

**Ephemeral traces of 'alternative space': the
documentation of art events in London 1995-2005,
in an art library**

Jacqueline Cooke

**Thesis Submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Fine Art)
Goldsmiths, University of London**

October 2007

Abstract

This research is based on reflexive practice as a subject librarian for visual art, concerned with representation (of artists) and context (of art practice and its representation) in the academic library, as a heterotopia.

My thesis is that the aim to create an 'alternative' art space remained operative in London between 1995 and 2005, although the term was decried. The research addresses the problem of documentation of transient contemporary art practices, by collecting and analysing ephemera and developing a resource based upon them. Art ephemera are by-products of institutions, galleries, exhibitions, and curatorial activities that may be significant in terms of criticality but which are often not recorded adequately and remain un-archived. The strategies of representation that ephemera mobilise take place at an interface of art aims and social structures, an area that has been a vital site of contemporary practice.

I review major issues in contemporary criticism of the 'avant-garde' and 'alternative', showing the discourse of the alternative to be an ethical discourse about practice.

Identifying citation as means of interpretation, I draw my account from a reading of ephemera in the chapters: "Citation, marginalia, mockery, fakes and tailpieces" where I identify visual and textual qualities of ephemera, "Artists, spaces and institutions," where I present the themes of mapping London and self-institutionalisation, and "Counter to ?" where I report a distancing from counter-cultural aims and development of complex alternatives.

I evaluate existing collections of art ephemera in libraries, projects to facilitate access to them, and cataloguing and collecting policies. I advocate use of catalogues to re-contextualise ephemera. In conclusion, I present a complex notion of 'alternative space' in art practice as a space for dialogue with, rather than opposition to established institutions and circuits of contemporary art and I endorse collection of ephemera as a source for diverse histories.

Contents

Abstract.....	2
Contents	4
List of illustrations	5
Output of practice.....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
Aims, objectives and outputs	8
Art ephemera and ‘alternative space’	10
The database catalogue.....	17
Contributions to art curating, archives management and art librarianship.....	18
Notes on the scope of the thesis	23
2: The alternative, the avant garde and the artist-run space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Definitions of ‘alternative’ space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Terminology and categorisation.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Residues of the historical avant-gardes and their failure	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Citation, marginalia, mimicry, mockery, fakes and tailpieces	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Art ephemera as documentation of alternative spaces	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Particular qualities of art ephemera.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Citation in ephemera.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4. Artists, spaces and institutions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Literature on alternative and artist-run spaces in London in the 1990s	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Artist-run spaces in London: a consideration of sources	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Alternative Space revisited	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Mapping London.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Artists and institutions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5. Counter to ?.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Knowledge economy as context.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The question of contingency	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The question of commodification	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The questions of politics and protest.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6. The alternative collection in the repository (utopia and heterotopia)	Error!
Collecting in practice.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The need for theoretical reflection	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Documentation and history	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Collecting in theory	Error! Bookmark not defined.
7. Cataloguing in the repository: context and relationships	Error! Bookmark not defined.

De-contextualisation, contextualisation and re-contextualisation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Relative values	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Library catalogues	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Artist's files and ephemera in art libraries.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Collaborative projects.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8. 'Ephemeris' in practice.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Ephemeris	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Crossing disciplines, knowing the rules	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Cataloguing as representation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
My research databases	Error! Bookmark not defined.
9. Contention, complicity, failure: a complex alternative space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Discourses of the alternative.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Aims and Strategies of alternative space.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Heterotopia: space for alternative voices.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Complex alternative space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Documentation of alternative space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bibliography	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 1.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
List of collections, portals and projects	Error! Bookmark not defined.
List of cataloguing and metadata resources.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 2.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 3.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Model collection policy for an art ephemera collection	Error! Bookmark not defined.

List of illustrations

- Figure 1: Johnny Spencer. *Critical Space*. 1993, card. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 2: Bank 'Mask of Gold', 1997, poster.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 3: Text based art space, c.1999. beer mat.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 4: Inventory, 'Smash this puny existence', 1999, card [publication announcement]
.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 5: Hogarth. Tailpiece to catalogue of Society of Artists exhibition, 1761**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 6: FN (1999 *Articultural Show*, programme, sheep currency note and ticket.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 7: Engaged vol. 3. Public Lavatory [QT Virtual Reality], 1995**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 8: Dafna Ganani 'Jaffa Bollywood', 2005, still.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 9: MW Projects, 2005
- Figure 10: Hales Gallery, Deptford, 2002.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- Figure 11: The Tea Building, 2005**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 12: Entrance to Temporary Contemporary, 2006**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 13: There is always an alternative, 2006, installation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 14: 'Life/live', 1996, book jacket**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 15: Anna Best. 'Occasional sightings', 2003, leaflet**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 16: Nils Norman. Hackney playscape complex A, 2003, flyer/poster**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 17: Platform, nos. 19, 2000 & 42, 2004, tickets/cards**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 18: Platform, 2005.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 19: Info Centre, 'Space 1999', invitation card .**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 20: Info Centre, former doorway, 2006.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 21: Emma Hedditch. A political feeling, I hope so, 2004, flyer**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 22: Cubitt, during 'Public Library', 2005.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 23: Cubitt, 'Public Library' 2005, installation.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 24: San Precario. Image by Chainworkers Crew, 2005, badge**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 25: Johnny Spencer. *Inquiry Unit*, 2001, freestanding panels.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 26: Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, 2003**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 27: Bojan Sarcevic.' Irrigation-fertilisation', Salon3, 2001, flyer/poster [detail]**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 28: Gunilla Klingberg, 'Tesco bag', 1999.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 31: Bank. 'Bonkers bird etc.', 1996, poster, limited ed. no. 965**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 32: xpo destructo, 1999, flyer**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 33: DMZ Media Arts Festival, 2003, flyer.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 34: fat, 'Work' demonstration announcement, 1994, flyer**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 35: Roman Vasseur, *St George's Estate, Shadwell*, 2004, poster**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 36: INS. Sic transit pass, 2001, ticket**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 37: AAA. 'Extra terrestrial cinema', 1999, flyer**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 38:Info Centre. Newsletter no. 6, 2000 [extract]**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 39: Naomi Salaman. Changed pressmarks of the Private Case, 1999, microfilm**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 40: Jonathan Adamson. Proposal for an unrealisable sculpture, 1995, A4 paper.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 41: B+B 'Archive', c.2005, web page.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 42: Arlis.net. Search results for "ephemera", October 2006**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- Figure 43: European-art.net, entry for an artist (Josephine Pryde), 2006**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 44: Writing as a curator – ‘East London Galleries: excerpts from Ephemerais’, 2005, a librarian’s artist’s book and introductory narrative **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 45: Writing as a librarian –metadata, from an early draft of ‘Ephemerais’ for item see Figure 32 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 46: Dublin Core Metadata table..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 47: Sample catalogue entry for a private view card **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 48: Entrance to 108 Roseberry Avenue, 2003.. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 49: Jacqueline Cooke ‘MH, 1999’, 2000 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

All items of ephemera are from the ‘Ephemerais’ collection.

All images of exteriors of venues are from the ‘Ephemerais’ database.

Output of practice

Collection of private view cards, press releases and other ephemera from London 1995-2005: ‘Ephemerais’

Cards database: a mapping of art events in London 1999-2001, using ephemera

Venues database: a mapping of galleries, institutions and sites of contemporary art in London 1995-2005

1. Introduction

This research is carried out as practice-based research in art librarianship and as art curating (in a library). The main subject is ephemera in art libraries. It has several other subjects: contemporary art in London 1995-2005, ephemera as an art medium and as a source of diverse histories, ephemera in art archives, the un-archived¹, citation and mimesis as visual and textual strategies, the ideology of 'alternative space', the library as a 'heterotopia',

The project is academic in scope, and individual in scale in terms of time and resources used. It is cross-disciplinary across art, curating, librarianship and archives management. The structure of the written thesis is mimetic of my practice as a librarian; going from establishing background knowledge, close reading of the items, deciding authority and subject headings, collection development, to cataloguing and review, in sequence. I deploy citation, a library-related technique, as my theoretical and methodological tool. The account shifts from descriptions of particular places in London to representational space, to informational space and to the library.

In what follows I will explain my methodology in the practice and in the text, my choice of subject matter, my reasons for collecting ephemera, how this produces my philosophical-ideological position on 'the alternative space' and how this relates to my take on cataloguing art ephemera. I also indicate the limitations of the project.

¹ In the sense of art practices which are un-recorded, undocumented at the time, and without records or documentation placed in repositories, see chapter 6.

The 'artist-run' space was a celebrated feature of the contemporary art milieu in London during the 1990s. Such spaces were appreciated for the vitality they brought to the scene, but, in the latter part of the decade, criticised for their failure to live up to their radical antecedent, the 'alternative space'. I argue that the aim to create 'alternative space' remains operative in the period 1995-2005, in London, although the term had been decried. The period as well as the galleries and other spaces covered in the thesis are inadequately historicised. I identify the public devaluation of the concept 'alternative space' as a problem set by the dominance of a 'plausible narrative'² and, as such, a reduction of possibilities. The creation of an 'alternative space' is often a practical move by artists rather than a theoretically motivated one and such spaces are usually connected to real spaces; but, deployed strategically, 'alternative space' is related to practices which work critically on how art and its institutions themselves operate.

Aims, objectives and outputs

The aims of the project are: to map sites of the circulation of contemporary art in London in the period 1995-2005, to describe a specific milieu of artist-run and 'alternative spaces', and to focus, within that milieu, on specific art practices which use ephemera as an integral component of their work. I aim to represent complex artistic strategies related to the contestation of space. I explore the potential of ephemera as a medium to describe, and often problematise 'space' for art (space being understood symbolically in social and political terms as something that is produced and contested). Rather than see ephemera all

² Real history therefore - mutable, heterogeneous, indeterminate - is kept prisoner in its own dungeons while a more coherent imposter (a more plausible narrative) takes public command and dispenses judgements. (Burgin, 1986, 159)

as ‘evidence,’ as performative documents or as art objects, I aim, through citationality (repetition which alters)³, to read ephemera as documentation of contexts. I aim to investigate the potential of dematerialised spaces: the ‘alternative space’ for art, and the library as ‘heterotopia’⁴, as creative mediums and I conceive the library as a site of re-contextualisation, or a place that disperses centralised power. Specifically I aim to question the value of the existing dominant Marxian art history⁵ of the ‘alternative space’ in this period by presenting it alongside other interpretations of ‘alternative space’ and other ideological allegiances.

The objectives of the project are: To make a collection of contemporary art ephemera that can subsequently be deposited in a library and will encourage and facilitate serious research into the period in question, to review existing art historical and critical treatments of the artistic ‘alternative space’ in this period and to contribute to the understanding of contemporary art practices, to review a wide range of existing collections of contemporary art ephemera in libraries and archives together with methods of cataloguing and provision of access to them (and to consider these as practices of digital re-contextualisation), to produce proposals for the development of art ephemera collections in libraries.

The outputs of the research project are: a collection of art ephemera from London 1995-2005 (the collection), a database providing mediated digital access to part of the

³ Drawing from Jacques Derrida’s conception in *Signature, Event and Context* (1988), the concept of citationality is deployed to understand the alternative as a constantly open, dynamic re-contextualisation.

⁴ Heterotopia’ is a Foucaultian term applied to libraries amongst other ‘other’ spaces in the essay *Of other spaces* Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 1986). See chapter 6.

⁵ Exemplified by Julian Stallabrass, 1997 and 1999. See chapter 2.

collection from 1999-2001 (the catalogue), a review and discussion of the subject matter and a subjective account of a particular milieu; as a focus for the wider issues considered (the thesis).

Art ephemera and ‘alternative space’

Working as a subject librarian for visual art,⁶ it was my aim to represent a wide and inclusive range of contemporary artists, art practices and art works in the library, which were and would continue to be relevant to ongoing study and research in art and visual cultures. By 2001 when this research project began, some difficulties were apparent, one being the question of how to provide access to documentation of contemporary art practices that were in some way time-based or dematerialised (in the senses of consisting of concepts, interactions⁷ and other issues explored in chapters 4 and 5), and practices that happened outside established institutions and/or were not object-based. In these areas of practice where many artists and curators are active at an early stage of their career and some continue to work, exhibitions, events and curatorial activities are often not recorded adequately and remain un-documented, un-archived and inadequately historicised. These activities may be significant for many reasons, particularly in terms of criticality, I present the possibility of a continuing, complex and contradictory ‘alternative space’ in art, based on a close reading of selected items of ephemera which contextualise art events.

⁶ a position I held at Goldsmiths from 1999-2007

⁷ Later widely termed ‘relational aesthetics’ after Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998), trans. to English as *Relational aesthetics* (2002).

Familiarity with artists who were forming and running institutions and producing printed matter, prompted me to think about ephemera as source material for the history of art practices. I made a collection of art ephemera that record a wide range of events that existed in London between 1995 and 2005. My aim was to collect the necessary critical mass of ephemera to become an effective source for this and further, undefined research by others. The collection was in acquisition mode until 2005 and is intended to remain open to additions of items from that period indefinitely. Completeness is not anticipated. During the research period it grew to contain around 10,000 items. The forms of ephemera collected include exhibition announcements: 'private view cards', preview cards, invitation cards, e-mails (included as print-outs) and also artists' statements, press releases, novelties such as badges and coasters, printed leaflets and programmes, tickets, posters and web sites, distributed to announce, publicise or give information about an event. Exhibition documentation and publications available only from galleries or from individuals are also included as are small magazines and leaflets that are not intended to be ephemeral⁸, but which are published informally. Whilst the collection was intended to include material from all galleries that showed contemporary art in London in this period, to 'map' the extent of activities in that field, its focus was intended to be on a specific milieu, that of so called 'independent', 'alternative spaces' and 'artist-run' galleries. There was continuous interest from students and researchers in these types of institution, and limited research, based on comparatively few case studies⁹. The collection is

⁸ Termed 'grey literature' in libraries rather than 'ephemera' these are an important documentary resource on the subject and one that libraries often fail to collect comprehensively.

⁹ See chapter 4.

inextricably linked with my theoretical purpose: it is intended to record a mass of activity, as documentation of a mutable and heterogenous history.

Contemporary art ephemera may be produced as a side effect of art, or have a supplemental relationship to it. Ephemera are recognised as a primary source of ‘alternative’ art histories, as argued by Julie Ault.¹⁰ Art ephemera may also be produced as integral components of art; as documentation, record, object, representation or notes. Ephemera may operate as independent works for which there is no other expression or they may, as Jean-Marc Poinot¹¹ remarks “embody the memory of the work” (Poinot, 2006, 66). Such ephemera may, or may not be, conceived of or designed by artists, curators or designers. It is generally accepted that documentation is an important art-historical source of art practices, as Poinot summarises “because of the dematerialisation of art and the fact that many artistic activities in the field of the contemporary visual arts are ephemeral or non-permanent” (66), However, already, by 1995, the technique of embodying radical strategies in mundane printed objects, influenced by the practices of Fluxus, conceptual and mail-art, had been overwhelmed by its own excess or superfluity and the profuse development of a multi-levelled art market. This crisis led to the mimetic re-iteration, which I identify as a ‘citation’, of the traditional documentary, commercial and political formats and styles of ephemera shown in this thesis.

¹⁰ A major source on the subject of art ephemera as documentation of art practice is *Alternative art New York 1965-1985*, edited by Julie Ault (Ault, 2002a). This was, at the time of my research, the only existing attempt to write a comprehensive history of ‘alternative’ art practices in a particular place and time and a primary authority for my project.

¹¹ Jean-Marc Poinot is Director of the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA), was a curator of the Paris Biennale 1971 and has written extensively and lucidly on art archives, ephemera and mail art.

Art activities that were happening outside established institutions in London in the late 1990s have some similarities with, and even historical allegiances to, what Ault describes as the “ad hoc, time-based or anti-institutional” (Ault, 2002b, 1-2) ‘alternative’ initiatives of New York in the later 1960s and the ‘alternative spaces’ associated with them. However, critical literature of the mid-1990s put this relationship with such earlier ‘alternative spaces’ or ‘artist-run spaces’ into doubt. My investigation of the ideologies of ‘alternative space’ begins (chapter 2) with a summary of critical literature on art historical relationships between the ‘alternative’ and the ‘avant-garde’. I discuss theories of socially active art, reception and radical temporality (with their origins in Marxian theories on the avant-garde), used to criticise the validity of ‘alternative spaces’ in London in the late 1990s. As alternative ideological interpretations, I introduce, and endorse the view of David Graeber (2001) that the legacy of the early 20th century avant-garde art movements overshadows an alternative (anarchistic) avant-garde trace, revealed by looking at ‘alternative spaces’ as organisations. I add to the themes he identifies, of opposition to the official art academies as institutions of centralised power, the principles of autonomy, self-organisation and mutual aid, other issues found repeatedly in the fragmentary literature about alternative spaces (articles, conference papers, statements and ephemera): pragmatic issues, individual needs, and responses to specific situations which can be motivations as much as political intentions are. I identify the category ‘artist-run’ space as indicating aims of autonomy, self-organisation and pragmatic mutual aid without the connotations of radicality and political motivation which the category ‘alternative space’ alludes to, through its association with both early 20th century avant-

gardes and late 20th century ‘alternative spaces’ but nevertheless identify continuing criticality.

Some modes of criticism are more operative than others, in this period. The way to understand these is to be guided by Marxist critique because the concepts and language which are employed in them have been developed there. I introduce the ‘knowledge-based economy’ as context,¹² and consider the themes of ‘countering commodification’, citation of strategies of politics and protest, and ‘exit’, drawn from my selection of ephemera. I show that the deployment of ‘alternative space’ has itself become an element of art practice and I discuss artistic strategies of opposition to what Ault calls ‘mercantile circuits’ of art exchange, of institutional critique and of ‘critical space’¹³. Marxism remains a relevant and persuasive ideology, and one that is part of the milieu described, however, the predominance of Marxian critique evident in existing literature and in art practices is a problematic ‘plausible narrative’ which emphasises an oppositional, dialectical stance. Taking Marxism as the dominant narrative of the ‘alternative space’, I present alternative views in a way that is consistent with my own liberal, individualist, occasionally feminist ideological position and my heterotopic practice in the library.

My argument for a complex alternative space is developed from Martin Beck’s analysis in his essay *Alternative: Space*, where he observes that ‘alternative spaces’ are material and symbolic spaces which reflect interrelationships between the conditions of their

¹² A widely used term, Marxian and economically deterministic in origin, in which art is understood as a form of ‘dematerialised labour’.

¹³ These practices may be seen as conceptualism’s legacy of critique (Alberro, 2005)

production and the material qualities of the space (Beck, 2002, 76). Such interrelations can be easily productive; the whitewashed walls of formerly industrial premises re-used as studios became the familiar background to ‘open studios’ in London in the 1980s and evoke an ambience of warehouse shows, but I propose that the interrelations, in practices of the late 1990s in London, may be of a more complex and uneasy kind, as criticality becomes distanced from oppositional or counter-cultural positions. In chapter 4, I provide a history of ‘alternative spaces’ in London and I revisit the idea of ‘alternative space’ by considering the re-use of buildings, mapping London and self-institutionalisation as examples of practices in which it is deployed. I build evidence for recognition of complex ‘alternative space’ (chapter 5), produced in art practices that show degrees of both complicity and opposition to existing narratives. Such a space is both compatible with other conditions, and a space where artists’ claim to authority about art is asserted.

In the thesis, I offer a subjective account of a specific milieu. I use a database catalogue as a means of widely surveying, describing and retrieving information about artists, art works and galleries from London from 1995-2005. Within this wider milieu, I focus on particular practices and art works which are illustrated by selected pieces of ephemera drawn from the wider collection. My selection of items is made from the work of artists, most of whom I knew personally, and with many of whom I had had some interaction usually related to documentation of their art practice in the library. Much of this ephemera was narrow-cast, rather than broadcast. The works selected had in common that they were intended to the viewer’s understanding of space, suggesting the theme of complex ‘alternative space,’ and they also shared some political references outlined above. My subjective engagement is cited in the thesis as a repetition of the way that the

art-world is formed of and by social networks and their allegiances. There is some disjunction between this engagement and a more objective, professional authority. My position might be considered paradoxical (I use my authority to take material into the library which would otherwise be excluded from it and I draw conclusions from that same material) but this paradox is intrinsic to my aims. My account is no more intended to be authoritative than the collection is. It is a re-contextualisation, a reinterpretation. There are other stories that might have been told, other alternatives. To indicate this, five additional images are included which refer to alternative spaces beyond the bounds of my research. These are figs. 1 *Critical Space* (theoretical space), 7 *Public Lavatory* (virtual reality), 8 *Jaffa Bollywood* (identity and geo-politics), 39 *Utopia* (classical conceptual art) and 40 *Changed Pressmarks of the Private Case* (Foucaultian methodology).

I am concerned in this research with how ephemera represent art practice metonymically, after they have reached the repository. I put their performative association with the 'event' in doubt and read ephemera primarily through citation. Derridean deconstruction (philosophy) ideologically and philosophically influenced me and helped me to find a way of carrying out my purpose. My argument refers to the effects of deconstruction, mobilising citationality in order to continue to dismantle preconceptions about the nature of art ephemera and challenge ideas of the relationship between the document and the event, the material and dematerialised and ideas of alternative space. Mass activity is recorded through a diverse set of (material) objects, artist statements and anything that marks the event – which is indicative of the event and also its expansion, or dispersal. In this way, citationality is deployed to explore how the infinity of context is productive as a librarian-curatorial medium.

The database catalogue

One of the objectives of the thesis is to explore the digital mediation of a collection through library-generated means. A database catalogue is used represent the complex relationships amongst what remains a fragmentary, discontinuous and plural set of material and a research subject with similar qualities. The use of digital metadata makes it possible to “structure the unstructured while preserving flexibility”¹⁴.

The material collection is filed in order of the date received, and to browse this file can give an impression of events happening at a particular time, including both single artist’s and group shows. The database catalogue is called *Ephemeris*. It has two parts: a detailed catalogue of ‘cards’ which are items from London from the years 1999-2001 and a database of ‘venues’. The venues interface also draws on items from the cards database (it is a relational database), to show events which happened at that site. The catalogue provides access to the collection by name, themes, categories of art space, areas, and post-codes. Longer descriptions, curatorial statements and references to published sources are included and provide more scope for free-text searches. By sorting the cards, or venues, by different criteria, different groupings are produced. This process of gathering and recording context is a library/curatorial practice. Considering that the artwork, be it ephemeral or not, conveys meaning, putting it in a database, adds more meaning, an added digital layer, the metadata.

When I used this resource as a means of surveying, describing and retrieving information about artists, art works and galleries, the connections made between events, networks of

¹⁴ Manuel Castells’ phrase (Castells, 2000).

people and themes suggested possible themes for the thesis, some of which were used, some of which, such as ‘the end of the world in 2000’ remain unexplored. The catalogue shows the scale and complexity of the contemporary art terrain. The detail and quantity of information which become accessible through this means provide new knowledge.

During the course of the research, the ‘venues’ database became a more visually oriented curatorial site, intended to provide an interface to the collection, and a navigable, digital representation of London. I added photographs of sites to it. These images show the facades of buildings, sometimes galleries, sometimes ‘past spaces’ no longer the place described in the metadata. The images refer to the city of London and the way areas and buildings change, are adapted and re-used and they represent memories, or traces of events. That the spaces are no longer extant, is another definition of ‘alternative space’.

Contributions to art curating, archives management and art librarianship

I contribute to understanding of contemporary art curating, archives management and art librarianship in this research, while remaining situated in art librarianship. The three categories are mutually supportive. They each make a relationship between text and visual material. Here, I summarise these contributions:

Art curating

Contemporary art curators make interventions and interpretations. Subjective positions and theoretical purposes are stated, or cited and become part of their public identity. The sense of the importance of visual impact is far stronger in contemporary art curating than in librarianship or archives management, and this enabled me to develop a more extensive and meaningful visual resource in the venues database. Curating itself is

understood as a creative practice meaning that methods and strategies are more likely to be used creatively, rather than in standardised ways. Thinking as a curator allowed me to be more explorative. One example is that deviation from standard cataloguing procedures would be improper in research in librarianship but acceptable in art practice. Another example is the way that I refer to citation, both traditional, academic sense and as a visual strategy (introduced in chapter 3 *Mimicry, mockery, fakes and tailpieces*). Whilst academic, textual citation conforms to the requirement for precise, acknowledged repetition, visual citation deploys allusion, adaptation and difference and is overtly subject to interpretation. In addition, I have used a database catalogue as a fragmentary form of ‘art writing’ and as a curatorial medium. Theoretical consideration of the spaces that art operates in is extensive in art curating. I contribute to this by describing dematerialised spaces; the ‘alternative space’ of art, which is a material but also a discursive or representational space, and the ‘heterotopic’ space of the art library.

I contribute to art curating by taking its creative and visually-oriented values into the library I compare it to other related professional practices, other than museum curating. In the library, curatorially, I encourage consultation and collaboration with artists about how their work is documented in libraries and re-emphasise long-term curation.

Archives management

Within archives management I contribute an exploration of art practices that often remain un-archived and establish a case for making ‘artificial archives’. Traditionally, archives ‘accrue’ during the course of the activities of an organisation or person, but the kinds of documents that record art practices are often made specifically for that purpose and the

collector intervenes and selects them. I have tried to widen the sources that archives are drawn from, to include more diversity and have emphasised the importance of images. I designed the database catalogue to reflect the kinds of information found in ephemera but, by the end of the project, I found that the structure of the *Ephemeris database*, mapped to archival standard cataloguing (ISAD(G)) more closely than to library cataloguing and I consequently transferred the metadata and images into an archives management system, CALM ALM, which has an integral images database.

I have adopted an archival concern with context, provenance and preservation. The distinction between context and content of an entity, so much a part my process of analysis, is an archival cataloguing concept, but whereas archival 'context' refers the formation of the archive, here it is open and changing because 'alternative spaces' are themselves changeable. In the research practice, I deconstruct an existing order through the idea that context is never finite, (that adding to a collection, adding an element that is out of context, is an act which expands the context). The alteration of meaning in this way is a function of citationality, reinterpretation and the infinity of context.

Art librarianship

I reappraise art librarianship in this research. I value the specialism but I recommend more critical examination of practice and more subjective engagement with issues which are pertinent to contemporary art. I explore the ideological consequences of this stance. In the context of research in visual arts, to deny having an ideological position is suspect whereas in librarianship there is a strong, professional, ethical obligation to be impartial,

and non-judgemental. I argue for the possibility that the library is a ‘heterotopia’¹⁵ as a way of acknowledging the legitimising¹⁶ role of the profession while keeping the library open to many diverse meanings: a ‘heterotopia’ being both a real place and also discursive space which holds ideas that could potentially subvert or contradict each other, in a kind of suspension.

I connect art librarianship, theoretically, to related practices of art, art curating and archives management. I review literature on the value of art ephemera as a source for histories of ‘alternative’ art practices (chapter 2). Ault for example, an artist and curator, in the introductory essay *For the record* (Ault, 2002b, 1-16) makes a strong case for valuing art ephemera collections in libraries commenting; “What becomes history is to some degree determined by what is archived” (3). She notes that it is because events and organisations are ephemeral “protests, meetings, actions, installations, exhibitions, temporary art” and “items from the paper trails of short-lived groups[]” that documentation from them is least likely to be found in library collections and rarely circulate after the event (3). In comparison to the case made by Ault, I have found that articles in art librarianship literature are usually written from a pragmatic, rather than theoretical position. The existing literature from the art library sector gives the impression of a constant beginning, a repetition of a call for ephemera to be taken seriously. This thesis is a contribution to that.

¹⁵ I expand on this idea in chapter 6.

¹⁶ Douglas Raber (2003) in *Libraries and Legitimacy* provides many references to literature concerned with the professional status and ideology of librarianship, his subject is the role of public libraries in the U.S..

I recommend the adoption of ways of curating and mediating access to collections of art ephemera which take account of the meanings and uses of images. I develop the forms of writing used in the practice of librarianship (e.g in catalogues, using metadata) as a pluralist form of writing, able to represent different viewpoints and complex history, cataloguing being, in a sense, a very fragmented ‘work’ and in this, I was influenced by archival description where there is a tradition of descriptive writing, by the archivist. I have opened up a way to understand library practice as potential material for practice-based research. I have used categorisation, a library tool, as a component of the research process. The problem of categorisation of the ‘alternative’ is something I explore in the thesis, in the relation of the ‘alternative’ to art historical avant-gardes (chapter 2), the question of the combination of mainstream and alternative in London over the period I am researching (chapter 4) and the role of categorisation in the library (chapter 7).

I have contributed a focussed collection to the library at Goldsmiths. Goldsmiths Art department is often credited with being the main source of London's 'alternative art scene' of the 1990s and it undoubtedly gained ‘cultural credit’ from that narrative. The characterisation of *Freeze* and the yBa phenomenon as 'alternative' is a “plausible narrative” which is viewed as reductive by many artists working with different intentions in the period under examination. My association with the department affects my agency in the research and the collection, in that my authority and Goldsmiths’ reputation may both encourage and inhibit contributions and participation.

To make a collection of art ephemera documenting ‘alternative’ kinds of art practice in a library is not a new idea, I review precedents in the thesis, but my aim to trace

‘alternative’ qualities in and amongst ‘mainstream’ practice is, I believe, innovative. I have tested how libraries can be a ‘heterotopia’, how they can represent a notion as abstract as ‘alternative space’ and I have used the collection, and my librarian/curatorial practice, to open up the possibility of new meanings and interpretations of a period in contemporary art.

Notes on the scope of the thesis

Although contemporary art ephemera and informal publications are one of the subjects of this thesis, the influences of key shifts in 20th century art history and philosophy on the production of such contemporary ephemera are not. Nor can this thesis engage in detail with art historical theories of the avant-gardes, or philosophical discussion of alterity.

Concerning ephemera, I do not analyse distribution systems, except where these are documented as part of the practice. I have not analysed the relationship between the production of ephemera, the publicising of events and the art market (including the entry of ephemera into that market).¹⁷ The increasing market value of art ephemera did not affect the growth of this collection, as it was acquired at the time freely from colleagues and contacts for the library. It will affect retrospective collecting and curation of the ephemera in the future. However, these aspects were outside the focus of my research.

Digital art ephemera are a potential subject for extensive research, but that issue is not addressed in this project. There are both thematic and a technical reasons for this

¹⁷ Alberro (2003) in an analysis of Seth Siegelaub's role in launching the careers of the first generation of conceptual artists argues that his deployment marketing and advertising strategies eventually helped to strengthen the bonds between this critical art and the conditions of capital, producing a market for ephemera.

decision. The art practices I was interested in primarily used printed matter. E-mail announcements are included in the collection as print-outs as was the convention in libraries, in 2005. Technically, objects that are born digital should be managed digitally in a repository and would require specialised resources which were not widely available at this time. The Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) report (IFLA Study Group on FRBR, 1998) put forward a major revision of the underlying concepts to be used in library cataloguing in 1998, as a response to digital production. FRBR gave me a set of terms to describe the relationships between concepts and materials, which helped me to analyse the functioning of art ephemera and to write clearly about them in relation to events, these analytic terms being: entity, expression, manifestation and item. For ephemera, the shift made in FRBR had huge potential, it was a theoretical resolution to the problems of cataloguing 'dematerialised' work such as an event, which removed the primacy of the 'original' object from library cataloguing. However, at the time of this research, FRBR had not been widely applied in libraries, was not generally implemented in library management systems and had not had an impact on library cataloguing practices for ephemera.