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This publication is the second of three following *More Than Meanwhile Spaces*, a collaborative project between researchers at Newcastle University and The NewBridge Project that aims to explore long-term models for creative practitioners in the city.

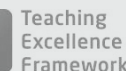
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*More than Meanwhile Spaces* is a collaborative project co-run by researchers at Newcastle University and The NewBridge Project.

It consists of three strategic conversations, hosted between October 2018 and January 2019, which each bring together creative practitioners, local businesses, council members, academics and interested parties in order to foster a shared understanding of the challenges facing artist-run initiatives in the city. Our hope is that through open and sustained conversation we can together develop viable, innovative business models for artist-run initiatives in the long-term.

This publication is a record of those conversations. It documents the key questions, themes and proposals discussed by the group. As the conversation continues, more information will be added. Statements might be amended or deleted. Although our discussions will be specific to Newcastle and Gateshead, we hope that some of the information provided here will be of use to others facing similar issues. This publication comprises an account of workshop 1 (pg3-18), followed by workshop 2 (pg18-32).

1

WHAT IS AN  
ARTIST-LED  
INITIATIVE?

We recognise that this is complex. There are a lot of different terms in play (e.g. artist-run, artist-led, D.I.Y., D.I.O., self-organised, grassroots, alternatives, pop ups, etc.) as well as a whole range of functions, motivations and ideologies. What artists in one space consider to be artist-run might not 'count' as such in another space up the road. Some are set up by graduates, as a temporary stepping stone away from the university. For others it's an enduring commitment to make work in a particular way. The scale and power of artist-run initiatives can also vary significantly. Artist-run initiatives can be large-scale, long-term, culturally powerful organisations. They can also be small-scale and temporary, and they may or may not involve artists in shops.

This variation in practice is a strength of the field, and it can't be reduced to an easy, catch-all definition. At the same time, this diversity may give rise to a sense of confusion for those from outside the sector, leading to a lack of clear understanding

of these initiatives' challenges, needs, and values. For the purposes of this project then, the term 'artist-run initiatives' (ARIs) is elective – if you want to join the conversation, you're included.

For example, we know that 'artist-run' suggests an initiative managed day-to-day by artists – which can leave little if any time for a creative practice. 'Artist-led', on the other hand, suggests an initiative driven by artists (i.e. via a board), where responsibility for running the initiative day-to-day is given to a dedicated team. But to say that something is 'artist-led' or 'arts-led' can be problematic too because in some cases (i.e. when talking about social movements or urban development), it suggests that artists alone are the driving force for change.

How do we manage and account for this complexity, without reducing practice to a one-size-fits-all solution?

1.1

# THINKING ABOUT ARTISTS

## *If they can do it, so can we...*

Does how we think about artists – as a group – influence decision-making and practice?

For example, narratives of the artist as Romantic hero, or as entrepreneur? What do these narratives suggest, or compel, artists to perform in order to be recognised? For example, what about payment, holidays, sick leave? Might even positive, inspiring examples lead to the uptake of particular models over others, regardless of their suitability?

Why do we insist on thinking that all artists and artistic scenes are welcoming of other artists? Some are and some aren't. Some are only welcoming to those that look and act in ways that we find familiar -- to people who 'fit'. Should we broaden the conversation and talk about competition? For example, with each other, with other spaces, and between cities. What else?

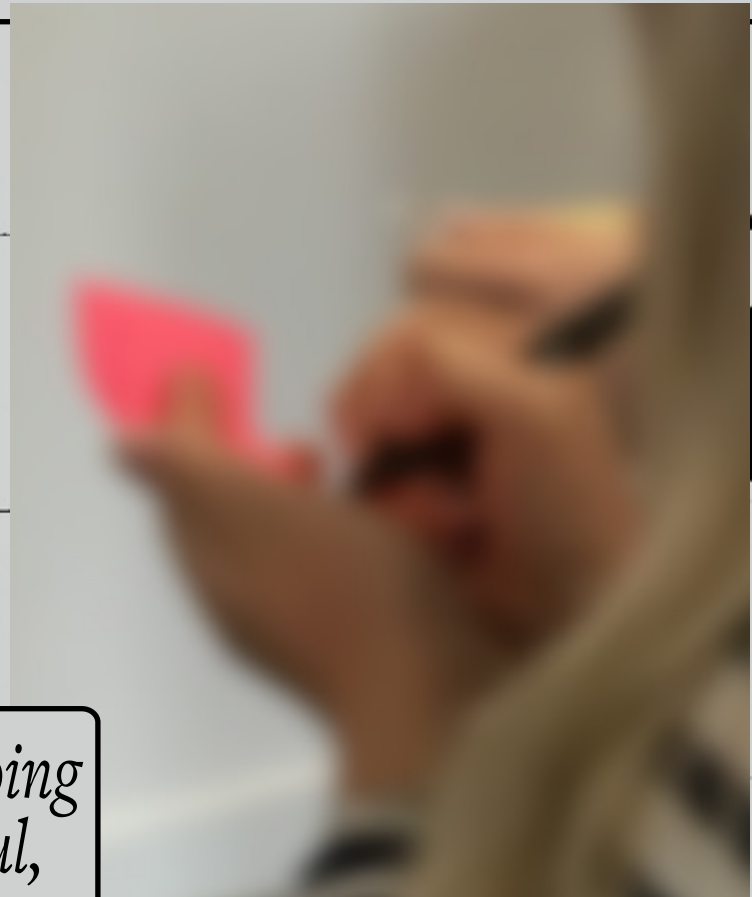
What about the emotional impact of this kind of work? How do we deal with a kind of 'siege mentality', where artists feel that every action and idea will be shut down, complained about? How do we protect artists and creative practitioners from burn out and exhaustion?

What do artists need from the cities they live in? How can the city ensure that it continues to cultivate a diverse art scene?





*the fact that the artist system is based on people working for free perpetuates the idea that only certain kind of people can be artists...*

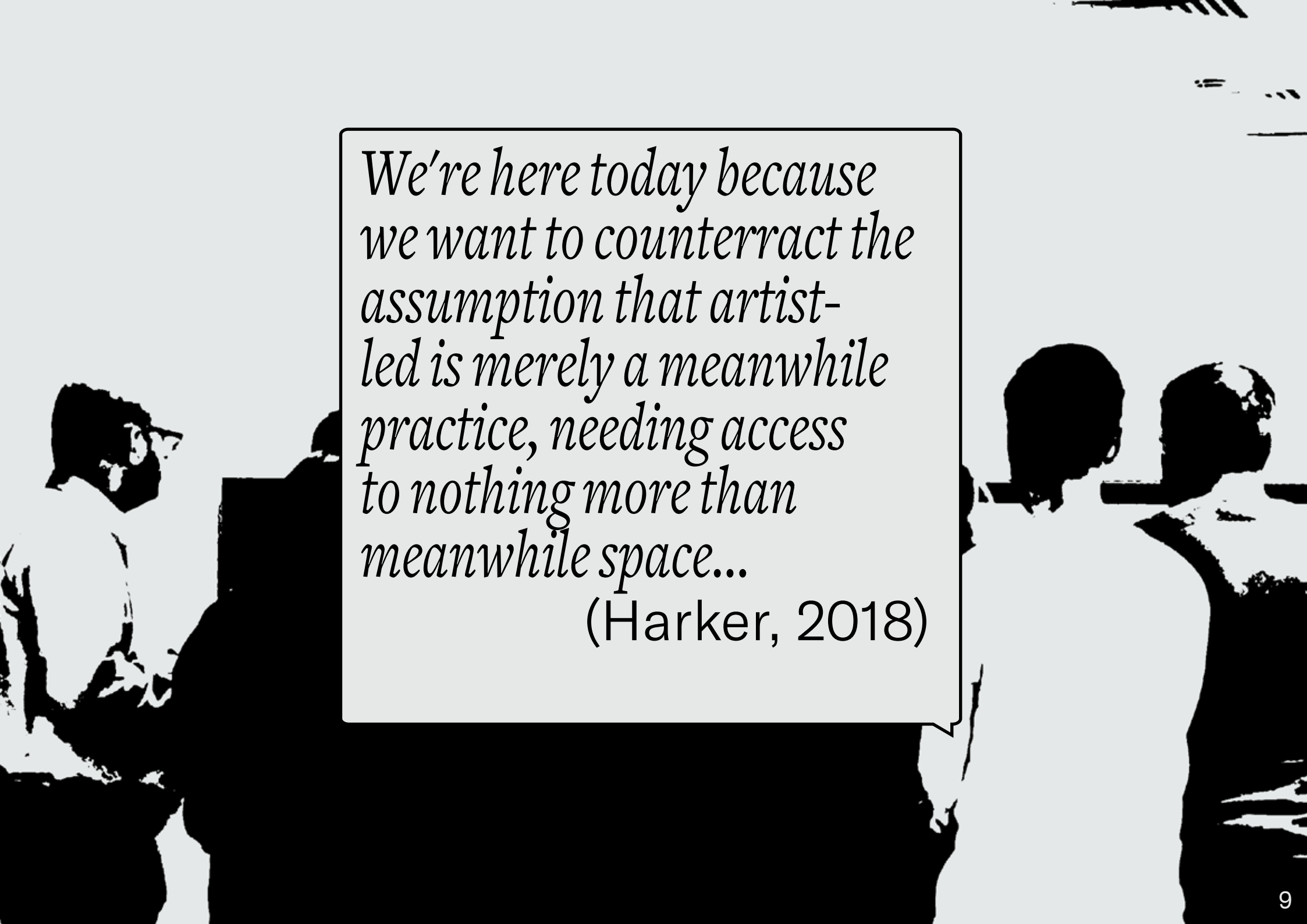


*[on funding applications] it says, “what are you going to give in kind?” and I feel like saying “I give my soul, always, in kind!”*



1.2

# THINKING ABOUT SPACES



*We're here today because  
we want to counterract the  
assumption that artist-  
led is merely a meanwhile  
practice, needing access  
to nothing more than  
meanwhile space...*

(Harker, 2018)

There are lots of different terms for the spaces that artists use – and not just in terms of their function (i.e. studio space, dance space, gallery, museum etc). But what do terms like ‘incubator’ and ‘platform’ do in terms of the way that we think about artist-run practice, and our expectations of those spaces? How do we understand ‘permanence’ in a sector that is subject to constant change and evolution?

How do artists use the city, and how does it use them? What about branding and so-called ‘creative cities’? Or should we talk instead about neighbourhoods? What about gentrification? In

working to house artists in the long-term do we displace other, local groups, or are our artists also locals? Do artists need to cluster together? Do they need to be in the city centre? How can artists better share knowledge about approaches to negotiating space ownership?

Is our focus on buildings and physical spaces here a misnomer? What other kinds of spaces are necessary to ensure the success of an artist run initiative? Can ownership over buildings sometimes be ‘traps’ for artist run initiatives? Are we misguided in thinking that ownership is the ultimate end goal for the majority of ARIs?

What does the ideal ‘space’ look like for artists and ‘ARI’s?

I think we're really poor at recognising when something has run out of steam. And I think there's something about that philosophy and what binds artists together in a collective, that sometimes it comes to an end when its principle movers leave...

*I'm not interested in the building in the sense of an artist going in to make a painting [...] it's space in a much more virtual sense. It's space for these sorts of conversations...*

There's a question here of what is "temporary"?

*What's the motivation of an artist run space to want to concretise into a permanent structure?*

What are the strengths of not having a physical space?

# 1.3

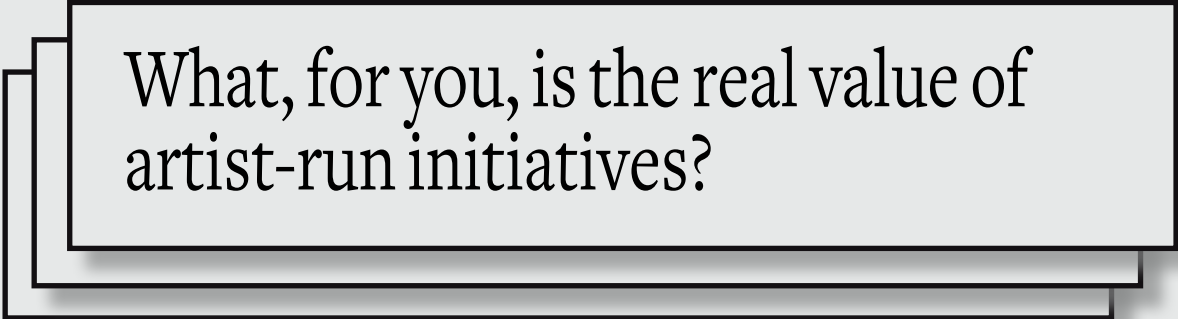
## UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF ARTIST-RUN INITIATIVES IN THE CITY

How do we recognise artist-run practice in the city? How should we?


Should we differentiate between occupation of a space and its use? Between value and exchange value? What do we do when land value rises, and how do we make the case for the arts when council funds are rapidly declining? Through the sum total / contribution of the creative industries? More local figures and solutions?

How do we communicate the value of artist-run initiatives? How much do alternative spaces bring to the life of the city centre?

How can we capture some of the value that artists and arts organisations bring to different parts of the city, when this value usually ends up benefiting private land owners and landlords? What role do artist-run initiatives have in gentrification? How do we take responsibility for/avoid this?



What, for you, is the real value of  
artist-run initiatives?



There has to be a reappraisal of, why do we support a cultural sector in the city, if it only relates to a very small portion of the population?

*it's about opening people up to seeing what that value is without it always 100% being financial value*

I think it's about us serving the city, rather than what we get from the city. I think that can build us towards a collective purpose.

*Artists are entwined with "austerity urbanism". We exploit and are exploited by a very real, dangerous form of "urbanism light" that privileges artists as Creative Class footsoldiers; a post-Fordist ideal. Meanwhile spaces and notions of artists "leading" reveal this privilege.*



1.4

# THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

Artists don't (or don't usually) start artist-run initiatives with any training, particularly in running large-scale capital projects. What support is currently available? What might we offer or improve?

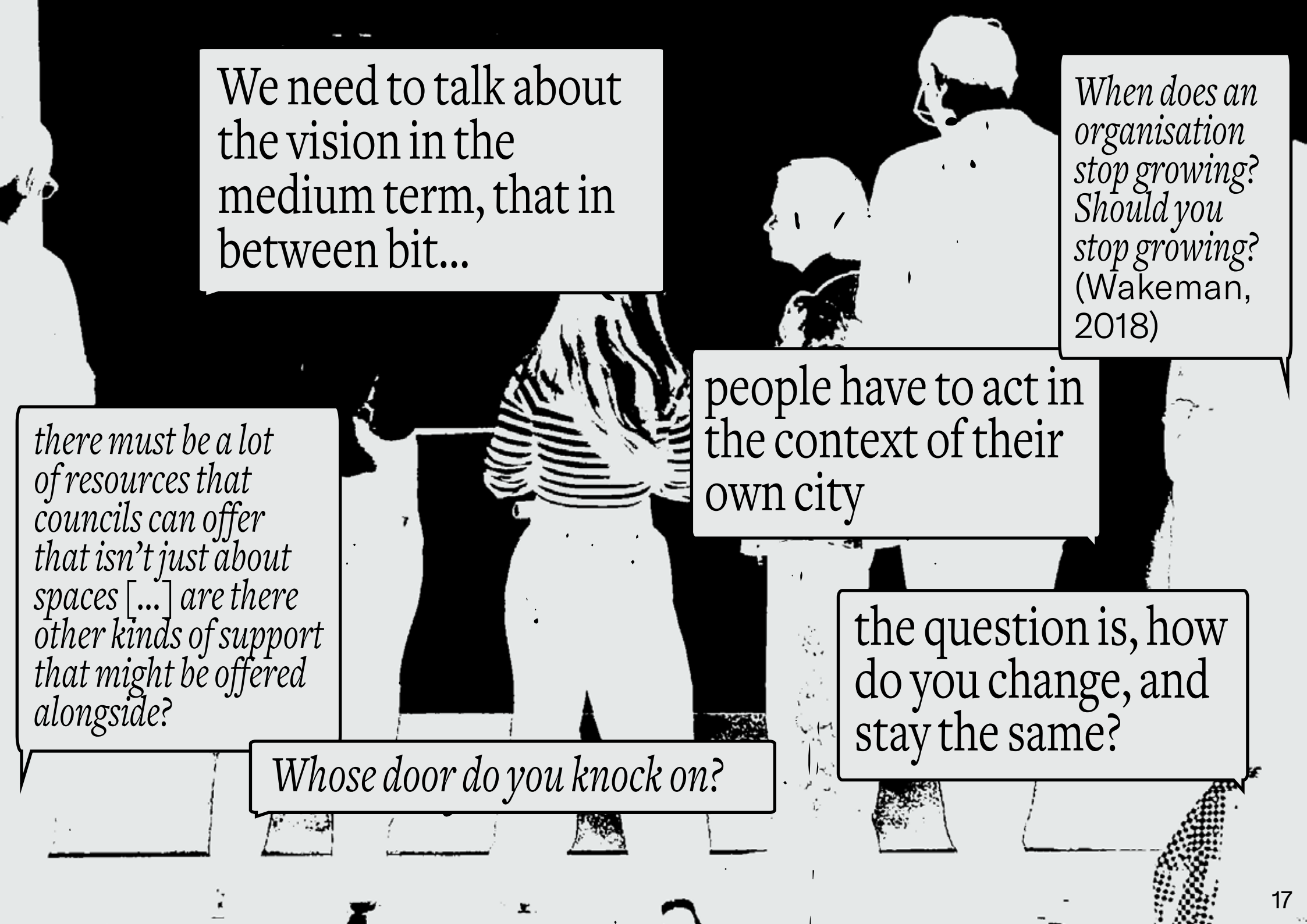
What processes can we speed up, or collaborate on? How can we better share resources and information? Where might an artist new to the region, or recent graduate, start?

How might we record and document artist-run initiatives in the city, in a manner that is open to everyone and the responsibility of no one individual? An archive? Webpage? What examples might we look at?

What/who needs to be part of the conversation?

What might the financial and emotional costs of this be for artists, given the 'chronic lack of capacity' within ARIs to carry out this sort of work?

What do you think the creative/arts sector in Newcastle should look like in the future?



We need to talk about  
the vision in the  
medium term, that in  
between bit...

*When does an  
organisation  
stop growing?  
Should you  
stop growing?  
(Wakeman,  
2018)*

people have to act in  
the context of their  
own city

*there must be a lot  
of resources that  
councils can offer  
that isn't just about  
spaces [...] are there  
other kinds of support  
that might be offered  
alongside?*

the question is, how  
do you change, and  
stay the same?

*Whose door do you knock on?*

2

# REMODEL- LING ARTIST-RUN INITIATIVES

In the second session, we proposed four categories for artist-run practice and **a)** identified some key questions for each category, **b)** identified ‘sticking points’ or issues that hinder artist run practice in each case, and, **c)** proposed tentative solutions in the short, medium and long term. Each model will be re-presented and discussed again at the final event.

2.1

# SUSTAINABLE MEANWHILE SPACES

Although we want to look at longer-term solutions in these discussions, we recognise that meanwhile spaces provide a necessary entry point into the wider art world.

Meanwhile spaces can help new graduates and entrants to the city figure out their ‘next steps’, for example, but they might also become part of a long-term community growth strategy and help revitalise parts of the city that are otherwise neglected. On the other hand, a reliance on short term spaces can have a limiting effect. Expensive, heavy equipment cannot be moved from space to space at the drop of a hat, or at the continued expense of the individual artist or artist-run initiative. Constant and exhausting relocation can limit creative freedom, curtailing opportunities to do something ‘big’. And

the reality of working in a building owned by a private landlord is that you may, at any moment, be asked to leave, as the area that you have become part of regenerating suddenly becomes prime development land for private owners and investors.

How can we make sure that artists get ‘good return on their value’ when they’re involved in regenerating areas of the city? Is there an issue of ‘timescale’ here? Are meanwhile spaces really only an option for younger, more mobile populations? What happens when meanwhile spaces once populated with people in their twenties, become spaces filled with people in their thirties and forties? How can we ensure that meanwhile space is still a suitable space for artists to work in? What about gentrification?





## Short-term

Newcastle is about to launch a City Cultural Plan - how can artist groups make sure their voice and concerns are properly represented in this plan?

## Mid-term

Newcastle City Council is a core partner in the Cultural Cities Enquiry scheme. What influence can a workshop like ours have on the development of this scheme's agenda? Can the models used in other, bigger cities in the UK and elsewhere be implemented in Newcastle (e.g. the Creative Enterprise Zone)? How might we generate more opportunities for artist-run initiatives to get a mortgage and buy a building from the council (e.g. the Star and Shadow in Newcastle have done).

## Long-term

Could we add a 'gentrification tax' to areas that artists have had a hand in regenerating? Or a capital gains tax? What about the Community Land Trust model -- could this be implemented in regions of the city?

# 2.1 TRANSITION- ARY SPACES

We wanted to reflect some of the conversations that emerged from the first workshop - about the diversity of artist-run initiatives and spaces and the identity shift that some of the more 'meanwhile' initiatives undergo.

This shift can, as participants noted in the first workshop, cause something of an existential crisis for some initiatives as they start to orientate their vision towards the priorities laid out by funders and local councils. Some artist-run initiatives later reverse this process, meaning they spend a lot of time operating in a liminal space, in between meanwhile and permanence, whilst others consciously choose to inhabit such a space on a longer-term basis. Such spaces might be labelled 'transitory spaces'.

What happens if we think of artist-run spaces

as transitory – as spaces that continue in the mid/long-term but which undergo significant changes on the way. What parts of an initiative might be transitory? Is it the space? Is it the organisational format and identity? Is it the people? How do we develop a model that captures all of these transitory elements? Might thinking about transition allow for more flexible, creative and adaptive organisations? Can there be one 'ultimate' vision here, or is this about keeping multiple options open and adapting to the work, situation and context? How might a 'vision' be passed on? Can you exist 'inbetween'? How do we provide support here to ensure that those involved are able to make the right decision for their organisation? What stability is there for those moving towards long term spaces? What resources and support can the city of Newcastle and other organisations provide? How might transitory spaces leave a footprint?

## Short-term

Space within other spaces e.g. in a bar/above retail spaces. How is this currently used in the city? What opportunities and resources could be shared quickly, and how? Should you put the 'programme before premises' (The Common Guild model)?

## Mid-term

How to enhance the capacity of academics and get them to move faster, to draw artists/artist groups in as part of a formulation? How to capitalise on the presence of research-intensive universities in the North East region?

What support (admin/financial) is there to make this kind of shared work happen, as oppose to a 'lucky conversation'? What training opportunities might there be via the council / universities to build up artists' confidence in and knowledge of applying for funding, leases on buildings etc?

## Long-term

How to match space owners with space renters – speed dating events / AirBnB system? Subscription spaces for makers who need access to equipment/facilities – even for just an hour? Can those facilities be mapped?

Could we create a digital network of knowledge/a training manual that supports those ARIs who are working towards long-term models to make the steps involved in buying buildings, getting a mortgage etc, transparent.

'Next-phase/medium-term'

# 2.2

# PERMANENT SPACES

The processes involved in locating permanent premises are laborious, obtuse and often expensive – and can require specialist knowledge around finance and mortgage applications that creative practitioners don't necessarily have. But long-term initiatives attract artists and diversify the cultural life of a city. They create a much-needed anchor and place of work for artists who want to stay in the city and develop their practice. We know that Newcastle as a city is subject to a 'boomerang effect', where young people move to London or elsewhere as students but come back to Newcastle to set up businesses and art collectives.

So how do we encourage councils and developers to invest more in this vision for the city? How do we manifest a political agenda that recognises the value and significance of long-term models? What might the impact of a post austerity UK be on the availability of buildings for long-term lets? How do we get business developers and development bodies like the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to engage more deeply with the arts and cultural sector. How do we persuade councils to let artists buy buildings from them when the amount of property owned by the council is diminishing year on year? How can we use culture to make Newcastle a desirable hub for people leaving London or elsewhere and looking for a dynamic city to live?



## Short-term

What opportunities exist to get artists on the board of local development bodies (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships)?

## Mid-term

How might we be able to make permanent artist space a key feature of Newcastle and Gateshead's long term strategic plans? What about multi-use buildings whereby artists co-exist with retail stores (who pay rent and are given tax relief), or religious buildings (e.g. Holy Biscuit model)? What legal support and advice might be available to those looking for a permanent home (e.g. such as Lawyers Volunteering for the Arts (LVFA))? What about training for artists?

## Long-term

Can artist-run initiatives use community asset transfer to take over buildings and venues that the council are considering letting go of? (For a guide on how museums do this see: Rex, 2018)



2.3

# MORE THAN MEANWHILE CITIES

Whilst the focus of these workshops has been on ARIs, or collective artist spaces, these groups wouldn't exist without the individual artists that comprise them. Not every artist can, or wants to be part of a collective, but the contribution of individual artists to the cultural life of the city is no less important for this. The life of the artist is often defined by low income, job insecurity, and uncertainty about the future. How might the cities of Newcastle and Gateshead (including its artists' and academics) create a collective vision that allows for artists (whether part of an artist-run initiative or not) to flourish in a meaningful way?

What might a More than Meanwhile City look like? What if we thought about long-term relationships, rather than focusing on physical spaces? What do 'we' want to see happen in the long-term? Is there a 'we'? Or several possible 'we-s'? How to mobilise a group/s and who should be included in the discussion? What about the relationships between artist-run initiatives? Should 'we' work to keep them close together, physically, or does it not matter where/how artist-run initiatives are dispersed throughout the city/region? Can we challenge the 'creative city' model? What about student housing?

## Short-term

Possibility to open up the existing 'Making Spaces' group (currently run by Newcastle City Council) and use this as an open forum for continued discussions. Would need a small amount of money for refreshments and a venue (e.g. a grant development bid submitted by staff from Newcastle University would provide funds and a neutral location) Are artist-run initiatives (or similar) mentioned in Newcastle's 'Cultural Plan' – and if not, could they be? How to overcome our silos? Can we identify why it is so difficult to work together – do we need to be more open and generous to listening and learning? How to 'unlock' empty space?

## Mid-term

Use the above forum to move towards longer-term partnerships (i.e. an AHRC bid) including a PhD studentship and 'live mapping' of spaces (e.g. create a digital map through Urban Observatory)? Include NE1 (retailers), landowners and developers? What opportunities are opened up via Neighbourhood Planning? How to shift policy – in the council and the university? How to empower the council in times of need? Which bits of the council hold the keys? Where might we be pragmatic, combine and adopt priorities/languages in order to unlock funding, without playing artist-run initiatives off each other? Can 'we' be disruptors and create a shared vision 'despite' some possible partners, and then present it back? What other possibilities/knowledge can be shared (e.g. the Guild model)?



## Long-term

Should we start thinking beyond the city centre – what about the outer city, suburbs, market towns, rural areas? Look at activity/possible relationships in the region more broadly (i.e. what about Gateshead, Sunderland, Middlesbrough)? What opportunities exist in light of the North of Tyne Devolution deal? Where might alternative agendas flourish? What do ‘we’ want to see in the long-term? What might ‘we’ collectively work towards? How to resist growth-driven economies business rates and land hoarding from the bottom up? Where are our allies? Can we change legislation? How do we advocate for change, on behalf of a range of groups, in the long-term? Do we lobby for change from the ‘inside’ or the ‘outside’? What do we want to change in this city, in society? How do ‘we’ do this work while taking care of ourselves, and each other?

# MOVING FORWARD

The questions and prompts contained in this booklet so far have been kept deliberately open-ended, reflecting the diverse and open-ended nature of the discussions held at the first of our *More than Meanwhile Spaces* events.

Going forward we will, as a collective, start finding ways of answering these questions and solving some of the issues laid out here.

To join us on this endeavour, please do drop us an email ([katie.markham@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:katie.markham@newcastle.ac.uk)) and come along to the next and final workshop, details of which are below:

WORKSHOP 3/3:

*Looking to the Future*

Tuesday 15th January 1-6pm

The Boiler House,  
Newcastle University

References

- Cultural Cities Enquiry. Available from: <https://www.corecities.com/about-us>
- Rex, B. 2018. *Successfully Taking Over Your Local Museum: A Guide to Community Asset Transfer of Museums*. Association of Independent Museums. Available from: <https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/V-5-Successfully-Taking-Over-Your-Local-Museum-2018-6.pdf>