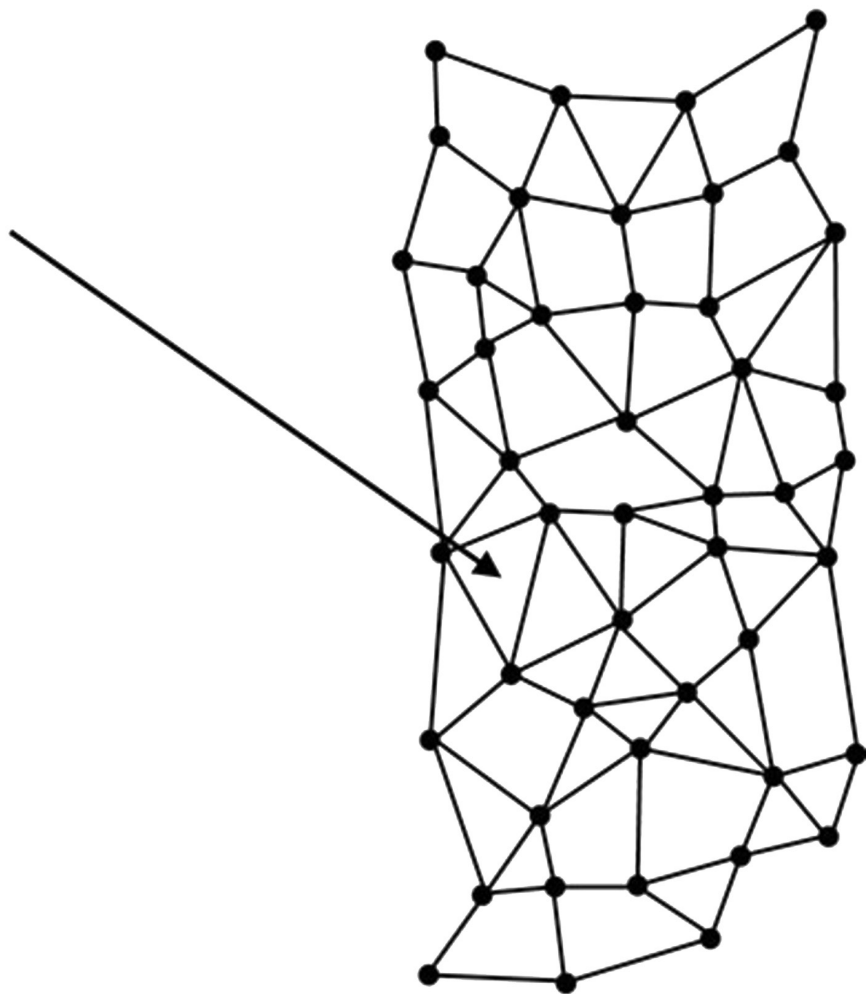


Tall Tales From An Artist-Led Space



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Featuring the artists:
Amelia Barratt
Natasha Cox
Keira Greene

Edited by William Noel Clarke

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Cover image: Paul Baran's network diagram used in Zach Blas'
e-flux article 'Contra-Internet', Journal 74, 2016.

'Tall Tales from an Artist Led Space' was a one day event at Cubitt Gallery on the 29th of September 2018 which was the culmination of an archive research placement being conducted by William Noel Clarke.

The event included commissioned performances by the artists Amelia Barratt, Natasha Cox and Keira Greene. This publication contains transcripts and texts from and about these performances and staging's by the artists, as well as an introduction from the curator.

Introduction

By William Noel Clarke

Cubitt's archive spans 27 years and includes funding applications sent to the Coca-Cola company, floor plans for their various past locations and faxes about getting suitcases stolen. Its brimming with pockets of information that make up Cubitt's historical narrative and is solid proof as to why Cubitt, founded by a group of artists in 1991, has been canonized as one of Britain's leading artist-led spaces. Its archive, like most others, is now being digitized and includes more information in the latter years than its earlier ones. Its earlier archived material generates a picture of an organization battling gentrification, moving from space to space, and working through one exhibition after another while funding for the arts begins to dwindle. The information available on the earlier years is concrete but dispersed and spread thinly which means the stories the archive tells aren't complete or its voice is hushed and lost. This however, is standard as material gets lost or isn't deemed important in the earlier stages of an organization. It is for this reason I have focused my Archive Research Placement on the years of 1991-2003, to tell the stories of parts of the archive which weren't included or that lack information.

If we think of an archive as a network and its material as nodes, revealing information that is considered complete only because of its inclusion, we are fed only one reality of that archive. An archive, much like a network, may be shaped by its paranodes; that what is missing and left out becomes equally as important as what is included and kept. A paranode, as introduced by Ulises Ali Mejias in his book *Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World*, is described as being an antidote to the "nodocentrism" of networks that lies between, behind and around the networked nodes and locates itself as 'other to' (Mejias 2013, 153). Nodes are redistribution points of data communication in a network that are only concerned with linking themselves to other nodes in that network. This results in a nodocentric network, and is what Mejias considers to be the dominant form of social organization and governance. The paranode, however, situates itself in between

these links. Paul Baran's network diagram, as used by the artist Zach Blas in his e-flux article "Contra-internet" and pictured on the front cover of this publication, indicates where the paranode exists in relation to distributed networks.

What potential then does the paranode have for rethinking and renegotiating an archive? Using non-traditional forms of research such as para and speculative fictional writing to activate Cubitt's archival material, I have commissioned the artists Amelia Barratt, Natasha Cox and Keira Greene to produce writings and performances. Para and speculative fiction have paranodal qualities because they create new narratives based on existing information which can transcend realities and extend stories, conversations and photographs. This new information can then be used to counter an archive's metanarrative by offering a different perspective or version of its reality. For example, Barratt has produced the text 'Cubitt: The First File' which ruminates on the conception of Cubitt Artists and their first year as an artist-led organization in 1991. Cubitt's first years were plagued with issues such as British Rail evicting them from their original space at Kings Cross, and the resulting 3 other moves, until they settled at their current location in Angel Mews. The text's dark humour and honesty reflects Cubitt's determination and the precarity of working as an artist led space in the early 90's. By creating an abstracted story considering its fruition Barratt offers us an alternative insight into their operation and the people involved highlighting community, relationships and networks of strong ties. On the other hand, Cox and Greene have collaborated on the project 'Through Your Eyes'. During the event at Cubitt Gallery they will attempt to restage a photograph from the archive. The 35mm print photograph, found in box 2003 (ii), had no information attached to it and documents an event curated by Emily Pethick in 2003. The image shows a screening and the audience all facing the projection of what seems to be a torso. Their restaging, and text which is part of this publication, considers the archives

temporalities and tries to trace the bodies who have occupied and shaped Cubitt's identity. By doing so they show how paranodalities within archives aren't empty but are filled with multitudes.

These works are intended to speculate on archival material which lacks information and clarity, and in doing so aims to create spaces of information that doesn't necessarily fit into the archive but exists 'other' to it; it fills the gaps through storytelling and speculation while subverting the archive's exertion of power. This is meant to be an exercise of non-traditional forms of research, using methodologies such as poly-vocality, which is the practice of using multiple voices, to form alternative narratives and histories from within the archive.

You can find documentation of all of the performances from the event online at <http://cubittartists.org.uk/gallery/research-and-archive/>

Footnote:

Mejias, Ulises Ali 2013: *Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cubitt: The First File

By Amelia Barratt

The Cubitt archive at 8 Angel Mews is a plastic nest with a pitched roof. Inside it is dry because conditions are controlled. Silver strips of tape have been stuck over potential holes in the canopy, which is made from a piece of polythene hitched up over snapped lengths of wood. Thicker squares of black tape denote actual repaired holes where birds have tried to peck through. Frosted tubs of porous beads sit in each of the four corners of the room. The whole space is double height but only wide enough for one working archivist to stretch out in. There is a small desk to one side, a lamp, a silver ladder with one wrong leg, a pale tray with a curling Post-It note the colour of a petal that can't be thrown away. The papers are properly organised in dark grey, dated boxes on high shelves (for the ladder), each file with a finger hole in the spine and a ribbon tail for when they are hard to reach.

Waiting for me each week is a taught, clear packet the size of an A6 envelope bulging with archival gloves, once fuzzy bright, now greying. It shocks me on the desk as a pregnant rat would. The gloves are dirtier than my hands (I make sure of that) but I am obliged to put them on for when I touch things, at least. A printed rule sheet with the official Cubitt 'C' stamp is tacked to the back of the door for my attention.

The toilets, down the corridor and where I take my breaks, are comfortable and have been compiled with the anxious artist in mind. There are more soaps than taps and a pyramid of tissue rolls waiting on a chipboard shelf. Dead lilac paper towels stacked at the top if you happen to look higher than yourself in the mirror. There is the helpful 'drinking water' penned on a tile above the cold tap. Each window has a different glass in, which I find difficult to explain. If young glass were putty and pressed into a frame with a five-year-old finger—that's about the look of it. In one pane are several map-shaped holes through which vines can be heard strangling brick. Or is it—the snap of a tired pen lid? The steady crackle of a fruiting collaboration?

The archive is wedged between studios and contains a peppered history of Cubitt Artists from conception to the present day. I was prepared for the period of research ahead. Like dressing each morning, the task at hand was to be approached with rigour and discretion. I began by employing my usual extraction methodology, laying the papers around me in the constellations that have delivered clarity in the past. The small

desk proved frankly to be too small and so I set about shrinking each document using a scanner and a pair of scissors so that I could see hundreds of them laid flat at a time. It was a senseless grid of faxes, press cuttings, press releases, typed letters, invoices, flattened receipts, photocopies of all sorts, photographs (real), 'architectural' drawings, printed emails, lists and lists and handwritten notes including the occasional birthday greeting or message of gratitude.

Regardless of this system, and after months of sifting, the truth of it became plain: everything important was to be found in the very first file.

*

What I found appears back to front. We begin with the climax, fall fast for a second, then flatly into a well-thumbed coming of age tale.

"Demolition!"

—is where we begin.

Demolition.

The word is printed inside a black box on a paper form. The form falls into Ron's hands and he flicks the box with a fingernail.

"Demolition?!"

Shouts Ron. It's 1991.

"Kings Cross Artists—"

In the beginning Cubitt Artists had a different name. Let me explain. Please note all names, numbers etc. have been changed.

Cubitt Artists was born on a cold day into the brains of twenty-nine bright young beans. For the sake of the story I am snipping this down to seven beans, and the day was warm. In fact it was night. All artists back then had steely bones, a good head of hair, and a crucial core of tightly packed grit. They had no sense as you might expect and at the same time, quite a lot of it. On this night the seven of them, who were all

friends, taped flashlights to their foreheads and crawled through a cut-out hole in the side of a factory near Kings Cross Station, which Marion had spotted on her way home one evening. Marion was the wily one. They all fit easily through the gap and once inside, partitions and bright light and brush-washing stations materialised before their eyes.

“AAooww! Spath his gooesnst thpare aaands parschetffaer aaus!”

Peter typically had his torch in his mouth, not on his head, and so the words could not be heard. It did not matter as they were all thinking the same thing. It's what happens in a collective like this.

The factory was owned by a railway company, the 'late, great' British Rail. It had up until now been used to store the faces of trains but had been basically redundant and gathering dust for a number of years. For fifty years the silver faces were stacked in corners in neat towers and looked as counted coins would. As soon as she saw them, Angela clicked her fingers as she often did, click click, quietly commandeering them for what was to be the sculpture that would make her.

Peter coughed out his torch as Angela's brilliant career flickered before his eyes. He wept a little onto his Monkey Boots. Peter was a Bad Artist by anyone's books but he could wield a drill and did have exceptionally quick fingers. They all had plenty of practical skills.

Ron, Marion, Angela, Peter, Carol, Wen and Luis sat in a circle on the floor and formulated a plan to transform the warehouse into working studios with a gallery space at the centre. It was big enough and would be totally in their hands. The artists would decide which artists would be shown. Studio holders would be charged with rent and a portion of responsibility: sweeping, fetching water, wiring, shopping, occasionally waiting and sticking the building back together where it fell apart.

Naturally one, Ron, rose to the top as leader, while the rest settled on the lower rungs. This much is clear to me: Carol was the brains behind the beast. She would later down the line continue to work under the well-trodden gallery guise of Administrator, all the while keeping everyone afloat.

Wen appointed herself Press Person. Wen did not know what the letters 'P' or 'R' stood for but she had a special knack of getting people to melt before her eyes; to give over goods, secrets, cash, their hands. Wen was short for

"Wenodene."

Or so she said.

Each of the seven could write well and in this first and historic meeting they penned a letter together to the Boss of British Rail.

Dear Boss,
We know that your factory is empty.
Let us make it good.
Young and old will be peering through the (safely maintained) cracks
in the windows:
Personal contact with real artists!
Your reputation enhanced.
Regards,
The Kings Cross Artists

Ron crossed out the The.

"More iconic!"

The name was a placeholder but it did what it said on the tin and so it stuck.

British Rail wrote back surprisingly quickly with the offer of a three-year lease, containing 'the usual three-month break clause', which was unusual in stipulating various extensive works be carried out by the artists.

They signed it. Figuratively speaking they were backed into a corner with a BIC. They were thirsty. They had done well and I must be careful not to play this down: some of these are the great British artists of our present time.

British Rail gave them cash for wood and walls but they needed more to patch up the roof, pump in hot water, get rid of the skips, clear away the piles of shit, rats and flies that had accumulated over time.

I looked hard for receipts and bank slips from this patch and let me be frank: there is no paper trail to speak of. However, in this first and crucial box-file (marked '1991') I found two fronds of hessian and a little scratch-worth of the silver stuff that used to coat coins in the '90s. This summer, somebody rode in with a sack of cash and left it under the rickety boards of 2&3 Goodsway, the official address of their new premises.

The artists worked hard fixing up the space with their bare hands as time fell gladly from June to September. There was already a kind of family dynamic in place. Ron and Carol held a candle for each other, which I later found would be fully lit. Several of the others were lovers. Who was keeping track? Wen was the most live wire and needed an eye kept on her while holding power tools. Marion designed buildings for a living, which they were all grateful for as she oversaw the angles and everything else important. Luis was as shy as a bone but spoke his way through food, and during the four month construction period brought everyone together each lunch time around the bread oven he'd built in the yard from spare bricks, glue and train tyres. They sunk their splintered fingers into warm rolls, ate soup or bright salads, drank soily coffee with famous 'canal pie', made from all the blackberries and other safe berries that Luis could find. They smoked cigarettes in a line on plastic chairs looking into the afternoon sun. You couldn't write it.

Their proudest moment was the painting of a fifty-foot sign, marking the end of the build. Peter drew out the shapes and everyone filled them in with indelible black ink. Kings Cross Artists. No sooner had they rinsed their brushes than a white envelope landed in the yard.

"Demolition!"

Shouts Ron. It's 1991. The freshly painted sign is riding high at 2&3 Goodsway. The letter now lies under Peter's prodding finger on the wonky table in the yard.

"Eviction!"

He shouts again.

"A double edged and bloody sword!"

Five months after the artists first secured themselves affordable workspace, British Rail served them with a three-month eviction notice. Not only this. British Rail sought demolition of the listed building in 1990 before the gang signed the lease and before they had spent 45,000 (firm figure) on the building improvements.

The council gracefully denied the demolition application but regardless, British Rail demanded the space back for 'engineers' and 'equipment'.

Wen throws the letter into the bread fire.

"I told you,"

Angela is crying.

"That the tunnel is coming. It was just a matter of time."

British Rail had snapped their sooty fingers, snap snap, and all efforts fell seemingly down the drain until—the artists spat back. They set to work painting flyers that said,

ARTISTS ASK FOR HELP TO SURVIVE.

For impact, and on the insistence of Ron, the paint was made from Angela's blood, which in the 27 years now passed has rotted out the shapes of the capital letters from the cheap sugar paper (prime example to be presented in my case for holes not to be conserved). They threw the flyers from the high factory windows onto the rail tracks. They glued posters to the slabs of pavement that ran from Kings Cross to Euston, hoping to catch the attention of wealthy and important commuters. They gathered support and a paper war ensued as letters flew between the two sides. A politician stuck an oar in at an arbitrary moment. The artists were ruthless and thoroughly informed and fought for the best option: that they themselves would find a new space and British Rail would

compensate them wholly what they'd lost so they could pick up where they left off.

Two months later they struck a deal and the Boss of British Rail penned a final and friendly letter.

Dear KCA,

Given the goodwill on all sides, I believe the matter could now be rapidly resolved.

Kind regards,

BBR

"Pah!"

Wen throws the letter into the dwindling bread fire.

British Rail was the sour milk in the belly of the cub. But what the Kings Cross Artists had lost in time and money they gained in spirit and strength and humour, a lesson that would prove to keep on giving for the remainder of their artistic careers.

The new building, which Marion had found, was on Cubitt Street and although it needed a lot of love it was admittedly, put simply by Luis,

"Much better."

Cubitt Street was named after Tom Cubitt who was a property developer. The archive is littered with this level of red heron. The name is not to be confused with cubit from the Egyptian 'pencil rod', the biblical measuring unit or the Latin for elbow. Cubitt means spawn of a cat or of one called Jacob. Medieval English variations are: little one, petit son, little cub, little cob.

British Rail re-gave them all the money for what they needed, and here is where things begin to peter out. Ron rallied the artists into action for a second time. The record of this build is testament to the rate at which the artists were evolving. I managed to unearth and have now preserved a printed 'sequence of events' presented unnecessarily as a flow chart, the first of its kind and such a feat in digital design that it was signed with

a pen and ink by its maker, Carol. What appear to be speech bubbles containing tasks are colour-coded into three categories: 'easy', 'not so easy' and 'Marion'.

They went through some of the same rigmarole as before, erecting stud walls and threading pipes through mysteries. The roof was leaking but they set down buckets to catch the drops, plop plop, a charming background patter atop the sound of Cubitt Street at night.

They filled the new studios with friends in no time. A rent slip was slipped under the door of each cubicle when the time came to pay. Carol had the idea to stamp the bottom of each letter with a big 'C'. Carol was a well-concealed egomaniac.

Luis whittled a piece of type from a new potato in his new fridge.

"We're going to need a bigger potato!"

They laughed like they knew how. The Cubitt typeface was born. Kings Cross Artists was no more.

*

Later that night (a decade later, it's 2001) Carol and Ron made a baby on the sweet, cool cobbles, the listed section of grey that runs from the front door, past the gallery, to the studios and archive here at 8 Angel Mews.

Through Your Eyes

By Natasha Cox and
Keira Greene

Amid
These bodies
in the
middle of
Those bodies give
way to these
bodies
in annular motion

The following directions read from the back to the front of the image; from right to left; and then left to right towards the furthest wall. Impressions have passed between us as speculation and these form the directions.

The shoulder of the person stood in the green t-shirt catches the flash, out of focus, creases show in their armpit.

The pose of this unknown person mirrors that of the figure in the unknown film - which cannot be reproduced - it is a self-assured man with a youthful but weathered stance. A little like Antoine from François Truffaut's 400 blows.

Above the shoulder: a temporary shelf; it's in shadow, lime green folded leaflets or white books rest on top of each other. Lime first, then white. Generous information bound for the pocket. Posters are stuck on the wall above.

The longer I spend thinking about this configuration, the more it appears to me like the edge of a set, it has something false about it, like Lynch's dark corners. "Damn! This sounds like a dialogue from our script!"

The back row: a person with thick brown hair bears the brunt of the flash, as a result the texture and colour is flattened. A hand might rest on a warm cheek. Their position close to the lens, suggests they are involved in the screening, or were late to arrive. The person in turquoise

sat square on, could be the artist, they appear responsive: their pulled back hair highlights the soft backs of their ears.

For a minute we consider this tender space.

The woman left of the artist holds her hand across her face, biting the nail of her thumb. Or maybe she is trying not to laugh? The other hand, the right one, holds a bottle of beer. The flash catches a red shimmer to her hair, the ends flick out like a cyclist's. Next to the cyclist, a friend.

As it seems they are sitting quite close to each other.

The friend has a similar hair colour - but maybe a bit lighter - tied up in a bun, a gold hoop glints. She wears a pastel shade of lemon, her shoulders fall forwards, on the back of her chair is a blue top or jacket? Left from her, cropped by the edge of the image is a woman dressed in black, jet black dark hair, magazines or loose photographs on her lap, one might show the angular face of a man.

Her left hand gently supports her other wrist in an almost choreographed manner. She is self-aware?

I once read that this is a good way to appear relaxed and confident in a book about body language.

In front of the choreographed women, in the second-to-last row: someone with a high collar. Next to them, a young woman. She arcs away from the high collar, holding her personal space, suggesting they didn't arrive together. Strands of hair fall from a loose bun, has she come from work? She may have come with the man next to her; he is about to take a swig from a beer. He wears a light grey sweatshirt, as does the taller man next to him who is blocking others' views.

In fact, everyone wears long sleeves carrying the implication of an early Autumn evening, a gallery space with no heat,

apart from that of the person next to you. A significant or recurrent theme, a motif within the Artist-led space.

On the chair next to him: a bag or a coat; this is the end of that row, and he doesn't want anyone to sit there. Or, maybe he is waiting for someone?

The screening is about to begin. We have lost our orientation in the image.

From here on in, all persons to the far left of the image, or far left of the frame, are in shadow and so they all appear to have dark clothing, dark hair and non-specific features.

It reminds me of the cut outs in Jacques Tati's Playtime.

So the baldhead, a young head, a shaved head? They're dressed in a jade green that is darker than the chairs. Next is the person with glossy honey brown hair that falls on her shoulders, their head slightly tipped to the right, wearing a loose Adidas sweatshirt. They exude coolness and seem confident. Are their knees raised? The figure in front of her is compelling.

My eyes keep returning.

They're accidentally placed at the golden section, if this was the establishing shot of a film, we might predict that this person will become our main protagonist.

Directly after this image was taken they all turned around to face the direction of the flash and the maker of the image.





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Back image: This image is from Cubitt's archive and all rights belong to them.