

8. 'Ephemeris' in practice

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my practice and my collection 'Ephemeris', addressing the research question:

- How have libraries represented alternative art spaces, and how can they do this more comprehensively?

Ephemeris

My collection of ephemera from art events and organisations is called **Ephemeris**. It is called this, to reflect the passing quality of events it documents and also the method of accrual, by daily additions.

A key aim of 'alternative' galleries and events is self-definition, by artists, of the space for art, of what art is. This aim is part of the 'work', the space is not a void, in which the 'work' is placed. It may be difficult, and unnecessary, to differentiate between the artwork and its documentation, criticism and explanation are not created separately, after the 'work' is 'shown', but happen simultaneously. Many of the items in the collection reflect this dual purpose. My aims are to document the 'alternative' in its wider context, and to endorse the authority of artists to valorise art.

Contents of the collection

Ephemeris contains private view cards, press releases, and other art ephemera, both printed and electronic, which have been distributed in order to announce art events. It also contains small magazines, mail-art and multiples, printed art-works and artists' publications. As I showed in chapter 2, a sub-set of this mass of documentation carries

commentary on the way the art-work is intended to operate, and it is this sub-set that I am concerned with in this thesis

Collection process and policy

In 2000 I e-mailed all the galleries then listed in two main listings of contemporary art exhibitions, Time Out a weekly listings magazine and New Exhibitions of Contemporary Art, a monthly listings leaflet to ask them to put me on their mailing list, explaining that I was compiling a collection of private view cards and exhibition documentation as a resource in the library at Goldsmiths College. Of the 90 galleries I contacted, only one refused to put me on their list, this was the Lisson Gallery. Most galleries sent me private view cards for the next year or two. I repeated invitations twice more before 2004, for newly identified galleries. I asked colleagues at Goldsmiths and other acquaintances to give me the exhibition announcements they received. Main sources were three lecturers and the office of Visual Arts Department at Goldsmiths, a gallery curator, an artist and a regular gallery visitor not related to Goldsmiths. Some invitations that my partner and I received from people we knew were included; my partner was an exhibiting artist. The collection covers the period from 1995 until 2005 and was acquired from 1999-2005, although it remains open for further acquisitions from the period.

The collection policy was as inclusive as possible identifying sources as all galleries that showed contemporary art in this period. The collection is not intended to be 'complete' but it is intended to be representative of the ways and means by which contemporary art was shown, drawn from representative distribution systems. As an entity it represent my own professional and social networks. It is also a representation of my own, and part of Goldsmiths College's Visual Art Department's geographic and intellectual environment.

Because it was my aim from the start to find traces of the ‘alternative’, I tried to include as many examples of this kind of event as I could, using criteria identified in my initial background research as likely to indicate ‘alternativeness’ in organisational structure, for example being artist-run, a lack of permanent institutional structure or a collective management, no regular funding, a flexible programme, in one-off sites, group shows and documentation not collected systematically elsewhere. As I developed other interpretations of ‘alternativeness’ (see my description of generic alternative gallery which opens chapter 2) these were incorporated into my criteria. I focussed on ephemera that had been designed or made with a lot of care and attention, this included novelties and those in which the text directly addressed the reader. I was also looking for art ephemera that adjusted the context for art, adapting informational formats such as notices and gallery hand-outs.

My professional position has enabled me to ensure that material collected will be looked after in the future and that access will be provided to it, in the following ways according to the type of acquisition:

- **Ephemera/Publicity material:** the collection of cards and ephemera is a distinct collection, which belonged to me during the research. At the end of my research, it was deposited in the Special Collections at Goldsmiths Library, together with its database catalogue as a computer file.
- **Archives** put into the library as the result of this research project (being either collections of publicity material compiled by respondents and given to me for

preparatory case studies or archives of projects, organisations or events) were deposited in Goldsmiths College Library, by mutual agreement, were kept in their integrity, were catalogued as archives and use and access was agreed with their creators, following standard procedure for the acquisition of archives (Glew, 2001). If a library takes in an archive from an artist or curator, liaison with the artist should be expected, to ensure that the archive will represent them as they want to be represented. A parallel professional project for me was to build up the archives held in Goldsmiths College Library in line with the strategic plan for the library special collections. Archives acquired were from The Top Room, Sarah Staton's Supastore, Curtain Road Arts, Virginia Nirmarkoh's Indent project, the Engaged Magazine archive and Bank flyers archive. The first two were not, and the last four were, from artists who had studied at Goldsmiths.

- **Books and exhibition catalogues** were put into the library collection, and included in my bibliography. They were also given a reference in my research database. MARC cataloguing and standard academic methods of citation deal more adequately with book material than with ephemera.

The collection as a representation

By making a collection of ephemera of disparate events, which is not the 'naturally' accumulating archival records of the work of any definite people or organisations, but of material which is dispersed, sent out, and which is ephemeral so not intended to last, I make a collection, which is fragmentary and open to contingent meanings. I organized the collection physically in date order, reflecting how ephemera arrive in the library, as a day-by-day accumulation of items and I have indexed artists' and all other named

participants and gallery names for 1999-2001. Preserved there, the ephemera represent a deconstructed history, which is complex. The collection as a whole 'represents' activity, dispersed attempts to communicate, it does not 'represent' the 'alternative space' itself, the expressions and manifestations of those are described in the individual items. It will be incomplete and open but that does not matter. Even the small proportion of material I have collected represents a diverse collection of ideas.

However, I have two difficulties with the 'representation' I have produced of 'alternative' spaces. The first is a contrast between the authority of my collection, which I have inducted into the institution, using traditional structures and systems and supported by an established institution, and the deliberate, contingent or nonchalant lack of archival protocol demonstrated by many of the organisations or individuals who produced the ephemera in my collection, which I have identified as its 'unarchival' qualities. The ephemera may record anarchic aims, ideas that are critical, or deconstructive of stability and anti-hierarchical. There is an intrinsic conflict between the preservative, static, character of a deposited collection and the thing I am representing by it, ephemeral strategies represented by ephemera, preserved. As Derrida notes in a footnote to *Archive Fever*, there is no political control without control of the archive. I am trying to make a record of something for which a record does not exist, the existence of which is itself contentious. I intend my collection to take part in the disruptive effect of the accumulation of a proliferation of material.

My Authority

When I began to present this project at the Visual Arts department research seminars, I said that I was collecting as widely as I could, and from as many people, but my

authority, both to collect and to say that ephemera documented 'alternative' aims was questioned, as was my 'authority' to re-present this material, which was not seen as public, in that it had not been intended to be held in an institution, by some people. When I presented my database, in a seminar for example, someone commented that it looked like the Stasi files. Other objections I encountered were to my proposition that ephemera were worth reading, they were criticised as being often formulaic. At another time, I was accused of being a pseudo-anthropologist. Back in the library, I myself began to see my growing collection as a liability, ephemera is notoriously time-consuming and overwhelming. However, I was very encouraged also when people were pleased that I was documenting diverse histories. In collecting, however, I rarely met resistance to the idea of archiving amongst the artists I had contact with, often there was just no expectation that a library would be doing this. My aim was not to actually to make an archive, although I was pleased when people I met while doing this research then gave an archive to the library at Goldsmiths. It was always clear to me that my collection is not an archive, and could never be an authoritative representation of its subject.

So, after being challenged in these ways, I analysed my position and my connections with ephemera. I was myself in an authoritative space, the library. I thought about how ephemera was distributed, usually narrowcast, not broadcast – the 'I hope you can make it' type of e-mail, I began to focus on representing ephemera from people I knew, and which I liked, and to make my own biases explicit in the project. Not only did this mean my collection reflected my own social network, but I realised that I was interested in the 'contestation' of space, as I was reading announcements of spaces that were taken over, and in contexts. I was interested in how art produced contradictory space, different versions of power and the authoritative voice.

Working as subject librarian for visual arts and visual cultures throughout this research, I was engaged in using librarianship as a research practice, and was able to put my professional practice under pressure. I used my authority as a subject librarian to open up the library as a repository for this material and to try to make the way that it functioned transparent. I needed to expand what is “normal” in the library and to present what I do in the context of visual practice, also to represent visual practices in the context of the library. The experiences, of demands, responsibilities lack of understanding, being asked “but why do you want to do that?” affected me and how I write¹.

Crossing disciplines, knowing the rules

Librarianship, although a practice and a profession, has produced comparatively little theory. As I outline in my introduction to this thesis, it has an ethical code which governs strategy and conduct and very clear, explicit, written rules for processes, like collecting and cataloguing, that we do, which should be practiced without censorship or prejudice. In this research, I had to show my partisan allegiances. This meant abandoning my position of neutrality as a librarian, because in this context, that was not trusted.

Holding a position of neutrality, of always focussing on the user rather than our own authority sometimes has strange effects. One is the effect in writing by librarians where the book becomes the subject, as if it, rather than the author, has agency, and requires to be catalogued in a certain way, when it is the rules that are actually producing the format of information. The rules of library cataloguing are based on assumptions which have to

¹ This chapter was first developed as a seminar for Visual Cultures Department post-graduate students on writing across disciplines, in October 2006, with Jorella Andrews and Dafna Ganani-Tomares, in which we thought about crossing disciplines and the useable inadequacies doing that might produce.

be reconsidered, I think, if they are to fit manifestations of works in different forms. As described in chapter 7, AACR2 fits a material object with an author who writes text. However, by seeing what happens when these rules are applied to visual productions is that these rules can reveal biases in disciplines: many exhibition catalogues don't name an author, the artist's name is there, as part of the title. The main authority is, in theory, the person with "primary intellectual responsibility for the work", whereas an artist, being responsible for images rather than text, is by default the subject of the book. Recently, I have noticed statements in the colophon, such as "concept: Olafur Eliasson", but information taken from the colophon has to be framed [as supposition]. The reason is standardisation, there is value in the fact that I have been able to catalogue a book in exactly the same way as someone in Canada, US, Australia, or India, since 1969, but I object, sometimes, to the theoretical consequences.

At the same time as crossing into visual practice, I was stressing my practice of librarianship by chairing the UK Art Libraries Society Cataloguing and Classification Committee, interpreting rules on cataloguing for art librarians. Knowing the rules has not been a burden for me. Rather, crossing disciplines, or presenting my work in a different environment, has given me ways of testing, evaluating my methods, or putting them under pressure. In the Ephemeris catalogue, images and text are given equal importance. I have mixed the interests and conventions of archivists and curators, into my practice, having created an 'artificial archive'.

Susan Lambert made a comparison of professional attitudes of archivists, librarians and museum curators (Lambert, 2002, 5), using the statements of respective professional organisations, which I cite here; a reflection across domains that she comments she has

not found considered more widely, yet which seems very relevant now, when there is an increase in cross-domain projects:

Archivists:

“Archives embody the national “memory” and give us a sense of identity as individuals, families or communities. They enshrine our legal and moral rights. Their very availability has transformed and is daily transforming the way in which history is written”

Discourse: nation, identity, family, community, law, morality, rights, access, history, revision. Speaker not identified.

Librarians:

“to collect, organise and make accessible material relating to the visual arts, architecture and design ...”to be responsible for establishing anticipating and meeting specific information needs of ... users, helping them to research understand and enjoy the diverse world of the visual arts”

Discourses: cataloguing, disciplines, public service, help, education, pleasure. Speaker self-effacing.

Museum curators:

“enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment...institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts..., which they hold in trust for society” selected material evidence accompanied by associated information”

Discourses: knowledge as active process, education, pleasure, safety, trust, society, selection, interpretation. Speaker is an intermediary, communicator, producer.

Lambert² says that shared aspects are collections, testimony to the record of human affairs and public service. The statements chosen are cited from Lambert, I have added an analysis of the discourses, to indicate professional attitudes and values,

Practicing as a cataloguer and subject librarian, most of my writing was in the form of metadata, or instructions. Even when it doesn't take the form of metadata, when I write as a librarian, I still use an analytic structure, e.g. using headings and sub-headings to break

² Susan Lambert, then recently appointed Keeper of Word and Images Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, was addressing ARLIS/UK & Ireland (the Art Libraries Society, UK & Ireland).

up the text into sections about different facets of the subject, as preferred by professional journals (Cooke, 2006b). I produce writing that cites the process of cataloguing. This breaking down into elements of description can be reductive, but it also enables plurality, in a way that presentation in the artists' book, below, where I write as a curator and which takes the viewer on a journey, does not.

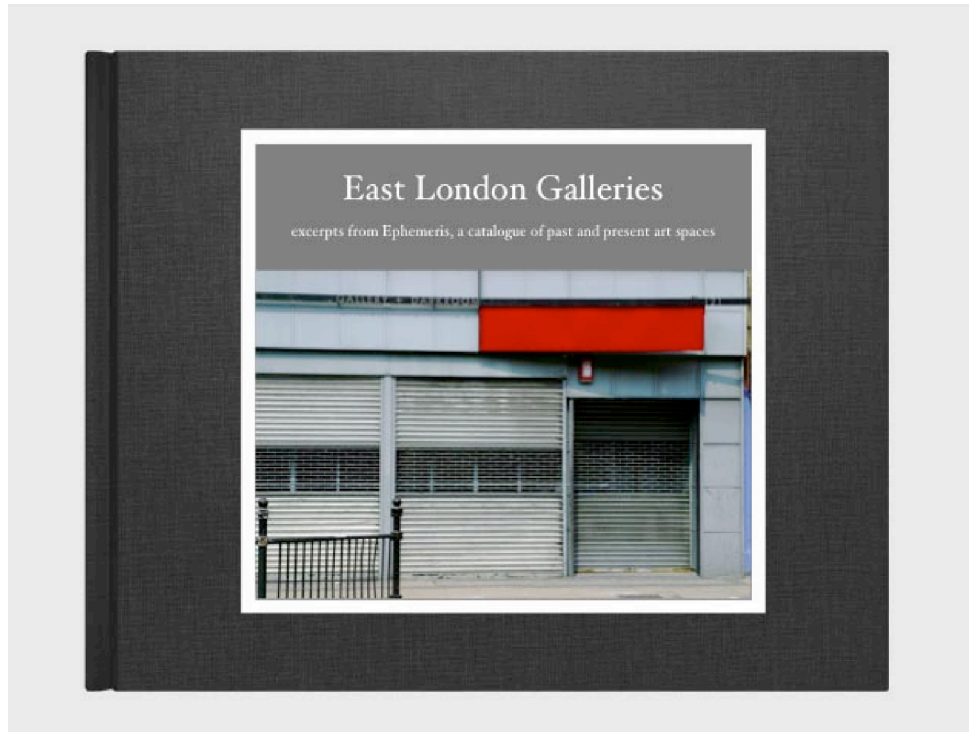




Figure 1: Writing as a curator –‘East London Galleries: excerpts from Ephemeris’, 2005, a librarian’s artist’s book and introductory narrative

As a curator, I like the fragmentary, vulnerable and ephemeral qualities of ephemera, as potential archival material and I like linking them to geographical and architectural spaces. It is in this area that my crossing of disciplines has produced something I can call a “useable ineptitude”, in that I have stuck to a close involvement with the documentation itself, and been unwilling to actually go and see the shows.

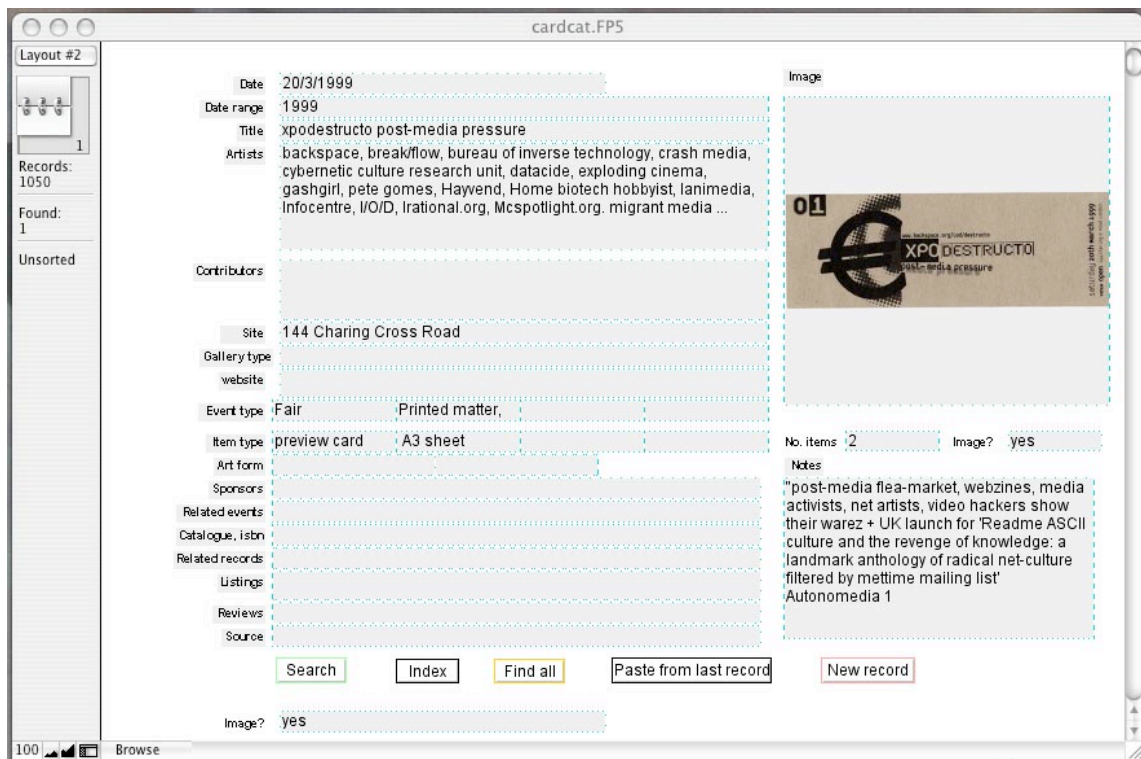


Figure 2: Writing as a librarian –metadata, from an early draft of ‘Ephemeris’ for item see Figure 32

My habitus

The methodology I use supports the theoretical principles of the profession. For many reasons, the library is a place where rules are explicit. One of these reasons is that in the library many things are juxtaposed, in order. When I place the collection in the library, I catalogue it according to the rules followed in my library. I began to learn these rules as part of my professional education, after that, they become partly natural to me and I value them, but there are not one set of rules, there are many. As I usually catalogue art materials, I learn the different sets of rules for cataloguing books and visual materials, for example and I also develop ways around them, to suit them to my subject, I find out how other art librarians have interpreted the rules and, in turn, I decide when I need to change them, but always in the wider context of interconnected library catalogues. In this way,

the library is a social space, made into a system, the structure of which is made from language; the symbolic language used in library cataloguing forms my 'habitus'.

Submission to this order is, paradoxically, the effect of becoming savvy in its ways, and of negotiating its effects. The 'habitus' of the library is maintained by not just one, but a collection of mutually supporting systems which structure information, and formalise this structuring in language, with, liberal, even libertarian, intention and an expectation of constant if slow change, performed publicly, collectively and reflexively. The fact that the 'symbolic' database relies on control and on codes to operate to make my permanent 'record' of these events in the library is a difficulty, an opposition creates a tension in the project for me, which I have explored by treating cataloguing as representation.

Library classification is, in practice, riven with alternatives. My practice of collecting ephemera of the entangled 'alternative' for the library is intended to stress this, as well as to stress the aim of countering ephemerality. By adding to the word mapping so that ideas endure, undoing the hierarchical structures, making the rules more flexible, the habitus is changed. Intervention in practice affects the way that the alternative space is mapped in the library.

Cataloguing as representation

Cataloguing practice is concerned not only with the catalogue record that appears, the copying of uncontroversial extracts of information from the thing as data, in words, in a computer system and the more worrying classification, or placing of entities into categories, it is epistemological; being concerned with the questioning of what information about a thing is used to catalogue it, what things are catalogued and by whose authority: in other words, with metadata and with representation. Because I want

documentation of ‘alternative’ art practices in libraries, I need to make the catalogue ‘represent’ them. The rules, as I work with and know them, were not assembled to accommodate such practices specifically, so the problem is to make ‘cataloguing’ accommodate the ideas of the creators and owners of cultural productions.

In my practice I use three kinds of cataloguing systems, for libraries, for archives and for electronic, or digital, objects. I have said that cataloguing is representation, but I have tried to assimilate different systems of cataloguing, of rules, principles and in Ephemeris. Having made this hybrid model, when I have conversations then with researchers or creators, then I have a ‘model’ that I can try to use flexibly, in my practice. I can exploit, use designated ‘free’ areas or misuse aspects of it, or use several at once:

- 1) by advocating cataloguing as research and taking responsibility for it as intellectual work, itself.
- 2) By using other people’s collections, at different stages of producing the effect of authority, for example: the Women’s Art Library – which I am picking up at the stage when it has created its own critical mass, and its own terms of description. I am inserting these into the habitus, using my position of authority in it, or as another example, the Materials database of the Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles (CHRRCT) – which uses a process of collecting cross-disciplinary and different histories, and which writes these histories in a layered, fragmented format in its database, in this case it is linked by shared thesaurus terms from the AAT, but has its own structure and content.

- 3) By using my own collection – my strategy in this is to overload with information, with rubbish, to willingly lose intellectual control, to catalogue excessively, to give access over and also to rely on my connections, all a kind of ‘drift’.

During the course of this research, I have tried to work with processes that are usually considered objective, as if they are ‘mimetic’. My intention is to represent diversification, so I see the cataloguing systems as being capable of change, of proliferation. For example, I have worked with a ‘controlled language’ system for subject indexing, but am aware that programs can be used to search the whole texts of digital documents, so I have to use formats that will work in the future, as well as with contemporary systems. This process of cataloguing does transform theoretical analysis of cultural space into a model of cultural space which is static. Lefebvre and Foucault are critical of classification and order, as reductive and fixing in their relation to space and time, respectively, but the library cannot but fix expressions in space and time. Being aware of these inherent tensions in my practice, I have used it as a critical tool in the research by considering the idea of the library as ‘heterotopia’ a ‘contradictory space’.

My research databases

Ephemeris is a symbolic type of database. It is predictable and reliable. It has been designed using standards common to research databases funded by the UK Research Councils in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and is based on Dublin Core metadata. It is intended to last through time, to be shareable and transferable to new host software and hardware. I worked in Filemaker Pro, and at the end of the research period transferred the data and images to the CALM archival management system at Goldsmiths. I made two relational databases; one for events, that is a catalogue of individual items and one for

sites, venues and galleries. When the information or references on and about the ephemera were collated in the databases, the databases mapped sites of activity and networks of people and suggested cross-references and relations, which I used as the source of my accounts in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

TITLE	Take from item
CREATOR	Refer to authority file
CONTRIBUTOR	Refer to authority file
SUBJECT*	Use existing thesaurus
DESCRIPTION	Free text
PUBLISHER	Take from item
DATE	YYYY or YYYY.MM.DD format
TYPE*	Use existing definitions
FORMAT*	Use existing definitions
IDENTIFIER*	Use standard where possible e.g. isbn or URL
SOURCE	From accession record, or known provenance
LANGUAGE*	Use standard code
RELATION	Link to other related entries
COVERAGE*	Time or spatial /geographic coverage
RIGHTS	Standard statement, or individual rightsholder details

Figure 3: Dublin Core Metadata table

TITLE	Doublethink / The golden age of the villain
CREATOR	Spencer, Johnny
CONTRIBUTOR	Pale Green Press (printer!)
SUBJECT*	Art exhibition Artists publication
DESCRIPTION	Private view card replicating information panel
PUBLISHER	Anthony Wilkinson Gallery
DATE	1998.11.25
TYPE*	Cultural Original Text Image Physical object
FORMAT*	Event announcement
IDENTIFIER*	jc00001
SOURCE	Mailing list
LANGUAGE*	EN
RELATION	jc00002 Relation title = The golden age
COVERAGE*	25 November 1998 - 17 January 1999 - London
RIGHTS	The artist & the gallery

Figure 4: Sample catalogue entry for a private view card

The first database, the cards catalogue, is comprised of data copied from individual items, and a classification of the events according to practice type using AAT, Library of Congress subject headings and Vektor's list of art practices. I discontinued this, because it was usually not possible to decide the practice type from the card. I developed a classification of organisation type which I wrote as a thesaurus because terms are used

ambiguously in the field³. The cards catalogue part has a close and obsessive focus. All the data on the cards is entered. This is intended to be a public database. Each entry describes a physical object in the collection. Each field has an equivalent field in standard library and archival catalogues.

The second database, the venues catalogue, holds information about institutions, geographical sites and social affiliations and also contained textual material compiled during the research, e.g. interview texts, case studies and references. This database contains an entry for each art site or gallery that I have documentation from or have found a reference to in existing printed sources, or have heard about. This database has two parts, one a 'factual' part that uses some standard Dublin Core fields and a second part, where the fields reflect my interests and contain my research notes such as references, citations, interviews and case studies. The genre of this catalogue is factual database catalogues like library catalogues, or AXIS, but this format is at odds sometimes with it being a personal research database, in that my comments may appear to be presented as fact. These two different purposes are reflected in the metadata chosen, in that the factual fields conformed to standard Dublin core fields, with additional data held in free-text notes fields. These fields were not transferred to the public resource.

Two elements of cards are treated in the cataloguing process, form and content. These together describe the item so that it can be accurately identified. The location is added so that the item can be found. I have included digital images of a small number of cards. Using databases to catalogue means that each person, site or organisation included in a group show can be indexed and can be used as an access point. The use of computerised

³ See Appendix 2

cataloguing means that there is no longer one correct place for everything. Even with this small amount of fluidity, the catalogue remains only an indication of what is contained in documentation that is, itself, only a reduced deposit. I used metadata to mirror complex social and cultural networks and processes, which are very unlike the form that I am using to represent them. The database/metadata structure represents a large amount of precise, specific, disparate, individual items and to identify, sort and group them by many different criteria. The other kinds of representation, for example my thesaurus of words used to describe 'alternative' art practice, and my visual mappings or drawings, represent different aspects of these processes.

An Alternative Thesaurus

It is problematic to use words to define the 'alternative', both because the meaning of words changes and because the 'alternative' has diverse qualities. In order to understand what might be implied by 'alternative', I began by collecting trace words from existing literature and research on 'alternative' or artist-run spaces that indicate some possible definitions of these spaces:

Artist-run, artist-led, self-definition, managed by participants, collective, co-operative, providing mutual support, providing facilities, independent, temporary, flexible, tactical, non-commercial, politically oppositional, radically subjective, relating to historical 'avant-garde' movements, Situationist, informal, pragmatic, DIY, recycling, urban, unsustainable attainment, transient, contingent strategies unstable, fugitive.

If any of these words or concepts were used to describe any organisation or event, then I assumed that it was possible that in some way it was been intended to have some relation to the 'alternative' and labelled it as alternative, in the Venues database. I labelled seventy organisations or places as 'alternative' venues, out of over 500 galleries and venues that were active during the period researched. Both Batia Sharon (Sharon, 1979)

and Julie Ault (Ault, 2002) who have researched ‘alternative’ art organisations in specific places and times produced similar lists of alternative characteristics, and have recognised that they are diverse and sometimes contradictory. I also compiled a list of words used to describe galleries, or institutions themselves, on the ephemera or in gallery guides. The thesaurus (Appendix 3) organises the trace words and the wider list of words, to show the following list of preferred terms for types of institution, which have been used in the venues database (see following page):

These types do not form a categorisation system, but are preferred terms in a thesaurus. Categorisation systems, unless sophisticated, are not good at indicating the links between concepts, which are necessary to my methodology. A thesaurus is an ‘alternative’ method for subject indexing, which can encompass changing meanings as well as uncategorisable items. A thesaurus can include images as well as words within the relationships that it describes. In a library context, however, a thesaurus has a more specific meaning, implying a hierarchical arrangement of concepts, and intended to direct users to preferred terms, for example as in the AAT, but in an art context, a thesaurus contains associative links.

<i>Types of institution, Ephemeris</i>
Academic institution
Archive
Art centre
Art fair
Art merchandiser
Artist-residency
Artist-run
Bar
Blue chip
Café
Club
Collaborative
Collective
Commercial
Community centre
Contemporary
Domestic
Exhibition space
Facilities
Funding body
Hire space
Hospital
Independent
Information centre
Installation
Internet
Local government funded
Mobile
Non-profit
Off-site project space
Organisation
Outdoors
Privately run
Project space
Property management
Public
Public museum
Publishers
Residencies
Shop
Social
Social event
Studios
Temporary

Uriel Orlow wrote perceptively about the difference between a categorisation system and a thesaurus, in an essay on the way that images are linked in Chris Marker's films:

The shared quality or concept, the broader term of the thesaurus, moves through analogical bifurcations and creates a network of related, narrower terms, an arborescence of possible meanings without a classificatory claim on, or hope for, precision, certainty and unique locatability. As such, the thesaurus enables a radically different kind of access to the archive from that gained through classification. Classification privileges individual items of a collection through a structure which allows their precise tracking while the thesaurus creates a conceptual architecture for the archive that highlights the connections between items. (Orlow, 2002, 444-445).

I used one categorisation only, of 'alternative', in order to establish my series, the 'entity' that I am researching (it is however an indefinite categorisation). The words used are themselves diverse in an additional sense; they come from different registers and discourses. The links may be to other entities inside the series, or outside. They link or refer to other words, and together all the entities and their relations make a fragmented representation of the subject, even when the terms applied are contradictory. (This is already the case in existing subject headings thesauri, the Art and Architecture Thesaurus (Getty Institute) for example has two categories for galleries; commercial and non-commercial. To apply both might seem perverse; but some galleries are both, for example in the catalogue to *'The galleries show'* (Royal Academy, 2003) the statement from White Cube says that it is a commercial gallery that also runs non-commercial projects). A thesaurus describes things rather than placing them.

In my databases and in my descriptions I have used words that describe what kind of organisation or activity a thing is, and have also used the direct references to people, or to other events with a stated 'alternative' position, in order to categorise an entity as

‘alternative’ and then to research how it is. This analysis remains at the level of a particular expression, using evidence found in the manifestation. I am not categorising a ‘norm’ and types of ‘alternative’, not attempting to produce order, in order to produce the library as a heterotopia.

Visual mappings

I started producing visual material, as a way of presenting my research and of showing relationships between different ideological and material spaces. This was a way of re-contextualising the collection. I already had geographical information about the sites. I then included images of the sites and buildings where art events happened as part of the venues database to offer this as an interface to the collection, which enhances the resource. These images form a visual record of material art sites in London in this period and link to the documentation and metadata. I started taking the photographs myself, until I knew what I wanted them to do, then with a small grant, I commissioned a photographer to take the rest. The photographs have often been taken when the building is closed, or become disused, or reused: they are in a sense empty, they do not do what the ephemera sometimes do; communicate the intentions of the participants or document events. The images can be run as slideshows, at lectures or teaching sessions. One I have shown is of the closed doorways of galleries, called ‘Photographs of London galleries (spaces I won’t go into)’.



Figure 5: Entrance to 108 Roseberry Avenue, 2003

I produced drawings, using information from the databases; against a background of geographical sites of galleries placed on a schematic map of London, I noted particular exhibitions that one person was involved in, across a period of time.

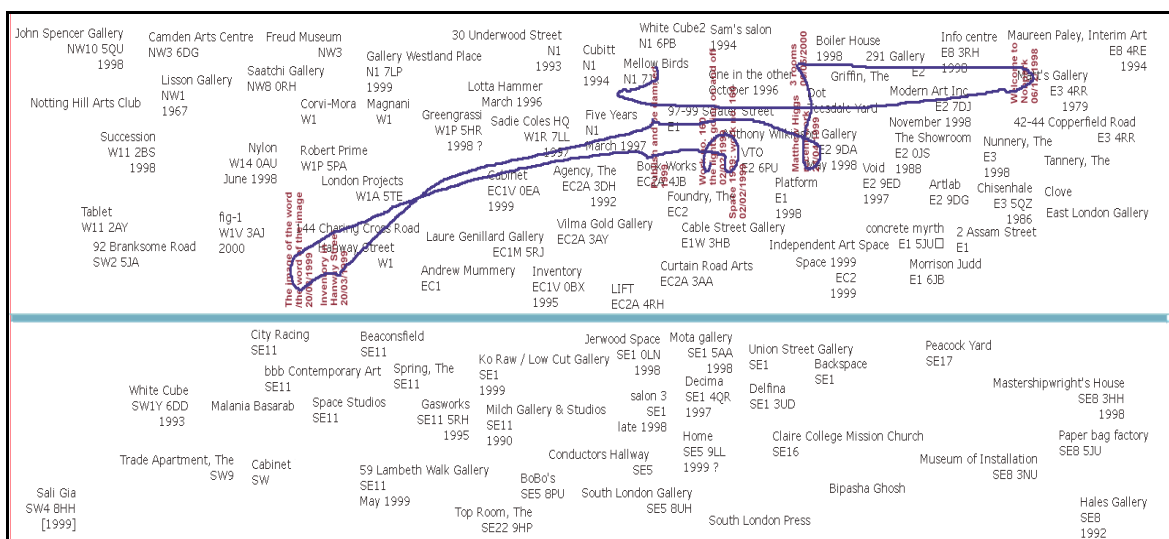


Figure 6: Jacqueline Cooke 'MH, 1999', 2000

On a practical level, this was a ‘resource enhancement’ project in which I used cataloguing processes as tools to develop the potential of ephemera as a research source. The resource produced is useable: although this may not be a scaleable solution, the principles established can be used as a model for other art ephemera collections..⁴. By using the same processes to analyse art practice and the idea of ‘alternative space,’ I have brought art practice and library practice together, under the same theoretical terms, to consider how an art library can better support research in contemporary visual art. My hybrid collection of rationales is intended to increase the possibilities for access to this collection, to evade the restrictions of files which usually hold them, which hide other access routes and rearrange their provenance. By these strategies, I facilitate the use of ephemera as a source of potential and diverse histories. The collection and database which were made as the practice element of this research, document the large numbers and varieties of practices in London in this period and are intended to counter a limited, and reductive, historicisation of the period.

⁴ A Model collection policy is included as Appendix 3.