Recomposing the image of the world:

micropolitical art interventions in the 21st Century

Jessica Shepherd

PhD in Visual Cultures

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Declaration of Authorship

I, Jessica Shepherd, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date:

Abstract

This research explores how creative practices can renew perceptions of 'globalisation'. Against the backdrop of increasingly polarised political discourses, in which 'globalisation' is often understood as synonymous with 'global capitalism', the following research aims to expose and deconstruct ideologies that ultimately situate people as commensurable and exchangeable. Its purpose is to find ways in which through cultural practices - in particular micropolitical art interventions - we might recompose the image of the world, facilitating critical methodologies that can sustain creative freedom and positively impact the ways in which we constitute our environments.

To do this, it turns to the work of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, in particular his writings on 'world-forming', and undertakes embodied reflections on these writings through three practices: protest performances with arts group Liberate Tate, grassroots curatorial practices with Art Action UK and institutional research at the Arnolfini in Bristol (participating in the Arts Council England Quality Metrics framework). I approach these three practices through analyses of three key philosophical threads throughout Nancy's writing: spacing, exscribing and co-appearing. These concepts are critically evaluated with reference to their philosophical or literary context, contemporary art theory and political theory.

To further address why and how these practices might recompose the image of the world, each analysis plots the development of theory from ontology to the political – a process that Nancy visualises as a 'slope' or 'inclination'. Tracing this incline throughout Nancy's writing, the thesis looks at ways in which cultural practices can sustain critical and creative engagement, facilitating alternative global paradigms. It suggests that recomposing the image of the world has ethical implications for artists, curators, audiences and cultural institutions.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used to refer to key texts by Jean-Luc Nancy that are frequently referenced throughout the thesis:

IC: *The Inoperative Community* (1991)

BtP - *The Birth to Presence* (1993)

M- *The Muses* (1996)

SoW: *The Sense of the World* (1997)

RtP - *Retreating the Political (Nancy & Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe)* (1997)

BSP - *Being Singular Plural* (2000)

GoI - *The Ground of the Image* (2005)

MA - *Multiple Arts: The Muses II* (2006)

CoW - *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (2007)

D - *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (2008)

AF - *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes* (2015)

DA: *The Disavowed Community* (2016)

Introduction

> Our task today is nothing less than the task of creating a form or a symbolization of the world. This seems to us to be the greatest risk that humanity has had to confront. … It is the extremely concrete and determined task – a task that can only be a struggle – of posing the following question to each gesture, each conduct, each habitus and each ethos: How do you engage the world? How do you involve yourself with the enjoyment of the world as such, and not with the appropriation of a quantity of equivalence?

> (Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Creation of the World or Globalization*: 2007: 53)

Overview

This thesis considers how art practices respond to neoliberal ideologies that reinforce global capitalism. At stake in this study is the role of visual cultures in providing a critical lens on the networks and hierarchies of power that characterise and reinforce global capitalism. This study forwards the idea of recomposing the image of the world. It explores how creative practices can sustain a critical and formative role in the way in which we constitute our environments. Although creative practices are constantly at risk of absorption into reductive systems of exchange, often unreliable in their ability to communicate a clear-cut sense of the world, they nevertheless have a vanguard role in campaigns for social change. Turning to philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, this study takes the concept of 'world-forming' as an entry point into this central question: how can the micropolitical interventions of artists and art collectives recompose the image of the world, and why is this significant?

To focus this question, I work with Nancy's ontology of 'being singular plural' through three cultural practices: performances with the art group Liberate Tate (a London-based collective that focuses on ending oil sponsorship of the arts, in particular BP's sponsorship of the Tate), curatorial practices with a grassroots arts organisation Art Action UK (who provide an annual residency for artists who live and work in Japan and are responding to the nuclear disaster of 2011) and educational practices with a

contemporary arts institution, the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol. As such, I analyse a trajectory in the practice of 'recomposing' images, from the ontology of emergent creative practices, through to the role of curators as agents in creating a new 'sense' of the world, to look at how micropolitical processes of transformation are structurally played out within government-funded cultural institutions.

Contemporary theorists have addressed the 'destruction of the image of the globe' (Latour: 2013) and called for us to 'recapitulate' what globalisation means (Berger: 2016). This thesis puts forward the term 'recomposing'. To 'recompose' – to compose again or differently – carries a sense of a shared process (*com*) of withdrawing, distancing or undoing (*re-*) that *poses* a question whilst 'suggesting' or 'placing' a new image (only to facilitate a further withdrawal). This term will be interpreted in the context of Nancy's writings and will be explored through the development of these three cultural practices. As such, the significance of this term will be gradually elucidated throughout the following chapters.

This thesis traces the effect of art from the moment of its becoming-present through to its role on a larger political stage, whilst critically engaging with the language we use to articulate this unfolding. Drawing on an embodied reading of three specific concepts within Nancy's writings – spacing, exscribing and co-appearing – it follows the creative flux of art practices and identifies points throughout this evolution where such practices risk absorption into familiar apparatuses of power and knowledge. Finally, it analyses ways in which creative practices can facilitate a critical awareness of, and retreat from, these apparatuses and what this means ethically.

The thesis considers how creative practices can provide a critical lens on the current paradigms of knowledge and power that characterise globalisation. It starts with the hypothesis that to recompose the image of the world requires critical engagement with prevailing conceptual frameworks, engagement that develops through a process of distancing from dominant paradigms of knowledge. To test this hypothesis, I will draw from the philosophical readings of Jean-Luc Nancy and develop a discursive analysis of his writings along with texts by Georges Bataille, Paulo Virno, Maurice Blanchot, Carl Schmitt, Alain Badiou, Hannah Arendt and Chantal Mouffe. As my analysis evolves alongside and with participatory practices (as a performer, curator and institutional

researcher), the theoretical scope broadens from an initial close reading of Nancy's earlier texts, with their philosophical focus on ontology, to wider discussions that draw from political theory.

Acknowledging and responding to Nancy's self-critique as outlined in the journal *Vacarme* in 2007, in which he explains that he was wrong to contextualise his idea of 'being with' and the motif of 'the common' under the banner of 'the political to come' (2007), this thesis will ultimately address the meaning of 'the political' and what it means to be politically engaged today. Taking up Nancy's metaphor of theory as a 'slope' or 'inclination' (Morin 2012: 113- referring to a colloquium conversation in 2002), I will examine creative practices that appear as specific loci on the 'incline' from ontology to the political.

To briefly elaborate on the structure of the thesis: it starts by looking at how one political art practice (Liberate Tate) operates through communicative strategies that shape social zeitgeists in a contagious and contingent way. It suggests that freedom can be sustained through intentional strategies of engagement and addresses the role of curatorial practices with reference to Art Action UK. How can a curator be faithful to the privileging of freedom, whilst ensuring that artworks continue to communicate and facilitate social engagement? Finally, having argued that the concepts of 'freedom' and 'faith', often associated with mysticism or religious discourse, are at the heart of cultural practices, it will turn to the role of cultural institutions (in particular the Arnolfini in Bristol) and consider how institutions might respond to the conflicting demands of their publics, and of funding bodies.

This thesis aims to provide an active reflection on political art practices that can act as a resource for both practitioners and theorists. Theoretical discourses around art activism can, at times, mute or de-activate creative practices by reinforcing their role in achieving a particular end. However, through a series of evaluations of current discourses on political art, this thesis outlines and participates in processes of critical reflection that facilitate and advance the creative potential of art practices. The ultimate goal is to reconnect theory and practice and demonstrate how they are contingent on each other and part of the same creative process.

What is at stake in this study?

Since the 1960s, when contemporary art practices increasingly began to take place outside of the traditional museum space, and particularly in Europe and America, more people have begun to turn to socially engaged art practice as a way of addressing micropolitical issues. These practices often take the form of collaborative workshops, performances and interventions, in which the emphasis is on the process rather than on the final product[1]. This thesis evolves from a critical evaluation of current theoretical approaches that often reduce such practices to determinative illustrations of politics or that reinforce differences between 'politics' and 'aesthetics' – approaches that continue to influence and inspire curatorial practices within cultural institutions. Contemporary theorists, notably Nicolas Bourriaud and Jacques Rancière, have sparked ongoing debates around the terms 'politics' and 'aesthetics'. Often, by addressing these terms, even in attempts to unify them, these debates tend to fortify a sense that 'aesthetics' – principles concerned with the nature of beauty – only 'lend' significance to political discourses (Rancière 2004: 19) which are (contrastingly) part of 'real' systems and social realities (Bourriaud 1998: 36). These theoretical discussions, developed by writers such as Gregory Sholette and Boris Groys, begin to point to a renewed perception of the political, a theme that will be developed throughout the following chapters.

Art as a form of social critique is a familiar concept to most - artists and artworks have been agents of history, changing attitudes and provoking questions. In the last decade, this role has become central to many artistic discourses. But often, popular discourses focus on how creative practices illustrate a particular political idea, ignoring powerful nuances and failing to recognise ways in which artworks can recompose perceptions of politics and globalisation, and sustain a sense of creative freedom.

In recent years artists have been dismissed and marginalised, silenced and even imprisoned because of fears over the social impact of their work[2]. Ironically, in many

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[1] Often cited examples include Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (which reenacted the police response to the miners' strikes of the 1980s, in collaboration with those who actually experienced these events), Santiago Sierra's *Line Tattooed On 6 Paid People, Havana* which controversially addressed the exploitation of workers, and the works of Thomas Hirschhorn created in collaboration with particular communities of people, such as *Gramsci Monument*, which encouraged interaction between people living in a public-housing tower in New York.

[2] It would be impossible to comprehensively list these here, but some familiar references would be Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, Russian performance collective Pussy Riot, Japanese artist Megumi

cases, these works become amplified through attempts to censor them. Nevertheless, increased media coverage and acceptance within the 'art world' does not guarantee the sustained agency of such works. As outlined, academic discourses often gravitate towards debates around the relationship between aesthetics and politics, an assumed relationship between what are seen as separate sources of power. These assumptions reinforce processes of differentiation that immediately reduce the creative potential of the works in question. These discourses will be explored in the first chapter. From prevailing desires to glean an immediate understanding of the meaning 'in' an artwork, to curatorial approaches that reinforce pedagogic narratives, and to institutions that use art as a tool for a wider set of aims tied up in funding and government policies, it is not surprising that creative processes are quickly appropriated and spaces for critical reflection diminished.

To read and apply texts by Jean-Luc Nancy in the context of institutional practices may seem incongruent with his philosophy. Nevertheless, the following analysis seeks to address the concrete significance of Nancy's thought, and suggest a renewed approach to the idea of 'the institutional'. In an interview in *Diacritics* in 2015, Nancy states 'Sense can only be *in common* (exchange, sending, referring, sharing); it cannot be *common* (granted by a common institution or constitution, or by and as a common order)' (2015: 104). Being-in-common is prior to an institution, it is a kind of anarchy - the antithesis of institutionality. Nevertheless, at the centre of a *cultural* institution is a sense of art as a form of open-ended communication that has social importance (even as this becomes expressed in economic terms). A gallery is structured around such incommensurability and 'sense'. In the same interview Nancy states that 'politics must remain held in reserve for sense (*se tienne en réserve du sens*): it must be understood as being in the service of the community, rather than its principle and end' (2015: 104, 105). As will be considered, ethical issues arise when art institutions aim to be in the 'service of the community' by attempting to 'produce' or 'grant' sense rather than *allowing* the common to take place informally, beyond the institution. I am interested in how cultural institutions can sustain the possibility of informal sites of 'exchange, sending, referring, sharing' – how they can be 'in common' by actively refraining from processes of quantification. Similarly, when I consider the 'agency' of art, I am interested in agency

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Igarashi (who was convicted of circulating 'obscene' images and fined, for making a kayak modeled on her vagina) and Cuban artist-activist Tania Bruguera (who was detained by the Cuban authorities and had her passport taken away from her after proposing to create performance piece about free speech).

as free choice – agency manifest through the decisions that shape conceptualisations of the world. Agency is not necessarily goal directed – creativity affirms a sense of open-ended agency.

The political importance of creativity is clearly emphasised by many contemporary cultural and political theorists. Visual media is a vital form of communication within capitalist strategies because it is capable of shaping conscious and subconscious aspirations. Creative practices can also be appropriated by political powers and wielded to terrifying effect. Nevertheless, art always brings with it a question, as well as an awareness of its speculative nature. Art can be used to coerce, but it is never entirely reducible to a straightforward function - it brings with it a shadow of ambiguity and is always subjective, referring to the unknowable experience of the other. With this in mind, however, the visual arts can embrace and work with its uncertain communicative power to create new spaces for creativity through a shared distancing and divergence from established social models.

At stake in this study is the role of visual cultures in sustaining critical engagement with the networks and hierarchies of power that generate a synonymy between 'globalisation' and global capitalism. As such, I will explore how creative practices can recompose the image of the world, rethinking the idea of 'the political' to create social ties and networks that sustain the possibility and development of paradigm changes.

World-forming

To address the central question - how can the micropolitical interventions of artists and art collectives recompose the image of the world, and why is this significant? - my entry point is through the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy, in particular his writings on 'world-forming'. Reading English translations of Nancy's work, I have been conscious of the transformations and slippages of meaning that take place through translation, particularly with words such as 'mondialisation', which translates into English as 'globalisation', but carries with it an emphasis on 'world-forming', rather than 'globalising' (creating a whole). However, increased awareness of the mutability of these concepts, and of how language generates images and frames concepts of 'the globe', has enabled me to defamilarise myself with the expression 'globalisation', and its

common usage throughout cultural discourses.

What is 'globalisation'? Often, 'globalisation' refers to production, manufacturing and finance, the freeing of trade and economic integration. To briefly summarise a number of different contemporary approaches to globalisation, we might begin by recalling Deleuze and Guattari's writings on 'deterritorialisation', particularly in their 1972 book *Anti-Oedipus*, which draws attention to the significance of *cultural* globalisation as a parallel to political and economic globalisation. By focusing on the deterritorialised exchange of cultural values, Deleuze and Guattari activate discourses on capitalist commodification and the mapping of cultural differences. This raises questions concerning how we might avoid or retreat from commodification.

Some contemporary thinkers, such as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, have focused on the social imaginary and its political significance in the process of globalisation. Appadurai observes that 'artists are increasingly willing to place high stakes on their sense of the boundaries between their art and the politics of public opinion' and that people progressively 'see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms' (1996: 53, 54). For Appadurai, the new social imaginary creates mass cultural aspirations and distances individuals from local cultural identities. The collective social imaginary visualises social possibilities (and impossibilities), meaning that visual cultures increasingly have a social role within the globalising process. However, this also demands that we address the informal and contagious way in which local cultural practices can interrupt and influence this wider cultural imaginary.

In their influential text *Empire*, published in 2000, Hardt and Negri envisage globalisation as an 'empire' that encompasses modern existence - a 'new global form of sovereignty' that hails the decline of the nation-state. Developing Foucault's writings on 'biopower' and examining the power of capitalism, Negri and Hardt form a concept of globalisation that both reflects and generates a sense of cultural, political and economic imbrication. At the outset of the book, they state:

> 'Our political task, we will argue, is not simply to resist these processes [of globalisation] but to reorganise them and redirect them towards new ends. The

creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire are also capable of autonomously constructing counter-Empire, an alternative political organisation of global flows and exchanges.' (Hardt and Negri 2001: xv).

What might counter-Empire look like, and what role might contemporary art play in the 'reorganisation' of processes of globalisation?'

These three very different approaches to globalisation nevertheless illuminate a series of significant questions: how can we avoid being 'captured' by processes of capitalist commodification? What role does creative reflection play in how we conceptualise and imagine the world? And how might a renewed reflection on ontology interrupt and change the way we compose images of the world, perhaps even 'redirecting' processes of globalisation?

Nancy's approach to globalisation offers yet another approach, but one that can provide a lens through which to approach these questions, further magnifying the significance of contemporary art and cultural practices. He underlines the significance of the process of 'mondialisation' or 'worlding' - how we 'form' the world. 'Mondialisation', or 'world-forming' is synonymous with 'globalisation' because these creative actions serve to characterise the 'globe'. The following chapters will focus on the (often infinitesimal) creative gestures of contemporary artists and look at how they might redirect and alter wider assumptions that continue to reinforce capitalist images of globalisation. I am interested in the potentially creative forces within globalisation - art practices that offer 'alternative political organisation of global flows and exchanges'. As such, Nancy's concept of world-forming and its emphasis on how we 'world' leads into the subject of how creative practices can facilitate critical engagement with the cultural, economic and political apparatuses that constitute globalisation as we know it. Nancy's conceptualisation of both globalisation and world-forming is developed from his ontological theory of 'being singular plural' and this will be the starting point for my research.

To outline the difference between 'globalisation' and 'world-forming', Nancy explains that globality is 'totality as a whole' and therefore nihilistic, because by understanding something as 'a whole' it becomes finite; it is towards-death (CoW: 2007: 27). But for

Nancy, another process, that of 'world-forming' happens simultaneously. For Nancy, 'world-forming' is 'absolute immanence' (Raffoul and Pettigrew: CoW: 2007: 5). There is nothing beyond it, because it is the world as praxis, rather than object.

Put simply, Nancy says that world-forming is an ontological process; it is the 'being with' of the world, the exposition of the world to 'being singular plural'. To explain this in a 'singular' ontological way, when I say 'I am', I am positing myself as a finite being, but in acknowledging myself, my consciousness of self is beyond the limits of the 'I' that has been articulated. In this way a person is always 'with' himself or herself, they are self-aware; therefore each singularity is necessarily plural. 'Being singular plural' is for Nancy the condition of 'being'.

Similarly, 'world-forming' is the infinite process of producing and creating the finite 'things' that together constitute the world. Nancy says that this 'creation' is 'a creation immanent to itself, a creation of itself and for itself' (CoW: 2007: 12). As such, world-forming is absolutely immanent: it both constitutes and exposes the finitude of the world, of being, but it does so infinitely. For Nancy, this awareness of infinity opens out into a kind of abyss, where we realise that there is an absence of a beginning, end and ground. World-forming can either reinforce what already is and unconsciously unfold in accordance with dominant paradigms, or it can be embodied consciously, emphasising creative potential and the possibility of the new. I will go on to argue that current systems of capitalist exchange, with their emphasis on forming commensurable, exchangeable things, disregard the 'sense' of the world, but that the conscious embodiment of world-forming emphasises sense and 'incommensurability', a term that will be considered later in the thesis.

This study offers a series of reflections on how art practices embody an approach to political discourses based on a sense of how the world forms. By understanding creative interventions as immanent 'world-forming' gestures, I aim to spotlight how art collectives might facilitate a sense of social agency that brings with it an increased sense of accountability, and consider how this generates ethical engagement with the practice of recomposing the image of the world. Consequently, rather than referring to 'globalisation' throughout my thesis, I concentrate on creative practices within these apparatuses, so as to distance the reader from these familiar terms and the assumptions

they may carry. Instead, I refer to 'world-forming'.

The image

What is an 'image'? The word 'image' is rooted in the Latin *imaginem* which indicates a 'likeness' or 'picture', but also carries the meaning 'phantom, ghost, apparition,' or metaphorically, an 'idea' or 'appearance'. This sense of the supernatural, of the separation between the 'appearance' of an identity and an identity itself, is apparent in Nancy's interpretation of the image as 'the distinct' or 'the sacred', as outlined in his essay 'The Image – The Distinct'[3]. By understanding the image as 'the distinct', the viewer recognises that a withdrawal or separation takes place in the creation of an image, rendering it untouchable, but able to evoke a sacred 'force' (GoI: 2005: 1-3). Nancy says that the image is 'distinct from all representation', that 'it is an imprint of the intimacy of its passion (of its motion, its agitation, its tension, its passivity)' (GoI: 2005: 2, 7). In a key passage in *The Ground of the Image*, Nancy explains the significance of the image in our perception of the 'the world'.

> The image suspends the course of the world and of meaning – of meaning as a course or current of sense (meaning in discourse, meaning that is current and valid): but it affirms all the more a *sense* (therefore an "insensible") that is *selfsame* with what it gives to be sensed (that is, itself). In the image, which, however, is without an "inside", there is a sense that is nonsignifying but not insignificant, in a sense that is as certain as its force (its form) (GoI: 2005: 10, 11).

This thesis explores how seeking to recompose the image of the world is to look at how an image (separate from an 'identity') of the world can become a 'force' that can 'suspend the course of the world and of meaning'. In other words, I am interested in how recomposing the image of the world can interrupt current, 'validated' capitalist ideologies and affirm sense, consciousness and perception.

Cultural practices, in particular contemporary art interventions, are key to recomposing the image of the world. Nancy writes of how each image is 'a finite cutting out, by the mark of distinction' and that the 'superabundance of images in the multiplicity and in

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[3] published in the *Heaven* exhibition catalogue in 1999 and again in *The Ground of the Image* (2005).

the history of the arts corresponds to this inexhaustible distinction' leading to the infinite opening of, and loss of, 'the *jouissance* of meaning' (GoI: 2005: 12, 13). Whilst the significance of the word 'jouissance' shifts depending on its context within Nancy's writing, here, the 'jouissance' of meaning might be understood as the excess of meaning – a temporal enjoyment of meaning that affirms sense as opposed to function. This thesis will look at how recomposing the image of the world to create a superabundance of images might sustain the infinite 'opening' of the jouissance of meaning, and what this might signify in terms of 'the political'.

An 'incline' from ontology to the political

Writing of the image as 'the distinct', Nancy explains that '[t]he distinct is at a distance, it is the opposite of what is near. What is not near can be set apart in two ways, separated from contact or from identity' (GoI: 2005: 2). In this sense, to recompose the image of the world is to create a separation, to withdraw from an apparent identity of the globe and to generate, and be part of, 'a co-incidence of an event and an eternity' (GoI: 2005: 10). To recompose an image is to withdraw from an identity. This thesis will suggest that this withdrawing might take place by tracing an incline, a slope, away from the identity of the world.

This can be understood in the context of 'world-forming'. Nancy's concept of the world and of 'world-forming' has developed from his philosophical analysis of 'being'. Stemming from a reinterpretation of the Heideggrarian ontology of 'Dasein', Nancy articulates an ontology of 'being singular plural' or 'being with'. This concept, which will be considered in Chapter 2, is fundamental to this study because it informs the way in which I approach themes of communication and 'the political' and is at the heart of the idea of 'world-forming' that underpins my relationship to the practices addressed in the following chapters. Nancy calls this development of theory from ontology to the political a 'slope' or 'inclination', and he acknowledges that development of this inclination requires greater analysis. In a colloquium conversation in 2002, quoted by Marie-Eve Morin, he admits that he had not analysed this 'incline' enough (Morin 2012: 113). He recognises that 'being-with does not immediately constitute a politics but 'allows us to determine the sphere of the political' (Morin 2012: 113).

As stated in the overview, two years before (in 2000), Nancy had again reflected on his work with a similar critical analysis. In the French journal *Vacarme*, speaking of his writings relating to *La Comparution,* written with Jean-Christophe Bailly, he stated: 'in writing on "community", on "compearance", then on "being-with", I certainly think I was right to discern the importance of the motif of "the common" and the necessity to work on it anew – but I was wrong when I thought this under the banner of the…"political to come" (2007). In *Vacarme,* Nancy emphasises that his writings on globalisation, on commonality and on the ontology of 'being with' are political in so far as they *question* the political, rather than proposing a new political essence.

He later continues, in the same article:

> For me, then, the political is from now on submitted to a questioning that must first and foremost bear on the relation and distinction between "politics" and "being-in-common". If you like: the ontology of the common is not immediately political. The most seriously political gesture I can make is to work on this question – no easy task – even if this in no way prevents me from being politically active, in the restricted sense, whenever is necessary (2007).

Nancy's ontology of being singular plural (the ontology of the common) is not instantly 'political' - it does not affirm a particular politics or a positive discourse for specific changes. Rather, it questions and deconstructs perceptions of the political. This critical engagement necessarily concerns the gradual formation and reformation of the political: the processes by which we become aware of, and respond to, the ontology of being singular plural. Consequently, the idea that critical engagement can unfold collectively and create new forms of engagement points to the significance of maintaining creative critique.

An incline can be an ascent or a descent. It indicates a disposition towards something or someone. To visualise the development from ontology to the political as an incline helps us recognise that it involves an inclination or attitude. It situates theory on a gradient of a continuing pathway, where it has a disposition and a context, but agency to move within this context. To trace the incline from ontology to the political is not to aim for a specific destination, but rather to withdraw from a fixed image or an identity

and to initiate a distancing. This distancing constitutes and maintains 'the distinct'. I am interested in how this process of distancing might displace and broaden the horizon of 'globalisation'. I will explore how distancing takes place through the process of recomposing the image of world - a process that requires an inclination away from reinforced perceptions of the world. To acknowledge how the creation of an image 'suspends the course of the world and of meaning' (GoI: 2005: 10, 11) is to see how recomposing the image of the world can interrupt meaning and facilitate a jouissance or excess of meaning.

Throughout the thesis, I approach the idea of political engagement as praxis, rather than as a means-to-an-end. The concept of the political, addressed in greater depth in Chapter 4, ultimately correlates with the idea of ethics. As I suggest, like Nancy, that political engagement is ultimately critical engagement, the thesis ultimately advocates an ethical approach that demands 'strength beyond certainty' (Nancy: RtP: 1997: 158) – strength that is required to sustain the political as a question, and therefore initiate paradigm changes. Here, 'ethics' no longer refers to universal morals, but rather to the way in which we generate and question the forms of knowledge that characterise morality.

Key loci on the incline from ontology to political engagement

To expand on the overarching aim of this thesis - to show how visual cultures might facilitate critical engagement with the apparatuses of power and knowledge that characterise global capitalism - I have identified a series of secondary objectives, which I visualise as key loci on the incline from the ontology of the common (being singular plural) to the political. These loci indicate the direction and organisation of my theoretical route.

My first objective is to recast discourses on 'the political' in a way that does not reinforce perceived differences between 'art' and 'activism', a difference fortified through theoretical approaches that continue to distinguish between politics and aesthetics. After problematising the differentiation between politics and aesthetics in Chapter 1, the thesis analyses Nancy's ontology, exploring how it gradually calls 'the political' into question. I finally address this question in Chapter 4 with reference to

political theory, contextualised within an arts institution.

My second objective is to explore how knowledge is structurally played out, rather than muted through theorising. After considering the commonplace separation of practice and theory and challenging this through critically engaged participation in a series of different cultural practices, I explain the importance of not trying to 'grasp' practice through theory. Instead, I look at how the functionalisation of practice gives rise to ethical issues, and how institutions can incorporate critical practices into cultural programmes in order to sustain ethical engagement with their audiences. Beginning with a series of disobedient interventions within a gallery (Tate), I look at how these interventions create new alliances. I go on to explore how institutions can respond to these kinds of critical practices through creative practices of their own.

My third objective is to modify the idea of inclusivity by using Nancy's expressions 'being with' and 'co-appearing'. Discourses on globalisation and global capitalism within mainstream media and academic theory often highlight issues of increasing social fragmentation and the continuing marginalisation of different peoples. As such the word 'inclusivity' has become a buzzword for cultural institutions, grassroots movements and political parties alike. By developing the ontology of the common, I aim to recast the idea of inclusivity through close attention to the nature of consciousness and the way in which we are receptive to others. This necessarily develops within the wider context of the institution, but in doing so, reframes the idea of inclusivity and asks what it means to 'include' others and to form social ties – what it means to 'co-appear'.

In addressing these secondary objectives, I will focus on the 'affect' rather than the 'effect' of 'the political'. This is to emphasise the thinking and creating that characterises political engagement, rather than its 'effect' or results. The thesis, structured as it is around the Nancean verbs of 'spacing', 'exscribing' and 'co-appearing', spotlights active processes. It is concerned with the significance of this dynamism, not simply its results. As such, I also use the phrase 'creative interventions' to discuss creative practices that some would consider 'art activism'. Again, this is a conscious decision to focus on creative processes as critical interruptions and communicative forces, rather than on how these interruptions fail or succeed in terms of any

predetermined political effectiveness.

In his 2015 book *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, Nancy speaks of the shifts in scale brought about by technologies that are capable of destruction beyond human conception. Changes in the scale of political and social issues are often directly caused by breakdowns of these technologies. Nancy believes that nuclear warheads, for example, introduce a 'balance of terror' in which national security becomes symbolised by the level of threat that each nation wields. For Nancy, this 'balance of terror' dissolves the link between the strong and the less strong in society, and in doing so breaks down the relational structures that characterise and facilitate political engagement (Nancy 2015: 21, 22). In such a political environment, where the *macro*political paradigms of global capitalism tip the scales of social issues away from the possibility of individual agency, I want to look at how we might reverse this process. By focusing on the micropolitical interventions of artists and arts groups, I suggest that it is crucial to sustain and respond to cultural practices during political crises. I argue that micropolitical cultural practices can create spaces of the 'in-common'; shared cultural spaces in which we can acknowledge increases in the scale of a given political issue, but allow for embodied exploration of human agency within these expanding frameworks of consciousness.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

The first chapter of the thesis, the literature review, explores a number of thinkers and significant texts that influence contemporary discourses around political art. It provides the setting for the ideas explored and developed in the thesis. It begins with a critical analysis of the writings of Jacques Rancière and Nicolas Bourriaud – two significant thinkers within art theory, who are often referenced by cultural institutions and curators. The review subsequently draws from writings by Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Paolo Virno, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, Gerald Raunig, Brian Holmes, Boris Groys, Gregory Sholette and Jane Bennett. These entry points into themes of social engagement and ontological theory raise further questions about political art practices, while the diverse viewpoints on political art outline the overall theoretical scope of the

thesis.

Chapter 1 culminates in an explanation of my choice to address the question of how micropolitical interventions of artists and art collectives might recompose the image of the world with reference to Nancy's philosophy. This chapter identifies a number of gaps in current discourses and explains why I go on to address these openings with reference to Nancy's concepts of spacing, exscribing and co-appearing. These three actions provide the theoretical base for each of the subsequent chapters of my thesis. The following three chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) address my initial hypothesis, exploring how critical engagement with dominant conceptual frameworks can allow us to recompose images of the world through distancing and divergence from established, 'validated' images that reinforce capitalist ideologies. These chapters develop my core argument: that cultural practices, in particular art, can enable us to engage ethically with 'globalisation' by continuing to recompose the image of the world, and sustain critical awareness of the *process* of 'recomposing'.

Chapter 2 - Spacing

Chapter 2 sketches out Nancy's incline from the ontology of being singular plural, starting with Nancy's quasi-ontological concept of spacing, and reflects on the idea of communication. Following on from a critical evaluation of the current literature on political art practices in Chapter 1, this chapter looks at how Nancy's approach to ontology diverges from phenomenological interpretations of being. This divergence is key to understanding his thinking of 'being singular plural' and being as a shared separation. With reference to my participation in the political art group Liberate Tate, I explore Nancy's understanding of art, and of the image. This understanding of art leads to a paradoxical dynamic – artwork that is dedicated to its 'unworking'. To see art in this way requires an active, or 'intentional', engagement with images. Crucially, however, this 'intent' is not phenomenological - it does not seek fulfilment in a subject/object relation - it is understood as a 'resolve' to think beyond phenomenological relationality.

This chapter explores the theoretical context of Nancy's writings. While the following two chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) develop critical discussions between Nancy and other

contemporary thinkers, this chapter provides a closer reading of those strands of Nancy's thought, beginning in his earlier texts, that outline the ontology of being singular plural. It considers how Nancy's writings have developed from his engagement with other philosophers and writers - Heidegger, Nietzsche and Bataille - and picks out a number of threads that continue throughout the thesis: the idea of existence as a state of being thrown into the world (looking at Nancy's response to Heidegger's 'Dasein'), the idea of the subject as progressively paralysed (turning to Nancy's writings on Nietzsche), the idea of communication as contagious (drawing from Bataille).

Chapter 2 considers how communication influences and forms political logics, and how the informal dissemination of a critical awareness can become the foundation for collective identities. It begins to analyse how collectives might interrupt and influence larger political discussions. In *The Ground of the Image*, Nancy states that the image seizes us through a contagion (GoI: 2005: 9). The chapter builds on Nancy's idea that communication, including visual language, is 'contagious', but that this can be approached with a particular kind of 'intent'.

Chapter 3 - Exscribing

This third chapter explores Nancy's approach to world-forming with close reference to the gesture of 'exscribing'. Exscribing, like spacing, is a drawing away from 'the real', but is necessary in the creation of a reality. This chapter addresses Nancy's idea of 'sense' and the ways in which we create a sense of the world. I look at how sense is constituted differently to meaning.

I approach the idea of 'exscribing' through curatorial practices with a grassroots arts collective, Art Action UK. Art Action UK is a London-based collective of artists, curators, gallerists and writers that offers an annual residency programme for artists who live and work in East Japan and who are responding to the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011. I am interested in how the group acts as a cultural catalyst and 'exscribes' meaning - how it generates a sense of the 'real' whilst moving beyond it. My role in the group - providing write-ups of talks and performances for the website, assisting with discussion events and co-curating an exhibition - provides the context for this third chapter. I reflect on these practices with relation to the idea of

communicating as 'exscribing'. In this chapter, I begin to consider how discourses develop within formal institutional settings.

Chapter 3 picks up the idea of sovereignty (initially raised in Chapter 2) with relation to Carl Schmitt's conceptualisation of 'the state of exception' and Paolo Virno's understanding of a 'cultural apocalypse' caused by mankind's 'exodus from state sovereignty' (Virno 2008: 56, 65). It begins by considering Virno's interpretation of the biblical concept of the 'katechon' alongside Nancy's concept of exscription. Virno's interpretation of communication as a 'constantly renewed deferral' (2008: 60) correlates with the gesture of exscription.

Exscribing is also linked to Nancy's perception of 'faith' as something pre-religious that works within, between and beyond cultural, religious, and political realities. This understanding of faith also reflects and responds to Maurice Blanchot's concept of faith as articulated in *The Writing of the Disaster*, firmly juxtaposing the idea of faith with art that responds to a disaster. I suggest that faith is an acceptance of non-knowledge that is implicit in the gesture of exscribing.[4]

Chapter 4 - Co-appearing

'Co-appearing' (*com-parution*) is an ontological gesture of mutual exposition with others. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy explains that 'Being-social is Being that is by appearing in the face itself, faced with itself: it is *co-appearing* [com-parution]' (1996: 59). Nancy says that 'co-appearing does not simply signify that subjects appear together… We must also wonder why they appear "together" and for what other depth they are destined' (BSP: 2000: 59). This chapter looks at how sense and meaning are played out within cultural institutions.

Chapter 4 considers the gesture of 'co-appearing' with close reference to Nancy's text 'The Compearance' ('La Comparution'), published in *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1992 and a later text in the sub-section 'Co-appearing' in *Being Singular Plural* (2000). I

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[4] Nancy describes faith as 'an act of non-knowledge as non-knowledge of the other in every act and in every knowledge of the act that could stand at the level of what James here calls (5:21, 24,2) "justification".' (D: 2008: 54) He clearly indicates that his conceptualisation of 'faith' refers to Judeo-Christian and Islamic faith in a monotheism, and situates this faith at the heart of 'the West'.

critically evaluate the idea of 'appearing' with reference to writings by Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou and Chantal Mouffe. I explore how Nancy's concept of co-appearing might resonate with Arendt's articulation of a 'space of appearance'. Following on from this, I address Badiou's idea of appearing as 'a transcendental legislation' (2001: lvi); and Mouffe's idea of agonism, which arises from her reading of both Arendt and Badiou.

Chapter 4 develops this theoretical discussion with reference to my active role within a cultural institution. In 2016, I worked as a volunteer learning assistant at Arnolfini for nine months, which enabled me to read and interpret these texts in practical, concrete terms. As such, this fourth chapter suggests critical methodologies that sustain creative agency within institutions. Reading Nancy in the context of institutional practices requires attention to the perpetual process of *being* an institution. Institutions are dynamic spaces of co-appearance. Although Nancy himself rarely engages with institutions directly, this chapter aims to emphasise the concrete significance of his writings. Chapter 4 argues that because cultural institutions are characterised by art, by images, they feature sites of shared separation. It is this shared awareness of absence and the subsequent questioning of meaning that give cultural institutions social value.

Having started this study with a consideration of the disobedient interventions of Liberate Tate, I close it through reflection on institutional practices, addressing a number of questions: how might institutions respond to the political gestures of art collectives? How can institutions develop dialogues that retain the cultural value of the institution, whilst acknowledging and sustaining signification that exceeds the institution itself? How does the institution 'co-appear' both with legislative and constitutional powers and with audiences?

To summarise

This study responds to issues resulting first from a conceptual division between aesthetics and politics, and second from the emphasis on the *product* of world-forming (the globe) rather the processes by which we 'globalise' or 'world'.

The division between aesthetics and politics often results in the simplification of artworks. It reinforces a perception of artworks as illustrations of pre-formed political

goals rather than embodied practices at the limits of the political. As such these analyses ultimately contextualise art practices within familiar patterns of globalisation, in which their communicative potential is reduced and they easily become commodified.

This study approaches art-making and participating in art (either as a spectator or an actor), as embodied, dynamic practices that function at the limits of, and beyond, the frameworks of global capitalism and neoliberal ideologies. It is concerned not with how art can carry out pre-formed political ideas, but how - through art-making and art-viewing - we might recompose images of the world. In particular it will look at how this process of re*com*posing is a *shared* distancing from perceptions of the world. I am interested in how we co-appear within this shared distancing – creating spaces of appearance in which individuals call into question their opinions and assumptions, and in which new discourses and ways of being together are sparked.

This consequently addresses the second concern – that emphasis on the *product* of world-forming hinders us from developing and communicating within these spaces. By maintaining an emphasis on 'world-forming', through a focus on spacing, exscribing and co-appearing, this study draws attention to creative processes, the decisions that distinguish and influence these processes and how these might bring about paradigm changes. Approaching these issues through the ontology of being singular plural opens up questions regarding who or what we consider to be agents – therefore situating artists, artworks, spectators and institutions all as agents of social change.

The thesis will outline a number of strategies that can generate and sustain such creative practices, without transforming them into political commodities. Although I approached this research with a set of particular aims, I was curious to learn how each creative group responds to neoliberal pressures, and the desire for political certainty. The contingent nature of communication, the need to sustain non-profit activities in a profit-led system of exchange and the pressure to function effectively are all concerns that I will explore throughout the three practices addressed in this thesis. I hope that this study will have relevance for artists, curators and cultural practitioners who want to advance the creative potential of their work, and that it will in turn open up new areas for further research.

In his article 'Art Today' in the Journal of Visual Culture, Nancy states: 'art is there every time to open the world, to open the world to itself, to its possibility of world, to its possibility thus to open meaning, while the meaning that has already been given is closed' (2010). This study will culminate in an analysis of how creative practices might 'recompose' – compose again and differently - images of the world: how art can 'open meaning' and facilitate divergence from dominant forms of exchange that characterise globalisation under the dominance of capitalism.

To plot the overall theoretical framework for my thesis, this first chapter draws from selected writings within art theory and political theory. Rather than attempting to offer a comprehensive genealogy of theoretical approaches to politically engaged art practices[5], the following section focuses on key texts within current discourses on contemporary political art. I identify particular theoretical positions and perspectives, not to provide exhaustive categories, but with the purpose of highlighting specific questions, gaps and openings within current discourses. My analysis of these texts defines the scope of my thesis and the angle from which I approach the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy. This chapter is the basis from which I begin to identify a pathway that traces Nancy's 'incline' from ontology to the political.

After discussing a number of approaches and their contemporary significance, I clarify why I have chosen to approach politically engaged art practices with particular reference to Nancy. I explain how his writing brings these texts into sharper focus and facilitates a more nuanced understanding of political art practices. Ultimately, I argue that Nancy's ontology of being singular plural provides a starting point for artists, curators and cultural practitioners to generate effective and dynamic social changes. I believe that Nancy provides a strong philosophical focal point that enables us to creatively engage with such art practices, with attention to how they are 'world-forming'.

Re-evaluating aesthetic histories

Responding to the linearity of the art historical paradigms that characterised modernist aesthetic theory, Jacques Rancière creates counter-histories. He is a key reference point

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[5] To list some examples, rather than a full list, other notable theorists include Theodor W. Adorno on aesthetics and propaganda, Walter Benjamin on mass culture and aesthetics, Jean Baudrillard on art, media and consumer society, Guy Debord, founder of political art movement Situationists International, the performances and writings of Allan Kaprow, which draw upon on the relationship between art and life and which inspired the Fluxus movement, and more recently the collaborative, practiced-based writings of Suzanne Lacey on art and politics. I have not chosen to trace these particular theoretical approaches given the extensive existing scholarship on these thinkers. Additionally, I felt that given the central question (how can the micropolitical interventions of artists and art collectives recompose the image of world?), subsequent research might have tended to centre on media representations of contemporary art rather than the practices themselves.

for a vast number of political art practices because he creates new perspectives on art history. He endeavours to go beyond 'post-structural' theory by critiquing the ways in which aesthetic theories have developed. By focusing on aesthetic fragments of social histories, he is able to deconstruct these histories and re-interpret accepted historic genealogies.

The Politics of Aesthetics (2004) marks Rancière's decisive turn towards aesthetics and defines the scope of his later writings on art and politics. In his essay 'The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics', Rancière says that it is the 'system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it' (2004: 12). However, he concludes the essay by saying:

> The arts *only ever lend* to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the *parcelling out* of the visible and the invisible. Furthermore the autonomy they can enjoy or the subversion they can claim credit for rest on the same foundation (2004: 19: emphasis added).

This comment epitomises an apparent impasse in Rancière's thought. Here, aesthetics is understood as a series of gestures, vocabulary and communications that are all inextricably linked to politics. However, he says that such gestures 'only ever lend' to projects of emancipation, even though their seeming autonomy depends on the same socio-political foundation. The use of the verb 'lend' is significant. For art to 'lend' insinuates that it can also 'retrieve' such gestures, speeches, visible and invisible 'parcels'; that these 'things' are always separate and divisible from a political project of domination or emancipation. Rancière appears to disregard the way in which these moments of commonality affect and transform both the 'project of emancipation' and the art practice itself. Rather than understanding that art is a form of communication that is part of a wider political environment, he reinforces a complete separation of 'art' and 'projects of emancipation'.

For Rancière, modernism put 'art' and 'life' on a level footing, and whilst maintaining the singularity of aesthetics, decreased the value of this singularity in relation to 'the

forms that life uses to shape itself' (2004: 23). As a result, some theorists believe that many 'socially engaged' art practices merely 'dress up' socio-political agendas[6]. Although this is a crucial issue, it is important to understand a difference between art having a political effect and art as 'political'. In other words, ascribing an artwork to an aesthetic regime immediately designates it as illustrative of a larger political agenda. On the other hand, if we approach aesthetic practices with a sense that emergent paradigms are fluid and mutable, it is hard to conclusively ascribe them to a specific agenda. Instead, we might start to see how an artwork can *affect politically*, rather than reinforce a perceived consensus. By articulating aesthetic regimes and critiquing them, Rancière makes it harder to approach aesthetics in this way because he focuses on how aesthetic gestures are anchored in specific foundations rather than on the emancipatory nature of the gesture itself.

However, at the end of the English edition of *The Politics of Aesthetics*, in an interview with the book's translator Gabriel Rockhill, Rancière speaks of 'novelistic micrologies' and says that although there is a limit to the way in which they can 'establish a mode of individuation that comes to challenge political subjectivisation', there is also 'an entire field of play where their modes of individuation and their means of linking sequences contribute to liberating political possibilities by undoing formatting of reality produced by state-controlled media, by undoing the relations between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable' (2004: 65). For Rancière, aesthetic regimes are initially literary and pictorial before becoming cinematic and photographic, and visual codes are a primary and defining stage within an aesthetic regime (2004: 33).[7] Perhaps the first step in this process is to unmoor aesthetic and political discourses from a perceived 'regime' by looking more closely at its linguistic roots, which in turn destabilise the foundation of the aesthetic regime. Rancière's later book, *Aisthesis; Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (2013) begins to do this more pointedly. It mines into the idea of an aesthetic regime and draws upon micro-political details that serve to fragment established aesthetic

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[6] This is the premise for Claire Bishop's 2013 *Artificial Hells*, which draws largely from Rancière's conceptualisation of aesthetics, and opens with a critique of the cultural policies of the 1997-2010 "New Labour" UK government, which used art as a legislative tool.

[7] Brian Holmes, in his essay 'Hieroglyphs of the Future: Jacques Rancière and the Aesthetics of Equality', states that the 'originality of Rancière's work on the aesthetic regime is to clearly show how art can be historically effective and directly political. Art achieves this by means of fictions: arrangements of signs that *inhere* to reality, yet at the same time make it legible to the person moving through it' (2001). This sums up the way in which Rancière articulates and begins to deconstruct aesthetic histories and fictions. However, as Holmes points out, for Rancière these signs 'inhere' to reality, and it is this separation from, and essentialisation of, reality that I would like to flag and call into question.

discourses. He creates multiple counter-histories within modern aesthetic history.

In *Aisthesis*, Rancière explores and defines thought patterns that categorise and interpret artistic spaces. The book consists of 14 'scenes', each of which address the 'aesthetic regime of art'. One of his key arguments in the collection is that 'art exists as a separate world since everything whatsoever can belong to it' (2013: X). He states that '[a]rt is given to us through these transformations of the sensible fabric, at the cost of constantly merging its own reasons with those belonging to other spheres of existence' (2013: XI). From the book's prelude, existence is catalogued as having separate 'spheres' and art is situated outside of these, 'given to us' as a specific and assimilable product.

Rancière says that readers of *Aisthesis* 'will be able to construct the history of a regime of art like that of a large fragmented body, and of a multiplicity of unknown bodies born from this very fragmentation' (2013: XIV). By splitting aesthetic histories into such fragments and forms, he initially appears to create an immobile history. His depictions of parts of this 'fragmented body' are separate and detached from the present. However, this process of 'fragmenting', of breaking down histories and re-evaluating and re-framing them, enables 'multiple bodies' to be born and counter-histories to emerge.

Nevertheless, Grant Kester, in *The One and the Many* (2011), critiques the way that Rancière focuses on this process of fragmentation and creation of spaces *between*. Referring to the consensus-based 'third way' of the 1968 protests, which he locates as the root of Rancière's logic, Kester states that he remains 'oddly dependent on an oppositional system of meaning' in which there are only 'active' roles and 'passive' roles that play instrumental parts in 'revealing' a core idea (2011: 102-105). Although Rancière tries to invalidate the opposition between the two roles, he relies on the idea that aesthetics embodies an enigmatic position *between* action and passivity, and believes that aesthetics have a 'civilising' mission that, once achieved, can bring about social and political change (2011: 42, 104). This means that political change, subject to the reformative power of aesthetics, is constantly deferred.

Rancière's method of critique - 'fragmenting' rather than 're-forming' - paradoxically

strengthens the historical presence of such a 'regime' within continuing social discourses. Through fragmentation, we are constantly reminded of 'the whole', which rather than disappearing or diminishing, becomes an overarching conceptual presence. Focusing retrospectively on a 'regime', even critically, perhaps hinders or limits interaction with an emergent aesthetic practice. Nonetheless, Rancière's texts provide the initial stage in the development of new political discourses.

In his review of *Aisthesis* in the journal *Parrhesia*, Jean-Philippe Deranty (2013) describes Rancière's 'strategy' by saying that he reduces 'the distance between conceptual elaboration and the object analysed, to transform the object of analysis into the subject of its own conceptuality, to let the subjects of practice unveil the conceptual knots at the heart of their practices'. Rancière's reinterpretation of aesthetic histories enables us to look beyond established aesthetic values and to recover the mechanisms of the perceptions that define them. Following this initial gesture of elucidation, we can begin to unravel, rethink and re-form aesthetic theory.

Negotiating oppositional paradigms

Nicholas Bourriaud is another significant theorist who arrived at a similar point of exposition to Rancière. Like Rancière, who describes the 'history of a regime of art as being like that of a large fragmented body', which through its fragmentation opens up spaces for 'a multiplicity of unknown bodies' to be born (Rancière 2013: XIV), Bourriaud recognises the need to liberate communicative interaction from modernity, which he depicts as a single historical trajectory and a single body of thought. However, unlike Rancière, he does not excavate aesthetic history or endeavour to fragment it. Rather, he focuses on negotiating the apparent divide between aesthetics and politics that results from this history and that characterises 'post-industrial' society. He uses the term 'relational aesthetics' (also the title of his 1998 book), which has subsequently become a key term in theoretical nomenclature.

Relational Aesthetics (1998) centres around contemporary art's inter-subjectivity and the increasing prevalence of relational art; art defined as much, if not more, by its form as by its final aesthetic product. Bourriaud's collection of essays addresses a central concern that such practices are 'reproached for denying social conflict and dispute, differences and divergences, and the impossibility of communicating within an alienated social space, in favour of an illusory and elitist modelling of forms of sociability, by

being limited to the art world' (1998: 82). For Bourriaud, relational practices are predicated on oppositional paradigms: activity/passivity, imaginary/real, creative/schematic. He tries to negotiate the divide *between* these opposites. The importance of the 'gesture' is central to his analysis. In his essay 'Art of the 1990s', he references a wide range of contemporary artworks and says that through 'services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks in the social bond…. So through little gestures art is like an angelic programme, *a set of tasks carried out beside or beneath the real economic system, so as to patiently re-stitch the relational fabric'* (1998: 36: emphasis added). Bourriaud again relies on a perceived separation between 'real economic systems' and art systems. By endeavouring to negotiate the divide between aesthetics and 'social bonds' without interrogating the foundations of this divide, he tends to oversimplify artistic practices and characterise them as 'divine' gestures, separate from reality, that serve to *repair* existing social bonds, rather than create new ways of experiencing commonality.

But he does recognise the need to create new 'ways of being together'. In his essay 'Joint presence and availability: The theoretical legacy of Felix Gonzalez-Torres', he makes the following statement:

> Reintroducing the idea of plurality, for contemporary culture hailing from modernity, means inventing ways of being together, forms of interaction that go beyond the inevitability of the families, ghettos of technological user-friendliness, and collective institutions on offer…. In *our post-industrial societies* the most pressing thing is no longer the emancipation of individuals but the freeing-up of inter human communications, the dimensional emancipation of existence (1998: 60: emphasis added).

Bourriaud here prioritises creativity, 'inventing ways of being together' and the 'freeing up' of communication. However, he reinforces a social divide by asserting that social responsibility, and subsequently power, is the duty of 'post-industrial societies'. By declaring 'being together' as dependent on the invention of post-industrial societies, this statement contradicts the emancipatory potential that he is trying to access because it insinuates that free communication is *not* a pressing concern within industrial societies.

Bourriaud's emphasis on embodied communication, on gestures, is a primary concern

and although form and aesthetics are important, they are secondary. He recognises that 'form produces and shapes sense, steers it and passes it on into everyday life' (1998: 83). He is concerned with the process of reimagining and reproducing, a process that prevents such projects from becoming familiar, assimilable and dismissible. When Bourriaud states that 'we must thus learn to "seize, enhance and reinvent" subjectivity, for otherwise we shall see it transformed into a rigid collective apparatus at the exclusive service of the powers to be' (1998: 89), he begins to uncover the idea that what is at stake is the *way* in which this transformation unfolds and *how* inclusive such communications are. However, he seems to do this at the expense of material production. He goes so far as to suggest that in contemporary art 'the production of gestures *wins out* over the production of material things' (1998: 103: emphasis added). The measuring of one against the other, of form over aesthetics, unfortunately seems to create a distraction from some of the more progressive nuances in Bourriaud's writing.

The tendency to quantify and compare aesthetics and form is characteristic of much contemporary theory and practice. For many theorists and artists, either material aesthetics define the value of the gesture or the gesture determines the value of the material product. Recent publications, notably Clare Bishop's *Artificial Hells* (2013), focus on the degeneration of aesthetics through the over-emphasis on form. *Artificial Hells* addresses the idea of 'relational aesthetics'. Bishop quotes Bourriaud in his 2002 book *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, where he states that 'it is the socius… that is the true exhibition site for artists of the current generation' and she defines this 'less in terms of society's users and inhabitants, than as the distributive channels through which information and products flow' (2012: 207: quoting Bourriaud in *Postproduction* 2002: 65). She states that this 'open-endedness stood against the closed meanings of critical art in the '60s and '70s' (2012: 208). This emphasis on the 'flow of information' as an open-ended phenomenon, one that works against the prescription of means and ends, offers a significant shift within aesthetic discourses. Bishop feels that shifts in artistic terminology, for example art as 'project' or a gallery as 'project space', indicate a 'renewed social awareness' which has not been fully theorised (2012: 215).

In her conclusion, Bishop summarises the book's core issue, saying that:

> [the] social discourse accuses the artistic discourse of amorality and inefficiency, because it is insufficient merely to reveal, reduplicate or reflect upon the world; what matters is social change. The artistic discourse accuses the social discourse of remaining stubbornly attached to existing categories, and focusing on micro-political gestures at the expense of sensuous immediacy, as a potential locus of disalienation (2012: 276).

This definition of the problematic is perhaps simplistic, referring to both 'artistic discourse' and 'social discourse' as if they were each separate and unified stances.

Bishop references Rancière, saying that for him 'the aesthetic regime is constitutively contradictory, shuttling between autonomy and heteronomy' and that 'there needs to be a mediating object that stands between the idea of the artist and the feeling and interpretation of the spectator' (2012: 278). But does the presence of a mediating object allow for development of theory *beyond* established oppositional paradigms? Might this not continue to facilitate a kind of repetitious ricochet between oppositional paradigms without opening up opportunities for new paradigms to develop?

After calling for a mediating object, Bishop reiterates her belief that it is important to *sustain* tension between social and aesthetic discourses, largely due to what she calls 'the new proximity between spectacle and participation' (2012: 277). She feels that social media has led to a merging of the spectacle with participation, which in turn has generated an 'endless stream of egos levelled to banality' (2012: 277).

Grant Kester disputes Bishop, saying that her writings in *Artforum* readily categorise and assume boundaries between 'aesthetic' projects and 'activist' works, defining the former as 'provocative', 'uncomfortable' and 'multi-layered' and the latter as 'predictable', 'benevolent' and 'ineffectual' (2012: 31). Kester believes that by classifying or simplifying these art practices, Bishop fails to acknowledge the importance of 'situationally responsive' work (2011: 32) and instead continues to 'reproduce the epochal consciousness that is typical of the modernist project' in which the positive potential of an artwork is summoned by a lack or loss within a specific historical moment (2011: 30). He also includes Bourriaud in this critique, because he believes that Bourriaud 'collapses all activist art into the condition of 1930s socialist realism' (2011:

31), and therefore simplifies socially engaged art practices and fails to address the diversity and complexity of such practices[8]. He asserts that, for Bishop and Bourriaud, 'progressive' art, for the most part, has to be provocative and disruptive. It must always act *upon* a given moment in history, a gesture that accentuates the aesthetic and political 'divide'.

Collaborative and communicative practice

Kester uses the term 'dialogical art' rather than 'relational art', which sets him apart from the 'post-structural' theorists he critiques. His 2011 book *The One and the Many* builds on an exploration of dialogical art undertaken in Kester's earlier book *Conversation Pieces* (2004). This term indicates yet another shift in aesthetic theory. It signifies a conceptualisation of art not as a separate or oppositional force, but as a dynamic and engaged form of communication. Such communication is never 'complete', nor does it negate or 'act on' histories. Rather it continues to inform these histories and to be informed by them. 'Dialogical art' approaches communicative gestures as multi-layered and 'incalculable' signs that have meaning and power but are not reducible to a single 'truth'.

This approach requires a constant letting-go of 'knowledge'. Kester's fundamental argument can be summed up in his concluding words: 'the creation of new knowledge regarding political and social transformations and the specific role that art can play in facilitating this transformation, requires the process of both *learning and un-learning via practice*' (2011: 226: emphasis added). As we have seen, Kester feels that other theorists do not sufficiently recognise the complex registers and site-specific nuances of socially engaged art practices. He feels that they are too closely bound to what he defines as post-structural ideologies[9] that subsume the radical potential of such practices because they approach them with assumptions based on specific art historical canons and ultimately situate them as nothing more than illustrations of art theory (2011: 54-56).

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[8] He is critical of the idea that art has an 'instrumentalising relationship to the material, against which art is defined' (2011: 35) and he believes Bishop and Bourriaud advocate this because they look for 'progress' in art and for that reason 'fix' the meaning of an artwork (2011: 35).

[9] e.g. for Kester, Rancière's thought is bound up in the Deleuzian/Spinozian idea that 'until we overcome our naive faith in our own conscious agency and come to recognize the "hidden" laws that structure and predetermine our ostensibly vocational actions, we will remain in "bondage"' (2011: 182). Kester believes that this leads to a belief in 'set' principles and in turn over-emphasises the value of 'shocks'.

For this reason, Kester focuses on what he calls (referring to artistic practices in Myanmar) 'the complex choreography of communicative interaction: the ways in which the cognitive and the haptic, action and movement, pose and gesture' that produce (and defer) meaning (2011: 149). It is this focus on the gestures that constitute a micropolitical intervention that, for me, sparks a new way of approaching such practices as an engaged theorist. Kester draws upon the significance of the deferral of meaning as well as its production and looks at each case study as a small microcosm in itself, and how each practice generates political questions within a global context, rather than presenting specific practices as emblems of pre-formed academic discourses.

Kester argues that 'the political always operates through an aesthetic modality, and even the most strident claim of *art pour la art* poetic freedom is political at its core' (2011: 37). Whilst I would agree with the statement that politics always operates though an aesthetic modality, the second part of his statement needs greater clarification, Kester's use of the word 'political' here suggests that an artwork has an essential 'administrative' core (that it is built around particular political values), and he perhaps inadvertently repeats the very functionalisation of art for which he has criticised others. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that 'poetic freedom is *politically affective* at its core'.

Kester thinks that post-structural philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze have supervised the process of 'privileging dissensus over consensus, rupture and immediacy over continuity and duration' and have built up 'extreme scepticism about organised political action' (2011: 54). He believes that post-structuralism is all about artists and writers enabling the 'ethical normalisation of desire and somatic or sensual experience' (2011: 54) and that this leads to the distancing of the artist and the viewer. Here the artist has a 'custodial role' and the viewer is always 'acted upon' (2011: 54). Whilst he makes a valid and important point about certain trends and their effect within the art world, he tends to generalise and to categorise many different thinkers as 'post-structuralist', even hinting at a kind of ideological co-option when he writes of 'thinkers who stormed the Sorbonne' and states that they constitute 'a kind of globalised theoretical *lingua franca* in the arts and humanities' (2011: 54)[10]. Ironically, in describing

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[10] Kester's tendency to make such generalisations is especially evident when he later writes about Nancy, who he describes as 'emblematic' of the idea that art must be the 'inverse of labor' (2011: 104). In short,

the limitations of these writings through limited references to their works, Kester readily commits their writing to a particular time and shuts down the potentiality of the nuances and complexities of these writings.

Kester's shift from relational theory, which tended to reinforce difference, to dialogical theory, which deconstructs oppositional paradigms, begins to create a kind of communicative synthesis that allows for a more nuanced understanding of micropolitical art practices. But to develop this further it is necessary to look in much greater detail at the concept of communication.

Paulo Virno's exploration of semantics in his 2008 book *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation* undertakes a finely detailed analysis of communication and its political significance, and is a point of reference in many articles and texts on art activism[11]. For Virno, our modes of communication are evidence of bioanthropological traits that distinguish people from animals[12]. Virno develops the idea of language and ritual as 'institutions'. He says that language 'concerns the single human animal only in as much as this animal is part of a "mass of speakers". Just like freedom or power, it exists only in the relation between the members of a community' (2008: 46). For Virno, language concerns 'the unknown' as well as 'the habitual' (2008: 49) it has no limits and yet it can close in on itself. He talks about the 'excess of semanticity', which 'is equivalent to a state of shapeless potentiality' and the 'defect of semanticity', which can lead to the over-definition and reduction of discourses into stereotypes: 'the world dries up and is simplified to the point of resembling a papier-mâché backdrop' (2008: 52). It is this tension that communication (and therefore visual language) negotiates. There is a risk that discourses can be articulated so thoroughly that they serve to negate their own potential. This question of communicability echoes Kester's solicitation to 'unlearn' as well as to learn.

Kester ignores Nancy's thread of logic that questions the approach to art as a site of production. Whilst Nancy understands art as a creative gesture, rather than positing it as the inverse of labour, he understands it as an 'excess' of labour, something that is not merely a tool to carry out a particular function, but something that operates *beyond* a function.

[11] For more on this see Alexei Penzin's interview with Virno in Meditations Journal no 25, entitled 'The Soviets of the Multitude: On Collectivity and Collective Work: An Interview with Paolo Virno', 2010

[12] 'Bioanthropology' is a key term and concept in the book. Virno addresses politics and language through an examination of biological and behavioural patterns, how these form the dynamics that sustain particular social relations.

Regarding communication, as the sharing of meaning through language, Virno develops a concept of the world stemming from the excesses and defects of semanticity. He understands the 'world' as 'a vital context that always remains partially undetermined and unpredictable' and aligns himself with Helmuth Plessner (whom Carl Schmitt writes about in depth), who understands humans as animals 'open to the world' (2008: 17). To paraphrase briefly, humans are animals that are determined by behavioural and physical characteristics, but they are also able to maintain a distance or separation from the state in which they exist. For this reason, humans are able to be 'open to the world'; to value indeterminacy.

One of Virno's central questions is: '[i]n what way can excessive drive and the opening to the world serve as a political antidote to the poison that they themselves secrete?' (2008: 24). Simply put, how can man's openness to the world perpetuate a freedom that perpetuates *further* freedom, rather than a recklessness that ultimately restricts openness to the world (for example violence that increases danger at the 'opening to the world')? Virno begins to trace a pathway between subjectivity, semantics and political engagement, and he draws out ethical and moral questions about how to negotiate the development from one to the other, often drawing on theological imagery. Whilst he refers to biblical metaphors, he traces their meaning back to basic philosophical questions that can be applied within a much wider theoretical framework. This highlights the Western bias of his writing but simultaneously begins to uncover mechanisms within Western thought.

Conceptualising 'the world'; political art practices and globalisation

Virno writes in detail about the biblical and political philosophy of 'katechon'. In a biblical context, the katechon is a force that limits evil by encompassing it and holding it within itself, but at the same time it provides the possibility of redemption. Virno says that katechon 'brings into check the excess and defect of semanticity'. It 'delays the end of the world. But the opening to the world, the stigma of the linguistic animal, consists precisely in this constantly renewed deferral' (2008: 60). At the heart of the concept of the katechon we find interdependent oppositional forces. This antagonistic tension is necessary for the continual formation of, rather than consolidation of, 'the world', a tension that resists both 'shapeless potentiality' and reductive stereotyping.

Although very different in scope from Virno's theories, the writings of political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau focus on the interdependence of art practitioners, activists and institutions and the significance of intercommunicative tensions that maintain and encompass difference. Mouffe's articulation of 'agonistics' advocates the need for dissensus to sustain openness to the world, and perhaps to sustain what Virno describes as 'constantly renewed deferral'.

In the preface to the 2013 edition of the (1985) book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, Mouffe and Laclau argue: 'Presented as driven exclusively by the information revolution, the forces of globalisation are detached from their political dimensions and appear as a fate to which we all have to submit' (2013; xvi). They reassert the need for democratic inter-communication within the development of 'globalisation'. Globalisation is often understood as a kind of independent capitalist force that eclipses micropolitical discourses. For Mouffe and Laclau, this global capitalist force is just one way in which the world functions: there are alternatives. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* calls for a re-interpretation of global political dynamics. It highlights the need for antagonisms and political tensions that sustain a more open and democratic development of global politics.

For Mouffe and Laclau, the crucial problem with liberal democracy is that it 'envisages democracy as simple competition among interests taking place in a neutral terrain - even if the accent is put on the 'dialogic dimension'' (2013: xvi). This diminishes the possibility of establishing a new hegemony, and marginalises anti-capitalist elements that had previously been more present in both right and left wing ideologies. In a much later essay, 'Institutions as Sites of Antagonistic Intervention' (2013) Mouffe advocates a 'radical critique fostering a strategy of 'engagement with institutions'' that enables us to envisage the conditions of a 'radical democratic' (2013: 68). Acknowledging, and working with, discordant dynamics in this engaged dialogue actively works against the binary categorisation applied to so many practices, a categorisation that often reduces both the potentiality of a political art gesture and the social value of an institution.

As discussed earlier, theorists such as Grant Kester criticise the disruptive nature of dissensus and consider it to have a traumatic impact. Mouffe, on the other hand,

suggests that if we are prepared for discord and accept it as a necessary political tension, rather than striving to create a perfectly harmonious, utopian society, we will be more able to develop new ways of addressing socio-political concerns, without experiencing dissensus as a traumatic 'shock'.

In his essay 'Flatness Rules: Constituent Practices and Institutions of the Common in a Flat World' (also published in *Institutional Attitudes*) art theorist Gerald Raunig calls for the institution of 'the common' (2013: 170). Like Kester, he speaks of the 'false choice between a neoliberal or a reactionary form' of art practice, and like Mouffe he believes that 'the art institution is capable of transforming the State apparatus from the inside' (2013: 172). He develops a theory of sociality as something that continually needs to be produced both between individuals and between individuals and institutions. His conceptualisation of the 'common' does not indicate homogenisation or complete harmony. On the contrary, instituting the common requires continual formation, re-formation and de-formation (Raunig 2013: 171); it is never 'fixed' or moving towards a specific goal.

For Raunig, a 'flat world' is one in which there is a continual modulation - but rather than modulating with a particular ideological goal in mind, the process of modulation is constantly initiated. It might be explained as a constant 'levelling-out' of social inequalities. Raunig calls for 'radical openness to questions of organisation' that would allow for 're-invention of the State apparatus from below' and he states that 'the institution of the common goes beyond establishing and preserving general accessibility, but rather makes the possibility conditions for becoming-common available' (2013: 173). Raunig's 'institution of the common' refers not just to equal opportunities within a given set of values (e.g. in a capitalist system), but also to the perpetuation of opportunities to experience commonality. Additionally, Raunig states that the institute of the common 'is where critical artistic practice also moves from the critique of the institution in the direction of instituting; it becomes an *instituent practice*' (2013: 176). Like Mouffe, he envisages a future in which a more cohesive society develops through engagement *with* institutions, rather than against them. Engagement 'with' creates opportunities for new discourses. This openness to unfamiliar global flows creates a possibility to transcend familiar paradigms of globalisation and form new commonalities.

To affectively transcend paradigms of global capitalism, we must engage creatively with existing institutions: not just cultural organisations, but our established practices in general, including our customs and conventions, which encompass the language we use and our habitual thought processes. As such, an increasing number of theorists are transcending the conceptual divide between aesthetics and politics and locating their point of departure in the indeterminacy of cultural practices and their creative potential, rather than in a perceived historical significance of specific forms.

Brian Holmes, in his essay 'Art After Capitalism' in *It's The Political Economy, Stupid,* points out that 'processual art explores the generative roots of any collaborative activity' (2013: 166). This indicates that by shifting our approach to art – by recognising art as 'processual', as a practice that requires creative engagement on the part of the viewer, rather than as a fragment of a larger cultural history – we sustain its vibrant creative potential. As such, Holmes calls for a 're-definition of art' (2013: 166) so that its creative potential is active through embodied critical engagement with the world around us. Here the convergent nature of art and politics becomes the starting point from which Holmes is able to write, albeit with an element of incredulity, about 'art after capitalism'.

Art critic and philosopher Boris Groys situates artistic aestheticisation *as* revolution. In his article in E-Flux journal, 'On Art Activism', he argues that artistic aestheticisation serves to defunctionalise technical and political tools. Because of this, it becomes a 'radical form of death' that creates objects for contemplation (Groys 2014). By creating representations of the world, we visualise it as a whole. This visualisation enables us to realise the totalising effect of our creative actions. Here the *process* of realising is of utmost significance because through this critical awareness we affirm a consciousness that is beyond the whole, and that has creative agency to act within in, disrupt and reform it. Groys says that 'total aestheticisation not only does not preclude political action; it creates an ultimate horizon for successful political action, if this action has a revolutionary perspective' (Groys 2014).

Artist, writer and activist Gregory Sholette responds to Groys' article in an essay in Field Journal, 'Merciless Aesthetic: Activist Art as the Return of Institutional Critique. A Response to Boris Groys', expanding and discussing the idea of aestheticisation as revolution with relation to institutional interventions. He points out that the revolutionary potential of aestheticisation isn't as 'jiffy clean' as Groys predicts, and he discusses ways in which this same process for aestheticisation is also evident in the increasing visibility of far-right political ideologies. Writing about spectacularisation, Sholette observes that '[i]t is not artistic ideals or critical theories but capitalism itself, with its seemingly endless destructive-creativity, that spurs the total spectacularisation of everything' (2016). Similarly, Groys draws parallels between aestheticisation and spectacularisation, but his emphasis is on the processuality of aestheticisation. Like Holmes, he spotlights the unfolding transformative potential of art in contrast to the final spectacle that is captured by capitalism, and which advances a scene in terms of its calculability. The constant renewal or reactivation of artistic practices is also emphasised by Sholette who, in his efforts to actively forget past debates about a perceived divide between aesthetics and politics, attempts to 'reboot' his perceptions of art activism. He proposes that to do this we must simply 'occupy, organise and repeat'. As such, he aims to focus on the immediate temporality of an artwork, and not on its 'tv-ready' spectacularity. He concludes:

> just as capitalist time can only ever offer the eternal return of the M-C-M commodity form, art action counters with its own perennial and redundant adversarial ontologies. Under conditions of post-democratic, ultra-deregulated markets, even these very temporary scraps of resistance against disciplinary time and space are disturbing to the moribund status quo (2016).

This idea of art introducing 'redundant' adversarial ontologies provokes questions regarding the implication of differing ontologies and the significance of their 'uselessness' within society. What are some oppositional philosophical studies of the nature of being? How do they prompt us to challenge and disrupt the status quo and to what ends? Sholette's statement perhaps alludes to the varying ontological discourses within visual cultures, such as Jane Bennett's writings on the ontology of 'vibrant matter' and Graham Harman's conceptualisation of object-oriented ontology, not to

mention the plethora of interdisciplinary visual practices that challenge and mutate our consciousness of 'being' and what we think of as 'art'. However, the very concept of '*adversarial* ontologies' is secondary to our consciousness of multiplicity. We can only be aware of adversarial ontologies because we exist as part of a plurality. As such, we need to address how the primary ontology of being-together with others is advanced through art, how the social significance of its redundancy unfolds in the world and how it provides opportunities for us to, as Groys says, 'aestheticise the world—and at the same time act within it' (2014).

How do Nancy's writings relate to political art practices?

Jean-Luc Nancy, born in Caudéran, France in 1940, studied philosophy in Paris and wrote his doctorate dissertation on Kant. His subsequent writings have reflected on the writings of Marx, Nietzsche, Breton, Heidegger, Bataille, Blanchot and Derrida amongst others, situating him within the tradition of continental philosophy, with its exploration of psychoanalysis, deconstruction and critical theory. Responding to the writings of 'post-structuralists' (many of whom reject this categorisation), Nancy's texts embody a critical relationship to dominant ideological structures, highlighting the radical relationship between language and knowledge, and fragmenting perceptions of history as a totality. Within this lineage of thinking, Nancy approaches themes of globalisation, religion, art, culture, disease, community, sovereignty and many more – addressing philosophical ideas through analysis of unfolding events. It is Nancy's expansive critical approach – demonstrated through over 50 books and manifold articles, catalogue texts and interviews - that gives his writing a contemporary relevance and urgency. However, these writings, developed from a Kantian philosophy of finitude and through a deconstruction of Christianity, have brought Nancy's philosophies into question, especially through the writings of speculative materialists, such as Quentin Meillassoux[13]. Although these debates are not central to my thesis, I will nevertheless advance a reading of Nancy's texts that might begin to address the alleged limits of Nancy's thought.

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[13] Although Meillassoux and Nancy forward new readings of 'post-theology', Nancy conceptualises atheism as necessarily relational to theism and looks at how religious ideology develops from pre-religious, philosophical ideas such as 'faith'. Meillassoux however, criticises the idea of faith, and thinks that Nancy's 'post-theological' faith exposes a limit to his philosophy. Chapter 3 considers the possibility of a non-religious faith. Chapter 4 reflects on the writings of Alain Badiou, whose philosophy has influenced speculative materialism.

As contemporary discourses move beyond the aesthetics/politics divide, there are still vital questions and ideas that demand critical philosophical analysis. The following paragraphs explain how Nancy's philosophical writings address specific gaps in contemporary art and political theory. Drawing together the issues and observations outlined above, I explain why I have chosen to respond to and develop particular emergent themes through a reading of Nancy. The brief summaries that follow serve as a reference point for my exploration of Nancy's writings, and indicate the scope of the thesis as a whole.

Exposing mechanisms of perception

As outlined, Rancière's writings act as a deconstructive gesture. However, whilst he fragments aesthetic histories, he continues to reinforce a sense of difference between aesthetics and politics. Nancy, on the other hand, approaches aesthetico-political semiology in a way that acknowledges concrete aesthetics but does not ascribe them to just one historical trajectory. He connects and moves beyond established 'meanings', and therefore avoids essentialisation.

This approach is illustrated by Nancy's writing style. In the introduction to her book *Jean Luc Nancy*, Marie-Eve Morin says that although Nancy defines things in a concrete way (X=Y), he continues to define and re-establish meaning within a given context, i.e. x=y but then y=z. She says that this creates a 'circular meaning' and that our perception and understanding of Nancy's thoughts, its meaning, should be found in this continual movement of understanding, so that the 'concepts start to *make* sense' (2012: 5). This mode of communication resonates with Nancy's perception of being and consciousness. For Nancy, 'to 'happen' is neither to flow (to disappear), nor to grow, nor to be purely present but to be continuously in the movement of arriving or 'acceding'' (2012: 33), so that to 'understand' is never a fully completed process, but is exposed to incomprehension.

Communicative gestures and linguistics

Bourriaud's spotlight on 'the gesture' highlights new questions regarding

communicative actions, especially when he claims that in contemporary art 'the production of gestures wins out over the production of material things' (1998: 103). Bourriaud references Guattari, for whom 'aesthetics must above all else go hand in hand with societal changes, and inflect them' (1998: 104). Key to Bourriaud's approach to art is that 'imagination seems like a prosthesis affixed to the real so as to produce more intercourse between interlocutors. So the goal of art is to reduce the mechanical share in us. Its aim is to destroy any a priori agreement about what is perceived' (1998: 80). Both Bourriaud and Nancy believe in the powerful agency of the imagination and of 'jouissance'. However, rather than destroying the 'a priori agreements about what is perceived', Nancy acknowledges the grounds that such agreements provide for the imagination. In other words, the real and the imaginary are part of a dynamism that characterises consciousness, or following Bourriaud, they produce 'intercourse between interlocutors'. Nancy focuses on this dynamic relationship, the movement beyond that which is already there, as his starting point.

Virno often writes of the 'linguistic animal' and the 'political animal' as two separate beings, but for Nancy, communication is initiated by, and yet beyond, linguistics, but is nevertheless a pre-requisite for politics. Communication allows for political engagement and the two are inseparable. However, like Nancy, Virno understands the 'world' as a 'vital context that always remains partially undermined and unpredictable' (2008: 17) and his writings on the excess and defect of semanticity, introduce an ethical concept of managing semantics in a way that creates a 'political antidote' to the evils secreted in the 'world' (2008: 24). Although Nancy understands 'communication' in a broader sense than semantic exchange, Virno's writings on semantics relate to the principles within the interpretation and production of meaning. Virno therefore offers a critical perspective on Nancy's writings, by looking beyond the creation of meaning and addressing the inevitable tensions within *governance* of meaning.

Commonality and community

Kester, in his generalisation of 'post-structural' theory, interprets Nancy's idea of an un-worked community as a reduction of 'all human labour to a simple expression of conative aggression, functioning only to master and negate difference' (2011: 105). He says that this results in 'a fetishisation of simultaneity and a failure to conceive of the

knowledge produced through durational, collective interaction as anything other than compromised, totalising and politically abject' (2011: 105). I would argue that rather than *fetishising* simultaneity, Nancy recognises the significance of these moments of sharing or 'un-working', rooted as they often are in durational collective interaction. Nancy is not dismissing the kind of interactions that Kester refers to, but he addresses the limits of communication within a given community, which is where these radical moments of commonality occur[14]. In this way, their logics and intentions are actually much closer than Kester gives him credit for.

However, Kester later asks an important question: '*How do we determine* which forms of insight, and which efforts to destabilise existing systems of meaning, are liberating or empowering, and which are harmful or destructive?' (2011: 113; emphasis added). This question concerns the political. Although Nancy's approach facilitates the continual reconfiguring of the limits in a way that allows for greater multiplicity and freedom, he recognises the need for structure. In *The Birth to Presence*, he states that although reason is appropriative, *irrationality* is 'more appropriative than reason itself, for it is so by annihilation' (1993: 180). We need rationale: principles and logics that determine which forms of insight are empowering and which are destructive. However, both Kester and Nancy highlight the need to address *how* these are determined. Part of the determining process is to allow for the continuing discernment of forms of insights, whether these are harmful or liberating, and this requires the opportunity for people to engage *with* the 'determining authorities'.

Political engagement

Mouffe, Laclau and Raunig develop the idea of engagement 'with' institutions. This engagement can be dissonant and oppositional, but the ultimate intention is to establish and sustain a communicative relationship with institutions that acknowledges the social significance of an institution and ensures a responsive relationship between audiences and stakeholders.

Philosopher Simon Critchley, in his essay 'With Being-with?', describes Nancy's

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[14] For Nancy, a limit exposed by communication, is not a 'place', but rather it is the 'sharing of places, their spacing.' (IC: 1991: 73)

ontology as a 'co-ontology' that provides the basis for a form of critique that leads to 'a post-foundationalist conception of inter-subjectivity that will provide a non-essentialist 'basis' for a critical ethics and politics' (1999: 58). Having established 'being-singular-plural' as 'first philosophy', Nancy develops the idea of 'being with' from the initial developmental stages in social awareness, through to 'being-with' in a political sense. His delineation of the concept of 'being-with' enables us to consider the social and political development of the kind of 'dissonant engagement' of which Mouffe and Laclau write. Nancy's detailed and ontological analysis of the conditions for interaction 'with' allow for a deeper understanding of this kind of engagement. This becomes particularly evident through his idea of co-appearing. Co-appearing, as will be considered, paradoxically refers to the appearance of an absence, or of that which appears as a disappearance. As such, Nancy's philosophy questions the idea that 'dissonant engagement' might lead to a new hegemony, instead drawing attention to how such engagement might exceed the hegemonic.

Co-ontology in art practice

Holmes, Groys and Sholette illuminate how current theorists are shutting down discourses on the 'divide' between aesthetics and politics, and are 'rebooting' aesthetic theory. This resetting (and active forgetting) of past discourses is possible through a shift of focus onto the agency of art, onto what Holmes describes as the 'lingering affective presence of art that creates an aesthetic atmosphere' (2013: 167). This focus on agency means that we refrain from ascribing a fixed political 'role' to a creative gesture. For example, Jane Bennett's 'adversarial' ontology of vibrant matter stems from creative engagement with what an assemblage can *do*, rather than defining what it *is*. She likens a vital materialist to a 'craftsperson' who works responsively with vibrant matter (2010: 60). Whilst their analyses of art and institutional engagement differ, both Groys and Sholette regard revolution and change as part of dynamic, open-ended creative engagement, in which the end result of an art activist gesture matters less than its trajectory, and the unpredictable assemblages it creates along the way.

Nevertheless, these approaches stem from a primary ontology of 'being singular plural'. Therefore, to adequately address the transformative potential of such creative projects demands not only a closer analysis of this co-ontology, but also a detailed study of how

this philosophy works throughout the development of a creative project from its initial formation, to how it is shared and transformed through broadening engagement. This simultaneously requires attention to how the ontological philosophy of being singular plural refers to shared distancing of individual bodies. Nancy's writings, as will be considered, address the significance of 'being with' – he explores how being is synonymous with appearing - that we unavoidably appear *with* others and that this shared co-appearing is what constitutes community. Throughout his writings Nancy conceptualises community as 'inoperative', in that it concerns being together in a retreat from a fixed identity, rather than in the formation of a fixed identity or 'togetherness'. This interpretation of community is key to understanding world-forming as the dynamic being-together of bodies constituting 'the globe', which can take place, as I have hypothesised, through the creation of images of the world. In this sense, images are the by-product of the process of being together. Nevertheless, as Nancy invokes in *The Creation of the World*: '[o]ur task today is nothing less than the task of creating a form or a symbolisation of the world' (2007: 53). However, the significance of this task is in 'being together' as separate bodies that share a distance, rather than in the representations themselves.

The significance of the 'image'

Before concluding this review to address Nancy's idea of ontology, it is important to look at the role of the image in developing a first philosophy that focuses on the nature of being. In *The Ground of the Image,* Nancy reflects on the role of the image as 'a manner of presence' (2005: 66). He says that '[s]ense requires the image in order to emerge from its meagre material, its inaudibility and its indivisibility. Sense requires sound, line and figure, without which it is as abstract and fugitive as the movement of a needle through the stitches of a piece of lace' (GoI: 2005: 67). Here, we see that 'being' requires an image – that ontology is visual. However, at the same time, the image functions by 'making *absence* a presence' because it 'does not do away with the impalpable nature of absence' and is concerned solely with 'immateriality' (GoI: 2005: 67: emphasis added). This complexity in Nancy's approach to the image is spotlighted by John Paul Ricco in his 2014 book *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*, where he points out that the image is the 'scene of a shared exposure to the infinite finitude of existence', and that it stages an intimate 'shared-separation' (2014:

29). This is a crucial observation to bear in mind before approaching the ontological significance of Nancy's writings. As Ricco emphasises, the image is an '*aporetic spacing* – a suspended path and a path of suspension' (2014: 137: emphasis added). For Ricco, Nancy's philosophy is dedicated to an 'unbecoming ontology of exposition and exposure' (2014: 86), explored through the concept of 'spacing'. Departing from this idea of an 'unbecoming' ontology, the next stage of my analysis will be to consider how 'spacing' embodies this philosophy of being. Ricco suggests that, for Nancy, 'existence is its own essence', and as such becomes 'divorced' from the ontological (2014: 75-76). I will reflect on this idea, and the possibility that Nancy's philosophy of being revolves around a continual process of 'divorc*ing*' which reaffirms the body as the site of ontology.

How might the intimacy of the shared exposure of bodies, and its subsequent scene or image, relate to the image of the world? In *The Ground of the Image,* Nancy gives the example of a literary image (from Edith Wharton's *Summer*) – the image of a girl standing on the doorstep of a building, framed by a village and surrounding countryside. He says:

> with the "girl"…an entire world "comes out" and appears, a world that also "stands on the doorstep", so to speak…: a world that we enter while remaining before it, and that thus offers itself fully for what it is, a *world*, which is to say: an indefinite totality of meaning (and not merely an environment) (2005: 4, 5)

For Nancy, this image has an 'intimate force', not in terms of what it represents, but through the force of the image represent*ing* – the ability of an image to touch consciousness (GoI: 2005: 5). This intimate force appears as 'a world' – in writing this image, and in imagining it, we participate in composing an image of this world. If, with Nancy, we understand the 'world' as the 'indefinite totality of meaning' that constitutes our consciousness of others' differing perceptions of the world, this creative gesture (of composing an image of this representation) recomposes the image of the world. Understanding the image as something that has an intimate force, that is a site of absence into which we cannot enter, has bearings on the central idea of recomposing the image of the world. An image appears as that which is absent – it exposes a separation. Consequently, the process of recomposing is facilitated by the way in which

being 'spaces' or 'divorces' itself from ontology, from already formed concepts and categories that show a set of existing properties and relations. To recompose the image of the world is to constantly affirm this separation or 'divorcing' of being, and to affirm its potentiality.

To summarise, the following chapters will investigate the development of Nancy's philosophy with regard to the concerns outlined above. Working with Nancy's choices of language, each chapter explores active, ontological processes. I begin by tracing the development of Nancy's concept of 'spacing' from that of an individual, to spacing of a collective identity (in this case an 'art activist' group). The first chapter will chart the progression of Nancy's idea of 'being singular plural' towards its political affect, further outlining the theoretical scope of the thesis. Subsequent chapters will develop this 'incline' towards political engagement in more depth and with reference to Nancy's gestures of 'exscribing' and 'co-appearing' before culminating in an analysis of how art interventions can enable us to recompose the images of the world.

Chapter 2 - Political art and 'spacing':
Reflecting on Nancy's 'quasi-ontology' with reference to the performance collective
Liberate Tate

The over-arching question of the thesis is: how can the micropolitical interventions of artists and art collectives recompose the image of 'the world', and why is this significant? To explore how political art practices recompose the image of the world with relation to Nancy's concept of 'world-forming', the research focus for this chapter is the concept of 'spacing'. The idea of 'spacing' reflects Nancy's analysis of the ontological - it concerns the nature of 'being'. Spacing is the sharing (*partage)* of being, a shared *separation.* This is key to Nancy's writings on being singular plural – a way of thinking that destabilises, and diverges from, phenomenological interpretations of being. In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy writes of 'singular beings' that are 'themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced,* by the sharing that makes them *others*' (IC: 1991: 6). Beginning with Nancy's writings on ontology, this chapter explores how Nancy's concept of 'spacing' relates to ideas of communication and community. It looks at how an art collective might embody characteristics of Nancy's 'inoperative community' – a community that is dis-functional within capitalist apparatuses: a community that 'withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension' (IC: 1991: 32).

Focusing on 'spacing' allows me to look at how a revised understanding of ontology, as non-phenomenological, can pave the way for engagement with 'the political' that facilitates 'recomposing the image of the world'. Nancy's text *The Inoperative Community* is central to this chapter. However, addressing key concepts from *The Inoperative Community* – particularly 'communication' – requires attention to the way in which Nancy's philosophy relates to and diverges from other thinkers such as Heidegger and Nietzsche, and in particular Bataille. Furthermore, I address the themes of 'spacing' and 'communication' through participation in the performances of art group Liberate

Tate. My aim is to observe and experience ways in which political art might embody characteristics of Nancy's 'inoperative community'.

The first part of this chapter looks at how Nancy's writings branch away from phenomenological approaches that emphasise individuality. It explores how Nancy's approach to ontology destabilises and abandons the idea of the subject - instead focusing on being singular plural. This section looks at the metaphors Nancy uses to evoke a deeper philosophical sense of 'spacing' and considers ways in which these motifs also characterise Liberate Tate performances. The second part of the chapter begins by looking at ideas from some of Nancy's texts on art. It again turns to Liberate Tate, to look at how this art group conceptualises its collective identity, returning to the chapter's focus on the idea of 'spacing'. The third part will further explore the writings of Bataille and will consider how both Nancy and Bataille reframe ideas of communication and community.

This chapter reflects on how Liberate Tate embodies Nancy's ontology and how the group's performances manifest a kind of 'inoperativity'. Accordingly, the chapter traces Nancy's 'incline' from ontology to communication with specific reference to 'spacing' as world-forming. My analysis centers on the way in which communicative strategies unfold within and beyond Liberate Tate, and explores the possibility that a sense of complicity in a creative process can allow us to 'recompose the image of the world'.

Liberate Tate: politically engaged art practice

Before commencing the analysis of Nancy's writings, and the way they reveal the particular potency of arts practices, the following paragraphs outline the history and context of the group.

Why Liberate Tate? Prior to starting this thesis, my research explored artworks that sparked critical engagement with social norms and challenged particular political paradigms[15]. For a long time, I have been interested in how artists and artworks can

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[15] For example, my MA dissertation reflected on the artwork 'Hong Kong Intervention' by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu. The artists gave 100 migrant domestic workers a plastic toy grenade and asked each participant to photograph the grenade somewhere within his or her employers' home. The resulting images were exhibited alongside images of the participants with their back to the camera so that they could remain

intervene in cultural discourses, generate a sense of accountability and suggest alternative approaches to specific micro-political issues. Over time, I became more aware of how such artworks can be absorbed into the art industry, and their potentiality reduced. As such I became particularly interested in art collectives that engaged directly with galleries and museums with the aim of reforming the institutions themselves - a process that I believe has significant repercussions in terms of the way in which artworks are 'framed' in cultural spaces, and their wider social significance. These collectives – including the Guerrilla Girls, Superflex, Voina – embodied critical and creative practices that resided both within and outside the perceived boundaries of the art world. Through my research into art activism and collaborative art groups, I came into contact with a member of Liberate Tate – who I interviewed at the start of this project. Having grown accustomed to the familiar BP logo throughout cultural spaces in London, the interview had a big impact on me and I joined the group. I felt that it was important to extend my research further, and approach these themes though embodied practice rather than as a detached onlooker. Although other groups in London, such as Platform and Greenpeace, also generated discourses around oil sponsorship of the arts, I was particularly inspired by Liberate Tate - by the way in which it was explicitly an 'art collective' and did not differentiate between aesthetic strategies and political strategies. In this way, the group moved beyond the aesthetics/political divide that characterised (and still characterises) so many approaches to art interventions.

In 2010, Tate commissioned a workshop exploring art and activism. They invited the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination to lead the workshop. A few months previously, the 'Lab of ii' had been dropped by the Nikolaj Contemporary Art Centre in Copenhagen because they had encouraged 'mass disobedience' during the Copenhagen Climate Summit. The group describe themselves as existing 'somewhere between art and activism, poetry and politics'. Rather than considering themselves to be a 'group' they define themselves as 'an affinity of friends' (Lab of ii 2013).

The workshop focused on the question: 'what is the most appropriate way to approach political issues within a publicly funded institution?' The participants collectively

anonymous. The interventions drew attention to political issues around the working conditions and rights of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong.

decided to address the issue of sponsorship - specifically BP's (formerly 'British Petroleum') sponsorship of Tate. Subsequently, Tate attempted to censor the workshop, a gesture that intensified the oppositional energy within the group. A majority of the participants then decided to continue the creative collaboration independently from the gallery, ending the workshop by placing the words 'ART NOT OIL' in the windows of the top floor of the gallery. This was the starting point for Liberate Tate who, six months later, performed an 'oil spill' at the Tate Britain Summer Party. The performance featured two women 'spilling' bags of oil-like molasses, hidden under their flowery dresses, as well as a larger 'spill' at the visitor entrance, undertaken by other members of the group.

Like the Lab of ii, Liberate Tate resists categorisation as 'activists' and prefers to be understood as a collective of performers and artists. They act within a larger coalition entitled 'Art Not Oil' which includes other activist, art and performance collectives including Platform, Shell Out Sounds, Greenpeace, the Reclaim Shakespeare Company, Rising Tide, the UK Tar Sands Network, and BP or not BP?, who communicate and act collectively to oppose sponsorship of cultural institutions by oil companies.

I joined Liberate Tate in 2013 and my participation has informed the following chapter. Because Liberate Tate performances have, over the years, included more than 500 performers, the 'boundaries' of the group are constantly in flux. To respond to the fluctuating levels of participation, the group distinguishes between those who are 'in the room' and those who are 'out of the room'. To identify a person as 'in the room' is to acknowledge that they regularly attend meetings and co-organise group activities on an on-going basis[16]. At the time of writing this chapter, I was 'in the room', and so when referring to specific instances of participation I identify as part of Liberate Tate, using 'we' and 'our'. However, there are points in the chapter, where I either refer to performances prior to my joining the group, or times at which I was 'out of the room' and these are indicated through referring to the group as 'they', to acknowledge my proximity and non-involvement in those instances. On the whole, however, I refer to the group as a separate identity in and of itself, taking care not to overstate my

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[16] These activities include performances, presentations at universities, assisting with workshops and participating in discussion events to which the group is invited and communicating with other groups in the Art Not Oil coalition.

participatory role, even though it influences the way in which I reflect on and respond to other members of the collective.

To effectively generate public awareness, Liberate Tate is required to have a strong collective presence, but at the same time the group does not want this presence to be assimilated and dismissed. Because Liberate Tate is an art collective, its potentiality lies in the creation of images. As Nancy explains in the first pages of *The Ground of the Image*, the image is 'the distinct' – it is sacred and set apart (GoI: 2005: 1). Accordingly, the creation of new images concerns the process of setting apart. As such, the group's presence embodies an amplified experience of shared separation. How might the 'shared separation' evoked in Liberate Tate performances recompose the image of the world? To address these questions, it is essential to examine Nancy's unique approach to ontology.

'Spacing' as ontological

This chapter is addressing how the 'task of creating a symbolisation of the world' is rooted in Nancy's approach to ontology, in particular his understanding of spacing as the shared separation that constitutes being. How does this approach affect perceptions of subjectivity? This section looks at how Nancy moves away from phenomenology to develop an understanding of being singular plural rather than individuality. This has significance in terms of how we think about communication and community, and consequently the political.

That which is not a subject

Nancy's writings challenge and deconstruct the idea of 'the subject'. For Nancy, the concept of the subject often affirms ideas of 'individuality', 'essence' and 'value', and consequently the idea of 'mastery' (Nancy: WCATS: 1991: 4). Critique of 'the subject' provides the starting point for the 1991 collection *Who Comes After the Subject?* - a collection edited by Nancy, Eduardo Cadava and Peter Connor - in which the use of 'who' focuses the reader on that which 'comes indefinitely to itself, never stops coming, arriving: the "subject" that is never the subject of itself' (Nancy: WCATS: 1991:7). Put differently, Nancy conceives of presence as a dynamic coming-to presence, a 'taking

place'. In *Who Comes After the Subject?* Nancy states '[t]he coming into presence is plural' (WCATS: 1991:8). He later (in 2000) publishes *Being Singular Plural*, but this idea of coming to presence as a *shared* appearing, characterises his approach to ontology, from his early writings (collected in *The Birth to Presence)*, right through to *The Disavowed Community*.

In *The Inoperative Community,* published the same year as *Who Comes After the Subject?*, Nancy explains that 'the *I* is something other than a subject' and he writes: 'That which is not a subject opens up and opens onto a community whose conception, in turn, exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject' (IC: 1991:14). As such he writes of 'being singular plural' and consequently of 'singularities' rather than 'subjects'. What are 'singularities' and how do they 'exceed the resources of a metaphysics of the subject'? Nancy challenges the idea of the subject as *that which causes* things, and instead he draws attention to the limits of this metaphysics. 'Singularity' concerns the relationality of being. This relation exposes the non-absoluteness of being. Nancy clearly states: 'singularity never has the nature or the structure of individuality' (IC: 1991: 6). Accordingly, referring to 'singularities', and 'being singular plural', rather than 'subjects' allows us to sustain awareness of the incommensurability of being and reminds us of the relational nature of community.

In his introduction the *The Inoperative Community*, Christopher Fynsk explains:

> While a singular being may come to its existence as a subject only in this relation (and it is crucial, in a political perspective, to note that Nancy thus starts from the *relation* and not from the solitary subject or individual), this communitary "ground" or condition of existence is an unsublatable differential relation that "is" only in and by its multiple singular articulations (though it is always irreducible to these) and thus differs constantly from itself. (Fynsk: IC: 1991: x)

Singularity is unidentifiable - it is characterised by the way in which a singular being is exposed to shared 'otherness' and shared finitude (IC: 1991: 23). This exposure invalidates the perception of a solitary subject, so that the concept of the individual lingers only as 'the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community' (Nancy: IC: 1991: 3). What is important to Nancy is how being is constituted by shared separation, the condition for communication and community. Importantly, singularity

does not originate in anything (it does not originate in an individual 'subject') but is a relation that calls to attention the non-absoluteness of a singular being.

Nancy's 'quasi-ontology'

What is unique about Nancy's approach to ontology? Ontology is the field of thought that branches from metaphysics to focus on the nature of being, and how this constitutes reality and its properties – the ontic. For Nancy, writing in *Being Singular Plural*, ontology is, canonically, first philosophy – exploring the nature of being is the primary way of thinking philosophically about reality.   However, he says that philosophy needs to 'recommence' and 'to think in principle how we are "us" among us, that is how the consistency of our Being is in being-in-common, and how this consists precisely in the "in" or in the "between" of its spacing' (BSP: 2000: 25, 26). He describes his thinking of 'being with' as a 'minimal ontological premise' structured by the 'spacing' of things and people (BSP: 2000: 27, 28).   Accordingly, Nancy introduces his interpretation of ontology as the 'being with of all that is' that is 'itself bare and impossible to evaluate' (BSP: 2000: 4). Here we can see that Nancy's thinking regarding ontology spotlights the *relation* between ontology and the ontic, and this emphasis on relationality means that the concept of 'spacing' cannot be assimilated into a category of ontology. In turn, this demands the 'recommencing' of thinking and prevents the finitude of philosophical thought or the closure of the philosophical 'field' of ontology. Perhaps for this reason, Nancy articulates the need to rethink the 'incline' between ontology and the political. His writings suggest that reflecting on the *relation between* ontology and the ontic can alter the development of theory and its influence.   This is a kind of 'quasi-ontology', a term I will use to distinguish Nancy's understanding of ontology as the 'spacing' or 'distancing' that causes things and people to appear. As outlined, I am interested in how Nancy's quasi-ontological stance characterises his interpretation of the image and how recomposing an image generates a conscious spacing from, but relation to, the ontic.

Nancy's quasi-ontology differs from ontological analyses in phenomenology.   It demands relinquishing the idea of 'the subject'. In simple terms, phenomenology frames phenomena as subjective - rooted in human consciousness – and affirms the existence of 'subjects' and 'objects'. The word 'phenomenology' (*phainomenon*) indicates

the study of appearances. To approach an idea phenomenologically is to look at how events happen to individuals and are experienced by separate subjectivities. This consequently leads to analysis of how individuals act with intent towards objects. Although Nancy writes extensively on 'appearing' - as will be considered in chapter 4 - he approaches it through his quasi-ontology.

Although ontology is the study of 'what is' (as opposed to phenomenology which is the study of what appears), Nancy asserts that 'what is' is not fixed or absolute, and that it appears as contingent and incommensurable, as a spacing that exposes shared separation. For Nancy, therefore, the idea of appearing characterises his quasi-ontology. In *The Sense of the World*, Nancy clearly articulates this idea: 'the *world* invites us to think no longer on the level of the phenomenon, however it may be understood (as surging forth, appearing, becoming visible, brilliance, occurrence, event), but on the level … of the dis-position (spacing, touching, contact, crossing)' (SoW: 1997: 176). Philip Armstrong, in his essay *From Appearance to Exposure*, spotlights this passage and goes on to describe the term 'spacing' as 'touching on or *at* the very limits of the phenomenological tradition.' (2010: 18) Nancy touches at the limits of the phenomenological tradition because he destabilises the idea of appearing as the appearing of a subject or object, but rather as the appearing of an absenting presence (a shared-separated spacing). For Nancy, being is characterised through a shared spacing, a shared awareness of the incommensurability of the other. In *The Fragmentary Demand* (2006), Ian James comments 'it is more true to say that, like Derrida's thought, Nancy's philosophy grows out of phenomenology in general and could more properly be characterized as post-phenomenological' (2006: 39). In this way he neither adheres to, nor entirely rejects, phenomenology.

Armstrong references James, who later states that Nancy's 'decisive break from phenomenology … occurs, perhaps, at a moment of greatest proximity or closeness to the phenomenological account' (2006: 96). Armstrong comments: 'Nancy's affirmation of exposure in his writings becomes most resonant when dealing with descriptions of phenomenological appearance' (2010: 17). For Nancy, appearing indicates the shared separation of being-with and, as Armstrong reminds us, 'there is no 'in itself' that is not already immediately 'with.' (2010: 17) So where Nancy's writings touch on phenomenology, they do so in order to complicate and question the idea of appearing

as a simply phenomenological matter, concerning subjects and object, instead asking us to reconsider what 'appearing' really is. Following Nancy, we can begin to understand being and appearing in terms of ontological spacing.

So far, we have established that 'spacing' indicates a relation rather than a subject or object. Spacing is not 'the spacing of a subject', rather it is the shared separating that allows singularities to appear as incommensurable presences. What other aspects characterize 'spacing' and how has Nancy developed the idea of spacing with relation to other contemporary philosophical texts?

Spacing as sharing – how Nancy's philosophy diverges from Heideggarian thought

The development of this quasi-ontology can be traced back to Nancy's doctorate, which explored the idea of freedom with reference to Kant and Heidegger. Nancy diverges from Heidegger because his quasi-ontology focuses on the relational idea of singularities as beings constituted by a shared separation, or exposition. Additionally, Nancy's writings emphasise 'sense' rather than 'meaning' – the ability to *be receptive*, rather than the ability to attach meaning or signification to sense, although the two are concurrent. Although the idea of 'sense' will be explored in more depth in the following chapter, it is important to address it briefly now, in the context of spacing, because it further illuminates how spacing is 'shared'.

Nancy's understanding of 'sense' is articulated with great clarity in his 1997 text, *The Sense of the World*. For Nancy, *things* exist - existence is not limited to things that understand themselves as existing. A stone has a weight and a 'thereness', which exists even when the stone isn't 'thrown', or 'manipulated by or for a subject' (SoW: 1997: 62). In other words, for a stone to 'exist' it does not have to be appropriated by a sentient being. On the other hand, Heidegger understands the '*world as the accessibility of beings'* - he states that 'the stone is without world', 'absolutely deprived of world' (Heidegger (1983) 1995 edition: 196-199). For Heidegger, a stone is *for* a Dasein, it is not itself 'open' to the ground or able to sense. Another way of saying this is that both Nancy and Heidegger think that the 'world is sense' but Heidegger thinks that there is no significance **outside** of this world of sense, and Nancy thinks that the world of sense is the *shared exposition* of singularities. For Nancy, Heidegger fails to recognise the

exposition of different beings to each other, of singularities arriving, being-thrown or being-abandoned (SoW: 1997: 61-63). Nancy understands the unlimited expenditure of being – the precipitation of being – as synonymous with a shared sense of exposition.

Simply put, Heidegger thinks that humans form the world but Nancy thinks that the shared exposure of singularities (the sharing of sense between humans *and* objects) constitutes, and consequently forms, the world. This is a small but fundamental difference. In other words, for both philosophers, being *is* sensing and stems from a concrete reality, even as it alters this reality through sensing. For Heidegger, sense leads back to, and is contained in, singular beings. But for Nancy sense is something that, whilst it leads back to singular beings, it is shared and cannot be reduced to, or contained in, a singular finite being. Nancy's understanding of 'being' can therefore be understood as less nihilistic, for although being is still finite, it is infinitely so.

Heidegger refers to being as 'having' or 'not having' a world, and in this way he situates being as 'possessing' sense, as withdrawing from concurrence (Heidegger (1983) 1995 edition: 196). Nancy also understands that whilst we share sense in the first place, we also partially withdraw from this concurrence. However, for Nancy being is 'singular plural' and we can never entirely contain our sense of the world. We are always spacing (world-forming) and sharing sense. As such, we cannot 'possess' sense, because it is the very condition our consciousness, the nature of being-with.

Nancy, whilst he acknowledges the finitude of existence, extends Heidegger's thought by reasoning that, if being is exposed to its own difference and to its finitude, it creates a space of freedom that is both shared and infinite. This infinite 'spacing' at the heart of this interpretation of ontology provides a liberating potential. If we understand the world *as* exposition, we arrive at the realisation that as we (singularities) articulate ourselves, we form a world at the limits of ourselves, and this is a shared experience; it creates and perpetuates a shared space of freedom, an un-appropriated space.

The opening at the limit of being is necessarily shared with others, because it is created through exposition, through contact with other beings. And whether these are sentient beings or objects, they all form 'weights of contact' (SoW: 1997: 61). This contact between beings and objects exposes the limits of signification. Here, beings are *toward*

each other but inassimilable. However, Nancy believes that without 'being-toward' there would be no world. The world is the being-toward of all that forms it.

This chapter is developing the hypothesis that creative interventions, artworks and art performances heighten our awareness of 'being-towards' because they magnify the sense of being-with. Through the exposition of beings and objects that are toward each other, art puts a question into play, rather than illustrating a pre-formed idea. In turn, this question implicates the spectator, turning them towards the unfolding assemblage of the art and including them within it. How does Nancy use metaphorical imagery to help us understand 'spacing'? How can these images help us understand the ways in which Liberate Tate embody a sense of shared separation, of spacing?

How does Nancy visualize 'spacing'?

Nancy uses a number of motifs in his work to describe spacing and to help readers abandon the idea of the subject: the subject as 'paralysed'; being as 'abandoned'; spacing as 'precipitation'. The following paragraphs take a closer look at these motifs with relation to Liberate Tate and the group's performances.

> The subject as 'paralysed'

> The heavens with no Self, with no Supreme Being, are the heavens delivered from the necessity of subjectivity…
>
> …they are heavens opened onto their new truth. No longer the abode of the world's support, they are the *free spacing* in which the world is cast without reason, as if by the game of a child. ('Dei Paralysis Progressiva': BtP: 1993: 56: my emphasis)

In 1988, Nancy contributed the essay 'Dei Paralysis Progressiva' to a collection of works under the title *Nietzsche in Italy,* and which is later published in *The Birth to Presence*. The volume addresses ontology and representation, specifically in Western thought. These essays forward Nancy's perception of ontology as a movement away from 'an identity', as a becoming that never 'is'. This particular essay considers the paralysis that affected Nietzsche in the final years of his life. Nancy develops an understanding of this paralysis to explain 'the death of God' and the idea that 'the Self is an ontological

paralysis' (BtP: 1993: 55). In this text Nancy uses the motif of the subject as 'paralysed' to further articulate his deconstruction of the subject. The text reframes the concept of subjectivity. Nancy looks at how a singularity paralyses its own finitude and nullifies the 'subject'. Nancy calls this 'absolute presence', a presence placed 'in front', so to speak, of its own production (BtP: 1993: 50). He says:

> This life need not mediate itself so as to appropriate its substance in the form of a subject. It simply exposes itself to its end, just as it has been exposed to the space of the play of the world. Its end is a part of this game; in its space it inscribes the trace of a name… in the same way that each time, with each name of history, a singular trace, a finitude whose limit puts into play each time anew the whole spacing of the world, inscribes itself. *Each name, each time that its subject is progressively paralyzed, discloses, that is, inscribes, a new spacing* (BtP: 1993: 57: emphasis added).

For Nancy, the figure of God is present as death or nothing. It is the figure of the divine that 'takes away all identity' (BtP: 1993: 51). He writes that death 'precedes itself' in the figure of the divine 'creator', and that 'God presents himself as a paralysed creator of a caricature of creation' (BtP: 1993: 52). Why is this? The subject, as Nancy explains, is that which is produced by the self, a 'relation-to-self' (BtP: 1993: 53), and it is his focus on this *relation* that allows his thinking to diverge from phenomenological thinking. If we recognise that this relation-to-self cannot originate in *a* subject, we begin to transcend phenomenology. Nancy explains that for this relation to take place, there must be a 'moment of the outside-oneself', and that this moment is 'death' (BtP: 1993: 53). Here, death is a 'nullity' in which the subject is rendered immobile and non-*being*.

There is a 'presenting' of singularity (a presenting that is singular plural) that precedes the compulsion to relate to oneself and produce a subject. It is this 'spacing' that characterises Nancy's approach to ontology. It is a form of 'death', of no*thing*ness, which leads to an understanding of the subject as paralysed. As will be considered, the paralysis Nancy writes about is 'progressive paralysis' – a continuous process rather than a final, frozen state. This recognition is important, because it allows us to comprehend the finitude of the subject and consequently 'paralyse' this finitude by not allowing it to be the focus of being, of ontology. Instead the focus is on being as a relation, which

allows thinking beyond the phenomenological.

Nancy explains: 'Subjectivity does not attain to present anything but its own absence. Yet this absence is so much its own that it is not an absence at all… it is the vanishing of a presence in the very process of its presentation' (BtP: 1993: 55). How does this relate to images and to art in particular? Art takes identifiable forms - drawings, installations, performances - and these forms can become subjects, with specific meanings. However, art also discloses an absence, a shared separation that means that a complete meaning cannot be extracted from an image. The 'paralysed' image 'mediates' - it brings into play a relation.

Turning to Liberate Tate, the group has constructed a recognisable identity. Prior to performances, rehearsals play an important role in establishing a consistent 'Liberate Tate Walk' and 'Liberate Tate Voice', with the intention that there is uniformity within the group and that some individuals do not stand out more than others. The collective endeavor is to sustain a calm, but authoritative 'tone' throughout all their performances. Often, members of the group wear a trademark black veil during performances.

This constructed identity has a specific purpose. One member of the collective explained:

> "We have an interesting relationship with Tate… I think they understand that we're not going to damage the art and we're not interested in hurting the art… they know who we are because we have quite a few signifiers; we wear all black and we may wear veils. We have the Liberate Tate pace and the Liberate Tate voice. I think they've come to know, not what to expect, because we change what we do, but the tone. We're not going to go crazy and smash things up."[17]

This identity plays an important role for the collective. The use of familiar signifiers allows continued access to the Tate. Liberate Tate is also able to maintain a persona within the media, which sustains an overall capability to generate further support. Why is this the case? As outlined by Nancy, the presented self is paralysed. By presenting itself as a paralysed 'subject', Liberate Tate asserts itself as a familiar presence, one

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[17] From a personal interview in 2013

whose actions are limited and unthreatening. Because its identity appears as easily 'graspable' and disarming, the illusion of a subject allows the group to repeatedly intervene and become mediators by creating new performances. As such the group generate and re-establish a relation with Tate and with Tate audiences. It is in this relation, in this mediation, that Liberate Tate generates the potential for diverging from the established ethics of the gallery. The decision to use visual artistic language to approach the political issues at stake has arisen from the sense that 'traditional' protests and activist approaches are too easily refuted, dismissed or assimilated. By appearing as familiar, it risks counteracting the very incentive for its performative approach. To truly engage Tate and the public, Liberate Tate has to constantly use new ways to suspend the 'appropriative thinking' of the audience.[18]

Here, the idea of a 'subject' acts as a kind of Trojan horse, a hollow vessel for the unexpected. The Trojan horse is an empty 'thing' that has no power in and of itself, but it allows for movement and transferral. At the end of 'Dei Paralysis Progressiva' , Nancy explains that the 'paralysis' of the subject is endless, 'it fixes the subject's regard on the eternity of its nothingness' (BtP: 1993: 57). Here the 'trojan horse' of the 'subject' allows for continual mediation and spacing. For Liberate Tate, the presentation of a paralysed identity allows for new spacing, for the composing of new images that disrupt and alter the familiar image of oil sponsorship within Tate, instead exposing this as a kind of cultural 'caricature'.

Being as 'abandoned'

Nancy's essay 'Abandoned Being' was first published in the French poetry and art magazine *Argiles* in 1981 and is part of the collection of essays that constitutes *The Birth to Presence*. 'Abandoned Being' centres on the motif of being as 'abandoned'. This motif requires us to relinquish perceptions of an 'initial position of being' - the idea of a subject that does things - instead regarding this as an 'empty position' (BtP: 1993: 57). At the outset, Nancy writes: 'From now on, the ontology that summons us will be an ontology in which abandonment remains the sole predicament of being, in which it

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[18] In the introduction to *The Birth to Presence* and with reference to Dante, Nancy speaks of the 'question of preventing philosophies, of *preventing appropriative thinking'* (BtP: 1993: 6: my italics).

even remains - in the scholastic sense of the word - the transcendental' (BtP: 1993: 36). The quasi-ontological concept of 'spacing' allows us to think about the way in which abandonment, as the distancing and withdrawal of being (the spacing of being) is its 'sole predicament', and at the same time 'spacing' means that being remains 'transcendental' - beyond thought.

Abandonment, Nancy explains, is the *condition* of being, not being itself, which cannot be explained using the words 'it is' (BtP: 1993: 39,40). He writes: 'Being *is* not its abandonment, and it abandons *itself* only by being neither author nor subject of abandonment. But there is abandoned being, and *there is* does not mean *it is*' (BtP: 1993: 40). This affirms Nancy's approach to singularities, not as subjects that can be articulated by a pronoun that affirms separate things (it is), but through the pronoun 'there' (is). 'There is' acknowledges the existence of singularity plurality whereas 'it is' identifies a specific singularity. Here, language embodies the sense of being that Nancy wants to evoke. Being, conditional on abandonment, is prior to an identifiable subject, and cannot be entirely summed up in a particular 'meaning' or identity. Again this affirms the idea that being concerns a relation rather than a 'subject'. Later in the same essay, Nancy refers to his approach to ontology as 'temporal' - it is an ontology that has no fixed subject or object, but indicates being as that which is incessantly disappearing.

What relevance does the motif of being as 'abandoned' have for artists? Performance, photography, film, painting - all art - concerns images. Recalling Nancy's words in *The Ground of the Image* (written many years after 'Abandoned Being') where he states that image affirms sense, that it is 'without an "inside"' and that sense that is affirmed is 'nonsignifying but not insignificant' (GoI: 2005: 10, 11), we can begin to see how images disclose an absence. An image is constituted by the withdrawal of being - it evokes a sense of something that is non-signifying - something that cannot be summed up with a simple 'meaning'. An image is an image because it is abandoned. An image exaggerates the sense of abandonment that is the condition of being.

What of art activism, which has a political message, a political 'will'? In 'Abandoned Being' Nancy refers to Heidegger's 'philosophical will', and goes on to say that 'all our spiritual exercises must be rid of the will, must disengage from "exercise" and "spirit"' (BtP: 1993: 43). This seems to clash with the apparent intentionality of art activism.

However, I believe that closer attention to art activist practices shows ways in which art disrupts political 'will' thus facilitating a radical approach to 'the political'. Turning to Liberate Tate in particular - how does this group's presence embody Nancy's ideas of 'abandonment'? In particular, how does it withdraw from an 'identity'? And what significance does this have in terms of its engagement with the political?

Although the group constructs a specific identity - for example, performers wear black veils - this identity is a constructed and dynamic part of the groups 'image' and aesthetic. During internal creative group activities, the aim is often to withdraw from this consciously created 'identity' and to focus on what 'there is' within and beyond the group (rather than what 'it is'). It is through this process of 'withdrawal' or 'abandoning' that individuals creatively engage with each other and compose new perspectives and interventions.

The awareness that 'abandoning' is necessary to create a new image or performance, is at the heart of the collaborative process of Liberate Tate. Each person is required to participate in 'round-the-table' discussions and encouraged to take part in creative sessions in which the aim is to generate a collective creative energy, and not necessarily a specific result. This establishes a general feeling of openness and receptivity that supports and cultivates the creative potential of the group.

Being as 'precipitation'

Years after writing *The Birth to Presence*, in *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy states that '[f]rom faces to voices, gestures, attitudes, dress and conduct, whatever the "typical" traits are, everyone distinguishes himself by a sort of sudden and headlong precipitation where the strangeness of a singularity is concentrated. Without this precipitation there would be, quite simply, no 'someone'" (BSP: 2000: 8).

'Precipitation' evokes raining, falling or emptying. It can also be used to describe someone behaving without thought. Similarly, Nancy describes precipitation as 'headlong' and 'sudden'. It occurs through the abandoning of 'thought' and the surrender to sense. It is in this place beyond 'thought' that 'the strangeness of a singularity is concentrated' and that 'someone' becomes distinguished, without

becoming a subject.

What does Nancy mean by 'the strangeness of a singularity'? As considered earlier, with relation to *The Inoperative Community*, 'singularity' is the word Nancy uses to remind readers that shared exposure to otherness constitutes being, and that being concerns a relation rather than a subject. This otherness can be understood as a strangeness that is most prevalent and 'concentrated' when a singular being abandons the 'typical' through a 'headlong' precipitation. It is precipitation that creates 'someone', even though this 'someone' is inappropriable - they cannot be reduced to an appropriable subject.

In her book *Jean-Luc Nancy (Key Contemporary Thinkers)*, Marie-Eve Morin explains that for Nancy, ontological difference is based on the idea that 'nothing' is not a 'no-thing', but the thing itself as it empties out its 'essence' (2012: 34). Nancy thinks that 'being' turns into nothingness as soon as it is posited (Morin 2012: 34), in other words, it cannot be *a* being. If we recognise that 'being' is a process of 'emptying-out', we reaffirm being as precipitation, or spacing. Such precipitation occurs not in one specific moment, but in the way in which being opens itself to the contingent and the unexpected. In other words, being is the (shared) sensing of the world that touches on what is anterior to thought. Thought essentialises sense, therefore generating an essence that is once again emptied out. However, many philosophers, taking a traditional phenomenological approach to being, focus on 'things' rather than the emptying out, or precipitation of, 'things'. The latter acknowledges a dynamic relation that enables us to be conscious of 'things' whilst recognising their incompleteness and 'no-thing-ness'.

We might understand this sense of being as precipitation through Liberate Tate's *The Reveal*, an artwork in which 9 performers, wearing recognisable black veils, scattered £240 000 of specially-designed bank notes (depicting the faces of Lord John Brown and Nicholas Serota). The performance was very literal and had a specific purpose - to spotlight the relatively small amount of money that Tate receive from BP and to argue that Tate does not need this sponsorship. Nevertheless, it is the artistic performance itself that makes this protest different from other non-art protests. And it is in this difference that we find the idea of being as 'precipitation' embodied and exaggerated - 'concentrated' as Nancy says.

Sense is not totally abstract, it is brought about *through* attitudes, dress and conduct and textures but cannot be reduced to these things. The falling notes drew attention away from the performers and on to the image on the paper, and these images drew attention to the relationships that shape institutional decisions. Here the image itself is significant, but as an indicator for a relational bond that is not strongly evident to Tate audiences. In this way *The Reveal* embodies an amplified sense of 'precipitation' - it manifests a falling away from the typical perception of the gallery to expose a new relation, one to be critiqued. Although they were quickly swept away by the staff, the notes were pointers that encouraged others to 'empty out' preconceptions of the gallery and of oil sponsorship. It was the performance as 'artistic' as opposed to 'activist' that changed the way that people engaged with this critique.

The suddenness of the performance and the obvious 'strangeness' of the performers arrested the attention of gallery visitors and staff. As the paper notes floated down over the spiral staircase of the Tate Britain, children reached out to grab them and people bent down to pick up the 'money'. Through curious engagement individuals can experience an amplified sense of how being opens itself to the contingent. And it is through this immersion in *sense*, prior to clear-cut thought, that other ways of seeing and thinking can arise.

Spacing and singularity

Throughout his life, Nancy has written extensively about art and for exhibitions and projects. This part of his oeuvre includes exhibition texts and essays, and he has influenced conceptual threads in a number of films. Nancy has collaborated on projects with artist Phillip Warnell and his 2000 autobiographical essay *L'intrus* inspired a film of the same name by Claire Denis. Whilst these significant texts clearly place Nancy's philosophy into the context of contemporary cultural practices, they are not main theoretical reference points for this thesis. Because my focus is on the incline from ontology to the political, I have chosen to centre my analysis on texts that have a broader analysis of philosophy, community and the political. I feel that drawing on Nancy's non-art texts allows me to analyse Liberate Tate, Art Action UK and Arnolfini in a way that emphasises their radical potential within and beyond discussions about

contemporary art. By and large, I purposefully do not approach Liberate Tate with reference to the images that Nancy analyses in these texts, images that through such analysis, might begin to define or reinforce a particular art historical canon. Nevertheless, Nancy's close attention to individual artworks can provide a powerful lens onto key ideas such as spacing and singularity, and for this reason the following paragraphs will briefly look at two particular texts *The Muses* and *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*. These texts consider singularities and praxis within the context of contemporary art and provide insights that help plot the incline from ontology to the political.

Nancy reminds us in *The Ground of the Image* that an image has 'force' and that it affirms sense and suspends meaning - a suspension that interrupts our sense of the world and alters how we experience the world around us (GoI: 2005: 10, 11). In his writings on art, he frequently turns to well-known images. In *Being Nude: The Skin of Images,* his poetic readings of specific paintings such as Rembrandt's *Bathsheba in the Bath* and Goya's *The Nude Maja* firmly contextualise his philosophy within the field of art theory. Importantly, they recompose images of these famous artworks, asking readers to look at these images again differently. Why is it important to 'recompose' such images? Writing of the distance between the audience and nudes in painting and photography, Nancy states:

> This ambiguous proximity is also an opportunity for thought, if, for thought, it is a matter above all else of remaining stripped bare of all received meaning and figures that have already been traced. The nudes of painters and photographers expose this bareness and suspense on the edge of a sense that is always nascent, always fleeting, on the surface of the skin, and on the surface of the image (Nancy: 2014: 4).

Here we read familiar vocabulary, such as 'expose' and 'sense'. Nancy turns to the image as a 'surface' that provides an 'edge' of incommensurable sense. Here, images expose a bareness, an absence that gives a sense of suspense and possibility. Without this sense, it is impossible to imagine alternative images of the world and possibilities for being.

The 'problem of art'

In *The Muses,* Nancy addresses the plurality of arts and the plurality of worlds. The

book's opening essay - 'Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One? (Conversation on the Plurality of Worlds)' - considers the way in which art is singular plural. Nancy writes, 'Art isolates or forces there the movement of the *world* as such, the being world of the world, not as does a milieu in which a subject moves, but its exteriority and exposition of a being-in-the-world, exteriority and exposition that are formally grasped, isolated and presented as such' (M: 1996: 18). Here, 'being-in-the-world' refers to the 'very springing forth' of being, its 'spacing'. The plurality of artistic expressions amplifies the singularity of art, particularly when these expressions or practices push the boundaries of what we think of as art. Art, as a formal presentation of exteriority, should not be thought of in terms of the subject, but in terms of singularity. Nancy imagines art's singularity as always 'just around the bend', not fully perceptible as "art" and just beyond our full comprehension (M: 1996: 4).

The obliqueness of art is what constitutes something as 'art' and characterises 'the problem of art': 'The singular plural/ singular is the law and the problem of art', Nancy writes, 'as it is of "sense" or of the sense of the senses, of the sensed sense of their sensuous difference' (M: 1996: 13/14). This absent singularity - a singularity that is just around the bend - means that art remains ungraspable even as we can sense it. How does Liberate Tate embody this kind of relation, even whilst creating a graspable and clear political message? And how might such an embodiment 'force the movement of the world' (M: 1996: 18)? One particular performance epitomises the way in which the singularity of art has the ability to 'isolate or force the movement of the world' - the 2012 performance *The Gift*.

On 7th July 2012, over a hundred Liberate Tate 'art-activists' offered a 'gift' to the Tate. The gift was a 16.5 m, 1.5 tonne artwork: a wind turbine blade installed in the Tate's Turbine Hall. The artwork, a direct reference to renewable energy sources, drew attention to BP's sponsorship of Tate. As with any donated art, Tate was obliged to discuss the donation at board level. A few months after the intervention, Tate declined the artwork and offered to have it recycled. Liberate Tate collected the wind turbine blade from a storage unit in London and returned it to Wales. Although I did not experience this performance firsthand, I feel that it exemplifies the disobedient and interventionary character of the group's performances. Watching footage of this performance had a strong effect on my perception of the group prior to my

participation - it made me more aware of the complex dynamics of creative interventions.

Liberate Tate's *The Gift* was a gesture in which the offering of a gift had a rupturing effect: the act of offering became intensified as a movement of arriving, rather than of having arrived. The process of intervening was sudden and unexpected - a spacing 'where the strangeness of a singularity [was] concentrated." (BSP: 2000: 8). And this intervention was shared with a large number of performers and a large audience. Unlike previous performances, the identity of the group remained ambiguous or un-obvious - the participants did not wear black clothing or black veils. As such the performance had a greater sense of abruptness and antagonism.

How does this artwork epitomise 'the problem of art'? In other words, how does the singularity of this performance remain ungraspable whilst generating a particular sense of the world? Granted, there is a clear political goal in the performance - to flag up and criticise oil sponsorship of the Tate and to lobby Tate to cut ties with BP. This can be understood as a deconstructive gesture - Liberate Tate do not advocate for a new agenda, they aim to liberate the gallery from an existing agenda. The group has an antagonistic presence within the gallery, generating a space for critical thought. Whilst the political goal is specific in one sense, it opens onto ambiguity. The group is often challenged by those who ask: 'what do you propose instead?' The answer to this is not within the remit of the group - they are happy for their actions to be simply deconstructive, disrupting discourses to allow for new ideas and approaches to develop.

This ambiguity, and perhaps the sense of an alternative being 'just around the bend', is amplified through the fact that these performances are *art* performances and not 'traditional' protests. Art presents the 'exteriority and exposition' that constitutes the world. This exteriority and exposition is a condition of being, but art *presents* it and demands that we become aware of this *sense* of exposition, even if we might not articulate it in specific terms. In the case of *The Gift* - one of Liberate Tate's more antagonistic performances - the wind turbine blade appears as an external presence, an uninvited gift within the controlled gallery space. The performance took advantage of the clauses within Tate policy that allowed this performance to be legal. More importantly, however, the performance arrests the attention of audiences and reveals

ways in which this cultural space resists open discourse, the ways in which those in power use the cultural prestige of an art gallery to influence visitors through advertising (and green-washing) a fossil fuel company.

As Nancy writes, 'Art isolates or forces there the movement of the *world* as such…' (M: 1996: 18). Here we see that Liberate Tate literally forces their presence into the Turbine Hall, changing the experience of the staff and gallery visitors, shifting perceptions of the gallery. It is through sense, experience and perception that we compose the image of the world, images that characterise our environments. Liberate Tate forces, or isolates, an event within Tate that disrupts an existing sense of the gallery and of BP. This disruption, although micropolitical and offering no alternative, affects perceptions of cultural spaces and familiar brands. This is not futile because such gestures incrementally alter the way we think about the world around us, gradually shifting our focus onto political issues (environmental issues) that have been purposefully obscured, to generate a sense of urgency.

Art as exteriority

As discussed, Nancy writes of 'exteriority and exposition of a being-in-the-world, exteriority and exposition that are formally grasped, isolated and presented as such' (M: 1996: 18). Nancy quickly clarifies the meaning of 'being-in-the-world' in this context - 'being-in-the-world' is synonymous with 'being-*of*-the-world' (M: 1996: 19). Nancy is keen to emphasise that we are singular plural and therefore part of the world (and constituting the world), we are not separate subjects *within* the world. What does it mean to 'formally grasp' exposition? Surely a 'formal grasp' serves to affirm a particular signification and to adhere to a convention, and Nancy clearly writes that art 'disengages the world from signification', that it 'dis-locates' common sense (M: 1996: 22). This dislocation allows us to critically engage with what we might consider to be normal or ordinary, and calls for a new way of being-with. Here, Nancy's use of the word 'formally' evokes a sense of seriousness, a sense of something being done in a 'correct' way. But this correctness does not accord to a predetermined etiquette or ethics, it is a correctness that is 'in its own right'.

Later in the same essay, Nancy writes of the limits of phenomenology when 'the single

theme of an "appearing" cannot respond to the clear-cut - and cutting - discreteness of a ground that withdraws and retraces itself in forms' (1996: 32)[19]. He goes so far to say that the 'things of art' are 'themselves phenomenology…because they are in advance of the phenomenon itself' (1996: 33). Nancy's descriptions of art as 'formal' and 'discrete' help us understand that art is immanent, that it is a 'patency' (1996: 34) - an openness that cannot be reduced or measured with relation to other 'things'. Through this very patency, art is always in advance of signification and is not answerable to anything other than itself. Art is the presentation of presentation, the presentation of 'spacing'.

Some years later Nancy briefly returns to this idea of 'discreteness' in relation to spacing, in *Being Singular Plural*. In the context of speaking of the 'Other', he says that 'Being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us and the rest of the world, as between all beings*' (BSP: 2000: 19). Here he uses the adjectives 'punctual' and 'discrete' to describe spacing, words that connote formality. Could spacing be the opposite, 'belated' or 'attached'?

The word 'discrete' implies a separation or distinction. In the context of understanding art as a singularity, one that is 'just around the bend', this discreteness refers to the separating that constitutes being. This separation or distinction constitutes the exteriority and exposition of being. And it is this sense that is 'grasped, isolated and presented' in art.

'Punctual' implies that something happens at a 'proper' time. To consider spacing as happening 'improper' time implies an inappropriate gesture, one that is relational to an intended outcome. But spacing cannot 'fail' or be 'improper', because it is necessarily open to possibility. By the same token, it cannot be 'proper' in a relational sense, because it is indeterminable and open to the contingent. However, it is 'punctual' in that it is *proper to itself*; it is 'on time'. Spacing is synonymous with time as an irreversible continuum.

Art practices embody this exposition, both through the creative performance of making an artwork, and through the way in which audiences and participants engage with art. Making a deconstructive political gesture through art, rather than through traditional

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[19] A form is understood as a 'ground that withdraws' (M: 1996: 32)

means of protest, calls for different engagement. It calls for attention to how we are 'of-the -world', how we can embody a patency that makes space for social change.

The appearance of *The Gift,* as an uninvited, inappropriable and external force, dislocated normal social dynamics within the Turbine Hall. As Liberate Tate slowly wheeled the turbine blade into the gallery, one security guard attempted to stop them from by lying down in front of the blade. In this extraordinary moment, this representative of the gallery embodied a traditional gesture of dissent and protest against Liberate Tate. At the same time, one member of Liberate Tate calmly repeats to him 'this *is* happening, this *is* happening'. In literal terms, the performance - punctual, discrete and formal - had the force of an exteriority that could not be stopped - it was a performative exposition. As such, in a theoretical sense, the performance 'force[d] there the movement of the *world*' (M: 1996: 19), because it altered the dynamics of the gallery and the behaviour of those in the gallery. In addition, it isolated a power-dynamic, critiquing it through a kind of joyful antagonism.

Tate, as the focus (and space) of this antagonism had limited options - they could either decline the artwork or they could accept it. Either way, the artwork would sustain the presentation of exteriority and exposition. In the case of it being accepted, the artwork would sustain the disruptive presence of Liberate Tate, it would stand out against the BP-logo-imprinted walls, pointing to and critiquing Tate's ethics. Or in the case of it being declined, as it was, the turbine blade was ejected from the space. Although this rendered the artwork temporal, it is recorded in gallery paperwork and shared by Liberate Tate through video documentation. The absent artwork remains as part of the Tate archive and is catalogued as part of art history. What is the significance of this record? How are such art practices recorded when they situate themselves as outside of the art institution? The next section looks at Nancy's idea of 'cataloguing' in this unique contemporary context.

Cataloguing in a digital age

In 2006, Nancy's follow-up book to *The Muses - Multiple Arts: The Muses II* - was published in English. Again, the book is a collection of essays on art, more specifically on the processes of art, including 'making' and 'cataloguing'. In the essay 'Catalogue' in

Multiple Arts: The Muses II, Nancy writes about how the catalogue produces the 'conditions for visibility' (2006: 149). The essay is a close analysis of François Martin's 1979 exhibition in Amsterdam: *The Air Show.* Consequently, Nancy's analysis stems from attention to the traditional exhibition catalogue, although he does suggest that a catalogue can exist in a minimal form of a list of titles (2006: 149). The following paragraphs, however, will draw on Nancy's essay 'Catalogue' to consider cataloguing in the contemporary context of Liberate Tate performances and the group's use of social media.   Interpreting these performances in the light of Nancy's essay, requires understanding that Nancy's writings on painting revolve around the idea that painting presents (rather than represents) the world, so that his analysis is relevant for all images - painted, photographed or performed – regardless of their form.

As 'disobedient interventions' each Liberate Tate performance is temporal and requires documentation. However, aside from the archival record of *The Gift* - a formality for the gallery - the performances remain largely undocumented within the art institution. Nevertheless, these interventions are 'catalogued' in a way that continues to give them visibility - through the Liberate Tate website and through press coverage and social media platforms.   These forms of cataloguing allow Liberate Tate to maintain a dynamic position both within a*nd* outside the art institution. This section argues that digital technology enables Liberate Tate to catalogue its work in such a way that it continues to have an antagonistic and incommensurable presence within the art world. It suggests that Liberate Tate is therefore able to intentionally embody a constantly renewing relation to the political, a relation that prevents its work from being subsumed and shut down. The group's intention to sustain a critical openness within an arts institution is paradoxical because intentionality is fundamentally a phenomenological concept. Here however, I am suggesting that critical openness requires a certain kind of intentionality. Just as Philip Armstrong refers to the way in which Nancy's writing touches 'on or *at* the very limits of the phenomenological tradition' (2010: 18), here I am suggesting that political art practices touch on the limits of intentionality, where intent opens up onto the non-phenomenological and requires audiences to let go of phenomenological thinking.

Being within and outside the art institution

For writer and researcher Emma Mahony, Liberate Tate 'operates at an interstitial distance' from Tate (Mahony: 2017: 126). In her essay 'Opening Spaces of Resistance in the Corporatized Cultural Institution: Liberate Tate and the Art Not Oil Coalition' in the Museum and Society journal, she looks at how the group maintains an 'interstitial' or 'internal' distance to the Tate. Mahony comments that, from this distance, Liberate Tate (and the ANO coalition) 'open up spaces of resistance ultimately capable of rewriting the cultural sector's corporatised value system' (2017: 126). For Mahony, Liberate Tate is an example of a collective that adopt a 'negotiated moving position' between two approaches - reformation from within an institution and self-government outside of the institution (2017: 132). It is this 'moving position' that allows Liberate Tate to create distance or space within an institution.

Returning to Nancy's writing on cataloguing - he considers how artworks are not founded on the spaces that support them, instead artworks 'partition' themselves off and in doing so, they 'slice into' the space supporting them. Nancy rarely writes about institutions directly, and here his focus is on the articulation of space that happens through the 'partition and distribution' of painting. Nevertheless, this has implications for exhibition spaces, and in this context Nancy's language helps us visualise how Liberate Tate 'slice into' the cultural institution of Tate, creating what Mahony describes as 'spaces of resistance'. Just as for Nancy, partition and distribution allow visibility, these spaces of resistance allow for a renewed visibility of the workings of an institution. He writes: 'The catalogue enumerates the incisions that are primarily an enumeration of the space they divide. Vision is itself dependent on this act of division. Although the existence of the catalogue may diminish ad infinitum, it will never be reduced to nothing' (2006: 150). Cataloguing work - naming it, sharing it, documenting it - makes visible the ongoing act of dividing and affirms artworks as incommensurable.

How does Liberate Tate catalogue its work? Works are named during group meetings prior to each performance. Each intervention is recorded by a film-maker and a photographer. There is a social media team, who immediately disseminate photos and messages through Twitter and Facebook. Prior to each performance, participants are briefed to use the same hashtag, to ensure a cohesive and concentrated presence on social media. The group often invites journalists from newspapers and media sources - for example The Guardian. At times, we have been joined by journalists from other

countries who are documenting global climate change activism. Video documentation is one of the most important aspects of cataloguing Liberate Tate's work, as it communicates with audiences directly and affectively (this chapter will later look at how the group communicates in a 'contagious' way). With the declining popularity of printed news and the increased use of online news platforms, video footage has become central to how mainstream media sources cover Liberate Tate performances. This is further enabled through video-sharing platforms such as Vimeo and YouTube.

The immediacy and apparent transparency of video documentation amplifies debates around corporate sponsorship and fossil fuels, and these debates quickly proliferate through Twitter and Facebook and on the comments section of newspaper articles. Mahony comments on the significance of social media and press coverage: 'The success and longevity of the counter public spheres Liberate Tate create in response to their actions is greatly assisted by the extensive press coverage they illicit and the parallel debates they inspire on social media platforms' (2017: 137). Even 'negative' responses, for example critical responses by the columnist and Turner Prize judge Jonathan Jones, serve to magnify Liberate Tate performances. However, as comments and opinions spread, the language used to describe these performances can shift and begin to reframe the artworks as simply 'protests', glossing over the more complex dynamics at play.

Cataloguing as 'interference'

Nancy writes that '"to paint" means to be subjected to this interference of world, word and painting' and that this interference forms a 'supplement' - an 'extra' - that means that art continues to open onto a 'supplement of world' - the continuation of world (2006: 154). The catalogue 'gives free play to the interference' because it is simultaneously the site of interference and a part of it, erasing itself but allowing this free play to take place (2006:154). Nancy references Martin's exhibition text that states that the exhibition is concerned with the "exhaustion of the subject". Cataloguing as interference and a site of interference continues to 'wear out' the subject, so that the gradual exhaustion and fading of the subject means that it paradoxically becomes a trace (of absence) that is 'infinitely exhausted' (2006:154).

Here we can see that for Nancy 'interference' liberates so that, recalling his writings in

The Inoperative Community , '[t]hat which is not a subject opens up and opens onto a community whose conception, in turn, exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject' (IC: 1991:14). In other words, we might think of cataloguing as something that allows us to understand how artworks exceed subjectivity. The catalogue presents and re-presents artworks, so consciousness of the artworks opens up each time within an altered and altering world. In this context, we can begin to understand the catalogue as something that, through visual and written language, re-presents artworks in a way that also exposes the artwork itself as a site of interference. This means that the audience for the catalogue becomes aware that in observing or reading about an artwork, they embody the withdrawal and suspension of meaning, allowing the work to continue to become a provocation for thought rather than an affirmation of a particular meaning.

When cataloguing takes place through websites and social media, there is a tangible sense of how catalogued artworks continue to open onto an altering world. For example, Twitter provides analytics that indicate the impact and activity of a Tweet. Whilst I will go on to critique the use of metrics within cultural analysis, the existence of this technology reveals (as well as embodies) the amount of 'interference' caused by an artwork and its documentation. Similarly, Facebook 'shares' and 'likes' mean that documentation spreads in unpredictable directions. Although social media creates 'echo-chambers' in which individuals increasingly engage only with those who share the same worldview, there is still potential for these platforms to create interferences. Regardless of political affiliation, art demands a very particular kind of engagement - it provokes questioning, rather than illustrating or affirming an already-held belief - and this constitutes 'interference' in that it requires critical engagement regardless of the context. Climate activists also engage critically with Liberate Tate, as demonstrated by the Twitter conversation cited earlier.

Cataloguing and social networks

In their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello critically examine the ever-changing structures that sustain capitalism, especially acknowledging the ways in which creative practices and countercultures are often subsumed into capitalism, thus creating this 'new spirit'. Although the book was published in 1999, prior to the proliferation of social media platforms, Boltanski and Chiapello address the

role of networks in sustaining the empiricism that is necessary for capitalism to flourish. Writing of the 'radical empiricism' of networks they comment: 'Rather than assuming a world organized according to basic structures (…), it [radical empiricism] presents a world where everything potentially reflects everything else: a world, often conceived as 'fluid, continuous, chaotic' [referencing Vincent Descombes], where anything can be connected with anything else, which must therefore be tackled without any reductionist aphorism' (1999[2005]: 144). Nineteen years later, we can see this manifest in references to 'fake news' and the way in which this phrase is used to justify capitalist agendas. Nevertheless, social media continues to evolve in ways that demonstrate self-awareness regarding the complexity of networks and the way in which this fluid connectivity can be absorbed and instrumentalised by capitalist agendas.

Boltanski and Chiapello comment on how in Anglophone literature, world-views 'based on network logics attached themselves to pragmatism and radical empiricism' (1999 [2005]: 146). As such it often seems that activists and artists, in fighting against or trying to transform capitalist connectivity actually sustain what Boltanski and Chiapello describe as the 'new spirit of capitalism'. But what if an individual or a group develops self-aware and critical engagement with network logics whilst still engaging with them? Creative activist groups are increasingly aware of the ways in which open spaces are quickly subsumed or instrumentalised and, rather than fighting this sublimation, they embrace it in a way that shifts focus onto the temporal affectivity of communication. One way that campaigns often do this is by having multiple 'messages'. Often global justice movements flag up a number of different issues. This is not to say that such interventions lack focus, rather that they have multiple focal points and platforms, and can shape a number of different political discourses. In this way, campaigns can look beyond the networks of capitalism and engage with them in way that knowingly challenges the status quo. There can be an acknowledgement that practices will likely become subsumed by spirit of capitalism, but at the same time an awareness of how they might embody a shift in the values that characterise capitalism, allowing for spaces of antagonism to open up within it. In the introduction to *The New Spirit of Capitalism* Boltanski and Chiapello write about how 'micro-displacements' allow capitalism to flourish but also cause shifts in its underlying value system, thus 'distancing a larger number of actors and creating new inequalities and injustices' (1999 [2005]: 35). These shifts sustain non-capitalist practices and, over time, can weaken the dominance of

capitalist networks and lead to larger social changes.

In the context of Liberate Tate, we can observe this shift in the way in which the views of art critic Jonathan Jones changed over time. Initially Jones was an advocate for fossil fuel sponsorship, clearly stating that in the light of cuts in funding, '[i]f they can get money from Satan himself, they should take it' (Jones: 2010). 7 years later, after Tate and BP ties were cut, he reflected: 'It is blind and narrow for arts organisations to pretend they are outside the struggle to save nature' (Jones: 2017). Here we can see a huge shift in values - Jones acknowledges the environmental and cultural significance of oil sponsorship, and rather than prioritising art institutions as he did previously, he looks at the bigger social and ethical picture. Nevertheless, he closes the article with the words: 'It is not true that you can cut off a source of money to museums without harming art. Without BP there might be no portrait award. So let's tell it truthfully: in the interest of the planet, art will just have to lose face' (Jones: 2017). Here we can see a return to a capitalist logic that affirms a particular value to art. Instead of embracing the creative evolution of art practices and institutions - one that can be fossil free - Jones returns to the more pessimistic view that art will be compromised without such forms of sponsorship. But in the process of this articulation, in communicating a capitalist argument from a different underlying value system, we can nevertheless begin to see how a shift in the status quo can open up new conversations and possibilities for social change that no longer conform to capitalist logic. These processes of communicating and interfering remains outside capitalist frameworks, and enable the dismantling of elements of capitalism, slowly eroding it or altering it from within. The focus on the process of social network*ing*, rather than on the outcomes of social networks also amplifies the ways that information spreads and modifies - leading to a sense of communication as a kind of unpredictable 'contagion'.

The New Spirit of Capitalism suggests that the artistic critique should 'take time to reformulate the issues of liberation and authenticity, starting from new forms of oppression it unwittingly helped to make possible' (1999 [2005]: 468). And that it can do this by slowing down practices and processes so that there are fewer 'tests' and 'abandoning a quest for liberation defined as absolute autonomy' (1999 [2005]: 469/470). This would require recognition of others (and by default being Other) and engagement with what has previously been understood as external authorities and

institutions. I will return to this idea in chapter 4. Importantly, Boltanski and Chiapello state: 'the renewal of the artistic critique notably takes the form of an alliance with the ecological critique' (1999 [2005]: 472) - something we can see embodied through Liberate Tate performances and their knowing engagement with social networks.

Spacing and communication

Having acknowledged the significance of social media, particularly in terms of cataloguing work, I now return to the idea of communication in a more general sense. My aim is to reexamine the way in which communication is understood not only in terms of social media but through observing and participating in collective action. This section looks at communication with relation to Nancy's quasi-ontology and the writings of Georges Bataille. Part of this analysis will necessarily address Bataille's writings on sovereignty, linking these to Nancy's quasi-ontology, singularity and spacing. I suggest that these ideas are embodied through communication and that they can shape understandings of 'world forming'.

In the preface to *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy says that we should dismiss the idea that messages are 'transferred'. Rather, we should understand that 'in "communication" what takes place is an exposition: 'finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it' (IC: 1991: xl: emphasis added). Communication exposes a limit, and Nancy describes this limit not as a specific 'place', but rather as the 'sharing of places, their spacing' (IC: 1991: 73). That is to say, communication exposes the shared exposition of finitude (spacing), which highlights the incommensurability of the other, and in doing so counters the possibility of ultimate unification or consensus.

Referring to the idea that 'clear' consciousness (a consciousness that is on such a 'limit' of being-with-self) takes place as the communicat*ing* of community (rather than 'is' a communication), Nancy, in an important footnote, further clarifies what he means when he speaks of 'communication' (IC: 1991: 19). He aligns himself with Georges Bataille, who stresses the 'violence' done to the word 'communication' and with Derrida's deconstruction of the word in *Signature, Event, Context*, and emphasises its 'untenability' (IC: 1991: 157). For Nancy, 'communication' essentially refers to the process of transmitting itself, rather than a transmission of a comprehensible message.

In his own words, Nancy 'superimposes' the word 'sharing' onto 'communication', and this overlaying of meaning is crucial to understanding how communication relates to 'spacing' (IC: 1991: 157).

Communication can only happen in a community, it is conditional on 'being-with'. And Nancy clearly states that community necessarily coincides with being: 'Community is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desires, and undertakings. At bottom, it is impossible for us to lose community' (IC: 1991: 35). If we understand that being is necessarily 'with', we understand that we are always part of a community. The idea of 'community' is often idealized - being 'part of a community' is something that many people feel is a choice. However, for Nancy, the plurality of being means that we are always part of a community, regardless of how we interact with it. For example, one might choose 'not' to engage with the community he or she lives in, but this choice is manifest as a communication to others in the community, and does not exclude the fact that however one behaves, they are still an accountable presence within the community.

For Nancy, finitude exists as communication, as the 'compearance' or 'co-appearance' of each subject's finitude (IC: 1991: 28). Communication is the exposition of finitude, the sharing of finitude. This sharing articulates difference and defines each singularity. Consequently, Nancy understands community as defined by a process of 'mourning'. By co-appearing, each singularity manifests incommensurability and finitude, which spotlights distinctions and detachment. However, this *shared* consciousness of how being singular plural is characterised by separation and loss, connects and affirms a community (IC: 1991: 29, 30). Following this train of thought, we might understand that at the root of community is a sense of loss, an 'unworking' (IC: 1991: 39) brought about by both the finitude of communication and the communication of finitude.

Nancy says that we should not stop 'letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself', because when singular beings share and expose their limits, they 'escape the relationships of society' and are 'unworked' in community (IC: 1991: 41). That is, within the sharing of finitude, of a coming loss, each singularity is open to the 'space of play of the world', and can sustain critical distance from fixed social categorisations. One way of doing this is through emphasis on the exposure, rather

than transfer, of meaning in communicative processes. The following paragraphs explore the idea of communication as a shared separation - spacing - with reference to Liberate Tate.

Bataille and 'the subject'

Nancy's deconstruction of the subject is influenced by his reading of Bataille. In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy addresses the way in which Bataille understands the subject. He says that 'Bataille had no *concept* of the subject,' and hypothesises that 'up to a certain point, he allowed the communication exceeding the subject to relate back to a subject, or to institute *itself* as subject' (IC: 23). The idea of communication (that exceeds subjectivity) instituting itself as the subject, dislocates 'the subject' understood in phenomenological terms. Nancy comments: "the concept he had of [the subject] was neither the ordinary notion of "subjectivity" nor the metaphysical concept of a self-presence as the *subjectum* of representation' (IC: 23). Bataille, in the 'Theoretical Introduction' to *The Accursed Share*, writes that the book's fundamental meaning, 'the object' of his research is bound up in the idea of 'the subject at its boiling point' (AS I: 10). If Bataille's writings mark this turning point for the idea of the subject, Nancy further addresses what this means with relation to communication and community. By looking at this trajectory of analysis, I hope to emphasise the relevance of this thinking with relation to micropolitical art interventions and the way in which they generate alternative images of the world.

Broadly speaking *The Accursed Share* explores the consumption of wealth, more specifically the movement of 'excess energy, translated into the effervescence of life' (Bataille: AS I: 10) so that economic crises are understood in terms of 'general problems of nature' - 'eating, death and sexual reproduction' (Bataille: AS I: 13) and the idea of sovereignty as 'that which cannot serve any purpose' (Bataille: AS II: 16). Later, Bataille describes this kind of sovereignty as 'sudden openings beyond the world of useful works' (AS III: 230), and consequently his analysis stems from dislocating 'functional' subject/ object relationships. The following paragraphs focus on this part of Bataille's concept of the sovereign, whilst wider political implications, revolving around the idea of power, will be considered in the following chapter with relation to Nancy's writings on exscription and Carl Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty. Bataille's writings on

sovereignty help us understand the development of Nancy's concept of spacing as a shared separation, and Schmitt's writings on sovereignty build on this analysis within a larger political context, and have particular significance when exploring the concept of exscription.

In Bataille's analysis of the sovereign he suggests that it is a way of being, rather than something one can possess or acquire. Additionally, because it concerns that which is non-functional and not needed, it comes about by chance (Bataille: AS III: 226). The sovereign is 'NOTHING' in Bataille's thought, an idea echoed in Nancy's writings, where 'nothing' evokes a sense of no-'thing' - a thing that abandons its objectivity. This has particular relevance for artists. Bataille writes: 'The artist is NOTHING in the world of things, and if he demands a place there, even if this only consisted in the right to speak or in the more modest right to eat, he follows in the wake of those whose sovereignty could, without being surrendered, have a hold in the world of things' (AS III: 257). Such a demand leads to 'fallen sovereignty'. As such, the role of the artist is to 'seduce' the spokesperson of the world of things (AS III: 256/ 257). In other words, the role of the artist is to draw away from 'things' even though this withdrawal generates new 'things'. An artist's role is to encourage others to also draw away from 'things' that appear to be fixed and unchangeable.

For Bataille, one becomes a 'subject' when 'the labour is finished' (AS III: 256/ 257). Nevertheless, this understanding of the subject is bound up Bataille's perception of sovereignty, so that Bataille negates the familiar phenomenological subject/ object relation (AS III: 244). Through labour a person is an 'object' in the functional world, but in the non-functional realm of the sovereign, a person becomes a 'subject', but only 'in a sense', because one still labours for others (AS III: 245). Here Bataille points to a kind of amalgam of subject and object. Years later in *Inner Experience* Bataille clearly states: 'Oneself is not the subject isolating itself from the world, but a place of communication, of fusion of the subject and the object' (1988: 9). It is for this reason that, in *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy comments: 'For Bataille, as for us all, a thinking of the subject thwarts a thinking of community' (IC: 23). An 'operational' community requires work, but an 'inoperative' community is one that does not yet exist as a 'thing', it unfolds through the dynamic process of communicat*ing*. This allows 'the communication exceeding the subject to relate back to a subject, or to institute *itself* as

subject' (Nancy: IC: 23). For Bataille, subjectivity is communicated through 'emotional contact' between 'subjects' but it is never the object of discursive knowledge, rather it takes the forms such as laughter or tears - 'contagious subjectivity' (AS III: 242/ 243). Again, this displaces phenomenological understanding of the subject, the point at which Nancy responds to Bataille. He explains that his observations are 'neither a critique of nor a reservation about Bataille, but an attempt to communicate with his experience rather than simply draw from the stock of his knowledge or from his theses' (IC: 25).

How does Nancy 'communicate with' Bataille's idea of the subject? He feels that Bataille abandoned the idea of community as that which is 'shared' or is a 'communion' between people, but that he allows us to see how communication happens through being as a shared *separation*. Instead of focusing on consensus, 'singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced,* by the sharing that makes them *others'* (IC: 24). Although Bataille's rethinking of the subject appears to reach a limit, Nancy's writings continue to think about how the spacing of being is a shared separation. It is this sense of shared separation that allows us to think of communication as contagious.

Communication as 'contagion'

Nancy draws on Bataille's use of the word 'contagion' as an alternative word to 'communication'. Bataille understands contagion as a kind of affective communication. In his essay 'Bataille and the Birth of the Subject' (published in *Angelaki*), Nidesh Lawtoo explores the formation of the subject with relation to what he calls 'Bataille's career-long meditation on contagious forms of mimetic communication' (2011: 44). Lawtoo emphasises that this contagious communication is not necessarily verbal, but that it is a moment in which a spacing 'subject' becomes part of a 'communicative flux' in which the division of the self and other is blurred or transgressed (2011: 74). Examples of this might be contagious laughter, being moved to tears by another distressed person, and can be as ordinary as a contagious yawn. But there is always a sense of excess in this communication, a sense of transgression or overstepping. It is the release of rationality, the moment at which one spaces oneself from their ontic self and 'expends' oneself. And for Nancy, the concept of communication as contagion underlines how spacing and communicating is a *shared separation.*

Additionally, 'contagion' is completely unpredictable, and this 'accidental' nature of communication is important to bear in mind when considering Nancy's interpretation of the word and the concept of 'spacing'. As in an epidemic, a contagion appears as an eruption or outbreak. It is something that is entirely 'other', but that manifests itself *with* an individual. In this way, it 'spaces': it is indeterminable, able to modify. Contagion pervades populations in an erratic way, which is why it is so difficult to bring under control. However, this irrationality poses a vital question when we understand it in the context of communicating. For Nancy, irrationality is more appropriative than reason because it appropriates though annihilation (BtP: 1993: 180). So we need to ask: how might the haphazard nature of contagion shape political discourses? Should we (and if so, how) regulate the ways in which irrational appropriation influences political decisions? These issues underpin the entire conceptualisation of Nancy's incline from ontology to politics, and the idea of regulation will be addressed in more detail in chapter 4 with relation to evaluating art. However, at this point on the 'incline' that I am tracing in this thesis, the focus will be on the significance of contagious excess within the context of Nancy's quasi-ontology.

Following on from the idea that communication occurs in states of excess, Bataille frequently refers to the contagion common to intoxication and eroticism. With relation to such passion Nancy says:

> But the "unleashing of passions" is of the order of what Bataille himself often designated as "contagion," another name for "communication". What is communicated, what is contagious, and what, in this manner- and only in this manner- is "unleashed", is the passion of a singularity as such. The singular being, because it is singular, is in the passion- *the passivity, the suffering, and the excess- of sharing its singularity* (IC: 1991: 32: emphasis added).

This passage correlates with the idea of spacing as a kind of paralysis, the passivity of sharing that exceeds the self, as discussed in the previous section. But, highlighting that this happens through contagious communication it emphasises the idea that ontological spacing (separating) occurs together with others.

Liberate Tate often embody an exaggerated sense of this shared separation, for example during small workshops that sometimes form part of the group's monthly meet-up. During one meet-up, we were scheduled to have a creative session to generate ideas for possible installations and performances. Prior to the discussion, the member of the group leading the session asked us to take part in an exercise. We each had to choose two other people in the room, without disclosing their identity. The idea was that each of us must remain as far away as possible from the first person, and as close as possible to the second. For the duration of the exercise (approximately 3 minutes), the group formed a shifting, disrupting jumble. Each person's actions were 'contagious' in that the movement of one person immediately triggered the movement of each member of the group, as they rearranged themselves in accordance with the game.

The exercise highlighted the fact that the togetherness of a group is *made up* of such tensions; the push and pull between singular beings. The exercise encouraged participants to embrace this exaggerated sense of 'shared separation' and to feel more confident to share creative ideas, without necessarily wanting to have a final consensus. This process made us aware of the developing 'thereness' of the group and the shared spacing of each being, and to perpetuate a 'space of play' within the group. The game made me more aware of the necessity of tensions within the group discussion that followed, and allowed me to be able to withdraw, critique and develop ideas collectively. Moreover, I was aware that this critical distance was something that was shared with each member of the group.

Communication and loss

Bataille's concept of 'contagion' is also bound up in ideas of 'sacredness' and sacrifice. In an essay entitled 'The Sacred', Bataille states, 'the sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled' (*Visions of Excess; Selected Writings 1927-1939*; 242). And Paul Hegarty, in his book *George Bataille, Core Cultural Theorist* explains this further stating: 'The moment that the sacred occurs is one of contagion, as opposed to a holistic unity - it spreads and takes us over, rather than us 'becoming one with it', and this contagion is the basis (or is) the communication Bataille is writing about' (2000: 97). The idea that the 'sacred' or 'untouchable' is exposed as communication, as contagion, indicates that such an

exposition is sacrificial, and that by exposing the sacred, it appears as something finite, and in this sense is 'sacrificed'.

In 'The Unsacrificeable', Nancy speaks of how contemporary reflections on sacrifice are 'haunted' by Bataille (1991: 20). He draws from Bataille's understanding of sacrifice to argue that 'there is no "true" sacrifice, that veritable existence is unsacrificeable, and that finally the truth of existence *is* that it cannot be sacrificed' (1991: 38). Nancy points out that to perceive existence as something that can be sacrificed, is to look towards an 'absolute Outside' of finitude, which does not exist (1991: 36, 37). Nancy proposes that we acknowledge how existence is already 'offered to the world' (1991: 35) and therefore cannot be sacrificed. For Nancy, we share in incommunicability of loss, even through attempts to communicate it. This is a paradoxical 'moment of communal unity' in which there is a realisation of shared separation, and of a loss that cannot be equated to a sacrifice.

Years after his initial reference to 'contagion' in *The Inoperative Community*, and in a note on the epigraph to *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy speaks of the world as a litany, as 'pure loss'. He refers to the political turmoil around him as he writes the book, (*Being Singular Plural* was written shortly after the Gulf War and during the Bosnian War), and says:

> What I am talking about here is compassion, but not compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness (1996: xiii).

For Nancy, this is a 'proliferation'; contagion propagates 'sharing' and also multiplies loss. This sense of loss is at the core of Nancy's concept of community. Community forms around shared finitude and a shared sense of separation.

The shared sense of separation and loss is manifest in Liberate Tate's 'Floe Piece' in January 2012. The intervention coincided with London's Occupy movement and the performance started at the protest camp at St Paul's, where four veiled members of Liberate Tate put a 55kg piece of Arctic ice onto a white platform and carried it slowly to the Tate Modern. The 'floe piece' of ice was placed in the Turbine Hall along with a

signboard explaining Tate's relationship with BP. The signboard also drew attention to the Deepwater Horizon disaster, one of the largest oil spills in history, and highlighted BP's subsequent expansion, despite the disaster. The encompassing message addressed climate change. By tracking a block of Arctic ice from the Arctic to the Tate Modern, the group traced the direct link between global warming in the Arctic and Tate's role in promoting BP, a company that continues to facilitate and perpetuate the issue. Occupy London then formed a group around the melting ice and held their daily meeting.

The temporality of the sculpture became the focal point of the piece in the gallery, and symbolised the global issue of melting polar ice caps due to climate change (this is not to say that the melting of the polar ice caps is a finitude that we should accept and become indifferent to). Occupy London 'used' this event of loss, of the ice melting, as a poignant place to hold a political discussion. Similarly, acceptance that climate change is a loss that has happened and is happening, calls for a new kind of engagement. The melting block of Arctic ice pointed to the gradual loss of ecosystems, due to climate change. In 'Floe Piece', the performance particularly highlighted the need for a corrective response to the Deepwater Horizon disaster, rather than downplaying its impact and expanding the growth of the industry (BP's reaction).

The piece emphasised collective responsibility for the climate and therefore linked to the idea that we might now be entering a new geological era, the Anthropocene - 'the age of man' - an era in which humans are the predominant force in the shaping of the natural environment and are generating environmental instability. Jill Bennett, Professor of Experimental Arts at UNSW Australia, suggests that by changing the language used within discourses on climate change, which often tends to reflect the interest of market logics, we could open up a 'big window for innovation' (2012: 6,9). She describes using the term 'Anthropocene' as 'a framing concept' for an intended paradigm shift and asks: 'What happens when a shift of magnitude ripples through the relatively unfettered, heterogeneous cultural sphere; how are the already receptive, differentiated, and politicized practices of the arts jolted and redirected?' (2012: 9). This question speaks to an understanding of cultural practices as a contagious form of communication and points to the need to address the role of culture in framing world-views. Liberate Tate creates new forms of visual language to address climate change. The central aim of 'liberating Tate' is to dismantle the social norm of oil sponsorship,

prevalent throughout cultural institutions, which undermines new and innovative climate policies. Environmental loss is the core concern of the group. Liberate Tate are not trying to renounce Tate but to 'liberate' Tate and, along with the Art Not Oil coalition, to end oil sponsorship of cultural institutions so that environmental loss can be addressed differently.

Chapter summary: spacing and world-forming

This chapter set out to explore how political art images can magnify a sense of plurality and shared accountability. To do this, it turned to the roots of Nancy's philosophy, his quasi-ontology, to consider how spacing allows us to visualize a divergence from phenomenological interpretations of being that ultimately emphasise individuality. Reflecting on Nancy's relational 'singularity', rather than a defined 'subject', it traced the deconstruction of the subject from Nancy's metaphorical descriptions of ontology through to his texts on art and finally to his writings on communication and community. This plotted Nancy's writings within a particular theoretical context - responding to Heidegger, Nietzsche and Bataille. How does this chapter develop the central concern of this thesis: how and why the micropolitical interventions of artists and art collectives recompose the image of the world?

In *The Creation of the World The Creation of the World or Globalization*, Nancy states: In any case, the decisive feature of the becoming-world of the world, as it were… is the feature through which the world resolutely and absolutely distances itself from any status as object in order to tend toward being itself the "subject" of its own "world-hood" - or "world-forming"' (CoW: 2007: 41). World-forming is the quasi-ontological becoming of the world. Here, Nancy uses the word 'subject' in quotation marks, as if to remind the reader that although he touches 'on or *at* the very limits of the phenomenological tradition' (Armstrong: 2010: 18), his idea of the subject has been transformed. How so? Following Bataille, for whom the idea of the subject is bound up in his understanding of the sovereign as 'that which cannot serve any purpose' (AS II: 16) - Nancy's "subject" concerns the *process* of becoming, a process that is beyond subjectivity because it is a relation constituted by the shared separating of being, and this relation can never be reduced to 'a' subject or object. This means no longer seeing the world in terms of a set of different phenomena, but as perpetual dis-positioning. As such, Nancy's quasi-

ontology is an approach to being that recognises the edges of phenomenological thinking. Nancy instead asks us to focus on what it means 'to be' or 'to become', and considers presence as a 'taking place' or as an active coming-to presence. Here, the appearance of a presence is the appearance of a shared separation, paradoxically the appearing of disappearance – a spacing. As such, Nancy's concept of appearing is developed from the ontology of being singular plural, and not from phenomenological appearing.

Nancy reminds us that although the world has no origin, it is not *lacking*. He says 'the being of the world is the thing permeated by the nothing', and that 'there is no longer a thing in itself but rather the transitivity of being-nothing' (CoW: 2007: 69). And for Nancy, the absence of an origin, of an established point of certainty, is at the centre of the idea of creation and creating. Being-nothing is a *transitivity* - it is characterised by transition, by spacing. The 'transitivity of being-nothing' differs from phenomenology in that it lacks intent (toward a particular outcome). However, there is a paradoxical logic within Nancy's quasi-ontology, which becomes even more evident when explored through an art practice, in this case with Liberate Tate: inoperativity requires work. Bataille's realm of the sovereign requires both working and unworking, but it is the 'unworking' that causes Liberate Tate, for example, to have a political impact. Because the group fails to 'work' within a larger apparatus, it creates space for critical engagement. Participation in Liberate Tate performances suggests that without 'intentionally' sustaining these non-functional spaces of critique, creative practices are more quickly subsumed into capitalist networks. Such 'intentionality' is non-phenomenological because it is not intent toward a particular object, but away from a thinking that is oriented around the subject/ object. Instead, the work of continuing to suspend appropriative thinking can allow creative practices to flourish. In turn, as such practices flourish, the underlying values of larger institutions can shift and spark social change.

In Nancy's 2016 book *The Disavowed Community* - a book in which he returns to a discourse with Blanchot that began 30 years earlier with Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*, and which also draws upon Bataille's understanding of community - Nancy clarifies this paradox further, describing such work as 'less unworked than devoted to its unworking - this makes a big difference' (DC: 2016: 74). What might this look like in a

wider curatorial context? Does this idea of unworking have relevance for institutions? The thesis is developing a reading of Nancy with relation to cultural practices and institutions, which may initially seem at odds with Nancy's thought because he rarely refers to intentionality, agency and institutionality. Nevertheless, Nancy's philosophy is not itself entirely inoperative, his writings unfold and 'work' within cultural discourses. They have concrete significance because they can help sustain 'inoperativity'.

As this chapter has discussed, this paradoxical 'intentionality' can become manifest through acknowledging how communication is 'contagious' - that it affirms the shared separation that constitutes being. For Nancy 'contagion' indicates the 'passion of a singularity' - the 'excess' of a singular being that is corresponds to the sharing of singularity. (IC: 1991: 32). Understanding communication as contagious not only spotlights the shared separation of being, but also emphasises the way in which communications alter and modify through the process of communicating - to communicate is not simply to transfer meaning, because meaning shifts through the process of communicating.

How might this applied reading of Nancy's quasi-ontology affect and benefit political art collectives, such as Liberate Tate? By looking closely at how Liberate Tate amplify spacing as a shared separation, I also hope to communicate in a 'contagious' way with others in academic and cultural fields, and to generate discourses outside the Art Not Oil network. For example, in November 2014 I had the opportunity to present a paper at a conference within the Museum Studies department at the University of Leicester on the subject of 'Museums and Oil Sponsorship: creating (un)ethical identities'. The conference delegates were mainly academics, curators and students working towards careers in curating and arts management. I spoke briefly about the concept of 'spacing' in Nancy and how this might inform our understanding of institutional identities. The talk prompted a number of questions and proved to be controversial for many of the delegates. It sparked questions and responses from members of the Museums Association, who at that time were reviewing the Museums Association ethics code.

Rebecca Atkinson from the Museums Association responded to the presentation in a blog post entitled 'Staying Alive; the slippery issue of oil sponsorship', clearly showing affiliation with Liberate Tate: 'I increasingly feel that oil sponsorship, like money from

arms or tobacco companies, is not appropriate in the cultural sector… I hope a revised code provides clearer guidance on how museums should think about sponsorship – although I can't help but wish the sector would say once and for all no to oil sponsorship' (2014). Although this response was from just one member of the organisation, it nevertheless perpetuates a communicative relationship that might affect others within institutional hierarchies who have more influence on the future projects and policies of that institution.

Additionally, after the conference I was able to generate discussions with others in Liberate Tate regarding complex and practical concerns raised by the other delegates, such as issues related to increased reliance on public funding, and the difficulty of implementing alternative funding options within large established institutions such as Tate. This is an example of how each member of Liberate Tate, by sharing and reflecting on the group's actions with those in their personal and professional circles, can feed back into group discussions, potentially influencing the development of the group's identity and embodying its receptive presence within the cultural field. In this way, Liberate Tate continues to engage further with public concerns around oil sponsorship, and respond to specific concerns.

In highlighting strategies of creative engagement, both within the group itself and through its methodology in the gallery space, this chapter has explored how practitioners can pose questions and open up new possibilities for engagement with established institutions. In this sense, it has begun to address the key term 'recompose', with a focus on the latter fragments of this term - 'compose'. The word 'compose' has layers of meaning. Its initial root is the Latin *pausare* 'to cease, lay down' and 'pause', which is derived from the Greek *pauein* 'to stop, hold back, arrest, to cause to cease' – indicating an interruption. As outlined in this chapter, Liberate Tate's interventions create a rupture in institutional logics that deem it acceptable to use cultural space to provide advertising for fossil fuel companies. They 'interrupt' an ordinary sequential logic. They also generate a break in the expected experience of the gallery-goer. These performances 'arrest' the attention of the viewer and create a temporary 'pause' in the familiar mechanics of power within cultural spaces. However, this only provides the founding sense of the term 'recompose'. To extend this further, the next chapter will look at the second sense of 'compose' – the Old French *composer* meaning to 'put

together, arrange, write' a work – in this case how meaning is 'put together' in a curatorial project.

Through a close reading of Nancy's texts on spacing and community this chapter has explored how the incline from ontology to the political is embodied through the micropolitical interventions of the art group Liberate Tate. The next chapter addresses how this idea of non-phenomenological intentionality can continue to unfold within institutional settings and impact broader discourses. Chapter 3 develops the idea of the incline towards the political through an analysis of Nancy's expression 'exscribing', with relation to a grassroots art organisation that responds to a specific humanitarian disaster in order to develop global discourses on nuclear energy production.

Chapter 3 - Political art and 'exscribing':
exploring the connections between materiality, sense and political engagement

The previous chapter traced Nancy's 'incline' from the ontological concept of being singular plural to political engagement through the concept of 'spacing'. It highlighted the 'contagious' nature of communication and considered how communication shapes collective identities. With reference to the art group Liberate Tate, it began to analyse how an art collective might intentionally be dedicated to its 'unworking' and influence wider political discourses through a kind of inoperativity. Chapter 2 is therefore a preliminary sketch of the framework, the 'incline' central to this thesis. This third chapter will further develop the idea of a paradoxical intentionality with reference to Nancy's concept of 'exscribing'.

'Exscribing' refers to how sense is exposed - to the way in which sense constitutes, but exceeds, materiality. It is a concept that extends throughout Nancy's philosophy. In his essay 'Exscription' in *The Birth to Presence*, Nancy returns to a short text he had written in 1977, which was published in an anthology, *Misère de la littérature*. Nancy says: 'Writing, reading, I exscribe the "thing itself"- "existence", the "real"- which *is* only when it is exscribed and whose *being* alone is what is at stake in inscription' (BtP: 1993: 338, 339). Later in 1997, in *The Sense of the World* Nancy develops the idea of exscribing to address the 'thought of the sense of the world': 'a thought that, in the course of its being-thought, itself becomes indiscernible from its *praxis*, a thought that tendentially loses itself as "a thought" in its proper exposition to the world, a thought that *exscribes* itself there, that lets sense carry it away, ever one step more, beyond signification and interpretation' (SoW: 1997: 9). To exscribe is to articulate a reality, but to exceed it at the same time. Like spacing, exscribing is a prerequisite for what 'is'. Both 'spacing' and 'exscribing' refer to a simultaneous process of bringing some*thing* into being whilst being conscious of, and sustaining engagement with the way in which this is happening. However, the word 'exscribe' focuses attention on how thinking carries sense 'beyond signification', and how consciousness at once interprets the world and carries itself beyond interpretation. *The Sense of the World* is a key text for this chapter, but I also

continue to reflect on and respond to earlier texts in *The Birth to Presence*, tracing ideas through to Nancy's 2015 book *After Fukushima; The Equivalence of Catastrophes.*

The fragment '-scribe' refers to the action of writing. Nancy's use of '-scribe' is a philosophical reference to Derrida's concept of 'écriture' and as such it signals the dislocation of meaning that takes place through writing. Nancy often uses the word 'inscribe' in his writing to indicate a relation to a 'trace'. For example, in *The Birth to Presence*, he writes of how we might 'inscribe the trace of a name' and he refers to how the limit of finitude 'inscribes itself' (1993: 57). The idea of a trace indicates Nancy's engagement with Derrida's texts *Of Grammatology* and *Signature, Event, Context.* Although these texts will not be analysed in this thesis, further contextualisation will be found in the following chapter where I go on to discuss how the concept of the trace influences Nancy's writings on 'retracing' or 'the retreat'.

A prefix to '-scribe' indicates a relation to act of writing. The prefix 'de-', whilst it is generally used to indicate position (down, down from, off) also carries with it a weighting towards totality (down to the bottom, totally). Similarly, '*in*scribe', which means to 'write on or in', carries with it a focus on writing into a surface a focus on the subject, of the object receiving text. *As*cribing again carries a different nuance – the prefix 'as-', an assimilated form of 'ad-' from the Latin 'ad', indicates being 'to' or 'towards' something. *As*cribing consequently carries a sense of attributing or assigning something to a pre-existing thing or pattern. Conversely, the prefix 'ex-' of exscribe indicates a movement 'out-of/from'. It forms the basis of words such as *ex*istence, *ex*teriorization, '*ex*pulsion' and '*ex*cess'. Nancy's writings on ontology, based as they are on the Heideggarian concept of being 'thrown', remind us of this motion 'out-of/from', of the idea of something exceeding, moving quickly beyond a boundary. Although Nancy often uses the word 'inscribe', this chapter will focus on the term 'exscribe' and its opposite, 'ascribe'. The concept of 'exscribing' relates closely to the quasi-ontological framing of 'world-forming'.

In *The Birth to Presence* Nancy writes of 'exscrip*tion*': 'Writing, and reading, is to be exposed, to expose oneself to this not-having (to this not-knowing) and thus to "exscription"' (BtP: 1993: 338). He explains that writing exposes meaning, but that we are left with this exposition. Suggesting the 'clumsy' articulation of the word 'exscripted'

to indicate writing that has been 'discharged' by its own meaning, he says that the word 'exscripted' 'exscribes nothing and writes nothing' but indicates the process of writing from the 'uncertain thought of language' (BtP: 1993: 338). The noun 'exscription' points to the evidence of exscribing, rather than the process. Because this thesis is exploring the process of 'world-forming', I will focus on the verb 'exscribe' and the action of 'exscrib*ing*'. I hope that this will emphasise the intended 'incline' of analysis, stemming from Nancy's interpretation of ontology with its attention to the dynamic relation between ontology and the ontic. The idea of exscribing as a process that lacks nothing, and yet is incommensurable, is key to the analysis that develops throughout this chapter.

Having approached the concept of spacing from the perspective of a political art group engaged in direct action, this chapter will address the idea of 'exscribing' from the point of view of a political art group that aims to create platforms for critical engagement with contemporary political issues, in particular the production of nuclear energy. I will explore how an arts group can facilitate open, discursive engagement. How might an arts group highlight the political relevance of Nancy's concept of exscribing?

I will consider the political relevance of 'exscribing' alongside my involvement with London based collective Art Action UK (AAUK), a small group of artists, curators and writers who 'are exploring various means to show solidarity and support for people who have been affected by natural and manmade disasters' (artactionuk.org), in particular artists living in East Japan who engage with political issues following the 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster[20]. AAUK clearly expresses a sense that it has little or no political effect, and yet it still addresses the political.

AAUK provides a platform for artists who tackle political and philosophical questions relating to nuclear energy production. The group does not directly take part in 'activist' strategies, although it potentially provides a space for artworks that do. What is the social significance of an arts group that is politically powerless? And what effect can AAUK have socially? My role in the group - providing write-ups of talks, performances and events for the website, managing social media pages and co-curating an exhibition -

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[20] AAUK was established in 2011 by UK-based artist Kaori Homma, Tokyo sociologist Yoshitaka Mouri and curator Meryl Doney.

will enable me to further explore the concept of 'exscribing', and will begin to consider how grassroots organisations can affirm and underline the political significance of 'exscribing'.

This chapter is structured into three main arguments:

The first section, *Exscribing and Sovereignty*, continues to explore the idea of power, and responds to Carl Schmitt's conceptualisation that 'the state of exception' is an opportunity to define a new norm. To question this idea, it interprets political power as something that is never 'fixed' but is contingent on the duality between emptying and regulating power. It compares Nancy's use of the word exscribing, particularly in *The Sense of the World*, with Schmitt's use of the word 'ascribing' and his sole focus on 'ascribing meaning', by turning to Paolo Virno's writings on communication as a 'constantly renewed deferral' (2008: 60). By comparing Virno's interpretation of the biblical concept of the 'katechon' to the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing, it argues that these two concepts are simultaneous and coexisting.

Second, having acknowledged the synchronous nature of ascribing and exscribing, I will develop Virno's thought that there are two possible responses to the material/ immaterial duality of existence: to reify or to fetishise. Reification refers to the 'progressive transformation from the internal to the external' - it is 'a way of being, a precondition for existence', and fetishism is a caricature of this (Virno 2003: 135-138). We can either 'reify' the oscillation of language between abstracted sense and categorisation, i.e. we can continue to make the abstract real without attaching a finite value; or we can 'fetishise' this oscillation - for example, by attaching value to an object for the way in which it symbolises the immaterial. This second section, *Exscribing and faith* will argue that 'to reify' acknowledges the significance of exscribing, and that because reification responds to the immateriality of existence, it requires a kind of 'faith'. Here, the concept of 'faith' is understood as a pre-religious thought. In his 2008 book *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Nancy understands faith as 'a resource hidden beneath Christianity, beneath monotheism, and beneath the West' (D: 2008: 34). A 'resource' refers to an action or strategy that may be adopted in adverse circumstances. So this chapter approaches faith as 'way' of being – a way of spacing.

Drawing on his writings in *Dis-Enclosure*, this 'resource' will be discussed as a kind of 'philosophical faith' in that which is 'in-ascribable' - that which is world-forming.

Third, it will consider how faith can transform concrete realities. The final section, *Exscribing as a 'political task'*, focuses on how 'faith', as a process of 'individuation', relates to the political. Nancy's concept of the political is gestural rather than structural. He understands the political as 'an incessant tying up of singularities with each other…. without end or structure' (SoW: 1997: 111-112). This approach is challenging because it does not define or prescribe a particular political ideology. Instead, in *After Fukushima; The Equivalence of Catastrophes,* Nancy directly refers to political discourses post-Fukushima to highlight the need for an approach to politics based not on 'general equivalence' but on 'common incommensurability' (2015: 41). The third section argues that this approach to political discourses can be found within cultural practices, but needs to be further supported and encouraged within established organisations if they are to avoid 'fetishising' social, economic and political issues.

This chapter focuses on art practices that challenge and disrupt the feeling of having 'made sense' of the world. Such disruptions are important because they prevent 'appropriative thought': thought that balks against the unknown and retreats into praxes which reinforce existing social narratives that continue to privilege some groups of people above others. To value the process of reaching, of 'sensing', is to acknowledge the human condition of 'being singular plural'. By articulating the way in which sense and materiality coincide, this chapter focuses on the mid-point of the incline from ontology to politics - the point at which our responses to the ontology of 'being singular plural' become manifest within wider social discourses and begin to characterise our engagement with political issues. Whilst Nancy's political theories cannot draw up a viable alternative to globalisation, his writings draw attention to the agency we have within the process of globalisation and the importance of sustaining connections to practices that influence and re-form social paradigms.

Portraits in Masks

Art Action UK was formed following the earthquake and tsunami in East Japan in 2011. The group initially raised money for the international relief programme through charitable events: art raffles, art auctions and food stalls. These events raised small sums of money throughout 2011 for organisations such as the Japanese Red Cross and World Vision. However, after some consideration, AAUK decided to focus on creating an on-going, independent residency project that would allow artists who lived and worked in Fukushima to have respite away from the disaster area. The residency provides an annual opportunity for artists to come to the UK to continue their art practice in a new environment, and to communicate the on-going social and political issues following the disaster to new and unfamiliar audiences.

The first artist-in-residence, Kaya Hanasaki, came to London in May 2012, over 14 months after the earthquake. Hanasaki responded to the political climate of Japan with artworks that addressed the wider political and social implications of the disaster. She particularly criticised the way in which political decisions in Japan had been made and enforced. Although Hanasaki's work did not explicitly address 'sovereignty', it touched on themes that relate to 'the state of exception' and created a sensory experience that reflected concerns about the power dynamics of political policy-making.

Her residency work *Portrait in Mask* was a performance and documentation project in which she asked participating members of the audience to each wear a surgical mask. The experience of wearing the mask amplified awareness of breathing and encouraged audience members to reflect on the anxiety that surrounds something as simple as breathing, following a nuclear meltdown. For Hanasaki the act of wearing a mask was a socially divisive gesture. Wearing a mask demonstrated mistrust in the government's safety guidelines. This theme of mistrust in the decisions of the Japanese government carried a subversive message that will be considered in the following paragraphs.

A month prior to Hanasaki's residency, new nuclear safety standards had been released. An earlier poll in July 2011 had shown that 74% of Japanese people wanted Japan to

become nuclear-free[21]. Despite this, the government instead proposed revised safety laws on the reactors, laws that specified that nuclear reactors would have a lifespan of 40 years, with the possibility of extending that time. These laws potentially laid the foundations for future nuclear developments.

At the same time, the Japanese government had just begun to hand out free 'health books' (hibakusha)[22], similar to the health books given to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those with health books would receive free health care, and would use the books to record and monitor their health. Additionally, the government were testing school lunches for traces of radioactive cesium[23]. The social and political climate of Japan was one of mistrust and anxiety. Although the government were keen to restore public confidence through increased testing, they were not willing to decommission nuclear plants that many people felt were unsafe.

Hanasaki is part of a vanguard of artists and writers who openly criticise governmental responses to what they feel is a crisis induced by capitalist technologies. For example, in his 2012 article 'Turbulence of Radiation and Revolution', New York-based Japanese writer and translator Sabu Kohso states: 'All conduct of the Japanese government in the wake of 3/11 has proven that the state would choose continuation of capitalist operation and its own sovereignty over the well-being of the people. It has been constantly blurring information about present risks of radiation and critical conditions of the power plants' (2012). Like Hanasaki, Kohso feels that people and democracy are being treated as secondary to capitalist values. In 'Radiation and Revolution', another article written the same year for Borderlands E-Journal, he says that the human body has become 'a battleground over the commons' or an 'informational front' in which concepts of commonisation/de-commonisation are under attack from capitalist ideologies (2012). Adapting to dangerous levels of radiation by creating greater 'transparency', altering safety guidelines and introducing new monitoring programmes,

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[21] Nagata Kazuaki, *Fukushima meltdowns set nuclear energy debate on its ear*, The Japan Times, 3/1/12,

[22] (National Kyodo News post) *Namie to seek medical fee exemption for all residents*, The Japan Times, 15/4/12

[23] (National news post) *New safety standards for radioactive cesium in food products go into effect*, Japan Today, 2/4/12

the government was able to reinforce and ratify the continued use of nuclear energy, despite the risks involved and widespread opposition.

How do artworks such as Hanasaki's *Portrait in Mask* criticise and challenge the power and sovereignty of the government? As an anti-nuclear activist, how might Hanasaki's artworks during the residency relate to global audiences? First, it is necessary to consider the role of sovereignty with relation to 'the state of exception'. Second, it is important to reflect on Nancy's question at the end of his essay 'On Sovereignty' in *The Creation of the World or Globalization*: 'And if sovereignty was the revolt of the people?' (2007: 109)

The state of exception

Political theorist and philosopher Carl Schmitt understood the state of exception as a state of emergency declared by the sovereign. Here, the state of exception does not refer to the emergency itself, but to the theory of state that articulates a situation as 'an emergency'. This articulation involves the codifying of an exception that lies beyond the existing legal order - a process that re-writes 'the norm' (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 6). It is this process of codification that, in Schmitt's writings, actively creates a monopoly to decide, which in turn affirms the sovereign as such. Here we see a logic that tries to assimilate the external exception and use it to create a new rule.

On the other hand, philosopher Giorgio Agamben understands the state of exception as 'a space devoid of law' and as a 'zone of anomie in which all legal determinations are deactivated' (Agamben 2005: 50). He argues that although Schmitt understands the state of exception as outside of the law, he tries to inscribe[24] it within the law, whilst acknowledging its separateness. If the state of exception is 'used' as a rule, it self-negates and can no longer be an exception. Instead it is used to wield power and define what is normal and what is not. Agamben says that this ultimately creates 'a killing machine' such as National Socialism (2005: 86).

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[24] As outlined in the introduction, to 'inscribe' gives precedent to the thing receiving the inscription – in this case, Schmitt reinforces the 'surfaces' or boundaries of the law from a position of sovereignty.

Rather than inscribing the exception within a new rule, Agamben believes that the state of exception should always be outside of the juridical order[25]. At the end of his book *State of Exception*, he concludes that 'the only truly political action… is that which severs the nexus between violence (understood here as the 'use of power') and law' (2005: 88). In other words, by inscribing the state of exception within law, as Schmitt does, a 'nexus' is created. If we visualise the nexus as a kind of 'tie' or connection, the act of 'severing' it would surely require a specific decision, a gesture of violence that would break the connection rather than undo it. Nancy's understanding of politics offers an alternative response. For Nancy, politics is 'an incessant tying up of singularities with each other…where the tie is taken up again, recast, and retied without end, nowhere purely tied or untied' (SoW: 1997: 111-112). We can compare this concept of a connection, which is neither complete nor incomplete, to the nexus between a destructive force and a regulatory force (violence and law). The word 'incessant' is vital and highlights Nancy's unique approach to the distributing of power. Whilst Schmitt tries to *secure* a nexus, Agamben tries to *destroy* the nexus. But neither addresses the duality of *any* response to a state of exception- that a 'nexus' between destructive and regulatory forces can neither fully exist nor be fully destroyed. Nancy, on the other hand, acknowledges that an 'exception' will automatically be assimilated into a shared reality, but at the same time he recognises that this shared reality is part of an infinite 'enchainment', a 'tying up of singularities with each other' (SoW: 1997: 111-112). The 'incessant' process of the tying/retying of a nexus means that the connection is never entirely fixed. However, to stop the artificial concept of 'a norm' from becoming a dominant and prohibitive influence on the 'tying up of singularities', this permanent lack of fixity can be spotlighted.

The previous chapter addressed Nancy's question 'And if sovereignty was the revolt of the people?'[26] (CoW: 2007: 109). Sovereignty was understood as a social relation that must be reinforced by the people to remain powerful. Therefore, if the people cease to recognise sovereign power during a state of emergency, this relational paradigm is abandoned and the state of exception is confirmed as external to the juridical order.

[25] Agamben draws from Walter Benjamin's 1928 book *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and reflects that 'in deciding on the state of exception, the sovereign must not in some way include it in the juridical order, he must on the contrary, exclude it, leave it outside of the juridical order' (Agamben 2005: 55).

[26] In the postscript at the end of Nancy's essay 'On Sovereignty'

Here we begin to invert Schmitt's theory of state, because by exposing the emptiness within power, the people sustain the external nature of the state of exception.

However, being outside of the juridical order *of the state* is not the same as being outside of a fundamental inclination towards justice, towards jurisprudence in a wider philosophical sense. But, when declared by the people, the concurrent tension between a destructive emptying of power (violence) and the creation of regulations (law) is more evident. This exscribing of power is as an empty*ing* of power, rather than an emptiness *within* power. But power does not vanish - it becomes re-appropriated by the people. Singularities tie and retie, but people have access to this process and can expose the temporality of the social relation that constitutes the sovereign, thereby sustaining the possibility for new political ties.

Returning to Kaya Hanasaki's *Portrait in Mask*, we can begin to understand that the gesture of wearing a mask does not just signify a private decision to protect oneself. It is a public sign of mistrust in state assurances. It communicates this scepticism to others. It provokes a shared sense of doubt that can quickly proliferate. This public manifestation of insecurity discredits the authority of the government. Although each individual decision to wear a mask seems insignificant, it becomes a collective gesture of opposition; one that exposes the creation of a new 'norm' to justify a political decision.

Although this may not immediately trigger a tangible political response, it transmits an international message. For example, by creating and exhibiting *Portrait in Mask* in London, asking UK audiences to wear a mask, Hanasaki draws attention to the way in which political decisions regarding energy production can quickly impact and endanger fundamental human rights, such as breathing uncontaminated air. Her work not only elicits an emotional response, it is a reminder of the need for 'the people' to exercise their free will in order to reduce the power of capitalist political logics over energy production. Discussing these issues in London highlighted connections between Hanasaki's anti-nuclear activism and the demonstrations against the use of nuclear power and nuclear missiles in the UK. *Portrait in Mask* tries to undermine belief in the capability of state mechanisms, not just in Japan but in all countries that are developing nuclear technologies.

Ascribing and Exscribing

Although the Art Action UK residency programme foregrounds artists who live and work in East Japan, the group organises and participates in events and exhibitions that feature other international artists, especially artists exploring issues around nuclear energy production. In March 2015, I co-curated the AAUK exhibition and event series *Those Who Go East* with artist and curator Kaori Homma at White Conduit Projects in London. White Conduit Projects is a project space in North London featuring the work of Japanese artists and designers alongside international artists. It opened in 2014 and, following interest in AAUK, the gallery director Yuki Miyake offered the use of the project space for free, particularly because *Those Who Go East* commemorated the fourth anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami. Alongside Japanese artists, the exhibition and panel discussions provided a platform for UK artists who have 'gone east' to the irradiated areas to make art, as well as artists who live in those areas. *Those Who Go East* featured a screening of The Otolith Group's 'The Radiant'[27], Chris Wainwright's photographic images from the devastated area of Kamaishi [28] and a discussion with artist Kirk Palmer about his video works based on the lingering presence of the atomic bombings in contemporary Japan[29].

One of our goals was to create a sense of a shared, international dialogue around nuclear energy production. What became evident in the talks that accompanied the exhibition is that British artists have a creative challenge: such site-specific and 'political' artworks need to acknowledge the 'foreignness' of the artists, whilst exploring global concerns *with* local people. Each artist wanted to create an aesthetic experience that was led by the space itself; an experience shared with, and guided by, those who experienced the disaster and its consequences first hand. The artists wanted to open up opportunities to question and discuss the politics at stake within the spaces featured,

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[27] Curated and directed by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar, the Otolith Group explores archival documentation, sonic communication and the moving image within gallery spaces. *The Radiant* is a film essay that looks at the invisible consequences of the 2011 nuclear meltdown.

[28] Chris Wainwright is lead artist and advisor on a three year project with Future Lab Tohoku, to provide a cross disciplinary arts based contribution to the social rebuilding and cultural enhancement in the Kamaishi area in the Iwate Prefecture of the Tohoku Region of Japan, devastated by the 2011 tsunami and earthquake.

[29] Other participating artists were Kaya Hanasaki, Yoi Kawakubo, Kaori Homma, Haruka Komori and Natsumi Seo, as well as sociologist Dr. Yoshitaka Mouri.

rather than to communicate an opinion or ascribe a specific meaning. Does this ambiguity or indecision mean these artworks are ultimately apolitical?

Returning to Schmitt, he argues in *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* that the purity of a legal idea can never be realised. He says that every legal thought brings a legal idea that 'needs a particular organisation and form before it can be *translated* into reality' (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 28-30: emphasis added). Here the formation of a concrete idea requires an authority that decides on how to conclude a juristic act. This is a process of translation, a process of 'carrying across' in which the 'pure idea' alters according to the translator's perception and communicative decisions. In this case the 'legal thought' brings with it a 'legal idea' and the sovereign decides on how to translate the idea into a reality.

This sovereign decision ultimately 'emanates from nothingness' (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 31). Schmitt extends the idea of the juristic decision as a 'translation', and begins to speak of it as a point of 'ascription' that determines normative behaviour: 'Ascription is not achieved with the aid of a norm; it happens the other way around. A point of ascription first determines what a norm is and what normative rightness is' (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 32).

For Schmitt, the juristic decision requires attributing the exception to a particular cause in order to create a new norm. In the context of continued nuclear energy production in Japan for example, many people believe the Japanese government have focused on attributing the nuclear disaster to a force majeure (rather than inadequate technologies installed in an area in which there are frequent earthquakes) in order to reinforce the perceived necessity and normality of nuclear technologies. Schmitt refers to Marxism to explain how the point of ascription can provide a systematic basis for political and social changes (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 43). But he critiques Marxists for finding the 'point of ascription' in the economic sphere, where value is relational. However, the reinforcement of any specific 'systematic basis', even one based on non-economic ideals, has repercussions that can destabilise democratic politics[30]. A focus on creating what Schmitt calls a 'point of ascription' allows those in power to hold on to their

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[30] For example, speaking with relation to energy politics in *This Changes Everything*, social activist Naomi Klein speaks of 'the underlying democratic crisis that has allowed multinationals to be the authors of the laws under which they operate' (2014: 360).

sovereignty - to monopolise power and minimise or disregard the concerns of those not in power.

However, if we consider the possibility that sovereignty could be 'the revolt of the people', the point of ascription is no longer the focus of the interplay of power because sovereignty is evident through the *emptying* of power (even as it re-ascribes it). Here the significance of 'exscribing' becomes predominant. In his early writings in *The Birth to Presence* Nancy says that '[t]hought exscribes itself, it corresponds to *itself* (as it must to be what it is) only in this outside of itself to which it alone remits (or rather, emits, and throws, and abandons)' (1993: 176). To exscribe thought is to carry it beyond signification and interpretation. Exscribing 'abandons' what has been posited as 'normative rightness'. By focusing on the way in which thought 'performs itself' as 'a thought', we acknowledge that something 'precedes thought in thought itself' (Nancy BtP: 1993: 176). Exscribing goes beyond the original 'point of ascription' and although it ultimately ascribes a new thing, the focus is on the transformability of these points rather than their permanence.

How can art, which necessarily ascribes meaning to materials and actions, also illuminate the way in which it simultaneously exscribes meaning, and why might it do so? As part of *Those Who Go East*, Kirk Palmer discussed his photographic and video works. The photographic series *Precious Fragments* features images that try to revive a sense of places that were devastated in the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (as well as places that impacted these bombings). The images have a mysterious quality; they appear to 'reside between an ambiguous historical time,' no longer anchored in the present moment (discussion on March 14th, 2015). Palmer emphasises that his artworks are personal attempts to reflect on the atomic bombings, but that these are *shared* reflections. He wants to create spaces that facilitate a process of contemplation and expressly wants to avoid 'telling' viewers what to think. 'The works are quite open in a sense that people can bring their own knowledge, thoughts and feelings about those events to the works,' he explains (discussion, March 14th, 2015). The video works provide a space for contemplation in which audiences can uncover and exscribe their memories, through a process of meditation. Palmer does not have a concrete political goal. 'I'm representing the space that allows people to make their own observations and enter into the work in a similar way to me,' he

explains. 'It's an empathetic process. It's important that lessons are learned [from the bombings], but part of that process is first of all feeling something and then setting about understanding it as well as you can' (discussion on March 14th, 2015). By prolonging the sensing that takes place prior to our ascribing meaning, a potentially transformative space is created. Deliberate attention to how we exscribe sense, to how sense is beyond interpretation, can lead to changes to the wider social consciousness or particular issues and the way in which we respond to them. This requires a suspension of pre-formed narratives and images, an emptying of the mind that enables the viewer to 'sense' the spaces featured in the artworks.

Nevertheless, exscribing and ascribing are concurrent; exscribing always brings about a concrete thing that is part of the tangible world. Each artwork, and each thought of an artwork becomes part of 'an order' - part of a reality. Nancy states that 'to compose is to regroup, reintegrate, return, reduce' (BtP: 1993: 325). Creative processes reorder the way in which we sense the world, but if we seek solely to ascribe meaning in these processes, we ultimately begin to reduce sense. If, however, we are aware of the impermanence of meaning, of how signification is generated through both ascribing and exscribing meaning, we remain open to sense.

The role of critique

AAUK aims to provide a space for marginalised artists to express themselves however they wish, away from the social and political climate in which they normally work. These include anti-nuclear activists such as Kaya Hanasaki. Nevertheless, the group is careful not to create a unified political message. The group's featured artworks cannot be illustrative of an overall political goal because this would reinforce the ascribing of meaning, which could close down their communicative potential. How then, can the group facilitate the process of exscribing sovereignty?

Here the illustration of the katechon helps us to further understand the relational dynamics of sovereignty. The katechon is originally a theological concept and is referred to by both Carl Schmitt and Paolo Virno to explore the idea of sovereignty and the state of exception. In theology, the katechon is a restraining force that limits evil by encompassing it and holding it within itself. The katechon prevents the manifestation

of evil and sustains the possibility of redemption. Paradoxically however, in sustaining this possibility through encompassing evil, it ultimately impedes redemption too. For Schmitt, a 'radical party organisation' embodies this restraining force because it decides on when and how the state of exception is declared (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 9). However, Virno, in his book *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation,* points out that by focusing on the ability of the katechon to stabilise and protect, Schmitt creates a role that enables different political institutions to 'claim responsibility'. He *uses* the idea of the katechon to ascribe sovereignty (2008: 58).

On the other hand, Virno wants to detach the idea of the katechon from the state. He understands it as a force that 'brings into check the excess and defect of semanticity' and 'delays the end of the world'; the katechon exceeds finality and is open to sense (2008: 60). In other words, the katechon is a restraining force that oscillates between over-articulation of sense and under-articulation of sense - a force that enables humans to be open and responsive to the world. He explains that '*Katechon* not only oscillates between the negative and the positive, without ever expunging the negative; it also safeguards the state of oscillation and its persistence as such' (2008: 61).

The word 'oscillation' indicates a repeating fluctuation and implies movement within a space, a motion that depends on two restoring forces that are in tension and continue to balance each other. These two restoring forces are in relation to a stable equilibrium in the middle of a cycle of oscillation. This equilibrium sustains oscillation, to bring about 'stillness' is to end oscillation. If we recognise that our consciousness is characterised by the way in which we ascribe and exscribe meaning, this point of stillness might be understood as our shared finitude. Here, non-existence is a latent equilibrium that enables the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing meaning.

To visualise how this relation between opposing forces is concurrent, we might imagine a metronome or pendulum. Just as the motion of a metronome is sustained through an equal and opposing 'force of gravity' and 'tension force', the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing meaning is sustained by each other, so that at any given moment, both forces are causing the 'motion' (here, the 'motion' of consciousness)[31].

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[31] In her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett explores the idea that power is sustained through oscillating forces. In literal terms, Bennett explains how electrical power is generated through oscillating

Ascribing and exscribing are two contingent and simultaneous forces at play within our sense of the world, within our representations of it and how we are represented in it. But this motion of oscillation between the two forces both liberates and consolidates the self. It is an oscillation between loss of presence and reinstatement of presence, a movement between an excess and a deficit of semanticity. That is, communication fluctuates between sense ('shapeless potentiality' - the 'excess of semanticity') and categorisation ('reduction of discourses into stereotypes' - the 'defect of semanticity')(Virno 2008: 52). Or, if we understand exscribing as 'writing's opening' (Nancy BtP: 1993: 338), we might say that social practices oscillate between exscribing and ascribing.

In his essay 'Mirror Neurons, Linguistic Negation, Reciprocal Recognition', Virno develops the hypothesis that 'the relation of a human animal to its own kind is assured by an original "intersubjectivity" that precedes the very constitution of the individual mind. The "we" exists even before we can speak of a self-conscious "I"' (2008: 175). In other words, language acts as rift that affirms the singular being, albeit as part of a plurality. Virno believes that language, as a public institution, radicalises aggression but at the same time limits this radicalisation because it maintains our ability to recognise and relate to others (2008: 187). Here, language is 'a very particular type of katechon' in which the problem and the solution are one and the same (2008: 189). The "I" ultimately is defined by the 'We' *after* a process of articulation in which the 'We' 'destabilises intraspecies empathy' (2008: 184).

Virno's interpretation of linguistics is based on the idea of 'multitude'. The concept of 'multitude' is built on the idea that the history of human nature begins with the 'articulation between drives and language' (2008: 40). Multitude is defined by history and is characterised by tensions and antagonisms. It is made up of what Virno calls

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waves of electrons (measured in amperes) and current (measured in volts). She says that when the two forces rise and fall at the same time they create active power, and when they are out of sync, they create reactive power. Reactive power is needed to sustain the pressure of electricity (voltage) and thus the whole electric grid. Because reactive power leads to less profit, it is in short supply and this balance within the system is often compromised, leading to blackouts in peoples' homes. This visualisation of a concurrent oscillation helps to illustrate the significance of being 'out of sync', and the importance of a less 'productive' force that sustains a flow of power (2010: 56).

'non-singular individuals' - individuals whose singularity is the result of a process that promises universality and who are therefore secondary to the multitude.

In this way, Virno's concept of 'multitude' seems to invert Nancy's ontological theory of being singular plural. Virno acknowledges the intersubjectivity that precedes the consciousness of self, but he overrides the significance of this by focusing on the power of the multitude. By emphasising the ability of the multitude to prescribe rules for singular beings, he understands individuals as pre-formed concepts of universal values. As such, 'multitude' reinforces already formed paradigms of globalisation because it assumes that singularity is constructed by the multitude, and therefore resides 'within' multitude, rather than *as* multitude.

Although Virno recognises the concurrent oscillation between the rigid definition and ambiguity of meaning within semantics (exscribing and ascribing), he ultimately brings the focus back on to the way in which we collectively ascribe meaning. Virno understands the katechon as an institution that adapts itself to the state of exception created by the multitude. At the root of Virno's argument is an emphasis on the power of the multitude over the individual. Here, individual agency is secondary to the collective political power of the multitude, and the katechon functions as a political tool of the 'We'[32]. However, a focus on the simultaneity of 'exscribing' leads us to acknowledge the way in which singularities exist *as* the multitude - that they have agency and can change or reform the multitude.

For Nancy, the 'we' occurs through being singular plural, so that singularites have agency *because* they are singular plural. So far, I have addressed the idea of exscribing and sense through focusing on Nancy's earlier writings in *The Birth to Presence*. Turning to his later book *The Sense of the World*, quoted earlier, we can see that Nancy then develops an understanding of the political as 'an incessant tying up of singularities with each other… without end or structure'; politics as a gesture rather than a form (SoW:

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[32] Virno concludes that the 'contemporary multitude, in the process of its exodus from state sovereignty, presents to the naked eye the connection between the two renowned Aristotelian definitions of Homo sapiens: linguistic animal and political animal' (2008: 65). These final words expose an additional difference between Virno's concept of communication and Nancy's: for Nancy, being singular-plural, being aware of oneself as plural, is first philosophy. Therefore communication, verbal thought and the distancing of the self from the self are pre-requisites for politics. Linguistics (communication) allows for politics and the two are inseparable. Communication exscribes social ties as it ascribes them - a movement that prevents atomisation and re-affirms 'being singular plural'.

1997: 111-112). Simply put, if we follow Virno's reasoning we arrive at an acceptance that politics defines being singular plural, rather than appreciating how being singular plural can generate new political possibilities. This leads to an ethical dilemma regarding the nature of democracy: whether democracy facilitates individuation or whether it prescribes how people individuate.

Virno's emphasis on 'the multitude' as a force over individuals is a valid and vital observation. Humans are increasingly subject to patterns of behaviour dictated by the general consensus of the masses, by the decisions capitalism places before us, and that we are often obliged to reinforce. Nevertheless, Nancy's decision to focus on spacing and exscribing, which emphasise the power of the individual as it spaces itself with others, is an intentional strategy (albeit one without specific goals).

To perpetuate the possibility of a democracy that allows people within the multitude to have agency over their lives, Nancy articulates how, as we ascribe meaning to things and events, we also exscribe meaning, in that our experience of the world is partly beyond signification. This suggests that in the search for meaning, we acknowledge that thought and sense exceed interpretation and that we consequently hold back from wholeheartedly reinforcing preformed discourses - a gesture that questions our inclination towards certainty and demands a kind of passivity.

In his essay 'Politics II' in *The Sense of the World,* Nancy argues that by conceptualising politics using the four terms 'subject', 'citizen', 'sovereignty' and 'community', we ultimately close down the space for sense to be self-sufficient. He defines the citizen as 'one, someone, everyone'. Citizenship is 'a gait', 'a mobile complex of rights, obligations, dignities and virtues' (SoW: 1997: 104). The concept of the citizen is similar to Virno's sense of the word 'multitude' in that it is defined by public exchange. On the contrary, the subject (in this context) is understood as a 'self that raises its unicity' which leads to a religious politics (SoW: 1997: 104).

In this context, the word 'people' refers to the point at which the citizen and the subject become relational, the point at which the subject 'spaces' and can 'appropriate the constitutive exteriority of the city' (SoW: 1997: 105/6). Religious politics arises from the way in which subjects collectively conduct themselves and reveal sense. In this way

religious politics results in the assignment of sense as 'appropriable knowledge', even though it initially develops from an emphasis on exscribing as *mode* of being (SoW: 1997: 105/6). Sense can transform the citizen into a subject, but at a certain point shared sense converges and becomes re-appropriated, for example through religious politics. And to prevent sense from spiralling in on itself, leading to fundamentalist religious beliefs for example, the process of exscribing must be acknowledged.

Nancy continues: 'in this crucial position, these two terms, *sovereignty* and *community* doubtless represent quite well all that is at stake in the West with regard to sense between appropriative interiority and inappropriable exteriority… sovereignty and community can be the mere outline of an area of shared jurisdiction, or else they can identify themselves as the subject of a fundamental legitimacy' (SoW: 1997: 107). In other words, to truly acknowledge sense, any manifestations of sovereignty and community must be placeholders - nothing more than an outline. If they are aligned or used for a specific 'legitimate' decision, political space begins to close itself. One of the unique characteristics of political art interventions is that they are open to sense; they chalk and blur the outlines that constitute 'sovereignty' and 'community'. But this is not to say that art, and cultural practices in general, are illustrative - they can expose sense, and highlight areas of 'shared jurisdiction'.

The political must be understood as relational, a process of affiliation or fellowship, rather than a 'quest' for a particular outcome. For example, if democracy itself becomes identified as the 'subject of a fundamental legitimacy' to be used to further legitimise political force, where again, political space closes. If like Nancy, we visualise democracy as a set of 'guardrails', we can begin to look at how these 'guardrails' function within the context of the political, rather than how they advance 'a politics'. This analogy draws attention to democracy as protecting or supporting (SoW: 1997: 110-112).

Nancy understands this element of fellowship as '*beyond* justice, liberty, and equality', and imagines the act of tying as 'coming into the very place of sovereignty' - an act that 'gives a place to every event of sense' (SoW: 1997: 115; emphasis added). Nancy's metaphor of a politics of 'ties' helps us to understand the relational dynamics that characterise the AAUK residency programme, both in terms of its structure and the kinds of artistic approaches it foregrounds. For example, at an event hosted by The

Japan Foundation at the Free Word centre in London, residency artist Yoi Kawakubo explained that he didn't want to make his work 'too political' because it makes practicing art 'too dangerous'. He feels that emotions are faster than thought and he prefers to respond calmly and thoughtfully to political issues, to take longer to respond. When pressed on his views on nuclear energy production he said, 'I just want people to think about it. If they ultimately decide that we need nuclear power then that is respectable' (from my notes on the talk). His deliberate openness and hesitancy to decide contrasts with commonplace political and social discourses that encourage us to form and share opinions as fast as possible. As such, Kawakubo's artistic approach itself becomes a political stance; whether it intervenes with or runs alongside politics, it still relates to and can influence political engagement. This indicates that by recognising that consciousness is experienced as an oscillation between ascribing and exscribing we can gradually create a dynamic 'place' for sense. Such a place cannot *contain* sense, but allows others to share in, and shape it - it is accessible because it forms gradually. Social bonds gradually 'tie' and 're-tie'.

How can acknowledging the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing be politically transformative? Current systems of globalisation focus on how we ascribe meaning and create values. Often, however, grassroots movements that draw attention to how we *exscribe* meaning prevent us from reducing people and things to specific values. It isn't possible to *replace* current systems of globalisation with other pre-formed systems, but it is possible to gradually alter the structures that reinforce globalisation as we know it, from within these systems. Similarly, the artists who take part in the AAUK residency cannot change political practices in Japan in the short term, but over time, their resistance can have subversive social power because they maintain a sense of the political through critical and creative engagement, and are open to sense. These art practices provide an ever-changing 'place for sense' that includes and adapts to those participating in, or engaging with, the artworks.

Exscribing and faith

How can we refrain from clinging to fixed signs? The following paragraphs consider the choice to either 'reify' or 'fetishise' meaning. It argues that to 'reify' is a process of becoming. It is the process of making an idea 'real'. Its significance lies in the way in

which it is understood as a *process* rather than the achievement of a 'final outcome'. The meaning of reifying is to be found in this process, not in its product. To explore the concept of reifying further, I also turn to Nancy's writings on the concept of faith. In his 2008 book *Dis- Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, he understands faith as a 'praxical excess' which, like the process of reifying, 'aligns itself with nothing other than itself' (2008; D; 52). By linking the concepts of reification and faith, I want to suggest that the significance of politically engaged artwork is found not in any apparent functional or 'operative' role within a political discourse, but in how its *in*operativity exceeds 'globalisation' and is 'world-forming'.

To contextualise my reading of exscription as different from Schmitt's concept of 'ascription' (Schmitt (1934) 2005 edition: 32), I approach the idea of faith as 'faith in the in-ascribable' - in the impossibility of fully ascribing meaning, as indicated through the ontology of being singular plural. 'In-' encapsulates the sense of 'not' and of 'the opposite of' ascribing (rather than un- which carries a sense of removal or reversal back *to something*, and therefore detracts from sense of engagement with the radically other). The idea of 'faith in the in-ascribable' also points to the relation between ascribing and exscribing, linking this perception of faith with the motif of 'oscillation'. In the context of art, this frames the process of making art as an act of faith in which an artwork becomes evidence of the faith required in creative processes, but it also demands faithfulness on the part of the viewer. As such I also frame viewing art as an act of faith. Viewing art also demands that the viewer have faith in the in-ascribable significance of the artwork itself, in the in-ascribable gesture of creating. As such, faith, even that of the viewer, requires creative engagement – engagement that refrains from ascribing a fixed meaning, and shares in the artist's sense of the world.

A choice between reifying and fetishising

The idea of consciousness as an oscillation between exscribing and ascribing meaning builds on a perception of language as both performative and productive, as praxis and poiesis. To speak is to manifest the self, but in choosing words we ascribe meaning, even though these meanings are relational and incomplete. As such, language is both compliant and yet its incompleteness sustains creative relationality. Creative potential is enhanced or hindered depending on our response to the oscillation between

ascribing/exscribing meaning. Virno's previous writings on language revolve around our response to this duality within language, and in his earlier book *When the Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature* (published in Italian in 2003 and English in 2015) he says that we have a choice to either 'reify' or 'fetishise' linguistic meaning: 'If we don't recognize the nature of language as inseparably perceptible and imperceptible, that is, the reification of the mind that language implies, ends up justifying fetishism by attributing a certain kind of conceptual attitude to a non-conceptual object' (2015: 151).

Virno's concept of reification differs from Marxist reification, which refers to the 'thingification' of interpersonal relationships in which subjects become objectified, and subsequent objects have the power to subjectify. For Virno, 'to reify' refers to the *process* of making real and concerns the relation of this process *to* the subject, rather than its final outcome. On the other hand, 'fetishisation' refers to the relation *between* objects and to the replacement of a thought with an object (Virno 2015: 140). Reification is the 'making-real' of a thought, rather than replacing it with something that is already real. This can apply to how we respond to the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing. We can either fetishise this oscillation and reinforce the illusion of fixed meanings, replacing one meaning with another, or we can reify it. The latter still facilitates the illusion of fixed meanings but exposes its illusory nature and focuses on how reifying exceeds the meaning produced. Virno says that 'fetishism passes the empirical off as transcendental, while reification results in the empirical revelation of the transcendental' (2015: 139). To reify is to dismantle the illusion of universality and accentuate how we are always beyond a 'common experience', even though paradoxically, this is one thing we have in common. To reify is to affirm the ontological condition of being singular plural.

Reification and Faith

In *Dis-Enclosure*, Nancy understands faith as the 'inoperative' work of the subject[33] (D: 2008: 52). To have faith is to acknowledge and tolerate what is unknowable. The incompleteness and non-functionality of an act of faith means that the faithful person eschews the need for an absolute. Nancy suggests that faith is something that

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[33] Nancy refers to the writer and philosopher Maurice Blanchot and writes in a 'Blanchotian idiom', saying that 'faith is the inactivity or inoperativity that takes place in and as the work of the subject' (D: 2008: 52).

underpins religious thought because by its very nature it cannot be 'material' or 'worldly'. As such, it allows the subject to be 'infinitely more and excessively more than what it is in itself and for itself' (D: 2008: 52). He refers to the book of James in the Bible, saying that 'there is at the heart of faith a decision of faith that precedes itself and exceeds itself' (D: 2008: 52). In this way, Nancy's concept of faith focuses on the process of making and of deciding, rather than a particular functionality or ultimate decision.

Virno's concept of 'reifying' versus 'fetishising', and the idea of having faith versus requiring 'evidence', both characterise the spacing of a subject. 'To reify' or 'to have faith' indicate the 'thrownness' of existence and emphasise the way in which we are required to 'let things be', even as we define them[34]. This process of reifying resounds with the concept of faith because both require a kind of passivity towards the future. To reify requires faith because it doesn't pre-suppose an outcome by projecting an already-formed thing or idea into a possible future. Both 'to reify' and 'to have faith' are conditional on the unknowability of the future. Neither activity can be 'used' pre-emptively to prove something.

Nevertheless, the verb 'reify' can be confusing because often within theory the etymological emphasis is often on making a *thing*, rather than *making* a thing[35]. The contextual meaning of the word is often weighted towards its eventual materiality. On the other hand, Nancy's concept of faith emphasises the process of 'making': 'faith is its own work. It *is* in works, it *makes* them, and the works *make* it' (D: 2008: 52). Nancy emphasises non-material (non)belief, in which significance lies in an act of trust and a 'decision of faith', rather than the search for 'proof' of something, or a logical belief in some*thing*, which requires proof of some pre-determined truth. For this reason, preference will now be given to Nancy's concept of faith. This will be approached as a 'philosophical faith' rather than a 'religious faith'. This is not to say that it is a secular faith, because faith by its very nature is immaterial and exceeds 'worldliness'. I want to

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[34] The idea of 'letting be' which characterises Nancy's concepts of 'exscribing' and 'freedom' and refers to Heidegger's understanding of language as the 'clearing-concealing advent of being itself' (Heidegger 1998: 249). For Heidegger, humans are able to access the 'clearing of being' through language. In other words, being is the state of moving into an empty space, but in doing so, inhabiting that space and negating its status as a 'clearing'. It closes the space so that it is 'a self concealed sheltering' (1998: 267).
[35] Virno says 'The most diverse schools of thought have violently denigrated the process of reification. This is a failure of thought....Reification is a dynamic term' (2003: 135).

suggest that a more radical process of 'world-forming' can be brought about through having faith in the in-ascribable rather than looking for definitive meanings within this duality to justify a universal goal. The awareness of the in-ascribable is only possible through the ascriptive/ exscriptive duality that defines human consciousness. Here faith can be understood as confidence in the mutability of meaning, in spite of how we nevertheless continue to ascribe meaning.

Art and faith

Art differs from production because it is ultimately functionless. Its significance depends on its inoperativity. Unlike design, architecture or advertising, the creation of an artwork is not simply representative of a pre-formed idea and does not have to meet up to criteria of functionality, it is the 'making real' of a sense or an emergent idea. Like the process of reifying, it results in 'the empirical revelation of the transcendental' (Virno 2015: 139). An artwork exists as a form or experience. Often, an artwork has a kind of lifespan. It both ascribes and exscribes meaning - it can be written about, photographed, interpreted. In time, it is swept up into larger social narratives, often becoming illustrative of a particular idea. Seeking to articulate a specific meaning or message within an artwork can quickly lead to fetishisation. Even then, however, an artwork eludes complete signification and is not merely functional. A straightforward example might be Duchamp's *Fountain*, which is 'art' only if the viewer continues to suspend the inclination to reduce it to a functional object, a urinal. And within the art world, *Fountain* carries an historical significance and a financial value and it ascribes meaning within art historical discourses. But even so, as a 100-year-old joke, we can still sense its ludic spontaneity, which continues to exceed its historical significance within the art world. It continues to provoke the question 'what is art?' and in doing so, points to this inquiring gesture at the centre of every artwork[36].

Because art is 'inoperative', to make it requires a kind of faith. Nancy's understanding of faith corresponds to art-making: 'It *is* in works, it *makes* them, and the works *make* it' (D: 2008: 52). And it demands a 'faithful' response; for it to continue to be 'art' it must continue to be inoperative. If it is functionalised, it is no longer really art, but becomes

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[36] Nancy's interpretation of *Fountain* can be read in his article 'Art Today' in the <u>Journal of Visual Culture</u> April 2010 vol. 9 no. 1 91-99.

illustration. And to be 'faithful' to a work of art, requires us to appreciate how it exscribes meaning (even as it ascribes it), to experience it rather than to search for and extract a universal meaning, which usually reflects a preformed idea or desire projected onto the work. Although it is impossible *not* to have a personal response to an artwork, and to ascribe some meaning to it, an artwork requires us to recognise how we respond to it and to question its meaning.

For example, when AAUK invited artist Kirk Palmer to discuss his work as part of a panel discussion for the exhibition *Those Who Go East*, we were initially interested in drawing out a specific 'anti-nuclear' discourse from his work. We soon realised that there was a much more complex engagement with history within his work. On one level, it might have been possible to ascribe a simple political significance to the work, but to truly engage with the work demanded a suspension of interpretation. This suspension was characteristic of the work itself, which used ambiguous images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to undo preconceptions of those places and to create a sense of shared exploration through 'oblique' documentary footage. Palmer explains that *Murmur*, a film showing wind blowing through the bamboo groves in Kyoto and Hiroshima, is intended as an 'oblique representation' of his contemplation of the bombings (discussion, March 14th, 2015). The obliqueness or indirectness of *Murmer* facilitates and encourages the suspension of pre-formed ideas about a given subject, even if this suspension is necessarily partial or temporal.

In *Dis-Enclosure* Nancy warns: '"Art" must not risk becoming the horizon, and therefore the closure, of an interrogation or hopeful anticipation that must, on the contrary, be immediately *dis-enclosed*, freed from any assignment as means or material aid, as possibility of response or provision' (2008: 132). If art were to become a horizon, it would demarcate a limit and become closed, or finite. In this particular passage in *Dis-Enclosure,* Nancy discusses the role of art in relation to the concept of prayer[37]. Therefore, in Nancean terms, if art forms a horizon, it would lead to the closure of 'religion' and must be rejected. Here, religion is understood as an exploration of the limits of human knowledge[38]. I am juxtaposing this idea with an understanding of faith

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[37] With reference to the writings of poet Michel Deguy and Theodor Adorno.

[38] When Nancy here refers to 'religion', he speaks of it in a wider sense as a kind of semantic institution that 'repatriates' the real within, and contrasts to what he calls our 'faded humanisms and clenched

as 'faith in the in-ascribable'. Nancy reminds us of the inclination to reduce artwork to an illustrative meaning, but he reminds us that for art to be authentic, it must 'allow sense to overflow'. When we call something 'art' we ask the viewer to share in the process of reifying, to suspend their opinions, and to demonstrate faith in the artwork and in the experience of sensing and thinking. Faith in the in-ascribable affirms the way meaning and sense overflow. It acknowledges the significance of exscribing.

Art-making and art-viewing are both gestures that require the ascribing and exscribing of sense. But by having faith in the significance of an artwork despite its ambiguities and its failure to function as a means to an end, we resist the inclination to uncritically affirm pre-existing social discourses. Art demands creative engagement - its purpose is not simply pedagogic. It demands thinking about thinking, a process that suspends 'knowledge' in the process of communicating knowledge.

The exscribing of the disaster

Although AAUK formed in response to a political crisis, the group does not have a specific political goal. Rather, we aim to provide a space for artists to find respite from the after-effects of a disaster and a platform for artists and art activists to critically engage with emergent social issues. When it comes to responding to disasters such as the Fukushima disaster, AAUK has a kind of faith in the ability of art to create and maintain vital social bonds. The group occupies a dynamic intersection between art, politics and faith.

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot understands faith as a 'staunchness' that 'dares not recognise its emptiness' (1995: 89). Similarly, Nancy believes that faith is defined as belief in spite of emptiness, a belief alongside and within emptiness. Blanchot's understanding of passivity points to how faith can sustain awareness of how artworks exscribe meaning, when responding to a disaster.

As we have considered, 'sovereignty as the revolt of the people' requires a process of withdrawing from the social relation that affirms the sovereign power. For example, by

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religiosities' (D: 2008: 138). Here religion is redefined as something that facilitates sense rather than closing it.

encouraging people to wear masks, Kaya Hanasaki aimed to expose the inadequacy of such an assurance. Likewise, wearing the masks did not generate a new assurance, but it was simply a gesture that acknowledged the personal choices of the individual. The oscillation between ascribing and exscribing exposes the emptiness at the heart of sovereignty, but conceals it again.

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot writes about 'the permanent neutralisation of all present thought', which is at the same time 'the repudiation of all absence of thought' (1995: 33). He goes on to say that '[o]scillation (paradoxical equality) is the risk run by thought which is abandoned to this double requirement and which does not know that it must be sovereignly patient - in other words, passive outside of all sovereignty' (1995: 33)[39]. In the face of unknowable disaster, writing can only communicate this unknowability - it can only fail to represent that which can never be grasped by thought. Writing is therefore an action of passivity. Because it is representative, it can never fully communicate sense. Writing ascribes meaning, but at the same time illuminates an absence of meaning.

How does this passivity relate to the political? To use Blanchot's language, we must 'welcome the passive pressure' of that which is not yet thought and to bring to the surface 'absent meaning' (1995: 41). Later he quotes Nietzsche, who depicts words as having 'grazed a problem' (1995: 106). This simple analogy indicates that whilst writing cannot articulate, let alone solve a problem, it engenders sensitivity. The passivity of words grazes against that which is written about. In writing, there is a tension between the presence and absence of the Other. Within this shared sense of interaction, writing both exscribes and ascribes meaning with, and in relation to, the Other.

Writing is relational to the 'political', even though this relation is indirect. Blanchot writes: 'Writing, since it persists in a relation of irregularity with itself - and thus with the utterly other - does not know what will become of it politically: this is its intransitivity, its necessarily indirect relation to the political' (1995: 78). Like the katechon, writing embodies the oscillation between presence and absence, between ascribing and exscribing, and allows us to share in the production of meaning and representation of

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[39] Blanchot's idea of oscillation as 'paradoxical equality' reflects Virno's metaphor of oscillation and the idea of oscillation as a motion that depends on two restoring forces that are in tension and continue to balance each other.

sense. If, like Nancy, we understand the political as 'place of being-together' (SoW: 1997: 88), we realise that this accessibility to the place of being-together is vital, and that awareness of exscribing is essential to our engagement with the political, even if it paradoxically eludes it.

In the context of art after the disaster, it is particularly significant that we refrain from fetishising the ability to ascribe meaning to experience. The disaster is 'what escapes the very possibility of existence — it is the limit of writing… the disaster de-scribes… it is beyond the pale of writing' (Blanchot 1995: 7). Because disasters are of such a magnitude, an experience of disaster cannot be communicated. Blanchot later reflects that 'it is not thought that the disaster causes to disappear, but rather problems and questions - affirmation and negation, silence and speech, sign and insignia — from thought' (1995: 52). In other words, the disaster is a kind of numbness to which writing alludes but cannot capture. It is important to acknowledge that the disaster exceeds our senses because to assimilate a disaster into reality is to reduce it and quantify it. After a disaster, focusing solely on the ascribing of meaning reduces the shared experience of reifying the experience, and exposing an absence of meaning. This shared experience, and having faith in its significance, allows individuals to respond in a personal way and to gain strength from the ability to re-form the world around them.

For Blanchot, art (and art as literature) 'maintains and regenerates' an unstable presence and absence between the sign and what it signifies (1995: 111). In his earlier text *The Birth to Presence,* Nancy reflected that art does not just expose the 'strangeness' of objects and of things, but also exposes the challenge of this strangeness (BtP: 1993: 185). Later, in *The Sense of the World*, Nancy extrapolates on this idea, saying: 'Art is the presentation of presentation insofar as presentation —the eternally intact touch of being — cannot be sacrificed' (SoW: 1997: 138). The fleeting sense captured within art is itself a testament to the impossibility of reducing existence to a comprehensible assemblage of sensations. It is testament to the need to reach out to others.

Drawing attention to the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing meaning can create communicative challenges. For example, AAUK's resistance to articulating a specific political stance has given it an ambiguity that has impacted public perceptions, even challenging how we perceive ourselves as a group. Initially, in order to extend our

network, we focussed on reaching out to anti-nuclear activists and climate change lobbyists. Some of the founders of the group have strong political views, especially regarding the production of nuclear energy, and have been perceived as facilitating 'activist art'[40]. At times, members of the group wanted to highlight specific political messages within the artworks, but found that the artists themselves were resistant to describing their work in such concrete terms. On numerous occasions, AAUK had been invited to speak in a panel discussion hosted by the Japan Foundation, but at the time of writing in 2017, the organisers had become increasingly concerned with our articulation of a political message. The Japan Foundation are funded by the Japanese Government, and therefore do not want to provide a platform for discourses that are explicitly anti-governmental. Our political 'agenda' was scrutinised by the Japan Foundation. But within the group we also felt that we needed to emphasise our role as facilitators of critical engagement. Instead of advancing the political views of individuals within the group, AAUK wants to provoke discussions. Because we don't try to find political solutions, for example by directly campaigning against nuclear energy production, our political ambiguity has alienated some audiences, who are drawn to AAUK as a 'political art group' with the aim of lobbying for specific outcomes. A recent talk in Tokyo highlighted the need to explain our role in more depth, which uncovered questions about the nature of political engagement and the role of art. The fundamental goal is to provide respite for artists still coping with the disaster and to facilitate discourses between disparate viewpoints. In the end, whilst we did participate in the Japan Foundation event, the content and speakers were carefully selected in accordance with the wishes of the Foundation. Nevertheless, the event itself actually sparked an engaging and fundamentally 'political' discourse, which began to address the themes of criticality and passivity themselves. AAUK recognises the need for diverse audiences, but rather than canvassing specific groups, as we had begun to do, we hope to engage with and generate new audiences. In this way AAUK 'grazes against' the political issues relating to the question of nuclear energy production or Japanese politics, rather than adopting a concrete political stance.

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[40] Fran Pickering, *Activist art for Fukushima*, 12/3/15, http://sequinsandcherryblossom.com

So far, this chapter has explored how Nancy's concept of exscribing relates to sovereignty and has looked at the ways in which ascribing and exscribing characterise engagement with art. It has highlighted the ways in which cultural practices influence how we sense the world, and how we conceptualise this sense. This final section will address how acknowledging 'exscribing' might influence our perception of the political. It builds on the idea that awareness of the simultaneity of exscribing and ascribing leads to a renewed perception of the political, and asks how this renewal might relate to political apparatuses in a globalising world.

In his essay 'Political Writing' in *The Sense of the World*, Nancy explains that writing doesn't pass on 'a sense' of something, but it '*makes sense in being passed on and shared among individuals*' (SoW: 1997: 118). Although writing exposes an absence of signification, the relation between presence and absence and a shared sense of a message is important. For Nancy, the 'political task' is 'to let the relation as sense "ground itself" in the signification of being together "as its figure". Only on this condition — that the "relation" should be a "figure" — can the *together* of the group avoid the alternative between *all* and/or *nothing*' (SoW: 1997: 119). As we have considered, to let 'sense "ground itself"' requires faith; a passivity that paradoxically arises from a 'decision of faith', an intentionality towards non-intentionality (D: 2008: 52). This is a decisive consciousness of, and criticality towards, how one senses the world and requires us to cultivate a kind of enduring passivity. Here, passivity does not mean a complete refusal to have opinions, or a refusal to make decisions - it means not clinging to these as fundamental truths. Even when making and carrying out daily choices, this passivity can characterise the sense of the world and the way in which sense is shared with others (recognising that it is singular plural).

For Nancy, writing is political because it traces out 'the essencelessness of relation' rather than an 'effect of an "engagement" in the service of a cause' (SoW: 1997: 119). It is political because it facilitates a shared communication in which sense grounds itself differently each time, rather than being contrived through pre-formed strategic goals. Because the significance of the communicative bond lies in its incommensurability and its ultimate failure to 'serve a cause', communication also requires a kind of faith.

However, even if (as with AAUK and Liberate Tate) there are no 'final' or conclusive goals, there are smaller goals along the way and these are articulated through a decision-making process. Fundamentally, there are still decisions made as to which relational bonds lead to the togetherness of the group. Earlier in the thesis, I highlighted Grant Kester's question: 'How do we determine which forms of insight, and which efforts to destabilize existing systems of meaning, are liberating or empowering, and which are harmful or destructive?' (2011: 113). Here I want to extend the question to ask 'how, through awareness of the exscribing of meaning, do we determine which forms of insight are liberating or empowering?' I want to suggest that forms of insight always contain self-determining, incommensurable nuances, and that these must be acknowledged and respected within any process of deliberate regulation, to allow for liberation and empowerment of those involved.

Nancy understands politics as 'being-with', a social relation in which singularities tie and untie. Within this process, Nancy draws attention to how we exscribe meaning, leading to a realisation of how one might reify, rather than fetishise sense. Whilst Nancy recognises that decision-making is necessary, he focuses on our relationship to meaning, to how we reach our decisions and our level of attachment to them, rather than the meanings that are ultimately reinforced through each decision. He wants us to critically engage with our ability to reduce and simplify sense, and to sustain openness and 'faithfulness' to that which is in-ascribable in our consciousness – to the inevitable excess of semanticity that characterises the ontological condition of being singular plural. Ten years after writing *The Sense of the World*, Nancy returns to address the political task before us. In the context of this thesis, one of the key passages that I have quoted is from *The Creation of the World or Globalization* where Nancy says that our task is 'nothing less than the task of creating a form or symbolization of the world… It is the extremely concrete and determined task - a task that can only be a struggle - of posing the following question to each gesture, each conduct, each *habitus* and each *ethos:* How do you engage with the world?' (CoW: 2007: 53: emphasis added). The following paragraphs will consider engagement with the world with reference to how we exscribe the 'in-common' of existence and how this has temporal significance.

The 'decision' of being-in-common

Writing has a communicative role. It accentuates our ontological condition of being singular plural and opposes the 'cutting-up of the world into exclusive worlds' (SoW: 1997: 119). Here we can begin to understand that by representing something - through gestures, speech, text or art - we engage in the *process* of communica*ting*. Communicating acknowledges the non-exclusivity of individual worlds. It is the recognition of the plurality of existence, and even though each communication fails to entirely capture a sense of a reality, we share an awareness of this failure. It is this awareness of an absence that binds our being-in-common. This is why Nancy says that existence 'decides itself as a certain *in* of the in-common' (SoW: 1997: 93). Existence is characterised by the shared awareness of the difference that we have in common.

When sovereignty becomes the revolt of the people, it does not mean that power evaporates. The idea that the people can 'exscribe' sovereignty (as they re-ascribe it) emphasises the political as the place of 'being together'. But Nancy, in an essay entitled 'Politics I' in *The Sense of the World*, warns that 'the becoming-truth of the political can go so far as to absorb sense into itself' (SoW: 1997: 89). For 'the political' to function and acknowledge plurality, it cannot 'absorb sense' or fetishise sensibilities - it must remain non-objective, a political engagement that requires passivity and receptiveness towards that which is not knowable, the Other.

This chapter is focusing on how grassroots arts organisations might respond to the aftermath of a disaster and how this engagement is 'political'. Often grassroots organisations are under pressure to demonstrate ways in which they provide tangible relief, or to show how they function towards a particular end. Following a disaster, when there are pressing issues concerning shelter, healthcare and food, how can a grassroots arts collective respond to the 'in-common' of the Other? In such critical conditions, there is still a need to sustain communicative bonds with those affected. Through sustained communicative processes, political ties form in the present, where they do not take the form of goals or ideals to be projected into the future. These communicative processes recognise the importance of being responsive to emotional and non-material requirements, which are often minimised when those in need have few rights.

During the 2014 AAUK artist residency, Haruka Komori and Natsumi Seo shared their video documentaries of communities in Rikuzentakata recovering after 3/11. The documentaries reflect on the abruptness of the Japanese government's response to the disaster. The rebuilding process has been rapid and efficient, but it has prioritised pragmatism. As a result, many living in the area feel that they have once again been disenfranchised because they have not had a genuine opportunity to respond collectively. Although there have been public consultations, often these were held so soon after the initial impact of the disaster that many in the community were still in a state of shock and unable to fully engage with the task of participating in the rebuilding process.

During the Japan Foundation panel discussion, David Alexander, Professor of Risk and Disaster Reduction at UCL, commented on the speed of the recovery programme in Japan. In the past, a recovery programme following a disaster of this magnitude has taken up to 25 years, but the restoration of infrastructure in these areas will likely be completed within the next five years. Nevertheless, the psychological and emotional impact of the disaster will have longer repercussions. This is where art has significance. Alexander believes art has an important role in communicating and nourishing the human spirit and he reflected that 'art has answers as much as science'; it reflects a shared *sense* and the experience of reality and can reframe and impact these experiences too (discussion, March 14th, 2015).

Nevertheless, in the same panel discussion, Yoi Kawakubo also highlighted that communities have been rearranged and 'almost broken' by living in temporary housing locations. Here we can see the complexity of decision-making, even when it is intended to be in the best interests of those who have been 'made passive' through a disaster (Blanchot 1995: 15). On the one hand, many in the community feel disempowered by the government's quick 'utilitarian' response, and on the other hand, many others feel constrained because they are stuck in temporary housing locations, and want the rebuilding process to be even faster. Both viewpoints balk against the sovereignty of the government but are discordant. But in both instances, the government has assumed the needs of those affected.

AAUK endeavours to address these conflicting issues and to highlight the need for local decisions to be made *with* communities, even if this would require a staggered, slower and more articulated process of rebuilding — a process that demands a receptiveness on the part of those with more power. By acknowledging that a disaster is incommensurable, AAUK maintains a sense of the political as a tying and untying of relational bonds, without adhering to a particular structure. In simple terms, although this approach can easily be criticised for its lack of political effectiveness, its purpose is to sustain openness and responsiveness to others, and to preserve a shared sense of freedom. At length, for the group to listen and not simply administrate, it has to respond to 'being-in-common'.

Exscribing the 'in-common'

In *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, Nancy addresses the incommensurability of singularities through a discussion of the Marxist idea of 'equivalence'. He situates creative processes at the heart of our ability to acknowledge 'non-equivalence'. Nancy responds to the Marxist theory of exchange - the idea that although 'value' is a dynamic concept, generated through social relations, it subsequently determines an 'exchange value', usually expressed in financial terms. In the context of global capitalism, Nancy argues that the systems that drive globalisation, the raw materials they require and the organisations that implement them, all depend on a 'general interconnection'; the idea that they must all lead to profit (Nancy 2015: 5). Nancy explains that for Marx, 'the equivalence of money could be demystified in favour of the living reality of a production whose social truth is the creation of true humanity' (AF: 2015: 33). However, capitalism has exacerbated the exploitation of power and has exposed people to 'a condition of finality' in which 'everything becomes the end and the means of everything' (AF: 2015: 36). This means that the technologies that have been implemented are increasingly exerting autonomous power over the people. Nancy argues that this sense of 'general equivalence' is catastrophic. Social relations are increasingly demonstrated through 'exchange values', and because of this, people, things and experiences ultimately become reduced to predetermined values that can be interchanged. The only way to resist this 'consumption' of reality is to acknowledge and support incommensurability - the distinctive particularities of each person, situation and experience.

The catastrophic nature of such equivalence is exemplified in disasters such as Fukushima. Although every disaster is unique, each disaster connects 'with the totality of interdependences that make up general equivalence', and over time this sense of general equivalence has given rise to the idea that humans can be 'in charge' of the world (AF: 2015: 6,7). However, Nancy believes that Fukushima has added 'the threat of the apocalypse that opens onto nothing, onto the negation of the apocalypse itself' because the use of the atom, whether this is for nuclear power or weapons, dissolves the link between the strong and the less strong in society (AF: 2015: 21, 22). It therefore takes with it a relational structure that acknowledges the 'oscillation' that defines human experience, and the possibility of a politics of the 'in-common'.

By acknowledging the non-equivalence of the disaster, we recognise its incommensurability. We can comprehend how the 'disaster *disorients the absolute*' and appears as the 'intense suddenness of the outside' which 'comes to us from beyond the confines of decision' (Blanchot 1995: 4: emphasis added). Accordingly, we reinforce the non-equivalence of human existence and the need for consciousness of sense and relationality – a return from the macropolitical to the micropolitical.

Nancy clarifies the idea of non-equivalence saying that it 'does not overturn equivalence; it makes it explicit. It says: All are equal in that no one is identical or commensurable with others' (AF: 2015: 60). How then, do we exscribe the 'in-common' without reinforcing a sense of equivalence? This is an important question for any organisation that is trying to raise money to help people recover from a disaster. Nancy reminds us of the 'naive belief in the possibility of a virtuous handling of general equivalence' (AF: 2015: 32). Although realistically money is needed to support and help communities that have been devastated by 3/11, it is important not to see fundraising as 'a solution'. Although AAUK began as a collective that was fundraising for international aid, it recognised the importance of providing space for a deeper critique of the social issues faced by those affected by disaster. The initial fundraising efforts created a sense of social responsibility. But the emphasis on raising money detracted from the overarching aim to provide support and solidarity for those affected. When social responsibility is expressed through the relationship of a financial donation, it can

accentuate the difference between the people donating and the people receiving the funds, and eventually amplify a sense of general equivalence.

In 2015, AAUK contacted The Museum of East Asian Art in Bath to ask if the curators might be interested in a collaborative project featuring contemporary artworks from Japan, alongside the permanent display of antique objects in the gallery. Coincidently, when we contacted the gallery, it was planning its annual 'tsunami fundraiser' event for those affected by the tsunami and earthquake in Japan. We suggested screening one of Komori and Seo's short video documentaries, which the gallery was happy to include.

Komori and Seo have created a number of short films in Rikuzentakata, and we were keen to exhibit a film that would connect to audiences in Bath and generate a sense of 'being-in-common' that went beyond a general sense of compassion or straightforward charitable giving. We chose the film *When my eyes had adjusted to the glare*; a film that focuses on the memories and experiences of Suzuki Masaharu, who survived the earthquake and tsunami but who feels a continuing sense of loss and displacement. Masaharu recounts the preparations for the annual 'Star Festival' - a light procession throughout his village - and its significance in bringing together the community. Similarly, in Bath there is an annual light procession through the city; the streets are closed and many in the community participate in the procession or come along and watch.

In this way, AAUK hoped to communicate a sense of the community in Rikuzentakata that might be shared by audiences in Bath. The artwork indicated how sense of place can be preserved by the community rather than created by the government. In this representation of the disaster, absolute awareness of the disaster is absent, impossible. The disaster is presented as irreparable loss. So although the artwork was 'used' to fundraise money, and to generate a political message, it simultaneously sustained a reflective consciousness of this message by asking audiences to 'reify' the very meaning of community.

Exscribing the 'present'

In *The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, Nancy reminds us that 'the *present* is the place of closeness - with the world, with others, oneself' (AF: 2015: 37). As discussed in the previous chapter, 'spacing' and 'world-forming' refer to the presenting of being, which is synonymous with time. In the introduction to *The Creation of the World*, François Raffoul and David Pettigrew define world-forming as 'absolute immanence' (AF: 2015: 5). World-forming corresponds to nothing other than itself, and like the process of reification, it reveals the transcendental. But its transformative potential to create new political ties rather than reinforce global paradigms depends on our willingness to remain in the present as 'place of closeness' - to have faith in the emergence of new paradigms, rather than re-emphasising how these relations ascribe meaning – an approach that passes 'the empirical off as transcendental' (Virno 2015: 139) and fetishises preformed patterns of globalisation.

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot draws attention to the inaccessibility of the disaster: 'we can only speak of the disaster through the paradox of understanding the immediate in the past tense' (1995: 24). This is because the gesture of speaking draws away from the present, but in doing so, forms it. In his early writings on exscribing, Nancy said, 'Writing, reading, I exscribe the "thing itself" - "existence", the "real"- which *is* only when it is exscribed' (BtP: 1993: 338, 339). The paradoxical nature of thinking, speaking and writing is echoed again by Nancy, years later in *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes* where he says that Fukushima 'forbids all present: It is the collapse of future goals that forces us to work with other futures' (AF: 2015: 37). For this reason 'contemporary culture is drowning itself because it removes 'the present from its own passage' (AF: 2015: 40). In other words, the disaster prohibits, but necessitates, the thinking of the present.

What does Nancy mean by 'the present'? He understands it as 'the presence of an arrival'; an 'approach' (AF: 2015: 38). Unlike general equivalence, which creates a measurable chronology, this 'arrival' eludes valuation — it *is* as it appears. This is true of 'sense'. If we acknowledge the exscribing of meaning, we can begin to critically engage with our inclination to ascribe a finite meaning to 'an approach'. We can choose to facilitate sense by demonstrating a kind of faith in the non-ascribable nature of that which appears and in doing so, avoid reducing something to a fixed value. Awareness of

exscribing allows sense to 'emerge from finality' (AF: 2015: 37), and it is a process that requires care.

Nancy highlights the need to 'care for the approach of singular presence' (AF: 2015: 40). He acknowledges that whilst other historic cultures have been morally problematic, they did 'care for the approach of singular presence' (AF: 2015: 40). This suggests that contemporary culture, whilst it has tried to abolish historic social cruelties and inequalities, has done so through creating general equivalences. As a result, rather than eliminating these issues, contemporary technologies and politics have volatised social inequalities and have disconnected people from technologies that determine the future - thus 'aggravating' our condition (AF: 2015: 19).

What might this 'care' involve? Throughout Nancy's writing, we are reminded that communication, like contagion, blurs the distinction between people and highlights our shared consciousness of being singular plural, manifest through our sense of the world. This openness to sense is synonymous with receptiveness to the 'presence of an arrival' or the 'approach' of the other. Nancy understands this as 'co-presence' or 'co-appearing'. In simple terms, we might understand that such 'care' is not shown through the application of a pre-formed idea of what is right or best for the other. Rather, it is the suspension of the inclination to ascribe an equivalent sense to the appearance of the other. To 'care' is therefore to receive, sense and to *co-appear with* the other (recognising that co-appearing concerns the shared separation of being). To care is to protect their incommensurability by acknowledging the way in which the sense of presence 'overflows'. 'Care' might be understood as demonstration of faith in the in-ascribable appearance of other, an acceptance of the non-objectivity of existence. Co-appearing is not an initial progression towards a future goal, rather it reifies a social tie and in doing so affirms the present as the place of closeness.

Nancy says: 'What would be decisive, then, would be to think in the present and to think the present' (AF: 2015: 37). This thinking of the present is 'decisive' in that it decides, not on some*thing* — a particular goal or future - but on the immediate and responsive decision to be guided by the approach to the singular presence. This increasingly goes against the grain of contemporary technologies and systems, which

depend on general equivalences and the 'need' to ascribe value with relation to a future intention.

Nevertheless, this decision to 'think the present' is a natural process. In his discussion with John Paul Ricco in *Art in the Anthropocene,* Nancy suggests that the unexpected is actually the 'regime of the world'. He says that 'we are accustomed to speeds, intensities, quantities or population or energy, that have no equivalent in our past - but we inhabit them, we engage with them raw, we cultivate their own possibilities' (2015: 88). He says that we need to be 'in the unexpected' and 'disengage' ourselves from patterns of behaviour that project a pre-formed meaning onto the future, from being 'hung up on a *representation* of the present future' (2015: 90). By focusing on *sensing* the present future and demonstrating faith in this (in-ascribable) sense, rather than determining it, we can avoid reinforcing paradigms of globalisation based on general equivalences.

Earlier in this chapter I addressed Nancy's appeal to take up the political task of 'posing the following question to each gesture, each conduct, each *habitus* and each *ethos:* How do you engage with the world?' (CoW: 2007: 53). The significance of the task lies in questioning how we sense the world and how we conduct ourselves within it. Within this task is an obligation, not to decide *for* the other but to acknowledge 'being-in-common' and decide *with* the other, an obligation that requires us to be open to the approach of singular beings and their experiences. To pose the question, 'how do you engage with the world?' to 'each gesture and conduct' is to invite co-appearance and to demonstrate openness to the world.

The idea of caring 'for the approach of singular presence' (AF: 2015: 40) underpins AAUK's residency programme. Nevertheless, there are still decisions relating to the number of art events and fundraising events, the location of exhibitions and the artists participating in the residency, and there is a very fine line between these structural decisions *characterising* the residency and allowing the residency to evolve. These structural decisions involve much negotiation. The final decisions are collaborative and are guided by specific events and opportunities arising each year. The decisions are made not by individuals, but by a combination of factors that appear to 'make the decision for us.' The curatorial decisions can sometimes feel a little haphazard, but

because AAUK is a small grassroots organisation, we don't have the pressure of meeting specific goals or outcomes. The objective of the residency is to allow artists to talk more freely regarding sensitive political issues in East Japan and to give the artists as much freedom as possible. All those involved (there is usually a group of five or six people, including the artist, who are contributing to the organisational process) have a kind of faith in the success of the residency or exhibition, because beyond increasing support for the group to enable further residencies, there isn't a fixed target.

<div align="center">Chapter summary: exscribing and world-forming</div>

As discussed in the previous chapter, we experience finitude through 'spacing', because to 'be' is to be 'singular plural'. This is 'world forming', a creative process in which people reaffirm and form affiliations. Although world-forming - the becoming-present of the world - often reflects and reinforces the global equivalences that characterise 'globalisation', Nancy uses the expression to remind us that the world is always becoming, and that it is the becoming-present of the world that allows for new paradigms to emerge.

Chapter 3 has studied the concept of 'exscribing', a world-forming process that requires faith in the in-ascribable significance of 'being singular plural' and the potential of world-forming to allow for new relational politics beyond global capitalism. Exscribing can be explained as a process that allows sense to 'emerge from finality' and exceed a given meaning even as we ascribe it (AF: 2015: 37).

Chapter 3 has looked at how, as we sense the world, we both ascribe and exscribe meaning. Our understanding of the world, and the way that it forms, oscillates between an excess and a deficit of semanticity. We ascribe meaning to our surroundings but, at the same time, our sense exceeds our understanding of the world.

Drawing from the writings of Paolo Virno on language and human nature, the chapter has argued that, having been 'thrown into the world', consciousness is experienced as an oscillation between an excess and a lack of meaning, we have the choice either to 'reify' this oscillation - to continue to ascribe and exscribe meaning without clinging to the illusion of established meanings - or to 'fetishise' the oscillation by continuing to

reinforce established values and to value objects and events for how they symbolise the immaterial.

Because it reaches into the immaterial, 'reification' requires a kind of faith. The second part of the chapter explored the concept of faith with relation to art, explaining it as a philosophical response to being singular plural that precedes religious faith. Faith is here understood as faith in the in-ascribable. To have faith in the in-ascribable is to respond to the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing in a way that facilitates a greater sense of being-in-common - a self-fulfilling practice that sustains the present as a place of closeness and of transformation.

Although faith, and its relation to the immaterial, often has a place in religion and culture, the third section of this chapter looked at how faith might influence our political engagement. This final section of the chapter considered how faith can transform lived experience because, in its passivity and inoperativity, it suspends appropriative ideologies and reductive opinions, and instead allows for co-appearance, thereby sustaining a shared sense of communication.

This chapter has developed the concept of intentionality by highlighting the contemporary political task: to question the way in which we make sense of the world. By acknowledging the indeterminacy of sense, and demonstrating faith in the in-ascribable, we reinforce the incommensurability of singularities.

To value non-equivalence requires us to resist the inclination to 'conquer' the future and to determine and classify singular beings and events as they appear. Instead it has stressed the need to 'care for the approach of the singular presence' (AF: 2015: 40) by being guided by the other in a mutually responsive way. This has led to the idea of 'co-appearing'.

The concrete focus of this chapter has been on the grassroots collective Art Action UK. It has considered the concepts of the state of exception and the disaster alongside the analysis of how we ascribe and exscribe meaning. It has suggested that acknowledging the way in which we 'exscribe' meaning, leads to questioning the norms by which a state of exception is defined. Fundamentally, we can only brush against the unknowable, and

can only touch on the unrepresentability of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown in Fukushima in 2011. Nonetheless, acknowledgement of exscribing allows us to share a sense of absence with others. But this awareness of shared sense approaches finitude in way that affirms the quasi-ontology of 'being singular plural' and attests to the incommensurability of each individual.

This chapter has reflected on a curatorial project – on how a collection of artworks is 'put together'. As such, it elucidates the second layer of meaning in the term 'recompose' in which the Greek and Latin meaning of the word 'compose' (as an interruption, a holding-back) adapts in Old French *composer*, meaning to 'put together, arrange, write' a work. Here, the idea of an interruption expands to highlight a sense of rearranging, of putting things together. This chapter has looked at how, through exhibitions and events, AAUK 'composes' a new perspective on the disaster and its political implications. This 'rearranged' image of individuals and groups in contemporary Japan counters media- and government-endorsed cultural programmes, providing new perspectives that encourage viewers to thoughtfully engage with artworks. The word 'compose' also overlaps with the Old French *poser*, which carries a sense of pausing and placing, and develops to contain an additional meaning 'to puzzle, confuse, perplex'. This shifting meaning also resonates through AAUK's approach to curating, where the aim is not to articulate a clear affirmative message, but rather to complicate clearly defined ideas and stances.

In his conversation with John Paul Ricco, Nancy reflects that the meaning of 'sense' is 'devoid of purpose, accomplishment — in the sense of fulfilment of purpose and fullness reached — is the most commonly shared sense among us (and perhaps all living things)' (2015: 90). How then can the idea of sense as 'devoid of purpose' relate to co-appearing? It is one thing to analyse the significance of world-forming gestures within a grass-roots organisation such as AAUK, but how can such gestures be adopted 'formally' within cultural institutions? And is it possible to gauge the social impact of co-appearing? The next chapter will consider these questions from within an established cultural institution.

Chapter 4: Cultural institutions and 'co-appearing':
How can institutions sustain ethical engagement with artists and audiences?

This chapter continues to analyse the central incline of the thesis - the development of Nancy's quasi-ontology through to political engagement - with emphasis on institutional practices. It considers the gesture of 'co-appearing' with reference to Nancy's text 'The Compearance'[41] and a later text - 'Co-appearing' - in *Being Singular Plural*. Nancy defines 'co-appearing' as 'an ontological gesture of mutual exposition with Others that raises the question of why particular subjects 'appear "together" and for what other depth they are destined' (Nancy BSP: 2000: 59). Co-appearing generates consciousness of another depth, a sense of absence and of absenting. As Philip Armstrong writes in his essay 'From Appearance to Exposure': 'The positing of what comes into appearance is now remarked not by its substance or self-identity but in and *as* its exposition and exposure, or in and as a *sense* of exposure' (2010: 12)[42]. It is this consciousness of displacement, exposure and absence that characterise Nancy's writings on appearing. Again, this understanding of appearance marks Nancy's shift beyond phenomenological traditions – whilst his writings retain a 'close proximity' to phenomenological conceptualisations of being (James: 2006: 96). Understanding appearing as exposure to absence distinguishes Nancy's thinking and allows him to diverge from phenomenological traditions. Nancy's understanding of co-appearing as a 'gesture of mutual exposition' is key to thinking of the political as a 'retreat'.

In *Retreating the Political*[43], the social and political significance of co-appearing is addressed through the idea of a 'retreat'. The retreat is not simply a withdrawal from the certainty of political ideologies, it also demands that we retrace and revise their conditions (Nancy: RtP: 1997: 138). Implicit in the idea of 'retreating' is a collective process of re-creation in which 'appearing with' facilitates the possibility for renewal. This chapter will address the themes of 'co-appearing' and 'the political' and will explain why co-appearing brings with it an ethical obligation. It will consider how the idea of 'retreating' can influence concrete strategies for engagement with the Other in an

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[41] ('La Comparution'), published in *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1992

[42] Armstrong's essay explores how Nancy's understanding of appearing and co-appearing, can be read as moving 'within and between a sense of displacement' - *from* appearance *to* exposure - and as 'a displacement *in* sense' (2010: 11, 12).

[43] A series of essays and transcripts written and edited by Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe

institutional context.

The previous chapter visualised communication as a kind of oscillation between an excess of semanticity - where things disappear into shapeless potentiality - and a deficit of semanticity - where discourses are reduced to simple stereotypes (Virno 2008: 52). It considered the idea that consciousness is characterised by this tension, and that in any communication there is simultaneously an excess and a deficit of semanticity. However, it suggested that being conscious of the way in which we exscribe meaning can help to sustain radical openness and therefore an ethical relation with alterity. Developing this analysis further, this chapter explores how 'the retreat', as a form of critical withdrawal from certainty (from foregone conclusions that adhere to familiar social paradigms) interrupts knowledge and traces new sites for communicating and co-appearing.

Nancy's use of term 'retreat' stems from his engagement with Derrida's concept of 'the trace' as an absent presence within language[44]. Although Derrida's writings will not be directly explored in this chapter, they provide a point of departure for Nancy and his thinking of the retreat. The opening page of Nancy's *Retreating the Political* introduces the key terms of the book: 'retraiter' in French, which indicates a retracing and a withdrawal. The words 'retreat' and 'retrace' indicate a drawing back or the process of tracking back through previous stages to look again with close attention. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe address the 'retreat' with relation to the political, whilst acknowledging the polysemous nature of language.

At the end of Chapter 3, I suggested that to 'care' is to sense, receive and respond openly to the other. Embedded in this perception of 'the other' is a sense of the radical alterity of other beings. On the whole, references to 'the other' are used to differentiate between beings, and 'the Other' is used to indicate the differentiating that *constitutes* being ('the Other' points to the way in which being is characterised by this radical alterity). Because Nancy's ontology has developed from a reading of Heidegger's

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[44] Derrida describes the trace as 'that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present.' He says that time is a 'fundamental passivity'; a relationship to an 'always-already-there' (1976: 66). He indicates that the trace, or dis-enclosed absence, is an experience of passivity, an idea that is reflected by both Blanchot and Nancy. It is the face of something that cannot be represented, that exists as an absence. Although meaning is determined, each sign contains a trace, and so it self-determines its own separation. Writing is the condition of knowledge but is passive; it is subject to its exteriority (1976: 34).

concept of being-with, he continually emphasises the shared experience of being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger says:

> By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me — those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself — those among whom one is too… By reason of this *with-like* Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others' (1962 (1926): 154).

Realising that 'other beings' also share in 'being Other', the distinction between 'the other' and 'the Other' begins to blur. There is a paradox within the acknowledgement of 'the other'. The concept of 'other beings' can therefore become unmoored from the sense that this is constituted by difference. Following Nancy's concept of being singular plural, which stems from a sense that each person is 'with' oneself, 'the other' indicates a shared experience of being Other. In his book *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness: Philosophy and Powers of Existence*, Daniele Rugo situates Nancy's interpretation of otherness with relation to Heidegger and Levinas. He explains that Levinas' idea of the Other critiques Heidegger's conceptualisation, but that Nancy responds and critiques Levinas' anti-Heideggarian position through situating the concepts of Being and Other on the same level (to be is to be with oneself, to be Other): 'Instead of posing an absolute otherness, Nancy's conception of the co-essentiality of Being and Being-with opens the question of otherness at the heart of Being' (2013: 5). This idea that 'to be' is 'to be Other' characterises my approach to the idea of co-appearing. To appear with others is to be conscious of the temporality, concealment and not-knowing that is part of being (Other). For this reason, although I generally use 'the Other' and 'Others' throughout this chapter, the expression can be contextualised within this understanding of 'the other' and 'the Other' as entwined concepts.

This final chapter addresses the ethical implications of being-singular-plural and of 'co-appearing'. It explores how an institution can acknowledge and embody social responsibility. To consider this in concrete terms, I draw from my role as a 'learning assistant' at the Arnolfini in Bristol, particularly throughout the 2016 exhibition *Art from Elsewhere;* a touring exhibition that focuses on 'socially engaged art practices in a global context', that featured 39 artists from 22 countries. As a learning assistant, I supported

the visitor engagement team by gathering feedback from audiences. In this chapter, I actively explore how institutions facilitate co-appearance, and I look at how the Arnolfini 'co-appears' with its visitors. I look at the ways in which audiences respond to the institution and how institutions 'listen to' and respond to audience feedback.

Having participated in many Liberate Tate interventions, I was keen to look at political art practices from the perspective of an institution, especially one in Bristol - the European 'Green Capital' for 2015. Although oil sponsorship is not an issue with relation to the Arnolfini, I chose this organisation because of its charitable status and because its exhibitions engage with discourses around ecology and contemporary political art practices.

An increasing number of art institutions are developing more discursive and responsive cultural programmes. For example, The Silk Mill in Derbyshire recently developed a community rebuilding programme in which local people helped design, curate and create the museum. Other galleries and museums aim to develop powerful cultural networks and knowledge exchanges to support micropolitical creative practices, such as Reina Sofia in Madrid. Established cultural institutions are also opening up spaces for social concerns and artistic practices that are often sidelined in dominant artistic discourses, such as the 2014 *Disobedient Objects* exhibition at V&A. *Disobedient Objects* created an active archive of objects used to generate social change, which facilitated participatory engagement and went on to stimulate informal responses outside of the institution – one 'how to' guide, explaining how to make a tear-gas mask, designed specifically for the exhibition, was seen in use in the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong the same year. Institutions such as MACBA in Barcelona, often mentioned by critics and theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, continue to develop critical 'agonistic' practices.

Artist and curator Jorge Ribalta[45], who has worked with MACBA to sustain places for debate and social engagement, draws attention to the increasing pressure for cultural

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[45] Ribalta's curatorial approach aims to defend 'critical, collective, fragile practices' that have 'almost no place either in the mainstream media or in the art institutions' (Ribalta 2009). He explains that when these works are brought into institutional frameworks, new productive opportunities emerge, but sometimes these require less visibility in their initial stages.

institutions to conform to marketing criteria and neoliberal practices. In an article in *eipcp* – 'Mediation and Construction of Publics. The MACBA Experience' – he explains that under these conditions, some institutions generate 'false tolerance' and 'false participation' (2004). Ribalta advocates institutional critique that allows for the emergence of new social paradigms. He says: 'We think that what our contribution to a radically democratic public sphere is, quite simply, to be self-critical and open to debates' (2004). However, he also explains that this critical engagement allows 'the public' to reform and actively produce new forms of self-organisation. This coalescence of criticality and creativity is the central theme of this chapter.

With this context in mind, the chapter explores how critical engagement can generate new social paradigms, and how institutions can sustain conditions of uncertainty that enable genuine public engagement. Continuing to develop a reading of Nancy, this chapter responds to the writings of three theorists: Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou and Chantal Mouffe. It considers how the Arnolfini, as a charitable cultural institution, might resist the pressures of neoliberalism. Again, interpreting Nancy's writings in the context of institutional practices may seem discrepant, as the very notion of institutionality runs counter to Nancy's sense of being-towards-the-outside. Nevertheless, I am suggesting that there is a sense of alterity at the heart of cultural institutions which is why they have cultural significance in the first place. I am suggesting that a cultural institution can be dedicated to its 'unworking' – that it can consciously sustain this openness and alterity.

The first section draws links between Nancy's concept of 'co-appearing' and Hannah Arendt's 'space of appearance'. Referring to 'appearance' in texts by Nancy and Arendt, Philip Armstrong writes: 'it is in Arendt's text that the 'space of appearance' becomes a critical dimension in which to think the effaced place of speech and action in our modernity' (2010: 13). Approaching Arendt's writings on the *polis* through an understanding of the *polis* as a contingent space shared *between* people – a space where shared separation characterises approaches to political engagement – the chapter explores the concrete significance of 'co-appearing'. It considers how galleries curate 'public spaces' and addresses the social responsibility inherent in institutional practices. It looks at how cultural spaces can sustain contingent 'spaces of appearance'. This

section begins to outline the ethics inherent in Arendt's and Nancy's conceptualisations of 'politics' and 'the political', and what it means to question the political.

The second section draws on the writings of Alain Badiou, in particular his references to 'appearing' in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* and in *Logics of Worlds*. Badiou and Nancy write from different philosophical contexts, but this section looks at how both writers develop an understanding of non-metaphysical being, of the irreducibility of being, through their understanding of 'appearance' (even as their language and approach to appearing subtly differs). Following on from this, it looks at how both approaches to being and appearing carry a meta-ethical significance.

The third section develops Nancy's concept of co-appearing with reference to contemporary political theorist Chantal Mouffe, in particular her 2013 book *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. Mouffe develops an understanding of agonistic engagement with the other (where both sustain the right to defend ideas) through a critique of both Arendt and Badiou. I unpack her argument and suggest a new way of understanding 'agonism' with relation to the idea of co-appearing and retreating. This final section outlines concrete ways in which cultural institutions can sustain agonistic engagement with visitors and other cultural practitioners. It frames these practices as forms of retreat that simultaneously retrace new sites for engagement outside of the frameworks of global capitalism.

Institutions are limited by different sets of material concerns. Often, they are committed to global economic, social and political discourses that have an immediate and powerful impact on a great number of people. I argue that although they might have an apparently fixed or established identity within a cultural scene, institutions can still interact with their audiences in a way that opens up new cultural discourses outside of the establishment. I identify ways in which art institutions might respond to the political gestures of art collectives in a way that allows for the informal 'contagious' communication that characterises the indeterminacy of 'world-forming' and can lead to new social ties, even if such institutions are embedded in established social models that initially appear to conform to predictable paradigms of 'globalisation'.

Co-appearing and the political

This section addresses Nancy's ontological concept of 'co-appearing' with relation to what he calls 'the political'. It highlights the difference between 'being-together' and 'togetherness' so as to distinguish between 'the political' and 'politics'. The differences between these concepts (even as they occur simultaneously) can be understood with relation to the oscillation between ascribing and exscribing meaning, as discussed in the previous chapter. These differences, or this 'differencing', underpin(s) Nancy's idea of 'co-appearing'.

To further explore the political context and significance of co-appearing, I draw from Hannah Arendt, whose writings on the 'space of appearance' - a kind of contemporary, revised *polis* - illuminate additional characteristics of 'co-appearing'. This leads me to expand on Nancy's writings and to read his texts with relation to a research practice within a contemporary arts institution - in this case, the Arnolfini.

In April 2016, the exhibition *Art from Elsewhere* opened at the Arnolfini (and Bristol Museum). Aimed at addressing 'life, politics and identity in a globalised society', the exhibition was conceptualised along seven themes: Borders, Transformations, Violence, Rituals, Surveillance, Resistance and Capital. I volunteered to help with the audience engagement research for this exhibition because I wanted to see how it might create a politically significant 'space of appearance'. I was interested in what the creation of 'spaces of appearance' might require in terms of institutional practices.

Arendt's interpretation of a new kind of *polis* calls into question ideas of relationality, and highlights the implications of sustaining the political as a question - a thread that runs throughout *Retreating the Political*. As Simon Sparks points out in his introduction to *Retreating the Political*: 'today, to be political is to already run the risk of a certain complicity with the totalitarian logic at the heart of the political' but that we should recognize that 'today, nothing less than our being political is called for' (1997: xxviii). By questioning the formal social relation of the political and exposing a totalitarian logic within it, we are led towards an interpretation of 'identification' that problematises the forms that one's political engagement may take.

This section explores the relationship, or 'co-belonging', of philosophy and politics, and addresses the limit of this relation. Additionally, I draw out questions with regards to the ethical significance of this limit, especially within the context of institutional ethics.

Co-appearing as quasi-ontological

As with 'spacing' and 'exscribing', 'co-appearing' is quasi-ontological – it is characterized by relationality, by shared separation. 'Co-appearing' particularly spotlights the political relevance of Nancy's thought. It's a term he focuses on in *Being Singular Plural* that resonates with the theme of 'appearance' explored in *Retreating the Political*. There are also strands of thought which link up with Nancy's 1992 essay 'The Compearance' ('La Comparution'), published in *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3. Although 'appearing' (and 'disappearing') are addressed within the context of the political in these earlier texts, I will initially address the later text (under the subheading 'Co-appearing') in *Being Singular Plural* before returning to the earlier writings, with their emphasis on 'the political'.

This later text 'Co-appearing' underlines the (quasi-)ontological significance of appearing, that it is necessarily 'with' Others:

> Co-appearance signifies that "appearing" (coming into the world, and being in the world, or existence itself) is strictly inseparable, indiscernible from the *cum* or the *with*, which is not only its place and its taking place, but also - and this is the same thing - its fundamental ontological structure (BSP: 2000: 61).

To understand co-appearing as the metaphysical process of being, rather than a concrete or determined 'thing', Nancy differentiates between 'being together' and 'togetherness'. 'Being together' is an unfolding simultaneity, an awareness of the Otherness of the other (including an awareness of the limits of this awareness itself). On the contrary, 'togetherness' refers to a defined group or collection 'in the sense of being a substantive entity… that is indifferent to the being together ("in common") of the objects of the collection' (BSP: 2000: 60). 'To be' is 'to be together' with Others, and although this can lead to 'togetherness', Nancy emphasises the consciousness of

being together, rather than the affiliation or identity that becomes definite. There is a sociality inherent in 'being' that is threatened when it becomes instrumentalised - the development of a function assumes fixed identities within the group, and often a fixed position of the group itself. A little later in *Being Singular Plural*, under a section that addresses 'The Spectacle of Society', Nancy reminds us that:

> If being-with is the sharing of a simultaneous space-time, then it involves a presentation of this space-time as such. In order to say "we," one must present the "here and now" of this "we." Or rather, saying "we" brings about the presentation of a "here and now," however it is determined: as a room, a region, a group of friends, an association, a "people" (BSP: 2000: 65).

To identify a 'we' is to assert a tangible 'togetherness', and by focusing on this togetherness and 'using' it to achieve a preconceived goal, the 'being-together' from which it arose becomes simply a symbol. On the other hand, sustained awareness of *how* we are 'we' sustains consciousness of the processes as well as the outcome. It simultaneously demands a consciousness of and withdrawal from 'togetherness' to allow for 'being together' to transcend functionalisation and allow for critical engagement with the collective ideology that has characterised the 'we'.

To acknowledge that 'being-together' differs from 'togetherness', even as the two are concurrent, therefore has social significance. When it comes to political engagement, we can begin to see that 'politics' is concerned with managing the mobilisation of already-defined groups. How then can we emphasise the 'being-together' that allows for creative and critical engagement? And why is this important?

Retreating the Political addresses these issues through an exploration of the relationship between politics and philosophy. Broadly speaking, it argues that we should not derive a politics from philosophy because this reinforces philosophy as a closed field (or a conceptual 'togetherness'). Instead, our social and political obligation is to question philosophy, so as to sustain the question of the political and retain the indeterminacy of being-together. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, in their opening address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political, which they founded in 1980 to explore and question the relationship between philosophy and politics, advise: 'vigilance is necessary as regards every positive discourse, that is to say as regards every discourse formed by a

pretension to grasp social and political phenomena on the basis of a simple positivity - whether this be ascribed to history or to discourse itself' (RtP: 1997: 109). This vigilance requires that we sustain critical thinking when we are presented with 'simple truths'. The ontological significance of being singular plural brings with it a social obligation to question universal 'truths', and to affirm the incommensurability of being. This motif of 'simple positivities' indicates that one retreats from, or withdraws from, an illusion of certainty or a sense that meaning is only generated through how something is fixed and mobilised. The idea of 'simple positivities' characterises the analysis of the retreat throughout this chapter.

In Nancy's earlier essay 'The Compearance', he explains: 'Reciprocal generation is not the mystery of a hypothetical subject but is the real condition of a real multiplicity of real relationships' (1992: 388). Later, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe speak of the 'reciprocal involvement of the philosophical and of the political' and the way in which neither are prior to, or independent from, the other. This reciprocity is characteristic of Nancy's ontology, expressed through the concepts of 'spacing' and 'exscribing', and is understood as inherent to human experience. Rather than causing, or resulting in, a specific political stance, this reciprocity is 'the very position of the political' (RtP: 1997: 109, 110). This requires us to rethink the way in which we understand political spaces, such as the Greek *polis,* and to reconsider our approaches to generating and sustaining shared political spaces - how do we deliberately acknowledge being singular plural? How can we continue to acknowledge the inherent reciprocity of philosophy and politics, and their limits?

The difference between 'individual' being-together and 'collective' being-together revolves around a shift from asking 'how do *I* appear?' to 'how do *we* appear?' The word 'collective', derived from the Latin 'gathered together' and the Middle English 'representing many individuals', itself announces this shift because it acknowledges that gathering together is 'singular plural'. To ask 'how do I appear?' is to acknowledge individual agency and choice, dependent as this is on being singular plural. To ask 'how do we appear?' is to acknowledge the uncertain agency of co-appearing and co-operating, based as it is on individuals appearing together. In the latter, the scale of agency increases, as does the risk of forming a commensurable 'togetherness'. Responding to collective action through an idea of the collective as a homogenous togetherness reinforces that perception. Such a response fails to understand the

singular plurality of 'being together' and the power that can be generated through a focus on '*being* together'.

In terms of the shift between an individual retreat and a collective retreat, this emphasis on '*being* together' becomes even more significant. Increasing the scale and 'contagiousness' of critical engagement can lead to paradigm shifts, not in advancing a fixed ideology, but in deconstructing social norms. At this point there is a danger of a 'simple positivity' being replaced with another, but there is also a possibility for an expanded space of appearance that can generate a greater consciousness of being together (as opposed to a togetherness), and a stronger awareness of individual 'response-ability' within wider social contexts.

Appearing and co-appearing

Hannah Arendt's writings on the 'space of appearance' can help us see how the reciprocal relation between philosophy and politics can be sustained in political spaces, even whilst the creation of a tangible 'togetherness' threatens to reduce these spaces to mere symbols.

In Platonic philosophy, the *polis* is understood as a delineated state, or a 'ship of state' steered by a reigning philosopher. In *Retreating the Political,* Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe identify the idea of the *polis* as a founding political idea in the West. They problematise it, saying: 'It is through the ideal or through the idea of the *polis*, more than anything else, that the modern epoch… has refastened itself to the Greek origin and finality of the West, that is to say, has tried to reassert itself as the subject of its history, and as the history of the subject' (1997: 117). The defining concept of the *polis* often situates philosophy prior to politics, a presupposition that is challenged. Although Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe question this relation through both *Retreating the Political* and the opening of the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political, Hannah Arendt deconstructs, reframes and revises the concept of the *polis* with emphasis on the idea of 'appearance'. Her writings reveal the social mechanisms that characterise the *polis* and begin to show that, by shifting our perception of what the *polis* actually is, we can 'renovate' the foundations of Western thought, to allow contemporary cultural structures to flourish.

Arendt looks at the roots of the Greek *polis*; she explains that it arose from a difference between the private realm and the public realm[46]. The *polis* was a significant political space, because it could generate 'power' without the use of violence. It was founded on the idea that people speaking and acting together could challenge the status quo and generate a sense of legitimacy through which social changes could be negotiated. Arendt states: 'To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence' (1958b: 26). Arendt calls this discursive space the 'space of appearance'. She understands it as a truly political space, because it comes into being through praxis. To constitute this space, individuals have to leave behind personal agendas or necessities and focus on collective needs and the needs of others, as in the *polis*.

The space of appearance forms when people gather to discuss and deliberate public issues, but at the moment that both the discussion and the deliberation ends, the space of appearance disappears. Crucially, Arendt says that it 'predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government' (1958b: 199). This 'in-formality' or 'pre-formality' is a key characteristic of the space of appearance. It is not secondary to a political agenda, it appears whenever and 'wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action' (1958b: 199). Here Nancy's differentiation between 'being-together' and 'togetherness' has particular relevance. To be together in the manner of speech and action resonates with Nancy's 'being together' as a dynamic openness to the Other, prior to any formal constitution of a 'togetherness'.

Arendt defines the space of appearance as 'the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly' (1958b: 198). As such, although the space of appearance is inspired by the polis, it revises the idea of the polis to focus on the relationality that constituted such a political space. But in this contemporary context, what does it actually mean 'to appear' and to make an appearance 'explicitly'? And how does can appearance be simultaneously 'explicit' or 'clear-cut' and yet open and receptive to Others?

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[46] A person was either a master of necessity in the 'public' realm, or a slave to necessity in the 'private' realm. Private space and home life addressed the personal necessities of family life - caring for children, maintaining a home and fulfilling family responsibilities; and public life was about managing necessity and creating the frameworks within which collective necessities could be addressed.

To answer these questions, the following paragraphs look at how an exhibition such as *Art from Elsewhere* can generate 'spaces of appearance'. Arnolfini is a registered charity, funded largely by the Arts Council England and Bristol City Council. As such, it has to maintain a clear social purpose: 'to create a place where all the contemporary arts could coexist and interact in order to stimulate creativity, to provoke thought and to give pleasure to a wide range of people' (Arnolfini 2016). The risk with any cultural organisation (and any curated collection of art) is that it is accessible to a limited range of people or that it assumes particular social narratives and rather than 'provoking thought', can close down creative or critical engagement. As such, organisations such as Arnolfini want to make sure that they engage audiences, and facilitate informal engagement with artworks shared by diverse audiences[47]. The gallery's funding depends on this, but the underlying significance is cultural. The Arts Council England's website opens with the question: 'Why do art and culture matter?'. The first answer it gives is that 'art and culture open our minds and stir our hearts' (ACE 2017). So whilst financial impacts are important, the focus here will be on this idea that the significance of art lies in its ability to communicate a sense of the world, and a shared experience of the absenting of sense.

In exhibitions such as *Art from Elsewhere,* which directly address political art practices within the context of globalisation, it is easy to reduce political discourses to simple narratives and to situate these narratives within reinforced cultural and geographical boundaries. The title of the exhibition - *Art from Elsewhere* - aimed to generate questions relating to the political:

> Who is the insider and who is the outsider? What is global and what is local now that we can seamlessly access stories, news and worldwide images in a click? What does 'Elsewhere' mean in relation to a constantly shifting and uncertain 'Here'? (AFE catalogue text)

Here we see layers of interconnections: individual audience members relating to themselves, to the artworks, to other people within the gallery, and to a wider social

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[47] A text on the wall in the entrance to the galleries says 'Our mission is to encourage participation with contemporary art by the widest possible audience, particularly those who are disadvantaged or whose voices are excluded from mainstream culture.'

consciousness. These themes relate to the idea of 'appearance' in the sense of 'coming into the world, and being in the world, or existence itself' (Nancy: BSP: 2000: 61). But for these themes to emerge, develop and be shared by diverse audiences, the gallery needs to embody these layers of interconnectivity by 'co-appearing' and making 'their appearance explicitly' (Arendt 1958b: 198).

In this context, for Arnolfini to make their appearance 'explicit' means to demonstrate that their role is inquiring rather than didactic. But how does an institution sustain their investigatory role and ensure that audiences are aware of this? Often this is most visible through participatory events, discussions, workshops and reading groups, all of which are important elements of *Art from Elsewhere*. But this is not just a performative role - the institution also needs to 'listen' to audiences and to be open and responsive to feedback. The gallery wants to facilitate this kind of informal 'in-common' engagement, but to do this they maintain a formal process of evaluation. These evaluations also allow for greater critical consciousness of how the exhibition might seem to advance a constructed collection or narrative, and demonstrates a need to understand what this signifies to different audiences. Having regularly visited Arnolfini, I often felt that the gallery generated a discursive space that enabled people to come together to share cultural experiences and to speak and act in response to the questions highlighted by the exhibition – that it was a 'space of appearance', or contemporary *polis*. For this reason I decided to join the Learning Team as a volunteer – I wanted to learn more about the methods the gallery used to 'listen' to its audiences.

Sustaining questioning of the political

In 'The Compearance', Nancy draws on the writings of Marx to address the concept of the *polis*. He suggests that it:

> represents something that does not let itself be confused with any combination of activities or assumedly distinct relationships. In this case, *polis* or "politics", designates precisely this element that is distinct from all others (in this, then, "shared") which is nothing other than the "in-common" of all the rest - and compearance (1992: 388).

In other words, for Nancy the *polis* designates compearance, and it is ultimately inappropriable. Contrary to the idea of the *polis* as a powerful ship of state, this idea of a contemporary *polis* visualizes something elusive, fragile and inappropriable. This *polis* is characterised by a sense of risk, precarity, and uncertainty. Arendt says: 'Wherever people gather together, [the space of appearance] is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever' (1958b: 199). As such, to initiate a space of appearance depends on an individual act of courage within a public space and an openness to uncertainty. In the context of the Arnolfini, this could be the gesture of an artist creating a work, or an individual publicly engaging with an artwork. To thoughtfully engage in an artwork demands that the viewer casts aside preconceptions and questions their firmly held opinions. This also calls into question our sense of identity.

Thinking with Arendt, we can see that identity can take two forms: '*what* we are' is our identity as defined by society- having talents or shortcomings that are judged in relation to society as a whole, and '*who* we are' refers to the *way* we do things and the way we respond to Others[48]. Arendt says that to be understood for 'who' you are requires strength and courage, because to assert this identity, and to develop it, is to put oneself in a precarious position, and to question one's opinions and beliefs. She says that we do not know who we disclose when we are in sheer human togetherness. This is because to be involved in an open discourse we must respond to the unpredictable appearance of Others, regardless of 'what' we are. In this situation, individuals become part of a communicative action that has no specific end. Accordingly, all those involved disclose themselves in a way in which intent is suspended. Here we can see that being in the space of appearance, gives rise to a sense of risk and vulnerability. One cannot create, or be part of, the space of appearance if they are purposefully seeking to use the space of appearance as a platform from which to achieve personal objectives and nothing more.

The objective nature of politics and the political is addressed in a recorded discussion in *Retreating the Political,* in which Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe problematises the way that 'the political is introduced as the will to reduce the incommensurable and to seal off the

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[48] This differentiation between 'what' and 'who' we are, is echoed by Lacoue Labarthe, where he says 'the mutation' of the question of man from 'what is man?' to 'who is man?' is a political gesture (RtP: 1997: 109).

tragic' and Jean-François Lyotard summarises Lacoue-Labarthe's stance as saying that 'the political must not forget the tragic' (RtP: 1997: 84). Here, following the differentiation between politics and the political, Lacoue-Labarthe begins to redefine the 'political' as something that amplifies the incommensurable and 'the tragic', and generates a state of receptiveness that requires a questioning of certainty - a questioning of the objectives of politics itself.

The appearance of the other (and their Otherness) in the space of appearance (having left behind, or slackened their hold on, particular opinions or perspectives) sustains the conditions for this questioning. However, as we have outlined, being-together also becomes concretised as 'a togetherness'. In *Being Singular Plural,* Nancy again draws on Marx, saying:

> co-appearance might only be another name for capital… it might be a name that runs the risk of once again masking what is at-issue, providing a consoling way of thinking that is secretly resigned… But this danger is not a sufficient reason to be satisfied with a critique of capital that is still held prisoner to the presupposition of an "other subject" of history, economics, and the appropriation of the proper in general… At the very least, a thinking of co-appearance must awaken this anxiety (BSP: 2000: 63).

That is, being-together can assume a value relation that exceeds or remains outside of the core issues at stake within the space of appearance: being-together can generate a symbol of value that 'masks what is at-issue'. In this context, 'value' denotes a metric or sense of something to be exchanged (in Marxist terms, an 'exchange value') and so it necessitates the ascription of a 'simple positivity'. The retreat of the political is a retreat from simple positivities and as such, it is embodied by a critical awareness of the exchange value that something has been given.[49]

Nevertheless, increased awareness of co-appearance can generate concern about this concretisation - concern that triggers further questioning. Without this concern or

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[49] Here, the idea of a 'value relation' carries with it a sense something has an intrinsic use that can be articulated as an 'equal price' and is exchangeable and commensurable. As such, to assume a value relation is to ascribe significance, and to overlook the incommensurability, the presence of absence within the process of being-together. This awareness of absence and absenting is fundamental to the space of appearance.

uncertainty, 'togetherness' can generate a totalitarian logic, because if we unquestioningly remain within the realm of already-decided 'truths', we can ultimately reduce and deny incommensurability. In 'The Compearance', Nancy says that 'sharing writes itself; compearance writes itself. But this word must never give the illusion of being an "answer". It gives us - it gives *us* - a program of work' (1992: 386). As in the traditional *polis*, speaking and acting together was not an end in itself, but it generated further action within society. Here, sustaining the question of the political is of ethical importance because, rather than remaining within the realm of accepted morals, we question what *is* ethical and thereby allow for and sustain ethical consciousness.

The exhibition *Art from Elsewhere* featured a number of artists from different backgrounds. Each work shone a light on different experiences in a way that provoked reflection. In many cases, the featured artworks voiced a purposeful political message. These political messages did not carry a specific agenda, but asked us to question the political logic at play within a particular reality, and for our questioning to resonate beyond the locale of the work. As such, each visitor to the gallery is called forth as a spectator to restore the conditions of visibility and affirm the appearance of the Other, perhaps creating a space of appearance. However, this response is not a given - as Arendt explained, the space of appearance is only potentially there, and it is a temporary space. So how can Arnolfini maintain the question of the political within *Art from Elsewhere* and continue to facilitate spaces of co-appearance?

There are number of important curatorial approaches that can be considered: the accompanying texts, the use of audio guides and guided exhibition tours. These are all ways in which the question of the political can be clearly articulated - gallery assistants and curators can literally call forth the spectator, draw links between the works and their global significance and articulate how this might implicate or impact the spectator. As a learning assistant, I noticed how the range of different media (e.g. paintings, photography, sculpture, video installations) in the exhibition created broad opportunities for engagement - different audience members tended to engage more with one type of media than another. As part of my role as a learning assistant, I had to use Arts Council England's evaluation model - a 'Quality Metrics' pilot scheme that is delivered through a digital platform, 'Culture Counts'. One of the evaluative processes was to undertake 'behavioural studies'. For this I had to subtly follow visitors

throughout the galleries, recording the time they spent in the exhibition as a whole and comment on how they engaged with the exhibition - for example, recording whether or not they read the texts, and which works they discussed more with their friends, or which works they skimmed past. This information became symbolised by a 'ladder of engagement' that collated the visitors' behaviour into different stages: orientation, exploration, discovery and immersion. Finally, I would approach the visitor(s) and ask them to share their impression of the exhibition and what they found most and least engaging. Although I was personally interested in how an informal space of appearance might be generated within the exhibition, this process of surveillance already traced a power relation that I felt stalled the 'retreat' and masked the co-appearance of the institution. This formal observational process put the institution into a position of authority – the authority to surveil individuals without their consent – and immediately dissolved any potential space of appearance. In the next section I will go on to critique this form of measurement in more depth, but for the time being, I will temporarily suspend this critique and turn to the 'data' that emerged.

One thing that quickly became obvious was that different people became active spectators of different works, whilst having minimal engagement with other works. On the whole, a visitor would leave the exhibition having been 'immersed' in one or two pieces of work. The aesthetics of the works either attracted or discouraged visitors from becoming fully engaged spectators. I was interested to see that those who engaged with the films often seemed to reach the 'immersion' level more perceptibly. The immersion level might be indicated by a number of different behaviours: for example, if a visitor breaks away from the group they were with to become fully absorbed in the work. Often, after being immersed in an artwork, individuals would be keen to discuss the work with me or the other gallery assistant. By situating the longest video work (*A Season Outside* (1997) by Amar Kanwar) in the final gallery space, visitors tended to leave the exhibition after engaging 'immersively' in this last artwork.

Drawing from these observations, it seemed that the diverse works and subjects within the exhibition engaged wider audiences, and even though individual visitors tended to engage with only a few works according to their personal taste, there were resonant themes throughout the exhibition as a whole. Many of the visitors I spoke with said that they found the exhibition depressing. For me, this exemplified the way in which the gallery, rather than offering 'an answer', instead sustained the political as a question - a

question that demands a programme of work. Nevertheless, one visitor, who seemed to carefully and thoughtfully engage with each artwork in turn, said that she felt that it was at times overwhelming and that she would have liked there to have been a greater variety of works, for example works that connected humorously with politics. As a representative of the institution, by generating a discursive space within the exhibition, the learning assistants are able to actively observe and listen to audiences and to provide feedback that will be taken into consideration for future projects.

How politics and philosophy 'co-belong' in the space of appearance

As outlined so far, one of the key ideas in *Retreating the Political* is that philosophy should not be perceived as the *origin* of the political, but that we should recognise that philosophy and politics 'co-belong'. In the opening address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe explain that their 'insistence on the philosophical' reflects the need to rigorously 'account for what we are calling the essential (and not accidental or simply historical) co-belonging of the philosophical and the political. In other words, to account for the political as a philosophical determination and vice versa' (RtP: 1997: 109). They argue that we cannot ethically derive a new political field from a philosophical field, because to do so would reinforce a determined philosophical field - a closed philosophy. This is the political problem we face - philosophy has reached its end in contemporary politics, because 'politics' ceases to ask philosophical questions. Our social and political obligation is to question philosophy, and consequently, to retain the political as a question. In doing so, we are able to trace new articulations and sites for engagement. The first step is to recognise the limits that politics has reached and to retreat from these limits by sustaining incertitude.

When Nancy wrote *Being Singular Plural* (which was published in French 12 years after the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political had closed) he reflected on these limits in relation to co-appearing. In the book, he speaks of the 'dead ends of a metaphysics':

> the dead ends of a metaphysics - and its politics - in which (1) social co-appearance is only ever thought of as a transitory epiphenomenon, and (2) society itself is thought of as a step in a process that always leads either to the hypostasis

of togetherness or the common (community, communion), or to the hypostasis of the individual (2000: 59).

For Nancy, we arrive at this limit by asking 'where has the subject appeared from?', 'why do they appear together?' and 'for what are they destined?' By *answering* these questions, we begin to instrumentalise co-appearing. However, if we continue to recognise that togetherness and being-together share the same ontological structure, we begin to realise that these questions can never fully be answered, and that any answer is temporal and incomplete. We will undoubtedly answer these questions, but by recognising their lack, we are less inclined to cling to whatever meaning we have derived as a 'fundamental truth'. Appearing is synonymous with being, and although it is inseparable from being 'together' with others, at the same time there is a dynamism and an 'absenting' of this 'togetherness' which exceeds and surpasses any perceived instrumentalisation (BSP: 2000: 59). Being and appearing are simultaneously Other.

Arendt shares this idea and conceptualises it within the theme of political action. She believes that action first becomes manifest in the space of appearance, and that this space immediately situates the moment of action beyond, or outside of, objective ideologies. At the very start of the *Promise of Politics* - in the opening words of the book, Arendt refers to the concept of action as 'ungraspable'. She says: 'In the moment of action, annoyingly enough, it turns out, first, that the "absolute", "that which is above" the senses—the true, good, beautiful—is not graspable, because no one knows concretely what it is' (2005: 3). She says that action is dependent on plurality, on appearing together, but that the 'first catastrophe of Western philosophy is that it ultimately wants to take control of action,' and that to take control of action, necessitates a unity (2005: 3). In reality, this unity can only come about by grasping and wielding the 'totalitarian logic' at the heart of the political and philosophical thought (RtP: 1997: xxviii). Failing to acknowledge the reciprocity between ascribing and exscribing that characterises being singular plural, can lead to the instrumentalisation of a 'togetherness' in line with a fixed ideology (even as this fails).

On the other hand, appearance and co-appearance initiate action, in the sense of openly responding to the other in an undetermined way. Action, in this regard, is dynamic rather than controlled. It reveals and implicates the spectator, calling the spectator into

the space of appearance, and in doing so, it extends and generates further action and responsiveness. Appearance generates a sense of active responsibility and an obligation to care for the Other.

Underlining the ontological significance of this later, in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt emphasises the shared nature of this disclosure:

> In this world which we enter, appearing from nowhere, Being and Appearing coincide. Dead matter, natural and artificial, changing and unchanging, depends on its being, that is in its appearingness, on the presence of living creatures. Nothing and nobody exists in this world who's being does not presuppose a spectator. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody… Plurality is the law of the earth (1971: 19).

She is saying that we are 'of the world' not 'in' the world, because being and appearing coincide. We constitute the world as we appear. And because of this our very existence assumes and necessitates a spectator. The spectator is integral to the act of appearing, and it is called in to this space of appearance, the spectator is called to respond. And as a spectator, regardless of 'what' they are, is called to respond in a way that hasn't been pre-decided; in a way that is receptive to the other.

This has relevance for contemporary institutions, especially an institution like Arnolfini, whose purpose is 'to encourage participation with contemporary art by the widest possible audience, particularly those who are disadvantaged or whose voices are excluded from mainstream culture'. As already outlined, the role of the gallery is to sustain questioning of the political. To do this, it must retreat from the limits of philosophy (from philosophical and political 'truths') and allow audiences to co-appear and enter into an 'ungraspable' moment of action. At the same time, it must choose ethical modes of engagement and receptivity that do not serve to negate this overarching purpose.

The challenge in an exhibition such as *Art from Elsewhere* is to provide enough information for audiences to 'access' the works, contextualise and engage with them, but not so much information that the work is reduced to an illustration of a political

message. For example, one of the artworks in the exhibition was a piece by Beat Streuli, *Pallasades* - a video projection that records crowds of people moving through Birmingham New Street. The film is slowed down, allowing viewers to focus on individuals within the crowd. Unlike other, more obviously 'political' pieces in the exhibition, *Pallasades* is politically ambiguous. By depicting individuals that make up a mass of people, it aimed to generate a feeling of connection with those individuals. Whilst a number of visitors explained that of all the artworks in the exhibition, *Pallasades* was particularly hard to understand, others highlighted it as the work that they liked the best. In both cases, the ambiguity of the artwork and its lack of an objective message meant that it was brought up for discussion more often than other works in the exhibition. Many people experienced the appearance of this particular artwork in the gallery as 'inappropriable'.

Nevertheless, there is still a risk that the artwork can be appropriated through over-contextualisation. Here, the lack of contextualisation of the piece – the fact that there was no accompanying explanation, and it was not featured in the exhibition guide - meant that this form of appropriation was also avoided. Instead, the artwork held the attention of the viewer in its suspension of 'understanding'. In *Dis-Enclosure*, Nancy describes 'literature' as 'any sort of saying, shouting, praying, laughing, or sobbing that holds - as one holds a note of a chord - that infinite suspension of sense' and that 'this holding or sustaining has more to do with ethics than aesthetics - but in the end it eludes and undoes these categories as well' (D: 2008: 97). This articulation of practices that eludes and undoes the categorisation of aesthetics and ethics, runs throughout Nancy's writing and resonates with Arendt's thinking of action, epitomised by the beauty or good that is 'above the senses' (Arendt 2005: 3). These are practices that have political significance because they sustain questioning of the political.

Co-appearing and ethics

Sustaining questioning of the political carries with it an ethical imperative. In *Retreating the Political*, Nancy says:

> The commandment - and the beginning, the *archie* - of ethics has meaning only in addressing a freedom and, consequently has meaning in not *responding*, in not summoning meaning and value but on the contrary, in opening, in reopening the

question - precisely the question of the end or ends of meaning (RtP: 1997: 36).

Without this re-opening of the question, political decisions become guided by assumptions and presuppositions. Co-appearing, as a condition of Nancy's ontology, brings with it an awareness that the other is also Other, and that this radical alterity is a shared condition of being. Consequently, we have an ethical imperative not to cling to assumptions of the 'fixed identities' of others. Here, ethical consciousness can only be possible through sustained questioning. As soon as a question is answered, the presuppositions taken into account in addressing the question begin to guide and dictate concrete political realities. Although this is inevitable, sustaining critical engagement and questioning has even greater ethical importance, because this shared questioning can sustain the freedom to challenge and reform policies and political decisions, by retracing sites in which to do this.

So far, in the context of cultural institutions, I have argued that to sustain questioning of the political requires acknowledging the presence of institutions and their active role in co-appearing with visitors and audiences. Rather than trying to appear as detached, a cultural institution can acknowledge its presence within the spaces of appearance that it helps to generate, both in terms of its curatorial influence and as a receptive, listening body of cultural practitioners. Rather than establishing specific institutional characteristics or taking a particular stance with regards to a given subject, the presence of the institution can be manifest through the scope of their cultural goals (which are not necessarily always the same) and more specifically through the questions addressed in the exhibition. As in the case of Arnolfini, its presence is initially framed by the current institutional goal of engaging with the widest possible audience (as stated in the entrance to the gallery) and through its current exhibition, in this instance the exhibition *Art from Elsewhere,* which clearly states that it is questioning ideas of alterity and the nature of the 'local' and the 'global'. Even so, this assertion leads to the question: how can co-appearing become assimilated within the institution? How is it 'used' by the institution, and what ethical implications does assimilation carry?

Up to now I have presented a rose-tinted image of Arts Council England's Quality Metrics programme – presenting it as receptive rather than prescriptive. However, looking into the brief history of the programme, it becomes immediately obvious that

it carries with it a political strategy. The Culture Counts website explains that the programme began in 2011 as a 'new logic model' through which 'the cultural, social and economic value created by the arts was linked back to government policy objectives. Quality metrics were developed through extensive consultation with the cultural sector, then internationally tested and academically validated' (2017). Further reading illuminates how Culture Counts was intended as a method for quantifying and reducing cultural experiences to a set of data that could be used to 'capture the essence' of cultural participation, 'capture the quality of arts and cultural work' and to 'sense-check' the data against a preconceived idea of cultural value, essentially using academics to 'validate', rather than critically engage with the metrics (ACE 2017). This immediately undermines the argument that such evaluations can help an institution sustain an ethical relationship with their audiences (especially as this data is collected by unpaid volunteers who provide surveillance by sneaking around the gallery with a clipboard).

Nevertheless, this intent was challenged during the preliminary tests of the evaluation programme. Culture Counts was trialled by the Manchester consortium leading the Quality Metrics pilot and the Children and Young People External Reference Group. These pilots immediately highlighted the complexity of the participatory process, in particular the 'event' frame and 'respondent' frame. The groups testing the programme felt that there needed to be prior self-assessments, which could then be compared against peer review and participant reviews. This culminated in a 'creative intention/reflection process… on both the quality of the participatory process and the performance' as reflected in the data (ACE 2015). In turn, those who participated in the pilot programmes discussed how the data could be used to ensure a 'powerful *starting point* for conversations both within the organisation and with their participants' and the possibility of building 'algorithms and automated reporting functions that are designed to flag interesting patterns in the findings, and which should act as a natural *prompt to critical reflection and discussion*' (ACE 2015b: emphasis added).

These responses indicated that in practice, the need to 'measure the quality of participatory work' does not necessarily demand 'grading the work' or seeking to attach an exchangeable value to an artwork, but instead provides a starting point for critical discussions on how engaging an exhibition or event is. Ultimately, the meeting between

members of the Manchester consortium and the Children and Young People External Reference Group suggested that the ideal outcome of this kind of research is to create a more powerful starting point for conversations and more incisive critical reflection - in other words, a sustained questioning of participatory practices. This points to a need for greater critical engagement with institutions. Whilst institutions co-appear - observe, listen and respond to their audiences – there is a need to acknowledge the inconclusive nature of what they hear and observe. This demands that they foster critical engagement with both the data and the evaluative methodologies. This feedback encourages institutions to refrain from assimilating the space of appearance, because by doing so, it begins to serve a function and can no longer be a true 'space of appearance'.

Arendt's concept of the 'space of appearance' helps us to understand the political as a discursive praxis, rather than a deployed theory. Through her focus on the *space* that is shared by (and yet separates) those who appear, she draws attention to the relationality of appearance. Reading this alongside Nancy's writings on co-appearing illuminates the ethical significance of appearance - that a lack of a specified intent and an acknowledgement of the incommensurability of the Other, is necessary in the space of appearance. Arendt acknowledges the temporality of the space of appearance - that it is only potentially there when people gather together, and that it depends on the nature of their appearance. However, her focus is on its relationality, rather than on the concrete significance of this transience. It is also important to consider how those who are part of the space of appearance might assimilate it.

This is where Badiou's writings on appearance can help us reflect on the ethical significance of appearing. Although Badiou's approach to 'appearing' seems at odds with that of Nancy – for example he writes of 'doctrines' of appearance – both writers sustain a sense of being as irreducible, as infinite. Badiou also disagrees with Arendt's emphasis on 'living together' and on consensus - he thinks that her thinking of politics leads to 'ramified public space' (2001: 115, 116). Instead, Badiou calls for an antagonistic relation to the political. Although the three thinkers differ in their approaches to appearing, each affirms a sense that it concerns the incommensurability of being - a sense that characterizes each theorist's conceptualization of ethics.

Chapter 2 considered how Nancy radically rethinks the idea of the subject, so that his writings develop beyond phenomenological traditions. As outlined, there are times when he is close to this tradition, but this serves to affirm the profound shift that Nancy's philosophy elicits. Chapter 2 looked at how Nancy's quasi-ontology deconstructs subject/object relations that affirm individuality, instead forwarding 'being singular plural'. Nancy is not alone in breaking away from phenomenological traditions, philosopher Alain Badiou also proposes a radical ontology that develops throughout his writings and characterises his approach to the political. Key to Badiou's radical ontology is the concept of appearing. Badiou uses different language to Nancy when writing of appearing and the following paragraphs will explore Badiou's approach to 'appearing' to see how both thinkers decisively shift philosophical discourses beyond phenomenology. How might Badiou's conceptualisation of appearing affirm the infinity of being? How might this influence approaches to art, to 'the image'? Although the philosophical context of Badiou's writings is different to that of Nancy's – how might Badiou's approach nevertheless affirm the idea of the image as that which concerns the ethical?

Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* has been one of his best-selling books, and is often sold in art gallery bookshops. In the preface to the English edition, Badiou writes: 'we are entering into a long period of recomposition, both for emancipatory political thought and for those effective practical forces that correspond to it' (2012: lv, lvi). Written specifically for students, Badiou describes *Ethics* as a 'sketch' in which he argues against the conventional meaning of ethics as 'a wise course of action' linked to abstract ideas (of 'Right' for example), and instead forwards an ethics that is referred back to specific situations (Badiou: 2012: 1-3). Again in the preface, Badiou clarifies that a 'situation' must be understood 'in its being, a pure multiple…and, its appearing, as the effect of a transcendental legislation' (2012: lvi). Badiou points readers toward *Logics of Worlds* where he further expands and develops ideas of appearing. The premise of *Ethics* – that we need a different approach to the ethical, that accords to this period of 'recomposition' - is the key reference point in the following discussion of ethics and appearing. However, I will also draw from *Logics of*

Worlds in order to articulate distinctions, and possible relations, between both writer's (non-metaphysical) approaches to Being.

In an interview with Peter Hallward in the Appendix to *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou clearly defines his approach to ontology: 'What I call ontology is the generic form of presentation as such, considered independently of the question as to whether what is presented is real or possible' (2012: 128). The fundamental characteristic of Badiou's ontology is that it is a 'mathematical ontology' that addresses 'pure presentation' - 'being as pure multiplicity [which] can be thought only through mathematics' (2012: 127). Badiou's approach to ontology allows us to address the idea of multiplicity through maths. As summarised by Andrew Robinson in Ceasefire magazine, for Badiou, 'what exists is a multiplicity structured by maths. Prior to the structuring gesture performed by maths, what exists is an 'inconsistent multiplicity'' (2014). For Badiou we acknowledge this inconsistent multiplicity through maths, but in doing so, the inconsistent multiplicity is presented as a consistent multiplicity. This shift from inconsistency to consistency is necessary for our consciousness.

As he reminds readers in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou's perception of the mathematical follows Lacan's definition that the 'mathematical par excellence' means 'transmissible outside of meaning' (Lacan, quoted by Badiou: 2009: 39). The idea of maths as ontology leads to Badiou's radical modification of phenomenology and his articulation of 'calculative phenomenology'. If ontology concerns being as 'pure multiplicity', there cannot be a subject and object in traditional phenomenological terms. Summarising the 'principle stakes' of *Being and Event*, Badiou explains that his formula can be summarised as: 'A subject is a point of truth' (LoW: 2009: 6). Keeping in mind that for Badiou, 'truths' can be 'identifiable beyond the empirical manifestations of their existence', exceptions to the 'forms of the 'there is'' (LoW: 2009: 6), we can begin to understand a 'subject' is a point of exception rather than 'an individual'. Badiou understands the subject as 'an operative figure' that dispositions the material traces of an event, traces that refer to 'frontal change' that has affected at least one object of the world (LoW: 2009: 33). What are 'material traces of an event'? In the preface to *Being and Event*, Badiou briefly summarises 'the event' as a 'type of rupture which opens up truths' (2001: xii) and that a subject is 'nothing other than an active fidelity to the event of

truth' (2001: xii). What remains of the event - its incalculable emergence - are traces that form the beginning of philosophy. Although the 'event' itself is not shared, the *exposure* to the event *is* shared, and that our active responses to this exposure constitute a politics. [50]

Badiou's philosophy is from a different 'lineage' to that of Nancy's – Nancy's writings have responded to thinkers such as Hegel and Heidegger and Badiou's writings have responded to thinkers such as Althusser and Lacan, and can broadly be described as a kind of Platonism. As Ian James summarises in his book *The New French Philosophy*: 'Nancy's thinking of embodiment and sense is clearly unequivocally and diametrically opposed to Badiou's subtractive approach to ontology and to his affirmation of a certain Platonism. However, Nancean singular plurality and Badiou's inconsistent multiplicity both affirm the actual infinity of being, its irreducible excess over itself, and its irreducibility to any horizon of unity, or any mode of substance or ground' (2012: 45). The concept of 'appearing' has a different philosophical context for both thinkers. Whilst I am not, in this thesis, attempting an analysis of these different lineages, I would like to highlight key aspects of Badiou's 'appearing' and address how these might affirm the 'irreducible excess' of being and consequently reinforce the argument that the image as something that concerns the ethical.

At the start of *Ethics*, Badiou explains that the book provides preliminary revisions to the idea of singular 'situations', as articulated in *Being and Event* - although a situation can be 'understood simply as a multiple [i.e. as a set]' (2001: lvi), it should also be understood in terms of how it creates and maintains network of relations. As quoted earlier, he says that a situation must be conceived in 'its *being*…and in its *appearing*, as the effect of a transcendental legislation' (2001: lvi). Here being and appearing are addressed as separate but connected concepts. This is an important point of contrast - for Nancy, appearing is synonymous with being, we cannot 'not-appear'. But for Badiou, pure being - a pure multiple - *appears* as the effect of a priori laws (transcendental legislation). Whilst Nancy's perception of appearing points to the

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[50] In *Ethics*, Badiou describes an event as an 'unpredictable supplement' to 'what there is' (2012: 67). The event occurs when something that generates 'knowledge' also brings about something that 'vanishes as soon as it appears' (2012: 67). A 'truth' is 'a fidelity to an event' - a relation that is incommunicable but produces 'a situation' (2012: 42). Fidelity is understood in terms of 'being faithful to fidelity' - being faithful to one's 'own principle of continuity' (2012: 47). Speaking of the Hippocratic duty of a doctor, in a medical 'situation', Badiou says that 'to be faithful to this situation means: to treat it right *to the limit of the possible*' (2012: 15). I want to argue that the act of faith *questions* the limits of the possible.

beginning of a contingent relation, Badiou's understands appearing as an 'effect' – an outcome or impression experienced through a 'transcendental legislation'. Approaching the idea of 'appearing' from different philosophical vantage points, means that when Nancy writes about appearing, it carries with it a sense of potentiality and freedom (freedom that gives meaning to the '*archie*' of ethics (Nancy, RtP: 1997: 36)) and Badiou's idea of appearing affirms calculative phenomenology and the idea that everything necessarily appears as a consistent multiplicity (even as it refers to an inconsistent multiplicity), so that 'appearing' carries a sense of 'adherence-to' an event.

Nevertheless, the shift from an inconsistent to a consistent multiplicity cannot be reduced to individual consciousness of phenomena. This shift subsequently allows Badiou to critique liberalism and its focus on individualism and universal values[51]. In Badiou's writing, 'appearing' affirms the infinity of being, because although things appear through 'the effect of a transcendental legislation', this 'transcendental legislation' sustains awareness of the inconsistent multiplicity – of pure presentation that is ultimately irreducible. How might this influence approaches to art, to 'the image'? Recalling Nancy, the image is 'distinct from all representation', that 'it is an imprint of the intimacy of its passion (of its motion, its agitation, its tension, its passivity)' (GoI: 2005: 2, 7). If we also understand the image as 'pure presentation', in Badiou's terms, we can begin to see how images do not *represent* or refer back to events, but can themselves *be* events. Consequently, recomposing the image of the world could set into play the possibility for radical reorganisation.

The ethic of art

In *Ethics*, Badiou writes: 'Ethics does not exist. There is only the ethic-of (of politics, of love, of science, of art).' (2001: 28) Consequently, when thinking of the image one can speak of the ethic of art. In the Appendix of *Ethics,* in an interview with Peter Hallward[1], Badiou responds to a question about how he would reformulate his conception of the relationship between truth and knowledge. He draws on the notion

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[51] In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou frames this as a move away from democratic materialism, instead forwarding a 'materialist dialectic (here inverting the dialectical materialism of Marxist thought) expressed through the maxim: 'There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths' (Badiou in Radical Philosophy: 2005). Here bodies and languages exist with and through truths (through exceptions to the 'there is').

of the 'situation' and explains that this reformulation will distinguish 'being of the situation' from 'being there'. Badiou explains that it is necessary 'for every situation to be not simply a being but, coextensive with that being, an appearing. It is *a doctrine of appearing*, but of a non-phenomenal appearing. It's not a matter of appearing for a subject, but of an appearing as such, as localization. It is a localization that doesn't itself refer back to any particular space or geography but is, rather, and intrinsic localization' (2001: 136, 137: emphasis added). At first, the idea of a 'doctrine' of appearing - a set of principles that apply to appearing - seems to counter the sense of appearing as contingent, as something that brings with it an unassimilable absence. As outlined at the start of this chapter, for Nancy appearing (more accurately, 'co-appearing') is 'an ontological gesture of mutual exposition with Others' (Nancy BSP: 2000: 59). This difference affirms Ian James' statement that 'Nancy's thinking of embodiment and sense is clearly unequivocally and diametrically opposed to Badiou's subtractive approach to ontology' (James 2012: 45). However, in the wider context of Badiou's writings, we can understand this 'doctrine' to be a set of principles that allow us to address inconsistent multiplicity. In other words, Badiou is not saying that appearing occurs *according* to a set of principles, but that human consciousness can only comprehend appearing through a set of principles.

For Badiou, 'appearance' is the appearance of truths - it is the appearance of that which does not confirm to the "there-is' of bodies' (LoW: 2009: 9). Despite the fact that 'mathematical presentation, like pure being, is stripped of all qualitative characteristics' (James 2012: 138), Andrew Robinson points out that in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* the concept of appearance begins to revolve around a quantification of intensity, 'linked to the number of active connections an element has with other parts of the situation' (2014). Badiou's logics of appearing further develop a revised phenomenology, paving the way for other thinkers. The focus can begin to shift from the appearance of truths, to the process of quantifying and defining what constitutes a truth or an event.

Quentin Meillassoux, a former student of Badiou, forwards a mathematical logic. Referring to *Being and Event*, in his book *After Finitude* he argues that liberation from calculative knowledge through mathematical logic is a more powerful liberation than

through poetry, art and religion (2008: 108). It is not surprising that emphasis on mathematical logics leads to a turn away from poetry, art and religion and towards 'rationality'. Philosophers such as Meillassoux, influenced by Badiou's radical rethink of phenomenology, forward a post-theological, rational mathematical logic. They downplay the significance of a gradual deconstruction of religious thinking - a deconstructive process found in Nancy's writings. Therefore, although mathematical logic and the conceptualisation of appearance through 'doctrines' can be liberating, they also have limitations. On the other hand, in Nancy's writings, where appearance is conceptualised as the appearance of an absence or of a withdrawing presence, we begin to understand how poetry, art and religion can be liberating when one approaches them critically, becoming aware of how they evoke a sense of shared separation.

As we can see both writers work with the idea of 'appearing' to forward post-phenomenological theory, and both affirm the irreducibility of being to a specific 'horizon of unity' (James 2012: 45). However, because they are working within different lineages of thought, their philosophy unfolds in very different ways. Nancy's writings approach themes of freedom and ethics through engagement with religion, literature and art, and the multiplicity of approaches to such engagement. Badiou's mathematical ontology, calculative phenomenology and doctrines of appearance require a comprehensive reappraisal of history, demanding a decision-making process as regards to what constitutes an event, for example. Whilst this is a powerful theoretical approach, it demands rigorous adherence to a set of rules, rather than the more playful engagement encouraged by Nancy. Nancy's writings have a strong sense of materiality. As such, when approaching political art practices, thinking with Nancy focuses our attention on how images expose a shared separation, and how this can influence the way in which people imagine, visualise and respond to the world around them. Nevertheless, despite their different scholarly approaches to ontology and to the idea of appearance, they ultimately both affirm the irreducibility of being, suggesting an approach to ethics that is bound up in this incommensurability.

Writing of Nancy's approach to art in *The New French Philosophy*, Ian James writes:
> In situating the images and forms of art 'prior to the phenomenon' and in arguing that they expose or touch upon the diffuse horizon of sense that the world is (without ever directly presenting or re-presenting sense), Nancy's account gives a

powerful philosophical explanation of all the things we may more intuitively know or feel that art does, and of all the things which have historically given art such a privileged status and value (2012: 53).

Here, James reminds us that for Nancy, images are prior to objects of perception, that the image discloses an absence and in doing so, touches on the horizon of sense that constitutes the world. The image has significance in that it exposes a sense of shared separation and cannot be reduced to a single interpretation. How does understanding the image as a shared separation, necessitate ethical engagement with art? And what might this mean in concrete terms?

Thinking of the ethic of art in the context of appearing as irreducible (and the image as incommensurable) it is clearer how applying a metric system of valuation to images is unethical. In the case of *Art from Elsewhere*, I am arguing that the Arts Council England's Quality Metrics scheme acted as an unethical 'logic model'. Whilst the initial intention behind Culture Counts was to actively engage with the political significance of cultural practices and to enable institutions to tailor their evaluations to suit the aims of the specific events and activities, the structure of the project became subject to sovereign decisions so that the 'cultural, social and economic value created by the arts was linked back to government policy objectives' (Culture Counts 2017). Arts Council England decided to adopt the programme as a means of evaluating cultural projects throughout the UK. This aim - to link art with policy objectives - immediately clashes with its principle of valuing culture because it 'opens our minds' (ACE 2017), because however benign the policy objectives might seem, they demand a reductive engagement with the image. Accordingly, any possibility for radical reorientation of ideas (that might characterise an image as an 'event') is immediately lost because the image is interpreted as commensurable.

The immediate feedback from the trials indicated that in practice, this objective approach to audience engagement could have potential to generate critical engagement, rather than fulfil criteria dictated by government policy (and market interests). As outlined, the group identified 'interesting patterns in the findings' but felt that these 'should act as a natural prompt to critical reflection and discussion' (ACE 2015b). In practice, the logic-model was a useful tool to generate more attentive critical engagement, but was subsidiary to the initial ethical obligation to co-appear with

audiences, and to be receptive to their experiences. My first-hand experience observing audiences and discussing artworks with visitors underlined the impossibility of quantifying engagement with art, or 'capturing the quality' of the exhibition as a whole. One cannot tell what someone is thinking or feeling when they look at an artwork, and even conversations (initiated and led by learning assistants) do not indicate the 'intrinsic value' of a cultural experience. However, these studies did illuminate some patterns, and unexpected feedback triggered further conversations and responses that will impact future events and exhibitions. The fact that the gallery is undertaking these evaluations shows a willingness to develop and transform through listening to audience feedback about experiential factors, rather than simply economic statistics.

In a blog post on the Arts Council website, Simon Mellor, Executive Director of Arts and Culture, addresses the question 'can you measure 'great' art?' He explains that 'the Quality Metrics system is about enabling arts and cultural organisations to enter a structured conversation with audience members and peers about the quality of the work they are presenting' (2016). The idea of sustaining a more communicative relationship between the various and dynamic agents within the expanded field of art is encouraging. However, he goes on to say that the goal (in the next 5-10 years) is to 'have a publically funded arts and cultural sector with an understanding of current and potential customers that is something akin to that already enjoyed by the commercial creative industries' (2016). This clearly showed that the priority is not to create open and receptive spaces of appearance, but rather to conceptualise the arts and cultural sector as a commercial venture in which audiences are 'customers', in turn situating art as a commensurable 'product'. As an obligatory institutional practice, it intensifies the risk of further commodification of culture, where the arts are no longer about opening our minds and stirring our hearts (ACE 2017) but about generating profitable models that serve a political ideology. Such institutional practices no longer faithful to the 'event' of the image. Andrew Robinson, again in Ceasefire magazine, reminds us that 'it is only possible to identify an Event 'reflexively' – by already having chosen to identify it (2014).' Consequently, understanding the image as a potential 'event' calls for an ethical choice - it requires engaging with the image, not as a commodity, but as a site of absence that allows for further critical thought and the possibility of a further change that can affect at least one object in the world (drawing from Badiou's description of traces of an event in *Logics of Worlds*: 2009: 33).

Concluding the collection of essays that make up *Retreating the Political*, Nancy says: 'Where certainty comes apart, there too gathers the strength that no certainty can match' (1997: 158). This is a space of freedom, the space in which we have an ethical obligation to question meaning and the certainty with which we ascribe meaning.

To embody this spirit requires that we recompose the image of the world. This is a creative process that simultaneously 'affirm[s] and denounce[s] the world as it is' (RtP: 1997: 158). To recompose the image of the world means drawing back from certitude and distancing ourselves from our convictions. Here, certitude does not vanish but becomes the point of departure for ethical engagement. Similarly, as Nancy describes finitude as 'the depropriation of the end' and the opening of ethics, our propensity to cling to 'fundamental truths' and to create patterns out of our experiences, provides the opportunity for a 'depropriation' of certainty and the opening of ethics (RtP: 1997: 40).

As considered in the second chapter of the thesis, the finitude of being, the idea of 'being towards nothing', can be approached in two ways. We can understand this condition as 'being *nothing*', with its emphasis on the final meaning of being (as nothing), or as '*being* nothing'; where being in its journey to nothing, means everything. In other words, being as appearing, as co-appearing, finds its ethical meaning in retreating from the illusion of certainty inherent in 'simple positivities'. Ethical engagement cannot be found in articulating finite truths (that, being finite, give way into no-meaning) but rather in the experience prior to production of 'a truth'. This can be renewed again after a 'finite meaning' has been produced, by drawing back from the certitude of this meaning.

This 'depropriation' of the end, and of certainty as an end of thought, requires active, conscious effort. In his 2015 essay 'The Weight of Our History', Nancy writes about the increase in fundamentalism alongside globalization and the pressure to collapse under the weight of history into the apparent security of a consciousness characterised by fundamental truths. To bear this weight, and to sustain the possibility for change, requires strength of spirit. This spirit is sustained through an active resistance to our natural desire for certainty and for 'truth'. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe states in his 'Political' Seminar with Christopher Fynsk: 'we must learn to renounce what has always

magnetised philosophical desire: (its) practical realisation' and later that this retreat 'has to be *active*, offensive even' (RtP: 1997: 96, 97).

In terms of institutional practices within galleries and museums, this retreat from reinforcing the illusion of certainty inherent in 'simple positivities' requires active strategies to sustain critical discursive engagement with artworks within the institution. It requires thinking of images as sites of shared separation. Paradoxically, to renounce the 'practical realisation' of philosophical desire requires an active retreat, which itself takes the form of a 'practical realisation' but one that opens, rather than simplifies, meaning. Cultural institutions have social responsibility. Their ethical role in allowing a retreat from the apparent certainty of our own convictions has never been more important. What remains to be considered now, is what this retreat means in terms of how it acts as a *shared* means of maintaining strength under the weight of our history, and how collectively retreating can itself can be a powerful form of engagement.

Co-appearing and retreating

As quoted at the start of this chapter, Nancy says that '[c]o-appearing does not simply signify that subjects appear together… We must also wonder why they appear "together" and *for what other depth they are destined*' (BSP: 2000: 59: emphasis added). Co-appearing is not just about the event of appearance, or the space of appearance, it's also about our consciousness within that space. It requires that as we co-appear (as we are exposed to the shared-separated spacing of co-existence), we acknowledge the unknowable consciousness of those appearing. That is, appearing brings with it an absence, an unknowable 'depth' that we cannot totally assimilate appearing as a finite thing or a defining 'truth'. This highlights the significance of retreating from certainty and from 'positive discourses' that use the space of appearance to bolster pre-conceived ideas and to strategise towards a particular end. In the introduction to *Retreating the Political*, editor Simon Sparks contextualises Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's idea of 'retreat' with reference to an earlier paper they wrote - 'The Jewish People to not Dream' - in which the 'retreat' is defined as 'the action of disappearing appearing' or 'to

appear *as* disappearance' (RtP: 1997: x)[52]. In this sense, the retreat is not merely a withdrawal, but it sustains consciousness of absence, which allows us to retrace the paths of the political anew (Sparks: RtP: 1997: xxvii). This generates the question of how awareness of how something 'appears as disappearance' can sustain ethical engagement with the Other. And developing this further, what role can cultural institutions such as Arnolfini have in sustaining the awareness of absence, and of images as sites of absence?

So far, I have identified that appearing is synonymous with being and that our fundamental condition is 'singular plural'. If, as Nancy proposes, our political obligation is one of sustaining questioning and of 'retreating', how might a collective retreat lead to greater engagement with Others and a deeper understanding of how this ontology characterises collective action? If retreating from certainty can help individuals speak out in 'the face of horror and emotion', how might we collectively bear 'weight of our history' *and* allow for the emergence of new social paradigms (Nancy: 2015)? This section further considers the concept of the retreat and will develop the idea of the retreat as a relation to 'radical negativity' with reference to the writings of Chantal Mouffe, particularly her writings on agonistic pluralism in her 2013 book *Agonistics*. In this book, we find an intersection between Mouffe, Arendt and Badiou, which provides the foundation for her thinking regarding agonism. This section unpacks Mouffe's critique of both Arendt and Badiou, and considers the idea of agonistic pluralism with relation to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's articulation of 'the retreat'. Through this analysis I suggest ways in which engagement through agonistic interventions can reform institutions. Referring again to Arnolfini, the following paragraphs explore ways in which institutions might 'retreat the political' and, in doing so, *retrace* the political. Acknowledging the Derridean root of this concept – the idea of a trace as 'that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present' (Derrida 1976: 66) - how can institutions refrain from condensing ideas and artworks into a set of 'simple truths' that close down critical and creative engagement?

Co-appearing as agonistic

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[52] Sparks here quotes Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in *Sandford Literature Review* 6, 2 (1989): 201.

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe has, like Nancy, problematised liberal thought (or 'liberal fundamentalism') saying that it 'cannot recognise that there can only be identity when it is constructed as difference, and that any social objectivity is constituted through acts of power' (2013: 4). She reasons that liberal thought is individualistic, and based on individual rights, and that as a result it turns away from the political. Like Nancy, she recognises that 'the political' refers to collective identities and is defined by the experience of 'being with', and that 'social objectivity' impedes political engagement. Writing of the antagonism of political in *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, Radical Democracy, and the Political*, Mouffe clearly states:

> This antagonistic dimension is what I call the 'the political'; I distinguish it from 'politics', which refers to the set of practices and institutions the aim of which is to create order, to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always conflictual because they are traversed by 'the political'. To use Heideggerian terminology, one could say that 'the political' is situated at the level of the ontological, while politics belongs to the ontic' (2013: 185).

From the start of *Agonism*, she distances herself from the 'strategy of 'withdrawal from'' that she says is inspired by theorists including Paolo Virno (2013: xvi). However, as I will go on to argue, the idea of agonism and 'engagement with' actually incorporates, and is built around, strategies of retreat and withdrawal.

At the start of *Agonistics*, Mouffe explains that the book takes its bearings from the idea that 'to think politically requires recognising the ontological dimension of radical negativity', as she, with Ernesto Laclau, argued in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2013: xi). This leads on to her differentiation between 'the political' and 'politics' - that 'the political' is ontological ('the ontological dimension of antagonism') and 'politics' refers to the institutions and practices that try to shape the way we live together (2013: XII). Although Mouffe and Nancy think about institutionality in different ways, this idea resonates with Nancy, in that it presents 'the political' as bound up in being and co-appearing, and that 'politics' refers to how this condition culminates into a set of objectives. Here we can extend this to say that, just as appearing is non-objective, 'the political' is not fully objective. Mouffe explains that 'full objectivity can never be reached' and as such hostility and opposition is always possible (2013: xi). This is the starting point from which she develops the idea of agonism, and from which she

advocates a set of principles that she applies to cultural institutions.

Mouffe believes that a consensus based on a set of shared 'communal' values is in fact an illusion, and cannot and should not be our goal. Such a consensus is simply a realisation of a power relation, which sustains marginality. Instead of advancing a programme for such consensus, she put forward the idea of 'agonism'. Put simply, agonism refers to a struggle between adversaries that want to defeat each other, and antagonism refers to a struggle between enemies whose goal is to destroy the other. As such, the behavioural patterns of each approach are very different. Adversaries fight not against 'a being', but against a mode of being - there is a fundamental acceptance of the others' right to compete. For Mouffe, antagonism is always still a possibility, but rather than fighting to win or lose (as antagonistic enemies do), adversaries can fight a 'positive-sum' game in which both adversaries can gain and lose at the same time. Agonism is, therefore, based on an understanding that ideas themselves can be contested and fought, but that we must sustain the freedom to defend the ideas. In a sense, to be antagonistic is to anthropomorphise difference as 'an enemy' - 'a being' to be destroyed. By contrast, to be agonistic means that, whilst one might contest differences, one still refrains from reducing another being to a symbol of these differences. In doing so, we acknowledge the absence (Otherness) within the other and the agency that this implies. Agonism recognises 'difference' as a shared condition of being.

Nevertheless, at the outset of *Agonistics*, Mouffe situates her understanding of agonistic politics with relation to an interpretation of both Arendt and Badiou. She contrasts her idea of agonism with Arendt's idea of agonistic politics, which she thinks rests too much on an emphasis on multiplicity and multiple perspectives, rather than the idea of 'truth'. She also criticises Arendt for what she feels is her overemphasis on parlimentarianism. Mouffe calls this 'agonism without antagonism' (2013: 10). On the other hand, Mouffe initially sides with Badiou, who shares this criticism of Arendt. However, referring to what, in her own thought, is a separation between ethics and the political, Mouffe explains that Badiou 'privileges an ethical perspective on politics' (2013: 16, 17) because he believes that political action concerns remaining faithful to an event (a process that produces 'truths'). She describes Badiou's approach as a 'quasi

religious effort at remaining faithful to a specific event', situating his politics as 'a politics of the unconditional', which in turn leads to a 'political dead end' (2013: 17). For Mouffe, antagonism constitutes democratic politics and so the political should always be contestable. Further, the 'domain of politics' requires 'making decisions in an undecidable terrain' (2013: 17). Because antagonism cannot be eradicated, actors can choose to take an agonistic approach that is contingent and therefore requires contestation and compromise. Nevertheless, if we re-examine her interpretations of Badiou and Arendt, we might begin to question the substructure of Mouffe's agonistics. The following paragraphs 'take apart' the idea of agonistics and put it back together again with reference to Nancy, and the idea of 'co-appearing' and retreating.

Retreating and hegemony

Mouffe's critique of Arendt centers around the perception that Arendt's emphasis on open-ended debate prevents her writings from having a concrete impact on politics. Mouffe says:

> I do not think that one can envisage the nature of the agonistic struggle simply in terms of an ongoing contestation over issues or identities. One also needs to grasp the crucial rule of hegemonic articulations and the necessity not only of challenging what exists but also of constructing new articulations and new institutions (2013: 11).

This idea of renewal is important, but I believe that Mouffe's reading of Arendt does not sufficiently address the significance of Arendt's emphasis on collective speech and action, and the political potential of the 'space of appearance'.

The problem is that Mouffe's critique rests on the idea that antagonism is 'not eliminated but *sublimated*' (2013: 8). In other words, antagonism is modified into a more acceptable form - agonism. Arendt's position stems not from an elimination or a sublimation of antagonism, but from an acceptance of an antagonism within our consciousness and a retreat from its closure or transformation. As such, it is not a case of how we 'channel' antagonism, but how we acknowledge it. This internal antagonism relates to the way in which we distance ourselves from certitude through critical

thinking.   Although Arendt uses the word 'antagonism' throughout her work, it is generally used to articulate specific instances in which this critical distance has been closed down within politics.   For example, in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958a), the word 'antagonism' appears ten times, mostly to describe political violence and conflict between the state and society.

Arendt's approach to the political brings with it a sense of the antagonism that is inherent in our existence.   Cecilia Sjöholm points out in *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*: 'In *The Promise of Politics* Arendt sees that the most important antagonism in contemporary politics is to be played out between freedom and life: 'Contemporary politics is concerned with the naked existence of us all" (2015: 307 quoting Arendt 2005: 145). This indicates a struggle not between adversaries, but between freedom and necessity, as opposing but co-dependent.   Arendt's reference to life concerns 'bare life' - the needs we have to address in order to survive.   The political implications of this antagonism come to the fore in *The Promise of Politics* when Arendt says that 'the brute force [of politics/of the state], which is supposed to safeguard life and freedom [and, I would add here, the antagonism between the two], has become so monstrously powerful that it threatens not only freedom, but life as well' (2005: 146,147). This points out an ethical obligation to sustain the antagonism between necessity and freedom, or put differently, between the necessity to ascribe meaning and freedom to deconstruct meaning, through agonistic methods in the 'external' world in which we appear.

Antagonism is ever-present, and to try to eliminate it or sublimate it into agonistic political struggles leads to an ethical crisis.   Such a goal is unachievable, and persistence towards this end can only serve to reinforce the swing towards totalitarian logic and lead to greater antagonisms within global politics.   Arendt's emphasis on deliberation, and on appearing together to speak and act politically may not fully 'grasp the crucial rule of hegemonic articulations', but it does release us from the oppressive weight of the ascribed meaning of these articulations, and allow changes to be made to them.   Mouffe acknowledges the necessity of 'challenging what exists', but when she calls for us to construct new articulations and new institutions, she glosses over the deliberative processes that are required to transform existing institutions into new institutions, or to allow for the emergence of informal discursive spaces (non-institutions) within

institutions, through sustained contestations.

The transformative power of speaking and acting together becomes clearer when Arendt describes the role of prejudices. She explains that prejudices seem legitimate when they fulfil their function of 'relieving the person from making a judgement from the burden of some portion of reality' (2005: 152). When they inevitably fail to do this - when prejudices prove to be inadequate, consequently demanding that a person make a judgement - she says that they come into conflict with reality and, because the person no longer feels protected by this prejudice, they can magnify it and turn it into an ideology. The only way to respond to this is to 'attempt to replace prejudices with judgements', which requires the revision of prejudices, and a revision of the judgements contained within them (2005: 152). This process requires a retreat from the illusion of certainty inherent in 'simple positivities'. It requires a freeing of thought from its finitude. It is still bound to result in a response - in a concrete outcome in the world - but the nature of this process has allowed for the emergence of 'new articulations', which in turn can transform institutions.

Retreating as an act of faith

Through this consideration of co-appearing, I have advocated Nancy's differentiation between 'politics', a tangible and concrete culmination of being-together, and 'the political', which refers to our approach to politics and emphasises *how* we appear together and how we respond to the incommensurability of being (and appearing). This has led to an understanding that 'the political' carries with it an ethical imperative. As such, ethics is separate from 'politics' (which tends to articulate ethics in terms of universal moral values and human rights) but is bound up in our approach to 'the political'. Although extrinsic to 'politics', this ethical consciousness shapes reality - not through 'positive discourses' that endorse a specific outcome, but through disengagement with objective 'truths' that sustain predictive hegemonies. By understanding the political as a retreat, one that is possible through the antagonism of ascribing and exscribing meaning, we can also conclude that this internal antagonism maintains our ethical obligation to the Other. Nevertheless, for this antagonism to generate new paradigms, we need to *consciously* acknowledge the absenting of meaning

that occurs as we generate meaning. But to sustain awareness of the subjective temporality of 'truth' rather than reinforcing familiar paradigms requires a 'strength beyond certainty' (Nancy: RtP: 1997: 158).

Badiou's approach to the political focuses on the production of truths generated by fidelity to an interruption of a given reality (an event). Mouffe believes that such fidelity prevents the development of radically democratic projects because it eliminates the adversarial dynamics that allow for democratic contestation. It is ironic that Badiou's rational, mathematical ontology is critiqued by Mouffe for being quasi-religious, nevertheless, Badiou's fidelity to an event requires a kind of adherence to an interruption to the real, a fidelity that dissolves hegemonic frontiers by suggesting alternative 'truths' (which as Badiou writes, 'have no substantial existence' but elicit 'a certain kind of intensity' (LoW: 2009: 5)). In contrast, Nancy's understanding of the political as a 'retreat' allows us to respond to interventions and interruptions - what Badiou might describe as an 'event' - but his idea of fidelity is slightly different to Badiou's. Badiou calls for fidelity to an interruption of the real (an event), fidelity that is manifest as an 'intensity' towards this interruption. Badiou's 'fidelity to an event' concerns a *loyalty to* the 'inscribing' of the void that constitutes the event (2012: 69). Nancy's conception of faith can be summed up as 'faith in the in-ascribable', manifest as kind of composed (as opposed to 'intense') refusal to ascribe political value to a reality. Nancy's perception of the political as a retreat destabilises hegemonic projects, but rather than working toward a 'final reconciliation' (Mouffe: 2013: 17), such a retreat allows 'new names, and new songs, [to] arise unendingly' (BtP: 1993: 57) - a gesture that is at once ethical (in the sense of sustaining criticality around normative ethics) and political.

In his essay 'The Free Voice of Man' in *Retreating the Political,* Nancy says that 'it is necessary *to be finished* with the demand for the production of an ethics', and later in the same essay he says that maintaining the question of the end of philosophy does not mean that 'questioning' in and of itself 'makes for an ethics of thought, but that our obligation is a 'more modest' one of '*maintaining* the *question*, as a question' (1997: 39, 40). Nancy is here critiquing normative 'ethics' but in doing so he writes of an obligation to maintain questioning - a kind of 'meta-ethical' obligation. Whilst macro-

politics and globalisation are often experienced through violence and conflict, Nancy's approach to the political suggests that rather than responding directly to these acts of violence, the focus should be on countering fundamentalism, and the swing towards fundamentalism that underpins violence and conflict.

In this sense, both Nancy and Mouffe forward political thinking that is beyond ethics (as adherence to a set of moral principles), but Nancy's engagement with the political calls for a kind of 'meta-ethics' an awareness of how we ascribe moral values and equivalences. However, whilst Mouffe calls for a 'strategic' questioning about the 'chain of equivalences' that a given politics calls for, Nancy's quasi-ontology and his approach to the political as a retreat lead him to expose and critique this sense of equivalence and instead call for a 'communism of nonequivalence' (Nancy: AF: 2015: 41) as considered in Chapter 3. But what might this mean in terms of agonistic engagement?

Nancy and agonism

Approaching the idea of agonism through a reading of Nancy suggests a series of revisions to our understanding of the term. First, antagonism is an active part of our internal consciousness - it is the relation between simultaneously ascribing meaning and exscribing meaning. This relation is antagonistic - ascribing and exscribing are paradoxically connected. Second, we have a choice in how we respond to this - either we sustain awareness of this antagonism through acknowledging the absenting of meaning, or we can try to sublimate it through ascribing ethical meanings to situations. However, it is never possible to fully achieve this. Third, as a consequence of this inability to ascribe a fixed 'meaning', we must embrace agonistic forms of engagement. This means not needing to 'grasp' the rule of hegemonic connections, as Mouffe decrees, but instead to retreat from the truths that make up these connections and to sustain critical engagement with (and within) these hegemonies. Only then can we construct 'new articulations' ethically. Fourth, as we have been considering, ethics relates to a retreat from the illusion of certainty, even when (and especially when) we feel totally convinced by something. Ethics concerns a questioning of what we hold to be 'true'. Because this demands that we confidently live with that which is indefinable, it also requires faith. The fifth and final revision is that agonism therefore absolutely

requires 'strategy of 'withdrawal from'', even though Mouffe argues otherwise (2013: xvi). Only then can we truly engage in an adversarial alliance, not one in which there is necessarily a win-win outcome, but one in which there is a shared win/lose - win/lose outcome. Here the very concepts of winning and losing themselves become obsolete, and what is truly meaningful is the way in which this relation sustains ethical engagement with the Other.

How can institutions 'retreat the political'?

I return now to the core focus of this chapter: institutions. Mouffe understands agonistics as a way of 'grasping the specificity of the current situation' (2013: 108). She describes agonistic debate as that which allows democratic citizens to 'choose between real alternatives' (2013: 119). These statements point to an underlying conformity to existing power structures. To bring about radical changes requires that agonism provides the opportunity for individuals and collectives to debate and construct *new* alternatives (rather than choosing between alternatives that are already 'real'). Nevertheless, to generate power and to bring about change, this must happen with and within institutions and organisations. Mouffe supports radical change, but she criticises certain movements for rejecting liberal democratic institutions. I believe that there is a key difference between 'rejection of' and 'withdrawal from', even though Mouffe tends to fuse these concepts. Following my reading of Nancy, 'withdrawal from' indicates an agonistic relation, and demonstrates recognition of the unknowable agency of the Other and of the individuals that constitute the formation of an institution (those who work within and those who visit an institution). Mouffe presents the idea that discursive practices are the *result* of hegemonies (2013: 67). I want to reframe discursive practices as a starting point for transforming hegemonies, changing the nature of their power. Additionally, Mouffe seems to critique movements (such as Occupy) for the way in which they appear to reject political institutions - there is little attention given to the role of the institutions themselves, and to their responsibility to respond, and develop affective alliances with these pressure groups and social movements.

In her 2013 essay 'Institutions as Sites of Antagonistic Intervention', Mouffe articulates a number of concrete agonistic strategies for institutions. She endorses 'putting

aesthetic means at the service of political activism' as an effective counter-hegemonic gesture. She wants to 'convert' art institutions into 'sites of opposition to the neoliberal market hegemony' through privileging marginal discourses within these institutions, and she wants us to 'use' galleries to 'foster political forms of identification and make existing conflict productive' (2013: 69, 71, 73). At first glance these all appear to be positive strategies, but in practice complexities immediately arise.

As I have argued, putting aesthetic means 'at the service' of political goals often means that creative practices are transformed into tools for larger regulatory programmes. This is not necessarily the case - Liberate Tate has a 'political goal', but it is one of radical critique rather than advocating a specific agenda that assumes a fixed political position. But within institutions, using research practices such as Culture Counts to extract intrinsic cultural values from political art practices, is *not* counter-hegemonic. Although it is possible to allow for counter-hegemonic engagement through 'listening to' and critically evaluating research practices and results, 'working with' them rather than 'using' them, this requires methodologies that resonate with these practices. The 'ladder of engagement' technique described earlier, directly counteracts the sense of 'being with' that the gallery hopes to foster. This technique positions the institution as autocratic, rather than allowing the researcher to co-appear with audience members in an informal space of appearance.

The idea of 'converting' art institutions into sites of opposition to neoliberalism suggests that they are inherently neoliberal. As I have argued throughout the thesis, art always eludes complete functionalisation, because it arises from a creative undertaking and demands creative engagement. As such, I want to suggest that at the heart of every arts organisation there is opposition to neoliberalism, a radical indifference to cultural metrics that tend to evolve into neoliberal logic models. This opposition and indifference needs to be drawn out and developed as a founding principle of institutions that wish to remain sites for creative engagement. Only then can the privileging of marginal discourses have radical potential.

Additionally, 'using' galleries to 'foster political forms of identification' serves to reinforce categorisation. Mouffe's idea of making 'existing conflict productive'

generates questions regarding the nature and impact of 'productive conflicts' - can these really change social and political prejudices? Alternatively, if galleries become sites of retreat - withdrawing from the certainty implied in the 'simple positivities' that often define political forms of identification - they are less likely to reinforce external political antagonisms.

Retreating the political and Arnolfini

To further elucidate the concrete significance of Nancy's concept of co-appearing (and retreating), this section looks at how institutional practices might 'retreat the political' by sustaining the political as a question and tracing new spaces of appearance. Drawing from a focus group that I attended in Manchester in July 2016, it looks at how theoretical ideas discussed in this chapter might play out on an institutional level and what challenges might follow. The purpose of the focus group was to discuss the need for a 'Museum Studies Academic Association' and what this might involve. Attendees included representatives from Arts Council England, academics, curators and development consultants. We discussed current institutional paradigms that blocked engagement between audiences, institutions and academics, and how these might be addressed in order to sustain critical consciousness within institutions. This critical engagement was considered necessary to develop affective and responsive cultural programmes.

The problems identified by the focus group centred on a sense of separation between academics, artists, activists and institutions. The group wanted to emphasise the importance of academics and creatives 'working with' museums and galleries, not just 'in' them. We identified a series of factors that contributed to this sense of separation. For example, we discussed the challenges that arise from differences in timeframes: researchers will often work on a project for three to five years, whereas curators work within a much smaller timeframe. This generated the question of when to engage with researchers, and how to develop the scope of the project, so that the focused research of academics can ultimately lead to wider engagement.

We also discussed how, given that cultural institutions are part of the apparatuses driven by neoliberal logic, a lack of funding leads to the closure of places that have acted as spaces of appearance. Reduced funding and the likely prospect of more museums closing draw attention to the need to care for collections that are at risk of losing funding. Related to this, was an emphasis on the need for networks of care and support, perhaps through highlighting the range of curatorial expertise throughout institutions so that some smaller galleries and museums can benefit from a greater number of collaborations and the sharing of institutional knowledge.

To address these issues, we discussed a number of concrete strategies, which included suggestions to establish universities as major partners from the outset (perhaps through increasing the number of university lecturers on the board of trustees and presenting institutions as creative cultural spaces, where students can spend time). This approach situated academics as catalysts within institutions. As such, although different cultural practitioners work within different timeframes, there is still the possibility of knowledge transfer and organic collaborations.

Other practical suggestions included recognising the need for a rigorous understanding of the policies that drive local councils and the ability to handle budgets, but also making sure that there is time for creative reflection prior to the start of a particular project, which could perhaps be facilitated through generating and sustaining informal spaces for collaboration. Here there is a sense of reciprocity between acknowledging the limits of a project and ensuring creative and critical engagement at the same time. It was suggested that larger institutions could work with and 're-activate' smaller collections that have been affected by neoliberal regimes. Inherent in these approaches is the need to develop listening skills to improve communication between academics, artists and institutions. Although there are different outcomes for each person and institution, collaborations can still enable projects to develop in new, agonistic ways.

These discussions spotlighted the need for reciprocity, for informal communication and for sustaining literal (as well as virtual) spaces for people to come together to speak and act informally or 'pre-formally'. Reflecting on the focus group reinforced the idea of co-appearing as a retreat from the political, as a retreat from the 'simple positivities' that

can characterise political engagement – a necessary approach to generating ethical and responsive cultural programmes. But these conversations also revealed the complex ways in which retreating the political can become manifest. They showed that in attempts to articulate concrete ways in which to retreat the political, processes of ascription are immediately activated. However, the critical awareness of the group itself created a space of appearance in which the creation of a 'togetherness' was under question.

The discussions in the focus group resonated with the idea that, in order to sustain

engagement between academics, artists, activists and institutions, all of these agents need to co-appear - to share in a space of appearance. But crucially, this required that each of those co-appearing acknowledge the Otherness of others, and to retreat from making assumptions based on simple positivities, or 'using' one of those agents to affirm a pre-conceived goal. Those involved in institutional policies have the opportunity to spark new collaborations through showing consideration for the unknowable 'other depth' for which each person is destined (BSP: 2000: 59).

Arnolfini is already developing some of these strategies. For example, in December 2014, Arnolfini and the University of the West of England (UWE) created a partnership in which UWE share the facilities and resources at Arnolfini. The partnership includes collaborating not only on programming but also on a range of projects, workshops and events.

Thinking generally about institutional evaluation methods in light of these reflections on co-appearing highlights the need to create spaces for informal interaction with audiences, and a greater opportunity for evaluation projects to be tailored to individual events. Aside from the problematic intent of the Quality Metrics programme, the methodology itself was often inappropriate and clunky. For instance, in July 2016 Arnolfini launched 'Moving Targets', an expanded exhibition and series of events celebrating punk, in particular punk in Bristol. Again, the aim of the gallery is to reach the widest audiences possible, and to invite people who may not normally go to

institutions such as Arnolfini. The opening night featured a number of performances by artist Gillian Wilde, with the title 'The Day the World turned Day-Glo'. The performance was described as 'jazz punk ballet', and it featured four performers. As a learning assistant, my role was to approach members of the audience to ask them what they thought about the performance. To generate the 'correct feedback', I had to ask individuals to fill in an online feedback form using an iPad. In theory, this may not sound like a bad idea, but in the context of the event (as a celebration of punk) it felt counter-intuitive. Many people politely refused to participate, and those who did found the comparative formality of the questionnaire quite humorous. After the event, I felt that the most direct feedback I had received throughout the evening came from informal discussions with audience members, often when I had purposefully decided not to ask them to do the questionnaire on the iPad. For example, I spent some time chatting with a new visitor to Arnofini who had been in a punk band in the 70s. He was genuinely disappointed in the event and felt that everyone there was middle-class. 'I'm not being critical' he said, 'But where's the punk?'. (Unfortunately our conversation was interrupted by a member of senior management, who wanted me to do something about the fact that too many people were 'leaning against the walls' and causing some of the edges of the wallpaper to curl.)

Although the Culture Counts methodologies are useful for gleaning some insights into audience engagement, they have little room for flexibility, especially for opening nights and participatory events. Putting aside for a moment the troubling long-term goal of the Culture Counts programme (to create a more commercial model for cultural institutions (Mellor 2016)), the immediate intent to listen to and understand how audiences feel is often immediately blocked by the methodology of the study. At the opening of 'Moving Targets', these particular surveys felt far too formal and exacting. For example, it could have been beneficial for the volunteers to have gathered together prior to the event, each chosen a couple of questions, and then approached audience members more casually, jotting down responses and data between conversations. By allowing for creative reflection prior to participatory events, researchers have the opportunity to generate more appropriate methods of engagement, and represent the gallery in a way that resonates with the aesthetics and themes of the programme.

The problematic nature of these methodologies is addressed in an article in *Arts Professional* in September 2016, in which editor Liz Hill offered a critique of Culture Counts: 'Arts Council to impose quantitative measures of arts quality'. In the article, she points out that, following the pilot scheme for Culture Counts, the participating institutions reported 'a lack of confidence in the reliability and validity of the data' (2016). Primary concerns revolved around the cost of implementing these evaluative measures, and whilst the participants are reported to have 'broadly positive' responses to the idea of undertaking these evaluations, individuals spoke of the reductive nature of the research. Nevertheless, Hill points out that 'few have been willing to go on the record with their views. One unnamed NPO [National Portfolio Organisation] representative described Culture Counts as a 'blunt instrument that will add cost but not a great deal of value' (quoted by Hill: 2016). The representative continues to say: 'It appears that there is a value to ACE in reducing its reliance on experienced relationship managers actually going out to carry out assessments, in favour of an automated tick box culture that will miss the nuances and surprises that are generated when you think and programme outside of the box' (quoted by Hill: 2016).

These responses showed that whilst evaluation and receptivity is an important part of institutional practices, the Quality Metrics methodology and the motivations behind it are demanding a "quantum change" in organisational attitudes to data, one that is forwarding ascriptive, reductive approaches to cultural practices.

Chapter summary: co-appearing and world-forming

This chapter has further delineated the 'incline' from ontology to politics, with a greater focus on institutional practices. Again, reading Nancy in the context of institutional practices may at first seem to be contradictory, because Nancy spotlights freedom and informality rather than the stability and formality that we associate with institutions. However, I am suggesting that, rather than dismiss institutions altogether, we can begin to see how they can be devoted to 'unworking' (DC: 2016: 74) and can consciously allow spaces for informal, 'non-institutional' engagement. Nevertheless, it is important that they 'allow' rather than 'actively create' these spaces.

Through critically evaluating the writings of Nancy, Arendt, Badiou and Mouffe, it has outlined a new approach to agonistic engagement through emphasis on the quasi-ontological foundation of political logic. This is not to say that individual consciousness should automatically be extended into collective consciousness. Instead, our awareness of the nature of consciousness and the antagonism within it can allow us to deliberately retreat from the illusion of certainty inherent in 'simple positivities' and question both individual opinions and how these might reinforce collective norms. This is a retreat that enables us to collectively retrace and renew engagement with the political. The retreat points to an ethical responsibility. Although this responsibility lies beyond possible fulfilment (in that we cannot quantify it and fully 'achieve' it), we are always relational to others because 'to be' is to be 'singular plural'. Paradoxically, this uncertain ethical responsibility is the only thing of which we can truly be certain, and our response to it characterises our collective experiences.

Through its emphasis on *re*treating, *re*tracing and *re*newing, this chapter highlights the significance of *re*composing. The prefix 're' is derived directly from Latin *re-* meaning "again, back, anew, against' and it also carries a sense of 'undoing'. This chapter explores the the idea of composing again, and composing anew. It spotlights the processual nature of recomposing – a process of re-imagining the world that diminishes and destroys the dominant image of the world as the product of capitalist ideologies, an image that often serves as a kind of sign of the inevitability of capitalism. Accordingly, this chapter leads to the idea that recomposing the image of the world sustains a sense of agency against, and in spite of, the prevalence of capitalist apparatuses.

The analysis of Arendt's writings situated institutions as agents, able to create and sustain spaces of appearance. Whilst institutions provide cultural frameworks that generate spaces of appearance, the institution is still a presence within this space. As such, institutions share in the ethical obligation of sustaining the 'appearance of disappearance' (RtP: 1997: x). This can be done through questioning the political – by abstaining from didactic presentations of political art and by listening and responding to the audiences and practitioners with whom they appear. Although evaluation processes are perhaps necessary in order to listen to and engage with audience, the results are often 'used' to fulfil preconceived policy objectives. However, I have maintained that cultural practitioners can 'work with' rather than 'use' evaluative data,

by considering it as a starting point for critical engagement, rather than an exposition of 'truths'. In this way, institutions can allow for audiences to retrace the political anew.

Drawing from Badiou's writings on ethics, I considered how both Badiou and Nancy write about 'appearing' in a way that affirms the incommensurability of being – the infinite, excessive nature of being. Although it is possible to consider the image as an event, I suggested that approaching images through a reading of Nancy's 'co-appearing' (rather than Badiou's 'doctrine of appearance') allows us to approach images as sites of shared separation. Although both thinkers critically engage with normative ethics, Nancy's idea of the retreat allows us to think about how the 'commandment' of ethics 'has meaning only in addressing a freedom and…in opening, in reopening the question - precisely the question of the end or ends of meaning' (RtP: 1997: 39, 40). Nancy emphasises the contingent nature of appearing, how it 'addresses a freedom' and an unquantifiable absence. As such, he acknowledges the creative potential – and the responsibility - that comes with recognising the image as a site of shared separation.

Having recognised that 'the political' concerns a mode of engagement, rather than the articulation of a means-to-an-end, the final section considered the concept of agonism. Unlike Mouffe, who believes that withdrawal from established institutions does not constitute agonistic engagement, I argued that this withdrawal is crucial for sustaining ethical practices within institutions. Drawing from my experience at Arnolfini and discussions with cultural practitioners, I suggested a number of ways in which institutions can collaborate with, and benefit from, critical associates. Agonistic engagement cannot be generated simply through foregrounding marginal concerns, but by ensuring that these do not become merely symbolic. Sustaining open discourses within the museum - between institutions, audiences, activists, artists and academics – continues to empower marginal discourses, making sure that they are not subsumed into neoliberal logics and reformulated as a set of fixed social values, which assume that social relations can be quantified and exchangeable.

Throughout the thesis, I have explored how political art and cultural practices in general emphasise the incommensurability of our relation to others. As such, rather than seeking political 'truths', a fixed political 'ground' or even established political ties, political art encourages us to acknowledge our own agency in maintaining a dynamic

and critical relation to collective action, even as we recognise that we are always a part of it. Rather than totally rejecting institutions, our withdrawal from familiar, and often neoliberal forms of regulation within these institutions is itself a form of engagement. Because this demands an active, deliberate retreat from the illusion of certainty produced in data-collection and 'Quality Metrics', it becomes a creative intervention. This kind of intervention is an interruption of that which is perceived as whole, or complete, and it restores our awareness of the incommensurable. Such interruptions initiate a retracing of the political. As Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe state in *Retreating the Political*: 'such a retreat makes something appear or sets something free' and they suggest that it can impose the need for 'tracing anew the stakes of the political' (1997: 131). The retreat is the opposite of 'giving in to' or 'conceding', it instead requires a strength that lies beyond certainty. It is an active and creative form of political engagement.

Onto other possibilities of worlds. I would say that art is there every time to open the world, to open the world to itself, to its possibility of world, to its possibility thus to open meaning, while the meaning that has already been given is closed.

Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Art Today', <u>Journal of Visual Culture</u>, 2010

The intention of this thesis has been to displace and broaden the horizon of 'globalisation'. To trace the incline from ontology to the political is to arrive at a different vantage point, a point from which to create a revised image of the world. By focusing on art interventions and emergent creative practices, and through emphasis on the force and movement of these practices, this thesis has explored how we might 'recompose' the image of the world.

The etymology of the word 'recompose' bears layers of meaning and the sense of the word has developed throughout the thesis. 'Compose' means to 'put together'. 'Com' signifies 'with, together', and 'pose' carries a layered significance – it is rooted in the Old French *poser* meaning 'to place or propose', a word that is derived from the Latin *pausare,* meaning to halt, rest, cease or pause. But at the same time, in Middle French, the word 'pose' developed a secondary meaning: it meant both 'to suggest' - as in 'to pose a question' - and 'to question' or 'to perplex'.

Reflecting on the task of creating an image or symbolisation, Nancy explains that this task requires 'posing the following question to each gesture, each conduct, each *habitus* and each *ethos*: How do you engage the world? How do you involve yourself with the enjoyment of the world as such, and not with the appropriation of a quantity of equivalence?' (CoW: 2007: 53). 'To *pose* a question' therefore carries with it a sense of pausing to address each *habitus* and *ethos*, a pause or interruption that indicates attention towards gestures of being, but sustains a feeling of perplexity and withdraws through questioning. The Latin *pausare*, which brings meaning to the word 'pose', has its roots in the Greek *pauein*: to hold back, arrest, to cause to cease. In this way, 'posing' a

question indicates a deferral, a holding back that can initiate a retreat. With this in mind, the word '*com*pose' indicates a sense of being *with* (com) that shares in this retreat.

Although infrequently used in English, 'recompose' therefore evokes a sense of undoing and renewing (re-) this shared 'placing' and 'questioning'. At the same time, 'recompose' acknowledges the production of a new 'composition' of the world, whilst again setting into play a renewal – a renewed attention to being singular plural that culminates in an entanglement with what cannot be clearly known, that which 'perplexes' and calls for recomposing a given image.

The aim of this thesis has been to explore how micropolitical art interventions can alter and transform the image of the world and to reflect on the ethical significance of this transformation. At stake in this study is the role of visual cultures in providing a critical lens on the networks and hierarchies of power that characterise and reinforce globalisation driven by global capitalism. It has aimed to show how creative practices can create 'new forms or symbolisations' of the world. As such, it has tried to displace and broaden the horizon of 'globalisation' through a greater focus on emergent micropolitical practices instead of larger macropolitical systems.

By zooming in and spotlighting these practices and their creative potential, the thesis hopes to provide a resource for theorists and practitioners. Departing from a binary understanding of art and politics, it has explored the inherent political significance of aesthetics through embodied practices. Rather than deploying theory in practice, or assimilating practice into theory, it has developed from active reflection and participation, affirming theory and practice as indivisible.

The art practices explored in this study are still progressing and developing. In 2016, Tate announced that, from 2017, they would no longer receive sponsorship from BP. Although not acknowledged by the gallery, the Liberate Tate performers believe that we have been instrumental in this development. However, Tate has not yet fully committed to being 'fossil free' and as such, the group continues its role as a 'critical friend' and endeavours to liberate the gallery from any future ties with the fossil fuel industry. Art Action UK has just completed the sixth year of its residency. It has expanded the residency to include curators and artists and is extending its research in

collaboration with students at Central Saint Martins. Arnolfini employed a paid Visitor Experience Assistant to develop its evaluation methods in accordance with Arts Council requirements, but after some months the Arts Council support came to an end and Arnolfini paused the exhibition programme to work on a new vision for the gallery.

Are there any consequences of my analysis of Nancy's 'incline' for these groups and institutions? In the cases of Liberate Tate and Art Action UK, I shared written reflections on my participation in each group: an essay on how Liberate Tate affects the identity of Tate, published in *Museological Review*, and an essay on the role of art after a disaster (published by Rowman and Littlefield International as part of the edited volume *artWORK: Art, Labour and Activism*). As such, I was able to further amplify the work of both groups – contextualising our practices within wider discourses and extending our network of affiliations. Above all, I felt that looking at these practices in the context of Nancy's incline from ontology to the political encouraged readers to pay closer attention to nuances within these practices.

During this research, I also co-founded the research group PLANK (Politically Led Art and Networked Knowledge) with three other students from Goldsmiths College, King's College London and the University of Milan. Each of us is involved in grassroots creative groups and academic institutions. Together we organise conferences, exhibitions and workshops that bring together artists, activists and academics to reflect on their methodologies and approaches. For four years we have sustained an interdisciplinary network focusing on ways in which grassroots organisations can support each other's development. The recent PLANK book project *artWORK: Art, Labour and Activism* features chapters on both Liberate Tate and Art Action UK. One of the intentions of the book is to emphasise and embody interdisciplinary networks and to look at ways in which different approaches unfold within different scenarios. In this way, the group participates in the process of recomposing images and perceptions of political art practices, insofar as it looks at practices that work against or beyond the macrosystems of global capitalism.

Whilst I had informal discussions with others at Arnolfini, and voiced concern about the Quality Metrics programme in the written report on the collated data, which I was responsible for drafting, I felt that my critique of the programme needed to be part of a

bigger conversation. As such, rather than continuing to feed directly back to the museum, I have begun to talk about these research techniques with wider audiences - at conferences in the South West, in panel discussions in London and through PLANK. There is widespread criticism of the Quality Metrics programme, and I aim to amplify this, joining with others to encourage Arts Council England to revise their evaluation methodologies.

Although there is still more to explore with relation to these practices, this study will now draw together the analysis of these projects as they developed to the stage outlined above. Having taken Nancy's writings on 'world-forming' as a starting point, it has analysed the ontological actions of 'spacing', 'exscribing' and 'co-appearing', concepts that appear throughout Nancy's writings and mark an incline from ontology to the political. The following section offers a summary of the key findings, underlines the contemporary relevance of this analysis and suggests ways in which these actions can lead to recomposing the image of the world.

Spacing - exscribing - co-appearing - recomposing

As outlined in the introduction there were three secondary objectives at stake in this study: objectives that acted as key loci on the incline from the ontology of being singular plural to the political. The first objective was to revise discourses on the political to show that art and the political are not separate. The second objective was to look at how knowledge can structurally play out through theory without being reduced and limited to a set of ascribed meanings. The third objective sought to modify or reshape the concept of 'inclusivity' - an idea that has become a buzzword in cultural institutions, often serving to reinforce conventional, dominant social paradigms. These objectives aimed to strengthen one of the central aims of the thesis – to amplify creative praxis and draw attention to the 'affect' rather than the 'effect' of political art.

These objectives have been addressed in this study through a critique of current theory on political art; through a series of embodied analyses that included performative art interventions, curatorial practices and institutional practices, and through a shift in focus from 'inclusivity' - a term that often reinforces a process of assimilation into 'the mainstream' and sustains marginality - to 'co-appearing', which refers to the exposure to

shared separation that constitutes being and emphasises incommensurability. The following chapter summaries elaborate on the development of these analyses.

Chapter 1 – Literature review

The first chapter of the thesis explored key texts and ideas within contemporary discourses on art, in particular, 'socially engaged' art. This chapter problematised a perceived divide between politics and aesthetics, found in the writings of contemporary theorists Jacques Rancière, Nicholas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop. It diverged from these interpretations to emphasise the significance of focusing on the processuality of art, with reference to Grant Kester. Developing an understanding of aesthetics as a dynamic form of communication, it introduced Paolo Virno's idea that consciousness (communication with the self and with others) is characterised by an 'excess' and a 'defect' of semanticity: that it oscillates between a state of 'shapeless potentiality' and an over-definition, or simplification of discourses (Virno 2008: 52).

Chapter 1 considered how communication with institutions might be interpreted with relation to this idea of semanticity. Referring to the writings of Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau and Gerald Raunig, it considered the idea of dissensus and how this might impact our engagement with institutions. It highlighted contemporary analyses - the writings of Boris Groys, Gregory Sholette and Brian Holmes - that have addressed institutional practices by moving beyond binary understandings of aesthetics and politics. These writers, activists and artists have advanced the idea that creating finite things through processes of aestheticisation might open new possibilities, and that the concept of redundancy can unfold within approaches to political discourses.

Nevertheless, these perceptions of meaning and of aesthetic practices are possible only through the primary ontology of being singular plural. For this reason, Nancy's writings on being singular plural and on world-forming were identified as entry points into this study of contemporary political art practices. Nancy's ontology, characterised by John Paul Ricco as an 'unbecoming ontology of exposition and exposure' (2014: 86) points to the possibility that 'recomposing' is concerned with the process of 'divorcing' oneself from the ontological. The starting point for my analysis is the idea of being as 'spacing'.

Chapter 2: Political art and 'spacing'

With this in mind, Chapter 2 sketched Nancy's incline from ontology to contagious communication and on to 'the political', with a focus on the ontology of being singular plural. This is a kind of 'quasi-ontology' because it focuses on *the relation* between ontology and the ontic and on the 'spacing', 'distancing', and 'separating' that constitutes being. The chapter considered how this 'quasi-ontology' leads to Nancy's post-phenomenology in which the idea of solitary subject dissolves, and 'being' is understood as a shared separation, a 'spacing'. Nancy asks his readers to think, not in terms of individuals, but of relational singularities (being singular plural).

The chapter developed these ideas through participation in the creative activities of art collective Liberate Tate. By interpreting Liberate Tate performances with relation to spacing, and vice versa, this chapter addressed how identities form and transform and how ideas can become contagious. Acknowledging how Nancy's trajectory of thought has developed from his reading of Heidegger, Nietzsche and Bataille, the chapter develops Bataille's idea that finitude and existence are co-dependent by concentrating on the idea of communication as contagion. This created a focus on the way in which communicating perpetuates 'sharing', but at the same time propagates finitude.

From this analysis emerged a paradoxical interpretation of art*work*. Turning to two of Nancy's texts on art, the chapter considered being singular plural with relation to art. For Nancy, the singularity of art is always 'just around the bend' (M: 1996: 4). Art suspends meaning - it embodies a shared separation. Nevertheless, there is a constant inclination to find 'the meaning' of art which risks reducing or closing spaces for open, responsive and critical engagement. As such Nancy writes of a practice that is 'less unworked than devoted to its unworking' (DC: 2016: 74). This devotion to unworking requires a kind of intent. However, this sense of intentionality differs from phenomenological intentionality because it is not oriented to a particular object or outcome, but towards an 'unknowing' and 'unworking'. Within the wider context of the apparatuses of global capitalism, this intentionality is needed in order to sustain spaces of freedom and the possibility of alternative ways of being.

The analysis of Liberate Tate's performances highlighted the way in which an arts group was 'dedicated to its unworking'. It looked at how Liberate Tate interrupted a cultural

discourse to suspend perceptions of a cultural norm and arrest the attention of viewers. This marked the start of a process of 'recomposing' an image – in this case spotlighting BP's sponsorship of Tate and providing a critical lens that magnifies the social and political implications of fossil fuel sponsorship. The critical engagement encouraged through the group's activities recast a social norm and demanded that we 're-image' its global context. This critical engagement, characterised through 'spacing', emphasised the way in which ontology 'unbecomes', allowing for a renewal of consciousness and meaning.

Chapter 3: Political art and 'exscribing'

Chapter 3 focused on the mid-point of the incline from ontology to the political. It turned to Nancy's concept of 'exscribing', an ontological concept that indicates how sense creates and exceeds materiality. Like 'spacing', exscribing manifests but withdraws from meaning. Both verbs are understood as world-forming, because they constitute reality but are beyond it. The concept of exscribing, as a motif of world-forming, was explored through participation in a series of curatorial practices for the grassroots arts collective, Art Action UK.

This chapter built on the idea that all beings are in a dynamic flux of being, and that as such, the world is continually becoming. Consequently, through becoming-present, there is also the possibility for new voices and new ideas to emerge and re-characterise the image of the world. However, as Virno points out in his book *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation,* our consciousness is in a state of oscillation so that at any given point our sense of the world both exceeds a specific meaning and reduces meaning to predefined categories (2008: 52). For Virno, we decide whether to 'reify' this state of oscillation; to give priority to the *process* of becoming, by ascribing and exscribing meaning without clinging to illusions of certainty; or to 'fetishise' the oscillation by continuing to reinforce that which already is, giving priority instead to the way in which things symbolise (rather than embody) the immaterial.

The analysis extended to consider how creative processes demand faith in being singular plural and, more specifically, in the 'in-ascribable' sense of the world that is generated through being singular plural. Being singular plural exposes the incommensurability of being and the unknowability of the Other. As such, it calls for

us to acknowledge how meaning oscillates between an excess and a deficit of semanticity. For Nancy, there is ethical importance in emphasising the amorphic potential of being, because although we inevitably ascribe meaning, creativity and change can only come about through exscribing meaning and by withdrawing from fixed symbols of meaning. Nevertheless, to acknowledge and to emphasise the significance of this shapelessness requires a confidence in spite of uncertainty – a faith in the in-ascribable.

Developing the analysis of faith, it considered how the passivity of faith might generate transformation through the suspension of appropriative ideologies, thereby facilitating a greater sense of being singular plural. This led to Nancy's concept of co-appearance, and to the question of how increased consciousness of the incommensurability of singularities might unfold within institutional frameworks.

The analysis of Art Action UK (AAUK) further developed the central term 'recomposing'. Having developed the founding concept of the word in Chapter 1 – as relating to interrupting or holding back – this chapter followed the development of the word in Old French, when it signified putting-together and arranging. As a curatorial project, AAUK tries to 'put together' new perspectives on the 2011 disaster in Japan, and to recompose the image of these events, taking into consideration the lived experiences of artists living and working in East Japan. The word 'compose' brings with it a sense of 'to perplex'. The significance of this nuance of meaning became evident through the way in which AAUK sought to complicate simplified media narratives of the disaster and optimistic government responses.

Chapter 4: Cultural institutions and 'co-appearing'

Chapter 4 continued the central analytical motif of the incline from ontology to the political, with a focus on the idea of 'the political'. This chapter approached the concept of the political through Nancy's expression 'co-appearing' and reflected on the way in which 'retreating the political' relates to this term.

Chapter 4 approached the idea of co-appearing alongside readings of Alain Badiou's *Ethics* (2001) and Chantal Mouffe's *Agonistics* (2013) - two important texts within

discourses on contemporary art and its political significance. Hannah Arendt's writings on the space of appearance provided a starting point for this analysis, particularly as both Badiou and Mouffe reference Arendt in their texts. For Arendt, appearance is convergent with being – an idea that is also found in Nancy's ontology of being singular plural and his articulation of 'co-appearing'. The reason for developing a discursive analysis of *Ethics* and *Agonistics* is to reflect on how an ontological approach to appearing has ethical and political significance, especially in the context of contemporary art.

The idea of the retreat from the political as a retreat from the illusion of certainty inherent in 'simple positivities' begins to reveal the wider significance of the ontology of being singular plural. In particular, it considered how individual perceptions are manifest in spaces of appearance and how these can either reinforce or weaken accepted social norms. Importantly, Nancy's concept of the retreat is also singular plural - through retreating we are able to critically engage with established social paradigms by retracing and renewing engagement with the political, and this happens 'with' others.

Interpreting the retreat with relation to Arendt's 'space of appearance' focused on how institutions co-appear with their audiences, exposing the shared-separation of being. Accordingly, institutions have an ethical responsibility to acknowledge the ambiguity of the Other in the space of appearance. The problem is that emergent research methodologies (in this case the Arts Council England's Quality Metrics scheme, Culture Counts) seek to reduce cultural experiences to sets of exchangeable data - to 'capture the essence' (ACE 2017) of cultural experiences and ascribe values that link to government policy objectives (Culture Counts 2017). In taking part in these processes of evaluation, arts institutions risk closing down spaces of appearance and reducing the opportunity for art to generate such spaces in the first place. Despite this, evaluative processes are important ways in which institutions can listen to and communicate with audiences. Approaching these processes as ethical *praxes*, rather than a means to find an essential meaning or value in cultural practices, means that the data that is sought, and that arises, can instead be used to sustain the political as a question and to generate critical and creative engagement with visual cultures. As such, although Nancy's ontology of being-in-common is an informal relation, prior to an institution, this

chapter considered the ethical importance of institutions being dedicated to their 'unworking', by sustaining spaces where this kind of informal relation (new ways of being-in-common) can develop. In this way, cultural institutions can resist the erosion of spaces of appearance.

Chapter 4 considered Badiou's writings on being and appearing and acknowledged that although Badiou and Nancy write from different contexts and perspectives, their reflections on 'appearing' are key to their post-phenomenological approaches to philosophy. Both thinkers affirm the incommensurability of being and recognise that 'appearing' does not simply concern that which seems assimilable, but that it carries with it a sense of the unknowable. Although it is possible to begin to interpret the image as 'an event' in Badiou's terms, Nancy's conceptualisation of the image as 'the distinct' leads to a greater sense of being as a shared separation. Nancy's interpretation of being and appearing in terms of 'embodiment and sense', rather than 'Badiou's subtractive approach to ontology' (James 2012: 45), spotlights the playful potential of art and its ability to spark processes of recomposing images of the world.

Finally, this chapter modified Mouffe's concept of agonism by arguing that a retreat or withdrawal is imperative for sustaining ethical practices within institutions. My analysis, generated throughout my role as a learning assistant at Arnolfini, puts forward the idea that for institutions to sustain spaces of appearance and innovation, they must support and encourage questioning and critique of institutional practices - in other words, a withdrawal from the day-to-day obligations of running a gallery, and from the already-articulated goals of the institution.

The analysis of my role as a learning assistant at the Arnolfini and Nancy's idea of the political as a 'retreat' continued to elucidate the meaning of 'recomposing', through attention to the significance of the prefix 're-'. Nancy's use of 're-' in his terms 'retreating', 'retracing' and 'renewing' indicates how these are continual practices. The Latin *re-* means 'again, back, anew, against'. It evokes a sense of 'undoing'. As such, this prefix brings essential meaning to the term 'recomposing' because it signifies how this is an ongoing process. To advocate for recomposing the image of the world is not to encourage a one-off re-imaging, rather it is a call for a questioning and withdrawal, to continually 'open the world, to open the world to itself, to its possibility of world, to its

possibility thus to open meaning, while the meaning that has already been given is closed' (Nancy 2010).

How does this study contribute to and develop approaches to micropolitical art practices?

This thesis has intended to contribute to practical and theoretical approaches to political art practices. It has aimed to do so in a way that strengthens the mutuality of theory and practice. The thesis has offered an embodied reading of Nancy's writings through three participatory roles that were undertaken not as 'formal' research that sought to establish facts or to follow a system as a detached observer, but to allow for responsive, active readings of philosophy in which theory also has creative agency. These final paragraphs summarise how this study has contributed to practical and theoretical approaches to political art practices. There are four main points of divergence from current discourses on political art:

First, the thesis generated an extended critique of the divide between politics and aesthetics. Although this differentiation has been the subject of debate within cultural discourses for some time, it still often characterises cultural practices. Rather than simply moving beyond this perceived divide, as some theorists prefer to do, I have tried to recast and reconstruct the foundation for this theoretical approach, with close reference to Nancy's ontology of being singular plural.

Through an analysis of being singular plural, the thesis addressed Nancy's idea of spacing to emphasise the *process* of being - as an emptying out or precipitation that occurs through the creation of finite things, and which leads to a greater sense of being singular plural. Meaning is not found 'in' finite things, but is generated through the shared force of being, even though this is necessarily linked to finite things. This idea was embodied through my participation in performances with Liberate Tate. I was able to realise this theory in practice, expand my understanding of 'spacing' through artistic performances, and to contribute to the development of further creative practices.

Therefore, the second point of divergence can be seen in the way in which this analysis differs from practices and theory that focus on the social outcome of art, on the way in

which it is instrumental in creating a specific meaning, or outcome. I have argued that the functionalisation of creative practices can ultimately reduce their potential to generate social change. I have suggested that art reveals an absence of meaning. In other words, it is the *failure* of an artwork to fully 'make use' of art, that engages viewers and calls them into a process of critical reflection that embodies an ethical relation to the Other.

Through reflections on communication and representation, the thesis has developed Virno's idea that meaning oscillates between an excess and a deficit of meaning. It suggested that by acknowledging the way in which consciousness exceeds meaning – the absence that meaning evokes – we can sustain the 'possibility of world' and its ability to 'open meaning' (Nancy 2010). By addressing *how* to emphasise the absenting of meaning, this study reflected on the idea of faith, in particular faith in the in-ascribable presence of others - a consciousness inherent in being singular plural. Drawing from Nancy's idea that faith 'aligns itself with nothing other than itself' (D: 2008: 52), it developed a concept of faith as a belief in that which cannot be known with certainty (rather than belief based on proof). In short, it advances the idea of faith in being singular plural, a relation that indicates a 'praxical excess' (Nancy: D: 2008: 52) - faith in the shared spacing of being, i.e. the becoming of a being, or the becoming of the world. Here, faith in ontology is paradoxically faith in the absenting that constitutes 'being singular plural'. To understand the relation between 'faith' and 'exscribing' (and the oscillation between 'exscribing' and 'ascribing' meaning), I expand on the idea of faith by inverting Schmitt's language to discuss 'faith in the in-ascribable'.

Following on from this, the third point of divergence is evident through an increased focus on the *way* in which we engage with art, as artists, curators, spectators. I have tried to develop a philosophical understanding of faith through Nancy's use of the term 'exscribing'. I have tried to reframe the idea of faith as a mode of engagement with what cannot be known – an 'ethos' that is open to questioning and that precludes 'the appropriation of a quantity of equivalence' (Nancy: CoW: 2007: 53).

Finally, the thesis cultivated an understanding of co-appearing that considered texts on appearing and on agonism to address the ethical significance of world-forming. Developing Nancy's incline from ontology through the political within an established

cultural institution, it explored how an institution can either close down or facilitate spaces of appearance – spaces in which the political is an informal discursive praxis. It suggested that institutions might 'retreat' and renew the political and, in doing so, sustain a shared space of freedom. More specifically, it emphasisied how this is a *deliberate* retreat from simple positivities. This retreat can be supported though institutional practices that sustain dynamic relationships between academics, artists, activists and institutions. It can be supported through resisting neoliberal evaluation methodologies, and through critical engagement with these practices, readapting them in order to sustain, rather than close down, spaces of appearance.

The fourth point of divergence is therefore manifest through the modification of the concept of agonism, and by advancing the idea of 'co-appearing' to highlight the importance of absence and ambiguity in the space of appearance. This in turn advanced an alternative approach to institutional practices – critiquing the increasing pressure to extract 'intrinsic cultural values' and to 'capture the essence' of cultural participation (Culture Counts 2017), and advocating for the protection of spaces that allow for spontaneous and informal communication.

In sum, this study has traced an incline from ontology to the political through a series of participatory practices. It has retraced and renewed the concept of world-forming in order to retreat from the prevailing perception that 'globalisation' and global capitalism are necessarily the same. Although capitalist systems of exchange are pervasive, continuing to emphasise general equivalence and shape each reality into a commensurable asset, globalisation can take other forms. At every moment, we collectively form the world, but at the same time there are infinite opportunities to recompose the image of the world. The process of recomposing generates critical distance from dominant apparatuses of exchange and can facilitate alternative social paradigms. This thesis has focused on how art practices can institute change and sustain organic, creative spaces that are independent - spaces that allow individuals and collectives to reaffirm the incommensurability of being.

Through this analysis, the precarity of these practices has become evident. Whilst micropolitical art practices may recompose the image of the world, these images can also be recaptured by systems of exchange that reduce them to an equivalent and commensurable value. Often, creative practices are sustainable for just a short time. Having traced the emergence and development of creative interventions, the next step is to address in more depth how such practices might develop further and how they might expand and join up with other groups and institutions to create stronger networks. In the context of this thesis, the next questions might be: How can Liberate Tate's success in cutting the ties between Tate and BP further expand spaces of appearance? How can Art Action UK continue to generate a critique of nuclear energy production that reaches further into mainstream discourses and connects with new audiences? How can Arnolfini retreat and retrace the political in a way that strengthens its relationships with other cultural institutions so as to become less regulated by the demands of funders?

As explained in Chapter 4, being-together and togetherness refer to two different senses of collectivity. Whilst further research might explore these practices on a wider scale, it is still important to maintain emphasis on *being*-together. How can organisations support and sustain each other in continuing to recompose the image of the world? This wider perspective, focusing on networks that operate beyond capitalist apparatuses, is the next logical step in this research project.

A continuation of this research project might begin to map cultural networks, perhaps approaching them through a non-Western theoretical lens. Using this analysis of Nancy's writings as a springboard, further research might begin to look at alternative systems of exchange that maintain a sense of the incommensurable, and that can form dynamic connections between emergent and established cultural groups.

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Conclusion

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