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THE POLITICS OF WANTING THINGS

Manifestations of Cruel Optimism in Artist-Led Curatorial Practice

A Case Study of the U N N A W A Y Exhibition Programme

Charlotte Cullen

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield

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ABSTRACT

The practice-led research submitted for the PhD submission is evidence of my investigation into aspirational relationships to material and form. This is evidenced in a curated exhibition series titled U N N A W A Y which contextualises the 'politics of wanting things' critical to understanding aspirational material and formal considerations of the artists manifest in the exhibitions.

The ambitious project presented artworks that engaged with historical sculptural forms though created using cheap, foraged materials. The precarity of the materials used revealed the economic precarity in which they were created. This inversion of materials produced an aspirational use of materials which brought a socially working-class aesthetic into the art works.

The exhibitions developed from the same aspirational relationship to material and form, contextualised through a unique site of a disused ballet studio in the town centre of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. U N N A W A Y was affectively informed by the precarious conditions of its production. The thesis contextualises this practice historically through examples of organisation by artists in the UK, the Artist Placement Group (Steveni et al, 1966 - 89) and The Shop (Emin & Lucas, 1993). The thesis then discusses artist-led curatorial projects in relation to how they are being affected economically in contemporary Britain.

The art movements of Minimalism, Anti-Form and Arte Povera and the exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* curated by Lucy Lippard will inform an historical underpinning to the formal

considerations of the art works presented in the practice led research. The *Young British Artists* (1990's) made sculpture with socially working-class materials that have the same significance of the traditional modernist sculpture they reference. This is exemplified in the work of Sarah Lucas; Lucas' art work understands and reworks sculptural histories using cheap forged materials which is able to say something about her class position. This material understanding will position the historical use of cheap, make shift materials in British sculpture.

Cruel Optimism (Berlant, 2011) and *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1989) articulate different forms of classed aspiration. The importance of this text in relation to my own practical research in the U N N A W A Y curatorial project resides in what Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' of those who have the material possessions she desires associated with a socially middle-class life as she understands it. In a contemporary US context, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has named this longing, 'Cruel Optimism'. These two articulations of what I will refer to as 'the politics of wanting things' underpin this critical reflection on the four U N N A W A Y exhibitions that form this practice led PhD submission.

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INTRODUCTION

The Practice-led PhD submission presents an artist-led curatorial project which took place in a disused ballet studio in the town centre of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. The curatorial project was titled U N N A W A Y, named after an A1 road junction in the town centre. The U N N A W A Y exhibition programme consisted of four exhibitions from October 2015 – January 2016 and presented the work of 34 artists.

The ambitious project presented works of early career and established artists from across the UK, North America and Asia minor. The exhibitions also included local artists based in Huddersfield. This supported community building and helped develop networks between local artists and artists travelling to be in the exhibitions. The exhibitions took place during a time of political austerity enforced by the David Cameron led Conservative party, the impact of this will be considered in *Section 1 Chapter 1: The Politics of Wanting Things* in how diminishing resources are causing uncertainty for artists and impacting material modes of making.

Huddersfield is a town in West Yorkshire, England, located between Leeds and Bradford. Huddersfield University campus is located in the town centre and supports around 20,000 studentsⁱ. Despite supporting courses in art, design and contemporary music, among others, at the time of this project the University did not have an art gallery. Instead the University collaborated with the local Huddersfield Art Gallery, located a short walk away, to present research driven exhibitions by practicing staff under the project title ROTOR. ROTOR exhibited various research outputs, including contemporary art, design and architecture and

aimed to create a space for social engagement with the local communityⁱⁱ. The exhibitions by ROTOR were often ambitious and challenging, however there was no support for art students, including research students, or local artists to present work in this way.

There were few studio spaces and galleries in the town centre. Artists therefor exhibited in coffee shops, craft spaces or bars, which often only supported small wall-based works. Artists and art students wanting to exhibit their work instead travelled to Leeds or Manchester where there were more opportunities and space to exhibit. Due to a lack of exhibition space it was rare that artists from outside of Huddersfield would exhibit in the town or travel to Huddersfield to view exhibitions. With little history of artist-led spaces in the town, and few other independent exhibition venues or projects, could it be possible to initiate an exhibition programme in Huddersfield and what could it look like? Could it make artists from other cities want to exhibit and travel to Huddersfield? How could it engage with the material of the site?

For practical reasons the programme needed a time frame and end point. This way the programme could be organised around a number of research aims, and critically reflect on its own output. Space was difficult to organise and the ballet studio where the exhibitions were held was arranged on a precarious and short-term contract, this is expanded on in *Section 1 Chapter 4: Building U N N A W A Y*. In initiating a purposeful, short term project U N N A W A Y aimed to create conversation, develop communities and act as provocation for possible projects in the town. This enabled resources to be focused into creating an ambitious, challenging series in which artists involved would be supported artistically and economically. With this aim the U N N A W A Y mission statement read:

U N N A W A Y is an artist led organisation establishing a platform for reflexive artistic dialogue in Huddersfield.

U N N A W A Y is an artist led organisation based in Huddersfield, established in 2015 to develop criticality within artistic frameworks and facilitate engaging, ambitious and reflexive artistic dialogue through exhibitions, residencies and events. U N N A W A Y's goal is to create a reflexive artistic community to support, develop and connect emerging artists and support the development of Huddersfield as a site of significant artistic production. Forming a platform for acute engagement with contemporary artistic practices U N N A W A Y aims to develop experimental sites of production, engage in artistic collaborations and utilise unconventional sites to bridge the gap between the current grass roots initiatives and more established arts institutions. Named after the Unna Way Junction connecting Huddersfield to the rest of the country, U N N A W A Y aims to act in a similar fashion, connecting Huddersfield to a wider artistic conversation.

These aims developed through research of operating artist-led projects, positively and negatively, reconsidered for the location of the project. This is examined in *Section 1 Chapter 4: Building U N N A W A Y*. Deeply rooted in place, U N N A W A Y acknowledged that sustaining space was not a practical use of resource for the aims of the project. The short turn-over of the programme supported ambitious and challenging artwork. It created a space to share and engage with art work which at times could be messy, experimental and large scale. Artists had the opportunity to create large scale envisaged projects or site responsive works, and students and the local art community could engage with art work, to experience the scale, crossovers, smells and noise of the exhibitions in a space that encouraged critical reflection.

In my art practice research leading up to the exhibitions I had considered Lauren Berlant's theory of Cruel Optimism, that 'something you desire can be an obstacle to your flourishing' as a way to think through the material I was using in my own practice. An embodied material understanding of my socially working-class background and how this affected my relationship towards material and objects. This manifest as an aspirational relationship towards certain material. What Zygmunt Bauman might call the 'faulty consumer' (Bauman Z. , *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 1998, 2nd ed. 2004) or what Carolyn Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' (Steedman, 1986). How the stuff that makes up our lives also signifies our place in the world.

Cruel Optimism (Berlant, 2011) and *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1989) articulate different forms of classed aspiration. The importance of this text to my own practical research in the U N N A W A Y curatorial project resides in what Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' of those who have the material possessions she desires associated with a socially middle-class life as she understands it. In a contemporary US context, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has named this longing, 'Cruel Optimism'. These two articulations of what I will refer to as 'the politics of wanting things' underpin this critical reflection on the four UNNAWAY exhibitions that form this practice led PhD submission.

What Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' (Steedman, 1989) of those who have the material possessions she desires articulates a nuanced aspirational relationship to material. In *Cruel Optimism* Lauren Berlant articulates the real physical effect this material aspiration can take through study of the titular character of *Rosetta* (Dardenne, 1999). The

film spans the toilsome journey Rosetta takes to reach the hiding place of her “good shoes” so that she can look presentable to employers. This physical articulation of the importance of this material possession to Rosetta punctuates the real lived effect of Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* and Steedman’s *longing*:

She finally leaves that workplace to continue the circle she runs in everyday, tracking a pattern from her home, to the town, to the bus, across a field, where she hides her precious “good shoes” – the ones that make her presentable to employers in the service economy – and into a trailer park where she lives, badly, with her mother.

Thus by the time Rosetta makes her whispered, bedtime affirmation, we know the emotional costs of her contentment: the impersonal pulses of capitalist exchange have had devastating personal, including physical, effects and now, momentarily secure, she has optimism about the prospect of becoming what she pridefully calls “a good-worker”.

(Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2011)

Considered alongside Steedman’s complication of the importance material plays in our relationship to the world, I propose that the matter of materials are inherent to understanding discursivity and representation within artistic practices and methods of artist led display. Steedman articulates the political relevance of material as it manifests through envy and aspiration. It is about making do without other things for the importance of the right cut of the hem or the right shoes; the material provisions which manifest and make

clear ones place in the world. These are the aspirational materials of ones' escape, as they are here for Rosetta.

Steedman historicises and disentangles the emotional attachments which built in her mother these relations of optimism to a normative, conservative "good-life" making which she could not attain but believed deeply in. Berlant's argument agrees that we must understand the complexities and changing situations which build up a person's relation to the world; what they long for; that this is not a narcissism but a reaction of survival – a 'politics of wanting things'. This 'politics of wanting things' is further articulated in *Section 1 Chapter 1: The Politics of Wanting Things*. This chapter plots the embodied, material nature of social class, desire and disadvantage.

Making is affected by our relationship to material; the material we can afford or find, know how to work with, how to process, the kind of scale we may work on. This relates to the kind of artist led and DIY projects which attempt to create space, facilitate exhibitions or in other ways work with what they have access to, to make a space for themselves and other artists. Practices can take on material and formal aspirations to historical practices from different material culture. Many of the artworks presented in the exhibitions engaged with historical minimalist sculptural form, though created through cheap, foraged materials. The precarity of the materials used revealed the economic precarity in which they were created. The exhibitions were framed around the same aspirational relationship to material and form, contextualised through the unique site of the ballet studio. This aspirational use of materials can demonstrate ways in which artists and artist-led projects are operating in the UK today. Many artists historically have worked through precarious situations and faced

economic difficulty. *Section 1 Chapter 2: Aspiration, Material and Form* considers how with current diminishing resources and access to materials artists and artist led DIY projects manifest their various precarities in how they practice, the form they take, and how materially they manifest.

The *Artist Placement Group* also known as *APG*, founded in 1966 by John Latham, and *The Shop* (Emin & Lucas, 1993) by Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, January – June 1993, during the *Young British Artists* moment of the 1990's, will be examined to consider their impact on collective organising, methods of representation and reactions to their specific historical moment. How these historical practices have informed and made possible exhibition programmes such as *U N N A W A Y* will be mapped in *Section 1 Chapter 3: Collective Exhibition Practices in the UK*.

Section 2 of this text will document the four curated exhibitions in the *U N N A W A Y* programme and will refer to the visual documentation of the research. The art movements of Minimalism, Anti-Form and Arte Povera and the exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* curated by Lucy Lippard will inform an historical underpinning to the formal considerations of the art works presented in the exhibitions. The *Young British Artists* (1990's) made sculpture with socially working-class materials that have the same gravity of the traditional modernist sculpture they reference. This is exemplified in the work of Sarah Lucas whose art work understands and reworks sculptural histories, at times using cheap, forged materials. This material and formal understanding is able to say something about Lucas' social class position. This material understanding will position the historical use of cheap, make shift materials in British sculpture and the significance of embodied material practices and

processes. 'The politics of wanting things' will underpin this critical reflection in the way it manifests in the art works material and formal considerations.

SECTION ONE

Chapter 1

THE POLITICS OF WANTING THINGS

This chapter will present the key theoretical texts *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant, 2011) and *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1989) which articulate different forms of classed aspiration. In my practice led research leading up to the U N N A W A Y exhibitions I had considered Lauren Berlant's theory of Cruel Optimism, that 'something you desire can be an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant, 2011) as a way to think through the material I was using in my own practice. This led into how I approached the curated exhibition series U N N A W A Y and the kind of material and formal considerations the exhibitions questioned and the kind of artworks exhibited. The importance of these texts to my own practical research in the U N N A W A Y curatorial project resides in what Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' of those who have the material possessions she desires associated with a socially middle-class life as she understands it. Together these texts map the embodied, material nature of social class, desire and disadvantage which I have articulated as 'The Politics of Wanting Things'. This chapter will articulate how the stuff that makes up our lives also signifies our place in the world. Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of consumer society in *Work Consumerism and the New Poor* (Bauman, 1998, 2004) will be used to consider Bauman's 'faulty consumer' to expand on the politics of wanting things as understood through Steedman and Berlant.

Making is affected by the artists relationship to material. The material the artist can afford or that they can find, material they know how to process or the kind of scale they are able

to work on due to space and resources. This is true of artist led and DIY projects which attempt to create space, facilitate exhibitions and in other ways work with what they have access to, to make a space to present and engage with art work. Diminishing resources are causing uncertainty for artists and impacting material modes of making. This is framed through the wider context in the UK of gentrification, sustainable studio practice, uncertainty for artists and material modes of making as outlined by Vanessa Corby in 'Art Matters' from *Aesthetica: Future Now* (Corby, 2016). This is considered alongside Herbert Reads argument for social equality in his 1941 text *To Hell with Culture* (Read, 1941). The precarious and intimate relationship to the specific site of the dance studio in housing the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme, and the projects relationship to the West Yorkshire Town of Huddersfield, will be contextualised through the chapters repositioning of material enquiry. This is exemplified through the sculpture *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* (Welch, 2016) by artist Matt Welch which was presented during the fourth U N N A W A Y exhibition *...And To Dust All Return* (2016).

Carolyn Steedman writes about British social working-class in *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1989) through her personal lived experience. Steedman's text articulates her mother's socially classed longing as a 'proper envy' (Steedman, 1989) which she relates back to the materials her mother longed for and how these were of social importance to her. Steedman takes the historical example of her mother's life as a case study of marginal working-class aspiration and its effects in *Landscape for A Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1989). The importance of this text to my own practical research in the U N N A W A Y curatorial projects resides in what Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' (Steedman, 1989) of those who have the

material possessions she desires associated with a middle-class life as she understands it: 'Born into the 'old working class', she wanted: a New Look skirt, a timbered country cottage, to marry a prince.' (Steedman, 1989). Making choices in her life that she hoped would help her reach these goals, her longing remained ultimately just that: 'For my mother, the time of my childhood was the place where the fairy-tales failed' (Steedman, 1989). This aspirational material relationship has been important in developing my own understanding of my socially working-class background and how this has, and continues to, inform my material resources. In a contemporary US context, the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has named this longing *Cruel Optimism*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Cruel Optimism (Berlant, 2011) critiques the failures of the good life fantasy and analyses what happens to those who remain attached to these fantasies once they have been rendered unachievable. Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed's critique of the 'good life' aspirations of capitalism became pertinent as I began to recognise the aspirational use of material in my practice. In *The Promise of Happiness* (Ahmed, 2010) Ahmed proposes that we attach ourselves to the objects available to us for the promise of happiness we may attain from them. Berlant expands upon this, positioning optimism as the socially grounded expectation towards certain attachments. For Berlant *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 2011) occurs when 'something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 2011), therefore our attachment can be detrimental. To return this philosophy to Steedman's positioning of her mother's longing as a 'proper envy' the social importance of how aspiration is embodied in material is emphasised.

Berlant and Steedman's case studies above are marked by their failure to attain the 'good life' fantasies of their society. Zygmunt Bauman describes this society as a 'consumer society' in *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Bauman Z. , *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 1998, 2nd ed. 2004). Bauman explains that a consumer is 'a person who consumes, and to consume means using things up: eating them, wearing them, playing with them and otherwise causing them to satisfy one's needs or desires' (Bauman Z. , 1998). In a consumer society the consumer is constantly enthralled, wanting more and never satisfied. Members of a consumer society are rewarded for their ability to consume, which means how much they are able to materially expend. These consumers become empowered through their ability to make material choices, and to cast away objects and material they no longer need in pursuit of something new to consume. Others become disempowered by their lack of ability to consume, which means the lack of resources, material and objects they are able to access due to their economic or class position. The promise of an object in a consumer society proceeds its need and materials and objects are used to express self-identity and position the consumer in society. For those who struggle to meet their most basic needs this can ostracise them from society, it can lead them to become what Bauman names the 'faulty consumer' by not having access to the newest thing and not being able to constantly consume. The 'faulty consumer' presents the failings of consumer societies inability to support the basic needs of all members of society. Instead of highlighting the damaging societal effects of this constant demand consumerism places on its members, the blame of these failings is placed on the 'faulty consumer'.

The 'faulty consumer' can be understood in Steedman's description of her mother's aspiration of a middle-class life. Steadman's mother attempted to consume the materials

and objects that for her represented a socially middle-class lifestyle. Failing in this she at times made use of objects and materials which she understood to have similar qualities to the materials she desired. She made her own clothes from fabric brought from the back door of her hometown mills, so that she could look like she could afford the New Look dress, or she enforced on her family a strict diet as an attempt to emulate the diets she read about in magazines or saw in adverts but couldn't afford for her own family. These imitations however further marks ones' failure to consume, as they emphasise what the consumer does not have access to and that she does not therefor have the freedom of choice integral in establishing ones' success as a consumer. This failure punctures the idea of consumer society; that all in society have freedom of choice to create their own identity. Rather than understanding this as a failure of consumer society this is seen as the failure of the individual.

Lack of choice is seen and understood materially. Alice Yeager Kaplan notes that

The way someone says hello, holds a pencil, wears a scarf – tells me more about race, class, and gender than the dreary litany of categories (I am white, female, middle-class heterosexual') that has come to pass in contemporary criticism for 'subjective positioning'. Such a nuanced, expanded, inflected, and non-reductive analysis of how historical experience shapes a practice rather than finds expression in its content...

(Yeager Kaplan, A. 1994 as cited in Corby, V. 2010)

This affective understanding of classed experience emphasises how experience is materially manifest. The kind of language one might use, the kind of clothing they might wear, the kind of materials one might aspire to consume, is shaped by their experiences and is materially visible. To understand this as marked by who has access to what things, or who is able to materialise their position in society politicises material choices. Material disadvantage is embodied in the subject, and aspirational material choices can further mark the subject as other – as the ‘faulty consumer’, as a ‘cruel optimism’, as the subjects ‘proper envy’. Making is affected by our relationship to material; the material we can afford or find, know how to work with, how to process, the kind of scale we may work on. To not have access to facilities and material can mark out a certain kind of practice. Practice can begin to show the complex tensions of this having a real material effect on the artwork produced. How our experiences shape us is therefore not an act of listing experience but can be understood through the tacit encounter of practice. In late 2014, I moved into a new studio in a disused former dance studio. The large open space and an access to abandoned industrial materials in the building inspired a move towards work which began to use some of the formal resources of *Minimalism*.

My use of found, damaged, make-shift materials and domestic and commercial props contaminated the formal restraint of Minimalist art. The make-shift materials I was using in these works was informed by the materials I had access to and reflected the precarious and difficult economic conditions in which they were made. This process began to manifest a make do and mend use of hybrid materials with a restrained formal consideration. This began a questioning of material and formal aspiration in my practice. In my research, I had developed an understanding of becoming woman, which had led me to consider the act of

becoming undone in queer theory^{iv}. I now wanted to understand how queer theory was intersecting with my practice as I had begun to incorporate my socially working-class background, and my precarious economic position was affecting the material choices in my practice. An aspirational relationship to materials in my practice was creating space to address an affective class dimension. An affective class dimension can be understood in relation to the feminist art movements challenge of formalist assumptions about gender neutrality in Minimalist art and queer theory's unfixing of identity to place othered bodies within discourse^v.

Building an understanding of my relationship to the material I was using in my practice as a politics of wanting things I began to engage with the embodied, material nature of class, desire and disadvantage. The physical act of making and experiencing art work in the space of my studio enabled me to better understand the material I was using in my practice. A wider context of austerity politics and gentrification in the UK has led to uncertainty for artists (Corby, 2016). The material disadvantage I had recognised in my own practice was manifest across wider art practices, while material modes of making were re-emerging. I began to notice this aspirational relationship to material and form in the works of other artists working at the same time as I was and I began to consider how this could be understood collectively. This material practice was informed by what was happening politically. Herbert Read argued for a social understanding of how ones' life affects their ability to produce art in *To Hell with Culture* (Read, 1941),

Obviously, we can't make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can't do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed. We must also be

properly equipped with the necessary tools, and then left alone to get on with the job.

(Read, 1941)

This assertion makes clear how someone's lived experience is integral to the art they might create or how they might access art practice and process. Read outlines the difficulties of having the time and space to make as an artist and that towards a fairer society we might get rid of the term artist. Or in referencing the socialist Eric Gill all work would be equal, which would mean all people could be artists. This clearly defines the politics of material and that artists lived experiences are inextricable from how they will approach process and the tacit ability they will bring to their practice. Disadvantage can therefore manifest through the aspirational material choices which further mark the subject as other. To understand this, I needed to understand other artists experiences; how they were making work, engaging in process, why they chose to work with the materials they did, as this embodies the conditions in which the work was made. If this is not understood something significant is lost in the work, the relationship of the art work to its materials can be flattened and removed from the relevance of the work.

I realised this shared practice could be brought together through an exhibition series. The exhibition series would itself be informed by its position of economic precarity and an aspiration to display art in a significant formal production informed by art movements including *Minimalism*, *Anti-Form* and *Post-Minimalism*^{vi}. An understanding of Berlant's critique of the good life fantasy, and what happens when remained attached to these fantasies once they have been rendered unachievable, enabled a self-awareness to not fix

the U N N A W A Y project to these forms. Instead the U N N A W A Y project questioned which optimisms, in relation to the display of art and in producing an arts programme within a limited budget and time frame, are cruel and which are necessary? For example, the exhibitions took place in another room of the same former dance studio building in which I had my studio. This space was precarious and secured on a week-by-week contract, which made planning exhibitions difficult. However, the continued use of this space was not inherently *Cruelly Optimistic* (Berlant, 2011), because the use of this kind of space was necessary for the projects budget.

The ballet studio in which the exhibitions were presented was held on a precarious contract. This meant we could be asked to leave with a week's notice. The project was not just precarious in this fact but was also precarious in how it was worked. I was working a zero-hour contract job and reliant on extra shifts at short notice which I needed to fit around the exhibition schedules. Emails and exhibition planning was often operated from my phone on the train or during invigilation of galleries in my job. Kashika Ashley Cooper who I organised the project with, worked at a coffee shop where we would meet on her breaks and plan during quiet periods. Many of the artists who exhibited with U N N A W A Y similarly worked in precarious or low paid work. Bauman calls this 'flexibility', expanding that it is 'a game of hire and fire with very few rules attached' (Bauman Z. , *Work, consumerism and the New Poor*, 1998). This kind of work allows artists to take up opportunities such as residencies or exhibitions at late notice but it means we have less economic stability or stability to plan daily. This effects how art work is made and with what materials. It informs the use of cheap, scavenged material. Art work can be smaller or constructed to be easier to store, post and travel with. The dance studio was a materially

specific site, empty for several years, it contextualised these practices as manifest through political and social structures. I have understood this within an aspirational relationship to material and form as it has manifest in my own practice and in the art works exhibited in the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme and the practical considerations and concerns of running the U N N A W A Y project.

The artworks presented in the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme manifest complex and nuanced relationships to aspirational materials and form, which will be detailed in the Exhibition Case Study chapters. The artists who exhibited in the programme often engaged with historical modernist sculptural forms created through cheap, foraged materials, which led them to question their own relationship to this heritage. An example of this is the sculpture exhibited by Matt Welch in the fourth exhibition *...And To Dust All Return* (2016), titled *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* (Welch, 2016) (figure 107-110). As I had recognised in my work above, *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* formally referenced Minimalist art works through its use of construction material, ambitious scale and minimal form to create a water feature which ran the full length of the exhibition space. However, Welch's use of air dry clay and the artists hand complicates this. Without an interest in removing the artists hand and without access to the clean materials of Minimalism *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* could be read as a manifestation of *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant, 2011) in Welch's desire to reproduce the material and formal aesthetic that he cannot attain. What results is a complicated reflection on aspirational material and what might be *good enough* for now.

Chapter 2

ASPIRATION, MATERIAL AND FORM

The artwork developed during the U N N A W A Y exhibition series often used found, damaged and make shift materials in formal sculptural arrangements. The precarity of the materials used reflect the economic precarity of the artists involved as they engaged with a make do and mend use of hybrid materials. This resulted in complex material relationships that manifest nuanced aspirational object choices in the art works. This chapter will map the material enquiry of these art works in relationship to historical art practices which have informed the art works formal considerations. The importance of making and materials in relation to social class will be supported through discussion of material enquiry and Modernist practices. *Minimalism* and *Anti-Form* will be studied through the work of Robert Morris and his 1968 essay *Anti Form* (Morris, *Anti Form*, 1968). *Post-Minimalism* and *Conceptual Art* will be understood through the exhibition and ensuing essay *Eccentric Abstraction* (Lippard, *Eccentric Abstraction*, 1966), written and curated by Lucy Lippard and will incorporate the second wave feminist art movements rejection of gender neutrality in art. Material modes of making and the impact of diminishing resources as outlined by Vanessa Corby in 'Art Matters' *Aesthetica: Future Now* (Corby, 2016) in the chapter above will be returned to in thinking about the importance of process and time. The artwork of Eva Hesse will underpin artists relationships to historical art practices and lack of material resources. The impact of UK politics to the projects material understanding is mapped across the UK 2015 general election and following EU referendum debate. The working-class assertiveness of Sarah Lucas' work is repositioned in light of the debates around social class

that have followed the 'Brexit' referendum, positioning the classed aspects of Lucas' material practice as urgently relevant.



Illustration 1. *Untitled (Corner Beam)* (Morris, 1964/2016) Robert Morris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Herbert Read argued for the importance of tacit awareness in understanding and appreciating modernist art practice. For Read sculpture was the most powerful art form as its physicality in space compelled in the viewer an embodied experience. Sculpture was meant to be '*felt*' (Getsy, 2011). I have argued for the significance of the embodied material nature of class, desire and disadvantage as it manifests in artists practices. Process and material are intrinsically linked to how an artwork is viewed and understood. Read

explained that this was a tacit understanding. An audience do not necessarily have to touch a work of art to understand what it might *feel* like. In *Working It Out: Values, Perspectives and Autobiography* (Sumser, 1995) Sumser explains how modernism and post-modernism are grounded in social class in their connection to work and the social economic systems which they define. He explains that 'modernism supported industrialism, and postmodernism supports the service economy' (Sumser, 1995, p. 300). If we understand this within the frame defined by Bauman in the previous chapter modernism was directly related to the producer society and postmodernism is directly connected to consumer society. Postmodernism is post structural and subjective, this has defined how we now relate to our material culture. It is what the material means to us and not what the thing itself does. Bauman explains this difference in how we understand and shape our own identity. In a production society this was through your job, in a consumer society this is through the materials we consume. But if our relationship to materials is now subjective this is more difficult to clearly define, materials become what they represent and not what they do or what they are.

In the 1960's some artists began to reject modernist art forms in favour of reducing art to its essential components. Donald Judd emphasised the 'gestalt', that an organised whole can create an essential experience for the viewer. 'Gestalt' emphasised that sculpture could be a self-defined object whose encounter could insight conceptual comprehension. This work has since been known as Minimalism or Minimalist Art^{vii}. Minimalist artists including Robert Morris and Richard Serra, used industrial materials and techniques, which sometimes came from the artists working-class trades, to create large sculptural works that sought an objective formal expression. Robert Morris' *Untitled (Corner Beam)*, (1964)

(Illustration 1) is built into the exhibition space. The simplicity of Morris' *Untitled (Corner Beam)* redefined the viewers relationship to artwork and the act of being in an art space; becoming more aware of their bodily relation to art work in real-time. Fabricating works was characteristic of Minimalist art to remove the artists hand. Materials, including large sheet metal and glass, were used because of the minimal simplicity of the material and were taken for granted as 'neutral' materials. This perceived neutrality would be challenged by the feminist art movement in the 1970's.

This questioning of traditional practices and materials led to a reconceptualisation of what could constitute an art practice in the late 1960's. Robert Smithson writing for *Artforum Magazine* in 1968 described this as an 'entropy of technique leaves one with an empty limit, or no limit at all. All differentiated technology becomes meaningless to the artist...' (Smithson, 1968). This reconceptualisation of practice led to new material investigation and changing conceptual relationships to the experience of art. This can be seen in art movements and practices developing under the then burgeoning titles of *Post-Minimalism*, *Anti-Form* and *Conceptual Art*. Artworks were breaking down and becoming experiential in myriad ways, in a move towards conceptual ideas but rooted in the material. The tacit experience of process, championed by Herbert Read's modernist view that the physicality of making is present in the art object of sculpture, was pertinent to this development. This could be understood through Robert Morris' self-defined *Anti-Form* (Morris, 1993) works such as *Untitled (Dirt)* (1968) (Illustration 9) or his felt pieces including *Untitled* (1967), in which he explored the qualities of his materials. Allowing the material to dictate the form he argued that 'Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and

orders for things is a positive assertion' (Morris, R. 1968). These soft materials of dirt and felt revealed the process of the art object.

This conceptual repositioning buffered diminishing resource and provision in art schools (Corby, 2016). While art students were taught the conceptual impetus of practice they found themselves without the same physical and material space to encounter these ideas through process. Political austerity has affected how artists are practicing today and the way artists are taught in art school. Artists have lost a tacit link to the artists they are informed by, in the way they practice, the skills they are taught and the time and space of the studio they are trained in. This is evident in artists relationship to the art work of Eva Hesse. Hesse's material practice was informed by an embodied, sensorial process that was experimental in its material practice. The decay of Hesse's work was understood by the artist to be conceptually significant to the material experience, as part of the ongoing relationship with the art object. Unfortunately, much of Hesse's work is not on public display due to its decayed state. Rather than create replica displays of Hesse's works or processes, collectors and institutions have chosen to keep the work out of public view. This is detrimental in understanding the material and formal significance of Hesse's work which is mostly accessed through reproductions in books or viewed online. Art students who might be inspired by the works only have access to the conceptual framing of the work and not the embodied material importance of the decisions she made through her practice. Hesse's fabricator Doug Johns details the damaging effect this has on art practice in his interview with Alison Rowley in *Encountering Eva Hesse* (Pollock & Corby, 2006)

DJ [Doug Johns]: ... To go back to your question about the workshop at Leeds: it was rewarding and gave me a feel for the enthusiasm that this generation of art students has for Eva's work and her legacy. Actually it was quite overwhelming. I found that there was an incredible curiosity about what the work looked like when it was made. Why should this be denied...? In the past the changing over time of an art piece, shall we say the "patina", is reluctantly accepted fact by everyone concerned. But with Eva, she embraced it, forced it, took into account what was happening and flaunted it. We should honour her legacy by exploring ways of displaying this element of her art, because I believe that the totality of Eva's work, thoughts, and philosophy is really pivotal in understanding modern conceptual art.

(Rowley, 2006)

This closeting of Hesse's relationship with material and importance on process translates into a lost material understanding of her work: The importance of being with material in the studio and the importance of how this material relationship develops through the resulting objects lifetime, whether it may decay or alter. In not having access to these works, art students and artists working today are not able to engage with the material significance of Hesse's art work. They cannot experience the tactile quality of the fresh latex and how it interacts with light as Hesse would have done, which informed her use of this material.

The impact of this restraint material interaction with art can be understood within the art school environment in Huddersfield. While I was studying, graduate students did not have access to studio facilities from the University and despite major development of the campus there was no art gallery on site. Students could not engage with the physicality of practice;

an artworks relationship to space, the smell of the material, experiencing scale, crouching or leaning or otherwise physically engaging in the viewing of art. Such engagement is integral to understanding how one might understand the work of others or develop their own practice in the studio or prepare work for display. U N N A W A Y created a space in Huddersfield to engage with the messiness and physicality of the stuff of exhibition. Exhibiting in the unique site was a continuation of process for many artists presenting art work. A chance to understand how their work might engage with the material of the site, or how it might be understood or experienced in the context of the exhibition.



Illustration 2. *Untitled (Eating Structure)* (Anselmo, 1968) Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. <https://ikon-gallery.org/event/where-the-stars-are-coming-one-span-closer/> (accessed May 2015)

Arte Povera, the Italian art movement of the late 1960's – 1970's moved away from traditional sculptural materials to use found objects. Similar to the post-minimalist work developing at this time in the United States, as documented by Lucy Lippard in *Eccentric Abstraction* (1968), Materials including textiles, stone, twigs and food stuff were used to challenge the monumentalism of sculpture as the post war austerity in Italy at this time informed the artists ability to engage with materials. These material decisions came from a different political history to the formless, tactile works by artists including Eva Hesse and Robert Morris who were making work in America. Giovanni Anselmo's *Untitled* (also known as *Eating Structure*) (1968) (illustration 2), traps a head of lettuce between two slabs of shaped stone, one larger, plinth like, and one smaller. A copper wire is tied around the two slabs of stone, the head of lettuce trapped between them. As the lettuce decomposes the copper wire keeps its shape and the structure falls apart if the lettuce is not replaced often. The decomposing material results in an ever changing, frail sculpture, refusing the fixed form typical of the medium.

Feminist artists of the 1970's would go on to challenge the minimalist essentialism and objectivity with a more direct subjectivity. Embracing performance and craft amongst other disciplines. Art works from the second wave feminist art movement made use of more tactile materials, whose place in the works was both of easy access to the female artists and essential for its purpose. *Womanhouse* (1972) was one of the first significant feminist art exhibitions and involved the new students of the relocated Feminist Art Program at California Institute of the Arts led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro (Wilding, 1977). *Womanhouse* (1972) responded to the feminine domain of the home to question the female sphere through the materials available to them. In doing so they manifest a separate

material and formal aesthetic to that of their male counterparts; one that challenged the dominant masculine aesthetic. This feminine inversion of the masculine materials used in practices such as minimalism unfixed the formalist assumptions of inherent gender neutrality in materials. This inversion of materials can be seen in the art works exhibited in the U N N A W A Y exhibitions, but these works produce an aspirational dimension, which is returned to and in the process undoes, the formalism of minimalist sculpture.



Illustration 3. Exhibition view of *The Law* (Lucas, 1997) (Exhibitions and Catalogue Raisonné 1989-2995, 2005, p. 83)

The *Young British Artists* (1990's) made art work with socially working class materials that have the same gravity of traditional modernist sculpture. This is exemplified in the work of Sarah Lucas, including *The Law* (Lucas, The Law, 1997) (Illustration 3) and *Bunny Gets Snookered* (Lucas, 1997). Lucas' sculptures can often use cheap, makeshift or socially working-class materials and her relationship to process is informed by her socially working-class background^{viii}. Herbert Read explains this kind of thinking as coming from material experience. In *To Hell with Culture* (Read, 1941) he defined his philosophy as 'a direct product of my aesthetic experience' (Read, 1941, p. 43). Lucas' understands and reworks sculptural histories using cheap, foraged materials so that she can say something about her classed experiences. Lucas' use of language in her works often literalises the subject. In some of Lucas' sculptures it is possible to see her reference to other artists, for example Louise Bourgeois^{ix} with works including *Big Fat Anarchic Spider* (1994) and *Mumum* (2012), though materially different pointedly evoke *Spider* (1994) and *Maman* (1999) by Bourgeois. The perishable waste products and food stuff used by Anselmo (above) have also been re-explored by Lucas in relation to her socially working-class British sensibility. Using fried eggs and a kebab in *Two Fried Eggs and A Kebab* (1992) (illustration 4), Lucas invokes a specifically British sensibility, making use of socially working-class British slang terms and suggestive imagery. The piece, whose title is indicative of its form, places two fried eggs and a kebab in a sexually suggestive arrangement on top of a worn, wooden table with a picture of the arrangement also placed on top of the table. The materials here are dirtier, greasy; abject. They too decompose and need to be replaced during exhibition. The crude objecthood of the materials is the punchline in this work because it literalises the offensive language, taking the bite out of it by making it ridiculous.

Like Lucas the artists in the U N N A W A Y exhibitions make use of the cheap, make shift materials available to them. The material nature of aspiration is embodied in the art works exhibited in the U N N A W A Y exhibition series. The process of making for the artists involved was informed by the political austerity in the UK at this time and the diminishing resources of space, workshops and traditional materials this has created. This lack of material provision in the practice can be understood as an embodied material disadvantage. Lucas' use of language and wit can be seen in the works exhibited in the U N N A W A Y exhibition series. Attempting to take the bite out of the situation, by re-presenting or literalising the precarity or uncomfortable material aspirations. For example, exhibition 4, *...And To Dust All Return* notes '...we seek solace in the ashes of our destruction for if we are the ones to burn it down these ashes belong to us and us alone.' (Cullen, 2016). Artworks in the exhibition include reference to burning tires (Odišarija, U), a horse hair violin bow fixed against a life-sized image of a horse's head (Koroleva, O) and various waste food stuff squashed into CD cases, decomposing during the exhibition (Fisher, J).

Discussion of social class and Britishness were present at the time of the U N N A W A Y exhibitions. Contextualised through the success of David Cameron's Conservative Party victory during the 2015 general election which was run on the promise to hold a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU. A fierce debate about social class in Britain, provoked by the bitter 'Brexit' campaign, was forming in late 2015. What has followed the referendum is an embittered debate about social class in Britain. This texts positioning of the embodied, material nature of class and disadvantage as a politics of wanting things should therefore be understood within this context of the representation and current debate of British working-class disadvantage. Questions of who voted for Britain to leave

the EU and why have considered material disadvantage due to the widening wealth gap, deregulation of EU control and an act of 'protest' by members of society who do not feel listened to, among enraged claims of deceit and ignorance. Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of consumer society critiques the social conditions which fail to support all members of society. He explains how being poor in a consumer society is marked by material disadvantage. He outlines how relations of consumerism can build towards resentment, what might be considered the impetus of a 'protest' vote or rejection of EU regulation,

A society of consumers is resentful of all legal restrictions imposed on freedom of choice, of any delegitimation of potential objects of consumption, and manifests its resentment by widespread support willingly offered to most 'deregulatory' measures.

(Bauman Z. , *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 1998)

As has been detailed in the previous chapter, an aspirational relationship to material is a nuanced manifestation of longing and disadvantage. Which could be understood here as an act of self-assertion or an allegiance to one's aspirations over political self-interest. The working-class assertiveness of Lucas' work is therefore more urgently relevant to discussion of material practice now because she understands the social importance and power of the stuff that makes up one's identity. In understanding this Lucas' throws it back, unfixing it through humour or agitation.



Illustration 4. *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab* (Lucas, 1992) (Sarah Lucas Exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery, n.d.)

Chapter 3

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION PRACTICES IN THE UK

There is a rich history of British artists who have organised their work and exhibition practices collectively, often in response to times of economic hardship. Informed by this I will consider how the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme has developed in its specific geographical location and how the artworks exhibited conversed or were contextualised in the West Yorkshire town of Huddersfield. The *Artist Placement Group* also known as *APG*, founded in 1966 by John Latham, and *The Shop* (Emin & Lucas, 1993) by Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, January – June 1993, during the *Young British Artists* moment of the 1990's, will be examined. Their impact on collective organising, methods of representation and reactions to their specific historical moment will be considered in how these have informed and made possible exhibition programmes such as U N N A W A Y.

The Artist Placement Group (APG) was founded in 1966¹ by John Latham and Barbara Steveni as a way to challenge what art could be and how it could be valued. APG placed over 20 artists within industry and government departments with varying success, contributing to the idea of the artist working within a social context and artist-in-residence programmes seen in Britain and across the world. Artists worked within businesses and organisations under a placement scheme and were paid a salary but acted under an open brief. In an APG leaflet the group stated that “The Context decides half the work” (Rasmussen, 2009), which allowed each placement to develop in collaboration between the artist and their place of

placement.

APG changed the title of artist within the placements to “incidental person” to represent the position of the artist as a third view between workers and management. The placements resulted in some radical art works, such as David Hall’s TV Interruptions (1971) on Scottish television, when during normal programming within commercial breaks an unsuspecting audience would be confronted with the sight of a TV burning or tap running water until the screen was full (Applin, 2013). Criticism of the group has suggested that they didn’t go far enough in challenging the idea of “the artist”^x or what artists could contribute. Many of the placements resulted in traditional sculptures made with assistance of the company, meaning that despite hopes of radical interjection the project had a conservative output. Despite this criticism APG did question how the role of the artist could be activated, which has gone on to have a lasting legacy in the way artists create work. Their focus positioned artists as an important part of society, not as purveyors of objects but as part of working life and provided crucial economic support for artists.

APG also presented a small number of exhibitions in gallery settings, presenting their work outside of this institutional model back within such frameworks. The first of these exhibitions was held at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1970-71 titled *Inno 70*. Several works were featured by artists within the group, including an installation of materials sourced from the British Steel Industry and conceptual re-figurations of the galleries or gallery’s façade. The exhibition also saw the realisation of *The Sculpture* (1971) an installation of a meeting table for members of the group to come together with their industry peers for discussion and debate. This sculpture would have brought the debate and

activity of the group into the gallery to become open to artistic enquiry. This reconsiders the tedious organisational tasks involved in operating this programme as part of understanding the art work. APG thought it important to reposition their artistic research, which sought ways of artists existing outside of traditional institutional settings such as gallery exhibitions, within a curated exhibition in a gallery. This is significant in understanding what drove the group. The gallery format was clearly something that was still important to how they envisaged the presentation of their work and the placements they organised where intended as a parallel to this established format. However, *Inno 70* (1970-1971) also shows their playful approach to this format and their methods of disruption within it. The exhibition acts as an ongoing record of the group's activities rather than presenting any set specific ideas, meaning the exhibition existed as a further tool in their ongoing research. This also meant that their ideas at this moment were fluid, perhaps even contradictory, as the group continued to piece together aspects of their research while still moving forward practically with meetings, debate and paper work. This mixed, fluid and active presentation is perhaps one of the reasons the exhibition was seen as unsuccessful, with one critic at the time equating it as a disaster (Tisdall, 1971). However, it is this importance placed on critical interaction with the present and the representation of the fluid and contradictory practicalities of organising which makes APG integral to understanding how artist groups can and do operate.



Illustration 5. Two T-Shirts designed by Emin and Lucas on sale in The Shop (Emin & Lucas, 1993) (Freedman & Emin, 2013)

In 1992 Sarah Lucas used the money she earned from selling an art work to Charles Saatchi to pay for a six-month lease on a former Doctor's surgery on Bethnal Green Road in Shoreditch, London. Here she opened a shop and studio with Tracey Emin (Schnabel & Elliot, 2008). *THE BIRDS. THE SHOP, THE SHOP, THE BIRDS* opened on 14 January 1993 at 103 Bethnal Green Road selling a range of items made by both Lucas and Emin in the upstairs studios in the building. Items included hand painted T-shirts with slogans that read 'She's kebab', 'Have you wanked over me yet?' and 'Complete Arsehole' (Illustration 5) as well as ash trays with Damien Hirst's face on the bottom, paper mobiles and a shrine to David Hockney^{xi}. Prices were affordable and if something sold the price would double, so that the more popular an item was the more expensive it would become, empty cigarette packets were signed and sold at £3.10 to cover the cost of their next pack of cigarettes. The Shop was a practical and immediate space for Lucas and Emin to create and present work and

socialise. The six months Lucas and Emin shared *The Shop* was intense and fast paced. Having paid six-months upfront for the space the project had an end date, this added a focus to *The Shop* while fixing an end point. The U N N A W A Y programme also did this, paying for four months upfront for a four-month programme.

Both Lucas and Emin have spoken about the authenticity of *The Shop*. Its primary function was to act as a space to sell the products they made to keep the space running. The space also supported the two young artists in the production and development of their work through a studio and living space above *The Shop*. There are similarities between the *Artist Placement Group* and *The Shop* as both projects were concerned with the practical support and structure for making art, but there are important differences too. *The Shop* had a short timeframe from its inception and was run by a small team of two artists who also used the space, whereas *APG* continued until 1989 before becoming *O + I (Organisation and Imagination)*. *O + I* was run by a board of artistic directors consisting of artists, industry representatives and later a union representative. *APG*, and John Latham in particular, believed artists were not socially classed as they took another position by being an artist. This is why the role of artist was changed to 'incidental person' in the artist contracts. Alternatively, Lucas and Emin created a space in which their class consciousness was indicative of the art works being created. *The shop* was run as a practical space whose processes of creating 'stock', selling these items and generally maintaining a shop front became part of understanding the project. It's socially working-class position was intimately tied to its output. *APG* however tried to deny social class politics as experienced by artists, which presents a failure of the project. In not acknowledging the lived experiences of some artists, *APG* misrecognised the ways in which artists engage in their practice, and how class

can manifest in the material provisions available to some artist. U N N A W A Y can be understood in relation to *The shop*, whose social class is intimately connected to the production of the artwork presented and how these works could be viewed and understood in the context of the project.

Chapter 4

BUILDING UNNAWAY

In the town centre of Huddersfield, down a small side street the U N N A W A Y exhibition series was hosted in a disused ballet studio which had previously been a dance school for 47 years prior to the school moving out of the town centre (Figure3). In Huddersfield art exhibitions and projects outside of the local art gallery, Huddersfield Art Gallery and the University of Huddersfield, lacked development around a clear focus. There was a gulf between the ambitious exhibitions undertaken by the research driven ROTOR programme^{xii} and sporadic exhibitions organised by small artist-led groups.

As part of my practice-led research I wanted to work with and support artists during the project and I wanted artists to be involved and engaged with the exhibitions. It was important that artists be treated fairly; covering the costs incurred by the exhibition such as travel, postage and materials, paying artists fees as well as offering support and a space for discussion. The exhibitions were initiated through an open call process so that the programme was accessible and enabled the exhibitions to develop with the artists rather than be dictated to them. I wanted to move beyond exhibitions in which the artist incurred the cost of producing the exhibition, I applied for funding from the University of Huddersfield's Researcher Development Fund (RDF). Receiving £2,500 from this source I was able to set aside £500 per exhibition to cover exhibition costs and pay artists. The funding was important for the development of a fairly run programme enabling the support of artists with ambitions aims for making and exhibiting their work.

The project was run by a team of two artists, myself and Kashika Ashley Cooper who I invited to join the project because of our shared interest in feminist practices and whom I had enjoyed working alongside when we shared a studio in the same ballet studio. An ambitious research programme, U N N A W A Y echoed the traditional language of established art galleries and projects in a way which is replicated across the broad spectrum of DIY and grassroots arts projects. This use of a formal language used by established arts institutions is not necessarily helpful for DIY projects and could be understood as an aspirational use of language to appear more established. Many smaller art exhibitions currently only run for a short period of time. Keeping an exhibition open and invigilated can be difficult on small budgets and against other economic and time factors, for example the organisers may work full time jobs elsewhere in order to maintain their practice.

In recent years a trend has developed in artist-led curatorial projects, in which the project appears to be a platform for the artist initiating the project instead of there being an interest in the artists involved. It has become increasingly common for early career artists to pay a small submission fee, for example £3, for an exhibition curated by another artist or artist-led group. These exhibitions often do not offer financial or other support to artists selected and their names may be excluded from publicity material in favour of the artist-as-curator's details^{xiiiixivxv}. This focus on the monetary value of the artist-as-curators project, over the support and presentation of the artists making work *for* the project, and the lack of clarity as to the artists involved other than the artist-as-curator, leads me to question how invested the artist-as-curator is in the artists they will go on to work with. In these situations, the open call process appears to be more focused on funding the artist-as-curators project idea than the work of the artists they are showing. It is possible that this

practice has developed in response to institutional open exhibitions such as the Royal Academy Summer Show and Bloomberg New Contemporaries. Both of these organisations have long standing reputations, but smaller award programmes and open exhibitions are becoming increasingly common. This is highlighted by an *a-n: The Artists Information Company* article titled *Open exhibitions and entry fees: price worth paying or licence to exploit artists?* (Hutchinson, 2016). Hutchinson asks whether ‘artists are simply being asked to subsidize the sector with their own money’?^{xvi} With pressures on organisations and budget cuts from central government, the increasing likelihood of submission fees can be understandable but this practice is also trickling down into artist-led practice. This has resulted in group exhibitions born less from a collective solidarity or presentation of work than as a way for one artist to fund the realisation of their concept at the expense of their peers.

An in-situ site, like the one of the ballet studio, is not in itself operating as an alternative or a challenge to art institutions. A review by *The White Pube* (a London based art review website) criticised a Nottingham exhibition for its white cube formalism despite its position in a skate park (Muhammed & de la Puente, 2016) (Illustration 6). The reviewers called attention to the white, masculine nature of the show. The exhibition perpetuated fundamental institutional problems exemplified by their lack of diversity in the selected artists and therefore lack of diversity in the art works exhibited. A space therefore is not specifically political in simply existing as other to a traditional white cube form. A space or project can be activated by a continued effort to explore the site as other to the mainstream art institutions through the selection, representation and positioning of the artists shown

and the message of the exhibition itself. This was integral to the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme.



Illustration 6. Trace Programme at Flo Skate Park (Flo Programme, 2016) (Puente, 2016)

SECTION TWO

Chapter 5

IT'S MY PARTY AND I'LL CRY IF I WANT TO, CRY IF I WANT TO

The first exhibition of the U N N A W A Y exhibition series *It's My Party & I'll Cry if I Want To, Cry if I Want To* (Figure 4-31) engaged with the act of beginning an exhibition programme, of curating and organising. It engaged with the aspirations in art practice associated with the act of displaying work and the control over this process artists, and the artist-as-curator, can have. The physical and emotional labour and economic pressures of producing and presenting a curated exhibition were considered in relation to the opening event of the exhibition. *It's My Party & I'll Cry if I Want To, Cry if I Want To* initiated a call to celebrate the opening of the U N N A W A Y programme and its first exhibition. Artists were invited through an open call (Figure 5) to reflect upon and engage with the event of the private view, the practice of presenting work in this way and its purpose within their own art practice.

The open call for the first exhibition, originally titled *I'll Cry If I Want To, Cry If I Want To*, was launched in July 2015, the deadline was 26th July, 2015. The text remained the same as what would go on to be the exhibition text, simply followed with the submission details; 'Up to 5 jpeg images, short description of work (to include title, dimensions, materials), artist statement'. This information was shared across social media networks including facebook, twitter, instagram and tumblr, and through emails to the University of Huddersfield and on artist sharing platforms including CuratorSpace^{xvii}. Posters and leaflets were made and distributed around Huddersfield, which referred to the U N N A W A Y social media handles

and email for more information. U N N A W A Y received fifteen submissions from artists, of which eight were accepted. The submissions were strong and included a breadth of artists from students to artists who had already exhibited widely. Kashika Ashley Cooper and I went through the submissions and made mood boards of artworks to see how individual works looked together, how ideas translated and how colours came together. From this I then contacted artists Maria Gondek and Charlotte Salt to invite them to be involved in the exhibition.

The works exhibited were *Untitled* Charlotte Salt (2015) (figure 21-22), *You've Come A Long Way, Baby* Das Balloon (2015) (figure 30), *I'll Cry If I Want To* Eleanor Cully (2015) (heard in Figure. 7), *Escapism* Hali Santamas (2015) (figure 29), *Gift for U N N A* Hannah Le Feurve (2015) (figure 18;19;20), *Private Dancer* Maria Gondek (2015) (figure 23;24), *Make Me A Mask* Mitt Wheeldon (2015) (figure 25;26), *Paint Cakes* series Rufus Newell (2012-16) (figure 28) and *Reclining* Charlotte Cullen (2015) (figure 27). The art work by artist Aimee Walker was misplaced by the gallery it was last exhibited with. As a playful reference to the difficulties of curating and problems that can occur we placed a post it in the space the work was supposed to have been shown (figure 31).

The front door to the ballet studio was propped open with a large rock I had been using as part of a sculpture in my studio. An A3 print-out of the exhibition poster was taped to the door. Inside a make-shift table had been made with left-over bits of MDF, glued to the wall. Exhibition text, titles and floorplan were printed onto A4 tracing paper which was folded to make A6 size booklets. On the left-hand side of the stairs a small window held the first artwork in the show; Hannah Le Feurve's *A Gift for U N N A W A Y* (2015) (figure 18; 19;20),

a hand-made bouquet of hand-picked and hand-dyed flowers, wrapped in an orange ribbon and sent as an exhibition opening gift from Le Feurve to U N N A W A Y.

To the left-hand side at the top of the stairs a doorway, propped open, led into the exhibition. To the right a small make shift bar area was set up in the corridor which led to further studios. This was the first time the dance studio was open to the public after Barbara Peters School of Dance had moved out of the town centre and this would likely be a different public that would be coming to the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme. As detailed above the space was an important aspect of the exhibitions. Upon entering the exhibition space most artworks could be seen at once and were further reflected in the large mirrors on either side of the space. Warm pinks, oranges and blues were prominent across the artworks and brought out a pastel tone to the space. A deep pink purple tinsel curtain decoration, used for the promotion of the exhibition, was attached to the inside of the large glass windows of the storage space towards the end of the room to hide the accumulated rubbish.

Make Me a Mask (2015) by Mitt Wheeldon (Figure 25) included an 'oil slick' effect oversized visor. The found object was appropriated by Wheeldon to help the wearer feel more comfortable in social situations, specifically that of the private view event in which an artist may have to meet and talk to many people they have not met before. The performative element of wearing the mask corresponded to a text piece written by Wheeldon also exhibited. Wheeldon arrived wearing the mask and proceeded to wear it for an hour into the event. After this time, the mask was given to the artist Jorge Boehringer who was manning the bar, to further integrate the outside social space connected to the

exhibition with the exhibition itself. After this time, the visor was hung on a hook by the doorway as one would enter the space and the audience, including other artists, were invited to wear the visor while present at the private view. The works playful approach allowed audience participation as well as a breaking down of the space in which the exhibition might be taking place. It questioned the social aspiration of meeting and talking to new people, for artists to make a good impression on galleries or the public, associated with the private view. Gondek's ambitious, technical and playful reimagining of the everyday object of a shower head into a sculptural form and sensory installation was titled *Private Dancer* (2014). A shower head with a rotating disco ball attached in place of the nozzle. Das Balloon's *You've Come A Long Way, Baby* (2015) similarly plays with the form of modernist technique of bronze which is seen in Sarah Lucas' *Nahuolin* (2013) or *Black Tit Cat Down* (2015).

The exhibition actively blurred lines between what was inside the exhibition and what was part of the social aspect of the private view, including works which sat outside the exhibition space or moved between the two. This repeats in many of the works and displays an interest from the artists involved in how their work is presented and understood in the specific social context of the private view. Central to the exhibition was the question of how the private view event is helpful to artist-led, DIY and grassroots exhibitions and who are they really for? I believed my sustained attachment to this means of display was a *Cruel Optimism* in that the structure, form and language of the private view was both comforting and confirming yet possibly not helpful to those outside more established institutional art galleries. This is due to the pressures involved in the production of a private view event including money, organisation, time and space. Yet the problem with this perspective

misidentifies a key goal in the U N N A W A Y mission statement to ‘support, develop and connect emerging artists’ and support ‘engagement with contemporary artistic practices’ (Cullen, 2015). The importance of the private view event for smaller projects including artist-led and DIY initiatives is not in the use of language or form of exhibitions. It could be considered in its creation of a supportive community for artists and an engaged public. It can create an opportunity to come together, present work and reflect on it in a different setting and facilitate critical reflection. It can build connections and support networks for continuing art practice. The importance of this happening in a town like Huddersfield is significant as Huddersfield had little support for artists and for the presentation of art for those earlier in their career. U N N A W A Y created a valuable place to begin to change this.

Chapter 6

THE CURTAIN PARTS

Once the space of the ballet studio was secured for the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme I knew it would become an integral part of the programme to respond to the space. While curating the first exhibition *It's My Party & I'll Cry if I Want To, Cry if I Want To*, (Figure 31-64) I learnt that I needed to care for the space as much as I did for each art work. The former ballet studio, with its large mirrors that covered two walls, ballet barres and scuff marked turquoise blue walls was as much a part of the exhibition as the art works exhibited and needed the same level of care and attention. It was an intimate space with a tactile sense of its former life as a dance studio.

It was important that the second show be a response to this significant space, in relation to its lineage and in how it contextualised artworks and brought attention to the material nature of the works on display. I was influenced by Rosalind Krauss' *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Krauss, 1977) when I began to think about the intimacies of the space through its relations to theatricality. Chapter 6: '*Mechanical Ballets: Light, Motion, Theatre*' opens with the line '*The Curtain Parts.*' (Krauss, 1977, p. 201). It is a bold, minimal and theatrical piece of text in its own right, used to introduce Robert Morris' 1961 performance of an 8ft by 2ft plinth displayed on stage. The curtain parts and for three and a half minutes nothing happens until the plinth falls suddenly. A further three and a half minutes pass with nothing other than the fallen plinth motionless on stage. The curtain closes. This dramatic act made me think about the dance studio as a place that is both still yet filled with motion. The materiality of the space encouraged an embodied awareness of the works on display, due to

the mirrors and physical apparatus still fixed around the room. The messiness and tactility of the space, with its scuff marks and smells, created a different kind of space to engage with the artworks displayed.

The theatricality of the space can be understood in multiple ways. Understood through the space's history of rehearsal and performance the dance studios link to theatricality becomes that of literal performance and performing to an audience. This can be understood through the display of art practice. This returns to the questions explored in the first exhibition of the purpose of the private view and the performance inherent in this exhibition. The exhibition therefor reflects on how the ideas of the first show manifest. The site of the dance studio connects to the practice of making as well as presenting as a space of rehearsal. The bodily through this rehearsal is constant in the space as the two walls of mirrors remind the viewer of their physical presence in the space while they are within the exhibition. With the act of viewing and being viewed omnipresent, the viewers relationship to the work is altered. In being more self-aware of the body while in the space, the movement, reflection and rehearsal of how one might move makes the bodily in the artworks more prominent.

Kashika Ashley Cooper and I again selected artists through an open call process, artists applied in response to the exhibition text (figure 33). This time with a better understanding of the space we could make an informed decision based on what would and would not work in the space. The artworks in the show included: *Blindly Orange Grounding Mapping* (2015) and *Blindly Orange Grounding Mapping 1* (2015) and *Where's the 'ouch 2* (2015) Puy Soden (Figure 43; 46); *Sortir Un Oeil*, Phoebe Collings-James (2015) (figure 44; 45) *A Very Fragile*

Paradise (2015) and *Core* (2015), Charlotte Cullen (figure 64); *Tonight is the Night*, Aimee Walker (2015) (figure 49); *My Serious Lining 1* (2015) and *My Serious Lining 2* (2015) Jala Wahid (figure 50-53); *Form Brewed in Fury Will Smell Like A Warning*, Hannah Regel (2015) (figure 55); *not allowed not (i)*, Jasmin Risk (2015) (figure 54); *Know You Love My Curves*, Daisy Forster (2015) (figure 58); *The Night of the Ballet (Part 2)* (2015) and *Sparkle and Tantrums (Let the Show Begin)* (2015), Jude Lin (figure 60, 61); *Untitled*, Hannah Le Feurve (2015) (figure 59); *Sickly Sweet*, Hazel Simpson (2015) (figure 62, 63).

Hazel Simpson proposed a a reworking of a previous piece. The original work was a hand-made scent extracted from chocolate and lard encased in a small spray bottle, made in response to Janine Antoni's *Gnaw* (1992)^{xviii}. Simpson suggested a new piece for the show, which replaced the scent of lard with the artists sweat. This new iteration played off of the nursery rhyme idea of girls being made of 'sugar and spice and all things nice' by physically asserting an abject bodily matter into the exhibition space, bringing a sensorial work into the space mixed with the sweet smell of chocolate.

The colours in this show were more subdued than the last, with bursts of oranges and blues punctuating nudes and natural materials of wood, cement and brick. Many of the works were in dialogue with the floor. Small sculptures by Regel, Soden, Le Feurve and Lin sat quiet yet purposeful on the scuffed, wooden floor. A video, by Collings-James played from an iPad rest on the floor, an angled view of bare feet placed as if one's own crushing eggs which emitted provocative squelching and cracking sounds. This was the only noise in the large room making it eerily still compared to the previous exhibition. Daisy Forster, an artist based in Leeds and a member of the artist-led curatorial collective Seize, exhibited a

large sculpture of wood, ply wood and cement leant against a mirror. Vulnerable in a constant relation with the floor and mirror of the space as it threatened to fall. Jala Wahid's large gloss prints *My Serious Lining 1* and *My Serious Lining 2* (2015) depict oozing liquids, dripping downwards across curved forms, returning to the ground in an abject decomposition of the object. The first image presenting the liquids oozing, flowing while in the second they have dried, congealed and sunk into the sculptural curved form in the image.

The emotional and physical process of art practice was considered in relation to the dance studio. Drawing out the presence of ballet, a physically and emotionally arduous dance whose graceful movements come at the physical expense of the performers through pointe work, more often choreographed for the female dancers^{xix}. The link between the dance studio and ballet was used as a correlation to explore emotionally invested and emotionally vulnerable art works. Material-led, bodily through their physicality and emotionally laborious artworks can provide a substantial refusal of the clean simplicity of minimalist sculptural practice. Artists including Eva Hesse and Tracey Emin have created artworks whose strengths lie in their emotional and physical investment. Predominately female and queer artists have continued to create work which is emotionally vulnerable. This is perhaps best epitomised in *The Curtain Parts* (2015) by Hannah Regel's '*Form Brewed In Refusal Will Smell Like a Warning*' (2015) (figure 55). Anthropomorphic and disobedient, Regel's *Form Brewed in Refusal Will Smell Like A Warning* (2015), with its anthropomorphic finger cast, disembodied, or rather re-embodied, with bone and kombucha leather, threatens to come to life and scuttle around the marked wooden floorboards of the dance studio, similar to sculptures by Alina Szpocznikow, such as *Fetish III* (1970). A laborious and

time-consuming discipline, Regel fermented kambucha leather in her London studio, making swathes of the cultivated bacteria fabric by drying the top layer of large buckets of bacteria. Visceral and uncanny the small yet bold work looks like a dangerous talisman watching over the space and draws from a history of female artists documentation of, and challenge to, the representation of the female body



Illustration 7. *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202 (Poppy Hotel, Room 202)* (Tanning, 1970-73) (Dorothea Tanning Foundation, n.d.)

A single piece of ribbon, one of my own works in the exhibition, was held by a clip to a high beam and pulled taught to the floor. A broken piece of tarmac weighting it down, the loose edge curling across the lacquer wooden floorboards. The focus is drawn down to the horizontal. Antithesis to the noise and lights and movement of the first exhibition *The*

Curtain Parts movements are quieter but still present in the tension of Forsters' *Know You Love My Curves* (2015) or the bodily presence of Jasmin Risk's *not allowed not (i)* (2015). Risk's sculpture, resting, waiting, the lumpy hand stitched bright orange form feels like it could spring to life at any moment. Like the sculptural works of Dorothea Tanning, full of life and roaming around their surroundings like in *'Hotel du Pavot, Chambre 202'* (1970-3) (Illustration7), or who wait quietly, resting like *Nue couchée* (1969-70). The soft, abstract body of the sculpture, imperfect and lumpy, taking its place alongside the reclining nudes of male modernist sculptors. *not allowed not (i)* (2015) was made to encompass the waiting of the dance studio; the waiting to perform, the anticipation, the nerves, the wait for change, 'the change that's going to come' (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2011, p. 2), idle, passive and imperfect. In its presentation, it complicates this reading however, it may be waiting but it is also on display, performing. The bright orange felt is striking, standing out against the neutral tones of the space. On closer inspection, the different hand stitched sections may be imperfect compared to the uniform stitching of a machine, but these stitches incorporate the artists hand and imbue the piece with a sense of care. It is not passive, but defiant.

The documentation of past movement gave a sense of the history of the space, of rehearsals once undertaken or performed. Hannah Le Feurve's hand drawn documentation of a secret performance undertaken whilst working as a gallery invigilator at a large London gallery is quietly subversive. Using her hours at work to continue her own practice as a personal, political act of survival as a young working artist. *Where's the 'ouch? 2* (Soden, 2015) was made by the artist by encasing her finger in a mixture of hot wax and paint and pushing the mixture onto a prepared bed of paint. The repeated cylindrical forms are organic rather than minimal, and capture traces of fingerprints. Like the organic repetition

of the work of Eva Hesse whose organic repeated forms and structures broke down the clean rigid lines of minimalism, bringing the artists body and its nuisance, fragility and imperfection into the gallery. *Tonight is the Night* (Walker, 2015) is a large canvas frame stretched across with a piece of nude coloured latex. A central overlap meeting as the fabric crossed each other vertically, the colour less sheer due to the overlap of fabric. A CD printed with a collage design of intimate couples and a private text message conversation was cased inside a clear plastic CD case and attached to the inside of the latex canvas, hidden by the sheer fabric, its shadow still visible. The temptation of the piece lay in the desire to draw back the fleshy latex curtain and reveal the object within, making the piece performative, bodily and alluring.

Phoebe Collings-James' three-minute length video work *Sortir un Oeil* (2011) played on loop from an iPad on the floor of the room. The video begins with several eggs on screen, mostly still. A foot comes into the screen, gently moving more eggs into view. A second foot comes into view. The first foot balances over the eggs, resting gently before moving slightly out of shot and the sound of an egg breaking can be heard, followed by egg yolk coming into the frame. Returning, the first foot again rolls across the eggs but this time applies more pressure, breaking several eggs at once. The second foot does the same. Bright yellow and sheer white yolk oozes onto the floor, amongst the eggs still on screen and up and around the feet which continue to crush eggs. Quickly becoming more violent and purposeful. Stamping and bringing across more eggs from outside of the screen the act continues until the feet are stamping on the broken egg shells and the fluid egg yolk. Collings-James is not 'treading on egg shells', a saying which means to tread carefully or to be careful. In Collings-James' video the fragile eggs are, after a moment of care, crushed violently until there is

little left, refusing any narrative of the delicate. Like Sarah Lucas Collings-James literalises the subject.

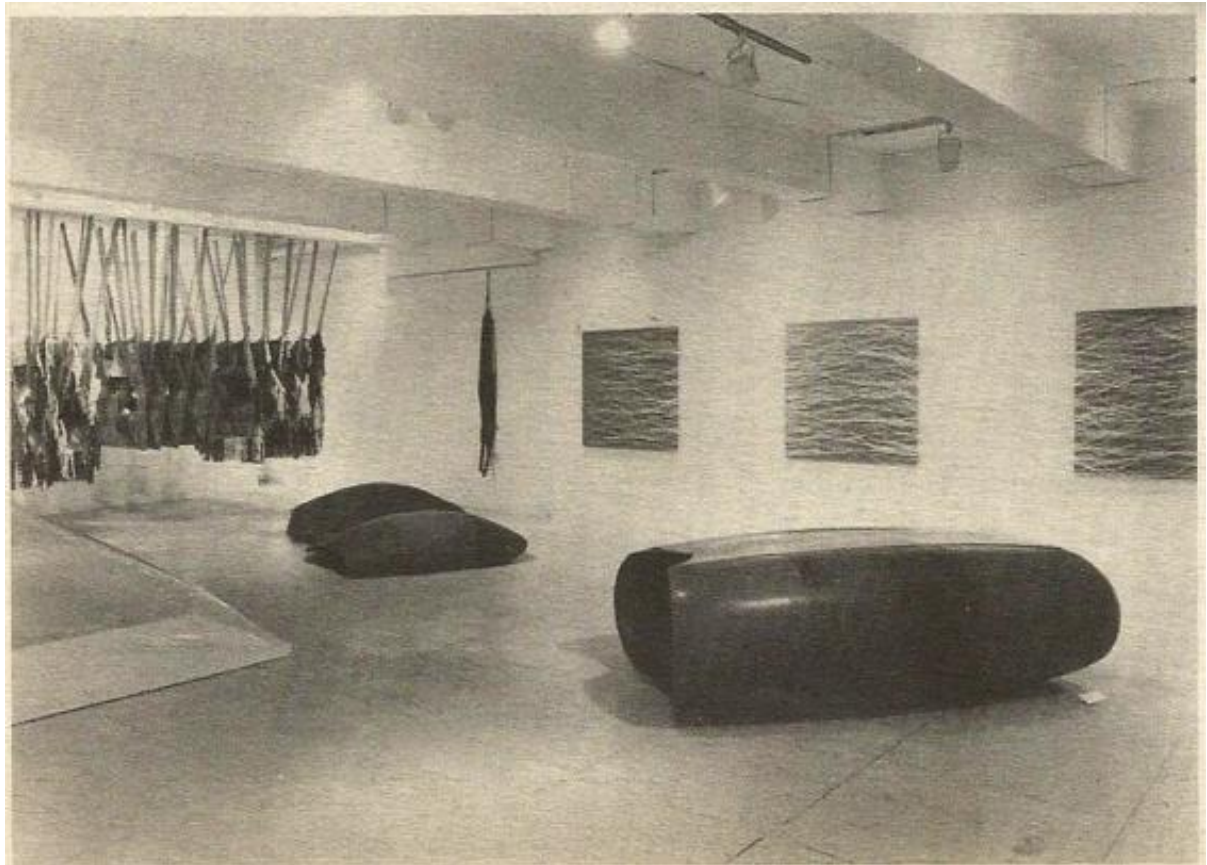


Illustration 8. Exhibition View of *Eccentric Abstraction* (Lippard, 1966) (Lippard, 1971, p. 103)

Each piece is firmly rooted in the site and comes together in relationship to each other and the specific space of the dance studio. At times literally balancing against a mirror or laying purposefully on the wooden floor. This engagement with the architecture of the exhibition draws from minimalist practices which redefined the viewers relationship to an artwork and the exhibition space. The simplicity of Robert Morris' *Untitled (Corner Beam)* (Illustration 1) redefined the viewers relationship to artwork and the act of being in an art space, the viewing becoming more aware of their bodily relation to art work in real-time.

Similar to the exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966) (Illustration 8), the curves of the works create a sense of fluidity and the body through subtle organic movements. Cement flows in a delicate form in Forster's *Know You Love My Curves* (2015) or careful cylindrical repeats show signs of the artists body and the action that has gone into creating them in Soden's *Where's the 'ouch? 2.* (2015). While the use of cheap, make shift materials is like that of *The Law* (Lucas, 1997) (figure 3) whose materials manifest the unique material relationships of the artists involved. Once in the exhibition the audience needed to engage physically, bending to see the details in works. The large space felt uncluttered and was able to be engaged with as a large, incredible structure in its own right.

Chapter 7

NOTHING

I knew I wanted to curate an exhibition that focused on materiality from the beginning of the project. As material and materiality were recurring themes throughout the exhibitions I wanted this third exhibition to reflect upon and challenge what this aspect of the exhibitions might mean. In my own practice I had explored materials and my material associations to consider intersections of my own experiences in relation to gender and social class. I wanted this exhibition to be an opportunity to further this in dialogue with other artists. In the third exhibition *Nothing* (2015) (figure 65 – 89) this focus on materiality would be explored in relation to socio-political hierarchal structures of materials, to question which groups of people matter and which groups of people don't. It was important that the show would reflect real lived experiences to question the socio-political and economic value structures of materials and through this reflect the bodies they represent.

For the title of the exhibition I returned to Eva Hesse. I was interested in how Hesse called interesting objects she found on the street 'nothings'. As an artist I often find things around and collect them as inspiration and to use in my work. The way Eva Hesse spoke of this process was particularly interesting as she noted the freedom in these found pieces, that they were unburdened objects and that as an artist she wanted her work to achieve this status (Lippard, 1992, p. 52). I wanted the use of the word 'nothing' to title the exhibition to be a challenge to how one might think about material, that it would be a haptic or speculative materialism to open a discussion around what is matter and what does or can matter. This returns to my central question of 'the politics of wanting things' in what

materials are available to specific groups of people, what materials do these same groups of people want and how do we understand these material wants politically? As artists how do we and how can we engage with this politics of wanting things through our relationship to materials and how is this manifest in our practice?

I wanted to understand how artists relationship to the materials available to them and how much control an artist might have over the production of their work shaped their practice. Did aspirations of other material or form come through this process? In my own artwork plans for large sculptural pieces or work with expensive materials have not been practical. I have had to reconsider or rearticulate ideas in ways in which my training, budget and access can support. Meaning I have had to make compromises in my art practices in order to make or present something because of my social and economic position. I wanted to see how this relationship to material in art practice was being explored and articulated by other artists. A question of artistic process and the continued optimistic relationship towards this process by the artist was also questioned. Contextualised through Hesse's 'nothings' I wanted to see how an artist might strive for the direct articulation of an object they might find on the street. This was about articulating a feeling, experience or moment which is otherwise difficult to articulate through the embodied nature of material disadvantage.

Thirteen artists were included in this exhibition, artworks included: *The Space Between* Ben Potts (2015) ; *Daughters* (2014) *No Where Between* (2014) Eleanor Culley (figure 86); *How to Protect Your Heart ii.* (2015) Emily Wang (figure 84); *(And It Felt Like A Kiss)* (2015) *Please* (2015), Hannah Regel (figure 80, 81); *No Shoes* (2015), *Yes Comfort* (2015) *Weave*

Experiments (2015) Jasmin Risk (figure 79); *Certain* Jesse Darling x Takeshi Shiomitsu (2015) (figure 87); *Peep Show* Jorge Boehringer (2015); *Where's the 'ouch Part.3* Puy Soden (2015) (figure 82); *Misfits* Rose Goddard (2015) (figure 89); *Untitled* Rufus Newell (2015) (figure 85), *Powder* (2015) *Pearl* (2015) *Silver Wing* (2015) *Diamond* (2015) Sarah Boulton (figure 76, 77); *Go Faster* (2015); *but you know better than that* (2015) Charlotte Cullen (figure 88).

On the right-hand side of the stairway near a light Sarah Boulton had handwritten in pencil a short poem, one of four presented in the exhibition, titled *Powder* (2015). *Powder* (2015) was the first work experienced in the exhibition, returning to the use of the in-between spaces of the dance studio to display works. *Powder* describes how the author was more affected by a stone they saw on their way to an exhibition than the art work in the exhibition. This idea of the stone as a more affective material returns to Hesse's idea of the 'nothing' (Lippard, 1992, p. 52) she would collect on the street in hopes of her work acquiring the same affective quality that led her to pick up the item. Relayed in a simple, hand-written poem, rather than material, Boulton's work allows the viewer into the same affective experience. The poem tenderly describes how the author kept the stone intimately by them and how it became part of them by applying it as nail varnish. The poem is physically cast out of the exhibition, just as the stone is described in the poem, symbolically representing the cast out affected object. The poem was to act as a reminder of how one might engage with the exhibition in the space, supporting the idea that it is O.K. to be affected by the stone and not the sculpture. A second poem by Boulton was hand written in the bathroom and was included on the exhibition floor plan under 1.d but not noted as to where in the space the poem was included. Boulton hand wrote her poem *Diamond* (2015) by the mirror tiles, just visible in the low light of the fairy lights. The short two-line poem

described the authors visit to an exotic garden. The simplicity and directness of Boulton's writing style shares what appears to be a personal account of an emotive experience. An experience that perhaps many people can relate to in some way, that of viewing something beautiful, moving yet unique and quiet. Quietly placed in the bathroom Boulton's piece was again displayed symbolically to represent the experiences described in the poem. Not included on the exhibition map the poem was purposely hidden in plain sight. In the intimate confines of the dark bathroom the viewer when reading the work can understand it as a singular, unique experience for them viewing the exhibition.

Two more of Boulton's poems *Pearl* (2015) and *Silver Wing* (2015) were hand-written in the U N N A W A Y exhibition space at almost opposite ends of the room. *Silver Wing* (2015) was purposely written near a hand-written pencil annotation which had been left in the space before it was used as an artist's studios and U N N A W A Y exhibition space, markings from the rooms past use. It was written to reflect in one of the large mirrors in the space. The poem documents a relationship to an ephemeral object now hidden to the author. The poems position and physical interaction with the marked walls of the dance studio bring attention to smaller details in the space, such as the hand-written annotation. Engaging with the intimate experience of each poem makes the viewer engage with the intimate histories of the unique dance studio site. Boulton's attentiveness as an artist creates a powerful and intimate experience in the exhibition that allows a reflective engagement with the dance studio site. Activating the dance studios unique structure and histories as an affective material.

Jasmin Risk's art work in the exhibition, titled *No Shoes* (2015) was installed on the step leading into the exhibition space. The grey vinyl lettering instructed the audience to take off their shoes. Placed here the work beckons the audience to take off their shoes, engaging in the exhibition space in a different way. Removing shoes to view the exhibition makes the experience more vulnerable, with feet touching the wooden floorboards; particularly cold due to the exhibition taking place in December in a building without heating. At the opening event this signage was largely ignored, but it was impractical to implement as there was little space to store shoes. The signage, placed simply on the steps could also be mistaken as part of the ballet studios historical quirks, a question which did come up in the exhibition, engaging with the histories of the site. *No Shoes* (2015) was linked to another vinyl lettering piece by Risk titled *Yes Comfort* (2015), reading 'Yes Comfort'. This was placed specifically in engagement with a broken mirror pane within the exhibition space. The two works were taken from a textile environment installation created by Risk, which asked people to remove their shoes to enter, creating a safe and comforting all-encompassing installation exploring methods of care and quiet reflection. Taken out of this installation context for the purpose of *Nothing* the words took on new meaning in the different space. The different environment and exhibition output became part of the architecture and created a conversation with other works in the exhibition.

The visceral and bodily materials of *Please* (2015), displayed lard plinth-like with an aluminium cast of a cow's stomach resting on top. This reference to and use of traditional sculptural practise built a conversation with historical art practices such as Joseph Beuys *Unschlitt* (1977), which was created out of 20 tonnes of tallow fat. *Go Faster* (Cullen, 2015), features three strips of white ribbon, hung from a beam running at an angle across the

space, weighted by three hair clasps painted with a granite effect spray, clinging to the end of the ribbon. The ribbon was held taught to the floor, weighted by three broken pieces of tarmac, rock-like. The ribbon continued at an angle across the floor until it reached one of the mirror panes and the fabric cut off when it reached the mirror. I reconstructed this work to specifically engage with the architecture of the space, falling from a beam within the space and continuing until it met the mirror, creating a continual reflection of the work. Within the ballet studio the ribbon could have appeared to be connected to the dance studios history, to be connected to dance and movement. Yet the taught clean lines and minimal colours maintain a connection with the architecture, minimalist histories in art and tensions within the work.

Emily Wang's video work *How To Protect Your Heart ii.* (2015) played on a laptop^{xx} from the floor of the space, a pair of simple purple headphones attached and falling across the floor to be picked up and worn to listen to the sound of the video. The video features a presenter talking to the camera from various park-based locations, explaining the difference between what the presenter describes as 'heavy hearted' and 'light hearted' people (Wang, 2015). Wearing a denim jacket and all black the presenter mimics, in a knowingly amateur manner, the gestures and presentation style of self-improvement videos. The video then cuts to a green screen for a 'how-to' portion of the video. This features an egg as representation of hardness and a small rectangle of pink knitting, in process, still attached to the ball of yarn and wooden knitting needles as representation of softness. The four-minute video is earnest and endearing in its amateur style.

On the back wall were Eleanor Cully's name cards for works not made, featuring the title of the work and materials list. The name cards are from a series titled *Private Sculpture Series* which Cully first exhibited with the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (HCMF) in 2014. At times incorporating ephemeral materials which mean the work could not be physically made or including, in this instance, an evocative material list which beckons the audience to imagine the works for themselves. *Daughters* (2014) and *Nowhere Between* (2014) list 'CAST IRON & SILK' and 'GLASS, BIRCH & CELLOPHANE' respectively. The poetic use of material in this instance creates a different relationship to how we might understand or interact with artworks. Along the same back wall is an alignment of Puy Soden's *Where's the 'ouch part 3*. Small white cylindrical paint works, created in the same process as the smaller orange and blue *Where's the 'ouch part 2*. This iteration is removed from a base and free standing. The organic cylindrical shapes, created by Soden immersing her finger in hot wax and paint, line up on the floor against the wall, almost becoming part of the wall's faults and damages to the eye from further across the room. The work is made up of the remnants of Soden's *Where's the 'ouch part 1*, a large wall-based painting. They are the remnants of the piece after being painstakingly taken apart and brought across to the dance studio. Here they became part of a further exploration in the series *Where's the 'ouch part 4* (2015). Talking with Soden the work developed and Soden proposed to crush the left-over matter of the painted object, the cylinders, and make a paint with them in the space. With this Soden painted directly onto one of the large mirror panes. This engagement with the space and the artist having chance to work in the space, resulted in a studied painting. A physical and tactile connection to the space of the dance studio which reverberated across the room in the many reflections created by the mirrors. It blurred the mirror panes ability to reflect, smearing and interrupting the continual flow of information across the space.

In the storage space at the end of the room artist Jorge Boehringer installed an immersive and sensory installation. Clearing the space and covering the windows with boards, Boehringer recorded the U N N A W A Y exhibition space when empty which was mostly at night. Documenting the sounds of the old building when no one was present, and the space, inactive, becoming nothing. This is similar to the sound installation *Voice* (Morris, 1973-74) by Robert Morris. The small, dark room only allowed a small number of people in at once and featured one solitary chair for an audience member to sit and experience the ambient, emotive, allusive sounds. Unlike other sound work in the exhibition and previous exhibitions, this immersive installation enabled a quiet moment of reflection and engagement with the space, separate, private and entirely personal. A similar experience as created by Boulton's poems through a different medium. Back in the main exhibition space Rufus Newell's untitled granite works reference the scuff marks embedded across the wooden floors of the dance studio which he had noticed during the first exhibition. A small children's football was coated in granite and placed precisely by two folded sheets of granite paper stacked one on top of the other, leaving a careful distance between the ball and paper so that the two *just* don't touch. A line of granite powder was carefully placed from one direction to control where the excess powder would fall, making sure for this to face the closest mirror. *Certain* by Darling x Shiomitsu was used to hold together the broken pieces of one of the mirrors panes towards the back, left hand side of the room. This break, variously covered in the previous two exhibitions, was now exposed in *Nothing*, like a wound in the space. The activation of the space in this way was particularly pertinent within this exhibition as the ballet studio as a site, abandoned, dated and broken was an apt figure

for the exploration of materiality and what material matters. The space itself is 'nothing' if not for the artists at this time inhabiting it.

Chapter 8

...AND TO DUST ALL RETURN

To detail the original contribution to knowledge of the PhD thesis this chapter will present a case study of the fourth exhibition in the U N N A W A Y series. Building on the research undertaken in the previous exhibitions this chapter will analyse how the fourth exhibition *...And To Dust All Return* (2016) can be understood through aspirational longing as detailed in Chapter 1. The significance of an embodied material practice in manifesting how we are connected to our material circumstances will be critically underpinned by the projects assertion of 'the politics of wanting things' as detailed in chapter 1. Five selected works from three artists from this exhibition will be analysed, these are: *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* Matt Welch (2016), *Awaiting Compression Below 2* and *Lamp (Platinum Life)* Anna Reading (2015) and *Sigh and Slip* Charlotte Cullen (2015). This will present the material relationships that manifest aspirational material choices in the art works. This will be contextualised in how they relate to historical art practices, including Minimalism, Anti-Form understood through Robert Morris, Arte Povera and the Young British Artists, specifically the work of Sarah Lucas. A relationship to sculptural traditions and material consideration will return to Lucy Lippard's 1968 essay *Eccentric Abstraction*. 'The politics of wanting things' will underpin this critical reflection in the way it manifests in the artists' material and formal considerations. Understood through a historical context of sculptural art practices I will locate the material and formal considerations made by the artists in this exhibition which moves beyond the art historical understanding.

The artworks in the U N N A W A Y exhibitions tacitly tease out complex material relationships through process and form. Lucy Lippard, writing in 1968 of the then newly burgeoning post-minimal art form which she titled *Eccentric Abstraction* (1968), described these works as 'allied to the nonformal tradition devoted to opening up new areas of materials, shape, colour, and sensuous experience.' (Lippard, 1971, p. 99). The works detailed in this chapter, and across the U N N A W A Y series, owe their heritage to the tacit material explorations undertaken by the artists of this period. I also understand the art works detailed in this chapter to come from a specifically British sensibility towards objects, language and presentation. This is presented in the material choices by the artists in their relationship to form or in the title or word play of an artwork. This British sensibility must be understood through the projects relationship to British social class and the social and political turmoil unfolding in the UK at this time which is detailed in Chapter 2. This is underpinned by the material nature of the unique site of the ballet studio in which the exhibitions took place. The projects relationship to social class in Britain asserts the political and socially classed relevance of Lucas' material practice because she understands the social importance and power of the stuff that makes up ones' identity. In understanding this Lucas' throws it back, unfixing it through humour or agitation. Herbert Read explains that it is an act such as this that gives art its social relevance. An aspirational material relationship manifest in art practice comes through life experience and social disadvantages. Material desire should not need to manifest as aspiration or longing but understanding this politics of wanting things through the tacit experience of art can highlight the social relevance of material disadvantage.

...*And To Dust All Return* (2016) (90-117) presented the work of 13 artists and included: *Sigh* (2015) and *Slip* (2015) (figure 111) Charlotte Cullen; *Continuous* (2015) (figure 103) Qian Qian; *Awaiting Compression Below 2* (2015) and *Lamp (Platinum Life)* (2015) (figure 105, 106) Anna Reading; *Unbalanced Seris (Unbalanced VII)* (2016) Byron Reece Jones; *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* (2016) and *Untitled, London* (2016) (figure 107, 110) Matt Welch; *Burnout* (2015) (figure 114) Ulijona Odišarija; *Hairpiece* (2016) (figure 112, 113) Olga Koroleva; *Between Waves* (2015) (figure 115) Andrea Williamson; *Referent* (2016) (figure 116) Puy Soden; *PEPPERSIMNET* (2016) *APOLLOWAX* (2016) *LEMONTIP* (2016) *BABYDNA* (2016) *LUCKDAILIES* (2016) Jack Fisher; *You Cannot say, or guess, for you know only A heap of broken images...* (2015) Paula Fleming; *I Dressed Up For You And You Never Even Saw Me* (2016) *Tell Me Did I Look Pretty* (2016) *Oh The Places You Will Go Sweet Heart* (2016) (figure) Jude Lin; *Message Massage* (2016) performed by Jee Lee (figure 101, 102).

The artist Matt Welch created a large water feature which ran the length of the U N N A W A Y exhibition space from mirror to mirror titled *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* (2016) for the exhibition ...*And To Dust All Return*. Welch's use of construction materials and the scale of the piece have formal similarities to the minimalist artists of the 1960's^{xxi}. Yet the materials are cheap and makeshift. Plastic drain runners arranged crudely to fit the space, mdf placed at intervals, hand formed air-dry clay was used to shape and hold the connecting rubber pipe which ran from one end of the piece to the other in order to pump the water around the structure. The clay is included in other areas of the form, this tactile intervention creates an embodied tacit intervention. Welch's *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* engages with the architecture of the U N N A W A Y exhibition space. Activating and connecting to the space Welch drew out and made use of unique details, such as the ability of the parallel mirrored

walls to create an infinity effect in the space. Like Morris' *Untitled (Corner Beam)*, (1964) (illustration 1) *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* is built into the exhibition space. The simplicity of Morris' *Untitled (Corner Beam)* redefined the relationship of viewing artwork. Being with an artwork created an awareness of the bodies relationship to the site of encounter. Welch's sculpture is active in the space and piece appears to revel in its materiality. This is more like Morris' later self-defined *Anti-Form* (Morris, R. 1968) works such as *Untitled (Dirt)* (1968) (Illustration 9) or his felt pieces in which he explored the qualities of his materials. Allowing the material to dictate the form Morris argued that 'Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders for things is a positive assertion' (Morris, 1993, p. 46) These soft materials of dirt and felt revealed the process of the art object.



Illustration 9. *Untitled (Dirt)* (Morris, 1968) (Morris & Artists Rights Society (ARS), Dia Art, 1968/2016)

Welch revels in the tactile evocativeness he can draw out through his uneven and incomplete clay. The craft quality air dry clay cracked and dried on the outside structure of the piece and remained wet and slip inside the plastic drain runners as they pumped water, which kept the clay from setting. The two finishes of the clay play off each other in the piece, wet and dry, immobile and cracked against fluid and changing, finished or unfinished. *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* asserts its own materiality as if to refuse the grand structural minimalist tradition it at first appears to reference through its scale. The choice to leave the clay and mdf bare draws out the material quality of the objects used creating a tacit awareness. The structural, everyday use of the materials makes the work clean and unfussy despite the tactile qualities of the piece. The sculpture is not decorative but nor is it entirely minimal which offsets the relationship between the form and content of the piece. These opposites in the material qualities and their use in the formal structure of the sculpture creates a delicate balance achieved by Welch through his restrained manipulation of hard materials and pliable form.

Welch's structure unfolds a complex set of relationships towards materials and objects which reflect how we long for different material choices. In this instance Welch may aspire to an idea of minimalist form but his use of cheaper materials corrupts the subject from a minimalist perspective. Such a reproduction of an inaccessible form is described by Lauren Berlant as coming from 'the need to *feel* normal' (Berlant, 2011, p. 180) and that this is manifest 'by economic conditions of nonreciprocity that are mimetically reproduced in households that try to maintain the affective forms of middle-class exchange while having an entirely different context of anxiety and economy to manage.' (Berlant, 2011, p. 180). In Berlant's terms Welch's *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* could be read as a manifestation of 'cruel

optimism' in its desire to reproduce that which it cannot attain. However, in this process Welch created a new set of relationships as manifest through his material choices. These are still formally and purposely composed though now tactile like the work of Keith Sonnier's Cloth Series *Untitled* (1967).



Illustration 10. Cloth Series *Untitled* (Sonnier, 1967) (Sonnier, n.d.)

The water feature at the heart of *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* was constructed to transplant an idea of a river or flowing water into the U N N A W A Y exhibition space. It was created so that the water would be continually flowing physically in the space, transported through a pump mechanism and pipes and also metaphorically through the reflection of the sculpture

in the mirrors. This body of water is central to both the work and the exhibition, positioned centrally in the space, it acts as a physical encounter. It is soothing and in continual motion. Like Sonnier, Welch's minimal structure belies the tactile materials of its construction. The soft rhythmic forms are tender while the everyday banality of the materials create a tactile accessibility. The soft light of Sonnier's sculpture softens the structure, emitting gentle shadows that is subtly bodily. The same subtle bodiliness is evoked in the gentle, rippling water, in *Fresh Kills (episode 2)*. The material choices Welch makes are complicated by his lack of access to materials. What results is a relation of aspirational material and what might be 'good enough' for now. These choices are not made in rejection of a minimalist aesthetic, *Fresh Kills (episode 2)* the piece is created out of what is necessary because of Welch's access to a particular set of materials.

Lucy Lippard curated the seminal exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966) in 1966, bringing together a number of artists whose sculptural practices were investigating new materials. These materials was increasingly affecting the form of their sculptural work. Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois were included in the exhibition. These artists were at different points in their careers. Bourgeois was established and had recently begun to make smaller sculptures in latex and other materials new to sculpture at the time. These were more organic and uncanny compared to her earlier wood sculptures. Eva Hesse was earlier in her career and had developed a sculptural practice from a painting background. She was similarly beginning to explore material led processes in the production of her sculptures. Hesse created repeated forms which were organic and chaotic. The work she exhibited in *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966) titled *Metronomic Irregularity* (1966) used cotton covered wire in a hectic action against neat panels which revealed ordered blank space on the wall.

Lippard writes about Bourgeois 1964 exhibition *Louise Bourgeois: Recent Sculpture* (1964) at the Stable Gallery New York in 1964 in her essay *Eccentric Abstraction*. Lippard explains that Bourgeois tactile sculptures had inspired the art work of the younger artists in the exhibition, like Hesse.

This sensuous description of Bourgeois' smaller sculptures in latex and cement is fittingly descriptive to the works of Anna Reading in the exhibition *...And To Dust All Return*, particularly Reading's piece *Awaiting Compression Below 2* (2015). A floor based silicone, plaster and wax sculpture is actually a mould intended to make a cast of another object. The processes and inverted materiality of the piece makes it uncanny while suggestively internal. On top of the piece is placed a clear Perspex sheet, trapping a compressed paper cup, a used plastic wine glass and a plastic six pack ring holder. To one side of the Perspex sheet is suctioned another organically shaped form which, without being able to touch, appears both rubbery yet hard like glass. This is attached to the underneath of the Perspex facing the floor so that what appears to be the bottom of the form is seen. Perhaps another left-over or in-process material it feels inorganic against the clear Perspex. Yet the sickly orange-yellow-brown colour and fluidity of its shape appears like a barnacle latching onto the plastic Perspex sheet, as if having made its home here amongst the waste of man-made debris materials. Yet this is decidedly man-made still, a further play between the materials and the relationship to nature Reading is creating. The Perspex appears to be an off-cut. It is scuffed and placed as if unkempt on top of the rock pool like mould, trapping waste plastic and paper between the flesh-like body of the mould and the hard, clear surface of the Perspex. The two materials bearing down and trapping the man-made waste. The organic form of the structure brings to mind the harshness of the man-made waste trapped

between its two surfaces and I am reminded of the damage man-made waste like plastic can cause. The choice in material is shrewd as plastic six can rings are largely evocative of the damage plastic waste has created in our oceans. Deformed turtles who have grown around the ring they are trapped in or birds strangled by the small ring caught around their neck are some of the main images we see in environmental campaigns, on the news or online. These waste materials also call to mind the daily street waste we might see in towns or cities across the UK. They are cheap and disposable. In an interview with Studio International artist Alice Channer talks about her use of materials

My start point for making sculpture is that there are no natural materials: all materials have been authored by humans. For my generation, this lump of concrete I am holding now is a rock, whereas, for previous generations, a rock would have been a lump of granite, or basalt, or alabaster.

(McLaughlin & Channer, 2016)

Understanding this shift in the materials available to artists across generations and what might constitute a natural source, plastic waste can be understood as a material that is widely accessible and recognisable. These cheap by-products show the cost of a disposable culture and have a particular resonance as we become more aware of the fact it will outlive us all. These are not decorative, beautiful or aspirational items but could be considered the result of a cheaper alternative to 'good life' ideas of socialising and drinking. Instead of a wine glass this is a cheap disposable plastic version, the six pack can rings come from beers bought in supermarkets or off licences and hardly reflect a positive or luxurious image.

Lauren Berlant writes about the relationships we create towards the materials available to

us, and the desire for something more past what we might have access to. In *Cruel Optimism* (2011) she writes 'what must remain veiled in order that a scene of social belonging may still be endured. Such euphemisms protect the vulnerable subjects and the social order that ejects them from appropriateness.' (Berlant, 2011, p. 187). Reading's material language manifests the implications of the materials widely accessible in our material culture, such as plastics While urgently bringing to the fore the impact these materials are having on the world around us.

The British artist Sarah Lucas' work uses cheap, foraged materials to say something about her class position. Sculptures made from stuffed tights reference the modernist heritage of art work by the likes of Henry Moore in her *NUDs* series (2009-2019). Lucas *Bunny* (1997) series was exhibited in *The Law* at St Johns Loft in London (1997), while an entire exhibition was dedicated to the slouched forms at Sadie Coles HQ in London at the same time in *Bunny Gets Snookered* (1997). These sculptures are assembled from everyday materials; a chair, tights, a clip; there is nothing hidden about their construction. Against the man-made materials and bodily suggestion this tactile form creates something of a sad scene en masse in *Bunny Gets Snookered*. An aspirational relationship to material is a nuanced manifestation of longing and disadvantage. The working-class assertiveness of Lucas' work is urgently relevant to discussion of material practice now because she understands the social importance and power of the stuff that makes up ones' identity. In understanding this Lucas' throws it back, unfixing it through humour or agitation. Herbert Read explains that it is an act such as this that gives art its social relevance. In *To Hell with Culture* (Read, 1941) Read asserts that 'It is not until art expresses the immediate hopes and aspirations of humanity that it acquires its social relevance.' (Read, 1941, p. 47). An

aspirational material relationship manifest in art practice comes through life experience and social disadvantages. Material desire should not need to manifest as aspiration or longing but understanding this politics of wanting things through the tacit experience of art can highlight the social relevance of material disadvantage. Reading's sculptural elements are pieced together from off cuts and casts as though in process or unfinished. Plastic waste materials are unceremoniously trapped within the structure rather than used throughout. *Awaiting Compression Below 2* draws from the works of Bourgeois, Hesse and Lucas, but is created under a different set of material considerations. Reading is making in a different historical moment which has informed the kind of material relevant to her practice.

The second work by Reading exhibited in *...And To Dust All Return was Lamp (Platinum Life)* (2015). This had a more direct use of found, scavenged, waste material. A large, bright green plastic bottle is held in place by waste polystyrene packaging (another non-recyclable product), a Vietnamese coffee pot balances on the top of the bottle while the structure is enclosed within a bare, upside-down lampshade. A clip-on lightbulb is attached to the bottom rim of the lampshade, lighting the piece by shining through the green plastic bottle. Emitting an eerie, rippling light. Within the purposely dimmed lighting of *...And To Dust All Return* this is particularly powerful. A melted, congealed formless by-product appears to drip from the top of the lampshade, yet is solid on closer inspection. An unopened take away sized packet of sweet chilli source sits on top of the polystyrene. Beneath the polystyrene is trapped a brochure whose front page reads *Platinum Life*, contradictory to the waste by-products above, yet a waste by-product itself.

The formal arrangement of the work could be likened to *Arte Povera*, the Italian art movement of the late 1960's – 1970's, which moved away from traditional sculptural materials to use found objects. Waste products and food stuff were also used in the UK by the Young British Artists in the 1990's. Sarah Lucas used fried eggs and a kebab in *Two Fried Eggs and A Kebab* (1992) (Illustration 4), invoking a specifically British wit typical of Lucas' work, making use of socially working-class British slang terms and suggestive imagery. Instead of waste decomposing, Reading's food stuff in *Lamp (Platinum Life)* is contained in a plastic sachet, vividly orange and durable far past the duration of exhibition. The use of waste materials and food stuff in *Lamp (Platinum Life)* is not about decomposition but exactly the opposite. The objects make up the after-life of cultural and consumer material; a large, empty, tattered bottle, a useless, naked lampshade, a worn coffee pot, an unopened takeaway food sachet, used polystyrene packaging. The 'Platinum Life' title on the cover of the unwanted booklet, trapped underneath the polystyrene, is an ironic reminder of the object choices we make through our longing and the negative impact and waste this creates.

I included two of my own works in the fourth exhibition titled *Slip* (2015) and *Sigh* (2015). *Sigh* (2015) was exhibited on the stairs leading into the gallery space and is a series of small sculptures. Small bags of cement are torn open at the top and automatic air freshener placed inside the dry cement mix. The tops of the air freshener designs poke out above the cement emitting air freshener at intervals or when passed on the stairs. The unworked cement is suggestive of a sculpture in process, the materials laid out and yet the bag remains a bag, the cement is not transformed. They are somewhat pathetic. Their threat of action and the lingering, cloying, synthetic aroma makes them hostile. The

material dictates the form and reveals the process in the art objects construction- *Slip* (2015) was exhibited within the exhibition space. It was made up of two large rocks supporting a strip of corrugated plastic roofing in a formal arrangement suggestive of a bench. This recalls modernist sculpture such as Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure* (1969-1970). A creamy, pale pink liquid oozed across the corrugated surface of the roofing strip, the weight of the fluid pressed down and altered its shape so that it bowed in the centre. The liquid dripped down onto the wooden floor as it reached the edge of the roofing, at the ends and at the centre, as the weight morphed and tipped the plastic just enough to allow the liquid to meet broken holes on one side. The pink liquid smelled floral yet synthetic, sensuous yet cheap and cloying. The formal arrangement also recalls Richard Serra's *Right Angle Plus One* (1969) which carefully balances industrial sheet material at precarious yet precise angles.

The pieces form is dictated by the materials, yet the formal arrangement of the body of the piece denies a complete turn to material essentialism. This use of material and formal opposites relates to Eva Hesse's *Addendum* (1967) (illustration 12). A bar is secured to the wall horizontal to the floor. This forms the base for seventeen spherical protrusions, each spaced systematically a little further than the previous, creating a gradual distance between the bulbous paper mâché shapes. A long length of rope, which tumbles organically to the floor, emits from each semi-sphere. The organic, flowing, chaotic form of the rope defies the structural simplicity of the central form, creating contrast in the piece. Using cheap, foraged materials *Slip* begins to say something about my social class position. *Down Below*

(Lucas, 1999) (Illustration 11)^{xxii} by Sarah Lucas has a similar aesthetic to *Slip*. It too is made with foraged materials and has an oozing pink liquid spilling from its structure onto the floor. An old, dirty bath tub looks out of place in a gallery setting in *Down Below* (1997). A thick pink substance escapes from the plug hole onto the floor. The title is suggestive of the human body and the bath a stand in for the female form.



Illustration 11. *Down Below* (Lucas, 1997) (Dziewior & Ruf, 2005, p. 85)

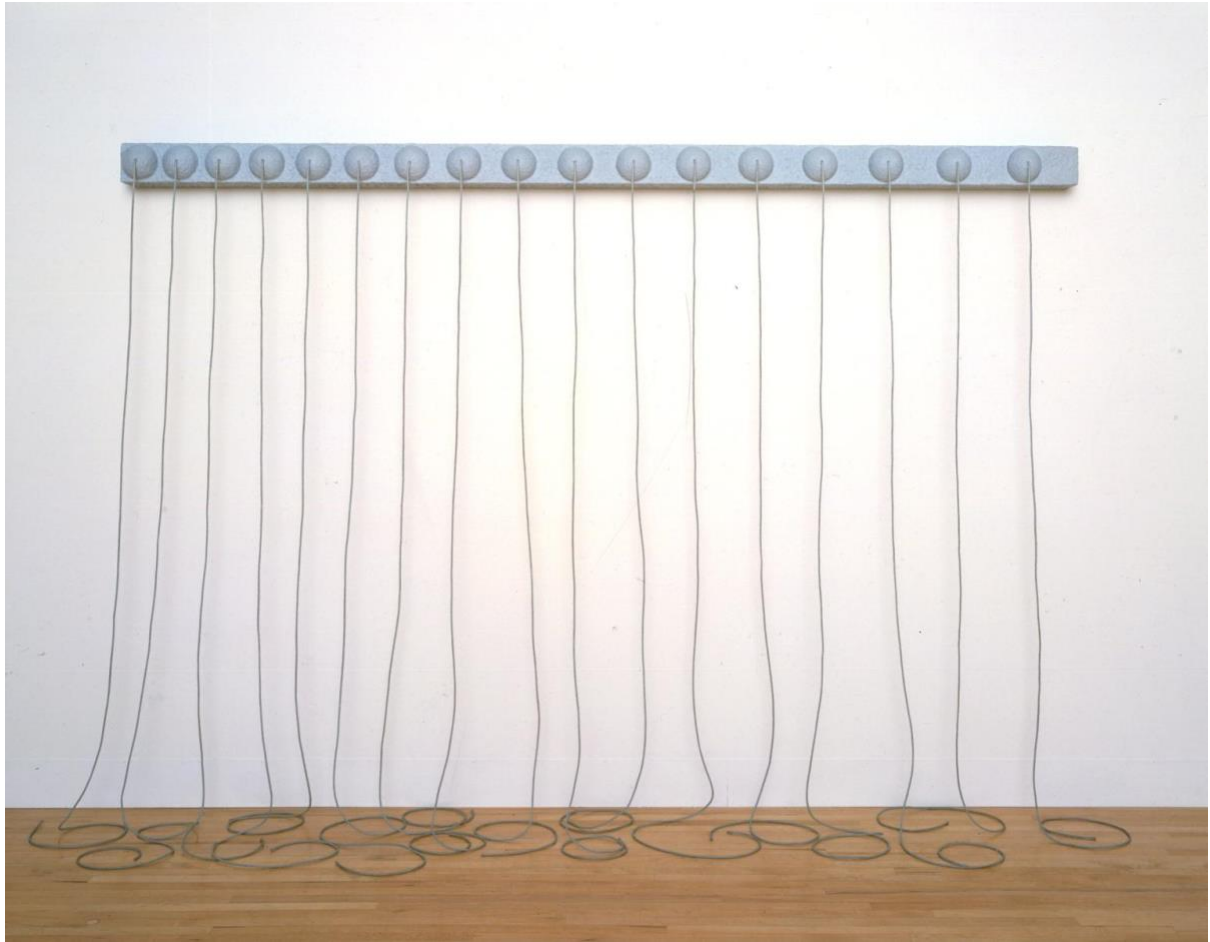


Illustration 12. *Addendum* (Hesse, 1967) (Wirth & Hauser, 2016)

CONCLUSION

In this practice led research I have presented the four-exhibition culmination of the artist-led curatorial project U N N A W A Y, which ran from October 2015 – January 2016. The project presented the work of 34 early to mid-career artists across a fast paced four-month period in a disused ballet studio in the town centre of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Many of the artworks presented in the exhibition engaged with historical minimalist sculptural form, though created through cheap, foraged materials. The precarity of the materials used revealed the economic precarity in which they were created. The exhibitions were framed around the same aspirational relationship to material and form, contextualised through the unique site of the ballet studio. The exhibitions took place during a time of political austerity enforced by the David Cameron led Conservative party, which has led to diminishing resources. This has caused uncertainty for artists and has impacted material modes of making. This aspirational use of materials can demonstrate ways in which artists and artist-led projects are operating in the UK today.

U N N A W A Y created a space in the town of Huddersfield to share and engage with art work which at times could be messy, experimental and large scale. Artists had the opportunity to create large scale envisaged projects or site responsive works or took the opportunity to present their work in the unique context of the dance studio. Students and the local art community could engage with art work, to experience the scale, crossovers, smells and noise of the exhibitions in a space that encouraged critical reflection. With little history of artist-led spaces in the town, and few other independent exhibition venues or projects U N N A W A Y created an ambitious project which develop communities and

engaged a large range of artists. Resources were focused into creating an ambitious, challenging series in which artists involved would be supported artistically and economically. A short project period encouraged a critical reflective awareness of the exhibitions output while developing out of necessity due to economic instability.

Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for A Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1989) located the specifically British social working-class relationship of longing. This central to understanding the aspirational material choices as they manifest in the art works and in the production of the exhibition programme itself. Lauren Berlant's theory of Cruel Optimism, that 'something you desire can be an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant, 2011) grounded a way to think through the material I was using in my own practice. This led into how I approached the curated exhibition series U N N A W A Y and the kind of material and formal considerations the exhibitions questioned and the kind of artworks exhibited. The importance of these texts to my own practical research in the U N N A W A Y curatorial project resides in what Steedman names her mother's 'proper envy' of those who have the material possessions she desires associated with a socially middle-class life as she understands it. Together these texts map the embodied, material nature of social class, desire and disadvantage which I have articulated as 'The Politics of Wanting Things'. The stuff that makes up our lives also signifies our place in the world. Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of consumer society in *Work Consumerism and the New Poor* (Bauman, 1998, 2004) mapped Bauman's 'faulty consumer' to expand on the politics of wanting things as understood through Steedman and Berlant. Berlant and Steedman's case studies are marked by their failure to attain the 'good life' fantasies of their society. Zygmunt Bauman describes this society as a 'consumer society' in *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*

(Bauman Z. , 1998, 2nd ed. 2004). This affective understanding of classed experience emphasises how experience is materially manifest. The kind of language one might use, the kind of clothing they might wear, the kind of materials one might aspire to consume, is shaped by their experiences and is materially visible. To understand this as marked by who has access to what things, or who is able to materialise their position in society politicises material choices. Material disadvantage is embodied in the subject, and aspirational material choices can further mark the subject as other – as the ‘faulty consumer’, as a ‘cruel optimism’, as the subjects ‘proper envy’.

An aspirational relationship to material is a nuanced manifestation of longing and disadvantage. Which could be understood as an act of self-assertion or an allegiance to ones’ aspirations over political self-interest. Discussion of social class and Britishness were present at the time of the U N N A W A Y exhibitions. Contextualised through the success of David Cameron’s Conservative Party victory during the 2015 general election which was run on the promise to hold a referendum on Britain’s membership of the EU. A fierce debate about social class in Britain, provoked by the bitter ‘Brexit’ campaign, was forming in late 2015. The working-class assertiveness of Lucas’ work is therefore more urgently relevant to discussion of material practice now because she understands the social importance and power of the stuff that makes up ones’ identity. In understanding this Lucas’ throws it back, unfixing it through humour or agitation. Herbert Read explains that it is an act such as this that gives art its social relevance. An aspirational material relationship manifest in art practice comes through life experience and social disadvantages. Material desire should not need to manifest as aspiration or longing but understanding this politics of wanting things

through the tacit experience of art can highlight the social relevance of material disadvantage.

We do not need to touch a sculptural work, or an object, to understand what it might feel like, many artists have explored this idea. Using fabrics that are familiar to the audience creates a sense of tactility which exists in our own lives. This returns to ideas of materiality and scavenged material and the importance of working in this way as part of the physical understanding of the work. We are still looking and understanding visually but using our own understanding and interpretation through our relationships to materials to understand the physicality and materiality of an object. Thinking only in aesthetics belies the way we actually look at and take in information. How we allow our own experiences to inform what we are seeing. This is an embodied experience. Through my embodied experience I recognised an aspirational relation to material manifest in my own practice. My socially working-class background has informed how I undertook the U N N A W A Y exhibition programme and how I have accessed the artworks I selected to exhibit. This relates to what materials I made use of, have access to or understand how to use. In curating the project, I moved the art works, touching and feeling them, carrying them, seeing the back or underside which is not usually on view. This was a different, privileged relationship to the artworks and enhanced how I was able to understand them. I developed ways to share this experience with the audience, teasing out the complex material nature of the art works exhibited. For example, with Puy Soden's *Where's the Ouch?* (Soden, 2015) in the second exhibition. The piece was three dimensional with material detail throughout. Although it was light, the physicality of the material and depth of process gave the artwork a sense of weight when placed on the floor. This brought the audience down to engage with the work.

The act of curating the exhibitions was physical and materially aware and was an embodied tacit process in itself.

The originality of the U N N A W A Y project to articulate its specific social and political position has made manifest the embodied, material nature of class, desire and disadvantage in the art works exhibited and in the projects realisation. The project has mapped the importance of an artists lived experience in understanding how they make an art work; in the material choices they make, the processes they engage in and in the histories they reference. These conditions define how an artwork is created. If these conditions are not understood or cut loose from the work something significant is lost. The project asserts the social importance and power of the stuff that makes up ones' place in the world. The politics of wanting things is inherent in how an artist comes to and understands the material they are engaging with.

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ⁱ According to the University of Huddersfield 'About us' page on their website

<https://www.hud.ac.uk/about/> (n.d.) accessed 20/11/18

ⁱⁱ (ROTOR, n.d.) <https://research.hud.ac.uk/institutes-centres/st/rotor/> accessed 20/11/18

ⁱⁱⁱ In writing about the working-class child Berlant references *Landscape for A Good Woman: A Tale of Two Lives* (Steedman, 1986), Berlant writes in her notes 'Steedman performs a like congeries of ambivalence silence, and secrecy entangled in her experience of the transactions of parental love in her working-class household in *landscape for a Good Woman*'.

^{iv} I began my research into feminist theory by questioning what it means to become a woman. The idea of 'becoming Woman' originates with Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1989, c1952), in which she declared 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1989, c1952). De Beauvoir challenged biological determinism with the idea of social construction by tracing the history and treatment of women and woman's subordinate role as 'the other' in relation to 'the one' (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1989, c1952) that is to say original sex, that is man. I was interested in the ways in which this becoming takes shapes and how I could explore this through material in my practice, the basis of which could be understood by de Beauvoir's reflection on the body as a situation; that the body reflects our understanding of our position in the world, de Beauvoir states 'The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project'. Feminist theorists have expanded on de Beauvoir's original text (see Grosz, E. 1994, Irigary, L. 1985, Haraway, D. 1994). Monique Wittig extends this enquiry by challenging the heterosexual determinism in understanding woman in relation to man, she argues 'The discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality.' (Wittig, M, 1980/1992 p.24). The categories of women and men, Wittig argues, must disappear in order to free society of heterosexuality (Wittig, M, 1980 29-30), this, she asserts, has been accomplished by lesbians because lesbians do not enter into the defining social contract with men, which is marriage, to which Wittig proclaims 'Lesbians are not women.' (Wittig, M, 1980/1992 p.32). Judith Butler extends this enquiry by challenging heteronormative subjectivity and examines the erasure of people who are outside of the fixed identities of male or female, including: gay, lesbian, trans-gender and other queer identities, or can be understood politically to not identifying with political or social positions and contracts, for example marriage. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler writes that 'collective disidentifications can facilitate a reconceptualisation of which bodies matter, and which bodies get to emerge as critical matters of concern' (Butler, J. 1993). Butler expands on the becoming woman in her writing on 'gender performativity' (Butler, J. 1999) and proposes methods to dispel the social construction of gender to create *Gender Trouble* (Butler, J. 1999), an example Butler details is that of drag, suggesting that the act of drag performance is an opportunity to challenge the accepted performance of gender not original to begin with, Butler describes this as to 'reveal the "original" as a failed "copy"'. (Butler, J. 1999).

^v See below.

^{vi} see for example *Eccentric Abstraction* (Lippard, *Eccentric Abstraction*, 1966), and the *Young British Artists*, see for example *The Law* (Lucas, *The Law*, 1997) and *Bunny Gets Snookered* (Lucas, 1997)^{vi} which will be detailed below in the chapter *Aspiration, Material and Form* (page 18).

^{vii} A number of different titles were considered to name this including: ABC Art, Primary Structures and 'literalist art' (Fried, 1967; 1998),

^{viii} Lucas' mum was working stuffing teddies at the same time Lucas' was developing her *Bunny* (1997) sculpture, made of stuffed tights placed on chairs.

^{ix} whose sculptures are included in Lucy Lippards *Eccentric Abstraction* (Lippard, 1971)

^x Rasmussen, M B. argues that the APG confirmed "the traditional, Romantic role of the artist." and that the 'incidental person' "looked remarkably similar to... the artist... in bourgeois capitalist society."

^{xi} Made after Hockney refused Sarah Lucas his lighter at an exhibition *Private View* (Abbot, 2013)

^{xii} 'ROTOR is an on-going programme of art and design exhibitions at Huddersfield Art Gallery; founded on a partnership between the gallery and the School of Art, Design and Architecture.' (ROTOR, n.d.)

^{xiii} See *Trading Places* (2015) curated by Joshua Parker at 12o Collective Project Space, Stoke Newington <https://www.artrabbit.com/events/trading-places-10> or the *Wellness and Motivational Centre* (2016) curated by Karl Sims in Leeds <http://wmcenter.info>. These projects, both curated by white, straight, cis men address themes of capitalism and ways for artists to operate within a capitalist and neoliberal system. Each charged artist's £3 to submit despite artists who were selected receiving no financial help and promotional material placing significant importance on the role of the curator over the role of the artists.

^{xiv} See the exhibitions above: *Trading Places* (2015) was hosted in 12o Collectives living room, the *Wellness and Motivational Centre* (2016) had the use of an East Street arts temporary space for free.

^{xv} Exhibitions can be expensive to host, but many of the projects that I have seen employ this method are already operating from a space that has been secured for free. See above.

^{xvi} Sean Worrall, artist and director of artist-led project space *Cultivate Vyner Street* says in the article '...it is resulting in more conservative shows, shows in which only a certain type of art or artist is getting to show'. (Hutchinson, 2016)

^{xvii} CuratorSpace is a website that shares artist opportunities, they describe themselves as 'a project management toolkit for curators, organizers, galleries, and artists.' CuratorSpace has since updated their website to include artist and curator profiles and now have a pricing structure which was not in place at the time U N N A W A Y used the website.

<https://www.curatorspace.com/about>

^{xviii} ^{xviii} in which Antoni shaped 600 lbs of chocolate and 600lbs of lard with her mouth and displayed 130 lipsticks and 27 heart-shaped chocolates made from the gnawed materials respectively.

^{xix} Pointe work began in the 18th Century. It is severely damaging to the dancers' feet and often leaves dancers with broken bones, bunions, blisters and cuts. Pointe work ballet shoes regularly only last one pointe work performance, of which there can be several in one ballet and need to be replaced often during one night's performance.

^{xx} ^{xx} My own despite borrowing a laptop from the University of Huddersfield as the borrowed laptop could not support the continual display of a video and froze a number of

times during the exhibition opening. I opened the video file onto my laptop which I had with me and placed it in the exhibition in place of the other laptop and continued to use this during other events of the exhibition.

^{xxi} such as Robert Smithson's *Mirror and Shelly Sand* (1970)

^{xxii} First exhibited in *The Law* (1997) (Illustration 3), and later edited and represented in *Beautiness* at Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin (1999).