

POSSIBILITIES OF AN ARCHIVE FOR NEW CONTEMPORARIES, OR CURATING
ARCHIVES IN CONTEMPORANEITY

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Abstract

This thesis examines the purpose and potentiality of an archive for New Contemporaries, the UK's annual exhibition of art by new graduates. Established in 1949, New Contemporaries has become one of the most prominent platforms for student and recent graduate artists within the UK. However, to date, they have no formal archive. Aware that the lack of an archive presents a significant barrier to preserving and presenting their historical knowledge, the thesis explores what and where their historical materials are, how they might be gathered, and how to build upon them.

As a case study operating from the middle of the last century, New Contemporaries brings together the legacy of a durable organisation with the ephemerality of an entity that has undergone a number of changes, breaks and reorientations, as well as being dislocated and reconfigured each year. New Contemporaries' innate temporality is reflected in its historical materials, dispersed across a number of institutions, personal collections and memories, as well as more recent documents held by the current organisation. Emerging within the framework of 'the contemporary', New Contemporaries embodies the ever-evolving artistic expressions of its time. However, the twenty-first century's shifting contexts have also renewed interest in historical preservation and cultural legacy. Consequently, the research has grown out of New Contemporaries' practical aspiration to develop an institutional archive and delineate its current relationship to both its historical legacy and the tenets of contemporaneity.

Through research that utilises curatorial methodologies and archival research, the thesis demonstrates the archive's complex and often contradictory position as a validating structure as well as a conceptually temporal and subjective space. This includes the construction of history through archival research while simultaneously resisting the formation of a singular institutional narrative. The research was further developed through two exhibitions, *Not a Live Show* and *Not an Archive*, which examined and expanded upon New Contemporaries history. The former presented archival research on the New Contemporaries Live Shows in 1976 and 1977, while the latter served to disrupt the researcher-curator narrative through three artist commissions.

The thesis proposes curatorial interventions that regard the dispersed materials in line with expanded archive practices. These may allow the organisation to access, assess, and review its history in ways that address its needs concerning validation and cultural capital, while also allowing a multiplicity of perspectives. Following the assertion that curatorial projects

originating from the archive should be redeposited (Yiakoumaki, 2009), the thesis also demonstrates the potential of this activity to expand extant archival material and support the organisation's ongoing progression through contemporaneous activity.

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Introduction

I used to have this picture stuck to my studio wall. It was of a bare room in a New York town-house-turned-gallery, in which it appeared as if nothing was there. However, on further examination a space that was seemingly empty was revealed to be full of work. From soft light stains carefully constructed in graphite, outlining frames that were supposedly there and then removed, to the heads of drawing pins, laying scattered and abandoned on an empty desk playing host to minute paintings; in paying attention to even the smallest minutiae a myriad of narratives emerged.

Over the years, the concept of that exhibition – or rather my memory of the picture of it – has taken on significant meaning. Equally, as my memory has blurred with my imagination, the possibilities of what it did or did not contain have become less certain. Did it include a hidden gothic carving within the round wood door handle, or was the seemingly forgotten and scrunpled piece of paper on the floor an intricate sculpture in porcelain? Whether the romantic notions and meanings I have attributed to it and the actuality or intentions of the original exhibition are the same are lost to time.

New Contemporaries' history, seen through the traces of its past actions, has often reminded me of that image pinned to my wall so many years ago. As an interweaving of myth and matter, it has appeared startlingly empty and yet full of content. Likewise, their archive appears to be something that is there and not there. Revealing fragments of their past, but only by looking carefully and from obtuse angles.

The aim of this research project was to examine New Contemporaries archive, exploring and developing an extant understanding of their history as an annual exhibition platform for new artists first established in 1949. In particular, the research made use of contemporary curatorial practices that rethink the 'nexus between curatorship and history' (Gardener 2019, p. 54 and argues for the development of a curatorial method that recognises both the importance of archives in historical research, as well as the archive as a site for generative activity and intergenerational dialogue. Examining an organisation operating within the visual arts sphere from the outset of the contemporary period, the scope of the research considers the changing parameters of archives, their purpose and utilisation by arts organisations within current discourse. Therefore, the research followed broader debates by humanities scholars over those within archival science (Buchanan 2010, p.37; Manoff 2004, p.10, in which archival concepts and activity encompasses a wider variety of formally archived and non-archived materials.

Following the preliminary archival and historical research, the thesis is shaped by two

curatorial projects that took place in 2019. These prompted reflections regarding the development of an archive within contemporaneity and illuminated new understandings of New Contemporaries archival potential. The structure of the thesis is therefore orientated around the simultaneous organisational desire for an archive and understanding of New Contemporaries history against a resistance to it. Or rather, the contradictory desires to both locate and preserve New Contemporaries past while at the same time retaining multiple possibilities of its futurity.

The desire for a New Contemporaries archive through which to understand the exhibition's history is not a new one. As one of several recorded comments in the foreword to the New Contemporaries 1984 exhibition, that year's organising committee wrote:

“The story of how the ‘Young Contemporaries’ became the presently structured ‘New Contemporaries’ remains untold until the day when some bright and archaeologically-minded student decides to make a thesis of it.” (‘So What’s New’, New Contemporaries 1984)

Four decades on and this story is still revealing itself. As an ongoing concern, New Contemporaries is an annual exhibition that presents the work of students and recent graduate artists each year. With over seven decades of activity, past participants have included artists that have become part of the contemporary canon within British art, as well as establishing itself as one of the most prominent platforms for new artists emerging each year. As such, its ‘story’ is as wrapped up in the legacy of past participants as much as in the anticipation of future legacies. Therefore, while this thesis responds to the 1984 call for an ‘archaeologically’ minded investigation of the exhibition as a historical entity, it also asks why New Contemporaries might want to tell this story[ies] and how it might be done.

Understanding these questions within the PhD not only highlights the role of archives in the construction of institutional narratives, but as an access point for historical information it examines the pertinence of New Contemporaries archive for an organisation operating within the contemporary. The research focuses on the role of archives in cultural discourse, what and where the archive materials of New Contemporaries are, and what potential they have for the current organisation as curatorial resources. Reflexive to its contemporaneous conditions, the gathering of their history is paired with curatorial ruminations that seek to open up new spaces of discourse regarding the exhibition and its position in British art history, as well as exposing the entanglement of institutions, archives and curating within contemporaneity.

New Contemporaries: history and contexts

From post-war Britain to current contexts, the last century has seen a radical shift in the professional working lives of artists. First established as Young Contemporaries in 1949, New Contemporaries is one of the most prominent and significant new artist exhibitions in the UK to date.¹ Selected from an open call by a rotating panel of artists and arts professionals, it has entrenched the group exhibition as a well-recognised facilitator and point of validation in the transition of art student to professional artist (Massouras 2013, p. 92). As an annual event, the venues, selectors, participants and artworks shown in New Contemporaries continue to reflect developments in art education, art practice, cultural activity and rise of influential figures in the British art scene. However, as a case study of contemporary British art, its history has not been so easy to access.

While New Contemporaries has established relationships with various venues throughout its duration, as an event-based activity it has no permanent home.² Regularly changing locations has resulted in equal mobility of its records. Its management through volunteer committees, particularly for the first four decades (1949 – 1986), has resulted in a further dispersal of its records. While the organisation was formalised as a charitable company in the late 1980s, its continued peripatetic temporal nature alongside limited resources have resulted in little capacity for historical investigation and preservation. Searching through the materials that can be located, a repeated refrain of ‘there is no historical information’ echoes across the decades.

Working with the organisation to consider their history through the archive, an awareness of what ‘an archive’ means for New Contemporaries has emerged alongside an assimilation of its history. As an organisation that has developed in parallel to the contemporary and is contemporary, its historical positioning, activity and structure emulate many of the same tenets. Following Agamben’s assertion that:

“contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it, through a disjunction and an anachronism” (Agamben 2009, p. 41)

¹ A self-referential accolade, the prominence of New Contemporaries is borne out through the reception the exhibition has had within the media throughout its history. For example, an article in the Guardian on signaled: “Anyone who wants a vision of the future should hasten to South London Gallery for the 70th edition of Bloomberg New Contemporaries” (Cunningham 2019, n.p.)

² New Contemporaries has a current office as an administrative base (first acquiring an office as opposed to being organised remotely in 2004), but as a dislocated programme there has been no significant capital investment in its location and its administrative base has also moved several times.

understanding New Contemporaries as a continuum that is renewed each year in different locations, with different artists, and under changing cultural and socio-economic conditions, makes it difficult to pin down. While it is inherently of its time in presenting a cohort of new artists each year, viewed as a continuum through its exhibition history it removes these artists from their time into a durational group of contemporaries, who have collectively transitioned through the exhibition as a rite of passage in developing their careers.

Embodied through the ephemerality of exhibition events, New Contemporaries expresses its relationship to the contemporary through its temporal and distributed nature as well as by platforming art of the present generation, with a continual focus on exposure of the 'new'. Therefore, the potential of tracking its history provides a dual opportunity: in the first instance, their chronology reveals what has occurred at the nexus point of arts education and practice over the last century. Secondly, it demonstrates the reciprocity of New Contemporaries as a cultural phenomenon within the contemporary, highlighted in how their historical records have been collected, remain uncollected, or disbursed. In doing so, the thesis asserts that its archive - and therefore how it is utilised by the organisation - needs to take into account its contemporaneous conditions.

New Contemporaries in contemporaneity

In a society that has come to value the new as the most innovative and now as the most authentic (Groys 2009, n.p., New Contemporaries – showing the work of artists who by their very definition are in the moment of formation – has not only been instrumental in the promotion of early-career artists, but also in defining what it means to be 'contemporary'. From the very first exhibition Foreword in 1949, to 'So What's New' in 1984 or 'Look Beneath the Label: Notes on the Contemporary' in 2011, the exhibition's premise of platforming the new is reiterated through a conveyance of 'contemporaries' as peers of the same time to a sense of its 'contemporaneity' - or as being of 'the contemporary' - in presenting the new (Osbourne 2011, p. 6. Although, as Osbourne elaborates, understanding 'the contemporary' as either a temporal condition or as a periodisation within history is not quite that straightforward.

Changing social conditions, the impact of technology and globalisation has extended 'contemporary' from its basis as a generational term into a number of disjunctive critical and philosophical frameworks (Osbourne 2013; Smith et al. 2008; Smith 2009; Smith 2010). A more challenging premise, not only as 'the contemporary' as a periodising structure is argued to start from a range of historical moments - anywhere between 1945 to 1989 (Osbourne 2013, ch. 1. 'Three periodizations of contemporary art' – but that there is no

dominant tendency or style that can be pointed to other than an increased eclecticism, temporalisation and performativity (Capdevila 2019; Smith 2012). The expanding pluralism of the contemporary and its definitions is perhaps one of its defining features: an epoch in which we are continually turning over a dialectic that foregrounds our complex and uncertain relationship to space-time (de Assis & Schwab 2019, p. 27).

The temporalisation of New Contemporaries as an annual event and the eclecticism of its offering in the form of an open call group show also reflect these broader debates regarding the contemporary as an experience of contemporaneity. As stated by Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, “Something has happened in our relation to time, how we exist in time, and the ways in which our conception of time relates to our conception of art.” (Cox & Lund 2016, p.13) Briefly considering how this may relate to New Contemporaries and its cultural significance as embodying the particular temporality of the contemporary, I want to draw attention to Marc Augé’s idea of the non-place.³ In a society that has become increasingly mobile and hyperconnected, the continual movement of people through transit points and temporary abodes - now also occurring within digital spheres - has resulted in a dense network of occupied ‘space’.⁴ For New Contemporaries, while the event of the exhibition serves as a temporary abode (where students enter and artists exit), its broader cultural activity is entirely dislocated from any singular ‘home’.

Further, if New Contemporaries operations are situated as an ephemeral network – the gathering together of artists at a particular transection within individual journeys – its social role also correlates to theories of the cultural field, as put forward by theorists such as Arthur Danto, Pierre Bourdieu or Bruno Latour.⁵ As a point of transition or threshold for artists as they journey out of education, New Contemporaries becomes a brief capturing of ‘present-ness’ and presences for a multiplicity of times and journeys.⁶ Therefore, considering the organisation’s function and critical position, the subject and material of New Contemporaries history becomes a layering and multiplicity of ‘present-ness’ within an archive that also stresses its fluid and temporal nature. The exhibition becomes a record of who and what was seen as worthy of demarcating ‘the new’ (by those making the selection) in contemporary art

³ In turn, Augé drew on Michael du Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

⁴ For Augé, the concept of a networked occupied space is non-located (neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’).

⁵ Discussed further in Methodology, Bourdieu’s theories (1984; 1993) responding to early definitions of the art world (as proposed by Arthur Danto (1964)) and its spheres of influence gave rise to ‘cultural fields theory’. While in contrast, Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) expands and simplifies Bourdieu’s position through examining human and non-human (i.e. people/objects) actors and their networks (1996, p. 369).

⁶ As a convergence of temporal relations and non-place as a ‘space’ of placelessness, see discussions put forward by Petra Kempf *The Journey to (No-)where: Constructing Place in a Space of Placelessness* (2009) and Geoff Cox & Jacob Lund *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art* (2016)

practices, but as a history under continual construction it is also subject to the contemporaneous perspectives through which it is retrospectively being viewed.

New Contemporaries, archives, and history

From Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) to Hal Foster's *An Archival Impulse* (2004), literature regarding the position of the archive, has become increasingly prolific over the last half-century. With the rise of institutional critique from the 1960s onwards and new institutionalism in the 1980s and 1990s, the parallel proliferation of arts organisations and their activity in Britain has seen a renewed concern regarding the documentation, preservation and presentation of the same (Breakell 2015). As the root of how information is gathered, authorised and validated, the central role of the archive in constructing narratives, whether relating to ancient civilisations or recent events (Schwartz and Cook 2002, p.18), has become a subject of critical debate.

Centralising *New Contemporaries* within the social, cultural and political conditions of the UK, the breadth of the research encompassed the inauguration of the exhibition during a tumultuous era of unknown futures and short-term planning (ACGB 1945) to cultural developments that have seen a divergence of art practice and art markets through dematerialisation, only to reconverge in the commodification of its discourse and mediation (O'Neill 2012; Sheikh 2009). In relation to archival acts, critical deconstruction of the archive and history over the same period has become, in turn, a site for generative practices (Bismarck et al. 2002, p. 417). Therefore, it was critical to the study to establish the context of archives in relation to cultural knowledge dissemination and as a subject of discourse within the cultural arena. Further, to examine what they mean, how they operate and what functions they may have for an organisation such as *New Contemporaries*.

While the archive has long been known as a “privileged stomping ground for knowledge production” (Sørensen 2015, p. 9), since the late 1990s there has been an expansion of its engagement in both academic and cultural fields (Foster 2004; Manoff 2004; Simon 2002). Concepts of metahistories or historical metafiction, post-structural discourse and modes of participation, alongside digitisation and remote working, have brought a greater multiplicity in how we visualise, navigate and interpret archives (Steedman 2011). To the extent that an early question within the research echoes one of the standard questions asked when

exploring archives, ‘what is an archive?’ (Dekker 2017).⁷ As philosophical debates and cross-disciplinary interest have risen, archives and archival boundaries have become less defined.⁸ As stated by Sue Breakell in *Negotiating the Archive* (2008), as the use of archives and archival terminology has become more dominant in popular culture, the term “has come to mean anything that is no longer current but has been kept” (ibid., n.p.).⁹ At the same time, there has been an increasing overlap in archival creation, curation and consumption: from artists employing the vernacular of the archive, to curatorial interventions or cultural initiatives engaging new modes of participation with and in their archives.

In particular, an emphasis on positionality has highlighted the interdependency between the concepts and structures of archives, emotional affect and ethical care (Morra 2020). Correspondingly reflected in curatorial display, archives and their contents can be seen as representing both evidential justification as well as serving to highlight (and or undermine) authorial positions.¹⁰ The resulting deconstruction, intervention, and re-readings of archives over the last half-century have led to a fertile field of activity outside the archival community (Manoff 2004). The commonality among these discussions however is the presence of the archive. Without the archive there is nothing in which to intervene or deconstruct how the past is represented and therefore comment or exert influence upon the present and future. In the context of New Contemporaries, the articulation of what an archive is understood to be led to the revelation that although they have archival and historical materials, they do not have *an* archive. Therefore, in ascertaining how their archive might be a starting point for positioning or repositioning the organisation in the present, it also required an initial assessment of what and where their historical information is, as well as its potential as an archive.

During the exhibition’s first four decades (1949 to 1970 as Young Contemporaries followed by 1974 to 1986 as New Contemporaries), the primary organisation of the exhibition was

⁷ Also echoed by Louise Craven in ‘What is an Archive?’ (2008), there are numerous texts that examine the changing conditions of archives and their resultant unravelling from previous traditional boundaries. Discussed further in Chapter 2, these includes *Dust* (Steedman 2001), *Moving Archives* (Morra 2020) and *Currents of Archival Thinking* (MacNeil & Eastwood 2017), to name a few.

⁸ Once I started the research, I realised I had been loosely gathering anything historical under the moniker of being ‘archival’ without really taking into account whether it was in an archive or not.

⁹ From my own background in curatorial practice, the term ‘archive’ initially invoked a conflation of meanings, ranging from dusty shelves, the desire for rigorous organisation and stationery, swipe functions on my phone to repositories of unknowable data. As these notions converged into an abstract ‘other’, the archive appeared simultaneously dead and distant, acute and overwhelming. Once I started the research, I realised I had been loosely gathering anything historical under the moniker of being ‘archival’ without considering whether it was in an archive or not.

¹⁰ Notably, within these contexts there is a presupposition of separation between curation within an archive as part of its function and curation from an archive. However, viewed as a constellation of objects and non-objects - organised and networked - the same concepts and concerns arise.

undertaken by rotating groups of volunteers. This resulted in documentation of activity carried out through associated organisations generally being conserved over the voluntary groups' own records.¹¹ Over the last three decades (from 1988 to the present the direct records of the exhibitions' activity are more consistent and held within the current organisational offices, however these are yet to be catalogued.¹² Consequently, an initial examination of New Contemporaries' history demonstrates a pronounced schism between the voluntary activity leading up to 1986 and its registration as a limited company in 1988. Through discussions with the current New Contemporaries Director Kirsty Ogg, it was apparent that for the organisation – alongside the practical cataloguing requirements for the later period – there was also a desire to reorientate and reconnect the present organisation to its earlier iterations.

In order to understand this relationship, an initial step for the research was deciphering the kind of records available regarding Young-New Contemporaries history, their accessibility - including ownership and copyright issues - and potential for use. Although some of these had been tentatively mapped out through earlier research commissioned by the organisation, the data extracted gave limited insight to what the material was that it was being extracted from. The secondary action of assessing these records then led to exploring possibilities to extend the extant material and regain lost organisational knowledge. Particularly as memories of the earliest generations of exhibitors are beginning to disappear, I also examined approaches to gathering and preserving as yet unrecorded details.

Exploring the process of gathering materials and personal memories from past participants, organisers and audiences, the research was not attempting to create an archive of oral histories but to investigate and reflect on the potential outcomes and opportunities that may arise from this approach.¹³ Building on encounters with past participants and the discovery of materials held at Acme Archive in London, the focus of my research began its first oscillation from a macro view of the full seven decades to a micro case study regarding two specific exhibitions in 1976 and 1977. This led to the first exhibition carried out as part of my research process, with *Not a Live Show* presented at Bonington Gallery from 4 - 30

¹¹ For the first two decades, the majority of these records are held in the Arts Council Collection at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Art and Design Archive. For the subsequent period 1974 – 1986, the majority of records that have been located so far relate to the Institute of Contemporary Art as a hosting venue (1978 – 1986) and are currently held in the Tate Archive.

¹² While the last three decades do represent a more cohesive picture of the exhibitions' activity, these have also been subject to relocation losses as well as the usual administrative clear-outs.

¹³ As the research progressed, the challenges of gathering oral histories also came to light. Attempts to reach out to past participants required patience and perseverance. As discussed in Chapter 3.2.2, not only was this in the locating of possible interviewees, but the response from many was a declaration regarding the lack of memory and or clarity of their past experiences. Equally, memories gathered are necessarily shaped by the intervening years, with perceptions of events often changing over time.

March 2019 (discussed further in Chapter Four). Including archival documents, interview transcripts and my own research findings, presenting the material through public display provided an opportunity to gather details and materials regarding the exhibition history. *Not a Live Show* also provided an opportunity to deposit new material regarding their historical activity into New Contemporaries (potential) current archive. Following on from the proposal by curator Nayia Yiakoumaki (2009) - that a curatorial intervention in the archive should be redeposited in the archive from which it originated - this thesis argues that through transferring the depositing of curatorial interventions into a New Contemporaries archive, previously inaccessible information can be regained.

However, the action of (re)depositing in order to regain organisational history does not negate that the curatorial intervention will necessarily alter and contaminate the original archival documents. As Jacques Derrida (1995) proposed – and is again emphasised in the work by Yiakoumaki (2009) – every reading of the archive alters the archive. However, presenting the archival research publicly through exhibition enabled me to assess possible outcomes and interactions that the archival materials might prompt. A screening event accompanying the archival display also showed work from past and current students, providing a further point of reflection on the potential value of an increased visibility to their history. Even so, while these records provided information regarding an earlier history, their curation and display in the present time is representational rather than replication.

Equally, while *Not a Live Show* can be seen as an outcome of research, exhibition-making in this context was a process *of* research. Therefore, framed through an implicit position of the curator-researcher, the question of representation also directs the discourse back to considering emotional affect and ethical care. While operating externally to the institutional parameters of New Contemporaries but directly adjacent to them, my assimilation of their historical narrative - however subjective that may be - will perpetuate a specific canon formation (Wilmsen 2020). Consequently, what role the archive performs must be considered alongside for whom it is speaking.

New Contemporaries, new artists

Indisputably, the archive New Contemporaries desires is being examined for and being asked to speak on behalf of the organisation, but as a collective presentation of artists over generations, who does that organisation represent? As an entity that has seven decades of introducing student artists to the cultural sphere, many of whom have become synonymous with British art, New Contemporaries' entwined relationships with structures of cultural capital and art markets are balanced against a philanthropic impetus to support graduating

artists in an ever more competitive field. Its function to help newly qualified artists navigate and engage with those structures extends the mission of the art schools from which they are graduating.

Throughout the 20th century, 'art school' has been offered as an alternative pathway into higher education. Underpinned by a series of transformations in the UK education system from the late 1960s onwards, an exponential increase in student numbers followed (Banks & Oakley 2016) . With higher numbers of students exiting art schools, an ongoing political drive to expand arts activity outside of London, and New Labour's "Third Way" in the 1990s, resulted in a proliferation of arts and cultural activity within the UK (Belfiore 2002) . However, while at various points those students who were feeding into Britain's burgeoning creative industries were supported through government grant schemes and educational policies, more recent policy changes and government cuts have resulted in a student body graduating with considerable debt as well as entering a highly competitive, underpaid and economised cultural sector (Beck and Cornford 2012; Gilmore and Comunian 2016) . As such, in order to fulfil its purpose and retain its economic and cultural viability, New Contemporaries has had to adapt to changing cultural, educational and socio-economic demands. From the 1950s drive to establish post-war art markets, followed by advocacy of new artists and practices within a growing cultural sphere, to needing to readjust to current conditions in light of the most recent educational policies as well as increasing economic and political instability.

Today, although New Contemporaries is now an established arts organisation with considerable longevity,¹⁴ it still operates with a limited staff and a challenging peripatetic programme. Moreover, the impact of Brexit followed by the global pandemic has led to a period of increased uncertainty and doubt.¹⁵ While the last two years have seen a rapid increase and engagement with digital platforms - especially pertinent in catering towards new digital practices - it has also further emphasised the precarity of the cultural sector (Comunian & England 2020) . Therefore, the potential value - monetary or reputational - and opportunities for furthering artistic support emerging from archival activity also need to be weighed against organisational capacity. In developing and exposing their organisational

¹⁴ While run through volunteer committees until 1986, in 1988 New Contemporaries was relaunched as a registered organisation with a Board of Trustees and one administrative staff member. However, it was not until 2004 that the organisation had its first official office and it was 2009 before the organisation appointed a Director and additional staff members.

¹⁵ Although New Contemporaries is exclusively a UK phenomenon, Brexit has had clear impacts on education sectors and the economy. Equally, the impact of international students' participation in New Contemporaries results in a global network of alumni. For example, the importance of internationalism within arts education is demonstrated in a report by Goldsmith's, in which it is highlighted that 40% of the international participants selected for New Contemporaries 2021 have studied with them (Cox 2021)

history there is also a risk of vulnerability (Wilmsen 2020; Eveleigh 2012) .

Considering the subject of and audience for New Contemporaries archive - alongside their philanthropic impetus in providing support for new artists and my drive in questioning the role of archives in institutional narratives - prompted the next step of the research. *Not an Archive* saw three commissions by early-career artists reflecting on the research to date regarding New Contemporaries history. Exhibited from 31 October - 23 November 2019 at artist-led space Primary in Nottingham (discussed further in Chapter Five) ,¹⁶ in contrast to the micro focus of *Not a Live Show*, here artists were invited to respond to any aspect of New Contemporaries' seven-decade history and or the context of their archive. As a pilot study of the potential activity the archive may prompt, and the opportunity for concurrent programming that supports the organisational aims, the risk of New Contemporaries exposure and vulnerability was mitigated to an extent by specifications of artistic rather than archival or art historical responses as well as through my own positioning.¹⁷ However, as a discourse regarding New Contemporaries as an institution, it still performs as a form of 'institutional thinking' (O'Neill, Steeds and Wilson 2017, pp. 19-22) .

The resulting works by artists Kobby Adi, Celia-Yunior and Suzanne van der Lingen demonstrated the inherent complexity of New Contemporaries history and archival materials. As a 'transit' location of intersecting people, spheres of influence and cultural sectors, the possibilities of New Contemporaries archive in both summoning its historical stories and simultaneously deconstructing and reorientating what these might mean through a contemporary lens is inherently paradoxical. Accompanying the exhibition, a workshop and symposium exemplified the dual dialogues emerging from the subject and content of New Contemporaries archive.

New Contemporaries, unarchiving

Considering New Contemporaries purpose and mission of supporting and platforming new artists, the workshop and symposium that accompanied *Not an Archive* exemplified the debates that have arisen during the research. The workshop, led by curator-artist Tom Godfrey, explored issues of networked agency, centre-periphery dialogues and current conditions for emerging artists. The subsequent symposium¹⁸ addressed the challenges of expanded archival practices in relation to artistic discourse, leading to discussions regarding

¹⁶ Primary had also hosted New Contemporaries alongside Backlit and One Thoresby Street in 2015.

¹⁷ As an independent curator, the project was associated to the organisation but not produced by them.

¹⁸ Speakers included Sue Breakell, Alice O'Hanlon, Lila Matsumoto, Naomi Pearce and Ego Awaibe Sowinski. The symposium took place on 23 November 2019 at Primary, Nottingham.

the evolving lexicon of the archive. As the symposium drew to a close, discussion on what an archive was from the multiple perspectives of the speakers – archivists, artists, writers and curators – concluded on the need for a greater depth of understanding and dexterity of terminology between the rigours of archives and wider associated activity.

Reflecting on New Contemporaries, the multiple locations of its archival material and disjointed nature of its history suggests that utilising its current platform – a networked, ephemeral, and progressive model – could not only provide the organisation an opportunity to give greater visibility to its history and longevity, but also help build on their established networks and provide further support for new artists. However, as exposed through the practices of the commissioned artists and during the associated activities for both exhibitions, the potential for mentorship and intergenerational peer support through intergenerational dialogue is also mediated by the anxiety in considering new artists' future ambitions and navigation of cultural 'gatekeepers' – New Contemporaries being a gatekeeper itself. Therefore, how might (public) ruminations in their archive serve to negate, navigate, rethink or expose new possibilities for supporting artists in the organisation's future.

In positioning these actions, the archive is understood as a networked, ephemeral and progressive model - or '(non)archive'. Taking as its premise a durational iterative approach, it also responds to the agile nature of New Contemporaries as the central case study. In an era which has seen radical acceleration, the impact of slowing down how they unpack and evaluate their history can allow for new transformational understandings. In the e-publication *Ecologising Museums*, Barbara Glowczewski highlights the concept of a slow institution as being "especially attentive to collaborating with concerned populations" (Glowczewski 2016, online). While Glowczewski is speaking of political conflict and repression, for New Contemporaries and their concerned populations these are the economic, political and cultural conditions for new artists. Turning to the archive, Glowczewski highlights:

"Acceleration of history, in which ongoing events become archived before being finished is a real issue to be thought about in a slowed down, more thought through process, both within art and within cultural institutions" (ibid.).

In contrast, the urge to archive for New Contemporaries – and the urgency felt as access to earlier generations is lost - precisely embodies Glowczewski's warning. However, while concerned with their archive and moving towards a greater retention of their history, the

thesis proposes the ‘archive for New Contemporaries’ is considered as an ongoing iterative concern through slow iterative acts of unarchiving.

To this end, within the thesis there has been a deliberate effort to negate my own actions. Based in the belief that knowledge-sharing, cooperation and openness allows the space for new possibilities, the inevitable restraints that occur when ‘pinning things down’ are deliberately left untethered. Therefore, while gathering the archive and orientating New Contemporaries history, the curatorial perspective introduced through the methodology has pushed for the opposite: a prospective open-ended questioning. As such, in response to the triangulation of curating, archives and contemporaneity, the thesis argues for a method that incorporates an expanded view of archives and curating activity that has an interest in both historiographies and the contemporary value of an archive as a site for intergenerational dialogue. A dual approach, the method proposes the exhibition as archive as a form of archive construction *alongside* commissioning as enquiry, as a device to engage and debate those constructions while supporting new artistic practices.

Terminology

During the research, it became clear that the terminology of *archives*, *curating*, and *the contemporary* can be slippery. As terms that have been impacted in parallel by the same changing social and cultural environments, each has become subject to a multiplicity of uses and abstractions that can make it difficult to differentiate their meanings in given contexts. For example, ‘an archive’ may imply a particular formal and functional storage system or the physical space where historical materials are stored. ‘The archive’ in contrast, carries abstract philosophical connotations of collective memory or knowledge-power dynamics. In a similar way, as curating professions have become independent to traditional museological care-taking roles, ‘the curatorial’ has come to be defined as a more abstract process of knowledge production and ‘curated’ as a popular synonym for a considered selection.

Although not concentrated upon in equal measure within the thesis, the reflexive relationship of New Contemporaries to ideas of contemporaneity is also embedded through a triangulation of its spatial-temporal relationships to archives and curating, as well as ‘the contemporary’ as a periodisation. Elaborating on discourse regarding the contemporary and its linguistic variations, I briefly provide some further background regarding the contemporary as a term for a cultural era as well as the increasingly complex debates regarding contemporaneity and its relationship to the same. While I have attempted to give

some shape to these aspects of terminology and their application within the thesis as outlined below, it is not without a small caveat. Reflective of the fluid boundaries between embodied notions and conceptual meanings, there remains an indelible multiplicity of how the terms may be read.

Archives, the archive

The introduction to *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art* by Charles Merewether states:

“One of the defining characteristics of the modern era has been the increasing significance given to the archive as the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated, stored and recovered.” (Merewether 2006, p. 10)

Examining the case study of New Contemporaries as a historically significant arts organisation within the UK, the subject of its archive has necessitated an understanding of what an archive is and its relevance to historical knowledge. As archives have reached cultural significance within modernity - as a physical site of document collection and a concept of collective memory - ‘archive’ has become a term that is increasingly mutable.¹⁹ Further, as technology has changed, so too has the perception of how we access, locate and valorise information, to a point in which “it could be stated that today everything is archive and everyone is an archivist” (Dekker 2017, p. 15). From various types of material stored in a plethora of spaces, such as digital files on your desktop or the box in your attic, to metaphorical notions regarding power and memory, the significance of archives has been given greater weight within popular culture. As a result, its linguistic meaning has equally expanded from its institutional and bureaucratic routes into a multitude of formal, informal and metaphorical uses (Manoff 2004, p. 10; Buchanan 2010, p.44).

Within visual arts, a reciprocal relationship between archival aesthetics, modes and discourse have influenced how archives are conceived and utilised, both in the expansion of what archival materials are and in the production of art (Spieker 2008; Breakell 2015). In the heterogeneity of materials, forms and concepts over the last century, more popular understandings of the term ‘archive’ make it akin to a form of remembering, or even ‘travelling’ to the past, with the result that independent of discipline and focus, the same language is often used to convey substantially different meanings (Bruchet 2019, p. 11).

¹⁹ And in more recent uses has lost its defining article.

Originating in the Greek ‘arkhe’, meaning governance, ‘arkheion’ or ‘archive’ can be directly translated to ‘public record’. For those within the archival profession, institutional or national store of records and documents - Archives - have a formalised specificity established through adherence to a set of published standards.¹³ For New Contemporaries, although there are archival materials relating to their activity in Archives, the expanded range of their historical information and their uncatalogued materials do not mean the organisation has an Archive. However, as expressed by Foucault, even regulated archives cannot be expressed in totality but emerge in ‘fragments, regions and levels’ (Foucault 1972, p. 130), subject to reconstituting, changes in law, recontextualisation and destruction. Therefore, examining these materials through their potential application to New Contemporaries history, the thesis utilises the idea of archives as representative of their summation.

To define the terms used, ‘archive’ can be applied in two ways. Firstly, in its most broad form and in lowercase, archive or archives can be read as an accumulation of objects or materials and/or the location in which those objects or materials are stored. When referring to specified catalogued repositories, the Archive will be capitalised and accompanied by the designated institution, i.e. Tate Archive or V&A Archive. For those items that are as yet uncatalogued and/or are generated through the course of the research and intended to be archived, for example a 1958 catalogue purchased online, the term ‘archival’ is used to signify their use as documents pertaining to New Contemporaries activities. When ‘the archive’ appears in the thesis as an abstraction, ‘the’ signifies its use as a conceptual metaphor in relation to social and cultural constructs. This includes the archive as denoting the storage of knowledge and its preservation to connotations of political power and identity.

However, as the archive starts to encompass more diffuse contexts from the specificity of its institutional functions, the slippage in its linguistic use can often mean it draws on both literal denotations and abstract connotations simultaneously. For example, exploring “the purpose and potentiality of an archive for New Contemporaries” addresses both the functional aspect of an archive as a system for storing and preserving historical materials – of whatever material quality and level of organisation - and the conceptual value, approach and meaning of an archive as established within contemporaneity. Therefore, keeping in mind Derrida’s oft-quoted comment: “Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’” (Derrida 1995, p. 57), there remains a certain flexibility – and mobilisation - of how the notion of the archive/archives may be read within the thesis.

Finally, in recognition of the work carried out within the thesis, the particularities of New

Contemporaries archival materials and my approach to them through curatorial methodologies, I want to draw attention to Marco Pustianaz's use of the term un/archive (2013, pp. 465-480). For Pustianaz, un/archive refers to not only to 'unarchiving' as the unpacking of materials from the archive and their reconstruction into present time, but more importantly those items and times which resist archiving. While Pustianaz speaks to the resistance of the archive,²⁰ I want to lean on this term as a response to the archival conditions and un/archival materials of New Contemporaries.

Throughout the research, I have repeatedly found myself uttering the phrase 'an archive that is not an archive' in an attempt to delineate the project as both archival and recognising the broader scope of materials considered outside of Archives. In acknowledging the desire for New Contemporaries to bring together their historical materials as an attempt to gain some coherence to their past, the curatorial actions taken and the inherent nature of what and where material are located has also presented an innate and paradoxical resistance to the same. Therefore, in bringing coherence to the varied materials that reach beyond the bounds of an Archive but collectively speaks to the history of the organisation, the 'archive that is not an archive' becomes a (non)archive. Uncapitalised, it refers to the materials both in Archives and with the potential for being archived, as well as those items that resist archiving or come into being through the process of unarchiving.

Curating, curatorial

The terminology within curating can appear as equally slippery as the expanded senses that cluster around 'archive'. For contemporary curatorial practice in the visual arts, curating has also taken on certain understandings that can appear incongruous to more museological or traditional settings (Fowle 2012; Gaskill 2011; Rogoff 2013). From its modern origins relating to the care and conservation of collections, to curating as a term in more popular use that infers superior connoisseurship in the selection of material or objects alongside an exponential contemporary global plurality, in which you can 'curate' almost anything, from social media to your sock drawer (Balzer 2014). As relevant to the thesis however, curating as a normative activity is generally seen as being primarily concerned with dissemination and 'meaning-making' effected by the exhibition.²¹

²⁰ While Pustianaz speaks to the resistance of the archive as part of a preoccupation of the "future present" (Pinsky 2003), as part of the expanded discourse of the archival turn it can also be seen to align with the sense of the contemporary as highlighted by Assis and Schwab as having a fundamental quality of resistance (Assis and Schwab 2019, p. 17).

²¹ Meaning-making' was a term first used in sociology at the end of the 20th century, but has since been widely used in cultural arts settings to indicate the production of social constructions through the spatial/temporal events in which artworks are conveyed to the public (Crane 1994; Accord 2010).

Particularly relevant to this research, my background in contemporary art and curating is influenced by developments in the late 20th and early 21st century in which ‘the exhibition’ can be read as encompassing any number of alternative forms, durations and spaces (O’Neill 2007, 2012). Underpinning this transformation in visual arts contexts, ‘the curatorial’ is often used as a noun to also encapsulate the discourses surrounding the production, presentation, and mediation of art activity within current art theory (Martinon 2013). Correspondingly, the concept of curating is no longer restricted to a singular point of public interface, but as an ongoing activity contributing to the production of knowledge. Within the thesis, the term curating is therefore applied to indicate direct action and activity relating to curatorial projects, exhibitions and events, while the curatorial is used to signify the methodological and conceptual approach.

The significance of this approach within the archival research also gives rise to the apparent paradoxical aims: the need to building a coherent archival narrative against searching for opportunities to incite frictions. For example, curator Maria Lind defines the curatorial as a “way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories and discourse” (Lind 2010a, p 63). Presenting the curatorial as arising from collective and networked inputs, Lind further proposes curating as a frictional presence that incites new ideas (ibid., p. 103). As a mode of stirring or agitation, the curatorial can be seen as a way of opening things up: a tendency in curating to create new constructs in order to prompt further questions rather than provide answers (Rogoff 2006). Taking this idea forward, inciting agitations or frictions through curatorial action does not mean the original position of ‘caretaking’ is entirely removed from its custodial origins but becomes reorientated towards navigating a myriad of intersubjective encounters.²² This includes the more traditional role in caring for New Contemporaries historical materials as well as providing care and support to the participating artists.

The contemporary, contemporaneity

In discussing New Contemporaries, the name of the exhibition itself elicits further unpacking. The use of ‘Contemporaries’ introduces a particular synergy to the concept of ‘being contemporary’. While it refers to a collection of peers, as a translation of ‘being together in time’, the connotations of that time being ‘now’ are further enforced when read through the prefix of ‘young’ or ‘new’, i.e. peers who have recently come into or are being brought into being. Further, the transition from Young to New also marks the changes and

²² The concept of care within curatorial practice remains fraught and filled with tension, situated between concepts of hospitality versus curatorial control, as discussed by Helena Rickett (2016) or Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer (2017).

developments within education and culture: ‘young’ implying an immaturity or amateurishness, while ‘new’ signifying an increased awareness of being cutting-edge, advanced, just out.

The enduring independence of the exhibition additionally highlights the pioneering positionality of generative peers pushing to the forefront of contemporary art. As a reflexive term applied to art of the 20th and 21st century however, its relationship to periodisation within postmodernism has caused some confusion. While postmodernism was the term used to define post-war culture, the increasing use of the ‘contemporary’ over ‘modern’ to signal the present time - as a disassociation from the modern of modernism - led to an accumulation of ‘contemporary art’ as a periodised phenomenon.²³ Equally, as modernity became the common signifier for the previous era (prompting much debate on the relationship between time and context), contemporaneity has become a regular subject of academic discourse relating to a distinct foreshortening of time, or temporality, in twenty-first-century culture (Agamben 2009; Smith 2008; Cox & Lund 2016; Assis & Schwab 2019).

Originating from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1962 [1927]), the idea of present-ness and the human embodied experience of ‘now’ is one that is processed reflexively and conditioned environmentally. As an experience of time within a culture of time(s), Heidegger express this as a phenomenon of ‘ek-stasis’, in which the singular present becomes dissolved into a multiplicity of existing at and influenced by multiple times. Most particularly, Heidegger suggests that this results in an experience of time as a constant projection of possible futures – existing in a what Groys has called a “living in a project” (Groys in Smith 2008). Or as Heidegger put it, as coexisting times of having-been or not-yet.

Most recently, in reaching for an understanding of ‘the contemporary’ I have been reminded of Janus, the Roman God with two faces who evokes the present as a state of looking simultaneously forward and back. He is the god of beginnings and endings, doorways and passages, of time, transitions and duality. This liminality between time(s) echoes the pluralities found not only in the contemporary, art and the archive, but also in considering the case study of New Contemporaries. From physicality to concept, from specific time to conceptual time, from philanthropy to cultural economy. These pluralities do not exist in separate spaces but are overlapping sliding scales: symbiotic, caught up with each other. In

²³ As a sense in the overlapping of postmodernism and the contemporary, the ‘post’ can be read as an attempt to move away from and differentiate culture from pre-war society, whereas the idea of the contemporary reflected present conditions, in which the plurality of global discourse and the temporality of new media technologies.

this sense, Janus embodies the present but also represents an absence from it. He cannot see himself, rather continually embodies the present as being in, with, and out of it at the same time.

This perspective of Janus can also be seen in the early formulations of Saint Augustine and the notion of a 'three-fold present' as the temporal dimensions of the past, present and future. Highlighted by both Smith (2008) and Osbourne (2013), Augustine's threefold present as a subjective orientation becomes attention, memory and expectation. While Smith suggests this formulation within the contemporary has returned to currency, Osbourne counters that in art the emphasis on expectation has led to a practice of anticipation. Re-orientating Augustine's threefold present as an interweaving of attention, boredom and distraction, Osbourne highlights this change through a shift in contemporary artistic discourse - also reflected in the archival turn - that forefronts memory. As a condition of the contemporary, the fracturing of history through a multiplication of reminiscences produces a constant reforming, reframing and reconfiguration of the political meaning and possibilities of social subjects.

Methodology, Questions and Frameworks

Drawing on *New Contemporaries* as a case study and my background in contemporary curatorial practice,²⁴ the research into their archive and the role of archives in contemporaneity was undertaken through a curatorial lens. While a relatively new disciplinary field with a narrow field of contributors, the emerging body of literature on contemporary art curatorial practices that has been gaining increasing visibility since the early 1990s (O'Neill 2012b), influenced by figures such as Harald Szeemann, Lucy Lippard, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Okwui Enwezor. Additionally, the turn towards archival projects within curatorial practice has also led to an increased output of literature that examines the intersections of these two dialogues.

As a theoretical and embodied approach, curation and curatorial approaches have been understood to extend beyond exhibition practices, encompassing art historical and cultural analysis through both inductive and deductive thinking (Persohn 2021). However, demonstrated to incorporate radically different approaches and knowledges, from historiographical to transdisciplinary constructions that look to cooperative models of

²⁴ Graduating with a BA(hons) in Fine Art, I went on to work within arts management and curating over the following decade before returning to study an MLitt in Curatorial Practice (Contemporary Art).

engagement and reflexivity, they remain highly situated (Lind 2012; Wade 2013; O'Neill et. al. 2016). Further, although research is implicitly part of curating - often involving archives - as a process of research it "has not been sufficiently problematised in relation to the curatorial field." (O'Neill and Wilson 2015, p. 15). Correspondingly, I have articulated the curatorial research and practice through the application of a bricolage or assemblage of frameworks and methods arising from existing paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

As an inherently interdisciplinary field, curating draws on a wide range of activities. In the organising and management of people, places and things, to the conceptualisation, interpretation and mediation of the same, the investigations undertaken can take a plethora of directions in both subject and action. As a converging field of curation in archives, the research builds on discipline specific studies in curating and archival discourse to establish a basis for the development of my theoretical framework, motivated by the primary research questions:

- What is the contemporary role of archives as the access point for historical information in cultural and curatorial discourse?
- What potential does a dispersed network of archival materials have in extending and expanding an archival dialogue for an arts organisation?
- What relationship do archives and curation have to New Contemporaries as representative of contemporaneity?

Combining theoretical analysis with empirical and archival research, this resulted in the development of two discrete curatorial projects. The initial exhibition tested a proposition developed from literature, the second was utilised in order to generate further data towards developing a proposition.

As the following literature demonstrates, while publications have emerged that look at the dialectic of archives and contemporary curating, these most often either draw from established and regulated archives or focus on examining specific events, cultural themes or phenomena. In contrast, the starting point for this study was the examination and extension of an organisation's archive that is currently unformed as well as distributed in multiple forms and locations. Therefore, the case study of New Contemporaries not only presented a gap in scholarship regarding their history, which to date has had limited investigation, but also in building archival content and historical knowledge through contemporaneous curatorial programming.

Drawing on theoretical literature from art history, visual culture and curating, the research had a particular focus on archival narrative, art sociology and historiography. The first

theoretical paradigm relating to discourse theory uses the premise introduced by Michel Foucault in *Archaeologies of Knowledge* (1972) of how language produces meaning, knowledge and power, structuring our thinking and our actions. As a composition of signs and statements circulating around particular subjects, discourse generates meaning and activates effect, or knowledge, within social contexts (Foucault 1972; Hall 1997; Macdonell 1986). As a socially structured action, discourse also relates to positions of power - the more powerful discourse the greater the impact and social effect.

However, although Foucault introduces discourse as a methodological tool, his work remains centred on abstract concepts. Further, the application of discourse can vary across disciplines, from post-colonial theory to anthropology (Saywer 2002; Jarworski and Coupland 2016), and perspectives, from social or critical linguistics to interpretive and critical discourse (Jensen 2008; Philips and Hardy 2002). This study has leaned towards the latter orientations, also recognising that a focus on terminology and language are required to provide a consensus of meaning. As an examination of discourses within overlapping fields of enquiry, a further paradigm of practice initially takes into account work by Pierre Bourdieu.

As study of power relations in art networks remains an important approach in the social production of art, the accumulation of practices highlights Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1984). Adding to the discourse described by Foucault, Bourdieu's 'habitus' argues that there are specific forms of cultural operation that also structure a particular field of activity. As a field or space of possibilities, the habitus provides a system of common references (Bourdieu 1984). However, looking to an alternative paradigm, Latour's more recent *Actor Network Theory* or ANT (2005), positions the cultural 'commons' within the fields of archives and curating as an intersection of meaning and knowledge production resulting from both people and things.

Considering the research looks to both understand New Contemporaries history and their artefacts, even while they are opposing propositions, different aspects of Bourdieu's habitus and Latour's ANT can be applied. In regard to New Contemporaries, its cultural position and gathering of 'new artists' as a set of social and processional relationships is dominant. Viewing the exhibition as a transition point, the habitus of New Contemporaries can also be seen as existing within Augé's nonplace, an untimely network of 'the new'. Further, considering the research as part of curatorial practice, Bourdieu also recognised the structure of practice as temporal and processional (1977). However, with an emphasis on the organisation's archive over a study of New Contemporaries social dynamics, Latour places

an emphasis on the totality of actors within the environment, including humans, animals, objects, and signs, that Bourdieu does not account for.

As New Contemporaries history is shaped not only through human dynamics (including the participants, institutions, and funders) , but also includes the art works and archival materials, ANT more readily recognises the importance of the artefacts and their production as durational actants within themselves (Theilman 2017, p. 6) . While this can presuppose a material stability, as their value and meaning become part of a durational network they can also be seen simultaneously as of their time and untimely, accentuating the multiplicity of cause and effect enacted as non-human elements (Latour 2005, p. 9; Law 2008, p. 141) . Further, although Latour's ANT has not been formally developed into a curatorial theory (Waller 2016 p. 193) , it can be applied to the dynamics of human and non-human interactions within exhibitions (Bayley 2018, p. 109) .^{25 26}

The combination of literature mentioned above sets out the analytical parameters for the thesis, however the exploration of historical and archival materials alongside the potential of these resources for curatorial activity was also undertaken through empirical research. This aspect of the research comprised several strands, including archival research, curatorial encounters, and exhibiting/commissioning as research. Initially, as there is limited literature on the case study of New Contemporaries, I undertook close readings of primary materials, including archival material within Archives and Collections and uncatalogued organisational documents. Alongside the analysis of primary items, this was supplemented through what I have determined as curatorial practice.

As a primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the curatorial research activity includes a range of formal and informal activity such as meetings, interviews, and informal dialogues with past participants and associates of New Contemporaries; participation in New Contemporaries organisational activity; and undertaking a placement with Archive Curator Nayia Yiakoumaki at Whitechapel Gallery. These activities, or curatorial encounters, were instrumental in the archival investigation and informing my historiographical findings as well as in developing the subsequent curatorial activity. Further use of reflexivity as a

²⁵ Speaking of the application of Latour's ANT to exhibition making, Lucy Bayley highlights that it is not just the object-subject dialectic that is mediated, but the hybrid space of the object-institution. In relation to exhibitions, this takes into account the human/non-human actants as including the exhibition institution, funders, and participants as well as the technology, materiality and behaviours of technology. This can retrospectively be applied in examining New Contemporaries exhibitions, but also in considering the curatorial projects that emerged from the thesis research, detailed in Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁶ It must be noted that while Latour's ANT helps provide an analytical framework for understanding the human and non-human interactions within archives and exhibitions, the thesis does not use ANT as a formal analysis framework.

qualitative tool (Watt 2007) was also employed as part of the curatorial approach. As a “personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing my research” (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p. 741), these elements of reflection are included in the thesis and are indicated as personal commentary through the use of italics, as shown below:

I feel a bit like I am looking at endless loops, some of this feels like it could be from decades before or decades after. Both full of information and at the same time slippery and incomprehensible, it is like watching a snail cross the grass. These personal comments are starting to litter my investigations...

Through reflection, the subjectivity of my position as researcher became a recognised and endemic part of the interpretative cultural analysis, providing tacit embodied knowledge that also informed curatorial decisions.

The use of interviews in my research follows the proposition that oral histories may be utilised to extend New Contemporaries archival resources.²⁷ While the thesis does not intend to be an investigation into or collation of oral histories, it explores the potential of oral histories and incorporates this practice within the initial curatorial project *Not a Live Show*. The interviews followed the long interview research method as described by MacCracken (1998), in which the researcher is working in their own culture and the relationship to the respondent is developed through formal and informal dialogue. Additionally, the broader range of research activity included attending the exhibition installation for New Contemporaries 2018 and the opening of their exhibitions in 2018 and 2019 and participating in New Contemporaries programming, such as New Contemporaries 70th Anniversary Conference and the *Archives in Progress* panel on behalf of New Contemporaries for The Courtauld Institute research festival.

Finally, working from my own previous studies and professional experience in curatorial practice, the practice-as-research parameters were extended to take into account individual actions in producing knowledge and further critical creative practice (Dean and Smith 2009). Exhibition as research was used as a form of experimentation (Basu and Macdonald 2007) and positioned as an enacting of research (Sheikh 2015). This took place in the public

²⁷ While the use of oral histories by historians is a long-standing practice, the relationship of how oral histories are placed into and catalogued within archives have been the subject of more recent debate (Mackay 2006). Informed by post-structuralist movements and the archival turn, contemporary discussions have challenged what, how and who is being collected and therefore communicated, emphasising the importance of capturing diverse perspectives and narratives (Thompson 2000; Webster 2016). Further, from the advent of recording technologies, oral histories are also often able to provide a greater level of understanding regarding the documentation that has been retained and therefore shortening the gap between the creator of the record and the archival curator or historian.

presentation of archival and research materials, with emerging archive narratives and subjective position of the researcher implicitly tested. Subsequently, commissioning as enquiry was utilised through the invitation to three artists to respond to the ongoing archival research resulted in a deliberate unfolding of my findings (Sorensen 2015). While curatorial activity is often posed as collaborative (Buchan et.al. 2007) - and aspects of the work did follow this model - I framed the artist commissions in this instance as parallel but intersecting processes to my own research. As a set of discrete methods in archival and curatorial research these practices are elaborated on further in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Thesis Structure

The thesis follows the development of research from an examination of New Contemporaries history through to potential participatory modes of archival inquiry. While attending to the history of New Contemporaries, the question of why and how their history may be accessed, assessed and disseminated has resulted in a dual approach: the first regarding the nature of archives and the second examining engagement with them through curatorial activity. Therefore, in following the research activity the early chapters in the thesis focus on providing a preliminary outline of New Contemporaries history, the impetus for archival research and the experience of carrying it out, while the second part of the thesis outlines the two curatorial projects undertaken and findings from them.

Although much of the thesis argues against master-narratives, the inevitable nature of needing a mutual space of understanding to start from has paradoxically led to the outlining of just that. Therefore, in order to position the reader **Chapter One** provides a preliminary overview of New Contemporaries' history. Taking into account the primary and secondary resources available, the organisation's activity is described through three phases: 1949 to 1970; 1974 to 1986; and 1989 to the present. As the exhibition reaches the present day, the recurring interest in the organisation's history and the subject of their archive comes to the fore. **Chapter Two** therefore looks at the internal impetus and external conditions prompting the archival enquiry. Focusing on the increased awareness of archival subjectivity, post-structuralist debates and the archival turn, the chapter reflects on the expanded field of archival activity and its contexts within contemporaneity.

From a consideration of the archival literature and theoretical perspectives, **Chapter Three** introduces my encounters with New Contemporaries historical materials. Carried out

alongside the formation of the overview outlined in Chapter One, this chapter focuses on the experience of the archival research as non-linear oscillations between micro and macro perspectives. Utilising the concept of the archival metaphor and anthropological-archaeological perspectives of dwelling within the landscape, the experience of the archive informed the research as much as the data extracted from its materials.

Building on emerging narratives, **Chapter Four** begins to unpack some of these threads through the exhibition *Not a Live Show*. Outlining the research method of exhibition-making, *Not a Live Show* discusses the development of the project from the archival materials and curatorial encounters to the mounting of the exhibition in Bonington Gallery at Nottingham Trent University in March 2019. Prompted through the monophonic focus of the first exhibition, the second curatorial project, *Not an Archive*, was exhibited at Primary in Nottingham in November 2019 and is discussed in **Chapter Five**. Expanding the premise of a singular authorial voice and the exhibition as research, *Not an Archive* invites a specific point of disruption through the invitation of three artist commissions. Utilising the commission as a point of enquiry, the parallel developments of the artists' work and their presentation in a singular space presents a reflexive dialogue regarding New Contemporaries positionality and archival potential.

Chapter One: Young to New Contemporaries 1949–2019

The following chapter presents an overview of Young to New Contemporaries, spanning from its initiation in 1949 to their 70th anniversary in 2019. As a relatively insular although notable activity within the UK²⁸, the history of the exhibition has not been widely researched. Therefore, while this thesis critically examines the purpose and utilisation of archives for a contemporary arts organisation, it is also important to provide a comprehensive overview of New Contemporaries history. This will effectively orientate the reader to the exhibition's contexts and significance within British arts, outlining the distinct phases of the exhibition programme and key resources available. It is worth noting that while the thesis challenges fixed institutional narratives in relation to archives - such as the one presented here - this initial account underscores the importance of historical resources and historiographies in shaping our knowledge, interpretations, and applications of history in the present.

Over the last seven decades, New Contemporaries has undergone several changes and iterations. For the purposes of this introduction and in order to avoid separating Young Contemporaries from its present iteration as New Contemporaries, I have classified this into three phases:²⁹ Phase One: 1949–1970 (Young Contemporaries), Phase Two: 1974–1986 and Phase Three: 1988–present (New Contemporaries).³⁰ In relation to their history to date, there are two key published resources alongside archive materials held at the V&A and Tate, uncatalogued documents in the New Contemporaries offices, and the published exhibition

²⁸ To date, the exhibition continues to be a UK-based platform for students and recent graduates who have studied within the UK. At points, the numbers of international students studying within the UK and therefore represented within the exhibition, have introduced broader international dialogues, however the impact of this remains relevant specifically to contexts for new artists in Britain. Similarly, the exhibition has never been toured outside the UK, although the issue has been raised on a few occasions. Young Contemporaries was first approached for an international tour in the 1960s by the New Zealand Arts Council, but difficulties in accessing both artists and works sees this request turned down. A secondary mention of moving the exhibition outside of the UK was voiced by Julia Peyton Jones with fellow Board Members in 1990, however this does not appear to be raised any further. Around 2009, the potential of touring New Contemporaries was raised by the Chair of the Board. Again, there is no further action.

²⁹ Within the thesis I will use the appropriate denominators above when referring to a particular time period, or if referring to a more holistic sense of the exhibition and its' history then I will use the current organisational name. However, when referring specifically to their overarching history this will be specified as 'Young-New Contemporaries'.

³⁰ Incidentally, these delineations also coincide with the three proposed starts to the periodisation of 'the contemporary' within art': 1945, c. 1968 and 1989 (Osbourne 2013, 'Three periodizations of contemporary art'). For Young-New Contemporaries these reflect the changed landscape of arts post World War II; the renaming and relaunch as new practices take hold; and finally, the formalisation of the organisation emerging alongside global transnationalism. As highlighted by Osbourne, these periodisation's are not so much either or but signify "differing intensities of contemporaneity, different interpenetrating historical strata" (ibid., 'Together in time?'). Spanning the first two of these eras, the early history of the exhibition - when examining it from the perspective of the current organisation - runs from 1949 to 1986.

guides.³¹

The initial resource identified regarding the early history is the PhD thesis by Alex Massouras published in 2013. *Patronage, Professionalism and Youth: the emerging artist and London's art institutions 1949–1988*, examines the 1950s as a precursor to the 1980s Young British Artists (YBA's) phenomena and the impact exhibitions such as Young Contemporaries had in the professionalisation of young artists. In contrast, the latter was commissioned by the student committee for that years' catalogue. *New Contemporaries: Past and Present* by art critic and curator Andrew Lambirth and was the first attempt to summarise the history of the exhibition from its first airing in 1949 to the mid-1980s. While these two resources are written with differing purposes and perspectives, they have both been invaluable in piecing together a coherent narrative for this period.

The current iteration of the exhibition was reestablished in 1988, when New Contemporaries became an incorporated charitable organisation with a Board of Trustees and its first paid member of staff. The records for this period are still held within the organisation's offices, with details of the exhibitions from 1989 onwards provided on their website. Further details have also been provided by current staff. However, while the exhibition's catalogues do tend towards including more critical discourse the only significant publication regarding an overview of their history published during this period focuses on a compilation of moving image works from 1968–2010, produced in collaboration with LUX in recognition of the exhibitions' 65th anniversary.^{32 33}

As an ongoing programme, the history accounted for within Chapter One culminates with their current impetus for an archive in light of the approach of New Contemporaries 70th anniversary. Further information regarding the immediate circumstances of New Contemporaries archive will be discussed in Chapter Two alongside a review of archival discourse literature; including understandings of the archive in contemporaneity and how an archive may function for a contemporary arts organisation.

³¹ Nearly all the records pertaining to Phase One are at V&A contained within five box files. The majority of records for Phase Two can be found in the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) collection within the Tate Archive. Sporadic records held by specific exhibiting venues are also available, but these are less easy to identify and access. For all records during this period the majority of items held are from the perspective of either funders and/or host institutions rather than internal committee/organisational records. Further, for Phase One there are exhibition card catalogues for most of the travelling shows, and from the 1980s onwards (Phase Two/Three) the exhibition regularly publishes an extensive exhibition catalogue with extended comments. Further details regarding the archival research is also outlined in Chapter Three.

³² LUX an artists' moving image agency and archive that evolved out of The London Film Co-Op, London Video Arts and the Lux Centre.

³³ Some further details were also provided by past and present Board members and staff during the course of the research.

Three Phases of New Contemporaries

For an exhibition that has been running as long as New Contemporaries, you might expect that an intended longevity was in mind at the outset, yet the tale of its origins speak more to happenstance than a vision of an active legacy seventy years in the future. An annual event since its launch in 1949 (give or take a few years when the show failed to materialise or was temporarily disbanded) , over the last seven decades the exhibition has platformed thousands of students as they moved from education to practicing artists. During this period, the exhibition has garnered a reputation for heralding the ‘next big thing’, showcasing artists such as Frank Auerbach, Paula Rego and David Hockney to Damien Hirst, Chris Ofili and Laure Prouvost. However, despite regular association to the earlier ‘star’ artists (Auerbach, Rego, Hockney) , general impressions are that the organisation is a much younger entity.³⁴

While having been active since the middle of the 20th century, the current exhibition is run by an organisation that officially came into being in 1988. Opening at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in 1989, what is essentially a relaunch of its previous voluntary operations coincided the emergence of what have become known as the YBAs and a booming art market.³⁵ In many ways, the relaunched exhibition echoes the very first successes Young Contemporaries experienced under its previous auspices four decades earlier. In 1949, the exhibition achieved over eight thousand visitors and 107 sales of work (Young Contemporaries 1949, ‘Preliminary Report’) .

Beginning with the earlier iteration rather than its later counterpart, Young Contemporaries was run by voluntary committees and as such information regarding the exhibition and its organisation is scarce. Extant information regarding its early history has been derived from associated documents retained by the Arts Council of Great Britain, newspaper reviews, and the two texts by Massouras and Lambirth, supplemented by comments made by past participants during the course of my research. As Young-New Contemporaries history includes several breaks as well as associations with external entities, details of the thesis research carried out has been compiled via the online platform Research Catalogue [here](#). In addition, I have provided a brief synopsis of each phase outlined in Figure 1:

³⁴ Repeated iterations of New Contemporaries start date highlight the 1989 launch, from remarks in the media such as the 2009 article by in Art Monthly reinforcing the exhibition as a much younger entity in a nicely laconic tone “Well, ... whatever; 20 years since its inception...” (Herbert 2009, p. 27) to Peter Osbourne in 2011 who identifies the founding of New Contemporaries as 1988 within the catalogue forward (Osbourne 2011, p. 6).

³⁵ Renowned contemporary art collectors the D’Offays bought a number of works from New Contemporaries in 1989, including those by Hirst (New Contemporaries 1989, uncatalogued document ‘Sales’)

PHASE 1: Young Contemporaries 1949 – 1970	PHASE 2: New Contemporaries 1974 – 1986	PHASE 3: Relaunched 1988 – onwards	(expansion) (2009)
Organised by a voluntary student committee who handle all elements of mounting the exhibition., with mentorship and oversight of selection by a 'Permanent committee' made up of art school tutors and artists. The exhibition is hosted in London, with a further independent tour of a smaller selection of work to local art centres across Great Britain, organised by the Arts Council.	Still organised by volunteers with a Permanent and Student committee, however practices exhibited have expanded, leading to the inclusion of film, installation and performance works. An accompanying seminar programme is becoming de-rigour, and the students begin to demand a greater oversight to the selection process.	After a feasibility study, the organisation becomes formalised, with a Board of Directors and a paid member of staff to facilitate the exhibition. Selection is conducted by a panel comprised of artists, curators, critics and dealers, not dissimilar to the prior form but more emphasis is placed upon their independent appointment.	The organisation expands, with the staff now including a Director plus additional support staff. Further focus and activity concentrates on artistic development opportunities.

Figure 1: Outlining the predominant phases of Young – New Contemporaries exhibition from 1949 to the present.

Phase One and Phase Two of the exhibition are both run by voluntary committees made up of art school tutors, artists and students.³⁶ The initial phase, Young Contemporaries, has a close relationship to the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB, also referred to as the Arts Council) and a tour of selected works from the London exhibition is facilitated around the

³⁶ The Permanent Committee was made up of art tutors from the central London art schools (i.e. Slade, Goldsmiths, Royal Academy etc.). Other artists, critics, curators and dealers were also included at various points, particularly for the process of selection. Although termed 'Permanent', the turnover of members was relatively high. Likewise the Student Committee had a maximum of two terms, although most only served for one.

UK. Subsequently, the majority of records for this period have been retained by ACGB, held in the V&A Art and Design Archive. Phase Two begins in 1974 as the exhibition renamed New Contemporaries, with the cessation of the Arts Council tour and the establishment of a significant relationship to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA).³⁷ In Phase Two, with advancing technology and developing practices, the exhibition also expands from what was a formerly Painting and Sculpture exhibition to include 3rd Area Art.

After increased student ambitions lead to financial difficulties in 1986, the Arts Council instigate a feasibility review leading to another hiatus. Relaunching on 13 December 1989 (Phase Three) , the exhibition takes on elements of both previous iterations and establishes an inverse structure of its previous iterations. From an exhibition mounted by a revolving voluntary committee but primarily located in London, the Board and an employed administrator deliver the exhibition which becomes peripatetic, launching in different cities each year with a secondary show in London. Further, from yearly or bi-yearly rotating committees, throughout Phase Three the Board remains largely static.

With only one Administrator in place for the first two decades, in 2009 the Arts Council prompt a further internal review and despite a global economic crisis, a subsidiary shift in the New Contemporaries organisational structure sees the appointment of a director and further staff. Increasing the organisation's capacity to deliver additional programming and further development support for participating artists, from 2010 there is an overall expansion of year-round activity. Facing another era of increased economic pressures, as well as Brexit and the global pandemic, the organisation may currently be facing a more transformational break that will be evident in the future.

Phase One: 1949–1970

It appears the concept of an exhibition for graduating students had been circulating for a few years before it came to fruition in 1949. That there are several differing accounts of how this came to be is mentioned by several sources,³⁸ however the most commonly cited is that of Royal College of Art tutor Carel Weight, who was looking to fill an unexpected gap in the Royal British Artist Galleries' (R.B.A. Galleries) calendar (Massouras 2013, p. 98.) The

³⁷ A relationship which resurfaces at various points with differing intensities to the present day.

³⁸ Those detailed by Massouras (2013) and Lambirth (1986), as well as cited on webpages (such as artbiogs.co.uk) and details provided in conversation with the current organisation.

exhibition opens at R.B.A. Galleries³⁹ on 25 March 1949 (Young Contemporaries, exhibition catalogue), largely remaining hosted by the venue until the end of Phase One in 1970.⁴⁰ Approximately 300 to 500 works are included in each of the London exhibitions, with a smaller selection of approximately 40 to 50 works selected by the Arts Council to tour the UK.⁴¹

At the outset of the exhibition, Arts Council Director Philip James introduced the purpose for Young Contemporaries as providing an opportunity to students for public exhibition of their work, highlighting the difficulties “between learning the art and earning a living” (James 1949, ‘Introduction’). Deftly referring to the students as ‘artists’ “each hoisting sail for the first time under a new flag”, from this very first iteration James neatly repositions the exhibition as work from students to an exhibition of work by new artists. Chiming with a sense of post-war utopianism and future-building, the focus on the next generation in Young Contemporaries meets a willing and supportive audience.

Demonstrative of the specific shift in how students are perceived, Massouras (2013) draws on this change in positionality indicated by James to centralise Young Contemporaries as contributing to the reframing of students from amateur to the pre-professional,⁴² and situates the appearance of Young Contemporaries as a precipitator to the “flowering of exhibition opportunities specifically for the young” (Massouras 2013, p. 94). Despite the

³⁹ The Royal Society of British Arts (R.B.A.) was founded in 1823. It is then umbrellaed by the Federation of British Artists (F.B.A.) founded in 1961, remaining at the same address of 6½ Suffolk Street. The F.B.A. then moves to Carlton House Terrace, the rear side of which opens onto The Mall and their galleries become known as The Mall Galleries. While New Contemporaries does not retain a connection to the R.B.A. or F.B.A., they return to the same location when they established a new connection to ICA which is located next door.

⁴⁰ The exhibition is hosted by the R.B.A. Galleries apart from 1967 in which it was hosted by Tate and 1970 when it relocated to Royal Academy

⁴¹ The Arts Council refined their selection from the London exhibition with the works selected by the Arts Director alongside an invited guest, who was generally an established artist or art critic. Following the Arts Councils aims in providing access to the arts in what they termed the ‘provinces’ (ACGB 1946, ‘Plans for an Art Centre’), the Arts Council edition of the show would travel the 40 - 50 works from a minimum of three venues to a maximum of nine across England, Scotland and Wales, including Public Libraries, Museums and Galleries. With some consideration of the limitations imposed by touring work, this was largely painting works. For further details please see the [Appendix – Chronology](#) on the Research Catalogue.

⁴² Highlighting the widely held belief that the YBA’s in the late 1980s signify a particular turn towards young or new artists, Massouras argues that the rise of student-led exhibitions evidences this turn occurs much earlier in the 1950s. The rapid movement of artists from being recently graduated students to well recognised and established professionals can be seen in article by Norbert Lynton for the Guardian in 1970. Lynton goes so far as to list Young Contemporaries alumni artists such as Caulfield and Hockney, who were by then only in their thirties, as ‘old masters’ (Lynton 1970).

hurried nature of its assembly⁴³ and being “inevitably dominated by Royal College students” (Lambirth 1986, p. 7), it was successfully organised and received serious attention.⁴⁴ The subsequent relationship of student exhibitions to the art market during this period and the role they play in the professionalisation of young artists,⁴⁵ can be seen as the exhibition gains traction and the post-war art market takes off.

Acknowledgement of their success was widely recognised in the press and has been considerably voiced since. For example, in 1951 Max Chapman comments:

“I have already placed on record my admiration for a scheme whereby students from all over the country... can submit work to be hung in a first-rate West End gallery, a scheme that helps to bridge the gulf between student and graduate and checks the tendency to isolationism and provincial loyalism in schools. Admirable.” (Chapman 1951, ‘Arts and Artists’)

The validation of the venue alongside a selection process carried out by the Permanent Committee and several notable figures in the British art scene instils a sense that the exhibition is more than a self-organised showing but subject to a higher level of rigour. A Young Contemporaries press release in 1951 recalls the freezing conditions as requiring overcoats to be worn throughout, as well as students who had volunteered to porter works in front of the selectors witnessing their own work being rejected. (Young Contemporaries 1951).⁴⁶

Despite the disappointment of those not selected, the welcome reception of a platform for students as they considered life after art school can also be inferred from the financial and

⁴³ It appears the concept of an exhibition for graduating students had already been circulating for some time but had yet to come to fruition. Massouras notes the contrary accounts claiming credits for its inauguration, from an art student Sylvia Wrangham who is said to have met with the Arts Council Assistant Director with a similar proposal in 1946 to the President of the Royal British Society of Artists John Copley. However, the version most recounted – by Massouras, Lambirth and cited online - is that of Carel Weight. A then tutor at Royal College of Art (RCA) and on the Board of RBA, Weight was said to have taken advantage of a gap in the RBA’s exhibition calendar to offer a chance for students and recent graduates to show their work to the public. Initially for RCA students, it quickly expanded to include several other London schools.

⁴⁴ Attendance by the then Queen (now late Queen Mother) – who purchased two works – signifies the gravitas the exhibition was afforded at the time (Fox 1949).

⁴⁵ Massouras sets out the issues of the art market as problematic for the young artist within several areas of his work, particularly The Sinister Market and its Cultural Roots (pp 75 – 76). It is also discussed directly in context to Young Contemporaries in The Art Market and the Rise of Young Artists Exhibitions (pp. 108-111).

⁴⁶ The selection process has been a consistent element of the exhibition, with all work submitted viewed by the selection committee. As technology has advanced, a preliminary selection was conducted with slides and now through digital submissions, however the final short list is still viewed in person.

touring support provided by the newly formed ACGB,⁴⁷ as well as galleries such as Gimpel Fils taking on artists for subsequent showings.⁴⁸ A number of awards and prizes also began to emerge, for example The Knapping Foundation cites Young Contemporaries as the most suitable event from which to award their prize (Young Contemporaries, unauthorised memo c. 1950).

However, as the specific post-war circumstances help catapult a student exhibition to success they also underline the difficult conditions and competitive arena young artists are facing, leading critic Neville Wallis to question “How many of the assured young artists here will be able to make a living in this overcrowded and under patronised profession?” (Wallis 1950, p.6). By 1957 he is further questioning the consequences of promoting young artists tipped for early success (Wallis 1957, p. 7).

“Where will it lead though? Will he [the artist] now be pounced on, boosted and presently shipped in every British Council cargo? That is the way of the art world.” (Wallis 1959, p. 7)⁴⁹

In answering Wallis’ concerns in his 1986 essay, Lambirth highlights the ability for Young-New Contemporaries to provide students a window into life after art school but also the dangers that attention early in an artists’ career may incur. Lambirth suggests that a desire to respond to the market and keep up with trends may prevent progression and development of artistic talent (Lambirth 1986, p.11). Massouras is equally sceptical regarding the role of Young Contemporaries as an instrumental mechanism for the commodification of young artists, however both acknowledge the philanthropic motive behind the endeavour.

Despite the excitement of interest by Bond Street galleries and the press attention, there is a repeated emphasis from the organisers and students on the collegiate aspect of showing work by students from across the country, rather than one of economic gain. Nevertheless, part of the emphasis on supporting young artists is necessarily through the purchasing of work. Encouragement towards this end is framed by the Arts Council as providing financial support to the next generation of artists, as much as providing the buyer (i.e. the burgeoning

⁴⁷ The Arts Council, who were trying to revitalise a cultural industry in the wake of World War II, not only arranged the touring edition around the UK on an ongoing basis until the late 1960s, but also underwrote the expenses for the show throughout the first two phases of the exhibition. In Phase Three, this support transitions into grant funding.

⁴⁸ In conversation with Bruce McLean (Appendix - McLean), he recalled a secondary invitation from Gimpel Fils after showing with Young Contemporaries two years prior. Having been in Young Contemporaries while at St Martin’s School of Art in 1965, he had retreated from the London art scene. However, after the approach from Gimpel Fils, many of the connections that led to his later success were initiated through that exhibition.

⁴⁹ Wallis’ reference to the British Council cargo also signals the increasing utilisation of British cultural outputs as a demonstration and assertion of national identity and political power in the Cold-war era.

middle classes) with an investment opportunity. It is in the early 1960s that the market trends become clearly felt.

As *Young Contemporaries* heralds new British Pop Art talents such as David Hockney, R.B. Kitaj and Derek Boshier, the quick response by critics, dealers and cultural institutions leads to an unprecedented uptake of young artist's work. The extent to which this is recognised as a global phenomenon is demonstrated by a response to the City of Auckland Art Gallery in New Zealand, whose request for a tour of *Young Contemporaries* Pop art in 1962 is turned down.⁵⁰ By 1964, the forward to the exhibition written by Joseph Rykwert goes so far as to wish for an art market recession, claiming that art schools have become "forcing frames to feed an insatiable market with novelties." (Rykwert 1964). The question of how trends impact what students were making was also raised in a conversation I had with artist Basil Beattie, as curating of the show started to favour Pop Art works over other styles.⁵¹

As Massouras also observes, the position of *Young Contemporaries* to the new post-war art market occurs in tandem with the decreasing viability of patronage as a pathway open to the increasing numbers of new artists (Massouras 2013, pp. 75-87). The dealer-critic dynamic of the art market becomes instrumental in the expectations of professionalism from young artists, and it is as early as 1950 in which *The Times* comments on the 'astonishingly and perhaps even alarmingly high' quality of art works on display (*The Times* 1950, p. 7). It is only later that these earlier exhibitions are seen as having a sense of student-amateur authenticity, one which is lamented as being lost in future shows. While speaking of the later exhibitions, Lambirth also highlights the increasing professionalism of student works as an 'alarming' development (Lambirth 1986, p. 11), with the consequence of platforms such as *Young-New Contemporaries* appearing to be co-opted from the idealised vision of supporting young talent to one that is perceived to be concerned with economic gain through investment in future markets, despite the philanthropic motives.

Discourse regarding the art market and the role of *Young-New Contemporaries* is one that continues to be endemic to its function as well as, at various stages, problematic. In this, it might be suggested that the exhibition as a platform for young artists has become more

⁵⁰ An initial response to the request by Auckland Art Gallery by the Arts Council Art Department cheekily responds: "Haven't you got any of your own?" (Arts Council 1962). A later response by Mark Glazebrook confirms the demand for the work and the artists and the difficulty of organising a show; "... I went into it, but five of the best artists were either having one-man shows or abroad on scholarships and did not have work available." (Glazebrook 1962).

⁵¹ In a conversation held in the Royal Academy towards the start of my research, Beattie recalled speaking with Derek Boshier at the *Young Contemporaries* opening in 1962. As they walked around the exhibition, Boshier claimed he would be converting from Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art, as the Pop Art works were placed at the front of the gallery whereas the Abstract Expressionists had been relegated to the back (Appendix - Beattie).

insular and introspective, speaking to a particular British art scene rather than the general public; just as contemporary practice is often said to be made for a knowing audience rather than the wider public (Lippard 1984). The encouragement of ‘amateur’ collectors by the end of Phase One appears to wane as the patronage of pre-war Britain shifts to secondary markets and the dealer-critic dynamic. In part, the changing expectations of the student show is demonstrated in the interest shown by new up and coming commercial galleries, such as Gimpel Fils and Kasmin Gallery⁵², as well as the 1967 exhibition which is hosted at Tate Britain.

With the early 1960s Pop Art attention, the increasing ‘slickness’ to Young Contemporaries display more often provokes comments that in the process something has been lost.⁵³

Reviewing the exhibition mounted at the Tate, art critic Guy Brett comments:

“It is a tidied up, well-spaced out, well lit “Young Contemporaries” exhibition which appears this year at the Tate Gallery. The shambles of Suffolk Street [R.B.A. Galleries] seems far away. So also and unfortunately does the atmosphere of the now famous “Young Contemporaries” exhibitions of 1961 and 1962” (Brett 1967, n.p.)

While the renown of the venue does lend validation to the enterprise, it also highlights the emerging friction within post-modern discourse between concepts of authenticity and the replication and polish that comes with professionalised (i.e. commercialised) practice. It is also the first year in which the selection committee includes a dealer. Paradoxically, the removal of prices from the exhibition catalogue, as requested by Tate, further elevates the work from its origins as a student enterprise.⁵⁴ The removal of prices sees the sales of work as no less important, but with a greater expectation of a mediated market.

The ramifications of careerist ambitions, new movements in Pop Art drawing considerable dealer interest (to the point that the first dealer became part of the selection panel), and a splinter group establishing Northern Young Contemporaries in 1965 as an alternative based outside of London, sees the exhibition come under increasing pressure. Rather than a recognition of Young Contemporaries relevance to the public sector, the Tate exhibition is taken as a ‘final capitulation to establishment control’ (Lambirth 1986, p. 17). Even with the

⁵² The attention of John Kasmin at Young Contemporaries in 1961 leads to Hockney’s first one-man exhibition at Kasmin Gallery in 1963 (Stephens 2023, online)

⁵³ Massouras’ refers to this within his 2013 thesis as ‘The Slickness Taboo’, in which the dividing line of art presented for arts’ sake versus art as a commercial commodity starts to denote its worth (Massouras 2013, pp. 82-84)

⁵⁴ The removal of prices continues for the following years, briefly returning when it is relaunched in 1974 and 1975 at Camden Art Centre, before being removed again from 1976 onwards.

gravitas implied by the Tate support, the exhibition is receiving less than enthusiastic responses.⁵⁵

Returning to R.B.A. Galleries in 1968, the questioning of the processes and mechanisms of exhibition operations by the student committee is apparent in a push towards a policy of horizontality. The urge to be 'representative of the total art college scene' is taken a step further, with prizes to be equally shared in an attempt to reduce 'individual prestige' (Young Contemporaries 1968, 'Foreword'). The design of that year's catalogues also includes speech bubbles of sensationalist exhibition reviews. Affirming a desire to demonstrate their shocking 'newness' and authenticity, the design also demonstrates a marked self-awareness of marketing and promotion. A design strategy led by the students, it raised comments from the Arts Council conveying an uncertainty that the sensationalist wording (taken from reviews regarding earlier exhibitions) was appropriate given the increased quality - or slickness - of the exhibition presentations.

In 1970, the show comes to an end with a rather chaotic exhibition hosted by Royal Academy. Again, although the venue demonstrates an increasing engagement with the public sector there is nevertheless an apparent lack of interest in moving the exhibition forward. Amidst rumours of a fire and student protests, its decline is heralded with a fizzle rather than a pop:

"The increasing presence of conceptual art seems to have done little to endear the Young Contemporaries to the public, or indeed certain areas of the art establishment. In an atmosphere of uncertainty, lack of interest, and in some cases active hostility, the Young Contemporaries stopped functioning." (Lambirth 1986, p. 21)

Amidst student protests against changing education remits and increasing political tensions, even though there is no apparent reason for its non-renewal, there are no willing bodies to take it on (Lambirth 1986; Massouras 2013; Appendix - Beattie).

Phase Two: 1974–1986

From the last exhibition of Young Contemporaries in 1970 and in the vacuum of a national exhibition for student work, the exhibition is reconsidered as the previous generation

⁵⁵ Guy Brett writes in 1969 "In the past few years Northern Young Contemporaries has on the whole been more enjoyable than the London one.... But perhaps the appearance of Young Contemporaries at the Tate Gallery two years ago marked an apex in an official attitude of grooming young English artists for the international art world." (Brett 1969, p. 9). Likewise, Norton writing for The Guardian says "Not that there is anything world-shaking or world-making about it. No sign of a change of direction; no need for a new label." (Norton 1969, p. 6)

participants become tutors to the next (Appendix - Beattie). This time, following the increasing post-modern influence as well as the recognition that not all new artists are 'young', the exhibition is renamed 'New Contemporaries'. Here, an iteration of new as in 'contemporary' alongside the variant of contemporary as 'contemporary peers' results in an emphasis on the exhibition as being the New New, or the most Contemporary of Contemporaries.

During Phase Two, it is clear that the changing parameters of practice and the push back on the educational reforms of the late 1960s are beginning to have a larger impact on the exhibition outputs. Even so, William Tucker's introduction to the 1975 show highlights the homogenization effect of the prevailing orthodoxies, whether that is led by the national curriculum or dictated by media tastes. From the urge to position students as artists, Tucker highlights how large this gap remains:

“The successful student these days is likely to be persuaded he is an artist. Nothing could be further from the truth. What the New Contemporaries should do is enable students for the moment at least as artists, to take a public responsibility for what they have made” (Tucker 1975, n.p.)

Tucker at the time was a tutor at Goldsmith's and St. Martin's, and alongside Gillian Ayres, Paul Huxley and Basil Beattie, who were responsible for the resurrection of the exhibition platform. Highlighted by Tucker in his statement is the increasing association of art practice with counterculture and a drive to push at the boundaries of tradition and establishment. However, contradictorily it is also one that aligns closely to those areas of practice which generate sensationalism⁵⁶ – a new form of orthodoxy for the contemporary (Assis and Schwab 2019, p. 17). In asking the students to take responsibility for their work he is perhaps questioning the tight rope of producing or following trend defining styles against true political motivations.

From Carel Weight initiating the first exhibition to the tutor group assisting with its resurrection in 1974, the educators at London's institutions played a leading role in not only the oversight and selection of works, but its very existence. The comradery inferred on exhibiting works of students from across institutions also came from the same comradery

⁵⁶ The social and political nature of art has been widely discussed regarding the advent of conceptual and performative practices within the contemporary period. From *Social Radicalism and the Arts* by Donald Egbert (1970) or *The Social Production of Art* by Janet Wolff (1993), to *Art and Politics: A Small History of Social Change Since 1945* (2013) by Claudia Mesch or *All Art is Political* by Sarah Lowdes (2014), to name only a few.

displayed by the tutors participating and supporting its activity. What is significant is that by the foreword written by William Tucker in 1974 is an attempt to undo the assertion of students as artists Philip James had instigated two and a half decades previously. As Tucker reasserts the participants students status over the presumption of future artistic careers, the relocation of the exhibition to Camden Art Gallery simultaneously communicates a closer alignment to artist-orientated contemporary exhibition spaces over the traditionalism of the former R.B.A. Galleries.

Even with the artist-led focus, the exhibitions at Camden Art Centre in 1974 and 1975 remain concentrated on painting and sculpture and it is only in 1976 that other formats are formerly introduced to the New Contemporaries remit. In the preface to the 1976 show, written by the New Contemporaries Student Committee, the range of work and practices being produced by students is a leading concern:

“...a student should be open to visual stimuli of any kind and while it is true that live work has recently received the customary avant-garde, band-wagon exposure, students feel the need to establish a serious intellectual and emotional basis for their work.” (New Contemporaries 1976)

Alongside shifting markets and artworld dynamics, new technologies, materials and formats of student work also undergo a significant change. Although by the late 1960s the types of works presented began to include a far wider range of media,⁵⁷ tensions around the acceptance of expanded practices in art schools are not only in the curriculum being taught but also come through generational frictions.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding an apparent resistance to the inclusion of new modes of practice, the enthusiasm and persistence by the Student Committee leads to the addition of a ‘Live Show’ to accompany the painting and sculpture exhibitions in 1976 and 1977. Segregated for the first two years, what is termed by New Contemporaries as ‘3rd Area Art’ (photography, installation, performance and moving image) becomes absorbed back into the main

⁵⁷ As stated in the introduction by Gabriel White, the 1968 Young Contemporaries exhibition “deliberately increased the scope of the exhibition by introducing student film and group light experiments” (White 1968).

⁵⁸ This is discussed by both Basil Beattie and Mike Collier when speaking about the New Contemporaries relaunch and activity in the 1970s – see Appendix – Beattie; Collier.

exhibition by 1978.^{59 60} Moving to the ICA – an organisation New Contemporaries has maintained a close alignment to – there is a renewed enquiry regarding the purpose of the exhibition, questioning:

“If the show is meant to be representative, then under its current structure, we have a contradiction, as you cannot ask selectors to operate on this level – obviously the selection of the selectors is anyway crucial.”
(Collier 1978)

Further echoing questions of representation and horizontality, a report by Mike Collier (Chair of the 1976 Student Committee and current Assistant Curator for ICA) highlights the disparity between practices and courses across institutions, and states that the exhibition needs to be more daring and explicit in outlining the types of practice, provide a critique of the work and the nature of art colleges.

Even with its new name and closer alignment to contemporary practice, as with the end of the 1960s reception to the exhibition continues to suffer in comparison to the heights of the early 1960s. A review from 1978 in *The Observer* states “The New Contemporaries exhibition at the ICA was frankly a disappointment” (*The Observer* 1978, ‘Arts & Artists’), although they do commend the attempt to revive the show in a climate that needs ‘outlets for their [students] work worse than ever’. The underwhelming reception becomes further compounded as the Arts Council threaten to withdraw funding and suggest the exhibition becomes a biennial. Staunch supporters of the earlier show, while they had discontinued touring a selection from the exhibition they had continued to guarantee against loss.⁶¹ Even though threatened, the Arts Council do resume their funding and the ICA continue to host (although no clear explanation is given as to why the Arts Council reversed their decision).

A recurring pattern within the Young-New Contemporaries history, the result of the pressure from critics and the Arts Council alike is that rather than diminished, the 1980 exhibition catalogue presents a much more comprehensive production than those that have come before. From the 1978 loose leaf sheets in a cardboard sleeve, the 1980 catalogue is more

⁵⁹ The submission form for students applying to New Contemporaries is likewise adjusted, enabling more diverse media entries to be considered.

⁶⁰ During this time, the process of submission also changes. As well as sending works to be selected in person (a considerable undertaking if you were not based in London – to the extent that during the Young Contemporaries period the Arts Council would arrange a ‘collection’ van to Colleges around the UK) submission more regularly beings to be through slide documentation and or written proposals. Some evidence of this material has been retained in the ICA records held at the Tate, as well as the 1976 Live Show catalogue in which the artists proposals are used to present each entry.

⁶¹ Richard Wentworth, who is the current Chair of the Permanent Committee at this time, attempts to remedy the situation and encourages the new Arts Director Peter Bird to attend. Following Bird’s non-attendance, the Arts Council send a letter stating ‘no go for funds in 1980’ (Wentworth 1979).

akin to a serious art publication in the format of an A4 glossy magazine, including black and white images of the works. Philanthropic support has also appeared to flourish, and a number of advertisements indicate a greater commercial sensibility in its production. The slightly uncertain air of the mid-1970s seems to have been overcome by a renewed cohesion and 'gloss'. However, this time rather than the critics, organisers or backers losing momentum it is the enthusiasm and participation of students appears to have waned.

In the forward to the 1980 catalogue Student Committee President Roger Manning and Publicity Secretary Mary McGee issue a call to arms, with an "irrational feeling of work seemingly being entered grudgingly" (New Contemporaries 1980, n.p.). Likewise, an accompanying 'Art Education' seminar event intended to provide a platform for student opinion is also under threat as not enough people are speaking. The introduction concludes with a bald statement regarding the amount of energy the Committees have exerted in producing the exhibition, and that without interest from students the show will not continue. The waning energy and enthusiasm seems at odds with the increased production of its publication, in which the 'Slickness Taboo' highlighted by Massouras seems to have come full circle. The increasingly professionalised production and commodification of art is, as ever, an ongoing concern.

Throughout Young-New Contemporaries the organisation of the exhibition, its presentation and reception can be seen to follow the educational, political and cultural concerns of the moment, including those of commodification. Chris Welsby discusses the continued debate regarding changing practices within the keynote address for 'Art Education', commenting on the changing parameters of practice towards a "more open-ended situation capable of investigating a wider spectrum of media and materials" (Welsby 1980, 'Art Education'). Even so, as he states, the 'trap of marketability' in an increasingly dematerialised practices is unavoidable: "Whether a diagram, a map, a set of instructions or a photographic record, the object is still the object and therefore a potential commodity." (ibid.). The emerging artistic disdain for the commercial sector is further compounded by the exponential returns in the secondary art market, for which artists receive no recompense even as their work increases in value.

Even with the tensions and turmoil underlying the presentation of the 1980 exhibition, over the next three years New Contemporaries has continued to grow in ambition and popularity. Declared as a "showcase for future artists" and highlighting previous successes Derek Jarman, John Maybury, Anish Kapoor who all showed for the first time in New Contemporaries, it is felt the exhibition reflects that "young British art is alive and kicking"

(New Contemporaries 1983, n.p.), despite the impact of the long-term economic recession putting future generations at risk. The long shadow of the Pop Art movement likewise appears to have been finally overcome, with less dependence on the validation of earlier figures. Further edification is also given to Collier's concerns regarding a more self-reflective, critical and transparent stance regarding the overall submission and selection process, with introductions of the discipline selectors commenting upon the submission quality and tendencies.

It is in 1984 that the move towards the format we are now familiar with begins to take shape, although with a few significant differences. The introduction to the catalogue is written by the students, and ownership by the student cohort in the running of the exhibition is seen as a vital and important part of the New Contemporaries context. Among many astute comments that they make, the story of how Young Contemporaries became the New Contemporaries shows an increasing awareness of the exhibitions' longevity. However, the difficulty of the task is hampered by the rotating voluntary committees and lack of record retention: a discontinuity that not only hampers piecing together a history that tells the story from the point of view of the exhibition organisers but also caused considerable problems in the realisation of each iteration at the time, "lead[ing] to a few too many shots in the dark" (ibid.). In order to establish a more stable basis, it is the 1984 committee that announce an intention to establish New Contemporaries as a limited company.

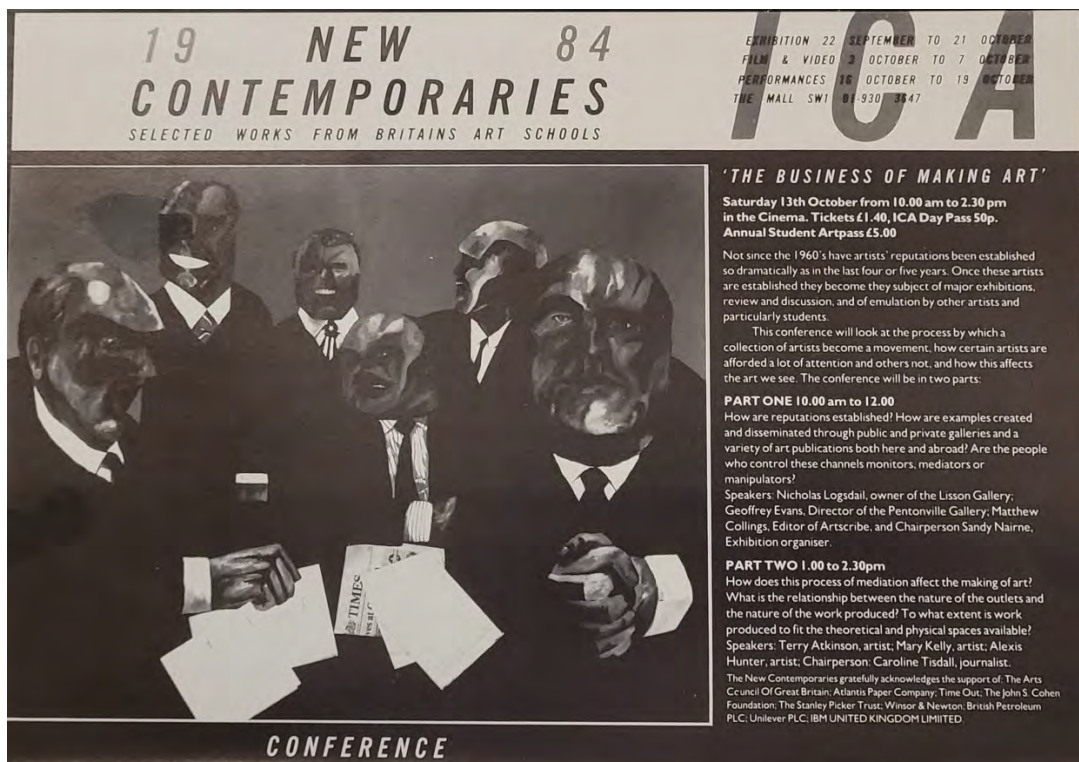


Figure 2: Conference pamphlet included in the catalogue for 'The Business of Making Art'. New Contemporaries catalogue, 1984. Courtesy of New Contemporaries.

Following the example set in previous years, associated seminar programming and critical commentary were also becoming de-rigueur. The 1984 discursive platform is a day-long conference on “The Business of Making Art” (Figure 2). In the entrepreneurial environment of the 1980s and the dynamics of dealer-critic-curator relationships, the acceleration of an artists’ career, first noted in the 1950 and 60s, comes full circle:

“Not since the 1960s have the artist’s reputations been established so dramatically as in the last four or five years. Once established, these artists become the subject of major exhibitions, review and discussion, prompting emulation by other artists, particularly students.” (New Contemporaries 1984, n.p.)

From years of economic decline, the 1980s move to enterprise and changing technologies were already beginning to have a critical impact.

In addition to the conference, the critical context of the exhibition is also reinforced through a call out for ‘The Sex of the Artists Matters’ in partnership with the Women Artists Slide Library, resulting in a series of written responses by the students. These discuss the position of women artists, but touch upon another shift within the parameters of art education, the professionalism of production through what is now seen as the ubiquitous ‘Artists’ Statement’, and question New Contemporaries as an exhibition for ‘best of’ versus a ‘selection of’ new artists in Britain. It also demonstrates an appetite for the exhibition to offer a platform through which to discuss contemporaneous issues in practice, such as new feminist discourse, new art histories and the commercialisation and mediation of work in the cultural market.⁶²

As the exhibition activities and Student Committee become more assertive, the increasing ambition puts New Contemporaries under increasing administrative pressure. Although the exhibition appears more polished, tensions with host institutions have not abated and the heightened production leaves the exhibition in financial arrears. In what is the most impressive undertaking yet, the 1986 exhibition moves in its entirety between three different cities, including London, Newcastle and Liverpool. Unable to sustain their momentum, the

⁶² *A New Art History* was the proposal for a conference in 1982 and went on to become an established term regarding an approach or method of study for history in academia. The conference in 1982 was organised by Middlesex Polytechnic in London, and Block, a visual culture magazine published from 1979 – 1989 (Jõekalda 2012). The subject of New Art History and what it encompasses varies dependent on the point of view taken, with perspectives from post-colonial pluralities, psychoanalysis, or feminist debates such as those led by Griselda Pollock, as discussed in *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (Harris 2001).

Arts Council commissions a feasibility study to assess its continued viability (Stokes 1986). It is in the ambition of the 1986 exhibition however that the seeds of possibility for a new organisational vision emerge.

Adapting to the changing cultural environments, the exhibition had already begun to react to the Arts Council's new aims regarding equability between London and the regions.⁶³ Taking inspiration from the early Arts Council touring of the exhibition, the 1986 exhibition travels from the ICA in London to the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle, before finally being shown at the Bluecoat and Hanover Gallery in Liverpool. This time, despite the level of applications remaining high the final selection of work is much smaller, as rather than only a portion of work from the London exhibition travelling as in Phase One the exhibition as a whole moves between each venue. With the accompanying essay commissioned from Lambirth, and despite its subsequent hiatus, the 1986 exhibition marks an important watershed in the organisation's evolution.

At the end of his essay reviewing *Young to New Contemporaries* through the first two phases of the exhibition, Lambirth celebrates the perseverance of the New Contemporaries in the face of its problems and instability. In managing to remain at heart a student show, he also voices his worry that New Contemporaries it is in danger of becoming a professional organisation, with the implication that it will lose its unique status and commitment to student work. In the recurring themes regarding uncomfortable relationship contemporary art has with commercialisation and commodification (Graw 2009; Massouras 2013) and the concerns of the consequences it can have on artistic development (Lambirth 1986; Massouras 2013), it may appear that with the incorporation and relaunch of New Contemporaries following Lambirth's plea what he feared did indeed come to pass. Alternatively, the need and ability for both the organisation and the artists to adapt to the changing landscape of contemporary demands is also perhaps what underlies its longevity.

Phase Three: 1988–present

New Contemporaries resumes in 1988 as a registered company, with the first exhibition launching in 1989. The Feasibility Report carried out by Richard Stokes resulted in the formation of a Board of Trustees, who meet for the first time on 17 January 1989. The Trustees comprise of Richard Stokes, Vanessa Jackson, Julia Peyton-Jones, David Manley, and Company Secretary Tony Patterson. The first paid member of staff is Paul Bradley,

⁶³ This is highlighted in the *Glory of the Garden* report published by the Arts Council in 1984. In some part, it can be seen as a reiteration and reaffirmation of the aims set out in the Plans for An Art Centre in 1949 (ACGB 1949).

employed as the New Contemporaries Administrator. British Telecom (BT) have also been secured as a sponsor, with a commitment for funding over the next five years.

The relaunch, hosted by ICA, is introduced as the “best work selected from art schools and colleges throughout the United Kingdom, and which acts as a catalyst for the work of young British artists.” (New Contemporaries 1989) The record of identifying past successes as a platform to launch the ‘next big thing’ is quick to be pointed out, but with four decades of prior activity in which thousands of artists were shown this is remarkably easy to achieve. Notwithstanding the ups and downs of the exhibitions’ reception, each year the exhibition platformed *at least* one artist who went on to have marked success. Reflecting on the ‘listing’ tendency in the New Contemporaries published material, even when gathering names from those who managed to achieve wider international acclaim, the list of those that would be imminently recognisable is extensive.

These past success stories listed in the 1989 Press Release feature artists such as Gillian Ayres, John Bratby, Frank Auerbach, Bernard Cohen, Cragie Aitchison, R. B. Kitaj, Michael Sandle, Howard Hodgkin and David Hockney. What is significant here is the reliance on the earlier Young Contemporaries, with the period of the early 1960s increasingly mythologized. Whether this is an issue of known quantities, record keeping, or organisational preference is unclear. However, with the longer lag time between their participation, recognition, and the present, it could be argued that they represent a greater cultural validity as they have become further entrenched in the British art canon.

The acceptance of the organisation's new status quo, embedded in the new entrepreneurial scene of the 1980s, is evident in the language used in the 1989 press release. From ‘young artists ripe for exposure’ to the chance for professional galleries and institutions to view ‘new and untapped talent’, the concept of investment in the new as ‘future value’ sees the language of the arts organisation catch up to the hyperbole of marketing campaigns. Initially appearing in a similar vein to the motivation and appeals for sales in the early 1950s, the exclusivity of the contemporary ‘art market’ is now the predominant target rather than the past appeals aimed at the general public.⁶⁴ However, with prices of works and/or sales of works unmentioned within the catalogue or marketing materials, the art market-dealer dynamic is obfuscated from public view.

⁶⁴ In the first few years post-1988 the success of artists such as Damien Hirst and Gillian Wearing as YBAs echoes the commercial viability of the enterprise as it was introduced four decades previously. Although exhibit and sales numbers are smaller, the shift in market value of new artists’ work has risen.

Tracking the turn to youth and the beginning of the ‘emerging’ artist⁶⁵ through the phenomenon of Young Contemporaries, Massouras utilises a quote from an RCA tutor regarding the tantalizing “whiff of the day-after-tomorrow”⁶⁶ (Massouras 2013, p 161) . Travelling forward to the prominence of the ‘now’ in the late 20th century⁶⁷, the concept of ‘future value’ sees art markets as sensationalist high stakes operations.⁶⁸ Even with the most notable economic turnover of art being in the secondary market, i.e. auction houses and re-sale dealers, the speculative gain of investing in new artists celebrity cache - and with a cultural sphere waiting to usher in the ‘next big thing’ – sees the entrepreneurial spirit of the 1980s meet growing generations of students working in an expanded field of practice. While Massouras’ thesis argues for relocation of the young artist phenomenon in Britain from the 1980s to the 1950s, the YBAs appear as a culminating point to the radical shifts in culture and commerce that have entwined the discussion throughout.

As we come to the 1990s, the rumbling discord between corporate influence in cultural activity continues to be exacerbated through the “co-dependency between art and the market” which is still “matched in degree by a notorious need for distancing” (Graw 2009, p. 81) . As artists and public institutions look to disavow commercialism, the lines between the two have become increasingly permeable. In the book *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (2009) , art theorist and historian Isabelle Graw draws on the changing environment of the late 20th century, the rise of the ‘celebrity’, and Bourdieu’s ‘credit and capital of trust’ (1977, p. 119) to outline not only the impact of the market on art production, but equally the power of the artist (in the form of cultural credit) in directing the market. As Graw notes, the market value is much easier to define than the machinations of cultural worth, and perhaps why New Contemporaries is often subjected to such a market-centric weighing up of its activity.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ ‘Emerging artist’ positioned as a particularly commodified entity in relation to the new art markets arising from the 1950s onwards.

⁶⁶ Richard Guyatt, who became Rector for the RCA, quoted by Massouras from ‘Art and Indolence: a Guide to the Art Student of Today’, Motif 1 (November 1958, p. 53).

⁶⁷ As artists are increasingly concerned with the present, the ‘avant garde’, the cultural state of continual ‘newness’ is also expressed by many contemporary theorists, not least Boris Groys in his article *Comrades of Time* (2009) or publication *On the New* (2014 [1992]).

⁶⁸ The proliferations of publications such as Gerald Reitlinger’s *The Economics of Taste* volumes (1961) in particular are noted as translating art into the equivalent of stocks and shares: “In this context a young generation offered not only obsolescence but a larger time span for investments’ fruition, so therefore a longer and safer bet.” (Massouras 2013, p 161).

⁶⁹ Working in a progressively globalised arena, New Contemporaries must take on the elevated expectations of participants and audience. Not only in order to sustain the corporate partnerships that enable their activity, but to match the demands of ‘professionalised’ art students. Students who by this point are facing the reduction and then loss of student grants, resulting in a slow transition from students in Higher Education as supported recipients to students as customers. Equally, in light of higher student loans and cost of living, there is a further emphasis on future financial viability and professional career opportunities.

However, their symbolic value is equally important, though less easy to quantify (Graw 2009, pp 27-33). Repeated sentiments of students, participants and critics noting the value of the Young and New Contemporaries – of the nonmonetary variety - is spotted throughout the records reviewed, and not least repeated by nearly all of the participants I have interviewed during the course of my research.⁷⁰ And yet, when asked what it is that is so valuable about the exhibition beyond any marketable ‘credit’ gained by the participant, there appears to be no easy answer. Upon meetings with the staff and Board Chair during the early stages of the research, there was an emphasis on moving away from a generational determination of New Contemporaries and a general concern over the correlation of the exhibition with expressions of professionalisation, which was seen as misrepresenting the organisation's aims. However, despite aligning themselves more closely as an extension of art education, the changing economic environments, advancing technologies and a hyper-consumerist culture means that the segregation of New Contemporaries as outside of market conditions is not possible.

Returning to the late 1990s and early 2000s, the exhibition during this period is primarily led by the Board of Trustees and operates with only one permanent member of paid staff. Attempting to respond more critically to the changing artworld, markets and education developments (also reinforced in the Feasibility Report by Stokes regarding the disparity between London and the provinces) the exhibition follows the 1986 example by touring to different cities in the UK each year. For the first year they retain their London base, starting at the ICA before moving to Cornerhouse in Manchester (which until 1993 the city is also home to the Northern Young Contemporaries at The Whitworth Gallery). However, from this point on the relationship with ICA ceases as the exhibition seeks to distance itself from being perceived as a ‘London exhibition’. In 1990-91, the exhibition tours to seven venues, with London placed last on the roster; and from 1992 to 1995 (the last run of BT sponsorship) they forgo London entirely.

Equally, the selection process put in place during the 1970s-80s iteration has become more refined. From 1989 onwards, 3 to 5 selectors are chosen by the Board of Trustees each year.⁷¹ These include leading arts and visual culture figures within the UK, from artists and art critics to dealers and curators.⁷² As with the previous Arts Council touring exhibition, the

⁷⁰ The interviews with past participants will be discussed further in Chapter Three: Locating the Archive.

⁷¹ The comments regarding the derivative nature of selection by the selectors have been echoed in past reviews, not least the Art & Artists review in 1978. However, it is perhaps more pertinent at this point as the selection panel is much smaller and reviews all work regardless of media.

⁷² Notably, selectors have always been from within the UK apart from 1990-91, when the selection committee included selectors from Europe in recognition of imminent arrival of the European Union.

challenge of changing venues would imply the number of works are likewise limited. However, the refinement in selection also indicates the influence of new curatorial practices as salon style shows become outmoded.⁷³ Described by the New Contemporaries Directors in 1992 as a “sparser and much sharpened” exhibition, the numbers of artists accepted vary from the smallest selection of 22 to the largest of 75 over the next three decades.⁷⁴

The process of selection has also advanced, with all applications going through a slide selection process before a short list of approximately 100 to 150 works are viewed in person. Sacha Craddock (Board Chair 1996 - 2021) , Des Laurence (Board Member 1996 – 2010) and Bev Bytheway (Administrator 1996 - 2009) all comment that despite not seeing all works in person, the labour involved in the slide selection process remains extensive. From the lugging of boxes of slides in and out of buildings and up and down stairs, to the immense organisation in loading the slide carousels and keeping track of applicants, the selection process is an extensive undertaking.⁷⁵ From the outset of this new edition, art critic Sacha Craddock becomes a leading figure in the organisation. A selector in 1989 alongside artists Veronica Ryan and Richard Wilson, Craddock returns to New Contemporaries as a Board member three years later (1992) . Subsequently appointed as Board Chair by 1996 and attracting the attention of exhibition funders, she remains in post for the next twenty-five years.⁷⁶ From a turnover of permanent and student committee members that occurs regularly, the stabilization and continuity of leadership reaches towards the opposite extreme.⁷⁷

Support from the Arts Council continues to be central to their survival, sponsorship from external sources remains vital to New Contemporaries ability to sustain their operations. During the same year of Craddock’s transition into the Chair position and with the term expiring on their BT sponsorship, the exhibition manages to secure temporary funding from the Nigel Moores Family Charitable Foundation. In 1997 the exhibition is sponsored by Becks, reigniting their image by lending the exhibition a further youthful and urban

⁷³ The paired down exhibition perhaps answers the issue of horizontality raised by the 1968 student committee – each artist has ‘won’ the award, so to speak, without diminishing the acclaim through dilution of numbers. Inference from organisational documents and through discussion with staff also implies independent awards and prizes to participants are discouraged, potentially due to the conflict of interest with the commercial backers to the exhibition as a whole.

⁷⁴ Until this year, 57 participants was the largest exhibition during this Phase. However, this has just been surpassed by the 2021 selection of 75 New Contemporaries participants by selectors Hew Locke, Tai Shani and Michele Williams Gamaker. While Chair of the Board Sacha Craddock has typically monitored the selection process, each selection committee is free to choose the number of participants accepted.

⁷⁵ With regular entries of 1000 plus, it is over a week spent in a darkened room viewing images – a process which remains the same today, even if the uploading of digital slides proves slightly more efficient.

⁷⁶ Craddock has remained Chair of New Contemporaries to date. However, she is due to step down in December 2021 after a quarter century term at the helm.

⁷⁷ At the same time, what has to date been a London exhibition (even though it has no permanent home) becomes even more peripatetic, reviving the previous Arts Council Touring ambitions by travelling to venues across the UK each year.

credence. As in the past, when support from sponsors provided awards and prizes that helped elevate the 'young' connection for youth centric brands, the low costs and high image value of student exhibitions proves mutually attractive.⁷⁸

While the last years of the 20th century remain financially precarious, ongoing financial support is secured with Bloomberg Philanthropies from 2000, with the exhibition becoming Bloomberg New Contemporaries (BNC). Today, many visitors to the exhibition have only known it by the BNC moniker, and the prestige of the Bloomberg empire – as a financial powerhouse and philanthropic entity - has also lent the organisation a certain cache. The Feasibility Report carried out by Richard Stokes in 1987 also played a large hand in prompting a renewed ambition for the exhibition as a headlining event within the British visual arts calendar,⁷⁹ with the recommendation by Stokes that the exhibition could play a larger role than merely as a platform for student work.⁸⁰

To this extent, early iterations in the 1990s sees an extension of education and community activity. In 1992, as the exhibition toured to Orpheus Gallery in Belfast, a series of educational workshops were conducted in the gallery in a variety of media as well as a Colloquium on Arts Education and Practice attracted over 200 attendees. However, from the mid-1990s to 2009, Bev Bytheway is the sole Administrator for the organisation,⁸¹ leaving the organisation often over-extended. Working closely with Chair Sacha Craddock (and on occasion Des Laurence) to organise and deliver the exhibitions, with some ad hoc assistance from further Board members, temporary staff and volunteers, production of a broader engagement programme is limited. Furthermore, the now extended catalogue with critical reviews and selector comments is produced as a matter of course. Despite this, over the course of the next three decades an accompanying programme of talks, events and seminars

⁷⁸ In the early to mid-20th century, corporate sponsorship was framed strategically as part of an organisations' philanthropic activity. While that is still the case today, sponsorship as a marketing strategy is much more clearly outlined. A paper published in 2015 by the International Journal of Advertising reviewed corporate sponsorship of 54 large companies in the UK, of which they found arts sponsorship was mainly a public relations activity (Witcher, Graigen, Culligan and Harvey 1991, pp 13-33)

⁷⁹ While the Feasibility Report invigorated the aims of the organisation in establishing itself as a dominant player in new artist platforms, a sponsorship evaluation produced by ArtLink in 1990-91 highlights that this still required further work. From a survey carried out with attendees, the exhibition had no problems in associating itself to the terms 'contemporary' and 'quality' whereas over half of the respondents they questioned disagreed or were neutral that the exhibition was of 'national importance'. (ArtLink 1991)

⁸⁰ Stokes report from 1987 states "The exhibition has had a larger role than merely as a platform for student work. In recent years New Contemporaries has acted as a forum in which new ideas could be presented and issues debated." In the introductory remarks to the 2019 exhibition at Leeds Art Gallery by New Contemporaries current Director, Kirsty Ogg refers to this statement, citing the relaunch as a pivotal moment for the exhibition for its current direction in becoming the 'leading open submission platform for the UK's emerging artists'.

⁸¹ Bev Bytheway was initially based at Cornerhouse in Manchester, helping forge a relationship for the organisation both there and in Liverpool.

make regular appearances.⁸²

The rise of the curator within institutions is also being felt during this period, causing difficulties in the securing of venues for the exhibition (Appendix - Bytheway). With more institutional programming looking to thematic shows, the prospect of an open submission exhibition of newly graduated art students becomes less attractive. Moreover, the changing concepts of contemporary curating means that in the hierarchy of curatorial activity, the aesthetic arrangement of selected work through an open submission is seen as a minimal curatorial act. This leads to several years in the early 2000s of pared back venues and activities. Despite this, the exhibition does secure a high-profile host in the Barbican, exhibiting in the Curve space as well as the Art Gallery from 2002 to 2005.

From their uncertain position in reaching a national profile in 1992, by 2005, *The Independent on Sunday* signals the exhibitions success at reaching the top of the pile:

“The day can not be far off when an annual art contest is set up to award a prize for the best annual art contest. When that self-gratifying day comes, Bloomberg New Contemporaries is sure to be on the competition’s first shortlist in the Guess the Next Big Thing category.”
(Derwent 2005, p 7)

It seems the reviewer is also persuaded of the further aims of New Contemporaries operating as a de-centralised extension of the public sector, with “the heart-warming knowledge that their work will be hung in public spaces around Britain – the competition’s non-London-centric nature is one of its pluses” (ibid., Derwent).⁸³ While commercial sales are not overtly part of the story, the speculation over future success is firmly entrenched as part of the exhibitions’ attraction, from the ‘Guess the Next Big Thing’ to the mention of the previous

⁸² Extra-curricular programming picks up dramatically from 2011, most likely due to the substantial expansion of the administrative team.

⁸³ Not all responses to the peripatetic nature of the exhibition are positive however, such as the review by Waldemar Januszczak for *The Sunday Times Culture* edition on 2 December 2007:

“Also unfortunate is the show’s annoying locational display. When I started writing about it in, in the 1980s, it popped up annually at the ICA – surely the perfect venue. These days, however, it tiptoes around provincial Britain and no longer has an influential London home. This nomadic uncertainty robs the show of much of its sense of event.” (Januszczak 2007)

‘winners’ reaching high enough accolades to become selectors for that years’ show.^{84 85}

As ever, the question over what exactly New Contemporaries is continues to be raised. David Barrett’s review in *Art Monthly* in 2007 comments on the trends of art students in emulating popular artists (which in 2007 is Luc Tuymman), much as many other reviewers have pointed to throughout New Contemporaries history:

“But boy oh boy is Luc Tuymman’s popular! Whatever iconoclastic impulses there may be among art students, there is always one painter who produces a group of followers in New Contemporaries.” (Barrett 2007, pp 30-31)

Not exactly disparaging of New Contemporaries premiss, the tone nevertheless implies a potential lethargy in viewing new artists’ work. Another article in *Art Monthly*, but this time in 2009, comments on New Contemporaries purpose continue to be questioned:

“...should New Contemporaries aim to be something like an objective cross-section of nascent talent, or a good-looking, cohesive exhibition, reflective of particular taste(s)? Might it somehow be both?” (Herbert 2010, pp 27-28)

Whether New Contemporaries is the best of the best, a selection of, or a reflection of the selectors’ own styles, or even in the ‘school of’ as emulators of artists who have reached canonical fame, is perhaps unanswerable.

Despite whether the core purpose of the show can be agreed upon, New Contemporaries has solidified their position within the milieu of new artists and ones to watch. The rapid advancement of technology in the early 2000s has already led to the establishment of the organisation website, and a project with aFoundation in 2007 sees the realisation of their exhibition history from 1989 onwards presented online. With a clear presentation of at least

⁸⁴ Even as Derwent celebrates New Contemporaries as a platform, the actual review for the art work on display is less complimentary:

“By these lights, Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2005 comes as something of a disappointment, the art in it having pretty well nothing to do with Big Things and sensation. If you were looking for a single word to describe the vast range of work in the show (and you’d probably be foolish to), then that word would probably be ‘reflective’... There is also, to put it mildly, an awful lot of crap: too much of that sub-School-of-Tuymans painting now found on every gallery’s backlist, of half-digested Neomodernism and Neo-Constructivism; too much art school.”(Derwent 2007, p 7)

⁸⁵ Externally, New Contemporaries appears to be receiving a warm reception. Internally, the strain on resources is being felt. From funding provided by John Moores in 1996 and a commitment to exhibiting in Liverpool, a partnership with Liverpool Biennial is established from the outset of the event in 1998. A successful enterprise and still ongoing, the partnership to the new Biennial also sees the ambition of the exhibitions and development of venues result in rising costs. The increased proportion of video and video projection is also incurring further expense.

three-decades of their activity, in 2009 the organisation also appears to solidify even further. The relationship of the organisation to ICA is reformed and staffing levels are expanded. Rather than a solo Administrator, an internal review sees Rebecca Heald engaged as Director, supported by Programme Manager Sandra Mahon. As the organisation approaches its 60th anniversary, mention of the potential of an archive is raised regularly within the organisation memos, including a proposition for a New Contemporaries Fellowship.⁸⁶ In the same document, comments regarding New Contemporaries legacy, although “not necessarily endorsing the star-system” identifies the public and commercial success past participants have achieved (New Contemporaries c.2009, uncatalogued document).⁸⁷

During the following years, responding to the continued economic downturn and the rise in tuition fees (from £3290 to £9000), New Contemporaries initiates further programming strands including a series of ‘The Trouble With...’ seminars, as well as various symposia, talks and events. With a focus on arts education, practice and professional development (professionalisation now a *fait accompli* rather than a future spectre), this advances the organisation's emphasis on providing an extension of the public sector rather than as a commercial enterprise. Even so, an underlying market function is unavoidable. Writing for *Apollo* in 2014, writer and critic Jack Orlik cites their annual appearance as serving “at least in part, to dole out social capital to the young contemporary art set.”⁸⁸ (Orlik 2014, online)

A month earlier, Heald, who had stepped down as New Contemporaries Director in 2013, also published an article in *Apollo*. Examining what Heald termed the ‘mixed fortunes’ of the exhibition, she queried “whether its current form and approach is still what ‘new’ artists need” (Heald 2014, p 34). The difficulty of defining what the exhibition is and should be is reiterated throughout the exhibitions’ history. Speaking to comments made by past participants (and non-participants), Heald recalled:

“...everyone had a story to tell me. John Stezaker remembered having been to the exhibition, though he could recall no specific details other than a fire; when Sandy Nairne worked on it, as director of exhibitions at

⁸⁶ The Fellowship, to be co-hosted with a Higher Education establishment, had already been voiced in internal documents from 2009 with the aim of compiling archival documents.

⁸⁷ A ‘New Contemporaries 60’ proposal further emphasises the potential for their archive to develop a “rich and complex series of narratives and stories that should prove a compelling basis for the development of television, radio or other media productions for 2009 and beyond.” (New Contemporaries c. 2009, uncatalogued document). Heald, who was appointed at the tail end of these celebrations, also responds to the archival influences within the programming.

⁸⁸ This same understanding of the exhibition appears in an application to the show ten years earlier. Although not accepted, *The Hut Project: New Contemporaries* was an intriguing proposal initiated in 2006 regarding the exhibition as an arbiter of emerging artistic talent and the value of achieving recognition through being accepted into the show (*The Hut Project* 2010, online).

the ICA in the early '80s, he had to negotiate Mona Hatoum's plan to have a video camera in the lavatories live-feeding into the gallery; Pablo Bronstein spoke about it in venomous terms, having applied on every possible occasion but having never been selected. Everyone also had an opinion about the organisation's role and what it should be doing." (Heald 2014, online)

A question that still has no clear answer, responding to current contexts and continuing to question how the organisation may best serve emerging and early career artists has become a core mission for the organisation.

Under the new directorship of Kirsty Ogg, the organisation has continued to work towards how to best support artists in a period further revolutionised by digital communication and ameliorate the gap in provision between education and the public sector. Alternative education programmes, studio bursaries, artist residencies and mentoring regularly take place, as well as expanding the criteria of applicants to include non-degree awarding programmes.⁸⁹ Particularly for a generation that do not see themselves reflected in the professionalised institutional structures of the art world today.⁹⁰

Although a conversation being had increasingly in the present time, the expense and precarity of arts as a viable career path today has not appeared to be altered from seven decades ago, when in the very first *Forward to Young Contemporaries* Philip James commented:

"To the economist, the men and women who set out on the career of artist may well look a foolhardy kind. Between learning the art and earning a living there is a long, lean spell. Until he can sell, the artist finds it very hard to show. Until he has shown, and more than once, he does not sell. No certificate or diploma can give him any expectations. The artist who has once discovered how to sell his work may have no great difficulty in exhibiting it. But, when earning has begun, there are no salaries, and no pensions. There is no hierarchy of jobs. Seniority is of no avail." (James 1949, n.p.)

While conditions and technologies may have changed, there has remained a steady

⁸⁹ The inclusion of non-degree awarding programmes is from 2018, in recognition of the increasing number of alternative education courses.

⁹⁰ 'Professionalisation' appearing as a fallacy for many in which an artistic 'career' rarely leads to a viable future without taking on a plethora of other work to support themselves.

circulating of ideas, challenges and obstacles that have been faced by more than Young or New Contemporaries but can be seen in the temporal gathering of its component parts in each iteration.

In a post-Brexit era and in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the exhibition necessarily had to adapt again. In 2020 the exhibition was launched for the first time online. Designed by Hato, the concept of ‘bubbles’ was presented as a metaphor for connectivity and community, with each artist designing their own bespoke ‘bubble’ experience in digital space. While Covid-19 has accelerated conversations regarding digital production and delivery of work, changes in practice that have no intension of being shown in an exhibition context – through digitised constructs, socially engaged practices or other formats – continue to push New Contemporaries to adapt, establish broader support structures and create platforms that can exist beyond the event of the exhibition.

In 2016, New Contemporaries reasserted their previous push for archival research. In partnership with Nottingham Trent University a call was put forward for doctoral candidates to undertake research that responded to a “general imperative to collect, store and recover historical knowledge and institutional memory” (Ogg 2019) . The specifications for the call out positioned ‘archives’ at the forefront of the research; how they may orientate the organisation within the contemporary art period and how extant materials may be expanded through contemporaneous research activity. The focus given to the archive and curating over an art historical enquiry during the early research stage also had a significant impact on the approach I have taken. Working from a background in arts management and curation, the role of archives within contemporary arts programming, curatorial practice and art theory has strongly influenced both theoretical and practical outcomes.

Reviewing the legacy of New Contemporaries and the recurring themes raised within their archival materials, the reiteration of New Contemporaries purpose and role within the contemporary British arts sector naturally sees a turn towards the archive in order to understand what it has been, and therefore where it might go. Likewise, in Heald’s Appollo article in 2014 she also turned to the archive to consider the potential future of the exhibition. However, as Lambirth discovered before Heald, and Massouras and myself have discovered since, much of this history is fragmented and difficult to find. More information is gathered through rumour and informal in-person dialogues than direct documentation. From the newspaper reviews, comments from past participants and mythologized ‘boom’ periods, New Contemporaries has had to contend with moments of disjuncture, changing educational and political environments, as well as being subject to varying levels of interest

from both the public and participants.

While remaining without its own venue may have allowed a certain flexibility, the challenges of the fluid, uncertain and ever-changing atmosphere it operates within has resulted in a surprisingly resilient organisation. In its failure to materialize due to funding crises, disinterest, venue conflicts, and internal tensions, it has always managed to resurface, with the next wave of enthusiasts moving it forward. Heald signals the prior moments in which the students have led the charge as when the exhibition has been most successful, if simultaneously also most under threat. However, in a current cultural landscape that has such high expectations of new artists, with the number of students, shows, and competitions far above the scale seen in the post-war country in which it was first initialized, a student-led exhibition seems not only out of reach but impractical. Establishing “What makes New Contemporaries different and necessary?” (ibid., Heald) is of greater concern.

Examining Heald’s question within the subsequent chapters, the next chapter will begin by following her example and turning towards the question of the archive. As an organisation that is a much younger formation than the occurrence of its activities, the desire to reconnect and establish their historical longevity within a cultural environment that is increasingly concerned with heritage as a point of affirmation is understandable. Therefore, I will initially review the set of circumstances that gave rise to the impetus to review their archive, including the influences seen in the cultural sector within the UK, before examining broader literature regarding archives and archival practice.

Chapter Two: An Archival Impetus

This chapter outlines New Contemporaries (recurring) desire for an archive, beginning with the contexts in which the subject of their archive arose. From what ‘an archive’ entails, an overview of the literature regarding archival theory, its implications in archival practice, and perspectives on historical narrative, will explore the conceptualisation of archive power-dynamics, its relationship to memory and notions of historical fragmentation. Concluding, as an organisation looking to its historical material in the present time, I will discuss the move towards the archive as a site of discursive activity.

Initially reviewing the organisational drives to develop their archival holdings and research their history, the first section of the chapter will explore the moments in which the organisation has considered their archive, its potential, and work in locating historical information. From mentions of the possible cultural and historical significance of their past, to moves towards developing their own archive, it is clear the lack of continuity for their early history has presented a barrier to the organisation in recovering knowledge of their history. Further to this, the capacity of the organisation, in terms of staff time and funding, has also presented a challenge to the collation of archival material and dissemination of archival activity.

As the organisation has reached significant durational milestones, a focus on their legacy has come to the fore. Documented within the more recent organisational records, the project in 2007 with aFoundation and discussions of the ‘living archive’⁹¹ led to a preliminary database of their exhibition history. As the only material available in-house, the project was limited in scope to outlining activity from 1989 onwards, with no detail of the earlier iterations. As the organisation has reached their 60th and 70th anniversary anniversaries, the question of evidencing their legacy through the establishment of an extended archive that includes their earlier history has been raised. As a result, and in conjunction with my research, further archival activity has been prompted within the organisation, including the initial cataloguing of their in-house materials.⁹²

In tandem with the longevity of the organisation, debates in archival discourse have been

⁹¹ Archival records, opposed to art collections for example, are traditionally referred to as ‘dead records’. As digital technologies have progressed, the realisation of the continuum of archive records as an ongoing process of management, transposition and maintenance, led to the application of the term ‘living archive’ for digital forms.

⁹² The cataloguing occurred directly after my research took place and therefore reference to these items in thesis remain listed as uncatalogued.

significantly influenced by theorists such as Foucault and Derrida, as well as broader discussions in twentieth century European philosophy. Therefore, the second part of the chapter will outline movements from the 1960s onwards, particularly post-structuralist developments that led to a questioning of hierarchical structures in the storing and preservation of knowledge, their absences and gaps, and the use of the archive in artistic practice (Foster 2004; Breakell 2008). Concurrent to these discussions, debates regarding archives and their position as evidentiary resources saw similar tensions arise in literary theory (Buchanan 2010). Resulting in a division between the writing of history and archives, this saw Archival Science as an empirical and objective study become its own distinct discipline in contrast to historical research, which was increasingly viewed as inherently subjective.

By the mid-1990s, the galvanisation of archival activity across disciplines led to what has been termed an archival turn (Simon 2002). As the practices, materials and discipline of archives became challenged by actors outside the field, an 'archival impulse' saw the aesthetics and signifiers of archives utilised within visual arts as a form of institutional critique. As the modes and materials of archives were deconstructed both philosophically and artistically, the archive became a site of excavation (Foster 2004, p.22). However, while its constructs were critiqued and questioned, in the reformation of archives into new orientations, the archive transformed from a site of excavation to one of construction. In an era of replication, rapidly changing technologies and a destabilisation of nation-states, the emphasis of the archive on the preservation of collective cultural memory and cultural value has likewise turned towards the (re)construction of cultural memories (Assmann 1995; Kaplan 1994; Mhembe 2002). For New Contemporaries questioning their archive today, their current lack of an archive also offers an opportunity to reconstruct and reorientate how they manage and present their history.

Concluding the chapter, the current position of New Contemporaries in the British arts landscape and their disjointed archival legacy is discussed. As an agile and reflexive organisation, new pressures and challenges following the 2008 financial crash has resulted in organisations needing to evidence their cultural value more clearly (Belfiore 2018; DCMS 2021; Grossick & Kaszynska 2014; Kaszynska 2018). However, responding to institutional critique and new institutionalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, new positions on the archive as a generative and discursive resource sees organisations needing to consider not only how they form and manage their archive, but also its productive function.

An Archive for New Contemporaries

The purpose and potentiality of archives in general, or of a particular one, necessarily changes and adapts according to its conditions. In the call out for the PhD in 2016, New Contemporaries framed the request for historical research in relation to and arising from an archive as responding to a lack of organisational knowledge and to help situate themselves as a contributor to the phenomenon of the contemporary in British arts over the last century. However, during the initial phase of the research - after questioning what exactly an archive was - it became clear that while some archival materials had been identified externally and organisational documents for post-1988 were available in their offices, New Contemporaries itself did not have an archive. Therefore, for an organisation that has had several starting points and earlier iterations, as well as little ownership over materials from the first four decades, building upon 'an archive' becomes logistically more convoluted.

Through the work carried out by Mary Doyle (c. 2009) and research by Massouras, I had some knowledge of where New Contemporaries' archival records might be and what they might convey, but this gave me little perspective on the extent of those materials and what they actually looked like, much as examining a catalogue description is not the same as the reality of the listed item (Dunley and Pugh 2021). Therefore, as described in the introduction to Chapter One, a preliminary action became retracing Doyle's and Massouras's steps in order to examine the materials available in more depth, as well as establishing where or if further materials might be located and in what forms. As the types of material and contents started to build a narrative of New Contemporaries history and their relationship to the British cultural landscape, it also opened up a broader question of what an archive for the organisation - formed today - might look like. If materials are held in disparate locations and in different forms, with a number of ownership and copyright challenges to navigate, can they form or become part of *an archive* that speaks to the full extent of New Contemporaries history?

As discussed in the conclusion to Chapter One, comments regarding the organisation's awareness of possible cultural and monetary value, with the desire to compile and acknowledge their history, have occurred at several points during their history. One of the earliest mentions of their potential importance demonstrates great forethought in a note within the Arts Council files, written on 15 October 1971 after the initial programme has disbanded:

"If at any time there is a spring cleaning and destruction of old files it is very important NOT to destroy any of the Young Contemporaries

correspondence. Sometimes student information emerges from correspondence which could be invaluable many moons later, thanks, Art Dept.” (Arts Council, 1971)

As the Arts Council retained the records in relation to the touring edition of the show, it appears that the Arts Department’s words were heeded. However, the same preservation ethos was not adopted by organising committees for the larger London exhibition. As rotating voluntary committees, with the majority of the practical work carried out by students, continuity and preservation were a low priority. Equally, with no central office or cohesive entity to retain them, they did not have the same opportunity to preserve material.

Similarly, in the next phase of the exhibition from 1974-1986, the same rotating committees and student run operations resulted in an equal lack of evidentiary records. However, as the exhibition became affiliated to ICA in 1978, an accumulation of documents centred around ICA’s interaction have been kept. In these records, the failure of New (nee Young) Contemporaries to retain any of their own records does become a point of tension in a series of letters between the ICA as exhibition hosts and the student committee Publicity Secretary:

“I have not been able to write an article on New Contemporaries for inclusion in your Jan/Feb magazine... there are LITERALLY NO records of past exhibitions from 1974.” (Bailey 1971)

Andrew Lambirth likewise alludes to the difficulty of tracking down historical information in his essay *New Contemporaries: Past and Present* (Figure 3).

However, as the exhibition becomes a registered organisation in 1988, the continuity of its records improved. With a Board of Trustees and an administrative staff member, the functions of the exhibition are able to be more clearly tracked. Further, although there was no designated ‘home’ to the exhibition the continuity of Board and staff members (for example, Sacha Craddock was Chair from 1996 to 2021 and Bev Bytheway was Administrator from 1996 to 2009), meant records largely remained with the same people. Later, as the organisation gained its own office space in 2004, records could be centralised. Even so, in the changing of administrative offices and general maintenance, inevitable clear outs and losses have occurred.



Figure 3: Andrew Lambirth, *New Contemporaries: Past and Present*, *New Contemporaries* 1986. Courtesy of *New Contemporaries*.

Although overall the last three decades have had a greater continuity, changes in the cultural and educational landscape, organisational development, and funding struggles have meant New Contemporaries has still regularly experienced periods of instability. Remaining flexible to changes in ongoing conditions, alongside adapting a new format of geographic diversity (travelling to at least one city outside of London each year from 1989 onwards), the organisation has also projected a sense of vigour. With its generational emphasis keeping the most recent graduates at the forefront of its activity, it is not surprising that from those outside the organisation recurring responses are surprise regarding the longevity of the organisation.⁹³ When talking to others about my research, even though many people made a connection to Hockney as a significant figure from the Young Contemporaries era, it was often in a vague and uncertain manner - unable to correlate his much earlier prominence with an organisation that appeared much younger.

As an organisation formally established in 1988, while New Contemporaries as an exhibition does have older roots, it inevitably shares features of other organisations that were also established within a similar period (c. 1990s). With an accumulation of activity, there is an equal accumulation of materials, documents and ephemera that have required further attention and management. Equally, as evidence of their ongoing cultural significance, their

⁹³ In the 'New Contemporaries 60' document (addressing the potential of the New Contemporaries archive) the organisation also states: "When told that New Contemporaries is reaching its sixtieth year many people are completely surprised – it feels so much younger!". (New Contemporaries 60, uncatalogued office doc).

longevity also starts to become a point of leverage and authority for sustaining current and future activity. The resulting questions for these organisations are not only how the records of this activity help situate them and evidence their work (within local communities as well as within national and international artistic dialogues), but as importantly, what to do with them. For some, this has led to projects that actively engage with the concept of the archive as a site of place-making through the creation of the archival elements or materials (Flinn et al. 2009), and for others it comprises an acknowledgment that there is a body of cultural identity, value and leverage held within those materials already generated (Crooke 2007).

Taking into account just the last three decades for New Contemporaries, the housing of not only the physical but the management of digital material is an understandable concern: resulting in a ‘storage crisis’ (Spieker 2008; Røssaak 2010). As in many circumstances, these collections do not constitute what would be recognised as an archive, and with a lack of in-house expertise, how to catalogue, preserve and manage what could serve as ‘an archive’ is subsequently done through a range of ad-hoc, informal, and administrative processes. As highlighted by archivist Sue Breakell, there are a number of organisations facing similar difficulties:

“it is indicative of an increasing awareness of the significance and potential of this kind of material, both in arts institutions that lack specific skills and support to manage visual arts archive material, and arts material in larger archives where it does not get particular attention”
(Breakell 2015, p. 2)

The rise in focus on archives within the cultural sector has seen the establishment of UK-wide projects such as *Archiving the Arts* by The National Archive⁹⁴ as well as a broader series of archival events and discussions occurring throughout the UK.

As an indicator of the increased visibility and activity around archives, these discussions have included a number of events local to me during the research. From seminars such as *Archive: In the Making* hosted by Nottingham Contemporary in 2015, or *Bummock: The Lace Archive Symposium* at Backlit Gallery in 2018, to the ongoing community archive project at arts venue Primary. As well as more prominent and formal activities within the national cultural calendars, a number of personal discussions have also been prompted by

⁹⁴ *Archiving the Arts* was an initiative to help develop and support archives across all artistic disciplines within the UK, with the goal to ensure that art records were recognised as culturally valuable, were suitably cared for and accessible. The project ended in March 2016, however a number of digital resources are provided on their website alongside legacy partnerships to provide ongoing support (National Archives 2023, ‘Archiving the Arts’).

my research with local arts initiatives that are also looking to or are currently undertaking cataloguing and archiving projects, such as One Thoresby Street, Midland Artists Group, and Bonington Gallery at Nottingham Trent University.

The increased awareness of the value of the archive and its dissemination can also be seen regularly within globalised discourse. From independent projects such as *Archaeology of the Final Decade* by Vali Mahlouji, to initiatives such as *Asia Art Archive*, who have been amassing one of the largest collections of recent art activity in Asia as a catalyst for new ideas. More recently, as digital events have proliferated during the pandemic, a wave of online seminars have also provided new opportunities to share ideas across international communities. For example, the webinars 'To imagine otherwise, Future Archives' led by a collective of Scandinavian organisers, *Voicing the Archive* by ApexArt or *Curing the Archive Fever: Filling the Gaps Through Situatedness* by international platform Shared Campus.

As digital communications have proliferated in the last two years due to global conditions, in the mid-2000s digital platforms also advanced due to technological updates. New Contemporaries were already at the forefront of new technology in 2007 as the turn towards digitisation and online accessibility has become more prevalent. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, in partnership with aFoundation - who occupied the same building New Contemporaries held offices in at the time - a digital pilot project resulted in a new content management system for New Contemporaries website that could act as a 'living archive'⁹⁵ (aFoundation 2006). While originally the project had been more ambitious, wanting to create a new data storage system, the resulting format was one that is now familiar to most web users.⁹⁶ Even though cost prohibited the new system from providing full digital access to past catalogues, it was able to provide the list of participants, selectors, venues and events for each exhibition from 1989 onwards.

In addition (although the organisation did not have the capacity at the time for a more in-depth archival project) during the same period the organisation enlisted Mary Doyle to research what records may exist for New Contemporaries elsewhere (New Contemporaries, c. 2009).⁹⁷ As preparation for their 60th anniversary, further proposals included the potential for television or media commemoration, citing:

⁹⁵ The term 'living archive' was predominantly used in conjunction with the occurrence of digital archives.

⁹⁶ The format of the original CMS is still apparent in the current website, although the original software from aFoundation has since been updated to a new system.

⁹⁷ These two documents were my starting points when picking up the trail of the research again in 2017.

“The legendary ability of New Contemporaries, nee Young Contemporaries, to act as a catalyst for and a “barometer” of the British art scene over the last 60 years provides a rich and complex series of narratives and stories that should prove a compelling basis for the development of television, radio or other media productions for 2009 and beyond.” (New Contemporaries, c. 2009)

Recognising the need for evidentiary material on which to rely for the development of this proposal, the concept of their emergent archive was termed “the long tail”. The “long tail” was seen as an opportunity to “maximise the potential of its significant intellectual capital” through the “harnessing and harvesting of its emergent archive.” (ibid.)⁹⁸

From the ‘living archive’ mentioned by aFoundation, the recurrence of the term in the proposal for ‘New Contemporaries 60’ highlights the changing theoretical discourse regarding archives, in particular the transformation of archives from static objects to ‘living’ entities. For example, Stuart Hall commented upon the ‘living archive’ in *Constituting an Archive* in 2001: “whose construction must be seen as a never completed, ongoing project” (Hall 2001, p. 89). Citing new approaches by both public and private bodies, the document outlines the possible collection and presentation of their historical materials, making use of new media platforms. In conjunction with accelerating digital developments, ‘search engine’ capabilities and the new ‘remote audiences’ organisations could attain through web-based production, the desire to realise and retain their ‘artistic, creative, educational and commercial benefit’ of their backstory was reinforced.

As the development of technology was a significant catalyst in the wish to retain, promote and leverage their historical materials during the late 2000s, similar examples of arts organisations beginning to produce and distribute their own content through various broadcasters was also cited within the proposal, include Artangel with experimental radio Resonance FM; the Royal Opera House in broadcasting live access to events and performances; and Tate Media becoming recognised as the ‘fifth Tate site’ (New Contemporaries 2009). While at the time they aired the possibilities of a “New Contemporaries TV”, today this proves to be not far off, with the New Contemporaries YouTube channel established in 2012.

⁹⁸ In this instance, ‘the emergent archive’ under discussion is uncertain, and is referred to later in the same document as ‘it’s extraordinary existing archive’. However, at this date the ‘archive’ under question appears to be limited to the online data presented through the partnership with aFoundation alongside the documents compiled by Mary Doyle, and the uncatalogued materials held in their office, none of which constitute an actual archive.

Further examples of organisations making significant steps regarding archive development in 2009 included Live Arts Development Agency and Locus+. At the same time Nayia Yiakoumaki was also completing her PhD on curating archives at Whitechapel Gallery, which led to the significant reorganisation of their archive materials as well as the introduction of the Whitechapel Archive Gallery. In other instances, there are efforts to achieve archival goals through partnerships with larger institutions, such as the Public Arts Commission Agency Archive being transferred to Birmingham College of Art in 2000, or the Public Art Development Trust Archive going to the Henry Moore Institute in 2005. Larger projects that focused on archival research include the *Brixton Calling!* project in 2011,⁹⁹ or *Performing the Jewish Archive* supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council ‘Care for the Future: Thinking Forward Through the Past’ programme from 2014 - 2017.¹⁰⁰

Over the intervening years, a number of research projects are established between arts organisations and Higher Education institutions regarding the formatting, reformatting, production of, and from, archives. Alongside *Archiving the Arts* project previously mentioned,¹⁰¹ partnerships such as *The Glasgow Miracle: Materials Towards Alternative Histories* between CCA Glasgow and Glasgow School of Art (McKee 2012), as well as PhD studies such as *Mediating Histories* by Lucy Bayley (2017) in conjunction with the ICA in London, all demonstrate a keen interest in organising and understanding the potential of their archival materials. What is unusual regarding New Contemporaries in comparison to other projects is both their format - more akin to an art fair - and the disjointed nature of their history. Many organisations originating in the early to mid-20th century became formalised at a much earlier date or were fixed to a particular place or abode. For these organisations, recent turns to the archive still sees the collection of documents and materials subject to various levels of disruption and distribution, but with a continuity of organisational and capital structures, also far more numerous and accessible. For New Contemporaries, the extent of their voluntary activity prior to 1988 also creates a significant

⁹⁹ Investigating the history of the British Artists Collective and Gallery with 198 Contemporary Arts, five Archive installations and seven Community Archiving and Engagement events were brought together in an exhibition at the Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture in 2011. Funded by Arts Council England and Heritage Lottery Fund, it was carried out in partnership with Tate Britain, Tate Archive, Women’s Art Library and Lambeth Archive.

¹⁰⁰ *Performing the Jewish Archive* focused on highlighting forgotten works by Jewish artists. The programme resulted in five international festivals, a complementary ‘Out of the Shadows Exhibition’, and the production of a digital archive resource. The project was carried out in partnership with the University of Leeds, with an aim to “theorise and re-animate the Jewish archive as ‘co-textual’: all artefacts are components of a non-hierarchical, non-linear system that destabilises the relationship between past, present and future, origin and diaspora.” (Performing The Jewish Archive 2021)

¹⁰¹ *Archiving the Arts* concluded in 2016, after working with over 250 organisations as well as establishing a number of legacy projects. The National Archive have also produced a number of informational papers and ‘how to’ documents, such as *Archive Principles and Practices: An introduction to archives for non-archivists* (2016).

schism pre and post formalisation.

Situated against the backdrop of an increasingly competitive visual arts field, a need for sustained funding and a desire for recognition, the impetus to not only realise an archive for those documents apparent within their current grasp, but to locate and connect to their earlier history provides a greater gravitas and opportunity to situate themselves within recognised artistic developments over the last century. In the lead up to their 70th anniversary renewed efforts to harness their archival material led to the proposal of their own partnership with a Higher Education institution. Concurrent with establishing their partnership with Nottingham Trent University, several applications were made by New Contemporaries to funders regarding legacy activity, particularly pertaining to the proper management and care of the materials currently held by the organisation. With an award from The National Archive's *Archives Revealed* Scoping Grants, Art Archives Consultancy (AAC)¹⁰² were appointed by New Contemporaries to conduct a feasibility report in 2020. With the key aims of establishing the significance of a post-1988 archive, they provided an overview of current materials and their condition, advised on preservation and accessibility, and made recommendations for further funding to support the work.

In the scoping report, AAC state the focus on the archive by New Contemporaries is led by a strategy to “celebrate our rich history and signpost the important role we have played in the development of the UK art scene” (AAC 2021, p. 3-4). It outlines the activity New Contemporaries are already undertaking, including the social media ‘Throwback Thursdays’ posts as well as the 70 Years Young video interview series commissioned by The Space.¹⁰³ As part of the New Contemporaries 70th Anniversary, the organisation partnered with The Courtauld Institute for a two-day conference in October 2019 that looked to New Contemporaries history as a prompt for current challenges in the visual arts field. Presenting the exhibition *Not a Live Show* that I had developed as part of my research, the programme included a number of contributions from past participants alongside panel discussions on the position of emerging artists in the arts arena and the future of artistic practice.

¹⁰² Archivists working across the cultural and visual arts sector, Vaknin and Lane established AAC in 2011, as well as publishing the book *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist* with fellow archivist Karyn Stuckey in 2012. Examining archival processes, art, and arts practice, *All This Stuff* presents contributions from several artists, archivists and art historian, the impact their contemporary activity is having on archive theory, and discusses the possibilities of what an archive is, or could be.

¹⁰³ ‘Throwback Thursdays’ are part of the organisation’s social media strategy for disseminating information regarding New Contemporaries alumni as well as sharing found archival materials. The Space digital agency is a joint initiative by Arts Council England and the BBC to ‘help promote digital engagement across the arts and cultural sector’, and commissioned six new videos with past participants including Sunil Gupta, Chantal Joffe, Hardeep Pandhal, Bruce McLean, Mark Wallinger and Rachael Maclean.

As New Contemporaries assert their future-facing nature in tandem to a historical consciousness, the tendency for the organisation to contextualise its activity as a register of social change (in the art world) is a repeated phenomenon, occurring as early as 1951 in which the exhibition historicises itself in reference to national service. Regularly voicing its own position in relation to contemporaneous contexts of art education and cultural production (as well as routinely being commented upon by art critics) situates archival investigations as a natural progression in establishing New Contemporaries in and of ‘the contemporary’ period, endemically fore fronting an assertion of their presentness.

While this thesis is an archival enquiry, the research it describes was not intended to construct, catalogue and produce New Contemporaries Archive, nor was it strictly an art historical investigation. Rather, it was an investigation into the archive as an assumed and critical entity, its potential forms, outputs and opportunities. As a contemporaneous question, what it means to [*make an*] archive becomes a particularly pertinent question. The question of how New Contemporaries organisational format, vision and aims shape their archival narrative was posed within the context of current archival theory and new technologies, from historical interpretation and literary theory to material evidence and data compilation.

Archival Understandings

In academic discourse across the arts and humanities, how archives function as repositories of knowledge within institutional bureaucracy, the reading of history and as an access point to past time(s) continues to be contested (e.g. Manoff 2004; Gilliland et. al. 2017; Foscarini and Ilerbaig 2017). In post-modernist thinking the evidentiary nature of the archival document is positioned against the endemic subjectivity of its collection and interpretation rather than in the ability for the archive to portray ‘truth’ and impart validity to past events (Buchanan 2010; Schwartz and Cook 2002).

Archives, traditionally positioned as the neutral storage of evidentiary materials, and history, as the animating of those materials in order to construct a narrative of the past, were initially inseparable in the process of historiography (Buchanan p. 40; Blouin 2004, p. 296).

However, since the mid-20th century a number of debates have arisen in how those materials are being utilised, how they are stored and managed, as well as how they have come into being in the first place. Framed as a ‘post-modernist’ mindset, this accompanies developments in post-structuralist, feminist, post-colonial and queer theory (Schwartz and Cook 2002; Bruchet 2019).

Most significantly, debates within Western discourse (primarily the French school of philosophy) have been led by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, while similar developments in post-modernist historiography and archival disciplines have seen Archival Science assert itself as an independent profession to that of history, based on notions of objective neutrality (e.g. Blouin 2004 pp. 297-298; Duranti 1993, pp. 10-11; Schwartz and Cook 2002, pp. 9-13). That is not to say the historian does not also adhere to an ideology of objectivity – to more or less of a degree – but the role of interpretation has been more readily recognised as just that, *an* interpretation. Equally, a common critique of Archival Science recognises the potential subjectivity of those who carry out the collecting and organising of the archive (Cook 2013; Eastwood and MacNeil 2010). The following literature review takes into consideration both archival practices (as understood from outside the profession) and developments in archival theory in relation to visual arts.

In his influential work *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault positions the document as central to the discourse of history, and problematises the statement within systems of organisation. Although Foucault resisted categorisation within any one school of thought – structuralist or poststructuralist (Mahon 1993, p. 129), his treatise presented a social and historical analysis underpinned by the relationship of the statement to the accumulation of knowledge, and therefore power. The control (or ownership) and dissemination of statements in correlation to power is not a new realisation. Writing systems associated to administrative forms of enforcing governance have been accepted in some form since the beginning of modern organisational life (Ventresca and Mohr 2001, pp. 805-806).

As archival understandings have evolved, from “some of the earliest evidentiary and memory-making texts” (Gilliland 2017, p. 34) forty thousand years ago, to archival practices such as *Respect des Fonds*¹⁰⁴ in the late sixteenth century that recognised the “cumulative nature of archives and their organic and ongoing relationship to the authority and activities by which they were created” (Gilliland p. 38), it is during the nineteenth century that our current archival systems formed. Now a principle of archival theory, *Respect des Fonds* is referred to by Michel Duchein (1983, p. 64) as the grouping of archival documents via their origins. However, despite originating two centuries earlier, ‘fonds’ was not a practice widely adhered to until much later:

“Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, neither administrators nor

¹⁰⁴ *Respect des fonds* is a principle in archival theory that delineates and maintains records according to their origins and units in which they were initially collected.

archivists felt the slightest scruple, in any country, to separate and dispose of documents of the same origin, or to regroup and mix documents of different origins whenever the need made itself felt for practical or intellectual reasons of convenience.” (Duchemin 1983, p. 65)

Considering the management and subsequent narratives established through archives, the attention to provenance, context and accountability have been heightened since the publication of the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* by Dutch archivists in 1898 (known as the Dutch Manual), and the idea that records do not exist in a cultural vacuum has become fundamental to archival practices (Douglas 2010, pp 27-28).

During the 20th century, as national identities and institutions were increasingly critiqued, Foucault highlighted that the collection of the documents (as monuments)¹⁰⁵ in themselves does not equal knowledge, rather a convergence of cultural and social normativity in recognising the authority of their ownership allows the materials to be shaped and formed according to those that control them. The site of the collected records accordingly represents the apparatus of social rule and regulation. The archive as a singular space provides the tools, through an accumulation of information, to manage and control both territory and populations (Featherstone 2006, p. 591). As a regulated gathering of evidence towards past actions, the authority of the archive emerges as paramount in supporting institutional narratives.¹⁰⁶

Today, following on from the Dutch Manual, the International Council on Archives promotes a unification in archival practices that has a particular lineage in Europe regarding the modern nation state, national archives and master narratives (Berger 2012; Thijs 2008; Cunningham 2017). ‘Master narratives’, as defined by Krijn Thijs in ‘The metaphor of the master: “Narrative Hierarchy” in national historical cultures in Europe’ (2008), is the dominant collective cultural narrative or ‘big story’ promoted by those in power within a given society. Highlighted by social historian Stefan Berger is the emphasis Thijs places on the paradoxical relationship these narratives appear to have with national archives:

“In other words, the grand stories that came to structure many people’s

¹⁰⁵ Foucault proposed that while previously history was a process in which the memorisation of ‘monuments’ were transformed into documents, this perspective has now reversed. Documents, as representative of statements (i.e. knowledge), and therefore power, have transformed into ‘monuments’. The document is no longer inert, but its factual existence becomes part of the validation process. If we were to take this to its most simplistic conclusion, if documents are monuments, the more documents, the monumental that repository must be.

¹⁰⁶ As neatly summarised by curator Nayia Yiamoumaki, “the concentration of information about the past in the single space of the archive manifests relations of power in a similar manner to the emergence of nation-states as centralised hegemonic forms of social control in the formation of modern societies” (Yiakoumaki, 2009: p 21).

understanding of the nation's historical development were not constructed out of prolonged engagement with national archives, but were told in a particular historical-political situation and out of particular sets of ideological-normative commitments of the national historians in question.” (Berger 2012, p. 17)

While ‘National Archive’ institutions promote a concept of transparency to collective cultural histories, ‘master narratives’ are often found to have little direct correlation to research emerging from the evidentiary material. Rather, the authority of the Archive imparts an understanding that the narrative promoted has a legitimacy that may be located within official documents.

In much the same way, New Contemporaries have established an institutional narrative (even if knowingly brief) that does appear to have some correlation to its known history, but it is yet to be fully born out within archival research. For example, potential discrepancies vary from Bridget Riley claiming the year she participated was 1957 to Rachael Whiteread being mistakenly identified as a past participant in the 1980s exhibitions.¹⁰⁷ Attempting to confirm the information, with no exhibition catalogue or listing for the Young Contemporaries in London, Riley’s self-assertion is the only reliable source. However, while Rachael Whiteread is confirmed as a selector in 1994-95 through organisational records, there are no records of her as an entrant to the exhibition itself.¹⁰⁸

In the construction of institutional narratives, how evidentiary material is utilised is put forward in Foucault’s work as an understanding that the archive - as discontinuous fragments and traces - represents the possibilities of ‘what can be said’. For example, I am unable to say categorically whether Bridget Riley or Rachel Whiteread were or were not participants at the times claimed. Foucault caveats ‘what can be said’ as determined – or restrained - within the parameters set by the ‘rules of practice’ or governing system.¹⁰⁹ As such, archives “enable statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification.” (Foucault 1972 [1969], p. 10). The governing systems, whether formed through social, political or institutional frameworks, are therefore the mechanisms through which discourses

¹⁰⁷ These examples came to light during discussions with New Contemporaries staff.

¹⁰⁸ The supposition that she was in New Contemporaries as a graduating student has likely become conflated with her participation in Whitworth Young Contemporaries during the 1980s (for which there is a record), however this is a separate event.

¹⁰⁹ According to Foucault’s critique, what is said or unsaid is determined through the social context in which it is placed. Within common perceptions, the associated assumptive authority and ‘truth’ ascribed to the preserved materials circumnavigates the possibility that the document - that has become so monumental - may only be so through happenstance; one thing arbitrarily kept over another. There is a presupposition that the contents presented (and not presented), and allowed to be voiced outside of the archive, are fundamentally empirical.

– and accordingly knowledge(s) - are generated (Simon 2002, p. 102).

Applied to New Contemporaries, the debate highlights the possibility to understand the organisation through the location and context of its historical materials but also the potential to seek out archival ‘truths’ that adhere to established organisational frameworks. However, requiring an archive to be critically specified by a framework or governing system is not such a clear-cut or all-encompassing predicator (Hall 2001). Subject to the myriad of circumstances through which the body of its materials are brought together, the possibilities of discourse prompted by archival fragments can be wide-ranging. In the inevitable ruptures, breaks and transformations of the archive as a durational body of material, Hall suggests that it is in the discernment of “a regularity in its heterogeneity” that you may avoid the “futile struggle” of applying a hegemonic interpretation of, or to, a governing system or body of materials, i.e. the archive (Hall 2001, p. 91). As modern institutionalism becomes the subject of post-modernist critique, the questioning of the archive exposes the possible bias and repression of non-adherent narratives (through appraisal, arrangement and description (Bruchet 2019) as well as in the writing of history (Schwartz and Cook 2002).

Archivist Luciana Duranti draws attention to the complex relationship archives have in society:

“Because of this, archival practice is often confronted with problems that cannot be solve in theory, methodology, and practice of the science and the discipline, simply because these problems have neither a scientific nor scholarly nature but belong in categories of ethics, administration and politics.” (Duranti 1993, p. 11)

Duranti highlights that in order to navigate the complexity of ethical and political issues within the archive, archivists need to have historical knowledge of administrative and juridical processes. Writing about ‘the problem of the archive’ in *Letters from Librarians*, Francis Blouin (2004, pp. 296-298) points towards the late 20th century turn towards a historicity that places the record as experienced in time – the time of its origins, preservation and moment(s) of encounter - past, present and future.

In an interview in 2017, Eric Ketelaar reflected on the changing viewpoint of archives as influenced by post-modernist thinking (in Glaudemans, Jonker and Smit 2017, pp. 295-305). Responding to Zygmunt Bauman’s *Liquid Modernity* (1999), Ketelaar sees the ‘record’ of the archive as never finished but always actual, subject to the changing conditions in which it exists. Furthermore, the evidentiary nature of the document itself does not translate to a

validation of what that record might say, just that it was said (or perhaps not even that it was said but was recorded as such).¹¹⁰ As such, even possibly incorrect information is still “reliable, genuine ... records [of the event]. That they are falsehoods are simply something else.” (ibid. p. 297). Duchein proposes that in France it has always been accepted that just because an item was preserved does not mean it is true (Duchein 1992). And as Steedman points out in *Dust* (2001), the record itself does not do anything on its own, it can only tell us that at some point a record was produced.

While a record may not tell the truth, the truth of the record as a recurring motif has seen the transference of authenticity as a key function of the archive, and one that continues to play into discussions regarding ownership, control and power. As contemporary as the discussion is, the Metroon, a Greek city-state from 400 BCE, has been suggested as one of the first instances in which archives are viewed as a site for reliable authentic resources (Sickinger 1999). While it may still be under debate a few thousand years later, Ketelaar highlights the archive as a system of retaining evidence that something happened/was created, can be trusted, regardless of its ‘truth’:

“They are not so strict and immutable as some people would think, but you can trust those concepts. Each of them has a history.” (Ketelaar in Glaudemans, Jonker and Smit 2017, p. 295)

Therefore, as my research circulates around how to extend New Contemporaries extant material, its archival truth may be that the occurrence of my activity is recorded. However, how the material gathered and manifested through my work will be received and viewed as a communication into the future also poses a challenging question. How does what I put into the archive change its meaning - for the archive, the institution, its constituents, and the objects themselves.

The ability to follow the processes and logistics of archival preservation and recordkeeping of authentic records has long “privileged the archives as an authoritative source in understanding the past” (Blouin 2004, p. 296). As Ketelaar is suggesting, the interpretation of archives can follow a logic, but requires a nuanced reading of its history - a layering of the context and history of the object and the context and history of the archive it is in both important in understanding the full nature of the record. The confusion comes with the concept that as archives are intended to provide reliable, integral, useful and authentic

¹¹⁰ While this is obviously not a new phenomenon, in what has been termed the “post-truth” era – a term recently promoted by figures such as Donald Trump - the veracity of recorded statements, if they were said and who said them, have become increasingly questioned.

records (Kastenhofer 2015, p. 166-180), the records in themselves should do the same: a lingering authority of statehood that has transferred outside of the archive and into public consciousness.

Even so, being conscious and conscientious of what is being preserved - and how it is contextualised - leads to some challenging dialogues. Working in visual arts and creative practice, the challenge emerges as two-fold: on one hand, as New Contemporaries have shown a plethora of work from a wide range of artists, in a variety of times and locations, they can establish a link to almost any number of subject areas and discourses. However, does this mean that New Contemporaries should interrogate their archive in this manner? On the other hand, as my work progresses, what 'authentic' integrity does the material gathered through the research process possess in relation to the core activity of the organisation? Following the critique of ownership and authorship, and in the face of newly emerging digital communications, the question of authenticity becomes even more complex with the advent of new technology (Hirtle 2010; Røssaak 2010).

Publishing *Mal d'Archive* (or *Archive Fever*) in 1996, Jacques Derrida highlights the politics of the public-private, inclusion-exclusion processes of archival formation. From Foucault's discussion regarding the politics of systems and power-knowledge dynamics of what 'survives' in the Archive, *Archive Fever* moves from what the archive says to what it leaves out: what is forgotten and remains outside the 'shelter' of archival memory. For Derrida, the reverence and reveries projected onto the archive holds us in thrall, a principle that Derrida termed as the "order of commencement as well as the order of commandment" (Derrida 1995, p. 9). Where the archive, as a space for effective retrieval of the past and therefore control in the present, has previously assumed a mantle of "perpetual memory" a "juridical concept according to which the documents preserved in archives are authentic and permanent evidence of past actions" (Duranti 1993, pp. 47-54), the desire or fever for the archive is not so much to use it as to have it or be in it (Foster 2004; Steedman 2006, p. 4).¹¹¹

Contrary to the yearning for perpetual memory, the archive does not and cannot fulfil an all-encompassing retrieval-of-the-past function. In the process of preservation - of claiming an event in time - what remains is only a trace attesting to its existence (Derrida 1972, p. 14).

¹¹¹ In the same way, the 'wunderkammer' is an example of attempting to gather all the world has to offer into one controlled space, the archive represents gathering all the actions of the past. The Wunderkammer then allows the mysteries of the objects, their associations and meanings, to then be shaped and controlled through their collection and presentation – those unruly and un-understandable items are now ordered and contained (Putnam 2001).

As relics fractured from their time and space of origin, much like the photograph, there is a “unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be” (Benjamin 1931, p. 59).¹¹² Verne Harris, responding to Derrida in *Shaft of Darkness*, describes this as ‘opening the future in the past’ (Harris, 2002, pp. 61 – 82). Rather than arriving at one unique moment of origin, returning ourselves conceptually or metaphorically to a point in the past, we actually create multiple new iterations in the present for the future.¹¹³

Throughout *Archive Fever*, Derrida invokes the duality of the archive as both physical places and conceptual entities. As a convergence of physical and linguistic ‘sites’, Foucault refers to these disquieting or ‘unthinkable space’ in which nonhegemonic mental and physical conditions converge as heterotopias.¹¹⁴ The ‘shelter’ of the archive for Derrida is both literal and figurative, a defining of domestic and legal frameworks of what is maintained and what is forgotten, where items dwell and where they are hidden. Through these imaginaries, the archive is conjured as a seat of power and repository of knowledge, a sepulchre and a hoard of relics, a heterotopia of meanings and things, in which it is both a manifest ‘place’ and a state of ‘otherness’. Its power is elevated above us, is signification of the past places it beyond anything that can be reached in the present, and as a heterotopia it exists in an alternate state of being to our own.

As a climatic tangling of authenticity, integrity, metaphorical meanings, and meaning-making, for New Contemporaries the archive is currently representative of potential possibilities. It signifies an ability to situate and solidifying their significance as an institutional identity. At the same time, in organising, containing and regulating their past,

¹¹² Achille Mbembe takes this one-step further in his essay *The Power of Archives and its Limits* (trans. Judith Inggs, 2002), pointing to the entanglement of the archive and its architecture. He states that the term archive must first refer to the building in which it is housed. As the constituted space of the controlling power, the dominance and symbolism found in the architectural forms, ‘its motifs and columns’, impart the same austerity and reverence that may be found in temples or cemeteries. From the rituals of governance, the internment of data – time and people ‘their shadows and footprints inscribed on paper and preserved like so many relics’ - evolves into the instituting imaginary (Mbembe, 2002, pp. 19-26). As a space in which there is both the ‘internment’ and worship of relics, the archive is inextricably linked with the spectre of death.

¹¹³ Reflecting upon Foucault’s notion of digging into the past, this is perhaps the mingling of the dirt dug up with the present layers of silt, resettling to form a new stratum. Or as stated by Derrida, each reading of the archive becomes a re-writing of it (Derrida 1996; Yiakoumaki 2009, p. 194).

¹¹⁴ Foucault, in *The Order of Things* (1970 [1966]) introduces *heterotopias* as a response to a passage by Jorge Luis Borge as a way to define nonhegemonic ‘sites’ that are at once both physical and metaphysical. A linguistic device, the term *heterochrony* was likewise introduced to indicate an alternate rate or timing of events. (Incidentally, both are also medical terms that indicate cell growth in a place other than is usual, or biological developments at an alternate rate or timing.) Applied to the archive, in the process of archiving the event steps outside of the moments of its origins, existing contemporaneously in the past, present and future. For Derrida, the archive as ‘outside time’ presents an impossibility of existing ‘with’ or ‘in’ it, but only to recreate and reconstruct, and in so doing, destroying what it once was.

there is a risk that it becomes interned, static and mythologised.¹¹⁵ As a convergence of what is known and unknown, its resulting interpretation and historical renderings may remain several steps away from an archive. As an offering of a multiplicity of stuff - echoing the unique ability for contemporary production - there is still the question of what to do with it, and if it should be kept.

From socio-political hierarchical machinations, the internal processes of archival appraisal and valuation are necessarily directed by approaches that respond to their particular political, geographical, technological and historiographical positions. As put in the introduction to *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory* by archival theorist John Ridener “archives hold singular information not duplicated elsewhere. It is logical that individual archives would each create their own specific approach to keeping their unique collections.” (Ridener 2009, p.4). From this perspective the archive site is never neutral, nor fungible, but exists in a state of flux. The ‘life history’ trajectory of materials travel “backwards and forwards ... between rubbish, junk, and sacred priceless records and icons” (Featherstone 2006, p.593). As Breakell suggested in her 2008 article, as a culture advanced in the proliferation of things, we are often confounded in how to discern what is of significance from that which is not.

Without an archive

From the archive as a site of authority and authenticity, to one of shifting concepts and practices, the next section of the chapter discusses the changing parameters of the archive for an organisation, such as New Contemporaries, operating today. From pressures of sustaining programming in a fiscally precarious sector to the urge to celebrate cultural history, the need to reconnect to a cultural legacy is also being met by new desires for archival activity. Contrary to the push for ‘contemporary’ organisation's wishing to disavow the weight of their history as they assert their newness, today there is a need to reassert its meaning.

¹¹⁵ The archive as a space of internment, by its very nature, it is one in which the items stored there are marked as already passed. It is a set of traces, actions that have been and gone. The procedures of the archive necessitate their departure precisely because it is no longer active. These documents turn into relics, records of time past, much as a tally on the wall notates a passage of days. They are bound up, placed in folders, boxed and catalogued. They are bones, data, marked by memorials that cite names, dates and inscriptions. Ordered and controlled, everything has its place, is labelled, marked, listed and logged. As put by Bhekizizwe Peterson, “underlying the archive is the aim of ordering the past as inheritance” (Peterson 2002, p. 29). As relics, they are remnants surviving from an earlier time. As a trace, they provide an outline or course to follow for investigation. Jacques Le Goff proposes two main forms in which the materials of collective memory may be termed: monuments as heritage of the past, and documents – the choice of the historian. Both of these are only partial in providing an actual rendering of past activity and are imbued with a mystical ‘othering’.

Writing in 2002, Schwartz and Cook examine how in recent years, “the word “archive” has experienced a resurgence well beyond its popular connotation of dusty basements and old parchments” (Schwartz and Cook, p. 4). As quoted from Stuart Hall in the Introduction (p. 18), archiving today is an almost instinctive and automated act. From replicated images and texts to automatic functions on digital devices, gathering, sorting and presenting traces of our activities have become a part of the ubiquitous everyday experience. As a result, while ‘Archives’ are seen as sources for the representation or repression of national and personal identities, they are at the same time a neutral, “even mechanical” (ibid., p. 5) storage of zeros and ones. The appropriation of the ‘archive’ applied to the increasing volume of data, as well as more diffuse collections of things and metaphorical abstractions, appear to instil the idea of the archive as both more accessible and transparent than ever before, even as it becomes more unwieldy and oblique.

As a process related to institutional operations, which Derrida called domiciliation, the record becomes part of a public collective, with varying degrees of accessibility and multiplicities in purpose (Derrida 1996; Cunningham 2017). While the position of archives as a public facility has promoted a presumption of democracy, the question of who has the right to access, articulate, make public or suppress “haunts any act of archival formation and retrieval” (Cranfield 2014). When faced with actually going into an archive, beyond browsing an online catalogue or delving in a cupboard, the sense of authority, rigour and weight of the past does not always feel so welcoming or inclusive.

Returning to the archive as a resource, as opposed to deep storage of data, the construction of a legible narrative of the past through organising, describing and interpreting records and relics, the particular contemporaneous conditions in which that occurs, consciously or subconsciously, exert an influence (Crane 2006). With an increased interest from outside the profession of related archival disciplines, a multiplicity of perspectives and approaches also become problematic when they do not pay attention to or become dislocated from the hegemonic principles from which they historically emerged (Gilliland 2017, p. 39). Efforts to smooth over difficult or unwanted histories “bring into question the difference between retrieving historical knowledge and producing it” (Bruchet 2009, p. 76). In bridging the past and present, there is an endemic risk of distorting it.

Framing the distortion as a problem of temporalisation, Ricoeur highlights the difficulty of unravelling the present from past or future:

“But history is a matter of “men in time,” which implies a fundamental

relationship between the present and the past. It is thanks to this dialectic – “understanding the present by the past” and correlatively “understanding the past by the present” – that the category of testimony comes on the scene as the trace of the past in the present.” (Ricoeur 2009, p. 170)

Equally, as we may understand the past and therefore the present through their interconnections, archives are at the same time, and even primarily, machines for transporting the present into the future (Groys 2013). As a tool towards historiography, and future imaginaries, Ricoeur points to the tendency of archival materials being seen as either positivist, in which testimony is evidentiary and critical, or antipositivist. As a negative or interpretative position, it is only through an examination of the sources from the presumption of their fallibility that it is possible “to distinguish the true from the false” (Ricoeur 2009, p. 172). In postmodern leanings, including institutional critique and post-structuralist discourse, the archive is further positioned as a space of potential fallibility: reinforcing the consensus that all history has a history, as does every archive and archival record (White 1973; Ketalaar 2017).

An implicit subjectivity of archives - even as they are constructed, managed and read with an aim of objectivity - causes a reflexive and paradoxical unravelling at the same time as trying to thread the parts together. Noted by archivist Terry Cook: “the border between impartial archives, on the one hand, and researcher or societal interpretation of the archive, on the other, may well be a good deal more porous and interactive than often supposed” (Cook 2013, p. 97). Sven Spieker in *The Big Archive* (2008) introduces this as a precarious oscillation between narrative and contingency: what narrative does New Contemporaries want to tell? What statements can they make? As information is drawn from archives and pulled into some form of coherence, there is a simultaneous undercutting of its narrative through a hyperawareness of the many agendas and histories involved in its construction.

From a personal experience of consulting national archives, picking through filing cabinets and rummaging around dusty bookshelves, it has felt at times as if I am trying to match unlike ends of a magnet – the pieces push apart rather than neatly attracting themselves together. However, the items themselves are still records, it is understanding the contexts surrounding it that make it appear as if everything is under layers of silt. In an effort to climb out from the archaeological pit, and returning momentarily to Foucault, there are also alternative opportunities to be found in its dissolution. As fragments differentiate themselves and “establish their multiple existences and specificities” (Foucault 1969, p. 170), there is

also a character of agency (Eliassen 2010, p. 31).

As my own research moves out of the archive as a space of containment and classification, and into the muddier waters of trying to discern what or how archival materials might be formed, inform or function for New Contemporaries, I am drawn towards curator Sabih Ahmed's description of an "archival explosion" (Ahmend 2017). As archival collections formed of and by artistic practice, Ahmed suggests that the 'artists archive' and their idiosyncratic nature are the precursor to the multiplicity of articulations regarding archives in the present. Often including a myriad of material traces, from personal notations, photographs, audio, moving image, art works and artefacts, the presentation of archival display within visual culture has come to the fore in since the late 20th century (Foster 2004; Simon 2002). As the boundaries between the 'archive' and 'artwork' come under considerable tension, the simultaneous appropriation of archival aesthetics and practices within artistic practice has highlighted the dislocation and plurality of interpretation (Foster 2004; Allan 2015; Wilmsen 2020).

As termed by Hal Foster (2004), the archival impulse in contemporary visual practice is a distinctive characteristic or tendency that seeks to assert historical information as physically present. As artistic visual narratives meet historical discourse (often those that are deemed as lost or displaced, or even fictive) the aesthetic and conceptual appeal of the archive is simultaneously appropriated and critiqued. Testing and provoking archival concepts, notions of authorship and authenticity are played out through "mutations of connection and disconnection" (Foster 2004, p. 5). Giorgio Agamben describes this 'contingency' in archives as the potential of being and not being (Agamben 2009 [1989]).

Ruminating on works by Hirshorn, Dean, and Smithson, Foster speculates the here-and-now of the artwork functions "as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future." (ibid., p. 15). A recurring trope becomes the desire to intervene in history, and a reinforcement of how archives are inextricable from the current concerns and future imaginaries in which they are read (ibid. Foster; Bruchet 2019, p. 74). As the topological construction of the archival history and its consignare or gathering of signs¹¹⁶ is transferred further into 21st century culture, it only becomes more complex (Cunningham 2017, pp. 53–54). Changing patterns of social behaviour around consumer demand require a wide range of multi-platform engagement, bringing the archive out of remote storage to an

¹¹⁶ Derrida termed the archive as existing in the intersection of topology and nomology: the topology as the place of law (its physicality, or commencement), and nomological as the document of the law (its ascribed meanings, or commandment).

emphasis on transparent, participatory processes and connecting to audiences (Johnston 2014).

With an ebb and flow of funding due to wider economical climates, the role of arts within the UK landscape has become inextricably linked to concepts of cultural value. While in real terms Arts Council funding from 2010/11 to 2015/16 fell by only 3.6% (Dempsey 2016), in what was termed “the biggest change to arts funding in a generation” (The Guardian 2010) the downward spike in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, followed by Brexit negotiations and the global pandemic highlighted the need for arts organisations to establish their worth in an increasingly competitive arena. As an organisation whose core values are to support the development of emerging artists as they transition from education to professional careers, the recent announcement of a further 50% reduction to arts subjects in higher education sees a further need to demonstrate their urgent contribution and value of their activity within the UK. As stated in The Culture White Paper, culture “makes a crucial contribution to the regeneration, health and well-being of our regions, cities, towns and villages” (DCMS 2016, p. 10), as well as being “fundamental to a nation’s identity and its people, underpinning education and research and offering long-term economic benefits.” (ibid, p. 46). As a site of identity, institutional memory and legacy, the archive as a locus for cultural validity becomes central to not only achieving sustained fiscal support but gaining a social and political voice.

Whereas archives from the point of view of the archivist drive towards the standardisation of data collection, collation, and preservation is one of reaching cohesion, the claims on what should be in an archive, what is not kept, its gaps and absences, make them more problematic. In the selective nature of national archive collections, the conflation of political agendas and individual reasoning sees researchers across disciplines make the case that archives are not neutral (Manoff 2004, p 14). In recognition of nation-state ‘master-narratives’ that have embedded patriarchal and colonialist perspectives, a number of independent projects have “sprung up dedicated to recording and preserving the histories of different communities, often under-voiced and under-represented within mainstream heritage” (Flinn, Stevens & Shepherd 2009, p. 71-86). For New Contemporaries, their ability to engage established artists and the ongoing networks they produce demonstrate that while they are not under-represented within visual arts discourse overall, as subject to trends at times their activity becomes more peripheral. Nonetheless, with a lack of access to their records and research carried out, their history and therefore their longevity is little known or recognised.

As an organisation that focuses on providing a glimpse into the future¹¹⁷ through group shows of (discordant) works, which often have little relation to each other over being graduating peers, its history reflects the same disjuncture. From what Rebecca Heald describes as the ‘mixed fortunes’ of New Contemporaries’ past, moments when it failed to materialise or fell out of favour, relaunched, changed its name or structure, its history has become little more than a roll call of past artists.¹¹⁸ Today, the organisation's peripatetic exhibition framework has also presented a significant challenge in ‘locating’ their identity.

Historically, their association to host institutions, such as R.G.B. Galleries during the 1950s and 60s, and the ICA in the late 70s to 80s, became a dominant feature. Over the last three decades, while there are certainly ties to certain organisations and enterprises, such as the Liverpool Biennial, Cornerhouse in Manchester, or most recently South London Gallery, their corporate sponsorships have had the most significant impact. Particularly after the first five years of funding through British Telecom from 1989 to 1994-5, New Contemporaries found it difficult to entice new sponsors as its image had become aligned with the sponsors brand (Appendix - Bytheway). Taking on Beck’s sponsorship for three years toward the end of the 1990s, the partnership with Bloomberg over the last two decades has had a particularly powerful impact on their public image.

A focus on sustainability in the arts (Johnston 2021), changing funding patterns and increased collaborations across sectors (Florida 2009), as well as a rise in pedagogical programming (O’Neill and Wilson 2010; Birchall 2015), sees art organisations and institutions required to produce and engage at higher volumes with little uplift in capacity. Further, the organisation sits outside of the usual institutions and museums, and although it offers extended programming, its’ internal art world focus¹¹⁹ also does not sit comfortably with the more socially engaged community orientated organisations of a similar scale. As an iterative event its programming is more akin to an Art Fair. Although there are comparable annual art prizes, New Contemporaries still sits in a unique position within the visual arts

¹¹⁷ The idea of being able to ‘glimpse’ at future professional artists in the moment they emerge is a repeated refrain within the reception of the exhibition. For example, ‘Sneak Peek Into Art Future’ was the title of the review by Artlyst.com in 2011, The Guardian declares “Anyone who wants a vision of the future should hasten to ... Bloomberg New Contemporaries” in 2020.

¹¹⁸ Particularly as the extent to which it is able to represent its past activity online has been limited – both in duration and content. A future project could potentially be the uploading of past catalogues and documentation of the exhibitions (although those available in-house are restricted to post 1988), however this also requires administrative capacity. More recently, digital advancements and the pandemic have led the organisation to mount online exhibitions alongside the in person shows.

¹¹⁹ Despite the wide range of audiences in the early decades (or claims made of them), the plethora of arts activity in the 21st century and the specific premise of graduate artists makes it a very particular offering for public audiences.

offering in the UK - at least providing an assurance of a ‘gap in the market’.¹²⁰

To the extent of New Contemporaries current public standing their current lack of archival material does not in itself represent a lack of cultural sway, however the turn towards archives in public policy as a way to ‘celebrate’ and reinforce national identity, alongside a continuing upward trend of archival outputs by contemporary arts institutions, has increased the pressure for the organisation to reaffirm their historical knowledge. As a “process of memory making and identity formation” (Cook 2013, p. 96), a reassertion of their longevity provides an equally compelling case for funders to support their future programming. However, rephrased through a perspective of archives as anticipations of collective memory rather “than being the tomb of the trace”, (Appadurai 2003, p. 16), new non-linear, diffuse and reflexive iterations may be found (Bayley 2018).

As the last part of the 20th century sought to deconstruct power hierarchies during a period of increased globalisation (Wilson 2019), the current period of localism, subjectivism and plurality has seen a turn towards generative acts:

“a turn that reflects not simply the urge to deconstruct, but a more fertile and iterative urge to build in a way that not only is not monolithic but also is inclusive; and in a way that can accommodate the self-consciousness of this age, a self-consciousness expressed through vast quantities of digital documentation that we generate, share and re-purpose or consume.” (Breakell 2015)

The interest and engagement within the visual arts is not only in the significance of their materials, but in the possibilities for “creative approaches to ‘archiving’ and the use of archives as a site of creative practice.” (ibid, p. 1). As suggested by Foster’s proposition of an archival impulse, the move towards generative practices across visual disciplines – and most particularly in curatorial becoming (O’Neill 2019) – sees archives, with their expanded and increasingly diffuse collection of materials and perspectives, becoming a renewed focal point for the exploration of histories dark margins and shadows (Lundemo 2010).

¹²⁰ Regularly when speaking with associates, colleagues, and friends about my research, as well as from the past participants of New Contemporaries themselves, there is a sense of New Contemporaries being important, but frustratingly, also no one quite being able to articulate exactly why. Examining the multiple introductions to New Contemporaries from 1949 to the present day, I come back to the image put forward in the 1949 introduction, of supporting intrepid voyagers setting sail.

Chapter Three: In the (non)Archive

Clutching a few sheets of A4 paper listing a rough New Contemporaries chronology, I arrive at black metal gates in South Kensington. Locating a grey box attached to the gate pillar, I ascertain that I should sound the buzzer and wait. "Yes? How can I help you?" "I am here to visit the archive?" The inflection at the end of my reply goes up, hovering between a statement and a question. I have no idea what is expected of me, having never been 'behind the scenes' before, as it were. Blythe House, the place I am visiting today, is the home to the V&A Art and Design records. Originally built as the home of the Post Office Savings Bank, it is now used as a store and archive for V&A alongside the Science Museum and British Museum. However, at this precise moment in time (the summer of 2018), it is slowly being packed up for transferal following a Government announcement of plans for a new purpose-built store and archive facility, with the building I am currently visiting being put up for sale. Although I did not know this on the day I visited, a full but empty feeling is one that persists in following me in every instance of my archival encounters.

Once through the gate and walking towards not only an imposing building but directly towards a giant head resting in the courtyard beyond, decapitated and staring vacantly, it feels like an unnerving echo of my own approach to the archive – what I perceive as my often chaotic process and interloper status butting up against a space of quiet authority and orderliness. Following signage, I turn to the left and, eventually figuring out I need to 'press here' to make the doors work, I walk through into an imposing red-tiled floor and dark wood-lined room. The reception staff gives me a warm smile and I feel myself relax. I am given a purple paper wristband like those you receive at a festival (in my mind quite incongruent with my current environment) and am asked to store everything but my laptop and notepad – pencils only - in the lockers provided.

The room in which I am actually going to see the documents, the real historical, significant and mysterious 'archive', reminds me of an old school classroom. With high barred windows, trestle tables, and the snap of cold from a building that insists on turning off the heating regardless of the weather by 1st May, it has the hush of a library and a formality instilled through the signing in of myself and signing out of each item. Five box files reserved for me sit on the shelf. Only one item at a time, weighed as they hand it over and when you hand it back. And here it is: a series of old cardboard files with bits of paper, which are magically going to tell me the answer.

In my efforts to find the answer, this chapter examines my methodological approach towards archival research. Many writers expressing their experiences of encountering archives have

invoked the imagery of hushed rooms and dusty records to invoke a sense of past time. Additionally, with the rise of archives in multi-disciplinary dialogue, the use of metaphors to give voice to the immaterial qualities of archival research has become equally as prevalent, from historian Carolyn Steedman who speaks of the ‘dust’ of archives as representative of not only the material present of past actions but as the practice and writing of history (Steedman 2001) to the comparison of archival materials with geological sedimentary processes discussed by Muller, Feith and Fruin in their *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (Muller, Feith & Fruin in Ilerbaig 2021).¹²¹ Searching for my own understanding of the archive as a historical resource as well as a conceptual phenomenon, the chapter begins with an exploration of the research process that utilises the *dérive*, landscape and dwelling to give shape and solidity – to concretise – the immaterial qualities of the archive and slipperiness of its meanings.

The second part of the chapter moves from the methodology as a ‘research event’ to what was uncovered: where and what the materials were, their associated contexts, and discussions resulting from analysing their content. Expanding in scope, I began with the holdings found in V&A Art and Design Archive at Blythe House. Growing from an idea of archival research as being about finding material that could be located and contained, Blythe House initially met this expectation. However, even with its decorous old-school atmosphere, the archive was a less solid and finite thing than its orderly surface first implied. More than reflecting its transitory nature, rather than ‘magically telling me the answer’, New Contemporaries history – with its many legs – was not as easy to pin down. In the final section, I discuss my investigations in the Tate Archive to the files in New Contemporaries offices and meeting with past participants.

While presented as an ordered journey, much of this was undertaken as and when information came to light: oscillating between the archival materials interspersed with more diffuse searches across newspaper databases, web-based items and personal encounters. Taking forward the idea of the *dérive*, Guy Debord describes this as a process of both “letting-go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of the psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculations of their possibilities.” (Debord 1981 [1958], p. 50). I was therefore responding to features of interest within the archival materials (as well as social encounters with New Contemporaries associates and participants) while keeping in mind the location and position of the information brought to light with regard to the duration

¹²¹ Marlene Manoff discussed the cross-disciplinary approach to archives in *Theories of Archives Across the Disciplines* (2004). Ironically, she highlights Steedman’s impatience with the archival metaphor, although Steedman herself uses the metaphor of ‘Dust’ (ibid. p. 18).

of New Contemporaries history.

During the period of archival research, working alongside but external to New Contemporaries also played a role in filtering and framing emerging narratives. Summaries and updates compiled from my own research were exchanged for information regarding organisational developments, new programming events and communication strategies. These parallel modes of activity served to increase my awareness of the potential impact of the historical information I was drawing together, as well as prompting opportunities to test the research in progress. The chapter closes by introducing the development of potential curatorial outputs drawn from the archival research: from more traditional modes of dissemination, including organisational communications, conference presentations and talks, to the development of the first exhibition project, *Not a Live Show*.

Searching for the Archive

Between Christmas and New Year in Prague several years ago, trudging past the gothic architecture and through the glittery snow, I arrived at the Franz Kafka Museum. In true Surrealist fashion, the museum display took the form of rows and rows of black filing cabinet, stretching seemingly to infinity. Hidden away behind these solemn shiny squares with their neat plate holders and regimented papers were all the bizarre possibilities that one might imagine: a man who is a beetle, a priest waging war against a giant mole, a persecution by unknown enigmatic figures. Here, the ordered realm of document storage was presented as a façade to a world of imagination. In the same way that the archive, in its material forms and the places in which they are held, is the mysterious façade to the writing of history.

'The archive', a slippery term. It suggests an ability to reach into other times and places, offering a tantalising pretence that being 'then' is a possibility. Yet the archive itself is merely a collection of things and stuff that are as fallible as those who created them. From these partial traces the past is painstakingly conjured through a process of join-the-dots, just as Kafka constructs his stories. We pull and stretch at these pieces in order to find that moment when a man did wage a war, when an authority surveilled civilians, or when a man did indeed turn into a beetle. The rows of file drawers, the stacks of archive boxes, the cityscapes and geological processes, are the physical and the conceptual frameworks of our past: as if fractured landscapes that are still being mapped. This does not mean history is entirely lost to imagination, or that imagination has no place in the writing of history. There is a fallibility, but the material of archives – or lack of it – is a starting place from which

understanding grows.

In the following pages, I will discuss the unfolding process of joining the New Contemporaries archival dots and the metaphorical imaginings that have helped me navigate the terrain. Starting with the premise of building upon New Contemporaries archive, I was provided with some references for external archive records and access to the filing cabinets in their office to look through. I also had some sense – if slightly abstract¹²² – of what an archive was. Going forward to explore what I imagined as the exclusive and hushed realm of deep storage – the physical reality of that mysterious space which imbues legitimacy on bits of history – was a prospect that felt intimidating but intrepid. However, despite the orderly and systematic territory I had pre-empted, the dislocated nature of New Contemporaries history quickly had me realising that rather than taking on an assumption of an archive, I was also searching for what the archive might actually be. And in turn, what that might mean for New Contemporaries. Therefore, the next section of the chapter discusses my methodological approach, taking into consideration postmodern archival discourse as well as my background in curatorial research practices.

For New Contemporaries' current management, in the most pragmatic terms, the required actions remained relatively straightforward: gather and organise their historical records and interpret them to determine how they may be added to and or disseminated. However, as the range and (sometimes minimal extent of their historical material became clearer, this presented a more complex challenge than they or I first anticipated. My encounters with the material included working in organised and catalogued Archives as well as web-based research and meetings with past participants. As I searched for what turned out to be a scattering of historical materials in multiple places, the traversing of New Contemporaries' archive took on the same non-place quality of the organisation; situated and temporal, identifiable yet dislocated.¹²³ This was an archival study in an expanded field, as borrowed from artist Neal White in *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist* (White in Vaknin, Stuckey & Lane 2013, pp. 47-61. As my understanding and practical experience of the existing records and of archival research grew, so did my understanding of New Contemporaries.

¹²² Alongside the Franz Kafka Museum, the idea of archive had inspired a plethora of imaginings. from shelves of dusty relics and inert documents, to the annoying function on my phone that archived my emails rather than deleting them.

¹²³ As discussed in the work by Marc Augé, “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place.” (Augé 1995, p. 77 – 78) However, for New Contemporaries, in which the organisation is relational, historical and concerned with identity, it can be seen as a place, but functioning as a dense network of individual identities in the process of transition (this is, from student to independent artist) as a form of temporal ‘stagings’, it is also a non-place. Applied to the archive, it is found as relational, historical and identifiable within discrete places, but as a networked study across multiple forms and spaces their archive is necessarily also a non-place.

Whether the archival material I was searching for was formally ‘archived’ or not, the development of my research strategy has also stemmed from my background in contemporary curating and visual arts rather than archival or art historical disciplines. However, highlighted as practices that are increasingly intertwined with the curating of archives as well as the use of archives within curating (e.g. Bruchet 2019; Yiakoumaki 2009), both disciplines can be seen to “produce, mediate, and reinforce knowledge and knowledge paradigms” (Bruchet 2019, p. 22). Correspondingly, the highly conceptual and embodied practices found within visual arts and contemporary curating have also been progressively reflected in postmodern discourses regarding archives.¹²⁴ As a result, several distinct research practices have emerged through the entanglement of these disciplines, from the *flâneur*¹²⁵ (Yiakoumaki 2009) to media archaeology¹²⁶ (Bayley 2017) or concepts of the ‘fragmented signifier’¹²⁷ (Allan 2015). Although framed through differing lenses, as curator-archivist, historian-curator or contemporary curator respectively, each of these approaches examines archival materials and subjects as networked fragments located in a multiplicity of time(s) and space(s).

Often considered through the imagery of cityscapes to wander through, archaeological sites to dig through or dislocated fragments from which to re- (or un) construct, there is an innate sense of the metaphysical embedded within the archive. From that visit to the Franz Kafka Museum years ago, the romance of the gothic architecture and glittering snow against the reveries invoked by the depths of the black filing cabinet display has also stayed with me as a representation of what a Derridian ‘archive fever’ could be. As I begin to experience a similar phenomenon emerging out of New Contemporaries archival materials, it is easy to

¹²⁴ The archival turn of the late 20th century sees an increased interest on the impact of the experiential nature of archives. Particularly within feminist and queer discourse, the materiality of the archive and reflexive accounts have taken on a greater significance in how archival narratives are shaped through subjective and institutional frameworks. (For example, Osthoff 2009; Steedman 2001; Eichhorn 2013; Swamby & Frank 2020)

¹²⁵ The concept of the *flâneur* was developed by Charles Baudelaire as a concept of a dilettante observer within the city and was later brought into art discourse through Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* (Buse, Hirschkop, McCracken & Taithe 2005).

¹²⁶ Media archaeology looks at the manifestations of culture through a constellation of textual, visual and audio materials. Again, Walter Benjamins *The Arcades Project* was seen as a case study “for the kinds of issues media archaeologists deal with” as a process of mediating time, space and the nature of sensations. (Huhtamo & Parikka 2011).

¹²⁷ The ‘fragmented signifier’ was introduced by Hannah Allan (2015) as an approach to understanding archival practices in relation to the de-contextualisation of archival materials as they become preserved and detached from their original functions. Referring to artists who frequently break down language and signifiers through their archival works, Allan demonstrates how the qualities of the ordered and categorised realm of the archive are specifically utilised in order to undermine the very thing they seek to represent: “In a work which illustrates the absent subject and the limits of dialectical language Borges’ protagonist of *Funes the Memory Artist* has a memory so detailed and specific that a dog in profile and head on seem like utterly different beings and moments rather than any common sign; this parodied the de-contextualised series of moments that were accumulated on-mass by the prevailing administrative, archival culture.” (Allan 2015, pp. 72-73)

see how searching through the past can hold a particular lure of becoming immersed in – and out of - time. There is a war-time romance inspired by the forward to the 1962 exhibition by Andrew Forge that conjures up a celebration of art surviving against the odds; or the handwritten letter by Derek Jarman, on blue writing paper in blue fountain pen, that makes it appear as if I could go and say hello to him.

The experience of the archive as both a tangible material and in conjuring the romantic “weight and presence of history” is not a solo experience, nor a purely objective or subjective view, but is also apparent in the proliferation of archival literature and artworks produced during the 20th century (Chadwich & Vermeulen 2020, p. 2). From a closeness to the past that can be dreamt up through imagining the events documented, to the fascination of the materials in and of themselves. Reviewing the records held by V&A for example, I was struck by material qualities such as the staining from metal paperclips resting against the pages, treasury tags that have become fused together with age, and in the transition of handwritten records to the fragility of typed carbon copies. A note made during one of my visits to Blythe House comments:

Typed letters on old standard sized, squarer than A4, shorter in length, and carbon paper that is tissue like – it feels like the past is delicate and fragile.

Equally, I found my language shifting into line with the idiom of the era of the records I was reviewing, with words such as ‘dint’ and ‘perishing’ suddenly appearing in my vocabulary.¹²⁸ It appeared I was subconsciously reflecting my own connection to those moments, even if I had only witnessed them through grandparents and historical media.

In the discussion that follows, I will be exploring the use of the archival metaphor in describing its methods and experiences. For archival researchers, the experience of the archive is often conveyed through the enlivening of its physicality. Librarian Gabrielle Dean proposes that archival imaginary demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between researcher and source,¹²⁹ the invocation of a dreary reading room with dusty grey boxes becomes animated through the actions of the researcher as she “flips [the folder] open and cocks her head to the flimsy leaves inside” (Dean 2011, np). Dean then moves from the realm of the archive to the actions of its practice, from conjuring the dusty boxes dancing to barn dances and pas de deux.

¹²⁸ A comment made within my notes remarks: ‘it seems reading this material makes me come up with some odd language. Last time it was ‘perishing’ (in relation to the weather) and this time ‘dint’. Neither of these words are actually in the files I am looking at and feel particularly old fashioned.’

¹²⁹ Gabrielle Dean is the William Kurrelmeyer Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Sheridan Libraries and Adjunct Professor in English and the Programme in Museums and Society at Johns Hopkins University, Maryland.

The use of metaphor and the archive are not only in the practical experience of archival research, but in attempts to concretise its increasing conceptual slipperiness, associations to physical forms occurs within a plethora of theoretical writings (Ilerbaig 2021; Ernst 2004). From the archive as a Derridean dwelling or domicile, prompting associations of interiority and exteriority to the power of the archive as transformed into Foucauldian monuments, the “fantasy continues to structure our archival encounters – what we expect and undertake in the reading room, what we allow it to mean” (Dean 2011, np). Even if the reading room today, specifically with the advent of digitisation, has become dislocated and remote.

As experiences of archives and archiving (particularly in person, but also as we have translated to the more fluid networks of digitised or born digital materials) it is unsurprising that these encounters are often expressed as forms in which time, memory and place can come together.¹³⁰ As stated by Jeanette Bastian “The relationship between collective remembrance, personal identity and historical trace emerged as tightly bound to geography and sense of place” (Bastian 2014, p. 46). With multiple uses of topography in conveying archival theory – such as Derrida’s topology and nomology - Dean’s 2011 essay also uses multiple references to the phenomena of landscapes as metaphor throughout, from layers and groundwork to strata and petrification. Considering the repeated imaginaries of geographic terms or the archive as reflected by man’s intervention upon it, my initial response was to follow that of the flâneur.

As a flâneur, New Contemporaries fragmented history could be imagined as if a dusty city through which I could observe and meander. However, with a more determined and purposeful agenda that recognised the range of materials and decades through which I needed to roam, I was drawn to a later off-shoot of the flâneur developed by the Situationists in the late 1940s, just as New (nee Young) Contemporaries emerged. The *dérive* similarly positions the archive and archival materials in the context of a psychogeographic terrain. As McKenzie Wark highlights, the *dérive* as drift or unplanned walk can be practiced in “almost any kind of time-space” (Wark 2008, p. 18), including that of the archive. However, Guy Debord, founding member of the Situationist International, specifically differentiates the *dérive* from the leisurely strolling of the flâneur as a rapid passage through various ambiances, which “involves playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of the psychogeographical effects.” (Debord 1981, n.p.) As New Contemporaries’ records are a

¹³⁰ As discussed in Chapter Two there is a conflation of the archive as it moves into the digital realm with its appropriation for digital functions. However, for the instance of archival exploration in which the archive is either mediated through a digital catalogue or exists in digital form, the use of metaphor to transcribe the immateriality of experience is no less apparent. (For example, such as Manoff 2010; Becker 2018; Manchester 2020).

dispersed range of archived and non-archived materials, neither overly ordered nor entirely random, each encounter formed a moment of becoming – a multitude of temporarily stable ambiances or landscapes. Deliberately seeking out psychogeographic features while retaining a playful and open approach is described by Wark as “like a divining rod for discovering interesting times and spaces (Wark 2008, p. 18). Even so, with the multitude of New Contemporaries historical localities and its resulting scattering of material, it was difficult to ascertain what these features might be before I got there.

As an uncertain terrain of considerable scope, to gain a coherent overview of New Contemporaries activity over a seven-decade period meant I also needed to map my findings according to a more linear and chronological schema. A systematic process that looked to observation of data rather than experience, this drew my research away from the situation and its interrelations towards building an objective history. Oscillating between micro (experiential) and macro (observational) perspectives, the tension between the experience of the unfolding research and mapping the findings chronologically required an approach that allowed me to both take my time meandering *and* deliberately explore the terrain. This resulted in a process of taking field notes of my actions and encounters alongside periods of systematically extracting the historical data, while simultaneously remaining open to the unexpected features I might find and my experiential responses.

It was in reading Andre Corboz *The Land as Palimpsest* (1983) followed by Tim Ingold’s *Temporality of the Landscape* (1993) that I began to consider how we view the landscape from a multitude of perspectives. As with the Fluxus artwork by Stanley Brouwn *This Way Brouwn*¹³¹ from 1964, our psychogeographic impressions of landscapes do not adhere to any literal positioning of geographic features. In the desire to follow the micro features as they occurred alongside a need to map a broader macro chronology, the transition of the archive and its materials as a landscape that could be read remained a compelling metaphor for my practice and experiences in the archive.

In conjuring up layers of time as being as readily bisect-able as the earth could be travelled across or dug up, each annual New Contemporaries exhibition could be examined as stratum on a rockface; or maybe as a series of distinct anthropological sites; or as archaeological remnants of each artist and each exhibition, leaving behind shallow grooves to be sought out to giant edifices that remain as anchors within the landscape. Or perhaps, as New Contemporaries is an entirely British phenomenon, mapped out as if responding to Brouwn’s

¹³¹ *This Way Brouwn* was a work in which the artist asked passers-by the way from point a to point b by drawing them out on paper. Sometimes the paper remained blank, as they would only offer verbal cues.

request, representing its' peripatetic nature around the UK, just as I have taken my own peripatetic journey in tracking down people and resources.

Taking Ingold's proposition of archaeology and landscape further, in which the landscape is "constituted as an enduring record of - and testimony to - the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves"(Ingold 1993, p. 152), he argues that a 'dwelling perspective' may be adopted. Particularly as attention has shifted to the 'back room' of archival construction in response to postmodern scepticism, the turn towards revealing the process of the research as much as the research itself has become a recognisable epistemological mode (Burton 2005; Dean 2011; Steedman 2001). In the act of dwelling, therefore, the experience of sitting in Blythe House shuffling through paper files or travelling to Liverpool for the current New Contemporaries opening, as much as the records themselves, contribute to the overall knowledge gleaned. Equally, in dwelling there is also a familiarity of landscape borne through an observational surveillance of surroundings as much as engaging with the experience of being immersed within them.

However, being in the position of the researcher also highlights the embedded subjectivity of results: what I was drawn to, what I missed out, what I did not see. Pierre Bourdieu speaks of the researcher subjectivity as part of the "concatenations of acts and operations she effectuates as part of her work and on the collective unconscious inscribed in them." (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1992, p. 46) Taken as a dwelling perspective – and that in turn to 'dwell' is to both observe and be present – emphasis on the lens through which something is viewed becomes inescapably bound up with what is viewed.

Following post-structuralist discourse and institutional critique, the deconstruction of the archive and its master narratives led to a term coined by Linda Hutcheon as 'historiographic metafiction' (1988). Referring to the practice of writing history and literature and increasing awareness of history and fiction as human constructs, Hutcheon proposes that the narratives derived from history reconstruct and reshape the past through current ideologies and subjective positions (Butter 2010; Bruchet 2019). For New Contemporaries, their current ambitions towards an identified and located archival repository and/or archival interpretations will necessarily be situated through the priorities of the organisation as it is

today, and in the future.¹³²

As discussed in Chapter Two, archival interest has risen in line with an increasingly postmodern scepticism. Romantic compulsions in discovering and reviving historical events has become a dramatisation of its gaps and silences, or a process of ‘unarchiving’ (Carter 2006; Thomas, Fowler & Johnson 2017; Chadwich & Vermeulen 2020; Meissen & Chateigné 2016). Voids and ruptures in archival content can occur from the moment of formation to destruction of records due to administrative and political process, as well as loss of records subject to archival management. Further, as archival materials are assessed and evaluated at various points the archeological field of the archive does not remain pristine, but is turned over, excavated, transformed and reconstructed into reconfigured or new layers of strata. Over the last decade however, there has also been increased concern with regard to digitisation. Even as advancing technologies afford new opportunities in the preservation, creation and dissemination of archival materials; access constraints and obfuscation of records due to the volume of production, as well as obsolescence of technologies, has given rise to new breaks and silences (Manoff 2016).¹³³

Although as mentioned in Chapter One it appears that the greatest lack of continuity in records for New Contemporaries is for the earlier period, access afforded by digitisation has provided the ability to locate and orientate records across a more dispersed archival terrain, with searchable catalogues as well as online access. For example, locating testimonies published by the British Library through their ‘Artist Voices’ project, or responses to past exhibitions within digitised newspaper archives. Even so, while perhaps the newspaper reviews are contemporaneous with the yearly exhibitions and potentially help ‘fill in’ some of the historical landscape, many of these resources operate as a form of linked data (to utilise digital terminology) layered within their own contexts and temporalities.

For New Contemporaries, the sparse terrain and dislocation between iterations has left potentially more gaps than silences but has still provided a rich resource through which many threads and narratives can be unravelled. From dwelling amongst the archival records and assimilation of materials, to connections uncovered through drifts, diversions, and

¹³² The moment of formation and interpretation also gives rise to the danger of projecting current ideologies backwards. For example, concepts of cultural functions have been dramatically informed by new technologies, therefore for those existing prior to their influence cultural functions and understandings may be considerably different. As discussed in Chapter Two regarding the concept of the archive continuum, while they are viewed through contemporaneous lenses, this is a continually moving frame.

¹³³ Media archaeology is based upon the premise that as new technologies overtake old formats, the ability for those formats to operate and therefore be accessed comes into question. Therefore, media archaeology attempts to both expose and revive the silences created by changing technologies (Parikka 2012).

meetings, the complexity of the archival realm sees an entanglement of history, time, space and identity. In the following passages are examples of the research process, actions, and analysis. These include the types and locations of materials explored, interviews with past participants and incidental happenings that have informed the subsequent curatorial projects (outlined in Chapters Four and Five).

Locating the Archive

Sitting in the lecture theatre, it slowly dawns on me that I have seen the presenters name before – more than just on the promotion for this lecture. ‘Dick Jewell’ is pretty distinctive. Where have I seen it? I think I have had this thought already. It must be in one of the thousands of photographs I have taken of archive documents or scribbled down somewhere in my notes. Perhaps I typed it into the participant database? I should have spotted this connection much earlier. I have known about the exhibition that is the reason behind Dick’s lecture for several weeks already. Surreptitiously pulling out my phone in the dim light of the lecture theatre, I start to scroll through my research material. Now I am thinking about it, I am pretty sure his name was on the programme for the 1976 or 1977 New Contemporaries Live Show. More than that, the connection should have been obvious as these two Live Shows are the subject of my own exhibition due to open in exactly the same space Dick’s artwork is presently occupying.

As I said, I think I have had this thought already. Recently.

It is becoming a recurring theme: drawing the line between the dots belatedly, or again. An endemic problem with looking at a seven-decade span of an exhibition programme perhaps. I am swimming in a swamp of names, dates, venues; art critics, selectors, participants; letters, reports and introductions. And because it is an ongoing programme, there is the addition of another thirty or fifty names each year, new exhibitions, performative events, artworks. And much of this is not actually within ‘an archive’ at all, but in multiple archives, office cabinets, online sites, personal ephemera, old boxes. Better yet, potential material is still within people’s brains, just like mine, which takes a little longer sometimes to retrieve the right information than searching an organised archive catalogue or database. After all, that is the origin of an archive, isn’t it? A system that extends our brains’ capacity to store and retrieve information.

As the starting point for the research, the brief chronology by Mary Doyle¹³⁴ provided a

¹³⁴ As previously mentioned, Mary Doyle had been commissioned by New Contemporaries c. 2009 to provide a brief overview of what and where archival materials could be located for the period 1949 to 1986. This resulted in two Word documents, *NC Final Archive narrative* and *NC Chronology*.

‘Rough Guide’ to the general vicinity of New Contemporaries historical records. Although, as an equivalent to a pocket travel edition (with a few pages torn out) this left a number of gaps and incomplete entries in understanding what the archival records could possibly reveal, as well as only taking me as far as 1986. As a result, much of the research journey was carried out through frequent stops to check directions, diversions and reversals as new information came to light, and as meandering explorations in unmarked territories. While there is an element of chronological progression in where the materials were located, my unveiling of New Contemporaries history occurred largely anachronically – exploring all phases of New Contemporaries all the time. Attempting to offer some cohesion to the material uncovered, I have attempted to group these explorations according to the materials explored.

First, I will review the more formal archive content, what was found and what it revealed: notwithstanding that in the process of exploration it naturally overlapped with an expanded field of archival research,¹³⁵ such as trying to track down the location of artworks and people, or ascertaining the reception of the exhibitions through newspaper reviews. Subsequently, I will discuss the wider range of activity, including visiting the current New Contemporaries offices and interviewing past participants, as well as more incidental occurrences: such as seeing what I could find for sale on Ebay, spotting how many past participants currently had work on display in Tate Britain, or a colleague discovering a couple of 1980s back-catalogues on their bookshelf during a clear out.

Beginning with the formal holdings housed by the V&A and Tate, the make-up of the archives and purposes of the collections informed the research as much as what was conveyed within the material. While these records did provide an overview of the early period of the organisation (Phases One and Two: 1949 – 1986) and a range of pertinent data, it quickly came to light that the collections at V&A and Tate only represented a partial view of New Contemporaries history.¹³⁶ Equally, while records assembled by the Arts Council within the V&A collection were a little more consistent – although only with regard to their involvement with the touring version of the Young Contemporaries exhibition – the records at Tate were more ad hoc, appearing to be the records that managed to end up preserved

¹³⁵ Although Neal White (writing in *All this Stuff: Archiving the Artist* and mentioned in the previous section 3.1), was discussing the expanded field of archival practice from the point of view of artists working in institutions (although it might be said I am in a parallel position as a contemporary curator), I have put the term to use here to refer to the part of my research practice that was following the threads presented to me through any other means, including online searches to chance conversations. These revealed both blind alleys as well as what could potentially become pertinent archival materials.

¹³⁶ For example, the records at V&A were collated by the Arts Council, and similarly the records at Tate were retained by ICA, rather than from the activity directly carried out by the Young/New Contemporaries committees.

rather than being intentionally gathered through an organisational retention strategy. These range from the report on the reception of the 1978 exhibition, prepared by Collier, to the seminar notes for the 1980 associated event regarding changing art practice and education.

When the formally archived material is compared with the uncatalogued records held by the current New Contemporaries organisation, the differentiation in perspectives between records generated through associated entities and those formed from the internal Young-New Contemporaries organisational machinations is further emphasised. Noting the purpose and locations of the records and documents, and whether they have been catalogued or not, offers a point of analysis in the process of positioning each exhibition within the British arts landscape of its time. Initially, the available records demonstrate the close ties New Contemporaries formed with the Arts Council – despite occasional threats to funding. Later, the reception of being seen as a natural pairing to the ICA, as well as subsequently gaining the recognition of an independent arts institution as they become a registered incorporation. The uncatalogued records located in New Contemporaries current offices also reinforce the identity of the organisation as not only a historical entity but an ongoing concern, demonstrating the purpose in reforging past relationships as well as highlighting the ongoing production of future archive materials.

Prompted by archival searches as well as meetings with New Contemporaries or referrals from previous colleagues, I also unearthed new connections concerning the phenomenon of New Contemporaries through the more diffuse research activity. From tracking down an image of a painting submitted by Patrick Proctor in 1962 or finding historic pictures for sale on stock photo websites, to realisations while listening to an artists' lecture or counting how many New Contemporaries alumni are in the current Tate exhibition, these activities accentuated my sense of New Contemporaries reach within the British cultural milieu. Because this is an ongoing process some of these findings remain fragmented, creating new layers of archival silt that still need positioning in the field of New Contemporaries activities and influence. However, in the constellation of data encountered - as a distinctly sparse but large chronological landscape - combined with the peripatetic nature of the organisation's history, the slipperiness of the archive and the range of the various materials do begin to converge into distinct events, moments and impressions.

Blythe House

The two largest identified collections of New Contemporaries historical material, V&A at Blythe House and the Tate Archive, were my initial focus. In tandem, searches in the

uncatalogued materials regarding the more recent activity took place at New Contemporaries offices. All located in London, the three venues and collections do largely reflect the three phases of the exhibition: from its origins in post-war London, to the increased emphasis on ‘now and next’ in the 70s and 80s, to the high expectations of a professionalised art world occupied by the current organisation.

Starting with the Arts Council records at the V&A, the touring and funding assistance for very first exhibition appeared key. As the Arts Council continued with the tour and guaranteed against loss for the London show over the two decades from 1948, various Arts Council administrators worked in close proximity to both participating artists and the Student Committees.¹³⁷ Amongst the milieu of application slips, booking of venues, transport of artworks, and letters regarding the location of artworks (and artists) the files seem both full of information and at the same time slippery and incomprehensible. My initial confusion in deciphering the broader contents lies not only in the legibility of handwritten documents but also in the need to develop a familiarity with the operations undertaken:

Typed Young Contemporaries list with notations. The catalogue numbers indicate there were at least 273 works but this only lists 59 – is it the selection they made for touring? But then again the main exhibition had more works than 273? The far-right column I had assumed was dates is actually £ s. d. Is this a list of sales??
NOT A LIST OF SALES – A LIST OF INSURANCE VALUATIONS

The struggle to understand the purpose of the contents is slowly alleviated as the rhythm of activity emerges: the selection of artworks, acceptance by artists selected, venue confirmations, dissemination of exhibition details, transporting of work, and financial reports. I establish that each folder runs from back to front chronologically, although every so often there is a hiccup in the timeline with years and months missed or jumbled within and between files. The catalogue cards for the Arts Council touring exhibition also quickly become a stabilising visual and textual focus (Figure 4), and the introduction written by the contemporaneous Arts Council staff, initially Arts Director Philip James then Gabriel White (Figure 5), offers a punctuation of coherence to what can otherwise appear as rather erratic and fragmented.

¹³⁷ Throughout its history, the exhibition also follows many of the Arts Council agendas: beginning with the urge to support young artists as they returned from war, extending access to the arts across provincial centres, and jump-start the art market, to more recent policies of diversity and inclusivity.

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Figure 4: The Arts Council Young Contemporaries 1950, touring catalogue card.

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Figure 5: The Arts Council Young Contemporaries 1949, touring catalogue card. Detail of Introduction by Philip James, Arts Director, Arts Council of Great Britain. © V&A Archive, photo Emily Gray.

As I work through the folders, these short introduction passages printed on the exhibition cards provide a window into a reflexive commentary regarding how the exhibition is framed,

its purpose and reception. I begin to copy and compile them into one document for later analysis. For instance, enticing audiences to ‘spot a winner’ (1953), or the exhibition as ‘an excellent hunting ground for those on the look-out for new talent’ (1955) brings to mind the post-war appetite for youth, innovation and the next generation as well as the changing systems of patronage, as discussed extensively by Massouras and referred to in Chapter One. Comments made in internal Arts Council memos and whether or not newspaper reviews are included also begin to prompt an overarching impression of the exhibition as it progressed.

Language styles and shifts in emphasis also highlight changing attitudes and cultural understandings: although at times this may be less due to a general consensus and more a result of personal styles. For example, I almost laugh out loud when reading a letter in which Philip James takes exception to the proposed front cover design of the 1952 catalogue card. I assume the typesetting company in charge of the design is attempting a painterly splash, but swiftly ameliorate their artistic flare to a graphic hexagonal design much more to James’ liking. It can also be seen as Gabriel White takes over from Philip James in 1959 in writing the foreword for the Young Contemporaries touring exhibition. The introductions become briefer – in tone if not in length - with a clearer focus on the validating structure of Young Contemporaries and the type of work on show (Figure 6):

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Figure 6: The Arts Council Young Contemporaries 1962, touring catalogue card. Detail of Foreword by Gabriel White. © V&A Archive, photo Emily Gray.

Sporadically, a catalogue for the London exhibition (and add any introductory material to my database) and, very rarely, an exhibition poster was also included. The presence of

Northern Young Contemporaries poster from 1968 and a Young Contemporaries exhibition poster from the following year in the same folder provides an interesting juxtaposition, particularly bearing in mind that notes within the Arts Council files report the success of the latterly formed Northern Young Contemporaries, which was held up as a paragon of cohesion and cooperation for the London group to look up to. The gold and minimalist design for Northern Young Contemporaries 1968 provides a very different appearance versus the design for Young Contemporaries 1969 in London just one year later (Figure 7). Some years the records also contain newspaper reviews, and very occasionally you can further discern the changing quality of the exhibition through the tone of the internal Arts Council memos.¹³⁸

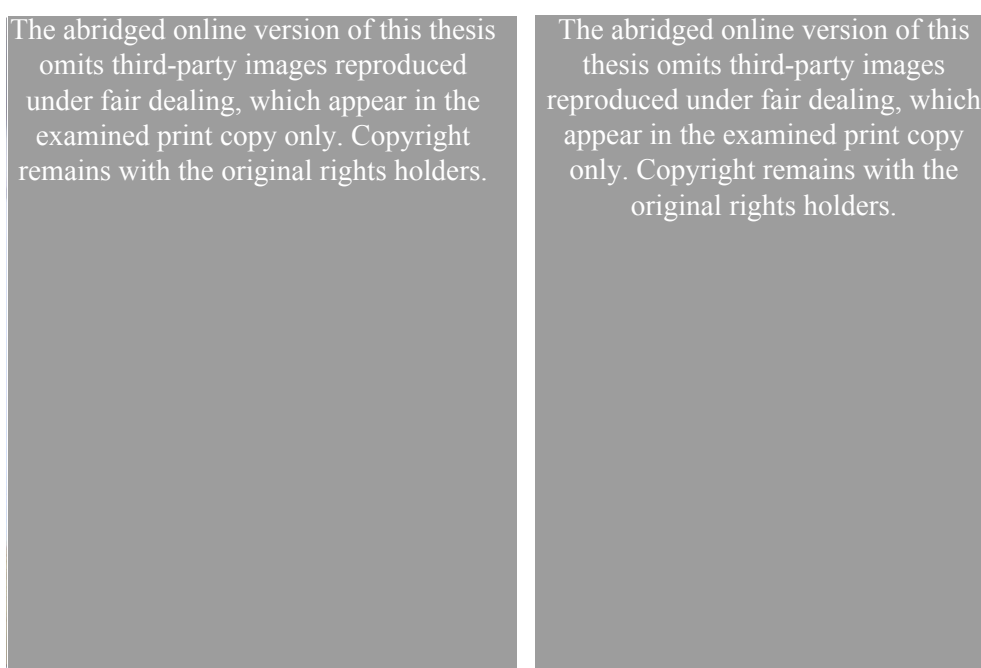


Figure 7: Left - Northern Young Contemporaries 1968, Right - Young Contemporaries (London) 1969. © V&A Archive, photo Emily Gray.

A report compiled by the Young Contemporaries Committee, ‘Recommendations for the future running of this Exhibition’, in 1955 also paints a clearer picture of the how the London exhibition was initially received, as well as how early the concerns over status and purpose occur within the organisation’s rhetoric. With the issue of selling a regular point of contention around the exhibitions’ role, the 1955 report states that 80% of sales are to private patrons seeking a “picture for the house” (Young Contemporaries 1955). As letters from buyers regarding either the location of artworks they have given on loan for the touring exhibition or requesting further information on the artists amassed, I started to wonder where these paintings have ended up. One avenue leads me to Google maps ‘street view’ as

¹³⁸ As discussed in Chapter One, this can be seen in the comments by the Arts Council Arts Assistant on 9 May 1968, in which she states: “I personally feel that of the three [exhibitions] I have helped organise, the first in 1966 was by far the best.” (Kenner 1968)

I locate the addresses provided and imagine if the works are still inside. Another avenue takes me to regional museums and educational institution collections, such as tracking down the work by Mak Kum-Siew. *Homage to Hsieh-Ho*. Now part of the University of Birmingham Collection, the rip in the canvas mentioned in one of the regular damage reports found within the V&A files is clearly visible in their online catalogue. Later, I discover a further damage report, including David Hockney's work *The Cruel Elephant* (1962) which was scribbled on in blue crayon while on display at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Wales.¹³⁹

An aspect of New Contemporaries history as a transitory gathering of graduating peers, is not only where artworks may have ended up, but who and what was exhibited. New Contemporaries do have a few documents that list some past participants: one being the Mary Doyle archive narrative (although only a very few names are mentioned), another spreadsheet outlines those who have subsequently had Turner Prize connections, and a further list of approximately 200 names that have been gathered over the years of assembling selection panels, associated programming events and promotional materials. A laborious process, the 'filling in' of these specifics from the data available – including who participated, when, where they were educated, the title of their work, the medium, and even the price of works – is still incomplete. Even so, to the degree I have been able to complete it during my research has made apparent certain patterns.

As the Arts Council touring exhibitions present the most thorough records, being able to at least input the information for these shows does start to paint a picture of how some of the contextual information plays out materially, as well as raising several intriguing mysteries. For example, why do some artists list their works at such high prices and others so modestly? ¹⁴⁰ Why is it sometimes in pounds and shilling and sometimes given in guineas?

¹³⁹ Incidentally, the listing for the Young Contemporaries exhibition only gives details of *Demonstration of Versatility – Tea Painting with Figure*, loaned by Kasmin Gallery. However, from the Art Council memo's it is not clear if *The Cruel Elephant* is an addition to the show or instead of. A review by Bernard Staniland in the Newcastle Journal (a later stop in the tour) certainly implies the listed painting was definitely on show, citing it as being influenced by or "taking the mickey out of" Francis Bacon.

¹⁴⁰ In some instances, the medium used can be seen to make some comparative sense, and whether the work was framed or not, but in other instances it is not as clear how prices were derived at. When speaking to Basil Beattie, participant in 1959, he did mention some schools helped give guidance, but this does not seem to be according to any set rules and students often created their own pricing systems (or not, as the case may be).

¹⁴¹ What is the Anglo-French Art Centre¹⁴² or the International Artist Centre?¹⁴³ Why does the importance of medium and pricing seem to fluctuate in importance in the catalogue listings? On the other hand, it is also exciting to see different names pop up, from Quentin Blake to Victor Burgin.¹⁴⁴

To the extent possible from the sample compiled, it also displays a sense of the shifting media and ideas. For example, titles move from regular descriptors such as ‘Regent’s Park in Winter’ (Michael Fussell 1951) or ‘Under Milk Wood’ (Paula Rego) to an increase in non-titles, such as ‘Painting 1961’ (Frank Bowling 1961) or conceptual references, such as ‘Getting the feel of a new machine’ (Michael Vaughan 1963). As the exhibition progresses, the impact of new materials can be seen in the listings (and the increase in damage reports due to the instability of untested media). Oils, watercolours and lithographs become mixed media, acrylic or collage. Skimming through the data, it is equally apparent that there is a dominance of artists from London schools who go on to have established careers. This may be due to attending London institutions from undergraduate degrees at provincial schools for further postgraduate study indicating a will to pursue their chosen field but may also be the embedded networking between the London galleries and institutions that help galvanise further opportunities upon graduation.

While it is easy to get stuck on ‘star artists’ as readily identifiable and easier to track, I find myself also getting caught up following diversions and meanders in virtual space: trying to find out what the works actually looked like (due to a lack of any images), or attempting to locate the artists I am more uncertain of or who are less readily recognisable. I do discover that there were exhibition images taken through discovering a small selection on the stock photo website Alamy, and it is later suggested that the Tate had a habit of photographing a wide range of London cultural activities by archivists Judy Vaknin and Victoria Lane,

¹⁴¹ My aunt, who was at art school in London during the 1970s, also mentioned artwork often used to be priced in guineas (as were horseraces) even though by that time they had already gone out of circulation.

¹⁴² The Anglo-French Art Centre was set up by Alfred Rozelar-Green, a painter who had fled the second world war. Set up on the site of the former St John’s Wood Art School, it ran from 1945 to 1951. Echoing the earlier French salon-style art gatherings, regular parties would take place as well as teaching by well-known British figures, such as Henry Moore, Francis Bacon, Victor Pasmore and Graham Sutherland. These figures overlapped considerably with Young Contemporaries, whether taking part in the Permanent Committee or selection processes. (StJohnsWoodMemories.org)

¹⁴³ The International Artists Centre was confused by myself with the Institute of Contemporary Art, with acronyms of IAC and ICA respectively. However, while I confirmed it was the International Artists Centre that played host to New Contemporaries in 1976, there is very little information about the organisation or venue to be found.

¹⁴⁴ As an example of the unusual and widespread reach of the artists who have participated in the exhibition, in discussing the project with my aunt she promptly produced a print by John Hoyland. She had purchased the lithograph in London in the same year he was a Young Contemporaries selector (he was also a previous participant in 1959 and 1960). Print 38/75 now hangs on my living room wall.

although I am unable to locate any of Young Contemporaries.¹⁴⁵

Of less immediately recognisable figures, I find information about George Crawford (participant in 1953) from a local newspaper article. Crawford went on to work in commercial publicity design after completing his National Service in 1957. However, it seems the former art student took up painting again in his retirement nearly half a century later, with a solo exhibition as a local featured artist in 2002 (Northern Echo 2002, np). Another artist, Ed Lister (participant in 1963), went on to teach at Chelsea School of Art before moving to Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, where he became known as a scenic designer for theatre, television and film. Most recently, he was commissioned to paint a large-scale mural for the Bishno Schall Clock Gallery of the Santa Barbara Courthouse (Santa Barbara Independent 2021).

Equally, while I am following individual artists or art works, the archival materials point me back to their relationship to the exhibition overall, with comments such as “a number of artists of the younger generation who are now well established made their ‘debut’ in the Young Contemporaries.” (Young Contemporaries 1957). Former participants who go on to teach do appear to have an influence on the next generation, such as Mario Dubsky (participant in 1958 and 1959), Basil Beattie (participant in 1959), and Richard Wentworth (participant in 1968) - among many others who not only became well recognised artists and tutors, but later members of the New Contemporaries Permanent Committee. The influence of having previously taken part appears to lead to the encouragement of the next generation to apply.¹⁴⁶

Generational shifts are not always so certain however, with new trends beginning to butt up against what has become the orthodoxy of the generation before. As the archival materials reveal that the London exhibition is confidently introducing itself as “one of the most prominent features in the ‘Art Calendar’” (Young Contemporaries 1959), there remains an uncertainty over the quality of what, exactly, is on display. Repeated incidences talk of the excitement of seeing new artists against the often-derivative nature of the work. These qualities are being readily self-acknowledged within the exhibition introductions, as well as picked up on by participants, the art council memos and art critics, but are also apparent to the general public. At home, between archive visits and trying to assimilate what is in my

¹⁴⁵ Vaknin and Lane also suggest that these images could be within the uncatalogued materials held within the archive, or remain as part of collections without detailed catalogue records.

¹⁴⁶ These are only a very few examples of many that demonstrate the cycle of the generational peer groups: from student to artist to tutor to student.

archive notes, I discover an interview carried out by BBC during the opening of the exhibition in 1959.

Shown as part of the BBC Archive social media #OnThisDay series in 2019, a member of the public is seen questioning the level of intelligence an art student expects from an audience member: that they assume them to be so unknowing as to not spot the similarities of the work presented to the current canon of artists. From the comments posted in response to the clip, ready comparisons are made to contemporary art today:

“And some are still insulting our intelligence now – with piles of bricks and unmade beds... but someone is paying for this rubbish.” (Lelean 2019)

The response is likely making reference to Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII* and Tracy Emin’s *My Bed*, neither of whom were in Young/New Contemporaries, but nonetheless are representative of how each conceptual shift presents baffling notions of new practices to many, as well as the potential value of such works, cultural or otherwise. Moving back to being in the Archive, in no item is this more apparent than in a 1967 clipping from the South Wales Echo, when a landscape work by Michael [Derek] Jarman caused art critic Jon Holliday to announce “Would you pay £100 for this load of rubbish?” (Holliday 1967, n.p.) As I read through the article to discover what had so enraged Holliday, I find the work under discussion was what would now be considered a rather modest effort influenced by American minimalism and Pop (Figure 8).

The stark style alongside a tap and towel rail attached to the canvas was a step too far for Holliday, and equally for a founder member of Young Contemporaries Charles White who responded to the article:

“These days the ratepayer is sending more younger people to art colleges ... looking for a quick success and easy money... It would be interesting to know if some of the rubbish described in Holliday’s article is still around in a 100 years-time.” (White 1967)

As an instance of how being in the archive can inspire a meander through unexpected terrains, reviewing the article by Holliday led to a tramping through the web to find a colour

image of the work, as well as attempting to track down its current location.¹⁴⁷

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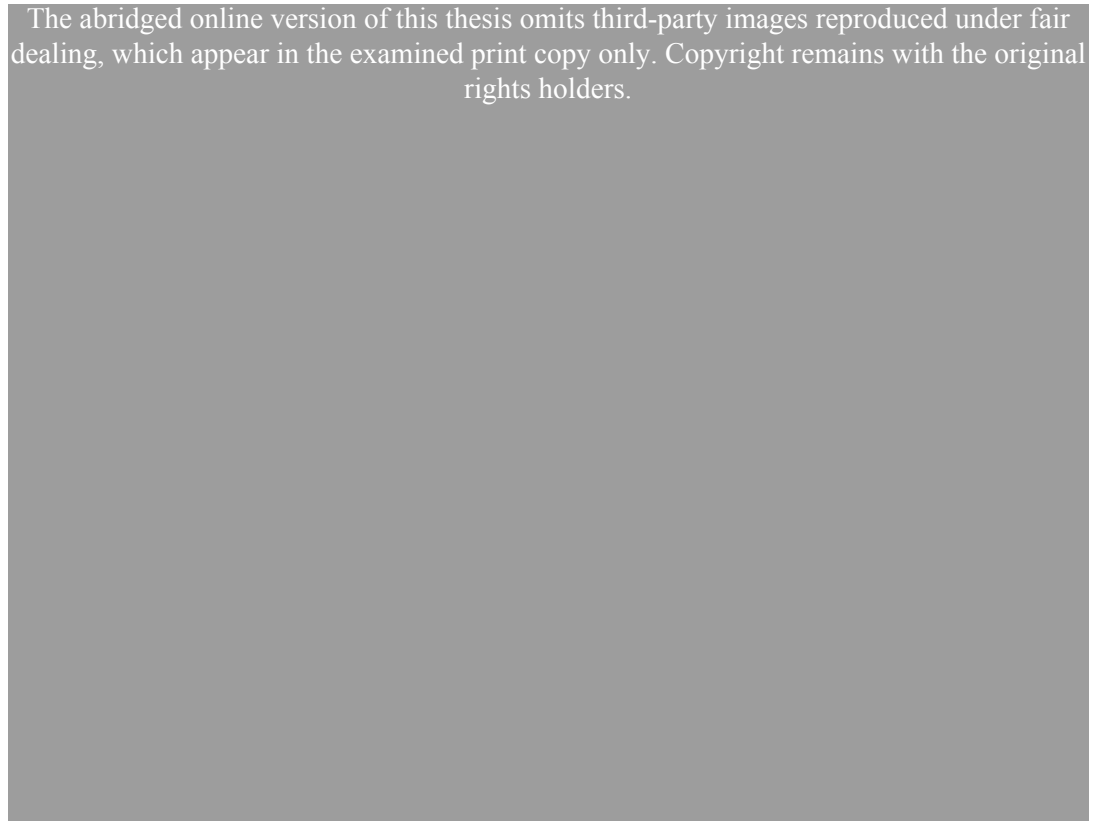


Figure 8: Derek Jarman, *Cool Waters*, mixed media on canvas, 245 x 183.5 cm. Exhibited in *Young Contemporaries* 1967. Artwork © the artist's estate.

Half a century later, in 2019 an article by Richard Martin for *Apollo Magazine* marking the 25th anniversary of Jarman's death makes reference to the *Cool Waters* series. Martin highlights the landscapes as signalling Jarman's interest in painting and demonstrating his experimentation with a range of styles as he worked towards developing his own artistic voice:

"It's fascinating to compare these uncertain beginnings with the boldness, confrontation, political potency and dark humour of the art Jarman created in the 1980s and 90s" (Martin 2019)

A brief bibliography on Jarman written by Michael Charlesworth in 2011 also notes the 'Young Contemporaries' exhibition as one of the high notes of success ending his time as a

¹⁴⁷ A description by Sotheby's details that although the work was purchased, it proved too large for the space the new owner had in mind. Repainting the work to a smaller scale, the original was gifted to Jarman's friend. The painting was subsequently exhibited in the Barbican Art Gallery for *Derek Jarman: A Retrospective* at the in 1996 (Sothebys.com). Christie's website expands on the dialogue with a price realised under auction in 2004 of £2,629, although I am uncertain if this is the repainted work as there is no tap, or a further edition. The website also notes that the exhibit of the work at the Tate was in the same year Jarman won the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation Prize for Landscape. This was for a second work of a similar artistic composition, also on show in the Young Contemporaries London exhibition, titled *Landscape with Various Devices*. (Christies.com)

student at Slade School of Fine Art (Charlesworth 2011, p. 31). Even if not the best and most poignant of Jarman's work, the series still has a role to play in understanding Jarman's legacy.¹⁴⁸

The impact of Pop art for Young Contemporaries in the 1960s – beginning five years prior to Jarman's experimentation in Pop with *Cool Waters* – was almost instantaneous. Since that period, Young Contemporaries has become synonymous with the launch of British Pop art as well as becoming the most frequent reference point for the exhibition's early history. Later exhibition catalogues as well as the current organisation often cite Hockney and his contemporaries to provide a foundation of validity, as do contemporary newspaper and journal articles.¹⁴⁹ In the here and now of the archive – which is currently a point somewhere between the V&A Archive room in 2018 and the R.B.A. Galleries in Suffolk Street during 1960s – I am drawn to the foreword for the Young Contemporaries exhibition in 1962. Written by art critic Andrew Forge, it offers a poignant point of reference to how and in what conditions Pop Art emerged. As an example of how materials located in a variety of different places start to converge, placing Forge's introduction alongside a contemporaneous article by John Berger from The Observer historical database, together they present an insightful take on the position and function of Young Contemporaries as marking this particular shift in British art history.

Starting with Berger's article, he suggests that rather than presenting an assessment of the works on display, the exhibition itself is a review of the conditions of society through "evidence supplied by the young" (Berger 1962, p. 27). Roughly allocating three 'schools' of practice, the first of these what he defines as minimalist architectural geometric abstract works, and it is clear Berger is not an ardent fan: "Have they enough content to give them wings to fly in our imaginations? I doubt it" (ibid, p. 27). However, he views the second school of Pop art as sophisticated and intellectual:

¹⁴⁸ During the course of my research, it has become apparent that the entries to Young-New Contemporaries often represent a period of experimentation for artists that comes with the transition between the security of the educational institution and the establishment of a distinct stylistic reputation. For example, Anthony Gormley's entry to the New Contemporaries 'Live Show' in 1967 is one of the few moving image works he has exhibited – which I did manage to find a reference to in an online article, but with the fallibility of the human researcher I not take a note of the website and I have not been able to track it down since. During an interview with Terry Shave he likewise speaks of a period of experimentation with film instigated during his Master's studies, before returning to painting a few years later (Appendix - Shave).

¹⁴⁹ Even a quick search online for information on Young Contemporaries reveals statements such as "it was through these shows that Pop Art, especially the work of Hockney, first attracted the attention of the general public." (artbios.org.uk) and "the most famous Young Contemporaries show was that of 1961, when British Pop art first appeared in force in the work of Derek Boshier, David Hockney, Allen Jones, R.B. Kitaj and Peter Philips." (oxfordreference.com) Definitely not the most reliable sources with a number of errors readily apparent, however as some of the easier and quickest references to access it does reinforce the entanglement of the exhibition with the phenomena of Pop Art and its reputation towards launching Hockney's career.

“It rejects the whole tradition of fine art as useless sugar coating a bitter pill. It is anti-authoritarian, anti-military, anti-snob. It affirms the individual unnoticed imagination which can transform commercial pulp fed to it.” (ibid., p.27)

It is quite telling that this commentary comes in the same year as a moving introduction to the exhibition written by Andrew Forge.

Introducing *Young Contemporaries*, Forge states that for painters the exhibition is by “far and away the most important thing that has happened in England since the war”.

Additionally, the language Forge utilises throughout makes reference to the battlefield.

Occurring over a decade after the end of World War II, as I sat in the cold Archive room I was surprised by the closeness of the war within his writing, and then was surprised that I was surprised. For those living through the early sixties, it must have still felt like the “firing-line a stone’s throw away” (Forge 1962) with national service only just ending.

Despite the ‘swinging sixties’ that we see in retrospect, rapid social change and a growing distrust in governance were giving rise to a wave of countercultures, divided communities and increased anxiety regarding the future (Walker 2002).

Berger, likewise, points to the “comparatively unprotected lives” of art students, with few illusions of many achieving a sustainable artistic career. However, through Forge agrees with Berger and emphasises the uncertainty of artistic success - for the exhibition year by year as well as for the artists participating in the long-term - his celebratory ending resounds like a victory call:

“Every *Young Contemporaries* has the quality of a celebration, a parade, a unique and fleeting juxtaposition. There will never be another quite like it, ever.” (Forge 1962)

In contrast, Berger appears to cast a shadow of crisis and artistic predicament. Nevertheless, there is a sense in his article of a fighting spirit, of artists digging out new meanings and forms through which to express their experiences of a changed cultural landscape. However, despite the compelling catalogue introductions, Holliday’s article or requests for a tour from New Zealand,¹⁵⁰ the ‘Pop Art’ years do not appear as a specifically dominant narrative in the Arts Council records as I am sitting in the Archive. The changing of mediums,

¹⁵⁰ Within the V&A Archive materials is a letter from the City of Auckland Art Gallery making a request for *Young Contemporaries* to tour New Zealand. An initial response by the Arts Council Art Department is quite amusing, asking “Haven’t you got any of your own?” A later response by Mark Glazebrook confirms that the demand generated for the work and the artists, and subsequently the difficulty in organising a show.

installation instructions as works become more complex, and the first few photographs in the late 1960s do indicate the changing dynamic of work being produced – a hint of what is to come in the next stage of the exhibition.

It is not until distilling my findings later on that I start to pick out the broader context, the peaks and troughs of the exhibition's popularity. Going from the high of the early 1960s¹⁵¹ its demise by the end of the decade appears to be prompted by the very same thing. As the exhibition's prominence earns them a slot in the Tate exhibition calendar, comments made by the Arts Council to Tate Gallery talks of the show having “fallen between not two, but three stools!” An expression I had to look up, it describes being caught between too many conflicting agendas – the result of increased expectations by all parties perhaps? The Art Council goes on to make reference to “troublemakers” although what exactly the trouble is, is not clear. The tension apparent here seems to recur in the 1970 exhibition at the Royal Academy (according to the account by Lambirth in 1986), although by this point the records in the V&A Archive have already petered out.

Tate and more

Transferring to the Tate Archive and to the relaunch of the exhibition as New Contemporaries, the first item I notice is the 1967 Young Contemporaries exhibition poster hanging on the Reading Room wall. It is unexpected. For an institution so internationally renowned, I am caught off-guard that they have chosen to display their association to Young Contemporaries within the very space that represents the immensity of Tate's history. It causes me to wonder who made the decision to hang it there, and why. On the other hand, as an inference of the importance of Young Contemporaries within British art history it is a welcome sight, and perhaps something I have lost perspective on as I became absorbed in all the detail. Even so, it demonstrates the long shadow the period of Pop Art in the 1960s casts over the exhibition, at the very time the records Tate holds are when it re-emerged with a new name.

The Tate Archive feels quite different to the old school atmosphere of Blythe House, with

¹⁵¹ The sentiments of Young Contemporaries playing a vital role to a broader segment than art students is voiced by David Thompson in the 1963 introduction, although he is less certain of what exactly the tantalising quality of Young Contemporaries is: “How has it dug itself in, then, as a serious annual event look forward to by more people than the students concerned? why does it seem more important now than a similar student-exhibition, had there been such as thing, could possibly have seemed in the past? is it the contemporary cult of youth again? is everyone hunting in it, like a bargain basement” (Thompson 1962). Thompson's concern with the speed of change is evident, with art tied to “the fleeting moment in a more fundamental way than it has ever been before.” (ibid. Thompson) The threshold moment of the artist as they are starting out appears to Thompson to provide a more sensitive barometer for artistic activity, with a sense that student artists pick up on new movements and, mixed into the canon they have been taught and studied, provide a new air of experimentation.

plush carpet, heavy doors and desks covered in rich green writing leather. Equally, the documents are encased in crisp new cardboard wallets, rather than the V&A's aged-softened and frayed folders. The records I am viewing here are from the ICA, with the new folders certainly the consequence of the recent transfer of the ICA's records to the Tate. However, rather than finding a cohesive grouping of material the records at Tate require a little more hunting through the Tate catalogue to locate what I am looking for.

The materials themselves also feel messier, although they are generally the same kind of organisational documents, with sporadic exhibition catalogues and posters. Hints of more detailed and complex proposals emerging in art practice from the late 1960s in the V&A Archive have come to fruition, as well as a greater access to photography. In the Tate records of the late 1970s however, the extensive performative and installation proposals are accompanied by notes in ball point pen rather than ink, a series of seminar acetates and typed documents, slides and contact prints. Even so, now familiar with the operations of the exhibition it is easier to see the repeating patterns – new mediums and practices emerging; tensions between the Student Committee and larger institutions; the questioning of the purpose and role of New Contemporaries. While there is overlap in contents, the rupture between Young to New Contemporaries is tangible: alongside the advancing practices shown within the material contents, the language has subtly shifted again, and the focus is now solely on the London exhibition (as the Arts Council have ceased the touring programme).¹⁵² The records at Tate are also much briefer than those at Blythe House as they only cover an eight-year duration rather than twenty, as well as being collated through an alternate agenda.¹⁵³

Established almost concurrently to Young Contemporaries, the two organisations of New Contemporaries and ICA have many similarities even if their formats are pronouncedly different. Curator and researcher Ben Cranfield speaks to ICA's formation as an attempt to return to modern art's formation, when it was "less mapped and more uncertain" (Cranfield

¹⁵² It should be noted that the records I am viewing here are also three years after their relaunch, relating to the hosting of the new exhibition by ICA from 1978 to 1986.

¹⁵³ Whereas the Arts Council did fund the London show, the records in the V&A Archive focused on organising the touring exhibition as an in-house activity. For the ICA records at Tate, Young Contemporaries is an external exhibition hosted within their venue rather than one that is part of their curated programme, resulting in record keeping that is ad hoc; more a question of which items ended up in the files rather than any preservation strategy. Nonetheless, as a reflection of the phases of the exhibition and the changes in practice, it appears fitting that while Young Contemporaries was primarily hosted by the R.B.A. Galleries, associated to the prestige and tradition of figurative practices, in the changed atmosphere of British arts - and the second claim to the beginning of 'the contemporary period' as post 1968 (Osbourne 2013, 'Three periodizations of contemporary art') - sees New Contemporaries become affiliated with ICA. Ironically, while the association of the Royal British Society (R.B.A. Galleries) to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) indicates a radical shift in attitude, these two institutions actually sit side by side. The entrance to the Mall Galleries (as R.B.A. Galleries are known today) is less than 50 yards from the entrance to ICA.

2013, n.p.), just as the highlighting of artists by New Contemporaries that are still in the process of education also points to an irresolute ‘becoming’.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, while ICA wished to reject the megalithic master narratives of institutional museums, they remained enthralled by their forms and possibilities (Cranfield 2013). In the same manner Young Contemporaries are seen as reflecting on and producing derivatives of the art canon while simultaneously pushing at new artistic boundaries.

Correspondingly pushing at the boundaries of the archive, in the process of research the materials at Tate feel much more caught up with the broader range of curatorial and historical research activity I have undertaken. Resulting in a far more anachronic impression, this includes further investigations in the New Contemporaries offices, as well as interviews with New Contemporaries participants from the Phase 2: 1974-1989 era, Mike Collier, Terry Shave, Dexter Dalwood, Neil Cummings and Terry Duffy, and earlier conversations with Basil Beattie and Bruce McLean (both participants during Phase 1: 1949 - 1970) who also overlap as they became Committee members and panel selectors during the 1970s. These meetings further direct me towards alternative spaces to track down materials: the missing years from 1974 to 1977, in which the exhibition is hosted by Camden Art Centre, International Artists Centre and Royal Academy, as well as the addition of the Live Show at ACME Gallery. While Camden Art Centre has only retained the catalogue and ACME Gallery not much more (IAC no longer exists and I have not managed to find any records), as I start to unpack all the interviews and scattered items together, the significance of the 1970s and early 1980s in how New Contemporaries articulated itself as well as reflecting the jump in technology becomes clearer.

Unsurprising perhaps, as the exhibition nears its current incarnation there is a greater sense of contextual familiarity. This is not least because Mike Collier is introduced to me through my previous colleagues at Cooper Gallery in Dundee (as is Bruce McLean) and Terry Shave through Nottingham Trent University, which are all closer to my own working environments. Yet, even though they appear more familiar there is a sense that these brief eight years within the uncertainty of the 1970s up to the burgeoning of the entrepreneur of the late 1980s are their own distinct phase. One that marks a specific transition between the avant-garde of abstract expressionism, minimalism and Pop to the conceptual and

¹⁵⁴ Concepts of ‘becoming’ have been prevalent within the discourse regarding the contemporary. Particularly with the advent of the art ‘happening’ and new mediums such as photography and moving image, truncated connections to time are brought about by an emphasis on the immediate experience and spatial relations in artistic practice. In more up to date contexts, Paul O’Neill describes the process of exhibition and curating as a form of emergence, and in the process of the exhibition ‘becoming’ it forms a brief temporal escape for the art work (O’Neill, P. 2020).

performative practices we have become familiar with today.

Within the somewhat erratic contents at Tate, I am thrilled to find a few rather fuzzy contact prints of exhibitions. For the previous period of Young Contemporaries images of the work, let alone the exhibitions, had been elusive.¹⁵⁵ Images I had found outside the archive all tended to display the earlier shows hung in a high-volume salon style. In contrast, the images present within the ICA records show a much cleaner and more refined presentation. The cool white walls and well-spaced work coming through the tiny windows of the contact photographs look immediately relatable to the New Contemporaries exhibitions of today. Reflecting the wider change in curatorial trends from 1960s onwards, with the advent of curators such as Harald Szeeman and seminal exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969), the detailed proposals included in the files by various artists also describe the increasingly complex and varied approach within contemporary practice.

Leaving behind my investigations beneath Tate Britain, I walk along the river and turn up past St James Park to the ICA - the reality of the venue I have just been viewing in the archive. Sitting down in the ICA café, I am meeting with artist and researcher Neil Cummings, who has brought with him a copy of the 1982 New Contemporaries catalogue. At the time of his participation in '82, Cummings was student at Maidstone. During our conversation (which starts out as many of them do, with him claiming he has little recollection of the exhibition) he recalls that New Contemporaries in the early 80s was a show that had a reputation as platforming the 'best of', but its profile remained concentrated largely within the London scene.

As a student from Maidstone, Cummings perceived London as exclusive and cult like, with a clear delineation between student life, London galleries and 'art world' activity. The reality of Cummings' participation was as remote for him as the distance in time is today. He did remember the satisfaction of being accepted, but as he had sent in his work and not attended the exhibition itself, it remained an abstract event (Appendix - Cummings). Even though it may have been an 'arms-length' encounter, three decades later Cummings was invited to return as a former participant for the 2015 symposium *New Contemporaries 1949 to Now*, remaking his connection to the exhibition and the current organisation.

¹⁵⁵ Subsequently to the V&A investigations I had managed to track down images of a few early exhibitions via a stock photography agency, as well as purchasing one press image for 1957 by Bill Russell on Ebay. The newspaper reviews from the historical newspaper database occasionally included a grainy image of the work, and the BBC interview is conducted within a small area of the 1959 show.

The meeting with Cummings brought to mind echoes from an earlier conversation with Basil Beattie. We had met in a quite different atmosphere to the contemporary cool of the ICA, in the Royal Academy Members Room, straining to hear above the sounds of clinking of coffee cups and excited chatter. Beattie nonetheless voiced the same sentiments of remoteness Cummings had felt, being accepted for the exhibition while an undergraduate in Hartlepool.¹⁵⁶ He too, had sent his work in and not attended the actual exhibition. Later attending the Royal Academy, he participated again, this time alongside Mario Dubsky, William Tucker and Paul Huxley.¹⁵⁷

Having already had a few brief conversations with Mike Collier during his attendance at an event in Dundee in late 2017, I knew that Beattie and Collier had crossed-over during the 1970s: Beattie as a Permanent Committee Member from 1974 – 1977 and Collier as the Student Chair of New Contemporaries in 1976. While I did raise this with Beattie briefly when I met with him - and it was at this point that the conversation digressed into a wider discussion regarding art education and the trend toward conceptual practice – it was not until a later, more in depth meeting with Collier that the reason why my conversation with Beattie had led in that direction came to light. Collier, much like Beattie, had been a painting student and primarily remains a painter still. However, as student at Goldsmith's in the 1970s he had become intrigued by students who were working with conceptual artist Michael Craig-Martin on the "back field" (Appendix - Collier).

At the time, although the mediums were becoming more diverse, the exhibition was still stated as a Painting and Sculpture exhibition. As Collier saw his friend's producing performance and film works, he fought to change the exhibition parameters to formerly include '3rd Area' works. With a resistant Permanent Committee – including Beattie - as a compromise it was agreed that a parallel 'Live Show' to the sculpture and painting exhibition could take place. Collier recalls putting on the main exhibition at the International Artists Centre¹⁵⁸ and the three-week long programme at ACME took up most of his time,

¹⁵⁶ Beattie recalls that going into college one morning he met with this painting tutor who 'had a very long face'. Upon asking what was wrong, his tutor told Beattie that Beattie's submission to Young Contemporaries had got a mention in The Observer. His tutor, who had sent in his own work in previous years, was upset as he had never received a mention from the critics. Beattie couldn't remember what the work was, just that it was a little painting, and that the Sunday papers would regularly cover group exhibitions such as Young Contemporaries at that time (Appendix Beattie).

¹⁵⁷ The art world during the late 1950s and early 1960s was even smaller than the one Cummings knew. Beattie describes it as limited almost exclusively to the area around Royal Academy and behind The Mall (on Cork Street, Bond Street and Dover Street), with the exception of Whitechapel Gallery in the east end (Appendix - Beattie). It was Beattie who was instrumental, along with his contemporaries who had also become tutors across the London institutions, in encouraging the re-launch of Young Contemporaries in 1974.

¹⁵⁸ Despite searching I have not found any further information regarding the International Artists Centre, which was the host of the main exhibition for just one year. Abbreviated to IAC, it was also becomes easily confused with ICA.

almost eclipsing his final year of Masters' study. As mentioned, it is Collier's own move to ICA after his graduation which seems to have precipitated the exhibition also moving there. A move that builds upon the exhibitions reputation for launching British Pop Art and solidifies its connection to not only showing work by 'contemporaries' but being 'Contemporary' in and of itself.

Alongside expanding the remit of the exhibition, Collier's own transition from artist to curator also reflects the leap in artist-curator dynamics, professionalisation and new institutionalism. Meeting with Collier over four decades later, the changes this has wrought on the landscape of the art world has already become part of art history – what Collier refers to in relation to New Contemporaries as an 'organisational package', or what Massouras' would perhaps call overcoming a 'slickness taboo'. Casting myself back to the Tate Archive, I recall the professionalism of the analysis Collier compiled in 1978 and the changing tone of the exhibition catalogues leading up to the feasibility report produced in 1986. The 1986 report in particular appears to form the culmination of a pivot between the start of Young Contemporaries in 1949 and the current form of the organisation.

Moving from external sources to the files in the New Contemporaries offices, they show that the transition from a rotating committee to a Board of Trustees in 1989 is a definite departure for the organisation. The files are not extensive but having had a continuation of staff – if not offices – has allowed an accumulation of internal documents rather than those gathered by external entities. Even so, while large amounts of information regarding the exhibition have only been retained in the memories of the many participants prior to 1989, much of the information regarding the current organisation also remains with those closely involved in running the yearly exhibitions. In this period, significant holders of those memories have been the Chair of the Board Sacha Craddock and former Administrator Bev Bytheway, alongside former Board Members such as Des Laurence.

Visiting Craddock at her house in London it is clear she has a remarkable memory of each participant over the last three decades, being able to recall many of the works artists submitted as well as what they have gone on to do, as well as retaining extensive records of the exhibitions' she has been involved with. Following the practices in previous iterations of the organisation in which past participants became Permanent Committee members, Craddock has also invited past participants onto the Board. Des Laurence for example, a participant in 1994, became a Board Member the year Craddock became Chair in 1996, serving to 2010. He speaks of Craddock as a strong driving force behind New Contemporaries over the last decades, praising her role in securing their ongoing funding

from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Meeting with Des Laurence in his studio, we also spoke of the relationship New Contemporaries has had with commercial sponsors and the art market. With the rise of the YBAs in the early 1990s, Laurence felt the organisation had an opportunity to push a more commercial agenda, but instead ‘turned the volume down’, with the Board deliberately opting to orientate itself towards extending artistic and professional development support. This has been regularly borne out through the organisation's subsequent programming strands. In considering how New Contemporaries has presented itself, the close associations to host venues and external institutions, it has also had a significant impact on the organisation's identity. This is no less so in the third phase of the organisation, and Laurence also highlighted the importance of these relationships during our conversation. The decision to tour the exhibition out of London was taken to counter the exhibition's reputation as being too London-centric as well as aligning to funder policies. However, this was not always easy to follow through in practice.

Working regularly to very tight budgets, Bev Bytheway (a key figure in the running of New Contemporaries from 1994 to 2009) spoke of how building strong relationships to host venues was vital (Appendix - Bytheway). By this time, the impact of new thematic exhibition forms had made it increasingly difficult to find venues in which to exhibit. Often venues would also want a say in how the work was selected. However, Bytheway reflected that the organisation felt the independent panel selection by leading art figures was important not only as a draw to both applicants and audiences, but also as a diplomatic function that demonstrated the organisation's integrity. Nonetheless, this has not prevented ongoing speculation each year on the reasoning behind the selections made. The close correlation between the selectors and the work on display has often been a topic of debate by commentators and critics.

As I talk with Bytheway, she recalled the immensity of the selection process. The arm strength required to move and stack the endless boxes of slides, the fiddly process of loading the slide carousel, and the hours and hours of viewing. Attending only parts of the selection process myself during my research, the hours of sitting in a darkened room viewing what are now digital submissions is still an extensive undertaking. Wanting to gain a better understanding of how the process operated from selection to the finished exhibition, I also attend the installation of the 2018 exhibition at South London Gallery. Curating a group exhibition, selected due to quality of submission rather than any overarching theme, can be challenging. From practical considerations of light, sound and wall or floor space required,

topic and aesthetic choices must also be made – not always so easy when work has no cohesive point to draw it together other than graduation date of the artist.

Attempting to map this journey out, I start trying to draw up how all the different elements fit together (Figure 9). During Phase One, turnover of committee members and selection is almost annual, and the Arts Council touring of the show increases the exhibitions geographic range. During Phase Two (1974 – 1986), funding requirements start to rise but very slowly, with only slight fluctuation in venues and participant numbers. Committee members and selection panels continue to experience a rapid turnover. In Phase Three (1989 – onwards), funding increases exponentially while the numbers of participants remain much lower. The committee members have now become a Board of Trustees with little fluctuation, while the geographic scope of the main exhibition takes on a much more mobile trajectory. The only consistent factor is the annual turnover of the selection committee.

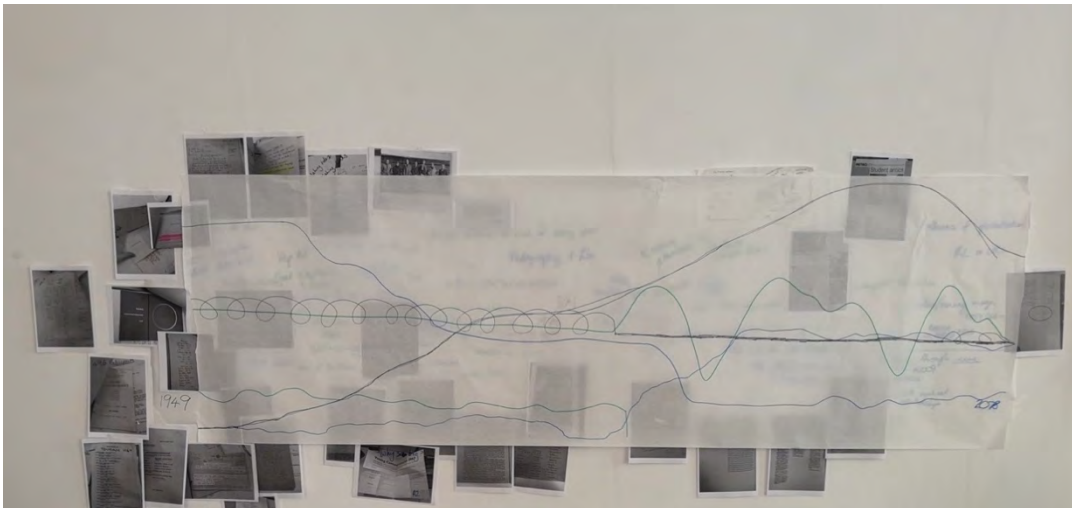


Figure 9: Trying to map/visually describe Young/New Contemporaries History. Image of working diagram.

Although still relying on several points of approximated data and subject to gaps in information, it describes a journey of the exhibition that refracts as it moves from Young Contemporaries (1949 – 1970) to New Contemporaries (1974 onwards). It is in the second phase from 1974 to 1989 that the changing conditions can most clearly be seen, as the funding, venues and formats are challenged – echoing the turbulence of decade. While the first wall installation remained a largely abstract representation, in trying to reorientate my interpretation into a more analytical form I also mapped out the information as diagram (Figure 10 - also viewable on Research Catalogue).

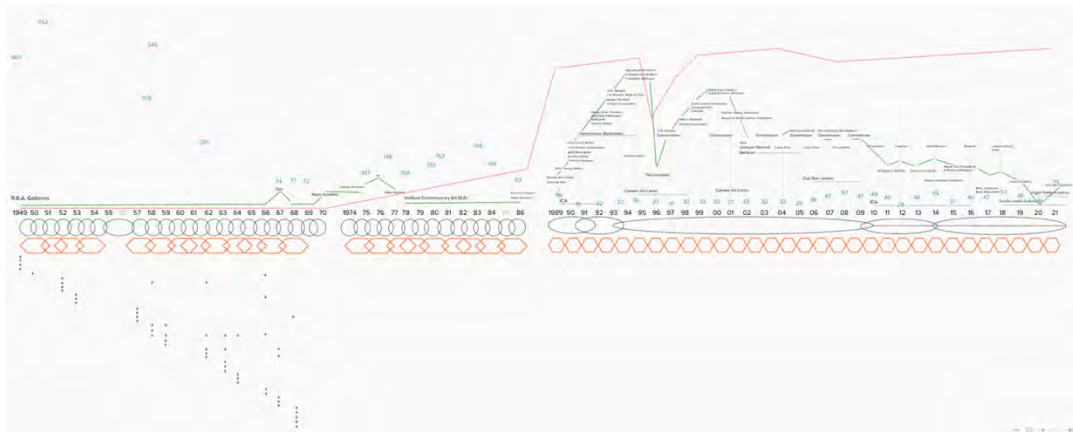


Figure 10: Representation of Young to New Contemporaries data from 1949 - 1986, including participants, venues, funding, organisation and selection committees.

From the desire to find and locate New Contemporaries archive, the research started to lean further towards its potential significance. In my attempts to assimilate the research I was prompted to ‘unpack’ all the information I had gathered – literally unpacking the documentation of my research onto a wall. However, having disorganised the materials and information from its origins there was an equivalent desire to make some order from it again. While the former felt more evocative of how the research felt, the latter appeared too rigid and seemed to lack the nuances of the journey it described. The iterative cycle of assembling materials, making them messy and then tidying them up again appeared to initiate a call-and response dynamic. The process of formation and unformation reflects the continual interplay between aggregation and dissection, highlighting the perpetual evolution of knowledge and interpretation.

[un]Forming the Archive

Building towards celebrating New Contemporaries 70th anniversary, the very subject of how to organise and provide pertinent pathways through their history arises. Considering the changes in practice to those in wider culture, New Contemporaries partnered with The Courtauld Institute to host a two-day 70th anniversary conference in October 2019. With the many areas in which artists have made work – from the mediums used to the commentary produced – understanding how to gather the range of materials together into a coherent discursive narrative that celebrates seven decades of activity reflected many of the concerns faced in this research.

As a transitory annual gathering, New Contemporaries captures a plethora of artists, eras, subjects, and practices that could legitimately prompt almost any area or era of artistic

discourse. Therefore, it is a challenge to distil the integral activity of the organisation from the many arms and legs it has, and the threads and pathways it could possibly travel along. On the other hand, as an embodied reflection of how it operates, each of the possible areas that could be discussed also progresses their overall aims in providing opportunities to support the development of contemporary artists.

Faced with the challenge of the research, its scope and the emerging possibilities, I had begun to gain some sense of the exhibitions' history from the mass of information and abstracted subjects it has been and continues to be entangled with. Prior to the 70th Anniversary conference, The Courtauld Institute had approached New Contemporaries regarding their annual research festival, ResFest. Passing the opportunity on to me, I was able to address some of the parameters of practice I had been attempting to understand, as well as connect with its potential audience. For Courtauld Resfest in April 2019, archivist Dan Heather, art historian Lucy Bayley and artist Kobby Adi joined me to discuss the connection between the archive, preservation, and meta-histories and historical metafiction. With myself as a curator, 'Archives in Progress' provided a meeting point for the four areas of discourse I had been circulating around, from the more technical and contextual aspects of how archives are positioned and the function they play in forming institutional histories, to the difficulties of disparate material forms and how to manage changing technologies.

In particular, Kobby Adi offered an alternate point of view that spoke to the more tangible aspects of how the gathering and assimilation of history occurs. Adi was a participant in New Contemporaries 2018, and I had seen his work at the exhibition opening in Liverpool and again during the install at South London Gallery, becoming intrigued by his project 'Nu Arkhives'. Examining how histories are formed and communicated through the gathering and orientation of objects to each other and their contexts, his work speaks to the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, object and narrative. As with discourse around meta-histories, Adi adopts the concepts of the archive to present a material version of Hayden White's (1973) metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony to investigate post-colonial identities.

Alongside the primary phase of archival research and discursive activities, I started to move into a secondary phase that looked to my curatorial practice as a form in which I could gather, test and position the 'archival' materials located – an unarchiving. As I had been in and out of Archives, met with past participants, tried to uncover what the artworks looked like, where artists have ended up, and the reflexive nature of the exhibition to its contemporaneous conditions, there was a building desire to see what any of the research may

amount to if placed in proximity to each other, and what it might communicate.

As one of the very first introductions made before even starting the research, the meeting with Mike Collier and the event of New Contemporaries 'Live Show' began as a small and fuzzy shape on the horizon. However, through the archival journey and as I covered more ground it came into sharper relief. Rather than a blurry dot, it loomed out of the landscape as a significant watershed landmark. Working with Bonington Gallery at Nottingham Trent University, the exhibition *Not a Live Show* - part exhibition as archive, part research on display – will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Manifesting an Archive – Part 1

This chapter will examine the first of two curatorial projects undertaken as an integral component of the research process (the second project will be discussed in Chapter Five). In March 2019, *Not a Live Show* was presented as part of Bonington Gallery ‘Vitrines’ programme at Nottingham Trent University. Aimed at drawing out a deeper understanding of New Contemporaries historical documentation, the exhibition and accompanying event focused on the instance of New Contemporaries ‘Live Shows’ which occurred in 1976 and 1977.¹⁵⁹ As an approach to providing an alternative point of analysis regarding New Contemporaries historical activity, exhibition making was utilised as both an embodied and intellectual research process. As an act of unarchiving, the exhibition exposes both the value of the archive in providing information on past activity as well as highlighting the positionality of our interactions with it. In the (re)archiving of the exhibition, *Not a Live Show* also provided an opportunity to test the possibilities of the organisation regaining their historical knowledge from external sources.

Reflecting on the process of exhibition making as a research tool (Sheikh 2015; Bjerregaard 2020; Krysa 2020, with an interest in both historiographic and contemporary value of the archive as a site for intergenerational dialogues, the first part of Chapter Four will discuss the curatorial impetus and method. These purposes were two-fold: firstly, the spatial aspect of exhibiting stored or immaterial items allowed non-linear interactions and juxtapositions to be realised and explored. As a public point of reflexivity within ongoing research, the production of New Contemporaries history as an exhibition event particularly highlighted the tensions regarding the performative and networked nature of the organisation itself. Secondly, the assimilation of disparate materials and historical data within a singular location enabled the temporary manifestation of a ‘New Contemporaries Archive’.¹⁶⁰ While *Not a Live Show* would remain an activity that took place in 2019, the archiving of the same also formed a new point of access to historical materials from four decades earlier.¹⁶¹ The resulting exhibition was therefore not only a forum for exposing and enacting the ongoing archival research but - as a process of regaining historical knowledge - also developing an understanding of the value in doing so.

¹⁵⁹ As discussed in Chapter One, while a range of practice had been included in the Young Contemporaries and New Contemporaries exhibitions previously, it is these two exhibitions that mark a specific departure for the organisation in becoming a platform for new contemporary practices as well as new artists.

¹⁶⁰ As introduced in Chapter One, Terminology, the use of capitalisation indicates an established Archive. A lower case archive indicates generalised archives/archival materials, and ‘the archive’ indicates a philosophical or metaphorical stance.

¹⁶¹ Examining Nayia Yiakoumaki’s (2009) contention that exhibitions arising from the archive should be (re)archived, I wanted to test how this could take place when the originating Archive was dislocated from the subject.

From articulating the methodological approach of exhibiting as research, and exhibition as archival formation, the second part of the chapter will outline the curatorial work undertaken. This includes the range of tasks defined by curators and theorists such as Hans Ulrich Obrist (2015) among others: from the development and refining of the subject; research regarding the relevant historical, contextual and artistic resources; the interpretation and contextualisation of the individual materials and ‘acts’; to the establishment and mediation of relationships between items exhibited, curatorial positions and the public (Smith & Fowle 2012; George 2015; Gschrey 2016). Using the concepts of *recherche* and *forshung* (Sheikh 2015, pp. 35-39), I will examine the archival and historical research followed by the experimentation apparatus of the exhibition, with an analysis of the information regarding New Contemporaries history, their archive and/or the curatorial methodology in each instance.

Concluding Chapter Four, I reflect on the impact of the exhibition as an archival object and research tool. Positioned as a ‘testing’ of curatorial frameworks, archival meanings and potentiality for expanding extant archive materials, experimental processes employed in the archive curation highlighted a reflexive dialogue between the subjects of ‘liveness’ and ‘enlivening’. Further, the method of presentation alongside the accompanying ‘live’ screening event reiterated the function of New Contemporaries itself as a conduit or transition point that is both in and out of time.

Exhibition as Research

From the archival research focused on concepts of the *dérive* and dwelling, the simultaneous development of discrete curatorial projects translated the emerging immaterial reflections into tangible actions. Although the overall research has been framed within curatorial practice (as a process that encompasses as wide range of actions and methodologies), there is nevertheless a certain mindset that differentiates itself from research that works towards a historical or historiographic outcome to a curatorial one. In writing a history, or examining the writing of one, there is a search for historical validation or identification of by who and how it was written. As a literary response it is also required to be written in a linear form, which is generally presented chronologically. However, in contemporary curatorial practice the spatial temporal dynamics allows for non-linear readings with less emphasis on providing a ‘factual narrative’, but rather allowing for a multiplicity of readings established through human and non-human interactions.

Examining the process of research within the thesis, a predominant element of the early research remained largely a historical process, with an aim to find accounts of what happened, when and in what context through the location and assessment of New Contemporaries historical materials and information. By extension, as these were orientated to each other, this also resulted in a production of its history. However, although curating can encompass a wide range of actions and methods – including historical and literary practices – the curatorial mindset differentiates itself from research that works towards a historical output as opposed to a curatorial one. As an investigation into their archive this work primarily produced a retrospective chronological and literary response. In developing an understanding of what the gathering of their historical materials might mean today through curatorial practice, the retrospective became prospective.

Within a prospective framework, contemporary curatorial practices tend towards the agitation of set norms and narratives through objects and actions (Bjerregaard 2020; Bruchet 2019; Kasprzak 2008; O'Neill 2012; Reilly 2018; Rogoff 2006; Wilson 2007): instigating the raising of questions rather than producing a finalised result or answer. Elena Filipovic has argued that “the ephemerality and lack of absoluteness of an exhibition might be its most important features.” (Filipovic 2013, p 81). While exhibitions and their apparatus of display can and have been utilised to convey what Filipovic calls the ‘unflappable truth of History’, she equally emphasises the exhibition as a site “where deeply entrenched ideas can come undone.” (ibid.) For the archive, it is finding new spaces in the past towards exploring unknown or imaginary futures (O'Neill 2012; Reilly 2018; Rogoff 2006; Wilson 2007). Bruchet highlights that taken together, the approach to exhibition curating in contemporary practice is ‘distinctly counter-archival’ (2009, p. 145). Therefore, the approach and process of understanding the possibilities of an archive for New Contemporaries resulted in a duality of action that was both historical and curatorial.¹⁶² With an aim to develop and extend the archive, the archival materials spoke to the traditional museological forms, while as a questioning of the archive’s validity, the curatorial pushed at the boundaries of those traditions to bring forth alternative readings and experiences.

Operating within the realm of the curatorial ‘event’ as spatially and temporally located,

¹⁶² As discussed in Chapter Two, the examination of archives and our interactions with them have long been debated in regard to their evidentiary nature and the ‘writing’ of history. However, as a system of accumulated records, they “are themselves chronological referents” (Bruchet 2019, p. 152). In contrast, “Any curatorial engagement with the archive is enmeshed – implicitly, explicitly – in the archive’s multi-directional relationship to time – pointing at once to the past, to the present, and the future-yet-to-come.” (ibid.) As evidenced in Chapters One and Three, exploring New Contemporaries archival documents and their locations in an effort to examine and extend their Archive inevitably speaks to its chronological narrative. Even so, as my actions served to manifest the former, in doing so they also highlighted the tensions of the latter.

Terry Smith cites this aspect of curating as an embodiment of contemporaneity (Smith 2012, pp. 141-176). Just as Smith emphasises tendencies towards the entanglement of past present and future within the curatorial, examining New Contemporaries history in particular prompts a similar relationship to time. In order to platform new artists - with the potentiality of them becoming the future canon – it also leans upon its past legacy as a source of validation in the present. As a process in the research towards advancing New Contemporaries historical knowledge and archive, developing the research through curatorial outcomes not only provides a further dimension of analysis that helps unfold their historical activity in current time, but also emphasises their entangled relationship to time as a prospective enterprise as well as the fluid nature of archives themselves.

With traditional curating established as the taking ‘care of’ collections and archives, these signifiers within contemporary curating have taken on a dynamic that both adheres to and confronts these origins. The [re]emergence of ‘archive as exhibition’ (O’Neill 2015, p. 18) can often see archival materials presented as [re]orientating precursors or epilogues to larger thematic or retrospective shows, or alternatively becoming the central tenet of the exhibition concept, artworks and or aesthetic (Bismarck et. al. 2002; Bruchet 2019; Foster 2004; Spieker 2008). With the material and vernacular of the archive utilised to both establish and/or question its authority, the relevance of how these materials are intended to exacerbate the exhibitions’ contemporaneity can vary. Either the materials are presented as preserved and historical, intended to instigate connections from the present to reframe a past time, or exposing a past event towards new speculative futures.¹⁶³

Working with a curatorial intention rather than a historical one, the purpose of looking through New Contemporaries materials and attempting to navigate their meanings took on new and uncertain perspectives - finding those points at which the records and emerging narratives could be unpacked and extrapolated into new understandings through the actions involved in and from public display. Nayia Yiakoumaki describes the search for curatorial ‘beginnings’ in her research for the Whitechapel Gallery Archive as a process of “stirring the archive” (2009, pp. 89-90), in which items that may have otherwise been overlooked begin to trigger the researcher’s interest and give rise to what she calls the curator’s fantasy (ibid.,

¹⁶³ In a recent article by Johnny Pitts in *Tate etc.*, was a pertinent reminder of the 1970 essay ‘The Past Seen from a Possible Future’ by John Berger, highlighting the shift in perspective of history as the past to history taking place now for the future. Commenting on what Pitts refers to as ‘retrospective forces’ – or I would perhaps reframe as prospective stirrings in the past – he succinctly articulates the particular impact these forces are having in relation to time: “Forgotten artists are reassessed, and new artists – from traditions previously ignored, sometimes because of gender, race or sexual orientation, or simply because of shifting trends and tastes – are brought forth, and past, present and possible futures are collapsed.” (Pitts 2023, p. 24)

102). Here Yiakoumaki draws on Andrew Renton's¹⁶⁴ assertion that searching for a personal discovery or 'connection' within the archive is a process of humanisation, resulting in the archive being constantly animated.¹⁶⁵ Reflective of New Contemporaries own activities, their archival materials pose a myriad of potential futures. Whose work signals the emergence of the next generation of renowned artists? Which records demonstrate transitions in education, practice and culture? How does New Contemporaries past tell us something about their possible future? Most importantly, what items generate new meanings and knowledge through curatorial action?

As a form of research, the approach of seeking curatorial interventions within and from the archive follows some similar elements of what may be termed as "action research". As a methodology, action research emphasises the utilisation of reflexivity in personal practice to inform, critique, and improve or reform the research process (Costello 2011; Frost 2002). In exhibition making, reflexivity as discussed by Mortari (2015), Etherington (2004) or Alvesson & Skoldberg (2017) remains an important tool. As time-based physical manifestation, the act of making research public inherently offers a point of self-reflection, but also invites collective reflexivity through testing the rigor of findings in front of a critical audience (MacDonald and Basu 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, in the instance of *Not a Live Show*, the utilisation of exhibition making as a public entity was to also expose the research as an ongoing activity or process rather than presenting an end point or conclusion. The transformation of the 'back office' into the public domain echoes those seen in the archive, with an elevation of apparent transparency in regard to how institutional and curatorial decisions are made and enacted.

The opening up of private or restricted processes to public scrutiny initially came to prominence during the middle of the 20th century. Accompanying the wave of post-structuralism and an increasing awareness of the positionality of the institution in shaping discourse (as can be seen within the critique around the archives and their role in the production of master narratives) within arts this was apparent through new critical works and actions (Alberro 2009; Fraser 2009; Sheikh 2006). Focused on overturning or subverting specific authorial positions, these practices became known as 'institutional critique'. Exposing frameworks whose purpose was purported as making work 'public' (the

¹⁶⁴ Incidentally, as an example of the interconnectivity of New Contemporaries figures within the British art scene, Yiakoumaki cites Renton from a source in which he is discussing archival project Browser with Sacha Craddock, New Contemporaries longstanding chair (Hiller 2002).

¹⁶⁵ As demonstrated in my own research process described in Chapter 3, in order to assimilate what is presented, personal ruminations become idiosyncratic processes of understanding. Therefore, the experience of the Archive gives rise to an innate subjectivity: both animating and contaminating the curators archival activity.

functionality of which was often assumed as objective) the inherent promulgation of underlying institutional processes and bias became increasingly contested (Raunig and Ray 2009). By the end of the 20th century, the transformation and absorption of institutional critique into activities led by curators and institutions initiated a new form of organisational self-reflexivity, or ‘new institutionalism’.

Reframed as a ‘new’ iteration of questioning of bureaucratic processes and established norms, the self-reflexive criticality of new institutionalism was seen as a proactive approach to tackling emerging cultural and economic debates within post-colonial discourse (Doherty 2006; Kolb & Flückiger 2013). Simultaneously, as the display of objects from museological archives and collections became subject to the shifting realms of curating, it was increasingly seen as the curator - rather than the institution - shaping emerging discourse (Greenberg et al 1996; Farquharson 2003; O’Neill 2007).¹⁶⁶ Consequently, the legacy of institutional critique and new institutionalism has become an inherited contestation of problematic materials and dialogues in order to expose the subjectivity of inherited authorial positions (Bishop 2006; Kester and Wilson 2007; Jackson 2011; Janes and Sandell 2019). A ‘stirring of the archive’ that has become de-rigour within curatorial action, its prominence within the public sphere has likewise become more diffuse.

A common criticism of this legacy however is that the critical examination often results in an ‘othering’ of the previously problematic positions, “like an object to be shown in a vitrine” (Holmes 2007, p. 3). The exploration of organisational histories and archives as distanced artefacts to be debated through contemporary discourse therefore enables organisations to appear progressive and transformational while still upholding their hegemonic positions (Bruchet 2019; Greenberg 2012; Voorhies 2017). Within the approach to *Not a Live Show*, tackling how I was positioned in relation to these dialogues, and therefore my role in engendering the same regarding New Contemporaries, were a central concern.

For Irit Rogoff, the turn through criticism to critique to criticality has led to a mode in which a spatial appropriation allows curating to ‘smuggle’ contradictory relations into institutional spaces. Although this implies a disingenuity or conformity to the stipulations of institutional

¹⁶⁶ As highlighted in the thesis Introduction, on the history of curating) particularly from the curatorial turn of the 1980s) a schism appeared between what may be seen as traditional museological ‘curating’ and what has become known as ‘contemporary curatorial practice’ (Obrist 2008). Within these debates a key differentiator has been the way in which the curatorial is posed as a research method and generator of knowledge. As highlighted by Simon Sheikh in *Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason* (2017), he argues that this is a false dichotomy. While I would agree that as a practice of displaying or exposing works and artefacts to public view the differentiation it is a matter of perspective, my position within the thesis looks towards the latter.

space, Rogoff highlights the possibilities that smuggling might allow. Smuggling allows “the relations between that which is in plain sight, that which is in partial sight, and that which is invisible.” (Rogoff 2006, n.p.) to be opened up. The ability to bring in alternative materials, means and methods to convey a partial visibility – a container in which things can be moved around, but also as a space of the invisible, one that is also not contained.

Working outside the institution of New Contemporaries (i.e. with no contractual or financial obligation) enabled me to assert an external positionality, appearing to allow me to side-step the potential problematics of an internal self-reflexivity exerted by New Contemporaries. On the other hand, the subjects and discourse I was engaging with still raised the same questions regarding how archives are institutionalised within arts organisations such as New Contemporaries. As highlighted by Fraser, while independent of New Contemporaries, my position was not external to the debates regarding institutional criticality. Although not forefronted as the purpose in the narrative of the exhibition that was presented to the public, these considerations remained challenges to myself in reviewing what I was doing and why. In any reconstruction of history there is a threading together of ideas, concepts, events, and times that will be subject to the decisions and processes of its particular context and occurrence, an ‘authorisation’ (Martinon 2013; O’Neill 2012). As we produce meaning from the archive, and in the process find it reflecting ourselves and our positionality back to us, the danger of ‘archive fever’ may also induce imaginings of what is there rather than seeing what is really in front of us.¹⁶⁷

If the curatorial presupposes an outcome of ‘making things public’, it is in the very publicness of the work that the awareness and consideration of actions changes to those which may have been carried out within a private setting. The criticality and ethics – or care – regarding what is presented, why and with what agenda can either help prompt new reflections between what has been said and what can be said, or alternatively elevate the ‘archive fever’ to push particular narratives over others. Within the archive, Yiakoumaki described the personal research experience as one that persists through three main characteristics: isolation, intimacy and closeness (Yiakoumaki 2009, p. 100). However, the persistence of the self within each foreshadows what we may find with the expectations we have brought with us, a sentiment also emphasised by Breakell: “Archives are traces to

¹⁶⁷ For example, as I recalled commentary by the Arts Council Assistant regarding the 1968 exhibition pamphlet design away from the archive, I formed an interpretation of the material in which the Arts Assistant had called into question the quality of the exhibition under discussion. However, while this led me to ruminate on curatorial interventions that could examine debates around student-amateur aesthetics and hype, on a second look at the archive these interpretations of the material unraveled: as while the newspaper reviews were mixed that year, the point made in the internal memo that I had attributed to this narrative was about the increased professionalism or ‘smoothness’ in the display rather than any derogatory comments about the work shown.

which we respond: they are a reflection of ourselves, and our response to them says more about us than the archive itself.” (Breakell 2008, n.p.) As historical analysis increasingly recognises the subjective position of those who are conducting the gathering, transcribing and interpretation of materials, the position of the researcher intervening in those items also brings a new layer of positioning and complexity. Through using the apparatus of exhibition making as a way of unpacking the meanings and interpretations being drawn through that intervention, the spatial and durational aspects of display are not only a form of making research public but also allowing embodied interactions with those materials to come to the fore.

Situating the space of the exhibition as an experimental but public frame – between research and ‘The Outcome’ – the research undertaken in the thesis was not intended to culminate in authorisation of a New Contemporaries ‘master narrative’ but remain a continuation of my research through the specific mode of spatial and temporal forms. Even so, in making things public there is a responsibility towards the actions taken that requires appropriate rigour and self-reflexive critique as a public rather than private activity. So, while leaning on concepts of exhibitions as an experiment and testing the materials as the instigators of (new and/or reinforcing) emerging narratives, the transition from the intimacy of archival research to the public apparatus of exhibiting necessarily requires an evaluation of the verification process of what is presented, as well as narratives I may be promulgating through those actions as a researcher and curator.

While the rigour of research provides justification for certain actions that can be verified through consensus, in the process of research and curating certain actions still involve the elevation of one item or idea over others and the bringing together of particular configurations in an individualistic manner (Bal 1992; Moser 2010; Bessel 2015). The exhibition therefore offered an opportunity to examine a recurring issue I found myself experiencing throughout the process of investigating New Contemporaries archival materials: the differentiation and value between objectivity and subjectivity.

Within curating and the use of archival materials, its associations as evidentiary “truth” also confuse the subjective/objective position. As historical artefacts, archival objects are recognised as tangibly ‘knowable’ – providing a fixed point or anchor - even as the curatorial conceit examines the transient and subjective positions of the same (Greenberg 2012, p. 175). The approach to the first exhibition as approximating a normative archival display therefore sought to ascertain if there was a correlation between what I presented and expectations of what may or may not be found within an Archive. Additionally, if the materials on view amassed to providing any significant meanings beyond those that had

already been drawn out of New Contemporaries history (i.e. the extent of what, where, when). Pertinently, in my hyperawareness of positionality, I wanted to explore the boundaries between archival presentation and curatorial intervention/representation (Bruchet 2019, p. 164; Callahan 2022, 'Authorship and Collaboration').

The interference of transposing materials from one location to another, from restricted access to public viewing, inevitably instigates a disturbance regardless of how objective an archival presentation may be. The requirements of exhibition display precipitate the organisation and reorganisation of items through a critical perspective, translating the meanings of those items to others and working through the possible idiosyncrasies of space, mounting style, exhibition furniture, and meaning. Therefore, how did my positioning, including the translating and replication of materials, as well as the physicality of an exhibition as a spatial and public viewing, alter, add to, redirect or proliferate the nuances of 'the archive' and therefore meanings attributed to the items displayed? In turn, how was my position as researcher and curator acknowledged or disregarded within a presentation of what could be seen as 'factual' material items?

As introduced by Peter Bjerregaard in *Exhibition as Research: Experimental Methods in Museums* (2020), the concept of the exhibition as an experiment has been under discussion for some time. As a key change in how curating has been articulated over the last half-century, when the exhibition is not taken as an end point it is apparent that the actions of exhibiting also result in a "research surplus" (Bjerregaard 2020, p. 1). Or rather, a different way of knowing through the making of exhibitions and their presentation that is both an intellectual and embodied process of knowledge formation (Sorensen 2016, p. 84). However, it must also be noted that while Bjerregaard focuses on the central premise of curating activity located within concrete museological settings - and although New Contemporaries could be seen to adhere to some aspects of those - in contrast, their event-based, dispersed and peripatetic nature also places them outside of these parameters.

In a similar vein to Bjerregaard, the earlier work *Towards the Exhibition as Research* (2015) by Simon Sheikh proposes that the curatorial is "not necessarily something that takes on the form and eventual character of an exhibition, but something that employs the thinking involved in exhibition making and research" (Sheikh 2015, p. 33-34). Orientating this type of thinking as a form of research able to reliably contribute to the academic field, Sheikh puts forwards the concept of *recherche* and *forshung* – the former as a process of verification and the latter as process of experimentation or testing. Therefore, while contemporary curating does have a tendency towards historicization - through excavating,

evaluating and (re)contextualising the past - it is in itself also a process of expanding data and/or making histories through new embodied and intellectual explorations. Applied to the curatorial activity within this thesis, *recherché* is apparent through excavating, evaluating and contextualising the history of New Contemporaries 'Live Shows', but also *forshung*, in testing how their archival materials perform and their potentiality for the production of new knowledge through public presentation.

A difficult aspect of working with New Contemporaries as the case study in understanding the challenges of contemporary archives is one echoed throughout their history – a tendency to turn their legacy into a validation barometer, or rather, reduce it into a list of those artists who are judged to have become 'successes'. Introducing the case study of *Unauthorised*, Sheikh highlights the plurality or multiplicity of how information may be positioned and received through exhibition. *Unauthorised*, based on various archival materials and art works organised around cultural initiatives that "may or may not go against sanctified cultural policies" (Shiekh 2015, p. 43), underlined the possibilities of how information is collated and organised according to a vast range of positionalities – from institutional policies to alternative cultural strategies, the elitist to the amateur.

The resulting exhibition offered two distinct points of research: firstly, the research carried out in order to represent the various positions, and secondly the positions themselves as modes of research into representation, circulation and validation. In a similar way, *Not a Live Show* presented an opportunity to research the historical event of New Contemporaries - although in this instance from a singular position rather than the collective impetus utilised within the *Unauthorised* framework - as well as the modalities of archival research and its materials as a process of validation and authorisation.

As a mode of practice, the curatorial over historiographical works as an iterative initiation, dissemination and evaluation of theory in practice across a constellation of points: in this instance, from the subject New Contemporaries history and archives as exhibition to archival authenticity and curatorial authorship. Further, Fowle also highlights the public nature of curatorial frameworks in "experimenting with the role of the public in the "completion of a project" (Fowle 2007, p.17). For *Not an a Live Show*, the public display applies a specific pressure on the criticality of the research through a visual and embodied approach, as well as provoking further enquiries emerging within the subject discourse. Taking on the position of the curatorial as discussed within this section however is not without its problems, not least in its tendency towards idiosyncratic applications. Ongoing debates regarding the expanded concepts of the curatorial, as both fluid unfixed practices that focus on time rather than

space, against its assertion as an intellectual activity that produces measurable research and public-facing outcomes, is further exacerbated when brought into the realm of archives (Bruchet 2019, pp. 171-174). As two arenas that are increasingly operating as ‘expanded fields’, both can result in what Ben Cranfield highlights as the gap between “what is present and what can be neatly labelled.” (Cranfield 2017, p. 124), or the blurring of boundaries between what is fixed versus ephemeral.

Sheikh further raises the risk in the application of exhibition making as experiment: if the thesis is proposed to be a curatorial project on the basis of an exhibition as an experiment, then the resulting exhibition may or may not confirm or disprove my thesis. In the case of *Not a Live Show*, the exhibition is testing the potential value of New Contemporaries exploration of their historical materials and also the way in which those materials are utilised by the contemporary organisation as an archival resource. However, as highlighted by Sheikh, “could this lead to the exhibition presenting its own failure?” (Sheikh 2015, p. 39) Therefore, as with all experiments that fail, the “research surplus” of exhibition making is not only in establishing what can be known about New Contemporaries history, but in the practice of the exhibition itself, the methodology of the experiment. Although I am seeking to understand the potential of curatorial methodologies in the generation of archival and cultural knowledge, the curatorial project as received by the public and inserted into New Contemporaries organisational records could potentially obfuscate the inherent polemics through the very same action.

In contrast to curatorial projects or museological explorations of Archives that have become forefronted throughout the archival and curatorial turns within the late and early twentieth century (Bruchet 2019), as well as within more recent PhD studies, from the exploration of Whitechapel’s Archive by Nayia Yiakoumaki (2009), Trine Friis Sorenson’s commissioning of work regarding the Danish Radio Archive (2017), exploring New Contemporaries as ‘an Archive’ has not been so straightforward. Overarching the study has been the multiple locations of materials pertaining to their early history but held by external entities, dispersed across Archives, individual collections, or personal memories. The initial exhibition of *Not a Live Show* however could be more regularly grouped with those mentioned above and assessed as an exploration of Acme Archive through curatorial action, or of New Contemporaries archival materials under the framework of a self-reflexive (New Contemporaries) institutional enquiry. It is at this point the considerations of material hierarchies, presentation methods and data derived from the archival research and exhibition making that *Not a Live Show* diverts into a further proposition.

Building on Yiakoumaki's thesis that proposed curatorial projects should be (re)archived within the originating archive, this thesis proposes the archiving of new curatorial projects as a method to both gather and expand extant materials held by New Contemporaries. As New Contemporaries is beginning the process of cataloguing and formalising their organisational records into an Archive from 1989 onwards,¹⁶⁸ these records would simultaneously be held as documents pertaining to activity occurring in 2019, but also referencing their historical activity from 1976 and 1977.¹⁶⁹ A more direct organisational solution to the orientation and locating of New Contemporaries historical material could be in the creation of a database that lists what items might be located, and where.¹⁷⁰ However, as a curatorial project within the PhD research while it sought to address New Contemporaries and their organisational capacity and purpose, it presented an opportunity to assess appropriate strategies to working with complex and dispersed histories within contemporaneity.

As an exploration of archives originating in contemporaneity, the generative archival research - operating simultaneously as retrospective and prospective - provided a new point of analysis regarding the changing parameters of archival investigations for organisations, events and histories that do not adhere to singular repositories; how historical knowledge can be regained and in what forms; and subsequently the meanings and materials derived from it. In particular, contributing to discourse regarding the use of exhibitions as critical frameworks to explore the increasingly nuanced and complex relationship between archives and curating occurring today.

Not a Live Show

As the first manifestation of the historical and curatorial research, *Not a Live Show* was developed from November to February during the second year of research and was presented

¹⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter Two, New Contemporaries have been working towards the formation of an Archive of their organisational documents through an initial scoping study and subsequent application of a new cataloguing system.

¹⁶⁹ This position echoes a common refrain regarding contemporary archival curating projects in the re-staging of historical exhibitions, stated by Bruchet as drawing "on archival fragments of the past, in the present exhibition moment, towards future-use value, representing the re-staged exhibition and its research documentation as archival resources for the future" (Bruchet 2019, p. 154). However, while the exhibition did seek future-use value, in contrast this was not regarding the re-staging of New Contemporaries Live Show, but in exploring their organisational documentation and remnants through exhibition in order to assimilate an Archive.

¹⁷⁰ With the range of potential Archives as well as the peripheral paraphernalia and oral histories the scale of this operation would be extensive and ongoing. Equally, a database does not necessarily help communicate values and meanings, just as the document produced by Mary Doyle was a good starting point but only gave a very narrow view of the potential of the originating materials.

at Bonington Gallery from 4 - 30 March 2019.^{171 172} Having carried out the archival investigations as described in Chapter Three, it appeared that being able to assess the materials derived from Archives in proximity to the more informal and ephemeral materials – archival/non archival - would be beneficial.

From an urge to see the material outside the archive confines, bringing these materials together in the form of a public display provided an opportunity to not only tangibly access the breadth of formal and informal records accumulated but also to understand if the fragmented yet significant nature of their archive was reliably borne out through the gathered material evidence. Moreover, I was interested in the hierarchy of materials that could be resourced, how these might be transferred into meaningful records for the organisation, what ‘gaps’ may be addressed and/or what other gaps may become apparent.

As an activity taking place outside the organisation, and from a contemporary curatorial perspective over the traditional museological parameters, the work was not subject to the same concepts of conservation applicable to collected artifacts (Bruchet 2019, p. 144). However, through my own ethics and the context of Bonington Gallery at Nottingham Trent University does situate it within a certain standard of professional practice. Equally, as a primarily archival display, the emphasis on the archive vernacular (i.e. display methods) also worked to convey meaning to the materials presented (Bal 1992).

Importantly, the format of exhibiting also removed the archival materials from storage and research functions into an open public viewing, an unarchiving that allowed spatial considerations, connections and juxtapositions to reveal as yet unrealised opportunities for research and curatorial activity. As an exhibition founded on the premise of curating, *Not an Archive* formed a discursive site, where its effect is both intentional and open to alternative readings (Greenberg 1996, p. 120). From the public yet private domain of reviewing documentation, catalogues and programmes within Archives, as well as materials gathered through personal interviews, found items online, and secondary research, as a visual presentation there is an affect of ‘evidentiary value’.

As a counterpoint, even while the overall history of Young-New Contemporaries had implicated a wealth of possible research pathways, the limitations of the archival records,

¹⁷¹ The exhibition was hosted in the Bonington Gallery foyer as part of their Vitines programme. The Bonington Gallery ‘Vitrines’ focuses on both the materials and concepts of archives and is a further demonstration of the increasing prominence of archival activity within cultural institutions.

¹⁷² Please note that documentation of the exhibition is available to view on [Research Catalogue](#).

including exhibition photographs and internal organisational records, still left a sparse number of items from which to mount a reasonable display. As a partial view of past events, the consideration of presenting these in a public space in a coherent manner raised a number of practical and conceptual questions, from the gaps in supplementary information required in order to comprehend the items presented, to the conceptual framing and how items should be displayed.

In looking to generate a greater tangibility to the research I had been undertaking, it became apparent that trying to bring together a selection of material regarding the full seven decades of the exhibitions' history would not be feasible within the parameters of the PhD, due to restrictions in accessing and presenting archival materials as well as capacity to deliver a suitably coherent presentation to the public of research still in process. Rather, a smaller case-study was sought that could demonstrate New Contemporaries activity as a continuum as well as highlighting a particular moment or incident of historical significance for the organisation - as highlighted by Lester in considering how the exhibition can open up questions about what is specific and unique about the archive in question: its content as well as the archive itself (Lester 2019, pp. 99-105). As ownership and logistics would make this a complex process for New Contemporaries historical materials as a whole, focusing on the sub case-study of 1976 and 1977 Live Shows, with only one smaller Archive source to draw on, enabled the potentiality of a 'New Contemporaries Archive' to be examined within the temporality of the exhibition.¹⁷³

From the association with British Pop Art in the 1960s, to the launch of the YBAs in the late 1980s, the period of Young Contemporaries becoming New Contemporaries in the 1970s and early 1980s initially appeared less certain. An awkward 'growing pains' of in-betweenness. However, while the prior Young Contemporaries exhibitions had concentrated on painting and sculpture, it was the Live Show as well as its change in name that marked a specific departure for the exhibition in becoming a platform for new contemporary practices as well as new artists. From this point on, New Contemporaries Association charter was amended from specifying the exhibition as painting and sculpture to painting, sculpture and '3rd area art' (with 3rd area art encompassing moving image, performance, photography and installation). With the advancement of new media practices and the bedding-in of conceptualism, further research into this period helped underpin a greater understanding of the changes in art education and practice at this time, and the significance of the name

¹⁷³ Interviews with Mike Collier had already prompted the development of research around the Live Show events, particularly as the period of New Contemporaries history during the mid-1970s was little known, and the later discovery of the 1976 catalogue reaffirmed these events as a point of access for new exploration.

change in light of broader cultural attitudes and perspectives.¹⁷⁴

In particular, the unique and improvised style of the Live Show catalogue in 1976 gave a greater insight into the contemporaneous artistic practices that had not been afforded by the more formal catalogue listings generally produced prior to this point, but also reflected the emerging do it yourself aesthetics of the 1970s. As my focus on the Live Show events deepened, the relationship of these events amongst the broader history of Young-New Contemporaries and the context of the art school in which the exhibition of their archival materials was taking place became gained further significance. At once, the historical significance of the archive and its contents could be extrapolated into an informative ‘display’, but in the act of exhibiting, these also became subject to the durational interactions of the audience. Located within the foyer of Nottingham Trent School of Art and Design, the reviewing of an historical exhibition of student work directly reached an audience of contemporary equivalents, as well as those who had previously engaged with New Contemporaries and had gone on to work in education.

Working from the premise that “testing out of ideas in a physical environment, and relating more or less directly to a lay audience” (Bjerregaard 2020, p. 1), provides new information to both the subject of the exhibition and method of exhibiting, *Not a Live Show* allowed me to question if the nature of New Contemporaries archival materials also relayed an embodied sense of the character of New Contemporaries itself; exploring what significance their history might hold for current art students and art audiences and how exhibiting their historical activity might provide a greater insight for the organisation into their past and present. As an approach to exhibition-making with archives, Lester highlights the complicity of archives in producing metanarratives of power and control (Lester 2019, p. 111).

However, Greenberg (2012, p. 175) also highlights the ability of archival presentation to either conform with linear narrative or to draw attention to the ruptures and gaps through the deliberate use of contrasting accounts. These can even be drawn out through the display apparatus. In the presentation of what was there (in the archive), and its presentation as a historical event within a chronological history, there was to an extent a complicity with what had been chosen as worth preserving. However, in seeking out a porosity that provoked

¹⁷⁴ While the impact of Brexit was beginning to be felt, the subsequent Covid pandemic and political upheavals also revealed a particular pertinence to reviewing the early to mid 1970s period. Colloquially referred to as the dark ages, the 1970s saw major trade union upheavals, public black outs and high levels of economic deprivation. Culturally, social unrest and polarised politics led to a flood of dystopian literature, with mass disillusionment simultaneously prompting high levels of nostalgia for the boom of the ‘swinging sixties’ against an acceleration of progressive sub-cultural trends. (Turner 2013; Forster and Harper 2010).

questions rather than provide answers, I also sought methods to actively undo and challenge the archival boundaries.

Therefore, in the following sections I will review the practical work undertaken. Considering the archive as both a site of historiographies and its value in demonstrating New Contemporaries reflexive contemporaneity, *Recherché* will focus on the archival ruminations and examine the curatorial research in preparation for the exhibition, including the key materials uncovered and considerations in regards to their contribution towards New Contemporaries historical knowledge. *Forshung* will consider the exhibition context and considerations in the curatorial decisions made. Documentation and further details regarding the exhibition, including information on the exhibition contents, layout and research, are also available to view online via [Research Catalogue – Not a Live Show](#). Finally, I will consider the value of the exhibition for New Contemporaries current participants and potential participants, explored through the screening event *[Not] Not a Live Show*.

Recherché

Unknowingly, the process of defining an area of discourse for *Not a Live Show* had already begun before I enrolled in the PhD programme, with connections made through Curator Sophia Hao at Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee. Working with Hao during the exhibition *Of Other Spaces: Where Does Gesture Become Event?*¹⁷⁵ (2017) its heavily archival format, offset through moving image works, live performances and durational symposia, had instigated my interest in the activation of archival displays and their pertinence in contemporary discourse. Further, it was Hao who initially introduced me to Mike Collier,¹⁷⁶ without whom I would likely not have come across New Contemporaries 'Live Show' and subsequently focused on the shift to '3rd Area Art' and artistic practices within the 1970s period of the exhibitions' history.

Collier had initially sent me a review of the 1976 Live Show exhibition by Studio International towards the start of the PhD research, however as the current organisation had no further knowledge of it and it had not been highlighted in any particular way within the chronology compiled by Mary Doyle ten years earlier, it was difficult to orientate its

¹⁷⁵ *Of Other Spaces: Where does gesture become event?* was a two-part exhibition exploring feminist activism in art from the 1970s to the present, presented at Cooper Gallery during October – December 2016 and January – March 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Hao also introduced me to Bruce McLean during this period. McLean was both a participant in the Young Contemporaries during the 1960s as well as being on the selection committee for the New Contemporaries Live Show in 1976. Subsequently to my discussions with him, McLean worked with the current New Contemporaries organisation for '70 Years Young', a series of six video interviews with past alumni carried out in partnership with The Space.

relevance with the overarching historical narrative. Even upon discovering the 1976 exhibition poster, its contrasting style (Figure 11)¹⁷⁷ to the archival documents examined to date furthered the impression that perhaps this was not the Young or New Contemporaries I had been researching, but some other exhibition history, exemplifying the often disjointed appearance of New Contemporaries past.

On a subsequent visit to the Tate Archive I did manage to track down a copy of the 1976 'Live Show' catalogue but again, with its contrasting aesthetic, lack of introduction page and with little to contextualise it, I struggled to understand how it related to the overarching narrative of the exhibitions' history - or if it was for separate entity altogether. As indicative of the partiality and what is *actually* said by archival materials, in itself it did little to initially explain how it came into being or its relationship to New Contemporaries as a painting and sculpture exhibition. My quest to unpick the 'Live Show' purported to be part of New Contemporaries history became a galvanizing force in focusing on the Live Shows within my research.

After meeting with Collier for a second time, records for both exhibitions were in Acme Archive (Acme having hosted both Live Shows in 1976 and 1977). While the records here still remained minimal, they helped provide a more cohesive picture in line with Collier's recollections. In particular, the 1976 catalogue had several further pages that had been missing from the version located in the Tate Archive, including an introductory text and list of participating artists.¹⁷⁸ During our discussion Collier had revealed that due to the lack of budget he was initially going to forgo any catalogues or posters for either the Painting and Sculpture exhibition or the Live Show. However, as he had fought for the film, performance and installation work to be included he did organise a small print run for the Live Show poster. His recollection of how the Live Show catalogue came about however remained vague. It was only through my prompting from the version discovered in the Tate Archive that he finally recalled that they made a short run of approximately 150 copies on a photocopier, utilising the proposals from the selected participants as readymade copy. As loose sheets assembled last minute, it is unsurprising the two versions I located had not remained intact – if they had ever been so.

¹⁷⁷ The 1976 exhibition poster was specifically for the Live Show rather than the Painting and Sculpture submissions. Included was a triptych of images by Elaine Shemilt. Titled 'Constraint', these were documentation of a performative installation work in which Shemilt's nude form has been bound in tape. Incidentally, Elaine Shemilt is also a Professor of Fine Art at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design where Cooper Gallery is located. Prompted by my research into the 'Live Show's', Shemilt was subsequently invited by New Contemporaries to speak at their 70th Anniversary Conference at The Courtauld Institute in October 2019.

¹⁷⁸ I had been hoping to discover an exhibition catalogue for the main painting and sculpture show which was held at the International Artists' Centre. There is very little information on the venue available, and with no catalogue produced the participating artists in the main exhibition remain unknown and unverifiable.

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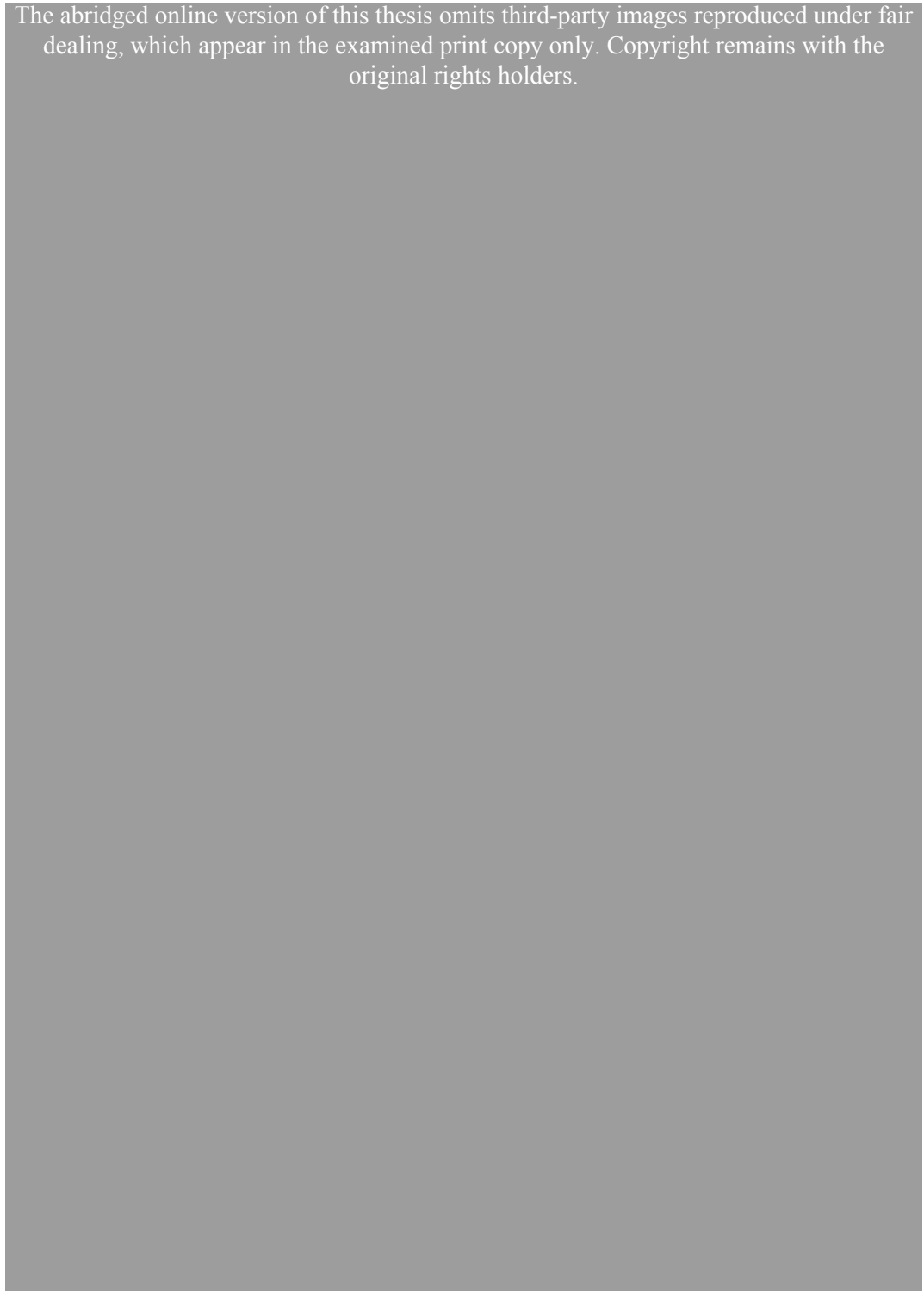


Figure 11: New Contemporaries Live Show 1976, poster. Courtesy of Acme Archive.

Although budgets had dictated the photocopying of the exhibition proposals for use as a low production catalogue, it unwittingly served to preserve the internal functional materials of the exhibition – ones which may have since been lost if subject to retention only by the volunteering student group organising the show (as much of the other materials have been).

The proposals also demonstrated the greater scope of information required when considering performative or durational works opposed to sculpture and painting. From a short form in which title, media and size can be filled out in a list of check boxes, these proposals took on a variety of forms, from the abstract to discursive to diagrammatic. In looking through the proposals submitted, I was struck by how similar the discussions and concerns of the time are to students today.

Despite contextual and technical shifts, as with all student-artists at the particular stage in their development (in which they are starting to acknowledge the need to engage with the world outside of art school but still not quite detached from it), there is an uncanny familiarity in the montage of materials and concepts. For example, John Andrews examines the audience-spectator public-private relationship through an imaginary journey, or Jwow Basto's discussion of objecthood, or even Brett Ewin's 'no other data necessary' statement advertising his Negative Music Live Ensemble, referencing the ongoing debates regarding Big Data and digitisation. On the other hand, the peculiarity of type-writer printing, old institutional names for places that have either been shut down or absorbed into larger bodies, references to obsolete media, and even the quality of the photocopies, place it firmly in the time it was created.

Sadly, in 1977 the main exhibition and Live Show were printed as one, reverting to the previous formality of the catalogue listings in which only a name, title of work and art school attended were listed. The front cover design and poster likewise reverted to an emphasis on the painting and sculpture show, with a small by-line regarding the 'Live Work' at Acme Gallery. As the only two exhibitions within the history of the exhibition that had dedicated Live Shows¹⁷⁹, they are anomalous to the overarching history of Young-New Contemporaries, however the 1977 catalogue – while not as informative – does help articulate the position Live Shows more clearly to the painting and sculpture exhibition.¹⁸⁰ Examining the materials side by side, the break from the printed exhibition guides helps signify the difference of the Live Show to previous iterations, while the 1977 catalogue highlights the continuity and familiarity of the established Young-New Contemporaries format, regardless of the introduction of new practices.

As only two relatively small artifacts to be presented however, they still represented a

¹⁷⁹ Later New Contemporaries exhibitions at ICA and following its relaunch in 1989 often have accompanying programme, but not the same distinction regarding the exhibiting of different practices.

¹⁸⁰ The lack of a catalogue for the painting and sculpture exhibition which was held at the International Artists Centre also leaves a significant gap in knowledge regarding the other participants selected for that year and their work.

challenge as resources from which to build an exhibition. As described by Hanna Holling in examining *Paik's Virtual Archive*:

“recovering the diverse fragments of a work from such a dispersed archive necessitates a more flexible and multi-locational effort... one often has to investigate the archives of the artist and track down information from his galleries, collaborators, estate, family and friends.”
(2017, pp. 146).

Although in this instance I was examining an exhibition rather than an artwork, the content in the vitrines from Acme Archive was minimal. Alongside the catalogues and some minor paraphernalia, such as invite cards, some small signage, and listings for the film and performance programmes, the only other items retained were the Articles of Association (that had the terms of the exhibition as a painting and sculpture exhibition underlined) and the original type-written copy for the *Studio International* article Collier had previously sent me.¹⁸¹ Handling the materials in the context of Acme Archive - even if photocopied materials and a typed replication of a journal article (that by its nature is both authentic yet not a unique document) - brought the events into closer proximity, and with them my thoughts on the unusual relationship the archive has to our experience of time.

From the realm of examining these items as pieces of paper in a cupboard in the basement of the Acme building, to the presentation of artifacts in a public display, highlighted the tension in distance from the originating events. My handling of materials would not be possible in the space of a public exhibition, and therefore the immediacy of interacting with the documents is removed as the items are placed behind protective panels. Alternatively, in the removal of them from storage and the transferal of them into an exhibition in the present placed them into current time in a different way – Marco Pustianaz refers to this as un/archiving (2013, p. 480). As archival artifacts they become evidential objects that are both fixed and temporal (Greenberg 2012, p. 175). Equally, if examined as a point of access to artistic practices – albeit taking place within the 1970s - then the discussion becomes one regarding the materials, media and subjects over archival data or historical verification.

Reported by Peter Dunn, the article in *Studio International* gave an in-depth response to the Live Show exhibition in 1976, commenting on the struggles to have the type of work shown included in *New Contemporaries* as well as the conditions in which students were attempting to make work:

¹⁸¹ Collier had photocopied the article from the edition of *Studio International* he had purchased when it came out in May 1976, still sitting on a shelf in his studio and kept as a record of his efforts.

“Much of the work reflects the difficulties of working in an area which suffers from both a lack of any critical, rigorous or considered attitude in art schools and from an ‘anything goes’ stylistic inheritance from avant-gardism. This ‘ethic’, which encourages ‘bohemianism’ but paradoxically requires academic fulfilment of ‘more serious’ individual requirements, creates a schism, extrovert in gesture but introverted in its concerns, which pre-empt the initial motivation for expanding the scope of communication.” (Dunn 1976, p. 198).

The extroverted performative nature of conceptual work against the interiority of art practice – an intellectualism – has been one that has epitomised the transition in fine arts during the last half of the twentieth century. While Dunn was responding to the works directly presented at the time, as I sat reading the type-written version in Acme’s Archive room – a large storage cupboard of bare concrete walls and blue metal racking – his words brought the contemporaneous frictions that were occurring between new practices emerging outside of education and a lack of teaching regarding these new forms within art schools into my present. This discussion was also emphasised by Collier as he sought to assert room for alternative media within the New Contemporaries platform and continues in discussions for the current New Contemporaries as new forms emerge.¹⁸²

The DIY catalogue for the first of the Live Shows, alongside the Studio International article and Collier’s own recollections provided a unique insight into artistic education and practice during a period of significant change; change which had been impacted by social and political upheaval within the UK as much as the influence of broader European cultural discourse and changing technologies. Even so, overall there was still a distinct lack of material to work with for an exhibition (the inventory of materials for the exhibition can be seen [here](#)). It was therefore perhaps both unusual and significant that I chose to remain with these events as the focus for an archival display. As a sub case-study of New Contemporaries history, the minimal and fragmented quality more than echoed my experiences within the archive. An interesting starting point when extrapolated upon, but still unsubstantial when represented by its material evidence.

Despite the catalogues and Studio International article, once assessed as a data source the materials revealed more gaps than concrete information regarding what and who was actually presented within the Live Shows. I started to explore alternative methods in

¹⁸² As discussed in Chapter One, while New Contemporaries have sought to include new emerging digital and writing practices within their programme, performative or socially engaged practices remain difficult to incorporate into the New Contemporaries exhibition platform.

researching the student-artists, the works shown, and - with the added benefit of hindsight - what they had gone on to do in their careers.¹⁸³ As with my previous archival research, from the materials located in Acme Archive I also initiated a database to capture as much information as possible regarding the two exhibitions. Initially, the compilation of the data sheets remained part of my internal research, as a way to identify possible further materials or contextual narratives to help build up the body of work to an appropriate level for the scale of the exhibition, it was only later that the sheets themselves became part of the exhibit.

Having already interviewed Collier and with a lack of documentation, I sought further possible interview subjects. I had met Terry Shave early on in the research and discussed his experiences as a selector in the early 1980s rather than as a participant. However, as I compiled the data I realised Shave had also been part of the film programme in 1977. Miraculously, as his studio had burned down along with the majority of his work several years ago, he still had the original work he had submitted for screening.¹⁸⁴ Alongside Shave, Collier introduced me to Terry Duffy who had been a participant in both 1976 and 1977.

Meeting Duffy while attending the 2018 opening of New Contemporaries in Liverpool, he had vivid memories of submitting to and subsequently participating in the Live Shows. In the mid 1970s, Duffy had been a student at Liverpool College of Art and was quick to recognise the New Contemporaries 'Live Show' as one of the few opportunities to show performative installation work as a student artist (Appendix - Duffy). Asserting that the type of work he was interested in was not widely popular at Liverpool College of Art during that period, he identified that locating a group of peers and being able to exhibit in London were important factors in his participation.

For our meeting Duffy had also brought with him some photographs he had found within his personal collection. Several were of his work in 1976, although as it was a performance in the back yard of the Gallery that subtly intervened with the items already present it was quite difficult to discern his work from the general back yard paraphernalia (Figure 12). The

¹⁸³ Even with the little information I had, new unexpected connections gave an impression that there was more information to be found. as my BA Sculpture tutor, listed in 1977 as C. Summerfield, I was able to confirm that my previous tutor had participated in the painting and sculpture exhibition at Royal Academy, but had not participated in the Live Show activity. to the incidental exhibition preceding Not a Live Show presenting work by Dick Jewel¹⁸³, provided an impression that there was more information to be found.

¹⁸⁴ 1000 Postcards was a 16mm film of a postcard of Piccadilly Circus. Shave clearly recalled wanting to make use of the photocopier, which at the time filled the majority of a room at the Slade School of Art. Re-photocopying each photocopy, Shave was experimenting with a newfound accessibility to reproducing images. He further recalled the comradery of showing work at London Film Co-op, and the excitement of the new materials and methods in practice appearing during that period.

other images were equally as opaque, with no indication as to whose work was depicted apart from one in which the artists' name 'Charlie' (from Charlie Process) was clearly visible (Figure 13). While the images provided by Duffy have a compellingly mysterious quality, they do help to evoke certain sensibilities in what was being made and the atmosphere of the events. Accompanying the black and white images, a small selection of colour photographs (likely to be from the 1977 exhibition)¹⁸⁵ brought the events into closer proximity to the present.¹⁸⁶ As highlighted by Bruchet (2019, p. 153), while the event of *Not a Live Show* brings the archival materials into the present, their material qualities however also mark them out as chronological referents.

Although an assortment of potential material was brought together for the exhibition, the primary source of material was derived from the Acme Archive collection.¹⁸⁷ Though not extensive, the archive materials gathered nonetheless provided an approximation of museological archival displays, with archival items displayed within traditional vitrines and the provision of supplementary items and oral histories helping establish context. Returning to Filipovic's tension between exhibitions of 'unflappable truth' and exhibitions as a site of undoing, the exhibition apparatus became the means through which to test the inherent tension of the archive as both evidential and partial.

¹⁸⁵ It must be noted that my assumption that the colour images are from 1977 has not been verified, but was based on the work included in the image being clearly attributed to Charlie Process. Process had participated in both years, however his work in 1976 had been reviewed in the Studio International article and it was apparent the work depicted in the colour image was not the same. Further, the other images that Duffy had that were in black and white related to Duffy's participation in 1976.

¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, the ad hoc nature of what was captured and overall lack of documentation of the exhibition and performance events is not something that is at all contemporary – both as images that are clearly pre-digital and in contrast to our current propensity for and ease of documentation. Returning to Collier to ask if he had retained any of his own documentation of the show, Collier highlighted that during his training at Goldsmiths documentation was actively discouraged. Equally, as a Chair who received little to no information from the prior organising committee (when the exhibition had been hosted by Camden Art Centre), there was no embedded ethos or urgency to retain records for the next. However, Collier did stress that he felt the need at the time for some kind of organisational memory retention and consistency to ensure that each year did not start from scratch or without a venue, as he had experienced. Even so, mounting the exhibition while completing his Master's, he failed to live up to these expectations, with only a verbal handover to the organising committee for the following year. It was not until he became assistant curator at ICA and New Contemporaries followed that his documentation of the exhibition became more thorough.

¹⁸⁷ The version of the 1976 New Contemporaries Live Show catalogue held at Tate could have provided access to entries missing from the Acme version, however copyright and loan costs also presented limiting factors. As Acme Studios are a smaller enterprise, they were able to provide a greater level of flexibility and support appropriate for the scale of *Not a Live Show*.

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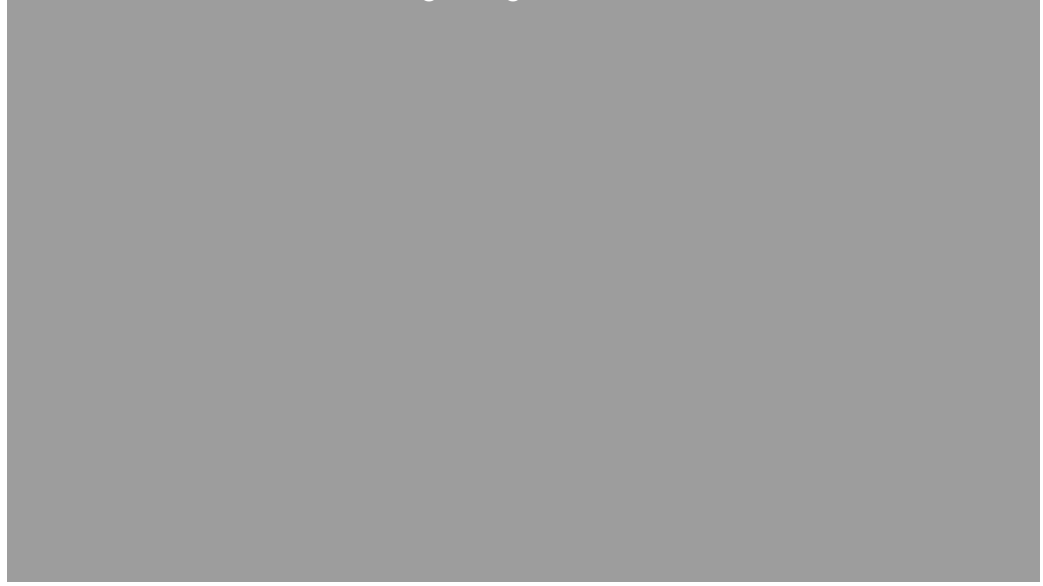


Figure 12: Interventions in the back yard of Acme Gallery by Terry Duffy, New Contemporaries Live Show 1976. Courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 13: Installation by Charlie Process in New Contemporaries Live Show c. 1976/77. Courtesy of Terry Duffy.

Forshung

From outlining the basis for the exhibition and the key materials being drawn on for the development of *Not a Live Show*, I will examine the exhibition venue, exhibition apparatus and curatorial decisions made. Situated within the School of Art and Design at Nottingham Trent University, the venue for the exhibition had arisen through working with the Bonington Gallery as co-convenor of a Student Curatorial Group. During the course of our discussions, the subject of the Bonington Gallery's own archive arose and their efforts to

organise and manage past records. As a point of commonality, the foyer space – which focuses on archival displays - was offered to mount an exhibition regarding my research. The Bonington ‘Vitrines’ are a series of micro exhibitions run in parallel to (physically and conceptually) the main Bonington Gallery exhibition programme. The ‘Vitrine’ exhibitions are presented within the Gallery foyer and focus on archives and archival acts, utilising the format of the vitrine as a conceptual and/or literal mode of display.

However, as the Vitrines programme is situated within a functional space that serves as the central hallway for the school, rather than being designated as a ‘gallery’ and its’ associated connotations, it remains a peripheral space of transition. As students move from seminar rooms to studios, pausing to meet a friend or colleague, waiting for classes or tutorials to start, or even to use the surface of the Vitrines to sort out their drinks/books/bags, the space fluctuates between display area, meeting place, and hallway. As with Marc Augé’s non-place (see thesis Introduction ‘New Contemporaries in contemporaneity’), the transience of the foyer within an art school also echoes the context of the artists participating in New Contemporaries, who themselves are at a point of transition – or the foyer - between art school and their future careers.¹⁸⁸ Equally, and appropriately to the subject of the exhibition, the historic ‘Live Show’ in 1976 and 1977 was also peripheral to the larger New Contemporaries sculpture and painting exhibition as well as forefronting transient practices.

As the unique position of the venue echoed the purpose of New Contemporaries - situated within the environment of art education while also occupying the professionalised sphere of the art world as a public facing gallery – the academic yet presentational context of the Bonington Gallery also afforded me the freedom to develop the exhibition as both experimental and public. As such, whereas the mediation between curator as author has been raised as a point of tension when working with individual artists and artworks, or alternatively the voice of the curator is removed through a formalised filter of objectivity (Pryde-Jarman 2016; Bruchet 2019), framing the work through my own ongoing activity positioned the exhibition as an authorial act of unfolding subjective commentary. Although this was not an overt statement within the textual framing of the exhibition to the public, curatorial choices made in the development of the exhibition served to embed the actions of the researcher within the display. These included research data and notations as well as the animation of the transcription process from three interviews carried out with participants Mike Collier, Student Chair 1976; Terry Duffy, participant 1976 and 1977; and Terry Shave,

¹⁸⁸ As the sentiments recurring within the New Contemporaries literature highlight, the transition point as art students leave education resonates with a vibrancy equated to the potential of artists at the start of their career juxtaposed against the sense of uncertainty and precarity in forging a career within the arts sector.

participant 1977.

In mounting the exhibition, I had a heightened awareness that the few archival materials I was drawing on did little to unpack or ‘unarchive’ the historical exhibition. However, as the Live Show had called for proposals rather than a selection from artwork ‘objects’, there was a direct insight into what students were producing at that moment in time (although only the 1976 proposals were readily available). At the same time, I did not want to diminish the tension between the serendipitous 1976 catalogue production and the ‘empty’ feeling of New Contemporaries archival materials, more apparent in the 1977 documentation. In recalling Riceour’s *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2000), the archive as a space of remnants, the statements that can be made (from a Foucault perspective) do not negate that it cannot contain everything. In this instance, the lack of what it contained draws even greater attention to the impossibility of recovering much of what New Contemporaries ‘Live Show’ actually entailed.

Central to the display area, the middle wall facing the main entrance has been frequently used to delineate the exhibition space from the surrounding functional use of the foyer as a hallway. With the original catalogue for 1976 as a closed document placed into the vitrine, the imagery and details from the proposals were not visible. Therefore, the removal or unarchiving through the creation of a facsimile wallpaper provided greater access as well as drawing attention to the vitrine content (Figure 14). Along the adjacent wall to the right-hand side the oral histories were projected, and in the rear corridor (behind the central display area) ongoing data gathering alongside the two exhibition posters were displayed.



Figure 14: Digital sketch of exhibition installation, *Not a Live Show*, Bonington Gallery 2019.

Displaying the DIY catalogue as a vinyl wallpaper, the preservation concerns and ‘authority’ of the archive were also subverted. From the formality of Archives in which the practices and procedures often limit access, the tactility of the wallpaper surface invited direct contact. Moreover, the textual quality of the vinyl echoed the tactility of the original photocopied sheets while its scale invoked the installation or immersive quality the Live Shows intended to forefront. An action taken as a curatorial intervention, this display method can be seen as part of what Hal Foster describes as “seek[ing] to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present.” (Foster 2004, p. 4). However, even with its dimensions and tactility, there is necessarily a gap between the replication and the subject it describes.

From the detail of the wall behind, the relative sparsity of the content in the vitrines further highlighted the fragmentary nature of New Contemporaries historical documentation. As Holling writes,

“A work’s identity is created on the basis of what the archive offers and what it withholds because of ruptures in its record, its belatedness, and its heterogeneity, and for this reason, a research, curator, and conservator also confront a lack of documentation during their archival work.” (2017, p. 146).

In the gaps, the tension between the exhibition as an unarchiving or enlivening of the archive also highlighted its distance from the originating event, and therefore its retrospective outlook. In the chronological representation – the two vitrines displaying 1976 and 1977 exhibitions respectively – initially framed the exhibition as compatible to the past. However, in contrast, the oral histories and data gathering signalled the disparity between the past and present. In particular, while the oral histories presented conflicting accounts and the inevitable forgetting of memory, the data gathering brought the process into the present through the hand of myself as curator-researcher.

From the relatively traditional archival display of the vitrines, the presentation of the oral histories to the right of the vitrines and data sheets displayed along the rear corridor provided a further dynamic that sought to emphasise the actions of the researcher as an active entity within the exhibition. While the vitrines utilised the more traditional apparatus of archival display, the oral histories gathered from Mike Collier, Terry Duffy and Terry Shave presented an opportunity to enliven the archive and highlight the experiential aspect of the historical events. Often utilised in archival exhibitions for this purpose, oral histories act in a

manner that is both counter to the archive and expressly created for it. Understood as a collaborative or community-based approach in gathering and reconstructing historical knowledge, first person accounts impress upon the audience a sense of authenticity and immediacy (Bruchet 2019, p. 51). However, even as they impart a sense of ‘truth’, the performativity and subjective nature of personal memories also undermine the very same. These paradoxical elements – created in order to preserve a past but also subject to partiality and forgetting - was embodied in the exhibition presentation.

Equally, as the exhibition was situated in a transient and functional area, it was not a space conducive to extended reading or listening. While audio recordings are often utilised to not only provide access to oral histories but also bring a sense of closeness to the past through the immediacy of voice, a key element that I wanted to convey was the process of research and transcription alongside the different perspectives on the singular events. Aware that in the process of transcribing and editing some intonations or meanings can be lost, I was interested in how to highlight this transferal process to the audience. Further, in editing down two-hour interviews into something that might make sense to a transient audience, that my own choices in what to include may begin to shape the narrative. By screen-recording my audio transcripts, the process of audio transcription not only gave an animation to the text as following patterns of a conversation but also highlighted the transferral of the spoken word into a written record. Calling to mind the purpose of oral histories as recovering knowledge for preservation, it was not only the personal forgetting and subjectivity that was highlighted but the conditions of its retrieval, but whom, and subsequently how it is disseminated.

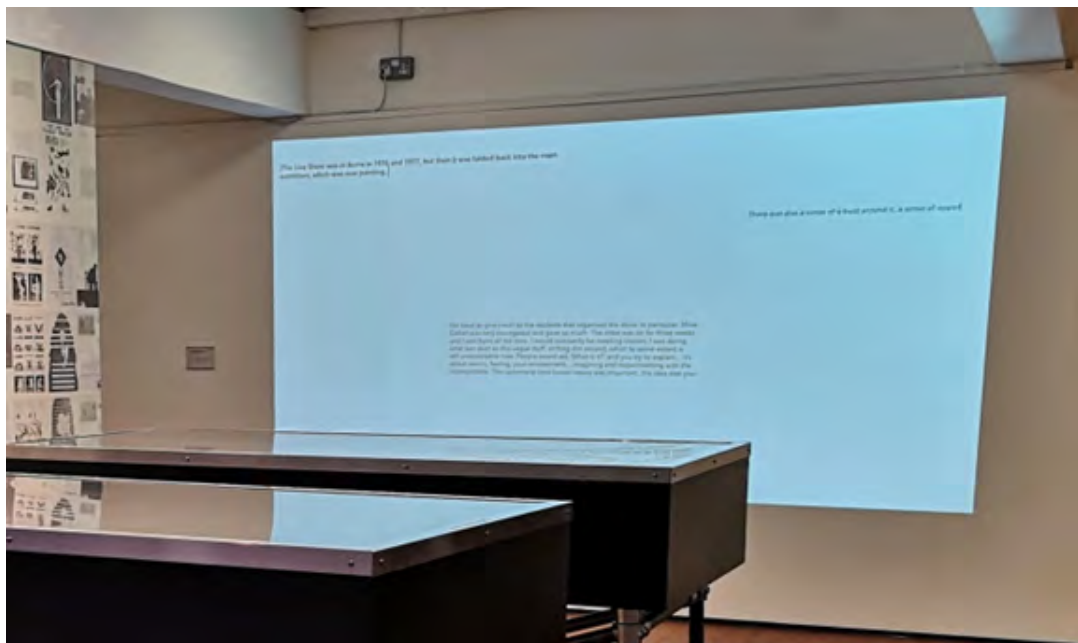


Figure 15: Terry, Terry and Mike. Installation view showing transcription of interview excerpts (15min 43 sec).

Translated into ten minutes of audio typing occurring simultaneously (Figure 15), the final composition of animated transcripts allowed me to place the three individual interviews into proximity – or conversation – with each other. The drawing together of these fragments into three dialogues that highlighted the crossovers and divergences, where they agreed or disagreed, and where they were able to offer alternative insights or information.

Collectively, the oral histories helped ground the archival display as less abstract – connecting the materials to the participants and memories of those involved. However, it also highlighted the archival partiality and fragmentation. The animation of the text also drew further attention, juxtaposing the ‘preserved’ nature of the materials in the vitrines.

In the composition of the three transcripts side by side, it was apparent that only so much of the text would be visible at any one time. In my naivety of moving image – even with the advanced technologies I was working with in comparison to the eras described – I did not know how to produce a scrolling script. Therefore, having delineated how much text could be viewed at a time, once I had reached the parameter limit the text was deleted and started again. Serendipitously, this appeared to echo the essence of oral histories themselves, as lived experiences over documented or recorded at the time of the event. Again, as with the installation of the wallpaper, the curator-creator boundaries became less defined. I have deliberately situated this as the curator-researcher dialectic, but the installation and method of presentation evidences a greater level of interference than the perception of archive displays as presenting ‘evidentiary’ artefacts.

As the transcripts were also being typed out simultaneously, audience members needed to decide if they would follow one narrative through or move across to capture the other comments appearing. As an intentional strategy in the mounting of the show, it emphasised the overlapping orientations of the same historical events. However, it also potentially made it difficult to follow the complete texts without careful and sustained observation. So even in the ‘frustration’ of the typing, it could be assessed as a success in conveying the interplay and contradictions within the three perspectives, as well as echoing the partiality of lived events in real time.

As the front of the exhibition space explored the archival materials and oral histories, the corridor to the rear revealed the ‘back room’ process of my research. Throughout the archival investigations I had been attempting to compile a database of information regarding the past participating artists, selectors, organisers and venues. Even though I had only been

concentrating on the first four decades (as the last three decades of information were more readily available to the current organisation) it was a large and exhaustive task. However, the anomalous incident of the Live Shows, in addition to the exhibition opportunity, had urged me to complete these two entries. As focused studies on just two of the total 66 exhibitions that have taken place since 1949, it also provided an opportunity for a more rigorous search in how far I could trace individual participants, the art works that were shown, and how much contextual information could be accumulated (Figure 16).

Antony Gormley	Connection [film]	Goldsmiths
re Johnson & Wad		Hornsey College of Art
ito Antonio Wadhwani		Hornsey College of Art
eon Kavanagh		Loughborough and Hull Coll
Mara	LIGHTS, an excerpt from an as yet, non-existent film	Hull College of Art
ty St James	<i>Comments from Mary's tutors: "well the bellies on, now where are the paintings?"</i>	<i>Bournville College of Art, Cardiff</i>
tair Boyd		
k Performance		<i>Sheffield Art School</i>
ard McIlRoy	I Wish it Were Lipstick, Richard	
nder Werk	<i>ICC Antwerp-recording of his performance done in 1977 in Ensembles Archive</i>	<i>Thom Richey & Dirk Larsen (R)</i>
ne Shemilt		Brighton, Winchester and R
id Stevens Stephens		
ia Ziranee Ziranek	<i>The following year Silvia worked with Bruce McLean 'Sorry: a musical in parts'</i>	<i>Goldsmiths</i>
e Stephen	Art, Psychology and the Moon	
Stephen		
	The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes [performance]	
bert Wentcherscher	Trinity Test/Superfaust [Super 8]	Royal College of Art
n Wallet	<i>Slideshow - 30 slides on kodak carousel projector, spoken word, writing</i>	<i>Goldsmiths - has worked</i>
w Basto	<i>Influenced by Carl Andre, captions without image</i>	
ie Brookes	<i>Richard Wentworth described the work as having been done</i>	
	<i>'with the hands in the pockets'</i>	London University
y Jenny Lowe		Melbourne University Scho
onio Lagarto		Lisbon School of Fine Arts, :
mi Ivy		Norwich School of Art, Slad

Figure 16: Data sheet with notations, detail, *Not a Live Show*, Bonington Gallery, 4-30 March 2019.

In the gathering of information, discerning what is important or worth retrieving can be difficult to decipher. Further, whether I was gathering 'fact' or further mythologising events and participants was hard to know. There is also a tension between filling the 'gap' of the archive in terms of information regarding the specific event and filling new gaps regarding the intervening years. Returning to Derrida's 'mal d'archive' (1995), the pull of the archive to uncover and unearth new information and stories expands outwards. For Derrida, the interest in the archive is not limited to conservation, but the relationship of the archive to memory, and in turn how that becomes expressed externally. As stated by Marlene Manoff, 'the methods of transmitting information shape the knowledge that can be produced' (2004, p. 12). Therefore, a lingering question is what function the data sheet played in both conveying the archive as a repository of knowledge, but also the narratives drawn out of and inspired from it. Considering the spatial layout of the exhibition, the 'display' of the reception area and resolution to the oral histories was also to an extent 'undone', as

discussed by Filipovic (2013), by the unfinished and ongoing research located in the back corridor.

A recurring question by others during the course of my research was also an interest in those participants who were less well known or had not become ‘successes’. Tracking down people and art works over four decades later is not an easy challenge. Digital research did allow a greater access to a wider variety of incidental information – from regional news, to social media platforms or academic listings. The question then became what was pertinent information to what I was trying to examine? What would have meaning in the context of New Contemporaries history and to the audience. In turn, how did enacting the research as part of the exhibition activity differ or impact the transference of archival research to New Contemporaries. Removing the 1976 DIY catalogue from the archive and transferring it onto the wall of the exhibition space, the act of unarchiving also gave equal voice to the artists who participated, rather than just those emphasised through the vitrine display.¹⁸⁹ The spotting of recognisable names was less dominant, instead drawing attention to the language, styles, and content of the proposals themselves.

While the format of the 1976 catalogue gave greater detail on the types of practices artists were developing, names, institutions, and details of the final works shown were less apparent. Conversely, in 1977 while surnames, media type and institutions were provided, only being provided with the first initial rather than first names meant identifying the correct artists was a greater challenge. Despite much of the investigation during this period being conducted through online research, as others became aware of my research subject through the exhibition comments and suggestions from colleagues and audience members also helped direct my search parameters.¹⁹⁰ The final additions to the data sets were limited, evidencing the difficulty of the task. Information added became a mixture of verifying incomplete data alongside commentary that helped provide context to a particular artists’ practice or early career activity. As a durational activity during the exhibition, the intention of the handwritten additions in blue against the black printed dataset highlighted the continual gathering of information, as well as the limits of what was known. Reflexive of New Contemporaries, the tendency towards their history as being a data set of names against the development of practices and live networks emulates the tensions between the exhibition as a historical record and the unknown future of its participating artists.

¹⁸⁹ During the exhibition a number of people stopped to talk to me about the artists or the practices of the artists instigated by the wallpaper. In retrospect, this could have presented a further participatory opportunity, with the audience being able to add to the data alongside myself.

¹⁹⁰ Past participants and attendees from other periods also got in touch, providing further commentary and in one case several back-catalogues of New Contemporaries exhibitions in the early 1980s.

The exhibition display resulted in three distinct but overlapping areas, reflecting the experience I had in the archival research process. Although each of these had been intentional in considering the materials and subject, the resulting delineation of the ‘busy wall’ with sparse vitrines, versus the animated oral histories and the ‘backstage’ research data were also unintentional. In describing the personal research experience within archives, Nayia Yiakoumaki identified three main characteristics: isolation, intimacy, and closeness (Yiakoumaki 2009, p.100). The wallpaper alongside the vitrines highlighted both the volume of information against the lack of material it originated from, while the animated oral histories drew attention towards its lived experienced. In turn, the translation of the materials into research data also commented upon the abstraction of information towards the creation of an institutional narrative. In turn, the isolation of the preserved information in the vitrines is followed by the intimacy of my research process in the data sheets and oral history transcriptions, and finally, closeness to the originating event is found by the replication of its conditions in the accompanying screening event.

[Not] Not a Live Show

In the process of tracing the work shown in the Live Shows I had tracked down some of the film works screened at London Film Co-op, including a work by Helen Chadwick and the film by Terry Shave. Reflecting on the moment of practice that Shave had described during our conversation, I wanted to bring some part of this dialogue into the present. In a playful response to the ‘Live Show’ title from 1976 and 1977, and the archival nature of the project, the working title of the curating project had become *Not a Live Show*. Although this was a relatively cavalier gesture at the time, as the project progressed it became more apt. It recalled the fragmentary nature of the material and evidential traces of the past events, as well as pointing to the impossibility of reanimating a past moment. Even though the context and purpose of the exhibition in Bonington Gallery were much removed from that of New Contemporaries in the mid-1970s, the juxtaposition of disclaiming the ‘liveness’ of the exhibition also highlighted dialogues regarding performative and time-based practices.

From the context of the exhibition regarding student and recent graduate artists, to the audience within the art school of current art students, provoked a further exploration of potential intergenerational dialogues. Reasserting the performative nature of the original exhibition, *[Not] Not a Live Show* brought together the two historical works with current student and recent graduate practices. An invitation was sent out to current students and recent graduates for an opportunity to screen new and experimental works, to be shown alongside the historical works I had found. As an event within the art school gallery, I was

interested in how these two generations, four decades apart, would relate to each other. The majority of the programme served to re-enact the film programme the Live Shows had introduced to New Contemporaries exhibition, but the introduction of the two works by Shave and Chadwick also pointed the event back to its originations. Simultaneously, as current students witnessing early works by two artists who have since become part of the fabric of contemporary British art history, the work gave rise to their own potential future legacies.

From the 1970s as a period in which technological changes were beginning to be more widely accessible, to the acceleration in current digital capabilities in 2019, the impact on types of practice generated by new media as well as about new media are reiterated across the decades. As each generation experiments and pursues the capabilities of art practice through new materials, the media themselves also situate the work within their own time period. For example, Shave spoke of his experimentation with media when constructing his work *Postcard*. The photocopier machine had recently been installed in the art school, and it was over the course of several weeks that he made the 1000 photocopies of photocopies of the postcard. The film then took him several months to construct as an animation in which the image slowly reformed – the reverse of the disintegration that occurred as each photocopy lost more and more detail. Shave also talked about how his experimentation in film and moving image only occurred during his Masters' studies in printmaking, and upon leaving the institution and becoming overwhelmed with the slow pace of film making he reverted to painting.¹⁹¹ Today, that frustration is often in reverse, with painting perceived as a slower process and technology affording us a more immediate result.

In the organisation of the film screening event, I came to experience the challenge in changing technology and that elusive sense of past time through the unpacking of Shave's 16mm film. For a film that had been sitting in a canister for forty years it had remained well preserved, however, the memories and knowledge of loading the reels and setting up the projector was lacking. After several hours we finally had the film playing in the right direction, although the accompanying sound would not play. The sound on 16mm film is recorded on a magnetic strip along the edge of the film. Unclear if this was due to our inability to operate the machine, a fault with the mechanics or a degradation in the recording, Terry described it to me as an abstract audio representation of the reforming postcard on the screen. In contrast, a work submitted by a contemporary art student, Dolna Dikania, 42.439,

¹⁹¹ As a rite of passage, the transition during education to professional careers is often marked by a period of experimentation beyond an artists' usual practice. For example, Anthony Gormley also submitted a short video piece to the 1976 exhibition, which he seldom utilised as more than documentation before or since.

23.13638 by Georgi Stamenov, presented an exercise in the possibilities of virtual reality as digital renderings depicted fluttering curtains and a glass jug became a viscous fluid.

However, despite appearing at two ends of the spectrum regarding technology – from 16mm footage to computer generated graphics, there are some direct comparisons between the two. Shave had explored with the most contemporary technology available to him at the time, just as the work by Stamenov was an exploration of digital capabilities. His work focused on the unusual interactions between objects when a still life becomes animated, as using digital manipulation each object slowly morphs into unexpected forms. This correlation was exemplified through the introduction Shave provided to his work and the context of his participation in the Live Show in 1977, with Stamenov's work being screened directly after Shave's Postcard projection. In contrast, the performativity and urgency of Helen Chadwick's work Domestic Sanitation: Latex Glamour Rodeo/Bargain Ben Bonanza from 1976 is echoed to a lesser degree by Molly Bouch's live performance HaHa and instructional film How to Laugh in 2019, exploring the dislocation of laughing from its originating impulse.

Considering the origins of archival exhibitions and their functions emerging from aims to create interest in archives for the wider public – as Peter Lester states, 'in other words, as a form of advocacy' (Lester 2019, p. 29) – the exhibition implicitly had an aim of advocating for New Contemporaries. As discussed in Chapter Two, the turn towards archives as a form of validation also allows for the leverage of financial support during a period of increasing financial precarity. As such, the visibility of the archive and its ability to engage an audience becomes as equally as important as the archive itself.

Occurring alongside the exhibition, the event also follows the development of museum and galleries engagement activity intended to bring greater connectivity with audiences (Sandell 1998, pp. 401-418; Black 2010, pp. 129-146). While New Contemporaries is outside the remit of a museum or gallery, its institutional parameters as an annual exhibition and arts organisation still require a recognition of the importance of social interactions. As stated by Lester, the engagement of audiences acts as a form of advocacy, but as highlighted by Christian Health and Dirk vom Lehn (2010, p.266), it also follows educational and learning agendas. Looking to the mission or purpose of New Contemporaries as advocacy for new artists, the event both promoted the value of New Contemporaries history to past, current and potential participants, but also provided an additional platform through which to share their work, in line with the Live Shows original premise.

Exhibition into Research

Examining the exhibition, the impact of this activity on my research process and key findings have contributed to the development of a distinct curatorial understanding regarding working with New Contemporaries archive but also the tension or dialectic between archives as historical resource and their potential towards contemporaneous engagement. As an investigative exploration of New Contemporaries history, as well as a proposition to be tested regarding exhibition making as archive formation, the outcome was assessed through a process of self-reflection as well as informal responses from the student audience and discussions with colleagues. Consideration was also given to the interactions and responses to the associated screening event, *[Not] Not a Live Show*.

From my ongoing interests in the archive as a site of power, a space for rethinking historical materials within current contexts – i.e. seeking a ‘contemporary’ archive for New Contemporaries – the exhibition presented as part of the Bonington Vitrines programme was relatively traditional (reading traditional in this instance as formal curating practices within museums and collections). The vitrines presented historical materials with appropriate labelling, oral histories were included to provide further context, and the short exhibition text helped orientate the audience. The vitrine as an exhibition apparatus reinforced the ‘informational characteristics’ of an archive-focused exhibition (Graham and Cook 2010, p. 173). While the vitrines appeared to be occupied – a tendency Bruchet argues that implicitly ‘fills the gap’ (2019, p. 152) – the sparsity of the vitrine materials was nonetheless apparent. The item that perhaps altered the dynamic of this presentation more than any other was the format and presentation of the oral histories themselves.

If the oral history presentation is reviewed in the context of the potential of New Contemporaries historical materials, and the expanding of the extant materials through oral histories, then it is clear this addition to the exhibition had a significant impact. The suggestion of New Contemporaries establishing an archive formed of oral histories as a solution to the current dispersed nature of their material has been an ongoing proposal, within the original brief of the PhD study as well as a recurring point in discussions held with colleagues and professional contacts during various public events and meetings. Within the limitations of my own research, the positive response to the transcription display provides further clarity in how the oral history material may contribute to an understanding of New Contemporaries, as well as instigating intergenerational dialogues.

However, as presented within the frame of ‘exhibition as experiment’, the format of their presentation and the intervention of the ‘hand of the researcher’ through the animated transcription process, pushed further elements of the oral histories away from the immediate relationship of those telling the stories to the performativity of the curating apparatus. The attention paid to the movement of the text reinforced the ‘liveness’ against the static nature of the archival vitrines, however they also demonstrated the ‘graphy’ of historiography as audience members weaved alternative narratives through the various compositions they followed.

During the event, *[Not] Not a Live Show* the potential of intergenerational dialogues was reinforced through the presentation by Terry Shave and the response by the participating students. As a platform for artists that focuses on new cohorts emerging from education each year, it prompted the question of how engagement with the archive might enrich their experience. While theorist Terry Cook debates the consequences of archives and archive professions becoming shaped by user needs as the introduction of a new form of bias (Cook 1991, pp. 123-134), the archival exhibition and engagement activity, alongside the archiving of the exhibition as a new record, also allows for the shifting contexts to be acknowledged and recorded.

As future audiences for the archival resource and resulting investigations is both past participants and the ongoing production of new ones, the archive as a focal point also provides an opportunity to build valuable relationships between alumni and future candidates. The intergenerational dialogue reflects and supports the nature of New Contemporaries as a temporal gathering of peers at a particular moment in their development as artists, bridging educational institutions and cultural spheres.¹⁹² The public nature of the exhibition also provided a bridge for myself as a researcher, to move from the intimacy and isolation of being immersed in the archive to the social interactions and activity generated outside it – reflective of Derrida’s expression of the interiority and exteriority of archives.

The title of the exhibition was also intended to draw attention to the repeated dialectics of the exhibition: the distance from the originating event to the exhibition, with historical traces as the evidence of a past event-based exhibition, opposed to what was a contemporaneous showing of new ‘live’ works. Returning to the proposition that the exhibition of the archive

¹⁹² Early on in my research I was engaged by Brilliant Club to participate in a pilot project for Nottingham Trent University. Researchers were requested to create digital presentations of their work to which in-coming first year art students were able to respond. The discussion thread generated indicated a range of ideas and interests emerging from the brief overview provided, from the subject of archives and curation to the role of art education and exhibiting.

should be returned to the archive – or in this instance, transferred to New Contemporaries (as yet) archive - as a process of archive gathering, the exhibiting of the archive materials effectively did produce new records of their historical activity. Further, the historical research and contemporary enquiries into the legacies of the participating artists, including the oral histories, provided new organisational information.

Even so, while the exhibition had an express function of being archived – and did perform that function – it is also unsettled, being both not yet archived by New Contemporaries to date, as well as unsettling rather than concluding the impact and value of this particular period in its history. As discussed in the Introduction ‘Unarchiving New Contemporaries’, while it could be viewed as an acceleration of history as an archiving of materials before they are finished - or in their designation of creation as explicitly being for the archive - the exhibition was not only for that purpose. Rather, the proponents that also surround oral histories, of being a form of collective meaning making and co-construction of historical knowledge (Perks and Thomson 2010) could also be said about the exhibition as a contemporaneous event. Therefore, as an unarchiving of their past, the exhibition is a site of exchange – of historiographies - rather than a construction of history.

In engaging with audiences and considering how the core values of New Contemporaries may be taken further, I wanted to provide a further opportunity for an embedded process of participation. From my curatorial background working with student and recent graduate artists, those who would be participants of New Contemporaries, generating an opportunity that would also engage them with the history of the exhibition and its contexts, led me to the formation of a further creative critical response. In the lack and or difficulty of accessing archival materials, the next curatorial project outlined in Chapter Five, *Not an Archive*, again provoked the context of historical exposition through the commission of three new artworks.

Chapter Five: Manifesting an Archive – Part II

Following the *Not a Live Show* exhibition, this chapter will outline the second curatorial project, *Not an Archive*, developed from May to October 2019. In this instance, rather than directly displaying the archival materials, the project introduced new points of engagement through the commissioning of work in response to the historical research. Opening up the subject of New Contemporaries history, *Not an Archive* invited artists to examine the broader scope of New Contemporaries over its seven-decade duration. The project culminated in an exhibition at Primary in Nottingham from 31 October to 23 November 2019.

As New Contemporaries history and associated archival materials are in various states of organisation, the commissions responded to the access afforded by my research to date. In this regard, I was both curator and gatekeeper. Utilising the research I had collated and my knowledge of the material, the artists developed discrete areas of interest relating to the subject of New Contemporaries, the exhibition's history, and the concept of the archive. As a form of enquiry and analysis, the intention was to transform the previous monophonic presentation of research displayed in *Not a Live Show* to a polyphonic series of interpretations and parallel readings, both of available and 'missing' information.

While the previous exhibition followed the format of the archive on display and exhibition as research, the first part of this chapter will examine commissioning as a form of enquiry and or durational/slow curating (Sørensen 2017; O'Neill & Doherty 2009; Johnston 2021). Commissioning is a well-recognised form of contemporary curating (see Obrist 2014; O'Neill & Doherty 2009; O'Neill 2012a; Smith 2012 among others), both as an independent practice and as an increased form of mediation and alternative exhibition strategies within cultural institutions (Ashmore 2015; Brownrigg 2014; Weinberg 2014). While commissioning presents a challenging set of power dynamics, with an extensive history in both defining and critiquing authority, there are many different approaches and styles in curating that vary from person to person as well as subject, institutional frameworks, social and cultural constructs.

Having previously worked more often with artists over secondary artworks or historical collections within my professional career my curating practice is orientated through a lens closer to that of artist-curator than art historian-curator. While it is often cited that commissioning is a collaborative process (Bishop 2006; Rito 2020) - depending on the

circumstances of its actions - I would posit that in this instance it was akin to intersecting and co-operative parallel enquiries.¹⁹³ While the resulting exhibition at Primary was of the artist's work, the claim of research and cultural production for the curator is through the framework of the exhibition, the process of the commissioning, and reflection on the outcomes, rather than the commissions themselves. As parallel enquiries, each artist worked to fulfil their ideas and interests within the given framework. Equally, while supporting, contributing, and mediating the artists' work into the public domain, I progressed my own research into the potential of an archive for New Contemporaries. This is not to say there was no collaboration, but that there were four distinct areas of independent research occurring alongside each other as well.

From examining the methodology of commissioning, the next part of the chapter will introduce the curatorial framework and activity of *Not an Archive*. Reading the archive as a paradox for making knowledge of the past more resilient versus a fragmentation of historical material that invites a re-inscription of past material into contemporary dialogues, the initial exhibition of *Not a Live Show* can be seen as an exercise of 'seeing what was there'. In contrast, *Not an Archive* intended to extrapolate, unravel, and reorientate New Contemporaries historical material through the engagement with current emerging and early career artists and artistic practices. When talking with Nayia Yiakoumaki at Whitechapel Gallery during my placement, she voiced these kinds of interventions in the archive as either acts of guardianship or as unsettling intruders. In this instance, the engagement with the subject of the archive could be seen as guardianship and advocacy. However, the interventions and outcomes as artistic works are also unsettling intruders.

When facing the position of New Contemporaries current archival assemblage, the balance between guardianship and intruder was precarious. The commissioning process deliberately invited the artists to disrupt the singular monophonic researcher position and therefore they were invited to play the role of unsettling intruders. On the other hand, as curator, while still considering the subject of the archive, I also had a responsibility to consider the modes of practice I was using in the process of gathering, preserving, and disseminating New Contemporaries historical materials. With the tension between these roles, who I worked with and the kinds of practices they encompassed required careful thought. For this reason, the artists invited to the commission were already known to me.

¹⁹³ The concept of play in art is well known, but I became interested at this point in the phenomenon of parallel play as a comparative description of the process being undertaken. Parallel play is an often- momentary transition between group activity, but also oscillates as new group dynamics shift (Bakeman and Brownlee 1980).

The first artist, Kobbi Adi, had worked with me on *Archives in Progress* at The Courtauld Institute and was already engaged in archival discourse. The second commission, artist-duo Celia-Yunior, I had met in 2013. Working as a collaborative duo since 2009, their practice investigates social, cultural and political structures through infographics, installation and participatory projects. The final artist, Suzanne van der Lingen, explores narrative structures through moving image and text, utilising subtitles, footnotes and iterative or looping formats. I had met Lingen briefly in 2015 but it was during my archival research I became more familiar with her work, particularly her project ‘Footnoting the Archive’ with Map Magazine. The final exhibition at Primary resulted in works that introduced points of parity as well as highlighting the singular nature of their interpretations. Through the commissioning process and exhibition as a response to the archive the project gave rise to questions of value, mediation, archival ‘gaps’, completeness and accuracy. In an email from Nayia Yiakoumaki responding to the project highlighted:

“the potentially therapeutic action of putting something where the gap is, even if this ‘something’ is not what attests to a logical and linear archival sequence... Elements that have nothing to do with what we see as historical.”¹⁹⁴ (Yiakoumaki, personal communication on 22 November 2019)

As previously noted in Chapter Four, the archiving of the curatorial projects was proposed as method of expanding New Contemporaries extant archival material. However, as a participatory and artistic action, the resulting works were not required to present archival data or authoritative archival narratives. Consequently, the chapter will conclude by discussing what role projects such as *Not an Archive* may play in an organisation such as New Contemporaries.

Commission as Enquiry

The following passages will introduce commissioning as a curatorial methodology. A methodology widely employed in contemporary curatorial practice, as the subject of furthering archival or art historical research it is more often spoken of from tangential positions: such as from the perspective of artistic practice or as the result of curatorial production – a discussion on the outcome of work rather than a process of research itself.

¹⁹⁴ Yiakoumaki posed these points on 22 November 2019 in response to the symposium *The Future [im]Perfect* which accompanied the exhibition. Unable to attend, I posed the questions in her stead, resulting in a discussion over the need for more attenuated language when talking about archives, archival materials, archival research, and broader ‘archival’ activities.

However, in light of the archival turn at the end of the twentieth century the use of artistic commissioning or intervention as a way of reframing artefacts and collections within museums as a more contemporary format has steadily increased with the advent of the contemporary curator (Barker 1999; Anderson 2004; O'Neill 2007; Smith 2012; Johnston 2021).¹⁹⁵ Equally, the same turn in artistic practice has seen a proliferation of literature that focuses on artists archives as well as 'artists in the archive' (Foster 2004; Spieker 2008; Osthoff 2009; Borggreen & Gade 2013; Vaknin, Lane, & Stuckey 2013; Clarke, Jones, Kaye & Linsley 2018). A differentiation to many of these positions in the instance of *Not an Archive* is the accessibility of the archival material (or lack of an archive) and the position of myself working from outside the cultural institution of New Contemporaries but adjacent to it.

Turning first to commissioning as a mode of curatorial work, the positions of the artists and curator in the development of new work necessarily require a level of cooperation. Curating, or the curatorial, has been argued as a process of 'thinking with' that occurs as a result of the networked activity. As discussed by Maria Lind, and figures within curatorial discourse such as Irit Rogoff and Jean-Paul Martinon, "have identified curating as a locus within contemporary art from which significant new ideas have emerged since the mid-1990s" (Lind 2010a). According to Lind, as a locus curating is not the product of curators but a multi-layered means of answering back in a given context. However, as the curator within any given project, there is still a specific galvanization of actions that can be relayed from a curatorial perspective.

While Lind leaves off her proposal by suggesting that this may not produce more than a frisson or irritant in the production of work, Paul O'Neill (2012a, 2012b) suggests that as mode of working it enables space for "doing and speaking together". As a form of co-habitational time, O'Neill describes this as a curatorial constellation or paracuratorial praxis, in which the process should be given parity to what may be perceived as a more tangible 'outcome'. Not dependent on the exhibition, rather an exhibitionary outcome may be – or not – one of many component parts. From this perspective, the curatorial becomes an ongoing event of knowledge production with events, exhibitions and presentations as punctuations within ongoing dialogue rather than as a finality or end goal (e.g. Martinon 2013; O'Neill 2012; O'Neill & Wilson 2015; Rogoff 2013). Looking to the exploration of New Contemporaries, working with the artists, Adi, Ceilia-Yunior and Lingen, this

¹⁹⁵ Further, in relation to the work by Massouras that examined patronage and professionalism, commissioning has been proposed by theorists such as Franziska Wilmsen, among others, to have become a form of contemporary patronage (2020).

methodology offered an opportunity to open up the dialogue and examine potential outcomes from differing perspectives - or layers of answering back.

Much of the reflective practice within the early stage of my research ruminated on my efforts not to invent a history or overly direct my investigations with pre-emptive conclusions. Coming to the understanding that in the process of finding, assimilating and disseminating material a narrative would be formed was also underpinned by a recognition that there is no set universal narrative to uncover (see Chapter Three). The juxtaposition of remaining porous and open to the experience of the archive while simultaneously trying to understand events and occurrences in relation to each other is one that has been echoed throughout the research, oscillating between the micro and macro, between multiplicity and the finite. By inviting others into the research, this dialectical position in scale and approach was made more explicit.

The interjection of alternative viewpoints through the commissioning process also offered an opportunity to start unpacking a deeper understanding and empathy to the complexities of New Contemporaries history as well as how it may relate to its key audience. While my own interests and incidental meetings had led me to the Live Shows of 1976 and 1977, what other instances or concerns could be drawn out through a collective process of investigation? For example, the dispersal of New Contemporaries archival materials reflecting the same dispersal and influence of its alumni; the navigation of cultural gatekeepers; or the intergenerational dialogues as part participants become selectors – a journey of emergence into establishment.

The premise of *Not an Archive* is not dissimilar to other projects carried out around archival materials. Mirjami Schuppert investigated Archival play: on the role of the curator in mediating artistic interventions into photographic archives (2016),¹⁹⁶ examining the methods whereby the contents of a photographic archive were explored through collaborative curator-artistic research. Trine Friis Sørensen also writes about two artistic commissions she curated regarding the Danish Radio Archive in ‘A Precarious Construct: The Commission as a Curatorial Mode of Enquiry’ (2016, pp.79-98), although each work was displayed or performed separately. Equally, a project initiated by Andrew Bracey and Danica Maeir, *Bummock: New Artistic Responses to Unseen Parts of the Archive* (2015 – present), invites artists to join them in exploring the unseen (uncatalogued) areas of various

¹⁹⁶ Although an abstract is available for Schuppert’s work via EThOS, the paper is not available to view.

archives as the catalyst to create new works. As with New Contemporaries, the focus is archives and archival materials (Townsend 2020). However, for Bummock both lead artists are also participants in producing art works, and although the project does concentrate on the uncatalogued materials within the archive (although all items within archives are subject to cataloguing and description to varying extents), there were still based around an archive. As were the projects by Schuppert and Sørensen.

In contrast, for *Not an Archive* the artists were reliant on the gathering and mediation of the archival material through my research. As a mediator between the artist-researcher and the archive, I was not far removed from appropriating the traditional mode of the archivist. Taking on the role of the archivist or museum curator as ‘carers’ and ‘keepers’, there was a responsibility to preserve things for future use as well as facilitate current access. As an inherited tension from traditional institutional activity, the approaches used in contemporary curatorial practice further affirm the complexity of mediation in accessing the past. Only one of the commissioned artists for *Not an Archive* visited any of the various archival holdings in person, accompanied by myself, with the other two artists viewing my archival research remotely as a more cohesive point of access. Consequently, the work could be more accurately deemed as a complex layering of questions and answers between myself and the artists, as well as between myself and the archive.

The paper by Sørensen¹⁹⁷ also leans on the same understanding of the curatorial as a durational locus of knowledge formation, as suggested by Lind, O’Neill and Rogoff (and others). However, extending the discussion with regard to the construction of the shared space, or co-habitational time. Sørensen highlights the notion of curatorial care, such as that proposed by Rickett (2016), with reference to the interdependence between the curator and the commissioned artists. Similarly, working with the artists for *Not an Archive* necessitated a level of care, consideration of ethics, openness and trust – from the artists as they shared their ongoing practice, and as the curator in remaining receptive, flexible and supportive (Green 2019; Huberman 2011; Martinon 2020).

Attempting to map the complexity of these relationships, Sørensen pointed to the exchange

¹⁹⁷ Further material did come to light, such as the work by Bruchet and Yiakoumaki, as well as meeting further colleagues through events such as Curing Archive Fever: Filling the Gaps Through Situatedness hosted by Shared Campus; Voicing the Archive, part of Voicing the Silence curated by Tok; and Participatory Archives: With and Beyond the Archival Institution, part of Imagine Otherwise: Future Archives, a series of webinars hosted by CEMPER in Belgium. However, locating work and peers that reflected the particular circumstances of my position, the context of the archive and commissioning, was a process that evolved during the course of the research. As such, the work by Sørensen remained an important touchstone when developing the commissioning project.

points between herself as the curator/ commissioner, the artists and the archive: the artists and curator each interacting with the archives and artworks. Implicating the space between a constellation of points as the area in which the curatorial is generated – not belonging to any one component or authorial voice, but formed through dialogues between people, acts, and objects – this may appear for *Not an Archive* comparably as shown in (Figure 17) . While for Sørensen, the inter-relationships occur across all points, for *Not an Archive* my position as curator/researcher also formed the main conduit through which the archival materials are communicated to or accessed by the artists.

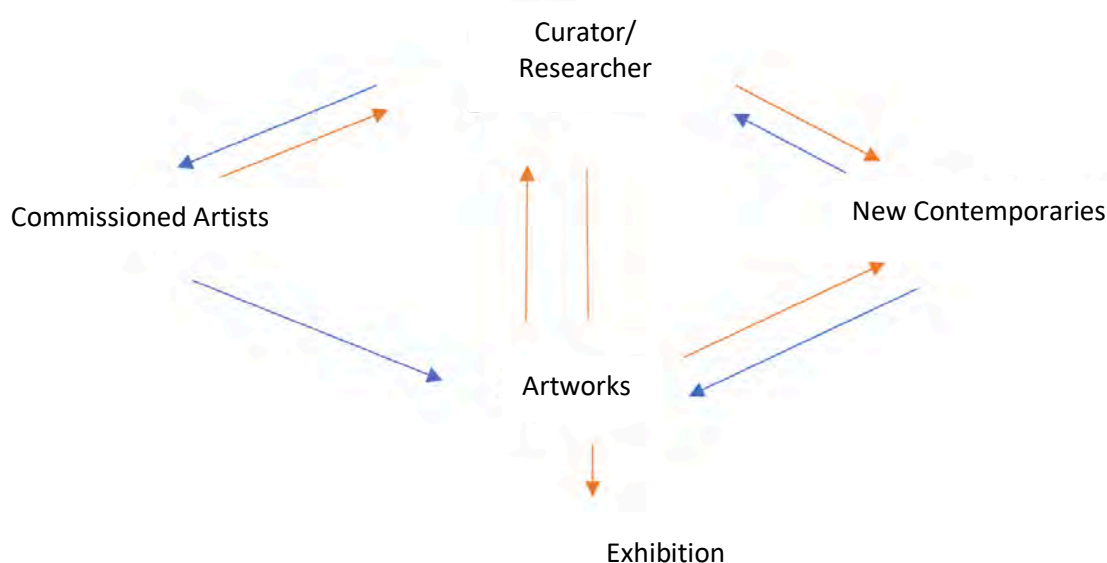


Figure 17: Diagram of constellation points and relationships for the commissions and exhibition *Not an Archive*, 2019.

As in past projects I have carried out through this methodology, there was an intention that the artists' work with awareness and co-operation with each other, particularly in relation to the knowledge that as part of this projects the resulting works were to be exhibited with each other. Again, often expressed as a mode of collaboration or collectivity within curating practice (an emphasis discussed by Maria Lind in 'The Collaborative Turn' (2010). However, as experienced in this and other projects, the emergence of more independent inquiries by each artist focuses the intention of co-working as residing with me, rather than between each other. There was a willingness to be made aware of what the other participating artists were doing, but only to a limited extent. Hence, it was a parallel endeavour with cooperation over collaboration, constrained to the individual path the artists took. Further, as also argued by Schuppert, there is a point in the commissioning process as the artist move their work forward in which the curator is required to let go (Schuppert 2016; Wilmsen 2020). It is at this point of detachment that I also, paradoxically, find I am most

engaged. Echoing the archival metaphor of dwelling in the landscape, reflecting on how the works may fit – or jar – against each other, reveals the most unexpected points of connection. In comparison to a project such as the *Bummock: Artists in the Archive*, this is substantially different. As the artist's in the Bummock archive projects work with each other without the presence of the interlocuter – i.e. the curator – their working processes evolved in much closer proximity, both physically and discursively.

Regardless, the collective enquiry and presentation still reflect a similar attitude towards uncovering and revealing archival materials through alternative means. As with *Not an Archive*, the exhibition of the Bummock commissions does not include any of the originating archival documents, nor did Schuppert's project, rather the responses are presented as an assimilation and interpretation of dislocated archival materials. Working in parallel to the commissioned artists on *Not an Archive*, the aim of producing a collective exhibition was also a part of the research process, commensurate to the commissions. Drawing what is often a meandering thread cohesively between the disparate materials and artworks, without being overly directive, requires a careful balance. One that reflects Yiakoumaki's observation of working in the archive – a precarious balance of guardianship and unsettling intruder.

While there was a focus on how the commissions may inform the understanding and knowledge of New Contemporaries, and subsequently contribute to the ongoing archival research, the exhibition itself was also a point of critical reflection, as with the previous project *Not a Live Show*. The temporal and spatial phenomenology of the exhibition forms a physical, social and cultural mapping that is both linear and cyclical. Echoing the layering together of histories, contexts and positions, the plurality and complexity of the collective works become a temporal landscape, in which the proximity of materials, concepts and gestures generate a multiplicity of readings or narratives towards a common topic. Moving between times and places in the past within the present, as points pile on top of each other they become something new. Or rather, returning to Foucault's archaeology metaphor, as historical items are turned over and examined it is not so much that the past is dug up, but that a new layer of silt is formed.

Not an Archive

The following section will discuss the commissions, exhibition and associated events. As a commissioning process, I will first look at the individual work of Kobby Adi, Suzanne van der Lingen and Celia-Yunior. I will then discuss the installation of the exhibition in Primary, the spatial considerations and emerging dialogues. Please note, as part of the research practice within the thesis the details and documentation of the exhibition are available to view on [Research Catalogue: Not an Archive](#).

Inviting artists to participate in *Not an Archive* required a number of conditions to be met: the interest from the artists in a commission opportunity that centralised New Contemporaries history; funding to support the artists, production of the work and its presentation; and a suitable venue to host the exhibition. Primary in Nottingham is an artist led space that also co-hosted New Contemporaries in 2015. As a proposal to the venue, they became interested in the format of the group exhibition in their downstairs exhibition space and, reinforcing their relationship to New Contemporaries, they offered to support the project in kind. Secondly, funding was secured which enabled a fair and ethical exchange for the artists in exchange for their participation in the project. Thirdly, I engaged artists Kobby Adi, Suzanne van der Lingen and Celia-Yunior, who were interested in considering New Contemporaries and the organisation's archives as a subject for developing new work.

In contrast to *Not a Live Show*, in commissioning the artists to engage with the context of archives and archival materials there was a balance between the known quantity of my research and certain parameters that were fixed, such as budget, venue, resources and subject focus, and the unknown direction the artists might take with it. Although I had some understanding of how the individual artists worked and an indication of the type of work they produced, there were uncertainties in what exactly what the artists might choose to focus on, and what materials or modes may be used. Reflecting on the archive as the resource for production, there is equally a balance between what is known and unknown. While Yiakoumaki referred to guardians and intruders – one protective and the other disruptive – Sørensen drew on Derrida's 'supplement' to voice how the artists' interactions work with, or against, the archive.

As an exhibition derived from an archive, in many circumstances the originating archival documents would also be exhibited, provided as part of the curatorial conceit and contextual reference. This form of archival response or contextualisation within contemporary exhibitions has become de-rigueur across many major contemporary art presentations, from the recreation of exhibitionary events to vitrines accompanying artist responses, to a focus

on specific archival programming, such as the Archive Gallery at Whitechapel Gallery or the Vitrines programme at Bonington Gallery, evidencing the resurgence of the archive as “loom[ing] large in many of these discussions, and the archive-on-display appearing as the new orthodoxy.” (O’Neill & Wilson 2015, p. 18). The curatorial impetus for *Not an Archive* however was precisely in the absence of the archive itself. Rather than displaying archival materials the intent was to commission works that could help expand the extant materials, a supplementary point of access towards an elusive history.

As described by Derrida, the supplement has two possible determinations: one as required due to an incompleteness, and the other as ‘an addition to’. The supplement in itself remains an external interlocutor, but one that seeks to further shape or ‘improve’ that which already exists and or helps bridge deficiencies or gaps. While New Contemporaries archival materials can be seen as individually complete - as singular items in themselves - as a selection of materials that contributes to an overarching history, or even as they allude to a specific event or moment in time, they are also fragmentary and partial. Posing these partial ‘complete’ materials as a source for generative practice, I did not want to pre-empt or restrict the artists as to a specific era or range of materials. Instead, providing an overview of New Contemporaries history and the range of items, materials and potential sources available, the artists were able to direct their own inquiries.¹⁹⁸

From the major infrastructural break that occurs between 1986 and 1989 there are further pivot points at which it appears the organisation becomes detached from itself - as it is handed from one voluntary group to another; in its transformation from Young to New; as it moved ‘home’ venues; or as it has transitioned through major sponsorships, becoming variously BT New Contemporaries, Beck’s New Contemporaries and Bloomberg New Contemporaries. As with *Not a Live Show*, the key challenge of infrastructural resources (making it difficult to examine and or display the archival materials directly) was exacerbated by location of the artists, based variously in Scotland, Nottingham and London. In regard to the artists and access to materials, this became a process of mediating the archive findings to the artists following initial discussions with them, rather than being able to provide them with an opportunity to conduct their own ‘rummage’.

¹⁹⁸ As a study over the duration of New Contemporaries, the various manifestations of organisation, the number of past participants, and the difficulties of its archival holdings have highlighted both the weight of activity as well as lack of materials readily available. Requiring extensive mediating, the dispersed materials, rotating committees, venues and incomplete database of historical participants alongside the more contemporary office documents further reinforce the organisation as differing entities throughout its history, particularly pre and post incorporation.

Responding to these conditions, the commissions are supplemental in that they are and must remain undeniably external to the extant archival materials that they are referencing, and yet they mobilise a dialogue across a history which has, at various points, become adrift from itself. Remaining in the position of gatekeeper or point of access, the introduction of the commissioned artists was intended to draw out new ideas, confirm points of parity, and enable a richer, more diverse reading of the New Contemporaries history (supplementary to the archive in both Derridian understandings). Furthermore, in the absence of New Contemporaries archival holdings, these works were intended to generate new archival materials pertaining to their historical activity.¹⁹⁹ Actively drawing on the temporal and contextual nature of the materials themselves, the enquiries by the artists became parallel threads to my own research, with the new points of connection and understanding serving to challenge a singular narrative into multiple perspectives. As the artists digested, assimilated and disseminated information in alternative ways - drawn together through exhibition into a coherent whole around a singular subject - there was also a question of what these points of connectivity might reveal.

The experience of previous curatorial commissions that propose a collective exhibitionary outcome highlighted the niche opportunity the commission afforded. A certain level of co-operation and familiarity was required to produce work which met the outcome of a thematic group show. In some respects, asking the artists to participate could be seen as a form of delegation, in entrusting someone with a task under your purview. Returning to the notion of curatorial care and reciprocity, there is also an implication of confidence within the commissioning of work that the artist will respond with a suitable level of engagement and work, and in return a confidence in the curator to support the realisation of the work and display or represent it appropriately. Presenting a conceivably complex set of power relations, this is potentially easier to negotiate with a solo commissionee for a singular presentation, or perhaps a certain type of practice. However, in this instance it was precisely that complexity and difference – the disparity between forms, focuses and concepts – in which I sought to find new connections, juxtapositions and realisations.

As a mode of research, the potential disparity or difficulty in a singular exhibition space also risked resulting in a confusion or cacophony. This required careful negotiating with the artists as well as a considering the navigation of the work for the audience. Even so, a resulting cacophony would still present a research finding, reflecting areas of disparity in or

¹⁹⁹ Created contemporaneously within the present time and intended to be deposited with current New Contemporaries records (with the intention that New Contemporaries will have an archive, developed at a future point).

discontinuity in the originating resources; disagreement on how these may be interpreted, or inherent contradictions within the approach and historical activity of New Contemporaries itself. Alternatively, discordance may arise from the aesthetic or artistic sensibilities and the navigation of housing these within a singular exhibition space. The exhibition space itself also presented several practical curatorial challenges, including its architecture and function. Unpacking and navigating these risks is reflected upon throughout the commissioning and exhibition discussion that follows.

Commissions: Kobby Adi, Suzanne van der Lingen & Celia-Yunior

Introducing each of the commissioned artists, their practices and connection to New Contemporaries, I will outline the development of their work for the commission and reflect upon the implications regarding New Contemporaries narratives and historical materials. Working from alternate perspectives in orientation to New Contemporaries and the British art scene, as well as focusing on distinct areas of practice from visualisation of opaque and complex social data, to archival metaphors, and archives as sites of conflict (Chateigné and Miessen 2016). I then will expand on this further through the event of the exhibition and associated programming.

Kobby Adi

Kobby Adi was a former participant of New Contemporaries in 2018. As part of my research into the organisation, I had incidentally seen his work both in Liverpool and London. In Liverpool, the stitched logo of Adi's project the 'NU Arkhives' initially drew my attention (Figure 18), while *The Weight* unveiled at the South London Gallery revealed a more subtle archival critique (Figure 19). *The Weight* had been developed in direct reference to the history of colonialisation, collections as 'specimens' of ownership and exotic cultures, and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Institute was established in London in 1962 as a cultural and educational organisation to promote the Commonwealth of Nations, including Ghana.²⁰⁰ Of Ghanaian heritage, the interest into how and what was deemed to be suitable for collection and display became a focus of Adi's work, responding to post-colonialist

²⁰⁰ The Commonwealth Institute ran from 1962 until 1993, when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office withdrew funding. Sold to a trust in 1998, they closed the buildings entirely in 2002. In 2008 Terrance Conran took on the site for redevelopment and it now houses the Design Museum. While the roof structure is still in place, nothing else remains of the original building. Adi also worked at the Design Museum while undertaking the commission.

critique.



Figure 18: Left installation of work and right detail of *NU Arkhives* by Kobby Adi at Liverpool John Moores University for Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2018. Artwork © Kobby Adi. Photo: Emily Gray.



Figure 19: Kobby Adi, *The Weight*, 2018, mixed media and found objects. Exhibited at South London Gallery, Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2018. Artwork © Kobby Adi. Photo: Emily Gray.

At the outset of the commission for *Not an Archive*, Adi discovered the catalogue for 1986²⁰¹ which included the entry by Keith Piper, who had also been on the selection panel for the year in which Adi was selected. Upon seeing the entry by Piper (Figure 20), Adi became interested in New Contemporaries history as a point of potential intergenerational connectivity. Approaching Piper regarding his past participation, Piper revealed he was in the process of reviewing his own artist archive. As two artists participating in the New

²⁰¹ I initially located a copy of New Contemporaries 1986 catalogue in the Reading Room of Baltic in Newcastle – a welcome discovery as it contained Andrew Lambirth's essay *New Contemporaries Past and Present*, which I had been unable to retrieve from elsewhere. Subsequently, I also managed to purchase a copy from ebay

Contemporaries programme three decades apart, Piper's archive represented the potential journey from the position Adi was currently in, as an artist working towards establishing his artistic career, to becoming a recognised artist with an international reputation.



Figure 20: Detail of Keith Piper entry for New Contemporaries 1984. Courtesy of New Contemporaries.

Visiting Piper at his studio in Brixton, Adi developed a dialogue with Piper around his archive, the materials and their significance, and the experience of working as a black British artist in the 1980s.²⁰² Piper's interest in time, history and archives as an access point to political and social positions on race and racism (within Britain) was evident from his first solo exhibition *Past Imperfect, Future Tense* exhibited at The Black Art Gallery in 1984, to *A Future Museum of the Present* in Dordrecht, Holland, during 2010. As a result, in conversation with Piper, and in collaboration with film maker Nina Porter, Adi directed a 16mm film observing Piper in his studio and reviewing his archive materials.

Within the footage, Adi includes references to a text Piper published in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Piper, 2005) and the 1981 film *Riots and Rumours of Riots* (Caesar, 1981) regarding the 1981 Brixton race riots (Figure 21). Intended as an endless loop, the close observation of Adi's film is echoed in its presentation to the audience, with subtle shifts in footage only revealed through repeated viewings. As Piper is seen repositioning his collection of posters in the filing draws with a different poster shown

²⁰² Depicting the four horsemen of the apocalypse, *the four horseman* Piper submitted in 1986 highlighted the political tensions and cultural divisions under Thatcher rule. Piper was also a founder member of the Blk Art Group running from 1979-1984, and subsequently The Black Art Gallery, which are recognised today as significant contributors discourse regarding black art, identity and institutional racism (Bernier, 2013).

in each iteration it also includes a poster Adi has inserted into Piper's collection (Figure 22). The poster, *Man with a Match* by Emory Douglas (Figure 23), was created by Douglas after H. Rap. Brown was accused of inciting a riot in the US in 1967. The insertion of the poster in the film - and into Piper's archive - presents several intertwined reference points to Piper's work, the political contexts raised within the footage, and the location of Piper's studio in Brixton.



Figure 21: Kobby Adi, *Rumours of Riots*, 2019, film still. Artwork © Kobby Adi.



Figure 22: left and right - Kobby Adi, *Rumours of Riots*, 2019, film stills. Artwork © Kobby Adi.

Just visible underneath the 'Black Art Black Strength' poster shown above (right), the poster Adi inserted can be seen. In a further loop, the poster created by Douglas is placed on top. As a student at the time of race riots occurring in the UK in the 1980s, Piper developed a practice that reflected the political and social events impacting a black artist practicing in Britain. Three decades on and Adi is establishing a practice that has seen an increase in the civil injustice awareness across the western hemisphere (Solomos 2011),

with the recent upsurge of Black Lives Matter protests in the UK²⁰³ remaining a powerful indicator of the ongoing societal inequalities in regard to race and policing discrimination.

Examining the political and social racial relations within the intergenerational dialogue between Piper and Adi - a history documented and contained within multiple archives - Adi highlights the fragility of societal race relations as reflective of the vulnerability of the archive to falsification and destruction: whether through its creation, suppression, subversion or alteration, or by physical threat. Framed behind heavy wire-meshed glass, commonly referred to as 'safety glass' and utilised for its fire-resistant qualities, H. Rap Brown holds up a match (Figure 23). Included in the exhibition alongside the film work, the glass can be seen as both a barrier to the potential violence of the flame, and to the vulnerability of the flame to be blown out. The safety glass also brings to mind the violence of the riots, and perhaps an oblique reference to the current incarceration of Brown. While Brown was initially cited as inciting violence it has now been established Brown had no involvement in the riot of 1967, and yet through the work by Douglas his image has become a lasting symbol associated to the Black Panthers (McGetrick and McGuirk 2017).



Figure 23: Kobby Adi, *(for now)*, 2019. Installation view and detail of illegally distributed poster 'Man with a Match' by Emory Douglas displayed behind safety glass, *Not an Archive, Primary*, Nottingham, 31 October - 23 November 2019. Artwork © Kobby Adi. Photo: Emily Gray.

Considering Adi's work in the context of New Contemporaries, the contextual references brought to light questions regarding the institution and their relationship to the Black Art

²⁰³ As with the transnational protests in the 1960s and 1980s, a movement of riots and marches was instigated by the unlawful killing of George Floyd in the US in 2020.

Movement (Bernier 2013), and whether it has been or is complicit (unintentionally or otherwise) in perpetuating a bias narrative. While this relationship may be seen through the lens of examining British art history, I would argue that the work by Adi also highlights the opportunity for New Contemporaries to develop and provoke further intergenerational dialogues regarding critical topics. Moreover, while New Contemporaries may not claim a direct relationship to the activism in Adi's work as an entity dedicated to providing a supportive platform for emerging artists there is a need to confront these issues as a systemic challenge. Additionally, as socioeconomic disparities widen and educational expenses escalate there is a risk that New Contemporaries may increasingly represent only the privileged few rather than supporting a more inclusive field.

Suzanne van der Lingen

Lingen is an early career artist who in 2019 was five years post-graduation.²⁰⁴ As an artist in the phase immediately following postgraduate study, educated within the UK but not an alumna of New Contemporaries, it was Lingen's external position to the New Contemporaries programme alongside her work around archives that intrigued me. In particular, her work focusing on "approaches to the archive that interrogate[d] and disrupt[ed] assumed hierarchies and conventions" (Lingen and Walsh 2016) led me to approach Lingen regarding the New Contemporaries archive project.

While conveying the research I had collated through my own investigations, Lingen was drawn to the imagery of the documentation I had taken as an aid to my research away from the archive.²⁰⁵ Wanting to utilise my research images as 'ready-made' material raised the challenge of copyright and ownership. As Arts Council documents, the replication or presentation of the documents within an artwork would need to be approved, and as part of the V&A Archive repository there would potentially be costs involved to gain permission for public display. In wishing to convey this necessity to Lingen, as well as to experience the formality of access required to see the materials in person, I invited Lingen to visit the holdings in Blythe House with me.

Travelling to the Art and Design Archive housed by the V&A, the by now familiar territory

²⁰⁴ Graduating with a Masters in Contemporary Art Practice in 2014, Lingen was longlisted for New Sensations a programme for emerging artists hosted by Channel 4 and Saatchi Gallery, in the same year. However, she did not apply for the comparable New Contemporaries opportunity.

²⁰⁵ As per the guidelines for taking photographs in the archives, the V&A Art and Design Archive allow research images to be taken for personal and academic use. Sharing my research with the artists, I used the imagery from the V&A collection to convey how I had undertaken the archival research, an overview of what the archival materials looked like, and where the archival material was located. As the imagery generally pertained to the Arts Council records held by the V&A Art and Design Archive, it was this body of material that Lingen began to focus on.

was once again made alien through Lingen's experience. The enigmatic nature of archive interactions were resurrected as Lingen also encountered the uncanny juxtapositions of the environment and materials: the archival formalities and what appears as commonplace organisational remnants. Despite the potential obstacles, the impetus to include my documentation of the research process within Lingen's artwork remained. Through a series of exchanges with the V&A Art and Design Archive permission was granted for the use of the images. In the stipulation for their use without incurring a copyright fee was that Lingen's work would not be made commercially available: an example of the potential value of archival materials as well as the barriers in utilising them. From this point, the turn to the concept of the archive alongside the relative locations of materials and past New Contemporaries participants became the key focus of Lingen's work.

Taking inspiration from *Dust* by Carolyn Steedman (2001), Lingen started to play with the phrase "as if by magic, what is lacking in every gaze". Within Steedman's book, the phrase contests the concept of the archive as a receptacle for 'all knowing' perpetual memory. However, isolated from the originating contexts its paradoxical meaning becomes emphasised, alluding to the ability of the archive to provide an insight or pathway to past event and simultaneously the inability for the 'stuff' of the archive to truly encompass or recreate a historic moment. Expanding on this point, Lingen became interested in the behaviour of the archive materials in relation to the participants of New Contemporaries, appearing as simultaneously chaotic and ordered fragmentary elements. Superimposing the phrasing upon a background detailing the movement of colloidal particles (Figure 24), Lingen alluded to the archive and the history of New Contemporaries as a constantly fluctuating motion rather than static entity through the physical process of Brownian motion.

Discovered by Scottish botanist Robert Brown, Brownian motion is the apparently random movement of particles as they are suspended within a fluid (liquid or gas) resulting from the collision of particle fragments with the constituent molecules. Proposed as a metaphor for the organisation its application can be read in a number of ways. As an organisational entity, their historical activity can be seen as a series of collisions and trajectories resulting from contact with other entities and environmental agents within the art sphere. Firstly, resulting fragmentation of the archival documents - by the manner in which they have become scattered and dispersed - and then again as they are brought together in new configurations, triggering new trajectories of discourse and reconstructions of historical narratives. Secondly, it can be applied to the conceptual and physical movement of New Contemporaries participants. The resulting network or constellation of alumni exists in a fluid and changeable state, as careers progress, rise, fall, or digress. Working across these

narratives, Lingen's work initiated a discourse that both directly presented the documented archival fragments but also a layered mediation of it. *As if by Magic* became a looping film work of dust catching in the light, Brownian motion and archival materials, initiating a discourse between the archive, Brownian motion and New Contemporaries through text and imagery (Figure 25).



Figure 24: Suzanne van der Lingen, *As if by Magic*, 2019, film still showing detail of Brownian Motion. Artwork © Suzanne van der Lingen.

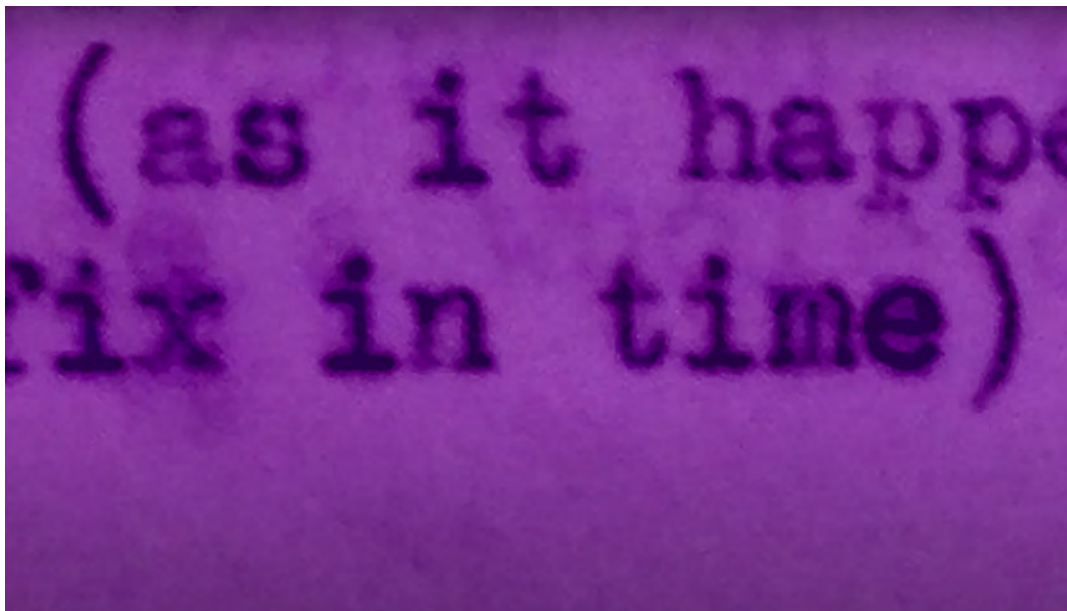


Figure 25: Suzanne van der Lingen, *As if by Magic*, 2019, film still showing detail of archival materials. Artwork © Suzanne van der Lingen.

As a spatial call and response, reiterating the visual language and phrasing from Lingen's film work, the second work by Lingen, what is lacking in every gaze (Figure 26) was a largescale textile installation.²⁰⁶ The transparency of the material responded to the shift in the sun's position throughout the day, although as it was late autumn the room was lit by spotlights by 4pm. The scale and placement emphasised the phrasing as a comment on the exhibition as a whole. In the archival observations and interventions by Adi, the evidential but partial archival fragments by Lingen – or in the data presented by Celia-Yunior discussed shortly – the manner in which the information and materials had been compiled together, and juxtaposed against each other, both filled the space and highlighted its absences. As contributors towards the potential and generative possibilities of New Contemporaries archival materials, the exhibition as a whole serves as a series marks at the end of the quote inspired by Steedman: “as if by magic, what is lacking in every gaze...”



Figure 26: Suzanne van der Lingen, *what is lacking in every gaze*, installation view, *Not an Archive, Primary*, Nottingham, 31 October - 23 November 2019. Artwork © Suzanne van der Lingen. Photo: Emily Gray.

Celia-Yunior

In contrast to Adi and Lingen, Celia-Yunior are an international duo who undertook their art education in Cuba. Forming their collaboration during their studies, they graduated from the Higher Institute of Arts in Havana in 2009 and went on to teach at the same institution. Currently based between Mexico City, Mexico, and Perth, Scotland, they have continued to work collaboratively between these two remote locales. We had been discussing the cultural and educational differences between Cuba and Havana for some time, however as initiated by my research we also began to discuss the idea of ‘launching’ into an art scene as students

²⁰⁶ Adi and Lingen's interest in making film work meant the physical conditions of the exhibition had to be considered. The downstairs exhibition space in *Primary* has a bank of six windows along one wall and in order to adapt the space for the film works the light levels and window dressings would need to be resolved. Responding to the suggestion that Lingen created a work that would be placed over the windows, *what is lacking in every gaze* enabling the projected work to be more visible during the day.

leave the confines of education. As one half of the duo had relocated to the UK in 2014, their experience of trying to establish a network and opportunities was renewed, despite already having a proliferation of exhibitions in mainland Europe and the US. Although it is difficult to navigate the challenges of an artistic career in any place, receptions to pursuing one regardless landed on opposite sides of the same end of fortune: one of becoming fortunate as it afforded opportunities otherwise prohibited, the other of already being fortunate in affording to follow it in the first place. For Celia-Yunior the differences between the UK and their prior experiences had been stark.

In comparing the opportunities for development within the two systems of the UK and Cuba, we discussed the practice of ‘platforming’ new artists, the anxiety of establishing yourself and networking within an alien, professional arena, and the often peripatetic or transient nature of an artistic career – presenting multiple national and international barriers or systems to breach. As an entity, New Contemporaries proposes to be one such barrier ‘breaching’ opportunity. As external observers to its role and function within the British art world, Celia-Yunior were struck by the roster of selectors that had been involved with the exhibition, the extent and calibre this represented, and the daunting task of being accepted by the previous generation as current gatekeepers.

Celia-Yunior’s practice stems from a desire to uncover and reveal what is often obscure and complex, with their work developing into infographic or visual representations of primary data. As an examination of New Contemporaries, an organisation that has become one of the most renowned exhibitions for new artists within the UK its cultural function and mechanisms seem at once obvious, but with little retained historical knowledge or continuity, remains remarkably hidden. As an artistic organisation that selects and displays new artists – becoming renowned for capturing the work ‘of the moment’ and the potential ‘next big thing’ – New Contemporaries also plays a powerful role within the structure of the UK arts economy. Since its inception in 1949 there have been a slew of alternative ‘new artist’ or student platforms, and in conjunction with the abundance of Art Fairs and Biennials, in many ways these types of exhibitions echo the salons of the century before (Massouras 2013). However, as a mainstay of debuting new artists into the UK art scene, New Contemporaries has a longevity that has seen it carve out its own unique space within the cultural calendar.

While the organisation has undergone several changes in the process of selection (particularly with an insistence that the selection has been radically altered since its 1989 inception), the programme has consistently operated through a panel of selection made up of

artists, critics, curators, academics and institutional figureheads. From the research I had carried out, Celia-Yunior were intrigued to assess who these figures were, and how they may convey a sense of New Contemporaries authority and associated imbuing of validation on up and coming artists. Compiling the information for as many years as possible, Celia-Yunior proposed displaying the data through a visual representation that also echoed the gauntlet of the selection experience. As New Contemporaries look back to their history in order to understand and ground their legacy, this citation of leading figures – both from selection and past participants who have gone on to acclaimed careers – further emphasises the cultural impact and validation New Contemporaries has accumulated.

Focusing on the relationship between New Contemporaries as a promotional platform and the emotional or psychological impact of entering into an increasingly competitive and precarious market, the large-scale diagrammatic installation was accompanied by viewing seat from which the audience were invited to contemplate the mechanism of New Contemporaries and its' historical and cultural reach, while listening to a breathing technique tutorial. Within the proposal the visual tension between the overwhelming scale of the data visualisation to the individual sitting in front of it was crucial (Figure 27).²⁰⁷ The rings – similar to those of a vinyl record – created a moiré effect,²⁰⁸ and in the difficulty of being able to apprehend the work without visual distortions it reflected the equal difficulty of attempting to absorb such a large volume of data within one frame (Figure 28). Demonstrating the challenge of deciphering and navigating New Contemporaries legacy and cultural position through its historical materials, it also highlighted the confrontation between new artists and established gatekeepers.

In the collation of the selectors required to create the work, there were several data sources for Celia-Yunior to work through. These were taken from the original documents compiled by Mary Davis a decade earlier, my later archival research updates, and through the public information provided by New Contemporaries. As ongoing research, there were several areas of missing information as well as conflicting records. With a focused effort to clarify additions, corrections and updates to the data by myself and the artists continued up until the work was installed, even so the final information still contained gaps and errors.

²⁰⁷ The data visualisation was initially proposed to echo the organic and concentric rings of tree growth, indicating the longevity of New Contemporaries. However, although there were many metaphorical points that could be drawn, it felt jarring to the context of the work. In the final design the organic shape was adapted to more straightforward concentric circles, leading to an unexpected outcome that also emphasised the scale of New Contemporaries history that Celia-Yunior were pointing to.

²⁰⁸ Moiré is a visual perception that occurs when viewing a set of lines or dots that is superimposed on another set of lines or dots. The difference in size, angle or spacing can cause a visual distortion, making it hard to focus or look directly at the pattern.

Incidentally, in the final printing a colour glitch caused some names to appear grey rather than black. Although barely discernible due to the scale and visual effect, it did perhaps reflect the potentially erroneous information presented. Again, as with the direct inclusion of archival material in Lingen's work or the more direct implication to the archives' fallibility by Adi, the evidentiary nature of historic material comes under question.

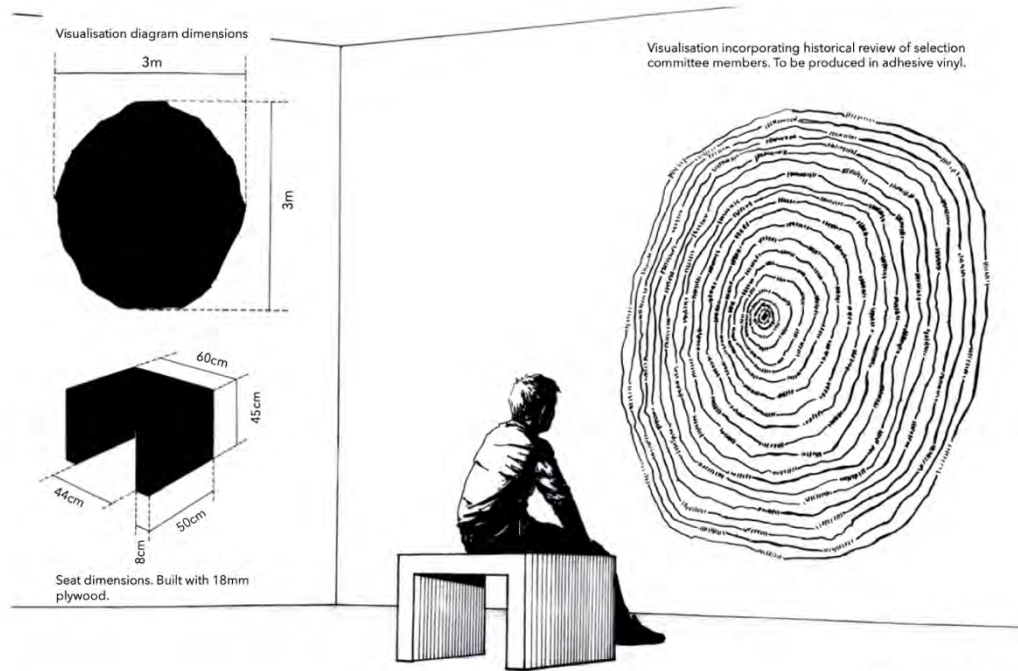


Figure 27: Celia-Yunior, *Not an Archive* project proposal, 2019. Courtesy of the artists.



Figure 28: Celia-Yunior, *Shallow Breathing 1949-2019*, vinyl wall diagram and audio, installation view, *Not an Archive*, Primary, Nottingham, 31 October - 23 November 2019. Artwork © Celia-Yunior. Photo: Emily Gray.

Exhibition: Not an Archive

Collectively, while each work drew on different approaches and styles, there were a number of areas in which the singular focal point brought the works into dialogue with each other beyond a fundamental proximity of subject or space. Details of the exhibition, artworks and layout are available to view on the [Research Catalogue](#). Allowing distinctive ‘voices’ to be apparent while exhibiting the resulting works together required careful balance within the installation, ensuring each work was given appropriate space (one not overshadowing or obscuring the other), and that the overall exhibition navigation flowed, and that the environmental, audio and aesthetic choices in layout and materials were considered. For example, to reduce the ambient light for Adi’s film work a segregated area needed to be created. Equally, when approaching the exhibition it was apparent that the first visual impact would be the fabric banners by Lingen, created for the windows that dominated the space from the entrance along the left-hand side. The dimming of external light also framed the atmosphere of the exhibition space, with the hushed light highlighting its interior aspect, and reminiscent of archives.

As the full room came into view, the work placed on the end wall by Celia-Yunior was intended to draw the audience forward. The large vinyl infographic had a dramatic impact, with the concentric circles pulling the eye in, while the moiré effect simultaneously caused the eye to slide or slip off. The visible text within the vinyl also compelled a closer inspection. Intended as a work for contemplation, the seat and headphones invited viewers to spend time with the work. As the meaning of the diagram started to emerge, the ‘roll call’ of artists that New Contemporaries has drawn on - including past participants - for selecting new generations for display, incited an equal trance-like effect and rising weight of authority. From the point of view of the artist trying to become accepted into the same community, an audio track with instructions for meditative breathing is intended to help calm the nerves.

As a focal point, the data-driven work by Celia-Yunior anchored the exhibition as a document or testimony to New Contemporaries activity. Each line of the diagram represented a year of the programme, starting from 1949 at the outermost ring to 2019 at the centre. The shift from multiple selectors to only three to four from 1989 was discernible, despite the spacing for the outer ring appearing less populated than the inner circles. Covering the seven-decade duration, this was the first complete compilation of selectors from the year of inception to the present day. In the changing atmosphere of the art scene, centred primarily in London, this has resulted in many influential figures – many of them

contemporaneously tutors at London institutions – being on the selection panel.

Seated intentionally at the base of the work with headphones on, a soothing voice guides you through a breathing exercise intended to relax. The atmosphere of contemplation fights against the scale and slipperiness of the wall piece. With the hushed lighting and steady voice, it is reminiscent of the archive as being a space of unhurried calm. Searching, filtering and assimilating, the volume of material to view is juxtaposed against an atmosphere of peace - until the archivist announces the archive has come to a close and there are still more documents to view. Sitting in front of *Shallow Breathing: 1949- 2019*, the presentation of the data is intentionally overwhelming, just as the relaxation instructions push your body in the opposite direction. A point of information dissemination, a celebration of decades, against the daunting climb to the top of the pile, to where your name may be inserted alongside those listed.



Figure 29: Installation view showing *Shallow Breathing 1949-2019* and *As if by magic, Not an Archive*, Primary, Nottingham, 31 October - 23 November 2019. Artworks © the artists. Photo: Emily Gray.

Entering further into the exhibition space the smaller projected work *As if by Magic* by Lingen came into view (to the right - Figure 29). Silent and at a smaller scale to the other installations, the subtlety of the phrasing - obliquely referencing New Contemporary's fragmented materials and archival desires - was echoed in its installation and the interference of light during the day. In contrast, Adi's large screening installation adjacent juxtaposed the immediacy of the visual narrative to the question of the archive as a fragile

balance of documentation versus mystification. From diagrammatic to the abstract, the motif of circularity is carried through to the work by Lingen, not only in the found depiction of a scientific study of Brownian Motion, but also in the looping of the video work – questioning “at what point does a beginning become an ending” while simultaneously forming a narrative that does just that.

The collated and ordered data provided by Celia-Yunior becomes a fragmentation of information as text and images flitter across the screen. From the introduction of Brownian motion, the circularity of the archive as both an ending or past time, and the beginning of a forming new narratives or associations as it is brought into different temporalisations. Again, as these narratives take on the authority of the archive, the ‘calcification of tenses’ implies a brittle and fixed notion of chronology in juxtaposition to the life of the archive as a durational entity. Through interlinked phrases, oblique references correlate the discourse to New Contemporaries as an iterative, ephemeral, yet monumental, event. Filtered through a disorientating purple lens showing partial views of organisational documents, catalogues and correspondence, the interspersed archival materials become unique and strange objects oscillating against each other.

As the material ruffles past, several frames land on a series of images for a fraction longer enabling the viewer to momentarily decipher or glimpse at the content. The text highlighted through this technique relays and reflects the actions taking place, such as ‘search for’ or ‘as it happens...’, as well as responding to the proceeding preposition. In the mounting imagery, the reflective process of looking at abstracted singular objects transforms into a weight of evidence. As *What is lacking in every gaze* serves as an overarching question of both the archive and the art works, *As if by magic* equally becomes another punctuation point. The discrete scale of the work relays the dialogic and intimate intentionality, outlining a paradoxical underpinning and undermining of the presence of the archive within the exhibition and, more broadly, its value as point of reference for New Contemporaries. A rhythm of collisions, collations, corrosions, and dispersals.

Turning towards Adi’s work, *Rumours of Riots*, the looping narrative continues. Housed behind reflective fire-retardant fabric, the busy but contained space of Lingen’s work becomes an invitation to walk into and become immersed in Keith Piper’s archive. Following Piper down the corridor of a seemingly ubiquitous office building – complete with flickering overhead fluorescent lighting – the journey into Adi’s film as traversing a threshold is intensified. Transitioning to interior details, objects and documents within, the scale of the work, first-person framing and 16mm film embraces the viewer. The finite shifts

of content within the archived documents, only revealed through patient observation, speaks to how small changes within an archive or collection may impact a larger narrative.

The addition of one of Adi's own collected pieces, the Emory Douglas poster, becomes a factual part of Piper's archive, which can be seen to reflect Derrida's proposal in that every reading of the archive fundamentally alters the archive. The presence of the inserted work within the exhibition space also further engages with the physicality of the archive as once current materials – allowing it to move from a detached abstraction or observation to its physical form: a conjecture of a career to the reality of practice over three plus decades. The presence of the safety glass, the bare blub and the unusual sheen of the fire-retardant siding to the screening area also impacts the atmosphere of the exhibition. From a large and difficult to look at but recognisable diagram of the UK art scene, to the hush ephemerality of archival abstractions, the underlying potential for harm and therefore fragility in Adi's work presented a lingering uncertainty. The audio track for Adi's work was equally subtle. Barely discernible as originating from *Rumours of Riots* rather than just noises from outside, occasional birdsong would be cut through with voices shouting and a distant police siren. The audio therefore served to bring the ambient sounds of Brixton to Nottingham, but also layered itself within the local urban setting.

Returning to the idea of what the New Contemporaries could say, or should say, all three artists underpinned the complexity of trying to distil seventy years of British art production through the lens of a new artists exhibition. However, as a starting point of a journey, each mapped the challenge that an artistic career presents. For Celia-Yunior it is the hurdles of navigating new fields of influence beset by the artistic canon; for van der Lingen it is in the fragmentation of reliquaries circulating and permeating the British arts terrain; and for Adi it is tracing both a history and a trajectory through monumentalism of the archive that belies its precarity.

As cross-points in the exhibition space, the non-archive of New Contemporaries instigates entwined discourses that both encompass the archival 'fact' and deviate widely around it. They span from viewing the archive as evidentiary material, to the more oblique references to the fragility of the archive and its fallibility, in contrast to the solidification of artistic careers over time. As a set of relationships, this could be shown as:

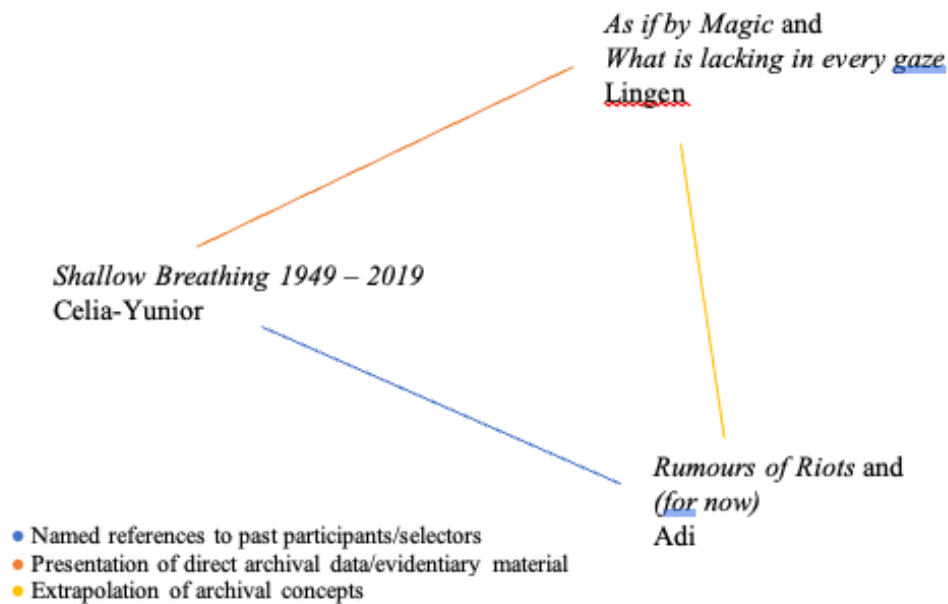


Figure 30: Diagram of entwining narratives, meaning, and archival fragments.

The diagram above is just one of a number of associations that could be drawn across the works presented, highlighting the multiplicity of how the works, exhibition, and New Contemporaries archive could be read. The drama of the diagrammatic presentation of *Shallow Breathing 1949 -2019* is juxtaposed by the audio of breathing exercises and seating. Similarly, *As if by Magic* scatters the archival dust only to bring it into new narratives while *What is Lacking in Every Gaze* simultaneously points out its partiality. Lastly, *Rumours of Riots* and *(for now)* become inextricably linked: as one work becomes inserted into the other the underlying gravity of racial violence both exposes an archival fallacy while reinforcing the brutality that can be enacted within it. The multifaceted approach within the manifestations of work by the three artists/artist-duo demonstrates the complexity of relationships and temporalisations to be found in British art history archives.

[un]Timely Interventions

From the revelations of data by Celia-Yunior, or the interactions and dispersal of past participants and archival materials by Suzanne van der Lingen, to the connections and legacies explored by Kobby Adi, *Not an Archive* expanded upon the discourses of archives as an institutional form and conceptual framework. As a set of commissions and event of exhibiting against the specific possibilities of New Contemporaries archival potentiality, it is

exactly as it is titled - not an archive - and archival. Paradoxically introducing an institutional critique that also serves as a validation of New Contemporaries past activities, the resulting collective discourse emphasises the complexity and multiplicity of contemporaneous approaches to historical narratives.

The temporal reach of *Not an Archive* extended beyond the exhibition itself through a duo of live events: a professional-development workshop led by curator Tom Godfrey on 6 November 2019, and a symposium held at Primary on 23 November 2019. The symposium brought together Sue Breakell, Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, Panya Banjoko, Lila Matsumoto, Alice O'Hanlon, Naomi Pearce and myself to consider archival practice, artistic labour and visibility. Framed around the question of how archives become entangled with the present moment, the discussion moved between institutional and community contexts to poetic, material and speculative approaches to the archival act. The conversation was guided by a series of provocations that addressed the archive's dual states of completeness and absence, the tension between guardianship and intrusion, and its potential as either a democratic tool or a site of reinscription. Lila Matsumoto's new sequence of poems, *We were amazed at what we saw*, opened the day. Her readings, which likened the archive to objects such as a nightcap or an apple tree, drew out the paradox of care, excess and inaccessibility at the heart of archival practice, reframing the symposium in sensorial and imaginative terms. Together, these events extended *Not an Archive's* proposition that curatorial work can operate as a mode of collective reflection and care—an [un]timely intervention that unfolded through conversation, listening and poetic encounter.

As reflexive of New Contemporaries, the entanglement of reputation, validation, dislocation and transience echo the trans-individualism of contemporaneity. Discussed by Cox and Lund (2016), trans-individualism is a term developed in work by Gilbert Simondon and Stiegler describing the pre-emptive interconnected nature of the individual and collective. Derrida's interior and exterior expressed at the start of electronic communication is exemplified in the last two years of social isolation and remote working. As mapped out by Cox and Lund:

“Very broadly speaking, artistic practice can be claimed to have moved from a modernist medial self-interrogation to a postmodernist so-called “post-medial” installation art, to - in dialogue with technological development, especially within digital media - a resumption of the question of mediality and its influence in the process of meaning making and issues such as subjectivity and memory.” (pp. 28-29)

While none of the work in either curatorial project was based on digital formats beyond the most rudimentary modes of film projection (and Adi's work was first filmed on Super 8 before transferral to a digitised format), the way in which material is read has been impacted through media as the dynamic entity that permeates how we shape our lives. Audiences experience the exhibition event or artists' work as a future already documented online, and as soon as it is in the present it is simultaneously redocumented and archived. Everyone is an archivist, and no one is. Equally, while the projects were only introduced on the associated venue's websites, they both now exist as a compilation of the research and documentation on the Research Catalogue – as the archival research, *Not a Live Show* and *Not an Archive* respectively.

As mediation, meaning and memory come to the fore with an increased ability to proliferate, document and keep, the subject of archives somehow appears both dated and urgent. "Yet archival accumulation and containment is always followed by loss and abjection." (Thylstrup 2017, p. 142). The consideration of how this may be played out as future interactions with New Contemporaries history is also mediated through the very nature of how that history has been documented, constructed, and reconstructed. Reflecting upon the ICA as a similar example, they too have the frustrations of a contemporary organisation that both desires its history while resisting historicity - the odd doublet of contemporaneity.

Taking on Boudelaire's 'doublet' of prioritising an immediacy in the present while attempting to form 'timeless' monuments, Smith (2008) argues that the second half of the doublet in contemporaneity has become 'untimely'. We have succumbed to the random-seeming mobility: the eternal has become 'for now' (also a title of one of Adi's works). This constant production and reproduction are also precisely where we arrive at a current society steeped in anxiety: the 'too much' juxtaposed against the endless possibilities – or the 'shallow breathing' required to navigate an increasingly competitive cultural sphere. Subsumed into an 'untimely', there has been a reorientation of the timeless 'classic' of modernity which has been propelled into an overwhelming transitory temporality. As an ideology and social formation for the everyday it becomes an understanding of history and experience as subjectively temporal (Smith, 2008). Gradually but inevitably obliterating the other half of the doublet, it is in the precise deconstruction of the 'timeless' over the last half century that has resulted in an urgency to rebuild the foundations of our past.

In the twenty-first century this conundrum results in the body of New Contemporaries historical information dissipating, just as new contexts and conditions requires its retrieval. Of course, the archive is not required to contain everything. While the curating or editing of an can often been performed as an act of suppression and oppression, not everything needs to be destined for an archive. While the unsettling intruders demonstrate the entwining of New Contemporaries with the conditions of contemporaneity, they equally draw out new information regarding New Contemporaries through both archival and alternate means. As associated discourse regarding each work sparking further areas of study, as well as voicing the concerns of those who are the subject of New Contemporaries, they perhaps also highlight that while everything need not be destined for an archive, the archive does offer a resource to not only consider the past but its relevance and implications in the present.

In researching the materials and traces of New Contemporaries it is apparent that while there is evidentiary material to examine, its fragmentary condition - as well as the very nature of its form as an peripatetic exhibition programme - requires careful negotiation. In understanding the potential value engagement with this material may have, consideration of the various agendas of doing so must also be taken into account. This includes the needs of the organisation as a business entity leveraging its cultural legacy, the conditions of education and arts practice in the UK, and the participants of the programme – past, present and future. Subsequently, a key aim of *Not an Archive* was to engage with duration of the organisation in order to understand its potential relevance within these three contexts. Utilising curating and the curatorial in what can be seen as a process of Kate Fowle’s 'Action Research: Generative Curatorial Practices' (2015, pp. 153 – 172) , Janna Graham’s ‘thinking with’ (or O’Neill, Steeds and Wilson’s ‘institutional thinking’ (pp. 20-22) to engage and question these positions, *Not an Archive* not only provides a body of knowledge and generative discourse regarding this specific and internalised enquiry, but introduces a broadly pluralist space in which the artists, audience and curator are asking coetaneous questions and drawing independent yet interconnected conclusions (Oprea 2017; Cranfield 2017).

Archives in Contemporaneity

This thesis has sought to examine the possibilities of an archive for contemporary art organisation New Contemporaries. As an entity that has been established for over seven decades, considering the development of their archive as an initiative in the present has brought to the fore a number of discussions regarding the timely nature of archives, their purpose and utilisation by contemporary arts organisations. In particular, the thesis has explored how the conditions of New Contemporaries archive - or non-archive - situates the organisation as part of, and emerging from, the contemporary period. As such, while orientated as an archival inquiry, the research has had a considerable methodological underpinning in curatorial practice. Initially, through curatorial research that circulates around the notion and actuality of archives,²⁰⁹ and latterly in the organisation of two curatorial projects.²¹⁰

The use of a curatorial approach within the research has been pivotal in understanding the complex interplay of temporalities when examining an event-based organisational history. As curatorial practice has risen to prominence in tandem to the archival turn, theoretical discussions regarding how archives construct and disseminate meaning (and value) within the public realm (Accord 2010; Durukun and Akemehmet 2021) have been increasingly reflected within contemporary exhibition-making. Building on recent arguments put forward by researchers such as Nayia Yiakoumaki (2009), Trine Fris Sorensen (2016) and Elizabeth Bruchet (2019), the resulting research contributes to a range of contemporary debates regarding archives, art institutions, and curating. In particular, the arguments I have advanced look to curating as a method that reflects the conditions of contemporaneity while expanding extant archive materials. These arguments further recognise the often-paradoxical value of archives in the formation, preservation and perpetuation of histories as well as their performative function and porosity as a site of anachronic and intergenerational dialogue.

Framed through the postmodern mindset – or positioned within contemporaneity – the impact of globalisation and digital technologies alongside the prevalence of post-structuralist debates highlights the partiality through which we encounter and interpret the archive. As such, the thesis is also underpinned by paradoxes as hierarchical linearities are juxtaposed by a diffuse and complex interweaving of multiple times, perspectives and contexts. In

²⁰⁹ Including encounters in the archive, the locating and gathering of archival materials, as well as understanding the potential of these materials as an institutional resource.

²¹⁰ *Not a Live Show* focused on the retrospective or historical, with the manifestation of the archive through exhibition. *Not an Archive* explored the prospective or generative potential through the commissioning of new works by three early career artists.

particular, in order to situate the series of actions and events that make up the historical legacy of an organisation, they are prescribed according to the perspective of those situating them – whether or not this occurs consciously or unconsciously. Although I sought to avoid the voicing of a singular institutional narrative, in positioning the research for the reader the first chapter of the thesis has done just this.

Following the identification of New Contemporaries archival materials and historical documents, the research began by focusing on macro events and occurrences. These demonstrated both anomalies within the organisation's history that signify particular moments of transition as well as recursive dialogues in artistic education, production and display. Moreover, in attempting to reconnect the current organisation with its prior history (pre and post 1988) their development has been emphasised as traversing through three phases in which the name of the exhibition, its purpose and organisational structure can be seen as a series of overlapping and evolving parameters. Reflecting on the potential value of these materials as representative of New Contemporaries history, there has been a need for the evaluation of their extent materials and orientation towards its emerging narratives. However, in considering the archive as an institutional construct, this has also led to debates regarding the partiality of the archive – its bias', gaps and silences.

In particular, this has highlighted the significance of the exhibition within British contemporary art: as identified by Massouras (2013) with regards to changing expectations regarding the 'professionalism' of artists, and demonstrated by their function as platforming the 'newest of the new', as demonstrated within Chapter One. The reciprocity to contemporary discourse however is not only in how the exhibition has been influenced by contemporary culture, practices and policies, but also how it in turn contributes to discourse regarding the 'contemporariness' of the contemporary. As an exhibition that is based on the temporality and ephemerality of peripatetic events, its ephemeral and dispersed nature reflect the increasingly fluid and precarious cultural condition.

Subsequently, the exploration and evaluation of the archival materials and their conditions, the two curatorial projects explored methods that looked to the historical value of the materials: opportunities to build upon them in order to increase their institutional knowledge and engage current audiences. *Not a Live Show* developed arguments towards the position of the curator-researcher and narrative formation in archival display, highlighting the importance of historiographies and positionality. Further, its relationship to the present through intergenerational dialogue. In engaging new audiences and prompting further dialogues outside of the archive, the additional screening event demonstrated how

interaction with contemporary students in proximity to the exhibition history and past work engendered an intergenerational ‘camaraderie’.

With the rise of institutional critique alongside an increasingly competitive economic field, my analysis highlights the contemporaneous need for validation as established through institutional narratives alongside a concern for ethical transparency and cultural amelioration (Haslanger 2019; Rylance 2006; Diara 2020). As 21st century cultural networks have become increasingly digitised and expansive, issues of and anxiety regarding identification and differentiation within the multitude have impacted perceptions of identity at all levels, from individuals to nation-states (Hall 1996). Equally, an awareness of how institutional identities may be constructed through problematic lenses or reconstructed according to a bias of specific cultural and economic contexts, has led to an increased scepticism regarding portrayed values and probity (Karjalainen 2020). While critiqued as a form of new institutionalism, renewed engagement with institutional archives offer the opportunity to simultaneously reinforce and reassert a cultural identity while providing space for alternative interpretations.

The requirements of the archival research and emerging historiography to fulfil multiple functions and agendas – within the PhD research and for the organisation – also reflects some of the most prevalent issues emerging within archival theory over the last century. In developing an archive for New Contemporaries, the ability to validate, stabilise and reinforce the organisational values through ownership of institutional narratives is set against the reputation and desire of the organisation to remain open, innovative, and responsive to emerging conditions. In order to explore the potential of the archival materials in answering both agendas, theoretical research was accompanied by empirical field research. Employing tacit curatorial experience alongside extended research at the nexus of visual arts, archives and curating enabled me to not only consider New Contemporaries retrospectively but also to test the possibilities of their archival materials as a prospective and generative resource.

Through the concluding exhibition *Not an Archive*, the purposeful disruption of the singular narrative was tackled through the commissioning of three new artworks. These extended institutional knowledge through unexpected pathways, from data gathering of past selectors to the subsequent career of a New Contemporaries participant. However, they also raised a number of further anomalies and distortions that took advantage of contemporary arts practices in exploring the archival gaps. While these are not archival, they nevertheless demonstrate the porosity of archives and their potential to generate new intergenerational

discourse. Even so, without the originating materials and a clear orientation to the history they are referencing, there is a barrier to their potential for establishing alternative readings and new archival imaginaries. This tension is also demonstrated within the structure of the thesis: that while the tendency of postmodernism is to the deconstruction of the archive, such deconstruction necessitates prior investigation into the archive itself.

Therefore, to contextualise New Contemporaries, its origins, and their current position regarding the archive, Chapter One introduced a preliminary history of the organisation and identifies the key resources available. As an organisation established at the end of the Second World War and at the start of the turn towards youth culture, the parallel developments of the organisation with post-modern discourse can be seen within the structure and presentation of the exhibition as a platform for young artists. Progressions in artistic education and practice are reflected within the exhibition as well as through commentary within the catalogues and critical reviews. A key recurring concern appears to be the professionalisation of young artists as well as the professionalism with which the exhibition was organised and exhibited. From the 1990s onwards, the organisation becomes a formal company, albeit still heavily reliant on voluntary input. It is not until a further review in 2008 – occurring in line with the wider economic crisis – that New Contemporaries starts to operate with a paid Director and support staff.

Throughout its history, at each point that the organisation reaches a crisis and falters, it is not only picked up again relatively promptly but also gains further traction, adapting to new movements and practices as well as achieving increased operational capacity. Remarkably, it has also remained peripatetic. With no fixed home, its periodic relationship to various host institutions also reflects changing trends and developments in the wider British arts scene. From its initiation in which it was regularly hosted at R.B.A. Galleries - located in what was then the heart of the 'art world' - to its history with the ICA, partnership with Liverpool Biennial and recent relationship with South London Gallery, it has followed the progression of 'art worlds' expansion in the UK.

From the preliminary history to its current position, there has been a self-awareness by those associated with New Contemporaries of the exhibitions' potential significance. Therefore, Chapter Two explored the organisation's increasing desire for an archive, its correlation to issues of validation and identity, as well as broader institutional practices. Particularly as the organisation became formalised and reached durational significance, the wider cultural turn towards the archive highlights the impetus to archive as well as the utilisation of the archive within modes of dissemination and display. Reflective of New Contemporaries peripatetic

exhibitionary format, considering how their performative history may be represented spotlights explorations in performative archives and restaging of historical events (Hansen 2013; Bayley 2017).

For New Contemporaries, as an itinerant event that celebrates the newest artists entering the cultural sphere, it is fitting that the earliest move towards articulating its history was through digital means. While the online cataloguing project with aFoundation was unable to fulfil a more extensive archive function, the ability to name past participants, selectors, venues and extended activities on a publicly accessible platform did begin to address the organisation's visibility as a durational entity. With the following decade experiencing high variations in financial precarity, alongside a heightened sensitivity towards transparency and ethical practices, the need to vocalise and demonstrate the organisation's efficacy saw an accompanying desire to establish and stabilize their position as a significant contributor to the contemporary period in the UK.

However, one of the most significant paradoxes in the desire for stabilisation within the contemporary can be seen in the pluralisation occurring across disciplines. As post-structuralist developments lead to the destabilisation and deconstruction of the archive, institutional critique likewise becomes the focus within artistic practices. At the same time, professionalisation and globalised networks required a stronger footing on the cultural stage. Therefore, as post-modern critique became absorbed by institutions – effectively denuding any activist power – the deconstruction of the archive turned towards the reconstruction of the archive through a variety of diverse methods, from intervention to redepositing new iterations of interpretative histories.

Through the diffuse and expanded practices of archives, there is also a focus on the re-orientation of the archive as a means to meet current and future socio-political standards, with an apparent transparency regarding past positions while mitigating potential future problematics. As positions are continually shifted and reorientated, they produce a plurality that acknowledges a more diverse set of positionalities, however these reorientations also present a past in flux.²¹¹ For New Contemporaries, as an organisation that celebrates the new as well as its ability to adapt and respond effectively to emergent conditions, it also has a simultaneous reliance on its legacy. As such, the archive is required to carry out a dual function: a stabilisation of its history that situates its historical position within the

²¹¹ In the desire for stabilisation, it could be suggested that there are also new underlying hegemonic institutional narratives established. Inevitably becoming promulgated, these become another iteration of abdication and distancing from difficult histories.

contemporary *as well as* demonstrating its current contemporaneity through responding to current practices.

Taking up the archival research baton from prior documents drawn up by Mary Doyle (c. 2009), Chapter Three detailed my encounters with the archival material, past participants and development of archival narratives, oscillating between macro and micro perspectives. At the outset, the duration of the organisation and significant schism pre to post 1988 presented a need to contextualise and map the transition from Young to New Contemporaries chronologically in order to understand the exhibition development as a whole. Conversely, from my position as a curator working within contemporaneity, my initial impulse for the archival research was to follow a more phenomenological approach. Additionally, with no set information to seek out or thematic parameters the expanse of the research scope, encompassing seven decades of history scattered in a variety of known and unknown locations, compelled a less directed navigation.

Wanting to remain open to possibilities, I allowed the invocation of Derrida's fever or Foster's impulse to guide the experience. Nayia Yiakoumaki describes this as searching for a curatorial project: relying on tacit curatorial knowledge to help assimilate, visualise and orientate disparate fragments within an inter-relational field or constellation. For New Contemporaries, although it is apparent that there are commonalities and recurrences from 1949 to the present day, the accumulation of knowledge, changing socio-political contexts and technologies also define specific moments as unrepeatable. In mapping over-arching activity, an analysis of trends in the exhibition, its organisation, and reception were tracked. However, the focus on a narrower period of activity or singular instance allowed me to gather a deeper understanding of New Contemporaries as a cultural phenomenon and their associated archival possibilities. Particularly as the contents of each iteration of the exhibition – much like art fairs, biennials and triennials – does not have any bearing on the next. To this end, accompanying the archival research I also gathered information arising from introductions to past participants. These included encounters with Basil Beattie, participant in 1956 and permanent committee member 1974-76 and Mike Collier, Student Chair in 1976 and Assistant Curator at ICA during 1978-80. Both involved during the 1976 Live Show, its occurrence for only two years marks a transition in the development of New Contemporaries that reflected the expansion of broader art practices out of education influencing those within.

One of the key challenges arising from the archival research was the minimal documentation retained as well as the lack of ownership for records between 1946 and 1986. In order to

address some of these concerns my methodological approach led to exhibition making as research and commissioning as a form of enquiry. Prompted by the interviews with Mike Collier and Basil Beattie regarding the 1976 and 1977 New Contemporaries ‘Live Shows’, Chapter Four outlined the curatorial framework, exhibition and findings of *Not a Live Show*. A presentation of archival research with accompanying screening event, the exhibition was included as part of the Vitrines programme at Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University from 4 – 30 March 2019.

The primary material presented was derived from the 1976 and 1977 exhibition catalogues, with further incidental items uncovered through extended research and in-person encounters. Accompanying the archival fragments was a selection of interviews with three participants presented as videoed transcriptions. Played out in parallel, the overlaps and contradictions in the accounts of the same events as well as the sparsity of remnants emphasised the fallibility of personal memory and archival documents in translating a past event to the present. However, the dialogues the exhibition provoked also demonstrated the possibilities of New Contemporaries archival materials to both engage prospective participants as well as engendering cross-generational opportunities.

From a monographic presentation of my own archival research, the urge to open out the research to new perspectives led to the commissioning of new work by three early career artists, recounted in Chapter Five. Moving from a retrospective to prospective stance, the commissions were concerned with the impact of New Contemporaries legacy in the present. With no coherent singular archive to access, the artists remained reliant on myself as the researcher-curator to help orientate them to the expanded history of the organisation. As a gatekeeper to the archival records, the position of the archivist as not only caretaker but also navigator and mediator was highlighted. Although the artists were subject to my curation of the archival materials – i.e. what I had gathered or highlighted – each artist took a singular perspective from the materials presented that related to their own interests and practices. The resulting exhibition, *Not an Archive*, presented a polyphony of interpretations.

From artist-duo Celia-Yunior, who reflected on the anxiety of current art graduates facing the hurdles of navigating the contemporary art world, to Suzanne van der Lingen, whose own focus on archival practices questioned the veracity of New Contemporaries archival fragments while simultaneously reflecting the dispersal of New Contemporaries alumni – and therefore influence – across the UK’s cultural sphere, the duration and impact of the exhibition was felt. Bringing the broader focus back to the individual relationship and experience each participant has as participant, Kobby Adi worked with fellow alum Keith

Piper, further demonstrating the potential value of cross-generational dialogues in supporting new artists development.

Commissioning and exhibition making offer a particular form of embodied and conceptual analysis that enabled the archival potential to be tested. *Not a Live Show* not only demonstrated the potential dissemination of organisational knowledge but also allowed previous archival materials held elsewhere to be gathered together and effectively re-archived within New Contemporaries own records. Further, the commissions demonstrated the interest artists have in engaging with New Contemporaries history – from its remarkable legacy to the problematics of the British cultural system. Equally, while the exhibition offered an opportunity to gather historical knowledge as well as address the risks of establishing a ‘master narrative’, it also provided additional artistic development opportunities for three UK-based artists furthering the New Contemporaries core mission. Overarching the archival investigations and curatorial practice, questions of value, validation and opportunity have permeated the work. Equally, the positionality of myself as researcher as well as discourse regarding the creation, construction and interpretation of an archive have highlighted the potential porosity of institutional narratives.

An archive for New Contemporaries

The following sections review the particular circumstances of New Contemporaries history, its value and archival opportunities. From the practical considerations and limitations of the materials to the potential problems of how they are presented and interpreted, the endemic dispersal of documents for a contemporary peripatetic exhibition as well as the dynamics of its position between art education, cultural institutions and art markets results in what could be described as messy histories with a number of sticky relationships. Within the thesis, the way in which the material from New Contemporaries broader history is gathered, accessed and presented is situated alongside a consideration of the value and position this takes within an organisation that has emerged within the contemporary period.

As the materials of New Contemporaries have dispersed with previous committee members and participants as well as hosting and affiliated institutions during the first four decades, in the last three the continued peripatetic format of both the exhibition and the organisation’s ‘home’ reflects an innate temporality beyond that of the exhibitionary moment. Not least, the purpose of the New Contemporaries as continually presenting the ‘most new’ typifies what Lyotard identifies as the avant-garde authenticity of postmodernism:

“Yet there is a kind of collision between capital and the avant-garde...It is understandable that the art-market, subject like all markets to the rule of the new, can exert a kind of seduction on artists... It exerts itself thanks to a confusion between innovation and Ereignis” (Lyotard 1989, p. 210)

Equally, as highlighted by Boris Groys (2014 [1992], p. 8) in the simultaneous move towards a perceived authenticity and the replication of consumerism, there is an uncanny entanglement of the utopian ‘new’ ideal with art market capitalism. The entanglement of the exhibition with its position between art education and the art market has been demonstrated by the arguments put forward by Massouras (2013). However, I would argue that New Contemporaries history also demonstrates this entangled relationship precisely because of the conditions in which it emerged.

As discussed in Chapter One, Isabelle Graw (2009) draws on the rise of celebrity and concept of cultural capital to outline the impact of the market on art production. However, Graw equally points to the power of the artist in directing the market. At the nexus point of the ‘new’ and therefore most ‘authentic’, the power of New Contemporaries as signalling the ‘next big thing’ within British art also serves as a significant historical marker. Equally, while they signal what is to come as they emerge out of education they also function as a benchmark to the most recent educational environments. As an evaluative tool, it is necessarily retrospective. A rite of passage for new artists, New Contemporaries becomes a significant record that marks the transition between the past and future.

Comments within the Arts Council records to catalogue essays and more recent business plan documents make it clear that New Contemporaries have been aware of the potential significance of their contribution to contemporary British art history for some time. Over the last decade they have stated the desire for an archive that can provide a cohesive presentation of their historical knowledge and enable opportunities to leverage cultural and financial capital. As the organisation relies on cultural reputation in order to attract participants, audiences and funders, opening up their historical narratives to further study could offer a greater visibility to their ongoing programme. However, as the compilation of materials from 1949 to 1986 to the more recent ongoing activity (as outlined in Chapter One), this could also highlight and reveal areas of potential tension between the New Contemporaries self-image and aims versus potential external agendas and analysis. For example, the work by Massouras (2013) emphasises the role Young Contemporaries had in the professionalisation of artists as oriented towards art markets rather than as a

supportive platform towards the advancement of artistic development.²¹² As spoken of in the Introduction and Chapter Two, increasing awareness of positionality and ethical transparency within archives, alongside critical debates on curatorial ethics as discussed in Chapter Five, the consideration of an archive for a contemporary arts organisation raises not only questions in what the materials are, who they are about and who collected them, but what is being done with them in the present. For New Contemporaries, I would propose that a curatorial approach would provide the opportunity to care for the subject of New Contemporaries, i.e. new artists.

With a legacy of institutional critique in highlighting the power dynamics in institutions (Buchloh 1990, pp. 136 -137), to the utopianism of new institutionalism which sought to resituate them as democratic social spaces through transformation from within (Doherty 2004, p. 4), curatorial archival inquiries have become key sites for institutional reflexivity. In the process, the distancing of the institution from its own history is seen as an acknowledgement of change through presentation of its past (Lester 2019). Presupposing a purpose of organisational archives as not only providing the organisation with evidence towards its cultural capital, as a potential resource for public interface with their past – either through self-directed presentation or invitation to other artists, scholars and cultural entities - in being made public they also risk organisational vulnerability.

For New Contemporaries, as their earlier archival material is already available through external Archives, this risk can be seen to have already been realised through Massouras' work. Even so, while highlighting an uncomfortable relationship the exhibition has to the art market, the PhD research by Massouras (2013) also provided valuable and rigorous detail on and elevation of their history within the academic and cultural arena, highlighting the significance of the exhibition in the promotion of young artists from the 1950s onwards. Likewise, the essay by Andrew Lambirth and the 2010 collaboration between New Contemporaries and LUX signal their further historical significance. While outlining their history from 1949 to 1986, Lambirth deftly tracks the importance of platforming student and recent graduate work outside of the confines of education institutions, and the particular dynamics introduced by student participation. *New Contemporaries Moving Image 1968 – 2010*, produced in collaboration with LUX, also signifies New Contemporaries value in

²¹² Despite the rhetoric of professionalisation and art markets being presented as having a negative correlation within Massouras's research, he also expresses that while platforms such as Young Contemporaries may have led to the commercialisation of young artists, there was a strong philanthropic impetus not only behind the motivations of Young Contemporaries but in the galleries who offered them further opportunities as a result: "if the art market played a role in this history, it did so partly by behaving uncommercially" (Massouras 2013, p. 108).

tracing the development of new practices. Providing an insight to the beginnings of artists' moving image, the role of the exhibition in platforming new modes that are still being introduced to art school contexts signals its position as artists seek to concurrently replicate those that came before them and push new boundaries.

As with new artists, New Contemporaries as an organisation similarly looks to its legacies as much as it pushes towards the future. Throughout the archival research and curatorial projects, a consideration of the purpose and utilisation of the research has been pervaded by the question of how (public) ruminations in their archive can to negate, navigate, rethink or expose new possibilities for supporting artists in the organisation's future. As put by Patricia Falguières, "Every institution is perceived from the sole perspective of silent restraint" (2017, p. 34). However, Falguières also posits that a renewed approach that grasps the institution as a continuum of events can also consider that the laws or norms surrounding an institution will necessarily adapt and change. Just as archival discourse has expanded, Falguières invites the possibility for invention. Described as a 'wave', Binna Choi and Annette Krauss (2017, pp. 66 – 75) likewise highlight the current movements towards rethinking institutions, but also the subsumption of critical practices presented within their institutions as a form of denuding the critique. Therefore, can an exploration of a bureaucratic institutional framework open up discourse and retain its own agency?

Reflecting the same duality of tradition and evolution, as the turn to the archive seeks to equally validate and challenge the past, as the exhibition functions as a contemporaneous 'meeting place' for new artists, there is also the potential to resolidify themselves as an intergenerational 'meeting place' through exploration of the exhibition's history. As a pressing problem in the present time, and parallel to the development of my own research, various steps towards the realisation of longer-view archival dialogues have already been taken by the organisation. From regular scheduling of social media posts under the term 'Throwback Thursdays', to filmed interviews and conferences with past alumni as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations, the organisation also commissioned a feasibility report regarding the organisational records held in their office as the first step towards establishing an in-house archive. In the latter half of 2021, the cataloguing of these materials from 1988 – present was realised and undertaken by AAC.²¹³ As this enables New Contemporaries to internally access, assess and utilise to their own history from this date onwards, it also provides an opportunity to extend the visibility and viability of their historical materials as a resource for external artists, curators and academics.

²¹³ Arts Archiving Consultancy was founded by Victoria Land and Judy Vaknin, who are also editors of *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist* (2013).

However, the cataloguing work carried out by AAC still only represents a partial view of New Contemporaries durational history. Therefore, regaining, reconnecting or recovering the dislocated early history is a continued barrier. Considering the changing parameters and perspectives of archival activity within the late 20th to 21st century, the challenge of availability, accessibility and capacity for New Contemporaries in developing and extending their archive – particularly for their earlier period - may be met through alternative methods. As contemporaneous art institutions and organisations have responded to the ‘impetus to archive’ there has been an emergence of new programming strategies in conveying and disseminating organisational knowledge (Bayley 2017; Berrios and Jakobsen 2019; Sørensen 2015). As such, the changing definitions and diversification of approaches outside of archives does not exclude archival activity from taking place.

Therefore, reconsidering the parameters of archival development, the curatorial method put forward in Chapter Four would present an opportunity to continue their archival research and extend their extant knowledge. Reframing the New Contemporaries archive as a durational curatorial enquiry - representative of its endemic contemporaneity – provides a method to regather disparate materials through discrete curatorial projects. Positioned as suggested by Eric Ketelaar, viewing the archive ‘record’ as never finished but always subject to the changing conditions in which it exists could allow for a more fluid interpretation of what ‘an archive’ might be for New Contemporaries. Incorporating the dispersed locations of their materials, oral histories, anecdotes, and ephemera – digital and otherwise – into an evolving ‘archive project’ or (non)archive recognises the conditions of their history as well as providing space for new investigations into their historical materials through alternative means.

Unarchiving the (non)archive

The thesis set out to bring clarity to the role of archives as an access point for historical information in cultural discourse. For New Contemporaries, an organisation that was formerly registered in 1988 but has a legacy as an exhibition reaching back to 1949, how to locate and reorientate themselves to their earlier iterations and what value this would contribute to their current programme have been central to the arguments presented. As such, there has been a duality to the research carried out from my position as curator-researcher that has situated me as bridging the internal-external frameworks of the organisation. As with the considerations of organisational transparency and ethics outlined in the previous section, this has also required me to consider my own positionality, ethical

care and probity with regard to New Contemporaries and its history as an entity, as well as consideration of emotional effect and curatorial care for the audiences and participants of its activity.

In an era of financial precarity, the current turmoil between and within the UK and Europe as well as global discourse has seen a rise in the need to situate and validate cultural positions (Belfiore 2007, 2015; Comunian & England 2020; Crossick and Kaszynska 2014. With the range of arts organisations within the UK who sit between institutions and more fluid or peripatetic artist-led endeavours, there is a need for archival care that takes into account those materials that do not adhere to traditional archival forms, as well as the organisational capacity for preservation. However, as a locus for evidencing cultural value and identity, the impetus towards the formation, utilisation and leverage of organisational archives has increased (Bayley 2018; Breakell 2008; Cook 2013; Wilmsen 2020.

Examining the theoretical discourse regarding contemporary archives, the thesis has explored how the late twentieth century archival turn that saw a deconstruction of the archive has in the twenty-first become a reorientation towards a multiplicity of reconstructions (Breakell 2015; Meissen and Chateigne 2016; Swaby and Frank 2020. Further, as generative practices have emerged from archives and archival activity, there has been a particular movement towards engagement and participation of audiences in the process of doing so (Cook 2013; Eveleigh 2012; Lang, Rieve, Woollard 2006. For New Contemporaries, an organisation that is focused on and aims to support new artists, the turn towards their archive is, in turn, an extension of their ability to sustain, engage and support artistic talent in the UK.

For New Contemporaries, the particular deficit of historical materials for their earlier history, 1949-1986, retained by the organisation rather than elsewhere has presented an apparent dislocation from the duration of their legacy. Building on the work of Nayia Yiakoumaki (2009 and Trine Friis Sorensen (2015, the thesis has examined the intersection of curating and archives as an opportunity to not only confirm their position as part of and contributor to the contemporary, but also engage their audiences with New Contemporaries past through participatory practices in the process of extending their extant archival materials. Developing this idea, the work looked to two specific forms of curatorial intervention, the exhibition as research and commission as enquiry.

In the first instance, the initial curatorial project *Not a Live Show* demonstrates the application of Nayia Yiakoumaki's (2009 supposition that activity deriving from an archive

should be redeposited in extending New Contemporaries organisational knowledge. Taking the tenet from Derrida (1995) that every reading of the archive alters the archive, Yiakoumaki proposes that curatorial activity that utilises archives also expands it. For New Contemporaries, whose materials are held elsewhere, have been misplaced or are retained within personal memories or collections, curatorial activity represents an opportunity to not only expand resources into investigating and recovering their history, but expanding extant materials under their ownership.

In (re)depositing the materials resulting from curatorial projects, they not only built concurrent archival records but are also able to gather and retain older histories. As reflective of the organisation's transient nature and forward-looking perspective, the multiplicity of narratives emerging from a more diffuse engagement with their history also circumnavigates assimilation into a singular authored narrative. Further, as representative of the plurality of artists, artistic forms and schools of thought that they exhibit and the nexus they occupy - between arts education, institutions and the cultural economy - there is a resistance to a formulation of identity as fixed and impermeable. As a two-fold process, this not only resolidifies New Contemporaries historical networks in the present, but also establishes the wider value of New Contemporaries exploring their history within a public domain while resisting a singular canonised narrative.

The second application of curatorial intervention in the archive examined the method of commission as enquiry (Sorensen 2015, 2016). As a well-known process of curatorial practice, commissioning is both a form of institutional positioning and presenting the value of artistic production (Wilmsen 2020). Increasingly, artistic explorations in archives have seen the re-reading and reorientation of institutional archives through artistic forms (Clarke, Jones, Kaye, Linsely 2018). As a process of both gathering and engaging the current iteration of participants and networks of New Contemporaries, the commissions are representative of new participatory practices in archives. Equally, as the artists directed their research parameters around the New Contemporaries historical records, further historical information was recovered and collated for potential future use by New Contemporaries, as well as engaging audiences with their legacy through interpretative lenses.

Further, within both curatorial events, the value of curatorial activity with archives as a contributor to New Contemporaries mission of supporting new artists development was demonstrated through the intergenerational dialogues generated. During *Not a Live Show* the exhibitions' environment and the screening event *[Not] Not a Live Show* engendered cross-generational areas of discourse in artistic practice and the position of arts as they graduate

from art school. On the other hand, the already participatory nature of the three artists/artist-duo was amplified through the relationship established between mutual New Contemporaries alumni Kobby Adi and Keith Piper in *Not an Archive*. Instigated through Piper's selection of Adi in 2018, it also highlighted the potential rage of pertinent and urgent discourses that have impacted and continue to impact artists looking to become established in the visual arts sphere today.

In the proposed depositing of the manifested materials within New Contemporaries current facilities (catalogued in line with their recent developments in forming an in-house archive for the period 1989 onwards), this work has also highlighted the contested relationship between archives as repositories of evidentiary 'authentic' information and archives as social constructions that blur the boundaries between fiction and fact. While the manifestations regarding historical materials are proposed as a plurality of interpretative meta-histories in the present, the endemic interplay between meta-histories and historical metafiction also speaks to the reflexive character of New Contemporaries to the contemporary as a particular period in art history as well as conditions of contemporaneity.

As highlighted within the thesis, the parameters of the research also presented several limitations. Notably, that in the broad scope of the unknown historical information, it was difficult to orientate the research pathway into a deeper development in response to the materials discovered beyond the potential value and establishment of curatorial methods in archival research. However, resulting from the research numerous areas for further investigation are revealed. From the possible explorations that range from the history of feminist and queer politics to institutional dynamics, the specific relationship New Contemporaries has to the phenomena of contemporaneity was highlighted through discussions regarding their transient, iterative and networked nature.

The research has also generated several other areas for specific development. Namely, the potential value - monetary or reputational - and opportunities for furthering artistic support for new artists through archival activity also need to be weighed against the risk of exposure and vulnerability (Wilmsen 2020; Eveleigh 2012). The demand for transparency and porous nature of contemporary working conditions, both on and offline, require a strong correlation to the resulting emotional care and ethical effect on both the organisation, as staff members, associates and participants, and their audiences, who are also participants, affiliates and possibly future 'New Contemporaries'.

As an agile organisation working within the precious dynamics of the cultural sector in the

UK, the capacity to carry out and enact archival developments alongside current programming needs and demands can be a difficult negotiation in time, energy and finances. As discrete iterative curatorial projects that work tangentially, the work proposed offers an opportunity to enhance and engage audiences with their history through associated programming in their current offering, while also building their extant historical knowledge. Further, as a contribution towards concepts of slow curating and curatorial care, the method proposed extends and solidifies their existing networks as well as creating new opportunities to support emerging artists in a challenging field.

Limitations and future research

An initial limitation to the research and an area for further investigation is the potential for providing an alternative means to both record and disseminate these activities. As the interface of archives are changing in line with digitisation, online catalogues have become one of the most regular points of visibility and engagement with external parties (Dunley and Pugh 2021; Däßler and Preuß 2020).²¹⁴ Utilisation of digital tools raises alternative possibilities for the accumulation, organisation and presentation of historical information (Moss and Endicott-Popovsky 2015). These pertain to both a compilation of their ‘archive’ and its various locations, but also in data collection and transposition. While the data itself does not constitute an archive, much as the catalogue of an archive is also not an archive, it could be a viable alternative for New Contemporaries as a ‘gathering’ place for their history.

During the research, the use of the [Research Catalogue](#) platform to document both the research and curatorial projects provided some insight into these possibilities. While not explored within the scope of the PhD research, following the aFoundation example in 2007, amalgamating the historical data discussed within this thesis into the current online presence New Contemporaries have could present a more cohesive image of New Contemporaries duration. In discussion with Anna Dekker, Dušan Barok speaks of networked media and its potential to transform knowledge, society, and economics (Dekker 2017, pp. 175-189). Examining the interlinking of bodies of texts, alternative indexes and images, Barok highlights the possibilities to not only include the formal structures of archives of class, reference and index, but informal notations – much as the visual and data presentation of my research on the [Research Catalogue](#) page both includes ‘data’, archival documents and my

²¹⁴ The practice of utilising digital catalogues to narrate historical knowledge has become more prevalent with the advancement of digital capacities. For example, the *European Summer University in Digital Humanities* offers a two-week workshop to “to develop practical and critical skills toward representation of knowledge in digital archives” (ESU 2021).

own notations and diagrams.

With the advent of linked data (structured data linked to further sources) new forms of archival cataloguing and alternative presentations have become more prominent and also present new ways for New Contemporaries to investigate their history, for example the project carried out by Liz Bruchet and Ming Tiampo through the British Art Studies [online journal](#) (2021). With the rise of new digital practices as well as responding to the opportunities of new technologies, New Contemporaries have already instigated a greater level of digital engagement through digital commissions. Extending digital programming and activity could also produce a variety of representations connecting historical materials, as well as increasing and diversifying potential organisational narratives. However, as discussed by Lucy Bayley during *Archives in Progress* at The Courtauld Institute, the ‘archiving’ of web materials presents a set of new challenges.²¹⁵ As new technologies advance there is also a risk to materials produced in this manner, as well as considerations of the scale of the work involved in its maintenance, which could become onerous and ongoing.

As part of the PhD research, there has also been a clear reflection on the position of New Contemporaries archive as reflexive to contemporary conditions. While the significance of their historical position has been discussed in regards to how the exhibition and New Contemporaries organisation has contributed and are a part of the contemporary period, further work could also be done to solidify the contribution New Contemporaries have made in defining the conditions of the contemporary period through closer analysis and reading of a number of areas, including but not limited to: the participants, selectors, the artworks presented, institutional language and self-representation, collaborative partnerships, market ties, response to cultural policies, political and societal conditions. In examining the ‘gap’ between New Contemporaries current self-knowledge and the current barriers to their broader history, some of this work would necessarily be incomplete and or contain distinct ruptures. It also demonstrates the need for New Contemporaries to build and extend their historical information. As such, the argument put forward within this thesis has utilised the identification of archival materials and their conditions as evidentiary to their contemporaneity.

Finally, in considering the inspiration for the research, it is also hoped this thesis prompts further debate on the curatorial approach to dispersed and ephemeral archives as they

²¹⁵ Lucy Bayley was one of four presented for the panel ‘Archives in Progress’, which I was invited to curate during the PhD as part of The Courtauld Institute *ResFest* in April 2019.

emerge out of contemporary conditions. With an increased focus on oral histories, artist archives, new media and technologies, the parameters of archives are already recognised to have expanded in material and form (Cunningham 2017, p. 53). In turn, the move towards the reorientation of archives through post-colonial, queer and feminist discourse has seen the fixity of archives shift towards an acknowledgement of their subjective and porous nature (Cvetkovich 2003; Caswell et. al. 2018). However, while the deconstruction of archives and contestation of their forms represents a significant progression towards institutional change (Lester 2019), the need for the preservation of historical records remains.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined what an archive is understood to be within the contemporary, its purpose and utilisation by contemporary arts organisations. In doing so, I have developed a curatorial method for working with archives and archival materials – or (non)archives – with an interest in both the historiographic and contemporary value of the archive as a site for intergenerational dialogue. The arguments I have advanced in support of these ideas contribute to a range of debates regarding archives and curating within current literature and practice. Through the case study of New Contemporaries, I have positioned their archival materials through a lens of reflexivity to the contemporary era in order to examine what potential archives have for arts organisations with dispersed historical materials. My analysis not only extends debates regarding the value and use of archives in the construction of institutional dialogues and their historiographies, but the increasingly significant role of curating, exhibiting, and commissioning in meaning-making and dissemination of institutional histories.

Significantly, the research also advances arguments for a dual approach to archives that recognise its retrospective historical value and its potential for prospective or generative activity. Through a practice-led approach, it does this by giving equal weight to the archival and historical research undertaken and the resulting curatorial practice, as well as exploring curatorial methods that explore retrospective historical display with prospective curatorial and artistic interventions. While questioning the authorisation of institutional narratives and highlighting the importance of historiography in positioning institutional histories, it nevertheless recognises the continued importance of archives in advancing and orientating institutional narratives. Consequently, an awareness of the positionality of the narratives derived from the archival research looked to illuminate a new method that draws on both the

vernacular of the archive and its materials in conjunction with the development of generative unarchiving activity. Equally, these methods consider the recovery of archival materials and historical knowledge through the archiving of the contemporaneous curatorial activity undertaken. It also recognises the mediation and interpretation of institutional histories in relation to present conditions, offering new opportunities for ‘institutional thinking’ (O’Neill, Steeds and Wilson 2017).

Further, in response to and reflexive of New Contemporaries, the contemporary value of archives as the site for intergenerational dialogue is realised. As an organisation that is based on platforming new generations of artists, it also serves as a meeting point for artists in the shared experience of emerging from education and establishing their career. A subject that has not been written about extensively, concepts of archives as spaces for intergenerational dialogue have been emerging particularly from community archives (Caswell et. Al., 2018). As demonstrated through the curatorial practice, the ‘comradery’ of New Contemporaries and its purpose in offering support to new artists align it to debates regarding the archive as a site to foster debates regarding identity and representation, as well as enabling the community of New Contemporaries – the ‘subject’ of their archive – envision its future.

As discussed in Chapter One, as a notable annual exhibition platform for new artists within the UK, the history of the exhibition has not been widely researched. Subsequently, while the thesis argues for a position that recognises the historiographical aspects of archival narratives, the research also recognises the archives importance in providing institutional knowledge and validation and the historiography produced as a result of the thesis research. As highlighted in the conclusion to Chapter One, in questioning “What makes New Contemporaries different and necessary?” (Heald 2014, online) the purpose of the archive and knowledge of institutional history comes to the fore. In expanding the research regarding Young to New Contemporaries history, Chapter One provides a new articulation of the organisational history from 1949 to 2019, while Chapter Three provides further insight to particular instances in their history derived from the archival and non-archival materials examined. Consequently, while the primary contribution of the thesis regards the development of a curatorial method, it also contributes to the ongoing historical research of the organisation, debates regarding its significance within the British cultural calendar, and its reflexivity to the contemporary.

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Appendix – Interviews

During the research I was involved in a range of meetings, informal discussions and encounters with both the current New Contemporaries organisation as well as a number of past participants and organisers. These were carried out both in person and remotely, with interviews being audio-typed or recorded and transcribed. Consent was given by interviewees for their named participation, with options to request omissions or to not answer any question posed. An example of the consent form is also provided.

Name	Date of Interview	Relationship to New Contemporaries
Basil Beattie	14 March 2018	Participant 1956; Permanent Committee 1974-1976
Bev Bytheway	22 March 2018	Board Member 1989-1995; Administrator 1996 - 2009
Mike Collier	9 April 2018	Student Chair 1976
Neil Cummings	30 April 2018	Participant 1983
Dexter Dalwood	4 April 2018	Participant 1983
Terry Duffy	14 July 2018	Participant 1976, 1977
Bruce McLean	3 March 2018	Participant 1964; Selector 1976
Terry Shave	28 February 2018 27 February 2019	Participant 1977; Selector 1984

Further informal meetings also took place with Kirsty Ogg, New Contemporaries Director, 2013 onwards; Sacha Craddock, selector 1989, Board Member 1994 - 1995, Board Chair 1996 - 2021; Des Laurence INFO?; Victoria Lane and Judy Vaknin, Arts Archives Consultancy; and Nayia Yiakoumaki, Archive Curator Whitechapel Gallery.

CONSENT FORM

Dear Research Participant

You have been asked to participate in a long-form interview as one of the former participants and/or associates of the exhibition programme New Contemporaries as part of the PhD study, Archives & Contemporaneity. This PhD is being carried out at Nottingham Trent University, in partnership with New Contemporaries.

As one of the most significant exhibitions of newly graduated emerging artists within the UK, this is a study of the history of the programme from its formation in 1949 to the present day. In order to gain a deeper insight into the New Contemporaries and the impact it has had, upon both the contemporary visual arts in Britain and upon individual careers, the research includes interviews with former participants and associates of the programme.

There are a number of questions for discussion attached, although it is expected that further topics may arise. You are welcome to decline to answer or ask for areas of the discussion to be redacted. There is no time limit on this interview, although most interviews last for approximately one to two hours. All interviews may be recorded and transcribed into text form and relevant quotations included in the final published report. All recordings will be stored securely and personal data will remain confidential. All participation in the project is voluntary.

If do you agree to be part of the project, I would like to use the information for my thesis. You will be indicated by name regarding the quoted material however you can opt to remain anonymous if you wish. If you decide, at any stage, you no longer want to be part of the project please let me know and I will make sure any information you have given me or recordings I have made are destroyed.

Please read the following statements:

- I have read the above project description and had an opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers to any questions.
- I have had sufficient information to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the study.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time by informing the researcher of this decision.
- I understand that personal details and any information I wish to keep confidential will be treated in the strictest confidence.
- I agree to take part in the study.
- I agree that this interview can be recorded.
- I understand that quotations from this interview may be included in material published from this research and I will be named unless I request to remain anonymous.
- I am willing to participate in an interview as part of this research project.
- I understand that anonymized data may be used in other studies in line with the University Research Data Management Policy.

Full Name _____ Date _____

In line with the Research Data Management Policy, requests may be made to use data from this study for other projects. If you do not wish your anonymized data to be used for future studies please tick here ☐

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Nottingham Trent University Joint Inter College Ethics Committee.