

**Decoration: Disrupting the Workplace and Challenging the Work of Art  
(Volume One)**

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of the Arts London  
Norwich University of the Arts

April 2017





# Decoration: Disrupting the Workplace and Challenging the Work of Art

## Abstract

This practice-led research proposes that decoration can be deployed as a lens for the illumination and interrogation of class and hierarchy when used in artworks which address the workplace. Photographic topologies conducted for the research highlight hierarchical values exemplified in the workplace; they are revealed as alienating places where, on the whole, luxury and decoration are restrained or only considered appropriate for those in seniority.

Looking at the ways in which space is organised (Lefebvre 1991) and how this can be contested through the introduction of site-related art (Deutsche 1996; Mouffe 2007), the spatial interventions made for this research are intended to 'puncture' the workplace and allow for the interrogative quality that Deutsche demands of art in public places. The artworks highlight hierarchical values and, at the same time, disturb these values through their placement, materials, form, method of production and their singularity. The language of decoration provides connective qualities which offset this criticality and afford the artwork a negotiating potential, providing a politics of pleasure. Thus, these decorative artworks possess dual value in critiquing aspects of status and alienation in the workplace while at the same time contributing an ameliorative function.

The use of decorative elements in artworks and the placement of such artworks in work-related contexts is made in close relationship to theoretical readings. These include references to the 'everyday' (Lefebvre 1947, 1962; de Certeau 1984) which propose that it is through praxis that the individual is able to respond creatively using tactics of bricolage and re-appropriation to alter the conditions of everyday life. The everyday working practices of the workplace are further considered in relation to the work of the artist and the 'work' of art. Secondly, the practice is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1979) as a way of conceptualising class and which, in its attention to the predispositions of the individual, is able to encompass attitudes to decoration. Together with the practice itself, these approaches address the interrogative and disruptive agency of the decorative in fine art practice.

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# Chapter One: Situating the Research

## Introduction

The site-related artworks made for this research provide a critical lens for the examination of hierarchy and status through their employment of decoration, ornamentation and pattern. Bespoke artworks placed within three work-related sites - an office reception area, an industrial laundry and a series of identical office chairs within an art gallery exhibition - test the extent to which decorative qualities highlight, challenge and to some extent ameliorate, physical and semiological signs of status, hierarchy and alienation. The disruption that is referenced in the title refers, therefore, to the visual and conceptual interference of these and other work-related contexts when artworks which incorporate elements of decoration are added to them.

Something of the potency of site-related artworks in the very public realm of outdoor spaces is well-rehearsed.<sup>1</sup> However, it is argued here that the value of critical artwork in the enclosed and semi-private spaces of the workplace is under-theorised and presents an opportunity for the acquisition of new knowledge. An obvious exception to this is seen in the work of the Artist Placement Group (APG) in the 1960s (Bishop, 2012; Walker, 2002) which will be cited at various points throughout the thesis. But unlike the APG the research described here proposes that the *language of decoration* can be used to foster a critical interpretation. These decorative qualities are employed in the use of repeated motifs, playful embellishments and a rich and varied mixture of materials. Beyond the cushioned comforts of the director's suite decoration is relatively alien in the contemporary workplace, but its accessible and connective properties enable it to carry meaning that is easily identifiable. Pattern, specifically defined as the use of a recurring motif, is utilised as a metaphor for repetitive labour and/or a link to escapism and desire. Cloth is a material that is employed in many of these artworks for its associations with the body, clothing and interior furnishings and for its facility in carrying decorative motifs.

References to value and hierarchy that are exemplified through the material and physical characteristics inherent in each of these contexts, are analysed with respect to class and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the work of Rachel Whiteread and Christo and Jean-Claude; also works commissioned and documented by organisations such as Artangel and Situations, as well as artists' use of London's 'Fourth Plinth'.

alienation. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (1979) is particularly valuable as it describes the way that class is embodied: we embody or inhabit class in the choices that we make about food, clothes, decoration and thus '(t)aste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu 1979: 6). This direct connection between the body and class provides a useful way of linking the material agency of these artworks with the occupants of the workplace; cloth and chairs being particular examples of this. Drawing on the influence of Karl Marx, Bourdieu's theories are further explored in relation to contemporary notions of alienation by, for example, Franco Berardi (2009). The role of the artist in challenging social conditions and power relations is explored with reference to Rosalyn Deutsche's (1996) appeal to artists to use site-related practices to challenge the power relations evident within that site, and to Chantal Mouffe's (2007) argument that art has the potential to displace and renegotiate the 'natural' social order.

Through the use of the decorative this research 'challenges the work of art' by affording the artwork a particular agency in as much as it is able to insinuate a physical and psychological space between the environment of the workplace and the mind of the worker. However, it challenges the work of art in another way: by considering the tasks involved in negotiating, making and installing this work it also introduces a way of comparing the work of the artist with the work of those employed in the office or the laundry. 'The work of art' refers not only to the artwork as object, therefore, but to the activities involved in making and siting art, thus allowing an exploration of the work of the artist and the production of art as a wider endeavour. Finally, there is a challenge to the work of art in the context of the broader art world and its distrust of the decorative that has been evident since even before the earliest whisperings of Modernism. Thus, to employ the decorative within the context of a fine art object or gallery, is a further way of ascribing to the decorative something more than merely superficial. The white-walled art gallery itself is also divested of potential alienation through the inclusion of domestic and decorative reference. The bringing of aspects of the office workplace into the gallery also indicates that the gallery itself is a place of work.

Site-related practices are those where the making of the artworks is informed by the immediate location in which the artwork is to be placed. The hypothesis tested here is that the artworks made for this research possess a 'negotiation value' due to their introduction of pleasure through the decorative that is 'out-of-place' in the workplace. The art is

superfluous on one hand – from the perspective of its utilitarian value or even as a commodity (as no money has been exchanged) - but it still has a role or function within the workplace. This gives rise to a further area of new knowledge: the grafted artwork can perform both a disruptive and an ameliorative function in negotiating opposing conditions or characteristics. These might include, for example, hardness and softness, the home and the workplace, the private and public, pleasure and alienation. The relationship between these characteristics, so often forced into binary opposition in the context of the workplace, is ‘negotiated’ through the intervention of these artworks. Further aspects of negotiation are evident in this research, for example, the negotiation that occurs between the artist and the staff working at the office or the laundry.

The concept of negotiation exemplifies how, in the practice-based elements of the work, a dynamic relationship between theory and practice has been sought throughout, achieving this through a process of ‘thinking the decorative’ where the decorative is accorded more potency than the superficial, passive position it is usually ascribed. An ongoing process of documentation and reflection fundamentally informs the concertina-like relationship between the theory and the practice. A timeline used in the gallery setting (see Volume Two, Section Three) ‘opens up’ and elucidates some of the more hidden aspects of the research process and the aspects of negotiation that are less visible in the final exhibited artworks.

Primary research, in the form of photographic topographies of each site, is used to deconstruct the way that value and status is exemplified in the décor (or, more characteristically, lack of décor) of the workplace. Spatial agitation, or the placing of artworks within ‘alien’ contexts is comparable to collage – a bringing together of disparate material - and is a key method for developing ideas and proposals early in the making process. Thus the documentary photographs of each site are used to provide supports for the development of drawn and collaged ideas on paper that are worked up into designs for site-specific artworks. These interventions are then placed, through negotiation, in each of the workplaces, or, as in the case of EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>, the workplace chair becomes a ‘site’ for such interventions. These interventions employ decorative aspects to draw attention to the potentially alienating and status-signifying aspects of the work environment. They do this in a number of ways:

- through their specific placement and by nature of them being ‘out-of-place’
- through the materials or objects the works are constructed from or refer to
- through their singularity and handmade nature
- through the use of patterned or repeated motifs (the cloud and stripe, for example).

According to dictionary definitions the meanings of ‘decoration’ and ‘ornament’ are difficult to separate, so in this thesis the decorative is used as an umbrella term to encompass the ornamental. For example, Collins Concise Dictionary (1995) defines the word decorate as:

*vb.* 1. to ornament; to adorn. 2. to paint or wallpaper. 3. to confer a mark of distinction esp. a medal, upon [C16: from L *decorāre*, from *decus* adornment]

The same dictionary defines the word ornament as:

*adj.* 1. heavily or elaborately decorated, 2. (of style in writing, etc.) over-embellished; flowery [C15: from L *ornāre* to decorate]

The implications of these definitions will be referred to later in the thesis.

In relation to gender it is clear that whilst no study of decoration, ornamentation and pattern could exclude the implications for gender, the scope of the research questions featured here do not allow for a full investigation of these aspects. However, where gender implications have intersected with issues around class they have been referenced.

## **Structure: Thesis and Documentation**

The research is presented in two volumes, namely the ‘thesis’ in Volume One (of which this is the introductory chapter) and the ‘documentation’ in Volume Two. Following the introductory chapter the thesis is organised around four additional chapters. Chapter Two, ‘Material Relations’, describes and contextualizes the way that artworks made for this research form decorative interventions in the Head Office of Aviva, one of the largest providers of insurance within the UK. Each of the chapters is divided into two parts and the first in this chapter, ‘Habitus and the Workplace’, begins by exploring different ways in which aspects of decoration and décor may be considered to have ‘value’, beginning with references to Marx and looking especially at Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ in relation to class. Specific examples of furniture and interior décor observed in the offices of two of Aviva’s

buildings are used as examples. Use value, exchange value, labour value and symbolic value are considered as factors that affect the significance of objects in the context of the workplace and the habitus of the employee. The way that the workplace shapes the habitus of the worker, particularly through the organisation and design of the space in which different strata of employees are situated, is examined with reference to a photographic study of the topology of the building.

The context of the reception area is addressed in the making of collage and sculpture made specifically for this space. *“Let’s get comfortable”* is the generic title of a series of five sculptures that were placed in Aviva and described in detail in Part Two of Chapter Two ‘Disrupting the Office: Artwork Interventions and the Mediating Role of the Decorative’. Establishing a relationship with the chairs (as well as the floor and walls) of the reception areas and acting as a visual and physical disruption of the space, these artworks employ signifiers that expose and examine the complex relationship between the home and the workplace. Unlike the corporate furniture at Aviva these sculptures are based on individual designs, each of them themed in some way, from the idea of formal and informal dress codes, office stationery and home furnishings. The sculptures have a performative dimension: they can be handled and manipulated thus asserting their material, tactile qualities. Notions of value as related to furniture and décor are compared to values and hierarchies in the employment structure of the workplace and to forms of privilege. The place of ‘reception’ further complicates such notions, given the institutionally-driven arena of power that is also laced with intimations of welcome.

Chapter Three, ‘The Deviant Cloud: Shape-Shifting and Repetition at Berendsen’, reflects upon the use of a specific repeated motif, in this case the cloud, when used in artworks in the context of a large industrial laundry. The proposition here is that the semiotics of pattern and repetition in art can be used as a metaphor for the repetition inherent in the workplace. The cloud motif, when used as a pattern that is repeated at various locations on site, is shown to be decoration used ‘out-of-place’ and is able to draw attention to and raise awareness of the potential for alienation in repetitious labour.

Part One of the chapter, ‘Observing the Laundry and Considering the Cloud’, includes a topographical photographic analysis of the Berendsen site in Norfolk and a close semiotic reading of the cloud and skyscape, especially as they function as decorative motifs. Part

Two, 'Between Pattern and Labour: Decoration and Repetition', includes a detailed description and evaluation of the way the semiotics of the cloud operates in six pieces of art made for the laundry. The potency of site-related art in reference to the writings of Deutsche and Mouffe is considered, along with ideologies of the decorative, the idea of the surface as an active vehicle for the placement of the decorative and the idea of pattern as a metaphor for repetitive labour. In particular, Mouffe's notion of the non-commonsensual is used to argue that the artworks at Berendsen, presented in the social space of the laundry, pose a challenge to the 'natural order'. Mouffe calls for 'widening the field of artistic intervention directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism' (Mouffe 2007: 3). The cloudscape is a virtual aperture to 'other' worlds, whether a dream world, an 'art' world or the natural world.

The placing of artworks on or adjacent to chairs in Aviva's reception areas in Chapter Two begins to highlight the properties of chairs in relation to use and symbolic value. Chapter Four, 'The Chair as a Site for Tactical Interventions', considers theories of the everyday (Lefebvre 1961; de Certeau 1984; Highmore 2002; Papastergiadis 1998) and the way that chairs, as ubiquitous features of everyday decoration, can be used as sites for further playful interventions both through collage and 'chair-jacking' tactics. Part One, 'The Chair as an Example of Everyday Institutional and Domestic Décor(ation)', uses a selection of chairs to illustrate how issues of class and consumption are made visible in the decorative qualities of a commonplace object. It is the persistent ability to hint at status, habits and tastes (or habitus) that forms one of the main reasons why analysis of the chair is so useful to this study and why the chair is such a rich site for potential decorative intervention. As an example or model of the domestic, chairs can also show the influence that protagonists of the Modernist interior had in denying the value of decoration, along with decoration's subsequent re-evaluation through the latter half of the twentieth century and since. Artists' references to the chair highlight crossovers between art, craft and design which are picked up again in relation to the practice-based elements of this research.

The second part of Chapter Four, 'The Everyday as a Critical Construct', examines the way that art practice, in the form of site-related interventions suggested through collaged proposals and sculptural assemblages, can undermine class and stratification in office furniture, including chairs found in the Aviva buildings in London. Sculptural assemblages

that incorporate identical low-cost office chairs were exhibited in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>, a gallery that is open to the public as well as students and staff at Norwich University of the Arts (NUA). As a site, this 'white cube' contemporary gallery space offered a rich and intriguing position, being both a gallery within my workplace (I lecture at NUA) and the location for NUA's 'Ideas Factory', a place for established and fledgling businesses to incubate and grow. The white cube space furthers the discussion of Modernist's disavowal of the decorative and the carpeted plinth that supports the chair sculptures continues the references to the office as well as disrupting traditional notions of the plinth.

As well as the group of sculptures the exhibition included an area where visitors could view the workings of the PhD that were less visible, such as the proposal drawings for each venue. This exposed some of the 'work' of the artist-scholar, thus correlating with discussion in Chapter Five, 'Hard Graft: the Negotiation Value of the Site-Specific Work of Art', that compares and contrasts the work of the artist to those who work in the offices of Aviva or the industrial environment of Berendsen. Reflecting on the repetitive nature of work practices that typify many work environments has shed light on the tasks that typically engage the artist and Part One of Chapter Five, 'The Power of Un-belonging in the Workplace', explores these observations. Although in all of these contexts time is of the essence, the time spent making art equates to only a small fraction of the work of the artist, much of which is hidden or only hinted at in the finished work. Many other activities go to support the exhibited outcome, not least of which in the case of this research is the aspect of negotiation between myself and the managers of the locations for which the art was intended. The artworks themselves become symbolic of this negotiation.

The labour values of both the workers at the office and laundry, and a comparison of how the labour of the artist sits within and alongside this, are brought into direct comparison. The extent to which the artist and artwork is out-of-place in these work environments is explored as a factor that is able to afford the artwork more potency. Artists who navigate similar areas around the labour of the artist as well as the mutable relations between the gallery and non-gallery spaces are used as examples.

Part Two, 'The Negotiation Value of Artworks', explores the idea that the artworks possess a function that pertains to their negotiation value, this idea drawing upon research by Mark Wilsher (2010). David Brett's exposition of the decorative as holding both pleasurable and

connective factors (Brett 2005) is discussed in relation to the decorative aspects of the artworks made for this research. The boundary between these works of art being challenging within their work-based placement, and their acceptability within these contexts, is a site of meaning that is explored: the decorative aspects become elements that help facilitate this acceptance.

The concept of negotiation, both as a feature of the methodology and a feature of the artworks made for this research, has become a significant form of new knowledge within the research. Each chapter identifies areas of mediation between the (parasitical) artwork and its host, whether this is the Aviva reception area and the *“Let’s get comfortable”* pieces described in Chapter Two, the chairs of Chapter Four, or the motif of the cloud in the industrial laundry in Chapter Three. In all cases the artworks are both able to challenge and at the same time are able to make connections, whether physically or conceptually.

In relation to the visual documentation of the research, Volume One uses illustrations to work in tandem with the text. Volume Two, however, is a predominantly visual account of the research and includes additional visual documentation of the artworks made for each of the three case studies. As the process itself is so crucial to the making of each of these, a visual log of the proposals, intermediary drawings and studio shots of work-in-progress that evidence the making process for each body of work are also included. Section Three of Volume Two includes an additional set of Photoshop pieces where the ideas evidenced in the siting of work at Berendsen are extended into a set of proposed scenarios that were more ambitious than my resources and permissions at Berendsen would allow. Volume Two also includes an edited account of the negotiations that facilitated access to each of the three sites.

## **Theory and Practice**

Rather than presenting ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ separately, each chapter of the thesis integrates discussion of my art practice with the historical, critical and theoretical dimensions that contextualise it. The hypothesis being proposed through this practice-led research, contextualised through critical analysis, is that everyday decoration, ornamentation and pattern can be used in gallery and non-gallery sites to question hierarchies of status, including class and alienation. Decoration, pattern and ornamentation have been shown to have historical significance and offer various functions including

psychological necessity and the affordance of visual pleasure (Gombrich 1979; Miles 2000; Trilling 2003; Brett 2005). The general research question posed here is how, and to what extent, might such decoration function as a critical tool both within and outside of the gallery? So, for example, can these artworks, when brought into a dialogue with the alienating spaces of industry (where decoration is notably absent) harness the semiological and disruptive qualities of decoration to question class and status, and how does this then transpose into a gallery situation?

The notion of practice in this research takes on a number of significant aspects. Firstly there is art practice in the physical or 'material' sense of the creation, installation and display of artefacts and images. Secondly, is the practice of a worker and the multifarious activities undertaken in the role of the artist that do not always relate directly to the making of the artwork – the job of communicating or negotiating for example. Thirdly, practice refers to the theoretical positioning of praxis – the idea that practice can be used to mediate theoretical positions as lived experience, and fourthly, that practices are activities or 'tactics' that can be deployed in relation to everyday experience.

In his *Dialectical Materialism* of 1939 Henri Lefebvre recognized in the model of 'thesis, antithesis and synthesis the potential to transcend both ideological theory and social practice, hinting at a resolution of these habitual oppositions through praxis' (Cummings and Lewandowska 2006: 413). For Marx, praxis is the way that theory becomes part of lived experience 'where an idea ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes an everyday reality' (Cummings and Lewandowska 2006: 413). The theoretical contexts being brought into this specific dialectic are Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) and de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau's privileging of the everyday through aesthetic practices is championed further by Ben Highmore, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, who has written extensively on the concept of the everyday. Thus, the practical aspects of this research are reinforced by the theoretical concepts of practice that are articulated by these key writers.

Also writing on the subject of the everyday, Michael Sheringham describes the necessity of simulating and thus stimulating the

dynamic creativity that is inherent in the practices that constitute it, yet are generally hidden in the 'opacity' of gestures and local contexts. If the explorer of the everyday .....seeks to grasp a dynamism that springs from pratique it makes

sense that it should be by inventing practices of his or her own (Sheringham 2007: 387).

Where practice is referred to in this thesis it refers to both the everyday practices and employment of the decorative, and also the practices employed by an artist that simulate and employ decoration, ornamentation and pattern. The decorative, in as much as it constitutes an aspect of everyday 'stuff', especially in clothing and furniture, is significant in this regard.

In this thesis decoration is used in the context of critically-informed art to nuance the relevant aspects of the everyday or of lived experience, especially in the context of a relationship between the workplace and home. The decorative is highly pervasive. Many areas of design and craft production incorporate decorative elements. The decorative can also be connective: it is often a 'way-in' for a potential audience to enjoy or discover ideas in art and design. The recognisable semiotics of everyday decoration are to some extent more inclusive, potentially, than some areas of fine art: the decorative, especially in relation to *décor* is an area of everyday experience that most would feel able to relate to or recognise. These connective properties and their recognisability are those that are being prioritised for the artworks. The use of the decorative is that which the audience will implicitly 'know' from their everyday domestic environments. It is the *reconfiguring* of these decorative components, through the lens of art, which moves them beyond the context of the domestic. Decoration in the 'wrong' place gives it its disruptive potential. So, for example, the use of an elaborately swagged curtain arrangement, complete with tie-backs and tasselled fringing in the foyer of a Modernist office block (Figure 2.17) is able to raise questions about the social interactions and values that are apparent in that space.

Malcolm Miles speaks directly of decoration as something that can disrupt or disturb the ideal space:

(i)n acts of decoration ..... in all the things people do themselves to state identity, the dominant city is disordered. Decoration is not a process of purification but of accretion and deconstruction, in the terms of the dominant city a kind of pollution or dirt. Endlessly diverse and always contingent, decoration undermines the ideal (Miles 2000: 5).

Everyday fabrics, patterns, objects and motifs are used to signify decoration, ornamentation and pattern, including specific materials such as dress fabrics, suit materials, upholstery, soft furnishings and other decorative embellishments. The specificity

of these materials and the details of the artworks are crucial to the jarring of the works in their different contexts: these details reveal an 'alternative' to the office, for example. The photographs in Figure 1.1 are details of the *"Let's get comfortable"* artworks made for Aviva's Head Office and reveal the care that goes into the decision-making and the crafting of the works, as well as uncovering the labour that is inherent in the making of them.



Figure 1.1: Details from *"Let's get comfortable"* including various fabrics, cord, cordstoppers, tape, elastic (Horton 2013).

Closely related to Bourdieu's notion of habitus is the concept of embodiment. Attendant to this, a key component of many of these sculptural artworks is cloth, which very often has an intimate relationship to the body, to be worn or to be sat upon, for example. Somatic and haptic material qualities in the artworks relate to everyday experiences of decoration and décor as well as the embodied, anthropomorphic weight and sag of the cloth. Thus the interface between clothing, soft furnishing and sculpture, often operating between the body and the wider architectural environment, is figured as potentially disruptive.

Drawing and collage are key processes for developing ideas for sculpture or for proposals to the alteration of specific sites, whether the site is a piece of furniture or a work space.

Primary research included photographic analyses of the topography of the two Aviva buildings and Berendsen, some of the photographs subsequently being used as supports for collages, drawings and proposals for artworks. The photographs served as both primary analysis and as an impetus for making new artworks. (The photographs of Aviva's Norwich site and the visual material accessed via Aviva's extensive archive in Norwich have been used largely for reference rather than as prompts for artwork.)

Where the artworks are 'out-of-place' (as in an industrial environment) the audience for the work is an unsuspecting one, certainly not one that would be seeking an experience of viewing art as if visiting an art gallery. The artworks escape the confines of an artistic practice as typically recognisable by the viewer. At the same time the work is not completely alien because the viewer recognises references from them, either in relation to their home space/s or in relation to an easily recognisable motif (the cloud or stripe, for example). In this way the art is 'inclusive' in a social sense. The focus on decoration in work spaces is able to facilitate a dialogue between art and theory and the social. As Nikos Papastergiadis writes:

(b)oth the materiality of art work and its meanings are always situated within a social history. To communicate the social impact of art always requires the use of non-artistic categories of representation. [Art's] specificity is located within a social context, but the available concepts of the social are not always adequate for communicating the fullness of its significance (Papastergiadis 1998: 22).

The artworks themselves can be made more effective because the audience recognises in some of them the non-artistic categories of representation – they recognise the different fabrics and their use in clothing or in soft furnishings, or the pattern motif as familiar, for example. However, the fullness of the artwork's significance is articulated through the written exegesis that accompanies them.

The research considered here, because of its references to decoration as an aspect of the everyday and its emphasis on alternative sites for the placing of artworks, draws upon research from art, design, material culture and sociology. From a survey of available literature it is clear that the analysis of domestic and work spaces, their wall and floor coverings and the types and arrangements of furniture contained within them, has provided a wealth of research arising from and influenced by disciplines that include art and design history, philosophy, sociology, material culture, anthropology and psychology. The ability of the everyday to encompass this array of disciplines is part of its strength. As

noted by Highmore, Lefebvre goes beyond this, arguing that the everyday actually provides a challenge to disciplinary demarcations:

(f)or Lefebvre everyday life is a challenge to general social atomization: a separation of society and experience into discrete claims of the political, the aesthetic, the sexual, the economic and so on; of life divided into labour, love, leisure, etc. It is also a challenge to a specialized disciplinarity, which can be seen in the intellectual articulation of such divisions and separation: economics, philosophy, sociology and so on. Such disciplinary isolation must be overcome in the same way that their social cognates must be overcome (Highmore 2002: 129).

Thus Lefebvre's emphasis on the everyday offers a double critique: the critique of the separation between work and leisure *and* a rethinking of the atomisation of academic/knowledge disciplines. The use of collage and the introduction of artworks in unlikely spaces underscores and makes use of these cross-disciplinary boundaries to aid the efficacy of the works. Working across these boundaries also expands the repertoire of the artist and reduces the temptation to atomise the roles and practices that the artist may employ. The wall-length timeline (see Section Three of Volume Two) that was designed for the exhibition at EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> was developed as an attempt to more clearly demonstrate the multiplicity of roles undertaken by the artist for the research.

To summarise, primary observations at Aviva and Berendsen allowed for an analysis of the way buildings embody the hierarchical structure of the organisation and provide clear examples of the relationship between the formation of the habitus and the 'field' of the workplace. Bourdieu's concept of the habitus is crucial to the research because it demonstrates how the individual's choices are influenced by the fields within which s/he operates, such as work, education and class. The relationship is complex and dynamic but what is important here is that these individual dispositions are formed and lived out on a day-to-day basis: they are the everyday behaviours and choices of individuals as they come into contact with work and home environments. Aspects of the office or the industrial laundry – the materials of the building, the size of the lifts, the quality of furniture and so on – symbolically represent (or organise) the hierarchy of the employees they 'house'.

The artworks made for this research highlight this hierarchy and thus doing so question it, disturb it and agitate it through their placement, materials, form, method of production and singularity. My own predispositions (habitus) are themselves altered by the field in which the work is shown, both as an artist and as someone who can contribute to the exchange that takes place within the environment of the office or the laundry.

## Process and Practice

Process is not only technical and practical but also reflective and critically engaged. Social scientist Donald Schön reinforced the value of practice by stressing the importance of understanding and knowledge from any given field being tested through reflective practice (Schön 1983). Reflective practice or 'reflection-in-action' is a means of deconstructing the often-dichotomized relationship between academic and practice-based knowledge, to demonstrate problem-solving and how this can be augmented through reflection. Reflection on the practice-based elements of my research is undertaken through documenting ongoing work in-progress photographically, testing through exhibition, writing a Reflective Journal and through the writing of this thesis. Photographic documentation of the work not only provides a record of the making process, but often reveals something new about the identity of the work or suggests other potential avenues of enquiry. Recording the work as it is being made exposes aspects of it that become obscured or hidden in its final version or in subsequent iterations of it. For example, photographing the making of the sculpture series "*Let's get comfortable*" was able to uncover more about the relationship to utility and functionality of cloth as a material used in both clothing and in soft-furnishings. (On occasion, some photographs, enlarged and displayed in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>, for example, are works of art in their own right.) What becomes clear is the way that the often dichotomized relationship between theory and practice is in fact a complex, heterogeneous process.

For the purposes of this thesis the photographic documentation is, for the most part, also a key record of the placement of work in alternative venues as these placements are only fleeting interventions (in Aviva, for example (Figure 1.2)). Hence the documentation serves to give a picture or idea of how the pieces were placed, or displaced, through use/movement by those encountering the works, and how they interacted with the environment. The pieces themselves, seen in isolation, serve only part of their intended function and the photographs are crucial in understanding the different aspects of their intentionality.



Figure 1.2: “Let’s get comfortable” photographed at Aviva’s Head Office, London (Horton 2013).

Photographs also show the works in situ as they would have been experienced first-hand by the viewers at the workplaces. This experience is different to being seen through photographic documentation only, that is, being seen by a secondary audience either in the photographs displayed in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> or whilst reading this thesis.

A process of reflection and illumination can be triggered when the work is exhibited in venues other than the one it was originally intended for. For example, Figure 1.3 shows one of the pieces of work made for “Let’s get comfortable” with its inner padding removed, exhibited in the Student Gallery at Norwich University of the Arts. Exhibited in a corridor, flat on the floor and away from any furniture, enabled it to be seen independently, but still within the walls of an institution, albeit an educational institution. Seen this way, it proved its redundancy as an object that can be interacted with and reinforced that the value of the piece in the context of Aviva’s furniture was only one of a number of frames of reference to which the work might allude.

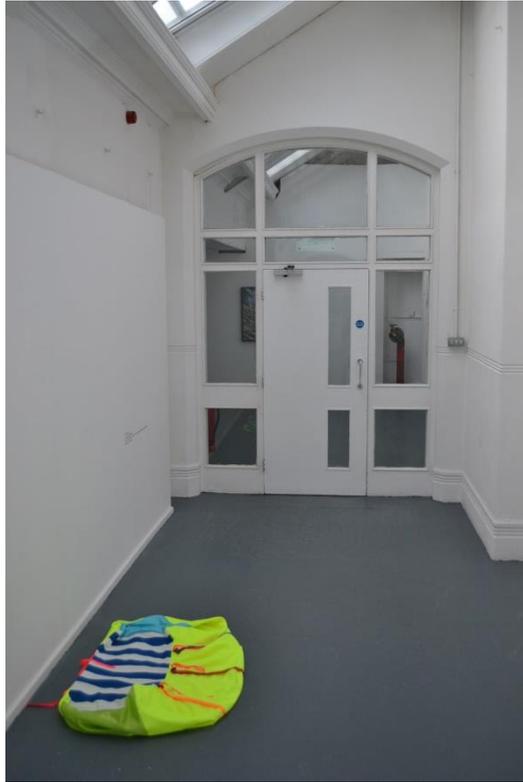


Figure 1.3: One of the “Let’s get comfortable” artworks used in the exhibition *Open for Discussion* at Norwich University of the Arts (Horton 2013).

The Reflective Journal interrupts the process of making in a constructive way, prompting me to pause and address the actuality of what is being made. Often the simple process of describing the work acts as a trigger for the next stage or highlights an aspect that does not serve the enquiry. It also runs parallel with the writing of the thesis allowing for the connections to the theoretical reading to be made. Here is a quote from the Reflective Journal dated January 2013:

[sculptures that look like] cushions made for the reception area of Aviva. How will these work? They are not cushions that would normally be seen here – they are mismatched with the black leather sofas and with each other. (Their similarity to each other, re their consistency of form make them a set; they appear to belong together, but not with the black sofas/benches.) They are not for sale, so they have no value in terms of commodity or exchange. Any ‘exchange’ is in terms of an *experience*; they may give more or additional comfort; they may give cause for thought – why are they here? Why are they so big? Why use these fabrics? .....They are transitory, like the people who sit with them. And unfixed.

Many of these questions or observations are expanded upon in the thesis. In some cases the practice provoked the questions, but with the question of exchange and value it was the reading being concurrently undertaken on Marx and the commodity that elicited this thought. This example elucidates the theory and practice working symbiotically within the

overall research and exemplifies the value of reflective practice. It also demonstrates the way in which the *process* of making the work, and not just the final outcomes, is itself revealing something about the research question. Quotes from the Reflective Journal are used where appropriate alongside the images in Volume Two to reinforce connections either to relevant theoretical references or the site in which the work was placed.

In this research existing signs and their interconnectedness are used, appropriating deliberately to draw attention to the original 'meaning' as Roland Barthes would call it (Barthes 1957). His strategy of alibi is also used where one reading and another flip backwards and forwards into consciousness. For example, the artworks play with the relationship between the functional and dysfunctional. This play is significant because the work references our everyday experiences of the decorative and décor, much of which has a utilitarian purpose. Many of the artists studied in relation to this research work with concepts of the everyday, some of them working on the borders between art and design whilst exploring aspects of functionality (see Jorge Pardo, Figure 2.21, for example). Working with these crossovers, at the same time as exploring functionality, can usefully question the context of consumption, value and display. This is also the case with the artworks where the functionality is always brought into question and is never the primary purpose of the artwork.

Highmore describes various practices used to highlight and simulate the creativity inherent in the everyday, including collage and montage. Collage is used in the creation of site-related proposals, works on paper that explore ideas from the safety and expediency of the studio. 'Clearly there is a huge potential for montage to generate critical forms of reading, by making contradictions and antagonisms explicit within the social realm' (Highmore 2002: 93). A collage allows for simultaneity of difference within the everyday to be represented, whilst refusing these differences to be subsumed into a homogenous whole or to be turned into a resolved or meaningful unity. Instead collage offers a 'bombardment of materials that resist narrative resolution.....where the disruption of one element by another challenges the authority of any one representational mode and allows the problematizing of representation itself' (Highmore 2002: 95). As a strategy, therefore, collage can bring together disparate elements without either one assuming overall authority.

Barthes uses the term 'myth' to indicate an instrumental tool for the suggestion of 'truth' via language, images or objects. The relationships between signifiers that generally determine our understanding of reality can be deconstructed through collage and other strategies to create new contiguities, new connections and relationships (Barthes 1957). As 'knowledge, rhetoric and aesthetic pleasure continuously disrupt one another, collage too becomes a way of thinking about looking and knowing' (O'Reilly in Craig 2008: 19).

Hybrid objects and furniture-sculptures use the juxtapositioning principle of collage to disrupt ideas of form and function in relation to decorative objects or patterns. Thus office chairs are altered through the addition of absurd antimacassars or headrests; beanbags are grafted onto office chairs; and the glass curtain walls of a Modernist office block are adorned by oversized, elaborate curtains more reminiscent in scale of a theatre curtain or the windows of a stately home.

These proposals, drawn or painted onto paper, sometimes using design software as in the case of Berendsen, bring disparate elements together into a composite form offering an alternative reading of that space or object. The collage in this sense provides a 'model', which is able to give form to these imagined artworks. Not only does this give the viewer a means of visualising the unknown, it also provides the artist with a way of testing spatial interventions in the safety of the studio and a practical method of exploring an idea in a multitude of ways without the expense and time required to physically make them.

The drawings and collages that inform the making of the sculptural works are included as preliminary investigations in Volume Two for each case study. There are occasions when the collage or drawing is arguably a conceptually complete idea or artwork in its own right and such pieces are indicated where appropriate (see, for example, *Boardroom Décor* in Section Three).

Collage is an important way of 'thinking through the visual' in this research, in at least one of the ways that Sarat Maharaj refers to it (Maharaj 2009). As thinking tools, collage and drawing act as processes that allow for dead-ends and blind alleys that are often necessary to the route of visual problem-solving. 'Thinking through the visual' in Maharaj's other sense, that is, of unpacking it and taking apart its meanings or components, is part of the role of the written thesis.

## **Spatial Agitation and the Interrogation of Site**

It is in the siting or placing of these works of art in their respective locations that the theory, process and practice described for this research can be brought together and tested. Thus, site-related tactics and the placement of artworks in non-gallery environments are crucial to the methodology of the work. If the frisson or efficacy of collage as a technique lies in its power to bring together previously disassociated material, the placing of artworks to disrupt the environment of the workplace works in a similar way. In the case of these interventions the strangeness or otherness of the artworks provides an 'edge' (Monroe 2008: 45), an entry point with which to pry apart the illusion of a space that combines, for example, the comforts of home with an office foyer. In other words, in the same way that the edges of the paint or paper in a two-dimensional collage disturb the illusion of a cohesive space, recognising the 'edge' or otherness of these artworks is also necessary: without it they lose their ability to accentuate the estrangement between their individual properties and the characteristics of the site. This edge is provided by their difference but also by their placement in and amongst the everyday fixtures of the workplace. This is artwork used not in the traditional sense of adorning the office wall but with a more interrogative and interruptive purpose – to literally and metaphorically be tripped over!

Robert Irwin (1985) describes four categories of site-related or public art: 'site dominant', 'site-adjusted', 'site-specific' and the 'site-conditioned/determined', all of which place the artwork and the site within different relationships to each other. In the latter category, 'site-conditioned/determined', he describes the making of the artwork as drawing all of its cues from the site, requiring what he describes as a 'hands-on' reading of it:

(w)hat is the site's relation to applied and implied schemes of organization and systems of order, relation, architecture, uses, distances, sense of scale? .....What is the physical and people density?... What are the qualities of detail, levels of finish, craft? What are the histories of prior and current uses, present desires etc.? (Irwin 1985: 218).

This level of investigation is represented in this research through the topographical photographs and/or analysis made for each of the sites where artwork has been placed. These in-depth analyses have then gone on to affect how the work is made and with what materials. Irwin describes this more fully as the 'aesthetic sensibility, levels and kinds of physicality, gesture, dimensions, materials, kind and level of finish, details, etc.; whether the response should be monumental or ephemeral, aggressive or gentle, useful or useless,

sculptural [or] architectural' (Irwin 1985: 218). As each site is different so the resulting artworks do not necessarily fit into any one style or type.

According to Doreen Massey 'The spatial ... can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace' (Massey 1994: 4). This emphasis on the instrumental elements of space is usefully seen alongside the concept of 'abstract' space, which is, according to Lefebvre, the space of capitalism. Abstract space is ideological because it reproduces prevailing social relations and because it represses conflict: consensus of thought and practice about a space determines what is or isn't expected in particular spaces. However, interventionist aesthetic practices can play a role in re-designing or recoding such sites. The reception area of Aviva's Head Office, for example, as a global financial corporation in the City of London, is indicative of an 'abstract' space as defined by Lefebvre. To introduce elements of home (and the body/clothing) through the interjection of artworks that reference domestic décor or personal adornment provides the difference that highlights the division between work and leisure<sup>2</sup>: '...inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences' (Lefebvre 1991: 52).

Within alternative sites, the work of art acts as what Lefebvre refers to as a form of 'play-generating-yeast' (Lefebvre 2002: 3). Johnstone extends this metaphor to suggest that this implies 'fermentation, agitation and disruption' (Johnstone 2008: 14). Finding alternative contexts for the display of work, for example a laundry, allows for different frames of reference to affect the work, both having the potential to use decoration as a tool for questioning and 'fermenting' issues of class, and 'agitating' and disrupting the spatial properties that support these assumptions. These placements of artwork within the work space function also as 'tactical' disturbances of the kind referred to by de Certeau, the

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<sup>2</sup> Gill Valentine cautions against valorising the home above the workplace arguing that the 'ideal home' is not as simple as it sounds. Romanticised as a place of relaxation and comfort, the home is implicitly conceptualized as a separate and distinct time-space from the workplace. However, as Gregson and Lowe recognise (1987) the home may be a site of paid work as well as an oppressive and isolating site of unpaid domestic work, which is still real work even if not always recognised as such (Davidoff et al 1979 and MacKenzie and Rose 1983: 159 in Valentine 1991: 77-79).

shifting or appropriation of objects and to Deutsche's interrogative model of site-related art where artworks provide a direct challenge to their surroundings.

Part of what makes the interventions 'other' is that they are one-off objects. The one-off artefact acts as a counter to the mass-produced furniture and design of the sites they are placed in. The hand-crafted qualities of the work invade the space, interrupting the space's seamlessness through their difference. The power of otherness or not belonging is discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

Since the inevitability of the artwork's display in the gallery became fundamentally challenged in the 1960s, site-related artworks have become commonplace. Miwon Kwon describes the potential for site-oriented art to unearth 'repressed histories, provide support for greater visibility of marginalised groups and issues and initiate the re(dis)covery of 'minor' places so far ignored by the dominant culture' (Kwon 2004: 86). Chapter Two of this research, for example, analyses the way in which Aviva's use and location of its spaces, for example the CEO's offices located on the top floor of the building, can illustrate or mirror the different class or level of workers within the organization. In using industrial or financial spaces it is hoped that the work made for this research can make more visible the way that space is structured and used to maintain and promote hierarchical and class-based relationships.

Henk Slager argues that a context-responsive research practice should connect 'the material conditions of location, the discursive network, and the prevailing modes of criticality, while articulating the site as a differential place and medium' (Slager 2012: 43). Both the Berendsen and Aviva projects combine a recognition of the space as a symbol of power or capital, a network of 'voices' that includes employees and visitors to the site and prevailing modes of criticality being discourses around art and design, labour and leisure. 'Context-responsive projects aspire to achieve a particular and non-essentialist locality at that very site, both acknowledging and cherishing internal conflicts and inherent plurality of views' (Slager 2012: 52). In the case of this research this exchange takes place on a number of levels: between the public and private (especially in the context of a reception area, a liminal or threshold space); between the artwork and its viewers; and between myself as an artist (and outsider) and the occupational inhabitants of the building space. These exchanges emphasise the porosity of the borders between artist/viewer,

public/private and work/leisure and are more fully discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

Massey has demonstrated that the permeability or 'flow' expected between work and home is often not an equal one and that although employers are not keen to see too many domestic references in the workplace it is all too common to find indices of the workplace in evidence at home (Massey 1994). It is possibly for these reasons that I found it easier, conceptually, to make challenging art interventions using the domestic in the workplace than to impose the workplace onto the home, but at the same time why making these interventions practically – gaining permissions, for example – is itself challenging. Consumerism depends on decoration for its associations with luxury and prestige. The ribbons, tassels, silks and satins, as well as the various aspects of craft that are present in the artworks made for this research, pierce open the bland workings and operational efficiency of consumerism. These two faces of consumerism, that have arguably lost sight of each other, are jolted into contact with one another in these artworks through the use of the decorative.

Negotiation as a key process within this research is explored in detail in Chapter Five. The negotiation that occurs with the managers of each installation venue is an obvious example. The way these artworks then go on to operate visually or physically in the work spaces reveals another aspect of negotiation and their capacity to mediate potentially opposing characteristics, for example, the hardness and softness of materials, use of colour and lack of colour, pattern and non-pattern, and luxury and economy. There is a sense too of negotiating the forms of the artworks in response to the particular physical characteristics of the workspace. All of these are explored in later chapters of the thesis.

Another example of negotiation occurs within the making process itself where forms and materials are manipulated and altered to form various iterations of an artwork as a project progresses. All of these factors can be seen in the example given in Section Three of Volume Two where a pleated sculptural form that was prompted in part by seeing fabric being folded and stacked at Berendsen (see Figure 3.27) was taken further into the piece 24/7 designed and made for one of the office chairs exhibited in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> (Figures. 4.21 and 4.22). Thus the practice informs the site for installation which in turn prompts the specificities of materials and methods used in each piece of work. Along with

reading, a constant process of documenting and reflecting backwards and projecting forwards is also crucial.

This iterative process of production finds echoes in what Maharaj describes as the 'agglutinative' process of making (Maharaj 2009), a kind of making that does not rely on the verbal but on the 'sticky', somatic and material qualities of the work. These exist alongside or independently of the discursive side of the process and are likely to link to our bodily and haptic understanding of the world as experienced through the individual habitus.

Alongside runs its intensive non-discursive register, its seething para-discursive charge and capability – both its "pathic" and "phatic" force, its penumbra of the non-verbal, its somatic scope, its smoky atmospherics, its performative range (Maharaj 2009).

## Summary

This research seeks to give greater credence to decoration, pattern and ornamentation as tools which are open to inclusion within critical discourse. The home, the domestic and the qualities of pattern, ornament and other surplus aspects associated with luxury, are examined and re-viewed in the context of the workplace.

Lefebvre (1991) provides a way of describing connections between 'planned' spaces and ways they might be used that are unpredictable or 'problematized'. The practice of everyday life (Lefebvre 1974) and the recoding of social space are tools for critiquing relations between work and leisure to highlight the alienation caused through the divisions of labour. If, as Massey states, '(t)he identities of places are always unfixed, contested and multiple' (Massey 1994:5), the reorganisation of spaces through artistic interventions can be used to emphasise this lack of fixity and create a new dynamic within existing spaces. Thus the site-related proposals and objects made for this research use art in a 'non-organisational' way by employing art in a public space as a means of unsettling the relationship between the way the space is abstractly designed and the way it is 'appropriated' by its user, in this case by the artist. The interjection of these artworks into a financial, industrial or gallery setting uses decoration as a spatial intervention, conceptually and physically puncturing the space and allowing for the interrogative quality that Deutsche demands of art in public places if it is to provide new awareness of the social dialectics of that space. These out-of-place imposters then negotiate their place through the connective properties of the decorative.

## Chapter Two: Material Relations

### Introduction

'Material Relations' describes and contextualizes the way that artworks made for this research form decorative interventions in the offices of one of the largest providers of insurance within the UK<sup>3</sup>. Establishing a relationship with the chairs (as well as the floor and walls) of the reception areas and acting as a visual and physical disruption of the space, these artworks employ signifiers that 'open up' and examine the complex relationship between home and workplace. Notions of value as related to furniture and décor are compared to values and hierarchies in the employment structure of the workplace and to forms of privilege. Primary research in the form of photographic topographical studies of two of Aviva's buildings has informed this analysis.

This chapter is formed of two parts. Part One, 'Habitus and the Workplace', explores different ways in which aspects of decoration and décor may be considered to have 'value', beginning with references to Karl Marx and looking especially at Bourdieu's 'habitus' with regard to class. Specific examples of furniture and interior décor observed in the offices of two of Aviva's buildings are used as examples. Use value, exchange value, labour value and symbolic value are considered as factors that affect the value of objects in the context of the workplace and the habitus of the employee. The way that the workplace shapes the habitus of the worker, particularly through the organisation and design of the space in which different strata of employees are situated, is examined with reference to a photographic study of the topology of the building. Aviva is especially interesting in relation to this research as it is a commercial enterprise founded on the protection of the individual's home, life and belongings: as a major supplier of house and life insurance in the UK Aviva has very obvious links to the domestic, an aspect that enriches its potential as a site for decorative interventions. The location of Aviva's Head Office in London's 'square mile' emphasises its global importance; the institution also has strong connections to my home town, Norwich, where it was founded as Norwich Union and where it continues to be a significant employer in the city.

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<sup>3</sup> This office is that of Aviva. Aviva is one of the largest providers of life insurance, pensions and long-term financial services in the UK and is a global company with around 33 million customers and 29,600 staff worldwide. In the UK Aviva has 16m customers ([www.aviva.com](http://www.aviva.com) accessed 29.12.2016).

When writing about labour value and profit, Marx introduces the concept of alienation, which put simply, states that human labour is divorced from the products of that labour. Marx believed that competition continually pushed down wages and that more economically effective production methods reduce the conditions for the employee to a 'fragment of a man' (Marx 1867) as an appendage of a machine, with no pleasure in work, little intellectual interest and a reduced number of hours for enjoying life. As a Victorian critic who saw the challenges of the machine age and its effects on labour, John Ruskin also believed in the enjoyment that comes from a real engagement in the process of making or of labour. He believed that art and design can reflect the mind of the maker and by extension its society: art is not a mere embellishment but expresses the health and condition of the public (Ruskin 1860, 1851-3).<sup>4</sup> Ruskin stated that manufacturers had a social responsibility, and interestingly many larger companies today adopt corporate social policies. It was under these auspices that Aviva agreed to the placing of my artworks in the building, my initial Aviva liaisons taking place with a member of their Corporate and Social Responsibility team. The placement of the artworks is explored in detail in Part Two of the chapter, 'Disrupting the Office: Artwork Interventions and the Mediating Role of the Decorative'.

As new forms of alienation enter our working lives (Berardi 2009, Crary 2013) it is still the case, despite the efforts of some forward-thinking companies, that workplaces themselves are typically alienating spaces. This alienation is explored in this chapter through the topographical analysis of the Aviva buildings and through the siting of artworks therein. The debates around working from home, and the conflation of work and home spaces, is more fully explored in Chapter Four.

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<sup>4</sup> A significant difference here, of course, is that art is being used as a disruptive element: in a post-Duchampian era art is not always as polite as Ruskin would have appreciated.

## Part One: Habitus and the Workplace

### Use Value, Labour and Exchange

Art objects are not easily assimilated within economic or sociological theories of value, labour and exchange. It is nevertheless pertinent to my positioning and questioning of the 'decorative' in relation to artworks within an office to briefly consider the economic environment of production and value. Notions of class and value as analysed within Marxist economics are central to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and these in turn have shaped critical analysis of 'the everyday'. Together these provide a critical framework to which an account of my practice refers. Within the office environment (and in negotiation with the social relations that support this) the work of the artist and the status of the artwork may together function to disrupt convention.

In Marxian economics any object that has a utility has a use value, thus '(t)he utility of a thing makes it a use value. ...A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use value, something useful' (Marx 1886: 2-3). Building on the work of predecessors Adam Smith and David Ricardo, Marx proffered a labour theory of value whereby prices could be directly equated with labour. In this system Marx argued that goods would sell in direct proportion to the labour required to produce them (Ramsay-Steele 1988: 33minutes). Marx defines labour power as 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he [sic] exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description' (Marx 1886: 145). Agreement to sell an individual's labour is made under a contract defining the amount of time that is expended. The labour is the individual's property to sell to another: if the purchaser takes it all, the producer becomes a slave, 'from an owner of a commodity, into a commodity' (Marx 1886: 146).

An object only becomes a commodity when it is brought into an exchange. Without this element of exchange it simply has a use value. Thus 'use values become a reality only by use or consumption ... they are, in addition, the material depositories of exchange value' (Marx 1886: 2-3). When an object's monetary value exceeds the labour-value inherent in an object's production, it incurs excess income or profit. This profit, or 'capital', introduces an inequality between the producer of the object and the object's new owner. It is this division of the owners of production and those who make it that underlies Marx's theory of

class: the bourgeoisie are the owners of production, whilst the proletariat or working-class are the producers. The products of this exchange, where labour ceases to be directly equated with value, give rise to the commodity. Marx talks of the 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' that transform a material object into a commodity, using a table as an example (Marx 1867: 163-5). In the words of philosopher Mark Kingwell, it is 'now a bearer of non-material significance, of ideological and social payload' (Kingwell 2002: 175). Thus even a table is no longer valued just for its usefulness; its value is loaded, both ideologically and symbolically, and in being so becomes a part of politics. For Arjun Appadurai,

(p)olitics (in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power) is what links value and exchange in the social life of commodities. In the mundane, day-to-day, small-scale exchanges of things in ordinary life, this fact is not visible, for exchange has the routine and conventionalized look of all customary behaviour. But these many ordinary dealings would not be possible were it not for a broad set of agreements concerning what is desirable, what a reasonable 'exchange of sacrifices' comprises, and who is permitted to exercise what kind of effective demand in what circumstances (Appadurai 1986: 57).

For Marx, '...the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things' (Marx 1886: 44). Thus, Marx begins to assert the social differences between those who produce and those who profit from the ownership of these products, that is, the extent to which an individual's productivity is socially useful and how much the products of their labour can be exchanged for other products.

## **Symbolic Value**

Although Marx's historical materialism still forms the basic definition of many theories of class, subsequent theories have nuanced the idea of stratification. Max Weber's theory of social stratification in *Class, Status, Party* (1946), for example, acknowledges the part played by non-economic factors such as honour, prestige and religion as well as affiliations in the political domain.

Other, more recent, authors have argued that class location should take into account cultural factors such as lifestyle and consumption patterns where individual identity is also defined by choice of dress, habitat, leisure, and the like. The French sociologist Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) identifies four forms of capital that characterize class position: economic

capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Symbolic capital (or symbolic value as it has also been called) is described by Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), a book that was grounded in Thorstein Veblen's theory of 'conspicuous consumption' (1899) and used subsequently by Marcel Mauss (1922).

Veblen's concept of 'conspicuous consumption' (in the context of the 'leisure class') describes the way in which outward signs of wealth, for example excessive giving of presents or entertainments, the wearing of lavish clothes or purchasing of expensive goods, are made for the express purpose of signifying the owner's wealth. To some extent, whether these decisions are made consciously, as in the case of conspicuous consumption, or not, every selection a person makes when choosing a product says something about the status, wealth, attitudes or values of that individual. Appadurai cites George Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (1900). 'Value for Simmel, is never an inherent property of objects, but is a judgment about them by subjects.....Today, in general, the link of commodities to post-industrial social, financial and exchange forms is taken for granted, even by those who in other regards do not take Marx seriously' (Appadurai 1986: 8).

Addressing the symbolic value of the artwork, Isabella Graw pairs the concept of the 'symbolic' as used by Bourdieu with the concept of 'value' in the context of the commodity as described by Marx.

(S)ymbolic value may be defined as a dual social charge, a charge that is conveyed by specific symbol-bearers but cannot be apprehended in terms of these bearers themselves. It stands for a surplus and an assumption of meaning and worth that goes beyond the concrete object used to refer to it (Graw 2010a: 23).

Graw describes the way in which the artwork trades on the symbolic cachet of the artist but differs from Bourdieu in his assertion of the 'relative autonomy' (Bourdieu 1996: 248) of the artist. She argues that in relation to the art market the artist's position has now shifted to one of 'relative heteronomy' whereby it is still possible for the artist to retain *some* autonomy, but that the 'external constraints [of the art market] are placed in the foreground, and this even more so when being driven by economic considerations has become a prevalent mind set within the art world' (Graw 2010a: 142).

As well as aspiration the symbolic value of objects is complicated further by the ironic selection of objects and what Mihay Csikszentmihalyi calls the *sociality* of an object rather than its economic value. Often more important than aesthetics or 'good design' is the

sense that an object connects the owner with a time or an event, or with another person, hence the sociality of an object (Csikszentmihalyi 1991). Secondly, as Peter Bürger writes '(a) garden gnome is no longer a garden gnome.... These days one cannot help suspecting a garden gnome of being an ironic quotation' (Bürger 1990: 47-56). Here Bürger's 'garden gnome' syndrome posits irony as sophistry. Thus, what is cherished by owners may not necessarily be related to consumption or to class but to emotional attachment or irony.

## **Habitus and Class**

Bourdieu uses the term 'habitus' to describe an individual's predispositions and demonstrates how these can position someone, and simultaneously also be shaped by, a person's class. In a footnote in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) Bourdieu writes:

(t)he word disposition seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions)...It expresses first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination (Bourdieu 1977: 214).

The habitus functions not only at the level of a person's conscious opinions and choices but at a deeper, less conscious, embodied level, that is, relating very directly to the body and the practices of the individual that relate to physical taste, accent, posture, and so on.

It is this system of dispositions (habitus) that characterises different classes and class factions from one another. These dispositions are acquired through the objective conditions an individual encounters through their multitude of different relationships and social, educational or other interactions. These dispositions provide lasting schemes of perception, thought and action. The individual's behaviour exists in a dynamic relationship between the habitus on the one hand and the 'field' on the other, the 'field' being any number of contexts or settings within which the individual is able to express a preference. According to Bourdieu 'there are as many fields of preferences as there are fields of stylistic possibilities'. Examples he gives include drinks, cars, holiday resorts and house and garden furnishings (Bourdieu 1979: 226). A field may also be a social structure or social group, for example those associated with the arts, education, law or politics. Subsets of the wider sphere of social structures, these fields or social spaces have their own internal rules, constraints, language and commonalities. Each of these fields engenders a set of social behaviours adopted by individual agents. Bourdieu argues that through these practices the

individual develops a disposition for social action conditioned by their position in the field, for example, dominant/dominated – although Bourdieu is careful to finesse and nuance these oppositions. Through the two concepts of habitus and field Bourdieu is able to theorise the complex inculcation of one to another.

Bourdieu argues that although art offers the greatest scope for aesthetic appreciation ‘nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even ‘common’ (because the ‘common’ people make them their own, especially for aesthetic purposes), or the ability to apply the principles of a ‘pure’ aesthetic to the most everyday choices of everyday life, e.g., cooking, clothing or decoration...’ (Bourdieu 1979: 6). Indeed Bourdieu goes even further stating that the ordinary choices of the everyday such as furniture and clothing are particularly revealing of deep-rooted and long-standing dispositions that ‘forge the unconscious unity of a class’ (Bourdieu 1979: 77).

Life-styles are thus the systematic products of habitus, which, perceived in their mutual relations through the schemes of the habitus, become sign systems that are socially qualified (as ‘distinguished’, ‘vulgar’ etc.). The dialectic of conditions and habitus is the basis of an alchemy which transforms the distribution of capital, the balance-sheet of a power relation, into a system of perceived differences, distinctive properties, that is, a distribution of symbolic capital... (Bourdieu 1979: 172).

Bourdieu's analysis of class and decoration resonates in the work and writings of the contemporary British artist Grayson Perry, notably in his series of tapestries, *The Vanity of Small Differences* (2012) in which references to décor and decoration are used as a way of signalling the class of the characters depicted within the work. Perry notes that

(i)t’s those default settings we all have, those unexamined “natural” and “normal” choices, which often say the most about us: where and when we eat, when and where we might expose a bit of flesh, the kind of curtains we buy, what television you watch, how you bring up your children. We often become aware of these unconscious choices only when we move between social classes (Perry 2013).

The financial exchange that takes place when we buy a particular pair of curtains is only one example of the kinds of capital that we accrue. ‘Capital’ is used by Bourdieu to encompass a whole range of acquisitions, not just of consumer goods but social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. Symbolic capital describes a field within which any set of objects or types of activity can be judged by or through socially generated systems of classification and can be seen as a source of power (Bourdieu 1979), or the values of

prestige, status and other forms of social honour that enable those with high status to control or dominate those with lower status. Individuals are grouped not only by their social class but every kind of capital available to them. In the dominant class competition for luxury goods or emblems of class continues in order to prolong a state or strategy for dominance. 'Exclusivity' of possessions makes their status less achievable.

It is useful at this stage to consider an example of the way in which the concepts of habitus and field work together in relation to class and labour to influence choice of decoration. An example here is my preference for decorating my home with original paintings rather than prints or copies. I use the word decorate in this setting because in the context of my home the paintings are viewed as artworks *and* items of home décor: they decorate my house in that very particular sense of the word decoration, *to adorn*, although this may be an additional function to those intended by the artist.<sup>5</sup> The preference for originals is likely to stem from my education in art: for Bourdieu education is one of the strongest influences on the habitus. Secondly, working as an artist and educator I have come to value the formal properties of an artwork that can only usually be appreciated by having an original rather than a copy (this is more obvious in the case of a painting rather than a print or photograph for example). Thus, the two fields within which I work – education and art, along with my personal education - lead me to value artworks, and preferably the original rather than a cheaper reproduction. However, my working-class background, mediated to some extent by my professional occupation, means that I can only afford to buy art of lesser-known artists.

Design historian Adrian Forty talks of the complex relationship between individual expression, class position and the market in choice of decoration:

(t)he conflict of the desire for individuality with the constraints of the economy and of dominant ideas thrives in the furnishing of domestic interiors. Every choice, every decision about the decoration of the home is a new episode in the same drama: the conflict is always there and never resolved. It is the fact that the home is both a factory of private illusions and a catalogue of ready-made tastes, values

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<sup>5</sup> Barbara Bloemink writes '(t)he separation of "fine" art from design is a fairly recent Western conceit, and has only been considered an issue during certain eras. So too is the idea, still prevalent, that art is "non-functional". Throughout Western history, art has functioned as religious, ideological, and political propaganda, economic currency, commodity, decoration, and as a vehicle for personal self-aggrandizement' (Bloemink 2004: 18). Interestingly she also notes that '(i)n a particularly Duchampian twist Donald Judd purchased and hung a commercial bottle rack on the wall of his son's room at Spring Street, ironically commenting on Duchamp's bottle rack' (Bloemink 2004: 21) and arguably using the work as decoration!

and ideas that makes all design for the home so extraordinarily revealing about the conditions of modern life (Forty 1986: 119).

Describing a study of seventy-six households in what she describes as a 'manifestly ordinary' cosmopolitan street (a mid-1960s council estate) ethnographer Alison Clarke gives examples of the ways in which the increasing emphasis on home decoration intersects with class, gender and ethnicity to affect the construction of *ideal* and *actual* contemporary social worlds. 'Home decoration, though tied to key life cycles and events, is the principal means by which members of households attempt to invert, reinvent or perpetuate their material worlds' (Clarke 2008: 26). It is how occupants imagine or envisage their ideal homes and how items they own embody these dreams. As an example of this Clarke describes one of the participant's ownership of a huge candelabrum because she fancied that one day she might live in a house with a baronial hall.

Highmore points out, in relation to the Mass Observation project of the 1930s – 1950s, that rather than assuming society is shaped strictly from a conflict between two main classes, class is 'mutable, heterogeneous and performative' (Highmore 2002: 103). He references Ian Harrison (ibid.) for whom class is to be seen in nuanced forms influenced not just by economics but also by emotional investment and social aspiration. In the case of the Bolton residents in the Mass Observation project, Harrison also talks of the way class might appear to change across the week as manual workers on a weekday would dress as "well-to-do' middle classes at the weekend' (Highmore 2002: 104).

Consumption is affected by class, and class positioning is reinforced through the mechanisms of consumption including advertising. These mechanisms play on the aspirations of consumers, often influencing people to identify themselves through what they consume rather than what they produce. Judith Williamson writes:

we are made to feel that we can rise or fall in society through what we are able to buy, and this obscures the actual class basis that still underlies social position. The fundamental differences in society are still class differences, but use of manufactured goods as a means of creating classes or groups form an overlay on them (Williamson 1978: 13).

Jean Baudrillard (1968) attempts to dispel the myth that we are offered a genuine choice of comparable objects, or that we are able to personalize our choices. He reinforces the point that choice assigns a person a place in the overall economic order but argues that the objects that are supposedly available to all, including those at the top price-range, are in

reality unavailable as not all have the means by which to purchase them. Therefore the choice is spurious.

Indeed we no longer even have the choice of not choosing, of buying an object on the sole grounds of utility, for no object these days is offered for sale on such a 'zero-level' basis. ...It follows that the choice in question is a specious one: to experience it as freedom is simply to be less sensible to the fact that it is imposed upon us as such, and that through it society as a whole is likewise imposed upon us.....Choosing one car over another may perhaps personalize your choice, but the most important thing about the fact of choosing is that it assigns you a place in the overall economic order (Baudrillard 1968: 152).

To summarise so far, the value of objects can be defined in a number of ways, including, significantly, the value of the commodity. Value and choice in relation to class is complicated by a whole host of factors and influences. Decoration works as a code which is essential to capitalism, providing added value and an expression of, and vehicle for, desire in the circulation of commodities. Although belongings can be signifiers for self-expression and identity and can, to some extent, be deconstructed through semiotic analysis, our selection of clothing or furnishing is not easy to generalise. Tastes or preferences as described by Bourdieu are multifaceted and complicated by many factors including education, access to money, awareness of design and use of irony. Added to this is the availability of 'faux' materials and brand fakes where more costly design is mimicked by cheaper manufacturing – all techniques that are used by manufacturers and marketers to indulge and exploit aspirations.<sup>6</sup>

## **Articulating Value in the Workplace: Space, Structure and Material in Aviva Offices**

Having looked at different notions of value in relation to class and habitus this section will look at symbolic values as evident in a specific workplace example. The particular place of work used as an example is that of Aviva. I will look at two significant Aviva buildings, the Head Office in London and the Surrey House building in Norwich, in relation to Henri Lefebvre's assertion that the *space of work* can indicate 'one's position in the mode of production' (Lefebvre 1991: 288). Whilst the two buildings appear to embody very divergent approaches to the decorative, both of them indicate the extent to which the

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<sup>6</sup> This appropriation of luxury can have serious negative effects on a manufacturer, witness the consequences for Burberry in the UK when its brand was famously adopted by so-called 'chavs' wanting to capitalise on the luxury connoted through its famous check pattern. Fuelled by a market flooded with fakes Burberry lost financial value and brand kudos during the early 2000s, resulting in a major rebranding whereby it removed its check pattern from all but a very small minority of its goods.  
(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4381140.stm> accessed 23.2.2014)

decorative can be used to codify class and hierarchy. The decision to place artwork for this research in Aviva was made firstly because it is a major financial employer and therefore embodies many aspects of exchange and value and, secondly, because it profits on the payments that are related to the value of the 'life' and belongings of the individuals who pay into it.<sup>7</sup>

If 'social identity is defined and asserted through difference' (Bourdieu 1979: 172) a person's status within the workplace is not only conditioned by the work they do but can also shape, and be shaped by, the differences in surroundings and objects they have access to, including the furniture they use and the clothes they wear. Aviva's brand is based on financial prosperity, prudence and the protection of the individual. It is interesting to observe how, if at all, this connection to the individual and to her/his values are borne out in their work environment. The placing of artworks that might remind Aviva employees of their home environment and their roles as non-workers as well as employees in this context could potentially raise awareness of the environment in which stratification is exemplified through the building and furnishings.

Aviva's Head Office (Figure 2.1) (previously known as the Aviva Tower or Commercial Union building) is in the St Helen's area of the City of London. The building is 118ft tall with 28 floors. Completed in 1969 it was the first building in the City of London to exceed the height of St Paul's Cathedral. Influenced by the design of Mies van der Rohe it was designed by the Gollins Melvin Ward Partnership. The double-height reception area (Figure 2.2) is sparsely furnished with a bench, two sofas and a handful of 'easy' chairs. These encourage the visitor to be seated and, although comfortable, are still relatively formal. Fairly austere in appearance the fabric is hard-wearing, dark leather. In the photograph Figure 2.23 a low level white-topped table can be seen (similar in size to a coffee table) and a curious wood-veneered structure placed against the wall that resembles the shape and dimensions of a fireplace surround. Although decorative features are few, crucially there are a small number of artworks placed throughout the ground floor that might be seen as adornments

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<sup>7</sup> Insurance policies provide a form of risk-management where assumptions about value (of a person's life or their belongings, for example) are made by the insurers through complex actuarial procedures. A company (or the state) guarantees disbursement of costs incurred due to loss, damage, illness or death in return for payment/s of a specific premium. Insurers profit through the collection and investment of these premiums. Any profit, after pay-outs for claims and if investments prove fruitful, is shared out amongst certain policy holders and shareholders. Although initially trading as a mutual company, in 1997 Aviva (or Norwich Union as it was then called) was demutualised and floated as a public limited company ([www.aviva.com/timeline/](http://www.aviva.com/timeline/)) accessed 18.1.2017.

to the space, including two paintings by Gillian Ayres in the reception area. These represent a small fraction of Aviva's art collection. A large Aviva logo dominates the back wall under which hangs a clock as a potential reminder that 'time is money'. The revolving doors 'confuse' the inside and out (O'Doherty 1986: 69) as do the huge expanses of glass.



Figure 2.1: Aviva Head Office, St. Helen's, City of London. (Horton 2011)



Figure 2.2: Reception area in Aviva, London. (Horton 2011)

In contrast, Aviva's Surrey House in Norwich (Figure 2.3), which opened for business as the Head Office for Norwich Union in 1904, is fashioned in an Edwardian historicist style. In its entrance hall (Figure 2.4) are 40 marble pillars and almost every surface is decorated or

patterned (often as the natural patterning of marble). Included in the building are at least seventeen different types of marble. Symbols of insurance, protection and wellbeing are evident throughout.



Figure 2.3: Aviva's Surrey House, Norwich. Designed by George Skipper and opened in 1904. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com) (accessed 13.2.2014).



Figure 2.4: The entrance hall at Aviva's Surrey House, Norwich. (Horton 2011)

The contrast in style between the two buildings is epitomised in the two boardrooms of the buildings, as seen in Figures 2.5 and 2.6. Where the London boardroom, situated at the top of the building, is furnished using very simple and unadorned furniture, framed by large floor-to-ceiling windows and lit by spotlights, the Norwich boardroom is highly ornate, with

decorative wall paintings over wooden panelled walls, elaborate carvings over the fireplace and doors and extravagant light fittings. The Norwich boardroom is on the first floor (*piano noble*) as befitting Renaissance typology.



Figure 2.5: The boardroom at Aviva's Head Office, London. (Horton 2011)



Figure 2.6: The *piano noble* boardroom at Aviva's Surrey House building, Norwich. (Horton 2011)

Figure 2.7 depicts one of the original Hepplewhite-style chairs dating back to 1795 that flank the boardroom table at Surrey House<sup>8</sup>. The symbol on the back of the chair is the dove and serpent and may refer to Christ saying 'be wise as serpents, gentle as doves'

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<sup>8</sup> Only three or four of these chairs are original, the others are reproductions.

(Matthew 10: 16). The writing '*prudens simplicitas*', meaning 'simply prudent', reinforces the visual symbolism, as well as signalling the 'virtue' of insurance. (In fact The Prudential is a competitor in the insurance market.)



Figure 2.7: Boardroom chair at Aviva's Surrey House building, Norwich. (Horton 2011)

These chairs speak of the lineage and heritage of Aviva and by implication its prosperity and longevity:

Every material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance. Heirlooms bear material witness to the age and continuity of lineage and so consecrate its social identity.. [they] also contribute to.... transmitting the values, virtues and competencies which are the basis of legitimate membership in bourgeois dynasties (Bourdieu 1979: 76).

The boardroom in which these chairs can be found (Figure 2.6) has mahogany panelling carved with swags of fruit and flowers representing growth and fecundity. Ceiling paintings depicting scenes of life, death, time and the benefits of protection (including a guardian angel embracing a grieving family) also include a garland representing the fruits of the earth. These together symbolise the prosperity resulting from a wise investment.

In contrast to the luxury of the boardroom at Surrey House, Figure 2.8 shows contemporary furnishings in the ground floor at the back of the same building. Here the chairs and tables are standardised and devoid of distinguishing features. The carpet is grey and cheap, the walls plain and unadorned and the lighting harsh and sterile.



Figure 2.8: A meeting room on the ground floor of Aviva's Surrey House, Norwich. (Horton 2011)

In Aviva's London high-rise, two lifts service the users of the building. A smaller one is used for the lower floors and a larger one is used for those in the highest floors of the building.

If a group's whole life-style can be read off from the style it adopts in furnishing or clothing, this is not only because these properties are the objectification of the economic and cultural necessity which determined their selection, but also because the social relations objectified in familiar objects, in their luxury or poverty, their 'distinction' or 'vulgarity', their 'beauty' or 'ugliness', impress themselves through *bodily experiences* [my emphasis] which may be as profoundly unconscious as the quiet caress of beige carpets or the thin clamminess of tattered, garish linoleum, the harsh smell of bleach or perfumes as imperceptible as a negative scent (Bourdieu 1979: 77).

The aesthetic choices of Aviva offices echo these observations made by Bourdieu. Figures 2.9 and 2.10 compare the polished marble floor of the top storey of the building to the carpet tiles on a lower floor. The qualities of the materials used and the placement of these throughout the building 'impress themselves', to repeat Bourdieu's phrase, upon the staff and visitors using the building, and form a hierarchy of bodily sensations as the materials become more sumptuous the higher one travels in the building.



Figure 2.9: The lift lobby on the top floor of Aviva's London office featuring marble flooring. (Horton 2011)



Figure 2.10: Carpet tiles in the lift lobby of one of the lower floors at Aviva's London office. (Horton 2011)

In Norwich's office the public staircase is made of marble unlike the staircase used only by employees (Figure 2.11). Despite the highly decorated nature of the building the corridors and service areas that aren't ordinarily accessible to the public are far more perfunctory in appearance.



Figure 2.11: The public and private staircases at Aviva's Surrey House, Norwich. (Horton 2011)

Returning to the Aviva offices in London, the Group Chief Executive Officer has both a reception area that is encountered directly outside the lift lobby as well as his own waiting area immediately adjacent to his office. That he has his own reception and waiting areas is itself an expression of status and power. Waiting spaces and reception areas are spaces in which outsiders are required to stop and, if 'checked out', are given permission to pass over the threshold to the space beyond. Although this reception area is a space for exchange – initially a conversational exchange between receptionist and visitor - it mostly prepares the way for a business exchange of some kind.

Michel Foucault (1977) describes various spatial techniques for the control and maintenance of discipline within schools, hospitals, the military and factories: enclosure, partitioning of space so that individuals can be easily located and assessed, and siting based on function, rank or 'the place one occupies in a classification' (Foucault 1977: 145). These are

'complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical, spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; they mark places and indicate values; they guarantee obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and

gesture. They are mixed spaces: real because they are governing the disposition of buildings, rooms, furniture, but also ideal, because they are projected over this arrangement of characterizations, assessments, hierarchies' (Foucault 1977: 148).

Although Foucault may have been referring to the factory specifically the placing of departments and people within this work space, the offices of Aviva, as seen in the examples provided here, indicate the hierarchical positions that the Aviva employees occupy within the organization.

Situated on the top floor of the building the Executive suite has commanding views of London (Figure 2.12) and at the apex of the building signifies, in unequivocal terms, the status of the Chief Executive. Labour, measured by time and productivity alongside the degree of responsibility or difficulty of the labour, affects the level at which that person in the workplace is remunerated. Level of status at work may also affect the status of the surroundings of that individual. In the case of Aviva's London office this notion of 'level' is quite literally enacted through the fabric of the building, thus the elite of the company are at the pinnacle of the building. It is noticeable too that the rooms become more spacious (compare the reception areas for the CEO's suite and the offices on Floor 8 in Figures 2.13 and 2.14), the furnishings more opulent and the art on display increasingly valuable, the higher up the building one travels. Pertinent to this 'elevation', as described earlier, are the use of the two different lifts, the larger, more opulent one traveling to the highest levels of the building.



Figure 2.12: View from a conference room in the Chief Executive Officer's suite at Aviva's Head Office, London. (Horton 2011)

In *The Production of Space* (1991) Lefebvre refers to the inseparability of spatial and social relations, and the interconnectedness of power and space in the city. He writes that the representations of space, signs and symbols that signify hierarchy are inherent in the location or space of the workplace.

And position (or location) with respect to production (or to work) *comprehends* the positions and functions of the world of production (the division of labour) as well as the hierarchy of function and jobs. The *same* abstract space may serve profit, assign special status to particular places by arranging them in the hierarchy, and stipulate exclusion (for some) and integration (for others).... The *space of work* has two complementary aspects: productive activity and position in the mode of production (Lefebvre 1991: 288).



Figure 2.13: Reception area of the Chief Executive Officer's suite at Aviva's Head Office, London. (Horton 2011)



Figure 2.14: A reception area on one of the lower floors at Aviva's Head Office, London. (Horton 2011)

This is borne out in contrasting the Chief Executive Officer's suite (Figure 2.13) with the basement office of Aviva, London (Figure 2.15) – a large open plan space, with individual workstations. In the latter, the chairs and tables are inexpensive, standard units, lacking in distinctive properties and closely packed together. There is a small 'breakout area' (not seen in the photograph) with a few chairs grouped around a table, plus a handful of communal coat racks. Because this is a basement office there are no windows and therefore no source of natural light. The appearance of the office is relieved by a printed panel (see Figure 2.16 for a detail) that runs along the length of the wall. This decorative feature is specially lit and ties in with the pink-painted wall at the rear of the office. The size of the panel is dramatic, but despite this is suitably banal so as to fit non-controversially into its surroundings.

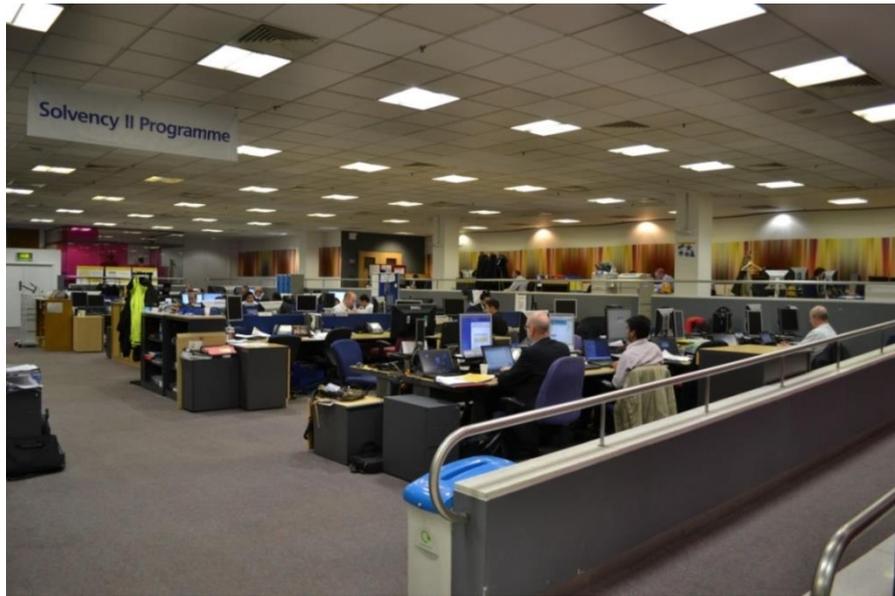


Figure 2.15: Basement office in Aviva's Head Office, London. (Horton 2011)

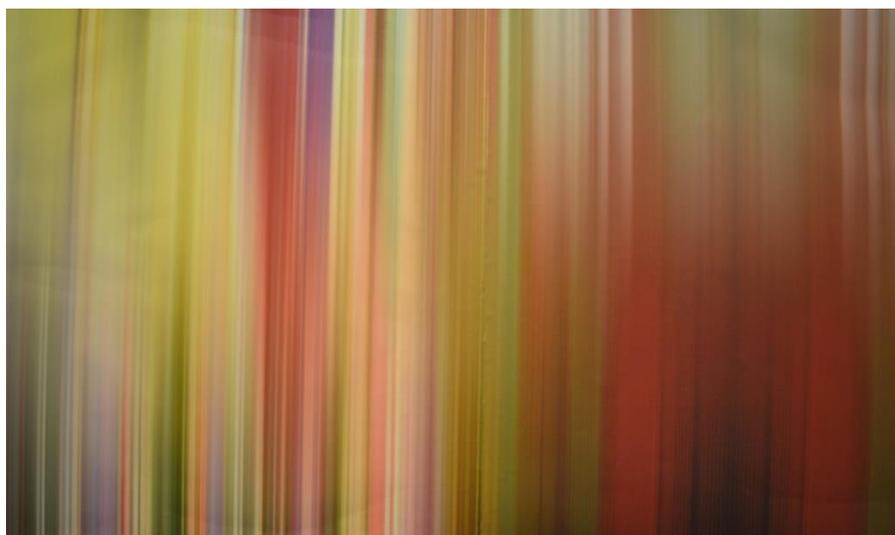


Figure 2.16: A decorative panel in the basement office of Aviva's Head Office in London. (Horton 2011)

Although not always the case<sup>9</sup>, in many offices there are limited ways in which an individual is able to fully express their own preferences for office design, decoration or clothing. Taking the example of clothing, there are complex social 'rules' that govern what is or isn't acceptable in the workplace. At Aviva the expectation is that employees will dress smartly, usually in suits. According to Bourdieu the extent to which the individual's taste relates to

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Myerson (2004), who has written extensively about offices, claims that work spaces need to provide physical, functional and psychological comfort and cites examples that are aiming to achieve this, including Scandinavian Airline System in Stockholm, Niels Torp Inc. and the Waterside Office for British Airways at Heathrow.

or relies on necessity, compared to the freedom of luxury, indicates the individual's class position. For example, the office worker who wears an off-the-peg suit from the high street retailers NEXT or Primark may make their judgement on the basis of what is practical and affordable as well as fitting for their role. The suit is appropriate to the 'field', that is the workplace, and at the same time will preserve the wearer's other clothes for time either spent at home or for special occasions. The tailored suit from Savile Row is an 'appropriate' index of luxury afforded by a senior manager, thus maintaining the seniority of the Chief Executive Officer and reinforcing the social position of each respective worker. Although not always immediately apparent it is in the *detail* of the tailored suit that the indices of luxury lie – the quality of the cut and the cloth, the additional features that might add comfort but also connote surplus value. The individuality and uniqueness of the Chief Executive Officer (who is able to choose the fabric and cut of their suit) is affirmed, as opposed to the ubiquity of the Primark suit, worn by thousands of other workers, characterising the multitudes of junior level staff compared to the minority of the elite management.

Within early twentieth century office design it was management offices that were most likely to include family photos, patterned wallpaper and decorative objects often arranged on a mantelpiece, resembling the gentleman's study in the middle-class home (Sparke 2008). The distinction between working-class and middle-class designated areas was often made through the contrast of 'comfortable, domesticated spaces with more utilitarian and regimented interiors, the latter emphasising the uniformity of the masses and characterised by a lack of bourgeois comfort' (Sparke 2008: 124).

Clarke (2001: 24) points out that the increase in home ownership in the 1980s has, in part, obfuscated and diverted attention away from awareness of alienation and has been aligned with the demise of class consciousness, thus: '(s)ociologists and geographers alike have identified the increasingly privatized and home-bound condition of the working-class as a symptom of powerlessness and alienation in the public realm and workplace (Marshall, Newby, Rose and Vogler 1988; Sanders 1990)'. This has also been accompanied by an attendant shift in focus 'towards greater home-centeredness and self-identification with a domain of control which lies in the home and consumption' (Franklin 1989: 93).

Studies show that an employee's ability to input into the design of their work space increases productivity as well as the happiness of the employee (Wineman 1982; eFIG 2012; Myerson 2014). At Aviva, however, there is very little scope for altering the appearance of the work space other than small references to home that appear in the form of photographs of family members, postcards or cards, a reading book or magazine (for use in break times), a mug, and so on. Furniture is standardised and relatively fixed. (There are other spaces provided in the building for employees such as a gym in the basement, and a space for more informal activities such as brain-storming.)

To summarise, the décor at Aviva, whether the highly ornate surroundings of the Norwich building or the minimally decorated Head Office in London, offers little or no scope for the individual employee to impose their own tastes upon their workspace. In London, their rank within the company is reinforced by their physical position in the building such that the higher level of management occupy the top floor of the building where the materials used are accordingly more expensive. Analogously, the decoration, where it is employed within the building, is used to signify the values of the company and to reinforce the status quo and status of those who work there.

## Part Two: Disrupting the Office: Artwork Interventions and the Mediating Role of the Decorative

A key concept of Bourdieu's used to contextualise these practical elements is *doxa*. Doxa is used to describe 'that which goes without saying because it comes without saying' (Bourdieu 1972: 167, 169). Where there is congruity between the habitus of the individual and the field within which s/he is operating the structures of that field tend to be reproduced. 'A doxic situation may be thought of as a situation characterised by a harmony between the objective, external structures and the 'subjective', internal structures of the habitus. In the doxic state, the social world is perceived as natural, taken-for-granted and even commonsensical', therefore self-perpetuating and rarely questioned. The intention of my practice is to question or de-stabilise this doxic state through decorative interventions.

### **Swag**

One such intervention, in the form of a modified photograph, is *Swag* (Figure 2.17), a proposal for a site-specific intervention in the main reception area on the ground floor of the Aviva building in London. The proposal presents a large expanse of silk drapes, secured with bullion-fringed tiebacks. The curtains have an elaborate pelmet, swagged with matching silk and gold fringing. The sheer volume and type of fabric indicates wealth and excess, going far beyond necessity or use-value. The title of the piece *Swag* refers to an ornamental festoon or swathe of drapery, though 'swag' is sometimes used as a slang word meaning somebody's goods or valuables and can also mean stolen property. This interventional reference to the domestic, albeit a home that many wouldn't wholly recognise due to the work's scale and extravagance, begins to challenge the usual relationship between work and home through its incongruity. The title *Swag* emphasises the concept of ownership as well as potential theft.



Figure 2.17: Sarah Horton: *Swag* Proposal for the ground-floor reception area of Aviva's Head Office, London (2012) paint on paper.

The size of the curtain is more akin to a theatre curtain than to domestic soft furnishings. Devoid of a stage, however, the curtains provide a framing of the view to the exterior. The foreground becomes the space of the 'audience' as much as the 'viewer'. To some extent this echoes the transition that the visitor undertakes when they pass through this threshold space. It also signifies perhaps the ritualised change necessary for employees to undertake as they pass through this area – they adopt their work-bound role. Thus this is a space for ritual transformation, or a rite of passage for employees who work here. As for my role as artist, this 'invasion' into their space in order to effect the placement of sculptures, is an 'acting out' of a changing role. Certainly the reception area, like the entrance hall of the domestic house, is often a space for exchange, where the individual becomes social and in the case of Aviva the person becomes labour force. The curtain emphasises this change of roles by suggesting there is a difference between internal and external (the suggestion that the external can be closed out of view).

Interestingly the multiplicity of uses and users of the reception area echoes the use of the domestic hallway. John Gloag gives an example of the hall chair in the nineteenth century, the hall being one of the few places in the house that was used by both the servants and the owners of a house. This combined use required a special type of furniture. Although seen by the masters, it was servants or prospective servants that were most likely to be seated in the hall. Thus the chairs needed to be decorated to the standards of other rooms

in the house but without the same level of comfort. Often the chair was made of oak or mahogany, with an elaborately carved back and turned legs, but would have only a plank seat and no upholstery. 'It was a hybrid designed to be seen by one class and used by another' (Gloag 1964: 86) and repeats the idea of a theatrical prop suggested by *Swag* in the reception area of Aviva's London office.

Siegfried Kracauer, a German critic writing in the 1920s and 30s, argues that the phenomenology of the surface should be a serious site for exploration and that we should examine these 'superfices of cultural ephemera and marginal domains – hotel lobbies, dancing, arcades, bestsellers – in order, however, ultimately to transcend them' (Kracauer 1993: 22). Writing about the architecture of unemployment offices in 1930 he says

(e)very typical space is created by typical social relations which are expressed in such a space without the disturbing intervening of consciousness. Everything that consciousness ignores, everything that it usually just overlooks, is involved in the construction of such spaces. Spatial structures are the dreams of a society. Wherever the hieroglyph of any such spatial structure is described the foundation of the social reality is revealed (Kracauer 1993:22).

In relation to the lobby (Kracauer is specifically describing the hotel lobby but perhaps the same can be said of the office lobby) the person sitting is 'idly overcome by a disinterested satisfaction in the contemplation of a world creating itself' (Kracauer 1993: 177). He suggests that the artist is able to 'give voice to the inexpressive world...meaning to the themes broached within it...[infusing] the muddled material with intentions that help it become transparent' (Kracauer 1993: 173-4).

Spaces such as this reception area, designed to be passed through, echo Marc Augé's definition of a non-place:

(i)f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place. ....spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike in Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places..... a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral (Augé 2008: 63).

Here, the visitor, having divulged their identity at the reception desk, becomes a spectator in this place for waiting. The theatre curtain reinforces a suggestion of their position as spectator or of becoming the form of spectacle themselves. The artwork acts like a 'prop' activating the space and reminding the visitor of their temporary occupancy in that space.

The French word *décor* refers to stage sets as well as to interior design. In reference to artworks that allude to the familiar forms of interior design in *The New Décor* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 2010, Ralph Rugoff describes them as objects that lie somewhere between theatre and everyday life, between the fictional and empirical: objects poised between artwork, theatrical prop and décor that ‘open up an expanded field of reference and allusion....often extrapolating on the ways that décor projects a desired image of the self or arbitrarily imposes one; how it reproduces social relationships or functions almost like a theatrical prop in staging the identity of a person or place’ (Rugoff 2010: 11). *Swag* reveals this alternative meaning of the word décor through its extravagant charade.

This proposed installation also draws attention to the extensive areas of glass window that characterise this building. Writing about the lack of ornamentation in Modernist buildings compared to Postmodern alternatives James Trilling suggests that ‘reflected in huge expanses of tinted glass, pre-Modernist buildings have a ghostly second life, while the newer structures borrow the ornament they were meant to eclipse’ (Trilling 2003: 5). Careful scrutiny of the photograph of the Aviva building in Figure 2.1 reveals the reflection of St Helen’s church in Bishopsgate, a Gothic church built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the reflection of newer buildings. (Chapter Four considers the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism and its implications for decoration in greater detail.)

Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska have argued that artists who work to challenge the artwork as an exchangeable commodity have the potential to make work of a ‘critical and corrosive nature’ (Cummings and Lewandowska 2006: 417). This installation might offer, through the unlikely-seeming form of soft furnishings, a critical statement on the alienation evident in a space such as this. Its form and uniqueness would act as a further riposte to the hierarchy of Aviva and the suppression of the home in the context of the workplace. The doxic congruency of this space is made incongruous by the inclusion of the curtains in the same way that the wallpapers in Martha Rosler’s *Bringing the War Home* (see Figure 4.11) contrasts the comfort of bourgeois domesticity with the harshness of war. In contrast to *Swag*, the other artworks in the Aviva building, made by prestigious artists such as Howard Hodgkin, Gillian Ayres and Anish Kapoor, add kudos to the environment, reinforcing a sense of security and financial well-being that the company would like to promote through its products. Unlike *Swag* these artworks are ‘safe’ and uncontentious in this context.

There are other ways in which temporary installations as proposed in *Swag* can serve to question the artwork as a commodity itself. Not intended for purchase the artwork's value is symbolic only: there is no quantifiable exchange value as the piece is made bespoke for these windows. As it cannot be purchased, its use value can only be to raise questions of the location. Cummings and Lewandowska discuss the ways in which Daniel Buren's work (see Figure 3.25) similarly critiques the commodification of art by expanding its repertoire of spaces or sites of production (Cummings and Lewandowska 2006: 406).

### ***"Let's get comfortable"***

Whereas *Swag* is a proposal, the intervention of *"Let's get comfortable"* (see Figures 2.18 – 2.29 and Section One of Volume Two) enabled me to intervene physically and document artworks in situ. These artworks were made specifically to be displayed in the reception area of the Aviva building in St. Helen's, London. The design of the sculptures and their connection to everyday decoration will be discussed in relation to the context of its display – its placement on or in close proximity to the existing furniture in two of Aviva's reception areas.



Figure 2.18: Installation of *"Let's get comfortable"* in Aviva's Head Office, St. Helen's, London, 2013. Five sculptures each made of fabric, cord, cord stoppers, hollowfibre filling and additional embellishments, placed on and around the furniture in various configurations. Each piece is approx. 140cm long x 23cm depth x 23cm height. (Horton 2013)

Lefebvre, de Certeau and many others see the value of art as a critical practice of the everyday. The everyday under discussion here is that of the workplace and the day-to-day employment of decoration, ornamentation and pattern. Ben Highmore builds upon the work of Lefebvre and in particular the way that Lefebvre privileges creativity for the transformation of everyday life: 'let everyday life become a work of art' (Lefebvre 1984: 204). Highmore sees the everyday as a site of 'resistance, revolution and transformation' and key to his thinking is the importance of aesthetics, or the visual aspects of daily life. These aspects are particularly significant as they expand the range of meaningful elements attributable to the everyday, at the same time 'examining the way in which experiences are registered and represented'. He goes on to say that to 'treat everyday life as a realm of experience unavailable for representation or reflection is to condemn it to silence' (Highmore 2002: 21).

Like Lefebvre, Highmore finds that 'praxis' is a key theme in attending to the everyday and that aesthetic strategies in particular are common to many of those who focus on the everyday.

The dialectic between the practical and the theoretical, between the concrete and the abstract, requires a mutual and continual testing. Philosophy is incomplete without being tested through examples, but what philosophy can offer is a 'critical tool' that can be used in the attempt to shatter the 'natural' appearance of objects and relations (Highmore 2002: 116).

He describes the need for alternative practices to provide a mechanism by which the social can be examined through the everyday and identifies the practices of montage and collage as ways of giving the everyday that articulation. In this respect Highmore again echoes Lefebvre and draws upon historical precedents in the work of the Surrealists and their use of montage in defamiliarising the everyday and in making strange what is otherwise overlooked. The pieces in "*Let's get comfortable*" (Figure 2.18) are used to defamiliarise the space of the office reception area. Deliberately designed to use decoration as a seeping of the domestic space into the workplace the sculptures have elements reminiscent of life at home, as a way of deflecting the segregation and alienation between home and work life (a home life that is a world of sensation and representation to a large extent disavowed in the workplace). Phenomenology suggests that, because of sensori-emotional experiences, we can relate directly to materials through textures, colours and patterns (Edwards 2011: 209). Marx too, in 1844, called for the 'senses to become theoreticians in their own right'. (Lefebvre 1991: 400) The viewer of these sculptures can recognise and relate to

suggestions of home and leisure as experienced through the touch and look of the fabrics used.

The 'resistance' of the everyday (de Certeau's leitmotif) is a resistance born of difference, of otherness: bodies that are at variance to the machines that they operate; traditions that are unlike those being promoted; imaginings that are different from the rationale governing the present (Highmore 2002: 148).

De Certeau's 'resistance' is not necessarily synonymous with opposition. Instead it is closer to the term used in electronics and psychoanalysis – a force that slows down another force. 'It is what hinders and dissipates the energy flow of domination, it is what resists representation, as much an activity born of inertia as of irruptive actions' (Highmore 2002: 151). 'Resistance' here is both a preservative (protection from something) and a creation of something new. Rather than presenting the inverse of power, it offers a different and pluralized account of powers:

(r)oom remains for micro inventions, for the practice of reasoned differences, to resist with a sweet obstinacy the contagion of conformism, to reinforce the network of exchanges and relations, to learn how to make one's own choice among the tools and commodities produced by the industrial era (de Certeau et al 1998: 188).

So these artworks, placed in Aviva's offices, offer a resistance, based on difference, to the furniture and surroundings of the building. They offer an act of non-conformism that presents an inverse of power in the space of this reception area. If the bureaucracy of Aviva can be described (as per de Certeau's definition) as *strategy* the placement of these sculptures can be designated a *tactic*, a resistive act. To return to de Certeau's definition, it has made use of a 'crack' opened 'in the surveillance of the proper powers... It is a guileful ruse' (de Certeau 1984: 37).

"*Let's get comfortable*" offers two contradictory suggestions in this space. Firstly, one of relaxation – the bulk, shape and materials invite the component pieces to be used for sitting on or against - but contrary to this the attached cords suggest activity or that something may be done to activate or alter the piece in some way (see Figure 2.19). In this sense it offers something additional to a passively used cushion and in the context of Aviva reinforces a kinship with stage props. This performative dimension adds to the disruptive presence of the works whilst at the same time their malleable and haptic properties might lend them, through their playfulness and soft materials, a comforting or ameliorative propensity.



Figure 2.19: Detail of “*Let’s get comfortable*”. (Horton 2013)

Rugoff refers to the subversion of familiar forms and etiquette of interior design as being able to ‘summon an unstable, restless apparition of décor’ (Rugoff 2010: 11) and talks of disarming our customary intimacy with the furniture that we take for granted. In the case of “*Let’s get comfortable*” the contrast between the corporate seating and the sculptures is what gives these pieces their potential for disarming the viewer. The playfulness in “*Let’s get comfortable*” is designed to contrast with the plain corporate leather sofas and chairs of this waiting area and offset the austerity of the Modernist design of the building.



Figure 2.20: “*Let’s get comfortable*” being used by visitors in Aviva’s Head Office, London. (Horton 2013)

Mark Prince, discussing 'functional' art, proposes that functionality is able to 'deflect attention from content to context, and exposes what we may think of as intrinsic value as being conferred value' (Prince 2012: 7). The context of the office building causes the identity of the artworks to be questioned, this ambivalent status bringing their value into question. According to Prince a Jorge Pardo chair (see Figure 2.21, for example) is able to straddle the spaces of the gallery and the gallery office, reflecting the values and performing the functions required by its placement in both contexts. If transferred to the home the chair would be a 'screen on which the art values we have conferred on them become visible, as well as a passport assimilating them to their new context in order to charge it with their own ambivalent status' (Prince 2012: 7). "*Let's get comfortable*" appears as a 'cushion' in the context of the furniture in Aviva's reception area, but its 'otherness' is announced by its colours, size and materials. This otherness is necessary: without it the sculptures are merely cushions and lose their ability to accentuate the estrangement between work and home and between art and furnishing.



Figure 2.21: Jorge Pardo *Halley's, Ikeya - Seki, Encke's* (1996)  
9 elements: wood, lacquer, glass, metal, electrical components.

[http://www.petzel.com/exhibitions/1996-04-13\\_jorge-pardo/](http://www.petzel.com/exhibitions/1996-04-13_jorge-pardo/) (accessed 25.11.2016)

The interjection of "*Let's get comfortable*" into a commercial setting uses decoration as a spatial intervention. Lefebvre (1991) identifies two different ways in which space is organised: firstly, representations of space that are conceptual (space as described and conceived by urban planners or architects, for example) and secondly representational spaces of experience (how spaces are actually used by those who live and work in them).

Lefebvre provides a way of describing connections between 'planned' spaces and ways they might be used that are unpredictable or 'problematized'.<sup>10</sup> He describes representational spaces as those that are

directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'.....This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs (Lefebvre 1991: 39).

Continuing this theme of the mediation of space, the use of art interventions is advocated by Miles as a way of making 'narratives visible, thereby aiding a political process; or to open a space for conversation where such possibilities are generally closed, in a society in which social institutions and market forces tend towards various forms of repression' (Miles 2000: 199). Believing in the potential for everyday decoration to radically change the dynamics of a space Miles gives the example of a public lavatory in Hull where the attendant grows exotic plants – a project that exists 'outside the necessities of industrial production' (Miles 2000: 165) and, as Lefebvre would describe it, an everyday public space *recoded* by its dual use.

The implications for the research questions posed here are evident in the way art is used in a non-organisational way, to find public spaces where art is less usually encountered as a strategy for unsettling the relationship between the way that spaces are abstractly designed and the way they are 'appropriated' by its users, in this case by an artist. It is also useful here to draw upon Rosalyn Deutsche's assimilative and interrogative models of site-related art; the first – assimilative - model, would insinuate work into a site, in a non-challenging way that sits at ease within its environment. The second model would place work that somehow offers a more challenging and potentially uncomfortable relationship with its surroundings (Deutsche 1996).

In this respect it is important to stress that the signifying function of these sculptures is affected by their specific placement in this reception area. Reception areas are places for meeting and greeting, and often for waiting. Furniture that is 'just this side of comfortable works best here, for the business of this space is circulation – moving on' (Yee and

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<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre sees the city as the space where capitalism acts out its operations and hence his writings on the production of space, including *Writing on Cities* (1996), are quoted by many architects (Miles 2000: 166).

Gustafson 1983: 58). Yee and Gustafson go on to say 'The hardness or softness of the materials lets visitors know whether this is a formal, strictly business office (hard seats) or a more informal 'let's get comfortable' type of place (soft cushions)' (Yee and Gustafson 1983: 163). In the case of "*Let's get comfortable*" the softness of the sculptures de-couple the association with business. The size of these sculptures is deliberately chosen to be slightly too large to read as cushions and slightly too small to be used as beanbags. While they can function as cushions, the uneasy scale and the inclusion of the cords and cord stoppers lend them an awkwardness that disrupts their reading as straightforward cushions. Whilst the fabrics and the softness of the sculptures are designed to remind the viewer of home and leisure the scale of the sculptures provide a counterpoint to this, a tension that highlights the separation that many employees feel between work and home and disrupt (and potentially augment) the usual exchange of roles in this space.

The individual sculptures of "*Let's get comfortable*", in their potential to be moved, also have a nomadic quality which echoes the itinerant nature of users of the reception area – staff and visitors that are moving through (with the exception of the reception staff and security guards). The portability of these pieces is evocative of the beanbag or cushion which is one of the strongest signifiers of leisure connected to furnishings. For Lefebvre '(a)lienation turns all of life into an abstraction (such as the division of life into the brutal opposites of work and leisure)' (Miles 2000: 413). Hence, for Lefebvre, the everyday can unsettle the polarisation of work and leisure by 'illuminating the complex ways in which subjects exercise their potential to be emancipatory and critical' (Papastergiadis 1998: 24). Perhaps the everyday qualities of the "*Let's get comfortable*" sculptures (their association with the beanbag and the use of home furnishing or clothing fabrics) highlight the polarisation of work and leisure that Lefebvre refers to. Thus Deutsche's models are tested through the insertion of these sculptures in the reception area of Aviva where the re-organisation of the public space is through decoration and ornamentation.

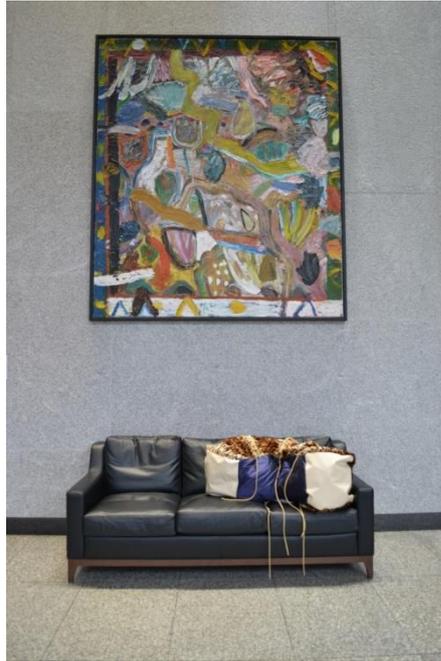


Figure 2.22: “Let’s get comfortable” photographed below a Gillian Ayres’ painting at Aviva, London. (Horton 2013)

Clive Edwards identifies the following functions of decoration and ornament: ‘a) representing collective identity, b) signifying place, c) creating distinction, d) being a symbol of society, group, etc., e) personalizing space and f) aiding orientation’ (Edwards 2011: 185) some of which inevitably overlap and are recognisable in the writings of Ernst Gombrich (1979), James Trilling (2003) and David Brett (2005). The semiotics of “*Let’s get comfortable*” makes use of a number of these functions. The different types of fabric associated with leisure and/or home furnishings allude to place but these signifiers placed out-of-context, away from home, give the pieces a potency they otherwise wouldn’t have. Denim, for example, in its capacity to hint at leisure/personal space along with upholstery fabric that would be more fitting in the private sphere rather than the public, corporate counterpart, disorients the viewer and reminds them of their identification with home.

Of the numerous functions ascribed to it, it is the social aspect of decoration - its ability to suggest belonging, class and status – that is being explored further here. Related to these social aspects Tim Dant writes:

The things we make, appropriate and use are a manifestation of social forms while also shaping them.....All objects are social agents in the limited sense that they *extend human action* and *mediate meanings* between humans...objects are shaped by a culture which defines what certain types of things can *do* (Dant 1999: 13) (Dant’s italics).

Referring to structures of interior design Jean Baudrillard writes ‘The arrangement of furniture offers a faithful image of the familial and social structures of a period. ....The pieces of furniture confront one another, jostle one another and implicate one another in a unity that is not so much spatial as moral in character’ (Baudrillard 1968: 13). Baudrillard ascribes to the furniture anthropomorphic qualities and spatial relations that are directly linked to the social hierarchy of those who use the space.

As well as the arrangement of furniture Baudrillard describes the way the design of furniture affects the social dynamics of a space. ‘Modern seating – pouf, or settee, wall-sofa or easy chair – invariably lay the stress on sociability and conversation, promoting a sort of all-purpose position, appropriate to the modern human being which de-emphasises everything in the sitting posture that suggests confrontation’ (Baudrillard 1968: 45). He argues that moral overtones are gone: confrontation through direct gaze is eliminated or made impossible with this kind of seating.



Figure 2.23: One of the artworks from the series “*Let’s get comfortable*” being used in conjunction with the furniture at Aviva, London. (Horton 2013)

‘The realm of objects constitutes a landscape in which social beings interact’, each piece of furniture being part of any action within that space (Dant 1999:121). Hence the artworks placed in the context of Aviva become participants in the dynamic between visitors, Aviva staff and the existing furniture. They ‘jostle’ – to use Baudrillard’s phrase – with the corporate furniture and provide a shift of emphasis that moves decoration from a passive position to one that actively challenges the relationship of work to home life.

The main component of these sculptures is fabric, with other embellishments such as cord and cord stoppers, ribbons or elastic. Yee and Gustafson refer to upholstery fabrics as

'extensions of clothing that dress the room. Like clothing it is a clue to character' (Yee and Gustafson 1983: 212). This link to clothing is one of a number of ways in which these pieces relate to the body and of the importance Bourdieu places on the body in its expression and experience of habitus. Secondly, the pieces invite touch, either through the tactile quality of the materials, through the suggestibility of the cords/cordstoppers or through other fastenings such as the braces. Thirdly, the slight crescent shape of the sculptures give them the capacity to curve around the body of the user.

The techniques used to make these pieces – machine stitching, hand stitching and so on – are skills that are held by many. Often associated with craft, the act of sewing is one that can readily fit alongside de Certeau's examples of the everyday such as cooking, reading and walking. Compared to some art techniques such as casting, sewing is a 'non-specialised' activity that in the case of these one-off, hand-made, pieces contrast with the mass-produced furniture placed in Aviva's reception. These hand-crafted artefacts invade the formal, machine-manufactured space as a riposte to the hierarchy of the building and its occupants, and like the visitors in the reception area can only be there on a temporary basis.

Although the use of soft materials is no longer a surprise in the landscape of contemporary art some of the writing of Max Kozloff around the poetics of softness (1970) and in particular the soft sculpture of Claes Oldenburg still rings true when viewing the use of the soft materials against the hardness of the corporate furniture in Aviva's reception area. Writing in the 1960s Kozloff argued that 'softness' had previously been disavowed in sculpture due in part to sculptural predecessors that emphasised the permanent, fixed and enduring qualities of, for example, stone or metal. Kozloff writes of soft sculpture that it is more likely to resemble 'fatigue, deterioration or inertia. It mimes a kind of surrender to the natural condition that pulls bodies down.... And regardless of how abstract a soft sculpture is it will unavoidably evoke the human' (Kozloff 1970: 224). Soft materials are more elastic, provisional, can be squeezed and yield to touch. He argues that these qualities extend to the viewer 'the possibility of a liberation from the conceit of having to dominate all material circumstances' (Kozloff 1970: 233). So, the "*Let's get comfortable*" pieces also privilege a freedom from the formal and rigid aesthetic of this global business and re-assert the importance of the haptic.

In addition to the pliability of the artworks it is the details of each artwork that are important as they give each a particular character. The piece using denim, for example, also uses a white and blue striped sweatshirt fabric (often used in Breton t-shirts) and tape threaded through 'belt' loops (see piece to the right-hand side in Figure 2.24). Originally designed for workwear in the 1870s, the widespread wearing of jeans stems from a surplus of WWII utility wear (Bonami, Frisa and Tonchi 2000) and now denim is more readily associated with leisure. (There are many instances of civilian dress being influenced by military clothing and vice versa, including the clothing of 'gentlemen' becoming the dress of the military, for example the Norfolk Suit (Tonchi and Greco 2000: 156).) The transfer of military and workwear into everyday fashion is another example of the blurring of boundaries between work and life.) As Steve Bayley says 'Dressing down can be as conspicuous as dressing up' (Bayley 1991: 167) and in an office environment such as Aviva's, jeans are only likely to be worn on occasions designated by those in authority.



Figure 2.24: Detail of two of the pieces for *"Let's get comfortable"* at Aviva, London. (Horton 2013)

Dant (1999) makes an excellent analysis of jeans as the antithesis of the suit. Jeans are made of cotton (vegetable) compared with wool (animal); have a fixed design rather than being tailored; have visible as opposed to invisible seams; have no pressed creases; and whereas jeans generally reveal the form, the suit (especially the jacket) covers it (Dant 1999: 103). Denim jeans are now the most ubiquitous item of clothing in the world, with almost half of the world's population choosing to wear them at any given time (Miller and Woodward 2007), perhaps because, as Dant points out, 'the form of jeans does not carry strong connotations of class, sex or even nationality' (Dant 1999: 107).

Another of the sculptures uses the colours of post-it notes and fluorescent highlighter pens (see Figure 2.25). Ubiquitously found in the office, the use of these colours playfully disrupts the more sober furniture in Aviva's reception. Post-it notes are cheap, accessible and useful and unlike some other office accoutrements they are used from the top to the bottom tiers of most organisations as aide memoires, for lists, for brainstorming and grouping ideas and are often used very creatively by individuals as time management systems. It is also part of their effectiveness as a design that they stand out from the usual monochrome of the day-to-day office. (Post-it notes feature again in artworks described in Chapter Four.)



Figure 2.25: Studio shot of "Let's get comfortable" artwork. (Horton 2013)

The toile de juy piece (seen left-hand side of Figure 2.26) has upholstery as its main emphasis, the fabrics all being relatively expensive, heavy in weight and made of wool and linen. Toile de juy traditionally depicts a complex working scene, often pastoral in nature, as is the case here. Originally from France in the mid-eighteenth century toiles soon became popular in Britain. More recently a number of artists and designers have adapted the toile de juy using it as a vehicle for alternative illustrations or designs. Timorous Beasties (Figure 2.27a), for example, have re-designed the toile to depict various cities including London, though without the idealised romantic scenes, depicting instead scenes of homelessness and disaffection. Renée Green (Figure 2.27b) uses the toile to tackle ideas around class, race and colonialism, pink flowers alternating with pink vignettes of images found in Dominique de Menil's *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (1989).



Figure 2.26: Two artworks photographed in the waiting area of Aviva’s senior management and CEO suite. (Horton 2013)



Figure 2.27a: Timorous Beasties *London Toile* (2004) (copyright Timorous Beasties) [www.timorousbeasties.com](http://www.timorousbeasties.com) (accessed 13.2.2014).



Figure 2.27b: Renée Green in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum *Mise-en-scene: Commemorative Toile* (detail) (1992) Hand silkscreen on cotton sateen <http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org> (accessed 22.1.2014).

The piece seen in the right side of Figure 2.26 uses a number of faux materials including gold lamé and gold cord as well as fake tiger fur. As with others in the series it alludes to the vagaries of fashion and differences in taste. In this instance the pieces are photographed in the reception area of the CEO’s suite, thus undermining and agitating the usual sense of decorum and status within this space.

Each of the five artworks designed for Aviva features stripes in some way (Figure 2.28), either through furnishing or dress fabrics. Stripes are interesting for a number of reasons,

not least of which being the role they have played in defining groups. From as early as the medieval denunciations of the Carmelites, stripes were worn by those who sat outside the social order because of their ability to mark out the individuals who wore them. However, despite their early associations with the marginal and outcast, stripes have since enjoyed a more prestigious status, playing a positive role and remaining enduring motifs in furnishings since the impact of the Industrial Revolution in the 1770s (Pastoureau 2002: 54). In the highly influential *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) Owen Jones stated that ‘all ornament should be based on geometric construction’ and stripes and herringbone chevrons continue to be popular into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Figure 2.28: Details of striped fabrics from “Let’s get comfortable”. (Horton 2013)

In more recent years the pinstripe is a pattern that in clothing again unites a social group, this time as a sign of industry and commerce. Usually an understated or subtle stripe, the earliest examples of stripes in the business suit have been in evidence from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Alastair Sooke (2011) describes the suit as both a fashion item and a uniform and although the pinstripe suit straddles the worlds of business and leisure it will usually place the wearer in the context of the workplace. The sculpture seen in Figure 2.29 uses a pinstripe as its main motif, accompanied by striped cotton commonly seen in shirts. The channels are made of polka-dot silk and threaded through the silk is red elastic with metal brace clips at the ends. Overall the stripe is used as a semiological link between the domestic and the place of work and can be seen to work in combination with the other pattern motifs to hint at labour, luxury and leisure, all three of which are bound up in issues around class and status.



Figure 2.29: Studio shot of “Let’s get comfortable” artwork. (Horton 2013)

Although suit fabrics are normally far less flamboyant than the stripes in upholstery, in 1962 furnishing fabrics were used for the design of ‘Peacock’ suits, particularly fashionable in areas of London (Sooke: 2011), Sooke arguing that the use of alternative fabrics was able to challenge traditionally held views of gender and sexuality. In general, however, the stripe in business suits is far more gender-neutral than other patterns, with more flamboyant patterns such as florals usually being used as ‘accents’ to the main suit (the shirt, necktie or handkerchief, for example) or in the suit’s lining. In this sculpture the polka-dot silk and the red braces signify areas where the suit may be enlivened with other patterns and colours (see Figure 2.19 for detail). In the context of the sculpture they provide an ‘accent’ or feature and offer decorative embellishments.

## Summary

This chapter began by considering the ways in which value is ascribed to objects and how the possession of certain objects indicates, according to Bourdieu, ‘a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space’ (Bourdieu 1979: 56). Using Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ the chapter described the ways in which an individual’s behaviour exists in a dynamic relationship between the habitus on the one hand and the field on the other (the field being any number of contexts or settings within which the individual is able to express a preference). Bourdieu argues that it is the everyday choices of cooking, clothing, decoration and the like, that reveal the most deep-seated ‘dispositions’ that ‘forge

the unconscious unity of class' (Bourdieu 1979: 77). By looking at specific spaces at Aviva's offices in London and Norwich, the ways in which class and hierarchy are made visible through objects, décor and the built environment were examined.

Informed by this analysis, strategies of play and the suggestion of theatre in *Swag* and in the actual placement of the artworks "*Let's get comfortable*", disturbed and agitated class and the stratification of roles that are specific to the workplace at Aviva's office in London. The particular space of the reception area, with its associations of social 'exchange', provided a place for the transformation and possible displacement of roles through the addition of sculptural 'props'.

*"Let's get comfortable"* used or appropriated decorative forms, from the overall form of the artworks and their approximation to a cushion or other appendage to furniture, to their individual features - the decorative fabrics and cords that are used to remind the viewer of home. Their placement on or adjacent to chairs and sofas immediately reinforced the connection to a cushion, a symbol of comfort usually associated with the domestic. However, the affordance of the cords and cord stoppers, the colours and patterns of the fabrics and the awkward size of the sculptures prevented them from being perceived as cushions only. They made use of a 'crack' in the 'surveillance of the proper powers' (de Certeau 1984: 37) and used decoration as a 'guileful ruse' (ibid) or a decorative tactic in the formal, alienating space of the workplace.

The placing of artworks on or adjacent to chairs in Aviva's reception areas has already begun to highlight the properties of chairs in relation to use and symbolic value. Chapter Four will look more closely at theories of the everyday and the way that chairs, as ubiquitous features of everyday decoration, can be used as a site for further playful interventions both through collage and 'chair-jacking' tactics. Before that, focusing on the use of pattern and motifs, the examination of the cloud motif in the environs of a busy, industrial laundry, will be presented in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Three: The Deviant Cloud: Shape-Shifting and Repetition at Berendsen

### Introduction

Chapter Two described the way decorative materials, in particular the use of cloth in sculptural interventions, could be used to highlight and redress the clinical and corporate signs of status in the context of the work environment of a Modernist office block. In order to test the potential of decorative artworks further, the aim of the second case study is to explore the use of a single motif – in this case the cloud - and the repetition of that motif to create a pattern that can function as a metaphor for desire and escapism in an environment of repetitive labour.

Having completed the project in Aviva I was keen to find an alternative type of workplace for the siting of artworks. Reflections upon clothing and also on bales of cloth (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) prompted a search for spaces that either manufactured or serviced cloth, hence making contact with the industrial laundry chain Berendsen. The shape-shifting nature of the cloud can be seen as a symbol of the changing state of cloth and clothing as it progresses through the laundry, as well as a mental or psychological 'space' for those working within the laundry. When used as a decorative pattern that is repeated at various locations on site it becomes matter 'out-of-place' and is able to draw attention to and raise awareness of the potential for alienation in repetitious labour as well as disrupting the industrial environment. A semiotic reading of the cloud in the context of the industrial workplace continues a close reading and understanding of the material surroundings of the worker as developed in the example of Aviva and the way these surroundings can contrast with the various meanings of the artworks.

The chapter contains two main sections. Part One, 'Observing the Laundry and Considering the Cloud', begins with a brief description of the operation and topographical analysis of one industrial laundry owned by Berendsen and will consider how the particular features of this workforce and location work in conjunction with the motif and repeated use of the cloud. Part Two, 'Between Pattern and Labour: Decoration and Repetition', provides a close analysis of the artworks made for Berendsen and is structured around the sub-headings: Expansion of Vision; Repetition of Pattern and Repetitive Labour; Surface Matter(s); and Physical and Conceptual Projections. As discussed in the case of Aviva in Chapter Two all

spaces can be argued to be ideologically laden (Lefebvre 1974; Deutsche 1996) and any intervention into these spaces can be interpreted as a form of political intervention (Mouffe 2007). As the walls of the workplace become a surface that can support the artwork, the artwork itself becomes a space for the projection of imaginings.

The theoretical research relating to production, labour and taste in Chapter Two remains pertinent to the analysis here. However, additional theory using semiotics and further references to relevant artists, especially in relation to motif, surface and cloth, are also explored.



Figure 3.1: “Let’s get comfortable” inners. (Horton 2013)



Figure 3.2: “Let’s get comfortable” outer covers. (Horton 2013)

## Part One: Observing the Laundry and Considering the Cloud

Berendsen is a European textile service business employing 9,000 employees working at 60 sites in the UK<sup>11</sup>. The Berendsen laundry at Fakenham, Norfolk (formerly known as 'Sunlight') employed 140 staff (at the time of my visits in 2014) in a purpose-built two-storey building housing a large 'laundry floor' plus two open-plan offices and a retail dry-cleaning service that also serves as the reception area for visitors to the laundry. The manager has an office on the first floor adjacent to the main administration office. A 'high-care' unit that washes items requiring a more complex level of care is a recent addition to the laundry.



Figure 3.3: External shot of Berendsen, Fakenham, Norfolk. (Horton 2014)

Fakenham is a country town with a population of around 7,500. The original laundry in Fakenham was founded in 1901 and for many years was a small domestic laundry. By 1957 its employees had risen to 45 and over the years it took in larger amounts of clothing connected to the food industry, thus requiring it to become more exacting in its levels of hygiene demanded by such industries. The modern Fakenham laundry plant also became one of the pioneers of garment rentals to the food industry and by 2001 the combined laundry and rental business had a yearly turnover of £6,000,000. The Fakenham site now processes up to 450,000 pieces each week including tea towels, table cloths and floor mats,

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<sup>11</sup> [www.berendsen.co.uk](http://www.berendsen.co.uk) accessed 31.5.2015

as well as work garments such as chef whites, high-visibility jackets and overalls. The business was sold to the Sunlight Services Division of the Davis Service Group Plc., changed its name to Berendsen in 2013 (Goodliffe et al 2010: 165) and is now a FTSE 250 company<sup>12</sup>. Of the staff at the site in Norfolk around 100 work on the main laundry floor as operators, approximately 15 staff are administrators, including service managers and quality managers, and another 25 are drivers. Throughout the time of this research the laundry was undergoing major refurbishments and effecting a number of staff redundancies.

At Berendsen, as well as the laundry of tea towels, table cloths and floor mats, the majority of objects being washed relate to the body and, in particular, the body *at work* – uniforms and overalls of some kind. Some of these are even worn by the workers in Berendsen itself. Cleaning of cloth/es is a near universal process for individuals and this activity provides a link from the domestic through to the industrial scale of Berendsen. Cloth is the connection between the Aviva sculptures and the products that are serviced at Berendsen (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4: Trolleys of cloth, Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

Soiled items are delivered to the site, sorted by colour and cleaning requirements and taken through a number of processes to be cleaned, dried and, for some articles, pressed. The items arrive dirty and untidily bundled and leave in neat, orderly and clean stacks.

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<sup>12</sup> [www.stockchallenge.co.uk](http://www.stockchallenge.co.uk) (accessed 9.3.2017)

Whilst machines do much of the cleaning, drying and pressing, staff at the laundry are often loading and unloading the machines, sometimes one piece at a time (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5: Berendsen staff placing individual items on a machine that washes and dries each article. (Horton 2014)

### Encountering the Site

Having negotiated entry to Berendsen (more of which is discussed in Chapter Five) photographs and Reflective Journal entries record initial observations of the laundry. The laundry had very little by way of a decorative scheme and what there was probably dated from the 1980s (Figure 3.6). Maybe it was coincidental that some of the machines and the walls in the laundry were the same turquoise-blue colour as the benches in the canteen (Figure 3.7) and the only decorative elements were fake plants on the stairwell and some motivational posters that had been chosen by the manager (Figure 3.8).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Unlike Aviva who has established a substantial collection of artworks, even inviting artists to make work for their premises, Berendsen at Fakenham have no such collection of artworks or any history at this site of artists making work for their premises.



Figure 3.6: Manager's office, Berendsen. (Horton 2014)



Figure 3.7: Laundry canteen, Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

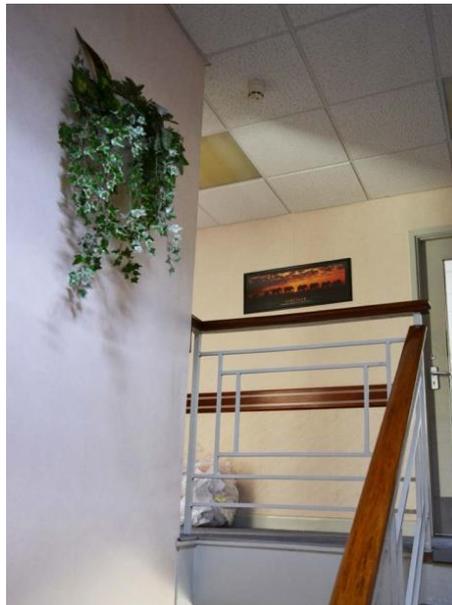


Figure 3.8: Décor at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

What was interesting on the first visit was the riot of colour and pattern that was evident in the laundry floor area (rather than the offices) that was not intentionally decorative but part of the functioning fixtures, fittings and cloth/clothing of the place.

The colour in the place is significant: signifiers of all sorts, from the clothes that are being laundered themselves (pristine, clinical; the cleanliness of the chef whites in the 'high care' area to the high-vis orange and fluorescent grey stripes of the orange overalls to signify warning or highlight visibility), to the coding of systems – the trunking of electrical cables, the hot air, steam, waste, etc.; the ducts in the ceiling all have their own colours. Bags are coloured to indicate whether they are chef whites, or are from different companies.

Orders/pieces/batches are allocated coloured cards to show how far they've progressed within the system (excerpt from Reflective Journal 4.7.2014).

Almost without exception the colour and pattern is significant, that is to say that it functions to signify something about the processual nature of the work, whether these are the coloured flags that mark batches of laundry pre- or post-washing, or the coloured trunking in the ceiling that marks the electricity supply or the air conditioning (Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.9: Coloured trunking at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

What has surprised me is how much colour and pattern there already is and what I'm responding to is how to highlight this and harness it in ways that a) might celebrate it and raise awareness of it but b) highlights the repetitive nature of

what staff do there. I'm aware that for a visitor like myself it's very easy to get excited about what I'm seeing because I'm not actually working there every day. So I'd like to think about how I can use the decorative to highlight both of these aspects (excerpt from Reflective Journal 4.7.2014).<sup>14</sup>



Figure 3.10: Coloured lot cards, Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

The visual systems that were in evidence for sorting and tracking items as they made their way through the laundry (Figure 3.10) were visually pleasurable (to the outside eye) and would become the focus for later collage experiments.

In the laundry itself it was noticeable how little floor space there was (due, in part, to the refurbishment of the space to allow for new machinery). The limited space made the placing of any sculptural artwork problematic and, obviously, anything that would impede the main functioning of the laundry would also be ruled out. Thus, due to safety and operational restrictions, the most obvious interior site for any proposed intervention would be the social and rest areas within the laundry – the canteen, for example, or the garden area. However, the more challenging option of placing work where it might be least expected would be where it would achieve its greater potential to contest and disrupt the appearance of the workspace, thereby aiding the efficacy of the artworks. This could be effected through wall-based interventions only.

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to state that apart from a few weeks as an undergraduate student, where I worked in both a food factory and another making soap products, I have never worked for long periods in a setting such as this. Later in the thesis I will talk about my role as an artist in this setting, but I am cautious of making presumptions about the working conditions in Berendsen, other than those based on my observations.

## The Cloud – A Polysemous Motif

Another noticeable aspect of the main laundry was the lack of daylight and the predominance of artificial lighting. This seemed in marked contrast to the location of the laundry: each time I made the journey to and from the laundry I was acutely aware of the broad, open vistas of Norfolk. The ever-changing skylscapes contrasted sharply with the windowless aspect of the laundry floor at Berendsen. It was this, in part, that led to the use of the cloud as the main motif within the artworks made for Berendsen. The motif of the cloud and sky was also prompted by the name ‘Sunlight’, still part of Berendsen and evident in many places throughout the laundry.

The potential for interposing artworks at Berendsen lay in creating a surface that would carry patterned motifs, as well as repeating the motif in various locations within the laundry. A motif can refer either to a recurring decorative form *or* a recurring theme or idea. In this case the motif of the cloud is used both as a repeated form *and* as a repeated idea. The specific cloud used here is the cumulus humilis (Figure 3.11), probably the most recognisable of cloud shapes. The cumulus changes shape rapidly and is unlikely to last for more than ten minutes or so (Pretor-Pinney 2006: 23). Interestingly, ‘cumulus’ is the Latin word for ‘heap’ and with its flatter bottom and clumpy, stacked shape (Pretor-Pinney 2006: 21) echoes the stack of inner cushions from “*Let’s get comfortable*” (Figure 3.1) and the many mounds of laundry that are stacked in Berendsen.



Figure 3.11: Cumulus humilis clouds [www.wjla.com](http://www.wjla.com) (accessed 15.7.2015)

Roland Barthes argues that 'all images are polysemous: they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others' (Barthes 1977: 38). Each signifying aspect of an image has both a denotative and connotative element whereby 'the literal image is *denoted* and the symbolic image *connoted*' (Barthes 1977: 37). Thus the literal or obvious first meaning of an image of a cloud is that of a mass of vapours that is seen floating in the sky, but it also has the potential to connote a number of associated symbolic meanings. Images that are replete with potential connotative signifiers are rich or 'full', according to Barthes (Barthes 1977: 34).

When discussing the 'rhetoric of the image' Barthes makes clear that these connotative signifiers are not 'natural', nor are they anarchic, but are generated through different kinds of knowledge: 'practical, natural, cultural, aesthetic, and that these can be classified or brought into a 'typology'' (Barthes 1977: 46). Pretor-Pinney (2006) gathers many of these 'types' together (the cloud as an intermediary between heaven and earth; the cloud as furniture of the gods; the cloud as vehicle for simulacra-seeking and so on). Suffice to say that the reasons for using the cloud in the context of this artwork and this location are various and where necessary will be described in reference to each individual artwork.

The use of symbols is common to many Surrealist painters and the cloud and sky motif, in particular, is used extensively in René Magritte's paintings where skies and clouds contrast with domestic interior signifiers such as curtains and screens. In *Le Beau Monde* (1962) (Figure 3.12), for example, interior and exterior are conflated through the use of a sky-painted flat screen in the shape of a tied-back curtain against a background of painted sky (the implication is that it is the 'real' sky) on a stage or platform of pale blue. The ideas of theatre, of interiority and of the mind are all inherent in this image and the plain blue tied-back curtains introduce the domestic as well as the theatre. The cloud refers to both the 'real' exterior but also a decorative motif and the flatness of this pictorial space hints at an inability to escape, linking to the windowless environment of Berendsen. (The allusion to theatre and the compression of the pictorial space in this image echoes the piece *Swag*, the curtain intervention drawing for Aviva's main reception area (Figure 2.17), as well as presaging the use of a carpeted plinth as a raised dais or 'stage' as it appeared in the exhibition at EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> (see Figure 4.22).



Figure 3.12: René Magritte *Le Beau Monde* (1962) [www.sothebys.com](http://www.sothebys.com) (accessed 10.7.2015)

According to writer and critic Rebeca Rosen (2011) the cloud is significant as a shapeshifter, a symbol that can represent change itself because of its ethereal and ever-differing form. Hence it is a metaphor that is able to be used as both a positive and negative signifier. A white fluffy cloud against a pure blue sky evokes optimism and escape, but introduce a greyness to it, or increase the quantity of the clouds, and they begin to pose a threat. In fact the cumulus is associated with fair weather – it is only when it expands into the cumulus congestus that it has the potential to deposit rain. As a symbol the cloud is easily recognisable and assimilated. The fact that it can be a symbol for dreams and change as well as threat make it complex enough to use as a patterned motif in the context of the Berendsen work environment. (Also, of course, there is the cloud as a form of data storage which was a particularly useful reference for artworks placed in the office as will be discussed later.) Maybe it is the accessibility of the cloud as a sign that has lent itself to aphorisms such as ‘every cloud has a silver lining’.

Shape-shifting is the metamorphosis of one form into another. In fiction and mythology this might involve a change from human to animal or vice versa. In the case of the cloud the

cumulus can alter in form quickly, thus allowing it to symbolise transformation. 'Pareidolia' is the ability to see shapes in external stimuli such as clouds and it may be that Rosen is referring to this also. Either way it is the cloud's ability to assume form, whether in the imagination of the beholder or in the suggestion of alteration and the affordance of hope, dreaming, escapism, and so on, that makes it such a seductive receptacle for meaning, a rich or 'full' signifier, to use Barthes' expression.

This transitional aspect of the cloud, and the contrast between the shape-shifter and repetition, is mirrored throughout the laundry in the transition between the chaotic mounds of material to finished, folded pieces, where the cloth is changed from dirty to clean, crumpled to pressed, disordered to ordered. The cloud and its repetition throughout the laundry is a reminder of these repetitive but shape-shifting aspects of the work at Berendsen. Interestingly, the cloud resembles a soapsud in both its appearance and its make-up. Thus, in true pareidolic fashion, might the clouds appear to be soapsuds fomenting and agitating, as they do in the over-sized washing machines? Clouds, of course, contain water, which is the main raw material used in the washing of the pieces/items at Berendsen.

## Part Two: Between Pattern and Labour: Decoration and Repetition



*Cloud Busting*: digital print on acrylic, installed on the main laundry floor



*Hi-Vis Clouds*: digital print on cotton, installed at the far end of the main laundry floor



*Dream Cloud*: neon, installed on main staircase



*Could*: digital print on acrylic installed in reception area



*Head in the Clouds*: digital print on vinyl installed in the office



*A Break in the Clouds*: digital print on silk installed on the main laundry floor

Figure 3.13: Six artworks installed at Berendsen, Fakenham. (Horton 2014)

If the whole space at Berendsen was seen as a 'surface' on which to hold the pattern of the cloud, introduced in various places, could this be a way of covering something both physically and politically to introduce an element of disruption that would raise questions for the viewer about the nature of their workplace and the repetitious activities undertaken within it? Could the pattern and the colour activate the space, the shapes and forms shifting and altering across the space, much as clouds move across the sky? And much as the bundles of cloth move through the processes harnessed in the laundry?

The previous page (Figure 3.13) features all six of the pieces installed in the Norfolk Berendsen laundry indicating their specific locations on site. These will be discussed in detail through the remainder of the chapter.



Figure 3.14: Proposal drawing for Berendsen (pencil and gouache on photocopy)



Figure 3.15: Proposal drawing for Berendsen (pencil and gouache on photocopy)



Figure 3.16: Proposal drawing for Berendsen (pencil and gouache on photocopy)



Figure 3.17: Proposal drawing for Berendsen (pencil and gouache on photocopy)

In initial proposal drawings clouds were painted onto overalls and chef whites that were paraded through the laundry on a suspended conveyor belt (Figure 3.14) or painted into a puddle (where mess becomes something dream-like and beautiful, not something to be

cleared away) (Figure 3.15). There were also clouds painted on the floor like an alternative carpet (Figure 3.16) and cloud sculptures being carried on the conveyor belt (Figure 3.17).

‘It is pattern, as [Eugen] Wiškovský implied and [Gregory] Bateson said outright, that determines intelligibility in a system; and it is fantasy that shapes the character of the truly meaningful patterns in human creativity’ (Witkovsky 2013:47). In these initial experiments and Photoshop adaptations the pattern is used to disrupt systems (Figure 3.18) and to undermine the intelligible order of the laundry.



Figure 3.18: Photoshop proposal drawing for Berendsen with the piece *Cloud Busting* visible in the background

A comparison can be made to Běla Kolářová’s artworks that depict patterns made using her personal everyday items (Figure 3.19). Here, these intimate objects collide with technological suggestions to create a social comment with strong feminist overtones. ‘To paraphrase such systems of communication as circuitry or diagrams, and to bring them into tension with a supposedly decorative world of poetically useless pattern creation, is a feminist and a countercultural project for the systems age’ (Witkovsky 2013: 54). In the environment of an industrial workplace the repeated poetics of the cloud, an apparently arbitrary and useless/functionless motif, works in contrast or tension with the instrumentality of the communication system – the labels and so on - that are so visible in the laundry.

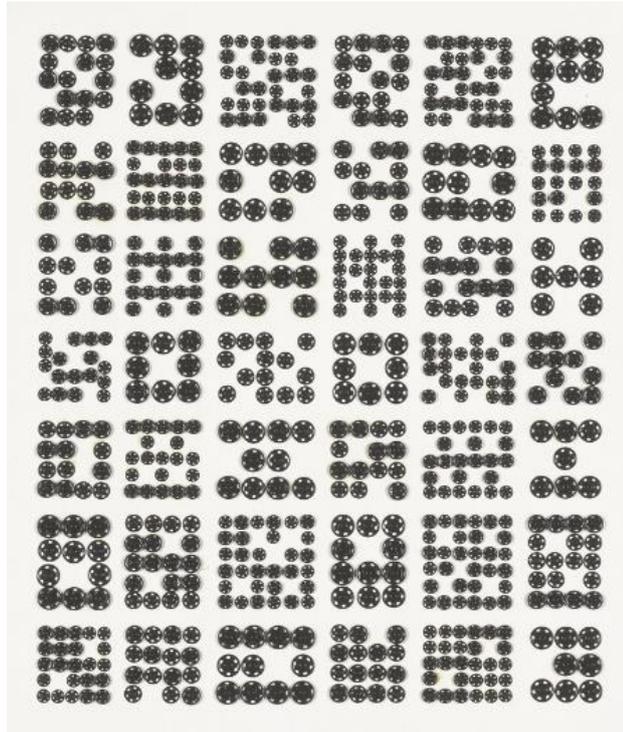


Figure 3.19: Běla Kolářová *Swatch of Snap Fasteners II* (1964)  
 snap fasteners on cardboard  
[www.london.czechcentres.cz](http://www.london.czechcentres.cz) (accessed 10.9.2015)

The relationship between figure and ground is crucial to pattern. In five of the Berendsen pieces the cloud sits on a blue background and it is the blue that signifies the open space of the sky. In Marshall McLuhan's 'The Medium is the Massage' (McLuhan 1964) he announces the importance of the figure (medium) in combination with the ground (context) arguing that the message can only be fully understood when considering the context in which it is placed. Another way of looking at figure-ground at Berendsen is that the whole surface of the laundry becomes the ground on top of which the artworks are placed, so the figure here is also the artwork itself on the 'ground' of the laundry walls. For McLuhan it would be the silk material or the neon glass in combination with the site that is as important as the motif of the cloud or skyscape. It will also be their existence as artworks in the context of the laundry that gives the pieces their agency.

The neon piece *Dream Cloud* is the only artwork where the cloud appears as a single motif. Here, fluorescent lighting is used to produce an instantly recognisable cloud motif (Figure 3.20). This is the linear outline of a cloud depicted in glass and containing gasses. The neon is both pleasurable and industrial, both art material (ref. Dan Flavin and Tracy Emin for example) and non-art material.

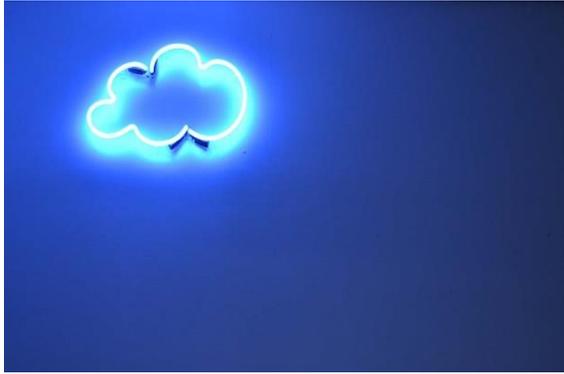


Figure 3.20: *Dream Cloud* at Berendsen.  
(Horton 2014)



Figure 3.21: *Dream Cloud* reflected in the  
office window at Berendsen.  
(Horton 2014)

As a single outline the cloud motif also appears like a thought or speech bubble, an association emphasised in its reflection in the office door where it appears to ‘float’ above the desk of an office administrator (Fig 3.21). Made as a blue neon sign its light and colour echo the laundry’s insectocutors.

In language the words that are spoken work alongside a host of non-verbal clues that assist the affordance of meaning: kinesics (body language) or paralinguistic messages, the aspects of communication that do not involve words but that, as Gregory Bateson writes, ‘ameliorate miasma’, or the ambiguity of the spoken word (Bateson 1972: 423). Arguably, in the case of the neon *Dream Cloud*, the use of the material as an additional signifier to the motif enables the meaning to be opened up and expanded. Thus here the resemblance to a speech bubble in conjunction with the materials – specifically the containment of gas – serves to augment and multiply meaning. The motif’s locution is reinforced and at the same time complicated through the material nature of the object.

Interestingly, Bateson uses the example of the cloud as an indicator of the possibility of a storm where the suggestion is conditional upon knowing that the cloud contains precipitation. The cloud is the ‘part’ or ‘signal’. ‘The ‘part’ may take on special ritual or metaphoric meanings in contexts where the original whole to which it once referred is no longer relevant’ (Bateson 1972: 423). The cloud signals the potential for rain. The illusion of a cloud when reproduced in a painting (because the potential of rain has been removed and made redundant) creates other, additional meanings – daydreaming and brainstorming, for example - which are the ones the workers at Berendsen are also likely to

relate to. They know it will not literally rain from these clouds so they will seek other meanings. Next to the office whiteboards the cloud and its semantics are different from those connoted when placed in the main laundry (see *Head in the Clouds* Figure 3.13).

When considering the neon piece *Dream Cloud*, it is interesting to note that McLuhan argued (McLuhan 1964: 8-9) that the light bulb itself is a medium because it has transformed the way that interior and exterior spaces can be used. The neon artwork transforms the space at Berendsen, not by changing its use, but by altering its appearance. When switched on, the neon piece lights up the space around it: the light is not just contained to the glass itself (Figure 3.22). The neon light bulb illuminates the space, the blueness of the light emitted announcing the presence of the art before it comes directly into view. Workers at Berendsen noted that at night time the light it generates is even visible from outside the laundry.



Figure 3.22: *Dream Cloud* and the light that is emitted in its surroundings. (Horton 2014)

David Brett (2005) provides a detailed history of the vicissitudes of decoration and its ideologies. He contrasts the use of ‘realist’ pattern by William Morris with Owen Jones’ ‘formal abstraction’ and Augustus Pugin’s ‘emblematic’ pattern (and cites the example of wallpaper designed for the palace of Westminster in 1846 using a crown motif as an emblem of state power). Ralph Wornum in 1855 distinguished between ‘symbolic’ patterns, where ordinary elements are chosen because of their significations along with those that are ‘aesthetic’ (Brett 2005: 118). These ideologies of the decorative are

significant here as they acknowledge that decoration can be used in different ways to allow access to a range of audiences and tastes. Whereas the decoration in Aviva was almost completely abstract, in the cloud motif it is at all times emblematic, but also realist (see Figure 3.13 *A Break in the Clouds*) and abstracted (in the case of the neon *Dream Cloud*).

## Expansion of Vision

The observations recorded in my Reflective Journal indicate that when I visited Berendsen I was looking at it from a very particular perspective, as an artist with the specific intention of making site-related artworks. Adam Chodzko discusses the process of making his site-related art in terms of *active* looking:

My art is not just about looking, but about looking *for* something; searching for something that is missing at present. This notion of 'looking for' takes place partly in public space but also in interior space: the imagination of the inhabitants of that space..... The idea of 'looking for something' proposes an expansion of vision to accommodate that which we did not previously know or perhaps what we previously did not want to know (Carson and Silver 2000: 32).

The proposal offered here is that these artworks offer an “expansion of vision” for the workers at Berendsen that might remind them of what they may or may not be aware of, that is that we can often feel alienated by our work spaces and wish to be elsewhere. The artworks are a portal or aperture for the imagination of the workers, both a broadening of vision away from the artificially-lit space of the factory to the arguably unlimitable interiority of the mind (as suggested too in the skies of Magritte’s paintings) and the exterior of the sky. Thus the clouds act as a metaphor for both the outside and the inside – a literal sign of the outside or exterior and a metaphor for interior thought.

Additional to this, in recent years the cloud has been used ubiquitously to refer to a virtual space for storing and accessing data via the internet rather than using a local hard drive, thus becoming a present-day metaphor for the repository of information and knowledge. Here, in the context of Berendsen’s sales office (Figure 3.23) the sky/cloud pattern is placed on the side of a filing cabinet which itself is situated alongside whiteboards that are used to record production targets as well as for brainstorming ideas. Through a process of ‘active’ looking and specific site placement the cloud motif is able to reinforce an idea of ‘blue-sky’ thinking or, more subversively, in a down-turned market perhaps it is saying that the idea of increased sales is actually ‘wishful thinking’.

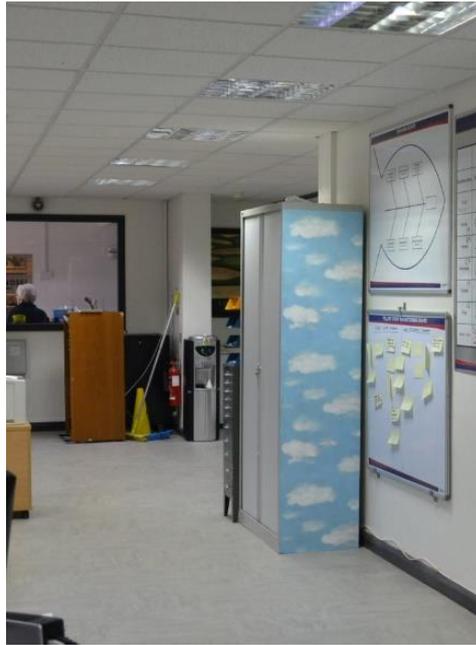


Figure 3.23: *Head in the Clouds* installed at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)



Figure 3.24: *A Break in the Clouds* installed at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

Chodzko also talks about his first viewing of Pieter Breughel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c.1558) and of seeing Icarus' legs looking out-of-place in the painting.

The painting requires us to expand our looking, to expand our field of vision to let in something which should not be there, which is just on the edge of vision. Something should not be there either because it is lacking or because it is excessive; it does not yet exist (Carson and Silver 2000: 32).

These cloudscares at Berendsen sit on the edge of vision of the workers in the laundry floor and the office. Whilst the largest piece is more obvious, the smaller pieces are placed intermittently throughout the space and are likely to be noticed less easily, possibly only accidentally if looking for something else, such as the cloud-painted garment hung on a peg on the farthest wall of the laundry (Figure 3.13 *Hi-Vis Clouds*). As works of art they are 'excessive' to the space. Having no functioning necessity to exist here, they are surplus to requirement.

Daniel Buren is able to perform this transference of a motif exceptionally well, to take the same repeated stripe motif such that it is recognisable as his, whilst at the same time using it to bring out the peculiarities of the spaces in which it is employed. This is evident in its use in *Les Deux Plateaux* in Paris for example, in contrast to the *Passage de la Couleur* in Basel (Figures 3.25 and 3.26). In each location the stripes are an addition to the space, a transformative alteration and adjunct to the function of each. The stripes are adapted to each individual site, drawing attention to hidden and unnoticed spaces such as the treads of the elevator, the corner of a room or the height of a column.



Figure 3.25: Daniel Buren *Les Deux Plateaux* (1986) [www.belaqui.tumblr.com](http://www.belaqui.tumblr.com)  
(accessed 10.9.2015)



Figure 3.26: Daniel Buren *Passage de la Couleur* (1979 – 2009)  
Art Unlimited, Basel [www.artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com) (accessed 17.7.2015)

### **The Repetition of Pattern and Repetitive Labour**

The scale of the laundry in Fakenham is much smaller in comparison to the vastness of the Aviva building in London. Both are potentially alienating places but at Berendsen there is a handling of materials and a physicality in the work that relates to the body, in both the actions that take place as well as the articles being dealt with – uniforms and workwear. Many of the processes at Berendsen are automated but they still require human labour to load and unload the machines. This is repetitive and fast work in a warm and fairly airless environment. Whilst large industrial machines do the washing and giant rollers steam and press, tea towels and large table cloths are meticulously folded and stacked in large quantities by hand (Figure 3.27). Thus, the processes used are both hands-on and mechanised, the body of the person working alongside the body of the machine. The shape-shifting, in the sense of the transformation of the objects from disordered to ordered, is the shared action of both the human and mechanical. Both are required to repeat tasks, in collusion with each other.

Here are some notes from my Reflective Journal following the installation of the work relating to the placement of *A Break in the Clouds*:

The large fabric piece seemed especially well placed alongside these processes as a backdrop to sorting and folding. Pieces are taken out of the washing machines

and sorted for the company they belong to and checked for repairs; folded neatly and placed in appropriate stacks ready to be bagged and transported back out of the building. A backdrop like a theatre curtain. Cloth being folded, placed, sorted, organised. Clouds are not sortable; floating. Fabric is silk, not industrial or durable like the workwear being sorted. Colour is full and resonant, vibrant rather than functional (excerpt from Reflective Journal 16.2.2015).



Figure 3.27: Laundry operative folding garments at Berendsen with a view of *A Break in the Clouds* on the far wall. (Horton 2014)

Some of the garments that are being serviced are 'uniforms' that are also being worn by many of the staff. Uniforms signal the status of the wearer, simultaneously identifying the wearer as the same as a group of others. Also, the uniformity of behaviour and the repetition of their labour is echoed in the visual sameness of the uniform.<sup>15</sup> Bonami et al (2000) remind us that to make things uniform means to make them equal (Bonami 2000: 14). The uniform maintains order: it signals not only the 'order' or status of the wearer but also, when used collectively, a sense of standardization. Here the cloud disrupts the uniformity offering a glimpse of another (dis)order. *Hi-Vis Clouds* (Figure 3.28) is a copy of the machine operative's high-visibility jacket, but instead of the usual fluorescent yellow, here the garment is printed with the cloudscape in a literal embodiment of the decorative. The garment is no longer made visible through its fluorescent material but by its difference or 'otherness'. Its decoration is both deviant and useless and marks the wearer as different to his/her colleagues. Also, the emphasis on efficiency, uniformity and neutrality that is so closely associated with the Modernist aesthetic of hygiene is disturbed through this piece of decorative fabric. Highmore's 'Bodies that are at variance to the machines they operate'

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<sup>15</sup> The suit as a form of uniform is discussed in Chapter Two in relation to typical office wear.

(2002: 148) describes the resistance of the everyday as seen in tactics that rely on otherness and this can be seen at play here, as they were, also, at Aviva. Thus, the cloud pattern sits at odds with the function of the garment onto which it is printed.



Figure 3.28: Laundry operative wearing *Hi-Vis Clouds* at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

Rosemarie Trockel's balaclavas (Figure 3.29) work in a similar way: they juxtapose two apparently opposing characteristics - the signals of war and intolerance, with the warmth and softness connoted by a knitted garment.



Figure 3.29 Rosemarie Trockel *Balaclavas* (1986) installed at The Hamburger Kunsthalle, Berlin. [www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de](http://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de) (accessed 11.1.2017)

In Figure 3.30 the jacket is shown hung on a peg at the far end of the laundry where it exists 'on the edge of vision' and is far less likely to be noticed. It is placed amongst the paraphernalia of the laundry as something functional, as if it might be worn with the hat that is positioned alongside it perhaps, but in fact, although kindly modelled for the sake of this study by the operative in Figure 3.28, its usefulness as a garment in the laundry is redundant as Health and Safety rules would not permit it to be worn.



Figure 3.30: *Hi-Vis Clouds* installed at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

Originally installed in a disused garage in Charleston, South Carolina, Ann Hamilton's *Indigo Blue* (Figure 3.31) includes a stack of around 18,000 used trousers and shirts from anonymous blue-collar workers, layered alternately in rows of trousers and shirts. Hamilton is interested in the history of American labour and the value of making 'in the face of so much unmaking in the world' (SFMOMA 2007). Inspired by the region's production of the indigo blue plant and the use of its dye in work clothing, Hamilton speaks of the materials carrying an embodied knowledge, able to evoke the presence of something unstated that is not easy to narrate. Hamilton talks about having to process this labouring class clothing – to fold it, sort it, stack it. 'The way in which they're touched is as much a part of the meaning of the project...the embedded, embodied quality of the material.... We made this mound like a collective body out of a gesture of smoothing a layer of pants and then a layer of shirts' (SFMOMA 2007).



Figure 3.31: Ann Hamilton *Indigo Blue* (1991) [www.annhamiltonstudio.com](http://www.annhamiltonstudio.com)  
(accessed 21.7.2015)

The way Hamilton talks of the gestures of smoothing, layering, folding and sorting, calls to mind the gestures of the staff who work at Berendsen and, despite the difference in situations, within these contexts is an element of care – of caring for the articles that are being sorted and stacked, and in the case of *Indigo Blue*, of caring about the labour of these anonymous workers.

Hamilton's work deals very directly with the role of the artist and the 'body', and the implications of labour in a range of work practices, including that of the artist, which is especially evident in the performative dimensions of her work. In order to arrive at the shape for the neon piece *Dream Cloud* I made thirty-three paintings of cloud outlines in a period of two hours (see Figure 3.32 and Volume Two, Section Two). I deliberately worked rapidly, using the same process, same materials and same size of paper for each painting. I wanted to know what it would feel like to make the paintings as if in a factory, reproducing near-identical objects under time constraints as the workers in Berendsen have to. As part of the process of making the paintings I wrote how long each one took to paint and a brief record of my thoughts at the time. From my observations it is interesting to note that in brackets, after the twenty-first painting I wrote 'take washing out of machine and check emails again' (Reflective Journal: 2.11.2014). What is significant about this is that, because my studio is located in my home, domestic and art activities are interspersed with each

other. What is also interesting about this is that, unlike the workers at Berendsen, I was able to take a break from production whenever I chose to. At the end of the process I noted 'I'm now tired! Only two hours of work but I'm physically tired from standing the whole time, but also mentally tired from the concentration. How much more tired would I be feeling if I'd been producing the same cloud image for an eight hour stretch?' (excerpt from Reflective Journal 2.11.2014).<sup>16</sup>



Figure 3.32: Painting clouds for *Dream Cloud* preparation. (Horton 2014)

Throughout Berendsen the repetitious nature of work both in the laundry and in the office is unmistakable. In the office space, for example, responses are almost identical when admin staff respond to telephone calls. In the laundry the gestures and movements are efficient and precise: hanging, folding, pressing, sorting, patting – all reminiscent of Richard Serra's verb list (1967-8). Used over and over they are familiar and automatic, not in a dissimilar way to the machines they work alongside. These repetitious behaviours of the workplace are reproduced metaphorically in my artworks, in the repeated depiction of the painted clouds and their recurrence around the laundry in various locations. The manual repetition of painting clouds reiterates and mirrors the manual repetition of folding fabric.

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<sup>16</sup> This was developed into a performed piece for 'Masterpiece?' a publication by GiuliaandJoe available at <http://www.giuliaandjoe.uk/masterpiece>

The distribution of bodies in the earliest factories are described in detail by Foucault (1977) who argues that spatial arrangements are made according to function and located in relation to the machines operated so that all could be supervised through central spaces for observing workers or for ‘the individualizing fragmentation of labour power’ (Foucault 1977: 145). The control of activity was also governed by the use of the timetable: ‘the temporal elaboration of the act.....[and] correlation of the body and the gesture’ to maximize efficiency (Foucault 1977: 150 – 151).



Figure 3.33: Edward Burtynsky “Manufacturing #17” (*Deda Chicken Processing Plant, Delhi City, Jilin Province*) (2005) <http://www.photographyofchina.com/blog/edward-burtynsky-4> (accessed 30.9.2015)

In Edward Burtynsky’s “Manufacturing #17” (*Deda Chicken Processing Plant, Delhi City, Jilin Province*) (2005) (Figure 3.33) the workers themselves become a pattern through their sheer number, the repetition of their pink and blue overalls and the way they are evenly spaced at the workbenches as they continue their work. This patterning emphasises the repetitious nature of their labour and the depersonalisation that occurs when all wearing the same uniform. Here, and in the laundry, the workers are incredibly dextrous, being completely in control of the unitised and fragmented tasks they undertake. At the same time, however, their boundedness to time and strict production quotas removes from them any real autonomy.

As a participant of the APG programme artist Stuart Brisley undertook a placement at the Hille Furniture Factory in Suffolk in 1970 where he chose to work in the metal-polishing

room, a site that he deemed to contain the most onerous labour. Here he painted the machinery in the colours of the workers' chosen football teams and introduced large mobile noticeboards that could be pushed around the factory floor with the intention of improving communication, though the latter was co-opted by management (Bishop 2012:167). Brisley also made a sculpture using 212 Robin Day chairs (Figure 3.34) to form a complete circle which he saw as a syndromic sign of the nature of work on the production line – 'a labour without end' ([www.stuartbrisley.com](http://www.stuartbrisley.com)).



Figure 3.34: Stuart Brisley *Poly Wheel* (1970) work-in-progress.  
[http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/27/70s/Works/Hille\\_Fellowship/page:4](http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/27/70s/Works/Hille_Fellowship/page:4)  
(accessed 6.11.2016)

Earlier in the twentieth century Siegfried Kracauer, an associate of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, drew parallels between the rhythms of the body at work and those in leisure in his analysis of early twentieth century popular culture. 'His work is one of the first contributions in the study of popular culture to attribute importance to bodily and spatial metaphors and symbols in managing mass conformity' (Rojek 1999:17)<sup>17</sup>. Kracauer analysed the famous dance group, the Tiller Girls, seen in Figure 3.35 (Kracauer 1993). As dancers the women move synchronously, as parts of a machine might. This is an example

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<sup>17</sup> Chris Rojek's book *Decentring Leisure: Rethinking Leisure Theory* (1999) examines the complex relationship of leisure to 'freedom' in the context of capitalism.

of what Kracauer describes as the 'mass ornament', one of the apparently 'superficial' elements of society that can be subject to scrutiny to reveal a deeper reality whereby the individual is subject to the same pressures to comply in leisure as they are in work. Kracauer argues that, although in their popularity and currency these dancers appear to represent progress, the way in which the individual is lost in the mass mirrors the way that mass labour dehumanises and anonymises individual workers in the pursuit of capital. Kracauer describes 'the mass ornament's empty and superficial shallowness' (Kracauer 1993: 86) as a form of false consciousness.

Everyone goes through the necessary motions at the conveyor belt, performs a particular function without knowing the entirety. Similar to the patterns in the stadium, the organization hovers above the masses as a monstrous figure whose originator withdraws from the eyes of its bearers, and who himself [*sic*] hardly reflects upon it. It is conceived according to rational principles which the Taylor system only takes to its final conclusion. The hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls. ....The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system (Kracauer 1975: 70).

Obviously, the Taylor system that Kracauer refers to is the 'scientific management' of labour designed and implemented by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the US from the 1880s, the mechanisation and fragmentation of labour, the breaking down of work into the smallest of tasks (Braverman 2009).<sup>18</sup> Kracauer does, at least, argue that the artist, by observing social phenomena, is able to help make transparent that which is 'muddled' (Kracauer 1993: 174) by making connections to another reality.

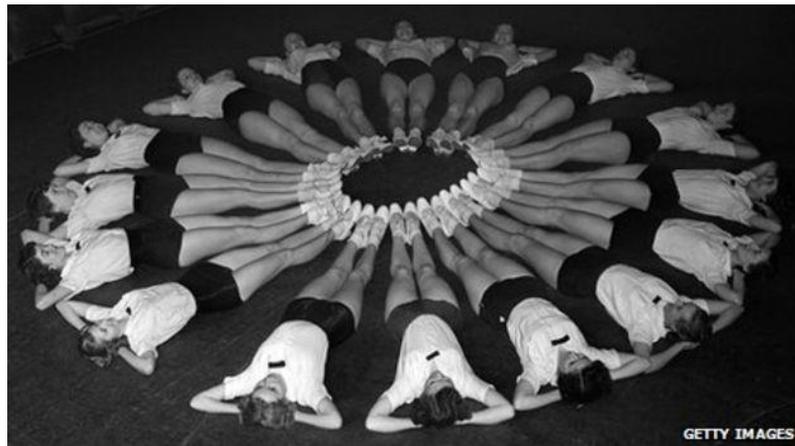


Figure 3.35: The Tiller Girls (1952) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-25151592> (accessed 19.10.2016)

<sup>18</sup> There are others (Hebdige 1979 and Bernstein 1991 for example) who argue that this depiction of the alienated work underestimates the individual's capacity to resist or subvert this position.

Similar to the drive to make correlations between the patterns inherent in leisure and work David Brett (2005) makes a correlation between the natural world as depicted in much ornament and pattern and the apparently 'natural' order of the production line via these words from architect Louis Sullivan in 1924: 'Man stands, by virtue of his powers, a solitary ego within a universe of energy; a witness, a participant; and by virtue of his powers a co-creator – his creations are but parallels of himself' (Sullivan 1967: 24). Sullivan argues that the inclusion of nature in decorative styles is a thread that connects the maker, through production, to the idea of a creator or creative force (Brett 2005: 134). Brett goes on to argue, with reference to Henry Ford's autobiography of 1924, that Sullivan's

...grandiosity of language is of a piece with a Dionysian concept of capitalism which contrives to amalgamate Spencer to Darwin, and thence to the production line. It is shared with Henry Ford, to whom mass production was a fact of Nature: "The ideas we have put into practice are capable of the largest application... they have nothing peculiarly to do with motor cars or tractors, but form *something in the nature of a universal code* [Brett's italics]. I am quite certain that it is the natural code, and I want to demonstrate it so thoroughly that it will be accepted, not as a new idea, but as a natural code." (Brett 2005: 134).

Ford is making connections to a higher, transcendent power, though for him the progress made is through human effort rather than the divine. References to the order of nature justify capitalist modes of production that are inherent in the production line of mass manufacture.

According to Mouffe, '(t)he frontier between the social and the political is essentially unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents... What is at a given moment considered as the 'natural' order – jointly with the 'common sense' which accompanies it – is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices' (Mouffe 2007: 3). Despite the fact that analogies can be made between the shape-shifting nature of the cloud and the way that the fabric in the laundry is re-shaped in its journey through the factory, I wish to argue that the artworks at Berendsen, presented in the public or social space of the laundry, question the idea of a 'natural order' through something that is non-commonsensual, that is, the placement of cloudscapes in a laundry environment. The cloudscapes positioned in the laundry are a distraction to the production line, a reminder that another world exists outside of the workplace. (They might also function as ironic signifiers of a missing 'view' from the non-existent windows, or possibly placate what for some might feel like a pattern of drudgery.) The cloudscape is an aperture to 'other' worlds, whether a dream world, the art world or the natural world. Mouffe calls for

'...widening the field of artistic intervention directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism' (Mouffe 2007:3). If, as Mouffe suggests, every order is political and based on some form of exclusion, is the exclusion of art from the workplace, or exclusion of the decorative, countered through the introduction of these works of art? The reference to the non-commonsensual recalls Bourdieu's description of doxa as the state in which the individual's 'habitus' and the 'fields' s/he inhabits are seen to be congruous with each other. Here 'the social world is perceived as natural, taken-for-granted and even commonsensual' (Bourdieu 1972: 169) and therefore rarely questioned.

According to Peio Aguirre (2009), artist Liam Gillick proffers an alternative to a Fordist method of production through his artworks that use both abstraction and distraction to create speculative scenarios, strategies for the production of objects and events that oscillate between art and design and between the public and private space.

Gillick's notion of "contingent space" partly evokes the state of semi-autonomy, between the contingent and the specific, art and the applied arts, the private and the public and so on (Kunsthalle 2009: 22).

In *The Good of Work* (2010) Gillick refers not just to the quality of the artwork but the purpose and function of making art. He argues that the work of the artist offers the potential of an alternative mode of production that shifts the emphasis away from consumption and offers the artist a number of strategies that reassert the good of art. Such strategies include: being able to emulate modes of leisure; working in complete isolation or choosing to work with others; having some control over the moment of completion of one's work; creating one's own deadlines and organising one's own time; and being able to employ research and documentary strategies. Whilst the reality for many artists is that not all of these strategies are open to them all of the time, the work at Berendsen and Aviva has allowed me to deploy many of these strategies in order to assert something from the private space of the studio to these public spaces of work.

The work at Berendsen is time and space sensitive. Each process is designed to be as economical as possible and each process to flow efficiently to the next. In Figure 3.18, a Photoshop experiment using Berendsen laundry as a backdrop, the relationship between time, space and movement is derailed as the labels that depict the batches of laundry and who they belong to are all replaced with the same cloudscape image.

In a similar vein to these subversive signals Diller and Scofidio, in their *Bad Press: Dissident Ironing* series (1993), reversed the usual logic of pressing and ironing by ironing excessive creases and folds into a series of shirts (Figure 3.36). Through this deviant act they upset the practices of housework that ‘continue to be subjected to the economic ethos of industry, guided by motion-economy principles once designed by efficiency engineers’ (Diller and Scofidio 1995: 43). In the Berendsen Photoshop artworks a process of decorative agitation appears to disturb and undermine the efficiency of the laundry’s work. (And in the case of the Aviva pieces the suit fabrics were shaped to disrupt the expectation of fabric in the context of the office.)



Figure 3.36: Diller and Scofidio *Bad Press Dissident Ironing* (1993)  
<http://www.themilanese.com/?p=271> (accessed 26.8.2016)

## Surface Matter(s)

I have argued that all the surfaces of the laundry at Berendsen constitute the ground or support upon which the motif and pattern of the cloudscape is held. The all-encompassing potential of wallpaper has led a number of artists to use it to create immersive and sometimes provocative installations. In the 1960s Andy Warhol, in his desire to close the gap between the everyday and the art object, designed wallpapers that were often displayed as a background for his other artworks (Figure 3.37).



Figure 3.37: Andy Warhol *Mao* (1974) wallpaper installed at The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh [www.warhol.org](http://www.warhol.org) (accessed 11.9.2015)

This wallpaper looked as out-of-place in the gallery as it would have looked in most homes, as would the cloud coverings used at Berendsen<sup>19</sup>. Because our expectations are that wallpaper is innocuous, polite, even comforting when seen in the context of the home, it has heightened power to surprise or shock when taken out-of-context or when its subject matter becomes more contentious. At Berendsen, due to the scarcity of floor space and health and safety restrictions the artworks are, by necessity, all two-dimensional and wall-mounted. Digitally manipulated 'drawings' allow me to explore ideas for more dramatic interventions (see Section Two of Volume Two). So, for example, when the cloud pattern became an all-encompassing 'wallpaper' as seen in the Photoshop image in Figure 3.39 the idea of a benign wall covering that is usually associated with the domestic becomes far more ambivalent. The repeating and copying inherent in these 'wallpapers' echoed the repetition of the activity of those who work in the laundry and the uniformity of the tasks and processes they enact but it is unclear whether this form of camouflage acts as a vehicle for projection (and thus a form of diversion) or a vehicle for entrapment.

In David Mabb's exhibition titled 'A Factory as it Might Be or the Hall of Flowers' at the Art Gallery of Windsor in 2003 the artist exhibited his paintings on a background of William Morris wallpapers and paint colours. Fittingly, for an artist who is intrigued by Morris's

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<sup>19</sup> Warhol is well-known for his own production-line style of manufacture at his 'Factory' between 1962 and 1984. As the site of parties as well as art production the conflation of art and life here is an interesting case study (Graw 2010b; Watson 2003).

complex relationship to industrialisation and utopian socialism, Windsor is one of Ford's original sites of assembly-line automobile construction and Mabb writes:

I have used the gallery's interior design and architecture to root the work into the building to some extent blurring the division between interior design and art. The installation will hopefully question the relationship to the idealism of Morris's designs, whilst at the same time retrieving them from the past (Mabb 2003: 30).

In Mabb's *Big Red Propellor* (Figure 3.38) the artist has used a background of William Morris's *Lily* fabric as a surface on which to paint and he describes the lily flowers as acting like a decorative screen across this large industrial object. 'I reconsider the system by which the particular elements of the fabric design interrupt or puncture through the painted surface... The process of painting reinstates the "unique" and "handmade" in the face of mass-produced versions of the fabric' (Mabb 2003: 30). This privileging of the hand-made and the puncturing of space with the decorative is echoed in the artworks installed at Berendsen.

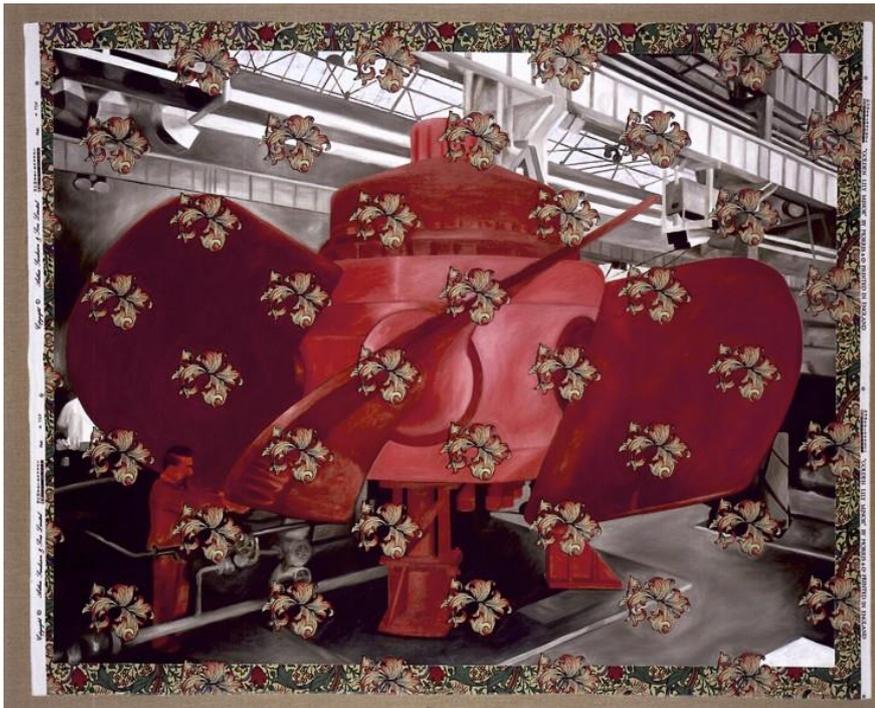


Figure 3.38 David Mabb *Big Red Propellor* (2001) Oil on *Lily* fabric 122 x 152 cm  
<http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/artist-members/david-mabb/>  
(accessed 12.10.2016)

Brett reminds us that 'carpets and their vertical equivalents, the tapestries, were the prime cultural objects of millennia, indeed, of whole cultures, as were also the floors and ceilings of great halls and mosques.... We are not dealing with single dimensions such as horizontal

and vertical, but with the whole manifold of space and colour and texture' (Brett 2005: 212). He goes on to say that there is an assumption that the vertical is preferable because it can be distanced from the body, contemplated more easily and therefore placed into a realm of theoretical discourse, denying the importance in the past of the ceilings and floor coverings, and of the spatial in general.



Figure 3.39: Digitally manipulated photograph using cloud coverings in Berendsen (2015)

The experiment in Figure 3.39 exploits a sense of camouflage that starts to form as all vertical and horizontal surfaces begin to be covered or smothered by the same pattern. A camouflage works when an object is so similar to its surroundings that it becomes indiscernible from it. Figure 3.39 shows the worker handling cloud-covered fabric in an environment where the garment and the background are almost indistinguishable. This suggests the mental projection of the laundry operative, the merging of the clothes and environment, where the sky occupies the mind and allows the worker to drift away in her imagination similar to Magritte's *Personal Values* (Figure 3.40). It is reminiscent too of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Regarded as an example of early American feminist literature, the writer explores attitudes to the status and health of women. Throughout the novel the pattern on the wallpaper in the main protagonist's nursery room becomes a mental landscape that (thanks to her manipulative husband) assumes both a place for her imagination to escape to but also a space for her entrapment,

as she imagines she sees women, including herself, trapped inside its pattern. In this case the pattern forms a more malevolent presence.

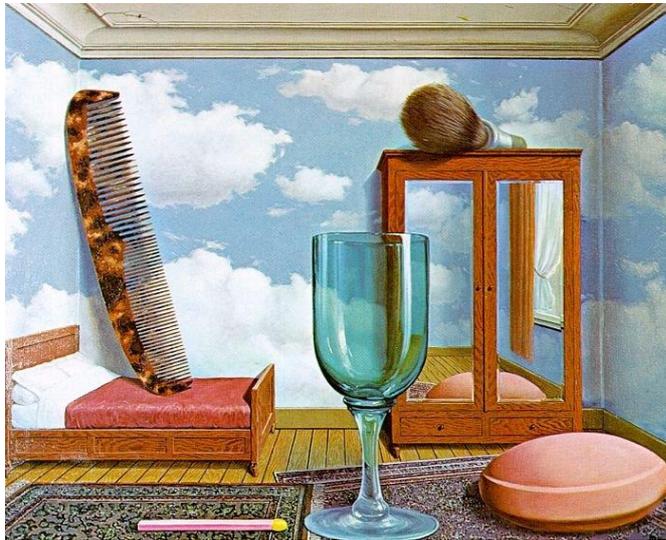


Figure 3.40: Rene Magritte *Personal Values* (1958) [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org) (accessed 19. 7.2015)

## Physical and Conceptual Projections

As argued by Lefebvre, if any space can be corralled into the service of capital (Lefebvre 1988: 75), the workplace, too, can become subject to the critique of public spaces. Deutsche refers directly to Lefebvre's argument that all public spaces are ideological because they reinforce prevailing social relations and repress conflict (Deutsche 2002: 77). Similarly, Edward Soja suggests that '(t)he generative source for the materialist interpretation of spatiality is the recognition that spatiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups' (Soja 1985: 92). Providing an alternative voice in these spaces can become a role for the artist making work in public spaces.

For Deutsche public artworks should go beyond what she calls mere decoration to challenge the 'apparent neutrality of those spaces' arguing for artworks that operate critically within a site, challenging its 'constitutive social conflicts' (Deutsche 2002: 68).

Abstract space represents, then, the *unstable* subordination of social space by a centralised space of power. This constitutive instability makes it possible for users to "appropriate" space, to undo its domination by capitalist spatial organization (Deutsche 2002: 76).

She gives the example of Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York* (see Figure 3.41 for a similar example of his in Boston, Massachusetts), a site-specific work where the artist projected images of the homeless directly onto the monuments in Union Square. By doing so Wodiczko appropriated the monuments with images of the homeless, thereby revealing marginalised groups and raising socio-political issues around land ownership and redevelopment.

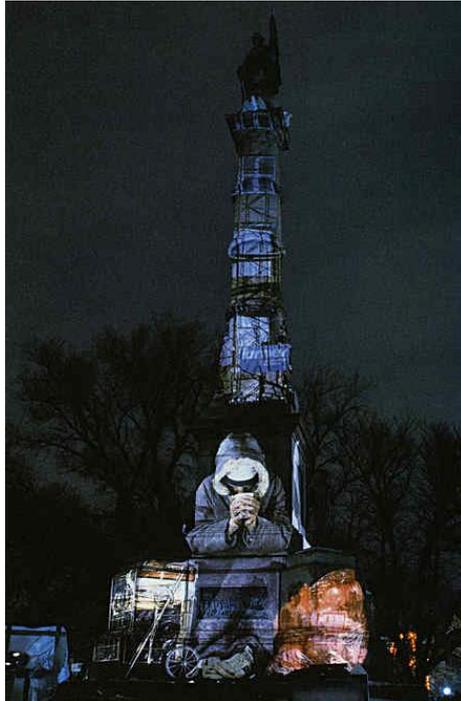


Figure 3.41: Krzysztof Wodiczko *The Homeless Projection 2* (1986-7), The Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Memorial, Boston Union Square, Massachusetts

<http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2012/krzysztof-wodiczkos-homeless-vehicle-project>  
(accessed 12.9.2015)

‘Against aesthetic movements that design the spaces of redevelopment’ writes Deutsche, ‘interventionist aesthetic practices might – as they do with other spaces of aesthetic display – redesign these sites’ (Deutsche 2002: 78). Wodiczko’s projections are able to contest the ‘myth’ (here Deutsche acknowledges Roland Barthes) that the idea of a home is available to everyone, where the reality is that homes are generally made available only if profitable. The potency of Wodiczko’s piece is due in part to the surface onto which the piece is projected: the memorial stands in stark contrast to the image of the homeless man thus providing the ‘spark’ that Andre Breton (Breton 1924) speaks of when he wrote of the power of two colliding motifs in the Surrealist Manifesto.

Compared to Aviva in London where luxury was abundant, especially in the reception area and the senior management suite, at Berendsen luxury is not at all in evidence. Even the products that are being washed are generally work-wear, hard-wearing and durable. They are plain and often white unless fluorescent hi-visibility wear. In contrast *A Break in the Clouds* (Figure 3.42) was made of a three metre piece of silk that had been printed with a repeat pattern of clouds that was generated from my own painting. Whereas the fabric in the laundry is put to the service of clothing and thus assuming a utilitarian function, this artwork, made with sumptuous material, appears to have no use value other than to adorn.



Figure 3.42: *A Break in the Clouds* installed at Berendsen. (Horton 2014)

However, because in its production *A Break in the Clouds* had been through a number of different processes its connotative potential was more complex and more contradictory than first appeared. Its first literal or denotative reading was of a series of cumulus clouds on a blue sky. Initially this was painted with gouache on paper, then digitally scanned and made into a repeat pattern using pattern-generating software, after which it was printed onto a piece of cloth, this cloth specifically being silk. (See Section Two of Volume Two for more of these details). If the literal reading was of clouds, a close-up of the piece revealed that the original depiction was a painting rather than a photograph indicated through the evidence of brush marks and the texture of the watercolour paper (Figure 3.43). The

gestural qualities of the paint and the surface of the paper were contradicted by the repeating of the images and it being printed onto fabric. Thus its repeated use is suggestive of wallpaper, an artificial wall covering and a fake depiction of the sky.



Figure 3.43: Detail of *A Break in the Clouds*

In another reading of the work *A Break in the Clouds* might be said to provide a simulated aperture, a visual gap in the 2D plane of the laundry wall. The image is of the sky and open space in the confines of a workplace that is almost devoid of natural light. Though perhaps not as provocative as Wodiczko's *Homeless Projections* the gap or aperture created by *A Break in the Clouds* was one onto which the viewer could project her/his thoughts and daydreams; or as one laundry operative said when talking about this artwork "I wish I wasn't here but on a plane instead". This aperture was created through a sense of space that the clouds or sky created, especially as a surface covering. This false space was also a virtual puncture: the artwork was able to 'scratch the surface', to penetrate the space in an unexpected way. It was a reminder of the space of the 'other', of being elsewhere, both a reminder of, and perhaps a riposte to, the potentially alienating aspects of repetitive labour.

Sarat Maharaj (2012) has described the division of labour into miniscule tasks as championed by Ford and General Motors between 1915 and 1927 as leading to something like a state of mindlessness, a 'bodily-mental discipline in which the mind is so blanked out that the task at hand is carried out almost 'of its own accord'' leading so far towards mechanized, automated, robot-performed work that for the Ford system, 'the ultimate

safeguard against the disruptive vagaries of the mind and its fondness for idling and daydreaming is to be rid of it – ideally to evacuate it entirely from the assembly line’ (Maharaj 2012: 132). Routine and repetition are not always indices of mindless, unthinking behaviour, where the individual has little or no agency, however. Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren point out that routines can be perceived as either of two polarities: ‘constraining straitjackets or supportive corsets’, such that routine can actually provide a form of reassuring familiarity and also allow for multi-tasking (Shove 2009: 101). Ehn and Löfgren argue that it is possible that the mastering of routine behaviours can work as a liberating force, providing energy and focus for other things. Maybe in the context of Berendsen the routine nature of many of these repetitive tasks is what allows the worker to daydream, and these artworks may have become an active conduit for this.



Figure 3.44: James Turrell *Twilight Epiphany* (2012) ©Museum Associates/Lacma 2013 from [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com) (accessed 14.7.2015)

James Turrell has made a feature of drawing attention to the phenomenon of light, creating structures that include windows or apertures onto the sky (Figure 3.44). Unlike Turrell’s structures that frame portions of the sky, thus highlighting the shifting nature of the clouds and their movement, the pieces at Berendsen were all static. Movement was suggested, however, through the repetition of the clouds and through the placement of the six different pieces of work in various locations throughout the laundry. The pieces appeared to drift through the laundry in a similar way to the pieces of cloth making their way through the numerous washing, drying and pressing procedures.

Deutsche makes the point that the idea of projection may operate in a number of different conceptual, as well as physical, ways. On one level a 'projection' is a mechanical device as used by Wodiczko. However, in another conception a projection is one whereby an individual is able to project their thoughts or consciousness outside of the body or of direct experience, thereby extrapolating from past experience and observations. This is echoed when Giuliano Bruno writes of the experience of viewing a James Turrell skyscape:

(t)he experience of sustained, durational, psychic looking into an exterior light space can also open up an inner space of "projection". An outer experience can turn inward as permeably as the inner sensations and affects of the viewer are at the same time exteriorized. In an experience of enlightenment, the subject's psychic interiority is encouraged to come to light, projected as it is envisioned through a contemplation of pure externality (Bruno 2014: 67).

Deutsche describes projection as a 'symbolic operation whereby concepts are visualized as external realities such that the impact of Wodiczko's work depends on the degree to which it mobilizes in its audience an awareness that the architecture onto which it projects images is not merely a group of beautiful or functional objects' (Deutsche 2002: 346).

According to Deutsche, Wodiczko's projections must 'disengage viewers from habitual modes of perceiving and inhabiting the city, of receiving its messages' (Deutsche 2002: 346) in such a way that it is impossible for viewers to comprehend the original 'message' of the monument without it being interfered with by Wodiczko's images. The visual 'apertures' opened up by the cloudscapes at Berendsen were a challenge to the workers at Berendsen to think differently about their environment and the work they carry out there. The invasion or infiltration of the cloud patterns within the context of Berendsen destabilized the perception of the space to provoke an alternative way of viewing it. If the workspace at Berendsen is the abstract space as described by Deutsche and Lefebvre, it also became a space for viewing art, an activity that is usually associated with a leisure activity.

Victoria Mitchell (2000) and Bruno both remind us of manifold links between textiles and architecture, of fabric's relationship to the wall. Mitchell makes reference to Vitruvius, Gottfried Semper (1860) and Indra Kagis McEwen (1993) who all write of walls constructed with and under fabric. Bruno writes that the study of cloth and weaving in the work of Otti Berger and Anni Albers enabled them to 'overcome the limits of opticality and to explore tactility and materiality'; Anni Albers especially regarding the process of weaving and building as related (Bruno 2014: 90).

Bruno is intent on articulating the surface 'as a site in which different forms of mediation, transfer, and transformation can take place' (Bruno 2014: 3). She writes about the surface of the artwork as a site for negotiation, observing the complex historical continuum of the surface, whether this is the wall as cloth, the wall in general architectural terms, or canvas in the depiction of pictorial spaces: that the surface is a form of dwelling that engages mediation between subjects and with objects. Similarly I have repeatedly argued that the decorative surface can operate as something more than just superficial, but here Bruno argues that surface is itself of importance. 'This means emphasizing the etymological root to medium, which refers to a condition of "betweenness" and a quality of "becoming" as a connective, pervasive or enveloping substance' (Bruno 2014: 4-5). She talks of the 'subtle ways in which imaginary space becomes projected in material space, on the surface of things' (Bruno 2014: 187) and refers back to the way in which historically this sense of cognitive projection would take place when viewing the depiction of light in paintings (Bruno 2014: 85). To some extent this is what is happening in the fabric pieces in Berendsen where the artworks provide a visual space onto which workers at Berendsen can project their thoughts, their daydreams and imaginings. Here there is a fusion or dissolution of the architecture, and is certainly taken further as a concept in the Photoshop experiment in Figure 3.39.

Luminosity and the passage of time are key features in Tacita Dean's *Kodak* (Figure 3.45) a film that follows the process of celluloid being made. In the film Dean employs long shots rather than the short takes that typify earlier factory films used to portray energy and progress. Bruno makes the comparison between film and cloth. 'As it emerges from the machines, this film being produced in a factory resembles a sheet of fabric being industrially made. Like cloth, film unfolds continually from a roll. Folded into layered sheets, it is a fine thread of filament. The film is a thin layer of fabric, a tissue.' (Bruno 2014: 119). Dean's film, through its repetitive, mechanical sounds and lingering shots, emphasises the duration of time and the process and repetition inherent in the factory.



Figure 3.45: Tacita Dean still from *Kodak* (2006) Film, 16mm, projection and sound <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lefVPUYGvi0> (accessed 16.10.2015)

## Summary

What distinguished the Berendsen interventions from the Aviva project was that they relied upon the use of a specific repeated motif, in this case a cloud, when used in artworks in the context of an industrial work location. The cloud became the core of the site-specific pieces in the same way that the cloth object is at the core of the operations in the laundry. The colour of these pieces – the colour of daylight – was the one colour that is underrepresented in the laundry and it is this that helped set them apart from the busyness and business of the other colours in that space.

Drawing on a semiotic reading of the cloud this chapter questioned the way in which art that incorporated pattern and repetition could address aspects of repetition inherent in the workplace. When used repeatedly through six locations in the laundry, including the stairs, offices and main laundry itself, the decorative qualities of the artworks – their use of a repeated pattern and of materials that offered a level of sumptuousness compared to the functional fabrics serviced at the laundry – operate in varying ways. The depiction of the sky as an image that is 'out-of-place' provides a viewing space onto which the viewer could project their own thoughts away from that space and this concept is explored further in Chapter Five. Being 'surplus to requirement' the artworks 'decorated' an otherwise unadorned and perfunctory environment. Rather than being a passive surface pattern, however, the polysemous connotations of the cloud motif provided an active plane upon which the occupants of the laundry could mentally project their imagination. Thus the use

of a repeated motif within these decorative artworks could be seen to disrupt, both visually and conceptually, the industrial workplace. Chapter Five will discuss further the way that, whilst visually disruptive on the one hand, these artworks can provide an ameliorative function within the workplace. Before that Chapter Four will examine the third case study, a series of chair interventions exhibited in a contemporary gallery, that will also raise issues about the relationship between the work of art and the 'work' of art.

## Chapter Four: The Chair as a Site for Tactical Interventions

### Introduction

Chapters Two and Three of this thesis examined the way that artworks, when placed in two differing workplaces, were able to employ decorative features to disturb the equilibrium of these spaces. Whether this was through the suggestions of home and leisure in the Aviva examples or by presenting a space for mental projection in the cloud pieces at Berendsen, when interspersed on the walls, floor and furniture of these spaces the decorative signifiers are imbued with a critical dimension.

Organised into two parts, Part One of this chapter, 'The Chair as an Example of Everyday Institutional and Domestic Décor(ation)', uses a selection of chairs to illustrate how issues of class and alienation are made visible in the decorative qualities of this commonplace object. Clive Edwards argues that chairs offer a 'view of collective ideas about authority and status, self-definition and identity, discipline, domination and behaviour, and comfort and relaxation' (Edwards 2011: 162) above and beyond being a place to sit. It is this persistent ability to hint at status, habits and tastes (or habitus) that forms one of the main reasons why analysis of the chair is so useful to this study and why the chair is such a rich site for potential decorative interventions.

In Chapter Two the relationship between chairs and the artworks "*Let's get comfortable*", and their combined relationship to the body, contrasted the 'relaxed' qualities of the artworks with the formal comportment of the chairs in Aviva's reception areas. The comparison to the body is inevitable with the chair: the chair itself is even described as having 'arms', 'legs' and a 'back'. This mirroring of the human body is another of the reasons why the chair is such a fertile site for creative interventions across and between both contexts of art and design. In the case of this research the chair is the perfect site for adaptations, re-workings, and for my 'chair-jacking' interventions. As an example or model of domestic decoration chairs can also show the influence that protagonists of the Modernist interior had in denying the value of decoration, along with decoration's subsequent revaluation through the latter half of the twentieth century and since. Artists'

references to the chair highlight crossovers between art, craft and design which are picked up again in relation to the practice-based elements of this research.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the second part of Chapter Four, 'The Everyday as a Critical Construct', examines the way that art practice, in the form of site-related interventions suggested through collaged proposals and sculptural adaptations, can undermine class and stratification in office furniture. The location for the interventions in this chapter is unlike the other environments of Aviva and Berendsen, in that it is the *chair* that is the 'site' to which the artworks relate or against which they resist. This group of low-cost, ubiquitous office chairs that have been altered through the use of sculptural additions and displayed in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> at Norwich University of the Arts (NUA)<sup>21</sup> form the main discussion within this second section. That all the chairs are the same allows for comparisons to be more readily made between them. The placement of these chairs in a 'white cube' gallery furthers the discussion about the place of the decorative within fine art and the Modernist interior.

Continuing to trouble the separation of domestic and workplace environments the practice again draws upon the theories of the everyday as seen in the writing of Lefebvre and de Certeau. Highmore's assertion that collage can be used as an aesthetic tool for use in everyday contexts also informs the thinking behind this work. As with the other case studies at Aviva and Berendsen the hypothesis being tested here is whether elements of decoration, pattern and ornamentation can be used in these fine art objects to disrupt the visual signifiers of status and to illustrate the complex relationship between home and work environments. By looking at spaces where it is generally denied, whether this is the office chair or the contemporary art gallery, the decorative can be used to question taken-for-granted assumptions.

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of the use of chairs by artists is limited here to those that directly illustrate points of argument within the thesis. Other artists that are not mentioned here, but have made direct use of the chair include Meschac Gaba, Erwin Wurm, Jessica Jackson-Hutchens, Sarah Lucas, Angela de la Cruz, Robert and Trix Haussmann, Richard Woods and Sebastian Wrong, Franz West, Martino Gamper, Marc Camille-Chaimowicz and Julia Lohmann.

<sup>21</sup> Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) is a higher education institution specialising in art, design and media, whose history can be traced back to 1845 ([www.nua.ac.uk](http://www.nua.ac.uk) accessed 2.2.2016). It offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as a Year 0 programme that feeds into some of the BA courses.

## Part One: The Chair as an Example of Everyday Institutional and Domestic Décor(ation)

The specific focus of the everyday in this section is the day-to-day uses of decoration, ornamentation and pattern in home and work environments using the chair as an example.

In his introduction to *The Englishman's Chair* design historian John Gloag writes:

(s)eats of almost any kind, fixed or movable, reveal the posture and carriage of the men and women for whom they were made, and chairs show more faithfully than any other article of furniture the importance accorded to dignity, elegance or comfort, thus supplementing the comprehensive disclosures made by architecture about life in any period. Chairs indicate whether social life was formal and rigid, gracefully relaxed, casual and careless, austere, voluptuous, romantic, vulgar, indifferent to art, dull, snobbish or poor (Gloag 1964: 1).

As I write this I am seated in my studio, a room that also serves as an office, situated in my home. This room provides a perfect example of the way in which the boundaries between contemporary home and work-life have become blurred, but the office chair I'm sitting on (Figure 4.1) would look out-of-place in any other room of the house: here it seems appropriate because it signifies industry as opposed to leisure. The work and home relationship is important because there is a common assumption that at work we are most likely to feel alienated, and that this is less so at home where we are surrounded by our own belongings, the things that represent our preferences (ref. Bourdieu's habitus). As discussed in Chapter Two, the workplace is more likely to deny these signs of affiliations – the self is submerged to represent the interests of the company whilst the owners of production are the most likely to have references to their home life in their offices.

Taking work home that would normally be done in the office is only one of the ways in which economist Berardi (2009) argues that new forms of alienation have entered our working lives. He describes the way employees commonly work overtime (often voluntarily) and take computers and phones home with them so they can continue working in their own time. Workers can feel tied to work because of ever-increasing financial hardship and feel increasingly under pressure to meet targets. As digital technology becomes more mobile, Berardi argues that it is able to exploit the mind, language and emotions in ever new ways, whilst one's own body and its interactions with others disappear behind computer screens. The home office and the influence of mobile

technology problematize the work/home polarity.<sup>22</sup> Maharaj (2012) also points out that the ability to check email on a mobile phone, or work at a laptop in the café lengthens the working day, making a clear divide between work and play impossible. In this sense, he argues, the worker's mental and intellectual facilities are forever 'plugged in to the assembly line', ushering in a 'deeper, more binding assimilation into work' (Maharaj 2012: 134). *A Year of Post-it Notes* (Figure 4.13 and 4.14) – explored in depth later in the chapter – was made specifically to explore the way work and home life activities conflate or crossover in everyday life.



Figure 4.1: Photograph of the author's chair in her home studio-cum-office. (Horton 2016)

One of the significant aspects of Penny Sparke's *Modern Interior* (2008) is that it offers a thesis on the blurring of divisions between private and public interior spaces. This is important as many of the issues around status, whether in relation to class or to gender

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<sup>22</sup> As indicated in Chapter One this home-work continuum is used with caution as the home is a site for various labour activities including domestic work. Margaret Harrison draws attention to the issue of paid work undertaken in the home in her artwork *Homeworkers* of 1977, which highlights, in particular, the low rates of pay, usually for piece work, paid to women who were (and still are) most typically likely to take up such work.

(the latter is prioritised as a focus for Sparke) pertain to the connections between the everyday interiors we live in and those we work in. The effects of industrial modernity, arguably still affecting attitudes to work and home life today, caused 'a significant physical, psychological and aesthetic divide between inside spaces of domestic life and those located within buildings dedicated to public activities, including work, commerce and commercial leisure' (Sparke 2008:13).

This aesthetic divide had profound consequences for both gender and for class. 'The separate spheres – the gendered distinction, that is, between private and public life – emerged at a moment when most paid labour moved out of the home, and, as a direct consequence, middle-class men and women became physically separate from each other' (Sparke 2008: 13). This is aptly described in the words of Walter Benjamin (1935):

(f)or the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him [sic] in his illusions... his living room is a box in the theater of the world (Benjamin 1933: 167).

This also reveals the implication that the work of men, outside of the home, is more important, or to use Benjamin's word more 'real', than the work that takes place inside the home, or the work undertaken by women. This discussion is of relevance here as it demonstrates the ways that hierarchical divisions are made evident through choices about interior décor.

Sparke analyses in detail the part that women played in maintaining the look and style of the home in the mid- to late-nineteenth century at the time that this gendered and class distinction took place. The division of home and work for women of the working-class at that time was felt very differently to those of their middle-class counterparts, this division reinforced in public spaces where, according to Sparke, the distinction between working-class and middle-class designated areas was often made through the contrast of 'comfortable, domesticated spaces with more utilitarian and regimented interiors, the latter emphasising the uniformity of the masses and characterised by an absence of bourgeois comfort' (Sparke 2008: 14).

The separation between work and home environments and the apparent dualism that ensued was partially challenged as a result of Modernism.<sup>23</sup> As Modernists began to assert the influence of the machine aesthetic, the separation of these spheres became attenuated and the relationship between the two has grown ever more complicated. Globalisation, the world-wide web and a greater population of self-employed workers have seen larger numbers of people working at home and employers finding inventive and flexible ways to accommodate their employees' complex work-life patterns (Myerson, 2014). As Massey argues '(t)he question that we have to address is not so much the degree of openness and closure of the homes in which we live, but the social and political terms through which that openness and closure is established' (Massey 1999: 25).

So the function of interiors is multiple and complex, and the function of the domestic interior complicated by the relationship between work and home. These in turn are influenced by class and have strong repercussions for both men and women. Traditionally, domestic interiors have been the domain of women and this attitude to a large extent remains entrenched. The implications for this research is to interrogate spaces where decoration is disavowed as a way to expose hierarchical relationships that reinforce inequalities of status and to use decoration and pattern to undermine these taken-for-granted assumptions.

Chairs have been subject to shifts in style as much as any other aspect of décor. Because these historical shifts around the domestic and, by implication the decorative, have been comprehensively explored by Reed (1996), Sparke (1998), Edwards (2011) and Hollis (2011), amongst others, it is not necessary to revisit these in detail. However, the prevalent attitudes of the twentieth century have influenced thinking around decoration to such a large extent that it is used to provide a backdrop to the artwork which has been made for this study and described in detail later.

The rise of the Modern interior and the 'International Style' of architecture prompted a pronounced shift in the aesthetics of the twentieth century, with Art Nouveau marking a significant transition between the nineteenth century and Modernism. Walter Benjamin

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<sup>23</sup> I am conscious this is a huge topic that I am prevented from discussing more fully due to space restrictions. It is more comprehensively discussed by Sparke (2008), Edwards (2011) and Bruderlin (2001) amongst others. Reed's edited book of essays (1996) describes how the domestic moved out of focus within art and architecture during the period of Modernism's International Style to be reconsidered and re-evaluated through Postmodernism from around the time of Pop.

refers to the 'immersive' interiors of Art Nouveau where 'the house becomes an expression of the personality. Ornament is to this house what the signature is to painting' (Benjamin 1999: 9). In this context decorative elements were chosen to last through generations and were a direct manifestation of the lifestyle and aspirations of the occupant/s.

However, it was precisely for reasons of eliminating the historically specific and subjective preferences of the individual that Modernist architects and designers were to reject decoration. With nineteenth century interiors now firmly established as indicators of individualism, the fashion-conscious or 'discerning' consumer would aspire to the 'neutral' white walls and streamlined rationalism of the Modernist interior. Architects and designers of Modernity wished to blur the boundaries between public and private, and between art and life, driven by a shared distaste for bourgeois domesticity and a desire to replace it with the 'democratic' values of efficiency and utility which they found in the public interiors of the world of commerce and industrial production (Sparke 2008; Wigley 1995). This preference for the white space was paralleled in the art world and in the galleries that were subsequently critiqued by O'Doherty (1976), Wigley (1995) and others, more of which will be discussed later.

A typical Modernist chair can be seen in one of the meeting/waiting rooms in the Chief Executive Officer's suite at Aviva's Head Office in London (Figure 4.2). Designed by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand in 1928 as a Modernist response to the traditional club chair and used extensively in Le Corbusier's interiors, the *Grand Confort* chair was first seen in Le Corbusier's 1925 *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau*. Having its origins in gentlemen's clubs the design of this chair presents a distinct alternative to a more 'feminine' domesticity. From the early eighteenth century men would meet to discuss politics and business in what Sparke describes as the 'privatised public space' of the coffee house (Sparke 1998: 144). By 'borrowing' the plush leather look of this chair for his residential interiors le Corbusier was introducing a semi-private, prestigious, masculine comfort associated with business rather than bourgeois domesticity.

Despite Le Corbusier's intentions that quality design should be more widely available, even reproductions of the original *Grand Confort* are now priced at more than £700 (for the

single version), thus exuding status<sup>24</sup>. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai refers to luxury goods as ‘incarnated signs’ to which he ascribes some or all of the following attributes:

(1) restriction, either by price or by law to elites (2) complexity of acquisition, which may or may not be a function of real ‘scarcity’ (3) semiotic virtuosity, that is, the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages..... (4) specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for their ‘appropriate’ consumption, that is, regulation by fashion; and (5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality (Appadurai 1986: 38).

Demonstrating many of these qualities, this particular chair is a symbol of prestige, expensive to purchase and thereby signalling entitlement. It also signifies the additional kudos of possessing ‘good design taste’, the implication likewise being that the owner has received a good education. That there are a number of these chairs in the waiting room signals even greater excess/access.



Figure 4.2: Chief Executive Officer’s waiting area/meeting room at Aviva’s Head Office, London. The chairs are reproduction *Grand Confort* Model No. LC2 club chairs (1928) made from chromed bent tubular steel and leather. Designed by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand. (Horton 2011)

The arrangement of the chairs suggests a scene of social conviviality suggestive of the gentleman’s club as described by Sparke (2008). The social aspect of the tradition is contradicted in this contemporary context, however, by the room’s lack of decoration,

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<sup>24</sup> Cassina manufactures an ‘authentic’ LC2 chair sold at [www.clippings.com](http://www.clippings.com) (accessed 24.2.2014) for £3290.

barring a plant on the central table and a TV playing updates of the financial news. Although the chairs as status symbols are reminiscent of the gentleman's club, the setting is formal, austere, and is not a place for relaxation. (Note the awkwardness of the table and chair positions and the difficulty of reaching the table to place a drink there, for example.) Yee and Gustafson describe executive offices as intimidating and the use of space as an instrument of power: 'there are times when the executive needs this shield of power – this show of strength. And then, just as an Army Sergeant puts his [sic] officers at ease, so the executive puts his visitors at ease – in his lounge area' (Yee and Gustafson 1983: 83).

Le Corbusier was a key figure in critiquing the decorative (1925), along with architect and critic Adolph Loos (1908). Writing on decoration during Modernism demonstrates that decoration and ornament are ideologically loaded subjects (Gombrich 1979: 59). Loos' indictment of decoration as a corollary of criminality is well known<sup>25</sup>. However, although Loos' is one of the most influential voices in the demise of decoration in Modernism, according to Gombrich many of his most radical ideas can be traced back to earlier design reformers, such as Louis Sullivan, cited here:

'it would be greatly for our aesthetic good if we should refrain entirely from the use of ornament for a period of years in order that our thought might concentrate acutely upon the production of buildings well-formed and comely in the nude' (Gombrich 1979: 59).

(References to the dressing of buildings and chairs, in particular, will be picked up again in Part Two of the chapter.) James Trilling also makes the point that cosmophobia (Trilling's name for the fear of ornament or prejudice against ornament) was already strongly held before the industrial revolution (Trilling 2003: xv). The Hepplewhite-style chairs in Aviva's Norwich office (Figure 2.7) are exactly the type of chair that Loos and his contemporaries were reacting against.

It should be noted that not all European designers of the early twentieth century were eschewing decoration entirely, including the Viennese architects Otto Wagner, Dagobert

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<sup>25</sup> For Loos ornament is associated not only with criminality, but with degenerates, women, eroticism and with the 'less civilized' [sic] of nations. The connection to the erotic is explored by Rae Beth Gordon in relation to literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century where decoration is linked to 'the embodiment of morbid sexuality and the dangerously seductive powers of fantasy' (Trilling 2003: 117). Connections between insanity, control, gender and pattern are also made in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 novel *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

Peche, Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffman and Josef Frank, for example (Sparke 2008: 99)<sup>26</sup>. Frances Elkins, the US surrealist-influenced interior designer, used chintz on multiple surfaces in a single interior; Dorothy Draper played with the scale of objects, for example, using a hugely oversized clock for her 1929 design of a Park Avenue apartment. Edwards also points out that much twentieth-century design that appeared to shun decoration reflected the notion of 'integral ornament', for example, Mies van der Rohe's I-section beams and his use of onyx in the Barcelona Pavilion (2011: 183) (see also Bruderlin (2001) and Irene Nierhaus in Sparke et al (2009). This is not dissimilar to the use of marble in Aviva's Surrey House, Norwich in Figure 2.4. The connections between 'hard' and 'soft' Modernism make this complex: in popular art and design culture decoration never really went away, one example being the Art Deco headquarters building for Martins Bank Ltd., Liverpool (1932), Art Deco offering a 'soft' version of Modernism which appealed to a wider consumer base.

If Modernism can be broadly described as a retreat from the decorative, Postmodernism, by contrast, embraced it. Pop art and design turned its attention to the everyday with its emphasis on mass media and mass produced objects, celebrated by Richard Hamilton in his collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956) and in the patterned motifs of Andy Warhol, Alexander Girard and Ettore Sottsass. Characterised by wit, accretion, cross-cultural referencing, de-and re-contextualization of objects and images, Pop prepared the way for Postmodernism's reproduction, circulation and consumption of forms (Wigley: 51) with decoration featuring prominently amongst these.

Decoration (or its lack) and its relationship to luxury and comfort is contrasted in the works in Figure 4.3a and 4.3b. The number of artists who have made or worked with chairs is testament no doubt to the fact of the chair's ubiquity within the everyday and its properties akin to the body, the possession of limbs and a back providing a useful body 'surrogate'. Although both chairs in Figure 4.3 are made by artists, their designation of their chair as either 'art' or 'design' is very different. The Chesterfield chair made by Nina Saunders has the decorative connotations of luxury and value undermined by the suggestion of discomfort and removal of the chair's utilitarian function. For Donald Judd (unlike Saunders) his chair is most clearly defined as a chair only and not as 'art', although

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<sup>26</sup> Reed summarises 'domestic' Modernism evident in Europe in the work of the Bloomsbury Group in England, Art Nouveau in France and Belgium, and the *Gesamkunstwerk* in Germany and Austria (Reed 1996: 13).

no doubt influenced by the aesthetic preferences of his artistic practice which the viewer brings to bear when seeing the piece. Judd also claims that the perceived discomfort of his chair lies in it being the antithesis of what he calls 'overstuffed bourgeois Victorian furniture' (Judd 1993). This lies in contrast with the obvious padding (and additional stuffing) of the Saunders' chair. Thus their position in relation to decoration and function is also contrasted: *The Age of Reason* is 'decorative' but unusable (and loaded with symbolism that is not even touched upon in this discussion); Judd's (likewise symbolic despite his insistence on it being 'only' a chair) is neither decorative, nor luxurious.



Figure 4.3a: Nina Saunders *The Age of Reason* (1995) Red leatherette Chesterfield style chair upholstered with central ball. [www.saatchigallery.co.uk](http://www.saatchigallery.co.uk) (accessed 11.5.2016)



Figure 4.3b: Donald Judd chair (1993) in coloured plywood. [www.risdmuseum.org](http://www.risdmuseum.org) (accessed 11.5.2016)

Suggestions of luxury abound in Nicole Wermer's *Infrastruktur* (Figure 4.4) about which Wermer speaks of the way spaces are designed strategically to provoke a reaction and the way that 'physical infrastructure determines social infrastructure' (Tate Shots 2015). Here the public space of a chair can be fleetingly claimed or 'privatised' through the placing of a coat on the back of it, a temporary claiming of ownership. An additional lining has been sewn into each coat which is used to hide the back rest of each chair. In this particular installation the use of Modernist aesthetics and high fashion brings to mind Appadurai's 'incarnated' signs (Appadurai: 1986) and has strong allusions to social class.



Figure 4.4: Nicole Wermers *Infrastruktur* (2015).  
[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) (accessed 8.3.2017)

The apparent dichotomy of aesthetics versus functionality is evident in Bruno Munari's playful photo-essay *Seeking Comfort in an Uncomfortable Chair* (Figure 4.5) where he exhorts designers to refrain from re-inventing the chair to follow new fashions.

Wouldn't you buy a chair that you are *sure* that you can relax on even if everyone else owns one? I seem to understand that interior design does not mean inventing a new form of a certain piece of furniture, but rather putting a common piece of furniture, a vulgar lounge chair, in the right place (Munari 1944).



Figure 4.5 Bruno Munari *Seeking Comfort in an Uncomfortable Chair* originally printed in *Domus* 202, October 1944. [www.sueper-store.de](http://www.sueper-store.de) (accessed 11.5.2016)

To summarise, the chair can be seen to exemplify an everyday object that can signify any number of properties from the status of the user, its location and the extent to which the era of its provenance values the decorative. Seen as both an extension and surrogate of the body, artists have persistently used the chair to signal issues of status, and the following section will look at the way the chair has been customised, 'clothed' and intervened with to examine issues of status and alienation within this research project.

## Part Two: The Everyday as a Critical Construct

Critique of everyday life encompasses a critique of art by the everyday and a critique of the everyday by art (Lefebvre 2002 [1961]: 18).

The reason the chair has attracted so much attention from artists lies partly in its ubiquity and its rootedness within the everyday: references to the chair can 'negotiate' aspects of the everyday and status. Interest in the quotidian aspects of life generally continues to spawn a wide spread of theoretical and practical applications in the areas of sociology and art. Writing in the catalogue for the Sydney Biennale in 1998, Papastergiadis offers a useful historical summary of the theorisation and importance of the everyday, finding that there are echoes of the concept that go back to antiquity (Maffasoli 1989; Featherstone 1992). He quotes from Scott McQuire 'The everyday has longstanding oppositional connotations stemming from its usage in Marxist sociology... and passing, by way of phenomenology and the Situationist International... into the doxa of contemporary cultural studies' (Papastergiadis 1998: 24). Not only do critics acknowledge its longevity, but they also recognise that the everyday has critical potential. Agnes Heller's attempt to synthesize both the phenomenological and Marxist traditions of the everyday leads her to characterise it as containing attitudes that are imbued with 'critical force' and able to offer the potential of an improved world. In her definition, everyday life is the 'co-constitution of self and society. It is the aggregate of the attitudes that shape the self and the processes of shaping the world' (Papastergiadis 1998: 24).

Throughout this section discussion will return to a series of chair interventions made for this research that seek to harness the critical force that Heller speaks of. Some of these interventions precede this period of research but provide a useful indication of how the interest in chairs arose and grew. The majority of examples are interventions into everyday, cheap and ubiquitous office chairs that were borrowed from Norwich University of the Arts, whose gallery was used to display some of these interventions. These chairs, through their modifications and additions, suggest something of the individual, using properties of decoration and embellishment to signify personal expression and diversity in the context of ubiquity.

Considering capitalism as 'thoroughly penetrating the details of daily life' (Lefebvre 1988: 75) Highmore tells us that, as a Marxist, Lefebvre saw contemporary life as exploitative,

oppressive and relentlessly controlled, but that 'as a romantic he sought energies within the everyday that could be used to transform it' (Highmore 2002: 115). Lefebvre's detailed observations of everyday life were those he witnessed when living in both the urban centre of Paris and the rural location of the French Pyrenees. Through intense scrutiny he looked for 'moments' from the everyday that revealed the possibility of alternative lives. Initially published in 1947 the key texts of relevance here are Lefebvre's two volumes *The Critique of Everyday Life*. In his chapter 'Clearing the Ground' Lefebvre responds to potential objections to his theory, thereby giving useful indicators of his overall aims saying that it is

'a question of discovering what must and can change and be transformed in people's lives....It is a question of stating critically how people live or how badly they live, or how they do not live at all....Critique implies possibilities, and possibilities as yet unfulfilled' (Lefebvre 1961: 18).

For Lefebvre the relationship of the individual to society as a whole is crucially neither passive nor neutral. He sees the potential for any action, even the apparently simple event of a woman buying a pound of sugar, to reveal through analysis the 'sum total of capitalist society, the nation and its history.....So now I can see the humble events of everyday life as having two sides: a little, individual chance event – and at the same time an infinitely complex social event, richer than the many 'essences' it contains within itself' (Lefebvre 1991 [1958]: 57). Everyday events are embedded in and imbued with the social and cultural influences or determinants of their condition.

Post-1968 the transformative tone that had pervaded the writing on the everyday, including Lefebvre's own, was replaced by a

more contentedly phenomenological quotidian [which] dispensed with Lefebvre's emphasis on critique or transformation and instead celebrated the homely practices – cooking, hobbies, strolling – of life as it is lived in the here and now by individuals intent on escaping the rationalist grids of modern administration (Ross in Johnstone 2008: 46).

Influenced by extensive travels and writing in the wake of events in May 1968, de Certeau's main texts on the everyday are his two volumes '*The Practice of Everyday Life*' published in 1984 and 1998 respectively though first published in French in 1980. De Certeau's writings are far more meandering than Lefebvre's but attempt to focus on the specifics of the everyday themselves and in fact Ben Highmore argues that the style used by de Certeau to write about the everyday is more closely in tune with its subject (Highmore 2002: 146).

Focussing investigations on the 'ways of using the products imposed by a dominant

economic order' (de Certeau 1984: xiii) what characterized the everyday for de Certeau is a creativity that responds to a system that has been imposed upon a society. This is done through acts of appropriation and re-employment, of 'making do' and 'making with' (de Certeau 1984: 29). Using materials close at hand everyday life is subject to the arrangements and re-arrangements of bricolage. 'Creativity is the act of reusing and recombining heterogeneous materials' (de Certeau 1997: 49).

Hence the possibility that if we want to draw attention to and acknowledge the everyday we need to simulate and thus stimulate the dynamic creativity that is inherent in the practices that constitute it, yet are generally hidden in the 'opacity' of gestures and local contexts. If the explorer of the everyday .....seeks to grasp a dynamism that springs from pratique it makes sense that it should be by inventing practices of his or her own (Sheringham 2007: 387).

### **'Chair-Jacking' as 'Tactic'**

Appadurai argues that objects have no inherent meaning apart from those given by their users. Their 'meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things' (Appadurai 1995[1986]: 5). Figure 4.6 is a photograph taken by Jean Baudrillard of a chair that is presumed to be his own.<sup>27</sup> What is firstly noteworthy is that the chair is made of cane and bent wood, one of the earliest techniques in the mass-production of furniture. What is also interesting in relation to this research, is the user's addition of the cushions. This decorative and functional intervention demonstrates an example of bricolage, the use of something to hand that enhances the function of the object, in this case the use of the cushions to soften the hardness of the chair. At one level it is the addition of something to add comfort to an otherwise slightly uncomfortable chair but it is also an example of the way that everyday decoration can be used to alter or supplement the way we use or *consume* the objects around us.

This type of consumption – the specific use of things in particular contexts rather than their use as prescribed by their designers or manufacturers – is of particular interest to de Certeau. He describes this type of consumption as itself a form of production as the user of an object makes or produces their own way of employing it (de Certeau 1984: xii). De Certeau argued that by attending to the everyday and anonymous ways in which people appropriate goods, through the inventive and unintended uses they are put to, they

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<sup>27</sup> Interestingly Baudrillard was at one time a student of Henri Lefebvre's. (<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/ baudrillard.htm>) accessed 14.3.2017

challenge the idea of passive consumption.<sup>28</sup> Many examples of this type of bricolage can be found in Richard Wentworth's series of photographs *Making Do and Getting By* (1973 – 2007).



Figure 4.6: Photograph of chair taken by Jean Baudrillard.  
<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/photos/>  
(accessed February 2014) copyright Olivier Rollier.

Figure 4.7 is an image of *Almost Every Cushion in the House* as displayed at EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>. It takes the idea of the cushion used to add comfort to an office chair to an absurd extreme. Looking at the decorative fabrics of most of the cushions it is clear that these are taken from a domestic context (in fact they are from my own home) and bound in place by furnishing piping made from suit material. The work reference suggested by the suit material implies that the stack of cushions is either being restricted or being supported by paid employment.

The fabrics are really mismatched because they've been gathered from all over the house, .....this is a collection of my own domestic 'comfort-making' objects: superfluous but helping to ease the relationship between the body as it sits and the furniture it sits upon... (excerpt from Reflective Journal 26.1.2016).

... except that now of course that comfort is impossible to achieve.

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<sup>28</sup> This echoes the idea of the 'prosumer' put forward by Alvin Toffler in 1980 and is a strategy of artists such as Bik van der Pol (see article by Nick Aikens 'Work and Play, Bik Van der Pol: artists as undercover agents' in *Frieze* Journal No. 158, October 2013).

Buried in the midst of these cushions is the only one made specifically for this sculpture – the black, unadorned cushion - and is another attempt to problematize the relationship between work and home. Work is necessary (usually) to sustain and support the individual financially and often emotionally and psychologically, but can also be a contaminant if the balance between work and home life is compromised: what should be a healthy and comfortable relationship is disturbed.



Figure 4.7: *Almost Every Cushion in the House* (2016).  
Office chair, various fabrics, cushion pads, piping. (Horton 2016)

Key terms for de Certeau are 'strategy' and 'tactic'. Cummings and Lewandowska describe 'strategy' as 'a mode of operation through which legitimate power operates from within a designated field; for example through language, political structures, retail culture, the law and discourses of the body. In short, strategy is the place of official power'. In contrast a tactic is 'the place of the "other" and the tactical is a mode of operation used by those unrecognized producers of culture whose lives are constrained by the impositions of

others.... tactics are the means for taking back that which belongs to us from production' (Cummins and Lewandowska 2006: 415). A tactic accepts the

chance offerings of the moment, and seizes on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse (De Certeau 1984: 37).

This is what Highmore describes as 'guerrilla combat', using tactics such as disguise, surprise, secrecy, wit, play and bluff.

The artworks made for this research adopt such tactics in what I call 'chair-jacking' interventions. The image seen in Figure 4.8 uses irony in a proposal for an intervention to the boardroom at Aviva's Head Office in London. This proposal takes as its starting point the idea of the antimacassar, the function of which is to protect the arms or headrest of a chair from dirt and grime. Though in the past they would have been found on sofas and armchairs antimacassars are now more likely to be used on headrests in trains and airplanes. These additions in the boardroom are suggestive of epaulettes or of shoulder pads, the latter a staple of the office suit in the 1980s. They also strongly suggest the ears of Mickey Mouse. The ideas of power dressing or of soaking up the sweat of one's labours at work to keep the furniture pristine are undermined by the suggestion of a Disney character, as well as challenging the authority of those who use the boardroom.



Figure 4.8: *Boardroom Décor* (2013). Proposal drawing for intervention in the boardroom of Aviva's Head Office, London. Paint on paper.

*Power Dressing* (2016) (Figure 4.9) depicts a similar, but three-dimensional, version of one of these pieces stretched over the back of an office chair and placed in front of the entrance desk in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>. The detail of this piece (Figure 4.10) reveals that it is embellished with small pleated ruffs around each of the 'ears'.

What does it mean to be using these Disney-like ear shapes on one of the chairs? In the Aviva context (Figure 4.8) there was the suggestion that it might undermine a sense of seriousness and seniority, or even competence, a hint of being a 'mickey-mouse' institution. [Although any specific Aviva connection is not evident in the drawing – this could be a depiction of any boardroom or meeting room.] If I make this piece for the gallery am I making the same suggestion and am I undermining my own position [as an artist]? (excerpt from Reflective Journal 18.1.2016).

Whilst there could be an element of self-deprecation in this piece it might also be drawing attention to the status of the artist in general or, possibly in its placement in front of the gallery desk, to the gallery's administration, or the gallery curator. The ruff might suggest self-importance or simply dressing up, but in its juxtaposition with the Mickey Mouse ears the piece seems to suggest a diminution of power. Conversely, could the piece also be like the joker in the pack, or the fool that is in fact no fool at all and an observer and commentator on social power?



Figure 4.9: *Power Dressing* (2016). Office chair, suedette, cotton. (Horton 2016)



Figure 4.10: *Power Dressing* (detail). Office chair, suedette, cotton. (Horton 2016)

The placement of the piece *Power Dressing* in close proximity to the gallery desk echoes Michael Asher's 1974 intervention in which he removed the wall between the office and the display space of the Clare Copley Gallery in Los Angeles. This not only revealed (physically) the administrative workings of the gallery and the professionalization of the gallery curator, it also pulled into view the behind-the-scenes operations that give rise to the ways that art is viewed, evaluated and used.

During the course of the exhibition the owner at her desk and the gallery's storage were in full view. Asher thus disclosed the inner "works" of the exhibition space by exposing its operations behind-the-scenes. Through the picture window separating the gallery from the street viewers could see the contents of the gallery as the content of the work (Rorimer 1990).

Once again there is a hint of the theatre that is alluded to in *Swag*, the curtain intervention at Aviva (Figure 2.17).

Another example of the office space viewed from within the gallery was the 1971 'Art and Economics' or 'Inno70' exhibition at the Hayward Gallery showcasing the APG and their placements in industry. One of the spaces in the show, named 'the sculpture', was 'a boardroom hosting daily meetings between APG and members of invited organisations. A large area demarcated by a long white wall (like an art-fair booth) contained shelving units, an information desk manned full-time by [Barbara] Steveni, a large table and chairs' (Bishop 2011: 170). This approach within the gallery was criticised due to its associations with corporate work and for not offering enough critical distance from its managerial implications. Similarly the APG attracted criticism generally about the co-option of their ideas by management and the difficulty this introduced in offering any real critique or

intervention. However, the APG is a forerunner to a project such as mine that, despite many differences, can still offer an opportunity to engage with everyday working conditions. As Bishop argues:

(i)n sum what needs to be appreciated today is APG's determination to provide a new post-studio framework for artists production, for providing opportunities for long-term, in-depth interdisciplinary research for rethinking the function of the exhibition from show-room to locus of debate, for its desire to put two different ideological value systems into constant tension, and for its aspiration to set in motion a long-term evaluative framework for both art and research (Bishop 2011: 176).

The proposal drawings generated for this research of which Figure 4.8 is an example, and sculptural assemblages typical of Figure 4.9 employ the method of combining two visual ideas together. 'The radical practices of montage offer a vivid way of making the familiar strange, and it is this as much as anything that will offer something like a methodological base to this tradition of everyday life studies' (Highmore 2002: 74). For Highmore, Surrealism's use of montage and collage became methodologies for attending to the social. Surrealism already finds the everyday strange and marvellous and was intent on that strangeness being recognised by others.

'Otherness' as a concept is a recurring theme in the practical aspects of this research (see Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of this concept). My experience of the everyday is not the same as another's, which is why decoration, when shifted between different classes or placed in unexpected contexts, can disrupt or disturb someone's sense of where and who they are and who others are in relation to themselves. Like Highmore, Papastergiadis sees art as playing a crucial role in investigating the meanings of the everyday and points to the work of the Dadaists and Surrealists, the Situationists and the Fluxus movements in particular. 'At their centres has been a critique of the dominant forms of consciousness in the modern world – and the habits of urban life in particular' (Papastergiadis 1998: 23). The contrast created through a mix of the unexpected gives rise to the frisson created in collage or montage. 'The value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between two conductors' (Andre Breton: 1924). The greater the difference between the ingredients, the greater the spark created. Highmore uses the example of Martha Rosler's photomontage series *Bringing the War Home* (Figure 4.11) arguing that this series 'demands that we read the outrages of neo-colonial wars in the domestic environments of Western everyday life' (Highmore 2002:

175). Not only is this a good example of the contrast between the everyday and the other, the image as 'wallpaper' is also an alternative and unlikely form of décor.



Figure 4.11: Martha Rosler *Vacation Getaway* from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967 – 1972). Photomontage. [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org) (accessed 13.2.2014).

Writing in the early half of the twentieth century Kracauer's examination of the everyday is a bid to override subject disciplines in order to more fully expose the ideologies that shape it. Thus by examining the particularities of the everyday, including the popular and the apparently unimportant aspects of a society, he argues that these 'repressed' features can allow access to something that he described as 'real' (Kracauer 1993: 25). In his critique of cinema he championed the technique of montage as analogous to a critical social theory.

Highmore refers to collage as a disruptive strategy for defamiliarising the everyday. 'If everyday life is what continually threatens to drop below a level of visibility, collage practises allow the everyday to become visible again by making the ordinary strange through transferring it to surprising contexts and placing it in unusual combinations' (Highmore 2001: 46). *Loose Covers* (Figure 4.12) depicts a collage of office chairs covered in a 'shabby chic' patchwork of colours taken from post-it notes. A less confrontational option than the 'antimacassars' in Figure 4.8 these loose covers would form a radical alternative to the usual office 'grey'. In Lynn Chalmers' essay 'Tactics at Work' she writes of 'small acts of subversion [that] suggest a refusal to repress the messy, fragmented trajectories of subjectivity in the face of constant uncertainty and change' (Hollis 2011: 126). Alternative chair coverings or 'loose' covers could be applied and changed at will to reinforce or

recognise the 'messiness' or individuality of the users of the office. Chalmers quotes from de Certeau:

Everyday practice patiently and tenaciously restores a space for play, an interval of freedom, a resistance to what is imposed (from model, a system or an order). To be able to do something is to establish distance, to defend the autonomy of what comes from one's own personality (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998: 255).

A choice of chair covers might restore an 'interval of freedom' for the individual to restore and retain their individual personality.<sup>29</sup>

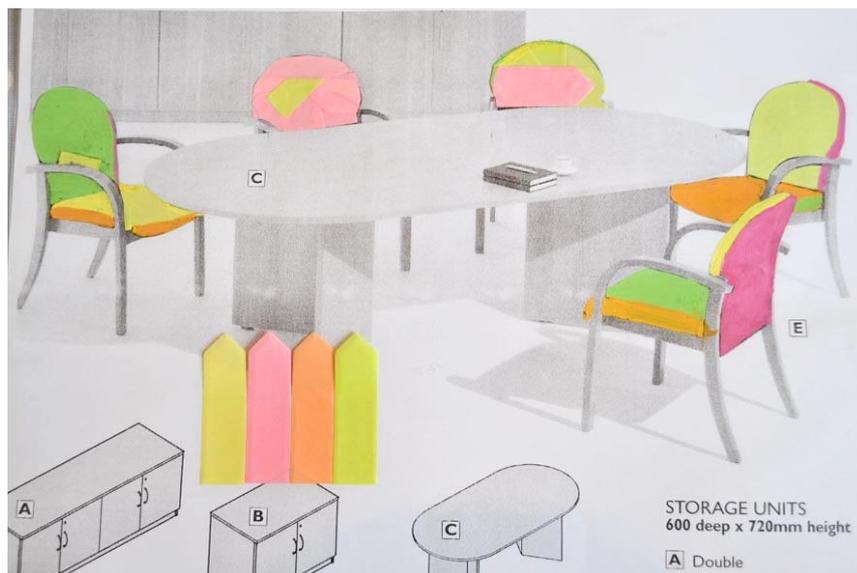


Figure 4.12: *Loose Covers* (2012). Proposals for low-cost office chairs with alternative covers. Paint and post-it notes on paper.

*A Year of Post-it Notes* (Figure 4.13) is a chair with an added cover depicting post-it notes. These post-it notes contain 'To do' lists and were photographed from my own diary for the academic year of 2015–16, the year in which many of the sculptural chair additions were made (see also Figure 4.14). The post-it notes include lists of jobs that relate to my PhD and art practice, to my lecturing position and also to non-work related activities, buying birthday presents for example. They also list activities such as making childcare arrangements for times when I'm teaching. These lists represent in a direct and prosaic way the multi-faceted activities that are necessary in order to balance work, study and art-making with home and family responsibilities. Although the details are particular to me these kinds of activities would look familiar to many.

<sup>29</sup> The differences between the group of chairs recalls the *Souvenir Palace* 'flag' chairs produced by Meschac Gaba (2010); also Franz West's *Uncle* series of woven chairs (2008-10), rug-covered sofas and *Ordinary Language* (1993-5) sofas with loose covers.



Figure 4.13: *A Year of Post-it Notes*. Office chair, digitally-printed cotton, ribbon. (Horton 2016)

This digitally-printed fabric has been made into a piece of work that can be pulled over the back of the chair but has at each side of it long attachments resembling sleeves, at the end of which are ribbons. These 'sleeves' can be placed in various positions, one of which can be to wrap tightly around the form of the chair, very much like the sleeves of a straightjacket might be used to constrain its wearer, though contradicted in part by the frivolous-looking fluttery pink ribbons. The piece is not so much a critique of the workplace, nor of status as such, but it does pick up on Berardi's description of contemporary forms of alienation, the conflation of work and home life and the seeping of work into the home. The straightjacket inference refers as well to the suggestion of the criminal and degenerate that Loos et al associated with the decorative (Loos 1908; Le Corbusier 1925).



Figure 4.14: Digital image used for print on *A Year of Post-it Notes*. (Horton 2016)

In 1979 Bourdieu wrote that '(t)astes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference..... The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated' (Bourdieu 1979: 56). Figure 4.15 depicts a 1968 Charles and Ray Eames *Aluminium Group* chair alongside the *Sacco* beanbag designed in the same year, both of which are featured in the Design Museum's *Fifty Chairs that Changed the World* (2009). The *Sacco*, however, has none of the traditional attributes of a chair (legs, armrests, etc.) and, being easily portable, was hailed as the precursor of a new genre of furniture. Floor cushions are, however, one of the oldest forms of seating: mentioned frequently in the inventories of palaces from the Middle Ages they were huge objects, often covered with leather. Used as a means of softening the angularity and hardness of chairs they were, and still are to some extent, a symbol of luxury (Claburn 1988: 150; Gloag 1964). The beanbag or cushion is also one of the strongest signifiers of leisure connected to furnishings.



Figure 4.15a: *Aluminium Group* office chair designed by Charles and Ray Eames (1968) <http://www.apresfurniture.co.uk/eames-aluminium-group-chairs> (accessed 8.11.2016)



Figure 4.15b: *Sacco* chair designed by Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini and Franco Teodoro (1968) for Zanotta <http://www.homedit.com/the-exceptionally-comfortable-sacco-chair/> (accessed 8.11.2016)

The drawing seen in Figure 4.16a depicts a sculptural proposal that joins together the Eames-designed *Aluminium Group* chair with a form that resembles a beanbag. The forging, or grafting, together of two different types of seating brings a sense of imbalance and unease. The two types of seating are the antithesis of each other. One is strongly associated with industry, the other with leisure. One offers structure, support, ergonomic detail and high end materials. The other has no structure and little support (being filled with polystyrene balls) and is produced cheaply with inexpensive materials. As well as two opposing styles and functions their difference in price suggests a ‘sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated’ (Bourdieu 1979: 56). Similarly the sense of authority and industriousness connoted through the designer office chair is undermined by the addition of the beanbag, a suggestion of leisure, rest or even slothfulness. The idea of the graft echoes Highmore’s theory that the juxtaposition of two dissimilar forms is able to create a discourse or tension that raises awareness of the complexities and absurdity of the everyday. This is explored in greater detail in Chapter Five in relation to the workplace as a host for the (parasitical) work of art.



Figure 4.16a: Proposal drawings for an intervention or chair-jacking to an Eames-designed *Aluminium Group* office chair. Paint and pencil on paper. (Horton 2012)



Figure 4.16b: A sculptural re-working of Figure 4.16a employing a 'beanbag' form in combination with an ordinary office chair. Fabric, webbing, wadding, clip fastener. (Horton 2013)

The piece seen in Figure 4.17 is a re-making of that in Figure 4.16b using the added element of faux fur and a re-shaping of the overall form so that it is left to fall down the back of the chair. The fur and distended shapes could be argued to extend the playfulness of this combination even further. The title *KISREFTEF* is an amalgamation of acronyms used at my workplace.



Figure 4.17: *KISREFTEF*. Office chair, various fabrics, cord, cord stoppers, hollowfibre filling. (Horton 2016)

## Dressing the Chair

*Chairs Re-Dressed* (Figures 4.18 and 4.19) is an example of my work that pre-dates this research but was the first time I had proactively used a decorative intervention as a means for disrupting the conventions of site. This intervention was made at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA) in Norwich. Scattered strategically throughout the main Sainsbury collection, Eames-designed *Aluminium Group* chairs encourage visitors to spend time studying the artefacts in the collection. My alternative coverings for the Eames chairs were made based on the width of the seat pad and the pattern of upholstered horizontal stripes that forms it. Ribbons were integrated into the piece to attach the covers temporarily to the chairs and the excess of fabric draped at the bottom appears almost as a skirt. The latter reinforces the connection to clothing and the suggestion of the body, whilst the ribbons, as well as performing a utilitarian function, provide a decorative flourish. The two pieces are identical and can be used reversibly. The black wet-look PVC connotes hard-wearing functionality whilst also suggesting clothing or even fetish-wear. The colour scheme of black and yellow are found in warning systems of predatory insects such as wasps, as well as being used in the construction industry and in other contexts where health and safety may be at risk. This mix of partly contradictory signs adds to the potency of the piece: on the one hand the materials and padding invite the viewer to use the seats, on the other hand the colour scheme and 'otherness' of the pieces warn them away. The pieces have also been displayed as wall-hung sculptures (Figure 4.20). Here they function as sculptures with fewer of the utilitarian suggestions, nor the disruptive nature of the works when experienced at the SCVA.

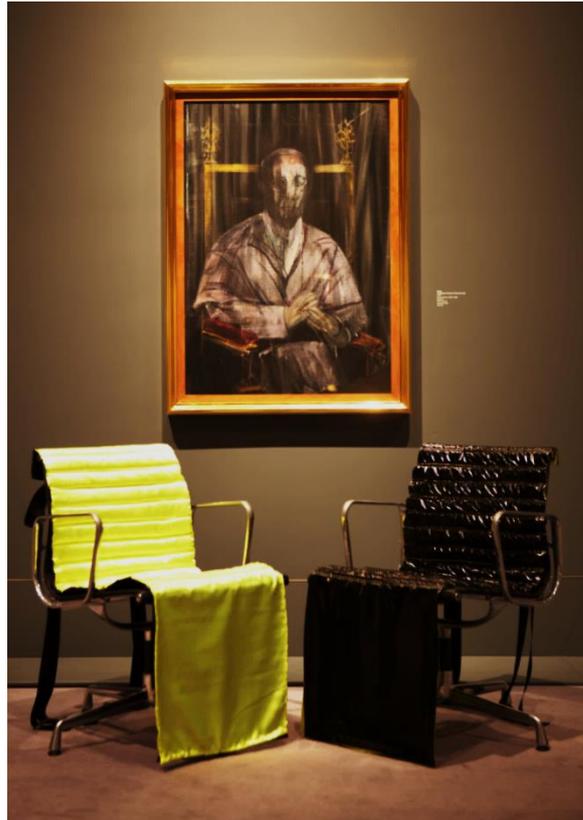


Figure 4.18: *Chairs Re-Dressed*, an intervention at Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (2011). *Aluminium Group* chairs designed by Charles and Ray Eames, polyester, wet-look PVC, wadding, ribbons, eyelets. Photographed here with Francis Bacon's *Study (Imaginary Portrait of Pope Pius XII)* (1955), oil on canvas mounted onto board. (Photograph c. Pete Huggins)



Figure 4.19: Detail of *Chairs Re-Dressed*, an intervention at Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (2011). *Aluminium Group* chairs designed by Charles and Ray Eames, polyester, wet-look PVC, wadding, ribbons, eyelets. (Photograph c. Pete Huggins)



Figure 4.20: *Chairs Re-Dressed* in the *Test Pre-enrol* exhibition, Norwich University of the Arts. Polyester, wet-look PVC, wadding, ribbons, eyelets. (Horton 2012)

The suggestion of a skirt as seen in *Chairs Re-dressed* (Figure 4.18) is picked up again in the piece *24/7* (Figure 4.21), photographed here in the context of the gallery. In this work the flowing form of the fabric drapes onto the floor like an ink spill seeping into the office carpet. (The reference to ink is taken up again in the piece *Dreaming of Versailles* in Figure 4.25). The indulgent silk-like material in *24/7* works in contrast with the hard-wearing denim of the upper part, making reference, as did the denim piece in *Aviva* in Chapter Two, to the mixture of connotations that denim holds of traditional utility wear on the one hand and leisure wear on the other. The patchwork of materials that gathers around the 'neck' of the piece contains a large number of fabrics that have been used either in the artworks made for this research, or for clothes or home furnishings that I've also constructed. Figure 4.22 shows the sculpture from the front of the chair and makes more evident the way the top section of the piece appears to slump, almost like a body.



Figure 4.21: 24/7. Office chair, various fabrics, zipper, hollowfibre filling. (Horton 2016)



Figure 4.22: 24/7 (pictured front). Office chair, various fabrics, zipper, hollowfibre filling. (Horton 2016)

The use of everyday fabrics, some of which are dress fabrics, others more readily associated with the home, combine with the office chair to form a conflation of home and work, smothering the office chair with the various fabric forms.

It is only recently that the elaboration, the modeling of one's personal and social identity, has been reorganized to conform to the uninterrupted operation of markets, information networks, and other systems... 24/7 is a time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate and within which sleep has no necessity or inevitability. In relation to labour, it renders plausible, even normal, the idea of working without pause, without limits (Crary 2013: 9-10).

In relation to the habitus Bourdieu uses a phrase that is key to this research: 'of the body'. The habitus functions at an *embodied* level, that is, relating very directly to the body and the practices of the individual that relate to their physical behaviour and preferences. Juhani Pallasmaa writes of architecture, but it could equally be said of our surroundings generally, that a building is

approached, confronted, related to one's body, moved about, utilized as a condition for other things, etc.... We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the self from its spatial and situational existence (Pallasmaa 1994:30).

This can be similarly extended to the chair. The beanbag/office chair assemblages rely very much on recognizable, functioning materials and artefacts that can be used by or on the body, for example furniture and clothing. The viewer has an awareness of the way a piece of furniture would feel if touched, of its tactile qualities: also how it might respond if sat upon. To sit on a bean bag would feel very different to sitting on an office chair for example. The viewer is able, therefore, to experience vicariously how the object feels, how it has been altered sculpturally through the addition of another object or through its re-clothing or re-covering. Similarly, in the examples given below, the haptic experience of silk used on an ordinary office chair alters the viewer's perception of it, elevating its status through the use of an expensive material (as in the case of *Head in the Clouds* at Berendsen), though at the same time introducing a level of frivolity with the addition of the pompom fringe.



Figure 4.23: Proposals for low-cost office chairs embellished with silk and pompom fringes. Paint on paper. (Horton 2012)

Lou Taylor uses Bourdieu's analysis of 'the correspondence between goods production and taste production' (Bourdieu 1979: 231) as a framework around which she analyses fabrics as used in fashionable women's dress using a number of criteria that can enhance a fabric's value (Taylor 2012). These include rarity of material, technique of construction or embellishment, price and the designer's brand. The 'value' of fabric varies according to different cultures and historic periods with silk, for example, being consistently at the top of a hierarchy of fabric. Thus, in the examples in Figure 4.23 silk is one way in which the status of these inexpensive office chairs can be elevated.

Many writers have attempted to elucidate the functions and significance of decoration and ornamentation (Edwards: 2011; Brett: 2005; Criticos: 2005; Bloomer: 2000; Miles: 2000; Gombrich: 1978). Gombrich recognises decoration as a sign of value or elevation in many contexts, including Indian temples, Moorish palaces and Gothic cathedrals (Gombrich 1978: 17). Decoration is a sign that something is to be enjoyed visually, is adorned and thus venerated. Pattern and decoration can therefore equal value, and the labour or craftsmanship associated with its production has been seen to indicate a labour of devotion and dedication. The function of decoration in military uniform (as seen in medals, insignia and ribbons) denotes role, hierarchy, belonging and status, where decoration is used in the sense of both ornamentation and a bestowal of honour (Luccini 2000: 230).

These chair interventions use colour, form and a variety of surfaces to evoke pleasurable responses that are typical of the decorative. These qualities and the use of craft skills and the labour that this type of production implies, combines with the everyday appearance of the office chairs to question the status of the chair. The use of skills commonly associated with craft such as sewing, imbue the pieces with a sense of labour, or hard, and, at times, very tedious graft (see Chapter Five). This reinforces a sense of esteem and value. The hand-crafted nature of, for example, the dyed fabric in Figure 4.25 gives emphasis to the hand-made and the sense of these pieces being unique in contrast with the mass-produced nature of the office chairs they inhabit. These pieces operate partially through a politics of pleasure, more of which is discussed in Chapter Five.

Pattern and decoration has also been used by many artists to contest assumptions about what constitutes the 'feminine', partially because of these associations with craft. In *Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture* (1978) Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff, key

figures in the 1970s Pattern and Decoration movement, highlight the way that language in several of the basic texts of Modernism privileges 'fine art above decorative art, Western art above non-Western art, men's art above women's art' (Jaudon and Kozloff 1978: 38). The proposals in Figure 4.23 introduce a colour and flower motif not typically associated with the office. The domestic interior, especially in the nineteenth century, has generally been designated a feminine domain in contrast with that of the workplace which has been traditionally seen as male (Sparke: 1995). Whilst these polarities are being blurred in today's home and workplace, many of the influences of this way of thinking are still in evidence: one need only glance at the number of women's magazines that include interior decoration articles. Much design semiology is still influenced by polarities of 'masculine' and 'feminine' where softer edges allied with comfort, colour, pattern and decoration are described as 'feminine', whilst harder edges and streamlined design, and plain, neutral colours are seen as masculine (Carlisle 2002). This is also evidenced in clothing where certain variations and exceptions at particular times, for example in 1970s menswear and to a small extent in 1980s women's workwear, are the exceptions that prove the rule. Because flowers are visible in the intervention in Figure 4.23 the gendered aspect of the chair's design is contested. The removal of the neutral 'grey' in favour of pink and of flowers, choices that are more likely to be accepted at home, have disruptive potential in the context of the workplace. The emphasis on surface (evident in Figure 4.25, for example) causes the eye to linger on the piece and the variety of fabrics emphasizes the haptic, often associated with the decorative.

The proposal in Figure 4.24a confronts the relationship with the female body more directly by making reference to a dress bustle as an appendage to the chair and through this association connects it to Leonor Fini's *Corset Chair* of 1939 (Figure 4.24b).



Figure 4.24a: Proposal for chair intervention. Pen and paint on paper. (Horton 2012)



Figure 4.24b: Leonor Fini *Corset chair* (1939). Ebonised timber, mother of pearl and metal [http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/one/leo-castelli-surrealist-design7-21-10\\_detail.asp?picnum=5](http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/one/leo-castelli-surrealist-design7-21-10_detail.asp?picnum=5) (accessed 8.11.2016)

The artwork *Dreaming of Versailles* (Figure 4.25) includes an opening that exposes its internal frame. This not only reveals a different type of labour (welding) and material (steel) but also the 'skeleton' of the piece. It uncovers its structure, resembling the boning or corsetry of a piece of clothing or an outfit. Here the fabric could also become to the structure what the clothes are to the body: attached to the steel structure only by fabric ties, the suggestion is that this piece of fabric is detachable and replaceable. The piece could be substituted for something very different, much as Efrat Tseelon argues that identity can be altered through changes of clothing (Tseelon 1995). Dressing the chair is akin to grafting an identity.

The size of *Dreaming of Versailles* also suggests something on a more architectural scale, like a small pavilion or tent, or a changing room. The hand-painted fabric is made using various washes of inks, including Quink, the writing ink. The reference is to painting (and

landscape painting particularly) on the frills - horizon lines, blues, earthy colours which, in the context of the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> exhibition, linked to the cloud pieces at Berendsen. The title of the piece refers to the flamboyant drapes and flounces of the Palace of Versailles in France.



Figure 4.25: *Dreaming of Versailles* (2016). Office chair, steel, hand-painted cotton, ink, ribbon. (Photograph c. Pete Huggins)

### **Dressing the Gallery**

The EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> is on the ground floor of a city centre building, with large windows making it clearly visible to pedestrians and drivers as they pass by and, unlike the other buildings at NUA, it can be accessed by the general public, not just by staff and students. Interestingly, it shares some of the characteristics of the London Aviva building's reception area with its large expanses of glass, making the interior highly visible from the outside.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly to the dressing of the office chair, these decorative artworks displayed here play a role in disrupting the appearance of the gallery. Whilst the gallery might be a more

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<sup>30</sup> The same building houses NUA's 'Ideas Factory', a mixture of large open-plan and smaller offices designed to house new businesses.

commonplace and accepted home for the display of the artist's work than the industrial laundry or office block that comprise the other venues for this research, the use of the decorative in fine art, and thus in the Modernist white-wall gallery, remains rare. With its plain white walls and grey concrete floor EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> is a very typical Modernist 'white-cube' gallery. Originally, such galleries arose in parallel to the whitewashed walls of much Modernist architecture and were conceived as places that were free of association, somehow sitting 'outside' of daily life and therefore able to frame the artworks contained within without any other reminders to sully or detract from the experience of viewing the artworks themselves.

According to Simon Sheikh, this enables these galleries to operate as a 'staging ground for objects of sound economic investment for possible buyers' (Sheikh 2009) thus appearing as a shop window for the objects arranged within.

[Brian] O'Doherty thus reminds us that galleries are shops—spaces for producing surplus value, not use value—and as such, the modern gallery employs the formula of the white cube for an architectonics of transcendence in which the specificities of time and of place are replaced by the eternal. In other words, the white cube establishes a crucial dichotomy between that which is to be kept outside (the social and the political) and that which is inside (the staying value of art) (Sheikh 2009).

To some extent this is true of these artworks when placed in the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>. The work has very little to 'compete' with: unlike the work at Aviva and Berendsen it 'stars' in its own environment without the complex agglomeration of furniture and fixings of the other sites. Interestingly O'Doherty also writes '(t)he classic Modernist gallery is the limbo between studio and living room, where the conventions of both meet on a carefully neutralized ground.' (O'Doherty 1986: 76). These artworks sit within a space specially designated for the viewing of artworks and this relative neutrality (relative to the sitting room and relative to the workplace of either the artist or the office/laundry) means the viewer can divorce their viewing from other experiences.

O'Doherty (1976) and subsequently Wigley (1995) amongst others, propose that these gallery spaces are themselves a result of an ideological position: rather than offering a 'timeless' artefact in neutral surroundings they are in fact a direct product of a certain time and place in history. Wigley (1995) writes that the white walls of Modernism constitute an avoidance of 'clothing'. Here he is referring to Louis Sullivan's idea that buildings can be

more fully appreciated when stripped of ornament, as ornament was associated with a coat - transient and prone to the changing whims of fashion.

This is taken further by Christopher Breward (2016: 170) using quotes by Le Corbusier in the same way that Wigley does to reinforce the links that have been made between fashion, the body, status and architecture. In Breward's extensive analysis of the suit (2016) he describes Le Corbusier's obsession with the well-cut suit as an index of the 'rational and ordered metaphor for stability and civilization' (Breward 2016: 170) compared to women's fascination with a 'primitive' interest in the decorative, colourful surface of the clothes they wear. He quotes Le Corbusier:

(d)ecoration is of a sensorial elementary order; as is colour, and is suited to simple races, peasants and savages...The peasant loves ornament and decorates his walls. The civilized man wears a well-cut suit and is the owner of easel pictures and books. Decoration is the essential surplus, the quantum of the peasant (Breward 2016: 170).

However, Wigley reminds us that the white paint of Modernist buildings is indeed only a skin, therefore itself akin to clothing. 'And by sustaining a logic of clothing, Modernist architecture participates in many of the economies from which it so loudly announces its detachment' (Wigley 1995: xviii). The 'dressing' of these chairs with decorative additions disrupts, to some extent, the white neutrality of this gallery space. It might therefore be claimed that the decorative – already argued to be deviant in the workplace - is also positioned on the outer edges of the practices and critiques of fine art, thus implying a double deviance by appearing in the gallery also.

The carpeted plinth (see Figure 4.22) also plays a crucial role in locating the chair interventions within the context of the workplace. Whereas the white wall may be the standard for the gallery space, the greige carpet is the standard for the office. Because the carpeted platform is also acting as a plinth the platform critiques both the gallery and the office in some way. (Continuing the comparison between the office and the gallery it is worthwhile noting that this plinth is almost identical in size to the large conference table in the room directly above it.) It also brings to mind the APG's temporary office space within the Hayward Gallery exhibition (1971) 'Art and Economics', as described earlier in the chapter.

As with *Swag* (see Figure 2.17), the carpeted plinth is another suggestion of a stage or tableau where the 'chair' sculptures become players on a stage, placed conveniently where passers-by become an audience looking onto them. Spatially, this suggests the shop window that O'Doherty refers to. Writing about installation Bryony Fer describes the tableau as

on the one hand a heightened sensory awareness of things, space, body, the subject as pure sense-instrument and, on the other hand, a separate or loss of connection, a kind of wilful elimination from the scene of fantasy in which one is enmeshed. The tableau cuts the continuity of experience (Fer 2004: 86).

This 'cut' recalls the edge that Monroe (2008) writes of in relation to collage - the disconnecting feature that is required to raise awareness of the illusion that is created. The carpeted 'stage' forms an 'edge' within this space, framing the chairs but at the same time causing an awkward juxtaposition between the suggested office and the gallery.

## Summary

The everyday is a paradox, being ordinary and extraordinary, 'self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic' (Highmore 2002: 16). The main value offered by theories of the everyday is that rather than presenting the individual as a 'dupe' of an overarching ideology s/he can act out a spirit of resistance. This may be done not necessarily through heroic gestures but through acts of displacement or intervention: agents exercise control and creativity within the objects and environments at their disposal which help to mitigate the effects of alienation.

The emphasis on praxis makes aesthetic practices ideal for intervening in the everyday. Papastergiadis believes that art has great potential to harness the energy and potency of our day-to-day practices and surroundings and quotes Lyotard: 'art is the flash that rises from the embers of the everyday' (Papastergiadis 1998: 27). The everydayness of the chair, its familiarity and its easy comparison to the body, make it an ideal site for the 'wearing' of artistic interventions. If, as Bourdieu describes, 'doxa' is the state of harmony between a person's habitus and field within which they live and work, deploying chair-jacking tactics makes use of playful and sometimes ironic gestures that disturb this doxic congruency. In Chapter Five I will make a case that these 'disturbances' highlight and arguably temporarily ameliorate the disjuncture that for many characterises the relationship between home and the workplace, the personal and the public.

Seen in the context of EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> the chair interventions offer a lens for problematizing not only the work-life continuum but also the role of the white-cube gallery space in perpetuating the suspicion of the decorative in fine art, as well as the 'neutrality' of the viewing experience therein. The chair-jacking tactics play a direct role in disrupting the neutrality of these office chairs by giving them a specific context to be played off against. The artworks act as clothing for the office chairs and the 'wearing' of these emphasizes the contrast between the mass-production of the office chair and the individuality of the sculptures and, by association, the individuality of the persons who have worked at these chairs.

The use of specific materials and techniques in the make-up of these works can to some extent challenge the cosmophobic assumptions of Modernism when brought into the environment of the white-cube gallery. A disruption of values occurs here, although the ability of these artworks to do this in the context of the gallery is different in comparison to the other workplace settings, as the gallery functions as a display case, an isolated space that more closely resembles the shop window. Although possibly having a reduced capacity to disrupt when compared to the office reception at Aviva or the industrial laundry, the experience of showing work in the gallery has enabled me to reflect back upon the presentation of the works at Aviva and Berendsen. Arguably all three sets of work present a disruption of the site of labour through the intervention of the decorative.

Finally, what is gained in terms of new knowledge by these chair-jackings can be summarised as follows: collaged juxtapositions of the art object with the everyday site of the chair can use the qualities and language of the decorative to focus upon and undermine signs of status, whether this is through the addition of a Mickey Mouse antimacassar or post-it notes that blur the boundaries between work and life.

## Chapter Five: Hard Graft: The Negotiation Value of the Site-Specific Work of Art

### Introduction

The previous three chapters have looked at specific examples where artwork has been placed in work-related locations. Through these examples the suggestion of new knowledge has related to the potential for decorative elements to disrupt or challenge the work environment and to provide a lens for examining issues of alienation, hierarchy and status. Effecting these placements has been a protracted process involving site visits; photographic documentation and topographic examination of the spaces involved; proposals in the form of collages and drawings made in response to each location; liaison with managers and estates staff; and, eventually, the placing of the work in situ. These were all key to negotiating my way in to these sites and negotiation as a key part of my research methods is outlined further in Chapter One.

Implicit throughout the discussion so far has been the suggestion that the artworks made for these contexts are not characteristic of the usual exchange that takes place within a market-driven economy. This chapter will look more directly at what they do offer in terms of their value within the workplace, and will argue that although out-of-place here, they are able to offer something to those who work in these environments. The artworks are not for sale, nor do they have a utility value in these contexts. However, they are able to *negotiate* their position in the workplace and it is this negotiation value that will be discussed here. It is their employment of decorative qualities that to a large extent facilitates this negotiating position.

This discussion is also important in relation to the 'challenge' to the work of art in the thesis title. Not only is it the work of art itself that is being problematized and questioned here but also the work of art as performed or carried out by the artist: the artist as one who also 'works' and makes work.

Thus the chapter begins with an exploration of the artist's role in Part One, 'The Power of Un-belonging in the Workplace' which refers to my role as an artist during my association with Aviva and Berendsen and how this position, though not entirely straightforward, made use of negotiation to positive ends. The process of gaining access to these workplaces has

caused me to examine the comparability or equivalence of work that the artist carries out and the work that typifies other professions. This becomes especially relevant when the artist is face-to-face with other work environments: can two dissimilar work practices be negotiated through the activity of placing artworks in the workplace? This is contextualised through looking at the historical model offered by the Artist Placement Group.

Part Two, 'The Negotiational Role of Artworks', relates to a function of the artwork itself – that it is able to insinuate itself as an alien but accepted, even appreciated, element in the workplace. The artworks occupy a unique space, conceptually and physically, enabling a visual dialogue to take place that challenges the décor, the furnishings and fixings of the workplace, but they are able to oscillate between the worlds of work and leisure in their suggestion of 'otherness'. Whilst the decorative on the one hand introduces a rogue element it is also able to provide a connective and potentially conciliatory element. The artwork's value is its ability to connect to its audience despite seeming to be at odds with the environment in which it finds itself.

Here is where the concept of the graft comes into play. Obviously the term 'hard graft' is a colloquialism for work of an arduous nature, but the word graft can also, of course, refer to a transplant where plant or living tissue can survive through insertion into another organism or 'host'. The artwork as it has been made for this research is grafted onto the workplace and its meaning makes sense because of the peculiarities of that site. Thus in the context of Berendsen, for example, the various meanings of the cloudscapes proliferate because of the lack of natural daylight and the repetitive activities that take place within the laundry. (As a means of negotiating two different territories, the graft has already been discussed in relation to the chairs in East Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> but is picked up again here as a useful analogy.) In the same way that the graft is both alien and ameliorative, the negotiation value of the decorative in these artworks enables this duality.

## Part One: The Power of Un-belonging in the Workplace

The experience of gaining access to both Aviva and Berendsen required careful negotiation, as artists do not usually present themselves for work in such environments. There is, however, an important historic legacy to acknowledge here in the work of the Artist Placement Group (APG) of the 1960s and 1970s, as touched upon in previous chapters. Organized by John Latham and Barbara Steveni, the aims of the placements were to make use of the skills of artists in various workplaces. Believing that ‘context was half the work’ (Walker 2002: 54), artists would observe and comment on practices within the setting they had been assigned to. Their aim was not necessarily to produce artworks (though some did – see Figure 3.34 for example) but to think of themselves as creative outsiders in their nominated role as an ‘Incidental Person’, providing a new form of patronage between the two disparate domains of industry and the arts (Bishop 2012:165).<sup>31</sup>

Bishop notes that the ‘APG’s activities go straight to the heart of contemporary debates about the functionality of art, the desirability (or not) of it having social goals, and the possibility of multiple modes of evaluation’ (Bishop 2012: 174). She argues that the APG had the effect of raising awareness of working conditions as well as enhancing understanding of the artist rather than actually effecting change, going on to say that its achievements were primarily ‘discursive and theoretical’, attempting to demystify the creative process and provide a mechanism for companies to rethink ‘their hierarchy and basic assumptions’ (Bishop 2012: 175). To this end they provided what Ian Breakwell (placed at the Department for Health and Social Security in 1976) described as ‘abrasive mutual debate’ (Bishop 2012: 176).

The APG placements were different to mine in many ways: unlike the APG artists, who received £2-3k for their placements, I was unpaid (though I received non-remunerative benefits that I describe later) and although I had to liaise with various staff in each location the process of making the work was undertaken entirely independently. Also, significantly, rather than produce a written report as the APG artists did (though this thesis enables reflection and analysis), my observations were implicated within the artworks that were made for each place (similar to Stuart Brisley’s *Poly Wheel* (Figure 3.34) described in Chapter Three).

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that despite over 100 approaches being made to various businesses less than ten placements were offered (Bishop 2012: 165).

Despite these differences, however, there was a sense of exploring the role of the artist in the workplace and, as with the APG artists, establishing my identity and gaining the trust of the two companies required tenacity and patience before I, and the artworks I made, were allowed to insinuate their ‘otherness’ into each situation. Clearly the artist is out-of-place in this context. Kathrin Böhm talks of the advantage this offers as the position of an artist is non-threatening. No-one expects the artist to have power and they are not representing the usual authorities that employees are familiar with (Doherty 2004: 11).

It is important to emphasize that my position was as an artist and scholar-researcher and in the workplace partially as an observer. Irit Rogoff refers to this as ‘positioned spectatorship’ (Rogoff 2000: 11) and with all that this implies about power relationships I was conscious of this distinction for many of my visits to each location. I was also, however, an operative of sorts: the workers at Berendsen will have witnessed me photographing their workplace and actually installing the works – physical and precise work that echoes their own attention to detail in their various roles (see Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1: Installing work at Berendsen. (Girling 2014)

But in many ways my involvement in their workplace was different. I was working on a timescale where my deadlines were generally self-imposed. Their use of time is strictly controlled and regimented: they had targets to achieve, as I had, but again mine were personally determined, not externally driven. (That said, I had to complete the work for my PhD by a certain deadline and was aware of retaining the goodwill of the laundry and Aviva’s managers.) Interestingly, the workers at Berendsen and Aviva might have seen that

much of what the artist does is unpaid and voluntary, so the usual 'exchange' that is a key characteristic of capitalism is replaced by other forms of exchange. (Hence my interest in Cummings' and Lewandowska's *Capital* project in 2001 where the artists use the gift of a limited edition print to visitors to Tate Modern as an alternative form of transaction.) At Berendsen and Aviva exchange became that of a trade of ideas, knowledge, and visual pleasure. The office or laundry offered me a display space, inspiration and an alternative audience and, perhaps more fundamentally, the chance to question the artist's role within the worlds of art and industry. It was gratifying that the manager at Berendsen also chose to retain the neon piece, *Dream Cloud*.

Miwon Kwon suggests that 'feeling out of place is the cultural symptom of late capitalism's political and social reality' (Kwon 2004: 35) such that according to Claire Doherty to be 'situated' is effectively to be displaced (Doherty 2004: 10). For Kwon the conditions of groundedness and connectedness are unable to form resistance to the forces of dominant culture and it is 'only from the position of being out of place that we can attempt to develop new skills – perceptual and cognitive – to map the hyperspaces wherein we have to survive' (Kwon 2004: 35). My use of the skyscapes in Berendsen hinted at an alternative space and changing temporality that to some extent I was playing out myself: my placement in the laundry was a shift in my usual workspace – the studio and the gallery - and the impermanence of the work was a further example of that.

Irit Rogoff talks of the way discussions around belonging and exclusions 'have largely ceded primary power to the state with its various apparatuses for the granting, policing and preventing of rights of belonging or conditions of expulsion' (Rogoff 2000: 5). She is keen to assert that her discussion is not frivolous and she does not deny the power the state holds in being able to disrupt subjects' lives, but argues that if we look beyond this juridical viewpoint there may be agency in an active un-belonging. In light of these observations Doherty asks 'How can we make un-belonging a kind of active realm by which to somehow relate to place and not through the identifications demanded by the nation state? How can we find a whole set of strategies by which we relate to a particular place by actively 'un-belonging' ourselves from it?' (Doherty 2004: 83). My 'un-belonging' to the laundry or the office block allowed me to ask questions, not only about these unfamiliar workplaces, but also about my own workplaces. It has allowed me to examine my own position in the art world.

Despite (and maybe because of) my feelings of awkwardness in these alien workplaces, it has made me increasingly aware that as an artist-researcher with connections to a higher education institute I have, in many ways, a privileged position. According to Bourdieu's *Distinction* the artist is likely to be left-wing and have higher cultural capital than economic capital; the teacher in higher education is better paid than skilled workers, foremen [*sic*] and office workers (Bourdieu 1979: 452). Regardless of income, there may still be an assumption that the artist is part of a leisure class, in which case my activity at Aviva and Berendsen might appear to be at odds with this socially-driven project. As an artist I can work with relative autonomy though I rely on a system of networks for the display, promotion and selling of work. In this sense, an income is not guaranteed as the 'product' is subject to many vicissitudes and the purchasing of artworks seen largely as a luxury commodity.<sup>32</sup> When installing the work at EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> I felt none of the self-consciousness I had in Aviva and Berendsen. In the context of the latter I felt 'wrong-footed' by having no role that was recognizably the same as any of theirs, although this was compensated for by some of the informal conversations with staff who would reveal that they too enjoyed art at school or regularly sewed, perhaps making their own clothes. The general manager at Berendsen had previously worked as an engineer and was especially interested in how some of my work was constructed. Art as an activity, therefore, when brought into their workplace prompted conversations about making and about leisure pursuits that otherwise may not have occurred.<sup>33</sup>

This research has also challenged the idea of the artist as solitary worker in the studio who perhaps at most negotiates with the gallery curator and the gallery's technical and marketing team. In the context of Aviva email traffic took place between me and a senior manager, their Corporate Social Responsibility team, and their estates and security team. Added to this, at Berendsen a health and safety officer enforced stringent health, safety and security restrictions. I have relied greatly upon the expertise and approval of these

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<sup>32</sup> The complexities of the class position of the artist has been explored by many, including Lucy Lippard (1977) and very recently in *Frieze* journal No. 183 (2016) by Adrian Piper and Dan Fox.

<sup>33</sup> At all three venues for my research I was able to gain informal feedback about the work through conversations with individuals working at each location, but at Berendsen I sought feedback through a slightly more structured approach. This involved a breakfast event in the canteen and included a feedback board with images of the artworks and post-it notes that employees could use to indicate their responses if they wished to. Mostly it provided a way of opening a conversation about the work which was more appropriate for those employees who felt uncomfortable leaving written feedback. It was not the intention of the event that it would provide quantitative feedback but would give a general sense of how the work had been received and allow time for conversation.

individuals. All of these liaisons are imbued with power relations, whether this is with the gallery manager or the laundry manager. The artist may feel autonomous but this is to a large extent coupled with caveats.

Place is important because it cannot be separated from power and status: whether it was the space of the domestic brought into the office, or the factory floor compared to the CEO's suite, place pertains to power. Whereas the generosity of Berendsen's manager granted me almost free rein to place my artwork, at Aviva my autonomy was far more restricted. Part of this project has involved me 'knowing my place' as an artist-interloper.

Rogoff reminds us again of the usefulness of Lefebvre's writings: that no space is devoid of social relations and their associated power dynamics (Rogoff 2000: 24). She asserts Lefebvre's concept of space as that which is constantly in the process of production. 'Spatial practice consists in a projection onto a spatial field of all aspects, elements and moments of spatial practice' (Lefebvre 1974: 27-9). As all these are contingent and subject to change and renegotiation so therefore 'is the space which comes into being via this form of projection' (Rogoff 2000: 24). Spatial analysis interrupts the illusion of a 'natural' order of space, the myth that 'naturalizes knowledge and power relations between subjects'. Spatial analysis makes clearer that which is made opaque through supposition, and since space is visual as well as geographical the visual arts are well placed to act as a lens through which this might be viewed more clearly. Hence the reason why photographic topographical analyses are useful in identifying the material outward manifestations of status and why art interventions in social spaces can be so effective. As discussed in Chapter Four the display of social relations and ideological implications are just as true for the gallery as they are for any other workplace (Wigley 1995; O'Doherty 1976).

It is precisely because art no longer occupies a position of being transcendent to the world and its woes, nor a mirror that reflects back some external set of material conditions, that art has become such a useful interlocutor in engaging with the concept of geography, in trying to unravel how geography as an epistemic structure and its signifying practices shape and structure not just national and economic relations but also identity constitution and identity fragmentation (Rogoff 2000: 10).

The experience of working at Aviva and Berendsen has done much to inform my understanding of the role of the artist. Many of the tasks I have undertaken for the making and installation of these artworks have been repetitive (pinning, tacking, stitching and so on). They have also been administrative (photocopying, sending emails, making telephone

calls and meeting with personnel.). These activities are not especially appealing or 'creative' but are fundamental for the realization of the work. They are laborious and protracted and challenge a romantic idea of the artist. In this respect I am reminded of the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles who seeks to address head-on the complexities of making artwork and the multifarious activities that go into the production of art (Figure 5.2). In 1969, one year after the birth of her child and attempting to balance her roles as artist and mother, she wrote a manifesto that sought to reassert the importance of maintenance work. She posits these activities as anti-avant-garde, anti-Modernist practices, as certain interpretations of Modernism privilege the clean, efficient aesthetic and the products of artistic activities whilst ignoring or denying the labour (that is often messy) that goes into these creative acts ([www.arnolfini.org.uk](http://www.arnolfini.org.uk)) (accessed 11.9.2015). In the same way that Ukeles (and Ann Hamilton – see Chapter Three) are attempting to challenge the binaries of art and work, the public and private, I would like to think that these artworks can intervene in such a way that working life and leisure or domestic time might more readily be associated with each other.



Figure 5.2: Mierle Laderman Ukeles *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* (1973). <https://saramelodyart.wordpress.com/2014/11/17/mierle-laderman-ukeles/> (accessed 11.9.2015)

Both Ukeles and Hamilton raise crucial issues about the role of the artist and the 'body', of implications of labour in relation to the performative practice of the artist. Both artists



## Part Two: The Negotiation Value of Artworks: Negotiating Pleasure Through Otherness, Dirt and Noise

Part One has examined the way the artist has to use negotiation in the making and placement of art in these work-related settings. Part Two will argue that in the context of the workplace the artworks themselves have a negotiating role to play. Mark Wilsher (2010) has posited a model of negotiation for fine art practice that takes into account individual differences and agendas of the stakeholders involved, acknowledging that rather than all partners being equal more often than not this is not the case. Using a theory of negotiation developed by Roger Fisher in 1979 Wilsher proposes the use of specific tactics and approaches to dealing with conflicting demands (Wilsher 2010: 69). Such tactics include an attempt to find shared interests and to generate options of mutual gain. This echoes Slager's contention that context-responsive research practice is most effective when it acknowledges and values 'internal conflicts and inherent plurality of views' (Slager 2012: 52). The exchanges that result can be used to connect the conditions of each specific location with a discursive network, in the case of this research emphasizing the porosity of the borders between artist/viewer, public/private and home/leisure.

Wilsher's account of negotiation acknowledges and works with the concept of difference, and my proposal is that it is a sense of difference or 'otherness' in these artworks that enables them to embody a negotiation value in the work environment. There are multiple senses of 'otherness' within the artworks themselves. In the Berendsen pieces there is the illusionistic depiction of another space – the sky – which is discussed at length in Chapter Three. The cloud as a decorative pattern in the context of the laundry is 'other', it is alien and out-of-place. In the context of Aviva's reception area the permitted decoration consisted of two Gillian Ayres paintings, a small part of Aviva's extensive art collection and symbols of wealth and status in this City of London building. The decorative qualities of the rogue artworks "*Let's get comfortable*" presented an alternative to the furnishings and the company's sanctioned art. In the chair pieces described in Chapter Four sculptural additions are grafted onto the office chair, as obvious and outlandish foreign objects.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Being 'out-of-place' is not in itself necessary to give the decorative art object a critical edge: it is this in combination with other factors such as the form of the object or its signifying content, its emphasis on the haptic and so on that, combined together, makes a piece more or less effective as a critical object.

There is also the 'otherness' of these as works of art in the context of the workplace: their unfamiliar presence there. Decoration has no place or function in the laundry, for example, because the decorative is usually associated with pleasure, whilst the workplace is associated with industry.<sup>35</sup> Thus it is this reassertion of pleasure through the decorative that affords these artworks another potential way to disrupt and at the same time to ameliorate or to reconcile. Pleasure is permitted in decoration and decoration itself is generally more acceptable in design or in the domestic. Decoration at work is, on the whole, unwelcomed. It is pleasure out-of-place.

In his book *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* (2005) Brett describes in detail three historic categories of objection to the decorative, one of which involves a preference for plainness of language (whether visual or spoken), of straightforward rhetoric rather than the 'guile' or florid speech that is at times associated with decoration (Brett 2005: 184). These categories come together, as Wigley (1995), Gombrich (1979) and others have attested, where decoration has been eliminated in many religious and cultural contexts in favour of the apparent purity of the white wall. In these situations the decorative is perceived as a form of dirt or contamination to be white-washed over. As described in Chapter Four the decorative, when placed in the context of the gallery, proves to be almost as divisive, as the purity of the white environment is contaminated by its presence. The ideology of the decorative might be seen to relate to the philosophical arguments around aesthetics in relation to the polarization of the 'natural' and the 'rational', with the decorative becoming ideologically implicated within this historical tangle (Eagleton 1992).

Anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that dirt is an offence against order and that ideas of pollution are used to coerce or convince people of the morality or otherwise of various behaviours. Although writing in the context of comparative religion she describes the impulse to clean, not just as an anxiety to escape disease but as 'positively re-ordering the environment making it conform to an idea' [my emphasis] (Douglas 1984: 2). Thus, she argues, it is not difficult to see how 'pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status..... And that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience' (Douglas 1984: 3-4).

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<sup>35</sup> As touched upon in Chapter Two there are exceptions to this general rule as some employers have begun to see the benefits to productivity of improved workplace design (Myerson 2014).

In Berendsen the idea that was being upheld by the removal of dirt, both in the products being processed and in the environment or décor was one of sterility and the promotion of the brand, where the cleanest equals best. Decoration in this context would be deemed to be excessive. Whereas reduction and restraint is necessary to eliminate error and danger, art, on the contrary, can emphasize the random and unpredictable. I am reminded of the manager's comment when I first photographed the laundry "just don't photograph any mess". That said, the manager welcomed the inclusion of these artworks despite their potential to 'pollute' the visual environment of the workplace through their decoration. Thus these decorative artworks in Berendsen negotiated the acceptance of the contaminating 'other' in the context of the 'clean' workplace. In NUA's gallery the decoration polluted the gallery's physical and conceptual white walls and in Aviva the otherness of the art objects were their corrupting interface between the furniture and the body.

Akin to the concept of dirt that Douglas describes is Bateson's articulation of 'noise'. Bateson wrote of the internal structure of message materials (primarily in language, but also in other contexts such as maths and engineering) that relies on a sequence (or collection) of events or objects or phonemes and so on (Bateson 1972: 419). What can be taken away from a sequence or sentence without the meaning being lost is described as 'redundant' or unnecessary. Decoration in an industrial laundry might equally be argued to be redundant to the main function or 'message' of the laundry's operations. The cloud artworks introduce the redundant, but they had an activity of their own to 'perform'. This activity ran parallel to the main work of the laundry: it hovered above and alongside the workers as they loaded and unloaded their machines. Bateson argues that noise can be visual as well as auditory providing a distraction to the main 'signal'. He summarizes this as the signal/noise ratio.

My argument is that the worlds of art and the decorative are both considered, metaphorically, to be 'dirt' or 'noise' in these work contexts. This noise or dirt is arguably an emphasis on pleasure. However, whilst these decorative artworks formed signs that were superfluous (noise) to the functioning of the workplace, the same qualities were necessary (signal) to their own function as signifiers. In the same way that audible noise such as chatter or the radio in the workplace can be both distracting and at the same time make work more enjoyable, similarly too for these artworks. Through the introduction of

pleasure these pieces employ the 'tactic' (to use Wisner's phrase, posited in relation to de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life*) of disrupting the status quo whilst also attempting to appease or reconcile conflicting sensations at work. They also provide a form of resistance that de Certeau describes as being able to slow down the force of capital rather than directly opposing it. Rather than making claims to annul power relations it preferences a diverse and pluralised version of power where individuals are able to 'restore a space for play' in their negotiation of the everyday at work (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998: 255).

When writing about the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Amanda Cruz refers to the power of pleasure and specifically to Bertolt Brecht's belief that writers should use various 'cunning' means to distribute their information, including metaphor, allusion and beauty – all of which are described as shrewd devices to spread a social message (Gonzalez-Torres 2006: 55). Gonzalez-Torres employs such devices in his use of sweets (Figure 5.4) and in conversation with Cruz has said 'aesthetics is politics.....a set of cultural and social values.... The problem with political art is that it had a look which was too easy to dismiss. We should rescue beauty and pleasure' (Gonzalez-Torres 2006: 55).<sup>36</sup>



Figure 5.4: Felix Gonzalez-Torres *Placebo* (1993) ©Sammlung Hoffman.  
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/68257750575012973/> (accessed 13.9.2015)

Brett aims to restore the ornamental, decorative and pleasurable with what he calls 'theoretical dignity' (Brett 2005: 1). His is a broad study of decoration, examining it not just for its aesthetic value but also for its psychological, perceptual and social values. He argues

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<sup>36</sup> The reference to beauty is used with caution. Not wishing to engage with ideological problematics of beauty as a concept, nonetheless it is often used in association with 'pleasure' (as used here by Gonzalez-Torres) and it is this term 'pleasure' that is preferred here.

that decoration is an expression of pleasure and that the pleasure experienced through the encounter with the decorative is able to connect the individual to a wider social sphere. James Trilling similarly argues that ‘ornament can be a bridge between cultures and between “elite” and “popular” strains in the same culture. To grasp a culture’s ornament, from within or without, is to grasp its heritage, its uniqueness and its joy’ (Trilling 2003: 3).<sup>37</sup>

In Aristophanes play *The Clouds*, the chorus of cloud characters have two roles: firstly, they are the patron goddesses of thinkers and secondly, when they remove their cloud costumes, they are conspirators with the audience. Acting in this dual capacity, the cloud negotiates between the audience and the make-believe characters on the stage. The clouds at Berendsen also possess a dual character. They are, on the one hand, thoughtful imposters, placed inappropriately to unsettle the visual appearance of the laundry and offer new ways of thinking about it. On the other hand, their decorative appearance enables them to be assimilated and accepted through their pleasurable qualities, to be able to ‘speak’ or negotiate.

## **Hard Graft**

The chair-jackings described in Chapter Four might also be thought of as ‘grafted’ to the chair, decoration added to these very perfunctory objects. Georges Teyssot describes a graft in the medical sense as ‘the subtlest form of prosthesis. It links a separation of substance to functional reparation through an exchange of mutual otherness’ (Teyssot 2013: 223). Can it be argued that a new species of object is created when interventions are made to the chair or to the workplace generally, and that it is through the ‘otherness’ that this reparation occurs both despite and because of the otherness of the grafted object and its host? In the case of the chair sculptures the additions to the chairs could be seen as grafts that are attached through bindings, straps, or simply by enveloping the chair. The relationship might be precarious and teetering – as with the stacked cushions in *Almost Every Cushion in the House* (Figure 4.7) – or a more stable, if smothering, structure as seen in *24/7* (Figure 4.21). In a sense these are parasites that feed off the association with the chair and completely disarm its function. But on the other hand they could be read as

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<sup>37</sup> Through reference to Bourdieu Brett also reminds the reader that it is the dominant class who create the ideology of aesthetics and taste (Brett 2005: 165).

prosthetic devices, where they disrupt a function in one sense but raise questions about an alternative quality of life on the other.

Ornament, or applied decoration, comes from the Latin word 'ornere', meaning 'to fit out' or 'complete'. Brett explores this idea of completion or satisfying a lack (Brett 2005: 264), arguing that it is often an essential characteristic and benefit of decoration that it completes the appearance of, for example, a building or décor. It is interesting to note that in contemporary architecture ornament is increasingly used as an element that is structurally necessary, or having a significant utilitarian function, reminiscent of Victorian engineering. Take, for example, the *Institut du Monde Arabe* (1980) in Paris, where the decorative surface is made of apertures that can dilate to allow in additional light or narrow to eliminate solar glare (Figure 5.5). Brett writes of the hierarchy of the decorative as received ideas that are heavily embedded in notions of expense, status, laboriousness and the command of resources: 'as such they are part of the social history and social evaluation of ornament' (Brett 2005: 220). Ornament is linked heavily to craft and to repetitive and skilled labour. (The sense of craft is inherent in the processes used to create these pieces. The techniques used to craft these fabric works in particular are time-consuming and tiring: they embody a sense of laboriousness.) This link to craft, as well as the link to gender, that is similarly often negatively associated with the decorative, is apparent in some of the work made for this research (see Chapter Four).



Figure 5.5: Interior view of *Institut du Monde Arabe*, Paris. [www.lettredeparis.com](http://www.lettredeparis.com) (accessed 16.8.2016)

If the word 'graft' means 'to work' the graft can also be described as a relationship between two opposing things – the host and the implant or prosthetic. This becomes a useful metaphor for the artwork and its site-related location. The artworks (and the artist?) are the parasites in this instance. In the case of the prosthetic graft Teyssot writes

(i)n a context of lack or absence – a gap or a specific need - a transplant indeed acts as a replacement. The realm of replacement then opens onto possibilities of placement, displacement, and replacement, a new definition of the term *place* ... (Teyssot 2013: 246).

This is again where Lefebvre's differentiation of the *experience* of space compared to the *conceptual design* of space might be seen through the intervention of creative praxis. The decorative additions to the workplace and the chair can be seen to provide something that is at times missing in the work environment – the sensual and pleasurable. This enriching of the workplace ties into Myerson's research into office design and how some companies see value in enhancing the workplace to include psychological as well as physical and functional comfort (Myerson 2014).

Teyssot asks the reader to consider the interaction between framework and prosthesis: 'frame as extension and projection of instrumentality, prosthesis as a new form of hospitality' from which arise the concepts of

hostility, unusualness, discomfort, alienation and the uncanny. Indeed prosthesis, like a graft or transplant, can be simultaneously hospitable and hostile. It vacillates between these two poles – *hospes* and *hostis*, guest and enemy – as is already recognised on the surgical level (Teyssot 2013: 245).

The prosthesis satisfies a lack, whilst the parasite thrives off its relationship to a host. Neither of these relationships need be deleterious, and so is the case where artworks rely on their host environment for their place and meaning. They are both 'hospes' and 'hostis', guest and enemy, in a relationship that works to generate options of mutual gain (Wilsher 2010). The graft is another way of writing about collage, of the use of opposing or different components to create a spark that can only be created by these tensions (Highmore 2002; Breton 1924).

## Summary

The introduction to this thesis pointed towards a double meaning of the phrase "challenging the work of art" as referred to in the thesis title. On the one hand there is the charge that the works of art themselves, in their use of decoration, ornamentation and pattern, can highlight and challenge issues of status in the workplace, whilst the second

meaning alludes to the work of the artist herself. Through this chapter I have demonstrated that a significant strategy adopted by the artist in making site-related work is the use of negotiation and that this is especially important because of the artist being out-of-context in these workplaces. For myself, being an artist out-of-place gave me a greater understanding of my distance from these workplaces but at the same time the autonomy and sense of satisfaction at being able to see a project through from beginning to end. Where the labour of the artist and other professions can be seen to overlap is in the number of repetitive tasks that have to be completed to effect these placements (as well as in the making of the pieces themselves). The hidden administration and health and safety concessions are common to the tasks of many at Aviva and Berendsen, as well as to the artist. Whilst not presenting new knowledge as such these observations seek to identify areas of comparability and correlation to other spheres of labour, thus bringing them closer together.

Comparisons were made to the APG and the 'Incidental Persons' presented to the workplace through the introduction of the APG placements. Of course there are many differences between this historical scheme and the research projects described in this thesis. (My work was implemented without a fee or contract, and without the collaborative emphasis that is inherent in the APG scheme, for example. Nor was my aim to introduce new ways of working or to directly influence policy.) What does correlate, however, is what Bishop describes as the use of social skills that extend beyond the production of art objects. She argues that this foreshadows the job descriptions of many contemporary artists undertaking projects in the social sphere that typically maximize the use of flexibility and negotiation (Bishop 2011: 171). Although the model of the flexible worker has been criticized (by Ross: 2003, for example) Bishop argues that the activities of the APG went to the heart of debates about the 'functionality of art, the desirability (or not) of it having social goals, and the possibility of multiple modes of evaluation' (Bishop 2011: 174) which for this research and its emphasis on the negotiating capability of the artwork itself is relevant.

The second part of this chapter examined the negotiation value of these works of art out-of-context and it was seen that the condition of being out-of-place, though equated with dirt and noise, was equally seen to offer an advantage in giving the artwork more potency. Liam Gillick argues that this advantage is part of art's surplus value. He writes:

(t)he surplus value that is art is not limited to its supposed novelty value but is embedded in its function as a system of awareness. ....Art is a series of scenarios/presentations that creates new spaces for thought and critical speculation. The creation of new time values and shifted time structures actually creates new critical zones where we might find spaces of differentiation from the knowledge community. For it is not that art is merely a mirror of a series of new subjective worlds. It is an ethical equation where assumptions about function and value in society can be acted upon (Gillick 2009: 70).

These particular artworks had a value in the workplace that was separate to either their use or commodity value. When brought into the workplace that surplus value (or 'uselessness') can be mobilised to create a new space for thought and critical speculation – a new 'critical zone'. It is through their suggestion of otherness (of an alternative space for contemplation and the otherness of the artwork itself) and pleasure that these artworks have potential strength.

The artworks made for this research performed a dual role. On the one hand they presented a disruptive function, but on the other they were able to fulfil connective and ameliorative functions. Here is where their negotiation value is evident: installing artworks at Aviva, Berendsen and even NUA's gallery provided a means of contesting the workplace through decorative artworks, by breaking up the uniformity of spaces and by introducing visual elements that were not essential to operational efficiency. Decoration was used as a tool to explore assumptions about status: pattern and repetition were used to highlight the repetitive nature of some of the jobs there, thereby also exploring alienation. However, by presenting singular, bespoke works in the environment of the mass-produced, these artworks also provided a vehicle for conversation and dialogue, not only as a dialogue with the interior design but also between the artist and the staff who work there and between the staff themselves. It is possible that by witnessing these visual interventions staff were able to think about the value of their own labour and work environment in a different way.

Decoration used out-of-place, in artworks such as these, was able to employ a number of factors as disruptive elements to take the viewers themselves metaphorically 'out of place'. These include the element of pleasure associated with visually engaging properties of pattern, colour, decoration and form within the artworks. Playfulness and physical engagement with the tactile and haptic aspects of the Aviva and the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> pieces mediated between the sterility of corporate furniture and the body of the worker. The

repeated metaphorical and semiotic qualities of the decorative skyscapes in Berendsen provided a space for mental projection.

In the workplace these works of art become elements of décor as well as containing decorative motifs within them and are therefore decorative on two levels. Decoration out-of-place can be critical whilst it may also provide a form of reparation or amelioration. This is potentially, then, a new model for art: to provide alternative forms of art practice and *critical* negotiation within the workplace through the pleasure of the decorative.

## Conclusions

### Introduction

Using the examples of an office reception area, an industrial laundry and the office chair, this research has tested the ways in which decorative artworks could provide a lens for the examination of class and alienation in the workplace. References to home and leisure evident in the form and materials of these sculptures were used to hint at the complex relationship between home and work life. The concept of habitus as described by Bourdieu was found to be a useful conception of class as 'embodied' in the individual through their choices of décor, food, clothing and so on. These choices are mediated through the multiplicity of fields within which the individual operates, such as their workplace, hence the effectiveness of using the concepts of habitus and field to underpin, theoretically, the references to both work life and home life within these artworks. The importance of art practice in everyday scenarios, in addition to the gallery, was particularly pertinent to the hypothesis being tested, hence the siting of works in Aviva and Berendsen. The examination of the everyday as lived at home and at work helps offset the atomization of society and knowledge that was so heavily criticized by Lefebvre. The problematizing of the everyday spaces of work has the potential to enrich the quality of life through the reintroduction of increasingly separated areas of discourse.

### Primary and Secondary Audience Reception

The primary audiences for these artworks were the employees working at Aviva and Berendsen and, in the case of the office chairs displayed at EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>, all visitors to the gallery. The audience at Aviva and Berendsen viewed these pieces of art against the backdrop of their everyday work setting. To experience them like this was to view them within the environment for which they were designed, such that the signifying references in the art - the materials used, the construction, the symbolic and metaphorical properties - would be appreciated alongside a familiarity with the viewers' very specific labour conditions.

Aviva was the first of my interventions and on reflection I wish I had found ways to gather more feedback about the presence of "*Let's get comfortable*". What I did observe was that the sculptures prompted conversation: employees and visitors to Aviva would point to

them, comment on them, sometimes laugh. At least two visitors said they wanted to play with them and others adjusted them in order to sit against and lean into them. These acknowledgements of the playful and/or comfortable qualities of the works suggest to me that the sculptures were able to play a positive role despite their incongruous appearance.

The feedback about the Berendsen works was gathered in a more structured way (see page 167) and although some of this feedback was directly related to the works themselves there was also an element of the works prompting discussion in the same way that I had previously seen at Aviva. Both the cloud motif and the issues around labour emerged as topics for discussion. Employees talked with me about changes to the environment at Berendsen, about physical alterations in the main laundry and also to 'efficiencies' that had led to redundancies or diminutions to roles. Another employee described their frustration at not being able to get a doctor's appointment at a time that would fit outside work hours. Workers also described the way in which the cloud motif reminded them of flying, or that they would rather be somewhere other than at work. In a simple tally chart the neon piece *Dream Cloud* was the most popular of the works and interestingly was the one work that the manager asked if he could keep as a permanent fixture.

With regard to the exhibition at EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> one visitor to the gallery (a senior lecturer employed by NUA) described it as "gaiety combined with corporate haunting" and recognised the echo of the shape of the carpeted plinth with a boardroom table elsewhere in the building. The curator of the gallery commented that the invasions of the chairs made such chairs seem dull and characterless and had prompted her to think about her own office as stark and functional. She also made the comment that it is unusual to see the artist herself installing the work which was, to me, evidence of the broader labour of the artist that falls outside of the making of the pieces. A student visiting the show described the chairs as "victims" of an infiltration, and another visitor iterated that there is "something unnaturally sterile about the office environment and the soft and squishy domestic sphere is a threat to this".

New awareness would be created for a secondary audience who would view the Berendsen and Aviva pieces as visitors to EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>, and who would see them either in the wall-mounted photographs or in the Powerpoint display embedded in the timeline (see Figure 5.3). These photographs now function as documents of the works in their original contexts.

On reflection, what was also significant about the experience of placing work in these environments was how it opened up discussions about art, the nature of Ph.D. study and research and how the employees themselves engage with art. Employees would tell me about the kinds of exhibitions they see, if any, or the types of creative endeavors they have undertaken at home or in their own education. On more than one occasion there was debate about the extent to which people are 'naturally' creative. These discussions about art, about employment and employers, even about local doctors, remind me of Henk Slager's assertion that context-responsive practice should connect 'the material conditions of location, the discursive network, and the prevailing modes of criticality, while articulating the site as a differential place and medium' (Slager 2012: 43).

### **Disrupting the Site of the Everyday Workplace**

In Aviva's Head Office, the decorative artworks disrupted the physical appearance of the office reception areas and formed a riposte to the symbols of status as seen therein. At Berendsen the motif of the cloud was a recurring pattern and image upon which the employee could project an alternative to repetitive work that is physically demanding and potentially alienating. At different locations within the laundry the image of the cloud was able to connote alternative signifying meanings. In the disruption of the office chairs described in Chapter Four, identical, ubiquitous chairs were unsettled through the use of three-dimensional artworks that featured decorative elements. Sited in the context of a 'white cube' gallery these decorative elements also challenged a longstanding mistrust of the decorative within fine art practice, referencing the writing of Wigley among others.

Using these three case studies the mythical and normalized doxa of the workplace was shown to be challenged through these interventional art practices, informed by the writings of Deutsche and Mouffe. By using acts of subversion (or 'tactics') within these everyday environments creative praxis responded to the 'imposed system' of the workplace (de Certeau). Having no obvious use value in the context of the workplace the artwork and the work of the artist, provided a site for the exchange and introduction of other factors, of, for example, pleasure and escapism. Associated often with the home, the decorative is infused with insinuations of domesticity and these, combined with the predominant use of cloth within the artworks, reinforced the link to the personal and the domestic, using theoretical references to the everyday to provide a means of examining the

complicated relationships between work and home. From these findings the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Artworks are able to disturb or disrupt the visual appearance of a work space when the decorative features inherent within them contrast with the surrounding environment.
- Artworks can highlight signs and symbols of status within the workplace through using decorative elements to contrast with these signs and symbols.
- Artworks in the workplace can use decorative features to make connections to home and leisure.
- Artworks can provide a metaphor for repetition and alienation when the use of a repeated motif is placed strategically in the workplace.
- In different work-related locations the use of a polysemous motif can shift in meaning to suggest various significations.

### **Challenging the ‘Work’ of Art**

It has been a curious corollary of this research to witness my labour value as an artist alongside that of other roles that are inherent to the workplaces I have installed work in. What was the value of my labour in Aviva and in Berendsen? How could the work of the artist be understood alongside that of the factory operative or office executive, for example? Unlike the gallery, where my status was understood and secure, what was my position with a less ‘initiated’ audience? Implicit in these questions was a sense of hierarchy, both within the personnel at work in each location, and in relation to the value of the artefacts or services being produced or performed there, including my own as the producer of art. While the tasks required for the making of the artworks themselves are obvious (practical tasks such as welding, stitching, pinning, tacking, casting, assembling, drawing and painting) there were many other non-making activities that were not visible in the pieces of work themselves but were crucial nonetheless for the completion of the research as a whole. These included making photocopies, emailing security officers, meeting managers, meeting employees, and negotiating the display of the work for

exhibition, all of which created a way of comparing my own work as an artist in these settings with the labour of those paid to work in either Aviva or Berendsen.

To some extent my own habitus was altered through my activities relating to these locations as I became aware of my conspicuous 'otherness' in Aviva and Berendsen. Whilst this feeling of not-fitting-in drew attention to my differences, the conversations and observations prompted by my presence as someone who had a role there (albeit different to theirs) gave us something in common. Also, the unseen repetitive administrative tasks I had to undertake, though invisible to most staff in these venues, found an echo to the roles and repetition in the labour of many of these employees. Therefore:

- Within the workplace the work of art, in both senses, can bridge the gap between the alien status of the artist and the workplace itself.
- Correlations can be made between artists and other types of worker when the artist is brought directly into the physical environs of another's workplace.

Chapter Five brought together a number of questions that were unforeseen at the outset of the PhD, but arose through the process of installing artworks at Aviva, Berendsen and the EAST Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>. This included the extensive use of negotiation that was evident in this project, whether between me as the artist and the staff working at either the office or the laundry, or between the artworks and their environment and their viewers. These factors were seen to complicate, challenge and extend the original intentions of this research project. The concept of negotiation was raised again in relation to navigating the peculiar spaces the laundry or office block offered to find locations for the artworks that were both practical and would effect the communication of meaning. In the workplace these works of art become elements of décor as well as containing decorative motifs within them and are therefore 'decorative' on two levels.

Chapter Five also explored the hypothesis that artworks that employ the decorative and are grafted onto an unlikely site exist in a parasitical or prosthetic relationship to that site that is on the one hand alien but on the other hand able to function in a reparative way as a medical graft might. Whereas the efficient 'purity' of the workplace might usually be achieved through removal, decoration is an additive process, achieved through accretion.

The somatic, affective, sensual, bodily aspects of the work at Berendsen, Aviva and the gallery are important aspects of the decorative and essential to the experience of pleasure that, according to Brett, decoration affords. They are also important in restoring psychological needs that have been shown to prompt a happier workforce (Myerson 2004; 2014).

Although beauty and pleasure are not immediately commensurate with industry they offer a way of connecting to an audience. These decorative artworks are therefore able to fulfil a dual role – they are able to both challenge and at the same time able to connect, thereby proffering a politics of disruption *and* pleasure. Thus, the ‘dirty’ business of these decorative grafts (as censured in key Modernist writings) can be seen as ameliorative in this case. They are playful and unfamiliar interventions that insert and assert themselves, presenting a resistive act (de Certeau) in the workplace. From these investigations significant conclusions can be identified:

- By being grafted on to the workplace (akin to a collage) the decorative features within a work of art can ignite a ‘spark’ (Breton 1924) of meaning or resonance for the viewer of that work.
- Through these resonances the decorative work of art carries a negotiation value that enables it to bridge opposing features of the workplace.
- The employment of decorative materials and motifs within artworks are able to restore visual and haptic connections to the body at work.
- Artworks that employ decoration, where specifically using pleasurable forms, motifs or materials, are able to introduce an ameliorative element into the workplace.

This suggests potential implications for art practice beyond the scope of this Ph.D research:

- That art practice can be a site for critical negotiation within the workplace in part through the pleasure of the decorative.

- The knowledge acquired here is a model whereby the decorative, rather than being seen as superficial, has a dual value in critiquing issues of status and alienation in the workplace and in offering an ameliorative function.

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