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Welcome to the real world.

A guide to effective implementation of self service.

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Abstract

Utilising international artists Marcus Coates, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Martin Creed as reference models, this exegesis discusses a range of recent text, video, and relational works by Elisabeth Pointon. Under the guise of 'double agent' - defined in as having a day job (at a luxury car dealership) - that feeds into her art practice, this exegesis investigates how shared spaces are becoming sites for communal isolation. In addition, it considers the wider implications of having a social practice to champion artistic spirit into the work environment, in an attempt to redefine the conventional hierarchies of corporate language, and the power attributed to it.

Welcome to the real world.

From time to time, I pop into my dad's work, for a catch-up. A couple of years ago, I was planning to surprise him, but while I was hovering outside his office door, I heard him shouting. My father is a very, very still person, and not the sort to get 'angry', so I was naturally quite taken aback. The only logical explanation for Dad's state was that he was disappointed with one of his two employees. As I had just seen the manager, I thought it was his part-timer who was on the receiving end of, "You are so selfish! You have absolutely no consideration for anyone else around you!" I don't know what quite made me decide to just walk in, but in a panic I did, and was startled to find that there was no one else in there with him. He looked up at me, and noticing my concern, simply said "Oh hello! Sorry, one of the pot plants is taking too much water from the others!" This explanation didn't perturb me though. Ever since I can remember our family home has always been filled with Dad's pot plants and if we ever went away, a house sitter was hired for the duration, so someone could take care of them. He would leave out a specific set of instructions around the watering of them, placement in the sun, and the best way to tend their leaves. To him they are to be treated with the utmost love, care, and attention, the same that would be afforded to a person, even if that means having to scold them every once in a while. His office bathroom has been coined *The Plant Recovery Room*, for any that are needing extra attention - they grace the window sills and floors so he can monitor them throughout the day.

Every day my dad wakes up before anyone else in order to meditate while the house is quiet. Before he does, he always wakes our parrot, Del, feeds her, and lets her onto his shoulder, where she will spend the rest of the morning. He then attends to all his plants, washes his hands and face, and together him and the bird settle into meditation. The reason behind this daily routine is simply to be of complete service to something or someone else, before doing anything for yourself. This particular notion of care and service has been elementary to the way I approach everything and is something I revisit often, when overwhelmed by anxiety and struggling to attend to all that is required of me, which happens from time to time. It has become part of my own personal manifesto:

Freedom from...

Freedom to...

Freedom *from* is the notion that when we let go of our needs, fears, expectations, likes, dislikes, and our ideas about ourselves, we then have the freedom *to* respond to situations as they arise, and reconnect with all those involved. Attending to something or someone else with your full attention is a way of opening yourself up to the world around you, and welcoming in all it has to offer.

Workplace romance

One of the most isolating and dislocated publics I have encountered is at the luxury car dealership where I work as the part-time Bookings Coordinator for the workshop. I became invested in utilising my experiences at work as the basis of my Masters project following a Human Resources meeting centred around how to improve the working culture and our relations with one another. At times our work environment is especially strained due to financial pressures, hierarchy, and the miscommunication inherent in our particular business. As an 'outsider' - a brown, female, part-time worker and artist, I never held any power as a part-time Bookings Coordinator that would enable me to articulate what I saw was wrong, or to offer constructive advice that would be taken seriously. If I were to speak up, I was often dismissed by the managerial staff as an "emotional woman who doesn't know anything about effective business management" (Anonymous, 2016, personal communication). The more I thought about it, the more I understood the 'special place' I hold as an artist working part time to supplement my studies, and the more I realised I could offer something else, in my own time, as a "double agent", without having to actually verbalise anything. In this context, a "double agent" is defined as having a day job that feeds into an art practice (Cahill, Z. & von Zweck, P, 2014). It is under this guise that I have tried to understand and re-shape the branch of the business I work for, through the subversion of the dominant language of business into the creation of what Carol Becker describes as "micro-utopic communities - small locations of utopian interactions" (2011, p. 68). I employ performance, text based interventions, sculpture, installation, and video, and these comprise my social practice. With these tools I could perhaps show management an alternative mode of operating... it was just a question of how I might do this without undermining, exploiting, or humiliating the people I work with.

I have been investigating how public/shared spaces are becoming sites for communal isolation (Muse, 2006). I saw the opportunity within my work situation - which has at times been an immense contributor to my anxiety - to reclaim this space for the coming together of its inhabitants: to free us up, artist, and spectators/audience/colleagues alike. I am starting to find that there is power and potential in simply asking people to spend time together. I think this lends itself to what John Armstrong and Alain De Botton describe as "art as therapy" (2013), not just for me as the artist, but also for those who may come into contact with the work that I facilitate and produce. Bringing facets of my work, my day job, into the academic art institution, then, may offer a mode of considering what or who we deem to be of importance, by elevating the experiences of these social intricacies to the status of the opulent good - to "art" (as defined by Davis, 2013).

I align the ethos of my art practice with what writer Priscilla Frank wrote in response to artist Terrence Koh's 2016 work *Bee Chapel*, "(a)s an artist, one takes responsibility by making work, translating the darkness that plagues the world around us into brief spurts of beauty that can reach for understanding, and bring about comfort and hope" (2016, para. 13). With the rise of artists in the mid-

twentieth century such as Joseph Beuys and Allan Kaprow, the artist has been “reconsidered as an agent of social change, an outsider figure who is nevertheless able to catalyse new relationships between individuals and society” (Charlesworth, 2004, para. 5). The artist has become a kind of “special person”; not in terms of the objects or works they produce, but for the way in which they form these new relationships between people (Charlesworth, 2004). Zachary Cahill argues that the romantic figure of the artist, then, “may still prove useful in an art world that is increasingly shaped by impersonal institutions” (2014, para.2). I would take it one step further, and suggest that the romantic figure of the artist may still prove useful in a *world* that is increasingly shaped by impersonal institutions, based on my experiences as a part-time employee at a luxury car company, and as an art student within an academic art institution. I was only supposed to be at the company for a month, but almost two years on this duality has fed into what I embrace as double agency; having re-defined my job as my two-year art residency in which my working will be the work, prompted by Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969!*

In their article *The Artist as Double Agent*, Cahill and von Zweck offer notions around the idea of art and labour, citing that life as a “double agent” is becoming a required tactic for artists, especially given the economic landscape of contingent employment, and decreased arts funding (2014, para. 7). As both an employee, and an artist, I sit in the “in-between”, a liminal space which affords a level of privilege that stems from my access to both education and the academic art institution. Cahill denotes the sometimes complex relationship ‘double agents’ have with their identity, as they adapt to their environments to ‘survive’ (2014). Loyalties get confused and “notions of right and wrong, the just and unjust, are less governed by actual laws than a personal code of conduct” (Cahill & von Zweck, 2014, para. 7). Perhaps a way to counteract this confusion of loyalties is to have a code of conduct centred on the ethics of care that can be applied to any given situation. For me, ‘Freedom from... Freedom to...’ is the philosophy that underpins every undertaking, serving as safeguard for myself and the people I am around. Cahill and Von Zweck discuss “roughly analogous way in which artists morph with institutions to perform their double agency”, to contrast the conventionally acknowledged romantic figure of the artist as an individual who retreats into their own subjectivity (2014, para. 9). In von Zweck’s opinion, conviction is what informs the decision to become a double agent, and he outlines that this can lead to mistrust, as double agents (both artist and spies) have to remain guarded. Von Zweck believes that the double agent doesn’t morph into the institution, rather “only appears to do so: there is always a distance, an awareness on the part of the double agent that his or her long-term plan is not necessarily aligned with that of the institution” (Cahill & von Zweck, 2014, para. 7). This poses issues for me, and my audience/s as to whether or my intentions are authentic, serious, and earnest as a double agent making no distinction between my day job, and artistic practice. Cahill argues that the double agent “slips between the gears of the institution, advancing at once the company’s dime and his or her own” (Cahill & von Zweck, 2014, para. 3). I am profiting financially, contextually, and academically, but how do I acknowledge that and then determine where I, as the individual, stop and the institution begins? Taking into consideration that the job at a luxury motor company is not the idealised place for an artist, how do I behave accordingly? How do I behave

ethically? It's a delicate balance. Given that a lot of the work I have been making has been for my colleagues within the context of our business, about our particular situations, how do I then, within an institution of study that requires evidence and documentation of my practice/time there, exhibit my work? I have been looking at artists Marcus Coates', Mierle Laderman Ukeles', and Martin Creed's respective practices in particular, as they each provide a solid model for how to penetrate institutions of capitalist enterprise, and what it looks like to work with the people supporting them, who are often overlooked, in favour of financial gain. In their book *Art as Therapy*, John Armstrong and Alain de Botton also offer an insight into a function of art that perhaps summarises these artists' ethos, and my own - "To define a mission for art, then, one of its tasks was to teach us to be good lovers: lovers of rivers, and lover of skies, lovers of motorways, and lover of stones. And - very importantly - somewhere along the way, lovers of people" (Armstrong, & de Botton, 2013, p. 103). The way in which an artist as "special person" can raise the status of someone or something otherwise considered uninteresting, unimportant, or un-relatable through the gesture of art is imperative to my project. According to Ben Davis, author of *Theses on art and class*, art's current definition is as a luxury good, often aimed at the rich or already initiated or "those who have the privilege to have been educated in it its traditions" (2013, p.35). Cahill denotes that "If nothing else, the romantic mission of the artist as double agent may be to remind us not that institutions are impersonal but that they are instead filled with personnel..." to which Von Zweck counters with "I don't think that institutions are made of people. I think they are made of structures and staffed by people, and it is the gap between the two where double agents work" (2014, para.2). I agree with both expressions, championing artistic spirit into my workplace, with this particular body of work, which corresponds with Jacques Lacan's argument that the artist's special place in culture is that they represent the ability to enjoy freely (Davis, 2005).

I align my understanding of social practice, with Maria Lind, who states that at the core of social practice is the desire to re-formulate the traditional relationship between the work and the viewer, between production and consumption, and the sender and receiver (2011, p.49). Social practice tends to exist more comfortably "outside traditional art institutions, however, it is not entirely foreign to them, and another way of phrasing this is to talk in terms of the collaborative turn in art- the genre as an umbrella for various methods such as collective work, cooperation, and collaboration" with specific groups or communities (Lind, 2011, p.49). Lind also writes that "(i)n service and knowledge sectors, social competence, teamwork, and collaboration are essential, as are self-organisation, flexibility and creativity which all belong to the repertoire of the Romantic artist." (2011, p.49). As an artist, this has become my pool to generate from, and I am interested in Nicolas Bourriaud's idea of artist as facilitator organising projects that relate to the surrounding world, that do something meaningful in certain moments and circumstances (Bourriaud, 2006). There is the hope that these events and interactions can provide an example of how we can positively redefine our relationships with one another, in the situations and spaces we are somewhat forced to co-inhabit.

As a performance, and public intervention based practitioner, Marcus Coates' work is useful here. I am drawn to his ability to immerse himself within specific communities of people, and his interest in the potential of art to touch other's lives. He begins by questioning what he can offer as an artist, and an outsider that is both remedial, and useful. In his 2004 work *Journey to the lower world*, Coates attempted to engage the mystical and transformative power of Shamanic ritual, to assist the tenants of Linosa Close in Liverpool, a council tower block condemned to demolition (Lamont, 2012). Coates and the invited residents gathered in the living room of one of the tenants, where Coates served as an intermediary for the spirits of the animal world, in order to help guide the tenants through the uncertain times ahead (Lamont, 2012). Donning a buck's antlered head and hide worn over his sweater and trousers, and with his "mystical tools" from pen lid nostril flutes, to house key shoe rattles Coates endeavoured to set about to invoke a sense of community, and stress the importance of banding together. Confronted by absurd costumes and "bizarre rituals" his audience seemed hard pressed as to whether to laugh out loud or get up and leave (Lamont, 2012). Before he started his trance, Coates prepared the space in the vein of Siberian Tuvak rituals, with a more conventional, contemporary, and westernised approach, as a point of access. He hoovered the floor, tied his keys to his shoelaces, and marked out and purified the ground by spurting supermarket mineral water from his mouth. Eventually the group gathered up enough courage to ask questions regarding their plight, such as "Do we have a protector for this site?" and "What is it?" (Lamont, 2012). Coates addressed the questions by interpreting a feather. Is Coates serious though? Only he will ever know, and the audience can decide whether or not they believe him. One of the main reservations in relation to social practice is that the opportunities for direct feedback are limited, outside of the comments generated by participants (Lind, 2011). How then should the project be assessed, and its effects analysed and gauged? Lind argues that social practices and projects do something significant in the moment, in "palpable and/or symbolic ways, within a specific set of circumstances" (2011, p.50).

Coates insists that it is an earnest thing for him, after all he was initiated as a Shaman (Lamont, 2012). More than anything though, he likes the idea of an artist trying to come up with answers, as historically, Shaman's imaginings were used to solve intractable problems in the community. In the case of this work it was as simple as listening to the tenants' problems as they felt like they were being discarded - "(t)here was a huge sense of loss. I wanted to try and tap into a collective imagination, represent it and offer an alternative to the scripted, corporate vision. These days that has become a corporate thing: rich developers have visions, councils have visions. Archaic culture has become part of corporate culture" (Lamont, 2012, para. 1). Davis states that "(s)ince class is a fundamental issue for art, art can't have any clear idea of its own nature unless it has a clear idea of the interests of different classes" (2013, p.27). In taking the work to the affected residents directly, Coates up-ended the idea of art being reserved for those of superior social status, those with high income levels and privilege. Leading up to the interaction, Coates spent months with the residents, living on site. In doing so, he was able to distinguish exactly what they were facing - "(g)etting to know people from the estate, I began to understand what an intricate community existed here. Residents depended on each other, doing each other's shopping, checking in – ways that you would never know

if you were the council visiting to do an assessment” (Lamont, 2012). Coates’ work was filmed and then displayed as a two-channel video installation at Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, utilising this platform to convey the struggles of this predominantly lower class community, as a result of the pursuit of corporate advancement. It is important to note that one enduring criticism of social practices like mine and Coates’ is that “they lend to “touch down” projects that intervene temporarily in a given situation - not unlike catastrophe relief” (Lind, 2011, p.50). Working with a marginalised group, and then exhibiting their plight also feeds into the problem of exploitation - raising concerns around it being a social experiment. In the case of *Journey to the lower world*, this work Coates re-visited the residents, over a number of years, hosting a series of meetings to bring the community back together again (Lamont, 2012). The project was made with support from the Liverpool Housing Action Trust, and an artists’ residency programme as part of *Further up in the air*. At the end of his residency, Linosa Close was opened up for the public as an ‘open weekend’. (Lord, 2005).

In taking on this role, and also in more recent explorations, Coates revisits modern art’s previous rediscoveries of the Shaman, especially the work of Joseph Beuys. Beuys’ reinvention of this figure was part of a “broader revision of the role of art and the artist in contemporary culture” (Charlesworth, 2004, para. 2). Beuys believed that the only way to resolve the troubles of society was through art, and its merging with the everyday. In doing so, it might operate as a healing force, creating links between individuals, and contributing in the whole of social existence. Beuys also distinguished that art can become a substitute for the collective needs of people in modern society, in the absence of other strong forms of collective identity (Charlesworth, 2004). Since the rise of artists like Beuys and Allan Kaprow, the artist has been reconsidered as an agent of social change, an outsider figure who is nevertheless able to facilitate these new relationships, becoming what Charlesworth describes as a “special person” (2004, para. 9). Coinciding with Frank’s sentiment around the role and responsibility of the artist, I refer back to these practices and methodologies as a touchstone to gauge how mine is operating.

Corporate gifts

Within my workplace, practical jokes have often functioned in response to the minute to minute management of our time, boredom, and perhaps even as a protest, carefully coordinated by the team of men in the workshop. Often, I was the butt of them, particularly the ones they coined 'art crimes.'

I had come back from lunch, and on my desk was a mummified bird, perhaps a sparrow, I couldn't really tell because there was a paper mask with a loosely illustrated face, taped to its head. There was a post-it note next to it with "ART" scrawled on it. The guys in the workshop had found it in a car grate, customised it, and thought I would appreciate it as animal lover, and as an artist. I ran to the customer bathroom, threw up, and emerged crying and laughing because I couldn't quite figure out if it was absolute genius, or completely idiotic; a joke or an earnest attempt at extending the conversation, and engaging with me and my interests?

When our boss found out, he was livid. According to him it was "highest level" harassment, and the boys were "lucky" I hadn't lodged a formal complaint. However, I have experienced far worse than these sorts of pranks, so it wasn't anything too unforgivable. The men were forced to apologise, and it came in the form of a photocopy of the mummified bird, complete with mask, and "SORRY!" written next to it.

This was just one of the "gifts" I had received while working at the car company. It is perhaps my favourite.

Needless to say we were all called into a lecture about how our jokes were going too far, and it "simply had to stop". No more tomato ketchup sachets on seats, no more tuna smeared on fans, no more feijoa throwing, no more dealership-wide emails proclaiming someone's sexuality (that one I agreed with), no more hiding the Parts Manager's pants, and certainly no more "ART".

"Elisabeth, they are mechanics, not artists."

Hell, it gave us something to talk about, but it also raised questions for me. In *Theses on art and class* Ben Davis addresses my concerns by saying "(c)reative expression needs to be redefined: It should not be thought of as a privilege, but as a basic human need. Because creative expression is a basic human need, it should be treated as a right to which everyone is entitled" (2013, p.36). It was a privilege that I as an artist I could perhaps utilise my practice as a mode of discerning how things were. Along with that privilege there is a certain level of responsibility as an artist to attempt some sort of discourse.

NB: The workshop boys protested with a mummified rat, again found in a car grate, which they pinned to a handmade cardboard cross, and hung outside the boss' office which overlooked the Workshop.

Business time

Last year, I hit crisis point. Over the past nine months I had been existing in a state of imbalance due to the tension around navigating my time between working at the dealership and undertaking my Masters. The business was going through a period of intense financial pressure, with low bookings in the workshop, and I would spend close to six days a week at work, always on call, even when I was in classes. My boss would telephone me, and if I said I had no means of making it out to work a driver was sent to collect me to work the last few hours of a day. When there were 'available hours' showing on our system (as part-time Bookings Coordinator I was tasked to fill available hours in the workshop with service bookings) my supervisor and I would be called into the boss' office. A screaming match would ensue where fingers were pointed in multiple directions but mostly mine. I would be chastised for being 'distracted' and for being a 'distraction', particularly in relation to the practical jokes at my expense, the ones that were being referred to as 'art crimes'. It was near impossible trying to explain why people were not booking in, and that personally I had nothing to do with the inherent structural problems of the business. It felt more like I was there simply to be made an example of and, even worse, the company scapegoat. After these meetings I had to walk out of the office and be confronted by the rest of the staff. I was rendered voiceless and situations like this trigger my anxiety - on a superficial level I feel that I am insignificant, or that my thoughts and observations have no place. After one particular meeting, I went into complete shutdown mode and, embarrassingly, cried, further affirming in my colleagues' minds the stereotype of me as an "emotional" woman. Unable to fathom just how to 'bounce back', I telephoned my dad. He decided the best thing to do was for me to just leave for the rest of the day as there was no reasoning at that time with my boss. He suggested we play along - he would come in, make his presence known, and then walk me out. Just before Dad arrived my boss called me back up into the office and tried to continue the conversation. I relayed to him that my dad was coming to collect me, and it was best that I left for the day. At that moment we watched together as my dad pulled up, and walked across the showroom. My boss muttered "Oh, shit!" and, with that, I left. What was obvious to me in that moment was that my dad, as a man, had more power and impact than I did, or perhaps would ever have, and he didn't even work there. I also realised that this had never happened to the same degree to any of the other three female staff, and the only point of difference was that I was a part-timer, a student studying art, and brown [Anglo-Indian].

I eventually spoke with my boss, asking him to adhere to the original agreement of three days of work a week so that I could complete my studies. To this he exclaimed, "Elisabeth, I don't care about Masters. I care about business" (Anonymous, 2016, personal communication). It was not the first time a meeting like this had taken place. I realised then that if I was to continue working to support myself I was the one who had to compromise. Curating my office space, carefully selecting the costume I wear to work (black trousers; white shirt; black jumper; earrings; and well-hidden, matching novelty socks), and approaching the work in a ritualised way, became a coping mechanism for dealing with the (unreasonable) expectations placed on me, a way of reclaiming each moment and my own autonomy.

It all aligned with Ukeles' exclamation in *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* that the act of working would become the work – a kind of self-performance (Cotter, 2016). Referring back to my manifesto and through making every action a ritual, I was simply responding to what was required of me, moment to moment. The reality was such that I couldn't change much about the circumstance - I needed the job, but I could alter how I chose to engage with it. What ensued was an alternative mode of behaviour – professional, free of emotion, thus free from external criticism. In doing so, the people around me benefited from the shift. I became aware that I was not the only one suffering from the external pressures of the business. Our boss was fearful - the financial performance of the business came back to him, and his gross profit would be affected. In situations where this arose he couldn't see beyond that, let alone try understand why my studies were so important to me. With our meeting I saw yet another potential for utilising my role as artist to respond to this experience. The more I thought about it, the more I liked my boss's slogan, so I asked him directly whether or not I could use it for some text-based artworks. I had researched extensively the etymological dictionary definition of business, finding it to originally mean "what I am of in this moment" (Harper, 2017). With both our concepts of *care*, there seemed to lie the perfect marriage. He was a bit confused at first as he thought he had really upset me with his refusal to support my time, but eventually agreed and was even quite touched.

I had "I care about business." printed on business cards, which I paid for with my own money. After a year of working, even though I had been considered important enough to send a driver to collect me, my role was not endorsed through official means like me getting my own official business cards. I would distribute the cards I had designed and paid for when I had to pass on messages to other colleagues. To my colleagues the business card seemed to encompass my commitment, and was a subtle, humorous, and welcome intervention, with people sending notes back. However, it felt like it did not quite articulate what I was thinking regarding John Armstrong and Alain De Botton's sentiment that "(i)n order to be effective, political art can't simply say that something is wrong; it needs to make this error feel vivid enough to generate the emotion necessary to stir us into reform. What this requires, artistic talent aside, is an original understanding, whether psychological, social or economic, of the problem in question" (2013, p. 199). What the business card did do was see my boss become collaborator, levelling out our value, value that was otherwise distorted by workplace hierarchies. There was clearly something validating in it for him that I, as an "educated artist", saw something worth drawing upon.

At the same time, we were subjected to a lot of emergency dealership meetings in which we were shown old videos from Youtube. Comedic sketches of car salesman, interviews of successful All Blacks, and anecdotal references to particular games they had won, as well as instructional videos on 'how to deal with customers', were often employed. The purpose was to drum up hype and fanfare for our jobs and to get down to the real order of the business - *what more can we do to generate money?* The meetings and their tone all seemed so cold, and the disconnect was almost offensive, because no one in management had gone through and acknowledged what the real issues were, nor how

much employee was doing their best within the framework to try make things happen. Not restricted to one department, I was well informed of all the 'deeper' issues of people feeling overworked, undervalued and hopeless. During these meetings, I would consider what I would change to make it really be engaging, if I, of all people, were the one hosting. Could that become a platform to address these concerns? I knew that I wanted to celebrate *each* employee, especially as in our big business, the average employee is regarded as a 'means to an end' for profit that only affected those in the managerial positions. I decided that if I was allowed to host, I would. In order for it to happen, I had to appeal to my boss for his permission, and support- it was just a case of how. Despite our clashing over my time, and his exclamation regarding my Masters, I was aware of his interest in art, in *my* art, particularly after the business cards. There was a desire on his part for me to 'succeed' in order to justify all the tension that usually existed between us. On occasion he would chat to me about something interesting he had read, or something he had written, or to show me some photographs he had taken. He was even interested enough earlier the same year, to want to come to one of my exhibition openings, when a lot of other colleagues who were invited felt uncomfortable in attending. I wanted to involve him somehow, but in a way that did not demean or undermine him in front of the other staff, or outside of the work context. I wanted to utilise the same framework as our business meetings, to provide another mode of engagement, adhering to Ernst Bloch's notion that "the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present." (Becker, 2011, p. 66). I spoke with my boss, and he was unexpectedly happy to let this happen, and to be a part of it. The only consideration was the time, and it was decided it was best that the meeting occurred around the lunchtime slot, so as not to affect productivity. He would afford an official invite, and it was paramount that everyone in the dealership was extended an invitation for participation. I would host it in the boardroom, screen a video, a speech, and present a token. Twenty minutes before the meeting, my boss helped me set up the projector and the computer in the boardroom. When my colleagues arrived they were greeted with COMPLEMENTARY CARE, emblazoned in bright yellow on the projector screen, to 'hype music' I had commissioned by a local musician –Lucas Donnell, to establish the tone of this meeting. I outlined the agenda, afforded apologies for those who could not attend, and presented a short anecdote on 'complementary care'. I talked to work-life-balance, and introduced an anthem that everyone was invited to sing along to (the words were on the screen) in a bid to 'let go'. With that, I 'awarded' each person a 'care package' consisting of one party popper, one 'I care about business' business card, and one custom engraved gold badge that read 'COMPLEMENTARY CARE'. Everyone received the same package, even our boss, and the fact that I, as the part-time Bookings Coordinator was the one executing all this, disrupted the instated power structure, utilising my position of 'outsider' to address the concerns of the other staff. To finish off, I presented the video I had made with my boss featuring us sitting side by side at his desk. It was in the style of a broadcast video with the phrase "Everything is going to be okay" ticking along the bottom, to music again made by Lucas from remixing business self-help tapes affirming the sentiment. To close, we all set off party poppers- a symbolic release as one may do with peace doves. For the duration of the presentation, the space became micro-utopic, "utopia from the Greek word 'utopos', meaning 'good place'" (Becker, 2011, p.68). By employing the recognisable and detached language of the staff meeting, and subverting it through the use of artistic

conventions, laughter became a Trojan horse, unsettling the idea of how our staff meetings function, and providing a different means of engaging with one another, and our roles, in the space we work.

If anything, the colleagues were affected by the effort, the attention to detail, and the meeting's design being specifically for them, and taken to them. They also appreciated the disruption to the mechanical scheduling of time, and labour. My boss's commitment to the meeting itself, and more significantly, appearing in the video, validated my attempt, through the shift in the power dynamic that normally existed between us, and him. It raised the question of why he would partake in all of this, however it also served as a kind of promise on his end as well. Considering the dealership is mainly comprised of white males, I would even go as far as to say that it helped validate my voice as a woman of colour. He even relaxed a little on our practical jokes, realising that fun, celebration, and opportunities for connection were necessary. In the weeks after, everybody was still talking about the meeting, they played the anthem at work drinks on Fridays, and made a point of wearing their badges, and calling each other out if they didn't believe their behaviour aligned with what it stood for. This would ultimately mark a shift in my time at work, and in my practice – my boss even adhered to my working three days a week after this. Earlier this year the dealership instated service badges to acknowledge the commitment of people to the business.

“The apparent opposite of idealisation - caricature - has a lot to teach us about how ideal images can be important to us. We are very much at ease with the idea, exemplified by caricature, that simplification and exaggeration can reveal valuable insights that are lost or watered down in ordinary experience...Strategic exaggerations of what is good can perform the critical function of distilling and concentrating the hope we need to chart a path through the difficulties of life.” (Armstrong, & de Botton, 2013, p. 22).

Work is work

"I hate to think that the art world is doomed to remain a playground where anything goes until we exit into the "real" world and have to pay our bills. But I suspect that real revolution (hardly in the forecast), not just "paradigm shift," is the only thing that would shake everything up enough to create true alternatives. In the meantime, Occupy Everything and see what happens." (Lippard, 2013, para. 3).

This mode of operating outlined by Lippard, has been proven successful through the works produced by the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Ukeles is best known for her nearly four-decade stint as an official, although unsalaried artist in residence with New York's Department of Sanitation. Forty years ago Ukeles wrote the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969!* which would establish the conceptual grounding of her practice, promoting maintenance "as an important value in contrast to the excitement of avant-garde and industrial 'development'". (Ryan, 2009, para.1). It would also bring to the forefront the role of maintenance in Western society, through "actively valuing, rather than dismissing or hiding it." (Cotter, 2016, para.1).

MANIFESTO, 1969! in part read "I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother: (random order). I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately) I 'do' art." (Ukeles, 1969, p.1). Holland Cotter notes that "Up to now separately" was the poignant, and pivotal phrase, as the Manifesto marked that from that time forward, she would continue her everyday life, but with a nod to the Dadaists and Duchamp in particular, redefine it as art (2016, para. 6).

In 1973 Lucy Lippard asked Ukeles to create work for an all-woman group show of Conceptual Art, and Ukeles's first piece was a performance which took place at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford. The artist cleaned and made sure the premises were secure – all the things she would have otherwise done at home. In doing so, and in calling these acts art, she "flipped the conventional hierarchies of value upside down turning art into a kind of chore, and chores into a kind of ceremony." (Cotter, 2016, para. 10). Generally, in a museum, these were the unseen tasks of the maintenance workers and security guards. The Athenaeum staff had shown her exactly what to do, and how to do it - locking and unlocking the galleries, and polishing the display cases. Two days later, Ukeles was on site again, this time to wash the museum's front steps on her hands and knees. Documented through photography, these images displayed "feminism, institutional critique, sly humour, and self-possessed humility." (Cotter, 2016, para. 11). Cotter denotes that the performance and photographs were a "power example, a reminder that it's high time that our filthy rich 21st century museums got a scrub-down." (2016, para. 11). The work speaks to a gendered neoliberal power, especially considering that while studying art at The Pratt Institute, Ukeles left after issues around her painting and sculptural hybrids, as they were poorly received by a mostly male faculty (Ryan, 2009, p.5).

It was in 1976 Ukeles recruited 300 office maintenance workers as collaborators from the Lower Manhattan Branch of the now closed Whitney Museum of American Art, as part of her social project. Over the course of five months, she took individual photos of them, as they carried out their tasks, and then asked them to label their labour as 'art' or 'work'. It is entirely possible that by having the workers themselves discern between the two, they would view their lives and jobs differently, just as Ukeles had done in writing her manifesto (Cotter, 2016). Ukeles as an artist is an example of the power of actively working within institutions, as an artist to reinvigorate collectivity and connectivity, between the workers, and the institution itself. In doing so Ukeles was exposing the process of what is carried out, and who is doing so to uphold these institutions. As an exhibiting artist, Ukeles allowed them to become collaborators within an institution that would otherwise exclude them based on class.

A critic of the work suggested that maybe her Maintenance Art, which comprised of all the routine jobs and chores people detested, might find some wider civic application with the Department of Sanitation. (Cotter, 2016). Ukeles approached the Department, and ever since has been their on-site resident artist. (Cotter, 2016). It was during a time of financial unease –New York was very poor, and people were terrified and angry, and garbage collectors were now targets of abuse (Cotter, 2016). Resolving to help, and seeing the clear value of these people and all they were doing to keep the city running. Over the course of 11 months, Ukeles conducted *Touch Sanitation*, in which she personally introduced herself to the 8,500 workers, greeting them, shaking their hands and saying “Thank you for keeping New York City alive.” (Cotter, 2016, para. 17). Most of the workers were men, and Cotter describes her interaction as a “secular benediction” in which “the energy flowed both ways, as they took her seriously, and generously as she took them.” (Cotter, 2016, para. 17). Following on, a series of performances, sculptures and installations have also been produced, and when exhibited, the workers-cum-collaborators and their families and friends, are admitted free of charge.

“Care, repair, and preservation are what Ms. Ukeles’s art has been about right along. It’s as if her early realisation that self-empowerment comes not through fighting but through redefining the meaning of power had given her a usable awareness of vulnerability in the world. That awareness has taken her, in ways extremely rare in contemporary art, through potential barriers or class and gender; it has given her an enviable ease with spirituality (her Jewish faith is central to her life); and it has let her produce work that’s as companionable as a shared meal and as serious as art can be.” (Cotter, 2016, para. 22).

Ukeles practice is an effective model on the commitment to the politics of care, ultimately establishing a culture that welcomes in everybody.

Corporate jargon

“Money and language have something in common: they are nothing and they move everything. They are nothing but symbols, conventions, flatus vocis, but they have the power of persuading human beings to act, to work, to transform physical things.” (Berardi, 2007, p.134).

It was upon reading Berardi that I became increasingly aware of the dominant language within my workplace, and the implications of being required to meet a daily financial target.

Berardi utilises Robert Sardello’s theory that “Money makes things happen. It is the source of action in the world and perhaps the only power we invest in” to convey the value we place on capitalism (Berardi, 2007, p.135). Berardi (2007) emphasises the ideas that growth and debt are a means of manipulating society, through the dephysicalisation of money. He writes that in a time where “things are not considered from the point of their concrete usefulness, but from that of their exchangeability and exchange value.”(Berardi, 2007, p.138). Berardi argues that in the sphere of the financial market, things are considered from the perspective of their exchangeability and exchange value, rather than their concrete use or function. Berardi (2007) argues that effect or effectiveness, not truth value is the mode in which language operates within communication. “Similarly, in the sphere of communication, language is traded and valued as something that is performed.” (Berardi, 2007, p.138). Berardi described poetry as language’s excess, imparting that “poetry is what in language cannot be reduced to information, and is not exchangeable, but gives way to a new common ground of understanding, of shared meaning: the creating of a new world.” (Berardi, 2007, p.147). There was potential outlined in this to utilise, critique, employ and subvert the distinct economy of language, emotion, and consideration present within my workplace as a means to address the social complexities.

A job well done is ‘celebrated’ with a dealership wide email, in which the full stop at the end of the sentiment raises the question around the authenticity of the statement- for instance, the often overused phrases *Good job.* Or *Well done to all.* The generic affirmation is then considered having been issued out of obligation, devoid of actual feeling. Ben Crair (2013) discusses the development of the full stop, from where it used to be a neutral indicator that a sentence was over, and to take a breath. It is now interpreted as meaning that the user is angry, sarcastic, and/ or the conversation is over altogether. As a result, digital communications are turning it into something more aggressive, and punctuation marks have largely been replaced by line breaks altogether, as it is deemed to be more efficient (Crair, 2013). Crair utilises the example of Twitter and the 140-character limit, rendering most punctuation dispensable. Choosing to use punctuation, and in particular the full stop, makes the recipient or reader question the choice. There is a level of awkwardness with it, and also when emphasised, an openness for interpretation and discussion. So the full stop became an integral part of my text based explorations.

In regards to the digital communications with in my workplace there is still the issue of accessibility – who does, but more importantly, who does not receive these ‘congratulatory’ or update emails – most of the maintenance staff do not ‘require’ a computer in order to carry out their jobs, which then classifies the information as being ‘privileged’. This then was one of the main complaints amongst staff in last year’s *Cultural Survey*, sparking the launch of a companywide digital and physical newsletter. It gave each of the dealerships a space to convey the successful ins and outs of their respective branches, and any news or updates. Often the contributions were ‘self-congratulatory’, devoid of any real representation of the average employee – it became insignificant and a temporary, superficial fix.

But what happens if you make the key message physical, and/or bigger for all to see? Could art/poetry be a mode to redefine the structures in place? So I began this year by utilising Vistaprint Digital Printing, an online platform for marketing your business, with the slogan “Build your brand. Build your story.” to create a series of text-based banner works. I have always been fascinated with our company’s way of marketing, especially the vehicle displays employed to ‘show-off’ new vehicles, or service specials. The banner is a widely used marketing tool, and recognisable to effective advertising and messaging, not just within our business, but businesses in general. So what would happen if the message was not to sell a product or ideal, but was instead direct extracts from emails that were intended to affirm and motivate?

I settled on ‘Good job.’ (with a full stop) as a starting point, and like the business card, it was only scratching the surface of the potential described by Berardi. I settled on Arial as the font, which is the stock standard within our dealership black, on a white background. This added to the coldness of the work seemed to reaffirm the lack of feeling behind the emails. This was effective on one hand, but not what I envisioned, along the lines of the notion that “(i)n fact, such work can only affect us because we know what reality is usually like. The pleasure of pretty art draws on dissatisfaction: if we did not find life difficult, beauty would not have the appeal that it does.” (Armstrong, & de Botton, 2013, p.20). So I tried again, this time extracting from an email telling us how to deal with customers in which we were told to make them feel special, and welcome them to the [business name] world. So I used “You are special.” with multiple readings. It references the place of the artist, the often used insult “you are *special*.” and to comment on members of staff idiosyncrasies. Again the full stop seemed to infer a level of insincerity. Within the context of the work place, though, the banner had quite a positive reading and effect, but extracted out into the ‘art sphere’ the sentiment was completely different. I was even more interested in playing on that duality.

Welcome to the real world.

To round off to some degree, the text based explorations, I settled on a commissioned store-front, double sided lightbox. Using the same font, and colour palette, *'Welcome to the real world.'* was printed on both sides. The lightbox is perhaps the pinnacle piece in this body of text work. It summarises and pulls together all that I have been researching, experiencing, and embodying as a 'double agent'. The box itself is double sided, and this feeds into the phrase, as physical double entendre - a functioning business display, and an art object. It also alludes to my personal experience of entering the job market as a student, and also the philosophical nature of some of the other works. The lightbox draws from modes of advertising, not just specific to my place of work, and in doing so subverts the language from informative, to an open and more poetic reading, depending on where it is hung. There is a slight Pop Art reference as the light box draws from advertising and printed word from mass media, along the lines of Bruce Nauman's text works which disrupt everyday words and phrases (Tate, 2017). As self-referential and playful, it also draws similarities to Martin Creed's texts works. There is an element of the romantic in his relentless optimism, and concern with feeling and empathy. In his own words, he considers his practice not so much conceptual, rather "Expressionist", as he places "great emphasis on art as a matter of feeling," (Hamilton, 2014, para. 11). It is his large scale, neon text works that for me, are particularly touching as Creed uses language to rethink the world, and evoke meaning. Since 1999 the artist has used the phrase *EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT* drawn from words of comfort expressed by his friend during a period of depression (Gates, 2015). The 46-metre-long installation of the phrase, in multiple neon-coloured lights gracing the front of the Christchurch Art Gallery is poignant in the fact it was installed to coincide with the reopening of the gallery, after an almost five-year closure due to the devastating earthquake in 2011. The *EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT* works have a history of being emblazoned on sites with a background of tragedy, offering reassurance, comfort and hope, heightening the significance of the sentiment (Feeney, 2015). The works are also physically uplifting, as they are often viewed from ground level; and also literally elevate the everyday and the encompassing sentiments to artistic status. The simplicity of both the statement, and the electrifying medium naturally invites a range of interpretations, distorting the line between art and life, and conveying how the power of language, or more in line with Berardi's thinking, poetry/art can be used to re-shape our cultural environments (Tate, 2017). Often regarded as 'The poet of the everyday', Martin Creed's text works serve as a reminder to romantics and realists alike of the power of art (Christchurch Art Gallery, 2015).

Within *'Welcome to the real world.'* there is also the element of compromise - the idea that when you are entering into the real world, whatever that may look like, you are leaving something behind, and I have always viewed that sentiment as coinciding with *Freedom from... freedom to...*

I have always envisioned this work to be shown with pot plants, especially as they have become such a grounding and important part of my life at work. I always keep one that I tend to throughout the day - especially in moments where I find myself on 'auto-pilot', stressed, or uncomfortable, as a means to

make ordered sense of the chaos. I like how they fight against each other aesthetically, and conceptually, but also lend to points of departure.

The water cooler

Water has become a recurring motif in the recent body of works, which began with an interest in the way in which the watercooler functioned within my workplace. At a point where my time, and almost every movement was monitored, the only leeway for my leaving my desk other than to use the toilet, or have my scheduled lunch break, was to grab a glass of water from the cooler, located in front of the customer television, playing generic, inoffensive, relaxed music. However, it wasn't only my movements that were under scrutiny, the team in the workshop were only allowed to venture out into the foyer for the same reasons. It was at the watercooler where we would often reconnect with each other, and other departments, see how each other was going in both a business, and more significantly, a personal sense. Here I would have actual human interaction, or time for myself. Here we would be free from the perspective of management. It became a kind of haven, and almost micro-utopic for the way in everyone around it was invited in, alleviating the distinctions imposed by class, role, and hierarchy. The owner of our company has often expressed disdain for the watercooler, as they are 'tacky, un-aesthetic, and a waste of space and time.' There was an element of ritual to the way in which I engaged with the water cooler, and water itself, which became fundamentally cleansing, and grounding. The action of drinking the water became a meditation in itself, with every movement becoming a ritual, from selecting a cup, feeling the weight of it, to actually consuming the water. With the potential of the cooler being taken away, I wanted to purchase one, with the mindset of gifting it back to the company, at some stage in some way- deadly serious, albeit slightly absurd given the professional context. The watercooler is almost emblematic of a workplace, or an office job, an institution in itself, and I wanted to almost exaggerate the experience, and make it aesthetic, to highlight its beauty, value, and significance. Beginning with the idea that on a basic level, water is a necessity that everybody requires to exist, but it also widely considered the basic substance of the universe, traced back to the Ancient Greek Philosopher Empedocles (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2005). More recently, in March this year the Whanganui river was granted the same legal rights as a human being. After 140 years, the local Māori tribe of Whanganui has fought for the recognition of their ancestor, the third largest river in New Zealand for it to be recognised as a living entity, passed into law (Roy, 2017). Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the Whanganui iwi expressed "(w)e have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as an indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management." (2017, para. 5). I certainly do not want to trivialise this movement, rather to apply it back to the experience of the watercooler and how it functioned as a 'free from space' within a capitalist enterprise. Soon after the passing of this law, the Ganges river in India, considered sacred by more than one billion Indians, was also afforded the same status (Safi, 2017). My Indian mother, who was raised Hindu, has always implemented a sense of water and ritual in our home life, utilising water as part of a cleansing ritual that marks the beginning and end of certain tasks, which grounds my being so drawn to the watercooler and how it functioned. Extracting the watercooler from the workplace, and into an academic art institution, seemed to lose a lot of the

significance that was held when situated in the workspace, with overtones of clinical cynicism, and irony that somewhat undermined their significance. Although, it was distinctly recognisable as talking to office work, and business which could be developed. However, the water in the tank became a focal point, as being alive, particularly in the way it responded to light, and the space around it. I worked to negotiate making it less of a readymade, and more into an interpersonal sculpture, and chance for relational activity. I placed a label on the front that read 'Self Service.' I liked the idea of custom drinking vessels, along the lines of the office mug. The maintenance workers, and service staff were not necessarily permitted to use the glasses which were reserved for customers and the managerial staff who were dealing with them. We would use our own cups which we brought in, often with novel slogans and images on them, or donated from the old boss during his house clear out. I utilised Vistaprint's Corporate Gift section and had text printed on the mug, in Arial font– '*I care about business.*', and '*Complementary Care*'. Initially, my supervisor at work had offered to make some handmade mugs, as outside of work, he was a potter, and also studying Art History at a university once a week. He was very excited at the prospect of collaborating, as on nights out when it was just the two of us, he would launch into conversation regarding his art output, and would show me photos of his work. He did not want any other of the other male staff catching wind of his private practice, and private escape. After a few months, with no mugs yet, and having chased it up a few times, I decided against asking him again, as not to compromise the intent or sincerity - it simply had to come from him. So I had new ones made, with *Welcome to the real world.* to coincide with the philosophical nature of the water cooler, water itself, and the way the action of drinking from it established a connection with those around us. I placed a few in the communal cupboard, and as cups get left around, or washed and passed on, it was interesting, and almost poetic watching them disseminate around the corporate environment.

Work dos /and don'ts

The observance of the Birthday Shout, in my workplace, is highly regarded. The expectation is on your birthday you provide a morning tea, or lunch for the other employees. As my birthday fell on my scheduled work day, I sought permission from our new boss to host my shout, in the boardroom where everybody could fit comfortably. I wanted to incorporate the same level of ceremony that I had witnessed at the brand's headquarters in Japan, on a recent research trip. The ceremonious overtones were used as a means to invite people into their world, and the dream they are selling. The headquarters are free entry, and every hour on the hour, a beautiful woman, dressed in all white with red accessories, and a headset steps out onto a rotating platform with the latest vehicle atop it. As the platform rotates, LED screens behind her light up, and a theme song plays over the top, as she announces the 'incredible' features. Everybody stops what they are doing, for the five-ten-minute-long presentation, even those working on site, to engage.

Within the studio context, I had already tested the *You are special*. text work, with disco lights, white balloons, and the watercooler to implement the same level of conversion from chore to ceremony, seen at the headquarters, before taking it in my workplace. However, it was still lacking the conviction that the work was earnest, and tended towards a reading of caricature. To contextualise the works, and the reasoning behind them, I relied heavily on my speaking about the incidents and stories to evoke the warmth of the gesture. It also seemed as if a party had occurred and all those present at the critique had missed out, and that exclusion was compromising. What was successful though was how this critique, and others involving the watercooler, invited the attendees to converse, and share their own workplace stories, and I was interested in developing this further.

On the day of my shout, I hung the banner, set up the disco lights, balloons, and had refilled the cooler with water from the Petone fountain. I had commissioned 'foyer music with water undertones' from Lucas again, which would play from inside the watercooler via an in-set blue tooth speaker to accentuate what I saw as its nature. The music had a 'heartbeat', which would cause the water to pulsate. I covered the available trestle table with the 'official table cloth', and the next morning laid out a cake, and a variety of other snacks, enough for every colleague. Ten minutes before morning tea I announced the shout in the boardroom by personally inviting each present worker. When everyone had gathered I made a short speech "Even though it is my special day, I would like to take the time to acknowledge that you are all very special to me too." For fifteen minutes, everybody present shared in the food, the water, and a game of rugby sparked by the workshop team grabbing balloons. Although doused with what could be considered as 'props as prompts'- provoking the idea that this was how things ought to be, the most effective element was the invitation having been extended to everyone, regardless of department, or role. The event became relational; I as the artist had constructed the social circumstance, and the experience of the social circumstance had become the art. I didn't document the work other than through a photograph of the set-up before and after, and a couple of

short videos to depict what it was my colleagues would be part of. I did not want there to be any sort of element that it was a hidden camera prank, or that their interactions were being filmed in order to be gawked at later. In hosting my shout in this manner, combining all these art objects I had made in response to our situation, it stood in stark contrast to one of the managerial staff's shout the week before. He supplied 8 sausage rolls, for the 28 staff. However, Dan Fox offers a critical response to social practices, as to the "superiority" that comes with the artist "re-imagining the world". However, this is twofold, as elaborated by John Armstrong and Alain de Botton- "On the one hand we are delighted by an awareness of how life should more often be; on the other, we are pained by an acute sense that our own life is not usually like this." (2013, p. 16) There is the potential here that I am establishing a set of standards that cannot be achieved by any other employees, and that whatever they do will not be good enough. This is difficult territory to navigate.

My new boss text me happy birthday later that night, as he was away that day. He asked how the event went, mentioning that a lot of people had let him know how much they had enjoyed what had taken place. The next working day, he met with me in my office, to ask if I would collaborate with him on launching the company's new brand changes to our dealership, because I "would make it more of an event, and more engaging than if I was to stand here and simply tell them." (Anonymous, 2017, personal communication).

A guide to effective implementation of self service

The inflatable wacky waving man/ air dancer is almost synonymous with the motor industry. They are often employed as a welcome gesture, or to represent the feeling of what it might just feel like to win lotto- to sell a dream, and way of life (Blevins, 2016). But these colourful, arm-waving novelties actually debuted as part of the 1966 Summer Olympics, when artist Peter Minshall, who had been specialising in large, dancing puppets, was signed on to help make the opening “unforgettable” (Blevins, 2016). This caused me to think about the potential of an inflatable air dancer as part of this project. I was drawn to the novelty, and how that held the potential as an entry point. So I had one custom made, by a small business in Auckland, to the specifications that it would be very neutral – white, tall, with only black eyes, and red lips –a stock standard, basic waving body, with a black box support. John, my point of contact, also made a custom made centrifugal blower, so that the noise produced wouldn't overwhelm the experience of the air dancer. Crystal – my inflatable air dancer, was initially purchased with the intent to use her to help critique the large white bodies that occupy our working space, their ability to do so - and to convey the effects it has had on me as a woman of colour. I began by filming Crystal in predominantly white spaces – the gallery here at the university, and specific areas around my workplace. I realised how self-interested this all was, and devoid of the ethos of care and freedom, outlined in my manifesto, and the works I had been making so far. Considering Jacques Lacan's argument about the artist's special place in culture, I felt I was disregarding the privilege afforded to me as an artist, and supported by the art institution, without producing anything that was helpful, or hopeful. The air dancer was already a pre-existing symbol, and Crystal could be employed to explore that further.

A guide to effective implantation of self-service was the video that manifested, informed by the instructional videos we were showed in our meetings. To some degree, it is a guided meditation loosely, based on one carried out in my family. The video utilises Crystal as the exemplar, and is filmed onsite in the workshop at work. The video incorporates the same affirmative tone and language and totals only two and a half minutes- enough time to be viewed in a workspace, without cutting into 'business time'. The video also re-uses the same theme song that was written for the watercooler, and contains similar references. The intended placement for this work, is on the TV screens around our workplace, however I have re-filmed it within the university, to feed back into that duality– a lot of the bureaucracy I, and my colleagues face, is not unusual in other businesses, based off of critiques and the divulging of workplace stories from other people. I wanted the work to be able to fill the two that I inhabit the most, and considering the 'exclusive nature' of the 'art world' I thought it was appropriate (Davis, 2013). Initially I had asked my new boss if I could use his voice for a voice over, as he used to do all the radio ads. He was excited to be asked, but I grew concerned that his voice may be recognised. I decided that I did not want to put him in the position where it would compromise him, or our company, even if I distorted the audio. I had tried and tested the distortion of voiceovers, but it became very new age. Considering the simplicity of a lot of the other tangible objects produced,

I don't want the work too invasive. I decided to stick to the English text instructions, and the music. Originally I wanted to incorporate other languages, to make it as open as possible. I began thinking about the most spoken languages within our workplace, and I felt it would be almost problematic for me to discern which other languages would be included, or more significantly, excluded.

I showed the video to the staff while it was in its draft phase, as most of them had been present as it was being filmed. They were all pretty taken with it, in the same way they were responsive to the air dancer herself. A couple of hours later, as I walked through the workshop, the team were all dancing like Crystal.

Business as usual

Earlier this year when we were approached by management about any newsworthy stories for the newsletter, I submitted a 'joke piece'. It was laced with puns, documented some of the practical jokes, and described some of the life events of myself, and my colleagues in our workplace. My new boss actually submitted what I wrote without attributing it to me and, when it was published and distributed amongst the dealerships, he was congratulated for his "witty" and "honest" writing. He subsequently asked me if I would like to continue writing our dealership's contributions. I believe there is potential here, and in other facets to keep making, coordinating, offering, and occupying.

I realise now that through the big, romantic gesture of art, that I have established a voice. It has allowed me to disrupt, and reconfigure our relationships with one another, and perhaps provide an effective solution to the HR problems, by actively valuing and acknowledging what each of us do, and who we all are. However, this whole project has forced me to consider whether or not the methods I have engaged with may be more about me, the artist, and my art project, where my agency is being exerted, and less a service to others I work with. There is an inherent danger that it could be viewed as having a somewhat egocentric inclination, and at times I have found that conflict difficult to reconcile. Perhaps the beauty and power lies in the attempt.

However, this project doesn't end at the point of submission. I plan to gift these art works, back to my workplace and share them with the people they were originally made for, when I return back to work after having been granted leave to complete all this.

I think it is worth noting that as of recently, I have just been offered a permanent full-time position. So I guess I will continue to occupy everything as a double agent, and see what happens. For now, it is business as usual.

Elisabeth Pointon, full-time Bookings Coordinator, and Artist in Residence.

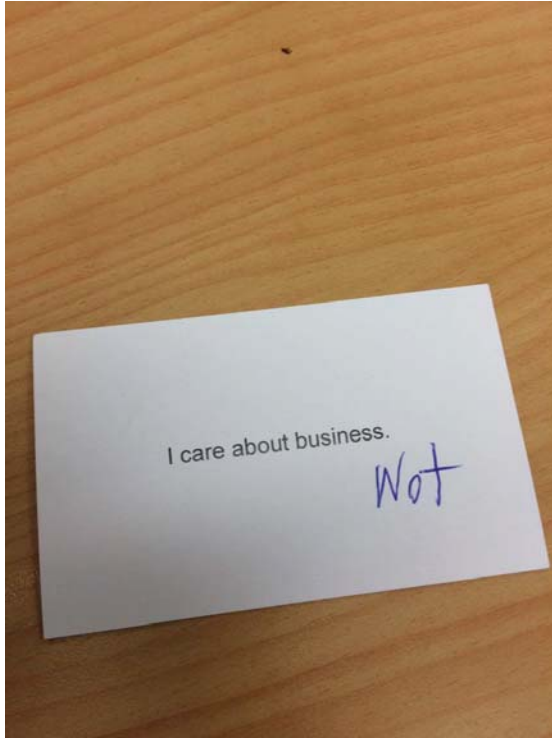


Figure 1. Pointon, E. (2016) *I care about business.* Business card. Image is artist's own.



Figure 2. Pointon, E. (2016). *Complementary Care.* Photograph of video presentation. Image is artist's own.



Figure 3. Pointon, E. (2017). *Good job.* Photograph of test installation. Image is artist's own.



Figure 4. Pointon, E. (2017) *Good job with water cooler.* Photograph of test installation. Image is artist's own.

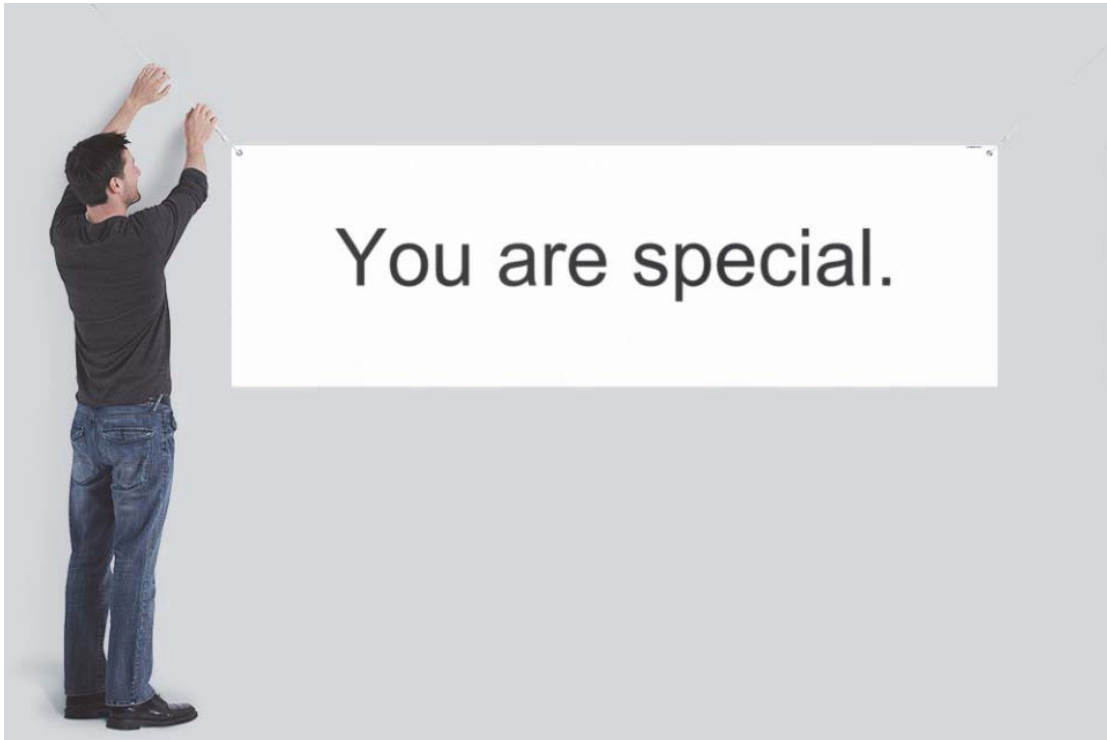


Figure 5. Pointon, E. (2017). *You are special*. Screenshot of design preview. Image is artist's own.



Figure 6. Pointon, E. *You are special*. Photograph of test install. Image is artist's own.



Figure 7. Pointon, E. (2017). Welcome to the real world. Photograph of lightbox test-install. Image is artist's own.

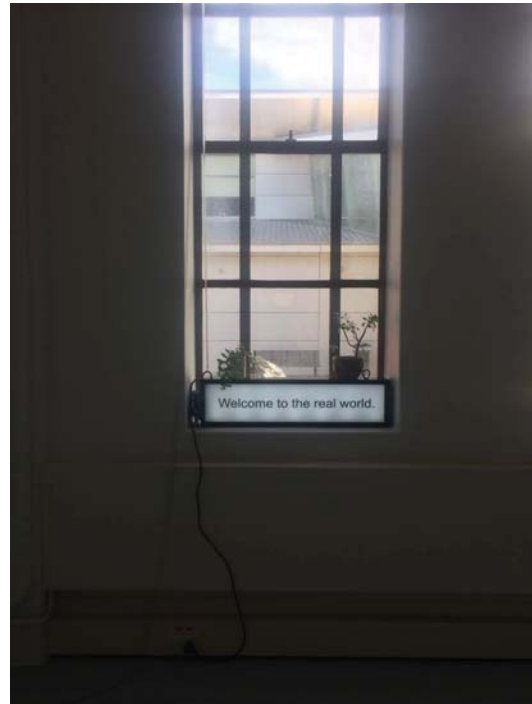


Figure 8. Pointon, E. (2017). Welcome to the real world. Photograph of lightbox test install. Image is artist's own.



Figure 9. Pointon, E. (2017). Water cooler, mug, and shelf. Photograph of test install. Image is artist's own.



Figure 10. Pointon, E. (2017). Welcome to the real world mug. Screenshot of design preview. Image is artist's own.



Figure 11. Pointon, E. (2017). *Watercooler*. Photograph of test install. Image Artist's own.



Figure 12. Pointon, E. (2017). *Birthday shout in the boardroom*. Photograph of live event. Image is artist's own.



Figure 13. Pointon, E. (2017). You can count on me to hold you up. Film still. Image is artist's own.

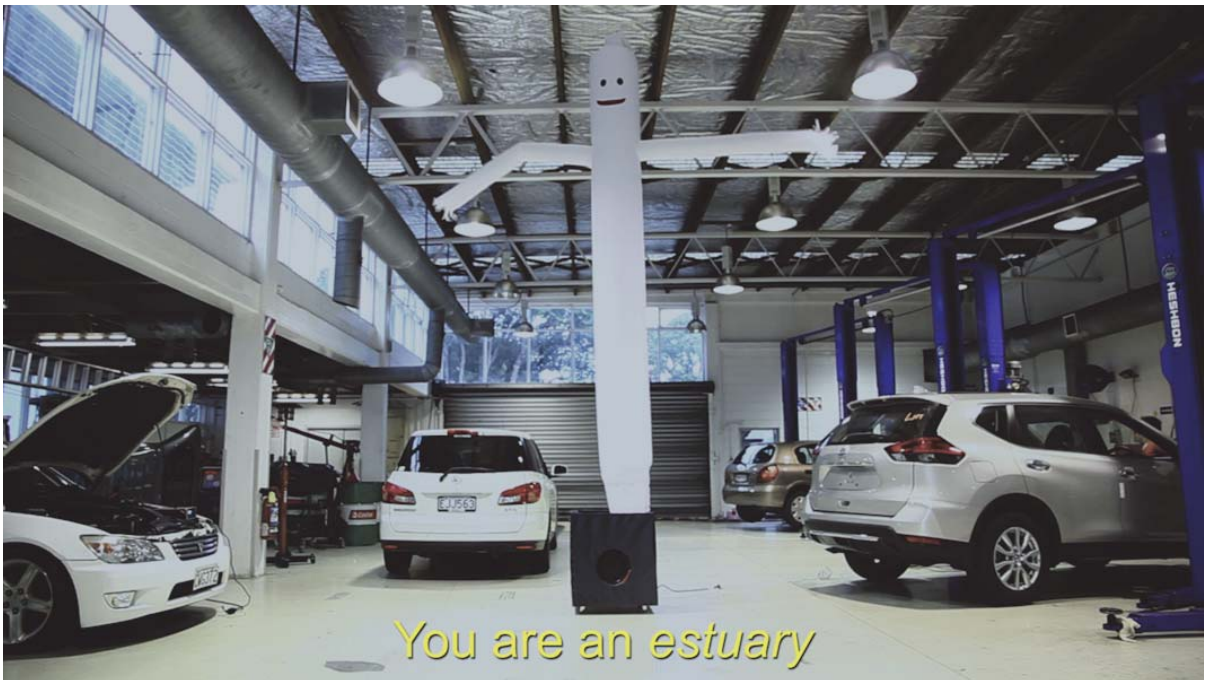


Figure 14 Pointon, E. (2017). An effective guide to implementation of self service. Film still. Image is artist's own.

Illustration list

Figure 1. Pointon, E. (2016). *I care about business*. Business card. Image is artist's own.

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Figure 3. Pointon, E. (2017). *Good job*. Photograph of test install. Image is artist's own.

Figure 4. Pointon, E. (2017). *Good job*. Photograph of test install. Image is artist's own.

Figure 5. Pointon, E. (2017). *You are special*. Screenshot of design preview. Image is artist's own.

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Figure 7. Pointon, E. (2017) *Welcome to the real world*. Photograph of test install. Image is artist's own.

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Figure 14. Pointon, E. (2017). *An effective guide to the implementation of self service*. Film still. Image is artist's own.

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