety of factors over the years. While the 1984-85 *Centerprise Annual Report* printed a diagonal banner over the drawing of the building on the front page, reading: "WARNING! This service is under threat from Government rate-capping", others would start with a title or introductory sentences along the lines of: "We will not close" (1985-86); "Centerprise, like any other community projects in Hackney and London survives for another year" (1986-87); "This has

[55] Ken Worpole, in an interview with the author, 3 September 2019.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

been a year of struggle for Centerprise" (1993); "Our bankrupcy and imminent demise had been predicted and hoped for by those who had other plans for this building" (1995); "The bookshop once again has held its own against increased local competition and the demise of the net book agreement a few years ago has not brought with it the devastation we feared" (1996-97). Being on a cliff edge was Centerprise's default condition; as such, resilience, resourcefulness, innovation, and agility were compulsory qualities for the organisation's continued development and survival.

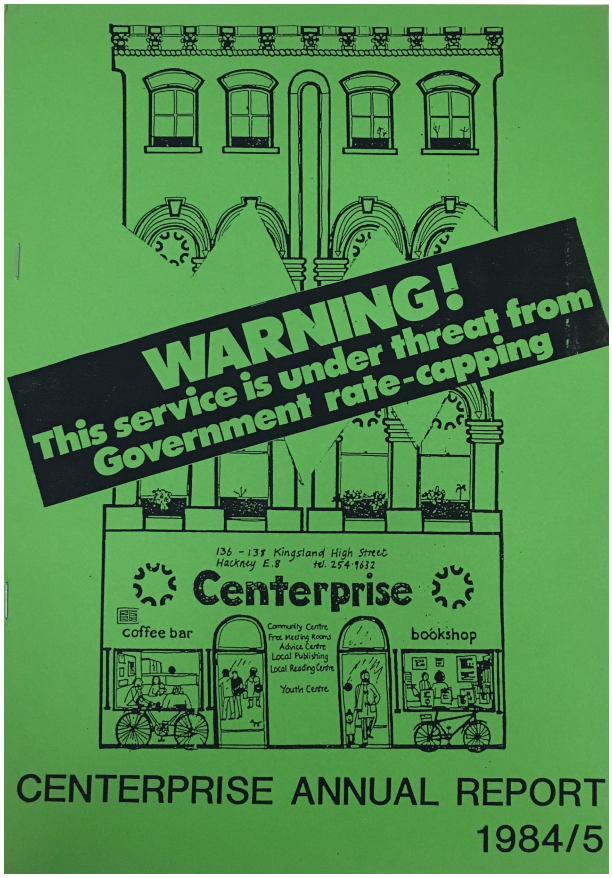

Fig 21. Cover on Centerprise Annual Report 1984/5.

III- Literacy and Empowerment

One remembers Worpole writing in the report *Local Publishing and Local Culture* (1977) about the role of Centerprise in lifting barriers for local working class people to access the literature written about them by people from a different class. The next step would be to contribute to operating a cultural shift in the writing and publishing worlds, by enabling the working class to write about themselves. Already two decades earlier, Richard Hoggart – a working class academic pertaining to the 'intellectual minority' – had meditated on such potential in *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Lives* (1957). In this seminal set of essays, Hoggart

notably deplores the inauspicious influence of mass media and popular entertainment on the intellectual development of the working class. Hoggart argues that instead of making working class people wise and agentive, mass media rendered them passive and aspirational, and that the aspirations projected onto them bore little connection with their actual lives. The author uses the example of cultural advertisements in quality weekly magazines, which he himself wrote for at the time, and which were intended for working and lower middle class readers. One of the many examples he quotes from reads:

> Have you a hunch that YOU could be a writer? If so–post this form': Do your friends say 'You ought to write a novel' when you tell them an anecdote? Do they say how much they love getting your letters? (cited in Hoggart, 2009, p. 280)

Although needs and desires were clearly identified, the con courses that were advertised in those magazines to access literary fame were, in Hoggart's opinion, never going to equip the aspiring working class writer with adequate skills.

> these courses are usually quite expensive and seem to me likely, in most cases, to be less effective than public adult education. But it seems unlikely that public adult education can ever attract many of these students. [...] There seems to be offered an almost magically quick method of removing an unformulated feeling of insufficiency (ibid, pp. 281-282).

A year after the release of Hoggart's book, Raymond Williams published *Culture and Society*, a book of equal significance in its toppling of conventional thinking about culture. Williams had started corresponding with Hoggart in the 1940s and would, alongside him and cultural theorist Stuart Hall, be one of the leading figures, in the late 1950s and 1960s, of the British Cultural Studies school of thought. Also of working class origin, Williams, in *Culture and Society*, tackles the subject of 'working-class culture', which he defines as:

> not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language; it is, rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this. [...] Working-class culture, in the stage through which it has been passing, is primarily social (in that it has created institutions) rather than individual (in particular intellectual or imaginative work). When it is considered in context, it can be seen as a very remarkable creative achievement (1958, pp. 423-424).

Centerprise undertook to give a new breath of life to this culture by adding writing to the repertoire of working class achievements, which included Trade Unionism, the Co-operative Movement, and participation in the Labour movement (Williams, 1958). More particularly, Centerprise aspired to make working class culture about individuals rather than about a uniform mass of people "all very similar even in the most important and individual matters" (Hoggart, 2009, p. 9), and to encourage the creation of idiosyncratic work rather than merely advancing the appreciation of dominant culture (Hoggart, 1957; Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017).

1. Writing and Publishing

Access to culture at large started with Centerprise's bookshop, whose stance was to be both generalist and specialist. It stocked fiction, cooking, gardening, sports, and children books – in the pre-cooperative period, while Centerprise was still located on 34 Dalston Lane, a second outlet was opened on 66a Dalston Lane to specifically sell children's books – alongside books on sexual and black politics, radical education, music, psychology, and people's history and culture (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978). If the project started with consumption – one that wasn't necessarily monetary since users were allowed to pick up a book and read it in the coffee bar next door – it would also engage with production on a rather large scale. Under Thompson's impetus, Worpole, an English teacher at Hackney Downs grammar school where Gosley also worked, was instrumental in putting Centerprise's publishing project in place. As he recalls in *Local Publishing and Local Culture* (1977), it is at his school that he first came across not only the difficulty to access books in the local area, but also to identify books that resonated with the reality of East London. He first became involved with Centerprise in 1971 upon presenting the founders with an idea for a book of local holiday stories and photographs, in collaboration with photographer John Boler. Written in consultation with young people, whose lives and activities were captured in the photographs, *Hackney Half-Term Adventure* was published in 1972. Enthusiastically received by both teachers and young people, the book sold 6,500 copies in the five years following the release.

The second book Centerprise published was also connected to Hackney Downs School; it was *Poems* (1972) by the twelve-year-old African-Caribbean foster child and pupil Vivian Usherwood, whose work had been noticed by school teacher Ann Pettit and edited with her help, alongside that of Worpole. Usherwood's book of poems – which, in the space of five years, sold over 8,000 copies and had 800 copies sent to the Swedish Workers' Educational Association (Schling, 2017) – are short, morose, and reflexive of his feeling of not belonging. The poems imaginatively muse over Hackney, violence, injustice, and escapism. This is one of them:

The pipe that leads to nothing

As I climb the pipe my hands begin to burn.
I am going. Misers are here. They're back.
Why can't they go and kill themselves?
And I will be saved.
Then I can stop climbing
The pipe that leads to nothing.
I am going
I am going
Never shall I come back to find misers
Are still there
(Usherwood, 1972, p. 10).

Worpole initially worked part-time as Centerprise's first publishing worker from 1971 to 1973, when he quit his job at the school to work at Centerprise full-time. The idea of a local history class called 'A People's Autobiography of Hackney' was started in 1972, soon leading to the publication of a number of autobiographies by local working class people, including *A Licence to Live: Scenes from a Post-war Working Life in Hackney* (1974), written by Hackney cab driver Ron Barnes. Barnes tells the reader in his introduction that one of the reasons why he decided to write a book was that he had never kept a diary.

> I don't think many people in the working class in Hackney keep diaries either. Yet you haven't wondered what life was like for 'ordinary' people centuries ago? [...] Well the aristocracy is able to trace back their ancestors, generation after generation, why shouldn't ordinary people be able to do the same? (Barnes, 1974, p. 1)

Barnes' tale is that of a life under economic duress and with severe asthma made worse by working in laundries, lifting heavy loads, and living in damp council flats. Despite the gloom, his autobiography is dotted with anecdotes of joyful moments and life-changing encounters including with the West Indian community and God. Talking about the process of writing, Barnes recalls bringing a manuscript full of typos and without punctuation, and getting Ken Worpole and Neil Martinson, a former pupil of Worpole, to help order the content in a publishable format. "One thing I am sure of is that there is a story in every one of us which will come out if we give it a chance to", writes Barnes (ibid, p. 2), who profusely encourages his readers to take a leap into the world of writing. In line with Centerprise's project to expand the range of voices that contribute to cultural production, *A Licence to Live* is a rich record of a

type of life that either gets forgotten or becomes the fictional subject of a writer who doesn't own it.

The course and project 'A People's Autobiography of Hackney' went on for nine years and brought together individuals aged 16 to 75 years old, who audio recorded people's stories and helped turn them into books. As Worpole explains, there were a few principles, including ensuring that they were kept in print – "A culture cannot develop if the constituent artefacts appear and disappear sporadically" (*Local Publishing and Local Culture*, 1977, p. 17) – and that they were published in paperback to save on costs, with the exception of 200 hard copies which were distributed to libraries. The books were reviewed in the local press, bringing awareness not just of Centerprise's creative outputs, but also of the organisation itself. Addressing the logistical side of things further, Worpole points out that "alternative media including tape recorders, radio, video, and community press, which required non-hierarchical forms of use, significantly contributed to the history from below movement"[58].

Self-actualisation was also attained through other means than publishing and writing, which were more directly connected to the education sector and to youth work. This notably included the production of "curricula for young people about living in London, including music, culture, and fighting police harassment"[59]. Due to his previous teaching position, Worpole was well connected to teachers in Hackney: this enabled wide circulation and use of the curricula in local schools. The teachers further bought the Centerprise books written by women, men, children, refugees, and old people, giving their pupils materials they could directly relate to. Worpole kept strong links with his former students, some of whom would become actively involved with Centerprise, including Martinson, who went on to produce the newspaper *Hackney Miscarriage*, design many of Centerprise's books, and publish his photographs in a volume printed by Centerprise.

2. Centerprise as a Catalyst for Other Organisations

Writing and publishing wasn't solely achieved through Centerprise-initiated projects; the organisation encouraged and enabled collectives and organisations to create their own writing and publishing culture. These included the Hackney Writers Workshop, which was set up in 1976 and was the longest-running writing group hosted at Centerprise, as well as the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, which in the same year held its

[58] Ken Worpole, in an interview with the author, 3 September 2019.

[59] Ibid.

foundational meeting at Centerprise with eight writing and publishing groups from across the UK coming together to share their methods and ideas (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978; Schling, 2017).

> [By 1978] fifteen groups belong[ed] to [the Federation] and it recently was granted funds by the Gulbenkian Foundation to appoint a full time co-ordinator. It is an organisation which Centerprise has played a part in setting up because we believe the work we are doing, and which other groups are doing[; it] is not an isolated flowering of the potential of particular individuals but part of a wider movement to enable people to lead more fulfilling lives (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 13).

Centerprise entertained a non-competitive and collaborative spirit throughout its co-operative period. As the flyers found at the Bishopsgate Institute archive reveal, Centerprise not only collaborated with other organisations on events and courses, but also published information about courses, groups, activities, and events offered by other cultural venues such as Battersea Arts Centre, Rio Cinema, and Chats Palace. Such information could also be found on the pin board of the coffee bar, which acted as a key and up-to-date resource for free cultural provision throughout London.

Some of the partnerships would be more formal than others. For instance, Centerprise rented some of its spaces to three organisations, against subsidised rent. While 136 Nursery made use of the basement floor in the daytime for children and family playgroups, and Hackney Play Association coordinated groups and organisations involved with children's play in Hackney from Centerprise, Hackney Under-Fives campaigned to provide more and better facilities for children, and made accessible information for families with children under five, notably by producing a guide to all free facilities in the borough. Each of the three organisations were invited to write about themselves in the 1978 *Centerprise Annual Report*. Similarly, every month Centerprise's newsletter *Shopfront* invited a group that made use of Centerprise's free meeting rooms – for instance the Socialist Workers Party – to promote their own activities and write about why they were using Centerprise.

Another close partnership was with the Hackney branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), which was revived the same year as Centerprise's opening. It had been Worpole's desire to collaborate with the Association on the class 'A People's Autobiography of Hackney', but the WEA resisted on the grounds that it had to work with its own tutors. It however maintained close links with Centerprise, using its free-to-rent meeting rooms and later on running classes and training on topics including housing rights and social security

benefits, so as to empower people to take action themselves. This was done in collaboration with Centerprise's advice centre, which dedicated itself not only to informing and advising, but also to starting projects such as a food co-op on the Haggerston Estate – negotiating the use of a flat with the council for that purpose – and running campaigns such as the media-successful Smalley Road Estate anti-dampness campaign. Highlighting the closeness of the relationship between the WEA and Centerprise, the 1978 *Centerprise Annual Report* noted:

> both people who have occupied the position of secretary of the Hackney WEA branch have been full time workers at Centerprise. It seems now clear in retrospect that it would not have been possible to have initiated and sustained a regular programme of classes without the time and resources made available by Centerprise to its workers to be active in a number of local organisations (p. 18).

Informed by his own experience and understanding of Centerprise, Worpole, who was secretary of the HWEA in 1978, wrote in the newsletter *Shopfront* that Centreprise was a particularly fitting location for WEA's classes. Besides the warm, welcoming, and informal set up allowing people to have a drink and snack before a class, Worpole noted that WEA and Centerprise had in common not only an inclination towards situated learning – that is experience-based education and problem solving – but also a shared "belief that the best education is self-education" (*Shopfront*, January 1978).

IV- Centerprise and the Community Arts Movement

1. A Brief History of the Community Arts Movement

To apprehend the work of Centerprise, it is essential to examine it not just in the sociopolitical context of the time, but also in perspective with the community arts movement. Active in Britain from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, the movement has been variously described as: "concerned with giving people access to the production of all forms of creative expression" (Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017, p. 1); "a liberating self-determination through which groups of people could gain, or regain, some degree of control over their lives" (Kelly, 1984: 1); and "a powerful medium for social and political change, providing the blueprint for a participatory democracy" (Bishop, 2012, p. 193). Community arts practice distinguished itself from established art practice by disengaging from, or setting itself against, the hierarchies and conventions of the international art world and its institutions. Accordingly, the community arts movement promoted co-production, co-authorship, and collective empowerment, process

rather than finished products, and the right to make art versus virtuosity. It worked in response to the locale, specifically areas of social and cultural deprivation, such as new towns and neighbourhoods as well as housing estates experiencing neglect and violence (Bishop, 2012; Braden, 1978; Kelly, 1984; Leeson, 2017; Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017).

The movement had barely emerged when the Arts Council of Great Britain started commissioning a number of committees – the New Activities Committee, the Experimental Projects Committee, the Community Arts Committee, and the Community Arts Evaluation Working Group – between 1968 and 1977, to investigate whether or not it was the Arts Council's role to fund this art form (Hope, 2011). It concluded that it was, though not without dividing opinions internally on the grounds of "concerns that the 'standards of excellence' set and maintained by the Arts Council were being jeopardised by the introduction of community arts" (Hope, 2011, p. 19). Indeed, tensions between quality and equality, and professionalism and amateurism were acutely present within a movement that supported wide access and participation, and was driven socially rather than formally. Community artist Owen Kelly, who saw in community arts practice a vehicle "to effect social change and affect social policies" (Kelly, 1984, p. 1), maintained that the Arts Council had (possibly deliberately and instrumentally) misread the community arts movement as aiming to increase access to the arts, while the real objective was to enable "meaningful participation in democracy *through* the arts" (Hope, 2011, p. 20). The setting up of the Community Arts Committee by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1975 marked the beginning of a rapid transition from an unfunded, grassroots, and inherently political endeavour to a state-sponsored movement rendered "politically neutral" (Kelly, 1984, p. 37). From then on, funding applications flooded in and "[t]he plethora of community mural paintings facilitated by community artists during the 1980s demonstrated how impotent the community arts movement had become during a 'decade of grant addiction'" (Hope 2011, p. 26). By the mid-1980s, Arts Council funding towards community arts had almost entirely dried out, coinciding with the slashing in arts funding and any activity deemed too political under Thatcher's government (Bishop, 2012). This led to the near disintegration of the movement, which was unable to revert to its former unfunded and DIY position.

2. Centerprise's Community Politics

Unlike many community arts projects, which were largely oriented towards the performing and visual arts, Centerprise's cultural activity was primarily geared towards literacy and publishing. The bookshop included an array of mainstream books with a well-stocked Penguin publications section: a testimony to the fact that Centerprise did not oppose official culture. It

however sought to expand it. In true community arts tradition, it worked to give the people whose voice was under-represented an opportunity to develop self-expression and gain agency through active participation in creative processes, including non-fiction and poetry writing, publishing and photography. But unlike the community arts movement, which often promoted diffused or collective authorship, while Centerprise's processes were collaborative – for instance, autobiography writers were supported by a team of people to turn their stories into publishable work, and writers' collectives were platforms through which people improved their skills and learned from each other – they led to the creation of fiction and/or poetry books signed by individuals. Furthermore, workers at Centerprise were not community artists with an educational background in fine art or drama: they were social workers, teachers, and enthusiasts, who worked to help individuals achieve self-actualisation. In many cases, Centerprise workers and projects' initiators in the co-operative period had themselves first been users and learners of Centerprise, and often came without educational credentials.

Fig 22. On the left is 'JP', a magistrate who helped at the Centerprise advice centre by declaring properties unfit for human habitation.
On the right is 'Ralph' a Centerprise employee, c.1981.
Copyright: Bishopsgate Institute, London.

If cultural production was paramount to Centerprise's output, literacy, welfare, and youth work were no less important aspects of Centerprise's activity. In particular, the advice centre, which led successful campaigns and trained people in how to protect their basic rights, was widely used by local residents and was fully integrated in the fabric of Centerprise. As per Thompson's original vision, Centerprise was thus a flexible umbrella under which multiple social, creative, and learning activities and services, and wide-ranging groups, associations,

and organisations, came together. In that sense, Centerprise operated in ways that were closer to Toynbee Hall – which too provided core legal services alongside educational, social, and artistic activities – than prominent community arts organisations of the time such as the Black-e in Liverpool, Jubilee Arts in Birmingham, Inter-Action in Milton Keynes, or Telford Community Arts in Shropshire, whose primary focus was on collective artistic creation and the use of art (e.g. drama, murals, printmaking, music, dance, playgrounds, or festivals) in order to publicly address issues ranging from identity and community belonging, to housing conditions and derelict land. One could argue that what made Centerprise stand apart from other community arts organisations was its provision of tangible services deployed to develop citizenship and enable democratic participation in society: teaching people how to read, helping local residents claim benefits, providing childcare, enabling people to publish their stories and see their writing stocked in public and school libraries, or serving affordable meals to customers who would have been made to feel unwelcome elsewhere.

Fig 23. Coffee bar, 1980s.
Copyright: Bishopsgate Institute, London.

In addition, Centerprise operated a relatively successful business, a bookshop, and coffee bar, which gave the organisation a level of financial autonomy rarely afforded by contemporaneous community arts organisations. Besides, through being initially supported by the Inner London Education Authority at a time when other community spaces were heavily

reliant on Arts Council funding, the organisation was able to circumvent the predicament by which others had to bend and depoliticise their practice. Centerprise's ability to retain political integrity and power of action provided the organisation with a degree of alternativeness – and with a life expectancy – higher than many other community arts initiatives of the time.

V- The Co-operative and Work-sharing

1. Co-operating: a Politically-endorsed Model

In 1974, the trustees of the charity, in agreement with the founder and core group of workers, handed over control of Centerprise's governance to the Centerprise Co-op, a collective of local residents who had been involved with the organisation as workers, volunteers, or users. Two more bodies were founded: a subgroup called the Centerprise Council, which made strategic decisions, and the Council of Management, legally responsible for the organisation and elected annually (Schling, 2017). After the transition, Centerprise retained its charitable status, but changed the ways it made decisions and managed responsibility. The number of employees kept growing and by 1985 eleven full-timers and one part-timer worked for the organisation (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1984-85). All of Centerprise workers were paid on the same scale; their salary was calculated according to their outgoings and number of dependants, rather than with regards to their experience, specialism, or area of responsibility (Schling, 2017). In fact, if workers were responsible for particular areas of the project, such as the bookshop, the advice centre, the reading centre, or the coffee bar, they were made to rotate on some days of the week. In addition, everyone had to engage with cleaning and fundraising duties as well as with attending the switchboard. This had the effect of challenging hierarchies and doing away with the traditional gendered division of labour, along with providing workers with a full picture of the organisation's work and, finally, ensuring that each and every worker made themselves accessible to Centerprise's broad range of users (*Report on the first year's work in the new premises at 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8*, June 1974 – May 1975; *Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978; *Centerprise Annual Report*, 1984-85; Schling, 2017). This was called the work-sharing system. There were also weekly meetings, which everyone was expected to attend. This led to workers effectively having "two days a week to focus on their own area of responsibility, spending the rest of their forty-five hour week on collective responsibilities. Balancing this demanding schedule could be difficult" (Schling, 2017, p. 146).

In an interview with Schling, Rosie Illet, a Centerprise worker from 1984, points out that "working in a collective was just how you did things in radical organisations". In fact, Centerprise conceived of its "co-operative working model [... as] a political statement in itself, prefiguring and demonstrating the possibility of forms of working life and social organisation that give hope for a future state of society" (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978, p. 6). Illet goes on to explain that this attitude to work was also encouraged by what was "a very politicised funding environment. Those were the days of the Greater London Council (GLC), Greater London Arts Alliance, that required lots of these structures and ways of behaving to almost be part of how they funded you" (cited in Schling, 2017, p. 144). As a matter of fact, the Labour-controlled GLC and in particular the Arts and Recreation Committee, which was given a boost in funding between 1981 and 1986 under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, supported the "making of a popular culture" entailing "cultural activities which are 'of the people', which belong to, and are part of ordinary people's lives and experiences" (1986 *GLC Report*, cited in Hope, 2011). In particular, practices of cultural democracy, which engaged "the participation of communities in both decision-making processes and in production" (Hope, 2011, p. 22) were high on the GLC's agenda and at odds with the Conservative's official cultural policy; this led to the eventual demise of the GLC on account of its connections with left-wing political campaigning.

2. Limits of Work-sharing

Work-sharing did not however come without problems; these included certain areas suffering from lack of skills, uneven food quality depending on who was cooking, and, more critically, overwork, a veritable epidemic at Centerprise. A group of workers shared their frustration and doubts as to the efficiency of the system and the impact on the quality of the services on offer. They took it upon themselves to interview each employee to find out how work-sharing worked for them. The results were presented at a Saturday morning meeting in 1980:

> * We don't fully workshare – if we did this would mean working even longer hours and be incompatible with moves to reduce working week, plus problem of holding it all in your head and acting productively in the various areas.
> * Can't collectively work share such a complex project – need continuity as well as question of scale and skills involved.
> * Bear in mind needs of people outside the project, worksharing may benefit us but does it help our users.
> * Taken for granted that people are good at everything and if not will get to like it. Working with reluctant people is inefficient (*Minutes of the Saturday Morning Meeting*, 1980).

The areas that workers most resented working in was cleaning, fundraising and administration. Others warned against the cramped conditions in some of the rooms and of the busyness and rush of Centerprise, leaving no time for meaningful engagement with people. One employee, Maggie Hewitt, asked: “does collectivity mean doing everything even if done badly”? In order to start enacting change, those who had written the agenda of that Saturday meeting called for more structure, ‘proper’ meetings and chairing, and for people “not to speak twice until everyone [has] spoken once” (ibid). Three years later, in a document written by co-operative members and workers Chris O’Mahony and Irene Schwab, “What’s happened to Caring?”, the authors talked about the difficulty in assessing and reporting on everyone’s work and feelings in a very large group of co-operative members.

> We feel most people here wanted to work in a collective because they thought that staff relationships would be better than in a straight job, however, the personal report system leaves us very little forum to discuss ourselves with each other and we think a change of system might help (*What’s happened to Caring?*, 1983).

O’Mahony and Schwab recommended meeting in small groups and taking the outcomes to the bigger group, in order to optimise support for each worker. In these meetings they proposed discussing:

(a) how we can make our working relationships more positive;
(b) problems in our own area;
(c) ideas in our own area;
(d) problems in Centerprise generally;
(e) ideas for Centerprise generally (ibid).

Judging from later comments about the management meetings (Schling, 2017), these ideas do not seem to have been picked up. Complaints would continue to be directed at the inefficacy of the weekly meetings, lasting up to four hours and involving too many people who didn’t know enough about what was being discussed. As everyone ran the organisation, everything needed to be discussed in the open. In consequence, the meetings could be fiery, as coffee bar worker Claudia Manchada recalls in her interview with Schling, with some of them even addressing sexual harassment among staff members (Schling, 2017). There were also ongoing tensions between those who worked more than others, which could lead to a charged atmosphere and irreparable divisions. Advice centre worker Janet Rees further expressed frustration at the fact that “[o]ne of the things that was pushed at the collective meetings was to make it impossible for a Centerprise worker to become famous through

working at Centerprise" (Schling, 2017, p. 153), which could lead to resentment and a feeling of not being valued for one's contribution.

In 1990, things started to change following the appointment of an administrator, Neil Barklem, who advocated the need for the collective to "adapt to the demands of the 1990s and its working patterns" and, perhaps rightly so, felt "very strong that a four hour weekly meeting gives more negative results psychologically than it does in terms of efficiency or management of the organisation" (Schling, 2017, p. 156). However, his intentions were not as compassionate as his words; Barklem was more of a pragmatic, yet complex-free technocrat. Before being fired for corruption allegations in 1993, Barklem dismantled the co-operative, replacing it with a pyramidal management structure, and ended parity of pay and responsibility among workers. Some people went from being paid from £8/hour to £3 or £4, and roles were divided into manual and intellectual ones (Schling, 2017).

VI- Centerprise: From a White to a Black Organisation

In *The Lime Green Mystery*, Schling recalls how Centerprise user Judy Joseph was surprised to see so many white faces at the launch of 'A Hackney Autobiography: Remembering Centerprise' in early 2015, while, in her experience as a regular user in the 1990s and 2000s, Centerprise was a black organisation. Prior to this period, Centerprise had gone through what could be identified as two phases: one in the 1970s, marked by a rather diverse team of workers including Glenn Thompson and Nancy Amphoux, but difficulties reaching out to Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) groups; and a second one in the 1980s, by then working extensively with the African-Caribbean community, but with an almost exclusively white staff. In the first phase, the organisation's emphasis on working class people and literacy gave the perception that Centerprise was a place for white working class' intellectual development, and as such, Hackney's growing African-Caribbean community found little resonance with it (Schling, 2017). Drawing from a 1984 interview with Sue Shrapnel – who had joined the organisation in 1975 where she had founded the Hackney Reading Centre – Schling reports that questioning the lack of engagement from that community was a "running theme" at Centerprise in the 1970s (Schling, 2017, p. 42).

In 1977, the firebombing of Centerprise by the National Front started turning things around, putting the two different communities on the same page and united in their beliefs and in anti-racist demonstrations. Centerprise's first public event held in the year 1978 was organised by the Hackney Communist Party and titled 'Is there a British Race?'. That same year, Centerprise started seeing BAME groups, or groups representing BAME issues – including

the Black Parents Movement, the Hackney Pan-African Organisation, and Hackney Rock Against Racism – use the free meeting rooms. Under Thompson's impulse, Centerprise's bookshop had always included well stocked sections on black fiction, culture, and politics, but only then did it start being fully utilised by diverse communities. By the 1980s, Centerprise's newfound diversity would be further reflected in its publishing projects – two examples of this are Savitri Hensman's *Flood at the Door* (1979) and Monica Jules' *Wesley, My Only Son* (1987) respectively addressing racism, and single parenting and illness, through poetry and prose – as well as in the demographic makeup of activities including the Employment Project and the Young Photographers, a long-term creative learning project. In addition, 70% of the reading centre users were of African-Caribbean descent (Schling, 2017).

In the 1980s, the co-operative running Centerprise was, however, all white. As for the employees, the only black people in post were given the coffee bar as a main area of responsibility (ibid). Janet Rees, who started working at Centerprise in 1979, recalls in her interview with Schling that the collective tried to correct the imbalance by recruiting more Black, Asian, and ethnic minority people, but that the gap between the staff and the communities Centerprise was working with remained colossal. Michael McMillan was the first black person to be recruited to work with the publishing project, however he felt unsupported and was eventually dismissed for wanting to study part-time. In 1986, a researcher called Birgit Hoppe wrote her dissertation about the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, which had been started at the impulse of Centerprise, and dedicated a large part of her essay to Centerprise. Her 242-page thesis followed a 10-week-long voluntary placement at Centerprise between 1984 and 1985 during which she had interviewed staff and users, and surveyed the use of the coffee bar. Her writing notably addresses the notions of cross-class encounters and oppositional culture, and highlights racism and other forms of intolerance inherent to the relationships not only between users and staff, but also among users, and among staff members themselves. The distance she observes between white workers and black users is emphasised by coffee worker Roy (his last name was ironically not mentioned, unlike his counterparts), who commented that when on duty, he would "attract more black users than his white colleagues as he is himself black" (Hoppe, 1986, p. 99). Meanwhile, black sessional workers would suffer from middle-class patronising behaviour directed at them by Centerprise's full-time workers. In rejection of Centerprise's philosophy, a number of people surveyed by Hoppe expressed their doubts as to Centerprise's ability and responsibility to cater for all Hackney residents. One remarks that " [n]o community centre can. A mixed community like Hackney needs a range of different facilities and centres" (cited in Hoppe, 1986, p. 105). Other users complained about the presence of homeless people who were "quite dirty and smelly" (Hoppe, 1986, p. 97) and of mentally ill patients from the local

German Hospital. “The German Hospital people – get rid of them” was the recommendation made by one of the surveyed coffee bar users.

This wasn’t the first time that Centerprise’s open door policy was being criticised or attacked. In the January 1978 issue of Centerprise’s newsletter *Shopfront*, a letter signed by Patrick Harris, who described himself as a community development officer, deplored the fact that Centerprise lacked a clear enough sense of direction and purpose. The author further accused Centerprise of hosting “various radical and left wing groups” in its building. If the free meeting rooms had been used that same year by the Anti-Nazi league, the Anarchist Workers Association, and the Hackney International Marxist Association (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978), it had also been utilised by organisations such as the Hackney Conservative Association, alongside the Forest School Camps, the Afro-cultural dance group, and the Hackney Cypriot Association, among many others listed in the 1978 report. The signatory’s other condemnation was aimed at Centerprise’s failure to create unity in public areas such as the coffee bar which, according to him, presented “a conflict of interest among users”. Harris illustrated it by contrasting “the boisterous activity of the young and those who want to sit quietly and read a paper”. Such points of view as Harris’ towards the organisation’s ethos, including the broad mix of people sought by Centerprise and the acceptance of politically vocal people from the left, would be taken to extremes with a high number of acts of sabotage such as broken windows, racist slogans on the facade, and bookshop rampages – four in the years leading to 1979 and many more to come – as well as a firebomb attack inflicted upon Centerprise by known members of the National Front (*Centerprise Annual Report*, 1978).

As theorist Sara Ahmed reminds us, “[t]o embed diversity within an institution involves working with the physicality of the institution: putting diversity into the organizational flow of things” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 28). Centerprise was founded before the term diversity became commonplace in policies and political speak. The organisation did not work with the African-Caribbean community to access or legitimate funding; it worked with whomever came forward and wanted to take part. As such, and in principle, Centerprise attempted to be a racially inclusive place at various stages of its life – despite major spells of racist behaviour within as well as against its walls. However, the pre-1990s phase reveals a disconnect, not only at the level of race but also of class, between the organisation and its output, and between workers and users. If diversity was talked about in weekly meetings and reflected upon, it did not flow through the whole system, nor was it acted upon. Ahmed postulates that the “recognition of institutional racism” is not “a solution”; instead it “can become a technology of reproduction of the racism of individuals” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 46). Hoppe writes in her thesis:

> [racism's] subtle presence makes it difficult to grasp, as many white people would not admit that they are racist. My stay at Centerprise was too short to make any judgement about the issue of racism [...] Besides I am as a white person biased myself and am not aware of my own racism (Hoppe, 1986, p. 108).

We witness here what philosopher Judith Butler, quoted by Ahmed, describes as a non-performative act: the "reiterative and citational practice by which discourse" does not produce "the effects that it names" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117). In other words, it does the opposite of what philosopher of language J. L. Austin calls a "performative utterance", whereby uttering is not describing one's doing: "it is to do it" (Austin, 1962, p. 6). Following this non-performative logic, by addressing racism in meetings and academic papers, racism was enabled to persist and Centerprise not to perform the changes it called for. If racism continued to exist within Centerprise's walls, by the mid-1990s, helped by the presence of black director Emmanuel Amevor, the staff gradually diversified to the point of being recognised as a black organisation.

VII- Centerprise in 2000s Hackney

1. Centerprise in the 2000s

In 1996, Hackney's Victoria Ward Councillor Howard Hyman wrote: "I consider that the partnership between Centerprise Trust Ltd and the council should be strengthened. The council cannot 'go it alone' and important community organisations such as yours need the assistance of Hackney Council…" (*Centerprise Special 25th Anniversary Report*, 1971 – 1996, p. 6). Five years later, LBH was however threatening Centerprise with eviction. Responding to the situation, Donna Travis, a local filmmaker, spent two weeks researching Centerprise and another two filming in order to make a twenty-three minute documentary aimed at showing evidence of the vitality of Centerprise's existence. Plainly titled, *Centerprise: an Amazing Place* was screened at the neighbouring Rio Cinema on Kingsland High Street on a Sunday morning, and brought necessary awareness of its unique role in the community to Centerprise's landlord, accounting for the relative stability of the organisation for another decade.

In *What Is Centerprise?* (1974), the author had finished with the statement that " [t]he real answer [to the question 'what is Centerprise?'], of course, can't be shown on paper; it's in the people who use Centerprise and all the things they do with it, for it and from it" (p. 19). Indeed, if lively narratives of the organisation's activities exist in countless reports and newsletters, one only gets to fully grasp the significance of Centerprise in people's everyday lives in this

polyphonic documentary piece. The film, which chose not to include subtitles or name people "for fear of being patronising"[60], is entirely set on the ground floor, between the coffee bar and the bookshop. It starts with a coffee worker cooking snapper fish, which she buys every day from Ridley Road Market, to make traditional Jamaican cuisine. Music is played by a homeless person and daily user of Centerprise, who shares his delight at having a place to play the harmonica and a ready-made audience for it. Later in the film, the protagonist reappears singing a cheery song in support of Centerprise, with lyrics addressing the council's desire to close and auction the building to the highest bidder, while it is serving affordable and tasty food, offering shelter to otherwise isolated people, and providing the local area with the only place to browse and buy books. A few talking heads, who include users, workers, and the director of Centerprise, talk about Centerprise being an institution, rather than just an organisation or a business: a veritable establishment and community reference. Some people call it "the only Afro-Caribbean community centre", while others qualify it as social communication or as a family where people get to know each other by dint of sharing space every day. The kitchen worker, now preparing jerk chicken, explains that some people come here to have their one hot meal a day. The coffee is shabby and the bookshop cluttered, but the atmosphere is warm and camaraderie is on the cards. A man reads his newspaper next to vocal people who assert that they would be completely lost without Centerprise; they would have nothing else to do but stay in their flats and cut themselves off the bustle of the centre and of the street. Another person comments that those who are not lucky enough to have a home walk around the area aimlessly on Sunday, the day Centerprise is closed. In the background, a handful of young people rehearse a choreography, while women and children tend to the vegetable and flower patch in the courtyard.

2. The Reinvention of Hackney

The campaign film shows Centerprise in all its candour and dereliction, a great contrast with the attractive and yet exclusive transformations, which Hackney Council would initiate later in the decade. The council's compulsory repossession, a year after the release of the film, of the legendary Four Aces Club on Dalston Lane, one of the first venues to play black music in Britain, would be the first sign of a programme perceived as dismantling the infrastructures used by the African-Caribbean local community as well as "the memory of a life that once made the neighbourhood" (Wright, 1991, p. 257). Other groups who failed to symbolise Hackney's new economic boom would be affected too. The infamous homeless people hangout, Gillett Square, would be next to go in a wave of council-led social and urban

[60] https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

transformation projects. Refurbished and new LBH-funded venues like The Vortex Jazz Club and Cafe Oto, an experimental music room and cafe, would open up for an increasingly white local population with a disposable income. With Centerprise's closure in 2012, a sense of deprivation was decidedly felt among Hackney "natives". As I explore in the next chapter, a number of former Centerprise users would elect Open School East as a surrogate safe space, until its own move in 2017, following rent hike pressures, and lack of ambition from the council to support a project that intended to also include residents of the old, pre-gentrified Hackney.

Today, Centerprise's ground floor is split into two separate shops: Hackney Pirates and Circle Collective. Ironically both are registered charities: the former is a literacy project for children and the latter a skate shop selling streetwear, the proceeds of which go to supporting young people into employment. Both are paying rent to Hackney Council at market rate and have a sustainable business plan. Their respective physical appearance blends in harmoniously with the nearby organic grocery store, the sourdough bread and pizza cafe, and the string of bars rapidly replacing the countless phone repair, pound, and African fabric shops. This is the new Hackney, "a perfect place from which to observe the ongoing decline [...] of the professional and intellectual culture of the Welfare State", as writer and broadcaster Patrick Wright wrote already a long time ago (Wright, 1991, p. 33). The council's policies were, however, not the only factor behind the disintegration of Centerprise. As Kendall pointed out in our interview, the management which took over Centerprise in the post-cooperative period brought about positive changes to the organisation, at the same time as less favourable ones. Needing to generate revenue, the management started renting some of the upstairs spaces to companies that had no affiliation with Centerprise's mission and which would be charged full commercial rates, including a solicitors' firm. Unable to respond to Hackney Council's increased rent partly occasioned by their knowledge of such commercial dealings, Centerprise stopped paying rent, providing grounds for the organisation's eviction in 2012 after a long-fought battle.

Fig 24. Facade of former Centerprise, 2019.
Credit: Anna Colin.

VIII- Conclusion

Even though Centerprise was still fulfilling an important function when it closed down – a function that was mainly social and no longer cultural and educational – the organisation had long ceased to be the radical and interdependent space it had sought to be when Amphoux, Gosley, Kendall, Manning, Stern, and Thompson had first got together for their brainstorming session in Newbury in 1969. In fact, in the last decade of its life Centerprise had not only lost its dynamism and significance, it also appeared to be largely under-used (Schling, 2020; Worpole, 2020; Kendall, 2020; Manning, 2020). When new GLC funding had been released under Ken Livingstone's scheme in 1982-86, a flurry of community arts groups and organisations had emerged, specialising in fields such as black theatre, women's culture, art for people with disabilities, or gay and lesbian publishing. Worpole contends that by that point, Centerprise's multipurposeness looked "strangely old-fashioned"[61] and lacking direction. What had been an asset – i.e. the coalescence between art, youth and community work, and the bringing together of diverse communities groups and generations – became a liability at a time of high specialism and separation between areas of work and perceived community

[61] Ken Worpole, in an interview with the author, 3 September 2019.

needs. It is fair to say that Centerprise's intended interdependence of activities and communities had not always succeeded, as the section of Hoppe's essay on racism and intolerance as well as McMillan's earlier-mentioned perspective on the metaphorical hierarchy of the building both testify. Indeed, certain physical and programmatic areas of Centerprise, along with certain responsibilities and social statuses, were considered impenetrable by some of the users, volunteers, and workers (Hoppe, 1986; Schling, 2017; Manning, 2020).

In *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, Greenwood et al. (2013) explore organisations with "multiple institutionally-given identities", which respond to "multiple logics", are "legitimated by multiple mythologies", and may be "multiple things to multiple people" (p. 244). They remark:

> Clearly, pluralism creates the potential for fragmentation, incoherence, conflict, goal-ambiguity, and organizational instability (Heimer, 1999; Stryker, 2000). In an organization with multiple identities, purposes, and belief systems, no group is likely to be fully satisfied, and political tensions are likely to be endemic (ibid).

Ultimately, when it came to its social and cultural offer, even in its heyday Centerprise was neither a place for everyone, nor to everyone's liking. It was too rowdy for some, too diverse for others or, on the contrary, too racially and socially divided, as well as too alien to people who didn't share the founders' love of writing and books. In its prime days, it had nonetheless served a generation of people seeking to develop their literary and creative voice. It had further catered for: people seeking legal advice before local citizen's advice bureaux became widespread; parents requiring support caring for their children while at work; young people striving to stay clear of racist police interactions, which abounded in the 1970s and 1980s; and, last not but not least, socially and economically excluded people who used the coffee bar as a daytime social centre and safe space.

Centerprise had been initially set up in response to the absence of bookshops in the borough and by the time of its closure, Hackney counted a handful of independent bookshops. It had developed into a service to record local culture from the perspective of the working class and, by the time of its closure, recent incomers with new wealth, new consumption habits, and new business models able to demonstrate self-sufficiency and financial sustainability were praised as the new norm by a council keen to support it at the detriment of the older order and ways of living. One can see how and why Centerprise would not fit in today, in the new, whiter, and socially cleansed Hackney, where businesses and organisations with fuzzy attributes such as 'social enterprises' and countless co-working spaces and cafes have replaced the activist-led

provision for communities that have since become socially and economically excluded from Hackney's new urban and economic configuration. As I explore in the chapter dedicated to Open School East, the coastal town of Margate, where a continual flow of priced-out East and South London dwellers have relocated, is experiencing the same phenomenon in an accelerated space of time, under the auspices of so-called cultural regeneration (Minton, 2017).

If one is to rely on the archives, interviews with workers and users, and the only book written about Centerprise, in the midst of cultural, social and educational achievements, of daring experiments and daily joy, one also sees a pattern of struggle and instability as well as of persistence and determination to counter difficulties – be they related to Centerprise's funding, lease, verbal and physical attacks, or management. During its long spell as a co-operative, with every struggle came the necessity to develop solutions, coping mechanisms, new forms of engagement, and new working patterns, making Centerprise a reflexive and ever-changing organisation that had to be light on its feet. Would it have encountered less hurdles, Centerprise may not have retained its spirit of resistance for so long and it might have joined other organisations, like Toynbee Hall, in becoming "a harmless branch of the welfare state" (Bishop, 2012, p. 193), or as Toynbee Hall's chief executive Jim Minton put it, "a delivery organisation for debt advice, welfare benefits and other things one might expect to be a function of the State"[62]. What had made Centerprise alternative in the first place was its politicised agenda, its intended flat hierarchy, its belief in the interdependence of education, culture, and social work, its open, unfinished vision and agenda, and its open door policy. One could argue that Centerprise lost its political edge and became conformist when it stopped serving the community it had sought to empower and make socially mobile in the first place, starting with the members of the co-operative that was running it. Upon dissolving the co-operative and resorting to conventional and rigid institutionalism with the belief that it would keep the organisation afloat, Centerprise failed to reinvent itself and its approach to community development. Instead of capitalising on its rich history of practices and activities to develop a new, adapted vision and seek opportunities in the changing socio-economic landscape, Centerprise continued to deliver its services in the way it had for decades, along with reducing the scope of its activities, thus accounting to the perception of an organisation that was not only "strangely old-fashioned" [63], but also unresponsive and unreflexive: an organisation with a closed vision and agenda.

[62] Jim Minton, in an interview with the author, 29 March 2019.

[63] Ken Worpole, in an interview with the author, 3 September 2019.

CHAPTER 5:
OPEN SCHOOL EAST

I- Introduction and Research Method

1. Introduction

The third and final case study is dedicated to Open School East, an arts education charity founded in 2013 in London and relocated to Margate on the East Kent coast in 2017, where it continues to operate. The chapter concentrates on the first eight years of its existence, which coincide with my involvement as a co-founder and director of the organisation, a position I will come back to in the research section. Currently based at 39 Hawley Square, Open School East (OSE) is a free, independent art school and community space that focuses on collective learning through the arts. Its activities have ranged from one-year development and learning programmes for adults and young people, to a weekly arts class for children, through to participatory art projects, creative courses, workshops, talks, and philosophy seminars. The organisation's dual mission is to support early career artists in developing and sustaining their practice, and to enable young people and adults to acquire skills and know-how and shape their voice – creative and otherwise – through active and situated learning. Central to OSE's ethos is the creation of an environment that is responsive, informal, and versatile, along with the commitment to making the arts a more accessible and inclusive sector.

In this chapter, I explore OSE's differential nature during my time of employment in the organization (2012-2020). This differential nature not only resided in OSE's pedagogical approaches, but also in the creation and maintenance of a space that brought together, under one roof, practising artists, training artists, young people, children as well as adult members of the public around a range of programmes and activities. While this attribute is far from atypical when it comes to community spaces, intergenerational and inter-programme encounters are harder to come by in present-day formal educational settings like schools, further education colleges, and universities. Like Toynbee Hall and Centerprise, OSE's building acted as a localised hub for a range of users who came to OSE whether to learn, skill-share, create, gain qualifications, build their confidence, socialise, or debate. The organisation's alternative disposition further laid in its self-scrutinising nature and ever-evolving form, which was much informed by those who came to inhabit OSE over the course of a few weeks, a year, or longer. Unlike Toynbee Hall and Centerprise, OSE's social remit

was limited to the development of human connections and wellbeing, and did not include formal legal advice or social and political campaigning.

The 2019-21 young associates, who took OSE's year-long art and design programme, following experiences of disenfranchisement from mainstream education, variously described Open School East as "a college where you are free", "a place that welcomes you for who you are and doesn't pressurise you to be someone you're not", an environment with a small enough group where "you get individual help as and when you need it" (*Young Associates Programme Internal Evaluation Report*, 2019). Back in 2017, one of OSE associates, Lou Lou Sainsbury, who took OSE's year-long development programme for adult artists, reported that Open School East had been:

> an incredibly life changing experience for me. With the collective power of artists, children, dogs and other critters, it proved the political/social/emotional importance of collectivity and collaboration in art making, which I believe to be a necessity for working and organising as a young artist today (*Open School East Annual Booklet*, 2017).

When Open School East was still located in London, Stephen Manning, one of Centerprise's interviewees who came to OSE on a weekly basis, spoke of the organisation in these terms:

> OSE isn't just a place to go to, it's a place to be. A lot happens here if you're willing to look and participate. I initially thought it was a bunch of artists and art students doing social work. I soon found out after getting involved that there was much fun and learning to be had – photography, filmmaking, animation, gallery visits, radio workshops, and a lot of Caribbean food. I feel OSE has given me confidence and encouragement to do stuff I really enjoy (*Open School East Annual Booklet*, 2015).

These different quotes evoke some of the educational, social, and artistic attributes of the organisation as well as its spirit and atmosphere. A fourth and final perspective comes this time from Debra Benita Shaw, a local academic who, together with colleagues from the Centre for Cultural Studies Research at the University of East London, taught a weekly 'Introduction to Cultural Theory' seminar at OSE:

> I was looking for a venue where my colleagues and I could continue our work of bringing critical ideas to a wider audience and OSE was a perfect fit. It was a great pleasure to engage in discussions about the relationship between cultural theory and art making in an environment that also welcomed participants from the local

community. The arts, in particular, have suffered from cuts to funding and the need to respond to the increasing commodification of higher education. Those of us committed to free education and sustaining critical debate very much welcome initiatives like OSE (*Open School East Annual Booklet*, 2016).

2. Research Method

The above quotes have been chosen both to give voice to an array of people who attended and engaged with OSE over the years and to counter my own voice, which will only be too present in this chapter, given the intimate relationship I have had with this organisation, which I co-founded and directed until early 2021. These quotes will appear conspicuously positive and in some cases celebratory; most come with the benefit of hindsight, having been collected at the end of a year or of a project, for the purpose of an annual booklet or evaluation report. However, as Manning's words denote, his early impression of OSE was fuelled by doubt, much like that of a member[64] of the mental health charity East Kent Mencap (EKM) who, back in early 2019, as OSE was starting a collaborative project with EKM, said: "[i]t's for artists, isn't it? I don't understand what they mean really, I'd be scared to go, I would feel funny really". At the end of the collaboration, which ended up taking the form of a collectively-made short fiction film, the same member would write: "[i]t was very enjoyable and a great experience. The film was really good fun and brought us all together, we met people we wouldn't usually get to meet." As I shall explore in this chapter, not everyone painted a rosy picture of the organisation or of the programmes taking place under its umbrella. The statements about the organisation that are negative however require context as they delve into the specifics of a programme, which first needs introducing in order to fully apprehend the extent of the criticisms. These statements are given ample space in this chapter; they help generate a critique of OSE in the most reflexive way possible, in an attempt to further overcome the lack of distance between the organisation and my person during the period of time I am covering.

When my supervisors, annual review examiner, and I started discussing the possibility of writing a chapter of my thesis on OSE, the question of positionality came to the fore at once. After various exchanges, it was agreed that my insider position should be embraced and that interviewing team members, learners, and users of OSE, or in turn, asking them to interview me, would do little more than what existing interviews and reports had done over the years, and would only artificially remove me from the narrative. One exception, however, was a retrospective interview I conducted in the last three months of my PhD with the former chair

[64] Unnamed for reasons of anonymity.

of OSE's board, Justin O'Shaughnessy, shortly after having had an informal conversation with him on how we could have planned OSE differently from the outset.

A few research methods were suggested by my supervisors, such as keeping a research diary, which I did for a few weeks until the daily grind of running the organisation made me shelve that effort, or tracing a line on my work's notebook's pages to physically divide my work-related notes from my observations as a researcher. Separating my work, which was partly research-oriented and ideas-testing in itself, from my academic reflection thereof, however revealed itself to be a near-impossible task. Instead, acknowledging complete entanglement between the two became a more realistic way forward. Indeed, the process of researching, constructing knowledge, and articulating thoughts in writing for this PhD profoundly influenced my practice and, by proxy, that of the organisation, in the same way that running Open School East provided me with first-hand insights, experiences, and reflections, which fed back into the overall research and writing. As critical management scholar Kiri Langmead writes:

> Reflexivity is [...] about exploring difference, conflict and contradiction, and understanding our engagements at and with these boundaries as creative moments where researcher, "researched" and research make and remake each other. It is at these moments that we come to understand, not only how our positionality and experiences inform the type of knowledge that is produced but, more fundamentally, *how* we have come to know (Langmead, 2017, p. 196).

The present chapter invokes what geographer Andrea Armstrong and sociology professor Sarah Banks (2011) name "extended epistemology", that is to say "an alternative to the traditional academic privileging of theoretical, abstract, propositional knowledge that understands 'legitimate' knowledge to come from outside practice" (cited in Langmead, 2017, p. 198). Grounded in first-hand experiences as well as on everyday observations – over seven years – of an organisation which, significantly, was also shaped by its participants as I shall soon explore, this chapter positions me concomitantly as individual and institutional body, researcher and researched, and practitioner and observer. Being OSE's longest-serving member of staff and one of the creators and keepers of the organisation's archive, I hold the memory of the institution, from its inception in 2013 until my departure in 2021, both in my head and my hard drive. During that period, I composed or edited the minutes of every board meeting, contributed to writing many of OSE's evaluation reports, and chose the tone and language of every official text representing the organisation both on- and off-line. This material is therefore, in and of itself, a reflection of my ways of prioritising, organising, and presenting

information, which further subjectifies the construction of the organisation's early years' narrative.

No substantial writing has been produced on OSE to this day, and when I started writing this chapter while still working for the organisation, it had become a necessity – at least internally – to record the organisation's short history for posterity and to revisit the key projects, events, approaches, and organisational shifts that had shaped it. Despite not being able to elaborate an impartial critique of the kind developed for the other case studies, I intend to provide a reflexive outlook on OSE as it existed between 2013 and 2020. Self-scrutiny and self-evaluation were key characteristics of OSE and a continuous process that took place at board, management, users, and learners' levels. This chapter builds on the organisation's self-reflexive mode and resorts to (self-)evaluation reports made in writing, audio, video, and image form as well as to my own memory of events, which have yet to be recorded. What is not covered in this chapter are the difficulties associated with staff relationships, which the high-intensity and under-resourced setting, along with personalities, my own not excluded, generated at various moments. These should only be written about from all perspectives and not by a single voice. Furthermore, the organisation being small – with two permanent members of staff at the start, and five when I left, along with two freelancers – individual employees are not singled out or referenced; as such, the subject of staffing is largely left out of the equation. This doesn't however preclude talking about the founders and their individual motivations for setting up Open School East.

As with previous chapters, while the present text starts with the genesis of the project, it then takes a largely non-linear journey through time and programmes to explore the evolution of, and entanglement between, OSE's pedagogy, organisational principles, and socio-spatial dynamics through a combination of empirical research and secondary literature.

II- What is Open School East?

1. Genesis of the Project

The story of Open School East starts where that of Centerprise ends. While London Borough of Hackney (LBH) had increased the rent of Centerprise's building to the point it made it impossible for the organisation to continue to exist, a year later, that is in 2013, it gave the organisation Create London free, indefinite use of the former Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall located on De Beauvoir's housing estate in Hackney. The first floor of the

building, which was a semi-active community hall, former library, and recent base of Hackney Archives, would become OSE's home for the next three years. Create London had come into being in 2009 and had led the East London cultural programme for the 2012 Olympic Games, working across five boroughs including Hackney. Contributing to "urban renewal in the east of London"[65] and working closely with councils to regenerate decommissioned buildings and bring culture and community engagement back into them, among other activities, Create London's mission was thus more closely aligned with the cultural regeneration agenda of LBH than Centerprise was.

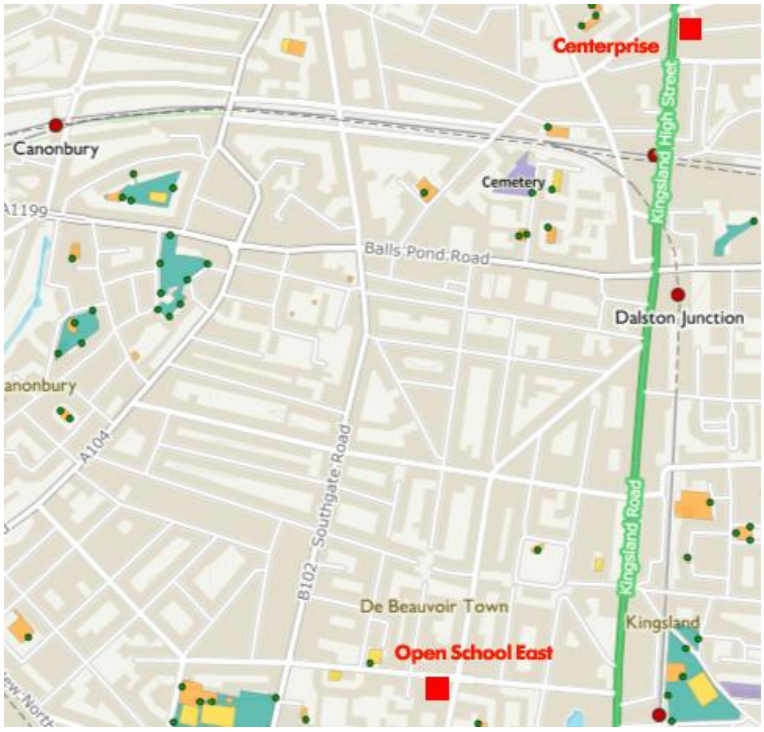

Fig 25. Map of OSE's first home at 43 De Beauvoir Road, Hackney, East London, a few blocks down from Centerprise.

The premise of Open School East was formulated in summer 2012 by curator Sarah McCrory, then art editor Sam Thorne, and art producer Laurence Taylor in response to a call out from the Barbican Centre and Create London, which were teaming up for the second time to award a group of people or an organisation a £100,000 Arts Council England grant towards a year-long project that would engage East London communities creatively. Each of the three bid writers came with a particular agenda: McCrory had an interest in setting up affordable artists studios in light of the dearth of financially accessible workspaces for artists in the capital;

[65] https://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends63/0001146063_AC_20150331_E_C.pdf (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

Thorne was researching contemporary alternative art education models and had a desire to start a learning environment that would substitute the expensive, bureaucratised, and discipline-specific art school; and Taylor was fresh from overseeing the setting up of a temporary community centre in a commercial gallery in central London, which had been conceived as an artwork by the artist Christoph Büchel. While there, he had met inspiring community leaders and users, who would later engage with OSE, and had acquainted himself with the importance and precariousness of community centres.

The three early founders' ambitions were merged into an initial proposal under the working title 'Free School Dalston' – which would be soon discarded due to its risk of alignment with the free school initiative set up in 2010 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. The proposal envisioned a space that would house affordable studios for artists, a free-to-attend study programme for the studio holders, and a community space for East London residents and members of the public from further afield, which would be activated by cultural events, workshops, and skill-sharing classes led by the study programme participants in return for their free education. The proposed location for the project was the former Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall, which Create London was in the process of negotiating the use of with Hackney Council and with whom McCrory and Taylor had worked under the banner of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. The project was submitted to the Barbican Centre and Create London in summer 2012 and in December 2012, it was awarded funding for one year. None of the three original founders – with whom I had variously worked, set up a short-lived artist-run space, or studied – was planning on developing the project themselves. They approached me to establish what we agreed would be a longer-term project, with the grant being treated as seed funding to start an organisation. In the end, I was joined by Laurence Taylor – the two of us initially employing ourselves two days a week – while the two other founders took on an advisory role. My own motivation for working on the development of what would soon be named Open School East was triggered by an interest in alternative forms of knowledge production and transmission, and in socially-engaged and participatory art practice. OSE was the opportunity to bring these interests closer together and to test ideas, methods, and formats in collaboration with Taylor and in conversation with McCrory and Thorne, under the guidance of two institutions with experience in the field, the Barbican Centre and Create London.

By the time we had signed the contract with the Barbican Centre (the project's main partner), which was extended to a period of nineteen months – nine for research and development, and ten for activation – Create London had put the social enterprise Mill Co. Project in charge of running the building, making Open School East a sub-tenant, against a rent of £15,000 a year for the use of the space as a contribution to the building's bills, rates, and services. OSE

negotiated the use of most of the first floor consisting of two sizable rooms and a large L-shaped open space – formerly the children's library – as well as a share of the use of the community hall. For the first nine months, we developed the vision and principles of the organisation to come, introduced ourselves to local community groups and organisations, constituted Open School East as a limited company and charity, and raised additional funds to cover for the extended period of activity, all the while fulfilling the requirements of the Barbican Centre: from quarterly activity reports, to evaluation and project plans. We worked on the elaboration of two main strands of programming. The first one, the Associates Programme, would be free, a year-long, tuition and studio-based, collaborative, largely self-directed, and public-facing (the original idea of charging for the studios was scrapped). The second one, the Public Programme, would be multi-faceted, participant-led, and also free of charge. The artists undertaking the Associates Programme would contribute to shaping it, and the room in which the public programme would take place would be further open to local community groups and organisations in need of space to meet, organise, socialise, create, and learn, and/or interested in collaborating with OSE on the provision of social and cultural activities.

Open School East and its two programmes were launched in September 2013. With the support of Create London, OSE held a first official event for partners, stakeholders, prospective funders, journalists, and art professionals. A second, this time discursive, event was organised a week later. Titled 'Art, School, Society', this panel discussion brought together the then director of the Centre for Possible Studies Janna Graham, the then co-director of Grizedale Arts Alistair Hudson, the artist Ahmet Ögüt, and the then PhD student Elena Crippa, all invested in alternative forms of pedagogies and in socially-engaged art practice. Following this, a few weeks later, with the support of the Barbican Centre, a community launch was organised; the associate artists played a key role in devising activities and making the space welcoming to local residents and groups of all generations. The first month thus established OSE as a multifarious, not to say schizophrenic, organisation preoccupied at the same time with developing itself as hospitable and locally-relevant; contributing to contemporary theoretical, artistic, and educational discourse; and building its future as a sustainable organisation.

Fig 26. ‘Art, School, Society’, roundtable discussion, September 2013. Credit: Eva Rowson.

Fig 27. Open Day, October 2013. Credit: Eva Rowson.

A few months on, if one was to come to Open School East on a Tuesday afternoon, one would have encountered the Hackney Streamers, a group of self-described ‘citizens of the pre-digital age’ – who included the aforementioned Stephen Manning among many others – brought together by the proactive and enlightened Age UK East London Development Officer Rick

Crust, whom Taylor had worked with on the abovementioned temporary community centre he had helped set up in a commercial gallery. While some would be busy planning the next monthly Spotify dance party, others would be preparing the itinerary for a local history walk on the following Saturday, or editing an animation film they had made the previous week. On a Wednesday afternoon, one would have caught a glimpse of a group of five young people aged fifteen to eighteen gathered with as many associate artists, OSE's chair, and OSE's co-director, to watch and discuss John Berger's 1972 television series *Ways of Seeing*. On Thursday, the occasional wandering visitor may have witnessed some of the associate artists receiving tutorials from the OSE mentors, and other associates in the common room discussing the content and logistics of the public activities and events they were busy putting on, as part of their self-directed learning. That evening, a couple of professors moonlighting from their jobs at the University of East London would come and teach a seminar as part of the 'Introduction to Cultural Theory' series, a popular weekly event. On Friday daytime, one might have come across a 'Feral Choir' workshop led by vocalist Phil Minton in the common room for the associates and a few members of the public, and in the evening the Antiuniversity Now Festival organisers presenting the workings of the festival dedicated to radical learning and mutual education events, and how one could contribute.

2. On Legitimacy, Motives, and Community Making

a- Who Invited You?

In March 2019, during a public discussion at the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, which took place in the context of a gathering of international alternative art schools in commemoration of the Bauhaus centenary, an audience member asked me who had invited us to set up an organisation in this particular area and at this particular time. This provocation was made by a curator, Sepake Angiama, who had herself worked in art education and with a wide range of communities, and who would later contribute to OSE's Associates Programme. The answer to that interrogation, which in itself raised questions about legitimacy and the role of OSE in the gentrification process of Hackney – a point I will come back to later – was that we had invited ourselves. Or perhaps more specifically, the Barbican Centre had invited us and outsourced our labour to have a presence, by proxy, in the neighbourhood, and reach out to a number of people they weren't able to engage. Indeed, the terms of the contract with the Barbican Centre, which would be revealed to us several months after submitting the initial proposal, stipulated OSE's audience targets for the duration of the contract. These involved attracting 600 "hard to reach" people and 3,000 people with "low cultural engagement" to the public programme over the course of the extended year they were funding. The figures were

then used for the Barbican Centre's own reports, effectively getting audience figures in exchange for funds.

Since the answer to the question "who invited us?" is not yielding the desired answer, let's ask instead "why did we invite ourselves?" or perhaps more plainly "why did we create OSE?". As art producer Justin O'Shaughnessy, former chair of OSE, recently provocatively commented: "the need for OSE was established after the funding. We followed the money. OSE was born out of an opportunity"[66]. While it is revealing, this statement needs nuancing to the extent that the original three founders had identified two discrete needs, the first one being for affordable studio spaces for artists in the capital. This need would however become less important in the face of the second one, which was for a differential art education; one which would be free, critical, and supportive. Indeed, art education was, and still is, in crisis, and the 2010 occupations of universities and art schools in London were a clear witness to this state of affairs. Among other factors, fees for higher education had spiralled, as had the student debt, thus making art education and its promises of a precarious future increasingly inaccessible to the socioeconomically disadvantaged; the critical, resistant space that universities and art schools had once been was being briskly repressed by marketisation; and London's art schools had become increasingly connected to the art market, which has had the dual effect of discouraging social practice and its largely process-, rather than product-oriented nature, and to generate competition for attention and visibility between students. OSE's initial drive was thus to provide an alternative to this predicament, however small it might be.

Coming back to O'Shaughnessy's comment, OSE's social and locally-focused remit, which would soon become a key trait of the organisation, did however come after the opportunity was granted to the project. If OSE was driven by the desire not to isolate learning from life and if it sought to establish a space for different activities and functions to cohabit and inform each other, the initial impetus behind the creation of OSE had little to do with the specific locality that the organisation would soon embed itself in. In fact, OSE could have settled into many different localities to set up its combined model of an alternative art school and sociocultural centre. In order to respond to the funders' requirement to engage East London communities, it had to elect that part of London. Would Open School East have existed without the £100,000 grant and the offer of an affordable space? I tend to think not. At least not in that form.

[66] Justin O'Shaughnessy, in an interview with the author, 20 April 2022.

The building that Create London offered OSE fitted both its spatial requirements and vision for an outward-facing art school. A ruin of the welfare state, the former Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall would prompt us to explore what the generations after ours would never get to access: a civic, feel-good, old fashioned environment in which to learn, discover, and encounter others in the simplest of settings, without swiping cards, glass walls, and risk assessments, but instead a labyrinthine building with many stairs and doors, and multiple activities behind each of these doors – just like Centerprise, which we didn't yet know about. Being sited in a former public library and community hall would further prompt an aspiration to make OSE pertinent to the local residents who had been using the building until not so long ago. If this mission still stood firm after the relocation to Margate, it would be reinforced when OSE moved to a second civic building in 2019, a council-run adult education centre.

b- Community Building

It was thus with the old library building in mind and during the funded research and development period that we identified and understood the lost importance of civic spaces. In 2012 alone, the UK had seen the closure of over 200 local libraries, including the Rose Lipman Library, and with the disappearance of Centerprise in the same year, along with the very tangible gentrification of Hackney, community spaces had become hard to come by locally. Reflecting on the closure of Centerprise in the oral history element of 'A Hackney Autobiography: Remembering Centerprise' (2014-16), local user Pauline Brown, in an interview recounted by one of the project's researchers, affirmed that Centerprise had been holding the community together and that she had been "shocked to learn" about its shutting down. She felt "there are not enough spaces like it to bring people together and inspire them, although she appreciates contemporary centres like Open School East where she has been organising activities more recently."[67]

To start making OSE known to the neighbourhood, in the months following the opening of OSE, we put in place, via the means of a local call out, a six-week, intergenerational skills-building project around radio broadcasting. Titled 'Parallel Radio', the project which Brown and Manning, among others, participated in, culminated in a radio show on Resonance FM, which we listened to live on the occasion of our first Christmas party, which also included performances by the associate artists and a Caribbean feast cooked by Brown. This was the first time that the different activities, participants, and audiences of OSE came together, creating a memorably cacophonous, fragrant, and joyful mix that we would recount when

[67] https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/people/pauline-brown (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

people asked us the dreaded question: “What does success look like for OSE?” Importantly, ‘Parallel Radio’ didn’t stop there. Using OSE’s space and radio equipment, the project continued in a self-organised manner until the closure of OSE in London – and OSE organised a succession space for it to keep going – where it developed a life of its own and received invitations to set up broadcasting events in places including the Curve Garden in Hackney and the Victoria and Albert Museum. This first project further inspired a 9-month long intergenerational and participatory project a year later, this time geared towards filmmaking and around themes that, like ‘Parallel Radio’, resonated with local issues and experiences including the area’s gentrification, the struggles and closures of local markets, and the housing crisis. ‘Open Cinema’ would also continue beyond the life of the project as a self-organised group of amateur filmmakers. The project was described by its lead artist Neil Cummings as:

> a wild, exciting roller coaster ride. An astonishing array of people have participated, the most diverse in age, background and experience I have ever worked with; from moving image professionals, enthusiasts to complete beginners. We have collectively learnt skills in expert-led workshops, watched material together, interviewed, filmed, laughed, edited and generously shared results. Peer learning at its best (*Open School East Annual Booklet*, 2015).

Fig 28. Parallel Radio group, after recording the show in Resonance FM’s studio, December 2013. Credit: Open School East.

Fig 29. Steven Manning on the day of the public presentation of 'Open Cinema', November 2015. Credit: Open School East.

We were at first resistant to the idea of using the term 'community' in the work OSE was doing and in how we presented ourselves, for we shared some of the reservations Worpole had expressed in the conclusion of the Centerprise report *Local Publishing and Local Culture*, back in 1977:

> I have avoided as far as possible the word 'community'; it is properly the right word to be used, but it has been so distorted [...] that in some cases I think it is a word and an idea that we will have to re-appropriate at a later point in time, when it once again suits our needs and not the needs of those who are so concerned to impose a sense of 'community' upon us as a cheap substitute for a radically different, and better, society. Community, like history, is not something which happens by accident; not given, but made (Worpole, 1977, p. 20).

As I have explored in the introduction to the chapter on Centerprise, following Worpole's suggestion that OSE researches the lineage of community art spaces in Hackney, we had put on the event 'Radical community arts centres in 1970s and 1980s Hackney: What Legacy?' a couple of months after launching the organisation. In parallel, in the second year we set up two groups to enact and research community practice; if both were short lived – they met at regular intervals for about five months – they were nonetheless instructive. The first one was the Open Programme group, largely composed of Hackney Streamers and associates, who would propose ideas of public activities and discuss who the organisation should and could

serve. Some of these proposals materialised into fashion shows, poetry readings, and evening socials during Black History Month, as well as storytelling workshops. The second one was an informal working group composed of researchers and artists, who discussed approaches to community making and the relevance of reclaiming the term 'community' at this moment in time, which resonated in many ways with the 1980s in consideration of the surge in locally- and socially-engaged democratic practices and organisations, against the backdrop of increasingly neoliberal governments and policies. In the 2010s, these policies strategically supported ideas of self-help and were guided by Prime Minister David Cameron's Big Society ideology, whose references to community abounded. Reappropriating the term community at this point in time was a political gesture as well as a means to learn and build from past practices and not let history go unwritten and, consequently, more prone to repeating itself.

As our knowledge of earlier forms of community arts and education expanded, notably thanks to starting this PhD research, along with our appreciation of radical community arts centres such as Chats Palace, Jubilee Arts in Birmingham, and the more recent Grizedale Arts in Cumbria, it became clear that what OSE was trying to achieve had not only been done before in one form or another, but that the organisation's vision had also more in common with this history than with that of experimental art schools which – with some exceptions including the aforementioned early years of CalArts in Los Angeles (1969-71) or Dartington College of Arts' Art and Social Context BA (1977-90) – created and sustained insider arts communities with little connection to the outside world. A year earlier, as we were starting to develop Open School East, I had put on the aforementioned exhibition *Nothing Beautiful Unless Useful* at the Whitechapel Gallery and spent time researching the Manchester Art Museum as well as Toynbee Hall. The two organisations' engagement with locally-based adult education, and with the use of art as learning and socialising tools in areas of socioeconomic deprivation, pointed to the long history of community education and of the democratisation of the arts in the UK. The various dots started to connect and largely informed my decision to undertake a PhD in order to put these different periods and initiatives in perspective with each other and to extract relevant teachings.

III- Pedagogical Approaches

The educator Paul Kuttner classifies art education approaches as generating three different types of cultural citizens: informed cultural citizens, participatory cultural citizens, and justice-oriented cultural citizens (2015). Cultural citizenship is defined by Kuttner as "broadly concerned with the development and recognition of cultural diversity on the one hand, and full

cultural and political participation on the other" (Kuttner, 2015, p. 72). The author further quotes sociologist Jan Pakulski who envisions cultural citizenship as a set of rights: the right to "symbolic presence and visibility (vs marginalisation); the right to dignifying representation (vs stigmatisation); and the right to propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles (vs assimilation)" (cited in Kuttner, 2015, p. 72). Going back to Kuttner's classification of cultural citizens, the informed cultural citizen is appreciative of artistic processes and aesthetic experiences, which they enjoy discussing; they are capable of a critical approach to art, at ease in a gallery or concert hall, and an active and reflexive consumer of the arts. In contrast, the participatory cultural citizen is concerned with challenging the hierarchies that traditionally make up the arts by dissolving the boundaries between so-called high and low cultural forms through, for instance, combining the fine and folk arts, as well as between art and audiences, through community participation and embeddedness. Finally, the justice-oriented cultural citizen takes community participation in the arts a step further from cultural democracy: if art is their chosen tool to improve communities and their livelihood, their central commitment lies in fighting structural oppression and injustice through grassroots community development and cultural organising (Kuttner, 2015).

The three programmes that are discussed in varying lengths in this section – namely the Associates Programme, the Despacito Art School, and the Young Associates Programme – largely worked to develop participatory cultural citizens, while introducing them to a social justice approach and resorting to some of the tenets that make a cultural citizen informed. In their various configurations, each of the programmes engaged with critical education principles which, in a nutshell, reside in: collective and democratic learning; self-direction, agency, and implication of learners in decision-making processes; critical thinking; and a situated approach placing learners in situations that directly connect to their experiences and strive to give these experiences visibility. The discussed programmes have been chosen out of a larger spectrum of activities at OSE and have in common their medium- or long-term existence, as opposed to being temporarily enabled through project funding. If this choice excludes an important part of the organisation's narrative, the focus on programmes with a long-term mission enables the development of a more comprehensive outlook on the distance travelled by those programmes, their transformation over the years, and, in turn, how they have altered the organisation.

1. Self-directedness: the Associates Programme

a- Introduction

> Bad Vibes Club met at Open School East on a beautiful June morning to explore the power of negative emotions in politics. At the once grand, now faded F.L. Pettman Ltd. Depository building in the Cliftonville area of Margate, Bad Vibes Club leader and former OSE associate Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau began the discussion not with opening remarks but with a yoga class. It was led, via YouTube, by a perfectly tanned Californian [...] After thirty minutes of contortions, groans, laughs [...] this not-particularly-supple group of artist associates gathered around a table to read, on de Kersaint Giraudeau's invitation, "Resentment/Ressentiment" by Michael Ure, senior lecturer in politics from the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Sydney. The yoga was as good preparation as any to access the themes of resentment and negativity—after all, de Kersaint Giraudeau quipped, who couldn't feel a little bit resentful when presented with the sun-dappled setting and physical perfection embodied by our online instructor? He was only half joking. It would be tempting at this point to say, "Welcome to a typical day at Open School East," but at this free, self-styled "space for artistic learning" there is no "typical" (Sharratt, 2017).

This description by writer and editor Chris Sharratt, who has followed Open School East over the years and published two articles about the organisation's work, is that of a day of talks and screenings led in 2017 under the auspices of the Bad Vibes Club, a project initiated by Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau at OSE in 2013-14, which initially took the form of a reading group and lectures series. De Kersaint Giraudeau is one of many alumni who was invited back to work with OSE whether to give their version of the OSE story to incoming associates, to lead one-off workshops and events, to be a mentor on the Associates Programme, a tutor on the Despacito Art School, or a workshop leader on the Young Associates Programme.

This short introduction gives away a few keys about the Associates Programme: its collaborative spirit and multifariousness; the coming together of theory and practice; the sociopolitical inclination of the programme's content; and, last but not least, the cross pollination between year groups and programmes, and, with it, the importance of the alumni community and their continuing involvement with OSE. Started in 2013, the artists development and studio programme welcomed approximately thirteen associates with or without previous qualification every year, who applied in search of a peer group and possible future collaborators, a critical and non-competitive space in which to develop or rethink their

practice, and, last but not least, an environment in which to engage with what Irit Rogoff calls “unframed knowledge”: knowledge that is “not framed by thematic and disciplinary orders”, but is instead presented in relation to “the pressures and struggles of contemporaneity”; “knowledge as disruption, knowledge as counter-subjugation” (Rogoff, 2010).

Structurally speaking, while I was working at OSE, the programme ran two days a week and access to the studios was 24/7, each associate being a keyholder. Two key phases defined the year: the first one, which lasted four months, was about immersion into the group, the programme, and the town, through a collective learning project devised by a guest artist and culminating in a public event or showcase. It was also the moment in which the OSE mentors introduced their practice through the form of presentations, workshops, or seminars to the group, who then chose whom to be mentored by. The second moment, which lasted eight months, was largely shaped by the associates who, working in groups as well as individually, invited a broad range of guests to lead public workshops, talks, excursions, or short courses for themselves and the diverse communities that both inhabited or surrounded the school. Guided by their mentors, the associates further devised the shape, format, and duration of what would be traditionally referred to as the interim and graduation shows.

b- Organisational Shapers

The associates were key actors in the shaping of the organisation and its practices; this happened through the self-directed nature of the programme as well as ongoing evaluation. In order to facilitate self-direction, at the beginning of each year a couple of sessions were planned with a community organiser to discuss possible collective working methods, how decision-making might be carried out and conflicts resolved, and what code of conduct to put in place. These sessions helped the associates set principles and approaches to collaborative working and space sharing, which would serve them during their year-long involvement and beyond. Chaired by a different associate every week, the weekly staff and associates meeting was the opportunity for everyone to check in and review past teaching sessions, public and otherwise, following which feedback was communicated to the guest tutors, mentors, and other relevant parties, and recommendations for the smooth running of future sessions were made. The meeting was also a platform to discuss and review, for instance, space use, who the associates-led programme was for, how OSE could make itself more visible to the outside, how OSE should respond to Black Lives Matter and other such organisational topics that would normally not involve students. The agenda was set by the associates who, for many but not all, and this without any request or expectation from the staff, saw their role at OSE as

beyond learning and sharing their learning with others, and actively sought to reform their programme and by proxy the organisation.

The associates got guidance from the team when and where needed, although on a number of occasions, it was the associates who guided the organisation into being, for instance, more thorough and efficient about access and legibility of OSE's programmes. For example, the associates took the initiative to redesign OSE's posters and leaflets, and, more significantly, to organise, in 2019, a forum through which individuals who identify as both neurodiverse and neurotypical were invited to discuss how the organisation could improve the experience of neurodiverse people. This forum led to the writing of a charter recommending: a clearly signposted accessibility statement on the website; reading a welcome script at the beginning of each public event to introduce the organisation, its building, and facilities; and making breakout rooms available, should people need to isolate or let off steam, among other suggestions that would be soon implemented. In addition, for their end of the year exhibition, the associates organised a neurodiverse-aware day for which lights were filtered, sound levels were lowered, numbers of people within spaces were limited, extra invigilators were available for questions and conversations about the works on display, and refreshments were served. The day attracted close to fifty people, half of whom reported they would not have come under normal circumstances.

Beyond taking the organisation into unchartered and necessary territory and inciting it to reflect and further deliver on its claimed inclusive ethos, with this event the associates also broke new ground in institutional practice. This isn't an isolated example; in fact, the associates – many of whom were at the forefront of intersectional discussions and practices, whether through their involvement in grassroots activism or their personal experiences – consistently brought highly topical social, political, and cultural debates into the organisation via the public programme they curated, and this, before many larger arts or art education institutions started to publicly address them and integrate them into their thinking. Besides neurodiversity awareness, other debates revolved around white privilege and the necessity for Black-only spaces and events; cultural workers' precarity; and the appropriation of feminist and queer activist histories by the art establishment, to give but a few examples. If OSE cannot claim ownership of these events, for they were convened by associates, it however supported them in terms of human, spatial, and financial resources, and was, in many cases, transformed by them at internal policy level as much as at programming level. This notably materialised in the organisation's early adoption of inclusive language and in the running of yearly workshops, for both staff and associates, on anti-racism, equality and diversity; neurodiversity and neuro-inclusion; and environmental change, which were led by artists and theorists.

c- Learning through Failure

> At OSE, education is not framed as a right. It is a privilege granted to us by the generosity of funding bodies, individuals and art institutions; a privilege we should be grateful for. When the school's structure was created, a choice was made to make these funding relations and expectations visible, and, unlike in a MA Fine Arts structure, we constantly have to deal with their presence. Knowing the funders' expectations in relation to what should be produced or what the school and students should be like generates a constant feeling of guilt: the guilt of having something for free and never being grateful enough, compounded by the fear that by failing to conform to expectation we could threaten the continued existence of the school and of this community we have built ourselves into. [...] As we internalise the pressure of our role in the school's survival, our study time is transformed into labour time that needs to be productive and we lose some of the most important characteristics of the time spent in education: we should avoid failure, we should occupy all our time, we should try to make everything public instead of creating a bubble of protection where we can experiment with no defined objective or outcome in sight (Franke, 2013, pp. 6-7).

These are the words of 2013-14 associate Andrea Franke, written for a publication developed at the initiative of the Associates Programme's first cohort. This is not the only critical text in this publication, which is still available for download on OSE's website[68], but it is the one that most directly influenced the organisation to shift its approach.

As Franke indicates, the first year of OSE was both burdened by the Barbican Centre's high demands in return for their funding and overshadowed by the uncertainty of the organisation's survival after the funding dried up. OSE was an experiment run by established curators and producers, yet under-experienced educators and managers, who soon started to doubt the intent, viability, and ethics of the model they had put in place. As I have partly touched on earlier, the model involved getting artists to actively partake in shaping a cultural and social offer for varied audiences as well as to develop locally-focused participatory projects without appropriate funding allocated to this end, in exchange for their free education. While this was of interest to some associates and aligned with their more socially-engaged art practice, it was met by indifference, confusion, and resistance by others. And rightly so, as OSE was effectively passing on to the associates the responsibility of meeting the funders' ambitious targets in order to secure the future of the organisation, which was dependent on successful

[68] https://openschooleast.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/whole-PDF.pdf (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

outcomes, and to enable future associates to access free education. In his 2017 article 'The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World's Performance of Progression', art critic and curator Morgan Quaintance launched an attack on organisations including Create London and Open School East, deploring the "massive transference of power [and funds] from artists to institutions, from the grass roots to the establishment, and from community groups to highly professionalised and internetworked charitable organisations"[69]. Quaintance suggested that Open School East used marginalised groups, including the artistic precariat, "to fund [its] own operations". If at the time the targeted criticism was hard to swallow, in hindsight, Quaintance had a valid point, and the expectations placed on the unpaid associates by a charity which was paying its employees were paradigmatic of this phenomenon.

Going back to Franke's criticisms – which too denounced the fact that the associates were fulfilling some of the duties expected of a staff member, for instance outreach work or lending a hand on a project or short course, and this against no remuneration – and fast-tracking onto what happened next, the aforementioned locally-focused projects were unsuccessfully reframed and phased out at the end of the following year. Further to this, from 2015, the associates-led public programme became entirely focused on the artists' practices and shared interests, as an opportunity to approach and meet the people – artists, writers, sociologists, scientists, designers, activists, etc. – they most wanted to learn from, and to share the benefits of their learning with others. No further requirements would be attached, other than ensuring that the programme was rightly balanced in terms of theory and practice, and showed an awareness of diversity, in all its possible forms. From 2017, the associates would no longer be asked to partake in any extracurricular activity unless there was funding to pay them. It took over three years for the organisation to apply this basic principle, even though volunteering by people from outside of the organisation had been ruled out from the start and all staff, mentors, tutors, course leaders, and participatory projects' lead artists were paid from the first day. Here again, the words of Quaintance resonate; if we felt he misrepresented OSE in his article, he nonetheless pointed to the organisation's undeniable exploitation of the associates' labour. As for sharing in organisational and financial matters and concerns with the associates, after the first year, they were effectively shielded from this practice. Unexpectedly, in the second year a number of associates who knew how the previous year had operated demanded to be made privy to these conversations, which we did as and when

[69] Quaintance, M. (2017) 'The New Conservatism: Complicity and the UK Art World's Performance of Progression', *e-flux conversations*. Available at: https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/the-new-conservatism-complicity-and-the-uk-art-worlds-performance-of-progression/7200 (Accessed: 27 April 2022)

required. This process was formalised in 2016 when we started inviting an associate at each quarterly board meeting to observe, gain insight into the organisation, and give their views on programming and organisational aspects.

In an article on free – as in non-fee paying and democratic – education, curator, and theorist Rogoff questions: “[w]hat are the institutional implications of housing knowledge that is ‘free’?” and “[w]hat are the economies of ‘free’ that might prove an alternative to the market- and outcome-based and comparison-driven economies of institutionally structured knowledge at present?” (Rogoff, 2010). The pressures and failures of the first year of OSE are some of the possible implications of housing knowledge that is free. In comparison, after the structural changes evoked above the Associates Programme became freer to acquire, in that there was no expected free labour in return, and freer in form, in that it was more autonomous from the institution than it had been in its first years of operation. Ultimately, the free, unframed knowledge that Rogoff refers to – that is at the level of higher education – is arguably more comfortably housed in an environment that is unaccredited, since with (valid and valuable) accreditation comes the meeting of outcomes and targets. This opens a can of worms as, if unframed knowledge can be personally and intellectually fulfilling, its professional usefulness is however much less certain, which begs the following question: who can genuinely afford to unlearn without a diploma at the end of the journey? Those with time in their hands, those who already have a valid qualification, those with non-vocational aspirations, or those with the determination to learn and grow outside of the establishment.

Discussions on whether or not to accredit the Associates Programme took place on a regular basis for the first three years. Accrediting the programme would have meant drastically changing both its format and approach, and risked excluding those without prior qualifications. Ultimately, the Associates Programme was a complement to formal education, a residency, or a development opportunity, but not an alternative to an MA programme, for the group and its activities were to a large extent self-organised, and much of what took place in the programme was shared with other beneficiaries, thereby constantly stretching the classroom walls, to name but a couple of key points of divergence. In the next sections, I explore that a different choice was made about accreditation for the Young Associates Programme, and that the question of access to the Associates Programme, and of who can afford that unlearning, remained central to the organisation’s thinking and future planning.

Fig 30. Fashion workshop by Cynthia Lawrence-John and Rhys Ellis, March 2019.
Credit: Dik Ng.

Fig 31. Cryptocurrency workshop, October 2017, as part of ‘Spelunking’, a collaborative project between OSE associates and artist Benedict Drew.
Credit: Open School East.

2. Responsiveness: the Despacito Art School

Upon relocating to Margate in early 2017, OSE's offer expanded to include a weekly arts, crafts, and functional object-making class for local children. Shortly after moving into the ground floor of the Pettman building on Athelstan Road, a residential street in the socioeconomically deprived Cliftonville West ward, local children started inviting themselves into the space and asking the staff and associates for activities relevant to them. Largely from Eastern European migrant families who face poverty and isolation, the young people aged 5 to 11 had nowhere to go after school, the local youth club being only open to over 12s, and spending the afternoon in their overcrowded flats was taking a toll on them. By that point, OSE was about to become an Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation, and had to transfer from an understaffed project started by friends and colleagues and operating without written policies, to a legitimate organisation. In the space of a few weeks, the part-time staff, by then extended to three and soon four people, undertook training in safeguarding young people, developed corresponding policies, and shuffled the budget to make provision to pay for materials and labour. OSE's work with the young people of Cliftonville began with a summer school through which the participants put together a DIY float and made costumes for the Margate Carnival. It is on this occasion that many of the children, who live minutes from the beach and the old town, ventured to these places for the very first time, effectively overcoming invisible barriers through creative engagement. Within days of the carnival, they came back asking for more and proposed naming their project the Despacito Art School, after their favourite summer hit, 'Despacito' by Luis Fonsi.

For three years, Despacito operated all-year round and was marked by its annual participation in the Margate Carnival and a yearly exhibition at OSE, where the young people shared their work with families, friends, and members of the broader public. Developed and delivered by paid OSE associates and alumni, along with an OSE support worker, the termly curriculum engaged the young people in reclaiming their town and responding to significant cultural and social events; for instance the Turner Prize, which in 2019 was hosted at Turner Contemporary and, critically, in summer 2020, the pandemic and Black Lives Matter, whereby the young people's doorsteps were used to make socially-distanced art, stage creative protests, and discuss the events with the Despacito staff.

Beyond developing the participants' artistic abilities and expression, the Despacito Art School worked with the young people to develop their confidence, behaviour, communication, integration, and critical skills. This took place through personalising support as and when needed, discussing topics and events surrounding and/or affecting them and developing

artworks around such topics, as well as bringing together children who didn't normally interact with each other, because they attended different schools or came from diverging cultural backgrounds. In addition, Despacito had its own manifesto and set of rules that the children co-wrote with their tutors, which included being attentive and helpful to others, and not judging others on the basis of race, sexuality, or disability, along with the motto 'Be the best artist you can be'. Significantly, Despacito went beyond creative learning and the development of what are commonly called life skills: the group who, more often than not, had no access to free school meals got fed; those who had failed to learn how to read could step out of the class and be tutored by a trained staff member; their Christmas presents from OSE often involved warm clothes; and their parents, who faced language barriers, regularly turned to OSE's support worker for legal help in relation to work, housing, and debt.

Fig 32. Despacito Art School, Margate Carnival 2019.
Credit: Anna Colin.

Fig 33. Despacito filmed by the BBC, 2019.
Credit: Despacito participant.

3. Re-empowerment?: the Young Associates Programme

a- Genesis and Introduction

While the Despacito Art School was a spontaneous response to a need made clear by the children themselves, the Young Associates Programme was set up at OSE's own initiative. The programme's original impulse came from internal discussions about the ability of the Associates Programme to effectively reach out to recipients who had not had opportunities to develop their creativity through official or structured channels, due to financial, physical and/or sociocultural barriers. The majority of the associates who joined OSE had had access to higher education, whether art school or university, principally at BA level. A minority had found their path into the arts outside of formal education; some of them had applied and joined the programme as a result of engagement with the organisation's creative courses and other public activities, whether through affiliation with local groups who used OSE's space or through finding out about it in local papers or word of mouth. During my time at OSE, a perennial question for the organisation was: how could those who hadn't found their path into the arts and weren't locally or digitally connected to OSE come to know about the organisation's offer, given its still relatively young existence and limited staff capacity for widespread outreach?

Going back to the moment where students decide what to do with their lives and career, in other words working with earlier age groups and specifically 16-18 year olds, was our chosen attempt at raising awareness, among those with little connection to the arts, not only of OSE's existence, but also of the possibilities afforded by free and democratic art education later in their lives. A pilot programme delivered in 2016 with ten students from a local sixth form college set the ground for the organisation's longer-term engagement with youth education and for the establishment, in September 2019, of a Level 1 Art and Design diploma and a Level 1 Functional Skills diploma in maths and English, respectively accredited by Gateway and City & Guilds. As research unfolded in Margate and particularly the Cliftonville ward – where OSE was initially located and which ranked as the 5th most deprived in the country for the Indices of Deprivation 2019 measuring children and young people's education, skills, and training – it became clear that the Young Associates Programme needed to be a full-time alternative to sixth form, and to be accredited in order to break the cycle of young people unable to progress into higher education. After a year of operation, and following consultation with the students and their parents or carers, which established that the majority of the young associates could only sustain their long-term commitment to education in an informal and tight-knit environment that offered a highly-personalised approach to student learning, the programme was extended by a further year to offer a Level 2 diploma. For the next year, the YAP operated as a two-year programme bringing together Level 1 and 2 in two subgroups, who shared the same learning and were given assignments corresponding to the qualification they were pursuing.

In January 2021, a month before I left the organisation, a new Head of Young Associates Programme joined OSE and reshaped the programme for September 2021, bringing it back to one year, opening it only to 18 to 21 year old students, and removing the previous accreditation to replace it with a Gold Arts Award. This latter fact is more for context on what happened next than for discussion, given that it relates to a time outside of the period studied in this chapter. At the same time, it introduces the subject of accreditations that are deemed valuable, which is discussed later in this section.

b- The Young Associates Programme in Practice

The Young Associates Programme (YAP), as it operated during my time at OSE, took place from Tuesday to Thursday on the ground and first floors of OSE's building. The 14 young people arrived between 9.30am and 10am to be greeted by OSE's Youth Engagement Officer who registered them, checked in with them, and offered them a hot drink, fruit, and biscuits. The group was divided into two adjacent classrooms a floor above, hosting 8 and 5 people

each according to the qualification they were working towards, though mixing between groups was frequent. The radio was on in the background, the doors were open, other OSE users walked by and peered through the doors to greet the young people, and my dog Dexter occasionally wandered around the rooms in search of attention or to offer himself for much sought-after pet therapy. Tuesdays were used for personal projects' development and Functional Skills, which often tied in with what the art and design faculty had prepared for the month or term. Wednesday was Creative Practice day, also connected to the discipline and topics that were being explored in the same month, while Functional Skills continued for those in need of extra support and personal projects' development also carried on. The Functional Skills delivery was known as the Creative Careers module, which was wittily described by a young associate as "doing maths and English without even knowing you are doing it, and without it being boring" (*Young Associates Programme Internal Evaluation Report*, 2019). An example of this involved making measurements and calculations to landscape a 1:20 garden in clay, and another visiting the Turner Prize exhibition at Turner Contemporary and composing an exhibition review to be written with locally-sourced chalk on the sea wall facing the museum, until the tide washed it away. Thursdays was when the roving faculty of artists and designers came in to deliver workshops, classes, or projects in the fields of sculpture, textile, fashion, furniture-making, film and video, music and sound, or graphic design and printmaking, often for a period of 3 to 5 weeks.

Fig 34. Young associates 2020, Turner Prize review.
Credit: Open School East.

Fig 35. Young associates 2020, planting trees with associates, tutors and Peter Hasted, director, Thanet Urban Forest. Credit: Open School East.

The development of arts, crafts, and literary skills and of the young associates' confidence in their abilities was key to the programme and was done where possible through the means of projects with real-life applications. These were designed to give visibility to the work, ideas, and state of mind of the young associates as well to give them voice and agency to participate in the cultural life of Margate. Designing a typography and signage for OSE's new home, addressing mental health issues in artworks to be exhibited online or at a local exhibition space, developing a fashion collection to be sold in the shop owned by their fashion tutor, or making a video about young people's perception of the changing town and their (re-)inscription within the narrative of cultural regeneration to be streamed on the District Council's website, were some of the projects that were in the pipeline in this second year. As I explore later in this section, many of them did not materialise. Cultural awareness and arts appreciation too formed part of the curriculum, which included visits to galleries and museums in Margate, London, and beyond, along with attending performances, plays, and festivals locally and in the region. As for personal and interpersonal development, this was facilitated by the smallness of the group, collective working as well as by open discussions that took place on a monthly basis. This meeting was the opportunity for the group to voice with their peers and the YAP team their wishes for changes within the programme and ideas for projects, as well as to address group dynamics or problems they may have encountered on learning, spatial, or relational levels. One-to-one check-ins with the Head of YAP and tutors also took place weekly, and parent/carer and student meetings took place thrice yearly.

Staffing-wise, the programme was delivered and taught by a mixture of trained teachers and artists and designers, who complemented and enriched each other's methods. The overall mission of the programme was to put artists' pedagogies at the centre of the learning and to offer practitioners a framework from which to work, one that was open enough to make it desirable for non-educators with a wealth of experience in their own field and an inclination for experimentation. The creative faculty worked alongside trained teachers, each experienced in working with vulnerable young people, which constituted the majority of the group. As Thomson and Hall posit, if "there is a lot that teachers can learn from artists, and vice versa [...] the two are not interchangeable" (2020, p. 77). One of the Head of YAP's roles was to work closely with the practitioners, brief them as to what learning objectives needed to be met, and to translate the work achieved into assessable material in line with the goals and criteria imposed by the accreditation. As the YAP developed and was being evaluated[70], the significance of having leading cultural practitioners who could act as role models but had no or limited experience of working with young people, versus less established or professionally active art and design practitioners but with youth education experience, began to being questioned.

c- Affective Pedagogies in a Climate of High Needs

> The experience of attending the YAP at OSE has been excellent for my son. He has benefited socially, through working with and bouncing ideas off people around his age, many with varied and different backgrounds, approaches, skills and interests, but generally working towards common aims. He has gained in self-confidence, as his work and his contributions have been appreciated, and he has been increasingly aware of the abilities that the course has given him to do things he had not tried or been aware of before. As far as employment is concerned, he has been introduced to and thought about different career paths in the creative industries, particularly by enthusiastic and inspiring arts practitioners who have led the sessions [...] He has also benefited from sessions with a counsellor, which have been very helpfully integrated with the course, so that he sees connections between the work he is doing, the ideas he is exploring, and his emotional state, and can bring them together to develop in an integrated way both psychologically and artistically (Young associate's parent, September 2020).

[70] Year 1 relied on self-evaluation and year 2 was externally evaluated by a senior academic at Canterbury Christ Church University, appointed to measure the impact of this alternative provision on the students, their learning, and growth, including those who had not obviously displayed talent or interest in the arts.

The above quote demonstrates that the mix of experiences and profiles proposed by the YAP could work for some of the students, but that it relied on a support structure that was elaborate, time-demanding, and costly for a programme of that scale which, at the time, relied entirely on trusts and foundations' funding as well as on individual donors. We knew that the first year of the YAP would require adjustments and while we had aimed to work with young people who had fallen through the net of formal education, we hadn't anticipated such a high level of educational, emotional, and social needs from our learners. Year 1 thus required swift adaptation from OSE, including developing a flexible approach to scheduling and programming, and increasing pastoral support, which was catered for by the recruitment of a counsellor and by staff members stepping up their duties of care to the students.

Another unanticipated event was Covid-19, which involved relocating the entire programme online six months after the launch of the YAP. Laptops and packs of art materials were delivered to students at the beginning of lockdown and tutors began teaching through Zoom, adapting workshops to suit remote learning. In spite of these logistical efforts, emancipatory and participatory learning, along with the simple but vital bonding moments that usually occur during breaks or an excursion, were strained by Zoom fatigue, feelings of disconnection, and straight impossibility, which impacted the learners' mental health – a common occurrence in the education sector during this period[71]. The difficulty of making eye contact with students and reading signs of disengagement during virtual exchanges, coupled with noise pollution and camera shyness – which often made one resort to general muting and blank windows instead of expressive bodies – not only made the building and maintenance of human connection a lot harder, but also reasserted the conventional teacher-learner relationship that we had strived not to replicate. Back in the physical classroom, we tried to repair what months of isolation had done to the young people who were already fragile in the first place, and to break away from the default dynamics between the team and students that were constructed by Zoom.

In principle, and in physical space, the YAP enacted what educationalists Michael Fielding and Peter Moss have named the "school as affective community" (2011, p. 53), which effectively "valorises the personal at the expense of the functional" (ibid, p. 54).

[71] A particularly enlightening survey was done on the subject by the charity Young Minds, which published the results in June 2020: https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/school-staff-warn-of-the-extensive-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-young-people-s-mental-health-new-survey/ (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

> It is animated by an inclusive, restorative impulse rather than by the sifting, sorting and segregating predilections of efficiency. Its intense concern with the individual needs of young people results in little time or patience for the functional or organisational arrangements needed to translate the warmth and deeply held emotional commitments into practical realities that help young people learn in a variety of ways (ibid).

Tapping into beliefs and knowledge that are integral to the young people's everyday experiences, the programme, but also the classroom and spatial environment, aimed to promote participation in Margate's cultural life and social discourse, in the ecosystem of Open School East, and in the shaping of the programme, its structure, and offer. If these attributes, along with collective learning, were foundational to the YAP, the emotional and social needs of the group were such and so different from one learner to another, who further had patchy academic abilities, that in order to meet the learning objectives of the programme, the Young Associates Programme team often resorted to what Thomson and Hall name "dull" or "default pedagogies" (2020, p. 76), as opposed to "open-ended, exploratory, deconstructive and reconstructive [...] and disruptive" pedagogies (ibid, p. 86). Further to this, the need to increase one-to-one support largely curtailed the ambitions of the abovementioned real-life projects carried out collectively by the group. This set of failures shows that the desire to turn learners into participatory cultural citizens is not always compatible with the life circumstances of learners.

d- Further Reflections on the Viability of the Alternative Art Schooling Model

As McGregor and Mills (2012) and Thomson, Hall, Earl, and Geppert (2019) have argued, alternative art education often becomes the last resort for those who have failed to remain educationally engaged and to undertake qualifications deemed valuable within mainstream education. This was the case for many of OSE's young associates. While some of them found fulfilment in engaging with art and even showed talent and aspirations to develop a creative career, others were principally attracted to the human-scale, low-pressure, social, and personalised learning environment offered by OSE and were unlikely to develop a career in the creative industries. If the Young Associates Programme didn't fully qualify as an alternative education programme in that it was formally accredited and, as such, regimented by criteria and outcomes set by the accrediting bodies, it was led by a team who was familiar with the exclusionary qualities of formal education and the failings of schools in catering for the most vulnerable and disengaged pupils. Furthermore, it sat within an organisation that practised alternative education and applied, where possible, the same principles as those found in the Associates Programme. In other words, the YAP was a formal education provision that was

delivered informally and with critical pedagogy principles in mind when and where possible.

As youth studies lecturer Frances Howard has argued (2018, 2019), alternative education programmes are often found to offer lower standards than mainstream education. Howard's research takes the case of the Arts Awards accreditation, whose impact on one's progression into Further Education or the workplace is often deemed inconsequential, not to say deficient. In contrast, the YAP – before reverting to the Arts Awards qualification after my departure – offered nationally recognised qualifications effectively allowing progression into further and higher education. Some of the most respectable initiatives on paper have too shown the failings of education delivered through the arts and alternative methods, as the aforementioned case of the Plymouth School of the Creatives Arts (PSCA) notably demonstrates[72]. The enviable pedagogical methods and spatial settings developed to accommodate collective, cross-year, and democratic learning as well as the cohabitation of pupils, grassroots organisations, and members of the local community – which I experienced first-hand in its early days and under whose spell I was – was deemed inadequate by Ofsted, leading to the school's closure and its take over by the Reach South Academy Trust as part of a rescue operation. However inadequate YAP's new Arts Awards qualification may be, it might prove to reignite the agility and spirit of experimentation that were largely taken away by the YAP's former accreditation process. Engaging adults rather than young people under the age of eighteen might also alleviate the weight of safeguarding that OSE's small team was under-equipped to carry – a point that I will come back to in the conclusion to this chapter.

IV- Spatial and Local Considerations

1. OSE's Four Homes

Open School East had four main homes during my time working for the organisation. As previously touched on, two of these buildings, both council-owned, helped shape the organisation's identity. The first one, from which the school operated between 2013 and 2016, was the recently decommissioned Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall built in the 1970s in De Beauvoir, East London. The second one, OSE's home in Margate between 2019 and 2020, was purpose-built as the Thanet School of Arts and Crafts in the early 1930s, before becoming an adult education centre in the 1970s. As buildings with a history of knowledge-production, social interactions, art education, and adult learning, they were not only fitting

[72] https://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/news/plymouth-news/plymouth-school-creative-arts-given-4273524 (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

homes for the school, but also provided the organisation with an insight into the adult education, literacy, and community arts movements in Britain, which inspired activities and aspects of its development. Crucially, and as I have explored before, the former local, communal, and public remit of these structures also informed OSE's philosophy and its ambition to be locally relevant.

Fig 36. Map of Margate with OSE's various homes.


Fig 37. The old Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall, 43 De Beauvoir Road, London, 2013. Credit: Owen Watson.

Fig 38. Margate's Adult Education Centre, 1-3 Hawley Square, Margate, 2019.
Credit: Ollie Harrop.

Originally, both buildings had been spatially organised to welcome local residents and users: each had a reception area, a social space, a canteen, and spacious rooms dedicated to set activities and facilities. At the time of OSE's occupancy, the brutalist Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall on 43 De Beauvoir Road was undergoing rapid transformation under the impulse of the building management company Mill Co. Project, with an increasing number of spaces being partitioned off and rented at near market rate as offices and studios for the creative industry. In addition, Mill Co. Project would regularly turn spaces in the building, which had been designated for community use as part of the agreement with Create London and Hackney Council, into pop-ups, including a restaurant providing experiential meals at £50 a head, during a full six months. This led to a radical shift in attitude to space ownership as well as in atmosphere – from communal to commercial, and often antisocial – which generated discontent within the local community.

In contrast, the spaces that OSE occupied on the first floor remained largely untouched and were centred around three types of use, which had been collectively decided upon, prior to OSE's launch, by the first cohort of associates and the staff under the guidance of participatory designer Bahbak Hashemi-Nezhad. These uses, which dictated the repartition of spaces and their fitting out, were: private – the team's office and the associate artists' shared studios, which would evolve over time to include a workshop area and a recording studio at the initiative

of other cohorts; semi-public – Troy Town Art Pottery ceramics studio[73] and the common room, whose uses rotated between associate-only activities, public workshops and events, and local groups' meetings and activities, and which held the OSE library; and public – the community hall used by OSE on a regular basis for larger events and specific productions. The common room, which had capacity for 60 seats, a cosy corner and a tea, coffee and biscuits station, was where members of the public, local and otherwise, and the various groups that came to use OSE's space, mainly congregated – for instance, the aforementioned Hackney Streamers, the feminist action group Sisters Uncut, De Beauvoir Estate's tenants and residents' association, the carnival group Tropical Isles as well as the Parallel Radio and Open Cinema groups. While the building's spatial character and former local focus had first inspired us to make OSE porous to local residents and topics, by the time we left in early 2017, OSE's common room was the most public space in the building and the only one whose use was free of charge. Despite its relative comfort, its many windows and broken central heating made the space freezing in the winter and unbearably hot in the summer.

In contrast, the Art Deco Margate Adult Education Centre building located on 1-3 Hawley Square had central heating and was solely used for learning, community, and public use. It was managed by Kent County Council and remained largely architecturally intact. The building was characterised by a strong municipal feel, outmoded furniture, and old smells, yet it had a feel-good, inclusive, and pre-gentrification atmosphere. While there, OSE rented two spaces on a permanent basis – a large classroom for learning and public activities, and an office – as well as a second classroom two days a week. In addition, OSE facilitated the rehabilitation of the former canteen into a fully functioning community cafe run by a former associate, and made it usable as an events space in the evenings. During the eighteen months of presence at the Adult Education Centre, OSE rented a studio space for its associates from the nearby studio organisation CRATE, effectively separating production work from learning activities as the main building could not let more spaces out to the organisation.

In between the Rose Lipman Library and Community Hall and the Margate Adult Education Centre, for two years OSE sublet two spaces from the organisation Resort Studios on the ground floor of the Pettman building at 50 Athelstan Road in Cliftonville, Margate. The

[73] Troy Town Art Pottery was the initiative of artist Aaron Angell, who used the facilities for his own work as well as to run, once a month, a free week-long residency for artists wanting to experiment with the ceramics medium. Monthly workshops for local groups and residents were aso run at Troy Town. See: https://openschooleast.org/programmes/associates-programme/associates-2013-2014/troy-town-art-pottery-2/ (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

imposing Victorian warehouse was originally built for the auctioneers and removal specialists Pettman F.L. (established in 1882), which, in 2017, still occupied one third of the building and let the rest out to Resort Studios. The overall footprint was a lot smaller than OSE's previous home, but it matched some of the soft requirements that had featured in an options analysis carried out by OSE the year before, as it was seeking to move out of London, including being on the ground floor and readily visible to local residents (unlike OSE's previous home), and being (mostly) physically accessible. The first space, the associates' studios, was organised around a workshop and 'messy' area on the ground floor, and a library and desk spaces for clean and quiet studio work on the mezzanine floor, built by OSE to double the space. The second one, the project space, hosted all public and associates-only activities, and was shared with Resort Studios' members. As for the office, it was installed in a makeshift garden shed on the ground floor, in the corner of the workshop space. If the first year was full of energy and hope, the second year was marked by a sense of exhaustion felt by staff, associates, and users alike, triggered by being in a space that was bitterly cold, damp, and airless, too small for its function, and hard to concentrate and find refuge in.

Fig 39. OSE's home at the Pettman building, 50 Athelstan Road, Margate, 2017.
Credit: Open School East.

After a succession of short-term leases, in July 2020 OSE moved to its fourth main home – a 5-storey Georgian building formerly used as an accountancy firm's office and before that as dwellings – on the same square as the Margate Adult Education Centre, at number 39. For the first time, OSE rented a building in full and secured a 15-year lease. Space rotation between activities and programmes was no longer necessary as each and every programme

had its own dedicated classrooms or studios. In addition, four spaces at the top of the building were offered at a subsidised rate to OSE alumni for up to two years, with the dual objective of reducing overall rental costs and supporting the associates beyond their time at OSE, all the while facilitating cross pollination between different year groups. On a busy day, OSE brought together up to 40 learners, studio users, tutors, and members of staff over its 240 square metre footprint and 14 rooms. With rooms open for ventilation during the pandemic, the rumble of the different activities leaked into the staircase and ample landings where various generations met each other and stopped to converse.

Fig 40. OSE's home at 39 Hawley Square, Margate, 2020.
Credit: Eni Timi-Biu.

2. The Move to Margate

As I have run through OSE's four homes and three of its programmes, addressing the motivations behind the move from London to Margate as well as its implications is long overdue. At the beginning of the third year, it was clear that the organisation could no longer sustain itself and rely on the funding model it was currently working with. Trusts and foundations' support was hard to come by in light of the heavy competition for the same, limited pool of grants and after two large-scale fundraisers made successful by the goodwill and generosity of a few over-solicited donors, a change of tactics was needed. Arts Council England informed the organisation that the next round of National Portfolio Organisations

would benefit from an extension of funds outside of London, and the possibility of leaving the capital was considered a plausible and necessary one. An options analysis led to the election of the relocation of the organisation to Kent – where one of the directors was moving and the other director was already partly living. Margate was favoured for: its affordable living – life would be less suffocating for the associate artists who multiplied part-time jobs in London; its proximity to London's cultural resources; its emerging art scene, with large numbers of cultural practitioners relocating in that direction; and its dearth of community facilities in the face of high levels of socioeconomic deprivation.

The team started conversations with Kent County Council, Turner Contemporary, and the smaller arts organisations CRATE, Limbo, and Resort Studios about the relevance and feasibility of OSE joining the regional arts ecology. The representatives of these organisations were overall welcoming and supportive of the relocation; they helped facilitate introductions to local stakeholders and discussions about moving into the ground floor of Resort Studios soon started. As for the artists' community, the sheer number of Margate- and Kent-based applicants to OSE's Associates Programme in its first year of relocation and subsequently demonstrated the importance of an artist development programme in the region. Around the time of OSE's relocation, the University of Kent's and Canterbury Christ Church University's BAs in Fine Art both closed, making the need for alternative provision in the East Kent area all the more pressing. At the same time, OSE has fulfilled Margate-born artist Tracey Emin's prophecy from 2011, when Turner Contemporary opened its doors and the artist was asked: "'What do you think Margate will be like in 10 years' time?' Her conclusion: 'I think there will be an art school here'" (Beck and Cornford, 2014, p. 16). In fact, there are now two art schools in Margate and soon to be three. Eighteen months after OSE's relocation, The Margate School (TMS), a liberal art school, launched its fee-paying Master of Fine Arts programme in the old Woolworths building on Margate's High Street, a project that had been in the pipeline for five years and is the result of a partnership with L'École Supérieure d'Art et Design Le Havre-Rouen, which accredits the programme. In January 2022, Tracey Emin herself announced the upcoming launch of a "revolutionary art school" named named TKE Studios – after her full name, Tracey Karima Emin[74]. TKE Studios may not be that revolutionary, given her aspiration to have mostly painters in the thirty studios she will be offering, and considering that loud music will not be allowed, among other rules such as strictly no smoking, even in open areas. It may not be much of an art school either but rather a set of subsidised studios, but she is nonetheless fulfilling her own prophecy.

[74] See: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/jan/06/tracey-emin-to-launch-revolutionary-art-school-in-margate (Accessed: 27 April 2022).

Going back to OSE, the shift from a major metropolis to a small coastal town had a deep impact on the organisation. The relocation operated a transition from being a small arts organisation in an ocean of similarly sized organisations, to being given a more official voice in a tighter-knit context. As an Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation, OSE was now represented on a number of Kent and South East wide committees and networks including the Kent Cultural Transformation Board, the East Kent Cultural Education Partnership, and Contemporary Visual Arts Network South East. These opportunities triggered credibility, dialogues, and partnerships not only across the cultural sector, but also across the education sector, most particularly since the launch of the Young Associates Programme. Given Margate's small size and the dynamism of its cultural scene – sparked by the opening of Turner Contemporary eleven years ago – interlocutors and collaborators were more easily identified and regularly come across on the streets or at events, which kept the dialogue going. The proximity afforded by the scale of the town, coupled with a tendency for local residents to spend more time outdoors due to the town's position on the coast, further enabled a form of outreach that London did not afford, and generated encounters with community groups that sometimes led to the creation of new programmes, such as the Despacito Art School. In turn, OSE contributed to the development of discourse in the town surrounding learning, participation, accessibility, and criticality in the arts, in the backdrop of a cultural scene that could at times be overfocused on celebration and lifestyle, although a new dynamism, more social and political in form, has become palpable since both the pandemic and the re-emergence of Black Lives Matter.

3. Reflections on Colocation and Relationship to Gentrification

Until July 2020, colocation with a landlord was a condition of existence for OSE. OSE's first landlord at the Rose Lipman building, Mill Co. Project, was a social enterprise whose main activity consisted of taking on – or managing on behalf of other organisations – council-owned and private buildings free of charge, except for bills and rates, in exchange for adding cultural capital to the area, usually deprived or earmarked for redevelopment. Mill Co. Project generated a significant profit from renting space to creative businesses and freelancers at near market rate. OSE's rental agreement being imposed on Mill Co. by Create London (which, as a reminder, had delegated the management of the building to Mill Co., but was the official leaseholder while OSE was in the building), the organisation was therefore given preferential treatment and made to pay less than the average tenant. A number of irksome situations however arose from this, including a recurring scene by which the Mill Co. managers would walk into OSE's spaces uninvited with an entrepreneur to show them the possibilities the space offered. And indeed, when OSE left the building, the spaces it had occupied got

partitioned and rented out for far higher prices than those OSE had negotiated to pay. Beyond such inconveniences, there were also external perceptions that OSE was associated with Mill Co. Project's ventures, while it was merely paying rent to it. The fact that the two organisations shared the same building, coupled with Mill Co. Project's imposed restrictions on OSE's outdoor and indoor signage, led to a blurring of identity, which the former would take advantage of. On several occasions, Mill Co. Project appropriated OSE's outreach work by including photos of its public activities and elements of reporting, available from OSE's website, in presentations to stakeholders and prospective funders, making OSE look like a subsidiary of Mill Co. The colocation was turbulent to say the least but, ultimately, and despite its good intentions, OSE was an actor, or at least a follower, in the borough's gentrification process, and it took the opportunity to occupy a set of spaces that could have been assigned to Centerprise or other struggling organisations, but which no longer represented a priority or advantage for the Council.

OSE's second landlord, Resort Studios in Margate, was an artist and designer-run membership organisation, which existed to provide the local creative community with desk and studio spaces as well as production facilities. It was the first organisation to open its doors in Margate to craftspeople, makers, and designers, and to operate a co-working model. Resort Studios received initial support from Kent County Council in an effort to supplement, and make more artist-led, the cultural regeneration led by Turner Contemporary. As such, Resort Studios were strongly connected to the ongoing transformation of Margate from an economically-depressed seaside destination to a thriving cultural centre. Tensions between the old and the new Margate abounded, notably in light of hiking rents and long-term rentals being increasingly replaced by Airbnb lettings, and the presence of Resort Studios in Cliftonville West, one of the UK's most deprived wards, was met with mixed feelings. Before OSE moved into the ground floor of the Pettman building, the space had been rented to a fine wine merchant to run a pop-up shop and a wine tasting bar. Here again, associations between OSE and Resort Studios – for much the same reasons as with the previous building, i.e. blurred identities facilitated by poor signage and occasional appropriation of OSE's work by Resort Studios' representatives – were frequently made by local residents, groups, and charitable organisations during the two years OSE was located there.

OSE's third landlord was Kent County Council and its colocator Kent Adult Education (KAE), a branch of the council, which ran all Adult Education Centres in Kent. As a provider of affordable education and social services – from English and maths, to computer and business skills, through to health and wellbeing advice, life drawing and silversmithing – KAE was the closest co-locator in ethos to Open School East. When the Pettman building – where Resort

Studios and OSE were then located – came on the market, putting OSE's lease at risk and offering at the same time the opportunity to move to a space that would be fit for purpose, we asked Kent County Council to consider hosting us in the Adult Education Centre, having heard that some of its rooms were underused. While its past in art education and present as a council-funded educational facility made it an ideal fit for OSE, the building was also free from negative local connotations, having been in place well before the gentrification of the town and having been active in serving its local communities, from life-long learners, to people with learning disabilities, through to asylum seekers. While the relationship with KAE was exceptionally good – numerous collaborations ensued, KAE referred several of the future young associates to OSE and it entrusted the organisation with the rehabilitation of the canteen, which had become defunct a few months after OSE's arrival – the rent charged by Kent County Council was over current market rate, and the space insufficient for the development of the organisation and its programmes.

In contrast, the latest chapter of OSE' space occupancy promised to be one of autonomy and sustainability. I left the organisation ten months after the last relocation, announcing it as final in our communication and relieved to have finally secured a long-term lease after seven years of lease insecurity. Yet, OSE remains an organisation that never rests and is constantly challenging its motifs and claims for inclusivity. Following my departure, an architectural feasibility study was carried out, revealing the financial impossibility of turning the Georgian building into a physically accessible space for a cost that would justify the great efforts of a capital campaign for a building it doesn't own. At the moment of writing, OSE is once again looking for a spatial solution to its stated ambition of being fully inclusive and accessible.

V- Conclusion

In this chapter dedicated to the first seven years of existence of Open School East, I have explored the evolution of the organisation from the early proposal submitted to the Barbican Centre and Create London in 2012, to its becoming a fully-fledged institution that responded to needs, circumstances, and events, as they occurred and/or were identified by both those in charge of running the organisation and those who contributed to shaping it – whether associates, alumni, mentors, users, or project participants. As I hope this chapter has demonstrated, during that period, and in particular early on in its life, OSE kept evolving its mission and questioning its values as well as the function of its programmes, listening to, reflecting, and, when possible, acting on internal and external proposals and criticisms through structural changes and adaptations.

Against determinacy and fixity, Wright tasks institutional designers with thinking of institutions as "capable of dynamic change, of responding to the needs of the people and evolving accordingly, rather than of institutions which are so perfect that they need no further change" (2010, p. i). Similarly, art theorist Gerald Raunig reflects on instituent practices in the following terms:

> What is at stake is specifically not the institution as an unchanging structure and state apparatus, as a mere element of a dominant repressive system. If, instead, institutions are grasped as processes, then the problem goes beyond the terrain of the critique of the state and capitalism, for social movements and revolutionary machines cannot dispense with institutions, nor are they immune to the occurrence of structuralization, rigidification and institutionalization (Raunig, 2009, p. 174).

Raunig discusses philosopher Felix Guattari's works on institutional analysis and, in particular, "the tendency to 'structuralization', as he called the process of the closure of/in the institution" (ibid, p. 175). Paraphrasing Guattari, Raunig suggests that structuralization has the potential of being eluded by "the practical testing and stuttering invention of machines" (ibid). If in the early years of OSE, the institution enacted a process of continuous doing and undoing, of trials and errors, by the time I left the organisation, it was at risk of institutionalisation and habituation (Ahmed, 2012). Two years before I departed, I started talking about the necessity to detach myself from the organisation, both for myself and OSE, as my energy levels had dropped significantly. However, I was driven by the feeling that succession planning, as the board called it, could only be initiated once OSE became stable on programmatic, lease, and financial levels. Having overseen the first eighteen months of the Young Associates Programme and secured a long-term lease, regular funding from Arts Council England, multi-year grants for the Young Associates Programme, and a generous donation, over ten years, by the chair of the board of trustees, it was now time to go.

Unlike Centerprise, whose founders had made the decision to leave the organisation after three years with the hope that it would be taken over by the local community, which it did, there had been no long-term planning on my or my co-founder's part. When talking to different people who had been involved with similar ventures, including Ken Worpole, I was often told that in order for an organisation to remain radical, the founders needed to exit after five years. OSE's co-founder Laurence Taylor stayed six years and I stayed eight years, leaving behind an institution that I no longer had the energy or desire to run, because it had become – or more accurately, I, Taylor, and the board had enabled it to become – the antithesis of what it was at the beginning: an intuitive, DIY, precarious, yet ever stimulating environment governed

by uncertainty, everyday challenges, experimentations, and incessant movements and flows. Leaving OSE could help prevent its stagnation and complacency, and open the door to new energies and new directions, which it did.

While regular funding from Arts Council England (ACE) had meant both the ability to plan in the long-term and relative financial stability, it also came with a heavy administrative baggage, including the writing and annual updating of business and financial plans, quarterly financial and narrative reporting, and regular attendance to training, networking events, and regional meetings. Open School East had already seen an increase in bureaucratic duties when becoming a charity in its first year of operation, and in hindsight, we often regretted not opting for the administratively lighter status of Community Interest Company, which would have given us access to most, though perhaps not all, of the funds that OSE was to raise, publicly and privately, in the following years. Going back to one of the questions asked in the introduction to this thesis – how does the organisation's values align with its practices and what are the mechanisms that facilitate, alter, or hinder this alignment? – I would say that the sheer fact of becoming a registered charity had hindered this desired alignment from day one. The charity set up came with the following conventions: setting up a governing board with a chair, vice-chair, treasurer, and other non-executive trustees; having one director (we were two directors for six years, which prompted recommendations, usually from entrepreneurs, to have one person 'clearly in power' and be the face of the organisation); and building a pyramidal staffing structure with wildly differing salaries. Could we have done things differently? Possibly, but not without the experience of failing first. The notions of success and failure, along with the exploration of organisational models and practices that may help escape the short lifespan of alternatives, are what form the main objects of the discussion chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 6:
DISCUSSION

Having explored the foundational years of Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East in the last three chapters, I now wish to engage in a multi-faceted discussion to begin answering the questions 'What makes a space alternative?' and 'What does it take to remain alternative?', and to further reflect on a question that has arisen from the above studies, namely: 'What makes an alternative socio-spatial?'. The first section summarises the three case studies' enactment of their differential principles, highlighting their similarities and differences as well as the possible issues and risks arising from the application of those very principles: from overwork and precarity, to failure in consistency. The second section returns to the notion of multi-public in relation to spatiality, reviewing the socio-spatial characteristics of the case studies and exploring the affects produced by their architecture. The third section tackles the hidden costs of differential organisations. In particular, I address organisational lifecycles and the subjects of adequate capacity, care, expertise, and training – or lack thereof – as pressure points for education, social, and cultural practitioners who have taken on often unanticipated responsibilities and risks associated with running organisations. In the final section, I look at approaches imagined and developed by institutional and cooperative practitioners, which may contribute to providing solutions to the question of what it takes for organisations to remain alternative.

I- What Makes a Space Alternative?

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined the characteristics of the organisational model under exploration as follows:

1. Run by a small staff with generalist and/or multitasking skills;
2. Resorting to an informal and often participant-led approach to programming and delivery;
3. Subject to a fluctuating agenda – responding to needs, circumstances, and events as they occur;
4. Demonstrating spatial flexibility, with rooms often hosting a number of unconnected activities on different days of the week;
5. Frequent exposure to unsteady finances.

Put differently, the values of the multi-public educational and cultural spaces examined in this thesis could be described as:

1- Versatile, responsive, nimble
2- Agentive
3- Open-ended, ever-evolving
4- In-between

The section that fellows is dedicated to reviewing the case studies' relationship to these four terms or cluster of terms.

1. Versatile, Responsive, Nimble

a- Programmes and Activities

Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East had in common the simultaneous running of programmes and activities directed at varied groups and audiences of diverse generations. Toynbee Hall's offer ranged from University Extension lectures for local adults, to children's holiday camps, through to exhibitions, legal advice, and the hosting of trade union meetings. In contrast, Centerprise's contributions to the advancement of culture, literacy, and social cohesion encompassed a free-to-browse-and-read-in bookshop; an affordable cafe; a children's play group; writing workshops; literacy and numeracy lessons; and the hosting of associations and groups in its free-to-rent room. As for Open School East, it brought together under one roof a development programme for adult artists; a crafts class for children; lectures, seminars, and skills-based workshops; an accredited art, design, English, and maths programme for adolescents; and participatory, locally-focused creative projects.

In all three cases, new programmes, activities, and uses were added as needs and opportunities arose. Being small-staffed, decisions could be made promptly, and being multi-function in nature, the organisations did not shy away from reorganising their schedule or space as and when needed; in other words, they were nimble at heart. For instance, one might remember that Toynbee Hall gave a space on a permanent basis to the London Branch of the Co-Operative Wholesale Society and the Southern Section of the Central Co-operative Board, which had lost their headquarters to a fire; that Centerprise's white working class and African-Caribbean communities developed alliances following the firebombing of Centerprise by the National Front in 1977, leading to anti-racist collaborative programming and action; or that

Open School East facilitated the creation of the Despacito Art School for local children, following their own request for the organisation to include them in their programming. Meanwhile, existing programmes, activities, and facilities were routinely fine-tuned, reshaped, replaced, or discontinued, again according to need and in response to users' feedback. Accordingly, change, diversification, accumulation, and superimposition superseded fixity, repetition, and sobriety which, in turn, came with the risk of making the organisations illegible, chaotic, burnout inducing, and harder to fundraise for.

b- Labour and Staffing

In order to cater for the multifarious cultural and educational offer of the three organisations, staff and volunteers needed to have versatile skills and dispositions. In the case of Toynbee Hall, the university graduates who settled in Toynbee Hall alternately played the role of hosts, lecturers, advisors, friends, representatives on boards and committees, and researchers. The warden, shadow warden (Henrietta Barnett), and sub-warden were involved in all aspects of the life of Toynbee Hall: from recruiting settlers, to managing finances and carrying out advocacy work, through to designing programmes and activities, scheduling classes, allocating and equipping rooms, and curating annual exhibitions. When it came to Centerprise, if workers were in charge of a particular area of the organisation's activities or facilities, they were made to rotate roles and responsibilities on some days of the week. In particular, everyone was equally responsible for cleaning, fundraising, and attending the switchboard.

As for Open School East, the directors simultaneously acted as managers, fundraisers, programmers, mentors to the associates, and artists' liaisons. All other roles also involved a wide variety of tasks from safeguarding and pastoral care, to marketing and communication, through to technical and practical support, leading to the regular rewriting of job descriptions and contracts to reflect the changed positions. While dynamic and skills-inducing, the wearing of too many hats, in particular at Centerprise and Open School East, came with the risk of loss of consistency and quality, and to the staff firefighting rather than meticulously attending to their respective areas of work and specialism. Furthermore, each organisation set themselves the ambitious task of simultaneously mastering the production and delivery of education, culture, and social care, often without prior experience and/or adequate training and skills in one or more of the three areas of work, and sometimes at the cost of neglecting the care of its own staff and structure – a subject I will return to in the next section.

c- Space

Space too needed to be flexible to accommodate the fact that there were more activities than rooms. In the case of Toynbee Hall, this went as far as settlers having to turn their bedrooms into classrooms in the daytime. At Centerprise, noise pollution would be an issue and staff would complain about the time spent rearranging rooms and looking for the materials they had left the previous week. At Open School East, additional spaces within the building as well as external venues had to be hired on a regular basis to cater for the surplus of activity. Ultimately, and despite these inconveniences, the cacophony, the continual rearrangement of furniture, and the non-linear circulation of bodies were what gave these spaces their identity as permanently shifting and open to reinterpretation. What is more, these factors enabled the creation of intergenerational and cross-cultural sociabilities that could not have been generated in places ruled by fixity of recipients, furnishings, and uses. The rooms of the three organisations were alive, vibrant, and in constant flux: from Toynbee Hall's library-turned-dining-room in the evening, to Centerprise's cafe bar as a place to eat, socialise, and read books borrowed from the shop, through to Open School East's common space in its first building, which acted as a makeshift kitchen as well as a classroom, meeting space, and library. Visitors who witnessed these places would not fail to comment on the invigorating and liberating potential of cross-activity interactions and spatial unruliness.

2. Agentive

Central to the mission of the three organisations was a commitment to developing learners and users' agency. Toynbee Hall was created with the dual aim of providing educational opportunities to those without access to university education and facilitating cross-class encounters and friendships with the view to reform systemic injustice. Through University Extension classes, lectures, exhibitions, and later skills-based courses, the intended recipients, namely lower working classes, were to access knowledge in the fields of political economy, history, science, and the arts. The Barnetts' hope were that lower working classes would not only enfranchise themselves through newly-procured knowledge and skills, but also acquire – or at the very least acquaint themselves with – the tools, language, and taste of the privileged middle class in order to become socially mobile, at least up to a point. Furthermore, by placing university graduates – and, with it, their privilege and networks – at the service of the working classes, effective action, campaigning, and policy changes could ensue. The success of the 1889 Dockers' Strike in securing pay increases for the workers and democratising the recruitment process was one example of productive cooperation between workers and settlers that took place under the roof of Toynbee Hall.

When it came to Centerprise, the development of agency took place on the levels of visibility of working class experiences and literacy. The Ken Worpole-initiated course and project 'A People's Autobiography of Hackney' led to the publication of numerous books of poetry and non-fiction by local residents as young as twelve in some cases, who recounted their life stories, struggles as well as joyful memories of growing up, living, parenting, and/or working in Hackney. Additionally, it equipped young and older people with skills to interview, record, transcribe, edit, and/or illustrate stories, which in some cases led to future careers. As for the exercise of literacy-building, this took place not only through the processes of learning how to read, mastering numeracy, and becoming a published writer, but also through understanding one's rights in order to overcome abusive situations ranging from police violence to unlawful eviction.

As for Open School East, its contribution to agency-building materialised in the learner-centred and self-directed nature of its programmes. Engaging the young associates to take part in projects through which to reflect their lived experiences and inscribe themselves in the narrative of the changing town was one aspect of it. Enabling the associates to take a leading role in the choice of guests, formats, and themes, or letting children lead Open School East in taking its first steps in understanding safeguarding were further examples of the organisation's participant-led approach. Those who went through OSE's programmes not only expanded their base of knowledge and artistic and critical skills, but also, and perhaps more importantly, they became decision-makers, producers, facilitators, and hosts, which led a number of them to subsequently set up their own organisations and informal collective spaces.

3. Open-ended and Ever-evolving

When it comes to the *raison d'être* and the spirit of the foundational years of Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East, one may qualify these spaces as utopian, according to Levitas' conception of utopia "as a journey and not a goal", demanding "an open and indeterminate future, which refuses the 'illusory coherence' of a fully worked out alternative" (2013, p. 109). If the three organisations responded to a specific set of circumstances – a lack of educational provision for the working classes of Whitechapel in the case of Toynbee Hall; an absence of bookshops in Hackney in the case of Centerprise; and a dearth of affordable art education opportunities in the case of Open School East – neither organisation had a pre-defined plan when instituting themselves.

Toynbee Hall had more financial resources than the two other organisations, which led it to secure, refurbish, extend, and furnish a building, or set of buildings, with durability in mind. The initial idea of bringing recent graduates to live on site was the most fixed element of its plan. The lectures, courses, clubs, and societies, and making itself accessible to trade union meetings and political organisations would come next, according to identified gaps in local provision and newly-arisen spatial needs. As I have explored in the 'Versatile, Responsive, Nimble' section above, programmes and activities would be created, expanded, and discontinued according to need, success, and/or failure. In contrast, Centerprise and Open School East were born with spatial instability; both moved a number of times before settling down into a more permanent space. However, like Toynbee Hall, their programmes, projects, and what one may call today their engagement approaches, developed organically, following a process of trial and error and of reaction to local as well as national events and circumstances, be they social, economic, or political. What is more, they were adapted in relation to the spaces the organisations had at their disposal. As such, Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East echoed Wright's definition of utopian institutions as "capable of dynamic change", "rather than of institutions which are so perfect that they need no further change" (2010, p. i).

The spirit of open-endedness further manifested in the organisations' pedagogical methods, and more particularly those of Centerprise and Open School East. These adopted an approach of the kind observed in chapter 2: a critical pedagogy crafted in opposition to formal education, whereby agentivity and self-direction opened the door to multiple forms of learning – collective, intergenerational, bottom-up, deconstructive of established epistemologies, and relevant to the experiences and identities of learners, and therefore fluctuating, indeterminate, and spatially and temporally unconfined (Dewey, 1938, 2015; Freire, 2001; Fielding and Moss, 2011; Illich, 2013; Biesta, 2016a; Giroux, 2020).

4. In-between

In chapter 2, I quoted anthropologists Esther Fihl and Jens Dahl whom, in their edited book of immaterial and material alternative spaces ranging from South Indian Caste Councils to the Danish Seamen's Church in Singapore, propose the following definition:

> alternative spaces are 'in-between' spaces rather than oppositional structures, and as such both 'inside' and 'outside' its constitutive elements. The in-between position potentially gives the 'members' of the alternative spaces the possibility of controlling their own agenda without engaging in open conflict with the existing dominant

> structure... As alternative spaces are found to be nurtured by the very power structures that they potentially react against, however [...] [they] are not sites for revolution or rebellion as such; they are, rather, sites of volatile resistance linked to other forms of power that lies in the ability to manoeuvre just outside of the dominant institutions or systems (2013, pp. 2-3).

Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East can all be said to have operated in-between the establishment and the grassroots; they understood power and navigated its structures with the view to directing opportunities at those precisely devoid of power. Toynbee Hall was set up by a duo of founders whose affiliation with the clergy, coupled with their educational and financial privilege, made their plea to Oxford University trustworthy. The late Victorian period was both a time of effective social reform and do-gooding infused by guilt at the gap between rich and poor. Through the University Settlements Association, which collected funds from both the university and individuals, Toynbee Hall garnered with relative ease the financial support it needed to accomplish its mission. Despite being once accused of being "a house of extreme socialists" (Jowett, 1890 cited in Scotland, 2007, p. 41), the support of the university and eminent figures, themselves with socialist leanings, was unconditional and allowed Toynbee Hall to take a step into radical politics, support trade unionism and key campaigns, along with helping the establishment of workers-led initiatives, one of the most long-lasting of which was the Workers' Educational Association.

In contrast, Centerprise was continually burdened by financial upheavals. However, and with the notable exception of Hackney Council, the organisation's co-founders knew how to interact with dominant institutions for the benefit of the minorities they were serving. Each founder had a skillset which complemented the other: in the case of Glenn Thompson, his was natural confidence, partly borne by his lack of understanding of the British class system. Coutts could not turn down the sneaker-wearing, self-educated, charismatic black American man who came in to open a bank account for a bookshop in a borough that did not yet have one. While Margaret Gosley was a prolific and convincing grant application writer, Anthony Kendall, with his background in social administration, was knowledgeable and pragmatic about the workings of charities. Thanks to their competence, charm, and vision, they were able to attract trustees who were "[e]xclusively middle class and professional for the convenience of the project – initially to add respectability to the early stages and later by allowing smooth transition to community control" (*Draft of the Report on the First Year's Work in the New Premises at 136 Kingsland High Street*, 1975, p. 12). These efforts and strategies were ultimately deployed to run a buzzing and militant environment where homeless people and youth hiding from arbitrary police mistreatment shared space with campaigners, cultural practitioners, and social workers.

When it came to Open School East, the organisation was started thanks to a substantial subsidy granted by a large institution, the Barbican Centre. A handful of people who happened to have started alternative art schools in the UK, either before or around the same time as OSE, would publicly and privately describe Open School East as a sell-out. In their under-nuanced view, which was partly infused with envy, spaces could only be truly alternative if fully separated from dominant structures. If the tie with the Barbican Centre was often burdensome, accepting the grant and the requirements that came with it however allowed Open School East to establish the seeds of what would become a sturdy and internationally recognised artists' development programme. After the initial Barbican grant, much of the funds that were raised came from generous and wealthy individuals introduced to the organisation by some of the trustees who were moving in privileged circles. In a time of austerity and high student debt, the organisation appealed to some of those in a position to help and who had witnessed better times for the art education sector. Here again, those funds were used for the educational benefit of a range of individuals ranging from, though not exclusive to, socioeconomically underprivileged children and young people, indebted students, and socially isolated senior citizens.

I have mostly talked about money and privilege in this section, and how both were accessed and diverted for the education as well as the personal and/or professional development of people from diverse generations, the majority of whom enjoyed neither money nor privilege. What has become evident through this study is that the ability for the three organisations to straddle the establishment and the grassroots, and to co-opt in order to redistribute, was enabled by the fact that they were set up by people with some form of privilege – be it educational, financial, and/or social. One could argue that without such predispositions and networks, the organisations may have taken very different forms and directions, or folded much earlier. The question is therefore not just: 'What makes an alternative space?', but 'Who can make an alternative space?'. I mean here, as I have all along, an alternative space in the sense of a model where staff are paid, rather than contributing voluntary labour, and where the building – and therefore the need to rent, buy, and/or refurbish and maintain – is central to the organisation's functionings and ethos.

II- What Makes an Alternative Socio-spatial?

> [T]he capacity of a building to allow inhabitation to take place—and to create meaningful effects—constantly emerges through ongoing, dynamic encounters between buildings; their constituent elements; and spaces, inhabitants, visitors,

> design, ergonomics, workers, planners, cleaners, technicians, materials, performances, events, emotions, affects, and more (Kraftl and Adey, 2008, p. 214).

The association between inhabitation, design, social life, and affects is what this section is occupied with. As explored throughout the case studies and shortly in the above section, the buildings of Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East – whether designed (in the case of the Toynbee Hall) or adapted (in the cases of Centerprise and Open School East) – supported cross-public connectivity as well as fluctuating and sometimes unscripted flows of body circulation, uses, and activities. The buildings' architectural and material forms – i.e. interiors, furnishings, staircases, doors, entrances, and interchangeable spaces of various scales and shapes – not only became a part of the organisations' identities, but were also instrumental in implementing their place- and community-making missions. The making of community implied, according to Iveson, Fraser, and Young's notion of 'multi-public', the bringing and being together of strangers sharing common problems, desires, and interests – from access to education, to resistance to systemic socio-economic injustice – rather than the creation of "a community of shared final ends, of mutual identification and reciprocity" (Young, 1990, p. 238).

1. Socio-spatiality and Affective Architecture

As the spaces were simultaneously and/or alternately used for learning, cultural production, work, and social and political agency, different meanings were affixed to them by their diverse users and workers. For example, one might remember that Toynbee Hall had two distinct entrances, which gave users the choice of either entering the building through the drawing room – a domestic space which, as I have explored in chapter 2, was not perceived as a homely and familiar place by all users and could trigger feelings of being out of place – or directly through the quadrangle into the lecture hall to attend a talk, a practical class, or a political meeting, thus setting boundaries when it came to their relationship to the building and the organisation at large. As I have observed earlier, Toynbee Hall could signify different things to different people: a home away from home, a place of temporary interaction for one's intellectual or socio-economic elevation, a space for cross-class cooperation, a model to study and/or replicate, or a place from which to implement change.

Centerprise was the only one of the three organisations to have a dedicated social space, namely its coffee bar. For that reason, social uses were largely limited to the ground floor where the coffee bar was located. Even though the building was described by some as hierarchical – the higher one got in the building, the higher brow activities became – the presence of the bookshop on the ground floor, a natural place for a business to be visible and

successful, coupled with the fact that browsers were welcomed to take books to read in the coffee bar, would have enabled the partial disintegration of class and cultural distinction. If all coffee bar users did not make it to the upper floors, one may speculate – in the face of the absence of socio-spatial evidence in the Centerprise archive – that some of the users of the upper floors may have taken a pause from their upstairs activities for a tea, lunch, or conversation in the coffee bar, and argue that the flow of sociabilities was not merely vertical, but trans-spatial.

When it came to Open School East, I have previously noted that the organisation's common space, situated on the first floor of the Rose Lipman building, OSE's first home, was the only free-to-use and democratic space in the maze of chargeable rooms. While the ground floor's co-working space aesthetics and atmosphere signalled access and inclusion for the creative class, OSE's spaces, and in particular the common space and adjacent courtyard, along with its activities which, as seen in chapter 5, notably engaged with the legacy of the community arts movement, nodded to the building's past history of civic use. Still adorned with murals of Tintin and Snowy (in the common room) and of the Jungle Book (in the courtyard) from its past function as a children's library, and juxtaposed with posters of past and upcoming activities as well as artworks left or donated by artists, OSE's space revealed layers of uses, memories, affects as well as contestations (Kraflt, 2010). Indeed, the preservation of the Tintin mural was at one point deemed (by the 2016 cohort of associates) to support the character's colonial demeanour, which led, after much debate, to it not being erased, but instead covered by a bookshelf, soon filled with cultural studies books, through which one could still make out the contours of the characters.

Harking back to Kraftl and Adey's reasoning that the inhabitation of buildings is entwined with affect-production (2008), as I have started to demonstrate, Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East both enabled and witnessed the planned and unplanned emergence of feelings of welcomeness, homeliness as well as misalignment. Writing about the first term, Kraftl and Adey posit that:

> The notion of welcome, for instance, is created through a combination of architectural forms that should direct the active dwelling and performance of inhabitants, memory, and emotion, thereby encouraging an inhabitant to "feel welcomed" (even if he or she does not consciously appreciate or state that "this feels welcoming") (2008, p. 218).

The open-door policy of the three organisations indicated a commitment to not only be accessible, but also inviting. Out of the three organisations, Centerprise was arguably the most inviting of all. While Centerprise was visible and accessible from the street, and adorned with clear signage as to what one could find and do at Centerprise, Open School East was invisible from the street in its first and third buildings, and only accessible to passerby's through ringing the bell in its second and fourth buildings, for reasons of security and staff capacity. As for Toynbee Hall, one would have had to know that beyond the elegant quadrangle set back from the street was a space welcoming to all. For all that, and despite Toynbee Hall's affected interior and OSE's bitterly cold space, both intended to make users feel welcome and trigger in them the desire to come back. Importantly, if Toynbee Hall had the look and feel of an upper middle class home, Centerprise and Open School East, with their mismatching furniture and their chaotic appearance, appealed to people in search of an alternative living room.

2. In Praise of Mess

In his study of alternative learning spaces, which range from Montessori and Steiner schools, to care farms and forest schools, Kraftl suggests that the "interplay between mess and order (or dis/order)" (2013, p. 119) is one of the prerequisites for the creation of "affective 'atmospheres', from which non-linear, creative forms of learning may flow" (ibid). His use of the term mess in relation to learning refers as much to improvisation in contrast to strict planning, as to literally "having stuff around" for pupils to express themselves without boundaries. When Kraftl interviews teachers about the role of mess in the learning process, they tend to concur that if mess is generally counter-intuitive, it is necessary to create the conditions for free, uncontained, and expressive learning.

Mess and disorder are also qualities described by curator Nato Thompson when recounting his first visit to artist Dan Peterman's space in Chicago's South Side, before it burnt down in 2001 and was relaunched in 2006 as the Experimental Station. An early influence of Open School East, the Experimental Station is a multi-use and multi-public space that describes itself as "fostering a dynamic ecology of innovative educational and cultural programs, small business enterprises and community initiatives"[75]. Today it is host to a community bike shop that acts as a youth learning space, a farmers market with an educational remit, a non-profit newsprint magazine, a civic journalism production company, a coffee shop that sells books and zines and acts as a venue for performances, workshops, exhibitions, and game nights as

[75] https://experimentalstation.org/ (Accessed: 30 October 2022).

well as Dan Peterman's studio. If Thompson's visit dates from 1999, the atmosphere he described was similar then to when I visited in The Experimental Station in 2015.

> On my first visit to Peterman's complex in 1999, I was quickly reminded that mixing art and life isn't always pretty. The term 'organic' seemed a bit passive to describe the space, which was mazelike and chock full of contraptions. Peterman's recycled minimalist bricks were laying around, refried beans and tofu were being prepared in the central kitchen, The Baffler magazines were piled up everywhere, a motley assemblage of people of all ages were milling about, and ramshackle bicycles were hanging from the ceiling. Everyone seemed quite comfortable in the mayhem and I hoped, one day, I would as well. Various discourses and modes of living were mixing in every nook and cranny, and I knew it was necessary to decenter my outlook (Thompson in Satinsky, 2014, p. 71).

In his text 'Alternative Space' (2002), artist Martin Beck also focuses on the social qualities of space, this time not triggered by the disorder that come with multi-usership, but by artists' penchant for raw architecture.

> 'Raw' – with its connotations of natural, crude, unrefined, unprocessed, rough, unfinished – became a metaphor for freedom from restrictive definitions of art making, alluding to a frontier state where boundaries are negotiated and challenged and where space is explored and extended. 'Raw space' refers to a specific physical state of an architecture structure; 'raw experience' denotes a social dimension excluded from the generic white-cube gallery space, and it impacts the artists' encounters with the physical space, with each other, with the immediate community, and with the audience at large. [...] Through this opposition a distinction is constructed between the space of the establishment qualified as static, homogenous, and bourgeois and the space of the alternative as process oriented, experimental, and working class. The details of this distinction are played out on the levels of physical space and social experience (Beck in Ault, 2002, p. 255).

If the notions or mess and rawness did not apply to Toynbee Hall, they were present in the atmospheres of both Centerprise and Open School East which, beyond their clutter of donated or found furnishings, had barely transformed the architectures that they embedded. In the case of Open School East, unpainted walls, remnants of murals and wallpaper, and missing polystyrene ceiling tiles were part and parcel of the visual experience of the various spaces it occupied, embracing scruffiness in an unaffected way rather than attempting to obtain a vintage look. If the atmosphere and functionality of Centerprise and Open School East were

deemed important, they were not achieved through design, but instead through a letting go of aesthetics and acceptance that space accumulates meanings, narratives, and memories which, as problematic and unesthetic as they might be, might be worth keeping hold of.

III- The Hidden Costs of Differential Organisations

This thesis has identified and highlighted the qualities of multi-public educational and cultural spaces as well as their limitations and hurdles. In observing the distance travelled by Toynbee Hall, Centerprise, and Open School East, I have touched on their quasi-inevitable institutionalisation. In all three cases, institutionalisation implied the difficulty to reflect their intended values in their practices – a difficulty that increased with the passing of time and that which comes with it: processes of habituation; temptation or pressure to scale up; ethos-bending fundraising exercises; long tenure; as well as the plain desire for stability and sustainability. In the present section, I analyse some of the symptomatic challenges encountered by organisations in their lifecycle which, when accumulated, contribute to the misalignment between values and practices.

1. Organisational Lifecycles

In *Management and Organization Theory* (2012), Jeffrey A. Miles observes the lifecycle of organisations and the potential difficulties encountered along the way in the following terms:

> Newly born organizations suffer a “liability of newness” […] in that they have to learn how to survive, and must create successful patterns of operations despite having limited resources […] Slightly older organizations can suffer a “liability of adolescence” in that they can survive for a time on their initial store of resources, but then their failure rate tends to follow an inverted U-shaped pattern as they age […]. Older organizations can suffer a “liability of obsolescence” if their operations are highly inertial and unchanging and become increasingly misaligned with their environment (Miles, 2012, p. 179).

Starting with Toynbee Hall, my study only covers the first two decades of the organisation’s existence and takes a brief look at the present; as such, its adolescent period cannot be commented on. Well-funded and endowed from the outset, and developed by a dedicated and highly networked duo of founders, and also with the added benefit of being a pioneer in its field, Toynbee Hall did not suffer a liability of newness. However, based on the comments of

the current chief executive Jim Minton collected during our interview, it did suffer what resembles a liability of obsolescence, or perhaps more accurately a liability of compliance. As recounted by Minton, in the 1980s and 1990s Toynbee Hall became little more than a delivery organisation for debt advice and welfare benefits, relying on contracts with local government or the financial services industry. For the following twenty years, Toynbee Hall conformed with the *status quo*, before renewing its independence of thought in the past decade, in part thanks to the selling of some of its assets. If the organisation has managed to get closer to its original mission, all the while updating it for the present and future to come, the question of whether it can function as an alternative today however remains to be seen.

Centerprise did not suffer a liability of newness either, possibly because of its founders' decision to call for its end after three years, should there be insufficient interest from the local community to take over. However, it could be said to have suffered a liability of adolescence. Having run its cooperative model on a high for a number of years, discontent, frustration, and disagreements started to make space for irreversible changes. The cooperative having been dissolved and replaced by a pyramidal management model, it then took a few years before the organisation suffered a liability of obsolescence, whereby fewer users and stakeholders still believed in the necessity of Centerprise's existence. In the following decade, the organisation hung by a thread and operated at a fraction of its former capacity, barely holding onto its original values, until its eventual demise.

When it comes to Open School East, the organisation suffered a liability of newness when attempting to maintain itself financially beyond the first, generous, though one-off subsidy by the Barbican Centre and Create London. Fundraising for the future of an organisation that barely existed and still had little to show for itself proved to be an extreme challenge and demanded extra energy and unremunerated labour from both staff and trustees. The self-imposed pressure to exist beyond the initial funding period set a precedent for time dedication above and beyond the call of duty, and for multi-tasking and firefighting, which would become the norm and be expected of incoming members of staff. The liability of newness manifested in a culture of overwork that one might retrospectively label as toxic, and which to this day, and according to reports from former colleagues and newcomers, is still hard to overcome.

2. Care in a Climate of Overwork

In the introduction to this thesis, I approached the subject of the institution according to Ahmed's metaphor of an organic body composed of interconnected parts, whereby if one fails,

the whole system fails. Based on my experience at Open School East as well as on conversations with multiple peers, I would argue that the desire for institutions to be differential today is systematically burdened by expectations to conform with various conventions that remain largely unquestioned and cannot easily be circumvented. In the last chapter, I commented on how organisations are almost compelled to become charities in order to access funding and gave the example of the UK charity and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation statuses, which come with a number of demands that necessarily bureaucratise and rigidify organisations.

Writing about the charity arts sector and in particular institutional racism embedded within its foundations, cultural producer Teresa Cisneros parallels current managerial practices in the arts with "colonial administration", which she describes as:

> the practice of administrating and organizing people, institutions and places of work, which maintain and replicate formats including structures, hierarchies and forms of control inherited from Britain's colonial empire. This is relevant because many of the institutional practices and behaviours are steeped in colonial-time behavior and the style of power over a few by an elite […] Coloniality is related to the colonial history of a place like England and the systems of administration that they created in order to profit from other countries' resources and people. In many ways, how we practise the institution is part of this legacy. It can be found in how we govern institutions; from how policies are made to how power is distributed within institutions […] What I want to think now is; how can we bring institutional practice into the 21st century, how can we make it a lived experience where social justice, mutual care, and accountability are at the heart of how we practise? (Cisneros, 2018, p. 4)

a- Reflections on Open School East and Present-day Social Practice

Since I am writing about the present time, I will start with reflecting on Open School East's practices before going down in history, looking at Centerprise next, and ending with Toynbee Hall, while bearing in mind that current practices necessarily have a connection to past ones.

During my time at Open School East (but also after, again according to former colleagues and new members of staff), staff burnouts were a regular occurrence and the duty of care towards learners and participants – at the core of any organisation dedicated to education and/or social work – rarely applied to Open School East's own organisational structure. If staff members redoubled efforts to make learners and participants feel listened to and emotionally and

socially attended to, for a long time, no human resource protocols were in place to attend to the needs and struggles of the staff itself. This in itself is symptomatic of small-scale arts organisations, which are overwhelmingly directed by cultural workers with no training or experience in management, and who often go from working as curators, whether in institutions or freelance, to holding the reins of organisations and managing staff. I remember being praised for co-starting an organisation and for our hard work, but no individual or funding body ever questioned our qualifications or skills to do so. The seeming success of Open School East always primed and the costs of that success were never put to scrutiny.

While Cisneros writes: "[a] crisis is emerging in arts institutions. I am witnessing an increasing number of mental health issues in cultural workers that in some cases are leading to breakdowns" (2018, p. 6), cultural theorist Andrea Phillips observes that institutions produce "hyper-committed" and "self-exploiting workers", and "are slow to practice more radical and experimental forms of management, perhaps due to the fact that there is a presumption that the aesthetic and performative achievements of the institution – its programme – is where innovation lies"[76]. Her comments are echoed by artist Julie Ault, who notes:

> For some time now the notion of alternative has been confined to what is shown, discussed, and publicized rather than how and with what methods and forms. Alternative space is considered to be venue rather than medium or an end in itself. [...] If institutions are going to reflect and advance alternative principles and produce culture differently, every aspect of the organizational process requires rethinking and potential reconfiguration (Ault, 2010, p. 99).

As I look to share my experience of running an institution – including my oversights and failures – and to forge kinder modes of instituting, in my current work as a lecturer on the MFA Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London, I attend to the subjects of instituting and managing, and to what it means to take on a directorial or managerial role in an arts organisation when one is trained and/or experienced in putting on exhibitions, developing public programmes, commissioning artworks, running artists residencies, or undertaking curatorial research. In seminars and workshops, I address the subject of care, human resources, and safeguarding, and encourage my students, in their future careers, to identify their missing skills and undertake training accordingly or, alternatively, to collaborate with appropriately skilled people, especially when it comes to working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults – an activity which arts organisations are increasingly engaging in. In a recent three-way

[76] Phillips, A. (2017) 'Museum as Social Condenser'. Unpublished conference paper.

conversation on socially-engaged art practice in which I reflect on my experience of a social practice project held at Open School East in 2019, I insist that "without substantial training and/or experience in social care – organised and paid for by institutions for artists and art-workers – meaningful and sustainable engagement between artists/art-workers and underserved groups can neither take place comfortably, nor safely"[77].

This conversation was crafted shortly before a text with multiple resonances was published by cultural policy scholar Eleonora Belfiore under the title 'Who Cares? At What Price? The Hidden Costs of Socially Engaged Arts Labour and the Moral Failure of Cultural Policy' (2021). In her article, Belfiore draws attention to the "chronically underfunded area of creative practice" (p. 2) that is socially-engaged art and to the tendency for practitioners to work for far many hours than what they are paid for due to the nature of this work, which entails, beyond the act of making a collective artwork, the process of building relations of trust, attending to participants' emotional and social needs, and being preoccupied with the legacy of an art project that is supposedly transformative, but often requires continuation to achieve sustained transformation. Equally concerned with artists' lack of training and support in working with vulnerable people – a legacy of the 1990s governmental policies of cultural inclusion evoked in chapter 4, whereby funding was directed, at a lesser cost, at culture rather than at social and educational infrastructures, with the expectation that artists would solve society's ills through their imagination and skills, and this, against a pittance (Belfiore, 2002; Hope, 2011; Bishop, 2012) – Belfiore writes:

> My contention is that funders are able to essentially neglect meaningful care (both during and after completion of the project) for the groups involved in the arts activities because artists are willing – due to their beliefs and a strong ethical and political drive in their practice – to carry out those duties without pay, specialist training or support (Belfiore, 2021, p. 2).

Writing from an organisational perspective, I believe in the necessity for funders to offer and/or fund training and mentoring to make the transition from cultural producer to director or manager both safe for staff, participants, and audience wellbeing, and sound for the functioning and development of an organisation. In previous sections and chapters, I have addressed the discrepancies between ideals versus reality, intent versus outcome, and how

[77] Chabanon, E., Colin, A., Planeix-Crocker, M. (2021) *'Crossed Perspectives on Collaboration'*, *OnCurating*, 'Instituting Feminism', Issue 52 / November 2021. Available at: https://www.on-curating.org/issue-52-reader/crossed-perspectives-on-collaboration.html#.YooQltPMLPZ (Accessed: 22 May 2022).

time and financial pressure at the level of management can impact the wellbeing, cultivation, and sustainability of programmes, pedagogical efforts as well as audiences. A conclusion that has come out of this research is the fact that multi-public, multi-vision, and multi-purpose organisations necessarily require multi-tasking, which may lead to the under-use and deprioritisation of valuable skills, if not to a form of deskilling.

b- Reflections on Centerprise

Some of the above observations made around skills gaps and the risks associated with them are also true of Centerprise which, while initially set up by two social workers out of a group of four founders, then went on to be run by a cooperative that was made up of people with varying degrees of skills and was sometimes ill-equipped to engage with the diversity present within its walls, be it on the level of genre, race, or disability, as I have described in chapter 4. If in principle its management structure was horizontal, as the initiators of the Saturday morning meeting in 1980 (described in chapter 4) expressed, there was a climate of overwork, a problem of efficiency, and an uneven workload between staff members, the result of all of which affected the quality of service to users of Centerprise. These difficulties ultimately paved the way for the dismantling of the cooperative and offered justification for the establishment of a pyramidal structure, whereby workers would be hired and tasked to work on their areas of specialism, which would be retributed according to status and alleged importance within the small ecology of the organisation. Mismanagement, coupled with a culture shift that was arguably too brutal and out of phase with the original vision of the organisation made the endeavour to 'normalise' the organisation fail and eventually led to its demise.

When it came to reflecting on issues associated with personnel, during the cooperative years this exercise was initiated by members of staff experiencing the highest possible level of frustration and sometimes aggression. Conflicts were addressed and sometimes resolved during weekly meetings, though not always judging from follow up minutes and meetings' agendas. The subject of staff care within Centerprise was far from topping the organisation's agenda which, by the 1980s, was ruled instead by "the tyranny of structurelessness" – a term developed by feminist scholar Jo Freeman in her eponymous 1971 essay dedicated to collective organising during the US women's liberation movement. One however has to put things in perspective and acknowledge that much of the problems experienced by Centerprise's management structure, at least judging from available research materials, became prominent in the 1980s after six relatively stable and functional years for the cooperative. Should the cooperative have started its tenure with establishing an end date or, alternatively, a fixed-term for those involved with the view to appoint new members to take

over, as Centerprise's original founders did? I shall return to this question in the third section of the discussion, as I delve into the subject of planned lifespans and overhauls.

c- Reflections on Toynbee Hall

When it comes to Toynbee Hall, the management structure was decidedly top down starting with the warden Samuel Barnett at the helm; Henrietta Barnett, acting as his right-hand woman; the committees; the sub-warden; the settlers and the teachers; and ending with the housekeeper and servants. Much of the work carried out at the higher level, namely the warden, the committee members, and some of the activities' content providers, entailed free labour which, in itself, barred those in need of an income from participating in the development of Toynbee Hall. This act of free labour was part and parcel of an attitude, common in late-Victorian social reform and philanthropy, to share in one's privilege with the exploited classes as a duty of citizenship. If noise, busyness, and space shortage were noted in various accounts, including in the retrospective writing on Toynbee Hall by Henrietta Barnett (1918), staff and settlers' workload, wellbeing, and care were never mentioned. Such discussion may have been deemed inadequate in consideration of the daily hardship experienced by the intended users of Toynbee Hall and again, sacrifices and poor life/work balance were considered a civic responsibility and a natural burden in the exercise of charitable work.

IV- What Does it Take to Remain Alternative?

In an attempt to answer one of the thesis' research question 'What does it take to remain alternative?', in the following section I set out to examine approaches that work to divert the common fate of alternatives from morphing into what they initially stood against. These approaches include: scheduled overhaul or closure (O'Shaughnessy, 2022); planned failure (Hunt, 2020); and institutional psychotherapy (Rassel, 2020). It would take a PhD in itself to develop these proposals in full and to review in any form of depth the concepts of failure, care, and institutional therapy. What I explore in the next section does not make claims for exhaustivity and depth of knowledge; instead, it opens out to subjects I may wish to pursue in future.

1. Scheduled Overhaul or Closure

As I have touched on earlier, Toynbee Hall was conceived with durability and legacy in mind, and indeed, the organisation still exists to this day albeit in a different form, with the settlers

long gone and having experienced what I have called a liability of compliance in the 1980s and 1990s. After Samuel Barnett stepped down from his role in 1908, a small succession of wardens came to work at Toynbee Hall, including James Joseph Mallon, who was in post from 1919 to 1954. In its propensity to attract long-term commitment and as the owner of fixed assets which have provided the organisation with financial stability to this day, Toynbee Hall sets itself as an exception in the discussion on scheduled overhaul or closure that follows. In contrast, Centerprise was conceived as a three-year project by its founders, who would not have shied away from closing the organisation, had it not been taken over by a cooperative of local residents. I have covered at length what happened after and have suggested that Centerprise may have taken a less bitter turn had the cooperative considered its lifespan, or that of its membership, from the start of its rule. When it comes to Open School East, it was conceived with the only certainty that it should exceed the year-long term initially supported by the Barbican Centre and Create London, for time was believed to be necessary not only to build and maintain meaningful relations with local residents and users, but also to allow the Associates Programmes to become a credible and recognisable art educational alternative for the recipients, as they moved forward with their practices and careers.

In this discussion, I mostly draw on an event connected to OSE to develop an argument in favour of scheduled overhaul or closure. In the interview I conducted with the former chair and current trustee of OSE's board[78], O'Shaughnessy reminisced over a period, back in late 2016, during which the organisation was preparing to move to Margate and was looking to acquire a building. A building was tentatively offered to the organisation for £600,000, which one of the trustees was willing to buy and donate to OSE. Securing ownership of space would, in the minds of some of the trustees and directors, provide an opportunity for long-term sustainability. Having worked on capital projects with unhappy turns, O'Shaughnessy was resistant to the idea and warned those in favour of the endeavour against the burden this would generate: OSE would have to fundraise for an equally large sum to refurbish and maintain the building, at a time when it barely had capacity to carry out its day-to-day tasks; the organisation would have to rely on income generation from subletting spaces; and a full-time building manager would be needed for the upkeep of the building and to manage tenants; all of which would distract OSE from doing the work that was embedded in its mission, that is to support emerging practitioners and individuals from further afield in accessing an art education.

[78] On 20 April 2022.

Instead of buying a building, it was proposed that the 600k intended donation be split over a period of ten years, securing much-needed annual, unrestricted funding for OSE's operation. In O'Shaughnessy's view, continuing to treat OSE as a meanwhile space, instead of associating it with a fixed building that would become the institution, was the only way for the organisation to keep to the mission and scale it was built on, both of which made up OSE's identity and reflected its intended values as a nimble, versatile, self-reflexive, and reactive organisation that would be as light on its feet as possible.

When talking to O'Shaughnessy, he suggested that the end of this funding should mark the conclusion of the organisation's life. This was a provocation more than anything else at this stage, but one that had the potential of generating thoughts, reactions, and a discussion on the relevance of an organisation at any given time. O'Shaughnessy asked: "What will OSE look like in ten years? Will it still be relevant? Could it become something else altogether?" When asked if he would have introduced the idea of a scheduled closure or overhaul, had OSE not been, in his own words, "only three steps away from collapsing, because of its over-reliance on individuals"[79], he posited that this exercise in self-reflection – which, if genuinely done, could lead fossilised institutions to decide to close down and allow for the redistribution of money to other or new organisations with fresher ideas – should be carried out by every institution. In thinking of the arts organisations established in the last few decades, which haven't overcome their liability of obsolescence but are nonetheless still going, we could not come up with a single one that had chosen to bring its operation to a close. Those that did close were those which had kept going until funding and income opportunities had dried out. Burdened by a sense of failure, they often closed quietly, silently, their website disappearing off the surface of the internet, leaving few traces behind and making their archives unavailable. And yet, reading about experiences of closure – whether forced or deliberate – might help circumvent the idea that ceasing to exist is failing. In the next part, I turn to Jack (then Judith) Halberstam's question: "What kinds of reward can failure offer us?" (2011, p. 3)

2. Planned Failure

Working to dismantle the logics of success and failure in a book about alternative modes of knowing and being that are neither excessively optimistic, nor trapped in nihilism – "a book about failing well, failing often, and learning, in the words of Samuel Beckett, how to fail better" (2011, pp. 23-24) – Halberstam starts from the observation that success may require too much

[79] Justin O'Shaughnessy, in an interview with the author, 20 April 2022.

effort and be best replaced by failure. “Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (ibid, p. 2). They ask:

> What kinds of reward can failure offer us? Perhaps most obviously, failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life (ibid, p. 3).

Halberstam’s understanding of the term failure as constructive, politically meaningful, and an intrinsic part of a collective learning process has informed and/or given credibility to a number of discussions dedicated to the subjects of failure, vulnerability, and the refusal to abide by the metrics of success (Harrowell et al., 2018; Hunt, 2020). In particular, writer and scholar Irvin J. Hunt deployed the term “planned failure” (2020) in his analysis of the Young Negroes’ Cooperative League, which was set up by journalist George Schuyler and activist Ella Baker in upper Harlem in 1930. Schuyler and Baker worked towards establishing a mass movement led by young black people in response to what they saw as the failures of contemporary black leaders who, in Schuyler’s own words, “had supplied no program capable of emancipating the Negro masses from subserviency, insecurity, insult, debauchery, crime, disease and death” (cited in Hunt, 2020, p. 6). In 1930, Schuyler wrote the manifesto ‘An Appeal to Young Negroes’ to enlist people between the ages of 16 and 35 to help launch a “’cooperative wholesale,’ a ‘cooperative bank,’ a production plant ‘where we shall start to produce some of the many commodities we consume,’ a ‘cooperative housing department,’ and a ‘permanent cooperative college’” (Hunt, 2020, p. 3). As Hunt explains, achieving economic independence was the means by which to protect the black population against racial violence at large, “from arbitrary incarceration to sexual assault” (ibid). By 1935, the Young Negroes’ Cooperative League had set up base in “twenty-two cities and twenty states, including California, New York, Washington, D.C., Ohio, Louisiana, South Carolina, Virginia, Arizona, and Pennsylvania” (ibid, p. 7). Each base known as councils incorporated buying clubs and grocery stores. When the young would reach the age of 36, they would have to resign to make space for younger souls.

In his reading of the League, Hunt puts forward the concept of planned failure – not to confuse with "planned obsolescence and reinvention" (ibid, p. 4), he warns us – as "the performative codification of strategic anarchy" (ibid), "the synchronized operation, the co-operation, of two affective drives: a love for the world thus a desire for its preservation, and the sense that the world must come to end for the world to have a chance, for property to be dismantled and for shared freedom to be born" (ibid, p. 5).

> Planned failure designates the intended demise of the original plan. It assumes that to maintain the structure of a movement's organization, which is made up of not only social arrangements, but also the constitution of its political subjects, is necessarily to reinforce the very problems one sought to escape: the distribution of property according to hierarchies of class, race, and gender (ibid, p. 4).

In other words, to plan a social movement's failure is to plan for it not to succeed in the accepted sense of the term, for success, in Hunt's view, almost inevitably entails compliance, compromise, conciliation, formalisation, regularity, property, centralisation, and institutionalisation (Hunt, 2020). The Young Negroes' Cooperative League was set up to resist this predicament and unsettle both dominant "conceptions of what it means to succeed at anticapitalist resistance and the metrics of measurements commonly employed to assess that success" (ibid, p. 6).

Schuyler, himself 35 years old when he wrote the manifesto and thus planning to resign from the League soon after launching it, was of the view that older people had a tendency to lean towards centralized planning, and as such were unable to engage with cooperative organising without imposing both their experience and authority. Schuyler and Baker hoped that enlisting young people would optimise the chances for the League to disengage with the process of eventually reproducing the dominant system's defects. As Hunt posists, "[t]he 'young' in the League's name signifies the avowal of failure and the refusal of longevity" (ibid, p. 7). Schuyler and Baker sought to set up transient, small-scale, and decentralised councils with the view to elude the notions of longevity and success, which are too often thought of as synonymous (Srnicek and Williams, 2016). Hunt asks: "[w]hat social movements come into view when these are not made synonymous and when success does not depend on schemas of duration?" (ibid, p. 1).

Brought back in the context of the three studied organisations, planned failure is incompatible with permanence, settledness, and thus the acquisition of brick and mortar and overbearing affiliation with a building. If this concept is irrelevant to Toynbee Hall, which had a slow turnover of wardens, hosted settlers who sometimes chose to stay for decades, and whose identity was defined by its building, it is more compatible with Centerprise and its three-year overtaking challenge and with Open School East, which ultimately made the decision to remain unburdened by the responsibility of owning a building, but nonetheless had a slow turnover of directors. Ultimately, if planned failure shares some of its qualities with the idea of scheduled overhaul or closure, it does more in its negation to achieve governability. As Hunt puts it, "[p]lanned failure is an ecstatic makeup (and breakup), a mode of being out of body while never more in it" (2020, p. 5).

What can one learn from the Young Negroes' Cooperative League's planned failure? If there is an element of absurdity and aberration – i.e. the exclusion of anyone over the age of 35 regardless of their ability to continue cooperating – a few tools can be taken away from this approach: from the reevaluation of how success is measured and understood, to the unsettling of the preconception that success and longevity are necessarily synonymous, through to the attention placed on maintaining the energy, flows, and ecstatic quality of an organisation.

3. Institutional Psychotherapy as Applied to a School of Art and Design

Themes of institutional overhaul, and planned failure, connect also to questions of institutional identity, and possibilities of institutional psychotherapy. This final section takes on the institutional approach of Laurence Rassel, a cultural organiser and cyberfeminist who has held positions in a variety of environments, the latest of which is l'erg (École de Recherche Graphique), a graduate school of art and design school in Brussels. When applying for the post of director in 2016, Rassel wrote an institutional project informed by her background in copyleft and open source practices, her feminist heritage, and the training she undertook in the field of institutional psychotherapy shortly before joining l'erg. Along with a desire to give back to culture and education their "speculative function" (Rassel, 2017), her project consisted in turning the school that she had inherited, and which showed multiple signs of dysfunction and malaise, into a place of transparency, collaboration, co-construction, and co-responsibility. Her main point of reference was the psychiatric clinic of La Borde in Cour-Cheverny, France, founded in 1953 by psychiatrist Jean Oury, who would be joined by a number of figures including Felix Guattari and the educator Fernand Deligny. La Borde distinguished itself from other institutions for breaking down the duality between patient and

carer, and for involving patients in every aspect of the clinic's operation: from cooking and cleaning, to participating in meetings, through to contributing to its newspaper and therapeutic club (Boulanger et al., 2021).

Since taking up her functions six years ago, Rassel's approach has first involved "imposing the collective" (ibid, p. 132), in her own words, that is to say rallying staff members from across the administration and pedagogical strata of the school, as well as interested students, to participate in the shaping of institutional change, notably through the creation of committees and groups. She uses the verb 'to impose' in reflection of the fact that not every staff member has been willing to engage in collective decision-making and in the bridging of disciplines and of the different educational programmes offered by l'erg. Rassel's so-called imposition is more an ideal than a directive in that staff members are not compelled to take part in the collective process. However, as Rassel lets out, those genuinely dissatisfied with the institution's new culture sometimes choose to leave (Boulanger et al., 2021).

Her other approaches have included: making decisions, budgets, and processes transparent and accessible; using open source methodologies to approach the rewriting of the rigid decree regimenting the school and embed, within it, its co-construction and transparency projects – which in turn could be changed following Rassel's departure; switching the working times of the cleaning team (with their approval) from night to day, in order to visibilise their labour and make them part of the fabric of the school; and, last but not least, setting up and opening up formerly inaccessible spaces, rethinking the atmosphere of the place – including its cleanliness and invitedness, a point of struggle that Rassel often comes back to – as well as enacting simple gestures such as changing the way doors open and keeping doors open in places that are traditionally uninviting, such as the director's office – I note here the echo to Ahmed's metaphors of hard, closed fittings in her discussion on institutional opacity and hostility – in order to sustain openness and cooperation in the long-run (Boulanger et al., 2021).

As she explains in her essay written as part of her institutional psychotherapy training, her motivation to concern herself with the topic in the first place was:

> to think about another relation to the institution, other than principles of efficacy, profitability, arbitrary authority, and/or paternalism. The violence of these principles is experienced by bodies and in the relationships of cultural workers. But also in the type of programmes that are undertaken and in the type of relations to the public, who is

> essentially considered as consumer. This relationship is measured quantitatively (numbers of visitors, money raised, number of friends on social media, etc.) rather than qualitatively. […] I would like to take on the direction of an institution according to principles that take into account the collective, care, a structure that is collaborative, open, process-oriented, with exchanges, transmission, and the distribution of possibles in mind (2017, p. 4)[80].

If Rassel aims for the construction of a commons within the space of the school, she is also clear about her status as the director and the fact that she is ultimately responsible for all decisions that are taken. While she is a utopian, she does not engage in conversations about horizontality, being ultimately accountable to the board of l'erg and aware of the precarity of her institutional project and its legacy. She has been resetting the institution to allow for a more open approach in present and future, and has made it clear all along that she is not the institution. She works in and with the institution, but has separated her authority, desires, and commitments from the school's identity.

Reflecting one last time on the three case studies of this thesis, the Barnetts were Toynbee Hall, in the same way that I and my co-founders were, for a long time, Open School East. The process of detachment is arguably more laborious when one creates their own institution, although the example of Centerprise and the mechanism it put in place for its founders' succession provides an effective counter example. On the established but debatable basis that success is synonymous with longevity, then it may also be synonymous with succession. What then makes successful succession according to the understanding of success that these last sections have drawn upon? I would argue that the preparation of a progressive and open toolkit of the kind crafted by Rassel does enable for successful succession. One aspect of this toolkit is the relaxation of the rules and procedures of the school's decree, which Rassel has worked on a for a number of years to allow for structural change to take place at a faster pace and with less hindrance than what she has experienced. Succession was on her mind while going through this painstaking effort (Boulanger et al., 2021). A scheduled overhaul or closure, or an institutional opening up and letting go, is in that sense closer to the provocative concept of planned failure in its refusal to achieve the expected, namely the ownership of property, the act of scaling up, and the provision of a defined and possibly phantasmatic institutional narrative.

[80] My translation.

CHAPTER 7:
CONCLUSION

'Alternative to what? Alternative how? A Study of Multi-Public Educational and Cultural Spaces in England since the Late Nineteenth Century' has asked the following questions:

- How do the studied spaces understand and situate themselves as alternatives and how do they enact their alternativeness?
- What can a historical analysis contribute to the understanding of educational, cultural, and social practice?
- What makes organisations alternative and what are they alternatives to?
- What does it take to remain alternative or, put differently, what is the lifespan of alternatives?

The five key contributions that have emerged from the pursuit of these questions have entailed:

1. Bringing a historical sensibility to subjects that bear relevance to the present;
2. Showing the virtue of a socio-spatial enquiry;
3. Reflecting on the temporality of institutions and their longevity or otherwise as well as on the nuances of failure and success;
4. Engaging with a transdisciplinary tradition;
5. Using professional knowledge to complement scholarly knowledge, with the view to sharing findings with practitioners from the field.

I- Historical Sensibility

The thesis has taken a transhistorical approach to the subject of multi-public educational and cultural organisations in the UK. As observed earlier in the writing, the project of this thesis was borne out of my practice as a director of Open School East as I was willing to identify the lineage and historical allies of this organisation, which I was responsible for co-creating. My interest in social history had been present throughout my work as a curator and educator, and the fact that I wrote about a multi-public educational and cultural organisation during my BA, a fact that I had long forgotten, demonstrates how not only history, but also education, collectivity, and utopia have permeated my practice to this day and accordingly influenced the shaping of Open School East. I noted in chapter 5 that as I was researching the community

arts movement, in large part prompted by the present research, I realised that what we were doing at Open School East was not new but instead intuitively reiterating approaches and practices of the past. Identifying and analysing historical methods and approaches, and, in the process, detecting their shortcomings and benefits, has been the means through which to produce what I see as a toolkit for future endeavours in socially-engaged art and education practice and the progressive instituting thereof.

To the question 'What can a historical analysis contribute to the understanding of educational, cultural, and social practice?', I would answer that the discovery of the countless filiations that have emanated from researching this PhD has not only helped thread a historical narrative and genealogy that did not exist to date – the case studies had either been studied in isolation of each other or never studied in depth before – but it has also generated the potential of guiding future initiatives and practices in reflecting on, aligning themselves to, or, on the contrary, drifting away from, initiatives and practices from the past, both distant and close. Further to this potential, this PhD's contribution has been to enable a reading and assessment of history from a contemporary perspective, with concepts and considerations pertaining to the present expanding the analysis and understanding of initiatives from the past.

II- Virtue of a Socio-spatial Enquiry

This PhD's second contribution has been to provide detailed and unprecedented accounts of organisations that, for some, have been examined in PhDs, books, and research projects, but rarely holistically and/or critically. If programming, delivering, governing, community-building, and space-making have been given equal emphasis and entangled throughout, it is perhaps the focus on spatiality, buildings, circulation, and projection and perception of social space that contributes the most to the thesis' originality. Indeed, this research has concentrated part of its attention on recognising that architectural space is an intrinsic part of an organisation's identity, narrative, and pedagogical processes; that space has the capacity not only determine function and influence outputs, but also to facilitate, bend, or hinder the values, ethos, and practices of an organisation.

III- Reflection on Temporality, Success, and Failure

For a long time, one of the questions of the thesis was: 'Do alternatives have a lifespan?'. As the research evolved, it became 'What is the lifespan of alternatives?'. Even though the analysis on failure and success in relation to longevity is relatively short in this thesis and may

well be a snippet of a broader piece of research that may come next, this set of reflections provided a breakthrough when it came to thinking through and against the accepted understanding that success is succession; that success means stability, certainty, and longevity. What the discussion on the length of tenure, on the amalgamation between the institution and the person responsible for instituting, and on the ownership of, or affiliation to, a physical building has revealed is that at the core of it all, the emotional and phantasmatic attachment to the institution is what may most need circumventing in order to prolong the lifespan of an alternative.

IV- Transdisciplinary Tradition

The thesis has also followed a transdisciplinary tradition, juxtaposing subjects and disciplines that do not obviously belong together; from architecture and utopia to education, through to organizational theory, geography, cultural studies, and contemporary art practice. Throughout the thesis, I have navigated between varied types of literature, layering disciplines and approaches to subjects in order to provide a holistic framework for the model of organisation that has formed my subject of enquiry. The knowledge constructed for the thesis further came from empirical research and non-academic observations of an organisation as I was simultaneously experiencing and shaping it, at least for the first five years of this thesis. Transdisciplinarity was a natural direction in the exercise of writing about a model of organisation that is, in and of itself, also transdisciplinary in its straddling of art and culture, education, and social work. If such a tradition isn't new, it has produced in this instance a dynamic and multi-layered analysis of a subject that cannot be pinned down to a single subject or discipline.

V- Professional Knowledge

This PhD was written from a professional standpoint, not only because I wrote about my own profession, but also because my daily experience of Open School East afforded me an outlook and reflexivity on like-minded organisations that not many researchers dissociated from the process of running a multi-public educational and cultural organisation could have afforded. This led me to become more acutely aware of the issues, decisions, and directions pertaining to and taken by both Toynbee Hall and Centerprise. In turn, every relevant finding and learning I extracted both from my scholarly research and from familiarising myself with these two organisations, whether through interviews or archival meandering, somewhat fed back into my thinking about Open School East and informed the approaches and directions I took for

the organisation, thus transforming its narrative until the point of my departure. As I have mentioned earlier, the work I have achieved for this thesis is destined to be shared with other and future professionals in the field, whether in book form or otherwise.

VI- Concluding Thoughts

When I left Open School East, I turned in part to horticulture and garden design, which in turn led me to paying attention to the entanglements between nature, plant lives and cycles, and education, and to research nature-based pedagogies. In the introduction to this thesis, I addressed the slow movement and permaculture. I chose the term slow, among others, to signify the differential and wrote that besides opposing accelerationism, slow stands for sustainable, responsible, interconnected, community-focused, small-scale, and holistic. I further pointed to the fact that permaculture, a form of slow agriculture, has increasingly been used as a metaphor and model for differential practices associated with the above-listed qualities as well as with the regeneration, healing, and care of society.

When I visited Jean Rakovitch, the director of pedagogy at École Domaine du Possible, a few months after interviewing him online for this thesis, he talked of the school as an exercise in human permaculture. It is worth remembering that Rudolf Steiner, a pioneer in alternative pedagogy, also spearheaded the biodynamic agriculture movement, which bears a number of connections to permaculture. If permaculture is notably concerned with ideas of regeneration, interdependence (e.g. companion planting), holistic attention to each and every aspect of an ecosystem, and community resilience, then one could argue that these principles align in several ways with those of the model of organisation that I have been researching in this PhD.

The term permaculture signifies the permanence of agriculture. The scale of permanence, a tool developed by engineer and farmer PA Yeomans in Australia in the 1950s, considered the backbone of agriculture, which encompasses: “climate, landform, water supply, roads, trees, permanent buildings, subdivisional fences, and soil”[81]. This backbone is however not a blueprint; as agriculture writer Tara Hammonds argues, “[t]he basic idea is that, as one moves down the list [of the scale’s eight components], the elements of a farm system become less permanent; that is, they take less energy to change and are less permanent as a factor for planning”[82]. If the larger social context is macro and more rigid, permaculture works towards

[81] Hammonds, T. (2016) 'Using the Scale of Permanence as a Tool for Land Evaluation'.
Available at: https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/2016/04/scale-of-permanence/ (Accessed: 5 July 2022)

[82] Ibid.

a local and more specific context of where the design is located and related to, thus lending itself to more micro and flexible approaches. As a potential future line of enquiry, and in alignment with the research of curator and writer Guillaume Désanges, author of the yet to be published 'Small Treatise of Institutional Permaculture for a Living and Productive Site for Contemporary Creation'[83], I would therefore want to ask: What can multi-public educational and cultural organisations learn from permaculture? What would institutional permaculture look and feel like? In the same vein, I would want to grapple with the inherent tensions between the necessity and desire for sustainability to combat the damage incurred by market capitalism, versus the non-fixity and time-limitedness of the alternative spaces that have been the object of this study, and which too, work against the patterns of market capitalism.

[83] My translation. The original document is written in French, titled 'Petit Traité de Permaculture Institutionnelle pour un Site de Création Contemporaine Vivant et Productif' (2022) and soon to be published.

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