Beyond waged work: the everyday politics of alternative socio-economic
practices

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Abstract

Within geography and beyond there has been much discussion about how to best respond to the mounting inequalities, pressing environmental concerns and socio-economic precarity that appear to characterise current neoliberal capitalist societies. Kathi Weeks (2011) suggests that contemporary forms of precarity are linked to dominant discourses around waged labour which she terms the 'work society'. This work society is characterised by three inter-related expectations that frame waged work as morally necessary, as the primary right to citizenship, and as the main way to participate in wider society. Weeks argues that these expectations have increased since the global financial crisis, yet paradoxically there are fewer secure and meaningful waged jobs available.

In response to these socio-economic and environmental concerns, feminist autonomous geographers like J-K Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that the best way to respond is to 'take back the economy' at local scales. Rather than 'overthrowing' global neoliberal capitalism, Gibson-Graham and groups such as the Community Economies Collective have been engaged in ongoing projects which foster and enact alternative practices and subjectivities.

In this thesis I draw on the work of J-K Gibson-Graham, the Community Economies Collective and others to explore two examples of collective social action in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. These two examples are the relational arts platform, Letting Space, and the Wellington Timebank. I employ a post-structural approach drawing on ethnographic methods to explore how these collectives foster and enact alternative forms of exchange and community in response to the dominant discourses of the work society. I draw on the ideas of Jacques Rancière (2001; 2004) to show how the practices associated with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank create political moments which disrupt the work society. I complement these discussions about political moments by drawing on the work of Judith Butler (2006b) and Jean-Luc Nancy (1991; 2000) to show how subjects enact forms of community that are not based on fixed identities.

In this thesis I provide an important contribution to geographic literature by illustrating the potential of relational art and Timebanking practices to move beyond the melancholy affects associated with leftist politics over the last 30 years. I argue that the forms of social action explored in this research provide one practical way for subjects to partially negotiate the contradictions of the work society while simultaneously fostering forms of community that are more open and not premised on exclusionary identity categories.

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Chapter 1: The work society

1.1 Introduction

When I told members of my extended family that I was going back to university to do a PhD some of them rolled their eyes and suggested that I should get a ‘real job’ and do something useful with my life. While I knew they were partly joking, their comments also reminded me of the ways people subtly discipline each other and enforce certain ideas around what counts as legitimate work. These limited ideas about what counts as legitimate work were further demonstrated in the 2012 Aotearoa New Zealand government budget. This budget announcement included significant cuts to tertiary student support and fee increases – particularly for postgraduate students. The Finance Minister at the time, Bill English, stated that protesting students should get their ‘training finished and get a job and start contributing’ (quoted in Hartevelt and Anderson 2012). Bill English’s comments suggest that these limited ideas about what counts as legitimate work and societal contribution are not restricted to my extended family.

1.2 The work society

Vrasti (2013b, para 1) writes that ‘[a]t the heart of recent discussions on waged work lies an enduring tension. We can sense that modern work isn’t working anymore, but we don’t know how to let go of it’. Vrasti (2013b, para 1) goes on to point out the ways in which automation, technological advances, commodification, rising unemployment and precarity, and the ongoing gutting of the public service in many minority world¹ countries have created a situation where contemporary employment ‘exists less and less to provide a living, let alone a life’ (see also Coe 2013). Various academics have described this as a crisis of work, in which automation and technological advances have reduced labour time, but failed to free people from the necessity of earning money to survive, or reduce the hours they work in the waged economy (see for instance; Frase 2013; Illich 1978; Weeks 2011).

¹ In this thesis I use the terms minority and majority world to refer to what have traditionally been termed ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ nations. While I am aware that any categorisation like minority/majority is problematic, I use these terms as they acknowledge global inequalities and unequal power relations around the world.

Weeks (2011, p 8) sums this crisis of work up by stating, ‘work is now so divorced from consumption and production that the idea we all “need to work” is nonsense’. Yet as she suggests, this doesn’t mean people are necessarily working in paid employment any less. For if anything since the global financial crisis, the social and moral imperative to be in paid work has only intensified. This has created a real tension – because there seem to be fewer and fewer full time secure jobs for people (see for instance Rashbrooke 2013). Weeks uses the term the work society to describe these contradictory expectations. She notes that the work society is characterised by three inter-related expectations which frame waged work as morally necessary, the primary right to citizenship and the main way to participate in the wider capitalist economy², and by consequence live a life deemed to be legitimate.

According to Weeks there is nothing particularly new about the expectations of the work society, and debates about the structuring nature of waged work have been taking place since the Industrial Revolution (see for instance Fraser and Gordon 1994; Marx 1976; Muirhead 2004; Weber 1958). However, the point that both Weeks (2011) and Vrasti (2013b) make is that the contradictions of the work society have intensified since the global financial crisis. Specifically the way that neoliberal capitalist discourses expand ‘the needs and desires of its subjects while simultaneously striving to minimise their wages and income’ and therefore their ability to participate in the capitalist economy (Weeks, 2011 p 113). Weeks (2011), Vrasti (2013b) and Bunting (2004) have argued that the work society, characterised by the moral imperative to be in waged work, is a hegemonic³, yet contradictory expectation underpinning the capitalist economy that has intersected with more recent neoliberal discourses to powerfully shape contemporary subjectivities.

² The economy is a somewhat slippery term. Throughout this thesis I use the terms ‘capitalist market’ or ‘capitalist relations’ to refer to dominant understandings of the economy. As Gibson-Graham (2006) note, the market and economy can be understood in much broader terms than only capitalist exchanges and not all markets or economies operate through capitalist discourses and practices. However, as they suggest the market and economy are usually conflated with capitalist relations as the most natural and valued form of exchange.

³ As Flint (2009, p 327) notes hegemony is generally understood as the ‘capacity to exercise control by means other than coercive force; namely, through constructing a willing mass acquiescence towards, and participation in, social projects that are beneficial only to an elite’. While I do not have the space go into a detailed discussion of the concept here, in this thesis I draw on Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) understandings of hegemony. Their post-Marxist understandings are more nuanced than that outlined by Flint and suggest that ‘democratic struggles’ involve contestations which are not always reducible to class and that there is ‘no single hegemonic centre’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p 138). They understand hegemony as processes of articulation where discourses seek to construct forms of mass acquiescence and fix subject positions. These hegemonic processes are always in flux, leading to the ‘impossibility of any closure of the social’ (p 136).

1.2.1: Conceptualising neoliberal capitalism

There has been substantial critical debate about the nature of neoliberal capitalism (see for instance Gibson-Graham 1996; Harvey 2005; 2014; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2010; Peck and Tickell 2002). In this thesis I understand capitalist relations as those which are characterised by a desire for a free or unregulated market, a commitment to competition through private ownership and the commodification of natural resources, intellectual property and labour to achieve certain (proponents would say efficient) allocations of profit and well-being (see Jones 2009). The interconnections between neoliberal discourses and capitalism are complex, however, Oksala (2012, p 117) suggests that neoliberalism can 'be understood not merely as an economic doctrine, but also as a comprehensive framework for understanding ourselves and the political reality we live in'. While I agree with Oksala generally, I'm also mindful of Larner's (2005, p 12) point that we need to be aware that there are 'different configurations of neoliberalism' in different places and that like any discursive practice 'neoliberalism is a social project that seeks to create a reality that it suggests already exists'. For this reason I avoid referring to neoliberalism or capitalism as a singular or monolithic discourse in this thesis. In the immediately following paragraphs I outline some key points about the nature of contemporary neoliberal capitalist discourses as these provide an important grounding for ideas which are revisited throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that contemporary neoliberal discourses are generally understood as emerging from the governments of Thatcher in Britain, and Reagan in the United States in the 1980s. Aotearoa New Zealand experienced its own significant change in socio-economic policy under the Labour Government in 1984 (Kelsey 1995; 2002). The discourses underpinning these changes borrowed from, and reinterpreted ideas from liberalism drawing on the idea that human well-being is maximised when individuals are free to do what they want as long as they don't harm others. Neoliberal discourses have shifted the expectations around the role and purpose of the state, leading to a preference for private ownership and production and use free markets to allocate resources (Painter 2009). Peck and Tickell (2002) describe how the initial neoliberal reforms in the 1980s

reduced the role of the state in providing social and economic services such as state directed planning; employment initiatives; state education and health care. This was done through privatising government agencies and deregulating economies in attempts to make them more efficient and competitive (see Le Heron and Pawson 1996 for a geographic account of how these processes played out in Aotearoa New Zealand).

Peck and Tickell (2002, p 384) suggest more recent neoliberal discourses since the late 1990s have moved to constructing and consolidating 'neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations'. These discourses have been more subtle and are less concerned with making the sweeping institutional changes that occurred in the 1980s. Larner and Craig (2005) note that while there is still a preference for competitive market mechanisms to provide for economic and social wellbeing, these newer forms of neoliberal discourses focus on specific ways of governing neoliberal subjectivities. These extend beyond just economic or market interventions and are increasingly concerned with fostering certain forms of 'community', maximising 'social-capital' and using partnership models with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others to deliver programmes in areas like urban regeneration, social welfare, crime, surveillance and policing (see also Bondi 2005b).

As Herbert (2008) points out, the application of neoliberal capitalist practices has had significant effects, producing uneven landscapes of competition and inequality between cities, regions and nations (see Peck and Tickell 2002). At more personal scales, neoliberal capitalist practices have also unevenly structured access to space, employment and influenced how people understand and negotiate their roles in society (see for instance Dyck 2005; Larner 2000). For example, Peck and Tickell (2002, p 390) suggest that in the United States and Britain as early as the 1990s it was shown that neoliberal practices were creating 'recurrent failures of a quasisystemic nature in areas like transport, food systems, and pollution, and even in financial and labour markets'. These systemic failures were most glaringly demonstrated during the 2008-2010 recession and collapse of the financial sector in the United States and the flow on effects to different European states (Glassman 2009). Connecting these concerns around competition to labour, Harvey (2005) has argued that neoliberal capitalist practices actually rely on an underclass of unemployed subjects to foster competition between different groups for employment in an ever-downward spiral of

wages and employment conditions, both within, and between nations. Coming from a feminist perspective, Waring (1988) and Hanson and Pratt (1995) have argued that inequalities in the waged economy are also significantly gendered. Their work has shown how certain forms of masculinised labour are valued more highly than feminised labour and that gender significantly shapes participation in the waged economy.

These recurrent crises, complex forms of competition and compounding inequalities that have become so normalised as an inevitable part of contemporary life also involve processes of both physical and social exclusion. Herbert's recent three part review titled 'Contemporary Geographies of Exclusion' (2008; 2009; 2011) provides a summary of the various ways neoliberal capitalist relations are contributing to increasingly exclusionary processes across the world. These include gentrification and urban regeneration projects which displace low income people (Atkinson 2003; Bond 2011; Murphy 2008; Slater 2006); gated communities and shopping malls (Mycoo 2006; Staeheli and Mitchell 2006); the forced relocation of homeless people (Mitchell 1997) and even banning the giving away of food in public places (Heynen 2010).

While the processes outlined above take place in different socio-political contexts with differing consequences, Peck et al (2010, p 95) urge us to imagine neoliberal discourses as an 'adaptive regime of socioeconomic governance', rather than any kind of singular fixed discourse. Underpinning this regime of governance are economic narratives which are continually expanding into new territories, commodifying new forms of affectual, creative and immaterial labour (see for instance Dowling, Nunes, and Trott 2007; Kuehn and Corrigan 2013; Vrasti 2011). In this way we could understand neoliberal capitalist discourses as subtly colonising our lives, reframing all kinds of human labour, time and social relations through economic rationalities. While there are significant material effects created in people's lives by the unequal discourses of waged labour, Vrasti (2013a) suggests that what is most worrying is the politically dis-empowering assertion that there is no alternative to the neoliberal waged capitalist economy. However, authors like Massey (2005; 2007), Gibson-Graham (2006) and Healy (2014) stress that there is nothing inevitable about neoliberal capitalist discourses. These geographers argue that what we are currently

experiencing is a crisis of imagination and desire in relation to human labour and how to collectively organise to meet material needs.

As outlined above, different theorists have focused on a wide range of aspects relating to waged work and the neoliberal capitalist economy. One aspect that is generally agreed upon is the significant way expectations around waged work structure people's lives materially, spatially, and psychologically (Weeks 2011). One of the key points much feminist work has made is how waged work functions as a process of interpellation⁴. Where the hegemony of waged work is maintained less through threats of overt violence, but more abstract modes of domination and coercion. These forms of domination include the obvious ways people are required to work for money to meet material needs such as food, shelter and clothing, but also subtler forms of coercion underpinned by moralistic narratives such as those with which I began this chapter. These narratives often draw on discourses such as the protestant work ethic, including the idea that waged work is somehow 'good for the soul' and a valuable form of creative self-expression (Weeks 2011). However, of more concern is the view that in the work society waged work should function as the primary right to citizenship and by consequence, be the only way to have a liveable life and be seen as a legitimate contemporary citizen.

In a recent review of the Britney Spears song 'Work Bitch' in *The Guardian*, Campagna (2013, para 1) suggests that it contributes to a 'new genre of motivational work music'. He argues that the lyrics of the song illustrate how the imperative to be in waged work has become the very essence of an unquestioned and unquestionable ideology. We work because we don't know what else to do:

What really matters, and really defines us as worthy people – unlike those benefit scroungers – is that we keep working hard, regardless of whether our work goes

⁴ The concept of interpellation originates with Althusser (Lloyd 2007). In this thesis I understand the term as referring to how people are "hailed" as particular subjects through the institutions of the family, education, religion and state, and through our own daily practices in relation to them' (Pratt, 2009 p 729). However, these subjectivities are always multiple, sometimes conflicting and fostered in specific contexts. See Section 2.2.1 for further discussion.

towards the production of land mines, the deforestation of the Amazon forest or the supply of frog-shaped slippers to gadget shops. Abstaining from work, or being forcefully cast out of it, puts one in the dangerous position of a stateless person during a war, or of an atheist in a theocracy (Campagna 2013, para 4).

This quotation by Campagna highlights how threats to subjectivity circulate and discipline people into certain ways of thinking. There has been a range of feminist work in geography exploring how bodies and subjectivities are disciplined and conditioned into various forms of gendered work that are unequally valued in contemporary neoliberal capitalist societies (see for instance Hanson and Pratt 1995; Massey 1994; Massey and McDowell 1984; McDowell 2008; McDowell 2009; McDowell 2013). While there are always multiple, and at times contradictory societal discourses circulating which frame work in different ways, in this thesis when I refer to dominant discourses of waged work I understand them as characterised by the following:

- A view that the most credible, necessary and desirable form of labour is in the waged economy;
- A view that while non-paid labour may be seen as important (such as volunteering, child-rearing or caring for relatives), this is not as important or ultimately significant as work in the waged economy;
- A view that even though unemployment levels may be high after the global financial crisis and that employment/unemployment may be shaped by factors outside an individual's control, individuals are still ultimately responsible for their ability to engage in waged work and compete in the labour market.

While it is not my intention to reify these views nor set them up in some binary opposition to alternatives, I think it is important to outline what I understand as constituting the more dominant discourses of waged work. In stating these more dominant expectations around work I am also mindful of Gibson-Graham's (2006) critique of much Marxist work which they describe as fostering a form of 'capitalocentrism'. They suggest that many Marxist critiques actually serve to partially maintain the hegemony of the very things they seek to question.

Gibson-Graham (2006, p 56, emphasis original) argue that this is done by inadvertently referring to:

a dominant economic discourse that distributes positive value to those activities associated with capitalist economic activity however defined, and assigns lesser value to all other processes of producing and distributing goods and services by identifying then *in relation* to capitalism as the same as, the opposite of, a complement to, or contained within.

1.2.2 Challenging the work society

While I outlined the more dominant discourses of waged work above, both Weeks (2011) and Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest that the hegemony of the capitalist economy and the work society is always incomplete. One of the key points about theories of interpellation is that there is the possibility for subjects to emerge who avoid or challenge dominant interpellation processes. These subjects were referenced above in Campagna's (2013) quote and include those who challenge the inequalities created through waged work, those who choose not to be in waged work, those who cannot obtain it and those who might just question the imposition of waged work in their lives.

For example, some feminists have actively sought to alter the gendered inequalities inherent in the waged system, arguing for more opportunities for women to engage in waged work. Other feminists such as Waring (1988) have attempted to increase the value given to feminised forms of work in the waged economy to address some of the structurally gendered inequalities. While these feminist approaches are valuable in creating more equitable waged work structures, as Weeks (2011), Vrasti (2013) and Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003) note, they tend to only question forms of waged work rather than challenging the underlying system. And in some instances, calls for more and better work for women have actually extended the contradictions of the work society, creating new expectations and norms such as the 'double work day' (see for instance Jaffe 2013). Or, in other cases led to decreasing wages overall as certain occupations become more feminised (Standing 1999).

Other subjects who resist interpellation could include those people who eschew waged work deliberately or attempt to operate either partially or completely in barter or non-cash alternative economies (including communes and other forms of collectives). Others such as the Italian autonomists of the 1970s did not limit themselves to a critique of the exploitative conditions of waged labour. As Vrasti (2013b, para 4) notes, the Italian autonomists' 'ambition was the 'refusal of work,' to reject work as 'the highest calling and moral duty''. By the end of the 1970s the movement was targeted by state repression on one side and armed militarised struggle on the other and was ultimately 'unable to propose a viable political program *for* workers but *against* work' (Vrasti 2013b, para 4, emphasis original). While there have been a range of political concerns expressed through the practices and demands made by these subjects who resist interpellation, what Weeks (2011) suggests is that given the wide ranging adverse effects waged work creates, there is a pressing need to explore practices that might help enrich both anti-work and post-work imaginaries. Part of this call involves resisting and countering those discourses that would naturalise, privatise, individualise and depoliticise both waged work and critiques of the work society. Or in other words, part of what is needed is to explore how subjects overflow the work society, while maintaining habitable subjectivities.

A recent edition of *Antipode* (vol. 42, no. 4) was concerned in different ways with the question of 'how do we get out of this capitalist mess?' (Chatterton 2010, p 906). This challenging question connects with Week's (2011) call above in relation to fostering anti-work and post-work imaginaries. However, given the scope and scale of both Chatterton's and Week's questions, where does one start? How does one re-imagine the way society is organised? What kinds of practices should academics interested in such questions be researching? And how does one go about challenging those powerful discourses which might work to shut down alternatives – either through conscious de-legitimisation, or more subtly, through claims to the common-sense of the waged work ethic entrenched within neoliberal capitalist discourses?

Debate around these questions has ranged far and wide. Driscoll-Derickson (2013) suggests that critical work has tended to debate the best scale at which to contest neoliberal capitalism. She notes that Harvey (1996) and Brenner et al (2010) argue that resistance to

neoliberal capitalism needs to be undertaken at national and global scales and essentially needs to entail fundamental wide-scale changes to the neoliberal capitalist system. Alternatively geographers like Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006), Holloway (2002; 2010) and Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) argue for the remaking of neoliberal capitalism at local scales through more everyday practices. As Driscoll-Derickson (2013) notes, these kinds of debates are essentially about three inter-related issues – what counts as, or constitutes political change, at what scale does political change need to occur, and how are subjects mobilised to desire and practice alternatives to neoliberal capitalist discourses.

Given the breadth of the issues outlined above, various academics have focussed on different aspects of this ‘capitalist mess’ at different scales. Some geographers have focused on the way neoliberal capitalist discourses are deployed and enacted, to show how they maintain a dominant currency (Larner 2003; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2010; Peck and Tickell 2002). Others have looked at how neoliberal capitalist discourses have worked to foster a constrained form of politics. Where what have historically been the political left and right are now conflated into what some have termed a ‘post-political’ consensus (Mouffe 2005; Raco and Lin 2012; Swyngedouw 2009). While there is debate about the nature of post-politicising processes (see for instance Darling 2014; McCarthy 2013; Swyngedouw 2010) what these authors tend to agree on is the way economic narratives and neoliberal market forces are framed as both inevitable and unquestionable. Or similarly to what Campagna (2013) argued about waged work above, the way the discourses of the work society have become an ideology of unquestionable common sense which structures how subjects think (see also Hall and O'Shea 2013).

Others have explored how neoliberal capitalist discourses have intersected with contemporary forms of social action and activism, shaping the way individuals and groups understand their own subjectivities and sense of agency (Bondi 2005b; Bondi and Laurie 2005; Guthman 2008; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). Others, such as Gibson-Graham (2006), Day (2004), Holloway (2010) and Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) and Chatterton (2010) have explored everyday alternative socio-economic practices – to actively legitimise and cultivate them, rather than just reiterating the ills of the contemporary world. Taken collectively, this body of work is broad, with different historic and academic trajectories and

disagreements. My sense however is that many of these authors are concerned with critically analysing and destabilising the primacy of neoliberal capitalist discourses, thereby opening up space for alternative subjectivities and socio-spatial relations. Much of this literature has critically engaged with the dominant discourses of the work society, to show how subjects become shaped by it, but also crucially how subjects resist and enact alternatives.

1.2.3 An open politics of place

As suggested above, geographers have been interested in theorising the different spatialities of neoliberal capitalism. Specifically how different places and subjects are shaped by and constructed through neoliberal capitalist relations and the work society. Massey's work has been particularly influential and her (2007) work on London explores how neoliberal narratives construct the city as a world financial centre. She argues that the national focus on London as the 'golden goose' of the nation has had uneven effects around the nation and within London itself in relation to housing, employment, and wages.

Massey's (1991b; 2005; 2007) work points to the political importance of seeing place as a node, connected to other places through a whole range of socio-economic relations, as this raises the potential to create more open or progressive places. Such a framing differs significantly from the globalised capitalist understanding of an 'interconnected economy' where capital tends to be free to move, but people are not. Massey (2005; 2007) argues that if we see places as interconnected rather than bounded, then our lives are understood as implicated with the lives of people in other places and the non-human world, thereby highlighting ethical questions in obvious ways (see also Mason and Whitehead 2012). These ethical questions may include reflecting on the reasons for unequal wages between the minority and majority worlds, or why environmental degradation is politically acceptable in one place but not another.

As Chatterton (2010) suggests, fostering and maintaining more open places requires ongoing political action. Sen (2010, p 1011) writes that places are open because people make them so and this involves considering 'what the social relations of the space are'. As noted earlier there has been important work highlighting how powerful exclusionary

discourses unevenly structure people's access to space (see for instance Cresswell 1996; Duncan and Duncan 2001; Sibley 1995). However, as Gibson-Graham (2008, p 622) write, Massey's work:

reminds us that a representation of structural impossibility can always give way to an ethical project of possibility, if we recognise the political and ethical choices to be made . . . The academic task becomes not to explain why localities are incapable of looking beyond their boundaries but to explore how they might do so.

1.2.4 Research questions

In this thesis I draw on the ideas of Massey (2005, 2007), Gibson-Graham (2006), Holloway (2010) Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) and the broader work of the Community Economies Collective to position this research as an ethical project of possibility (see for instance Byrne and Healy 2006; Cornwell 2012; The Community Economies Collective 2001). Drawing on these ideas provides one way of thinking about the problem of the work society, by reframing research as an ethical project of possibility that can actually contribute to fostering alternative socio-economic practices and understandings. Given that I returned to study as the effects of the 2008-2010 global financial crisis were becoming more apparent and according to some, was not contributing legitimately to society, I became interested in how other people were experiencing and negotiating the contradictions of the work society. The following two questions underpin this research:

- How do people negotiate the limiting hegemonic framing of what constitutes legitimate work (and consequently legitimate subjectivities) in society?
- How can people individually and collectively expand the limiting discourses of the work society?

To provide a context for exploring these broad questions, this research draws on two examples of urban-based collective practices in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand that foster alternatives to the capitalist economy and waged work. These two examples are the arts collective, Letting Space, and the Wellington Timebank. Both of these collectives are concerned with a range of similar issues and emerged in Wellington following the global financial crisis. The issues they address include: re-framing and valuing human labour; widening dominant understandings of what counts as legitimate work and the economy;

and facilitating alternative exchanges between people in urban places. The two broad questions above are useful starting points for tackling the complexity and contradictions of the work society. However, given the relative breadth of these questions, the following three sub-questions are used to focus the analysis in the empirical chapters 4-8 of this thesis:

- How are subjectivities articulated through discursive and performative practices?
- Are these subjectivities and practices fostering alternative spaces for overflowing the hegemony of waged labour and the capitalist economy, and if so how?
- How are these subjectivities and practices fostering a more open politics of place?

The three sub-questions connect to the three inter-related issues Driscoll-Derickson (2013) described earlier (see Section 1.2.2). These include questions of what counts as, or constitutes political change, at what scale does political change need to occur, and how are subjects mobilised to practice alternatives to neoliberal capitalism and the work society? In this thesis I draw on a number of theorists to provide a framework for analysing the subjectivities and social actions articulated through Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank and to speak back to these questions. Firstly, I draw on the work of Rancière (1998; 2004) and his framing of political moments as a disruption of the 'order of the sensible' to show how social art and Timebanking can be understood as political interventions which challenge the work society. Secondly, I draw on the ideas of Butler (1999; 2006a; 2006b) and Nancy (1991; 2000) to show how subjects desire connection with others through community to alleviate fear and minimise the shaming effects of uninhabitable subjectivities. Butler's and Nancy's ideas provide a relational understanding of subjectivities based on fluid identifications which are useful in understanding the forms of social action and communities that emerge through the two examples. Finally, I draw on the work of Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) and Massey (2005; 2007) to connect political moments, subjectivities and collective social action to an open politics of place which challenges the dominant discourses of neoliberal capitalism and the work society at local scales.

As suggested above, this research is underpinned by a critical poststructural theoretical framework. To explore the two examples of Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank an ethnographic methodology was employed that included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, analysis of secondary material and the use of research journals. In what immediately follows I outline Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank and then discuss some of the work which has been done in geography and elsewhere in relation to art and Timebanking. These sections highlight how art practices and Timebanking can overflow the more dominant discourses and limiting subjectivities of the work society, and importantly, foster a more open politics of place.

1.3 Empirical examples

1.3.1 Letting Space

Letting Space is a curatorial arts group that have produced temporary art exhibitions and social art installations in vacant commercial/retail and public spaces across a number of Aotearoa New Zealand cities since 2010 (Letting Space N.D.). While the aims are multiple, the project initially began as an artistic response to the global financial crisis and high office vacancies within the central business districts of Wellington and Auckland. Letting Space is led by Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery who operate as the primary curators. They were initially focused on curating art projects that brought artists back into city centres by providing alternative spaces for exhibition and installation. Many of the projects also critiqued those processes which had led to the economic exclusion of certain individuals and groups from the central city⁵. More recently their projects have moved on to consider a whole range of issues from the nature of democracy, contested discourses around public space, expanding what is considered legitimate work, to urban resilience and change in relation to Christchurch following the earthquakes in 2011 and 2012.

1.3.2 Social art practices

Within geography there is an emerging body of work looking at the intersection of art and space, specifically how art practices can be used to raise political questions around cultural agency, subjectivities, place and power relations (see for instance Cant and Morris 2006; Dixon 2009; Dufour 2002; Hawkins 2010; 2011; 2013; Hubbard 2003; Massey 2000; Pinder

⁵ Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide further discussion around five of the Letting Space projects which were included in the current research.

2008; Rose 1997c; Sharp 2007; Zebracki 2012). These art practices go by different names including 'socially engaged art', 'community-based art', and 'participatory' or 'collaborative art'. Like all words and practices, 'art' has discursive histories⁶ which are characterised by specific bodies of knowledge. While for some the term art raises the idea of specific objects, such as a painting, in this research I take a broader view. I borrow from Hawkins (2011, p 465) who understands art as an 'ensemble of practices, performances, experiences and artefacts rather than as a singular 'object''. This understanding of art incorporates a whole range of practices, from objects, to more relationally based works, including performances and installations (what are often termed 'relational aesthetics'⁷), temporary art, sound art and public sculptures (see Bourriaud 2002; Schuermans, Loopmans, and Vandenabeele 2012). In this thesis I am interested in what Hawkins (2011, p 465) calls 'participatory and 'socially engaged' art practices' or what Toscano (2009) calls 'politics in action'⁸. Miles (2006, p 991) suggests that these types of art practices can provide 'critical readings of the dominant society, repossession of urban spaces, and construction of alternative social dynamics'. In what immediately follows I outline two examples of art practices to illustrate these points.

Pinder's (2008) work discusses an operatic sound walk in London in 2006 which was part of a longer initiative called 90% *CRUDE* put on by PLATFORM - a collaborative arts and research group. This performance led participants through the financial centre of London linking individuals, institutions and companies to British Petroleum (BP). It sought to show how these different actors were interconnected through the story of an unhappy finance worker plagued with disillusionment about the impending collapse of civilisation due to climate change and fossil fuel consumption. It also sought to show the connections between BP and human rights abuses in Nigeria and Iraq. Pinder suggests this work illustrates Massey's

⁶ Miles (2006, p 988) notes that the term 'art' was used in the late middle ages in Europe to 'denote a transition from craft, or artisan work, as the skilled reproduction of a received vocabulary of images and from denoting an accepted theology, to the intellectual work of producing original interpretations of narratives for secular as well as religious purposes'. In this sense it was seen as different from 'craft' because it could creatively re-interpret and invent knowledge.

⁷ Bourriaud (2002) describes how one of the themes in art practices since the 1990s has been a move to 'relational aesthetics' where the aesthetic object itself is the social process generated between people.

⁸ In this research I am not concerned with discussing the aesthetics of art practices - commonly understood as what they look like. I am also not interested in the kinds of public sculptures or products often associated with what Pinder (2008) calls urban regeneration projects or 'creative city' strategies.

(2005) idea about the potential for a progressive politics of place or an outward looking attempt to rearticulate spatial relations. The work sought to re-frame London not as some great (bounded) world city, but as a place still intimately connected to other places, in often exploitative and contradictory ways.

Hawkins (2011) suggests that if we understand art as a process (rather than an object) then we can better appreciate how art practices can contribute to challenging and subverting dominant and limiting subjectivities. An example of this includes Hubbard's (2003) article which discusses a work called *Warte Mal! (Prostitution after the Velvet Revolution)* by Ann-Sofi Sidén. This work involved documentary footage of interviews with those involved in sex work (primarily female sex workers) in Dubi, Czech Republic. Hubbard describes how the work overflowed the usual subject positions of sex workers as either threatening 'fallen' women, or the oppressed marginalised Other. The documentary let participants tell their own stories and also revealed embodied and complex aspects of their lives. So while they were framed as sex workers, they were also friends who cared about each other, who made jokes and who danced in bars for fun.

One of the key points geographers such as Hawkins (2011) and Pinder (2008) make is that art practices can be understood as a form of social action that generates effects. They advocate exploring the work art practices do, which may provide insights into challenging the discourses that attempt to fix certain people and places, in creative and unexpected ways.

1.3.3 The Wellington Timebank

The Wellington Timebank started in October 2011 and was modelled after Edgar Cahn's (2004) concept outlined below. The Wellington Timebank is essentially a network of members who trade skills and swap their labour using the currency of time rather than money. The collective initially received funding from the Wellington City Council to pay for a part-time coordinator. At the time of writing, membership stands at approximately 400 people and grows by around 2-5 people per week. A part-time coordinator remains

responsible for the day to day running of the network and a Steering Committee composed of different members provide governance and strategic input⁹.

1.3.4 Timebanking

While the concept and practices behind Timebanking are not necessarily new, contemporary forms of such collectives are most often associated with Edgar Cahn (2004) who popularised the practice in the United States. Cahn had worked for most of his life as a lawyer challenging socio-economic inequalities until poor health meant he could no longer continue working in paid employment. In his 2004 book he talked about how he felt useless and invisible in society because he could no longer contribute in the waged economy. He was inspired by the work of Waring (1988) which looked at the ways feminised labour has been, and continues to be, excluded and undervalued in the waged labour market.

In response to his personal circumstances and politicised reading, Cahn developed the structure of a Timebank which is basically a collective of members who post offers and requests through some kind of networked database system. Every member's labour is valued equally in terms of time and members keep track of the number of hours they work and the number of hours for which they receive something. So for example, someone may offer to clean your house for an hour and this has the exact same value as someone offering legal services or a back massage. Cahn suggests that the practice is significantly different from charity because of the reciprocal nature of the exchange and it is this reciprocal relation that he calls 'co-production'. The process also differs from charity because it recognises that both subjects have something to offer and something which they could receive. In this way the process avoids designating one subject as the object of charity. Cahn argues that co-production as practiced through Timebanking is an effective way of reclaiming the values of family and community that have been devalued in the waged economy.

A key value underlying Timebanking is the belief that humans' material needs are best met through an ethic of collective interdependence, rather than neoliberal discourses of the independent, self-sufficient subject. The importance of this collective interdependence is

⁹ Chapters 3, 7 and 8 provide a discussion and analysis of the Wellington Timebank.

juxtaposed against the value fostered by capitalist discourses that reduce all human worth to earning potential or wealth. In characterising contemporary neoliberal capitalist discourses Cahn (2004, p. 40) writes:

Those who produce wealth are the only ones morally entitled to share in the wealth. If you want to eat, you must either put your money to work or go to work yourself. Trapped within that framework, the only permissible intervention is one designed exclusively to get people to work. The function of childhood is to provide a market for goods and services based upon pensions and earnings made during a lifetime of productive employment. Beyond that, the function of old people is not to burden the economic system; restated more bluntly, the function of the elderly is to die as cheaply as possible unless they can pay their way with assets acquired by previous employment or investment.

Timebanking is premised on an asset-based understanding of human subjectivities. Cahn (2004) suggests that all people have both needs in their lives and skills and attributes which they can offer to others and that our lives are intimately bound up with the lives of others. It is through valuing everyone's labour equally that dignity is restored to the lives of people whose labour may have been undervalued, ignored or denigrated by the dominant waged economy. Cahn argues that Timebanking acknowledges the true value of the non-market economy and redefines the nature of the relationship between the market and non-market. He suggests that the non-market world is the place to begin from which to leverage change because it is here where surplus exists. He (2004, p 49) writes 'if social progress is limited to what we have money to buy, we are going to have to tolerate a great deal of needless suffering and deprivation'. As suggested above, Timebanks are premised on the following five core values:

- All people are viewed as assets;
- Work is redefined so that all labour is valued, creating a more equitable society;
- Reciprocity is key and trust develops through people giving and receiving;
- Social networks are important and people need to have a sense of social belonging in the place they live;
- Respect is an important part of a healthy functioning society.

Cahn paints a very optimistic view of the potential for Timebanking to instigate social change and overflow the limitations of the work society. There has been emerging debate in the literature about the effects and success of Timebanks (see for instance Cooper 2013; Gregory 2013; North 2006; Seyfang 2001; Seyfang 2004a; Seyfang 2004b; Zademach and Hillebrand 2013). However, as I argue in Chapter 8, the underlying ethos of all human labour being valued equally provides a radical alternative to discourses of the work society.

1.4 Social action, subjectivities and neoliberal discourses

Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank are both deliberate forms of social action which seek to alter relations between people and shape urban spaces. In this sense both of these examples would fit Routledge's (2009a, p 5) framing of activism as '[t]he practice of political action by individuals or collectives in the form of social movements, non-government organisations and so on'. However, like all words, the meaning of activism can be slippery. The word can be used to describe something you do – 'activism', or be used to constitute a subject position which is created through the performance of certain actions – the 'activist'. While I definitely agree that activism can be framed as the types of encounters Routledge describes, in this research I draw on both Pulido (2003) and Maxey (1999) who understand activism as a discursively constructed and performed process. In this way my understanding of social action includes, but goes beyond that which is conventionally thought of as 'political', such as voting in elections, attending protests or being involved in political parties.

Maxey (1999, p 201) argues that social relations are constructed through the everyday acts people perform and that '[e]verything we do, every thought we have, contributes to the production of the social world'. He therefore understands activism as 'the process of reflecting and acting upon this condition'. This involves what Pulido (2003) calls 'the interior life of politics' which includes the emotions, psychological developments, passions, frustrations and also the sense of empowerment which can arise from engaging in these reflections and actions. These broader understandings of activism by Maxey and Pulido arose from critiques of the tendency to associate the term and identity with a limited range of more dramatic and macho forms of social action (see also Brown and Pickerill 2009;

Chatterton and Pickerill 2010). The focus on these forms of dramatic and masculine actions often neglected to explore the complex emotional and learning processes individuals and groups go through which (can) lead to these more visible actions.

As noted above I am interested in subjectivities and practices which include both the processes of reflection individuals and groups go through, and the embodied actions they undertake. I am not suggesting however that there is necessarily a linear process between reflection, thought and action, but the forms of social action I investigate in this research all involve some form of embodied action in specific places. Embodied actions which may at times suggest either a critique of, or propose alternatives to more dominant capitalist relations of waged labour. From the outset it is important to note that I have specifically chosen to explore two examples of collective social action which are committed to ideas broadly grounded in social justice, challenging inequalities and unequal power relations and a desire to see society operate differently.

1.4.1 Neoliberal subjectivities and social action

The suggestion by Peck, et al (2010, p 95) outlined earlier, that neoliberal discourses form an 'adaptive regime of socioeconomic governance', has implications for understanding social action. For example, geographers have explored how neoliberal discourses and practices have intersected with and influenced people who have been involved in social and environmental action (see Bondi and Laurie 2005). Guthman (2008) suggests that one common theme has been the way funding and new accountability measures can depoliticise NGOs and other groups who would have traditionally articulated more critical opposition to the state (and other institutions) pursuing neoliberal practices. NGOs and other activist groups have become increasingly service oriented, required by funders (state, private and philanthropic) to measure outputs to which they are held accountable (Bondi and Laurie 2005). These processes are bound up with more recent neoliberal modes of governance discussed earlier in Section 1.2.1. Guthman (2008) observes that these new accountability measures not only take away from the real work of many organisations, but more importantly create governability rather than instigate social change. NGOs and other groups become dependent on the funding to ensure their continued survival, while also being

increasingly constrained in their ability to critique or challenge policies and practices they consider problematic¹⁰.

In the light of these issues, some geographers have been grappling with how to imagine alternative subjectivities and practices beyond the limited framing and funding offered by more dominant neoliberal capitalist discourses. Bondi and Laurie (2005, p 398) note that what is missing is 'how spaces might be 'deliberalised', and how resistance to neoliberalisms might be fostered'. Similarly Chatterton and Pickerill (2010, p 475) conclude that detailed case studies are needed that inquire 'into what it actually means to be simultaneously against and beyond the capitalist present, while at the same time dealing with being very much in it'. This last point provides a theoretical starting point for this research and links to Gibson-Graham's (2006) call to explore what alternatives to dominant neoliberal capitalist relations look like and how these can be fostered (see also the edited collection by Hickey 2012). This research directly addresses this gap by showing how some people in Wellington New Zealand are enacting alternatives to waged work and capitalist relations to meet their material and emotional needs. These practices are not somehow 'outside' of the work society or neoliberal capitalist discourses, but instead negotiated in complex ways through collective encounters with others.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis addresses the call for detailed case studies of what it means to be 'against and beyond the capitalist present' and foster anti-work and post-work imaginaries. There are eight chapters following this introduction and empirical chapters 4-8 explore the subjectivities and practices cultivated and enacted through Letting Space art projects and the Wellington Timebank. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of how the remainder of this thesis is structured. As shown in Figure 1.1, the empirical chapters (4-8) do not necessarily address one single research sub-question, but rather discuss aspects associated with four common themes across the two examples. These four themes include re-framing the

¹⁰ Guthman (2008) provides an example of a food activist project by an NGO in California. The project's goal was to create a long term plan for more sustainable food production systems in California and was funded by Roots of Change Fund (a consortium of several philanthropic organisations). She shows how the project was de-politicised and basically produced a plan promoting 'green consumption' which did nothing to challenge dominant neoliberal discourses around either consumption or racialised labour practices in California.

capitalist economy, reframing human labour and subjectivities in relation to the work society, enacting community, and fostering a more open politics of place.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

- Outline of critical post-structural ontology
- Explanation of Butler's and Nancy's ideas around subjectivity, performative practices and community to provide a framework for analysis in chapters 4, 6, 7 and 8
- Explanation of Rancière's ideas around disruption of the order of the sensible to provide a framework for analysis in chapters 5 and 8
- Drawing together Butler, Nancy and Rancière with Massey and Gibson-Graham to provide a framework for responding to Week's call to challenge the work society

Chapter 3: Methodology

- Outline of epistemology and ethnographic methodology
- Reflections on positionality and outline of analysis techniques

Chapter 4: Letting Space

- Overview of five Letting Space projects
- Analysis of how four art projects disrupted dominant framings of the economy

Chapter 5: Letting Space

- Analysis of how two art projects disrupted the order of the sensible, reframing subjectivities in relation to waged work

Chapter 6: Letting Space

- Analysis of how one art project reframed subjectivities in relation to waged work through embodied encounters

Chapter 7: Wellington Timebank

- Analysis of subjectivities and the forms of community cultivated through the Wellington Timebank

Chapter 8: Wellington Timebank

- Analysis of labour enacted through the Wellington Timebank
- Analysis of how the Wellington Timebank disrupts the order of the sensible through reframing subjectivities

Chapter 9: Conclusion

- Summary of responses to research sub-questions: the subjectivities cultivated through the two examples; the nature of collective practices; and how these practices overflow the work society and foster a more open politics of place

Figure 1.1: Structure of this thesis

1.6 Conclusion

I began this chapter talking about the limiting ways in which only certain forms of work are considered legitimate and some of the contradictory expectations created through dominant understandings of waged labour, or what Weeks (2011) calls the work society. But what alternatives are there to the neoliberal capitalist discourses that structure the work society? How can people cultivate both alternative subjectivities and work practices, while also fostering more open places? Through this research I explore two forms of urban social action within Aotearoa New Zealand to speak back to these questions. However, there is still a question as to why social art and Timebanking are important in the face of so many other pressing issues - from climate change to environmental degradation, to the high level of child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand? I would argue that these pressing socio-economic issues are all interconnected and are actually an outcome of the complex intersection of neoliberal capitalist processes. As Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) suggest, we urgently need to 'take back the economy' and re-orient the ways in which our societies function. Such work is vital and through this research I build on the small emerging academic body of work on alternative socio-economic practices in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bargh and Otter 2009; Cretney and Bond 2014; McGuirk 2012; Ozanne 2010). Through this research I contribute to Massey's (2007) and Gibson-Graham's (2006) assertion that geographers should move beyond endless critiques of neoliberal capitalist discourses. Undertaking this research is one way of fostering and performing alternatives.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced a range of concepts, from outlining key debates about neoliberal capitalism and the work society, to discussing subjectivities, processes of interpellation and the potential for subjects to resist more dominant discourses. This chapter deepens the discussion around subjectivities, interpellation and subjection processes and the nature of political change and social action. The chapter begins by outlining the critical post-structural ontology that underpins this research. Following this I discuss the role discourse plays in shaping subjectivities, the ability of subjects to enact and perform differently, and the linkages between these processes and post-foundational theories of political moments (Marchant 2007). This is by no means an exhaustive account of all the work done in geography on subjectivities and social action. Rather, this chapter covers some of the key concepts I use to explore how subjectivities are fostered and enacted through practices discussed in the empirical chapters that follow.

I adopt a critical post-structural ontology with an interest in understanding the material and internalised effects associated with the construction of meaning and socio-political arrangements (Flowerdew and Martin 1997; Wylie 2006). Lloyd (2007, p 11) suggests that the simplest way to understand post-structuralism is to see it as a critical philosophical position. Post-structural theories tend to be suspicious of grand narratives and any appeal to a stable, coherent or unified subject. A critical post-structural framework raises ontological questions about what has meaning and ultimately what exists. I follow Laclau and Mouffe (2001) in coming from a materialist perspective. They suggest that there may be a material world independent of people, but the meanings and functions of material objects are constructed by people through language. Post-structural approaches have been used to investigate how shared meanings and practices form discourses which can coalesce to create the appearance of a 'real' world. Such discourses and practices are constantly constructed and performed by individuals in different spaces (Schwandt 2000). Critical post-structural approaches often adopt discursive methodologies with the goal of showing how certain points of view and subject positions have become dominant and accepted as

natural, or common-sense 'truths' over time in different spaces (Lloyd 2007). Foucault (2003) uses the term 'genealogy' to describe this process as an 'investigation into how discourses function and the political aims they fulfil' (Salih 2002, p 48). Post-structural approaches tend to focus on the ways various discourses intersect to shape subjectivities. This includes an appreciation for both the enabling and constraining effects of discourse on subjectivities.

In this thesis I use the terms 'subject' and 'subjectivity' rather than 'identity' because as Probyn (2003) suggests, these terms fit more within a post-structural understanding of discourse. Debates about the human subject within geography have been substantial and significant (see Longhurst 2003). Much recent work has drawn on post-structural ideas to question the long-held belief that our selves are essential and somewhere deep inside us (Probyn 2003). While there are different theories around how subject formation occurs (for example, psychoanalytic, Freudian, Lacanian), subjects are generally understood as an *effect* of the signifying practices of discourse, language and power relations. I do not review theories about the origin of the subject here, as these debates have been substantial and to some extent, remain unresolved. Rather, in Section 2.2 I discuss how Butler's (1996; 2006a; 2006b) ideas about desire, and Nancy's (1991) concept of being-in-common, provide a framework for understanding why and how subjects create relations with others. This focus on unfixed subjectivities, desire, and being-in-common provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of Letting Space art projects and the Wellington Timebank in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. From there I move on to outlining how subjects challenge, resist and overflow limiting subject positions. This discussion draws on the ideas of Rancière in relation to political moments, to provide a framework for analysing how subjects expand and shift dominant discourses discussed in the empirical chapters. This chapter concludes by providing a brief summary of how these post-foundational understandings of subjectivity and social action have been applied by geographers concerned with social actions and subjects relating to neoliberal capitalism and the work society.

2.2 Subject formation, desire and boundary making

One of the more recent and influential theorists to discuss questions of desire and boundary formation in relation to subjectivity is Judith Butler. She frames desire relatively broadly, as an important motivating force for the subject. She argues that desire can be understood as a process of increasing the capacity for self-knowledge and the impulse to know (Butler 1999). This desire and knowledge is recognised both through our bodies (the forms we inhabit) and through the work, relations and practices we perform. The desire to know is intersubjective in the sense that we need relations with others to make sense of our own subjectivity.

There has been much writing about the ways subjects construct their subjectivities through relations with others, specifically through identifying differences or oppositions whereby a subject understands who and what they are by comparing it to something they are not. Lloyd (2007, p 18) notes that this is often called the dialectic, where 'one term in the pair actually requires its opposite in order to define itself, it depends on the term that appears to negate it'. So the understanding of what it means to be a male only has meaning through its relation to an opposite - being female. Salih (2002) notes that subjectivities, such as gender, while drawing on specific bodily forms, are constructed and constituted by language which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. 'There is no 'I' outside language since identity is a signifying practice and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings' (Salih 2002, p 64). In this way the very act of saying 'I'm a woman' or 'I'm a man' draws on historical boundary identifications which, while seeming 'natural', actually serve to obscure the way these identifications have been naturalised. Telling examples of these processes include the way in which until relatively recently, babies born in minority world hospitals with indeterminate sexual organs were surgically modified close to birth so that they could be raised within the existing sexed binary. This surgical work serves to both remove the visible evidence of anxiety provoking boundary crossing bodies while maintaining and perpetuating the idea that female and male bodies fall into 'naturally' discrete binaries (Salih 2002).

In becoming culturally intelligible subjects, people engage with processes of definition or boundary making. The way subjects identify or dis-identify with someone or something is a 'fragile and contradictory achievement' (Pratt 2010, p. 729) and linked to ideas of reciprocal

recognition. In its simplest terms I understand recognition as the desire of a self-consciousness to know another self-consciousness (an Other) 'that can affirm its existence as a self-conscious, and autonomous being' (Lloyd 2007, p 16). The self-consciousness begins from a presumed moment of independence, however this is quickly replaced with the knowledge that through its desire to be recognised by the Other, it becomes dependent on it, which creates what some authors have called a 'life and death struggle' (Lloyd 2007, p. 16). This struggle is characterised by attempts to both consume and possess the Other, while at the same time needing to maintain its existence. Lloyd (2007) notes that Butler's work has drawn on Foucault's to show the limitations of thinking about subjectivities only in this dialectic form. Understanding subjectivities as only constructed through dialectic forms contributes to reifying the idea that there is something inherently fixed or essential about certain subjects. Butler's (2006a) work has explored what is excluded through the construction of such binary oppositions and in the process sought to show how such oppositions gain and maintain such cultural purchase (see also Davies 2008). In the next paragraphs I draw on the ideas of Nancy to complement Butler's by providing an alternative framing to this dialectic. Nancy's (1991; 2000) understanding of subjectivity provides a useful framework for understanding processes of community, identification and inclusion/exclusion. In chapters 4, 7 and 8, Nancy's ideas are used to complement Massey's (2005; 2007) in terms of cultivating a more open politics of place.

One of the common threads running through work on subjectivities is how practices of community involving inclusion and exclusion are enacted in different spaces. Geographers such as Bond (2011), Panelli and Welch (2005), Welch and Panelli (2007) and Rose (1997c) have drawn on the work of Nancy (1991, 2000) to explore the ways in which subjects come together to form communities and the material effects these processes have on subjects. These geographers' empirical work uses Nancy's (1991, 2000) ideas to understand what motivates subjects to form communities, and explain some of the boundary making processes of inclusion and exclusion that play out through community relations. As outlined earlier, Butler understands desire as a need to know, a need to make sense of one's self in relation to others (Salih 2002). Nancy (1991) argues that this ongoing need that human subjects appear to have for relationship with others (which could be understood as a desire for community) arises from the shared experience of 'singular finitude', which is essentially

an awareness of death. His understanding of subjectivity is premised on the idea that rather than some pre-existing 'single, substantial essence of Being itself', the experience of being is always a case of being-with some other/s (2000, p 12). It is this need to alleviate some of the anxiety of singular finitude that motivates subjects to create relations with others and thereby form communities. So as Bond (2011, p 782) notes, while subjects are singular beings, they 'can only know and experience [their] strangeness and [their] difference in relation to others'. Nancy suggests that it is the being-with an other that is most significant in forming any sense of self, and is integral to explaining why people desire and form community.

As Welch and Panelli (2007) point out, Nancy's understanding of subjectivity and community challenges much previous academic work on community processes. Instead of seeing community as a fixed social construction, or a bounded social collective premised on feelings of belonging and inclusion, Nancy frames it as 'the event of being-with, or that which constitutes being' (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 351). In this way community can 'never be the idealised fantasy of common-being, nor a unity of experience or perspective' (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 350). Nancy (2000) uses the term 'singular plural' to explain these incomplete and shifting relational processes of community. In other words, '[b]eing in this simultaneously singular and plural form involves continual cross-referencing between 'self' and the non-self 'other' not as binary poles but as a continuous condition of co-constitution' (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 350). What Nancy suggests matters, are those points of continual cross-referencing, those connections and moments which are complex in the sense that they '*expose*, as well as *bridge*, the distances, differences and spaces separating singular (plural) selves' (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 351). Welch and Panelli (2007, p 351) note that it is these moments that are most significant in terms of understanding empirical community dynamics, 'the potency of 'connection' and 'between' exists in a conception of community as a connection of beings-in-common that distances at the very moment that it appears to bind'. Nancy's understanding of subjectivity resonates with Butler's outlined above, for rather than thinking about subjectivities as constituted only through binary oppositions, subjects are mutually constituted by multiple moments of connection and being-with, but also moments of distancing and the recognition of difference.

Nancy's (1991) ideas have important political implications because they provide an explanation of why subjects continue to desire and practice forms of community, while simultaneously being aware of, and dissatisfied by the limits, distances and exclusions experienced through community encounters. A key point Nancy (1991) makes is that community need not rest on some essential or ascribed identity, but that all beings could (potentially) be included in community, which provides for a certain radical potential. However, this potentially endlessly diverse community creates a tension for subjects, because it is essentially too inclusive to provide any alleviation for feelings of singularity. Hence people seek out membership in more exclusive groups and communities, 'even though such communities can provide only partial and ephemeral relief from anxiety and singularity' (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 353). As Bond (2011, p 783) notes, to reduce feelings of singularity, anxiety and uncertainty, people tend to 'seek a fixed identity through commonality' which can be thought of as community's work. Bond (2011, p 783) writes that community is:

always at work seeking commonality, or an essence to bind it on the basis of sameness. It is work because it is never possible to achieve a full identity although it is always desired. In Nancy's terms, such constructed common being communities are myth – both in the sense of being mythical or a fiction and in the sense of constituting an entity that is figured or called into being via speech acts.

Nancy (1991) argues that this myth-making is significant in alleviating anxieties by gathering singularities together and has significant political implications in terms of which subjects are included and excluded. While myth-making is powerful, these processes are always inoperative because the realities of lived community never quite achieve the desired commonality (or myth). They are unstable, interrupted and un-worked. Or, in other words – there is a constant tension where myths work community into a sense of commonality, while singularity constantly seeks to unwork this commonality and make community inoperative.

The understanding of subjectivity and community put forward by Butler and Nancy provides a framework for better understanding the everyday and messy processes of inclusion and exclusion. Sibley (1995) is probably best known within geography for his important work on

subjectivities and exclusion. While he does not draw on the work of Butler or Nancy specifically, his empirical analysis of how boundaries are used to form self/Other binaries in different contexts, where the Other is both desired and reviled, has provided important insights. Part of his work involves examining the types of discourses and imaginings used to construct the Other, often by highlighting how the abject is invoked. Sibley (1995) shows how more dominant groups in society use abject descriptions and language to fix, revile and restrict subjects to certain places and times. He also suggests that those subjects who transgressed borders are threatening because they create fear and anxiety. He characterises such subjects as 'in between states' and examples include children turning into adults and, as discussed above, intersexuals. They cause fear and anxiety because they threaten contamination and pose a challenge to more dominant binary subject positions. Sibley (1995) links these more psychological processes to material effects in terms of who is allowed to access certain spaces. His work illustrates how more dominant groups in society use specific discourses to demonise and legitimise the exclusion of certain subjects from various places. To draw on Nancy here: we could also see the processes Sibley (1995) describes as forms of myth-making where singular subjects come together and revile others because they are perceived as a threat to their sense of self and ultimately, way of life. Other critical geographers have maintained an interest in exclusionary processes, illustrating the value of maintaining a geographic lens when discussing subjectivities and space (see for instance Cresswell 1996; Herbert 2008; 2009; 2011).

2.2.1 Interpellation

As suggested above, critical post-structural work like Butler's (2006a), Nancy's (1991, 2000) and Sibley's (1995) provides important theoretical insights into how subjectivities cultivate a sense of selfhood through language, and being-with others that involve processes of boundary demarcation, inclusion and exclusion. These various processes are shaped by wider socio-cultural contexts and in this way subjects are partially shaped by disciplining discourses, which are often called subjection processes. Longhurst (2003) notes that in cultural geography in the 1980s there was much debate focused around the role structure and agency played in subject formation. Structure was commonly understood as those circumstances which dictate what people could do, while agency was understood as the ability for people to choose their own paths or actions. These debates around subjectivity

and agency moved in the 1990s onto discussion around the effects of discourse, representation, and how different spaces both shaped subjectivities and were shaped by them (Longhurst, 2003). So for instance, Pratt (2009 p 729) writes that subjects are:

interpellated or 'hailed' as particular subjects through the institutions of the family, education, religion and state, and through our own daily practices in relation to them. Subjectivities are built up through these practices of subjection, but these are multiple and sometimes conflicting, always constituted in particular contexts.

Lloyd (2007) notes that this idea of being 'hailed' or 'interpellated' comes from Althusser and is often linked to structural understandings of identifying the moment when a subject comes into being through categorising language processes. She (2007, p 12) suggests that Foucault on the other hand looks at the:

variable and historically specific ways in which subjects - or rather subject positions - are produced by discourse and power, while in its Derridean form it focuses on the impossibility of defining any identity (for instance, woman) because any such definition is inherently open to resignification. As such, it is 'undecidable'.

These ideas are relatively complex and to a certain extent I am not overly concerned here with resolving different understandings of when a subject comes into being. I would suggest that Nancy's understandings outlined above are useful, in that any definitive categorisation of a subject as, say, a 'woman' as ultimately impossible - impossible because any sense of commonality based on essential binary categories of identification are a myth. Such myths are powerful though and constantly being both re-affirmed through more dominant societal gender norms, and also challenged and re-worked as subjects seek to alleviate feelings of singularity and anxiety.

The discussion above highlights a number of key points in relation to subjectivity that inform the analysis in the empirical chapters which follow. In this thesis I draw on the anti-essentialist understanding that subjects are interpellated through more dominant discourses, however as Nancy suggests these processes are always incomplete and inoperative. This understanding creates possibilities for resisting and overflowing the subject positions more dominant discourses seek to construct. In this research I am more interested in the political possibilities created by interpellation processes. Following Gibson-

Graham (2006, p 24), what interests me is how subjects 'may shift and create new identities for themselves despite the seemingly hegemonic power of dominant discourses'.

As outlined already, Nancy's and Butler's understanding of the subject as unfixed and constituted through relations with others complements Massey's (2004) theorisations of space as relational and unfixed. Many geographers have drawn on Butler's ideas around performativity to highlight how subject positions are constitutive of and constituted through different spaces and places. For example, Longhurst (2003) notes that work in the 1990s and early 2000s on subjectivity looked at the ways in which different spaces and contexts both allow and delimit individual and collective subject performances. A key point Butler (2006a) makes is that subjectivities are performative constructs. However, these performances are not like those of an actor. The subject is not behind or before its performance. Subjectivities are something we do, rather than, something we are. Similarly Heckert (2010, p 43) writes that being 'is always a *becoming*, never an achievement, a truth, an actor pre-existing the enactment' (emphasis in original).

To illustrate this concept Butler (2006a) shows how subjects become women, through the way they engage in culturally specific bodily practices within certain historical contexts. This involves practicing and performing how a woman should look, what they should wear, how they should talk, sit and move. These ideas were picked up by geographers to show that 'not only is subjectivity always emplaced; it is also always embodied' and that one's subjectivity is performed and reinforced through everyday, lived experiences (Longhurst 2003, p 285). An important aspect of these everyday lived experiences involves acknowledging that one's subjectivity is intimately tied up with one's body and that this is not just a social construct (Brown and Knopp 2003). These ideas resonate with Nancy's assertion that subjectivities are constructed and experienced through being-with others. Such an understanding highlights the embodied nature of these processes. A lot of geographic work has looked at how certain bodies become fixed or designated in different ways - whether this be through skin colour, body size, gender or sexuality (see for instance Bell and Valentine 1995; Longhurst 2011; Valentine 1998). Such fixings have very real consequences and shape people's lived experiences through being denied access to space or employment and through other forms of discrimination including bodily violence.

Probyn (2003) suggests that even though there is a wide variety of different spaces and experiences, there are a limited number of subject positions which can be enacted and these are often informed by societal ideas about what constitutes a good or bad subject. Butler (2006a) illustrates these good and bad subjects through the way societies privilege certain positions over others, such as heterosexuality over homosexuality. Or as Weeks suggests and as outlined in Section 1.2.2, those subjects who resist waged labour are framed as lazy and somehow immoral. This does not mean that these are stable and discrete good or bad subject positions. Rather, we are all situated within a range of possible positions depending on aspects of our bodies and lived experiences. Dominant societal ideas about what it means to be a good or bad subject are always in process and open to change and contestation. What Probyn (2003) and Butler (cited in Salih 2002) note are that these processes of privileging certain positions create very real concerns relating to cultural survival because society punishes those who perform their identity incorrectly, or who enact bad positions. Butler talks about how what is at issue for those who deviate from the norms of a recognisable or legitimate subjectivity is having a liveable life - one that is 'recognised as having value and legitimacy' (cited in Lloyd 2007, p 33). As noted in Section 1.2.4, widening conceptions of what counts as a legitimate subject in relation to the work society is a key question explored in this thesis.

So how do we negotiate these variously privileged subject positions in daily life? Probyn (2003) draws on Althusser's ideas to suggest that most of us try to enact an ambiguous position by being a good subject. We accept our submission, discipline ourselves and conform to what being a good subject is, and in the process forget the 'reality of being subjected to different ideological systems' (Probyn 2003, p 293). However, this is not to say that we do not necessarily feel conflicted or constrained by these limited and sometimes conflicting positions. In fact it is often these mundane conflicts in everyday contexts which can reveal how subjection occurs - the everyday forms of policing, conformity and obedience. For instance Butler writes:

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form that power takes. To find, however, that

what 'one' is, one's very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another (quoted in Davies 2008, p 10).

Butler goes on to suggest that this paradox can be productive: '[t]hat my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility' (cited in Davies 2008, p 10).

The ideas discussed above suggest a relatively nuanced understanding of power relations and dominant discourses. Debates within geography have ranged over how power and resistance operate and are mobilised. For example, Brown et al (2007, p 5) draw on Foucault (1990), understanding power not as something an individual or institution holds, but as 'an amalgam of forces, practices, processes and relations' which include resistance as an entangled process (see also Sharp, Routledge, Philo, and Paddison 2000). Deleuze and Guattari (1988) employ the metaphor of the rhizome to conceptualise power. Drawing on these ideas Heckert (2011) writes that power has neither a centre nor an end that is reducible to one particular source (such as patriarchy or capitalism). Rather, power forms 'complex intersecting patterns' (2011, p 197). In this thesis I draw on both Heckert's (2011) and Brown et al's (2007) understanding of power – conceptualising the mobilisation of power as a process which can be productive and take many forms, through a whole range of social relations, including willing subjection and the desire to be a good subject.

So for example, in relation to various forms of progressive social action, I follow Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) who see the practices of activists as the deployment of a form of power. They frame the practices of activists in their research not as something external to more dominant neoliberal capitalist relations, but as emerging from and through these relations in a constantly evolving way. This framing by Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) resonates with Gibson-Graham's (2006) point that even the way we conceptualise the economy and waged labour has implications for theorising alternatives. For if we continually emphasise the view that neoliberal capitalism is an all-powerful force structuring our lives, then to some degree we end up subjecting ourselves to that story and reinforcing the hegemony of this view. What Gibson-Graham (2006) and Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) suggest therefore is a more nuanced and hopeful understanding of power connected to the more everyday beliefs people hold and actions they repeatedly perform. Wylie (2006) notes that Foucault's work

demonstrates how repeated everyday performances in specific places perpetuate discourses. Hence it is through examining these more everyday performances that we can gain an appreciation for how discourses enable and constrain subjectivities and importantly, open up the potential to imagine and enact alternatives.

2.2.2 Performing differently

You do go for the more hopeful, fluid moments, for which I'm quite grateful and which makes sense to do, precisely as one is trying to figure out how certain norms do take hold and how that hold can be lessened (Butler quoted in Davies 2008, p 243).

This quote by Butler points to the sentiment underpinning the three broad questions of this research outlined in Section 1.2.4. Specifically: if there are a limited range of subject positions constructed through discourse, what is the nature of individual and collective agency; and, if people find subject positions in relation to the work society constraining, how do they open up space for alternatives? Or to put it another way, given the contradictions and adverse effects of the work society outlined in Chapter 1, how do people collectively imagine and enact alternatives in the face of more dominant neoliberal capitalist discourses which seek to constrain and de-legitimise these. The discussion above has suggested some possibilities, but in the remainder of this chapter I discuss affect, performativity and the post-foundational ideas of Rancière around disrupting the order of the sensible to provide a theoretical framing for the analysis in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8.

Butler understands the subject as having agency in the sense that there are opportunities for subverting dominant discourses to radical and political ends (Salih 2002). Post-structural critiques have suggested that the most effective way to challenge dominant and restrictive subject positions is to show how a more privileged term or position, say waged work, is dependent on the lesser privileged term or position such as domestic (un-waged work) (Lloyd 2007). An important aspect of this involves drawing attention to the constructed nature of certain positions that may have an interest in presenting themselves as 'natural' or 'right'. For example, Butler's (2006a) work demonstrates the constructed nature of gender through her analysis of drag performances. She argues that drag performances

reveal all gender to be a form of parody by illustrating that there is no essential femininity or masculinity. Rather, femininity is an effect of specific bodily practices - practices which men can (often) convincingly perform. She suggests that while gender norms are culturally conditioned, through appropriating these norms and exposing their very constructedness, space is generated for their transformation¹¹.

There has been useful work, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s deconstructing the exclusionary discourses and spaces of sexism, racism and homophobia (Cloke 2005; Cresswell 1996; Massey 1991a; Massey 1994; Valentine 1998). Popke (2010) notes that more recently geographers have moved towards exploring the interconnections between subject positions or what Nancy calls 'being in common'¹² (see also Panelli and Welch 2005). Some of this work has used the concept of subjects 'being-in-common' to theorise moving beyond the (often) fixed and exclusionary identity politics of earlier decades (Day 2004; Heckert 2010). Along with this work there has also been a shift in focus from what Whatmore (2006, p 603) calls 'discourse to practice', whereby theorists see social agency articulated through performance rather than representational discourse.

The related second change Whatmore (2006) has identified is the move from looking at meaning to understanding affect. Whatmore (2006, p 604) sees affect as:

the force of intensive relationality - intensities that are felt but not personal; visceral but not confined to an individuated body. This shift of concern from what things mean to what they do has methodological consequences for how we train our apprehensions of 'what subjects us, what affects and effects us'.

Anderson (2009, p 8) notes that while there is debate over how to understand and define affect, he agrees with Whatmore, stating that affect is generally understood as an intensive capacity - 'unformed and unstructured intensities that, although not necessarily experienced by or possessed by a subject, correspond to the passage from one bodily state to another and are therefore analysable in terms of their effects'. In this way affect is often

¹¹ Work by others has shown how certain bodies and subject positions can be mobilised as sites of resistance and transgression of normative landscapes and orderings. For example, Cresswell (1996) has shown how the occupation by women of Greenham Common to protest increased militarisation used certain bodies and subject positions to transgress the militarised space of the common.

¹² Dikec (2005, p 185) notes that Nancy uses this term to 'imply that there are no definitive bases for attachment, in other words, no proper places that definitively secure identities'.

described as impersonal or pre-personal and therefore different from emotion, which tends to be understood as the 'socio-linguistic fixing of intensity that thereafter comes to be defined as personal' (Anderson 2009, p 9). Whatmore argues that theories of affect have implications for how we undertake research, for if we think of discourse as a form of practice, how do we go about understanding the effects of such practice, the affects different bodies experience and how they affect other bodies (human and non-human).

This practice turn has highlighted the importance of moving beyond just talking and creating texts, to experimental practices which somehow capture the affective registers – and in the process somehow extend what we understand as a research subject. These kinds of ideas have been drawn on by action researchers (including Gibson-Graham 2006) and such approaches are based on the understanding that the object of study (for performative research) comes into being through being enacted in the practice of the research itself¹³ (Dewsbury 2010).

Beausoleil (2014) suggests that focusing on the role of affect counters what Brennan (2004) calls the 'foundational fantasy' of much western theory which prioritises the autonomy of a unified subject as a pre-condition for political change. In this way the turn towards practice and affect connects with Butler's and Nancy's framing of a fluid, relational subject. Theories of affect reflect Nancy's idea of being-with an other by acknowledging 'that we are always-already *affected* and only ever in response to the world in which we are embedded' (Beausoleil 2014, p 20, emphasis original).

Work drawing on theories of affect has highlighted the political possibilities of moving away from more cognitive ways of understanding subjectivation¹⁴ processes and social change (see for example Dewsbury 2010, Woodward and Lea, 2010). While this work on affect has been varied, it has tended to illustrate the ways subjects become attached to certain truths, identities and social relations which shape their self-beliefs and interactions with others.

¹³ In my reading of affect and non-representational theory (see for instance Thrift 2008), I see some similarities to arguments feminist geographers have been making for many years, particularly in relation to the historical privileging of mind over body and reason over emotion (see McDowell's 2010 critiques in relation to these points). As Popke (2010) also notes some writing on non-representation theory privileges an individualism which fails to engage with responsibility or collective being-in-common.

¹⁴ Gibson-Graham (2006, p xxxvi) understand 'resubjectivation' as 'the mobilisation and transformation of desires, the cultivation of capacities, and the making of new identifications' with alternative economic forms.

These attachments to norms are formed through both cognitive and precognitive processes in complex interplays between memories, encounters, neurological, and bodily processes which create enduring stories and structural pathways in subjects' bodies (Beausoleil 2014; Woodward and Lea 2010). Various authors have shown how subjects become conditioned to certain discourses and ways of being, but also how they overflow and entertain alternatives, challenge hegemonic discourses, often through embodied actions such as dance (see Somdahl-Sands 2011), theatre (see Beausoleil 2014; Pratt 2000), and other performative practices (see Feigenbaum et al 2013; Kanngieser and Grindon 2013; Routledge 2012).

The kinds of embodied-affectual practices discussed by these authors are a useful way of moving beyond fixed representations of subjectivities because they tend to focus more on the present than 'describe or relay a determinate message or represent an elsewhere' (Beausoleil 2014, p 23). In this way they can reflect or be seen as radical democratic moments that post-foundational theorists like Rancière (2001) are concerned with theorising. For rather than conveying traditional political demands which tend to perpetuate social systems of domination and control (see Day 2004), some forms of aesthetic-affective encounters can actually interrupt what Rancière calls the order of the sensible in creative and unexpected ways. In the next section I outline how Rancière's ideas provide a tool for explaining how subjects resist and overflow dominant discourses.

2.3 Disrupting the order of the sensible

The post-foundational theories of Rancière have received increasing attention within the social sciences. A strong thread in his work involves theorising what constitutes political actions and moments, and how these instances are linked to specific subjectivities and spaces. In the following discussion I outline his ideas about how subjects can disrupt the order of the sensible. Rancière's understanding of a disruption of the order of the sensible provides a useful lens through which to analyse how subjects move beyond limiting dominant discourses and is drawn on in Chapters 5, 6 and 8.

Rancière (2003, p 201) writes that:

In the end everything in politics turns on the distribution of spaces. What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? For me,

political action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done to it.

In some ways these ideas are not new and geographers have been exploring these questions for many years. However, Rancière (1998) makes some useful distinctions between what he calls 'the police' (*le police*), 'the political' (*le politique*) and 'politics' (*la politique*). These distinctions provide a helpful framing for the discussion about some of the Letting Space projects and aspects of the Wellington Timebank which follow. Rancière (1998, p 29) understands the police as:

an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.

He suggests that the police are concerned with maintaining this order of the sensible which could be understood as a kind of normalising and accepted social arrangement (or, in other words - dominant discourses). Dixon (2009, p 422) writes that the order of the sensible can be understood as the 'visible appreciation of form and feature, which is then conceived of as imbricated in complex relations of dominance and subordination between various elements of science, state and capital'. In this way Rancière understands the order of the sensible as shaping the material realities of people's lives, including how they make meaning, where they can live and work, and significantly, what they can say about these arrangements.

So for Rancière, the police are not necessarily police officers employed by the state (although they can be). Rather, the police include a whole range of activities - including state processes and other spontaneous social relations which are in dynamic flux. Dikec (2005) suggests that we should not confuse Rancière's description of the police as some form of totalitarianism or as some form of binary opposition between the state and society. Instead the police can be thought of as the continual struggle or contestation to fix and normalise meaning. 'As conceived by "the police", society is a totality comprised of groups performing specific functions and occupying determined spaces' (Rancière 1998, p 19). The police order

is therefore mostly concerned with governance or distribution and not necessarily repression.

To further explain this Rancière (1998, p 19) writes that 'the essence of policing is not repression but distribution – distribution of places, peoples, names, functions, authorities, activities and so on – and the normalisation of this distribution'. The police seek to create a 'whole' society where everyone and thing is named, accounted for, and in their proper place. This society may well include both those enjoying their freedom and those with differing interests or demands (Dikec 2005). The police order can be tolerant of such difference as long as these individuals and groups are properly recognised and placed. However, complete governance or categorisation is an impossibility, but still one that the police order attempts to fill. Consequently the order of the sensible is dynamic and contested as there will always be some subjects and forms of social action which do not quite fit their categorisation or overflow their name and place. It is these subjects and actions that enable the possibility of political moments.

Conventionally, political moments are seen as encounters where competing interests are expressed or where unequal power relations operate and are challenged (Dikec 2005). Rancière suggests that contrary to these popular understandings, the true political moment does not occur when demands are expressed to elites to bring about change, but rather involves the speaking out of the right to a certain form of liberty. Drawing on Rancière, Swyngedouw (2009, p 606) writes that:

politics (or a properly political sequence) arises when, in the name of equality, those who are not equally included in the existing socio-political order, demand their 'right to equality', a demand that both calls the political into being, renders visible and exposes the 'wrongs' of the police order: this is the place and time of politics when the staging and articulation of an egalitarian demand exposes the lack, the superfluous, inscribed in the order of the given situation.

The political moment then, involves an interruption or transgression of the order of the sensible - when individuals or a group challenge the nature of the relationship through which they are positioned, when those who are 'unaccounted for' speak (Dikec 2005).

Rancière describes this as a moment where groups articulate something which is more than 'noise', which challenges how certain subjectivities are understood and placed by the police.

But like Isin (2002) I wondered what this means. Is Rancière suggesting that there are simple binaries between who is visible and invisible? And if they are invisible and unaccounted for where do they come from and how do we recognise them? Dikec (2005) suggests that it is not so much that these subjects suddenly emerge or become visible, but rather that they overflow the police orders' logics of categorisation. Or, in other words, their subjectivity exceeds the categories constructed to name and place them. These categorisations are done in the right places at the right times through for example, casting votes in government elections, paying taxes, going to work or taking part in a survey or a census. Rancière (1998) describes these kinds of practices as the collapse of politics because they merely reinforce the order of the sensible. In disrupting these categorisations Rancière is not suggesting that there exists a group of individuals who will suddenly appear as new political subjects and challenge the police order. Instead he is suggesting that everybody is already counted and the unaccounted for 'is at once nowhere and everywhere' (Dikec 2005, p. 176). This is because 'the people' cannot be reduced to any single category because their subjectivities continually overflow these attempts at categorisation.

Dikec (2005) provides a helpful example of how this actually plays out. He notes that twenty years ago in France and much of Western Europe public policy discourse around immigration tended to be framed through a Marxist lens of working class immigrants being marginalised in a capitalist economy. Now the 'problem' of immigrants is primarily defined in various government policies as one of exclusion from wider society (which includes waged work, and education). Through these policy discourses which construct immigrants as excluded, the whole of society is named and placed – those included and those excluded. Through this naming and placing, the possibility of posing wider political questions is shut down. There is only room to modify the police order around who is included or excluded, there is no wider debate about the form of society they are either included in, or excluded from. Consequently debates about immigration tend to play out as moral concerns to either foster the inclusion of more immigrants, or around ensuring the security and protection of those (already) included from dangerous outsiders. So while there may be emotive debates about immigration policy, these are generally not 'true' political moments according to

Rancière's framing because such debates and moments only redistribute those who have already been accounted for.

Similarly Swyngedouw (2009) suggests that much of the dissent and contemporary forms of urban environmental protests would not meet Rancière's framing of a 'true' political moment because they are fully accounted for within the existing police order. Examples he gives include land-use protests, local pollution problems, road, airport and noise issues which, while they may become imbued with a certain political significance, tend to take place through existing political processes (such as planning regulations and environment courts). The subjectivities expressed by activists associated with these forms of protest and opposition are already named and placed within the existing (often legislative) framework. Swyngedouw (2009, p 615) writes that opponents,

become either instituted through public-private stakeholder participatory forms of governance, succumbing to the 'tyranny of participation' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) or are radically marginalized and framed as 'radicals' or 'fundamentalist' and, thereby, relegated to a domain outside the consensual postdemocratic arrangement.

Swyngedouw suggests that even when such concerns (or subjects) are excluded as 'radical' they still fail to disrupt the order of the sensible because they leave the existing order intact. They 'ultimately support what they intend to subvert, since the very field of such "transgressions" are already taken into account, even engendered by the hegemonic form' (Žižek 1999, p 264). These ideas relate to Mouffe's (2005) understanding of how a postpolitical consensus is maintained. Day (2004) argues that this postpolitical consensus (or closure) is facilitated by the neoliberal capitalist order either satisfying, negotiating with, or assimilating demands through participation and consultation which create the illusion of democracy. It is an illusion because debate is framed entirely within an existing order of the sensible that subtly limits the extent of the debate. While there has been recent debate about the usefulness and framing of the postpolitical as a concept (see for instance Darling 2014; McCarthy 2013; Swyngedouw 2010), the point about the ways in which subjectivities are named and placed within an order of the sensible provides a helpful framing to analyse some of the Letting Space projects discussed in Chapters 4-6.

So what does a 'true' political moment look like according to Rancière and what are the nature of subjectivities articulated through them? Dikec (2005, p 177) writes that the:

only place one finds the unaccounted for is in the emergence of a political articulation, at a particular time and space, an emergence that becomes the claim of the unaccounted for to *redefine the whole* and to speak for this whole, *which both is and is not yet* (emphasis original).

In this sense the political moment is not one in which individuals or groups attempt to be included in the whole, but rather the moment when the whole is re-defined through a disruption of the order. In applying Rancière's ideas, Dixon (2009, p 414) writes that the police order mis-take the place that individuals and groups have within it:

In the hegemonic notion of the social, those who have no place are not necessarily synonymous with the 'excluded', as such subjects have already been identified within a political regime and allotted a role; rather, they have no place because their subjectivity does not 'match' with that accorded to them. And, this mis-take is posited as an indicator of fundamental problems within the organisation of society as a whole.

Dixon (2009, p 415) provides a number of examples of individuals and groups whose 'subjectivity exceeds their allotted character and role and whose experiences have become the touchstone for broader debate on the state of society'. These include the subaltern, the insane, the criminal, the refugee and the teenager. While these subjects may be partially named and placed (at certain times), they are also somewhat problematic because they are often in between categories which threaten to disrupt the order of the sensible.

So if the above subjects possess the potential to disrupt the order of the sensible, how does this translate into a 'true' political moment according to Rancière? Rancière (1998, p 32) writes that a strike is not political if it only demands better wages or work conditions - it is political if it 'reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community'. This point reminds me of a discussion forum I went to about the widening gender wage gap and low minimum wage in Aotearoa New Zealand. One of the panellists tried to expand the limits of the discussion. She suggested that we should be moving

beyond just arguing about what wages should be and for whom. She suggested we should be asking questions about how our society understands work more broadly. For example, is the societal expectation that people work a forty hour week and earn enough to pay for shelter, clothes and food for themselves and their families? Or, if this is no longer 'the deal' so to speak, in the sense that is not possible due to the cost of living versus wages, then what is 'the deal' and what would we like it to be? Her point is pertinent to this discussion for through these questions she broadened the limits of the debate. Gone was the discussion about why gender wage gaps occur, instead a wider question emerged around what work means and how it is valued in relation to the operation of the wider community.

A further example of the 'true' political moment lies in Dikec's (2005) discussion of the story of the Roman Plebeians. In seeking greater equality in Roman society the Plebeians (commonly understood as the Roman working class) did not demand that their subjectivities be understood within an existing order - that is, that Plebeians should be treated with respect or should have better living conditions. What they did was reject the name given to them by the police order and claimed another name. Dikec describes how they defined themselves as 'men' rather than 'mortals'. This enabled them to create a new order or a new understanding of the 'whole'. The 'whole' was no longer identified as those of only Patrician or Plebeian descent. Nor was there any longer a difference in who had the ability to speak and be recognised by the police order. In doing this Dikec (2005, p 178) suggests that they constructed,

A space, a polemical space for addressing a wrong and demonstrating the equality of anyone with anyone, a common space in which two worlds – and two opposing logics, the logic of the police (true identification and proper placement) and the logic of equality – exist simultaneously.

While this example is helpful in illustrating the way certain subjects disrupt the order of the sensible, it does not really explain what happens at the individual and collective level. How did the Plebeians come to this new name? How did they agree on it and mobilise around it? When I first started reading Rancière I didn't know what to think. I thought he was setting up some kind of binary between a 'true' political moment and an 'untrue' one, between those accounted for and those unaccounted for (see also Panagia 2001 for a discussion

about essentialist language). I wondered how his framing of these ‘true’ political moments fits within a more post-structural understanding which tends to question such claims to absolutism. However, I do not think that is what he is getting at.

Rancière (1998, p 137) also talks about ‘intervals of [political] subjectification: intervals constructed between identities, between spaces and places. Political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds’. In this sense political moments come about by operating between subject positions, which is not unlike Nancy’s (1991) understanding of subjectivities forming through being-with others. For example, in thinking through my own position with neoliberal capitalist discourses I came to recognise that I am both simultaneously complicit in perpetuating certain practices to ensure my material and cultural intelligibility and survival, while also feeling constrained and limited by them. I identified with the paradoxical position outlined by Butler (quoted in Davies 2008) earlier and what Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) found in their work with activists – that subjects are never completely inside or outside neoliberal capitalist discourses. In relation to this point, Rancière (1998, p 40) helpfully writes that:

A political subject is not a group that ‘becomes aware’ of itself, finds its voice, imposes its weight on society. It is an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience.

This description of a political subject fits within my own experiences – where individuals and groups come together for a moment to articulate a specific point, and this may be very transitory, yet also subtly shift the order of the sensible. In many ways this conceptualisation of both subjectivity and political change fits with that outlined by Gibson-Graham in their action research (2006; 2008), here there are no fixed subjects, but rather subjects are multiply positioned and at times articulate these contradictions, but also connect different experiences and voice hidden or repressed desires and stories which reframe and overflow more dominant discourses (or the order of the sensible). In the empirical chapters which follow I draw on Rancière’s framing of a political subject as an operator to analyse how Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank reframe subjectivities and practices in relation to waged work. This framing allows me to show how people associated with these collectives connect different concerns in ways which do not

necessarily rest on unified, essentialist understandings of subjectivities, or even coherent 'political' identifications.

So what are the conditions of possibility for these political subjectivities to emerge? Rancière makes three suggestions. Firstly disruptions of the order of the sensible cannot be institutionalised, or rather, institutional space cannot be provided for such moments as this would mean they were already accommodated by and named within the order. So while space for dissent, say in legislative processes or organised political systems can be useful, this does not allow for 'true' political moments in Rancière's understanding. Secondly any redefinition or disruption will lead to a new order of the sensible. This is interesting because it implies a continual political process instead of an end point (which has implications for the debate around postpolitics and 'overthrowing neoliberal capitalism'). As such there is no socio-political utopia and the order of the sensible is not inherently good or bad, although there may be orders which place people in very different and unequal ways. Finally, political subjects cannot be predicted or identified before they disrupt the order of the sensible. Consequently Rancière suggests that the 'true' political moment is very rare. These conditions of possibility are why Ding and Schuermans (2012, p 722) note that Rancière's framing of political moments 'cannot be anticipated... but only retroactively revealed'.

I am not overly concerned with judging whether the examples in this thesis generate 'true' political moments according to Rancière's framing, for in some ways such judgements would be somewhat at odds with a post structural ontology and reify what Gibson-Graham (2006) call 'strong theory'. Additionally I wonder about the practical usefulness of making such judgements for those people and groups involved in the examples of social action I explore here. The key point I take from Rancière, Swyngedouw and Dikec however is that an important factor to be aware of and analyse are the relationships between certain subjectivities and how more dominant discourses (or the order of the sensible) name and place subjectivities and social action. This point has implications for thinking through how to overflow the more dominant discourses of neoliberal capitalism which simultaneously seeks to name, place and de-legitimise alternative subjectivities and practices.

2.4 Overflowing binaries: subjectivity and social action

In the preceding sections I have drawn on the ideas of Butler and Nancy to provide a framework for understanding subjectivities as fluid and constituted through being-with others through myth and inoperative community. I then outlined how Rancière's ideas provide a framework for understanding how political subjects shift dominant discourses or disrupt the order of the sensible. These concepts provide helpful theoretical frameworks which I draw on in the following empirical chapters to show how people resist, question and propose alternatives to the dominant discourses of the work society. This final section moves to discussing more empirical examples by geographers who have done work around subjectivities and social action in relation to neoliberal capitalism and the work society.

One of the key points suggested by geographers is that we should not view neoliberal capitalism as a singular project imposed on passive subjects who lack the agency to resist. Rather, neoliberal capitalism should be conceived of as a discourse that people engage with in complex ways (Bondi and Laurie 2005; Gibson-Graham 2006; Holloway 2010; Larner 2005). So for instance Gibson-Graham's (2006) approach frames the economy as a realm of social relations to which people subject themselves. This understanding allows researchers and participants to imagine other possibilities and Gibson-Graham (2007) suggest we should begin by assuming there is ambiguity and many alternative subject positions in play. Their (2007, p. 107) action research has the goal of fostering these alternative subject positions, by creating a 'desire for non-capitalist becomings' and encouraging participants to re-think their role in socio-economic relations. This involves encouraging people to think about what brings them joy and pleasure – specifically experiences which do not involve the transaction of money or work in the waged economy.

Echoing this point about fluid subjectivities, Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) found that social activists in the United Kingdom framed their actions in terms which go beyond fixed identities such as the 'militant' or the 'activist' because they saw these as exclusionary. Their research illustrates how people consciously managed their subjectivities through their clothing choice and communication styles to achieve certain goals. Through these practices their research participants attempted to overflow the dominant binaries of being either for, or against capitalist relations. Or in other words, they were attempting to move beyond the common stereotypes of what it means to be someone contesting neoliberal capitalism or

enacting alternatives. In Rancière's terms we could see this as an attempt to move beyond how the order of the sensible names and places subjects and practices.

Another helpful way of exploring social action is through what Day (2004) calls a 'politics of action' rather than a 'politics of demand'. He notes that many of the activist groups in civil society (commonly termed the 'new social movements' which emerged from the 1960's through to the 1990s) articulated a politics of demand requesting specific changes from the state and civil society. These movements articulated a wide range of demands, from legislative change associated with civil rights, (including women's, indigenous and gay rights) to greater environmental protection. While they achieved important changes, they did not alter the fundamental capitalist-democratic structures of minority world societies. Rather, they tended to perpetuate the very structures which exist in anticipation of demands¹⁵. A politics of demand creates a cycle of discipline and control prompting new demands which may be accommodated within the existing political structure. Day suggests that one way to challenge neoliberal capitalist discourses is to engage in a politics of action.

A politics of action is a process of surprising oneself and the structure by undertaking an action that 'precludes the necessity of the demand and thereby breaks out of the loop of the endless perpetuation of desire for emancipation' (Day 2004, p 734). Such forms of action (exemplified by the anti-globalisation protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s) have tended to work outside state forms and prioritise the process of action rather than any end goal. Day (2004) cites the example of the 'Reclaim the Streets' collective to illustrate these points. This collective has chapters across the world with a shared ideal of community ownership of public spaces. Chapters stage non-violent events, invading highways and roads and organising parties with sand pits for children to play in, free food and music. While this may obstruct other users (cars and trucks) the idea is that it is the vehicles which are obstructing pedestrians. This kind of politics is premised on the idea that change is possible through an accumulation of direct action and small changes at the local scale, counteracting the feeling of powerlessness an individual can experience. Groups like Reclaim the Streets

¹⁵ Day's (2004) framing of a politics of demand resonates with Weeks and Vraiti's point in section 1.2.2 that while feminist calls for better work for women have led to increasing equality, they have not questioned the underlying requirement or structure of waged labour.

do not make demands from the state or necessarily organise individuals into identifiable groups. Rather, they are concerned with taking actions to create the type of world they want to live in, and regain control over space locally in the present. Academic interest in these types of actions reflects Whatmore's (2006) earlier suggestion that there has been a shift in focus from discourse to practice. Day's (2004) framing of a politics of action also resonates with Rancière's understanding of the police order – whereby a politics of action can shift the nature of the order of the sensible by disrupting the naming and placing of subjects and actions.

The empirical examples discussed above illustrate how some of the individuals and groups involved in contemporary social action are reflexively aware of, and engaged in a politics of action, but also of representation around their own subjectivity which requires a re-think of the 'parameters of political agency' (Bondi and Laurie 2005, p 398). This involves negotiating a certain tension. While activists may be trying (whether consciously or not) to operate outside the reach of neoliberal capitalism, there is no pure 'outside'. Chatterton (2010, p 901) writes that 'our political contention uses the resources of everyday life to constantly create struggle within, against and beyond the present condition'. Such a tension-filled position or paradox can be difficult to negotiate, yet as Butler (quoted in Davies 2008) suggests, it also provides the possibility from which to both imagine and act differently.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described some key ideas in post-structural thinking and post-foundational theories about the nature of the subject and what constitutes political moments and social change. The chapter began by highlighting the role of desire and boundary making in relation to processes of interpellation and subjection. This discussion drew on the ideas of Butler and Nancy to provide a framework for understanding how and why subjects desire recognition through encounters with community to avoid unbearable feelings of singularity. Following this was a discussion around the ways subjects can resist or challenge those discourses that constrain, thereby opening up possibilities to act differently. The discussion then moved on to outline the post-foundational ideas of Rancière, specifically in relation to his framing of political moments as the disruption of the order of the sensible. Or to put another way, those moments when subjects disrupt the ways they are named and placed by

more dominant discourses. I have drawn on these ideas to create a framework to analyse both the subjectivities and practices associated with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank.

Figure 2.1 provides an outline of how these theoretical ideas are employed in this thesis. Butler's and Nancy's ideas around subjectivity, desire and community are used to analyse how subjects associated with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank attempt to meet their material and emotional needs, while fostering being-with others to alleviate some of the anxiety associated with precarity and urban living. Rancière's ideas around the disruption of the order of the sensible are drawn on to analyse how Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank disrupt the dominant discourses of the work society in unexpected and creative ways. The underpinning ideas about unfixed or non-essential subjectivities are then drawn on to link back to Gibson-Graham's and Massey's calls for academic research that fosters a more open politics of place. Underpinning these theoretical ideas is Week's broader concept of the work society, specifically, the question of how subjectivities can be fostered that exceed the limiting discourses of contemporary waged work.

Figure 2.1: Connection of theoretical ideas employed in this thesis in relation to research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described a critical post-structural ontology and theoretical framework for conceptualising how subjectivities are articulated through discourse, performative social actions and political moments. This chapter builds on that by further developing the epistemological and methodological approach underpinning this research and is divided into three sections. The first section outlines my epistemological approach which includes a discussion of the goals and value of academic research. The second section outlines the ethnographic methodology employed. It includes descriptions of the specific research methods used for Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank and a discussion of how empirical material was analysed. The final section includes some reflections on my positionality in the research, the ethical considerations which guided the process, and a discussion around some of the constraints experienced during the research.

3.2 Epistemology and academic research

Within geography there has been a renewed interest in what an ethical, yet critical approach to research entails. Popke (2007; 2009) notes that there has been a resurgence in thinking about both the goals of critical academic research and how it should be undertaken (see for example Graham and Roelvink 2010; Massey 2004; Popke 2007). In relation to this interest in ethics, Olson and Sayer (2009) suggest that much recent critical research is underpinned by a normative vision of maximising human good, yet authors often fail to clearly explain what this means. In responding to Olson and Sayer's (2009) call for being more transparent about the values underpinning research, I follow Massey's (2007) assertion that it is not enough for critical geographers to critique exclusionary and unequal practices and conceptions of space. We need to be proposing alternatives and raising political questions around responsibility.

In applying Massey's (2007) call for empirical research which investigates questions of responsibility I have found the work of Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008) and the Community Economies Collective useful (see for instance Healy, 2014; Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003). Gibson-Graham (2006) explore some of the

subjectivation processes which have limited and constrained theirs (and others) thinking around what constitutes legitimate academic research. In 2008, they wrote that much critical academic work has been grounded in scepticism and negativity, which is not a helpful position to imagine and perform hope-filled alternatives. To overcome this they suggest academics need to move beyond the paranoid motive in much theorising which seeks to minimise surprise. Gibson-Graham (2008, p 619) write:

What if we were to accept that the goal of theory is not to extend knowledge by confirming what we already know, that the world is a place of domination and oppression? What if we asked theory instead to help us see openings, to provide a space of freedom and possibility?

To do this they advocate practicing a form of 'weak theory' which could never know that social experiments and alternative economic practices are doomed to fail. They suggest that weak theory can be used to welcome the unexpected and care for the new as 'objects of our thought' (2008, p 619). This type of approach draws on second-wave feminist thought that the process of changing the world begins through changing oneself.

Through their activist research Gibson-Graham engage in self-learning processes and new forms of subjectivation – for research participants and themselves. In terms of practicing weak theory, Gibson-Graham (2008, p 623) suggest 'reading for difference rather than dominance'. They draw on queer theory which has highlighted the range of forms of sexuality and gender without subordinating these to binary hierarchies of heterosexuality and homosexuality, or male and female. Through their own work they have queered the economy by showing the diverse range of socio-economic practices which co-exist alongside capitalism, to point to new possibilities. Gibson-Graham (2008, p 623) write that their interest in building new worlds involves:

making credible those diverse practices that satisfy needs, regulate consumption, generate surplus, and maintain and expand the commons, so that community economies in which interdependence between people and environments is ethically negotiated can be recognised now and constructed in the future.

Gibson-Graham's understandings of academic research and subjectivities more broadly reflect many of the ideas discussed in Chapter 2 - specifically, moving beyond fixed and binary understandings of subjectivity and place. Their epistemological understanding of

research as an ethical open-ended process of change informs the methodological approach I employ in this research.

The critical post-structural theoretical framework underpinning this research suggests that I do not take the view that there is some fundamental truth to be uncovered through research, nor that through asking the right questions this truth will be revealed. Drawing on feminist epistemologies I view the research process as a co-fabrication, or a process of working together with participants for a specific purpose (see England 2006; Whatmore 2003). Critical post-structural feminist epistemologies tend to view assertions of neutrality and objectivity as truth making claims which often neglect the power relations which have historically, and continue to shape discourses of academic research (see for instance Massey, 1991a; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Rose, 1997a). Or, to draw on Rancière, I suggest that claims of, and for, neutrality and objectivity are discursive mechanisms through which the order of the sensible seeks to construct academic knowledge and practice in particular (and often limiting) ways. Consequently in this thesis I have clearly outlined the values underpinning my approach, and in the final section of this chapter reflect further on my positionality and some of the ethical negotiations I engaged in with participants.

3.3 Ethnography

Watson and Till (2010) note that while ethnography is historically associated with social anthropology and colonial research on indigenous groups, critical reflections on the method have also contributed to important discussions surrounding the 'crisis of representation' in the 1980s (Cahill, Sultana, and Pain 2007). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s critical, feminist and post-colonial ethnographic methodologies became much more attuned to issues of power, considerations around the position of the researcher and the ethics of representation, and importantly – thinking through the benefits of research for participants (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007).

Watson and Till (2010, p 4) write that 'within geography, ethnography is a research strategy used to understand how people create and experience their worlds'. Ethnography tends to be categorised as a qualitative methodology and as Cloke et al (2004) suggest, is therefore most appropriate for understanding how people create meaning and foster social change.

Ethnographic practices draw on a range of qualitative methods and source materials, from interview transcripts, secondary sources, performances and images, to the observations and embodied experiences of the researcher. It is this final aspect of the embodied participation and observations of the researcher which distinguish ethnography from other qualitative methods. For as Gesler and Kearns (2005) note, ethnography is concerned with experience as method, to enable the researcher to experience the everyday and spontaneous moments that may be missed through the more staged nature of interviews. Ethnographic methods therefore tend to be rather time intensive for the researcher, but are an effective way of exploring the 'experiential, the embodied, the emotive qualities of human experience' (Lincoln and Guba 2005, p 179). Ricketts Hein et al (2008, p 1266) suggest that recent research on more 'everyday' life practices' has sought to bring mobility into the research process, stating that it is the 'unique position of the embodied subject that generates their subjectivity, constituted through the relations between themselves and others'. Given that I was interested in understanding and fostering the practices associated with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank, and understood the research process as a co-construction - an ethnographic methodology was an appropriate choice to explore my research questions.

With the recent move from discourse to practice in geography there has been an increase of interest in participatory research approaches as well as renewed interest in thinking through the benefits of academic research for participants (Gergen and Gergen 2012; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007; Whatmore 2006). While participatory approaches go by different names, they are generally understood as a 'set of research frameworks designed to share power and return value to the participants of a research project' (McGuirk 2012, p 142). While I did not undertake the type of participatory approaches outlined by Kindon et al (2007), as I did not involve non-academics as researchers. I did employ similar methods to McGuirk's (2012) research with a Timebank in Dunedin. McGuirk adopted an approach whereby she was both a member of the collective and engaged in a range of administrative tasks, while also undertaking research that would benefit the collective. In this way she moved between a number of positions and roles during the research process which is one of the strengths of using an ethnographic methodology.

Although I used ethnographic methods with both Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank, there were some differences in the exact methods employed in each case. These different methods reflected the divergent organisational forms of the two collectives, and to some extent, the inherent uncertainties of the research process. These uncertainties included the following: being reliant on participants agreeing to be involved (see for instance McDowell 1998), navigating research relationships and encounters (see for instance Cupples 2002; Diprose, Thomas, and Rushton 2013; McDowell 2010), and issues around time, funding and institutional constraints (see Cook 2001). All these factors meant that slightly different methods were used for the two examples which were negotiated and adapted as I developed relationships with participants (Kindon and Latham 2002). In this way the methods used extended out of my epistemological understanding of research, where I sought to establish respectful and responsive interactions with participants that were context specific. In Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 I outline the specific methods used for each example.

3.3.1 Letting Space

I drew on a range of ethnographic qualitative methods to undertake research with Letting Space and associated artists. Table 3.1 outlines the specific methods undertaken and includes notes about pseudonyms and the naming of participants¹⁶ in the empirical chapters.

¹⁶ In the empirical chapters I refer to all interview participants associated with both Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank by their first and second names, including those who requested a pseudonym. Given the ethnographic methodology employed, I felt that using both first and second names (rather than just surnames) was a respectful way to acknowledge the relationships that developed through the research process.

Table 3.1: Outline of methods used for Letting Space

Method	Description and detail	Pseudonyms/names	Reference in text
Semi-structured interviews	Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery – curators, 1 joint interview	Real names used	Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011
	Matilda Fraser – Letting Space intern, 1 interview	Real name used	Fraser 26 October 2011
	Kim Paton – artist, 1 interview	Real name used	Paton 25 June 2013
	Tao Wells – artist, 1 interview	Real name used	Wells 14 November 2011
	Colin Hodson – artist, 1 interview	Real name used	Hodson 19 December 2011
	Bronwyn Holloway-Smith – artist, 1 interview	Real name used	Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011
	Dr Mark Harvey – artist, 1 interview	Real name used	Harvey 16 March 2012
	Abby Cunnane – arts worker, 1 interview	Real name used	Cunnane 2 October 2011
	Jo Wilson – arts worker, 1 interview	Pseudonym used	Wilson 20 October 2011
Participant Observation	<p>Attended openings of the following four art projects¹⁷:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Beneficiaries Office • The Market Testament • Pioneer City • Productive Bodies 	NA – public events with open, free invitations.	This material is referenced as ‘Research Journal date’.
	<p>Attended artist talks and/or panel discussions of the following art projects¹⁸:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Beneficiaries Office • The Market Testament • Pioneer City • Productive Bodies 	NA – public events with open, free invitations.	This material is referenced as ‘Research Journal date’ except the panel discussion for <i>Productive Bodies</i> which is referenced as ‘Harvey, Waring and Guthrie 13 March 2012’.

¹⁷ I did not attend the opening for the Free Store in Ghuznee Street, Wellington in 2011 as this was prior to confirming that Letting Space would be one of the examples explored in this research.

¹⁸ While I was unable to attend the artist talk for the Free Store by Kim Paton due to timing issues, I was able to obtain a recording of this talk which I transcribed. This source is referred to as ‘Paton August 2010’ in the empirical chapters.

	<p>Attended the following events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two day symposium entitled 'Where Art Belongs' organised by Massey University on the 28-29 October 2011. Sophie Jerram, Mark Amery and Tao Wells presented at this symposium. • 'The Urban Dream Brokerage' curated by Letting Space on the 29 July 2011. 	NA - public events with open, free invitations.	This material is referenced as 'Research Journal date' or 'Kraus and Wells 28 October 2011'. American art writer, Chris Kraus and Tao Wells were involved in a public discussion on this date.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated for two days in Productive Bodies, led by Dr Mark Harvey in February 2012. • Participated in two iterations of The Free Store by Kim Paton. First in Wellington 2011 and then in Henderson, Auckland 2012. 	NA - public events with open, free invitations.	This material is referenced as 'Research Journal date'.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked as a volunteer once a week for two months (October – November 2011) at the semi-permanent Free Store in Left Bank on Cuba Street¹⁹, Wellington until it closed at the end of 2011. 	Negotiated volunteer status with the organisers of this <i>Free Store</i> .	This material is referenced as 'Research Journal date'.

3.3.2 Wellington Timebank

As with Letting Space I drew on a range of ethnographic qualitative methods to undertake research with the Wellington Timebank. Table 3.2 outlines the specific methods undertaken and includes notes about pseudonyms and the naming of participants in the empirical

¹⁹ This semi-permanent Free Store in Cuba Street, Wellington was not directly associated with either Kim Paton or Letting Space. Rather a group of individuals associated with the Zeal Youth Group contacted Kim Paton and asked if they could create a semi-permanent Free Store using her idea and project's name (Paton 25 June 2013).

chapters. In the section following Table 3.2 I provide further explanation and justification of the methods used in relation to both Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank.

Table 3.2: Outline of methods used to research with the Wellington Timebank

Method	Description and detail	Pseudonyms/names	Reference in text
Semi-structured interviews	Hannah Mackintosh – Timebank coordinator	Real name used	Mackintosh 31 January 2013
	Sonya Cameron – Steering Committee member	Real name used	Cameron 20 November 2012
	Renee Ruston – Steering Committee member	Real name used	Rushton 26 November 2012
	Anna Porter – Steering Committee member	Real name used	Porter 17 December 2012
	Fairhall Parker – member	Pseudonym used	Fairhall 31 January 2013
	Claire Hewitt – member	Real name used	Hewitt 27 November 2012
Participation/ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From May - December 2012 I worked in the Timebank office one morning every week. Attended two Steering Committee meetings to discuss and report on the Timebank Tune-in. Attended a regional Timebank meeting in July 2012 with Hannah Mackintosh. Attended various other Timebank events including birthday celebrations, clothing swaps, and individual trades. 	Individuals are only identified if they signed a consent form permitting this.	This material is referenced as 'Research Journal date'.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated the Timebank Tune-in on behalf of the Steering Committee. 	A copy of this final report was made available to me by Hannah Mackintosh.	Referenced as 'Wellington Timebank'.

3.3.3 Discussion of methods

Through the range of methods described in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 I sought to immerse myself in the Letting Space art projects and the everyday practices of the Wellington Timebank²⁰. I found that being a participant observer at events like the two day symposium *Where Art Belongs* and *The Urban Dream Brokerage* was a useful way to better understand the position of Letting Space in relation to other art practices and institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand (including dealer galleries, public art galleries, education institutions and local government). Similarly I found that working at the Timebank office and attending trades and other events was a useful way to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday rhythms and practices of the Wellington Timebank. Through attending these various artist talks, symposium, art openings, Timebank meetings, events and through talking to members more informally I was more able to immerse myself in and experience the social relations fostered by the projects themselves. In approaching being a participant observer I sought to do what Gesler and Kearns (2005) suggest, to listen rather than talk, to become aware of what matters for others in specific settings.

I felt that participation in two of the art projects (*Free Store* and *Productive Bodies*) and in trading encounters through the Wellington Timebank were appropriate given that the two collectives are more broadly concerned with fostering alternative relational exchanges. Participating in the artists' talks, art projects, Timebank meetings and trades also provided useful background material to complement the information gained through the semi-structured interviews. So for instance, as shown in Table 3.1, I explored how the *Free Store* by Kim Paton, moved beyond the Letting Space series in Wellington, to Waitakere, Auckland and back to Wellington on Cuba Street. I visited and participated in the *Free Store* in Wellington and Waitakere, and then worked as a volunteer once a week for two months (October – November 2010) at the semi-permanent *Free Store* in Left Bank on Cuba Street, Wellington until it closed at the end of 2011. Similarly from May – December 2012 I worked in the Newtown office of the Wellington Timebank one morning every week. I performed a

²⁰ The empirical sources are referenced in the following ways in Chapters 4-9: Interview transcripts are referenced using the participant's last name and date. My own notes from artist's talks, symposium, participant observations and volunteer work are referenced using the term 'Research Journal' followed by the date. All publicly available secondary material, such as media reports, are referenced in the standard author, date format.

range of administrative tasks during this time, including preparing weekly trading posts²¹, talking to new members, undertaking referee checks of new members and taking phone calls.

Kester (2013) argues that participatory social art cannot be easily analysed through traditional approaches to art writing - characterised by a critic viewing the work (or in some cases a photograph of it) and then writing a response. Kester (2013, para 5) suggests that traditional approaches to art evaluation often neglect to take the time to examine projects in detail:

observing the changes that occurred in the social organization of the project over time, the modulations of agency, the moments of creative insight and stasis, and the ways in which the participants accommodated or challenged the authority of state or public agencies' and the artists themselves.

For these reasons he argues that we need new research methodologies, 'a field-based approach, in which the critic inhabits the site of practice for an extended period of time, paying special attention to the discursive, haptic, and social conditions of space, and the temporal rhythms of the processes that unfold there' (Para 16). In response to Kester's critique and call, I would suggest that the participatory ethnographic methods I used in relation to Letting Space were appropriate to better understand the complexity, affects and reach of these art projects.

Throughout all of my ethnographic encounters outlined above I maintained a research journal and recorded my observations, feelings and sensations. This was done to keep track of the different issues and themes which arose for participants, and also to keep track of my own embodied experiences and sensations (see Watson and Till 2010 for a discussion about the use of research journals).

3.2.3.1 Timebank Tune-in

Throughout my time at the Timebank office I had discussions with the coordinator, Hannah Mackintosh and members of the Steering Committee about what type of research would be helpful for the Timebank. It was agreed that a survey questionnaire of the members would

²¹ This involved compiling all the Timebank members' latest offers and requests.

be useful to gain a better understanding of how the Timebank was operating. Consequently I facilitated the 'Timebank Tune-in', which was an email and telephone survey of the approximately 140 members at that time. The questions in the Timebank Tune-in were drafted by Hannah Mackintosh, members of the Steering Committee and myself. The questions were designed to gain a better understanding of why members had joined the collective, and what was working well and not so well for them.

The survey was administered either through a phone call or completed by email. Of the approximately 140 members contacted at the time, a total of 45 responses were gathered which was a response rate of 32.1 percent. I coordinated the Timebank Tune-in with three other Timebank members who helped by phoning participants and sending the responses through to me for compilation and analysis. The Timebank Tune-in didn't technically form part of this PhD research as ethics approval was not obtained from Victoria University and nor were members informed that they would be taking part in research for academic purposes. Rather, the survey helped me gather background information through an ethnographic approach and formed part of my participatory work with the Wellington Timebank. However, Hannah Mackintosh provided me with a summary report which includes the aggregated results of the survey (see Appendix A for a copy of this report). There are a number of instances in Chapters 7 and 8 where I have drawn on this report. Within Chapters 7 and 8 this report is referenced as a Wellington Timebank authored document, and was obtained through personal communication.

3.2.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that I undertook a range of semi-structured interviews. I used semi-structured interviews because, as England (2006) suggests, they allow participants to shift the direction of the conversation and can allow for a greater understanding of subtle nuances of meaning. Semi-structured interviews also seemed most appropriate because the nature of the research questions were not conducive to a closed, structured interview or questionnaire format (see Appendix B for an outline of the interview schedule). The choice of semi-structured interviews reflected my underlying values around the co-production of

research knowledge – specifically the desire to attend to what matters for participants and develop trusting relationships to construct rich empirical material.

3.2.3.3 Secondary sources

To complement the ethnographic methods outlined above, I also drew on secondary texts to better understand how the five Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank were understood, framed and re-presented. I collected and analysed art reviews, mainstream media articles (including online comments) about the art projects and the Wellington Timebank. In Chapters 4-6, I have at times drawn on the essays about each art project that were commissioned by Letting Space. I used these secondary texts to gain a greater understanding of the reach of the projects and practices, how they were narrated and framed in different forums and how people responded to them. The use of such secondary texts through media forums is a relatively common method of exploring how discourses circulate. For example, McCreanor (2005) has explored how discourses around Pākehā/Māori ethnicities in Aotearoa New Zealand circulate through media texts and associated comments. Similarly Hall and O'Shea (2013) have shown how neoliberal subjectivities in the United Kingdom get articulated and maintain currency through online media commenting.

3.3.4 Analysis

In line with my theoretical framework I used a critical post-structural analysis to interpret my observations and empirical material. Wylie (2006) suggests that the goal of post-structural analysis is show how some identities and stories are constructed and privileged over others that are marginalised and silenced. Waitt (2005) notes that through this analysis process, attention is paid to the effects of a particular cultural text in terms of the power relations which shape what an individual may think or do. Intertextuality is also important and post-structural analyses tend to draw on a number of different texts to examine how meanings are (re)produced and circulated in specific places and times. In Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 I outlined the range of intertextual sources this research draws on which include: interview transcripts; informal conversations; participant observation; field notes; and secondary texts such as media articles and online comments.

In describing my analysis I think it useful to distinguish between the different texts on which I drew. These included the self-representation texts (such as Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank's websites, emails and information they distribute about their events and actions); mediated texts (interview transcripts, field notes and participant observations which were influenced by my involvement and position in the research); and texts produced by others in various forums (which include comments on websites, media articles, art reviews and press releases). While I have interpreted and analysed all these textual sources, it is important to note that these texts had different authors and intended audiences. Therefore I saw the analysis process as a complex weaving together of different voices, speaking in different contexts which have however, been interpreted and mediated through my writing process.

When undertaking a post-structural analysis Waitt (2005) suggests following seven steps. I followed these seven steps which included: attempting to suspend any pre-existing assumptions; familiarising myself with the texts; coding the texts to identify key themes; investigating the persuasive nature of the texts which included looking for effects of truth; taking notice of inconsistencies and absences; and finally, focusing on details. In coding the texts I followed Cope (2010) who suggested beginning analysis by using descriptive codes or category labels, and then moving onto analytic codes that are thematic and emerge from the analysis.

In addressing the first research sub-question of how subjectivities are articulated through discursive and performative practices, I used the strategies outlined above to identify how participants articulated aspects of their subjectivity. I focussed on analysing the individual and collective social actions that participants engaged in, the words they used to self-identify and how they talked about their actions and motivations driving involvement with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank. This included paying attention to the tensions and contradictions people spoke about as well as identifying any slippages, inconsistencies, and the 'active presence of the invisible' or mechanisms which silence (Waitt 2005, p. 184). So for instance, I coded the ways in which participants talked about their own labour with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank. I noted any barriers to their continued

involvement, issues around funding and sustainability of the collectives and how they talked about their interactions with others who were involved.

In addressing the second research sub-question of whether these subjectivities and practices are fostering alternative spaces for overflowing the hegemony of waged labour and the capitalist economy, I focussed more on how participating in Letting Space projects or the Wellington Timebank had altered how people thought of themselves, and the impact involvement was having in their lives. This included noting the effects of various practices in participants' lives - from more psychological or emotional effects such as feeling connected to others, through to material effects such as obtaining free food or a free haircut.

In addressing the third research sub-question around subjectivities, social action and an open politics of place, I focused on connecting aspects of subjectivity to social action in certain places. This included exploring how Massey's (2005) framing of an open politics of place, based on non-essential understandings of relational subjectivities and places was or was not playing out in the two examples. The analysis in relation to this final question involved a weaving together of key themes from the two other sub-questions by drawing on Butler and Nancy in relation to subjectivities and community, and Rancière in relation to disruption of the order of the sensible.

Crang (2003b) describes the process of analysis as 'making sense' of, or disciplining one's material into a text. Given the theoretical framework I have employed, I follow Crang (2003b, p 133) in understanding analysis as 'a practical action of describing and relating things to answer specific needs and questions'. Heckert (2011) cautions that in approaching analysis, especially when coding information and organising it into themes we should be careful not to 'overcode'. He (2011, p 201) writes that to overcode is to attempt to 'capture the endless creativity of life through the deployment of categories of judgement . . . the colonizing strategy of declaring, with authority not to be questioned, both how things are and how they should be'. In this way he picks up on critiques mentioned earlier around the crisis of representation. However, Heckert (2011) goes on to say that there is an inherent tension here because coding and naming is an important way of making sense of the world and communicating with others. The categories and terms employed in the social sciences

(and beyond) to distinguish between different subjects, material objects, stories and positions seems essential to creating shared understandings.

In section 2.3 I discussed Rancière's ideas about how the order of the sensible attempts to name and fix subjects and relations. For me this tension between the need to analyse and code (or name and fix) enough to communicate, without attempting to impose a view of how things should be remains somewhat unresolved. Responding to this concern I suggest that my analysis and conclusions are just one representation of the multiple meanings and social interactions happening in any given situation. My analysis is never complete and other interpretations could have been made. In this sense what I have done in this research is not represent participants in an authoritative sense by fixing their identities in one particular way. Instead, I have sought to identify how relations between people and wider societal discourses shape what participants are able to say about themselves and what others (including mainstream media, online commenters and reviewers) are able to say about participants and their practices. In this way I have drawn on Massey's (2005, 2007) ideas about the relationality between people in specific places as key to understanding how forms of social action emerge.

3.4 Positionality and representation

The ethnographic approach I employed in this research has been well documented by other geographers who note that they were neither completely an insider nor an outsider, neither an academic nor an activist but that they negotiated 'a path in-between, or, rather, somewhere else' (Ricketts Hein, Evans, and Jones 2008, p 1276). Watson and Till (2010) suggest that ethnography is a useful method to move away from the dichotomy of the researcher being either an 'insider' or 'outsider' because it allows a greater appreciation for the nuanced betweenness of the research process, where researchers work alongside participants. In the section which follows I reflect on my position within this research and discuss some of the relational dynamics that occurred in research encounters.

As noted earlier, within geography and beyond there has been an increasing recognition of the political situatedness of knowledge, linked to discussions around the crisis of representation. These debates raised questions about who academic researchers could

speak for, how they negotiated power relations in the research process and how they re-presented their research (see Kobayashi 1994; 2003). To illustrate the nature of these critiques, Heckert (2011, p 199) writes how some critics see the process of academics trying to understand and name or fix research participants as a form of violence: '[t]o claim the authority to speak for another is a violation of that person's capacity to speak for themselves'. Such critiques have generally focused on the way representing others can reify certain subject positions or narratives which are often associated with the historical violence of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism. As a way of recognising both the political situatedness of research and the fluid power relations operating throughout research processes, many researchers now reflect on how their position affects the research process and how empirical material is interpreted and re-presented (Scheyvens and Storey 2003). This involves the recognition that a researcher's positionality is shaped by their own understanding of their embodied position, how wider discourses position them, and how research participants position and understand them (England 2006). Or as Browne et al (2010, p 586) state, positionality is partly about 'how research is created through interactions and relationships between researchers and those being researched'.

One way of thinking through the multiple positions of the researcher is through being reflexive, being clear about the motivations for doing research, reflecting on with whom we engage and the multiple subjectivities that represent the fluid self in the research (Lincoln and Guba 2005). However, being reflexive is not always straight forward nor is it necessarily easy to know what reflections to include or how much analysis to undertake. For instance in an interview (cited in Davies 2008, p 13) Butler questions the idea that one can ever give a true account of themselves. She describes her mixed feelings about the practice of reflexivity:

Because, on the one hand, we take it as good that we account for our practices, situate ourselves in them, and have a heightened self-consciousness about what we do so that we're able to explain it to others. But on the other hand, it seems that reflexivity always runs the risk of [disciplinary] recodification, and that if I had to explain what I'm doing I would probably cease to do it. My doing it actually demands a certain kind of forgetfulness about the reflexive dimension in order to allow it to

move forward. And I just worry about how heightened self-consciousness not only yields to recodification but can actually stymie a certain kind of innovation.

Butler raises two points that interest me. She hints at the impossibility of ever being able to entirely provide an account of one's position as a researcher (see also Gibson-Graham 1994; Rose 1997a) and secondly, to attempt this may actually limit one's understanding and ability to think creatively, inducing a feeling of paralysis. Bearing these points in mind, in what follows I provide one account of some of the factors which at the time of writing seemed to be relevant to my position within this research. This includes a discussion about the more obvious signifiers of my position and motivations for undertaking this research.

I am a well-educated man from a middle class background of Pākehā (or European) descent. While I use these descriptors carefully because they can be overly reductive, I am also aware that they can influence how people perceive and interact with me and influence the power relations in the research process. My underlying reasons for undertaking this research are important to me personally and in many ways have shaped my choice of examples. For the last ten years or so I have been feeling increasingly uneasy about the way of life in which I participate and perpetuate. What I have been grappling with is a way to imagine and practise a different way of living which is more equitable and sustainable. While in many ways the current socio-economic system in Aotearoa New Zealand would enable me to 'get ahead', at least in terms of my ethnicity, gender and level of education, it makes me feel trapped in a competitive vacuum. In this sense my personal values are very much aligned with those of the two examples I explore in this research.

During the first year of my PhD I was also moving from a secure, well paid waged job to the precarious position of being a postgraduate student without a scholarship. The process of re-thinking my waged work and overall career direction coincided with a re-thinking of much I had taken for granted about myself. The opportunity to reflect on these issues, along with reading critical academic texts on waged work highlighted how I had become subjected to the dominant discourses of the work society. Deleuze and Guattarri (2004) talk about desire as an open-ended productive process. They use the term the 'desiring machine'. I like this framing of desire and in many ways the process of this research has been fuelled by

desire in the broadest sense - desire to re-imagine my own subjectivity in relation to waged work, the economy and through this, connect differently with others. Gibson-Graham (2008, p 614) suggest that as academics we need to be 'conscious of the role of [our] work in creating or 'performing' the world we inhabit' and 'become open to possibility rather than limits on the possible'. I seek to follow this suggestion and at a wider level I hope that this research contributes to understanding what the characteristics of more open places are and how these processes can be encouraged to overflow the dominance of the work society in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Domosh (2003) raises concerns that where discussion of positionalities focuses only on the researcher, this can become narcissistic. While I am mindful of her point, I have included the discussion above because I believe it has shaped the way I think about myself as a researcher and how I relate to participants and importantly, the potential I see for progressive social action. In this way I identify with Gibson-Graham (2008, p 615) who write '[o]ur goal as academics was still to understand the world in order to change it, but with a post-structuralist twist – to change our understanding is to change the world, in small and sometimes major ways'. Throughout the above paragraphs I have tried to be mindful of Butler's two points about positionality and reflexivity. I have tried to avoid giving any kind of true account of myself, but rather given one account of some of the factors that have led to me exploring this research topic in the way that I have.

In recognition of Domosh's (2003) point, in what follows I discuss some of the inter-relational aspects that occurred between myself and research participants. The following section begins with a brief discussion around research ethics and then moves onto discussing some of the constraints I experienced with the methods employed.

3.4.1 Ethics and connections

As noted in Section 3.2 since the 1980s feminist geographers have been calling for more focus on the the ethics involved when undertaking research (Pratt 2009). Drawing on these substantial debates, Popke (2010) suggests that in order to undertake ethical research (particularly with vulnerable or marginalised participants) we adopt an ethic of closeness, of care and of relatedness. This approach foregrounds the importance of thinking about ethical

responsibilities not so as to enforce proper conduct, but rather through being open to the ethical potential of every act to create space for new possibilities. In this way the ethical considerations advocated by Pratt (2009) and Popke (2010) extend beyond just applying for ethics approval from university or institutional committees. Geographers like Browne et al, (2010), Kindon et al (2007) and Cahill et al (2007) who use participatory approaches argue for a greater emphasis on the importance of relationships with research participants and co-researchers. So for example, in this research, I went through Victoria University's ethical approval processes (see Appendix C for further information). I also discussed with participants what kinds of research would be useful for them. The Timebank Tune-in is the most obvious example of a research output which was useful for the Timebank Steering Committee. Beyond these considerations around research outputs were issues surrounding the way I interacted with participants in more everyday encounters. Throughout this research I took the view that regardless of whether participants expressed different views to mine, the key was to explore why they held this particular view by paying attention to their individual narratives. This sometimes meant exploring participants' fears, desires and needs, while appreciating that these could be quite different to my own.

In previous research I have undertaken I often felt so grateful to participants for being involved that it sometimes created an odd dynamic in an interview. Similar to Heckert (2010), I was concerned that I was somehow exploiting my participants, or taking up their time. I no longer see it this way anymore – at least not in this research. I am starting to see the positive benefits for participants of being involved in research. For example, I was reminded by participants on different occasions that by listening and participating I was giving something back. Comments from various participants prompted me to reflect on the therapeutic nature of listening, and how an interview can allow people to process how they are feeling about their work²². By therapeutic I am not referring to psychological therapy, and nor was this research specifically oriented at creating a therapeutic process (for instance see Bondi 2005a). But rather in the everyday conversations about being an artist, putting on (sometimes) controversial art performances, volunteering at the *Free Store*, or

²² For instance one artist noted at the end of the interview that it had been useful for him to talk about what had happened as a consequence of undertaking an art project. He said something like 'I need someone with a mind like yours to help me articulate what has happened'.

taking part in a Timebank trade, participants were able to reflect on what they do, why they do it and the more mundane challenges they may face in relation to these practices.

For example, both of the curators and all of the artists associated with Letting Space talked about the difficulties associated with their personal cultural and material survival. Many of them talked about the emotional and financial costs of investing their energy and time in art practices which wider society often denigrated or didn't recognise as legitimate work. In a more practical sense there were also moments when participants found interviews or the work I was doing helpful. In another example, the two curators of Letting Space said at the end of the interview that they really needed to sit down and talk about a few things as they hadn't been in contact for a while and one of them joked that I should stay because I was a good facilitator of communication. Similarly the coordinator of the Wellington Timebank, Hannah Mackintosh, noted on a number of occasions how much she appreciated me being in the office once a week.

I also attempted to foster an approach that Heckert (2011) discusses and is similar to Gibson-Graham's (2006) idea of weak theory, whereby I tried to avoid judging what participants said or coming to the interaction with a set idea about what I would discover. So for instance, during interviews I tried to restrain my judgemental habits. These included the habit of constantly deciding whether I thought an opinion or comment was good or bad or how it fitted with different theories I had been reading about. Instead I sought to explore with participants what had influenced their current set of practices, whether these were in relation to making art, Timebanking or something else. In a notable example, one artist said at the end of our interview that he had appreciated the fact that I had listened and didn't come with a pre-determined view of his work or attack him personally. I had already noticed that this particular artist and his work tended to polarise people. During the interview he acknowledged that he felt somewhat unsupported by the wider arts community in Wellington and that in the past people had often been either critical of his work, or ignored it completely. While it would be disingenuous to say that I managed to suspend any preconceptions about this artist (in fact I was somewhat anxious about the interview due to his reputation). I did consciously adopt an ethic of care and sought to create a space where we could talk about his experiences and work.

However, there were moments when, even though I was committed to an ethic of care, I found respondents' views difficult. For example, when talking with a retired female Timebank member who was living in Council owned housing, she explained that she had joined the collective because she wanted to meet people 'more like herself' and that she felt isolated in the housing estate because none of her neighbours were white. She made a number of comments which I considered to be overtly racist, talking about how all her (non-white) neighbours were poor, involved in crime and dangerous. She also made a number of essentialising comments about how young people are lazy and not interested in giving back to the community or helping others. I initially found these statements irritating and wanted to either disagree or try to direct the conversation to another topic. However, I persevered and explored with her why she held these views. The impression I got was that she felt isolated socially and surrounded by people she didn't understand both in terms of the languages they spoke and their cultural practices. She also felt neglected by her children who she claimed didn't visit her enough. In this way I was able to work out that her expression of what I considered racist and ageist sentiments were actually coming from a sense of fear, isolation and neglect. While I still disagreed with the essentialising way she framed her neighbours and young people, I could at least appreciate a little more why she held these views and what experiences were informing them.

Moments like the one described above were relatively rare. Throughout the research process I generally felt quite politically and emotionally aligned with participants and sympathetic to their understandings of the world. There were often friends and acquaintances at the art openings, artist's talks and Timebank events, and I utilised social connections I already had to make contact with many of the participants. Participants in both Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank were generally happy to be interviewed and talk about their work and experiences. In many ways I felt like an insider in the sense that I was already part of the wider social networks or audiences to which Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank were appealing to, and therefore felt familiar and relatively comfortable in these social spaces.

Feeling like an insider was also somewhat difficult to negotiate at times, because I felt like I was studying my friends and I wondered how that would influence my analysis and discussion of their actions (see Tillmann-Healy 2006). I also wondered if being such an insider would limit my ability to say anything vaguely critical of the projects and participants involved. These kinds of concerns have been noted by other geographers using participatory ethnographic methods. For example, Maxey (1999) provides some good examples of the issues he faced when undertaking PhD research which had an activist orientation. Similar to Crang's (2003a) point, Maxey talks about how the academic construction of boundaries such as 'the field' or 'research participants' did not fit his experiences. He (1999, p 204) describes how most of the people he was involved with probably didn't recognise him as a 'researcher': 'I am at various points a friend, acquaintance, rather enthusiastic (and for some extreme) activist and fellow activist'. Maxey suggests that sometimes boundaries can be useful, but we need to interrogate how these function and examine their effects (see also Katz 1994).

This point about the effects and functions of boundaries raised questions for me around how I understood ethnographic research, especially when I undertake it with people I already know and with whom I am sometimes friends. I wondered how to distinguish between the information and ideas expressed during the recorded interview and the conversation later at a gallery opening where the same person and I talked generally about a similar topic. The obvious ethical answer is that to quote anything I need permission (obtained through a signed consent form and information sheet). However, what these experiences highlighted more generally was the importance of understanding research as a process and not just a product. These concerns also pointed to certain ideas I had internalised from positivist understandings of research occurring in the field, which is clearly demarcated. For as Watson and Till (2010) note, in ethnographic research it is often hard to know where the field begins and ends and how this relates to one's life more generally. The ethnographic approach provided a useful framework to move beyond positivist understandings of such binaries and see myself as a collaborator with participants in a wide range of encounters in an ever-evolving research process.

While I was not consciously aware of any instances where my gender, sexuality, class or ethnicity affected interactions with participants, I am also reminded of Rose's (1997a) point about the 'god trick' and that we may never know exactly how others' understand us, or how this affects their interactions with us and therefore the co-construction of the research. While I am not sure how others understood me, I did at times try and frame their understandings in specific ways. For instance, when interviewing participants associated with Letting Space I would often say I was not 'in the 'art world' or 'didn't know much about art'. While I don't have a formal education in art this comment is not entirely reflective of my life experience. I said these statements initially without much thought, however in reflection realised they were a framing strategy. Firstly they indicated that I was not particularly interested in talking about the aesthetics of the work (commonly understood as what they looked like). Secondly my comments were a useful way to construct certain positions in the interview. I was seeking information and the participant was the expert. This framing enabled me to construct a certain position, especially when it came to interviewing the 'difficult' artist mentioned earlier.

I generally engaged participants in one-on-one interviews, however as mentioned earlier I did undertake two joint interviews with the curators of Letting Space. These interviews had a very different dynamic to most of the others I undertook and prompted me to reflect on the benefits and limitations of interviews with differing numbers of participants. Although the curators were not a 'couple', the interviews resonated with some of the points Valentine (1999) makes in relation to joint interviews including not being able to pursue a line of enquiry with one of the participants because I didn't want it to seem like I was prioritising one person's view. At other times I was also unsure about what the participant who was not talking was thinking. However, these two joint interviews were also quite dynamic and created a different kind of energy to single participant interviews. I found that there was more discussion and sometimes the differences of opinion between participants were useful and revealed more of the complexities around an issue.

3.4.2 The limits of language

While I enjoyed many of the interviews, at times I also felt a certain dis-comfort with the interview format. Geographers such as Gesler and Kearns (2005), McDowell (2010) and Rose

(1997a) have talked about the staged or artificial nature of interviews and I experienced similarities with what these authors describe. At times I even joked with some participants about how when the dictaphone came out and got switched on it suddenly created a different social dynamic, which subtly affected the way we talked. These kinds of moments reminded me of the ways in which certain technologies and methodological formats can subtly shape how interactions play out and consequently how knowledge is co-created.

Rose (1997b) talked about some of the challenges she faced when interviewing artists associated with community arts projects in Scotland. She (1997b, p 195) describes how in interviews artists would articulate 'excessive objects, surpluses to meaning, contentless voices' whereby people used both the phrases and 'buzz-words' of more dominant discourses (say when applying for funding) but sometimes used these ironically or never quite explained exactly what they signified through their usage. There were times I experienced something similar. For example, in one particular interview I felt like the participant was saying all the 'right' words, in the sense that she knew what was the appropriate or relevant thing to say. Yet I felt like I had no idea what she actually thought about specific issues and I didn't know how to ask her differently. Similarly when talking to Timebank members about why they had joined the network, many mentioned the value of community, that they wanted to connect with their neighbours and their wider community and give back in some way. I was struck by this use of the word community, yet when I questioned participants further, many were unsure of who actually constituted this community. I was left with the impression that people had a desire for some kind of connection with others, yet this could not quite be articulated with such a contentless word like community (see for example Panelli and Welch 2005; Rose 2000 for a discussion of the various discourses of community). While some of these communication difficulties could be explained by different personality profiles, age and cultural differences, they also point to the ways in which language both conveys and constructs meanings, but also obscures and empties meaning.

There are also some aspects of embodied experience in relational encounters that cannot be easily explored in an interview due to the linguistic focus. This is why some researchers are moving towards more embodied methods to better understand the affects of

experiences, rather than re-interpreting these through interviews. For example, Rose (1997b, p 193) writes that with the artists she spoke to, their work was always:

placed in the context of performances, both in their making and in their audiencing. These products were understood as moments of 'communication', not as representation, and could not therefore be described in the context of an interview²³.

Or, in other words the artists' work was communicated through the performance of it, which needed to be experienced in that specific encounter, rather than explained in an interview at a later date. While I did not necessarily experience this to the same extent as Rose, there were many instances when participants and I struggled to explain and understand such 'moments of communication' in the context of an interview. For example, often when I asked participants which art projects associated with Letting Space they had enjoyed or thought were successful, they could state which ones, but found it difficult to both remember and explain why they liked them.

One example of how I attempted to navigate these issues was my participation in the Letting Space project, *Productive Bodies* for two days. The project was broadly concerned with exploring what it means to be productive in society and involved forms of social play with others in public and quasi-public spaces. I was an active participant in the project which ran for five days in total. It began each day in the Reading Room at City Gallery in Wellington where participants brainstormed actions to undertake in the afternoon. On the two days I participated we practiced different kinds of actions which included lining up in two rows and clapping as people walked between us, blindfolding someone and leading them around other people, forming protective shields around others (holding hands in a circle). One morning we all shared an embarrassing or shameful experience from our working lives. We practiced hearing these stories standing close to each other and then spread around the room and told them in a much louder voice. We then discussed how we could respond to others' stories and whether it was appropriate to clap, say thank you or just quietly listen. In the afternoons we then moved into public and quasi-public spaces and undertook these

²³ Rose (1997b, p 188) draws on the work of Nancy (1991) who argues that communication is 'both the origin of human beings and our limit: each becomes only in communication with an Other'.

activities, sometimes engaging with members of the public and sometimes not (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of the project).

After participating I was struck by how the project cultivated affect and circulating intensities which at times exceeded the linguistic and verbal. The process encouraged all participants to use their own bodies, voices, and at times stories to generate intensities which became more than personal and circulated in different ways. Significantly these interactions and intensities were not documented other than in a small number of photographs. In terms of my methodological process, I did not document any of the interactions either. I did not interview other participants (except the artist) and while the photographer made images publicly available online, there are no other visual representations of the event (in the sense that there was no representational art object created).

I deliberately did not document anything visually because I wanted to be more present in my own body and not concerned with analysing the interactions as they were occurring. While I took detailed notes in my field journal at the end of each day, I also attempted to focus on the experiences and intensities I had felt instead of analysing what they meant. I could have undertaken interviews with people to ask them about their experiences, and the curators asked a number of us to respond in writing about our experiences which were then published online, but it seemed like it would be hard to describe the process to someone who wasn't involved. I almost felt as if only those of us who took part could understand the affects of it. In this sense what happened were moments of connection (or what Rose (1997c) calls 'moments of communication') with others which would be difficult to explain in the context of an interview. What the experience of being involved in *Productive Bodies* left me with was a deep appreciation for the value of participatory ethnographic methods in gaining insights into the productive affects of art projects and embodied relational encounters.

3.5 Limitations of the methods

This research offers a snapshot of certain processes at specific points in time and therefore has a number of inherent limitations. Letting Space are still active and have gone on to produce a number of other relational art projects following the ones discussed in this thesis.

Similarly the Wellington Timebank continues to grow in membership and develop as people co-construct the collective through trading and other activities. Therefore the conclusions reached in this thesis relate to specific moments in relation to the collectives, rather than some definitive or final word on them.

In terms of specific methodological concerns, if I was undertaking this research again there are a number of things I would do differently. For instance, while I briefly attended the first *Free Store* in Ghuznee Street, Wellington, as I hadn't started my PhD at that point I did not take notes or talk to people in attendance. Consequently I did not attend the artist talk for this project, but luckily managed to find online transcripts of this and also interview the artist, Kim Paton at a later date.

I would have also preferred to develop a more participatory approach with the curators of Letting Space to ensure this research was useful for them. For instance in Section 3.3.3 I discussed Kester's (2013) point about the need to adopt different ways to explore the effects of relational art practices. In reflection it would have been useful to draw on methods beyond interviews and participant observation, such as using images or diaries to prompt discussion about the affects created through the projects. These kinds of methods may have helped both myself and the curators of Letting Space gain a better understanding of the reach of the projects.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this research was underpinned by a critical post-structural approach which understands knowledge as situated and partial (Bondi 2009). In this way the conclusions and analysis in this thesis are interpretations of many that could have been made. While some may see this as a limitation, following Gergen (2009) I suggest that all knowledge is situated and partial - especially that which claims otherwise. Therefore the key is to situate oneself within, and be clear about the political orientations underpinning the research, while also being clear about the methods used.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined my epistemological understanding of academic research as a collaborative co-production of knowledge between participants and myself, for specific purposes. In this way my epistemological and methodological approach extends out of the critical post-structural framework which posits that subjectivities and social practices are

enabled and constrained through discourse and performance in different contexts. To explore the subjectivities and social actions associated with Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank I have used ethnographic methods. The ethnographic methods draw on feminist critiques of some academic research which has neglected to consider both the power relations between researchers and participants, and the usefulness of research for participants. Consequently the ethnographic methods I use were done so for two reasons. Firstly, I considered some participatory methods appropriate because I wanted to ensure that my research could in some way be useful to the individuals and collectives involved - or at the very least, not extractive or too onerous for participants. Secondly, I considered ethnographic methods appropriate because the two examples were focused on embodied exchanges between people. To better understand the affective intensities of these exchanges, ethnographic methods seemed the most appropriate way I could actually experience some of these relations with participants.

Given the ethnographic methodology employed, in the final section of this chapter I have discussed aspects of my positionality throughout the research process. This includes acknowledging that I am not necessarily opposed to waged work, however I am committed to overflowing the discourses of the work society which construct such limited positions for subjects, inducing shame for those who cannot fulfil dominant expectations. In the final sections of this chapter I highlighted how embodied participation can be a useful way of moving beyond linguistic accounts in interviews to better understand how affective intensities occurring between bodies in different spaces shape social action. The participatory ethnographic methods employed (including semi-structured interviews) enabled me to gain deep insights into the two examples and have contributed to building relationships with participants that have extended beyond the scope of this research – particularly with members of the Wellington Timebank. In Chapters 4-6, I weave together the empirical material co-constructed with participants, with my analysis of five Letting Space projects. In Chapters 7 and 8 I weave together the empirical material co-constructed with participants, with my analysis of the Wellington Timebank.

Chapter 4: Letting Space and the economy

4.1 Introduction

Art critic, Bishop (2006) notes that over the last few years there has been an increase in art projects which engage in collaborative, relational practices. While they generally have a relatively weak profile in the commercial art world and institutional gallery spaces, given that they often cannot be sold, they are becoming increasingly prevalent forms of social action in some societies. Bishop (2006, p. 179) suggests that many of these projects arguably form the contemporary avant-garde with 'artists using social situations to produce dematerialised, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life'. Some of these art projects articulate critiques of neoliberal capitalist discourses and as Kester (2004) outlines, challenge a society where participants/viewers become reduced to little more than consumers who experience endless spectacle and repetition.

Bishop (2006) is sympathetic to the goals of many of these projects but notes that some of them uncritically adopt an ethic of community and inclusion – which she claims are sometimes similar to the more post-politicising discourses of New Labour in Britain and elsewhere throughout the early 2000's (see for instance Rose 2000; Levitas 2005). She notes that most of the discussion around these art practices centre on whether the collaboration process is good or bad, whether the artists employed consensus and non-hierarchical processes and whether participants voices were heard and fully represented. It is not that Bishop thinks such questions are unnecessary²⁴, but that sometimes such a focus can obscure the most interesting aspects these art projects create – those moments which are not so polite. She (2006, p 181) argues that it is precisely those moments of 'discomfort and frustration – along with absurdity, eccentricity, doubt, or sheer pleasure' [that] can be 'crucial elements of a work's aesthetic impact and ... essential to gaining new perspectives on our condition'.

²⁴ Bishop (2006, p 181) writes that such a focus 'adds up to a familiar summary of the intellectual trends inaugurated by identity politics: respect for the Other, recognition of difference, protection of fundamental liberties, and an inflexible mode of political correctness'.

Similar to Bishop (2006), Hawkins (2011) suggests that critical research on relational art practices should explore how they can create social and political moments of discomfort, or in the words of Rancière, disrupt the order of the sensible. As outlined in Chapter 1, the following three chapters explore how five Letting Space art projects enabled participants to expand the limiting discourses of the work society, by disrupting the order of the sensible in relation to how the economy is understood, and how contemporary working subjectivities are framed.

This chapter explores the first theme by looking at how four²⁵ of these five Letting Space projects presented alternative understandings of the economy and reframed participation in the economy beyond moneyed exchanges. The chapter is divided into two sections and begins with a descriptive overview of Letting Space and the five art projects that were investigated in this research. In the second section I argue that four of these five art projects re-framed the economy as an incomplete and socially constructed process in which people have (some) agency in shaping. The chapter therefore addresses the three research sub questions outlined in Section 1.2.4 by showing how discursive and performative practices associated with Letting Space fostered alternative understandings of the capitalist economy, and the wider work society. I show how these four art projects articulated an open politics of place by reframing the economy foregrounded on relationships between subjects in different places, rather than an essential place-based call for an exclusionary local economy.

4.2 Overview of Letting Space

As outlined in Section 1.3.1 Letting Space is an ongoing arts platform curated by Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery that stages interventionist, performative art installations in quasi-private and public spaces. From mid-2010 Letting Space has been curating and producing a wide range of art projects²⁶.

²⁵ The four art projects discussed here include *Productive Bodies*, *The Market Testament*, *Free Store* and *Pioneer City*. While *The Beneficiaries Office* also presented alternative understandings of the economy, this project is discussed in detail in Chapter 5 as it more clearly disrupted the order of the sensible in relation to working subjectivities.

²⁶ Letting Space have been involved in a wide range of different projects including the *Urban Dream Brokerage*, *Community Service* and most recently the *Transitional Economic Zone of Aotearoa* (TEZA) in New Brighton, Christchurch (Letting Space N.D.).

Before outlining five of these projects, I discuss the curators' intent. I begin here because it is a useful point from which to explore their understanding of art as a process²⁷ which partially constitutes social life (as opposed to the production of specific objects). For example, in talking about their work, Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery stated that they wished 'to commission a series of works where people rather than things are the principal material activated' (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011). All of the Letting Space projects reflect this priority and speak to contemporary concerns in some way including: socio-economic inequalities; waste; over-consumption; environmental collapse; the precarious nature of employment and cultural survival; and the need for new ways to relate to the human and non human world. Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery summed this up by stating '[w]e're interested in work that increases the space we call 'commons', whether it's an under-utilised private or commercial site or a public site that has fallen out of the public utility or occupation...' (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011).

An important value underlying their work with Letting Space involves ensuring they foster aesthetically 'good' art which connects with social processes and wider societal concerns beyond what they term the 'art clique'. For example, Sophie Jerram stated that:

It's totally crucial to me, you know I wouldn't want to be working within a mainstream institution just to promote art on its own, unless it had a clear agenda and commitment to a social process, cause otherwise I'd go back to my activist organisations (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011).

This is not to suggest that aesthetics don't matter, as Mark Amery went on to say that 'we also often have this tension which I think is a very positive one, between the social activism and making good art' (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011). He suggested that the moments of great art history are those that have had a 'political charge. They have been relevant, they're not just about aesthetics' (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011).

This commitment does not necessarily mean that they are only interested in 'loud' political moments. For example, Sophie Jerram stated that she is interested in how:

²⁷ These understandings also resonate with Hawkins' (2011, p 465) definition of art as an 'ensemble of practices, performances, experiences and artefacts rather than as a singular 'object'' (see Section 1.3.2).

art can integrate as part of the social fabric as it were. How it can play a part in the assistance of our life, as a way of testing ideas and provoking them, of really enacting change. The gallery model is a really important laboratory, but we're really interested in how we can actually work with artists and empower artists to work very much in, as part of the whole fabric of things (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011).

Mark Amery went on to juxtapose this commitment to a socio-political process against much contemporary fine art practice which he described as being:

just about moving the furniture around within the gallery space, or moving or experimenting with forms of communication and I guess we're kind of interested in how we employ experimental forms of communication in terms of actually having something to say or trying to make a change in the real world (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011).

These priorities reflect what Kwon (2002) suggests are current concerns in many critiques of contemporary art, where some artists and curators are seeking to re-engage art with the social world, both in an activist sense, and to expand what is considered art and the spaces art can occupy. While Letting Space has commissioned projects that involved what are traditionally understood as art objects, most of the projects so far have involved a more relational or social process. Artist Colin Hodson describes this as a kind of 'theatrical aspect' or 'time based ... performance [which also] used space' (Hodson 19 December 2011). These values and understandings appear to have significantly shaped the direction and form of Letting Space to date, as well as the types of projects and artists with which Letting Space engage.

Other important values include the independence and flexibility of Letting Space because they are less constrained by institutional processes. This allows them to collaborate with artists whose work interests them and use spaces outside traditional gallery contexts. However, with this freedom also comes funding and resource constraints, and income insecurity:

I think we've both worked in public galleries a little bit and we've, you know we know the university environment, but essentially we're not from it. We've always managed to stay outside of it and independent of it... We're not on salaries. We don't have any boxes to fight against (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011).

The flexibility of their organisational context also allows Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery to engage in alternative types of relationships. So for example Mark Amery noted how they are interested in fostering different kinds of relationships with artists and suggests that the term 'curator' is not quite right because their approach is much more collaborative than the term curator conventionally implies (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011). One of the artists they worked with, Dr Mark Harvey, illustrated this by comparing his experience working with Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery to other curators. He stated:

[m]ost curators, they do care for things but often they don't seem to show that they care or they're never present when the work is made or your work ends up a kind of object that they look at in the distance and the dialogue isn't often very deep (Harvey 16 March 2012).

In this way Letting Space appear to be fostering both alternative spaces for art practice outside traditional galleries and art institutions, and alternative forms of collaborative relationships with artists.

Having foregrounded the curatorial intent behind Letting Space I now outline the five Letting Space projects discussed in this thesis. These include: *Free Store*; *The Beneficiaries Office*; *The Market Testament*; *Pioneer City*; and *Productive Bodies*. These projects took place within a range of different spaces, from vacant commercial spaces, online media forums to more 'public' spaces like streets, parks and government buildings' lobbies.

4.2.1 Free Store by Kim Paton

Table 4.1: Outline of two *Free Store* projects

<p><i>Free Store</i>: Ghuznee Street, Wellington</p>	<p>Project Details</p>
<p>Source: Letting Space N.D.</p>	<p>22 May – 5 June, 2010</p> <p>The project gave away free food sourced from local retailers, supermarkets and the general public. Staffed by Kim Paton and other volunteers, the project looked like an ordinary shop with food displayed on shelves, except there were no prices or money transactions. Participants were able to enter the store and take whatever products they liked for free.</p>
<p><i>Free Store</i>: Waitakere, West Auckland</p>	<p>Project Details</p>
<p>Source: Author (2011)</p>	<p>14 February - 11 March, 2011</p> <p>The Auckland Council partnered with Kim Paton to stage a month long Free Store in Waitakere, West Auckland. A vacant commercial space was temporarily used for the duration of the project which was staffed by volunteers and relied on donated food.</p>

4.2.2 The Beneficiaries Office by the Wells Group

Table 4.2: Outline of *The Beneficiaries Office*

<i>The Beneficiaries Office</i> : Manners Street, Wellington	Project Details
<p>15 October – 1 November, 2010</p>
	<p>The Wells Group, led by artist Tao Wells, established a public relations company in a vacant office space. The project involved media work around what constitutes legitimate work. The Wells Group issued press releases, staged a Labour Day march, did interviews with journalists, invited members of the public to engage in face to face discussions and participated in the creation of a documentary. Tao Wells also staged a play called <i>Inuit Time</i>.</p>

Source: Letting Space N.D.

4.2.3 The Market Testament by Colin Hodson

Table 4.3: Outline of *The Market Testament*

<i>The Market Testament: The Terrace, Wellington</i>	Project Details
11 – 25 April, 2011
	<p>Colin Hodson staged a light show across an eight storied vacant building. For two weeks seven floors of the building were re-wired so that during the night the buildings' lights changed in response to a live data feed from the New Zealand stock market²⁸. A live webcam meant the project could be viewed near the City to Sea Museum. The project involved an opening where the public were invited into the building to experience the lighting and a walking tour to view the building from Lambton Quay.</p>

Source: Letting Space N.D.

²⁸ This image of the project is taken using time-lapse photography and illustrates to some extent the changing nature of the patterns of light which occurred throughout the 7 floors of the building.

4.2.4 Pioneer City by Bronwyn Holloway-Smith

Table 4.4: Outline of *Pioneer City*

<i>Pioneer City</i> : Taranaki Street, Wellington	Project Details
<p>Source: Letting Space N.D.</p>	17 June – 10 July, 2011
	<p>Pioneer City occupied the ground floor of the new apartment building. The project involved a showroom that advertised a settler lifestyle on Mars, including an architectural model of the settlement, images of the proposed development depicting a kind of clean science fiction utopia with young, healthy looking European (Pākehā) models. A real estate agent (a professional actor) was also engaged who represented ‘Colonial Real Estate’ with business cards, phone and email contacts. The work involved viewing art objects and also included interactions where participants were encouraged to engage by filling in expressions of interest in order to be part of the colonising settlement on Mars.</p>

4.2.5 Productive Bodies by Dr Mark Harvey

Table 4.5: Outline of *Productive Bodies*

<i>Productive Bodies</i> : Central Wellington	Project Details
<p>Source: Letting Space N.D.</p>	<p>12 – 16 March, 2012</p> <p>This project included the unemployed, and those between jobs in a week of performance²⁹. Each day began with a participatory workshop held in the Reading Room of the Wellington City Gallery and interactive activities and performances in public spaces after lunch. The project included a panel discussion with the artist Dr Mark Harvey, Professor of Public Policy at AUT, Professor Marilyn Waring and economist, Susan Guthrie. Artist, Tao Wells provided a response to <i>Productive Bodies</i> at Enjoy Gallery in Wellington on 16 March, 2012.</p>

As the tables above illustrate, these five Letting Space projects explored a range of different contemporary socio-economic issues. Some of the projects were more focused on asking questions or provoking discussions about the economy and the nature of waged work, while others were more focused on facilitating alternative embodied exchanges to those of the work society. However, underlying all of the projects was an interest in exploring contemporary socio-environmental issues through artistic practices outside conventional art spaces and more traditional forms of social activism. In the following section I draw on Gibson-Graham (2006) and Massey (2005) to analyse how four of these art projects questioned, and presented alternative understandings of what constitutes the economy. I

²⁹ *Productive Bodies* was produced with Letting Space and the City Gallery Wellington as an associate partner, in association with a survey of contemporary New Zealand sculpture, *The Obstinate Object* (Letting Space N.D.).

argue that these four projects variously challenged dominant discourses of the economy which underpin the work society and privilege moneyed consumption as the primary way to participate in society.

4.3 Querying the economy

Productive Bodies, *The Market Testament*, *Free Store*, and *Pioneer City* posed broad questions such as who has the power to influence and shape the capitalist economy, who benefits and loses from the operation of the capitalist economy, and what effects neoliberal capitalist practices have on the human and non-human world. However, the projects raised other questions too, pushing at and exposing what is excluded and silenced in dominant framings of the economy, and at times, actively proposed alternatives. In this section I explore three themes. Firstly, I show how these four art projects variously questioned the neoliberal capitalist framing of the economy as somehow separate from the human and non-human world. Secondly, I show how they questioned the concept of scarcity and the cult of the commodity and some of the inefficiencies and wasteful practices inherent in capitalist markets. And finally I show how the projects questioned the increasing enclosure and colonisation of the human and non-human world through neoliberal capitalist practices. I suggest that these four art projects framed alternatives to the dominant economy and waged labour in relatively open ended ways, rather than identifying these alternatives as either the same as, opposite to, or contained within capitalist practices (Gibson-Graham 2006).

4.3.1 Asking difficult questions

The *Productive Bodies* panel discussion mentioned in Table 4.5 involving artist, Dr Mark Harvey, Professor of Public Policy at AUT, Professor Marilyn Waring, and economist, Susan Guthrie, explored how the project challenged the nature of the capitalist wage market. The discussion began by covering issues that many economic and political economy geographers are familiar with. Susan Guthrie talked about the way capitalist markets are convenient, where goods, services and human labour get exchanged for set prices and 'we can get on with our lives' (Harvey, Waring and Guthrie 13 March 2012). However, she went on to point out the limitations of capitalist markets - the ways in which they fail, rely on private ownership and are therefore often unable to value important public goods:

Public goods like art, architecture, and the environment are goods which everyone can consume (to a certain extent) and enjoyment of these does not diminish someone else's enjoyment so the market cannot handle those sorts of goods very well. They [capitalist markets] undervalue them, they don't produce enough of them (Harvey, Waring and Guthrie 13 March 2012).

To deal with these kinds of failures Professor Marilyn Waring noted that neoliberal capitalist discourses attempt to turn public goods into private goods as fast as possible (Harvey, Waring and Guthrie 13 March 2012). However, as this creates a whole range of other problems, Susan Guthrie observed that we need rules to regulate markets and modify them and be committed to valuing things that the market cannot price.

These observations are not new, and geographers and others have explored many such examples in nuanced ways (for instance on water see Bakker 2007; on the oceans see Mansfield 2004; on forests see McGregor 2010). What emerged through this discussion though was Susan Guthrie's framing of the risks associated with capitalist markets extending to all areas of life. In what follows she outlines what is at stake if, as subjects, people become completely seduced by, and extend capitalist market discourses to all interactions.

I was thinking before I came, about [how] markets aren't the only way you exchange things. We do it all the time. We swap seats on a bus, we let people in the queue in the traffic jam. We're always exchanging time, ideas, space without money ever changing hands and how we do it, what are the rules, you know it's really just the social norms. I was thinking... that we don't have a market in the bus. I'm standing up, someone's sitting down. I could pay them to have a seat but we just don't allow it to go that far. And so those social norms define the values of things that happen in all the rest of our lives. When you allow a [monetised] market to start taking over on that bus for example then it crowds out all the nice behaviour we have with social norms. So we used to allow, I'd always stand up for a pregnant woman but now I go well, she could just pay me if she wants my seat, hand me the money. So I stop, I've got conflicting rules now and so suddenly I suspect over time the market rule will dominate. For everybody it's a simple one. I get up if I'm paid, I sit down if I don't. No more thinking needed. And so for something like this [Productive Bodies] where you

are inspiring each other. Now we could have had a lovely conversation on the bus but I'm not going to talk to you unless you pay me so I'm not going to have that conversation. So we lose all this value when we allow markets to come in and I think that's a problem. We've gotta find a way to articulate the value of the non-market things. Push back (Harvey, Waring and Guthrie 13 March 2012).

This questioning of capitalist commoditisation and competition was also explored in *The Market Testament* which asked participants/viewers to reflect on how capitalist markets (epitomised by the sharemarket) often fail to provide for local needs. Letting Space wrote on their website that *The Market Testament* asked people to consider 'that what drives our economy has been abstracted to the point that local needs and concerns play little part in determining the flow of capital keeping our city alive' (Letting Space N.D.).

In framing the project, artist Colin Hodson stated, '[w]hen you walk along the city streets at night do you wonder how much input you have into the quality of your life, or of our society, and whether we have handed too much control to anonymous stockmarket traders?' (cited in Pullar-Strecker and Hunt 2011, para 2). In developing the project, Colin Hodson noted that he became interested in literature that described how the global, and particularly United States, economy had become dominated by transnational corporations:

...how our trade and economies are dictated by financial markets and manipulations as opposed to investment and infrastructure or whatever. It's been taken over by just capitalising on money trading, increasingly so... It's not serving, sort of, people (Hodson 19 December 2011).

Through these explanations of the project, Colin Hodson and Letting Space presented both a critique of the dominant framing of the economy, and also provided a normative framing of the ideal economy as something which *should* provide for 'local needs and concerns'. In this way the project articulated a place-based vision for a more desirable economy through the juxtaposition of the 'anonymous stockmarket traders' against 'your life' and 'our society'. Where the 'self' and wider 'society' (constituted by proximity to the place of Wellington) are represented in opposition to anonymous and powerful stockmarket traders, who, while not explicitly stated, could be seen as inhabiting more global places. What was also significant about Colin Hodson's framing of *The Market Testament* was the way he characterised the

sharemarket not as a disembodied machine or network, but as composed of specific (even if anonymous) stockmarket traders. The framing of this part of the economy as an embodied network of actors resonates with Massey's (2004, p 8) comment that '[c]apitalism too is carried into places by bodies'. Both Massey (2004; 2007) and Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that understanding the economy as an embodied discourse has significant political implications and can serve to counter the discourses which seek to construct the economy as somewhere 'out there' and beyond intervention.

The Market Testament encouraged participants and viewers to question the narratives they tell themselves about the economy, specifically the degree to which they are passive subjects of the sharemarket economy and the extent to which they have handed over their ability to shape these processes to distant others. Gibson-Graham (2002, p 35-36) suggest that it is politically important to engage people in an imaginative leap in which we can learn 'to think not about how the world is subjected to globalization (and the global capitalist economy) but how *we are subjected* to the discourse of globalization and the identities (and narratives) it dictates to us' (emphasis original).

While *The Market Testament* raised questions around agency, it would be over-simplistic to state that the project merely reinforced the dominant narrative of local communities being overpowered by global capitalism. The project managed to avoid adhering to such a fixed narrative because the central message was framed as a question. So for instance we could see the project as an implicit call for a place-based, collective response to more global anonymous processes. For as Colin Hodson suggested, *The Market Testament* as a concept could transcend any one local place, and he saw the project as a place-based provocation that could be installed in different places in order to see what kind of questions and responses could be generated (Hodson 19 December 2011).

The project's concept was partially articulated through the site choice - a vacant high rise building in Wellington's central business district that was emblematic of the downtown economy. This was significant as at the time the project occurred the building was vacant which was attributed to the recent global financial crisis. In this way the vacant building served to partially provide the space to question the operation of the sharemarket economy. Colin Hodson noted that he wanted the project to take place in a modernist

tower for two reasons. He wanted the project to have a phallic, almost monolithic presence, and be visible or part of the city with no barriers, unlike more traditional art gallery spaces. 'There's no barrier, there's no, you don't walk through a door and then you're in the gallery and art suddenly, you've crossed into art zone' (Hodson 19 December 2011). In relation to the site specificity, one interviewee noted that the Letting Space projects generally related to their site but that this 'wasn't like core to their agenda... I mean they could have kind of been anywhere but because of the place that they were they had a kind of particular resonance with it' (Wilson 20 October 2011). In this way the importance of place subtly infused many of the projects, but not in an essentialising way.

The Market Testament invoked an understanding of place that was both open-ended yet specific. While appealing to a local place (Wellington) the project also managed to avoid defining Wellington as a place in a closed way. Both the project and Colin Hodson's framing of it, never defined Wellington, or even what was meant by 'the local' in an essential sense, such as stipulating geographic boundaries or a fixed Wellington identity. In this way the project reflected Massey's (2004) description of an open politics of place because it avoided an essential, exclusive and localised claim to belonging. However, while the framing of the project prompted a reflection on the decisions made by others in distant places, this was primarily inward focused. So for instance the project did not necessarily raise obvious questions around Wellingtonians' ethical responsibilities to distant strangers, but rather focused on how Wellington as a place was shaped by others' choices and decisions through the sharemarket and wider economy. The project connected the effects created by the sharemarket economy to aspects of the work society. Specifically the recent global financial crisis and the flow-on effects such as job redundancies and down-sizings that had occurred in Wellington.

The Market Testament also avoided being framed as exclusively opposed to capitalist markets. For example, Colin Hodson stated that 'he is not opposed to capital markets, but saw such buildings [like the one used for the project] as symbols of an economic system that was increasingly run independently of human intervention and concerns' (cited in Pullar-Strecker and Hunt 2011, para 5). It seemed that Colin Hodson was attempting to reframe the terms of the debate around capitalism, the often repeated binary of being 'for or 'against capitalism' (See Chatterton and Pickerill 2010; Chatterton 2006). For Colin Hodson,

such a binary position in relation to capitalism seemed almost impossible. For example in the following extract I discuss what his project had in common with the Occupy movement:

Gradon: What's your hope for the type of work you've been doing and Occupy? What would you hope that these things can achieve?

Colin: Yeah, um I don't know whether its achieving things on a huge paradigm shift, like the breakdown of a kind of corporate capitalism with some other kind of thing. I don't know what that would be? Or is it just a softening of it so that, like a redistribution of wealth? And I guess that would be a great thing to me that there wasn't such a disparity between wealthy and you know . . . Because I think that's causing a lot of suffering. But the thing is, at the moment there's nothing that will reverse that trend with deregulation because corporations, this is what they do – they make money. So until you intervene in that it's just going to keep happening. It's just like Monopoly. Once you start winning at Monopoly you're going to win... (Hodson 19 December 2011).

What Colin Hodson articulates here is an issue Vrasti (2011) raises – specifically the tension between a desire for a softer, more equitable form of capitalism and a complete structural shift, which is complicated by the lack of a credible alternative socio-economic order. Colin Hodson simultaneously articulates an ethic of care that is missing in the current socio-economic order while also noting that the underlying philosophy of neoliberal capitalism is similar to a Monopoly game and induces inevitable competition. Vrasti (2011) describes this inability to imagine a credible alternative socio-economic order as a collective crisis of imagination. She goes on to suggest however that desire for a softer, more caring capitalism tends to invoke individualistic consumer strategies such as sustainable or green consumption, fair trade and buying sweatshop free products. In this way capitalist discourses resolve and transform these ethical questions but are also somewhat duplicitous because they partially serve to give the existing socio-economic order more ethical credibility and soften the worst inequalities that could lead to widespread dissent. Such practices therefore ultimately fail to question the underlying logic of neoliberal capitalist discourses. The issues raised here are substantial but Vrasti (2011) and Gibson-Graham (2006) both suggest (although in different ways) that the dominance of neoliberal capitalist

discourses is linked to subjectivities, specifically the ways in which people become seduced by and invested in maintaining certain discourses (see section 5.2 for further discussion in relation to subjectivities).

The Market Testament did not attempt to resolve these complex questions of desire for a softer more ethical capitalism, versus the complete overhaul of capitalism. For example, the project did not necessarily suggest how to resist the power and effect of the sharemarket in Wellington. Nor did it attempt to deliberately foster obvious alternative socio-economic relations like *Free Store* did³⁰ (see Section 5.2 for further discussion). Rather, the project left it to the participant/viewer to interpret their own meanings about, and possible responses to, neoliberal capitalist discourses. In this way it managed to partially avoid providing any kind of rigid, fixed narrative. In talking about this aspect Colin Hodson stated that his project was about:

How are we labelling all these things, what are we determining is good and worthwhile and what's not. I think that's the issue. And so yeah, maybe one of the issues with the data feed and stuff is it's always spun in certain ways as you know, economic situation great or bad, but who's that for, how is that interpreted. And that is where the arbitrariness of it comes in or a lot of values and ideologies saying what that is, who it benefits and stuff, there's always a bit of spin on that as well (Hodson 19 December 2011).

In his commissioned essay on *The Market Testament*, Patrick (2012, p 4) suggests that this elusive quality was both 'fascinating and frustrating':

[A]s if turning itself inside out from time to time, transforming the flows of unseen numerical data into the visible flickering of lights, but also by asking in a sense, where, when, how is the piece? Even if its logistics were completely revealed to me, could I or would I comprehend them?

This somewhat elusive representation of the sharemarket was important to Colin Hodson. For example, in discussing how the project was linked to the fluctuations of the stock market, he noted that it wasn't necessarily a case of if the stock market goes up, the lights

³⁰ However, through taking place in an empty office building in the CBD of Wellington an alternative use of urban space and resources was enacted which I still consider to a significant political provocation.

flicker more. Rather, there was a complex algorithm used to connect the movements of the stock market to the lighting changes which were not necessarily decipherable. In talking about the work, he noted that his original idea was to have an interior space with:

data feeds going into monitors, and I was trying to kind of present this information in a way as an alternative media type of a hub or something or node which is different from the one you are getting through the Dominion Post or the Herald (Hodson 19 December 2011).

He stated that he then wanted to try something different and wondered whether it would be possible to get 'a whole building... and in a way what we ended up doing was more abstract. Yeah it's kind of less overtly of anything' (Hodson 19 December 2011). To me this illustrates the way in which what started as an idea for an alternative representation of capitalist markets turned into something more open-ended. Patrick (2012, p 4) suggests the project avoided a kind of 'totalizing understanding or awareness and in this aspect is quite different from a mode of activism'. I interpret this to mean the kind of activism characterised by a politics of demand that request specific reforms or changes from the state and other institutions (see section 1.4.1) as well as the more traditional meta-narratives of some Marxist scholarship that call for a complete overthrow of capitalism (see Driscoll-Derickson 2009).

Such an approach to art reflects Ding and Schuermans' (2012, p 728) observations about the Second Hefei Contemporary Art Biennale in China whereby the 'performances, the pictures and the installations in Huangqiao did not provide a ready-made critique of the current situation in China. Neither did they offer a crystal-clear plan for a more equal future'. Similarly *The Market Testament* did not state that the sharemarket is all bad, nor did it clearly articulate a series of ills created and sustained by the sharemarket, and nor did it suggest how people should challenge the current form of the sharemarket. The project did something more subtle – it posed a question which enabled people to reflect on how they understood the sharemarket and wider economy. The economy was no longer depicted as some external reality separate from society, but as a relational sphere of interactions which could potentially be reclaimed and transformed, by local people.

This shift is important because as Gibson-Graham (2006, p 53) write, there has been a tendency over recent years to represent the economy as ‘something that governs society’. So part of this project actually posed an invitation to imagine the economy differently through invoking a geography of care nested in a local place. The questions posed by the project take seriously the ‘role of language and discourse as productive of, rather than mere reflections or representations of, the social and natural world’ (Driscoll-Derickson 2009, p 3). Colin Hodson linked this questioning of the economy to broader shifts occurring through the Global North and elsewhere around the nature of waged work:

I guess people are trying to find a different way of being or living, which is what I think I’ve tried to do with my art practice... I think these are issues which started coming out when I did *The Market Testament*, like what’s the relationship we have to money and how does that put value in our lives? (Hodson 19 December 2011).

In the discussion of the two examples above I have argued that *Productive Bodies* and *The Market Testament* both raised questions about the nature of the capitalist economy. The *Productive Bodies* panel discussion pointed to the risks of capitalist markets extending to an ever widening range of embodied human interactions. *The Market Testament* used a specific site to pose relatively open ended questions around the agency of local people in relation to the sharemarket and wider economy. These two projects encouraged participants to imagine the economy as an embodied, relational process in which local people could reflect on their agency in shaping. However, neither of these projects provided concrete suggestions for imagining and practicing a different type of economy. In contrast *Free Store* did. I turn now to discuss how *Free Store* challenged the concept of scarcity and the cult of the commodity in neoliberal capitalist markets while also enabling a mechanism to participate in a different type of exchange - through a gift economy.

4.3.2 Scarcity, distribution and the cult of the commodity

One of the key principles invoked to explain the operation of the capitalist market economy is the idea that goods and services are more highly valued if they are scarce. It is through the capitalist market’s mechanisms of supply and demand that goods and services are allocated to consumers and it is often claimed that a key advantage of neoliberal capitalism is the efficient distribution created through a transparent and competitive market (Larner 2003;

Mankiw 2006). The *Free Store* engaged with these ideas and to some degree destabilised these dominant understandings of scarcity and efficiency within capitalist markets.

Artist, Kim Paton stated that *Free Store* had two aims. The first was to publicly highlight moments in capitalist supply chains to show how much edible food was being thrown into landfills and the second was to redistribute this in creative ways³¹. I discuss this first aim here, while the second aim is discussed in Section 5.2.

In relation to the first aim, dumped food included those products with damaged packaging or dents, those close to their use by dates and those that don't sell well which are routinely put in locked dumpsters and transported to landfills. Kim Paton described how re-distributing these goods through *Free Store* could re-frame their value. 'Many of the products at [*Free Store*] will already have been paid for several times over. Every loaf of bread or bag of apples we buy includes the unseen cost of however many are wasted' (Paton August 2010). She suggested that the project sought to challenge the idea that the economy somehow 'sits in isolation from people and from the environment. Issues such as pollution and unemployment are external, products of course of an imperfect market' (Paton August 2010). She went on to state that such a view is the taken for granted narrative and that within mainstream economics there are 'no alternative possibilities, no disclaimer that this, like all theories represents a specific, a personal point of view, based on a series of imperfect assumptions and by its very nature requires a vigorous critique' (Paton August 2010).

Kim Paton also pointed out an inherent tension here for people involved in business - that they must subscribe to a model of continual growth if they wish to succeed. *Free Store* sought to 'create a brief respite from the normal rules of trade. A chance to test the viability, to work within the commercial framework, that is to say, to operate within a commercial space, speak the language of retail and create a network of other businesses big and small' (Paton August 2010).

³¹ Kim Paton notes that *Free Store* was an outcome of undertaking an MBA at Waikato University's corporate school where she was issued Mankiw's (2006) book. She stated that '[n]o one better represents how outdated the neoliberal economic agenda is today than Mankiw' (Paton August 2011).

The project did this by providing an alternative distribution system to the capitalist market where dated stock could be passed on. Kim Paton argued that alternative systems such as this are really needed:

And that's one of the biggest issues especially with the Auckland project that we've been dealing with, a lot of businesses and a lot of really big businesses... one of the biggest issues for them, or that prohibits them from having a kind of regular system in place for dealing with waste is that there isn't enough agencies able to undertake the logistics (Paton and Steamson 11 May 2011, Radio New Zealand).

The initial Wellington project raised questions around what it means for participating businesses to expose their waste (Paton August 2010). Kim Paton openly acknowledged this, noting that '[t]o expose product supporting their name but suddenly with no attached [monetary] value' is controversial (Paton August 2010). This was controversial for a number of reasons. The project partially revealed the artificiality of the market and some of the wasteful (inefficient) practices through which prices and brand images are maintained. The project also posed an interesting marketing dilemma for retailers and producers. On the one hand involvement in the project acknowledged that they generate waste which presumably would have gone to the landfill. Therefore involvement could result in their usual practices being framed as environmentally irresponsible and ethically questionable in times of austerity because they had waste to share. In one sense the project therefore pointed to the fact that some businesses would rather dump their old, slightly damaged product than give it away³². However, participation in the project could also indicate a willingness to try an alternative distribution approach that deals with surplus and avoids unnecessary waste. But dumping free products on the market through *Free Store* could also have implications for the value consumers attributed to certain products. These various representational and material concerns were significant for businesses that were approached by Kim Paton. She stated that:

Damage to brand was the number 1 reason for businesses saying no to *Free Store*.

And it was often the businesses we least expected to say no. The nature of business,

³² There are of course a range of health, safety and legal issues associated with the gifting of branded produce close to or past 'use by'/'best before' dates. Accordingly 'damage to brand' may actually encompass a wide range of logistical and health risks that the companies were not prepared to engage with.

the restraints that the rules of business place on us through the ever increasing competition in the market leaves little to no room for acting like a free thinking, rational human being. Many people have noted the irony in a large Australian owned multi-national [Progressive Enterprises] being *Free Store's* biggest contributor (Paton August 2010).

This was also the case for the Waitakere, Auckland *Free Store* and Kim Paton noted that Kraft, which owns Cadbury, Watties and Freshdirect all provided food. She praised those retailers who partnered on the project in Wellington and Waitakere saying they had been open-minded and explored ways to reduce unnecessary food wastage. She suggested that the decisions around whether to get involved could partially be solved by the size of marketing departments. 'In some respects they [large businesses] are leading the game in at least understanding the potential value from a more dramatic response to sustainability' (Paton August 2010). Such examples illustrate Vrasti's (2011) observations discussed earlier in Section 4.3.1 about the ways in which neoliberal capitalist discourses have already resolved and displaced consumers' dissatisfaction with environmentally irresponsible and unethical behaviour through both greenwashing and more genuine attempts to capture ethical consumers.

While damage to brand was a significant issue, as Debord (1966) suggests, the gift economy (enacted through *Free Store* in this case) fundamentally challenged the cult of the commodity. Debord (1966, para 5) writes '[o]nce it is no longer bought, the commodity lies open to criticism and alteration, whatever particular form it may take. Only when it is paid for with money is it respected as an admirable fetish, as a symbol of status within the world of survival'. In writing about the black initiated riots in Los Angeles in 1965, Debord (1996, para 5) argued that through looting and the gift economy, black 'rioters' challenged commodities exchange values:

The *commodity reality* which molds them and marshals them to its own ends, and which has *preselected everything*. Through theft and gift they rediscover a use that immediately refutes the oppressive rationality of the commodity, revealing its relations and even its production to be arbitrary and unnecessary [emphasis original].

It is therefore completely unsurprising that some businesses refused to participate. Not only did the project have implications for individual brands, but partially questioned the commoditising discourse of capitalism itself.

Kim Paton suggested that *Free Store* focused on 're-distribution over production' (Paton August 2010). What *Free Store* so clearly showed is that the problem of need in the economy is not to overcome scarcity, but 'to master material abundance according to new principles. Mastering abundance is not just changing the way it is shared out, but *totally reorienting it*' (Debord 1966, para 7, emphasis original). Kim Paton framed the need for systemic economic change against an impending food crisis of shortages and increasing costs, the need for real environmental sustainability (and not just green-washing) and a re-think of the underlying economic growth model. This focus on re-distribution over production picks up on the point that in many ways the capitalist economy is already too efficient and paradoxically, wasteful or inefficient because the true cost of production is not accounted for in the process. However, as Vrasti (2011, p 5) notes while '[t]he days of mass production may be over, at least as a formula for growth', the 'logic of production now extends throughout the entire social field, collapsing labour and leisure, prosperity and sociality, philanthropy and entrepreneurship, into a so-called "social factory"'. Vrasti's point partially connects with that raised in the *Productive Bodies* panel discussion by Susan Guthrie. Specifically how discussions about the economy have moved beyond maximising material production, to maximising value, brand differentiation, ethical/sustainable consumption and the commodification of social relations such as polite behaviour. These various issues were illustrated in *Free Store* as retailers and producers negotiated how involvement could affect their branding and product reputation, but also their reputation as ethically engaged philanthropic environmentally conscious actors.

This is not to say that material production doesn't matter and there is an inherent tension here. For while *Free Store* exposed the overproduction, artificiality of the capitalist market and wastefulness through dumping, the project was only able to exist as a result of the productive excess of capitalist markets. One could also argue however, that capitalist markets rest on the enclosure and capture of food and energy commons. In this way as Kim Paton noted, the project is really an exercise in alternative distribution, mobilising the gift economy to distribute surplus produced through the efficiency of the capitalist market

without the usual traditions of capitalist exchange. As Gibson-Graham (2006) point out, gifting happens regularly, yet we often fail to acknowledge the importance of this practice in the economy, and to do so is one important way of challenging capitalocentrism by making visible other forms of market distribution.

Free Store pointed to the complex interplay between abundance, artificially maintained markets and narratives of crisis and need. What the project exposed is the perversity of mainstream economic theory - where the dumping of products are actually necessary to maintain brand value, product desirability and consumer confidence in the market. The project clearly highlighted the ways in which the market is not necessarily transparent or free, but rather fragile and artificially manipulated to protect brands and maintain commodity values.

In this way the project disrupted dominant narratives about the capitalist economy, while simultaneously enabling participants to experience an alternative market of the gift economy. However, much like *The Market Testament* it would be over simplistic to argue that the *Free Store* was somehow wanting to overthrow capitalism. Instead the project sought to expose some of the wasteful practices and limitations of dominant capitalist thinking which mean that retailers and producers would send products to landfill rather than re-distributing them. The project provided a practical local response to wasteful capitalist practices and an alternative re-distribution system which was both reliant on capitalist production – but simultaneously partially undermined the logics of it. I suggest that a key theme running through *The Market Testament* and *Free Store* is that they both frame the capitalist economy as a complex, embodied set of discourses and practices that can be shaped through the agency of local subjects through interventions like operating in the gift economy.

4.3.3 Enclosure, capture and colonisation

As outlined in the above sections *Productive Bodies* pointed to different ways in which neoliberal capitalist discourses enclose, capture and colonise human labour and common or collective goods. In this section I outline how *Pioneer City* further developed this theme.

The artist behind *Pioneer City*, Bronwyn Holloway-Smith noted that many participants and members of the public could not work out whether the idea of colonising Mars was some

kind of wishful science fiction, a comment about the socio-ecological state of the earth, or in some cases, whether it was actually a showroom for a new apartment development in a desert in the central North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand (see Figure 4.7). Bronwyn Holloway-Smith stated that the project wouldn't work in a traditional gallery because it needed to be an 'imposter':

That people might actually be convinced by it and think, 'oh it's just another showroom in Wellington . . . And it's only you know, the people who engage and pry a little bit deeper that they start to realise, 'oh actually is this real, are we actually talking about selling Mars ? or is it...?' Where does the illusion end for people? And so if it was in a gallery space it would kind of be obvious that it was an art project. Where as in public space, on a site which hasn't got a history of being one thing or another, it was a bit easier to sit in that territory (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011).

Figure 4.7: Image of model Martian colony
Source: Letting Space N.D.

In developing the project, Bronwyn Holloway-Smith described how she had been following the Nasa Mars Rover explorations and notes that the idea of living on Mars may not be all that ridiculous given that the planet has ice and other basic chemistry which could support human life. She also got interested in how the desire to explore and settle Mars is tied up with ideas around colonisation:

So I guess that was when I started thinking about New Zealand as a colonial country and the fact that we've got a fairly recent history of colonisation and we're still dealing with issues and repercussions of that kind of system and how could we, a nation which doesn't have a government space programme, how could we contribute to this movement to colonise Mars? (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011).

She suggested that we could use our history to provide some guidance around what 'you shouldn't do as well as what you should do' (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011). While researching the project Bronwyn Holloway-Smith was also buying a house and noticed how much real estate is bought and sold off plans. Where people visit a showroom and are shown idealised photos of 'white walls and designer furniture. And it kind of mimicked some of the styles you see in contemporary art galleries' (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011). She wanted to incorporate these ideas into the project in the sense of both appealing to an 'ideal' lifestyle and how these aspirations are often tied up with colonisation and capitalist expansion (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011).

In many ways I didn't initially know how to interpret this project. The opening incorporated music and a video piece which drew on a cultish science fiction aesthetic in its unquestioning optimism about the future utopia awaiting those lucky few selected to colonise Mars. However, I couldn't work out what the project was saying about colonisation. Was the project suggesting that given (some) humans have polluted the Earth, that those of us who can, should head elsewhere? Was it pointing to the very real possibility of colonising Mars within the next few decades, in the language and aesthetic of the contemporary real estate industry? Was it commenting on the frontier myth and a certain euro-colonising narrative and desire to settle new lands? Was it a critique of the real estate industry, a flawless replica which imitated a classed urban aesthetic of clean apartment living which many cannot afford?

In media about the project Bronwyn Holloway-Smith stated that it was a 'mixture of scientific facts, our colonial history and current real estate practice' (cited in Dekker 2011, para 6). Her intention was for the project to comment on current socio-ecological issues, 'over-population, global warming, the threat of nuclear war. Earth could be a horrible place

in the future. I hope this will make people think about the state of our cities' (Holloway-Smith cited in Dekker 2011, para 13). At the same time she intended the project to also seriously consider the prospect of living on Mars (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011).

In a fictional piece of work taking the form of letters between a mother and daughter who are investigating settling on Mars, Meros (2012, para 15) hints at some of this political ambiguity in his response to the project. The daughter outlines a debate which is being held over the statement: 'Mars should not be settled until the main troubles of earth are under control'. The daughter writes to her mother describing how the speaker for the affirmative argues that 'mankind [sic] had done very well in offering the technological possibility of colonising Mars, but that there's no real point if we were just going to ignore the political, economic and social factors that have made earth worth abandoning' (Meros 2012, para 17). *Pioneer City* didn't necessarily outline or offer a critique of these political, economic and social factors leading to this situation and I couldn't quite understand this. Why didn't it? Why did the project leave these questions so open ended?

This ambiguity was a little unsettling. However, as Bishop (2006) and Hawkins (2011) argue, moments of doubt, confusion or absurdity can be important aesthetically and politically - important because they allow for moments of in-betweenness or the ability to disrupt the order of the sensible and pose more open questions where the answer does not reiterate existing categories. This project provided space for participants to consider a range of positions and responses and encouraged people to use their imaginations to reflect on their lives and wider socio-environmental processes. For example, the project directly asked participants (through an 'expression of interest' form) whether they would be interested in going to Mars as part of a new colony, how they would feel about leaving earth, and how they imagine a new colony?

While the project entertained the exciting prospect of settling Mars, it also pointed to the darker consequences of the intersection of capitalist expansion, the eventual despoiling of the earth and need to escape to Mars which is then commodified and sold. The (seemingly) final frontier in the endless extractive narrative of capitalism which pushes us to another planet to partake in a carefully designed and packaged lifestyle. But an escape which is not guaranteed or open to all, and like many neoliberal capitalist discourses, is based on the

cultivation and privileging of certain subjectivities and bodies. This only included those deemed 'productive' in a work society such as the able-bodied, the young, with relevant work skills and heterosexuals with the ability to reproduce. These were some of the factors that were included in the 'expressions of interest' forms participants could fill out if they wished to apply to be a new settler in the Mars colony. The project highlighted the contradictions and various ways subjectivities are bound up in the neoliberal capitalist economy and points to possible, however unequal and dark, future scenarios.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that these four art projects challenged dominant framings of the economy through relational art practices. The four projects encouraged participants to think about: how capitalist markets continually seek to commodify new areas of life in *Productive Bodies*; how the economy is an embodied process and could potentially be re-oriented to focus on local needs in *The Market Testament*; the significance of the gift economy through *Free Store*; and the potentially drastic uneven consequences if humanity does not collectively change relations with the non-human world in *Pioneer City*. In this way the four projects variously disrupted dominant narratives that the capitalist economy is somehow an inevitable, external force shaping society. The projects did this in different ways but a common theme was they all encouraged participants/viewers to reflect on their agency in relation to how the economy is enacted.

These questions around agency were encouraged by framing the economy as embodied, relational - connecting people with distant and proximate others, and able to be shaped through people's local actions. *The Market Testament* and *Free Store* also pointed to a desire for a softer capitalism, infused with an ethic of care and philanthropy culminating in a normative framing of the economy as a system which *should* meet human needs and not destroy the earth. However, this normative view was riddled with contradictions and at times either the inability, or unwillingness, to imagine and name what could replace the current dominant economic system of waged labour and the capitalist economy.

Bishop (2006) writes about how Rancière (2004) understands aesthetics as the ability to think contradiction. The four projects discussed in this chapter produced a kind of confusion

which cannot be easily described as anti-capitalist. Rather, they posed harder questions than merely being for or against something. These questions and contradictions played out in different ways through the projects. Examples include the partial contradiction of *Free Store* relying on the efficiency and overproduction of the capitalist market to source free goods, the difficulty of thinking through the complicity of one's involvement in ecological collapse with *Pioneer City*, or the desire for a softer, kinder form of capitalism without necessarily replacing the sharemarket completely in *The Market Testament*.

Through this refusal to name or categorise in binary framings (of being either for or against neoliberal capitalism), the projects avoided a totalising anti-capitalist narrative which actually reifies the current hegemonic socio-economic order. To borrow from Driscoll-Derickson (2009, p 11) the projects presented an understanding of the 'socio-economic-political world as multiple and heterogeneous, in which capitalist relations exist, but are just one of many different types of existing and meaningful economic' relations. The projects also reflected a more post-structural understanding of power relations, where rather than attempting to seize power, social action is directed towards harnessing 'the productive power of representation and discourse to produce social space through which performance and parody explode the restrictive, oppressive grammar of binaries' (Driscoll-Derickson 2009, p 4).

As Bishop (2011) notes about the most productive kind of social art, in these four Letting Space projects there was no utopia reached, or even necessarily suggested. Rather, the projects asked participants and viewers to confront more difficult questions and did not necessarily provide a blue-print for solving them. Underpinning these difficult provocations was also a sense of agency in relation to contemporary subjectivities. I have argued in this chapter that the projects managed to avoid two common dis-empowering narratives in relation to capitalism and the work society. The first is that local people are powerless to shape the global (and consequently local) economy, and the second related point, is that as everything is already subsumed to capitalism, doing nothing is the only viable option. Through the performative practices of lighting up entire buildings, creating a fake Mars colony showroom, and redistributing food destined for the landfill, the art projects pointed to the more everyday ways in which contemporary subjects are complicit in capitalist

practices. However, the projects also highlighted the often invisible yet simultaneous non-capitalist practices that could potentially be enacted and expanded. The chapter which follows turns towards these themes of agency in relation to re-imagining the limiting framings of contemporary subjects as consumers and waged workers.

Chapter 5: Letting Space, subjectivities and political moments

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how *Free Store* and *The Beneficiaries Office* disrupted dominant understandings of contemporary subjects, creating political moments in which to articulate alternative subjectivities and social actions. The chapter begins with a discussion of *Free Store*, focussing on how the project disrupted a dominant consuming subjectivity. I then analyse responses to *Free Store* in mainstream media to show how the project was conflated with a charity and led to a classed and racialised critique of participants centred on welfare beneficiaries. Following this I outline how *The Beneficiaries Office* extended these ideas, provoking political moments centred on the subjectivity of the unwaged welfare beneficiary.

This chapter moves between analysing the subjectivation processes the two projects prompted for some participants, and the wider societal responses by drawing on mainstream media reporting and online comments (outlined in Section 3.2.1). I argue that *Free Store* and *The Beneficiaries Office* simultaneously exposed the violence of dominant discourses of the work society, while also disrupting how certain subjects are named and placed. The two art projects can therefore be understood as productive political interventions which enabled people to glimpse alternative ways of understanding their subjectivities and the nature of waged work in relation to more dominant discourses of the work society.

5.2 Consuming subjectivities and the Free Store

As noted in Section 4.3.2 the first aim of the *Free Store* was to publicly highlight how much edible food was being thrown into landfills and redistribute this in creative ways. Kim Paton stated that the second aim was to see what new social relations and experiences were created through the project. She described *Free Store* as creating a ‘brief respite from the normal rules of trade’, while appearing to speak the language of retail ‘but with no eftpos, no cash-drawer, no bartering, no stipulation for who takes what’ (Paton August 2010). In this way the project was both an experiment in ‘re-thinking what it is to be a consumer [and] what it means to be in business’ (Paton 2010).

In talking about the broader context for *Free Store*, Kim Paton described the paradoxical position of contemporary consumers. She observed that '[t]he most powerful thing that any of us can do on any given day is spend money' (Paton August 2010). Yet she also queried what this meant for those who have less money and whether consuming is actually powerful when the experience is increasingly constrained and managed. To illustrate this point, she described how the physical layout and product placement in supermarkets (and elsewhere) can create an unease and helplessness when 'the choice has been made for us', and 'it doesn't matter on what side of the road we stop to fill the tank because the petrol stations are likely to be owned by the same person' (Paton 2010).

Her description of the consuming subject having illusory choice reflects Debord's (1966) writing on the 'Spectacle-Commodity Economy'. In this work he argues that the capitalist 'commodity reality' has actually pre-selected everything and subordinated worker-consumers to the cult of the commodity. What Kim Paton appeared to be trying through *Free Store* was to both expose this 'commodity-reality' and provide consumers with another type of experience where commodities were taken out of their normal contexts, laying them open to alteration because they weren't being purchased.

The initial installation of *Free Store* in Wellington was considered incredibly successful by many, including Kim Paton and the Letting Space curators. In addition to high participation (around 1000 in one eight hour day), reviewers claimed that the project successfully accomplished its two goals, making visible wasteful practices in capitalist food supply systems and facilitating interesting social encounters beyond the 'art-informed minority' (Walker 2010b). It thereby provided a space for people to re-think their position within a consumer-oriented society (see Bell N.D.; Galbraith N.D.). As stated by Kim Paton:

where I feel confident in the project's unequivocal success is that the strangeness and the discomfort of the value having shifted to something other than money means suddenly people talk. There is relief and delight and an opening up. We've been open four days and there have been 100s of small conversations, about businesses, about waste, charity, goodwill, hunger and about people being human beings (Paton August 2010).

The initial Wellington project grew organically. Wellington High School students decided they would set up something similar at their school, a short film was made about the project, donations of food flooded in, and one volunteer/artist extended the project by giving away signed \$5 notes (Walker 2010b). The project also received significant national media coverage, both in print and television news which is relatively rare for art projects in Aotearoa New Zealand (see for example McLeod 2010; Wood 2010).

The lack of stipulation around what a participant could take was an important point of the project - there was no screening process. Those who took part could determine the value of goods and how much they wished to take; how much they thought they deserved or needed. Kim Paton stated in relation to the Waitakere *Free Store*:

[i]ts like we've said we need to trust you that you're standing in this queue because you sincerely feel like you need to be here. Yeah and that's the only contract we have. But what I think that does to anyone of us when we feel like we are implicitly trusted or given responsibility as a free thinking, independent adult is that that is empowering and I think its uplifting and that I think is kind of the heart of what is a real, real strength of the *Free Store* (Paton and Steamson 2011, Radio New Zealand).

Positive responses to the projects tended to focus on the creative underlying concept. For example, in mainstream media, online comments and participants' comments in the Letting Space visitors' book in the Wellington site praised the initiative as a great idea for both the creative redistribution of food (which would otherwise end up in landfills) and the positive social service it provided - 'a real community spirit at work' (see comment in Greig 2011). Other participants talked about the productive discomfort taking food had created for them. They described how they felt unsure and slightly strange taking food for free which caused them to question the ways in which they had been conditioned into more dominant purchasing practices without even realising it (Letting Space Visitors' Book 2010).

One of the key observations from Kim Paton, Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery was that a wide range of participants across the socio-economic spectrum took part (Jerram and Amery 22 November 2011, Paton August 2010). As noted earlier, Kim Paton used the words 'human beings' in referring to participants. Through these words, which link the human subject to the project, she simultaneously reminded people what they have in common and

articulated a political subjectivity which exceeded the particular (or named and placed), therefore exacting a universal claim. This representation of human subjectivity, and the performance of this through the project, resonates with Rancière's suggestion that we can think about political moments where those who are not equally included in the existing socio-political order, articulate their 'right to equality' (see section 2.3). In this project the articulation for the right to equality wasn't done in the more conventional sense of demanding that those on welfare benefits receive more money for food. But rather, through the invitation to all 'human beings', a universal call for participation was articulated which exceeded the naming and placing of subjects within conventional discussions about charity, poverty and need.

It was through this open call to participate that the project was able to foster re-subjectivation processes. For instance, as noted earlier, participating in the project prompted some participants to re-think how they understood their own need in relation to dominant categorisations of class. Some participants suggested that the discomfort of participating came from a view of themselves as not being 'in need' and they were uncomfortable about taking something for free which others may need more (Letting Space Visitors' Book 2010). For example, in a reflection piece on the project, the volunteer and artist who helped with the initial Wellington *Free Store*, Darryl Walker, described how participants responded when he pointed out that they could take free \$5 notes which were his personal addition to the *Free Store* project. He writes, '[t]he majority of people approached in this way, were bemused but declined saying things like, 'I can't do that' or 'I can take food, but I can't take money'' (Walker 2010a, para 10). Similarly, while working at the subsequent iteration of *Free Store* in Left Bank Arcade, Wellington, I was involved in a number of interactions where the project prompted discussion around participants' need. The following excerpt from my research journal illustrates two such instances.

Today a guy came up to the stall and said he thought what we were doing was great, we asked if he would like to take anything and he said he had just bought his dinner and that others needed it more. A co-worker asked whether he would like something sweet for dessert, he said again that he didn't really need it for free and that others would probably need it more, while glancing at the others in line. I said it didn't really matter and asked whether he would like it, he eventually decided to take it but

seemed both interested in engaging with the *Free Store* and slightly unsure about being a recipient. Then another guy came up and asked whether there were any sweet pastries. One of us said yes, that we had heaps left over and needed to get rid of the food before closing time. He said he didn't really need it and should leave it for others, but as we were needing to close up he would take some (Research Journal 11 October 2011).

In Cook's (2011) research on this same *Free Store* she discussed a number of similar interactions where participants expressed reluctance to participate because they did not 'need to'. For example one of her respondents said 'I don't need to go to the *Free Store* because I'm not in need of help... I'd think it is unethical for me to go and take' (p 39). Cook suggests that these classed ideas about 'need' are linked to capitalist discourses where those who transgress the hegemonic economy by operating in the gift economy of the *Free Store* 'without qualified need – [are] deemed to be immoral' (p 40).

To me these responses show how the project raised an ethical demand of participants that caused them to reflect on their perceived socio-economic subjectivity. Here I am drawing on Critchley (2007) in referring to ethics as the disturbance of the political status quo. *Free Store* participants were faced with an interruption of their perceived socio-economic subjectivity by being offered free food (and money in one instance), and also an invitation or demand to participate. However, there was at times a certain slippage in Kim Paton's framing of the Wellington and Waitakere projects. For example, as noted above with the Waitakere project, she simultaneously stated that anyone could participate, while noting that the ethical contract was 'because you sincerely feel like you need to be here'. The nature of this need was never explicitly defined though and could therefore be interpreted in different ways. For instance the need to participate may be a desire to operate outside the capitalist market as much as a material need for certain goods. In this way the wider ethical demand created through the projects was expressed through the opportunity to take whatever one wanted from the temporary food commons, while balancing this with the knowledge that others also wished to partake and may need this food more.

Critchley (2007) argues that ethical subjectivity comes about through accepting the demand to be infinitely responsible to the other. But if truly considered, this demand can become

overwhelming and result in a form of tragic guilt. So in the example above, it may have been overwhelming for some participants to think through their level of need in relation to others, and then make a decision about how much to take from the food commons. For if a subject seriously considered the need of all others at all times, they would be crushed. However, what the project allowed was a sublimation of this usual self-sufficient/needy dichotomy. Because the project was not framed around existing charity norms or subjectivities, but was an art project, subjects were able to participate through an interruption of the order of the sensible which if they allowed it, reframed their sense of self in relation to capitalist exchange, charity and other humans.

As outlined in Section 2.3, various theorists broadly argue that political moments involve an interruption or transgression of the order of the sensible: when individuals or a group challenge the nature of the relationship through which they are positioned (Dikec 2005; Rancière 1998; Rancière 2001; Rancière 2004; Swyngedouw 2009). Such moments can be observed in *Free Store* with the lack of screening and the open invitation to ‘human beings’ to participate. This meant that participants were not necessarily already named and placed subjects, such as: the art patron; the food bank recipient; the welfare beneficiary; or the ‘needy’ versus the self-sufficient ‘good’ citizen. While Walker (2010b) described Wellington *Free Store* participants as falling into four categories: those who genuinely ‘needed help’; the curious passer-by; people bringing donations; and others just out for something free. I would argue that *Free Store* disrupted even these kinds of categorisations. Everyone was welcome. All those who participated were somewhat re-defined through the encounter, not named and placed through screening processes or other welfare/statist technologies of governance, but rather as ‘human beings’ who deserved (needed) a break from the hegemony of the neoliberal capitalist economy. However, this is not to say that either the projects or participants were suddenly free from the powerful subjection effects of more dominant discourses. For as an earlier paragraph notes, there were still moments when participants felt like it was immoral for them to take from the *Free Store* if their level of need did not match that of charity/welfare discourses, and where Kim Paton attempted to qualify the need of those who did participate at the Waitakere *Free Store*.

Many participants expressed the hope that *Free Store* would continue and spread throughout the country (see comments after Greig 2011; Walker 2010b; Wood 2010). It did,

leading to a proliferation of similar projects across Aotearoa New Zealand. A group of individuals contacted Kim Paton and opened a more permanent version of *Free Store* in a vacant commercial building in Left Bank Arcade, Wellington in December 2010. The individuals formed a not-for-profit organisation and maintained the store's position in Left Bank until December 2012 when its free lease was terminated (Research Journal 12 November 2012)³³. This *Free Store* operated in a similar way to Kim Paton's two projects where myself and volunteers collected surplus food, primarily from cafes, bakeries and restaurants in the city and distributed it for approximately one hour each day from Tuesday through to Saturday. The project also employed the same principle that the individual participant could determine how much they took. Again, this project did not frame itself as a charity as anyone was welcome to participate. The initiators of this *Free Store* foregrounded the point that the project was providing an alternative and sustainable business model (*Free Store Wellington N.D.*).

In May 2011 a *Free Store* opened in Palmerston North, led by full-time volunteer Rebecca Culver. Again the project used a vacant commercial building and was staffed by volunteers. This project was framed slightly differently however. While it was framed as a way to reduce unnecessary waste and redistribute food, it was also pitched as meeting a need that was not being met by existing charities. So it was framed as a project for those people who were in need but who would not qualify for welfare or help from standard charities. Approximately one month into the project Culver reported that most days they had more than 50 people from 'all walks of life' through the store (Sutton 2011).

Kim Paton then partnered with the Auckland Council and a *Free Store* opened in Waitakere, West Auckland in February 2011³⁴ for one month. The Waitakere project had a significantly different reception in West Auckland than Central Wellington. Where in Wellington the project had been primarily understood and framed as an art project curated by Letting Space and partially funded by Creative New Zealand. The Waitakere *Free Store* was framed more as something between a social service and sustainability initiative with support from the Auckland Council.

³³ As noted in Table 3.1 I volunteered once a week for two months (October – November 2011) at the semi-permanent Free Store in Left Bank on Cuba Street, Wellington.

³⁴ This second project by Kim Paton in Waitakere was not officially connected with Letting Space, although it was acknowledged that the project had debuted through Letting Space.

The Waitakere project prompted much more controversy and mixed reactions than the first Wellington project. It got joyful praise and positive feedback about reducing waste and re-distributing food, and also received subtle criticism and outright condemnation. It generated a predominantly racialised debate in the mainstream media which focused on the nature of charity, poverty, need and welfare beneficiaries' bodies. Kim Paton stated 'I guess the one astonishing thing is the feedback from media reports about *Free Store* and a lot of it is a groundswell against people on benefits' (Mackey 2011). In what follows I discuss how *Free Store* in Waitakere provoked shame and stigmatisation around specific subjectivities and bodies, both in mainstream media reporting and in online comment forums.

5.2.1 Charity, competition and need

Kim Paton never described the Waitakere *Free Store* as a traditional charity or poverty action plan, but rather as something for those who were 'struggling to pay their weekly food bill but unwilling or ineligible to access a food bank' (Harvey 2011). However, media reporting on Waitakere's *Free Store* focussed on the sheer number and neediness of participants. Steamson of Radio New Zealand stated in reference to the opening day, '[t]he queue of people stretched hundreds down the pathway, every one of them with a tale to tell' (Paton and Steamson 2011, Radio New Zealand)³⁵. This tale was primarily narrated as one of need, of hardship and tough times on limited welfare benefits and inadequate incomes. For example:

[f]ood wise it's a bit of a struggle because all the food prices have gone up and the benefit's not going as far as it should be. I do part time work as well but that's not enough to cover. So it's tight all round, yeah (unnamed interviewee in Paton and Steamson 2011, Radio New Zealand).

Kim Paton partially echoed these points, stating that while there was a mix of people from every ethnic group 'the need was incredibly real and absolutely unavoidable' (Paton and Steamson 2011, Radio New Zealand). She described those who took part as 'dominated by unemployed people, people on the benefits and I would say really low income, large families and there was not one moment that I saw anyone under any kind of scrutiny that

³⁵ Kim Paton suggests that there must have been anywhere between 300-400 people in this queue. She states that on average the project in Henderson was able to provide food to between 150-400 people per day, depending on supplies (Kim Paton and Steamson 2011).

wouldn't have qualified³⁶ to be in there' (Paton and Steamson 2011 Radio New Zealand). The demand for food was so high at the Waitakere project that volunteers had to limit the number of people in the store at any one time and restricted what people could take to what they could carry - no bags were allowed (Research Journal 11 February 2011).

Even though participants told stories of economic hardship and need and at times these were repeated by Kim Paton, she still continued to frame *Free Store* as different to standard charities. *Free Store* complicates the idea that charity is 'always about someone having to give and another person taking. The *Free Store* is not about that' (Paton August 2010). She understood interactions at *Free Store* as reciprocal, where food destined for the landfill was re-distributed, where volunteers gave their time but got something out of the experience and where landowners increased their chances of renting their space by activating it.

While Kim Paton never framed the Waitakere project as a traditional charity, responses indicated other understandings. One theme which emerged was a link between participation and reducing the experience of shame. For example during Wellington's *Free Store* Kim Paton had talked about how some participants were 'not living in poverty but were possibly struggling from one pay cheque to another, and would be ashamed to go to a food bank' (Wood 2010). This position was re-iterated by participants in the Waitakere project. For example, a participant in the Waitakere project said '[y]ou know a lot of these people wouldn't go to the Salvation Army, they're too embarrassed. But they'll stand in line here because there's support. Look at all of us, you don't feel so alone'. This participant also noted that '[i]t's really tough, for a lot of people and it's not just Māoris or Islanders [sic] it's all of us, the whole lot of us' (Forsyth 2011).

While waiting in line myself at the Waitakere *Free Store* a woman standing behind me initiated a conversation stating that she normally wouldn't come to 'something like this' but was curious to know what it was all about (Research Journal 11 March 2012). What I sensed from our conversation was an ambivalence, a desire to let me know she was not one of the unlucky who needed charity, but was also interested in participating given so many others in her community were participating (see Figure 5.1). The potential discomfort of participating so publicly by waiting in line was then illustrated as people in two different cars driving past

³⁶ It is interesting to note that Kim Paton slips into more dominant framings of charity here with the use of the term 'qualified'.

shouted at us. From the first car someone shouted the phrase ‘poor people’ while from the second, someone shouted ‘shame’ (Research Journal 11 February 2011).

Figure 5.1: Image of the Waitakere Free Store showing line of participants. Source: authors, 11 February 2011.

The idea of charity and assessing need was a major theme in responses to the various *Free Stores*. In online forums following media articles about the Waitakere, Left Bank Arcade and Palmerston North *Free Stores*, comments questioned whether the proliferating projects would compete with existing charities and whether participants would ‘take advantage’:

I appreciate that many in the community are significantly in need, but I don’t understand why there has to be competition for the delivery of this kind of community welfare. Surely existing establishments like food banks would provide a much better service if they received goods from ‘Free Store’ donors, and they are already set up to adequately judge the needs of their clients (comment in response to Harvey 2011).

[The] concept makes sense if the needy are to benefit. I would be interested to know how they will vet (sic) their customers though. Sadly there are always people willing to profit from the loopholes of this kind . . . (comment in response to Harvey 2011).

In response to these concerns, Benjamin Johnson, one of the organisers of the *Free Store* in Left Bank Arcade, Wellington, stated that participants 'taking advantage' was not really a problem. That 'most people understand that others need the service too' and that 'on some level people's conscience kicks in: we all want the *Free Store* to be there tomorrow' (comment in response to McBride 2011).

The response from established charity groups was mixed. The Wellington Downtown Community Ministry³⁷ Director, Stephanie McIntyre, supported the projects and noted that they would not make a difference to demand for food banks as those people in systemic poverty would continue to need help. Other charities were not so supportive and felt that the proliferating *Free Stores* could lead to negative social effects. In response to the Palmerston North *Free Store*, Salvation Army Communities Ministries³⁸ Manager, Kevin Richards, queried whether the project would encourage 'welfare dependency' and actually benefit those most in need given that there were no screening processes. Richards outlined how the Salvation Army and Methodist Social Services use strict rules to determine who can access support, which includes a host of other services such as budgeting, health care and addiction services. While Richards acknowledged that times were getting tougher for many and demand for food banks was increasing, he was also not overly concerned about the competition of *Free Store* as the suppliers of *Free Store* and food banks were quite different (Fairfax NZ News 2011). In response, Culver, organiser of the Palmerston North's *Free Store* stated that the project was not intended to compete with established charities but rather cater for people who were caught short such as those who have a sudden bill and wouldn't qualify for a food bank. 'It's a different niche . . . it's between a soup kitchen and a food bank' (Hatch 2011).

³⁷ The Wellington Downtown Community Ministry is an umbrella organisation set up by different religious groups in Wellington. The organisation is concerned with advocacy for those in poverty or who are homeless, and also provides material assistance for these groups.

³⁸ Similar to the Wellington Downtown Community Ministry, the Salvation Army Communities Ministries provide both advocacy and material assistance for those in poverty around Aotearoa New Zealand. They tend to operate within a more traditional charity model and many of their services involve needs assessments and screening processes.

Through the above discussion I have shown how Kim Paton's *Free Stores* disrupted the order of the sensible in relation to conventional understandings of both art and charity. Through blurring conventional categorisations of art and charity the projects provided embodied encounters that prompted participants to reflect on how they had been conditioned into more dominant consuming practices. The lack of screening processes in these projects was an important factor in disrupting the more conventional mechanisms through which subjects are named and placed in relation to poverty and need. While some people embraced the ambiguity and disruptive nature of the projects, others did not and sought to fix the projects and participants through familiar tropes which characterise the order of the sensible in relation to the work society.

5.2.2 Beneficiaries, bodies and conspicuous consumption

In response to a TV3 News story on Waitakere's *Free Store* there were many comments about the bodies of participants waiting in line. Comments focused on the (often) large size of people waiting in line, their apparent lack of employment, their clothing choices and smoking habits:

It's good you are enlightening people of NZ that we do have poverty in this country, it was a shame that there were poor people standing on the street smoking tailor made cigarettes, wearing gold chains, \$70 label hats and maybe of the many there 10% were slim or looked hungry, I hope any users were required to show proof of poverty eg community services card? (comment in response to Forsyth 2011).

Judging by the people in the queue at the Free Food Shop we must have the fattest poor people in the world (comment in response to Forsyth 2011).

None of those people looked malnourished or hungry, on the whole they looked like they had obesity issues! They also didn't have jobs to go to. Why is there such a focus on how the government is failing society? It's up to the individual or family to be responsible for their own welfare. It's time people stepped up and stopped relying on welfare (comment in response to Forsyth 2011).

In response to these kinds of comments, others pointed out that obesity does not necessarily mean someone is rich, or that they are healthy and eat well – but that obesity can often be associated with those who cannot afford healthy food. Still others just

condemned these people for being judgemental and mean-spirited people and perpetuating feelings of shame for those on benefits. For example:

Being on a benefit sucks with people like you making those less fortunate feel like shit because they have to use welfare to survive. Why would you bother queuing for all that time if you didn't really need it – it's not like they were getting much. If you are ever on 'struggle street' I hope you remember what it felt like to be so superior. Maybe the people are fat because they comfort eat to shut out the reality of their depressing lives (comment in response to Forsyth 2011).

Others talked about how difficult it was to survive due to the recent global financial crisis, welfare cuts, GST rises and high unemployment in Aotearoa New Zealand. One writer who identified as relatively affluent noted that many middle class people have no idea of the difficulties others in society face. They suggested that it is not so easy to get an education and 'take responsibility' for those who have been subjected to family violence and sexual abuse, who have parents with addiction problems and limited incomes (comments in response to Forsyth 2011).

Meanwhile others embraced and praised the project. 'Great concept and yes it has been done before and I hope it spreads throughout the country' (comment in response to Harvey 2011). Still others pointed out that the project should be read as a social art intervention. 'I don't think anyone has acknowledged that the Free Store is an artwork, and it's open to anyone that wants to participate' (comment in response to Forsyth 2011).

These varied responses illustrate the unsettling nature of the project and point to the ways in which it challenged fixed ideas about certain subjectivities and socio-economic practices. The more negative and shaming comments directed at participants illustrate McCreanor's (2005) use of the 'standard story' (see also Fish 1980). Here the standard story is a 'loosely bounded group of images and ideas that is widely recognisable within a culture, despite its flexibility which renders it capable of being evoked by a few words' (McCreanor 2005, p 55). *Free Store* challenged the wider standard story in Aotearoa New Zealand in relation to charity, welfare and significantly - ethnicity. Was this an art project, a social service or welfare initiative or an alternative philanthropic community/business model? Who should be allowed to participate and if it takes place in a poorer neighbourhood with higher

numbers of Pasifika and Māori, does that mean it is automatically a charity and those participating are open to critique and shaming, thereby re-inscribing the standard story for these ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand? There has been significant work in Aotearoa New Zealand which has looked at the ways in which Māori and Pasifika people are consistently framed and understood in negative ways in relation to Pākehā and other ethnic groups. Specifically they are often framed as ‘unmotivated’, criminal and overly dependent on dominant groups and the state. See for instance (Bell 1996; Karlo 2013; Loto, Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Nikora, Karapu, and Barnett 2006; McCreanor 2005; Workman and McIntosh 2013).

These are relatively challenging and potentially threatening questions, and the project transgressed and blurred the boundaries between taken for granted social categories of people and practices. While some participants and sectors of society appeared to embrace this provocation and transgression, others responded by trying to fix, name and place the projects and participants in predictable ways. These fixing or common sense responses drew on specific understandings of certain places and subjectivities, illustrating Kwon’s (2002 p 53) point that ‘specific locations or places imbue projects with certain uniqueness’. Wellington’s *Free Store* could more easily be understood as a form of social art because of its urban/intellectual ‘cool’ character and a creative city discourse that the city has attempted to foster for a number of years (see Levin and Solga 2009 for a critique of creative city discourses in relation to social differences in Toronto). But in Waitakere where predominantly Māori and Pasifika people lined up around the block to participate, it was seen as a charity in the eyes of many, revealing the ways in which certain raced, classed and ethnic groups are geographically placed in relation to what it means to be a good neoliberal subject³⁹.

The shaming discourses that were invoked, particularly in relation to Waitakere’s *Free Store* participants, drew on contemporary neoliberal framings of certain subjectivities. In particular, the ways in which welfare beneficiaries were framed as being somehow

³⁹ Central Wellington has some of the highest income and education statistics in New Zealand, while Waitakere West Auckland has very mixed socio-economic statistics, with notably larger numbers of Māori and Pacific peoples (Statistics New Zealand 2012). Central Wellington also seeks to construct itself as an urban, cosmopolitan and creative centre, while West Auckland is suburban and often associated with a ‘Westie’ or more of a ‘working class’ cultural identity.

‘immoral’, ‘lazy’, ‘greedy’ and ‘taking advantage’ of the state and other surpluses are points that various authors have discussed (see for instance Hall and O’Shea 2013; Lerner 2000; Levitas 2005; Rose 2000). In this way the project pointed to a tension between acknowledging need, economic precarity and inequality, without allowing those aspects of someone’s subjectivity to become their only public story. What this also raised, among other issues, is the question of whether it is only obviously recognisable middle class people who are allowed to legitimately engage in alternative socio-economic practices because they are not already positioned and named as welfare beneficiaries. If, as Gibson-Graham (2006) and others argue (see Chatterton and Pickerill 2010), academics should be investigating and fostering post capitalist practices, I would also argue that we need to be mindful of how these practices are framed and be attuned to the consequences for those who participated. While some may suggest that being called ‘lazy’ or ‘fat’, or shouted at by passing cars isn’t that significant (and in many ways pales in comparison to the forms of physical violence and annihilation many bodies are subjected to), such abuse may be enough to discourage those already uncertain about participating in alternative socio-economic relations.

What is at stake is, as Butler (2006b, p 20) notes, that ‘each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies, as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed’. This vulnerability was publicly enacted by those lining up around the block at Waitakere’s *Free Store*. And yet through participating so publicly, participants were also able to enact a degree of agency. Through publicly lining up with others, they were able to displace some of the shame being poor or ‘needy’ induced. Or more specifically, the act of publicly lining up to participate in a non-screened encounter (unlike most charities) could be seen as an effective response to the individualising discourses of neoliberalism that allocate blame for material need to specific individuals rather than wider structural processes.

The various *Free Stores* provided relational spaces where participants could re-think their subjectivity and engage in alternative social relations. However, the projects also illustrated how when some people attempted to engage with alternative socio-economic relations they were still at times deprived of identifying with valuable conceptions of what it means to be legitimate citizens through the dominant discourses of the work society. When

predominantly Pasifika and Māori people lined up to participate, the project was narrated as a charity, prompting stigma and shame speech towards those who participated. But like Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest, there are always multiple stories and at other times the collective act of publicly lining up was one way to minimise the stigma of individualising neoliberal discourses around poverty and need.

What I have shown above is how the various *Free Store* projects highlighted urban processes of struggle and discomfort. The projects reflect Levin and Solga's (2009) point that art practices can create an agonistic politics building from 'real conflict and collision rather than insisting on a consensus over what constitutes community values, morally, aesthetically, and politically' (p 52). The *Free Store* projects did just this and were generative interventions which prompted discussions about poverty, need, waste, inequality and welfare beneficiaries which overflowed the usual categories of the order of the sensible. While some people embraced the projects' unsettling ambiguities, others drew on the dominant discourses of the order of the sensible to try and name and place those who participated as 'bad subjects' who were somehow 'taking advantage' of charity and waste surplus without having to qualify their need. Bearing these points in mind, I now turn to *The Beneficiaries Office* which further intensified these political questions around welfare beneficiaries, the nature of waged work and what counts as a liveable life in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand.

5.3 The Beneficiaries Office: The 'legitimate' worker and unemployed welfare beneficiary

As briefly mentioned in Section 4.2.2, the Wells Group, led by artist Tao Wells⁴⁰ challenged and re-framed how unemployed welfare beneficiaries and waged labour was understood in Aotearoa New Zealand through *The Beneficiaries Office*. The Wells Group did this through a range of public relations type practices which at times focused on constructing the welfare beneficiary (or unwaged worker) as a good citizen, while at others, attempted to completely reframe this subjectivity outside the order of the sensible that structures the work society.

⁴⁰ The Beneficiary's Office was framed as a collaborative project involving a number of people operating under the collective 'The Wells Group'. While Tao Wells framed the project as collaborative, he was primarily quoted in media reporting around it and appeared as the identifiable spokesperson and primary artist responsible for the project.

5.3.1 The unemployed beneficiary as the 'responsible' citizen

The Wells Group issued press releases arguing that working less would reduce environmental degradation because the 'average carbon footprint of the unemployed person is about half of that of those earning over \$100,000' (Letting Space N.D.). They stated that in an 'advanced' society people should actually work less, consume less and enjoy life more (Letting Space N.D.). In this way the Wells Group attempted to re-frame the subjectivities of welfare beneficiaries, the under-employed and the poor in Aotearoa New Zealand as environmentally responsible members of society. This approach illustrated a simple reversal, where rather than being seen 'lazy' and 'irresponsible', the unemployed were framed as making ethically informed decisions around consumption in a world of finite resources.

The Wells Group also drew on more hybrid discourses to discuss connections to waged work. For instance Tao Wells argued that '[n]o one should be forced to do a job, because unhappy people in jobs are not economically efficient . . . so we can not afford for people to not be happy doing jobs' (Tonkin 2010, para 4). These two broad framings pick up on both anti-consumption and sustainability discourses around living more simply and populist new management ideas around the efficiencies gained through happy, engaged employees (see for instance critiques by Tokumitsu 2014). Such ideas focus on tempering the negative excesses of capitalism (through consuming less) while still facilitating a certain kind of happiness or willingness to work, that partially resonates with appeals to maximise the efficiency and productivity of the waged neoliberal subject (see Vrasti 2011). In this way the Wells Group partially re-framed relatively contemporary discourses around the joys of waged work through a sustainability/efficiency lens, albeit it in a softer, more caring form of what the good neoliberal subject should aspire to and expect from life in the work society.

5.3.2 Society as a prison

While the above discussion partially points to a legitimising of welfare beneficiaries, the unemployed and the poor (drawing on a range of different ideas), the Wells Group also reframed these subject positions in relation to wider society and the state. For example, in media releases Tao Wells compared waged labour to a form of 'slavery'. He was cited critiquing the current requirement in Aotearoa New Zealand where if you are on a benefit you are required to take a job or your benefit may be cut. He said, 'we should never be

forced to take a job. If you're forced to take a job it's a punishment. If a job's a punishment then society must be a prison' (Nichols 2010, para 12).

To some extent we could see this statement as a political moment after Rancière. As outlined in section 2.3 Rancière (2001; 2004) argues that political moments are not when individuals or groups demand something from elites, but rather involve the speaking out of the right to a certain form of liberty. In this instance Tao Wells didn't demand that beneficiaries receive more money or be given greater training allowances so they could get jobs. Instead he re-defined 'the whole' of society as a prison. He articulated a lack of liberty, a lack of real choice for all – including welfare beneficiaries, the unemployed and the poor, but also those in waged labour and the wealthy. Tao Wells proposed that there is essentially no real liberty in our society, in this case the liberty to choose what work one performs, because one's material existence (in the form of food and shelter) is threatened if you refuse to do a certain job.

Through this re-framing of all waged labour, Tao Wells challenged aspects of the work society that frames waged work as providing a sense of legitimation and personal satisfaction for people (see Weeks, 2011). Tao Wells didn't frame waged labour as something to be pursued, as something which provides legitimation for people's sense of self. Nor did he frame waged labour as the means through which to live the life one desires, a way to fund certain consumption practices and lifestyles. Rather, he framed work as punishment – akin to a prison sentence. Tao Wells challenged the nature of the relationship through which he, as the unemployed/underemployed was positioned. He was no longer a certain named and placed person - the 'lazy bludger', or the 'desperately seeking work beneficiary'. He attempted to move discussion beyond such limiting shame-placed subjectivities. In this way Tao Wells sought to point out a common condition and vulnerability affecting all people, whether they have waged jobs or not. He articulated the point that all of us are subjugated and constrained through our relationship to waged work which is maintained and enshrined through the powerful, yet unquestioned societal discourses of the work society.

5.3.3 Post-capitalist practices and subjectivities

The Wells Group also pointed out the ways in which dominant neoliberal capitalist discourses seek to make invisible and/or devalue a wide range of non-economic relational

practices that sustain society. Tao Wells claimed that contrary to popular framings of welfare beneficiaries and the unemployed, they were not getting paid for 'doing nothing'. Instead he stated that:

everyone who is alive works to live. Now what is work? Is it just purely financial? It can't be – we all rip off our jobs, we all participate in other things that we're not supposed to at work. If we didn't, society in itself would collapse. If we didn't notice our neighbour, if we didn't say hello, if we didn't do the extra things - I feel ridiculous even having to make those points but this is the state of things (Fox 2010, para 6).

Through these statements Tao Wells challenged the primacy given to waged labour and re-focused attention on a whole (often politically invisible) range of socio-economic relations which tend to be ignored by capitalist value structures or not considered legitimate 'work'. In this sense he was articulating in public forums the iceberg idea Gibson-Graham (2006) and others talk about. Figure 5.2 suggests that what we understand as the capitalist economy and waged labour is actually underpinned and sustained by a whole range of non-capitalist practices that tend to be politically invisible in most discussions about the economy. Tao Wells argued that even when we are in waged work we are continually involved in these non-economically productive actions and encounters, but often fail to acknowledge or understand them. He pointed to the emotional and relationship work involved in everyday encounters (both within waged work and elsewhere) which facilitates being-in-common with others and that actually sustain the capitalist labour market and wider economy.

Tao Wells claimed he was not advocating for people to live off the state, but instead 'living for the state' (Fox 2010, para 8). In this way he also attempted to re-frame the relationship between welfare beneficiaries and the nation state. So rather than the contemporary dominant framing of the state being an entity supporting some citizens through welfare payments, the state became a process that people actively participated in creating and 'living for'. This re-framing of the state and subjectivities resonates with conceptions of radical democracy and the agency of all subjects to concern themselves with political issues, no matter who they are (see for instance Brown, 2011; Ross 2011). In this way Tao Well's attempted to challenge and overflow those more dominant discourses of the work society

which seek to limit conceptions of legitimate citizenship (and therefore voice) to those in waged work.

Figure 5.2: The 'hidden' alternative economy and social practices. Drawing by Ken Byrne.
Source: <http://www.all4all.org/2005/11/2188.shtml>

The above statements and positions articulated by Tao Wells (and the Wells Group) through *The Beneficiaries Office* illustrated a range of contradictions and tensions. On the one hand, they suggested that happy waged workers will actually increase efficiency. On the other hand they pointed to how increased efficiency and consumption are leading to environmental collapse and therefore the unemployed and poor are more responsible citizens than the working rich. However, waged work was also framed as a form of slavery to

which many subject themselves without much critical reflection about what this means. To some extent these contradictions sum up the position Tao Wells occupied and embodied throughout this project.

In pointing out these tensions, I do not mean to suggest that the project was inconsistent or somehow at fault. Rather, like Bishop (2006) and Butler (cited in Davies 2008) suggest, it is important to discuss those moments of discomfort and contradiction because they provide important insights into how discourses shape subjectivities and the limits of what is sayable and not sayable in the public realm. In what follows I discuss the pointed reactions and at times rage, this project prompted because these responses reveal the politicised ways in which the project further disrupted the order of the sensible of the work society.

5.3.4: Responses to The Beneficiaries Office

The project garnered significant mainstream media attention (for instance see Fox 2010; Prime News 2010; TV3 News 2010), provoking messy and varied responses in much stronger and more personal ways than any of the other five Letting Space projects. In this sense it reflected Bishop's (2006) point that sometimes the aesthetic of a work can actually be provocation or discomfort. But as Ding and Schuermans (2012) point out, we cannot assume that people will necessarily understand an art project the way the artist intended it, or what the eventual effects of the project will be.

Mainstream media consistently described the work as 'a tax-payer funded project to promote unemployment' (Fox 2010, para 1). Media articles also consistently mentioned the amount of money Wells was receiving for the work. For example; the Dominion Post initially incorrectly reported that *The Beneficiaries Office* (and Letting Space) received \$40,000 from Creative New Zealand to stage the work. The amount was in fact \$3,500 and a retraction and correction were printed (Nichols 2010). Tao Wells' own position as an 'unemployed beneficiary' was also consistently foregrounded even though he was employed part-time during the project as the principal artist (Fox 2010)⁴¹.

While different media organisations no doubt sought to provoke controversy through their headlines such as the incorrect reporting of the costs of the project, the framing of

⁴¹ There were other ways Wells could have been framed – as an artist who had been employed on this project for a number of months. Or just as an artist with no reference to the fact he was also a welfare beneficiary.

subjectivities described in the above media reporting bear dissection. Through juxtaposing the terms 'taxpayer' and 'unemployed beneficiary', binary subject positions were emphasised which attempted to define the limits of the project and contain the two positions.

Through these binary framings 'tax payers' were cast in the 'responsible' position of funding both the state and the project. However, what made this project controversial was the fact that it was 'promoting unemployment'. The headline implied that something was clearly wrong, as promoting unemployment could never be a legitimate goal for a neoliberal government or the use of tax payers' money? As McKee et al (2012) note, many minority world government responses to the global financial crisis emphasised strategies to reduce or manage unemployment as the only 'legitimate' approach. Indeed fears about increasing unemployment, precarity and welfare dependency are some of the biggest political issues facing many minority societies at present (Kitson, Martin, and Tyler 2011; Vradi 2013a; Weeks 2011). Debates about these issues reflect inherent tensions around the role of government, where on the one hand people expect their governments to try and reduce unemployment and thereby maintain the work society so that they can have some form of a liveable life. Yet on the other hand, neoliberal discourses around reduced state intervention and the promotion of flexible competitive labour markets have simultaneously contributed to reducing people's expectations of secure waged work. These debates reflect the ways in which the discourses of the work society have shifted in recent years as neoliberal ideas around personal responsibility and the retreat of the welfare state have become further entrenched, albeit in geographically specific contexts (Larner 2003; Lewis, Larner, and Heron 2008).

In addition to these wider societal structural issues, the media framings of the 'taxpayer' and 'unemployed beneficiary' also sought to personalise the issue. Where the state was framed as a collective composed of tax payers and non-tax paying 'unemployed beneficiaries'. Moreover tax payers were not recipients of other state benefits. The framing set up two subject positions which were more simplistic than the realities of most people's lives. Increasingly in Aotearoa New Zealand people simultaneously contribute to maintaining the state through tax on a wide range of transactions (such as goods and services tax, local government rates, petrol taxes) and also receive various state benefits

(such as public health care, education and unemployment benefits). In this way the media framing illustrated how the order of the sensible attempted to name and place both Tao Wells and the project within existing dominant binary positions of the tax payer and welfare beneficiary.

Much anger and derision was directed at Tao Wells in response to the project and internet comments attempted to make his position uninhabitable through shame and stigma. In online comment forums people called him a 'lazy bludger'. People said that he 'looked like Lenin' (see Figure 5.3). That he deserved everything coming to him and that his benefit should be cut, that he was 'a waste of space' and 'didn't deserve to live'. People called on him to contribute back to society and questioned his sense of morality – describing him as someone who just takes while others have to work. Others described him as a thief, stealing their tax dollars while doing nothing productive. Still others seemed confused in their criticism displaying both envy and disgust – saying how lucky it was for Tao Wells (and others like him) to do nothing while they had to work their arses off. He was also critiqued by other welfare beneficiaries who claimed that he was giving them a bad name by perpetuating the stereotype of beneficiaries being lazy and not wanting to work when in fact many beneficiaries were trying their best to get a job. Still others claimed that Tao Wells was 'abusing' the welfare system because it is only meant for short term need and should not be allowed to be a 'lifestyle choice' (see comments in response to Fox 2010; Nichols 2010; Tonkin 2010).

Figure 5.3: Media image of Tao Wells.

Source: <http://static.stuff.co.nz/1287132611/836/4239836.jpg>

People also described Tao Wells as a ‘bad artist’ who had no talent. They suggested that the funding of this project was a shocking display of ‘PC gone mad’ and the ‘art mafia’ having their way. Criticisms were directed at Creative New Zealand and the other bureaucrats who approved the funding for the project and who needed to be held accountable in some way (see comments in response to Nichols 2010). One person even advised Tao Wells that he ‘shouldn’t bite that hand that feeds him’ (comment in response to Fox 2010). Such a comment could be interpreted as a warning to not risk speaking up (thereby quelling dissent) but also as an admonishment that only certain subjects are entitled to speak about these issues.

To me the range of comments outlined above illustrate two important points. Firstly they reveal a contemporary contradiction that Aronowitz and Cutler (1998, p 40) describe whereby ‘[l]ate capitalist society is engaged in a long-term historical process of destroying job security, while the virtues of work are ironically and even more insistently being

glorified'. Secondly they reveal an awareness of the shame surrounding welfare beneficiaries' subjectivities and an attempt to emphasise what could be called the good beneficiary. Or, in other words they reveal the extent to which people have subjected themselves to the dominant discourses of the work society. These attempts to define and manage what constitutes a good and bad welfare beneficiary are completely understandable given the Human Rights Commission's recent findings that welfare beneficiaries are one of the social groups most discriminated against in Aotearoa New Zealand (New Zealand Human Rights Commission 2012).

Those online comments, journalists and others who supported the project or engaged with it in different ways pointed out that it was performance art and was intended to provoke reactions. Some pointed out the predictability of the right-wing reactions and criticised such responses as limited and unengaged with the actual ideas the Wells Group articulated (see comments in response to Nichols 2010). For example, artist, Colin Hodson noted that some journalists did engage with the concept:

[Y]ou'd hear on National Radio, amongst all the 'this is ridiculous, this is outrageous', someone would go, I think it was, what's her name who does the morning show in National Radio, Kathryn Ryan. She said something like 'it did make me think though, what am I doing every morning when I get up and rush off to do this and come home and go off again, what am I chasing?' So that idea did lodge with people, but after you got over the yelling and shouting (Hodson 19 December 2011).

However, from my analysis of responses to the project there appeared to be relatively limited positive support, and most of this was framed in terms of an artistic aesthetic or authorial intent to provoke. And at times even this authorial intent to provoke was itself critiqued as reactionary and unhelpful for welfare beneficiaries (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011; Wilson 20 October 2011; Cunnane 2 October 2011).

In many ways there is nothing new about the responses to the project or the critique of Tao Wells' subjectivity in this project. Criticism of welfare beneficiaries, the reification of certain forms of work as legitimate, debates about what constitutes good or acceptable art and which forms of art should be publicly funded have been going on for decades (see for example Bishop 2006; Lerner 2000; Waring 1988). The project to some extent reflects

Kingfisher's (1999, p 14) statement that '[t]he new discourses are the old discourses'. However, as Butler (2006b, p xvii) suggests, the:

public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors.

Butler suggests that what is sayable is constrained through the allocation of stigma and shame to specific subjects. In this way dissent and critique are shut down by threatening the 'speaking subject with an uninhabitable identification' (Butler 2006b, p xviii). Although *The Beneficiaries Office* prompted predictable responses and clearly illustrated Butler's point about threatening the 'speaking subject' (Tao Wells) 'with an uninhabitable identification', the project also pushed at the limits of what was sayable in mainstream media spaces. What struck me about the responses were the very personalised forms of (often) violent hate speech directed at Tao Wells. Why did Tao Wells' subjectivity generate such hate speech and calls for punishment and even death?

Through analysis of responses I was struck by the fear and anxiety Tao Wells and *The Beneficiaries Office* generated. What was it about this project which provoked such anxiety? Butler (2006b) suggests that violence and hate speech emerge when one feels vulnerable. Similarly Nancy (2000) suggests that fear of others is not about difference per se, but a fear that someone else will expose one's singularity, thereby threatening one's existence. What subjects attempt to do is reduce their feelings of, or the awareness of singularity, sometimes through hate speech and exclusionary disciplining practices. Tao Wells' subjectivity and *The Beneficiaries Office* as a wider project was threatening precisely because he refused to play the good welfare beneficiary. He critiqued the discursive structures or order of the sensible which sought to both place him, and constrain what could be said and who could say it. In what follows I draw on Butler's and Nancy's ideas to provide a lens to explain why Tao Wells and *The Beneficiaries Office* promoted such anxiety.

5.3.5 Desire and disgust

As noted above, *The Beneficiaries Office* elicited complex emotions from people; envy, fear, desire, disgust and hatred. Some interviewees wondered if this was the response Tao Wells

actually wanted to generate and queried whether he was trolling the media to provoke right wing reactions (Holloway-Smith 10 November 2011; Wilson 20 October 2011). Or as Kwon (2002) notes about other art projects, a case where art criticism turns into spectacle. Regardless of Tao Well's motivations, or even the difficulties around establishing whether an online comment is just an ironic joke or trolling provocation – the responses, even if meant as parody, still revealed interesting points. Fear of a job loss and being forced to inhabit the shame placed subject position of the welfare beneficiary appeared significant. The comments from those welfare beneficiaries who claimed that Tao Wells was giving them a bad name pointed to this aspect most clearly. Specifically, that it is only possible to legitimately inhabit the welfare beneficiary subject position (or be a good subject) if one is seeking work and being unemployed is a temporary situation. In this way Tao Wells highlighted the anxiety of being unemployed, while simultaneously undermining welfare beneficiaries ability to be the good welfare subject. In Butler's and Nancy's terms we could understand this as exposing these subjects to further vulnerability, who are already in a precarious position.

Kingfisher (1999) writes about the framing of welfare beneficiaries (specifically poor single mothers) in government discourse in the United States and Aotearoa New Zealand. She shows how poor single mothers are constructed as 'out of control, hedonistic, irresponsible, and dependent' (p 1) - how they both threaten and define the boundaries of an ordered society. Similarly, Sibley (1995) outlines how desire and disgust function in relation to the Other and actually serve to define the boundaries of one's own subjectivity. Sibley suggests that a person's subjectivity only makes sense in relation to an other, which can seem threatening and has the power to destabilise the fragile sense of self people construct. Those subjects who transgress taken for granted boundaries are anxiety provoking precisely because they cross these borders, disrupting the established order of the sensible. The unemployed welfare beneficiary could be understood as the contemporary other to the self-sufficient, independent, waged neoliberal subject. The contemporary folk-devil of the post-global financial crisis upon which all manner of societal ills are pinned and around which moral panics circulate. However, *The Beneficiary's Office* disrupted the dominant framings of welfare beneficiaries and Tao Well's refused to play the 'good' beneficiary. He transgressed the established understanding of what constitutes a welfare beneficiary and in

doing so also threatened the identification of what it means to be a legitimate, or good working neoliberal subject.

The threat Tao Wells posed was clearly illustrated in the well-rehearsed labels which people applied to him. Labels such as 'lazy' and 'dole-bludger' while serving to confirm his name and place, also pointed to the threatening possibility of his and others' on-going refusal to subject themselves to contemporary neoliberal waged discourses. Threatening because welfare beneficiaries embody, to differing degrees, the excess of the late capitalist society that is always threatening to overwhelm the state and wider society. Threatening also because as the number of welfare beneficiaries increased after the global financial crisis (see Ministry of Social Development 2013), they created a greater burden on the state, decreasing government resources and their ability to address the global financial crisis through both tax cuts and austerity policies.

The project spoke very clearly to these fears around increasing levels of this excess of welfare beneficiaries. What would happen if more and more people decided to stay unemployed or chose to resist dominant shaming discourses associated with being underemployed or unemployed? Such an idea is indeed threatening to the good neoliberal subject and the current order of the sensible. *The Beneficiaries Office* pointed to these unsettling possibilities which challenged the stories good neoliberal citizens' subject themselves to about the meaning waged work has and how they should be living in late capitalist societies. Specifically, it challenges the narrative that implies the only liveable and legitimate life is one that involves paid work and ever increasing levels of consumption.

But this disgust and critique was also tempered by envy and an imagined utopic subjectivity. Internet comments expressed envy of Tao Wells, possibly because they imagined he was free from having to subject himself to waged work. Mixed with their criticism of him was a desire to potentially live in a way in which they could also escape the subjection of paid labour. Who hasn't imagined not having to go to work, the endless leisure time which is so valued in late capitalist societies? However, this freedom may also be impossible to achieve as a welfare beneficiary because that would involve voluntarily submitting oneself to a shamed subjectivity and exposing one's singularity - a subjection that may cause one to be disgusted with oneself and an object of disgust to others.

In an interview with Tao Wells at the Symposium 'Where Art Belongs', art critic Chris Kraus discussed how courageous it was for him to produce the project:

[G]iven that fact at the time you' yourself were a beneficiary. So it's not like you were coming to this from completely outside the mix. You were relying on the benefit for your own livelihood. So to turn that into, I mean to be dependent on that system and to so publicly expose the issues around that system was very brave cause you were a participant yourself (Kraus and Wells 28 October 2011).

Kraus compared Tao Wells to Simone Veil, a 20th century French activist and philosopher from the Marxist left who attempted to make publicly visible the unemployed⁴². I agree with Kraus that to undertake such an intervention (regardless of whether we understand it as 'art' or not) is courageous. However, it came at a personal cost for Tao Wells and his partner. Work and Income New Zealand⁴³ suspended Tao Wells' partial benefit during the project and he became involved in an ongoing legal dispute and was subjected to an aggressive form of scrutiny and surveillance by the Government department in relation to work placements and threats to end his benefit. At the time of interviewing Tao Wells, he also explained how the surveillance and targeting by Work and Income New Zealand had adversely affected his mental health (Wells 14 November 2011).

5.4 Neoliberal subjectivities, voice and legitimacy

Free Store and *The Beneficiaries Office* point to the complex intersection of contemporary subjectivities within the work society. The two projects raised questions about voice, recognition, shame and illustrated the disciplining nature of contemporary neoliberal discourses in relation to waged work, welfare and charity. They also illustrated how the dominant framings of what is considered an acceptable or good subject are open to moments of flux and contestation. *Free Store* and *The Beneficiaries Office* both provided greater visibility to marginalised and demonised groups in society, but significantly did not seek recognition of these subjects through dominant understandings. So *Free Store* partially disrupted the position of the consuming subject, and also troubled understandings of the

⁴² Kraus describes how Simone Veil led a march of unemployed people in La Quis to the City Hall and was widely criticised for it (Kraus and Wells 28 October 2011).

⁴³ Work and Income New Zealand are the agency responsible for administering welfare payments and other social support services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

charity subject. While at times Kim Paton highlighted the neediness of participants, she also foregrounded the commonality of all participants as 'human beings'. Similarly The Wells Group challenged the ways in which welfare beneficiaries were represented and pointed to a certain lack of liberty for all within neoliberal capitalist discourses where one's value as a subject is based on their participation in the waged economy and their earning/consuming potential.

Dixon (2009, p 413) suggests that social art can be seen as political if it 'animates social relations of power and the spaces and times within which they unfold precisely in order to provoke new modes of thought and so, in Rancière's terms, draw its audience into a refiguring of community and the redistribution of agency'. Similar to what Ding and Schuermans (2012) argue in relation to the Second Heifei Contemporary Art Biennale, these two projects clearly animated social relations of power and reconfigured communities. I have argued in this chapter that these two projects enabled the expression of political moments which began with a disruption of the usual framings of what it means to consume and be a welfare beneficiary. While the order of the sensible responded in predictable ways and sought to name and fix certain subjects within neoliberal capitalist discourses. The projects and debates that ensued also exceeded and overflowed these disciplining discourses.

For example, while *Free Store* 'brought a community together', at other times it created a backlash for participants and prompted criticism and shame. Even more extreme was *The Beneficiary's Office* which provoked violent reactions and pointed anger – from both welfare beneficiaries and those in waged labour. Tao Wells was seen as politically irrational because he questioned the truth-claims of neoliberal capitalism and the work society and embodied a certain vulnerability through being unwaged. Through their projects both Tao Wells and Kim Paton questioned the ways in which arguments about the economy and certain subjects are framed and taken for granted as a form of truth. Both projects also pointed to the very real possibility of people opting out of the current order of the sensible - whether this be through eschewing waged work or no longer buying food. Oksala (2012) suggests that in a sense this is both the ultimate threat to, and transgression of, the order of the sensible. She (2012, p 141) writes:

[t]he free market has to be produced by artificial means. More fundamentally, the state must also make it impossible for people to simply opt out of the game. For the economic rationality of market mechanisms to extend maximally throughout society, the possibilities of engaging in practices with alternative, non-economic rationalities must be restricted, by violent means if necessary.

What I have shown in this chapter is how the two projects provoked debate around what it means to be a legitimate subject or citizen. Kraus suggested that *The Beneficiaries Office* effectively revealed the ways in which dominant contemporary discourses render the poor or those on welfare as invisible. She recounts an ideological view from the Reagan/Bush years in the United States as being one of:

the poor must exit, you know, that's like the road sign and the poor must exit. They're not even reviled anymore. They are simply invisible. Poverty is just off the table. It doesn't interest us. These people have no subjectivity. These people aren't even a blight anymore. They do not exist (Kraus and Wells 28 October 2011).

While I think some of the responses to *Free Store* and *The Beneficiaries Office* actually show that the poor are still reviled and considered a blight, the wider point Kraus makes is that within a certain neoliberal discourse, poverty is no longer seen as an ethical issue which needs attention or reflects systemic inequalities. Many internet comments and media reporting on the two projects framed poverty as an individualised or family problem that the good neoliberal subject is able to overcome. The only way one could be considered a 'good' welfare beneficiary was if one was actively seeking waged work. What many of the reactions to the projects illustrate is the ongoing prevalence of neoliberal discourses underpinning the work society - that constitute the legitimate citizen as the waged worker/consumer, and those outside waged work are unentitled to voice, recognition or care. Such responses highlight the narrowing of critique and the idea that only certain subjects are entitled to speak in the public realm. Artist Colin Hodson summed this up stating:

[h]ow do you have a right, a place to stand? How do you earn that? What gives you the right to have the place to stand? At the moment you have that right by exchanging all your work for some cash or something. If you don't do that then

supposedly you can say you don't own a place for yourself to stand maybe (Hodson 19 December 2011).

What I have shown in this chapter is how these two Letting Space projects provoked reactions which clearly illustrate a narrowing of public debate around who is entitled to speak and be heard. However, while the projects illustrated this narrowing through provocation, they also prompted alternative ways of framing subjectivities and other ways of imagining socio-economic relations.

5.5 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that *Free Store* and *The Beneficiaries Office* were provocative political interventions, which raised a range of difficult questions and fears, while also proposing alternatives to the order of the sensible of the work society. While in the section immediately above I suggested that the order of the sensible responded by trying to name and place both the subjects and social practices within existing frames or 'standard stories'. The projects also provided participants with temporary glimpses of alternative ways of thinking and the opportunity to participate in alternative social relations, such as the gift economy in the *Free Store* and the conversations about waged work in *The Beneficiaries Office*. Both projects revealed to varying extents the hegemony of certain neoliberal subjectivities and simultaneously showed how constraining and limiting these subject positions can be. The various responses to the projects also revealed the ways in which people are disciplined into certain subject positions but also willingly subject themselves to a lack of freedom in late capitalist societies. However, in this sense the projects also revealed the fragility of the contemporary neoliberal political terrain. For if those who want to opt out, or present alternatives are threatened with shame, hate speech and ultimately annihilation, this suggests that the kinds of ideas and subjectivities articulated through these projects are in fact dangerous to the current order of the sensible.

What I have shown through discussion of these two projects is both the power of articulating other worlds and also the high stakes or risks involved for those who imagine and enact these other worlds. In a sense the projects provided a window to observe the violence of neoliberal work society discourses taken to their logical extent. But we could also see moments where people pushed against and beyond work society discourses and

argued for compassion, care, understanding and a widening of what constitutes a legitimate life. In this way the two projects reflect Butler's (2006b, p 43) comment whereby they solicited 'a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other'. The transformations were those moments when participants and conversations in wider public forums prompted people to re-think their own subjectivities and social actions. The petitioning of the future in relation to the Other were the ways in which the projects sought to provide alternative ways of meeting people's needs, of extending the value of human lives beyond their participation in the waged economy and ultimately providing glimpses of what another society could look like. Or in the words of Bishop (2006, p 183) revealed the 'promise of a better world to come'. The Other in this sense could be thought of as a certain subject (the unwaged neighbour who is also a human being) or more simply that other future and other society where one's legitimacy is based on their shared human-ness, not one's earning and consuming power. In the chapter that follows I explore how *Productive Bodies* enabled forms of playful care-based performance which attempted to broaden the limited framings of what constitutes legitimate labour in the work society.

Chapter 6: Letting Space, subjectivities, Productive Bodies

6.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous one by exploring how participants overflowed the limited framing of waged work through the project *Productive Bodies*. In this chapter I draw on Rancière's framing of political moments and theories of affect to show how embodied forms of social action can disrupt the order of the sensible in relation to waged work. The chapter begins by outlining the wider socio-political context from which *Productive Bodies* emerged and then outlines how the project functioned. Following this I discuss three moments from the project which illustrated how it enabled participants to widen the discourses around what constituted legitimate labour in contemporary society.

The conclusion of this chapter provides a brief summary of key similarities which run through the five Letting Space projects. In this conclusion I argue that the relational art practices fostered through the five Letting Space projects provided politically open-ended ways for participants to overflow the dominant subjectivities and practices of the work society. The projects enabled this by avoiding claims to any essentialised or binary subjectivity and thereby managed to frame progressive social actions as always multiple and relational, rather than specifying a single course of action or solution to the contradictions and inequalities of the work society.

6.2 Productive Bodies

In March 2012 the New Zealand National led Government announced yet another wave of redundancies in the public service. A total of 305 jobs were cut from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade which resulted in one in four staff at the Ministry losing their job (see *Dominion Post* 2012). Like many governments in the minority world following the global financial crisis, these redundancies were justified by an austerity narrative of reducing state spending in tough economic times (see McKee, Karanikolos, Belcher, Stuckler 2012). As noted in Section 5.3 in relation to *The Beneficiaries Office*, the National led Government's changes extended to tightening the criteria for welfare beneficiaries and intensified neoliberal rhetoric about 'personal responsibility' for finding, what critics claimed, were non-existent waged jobs (see for example One News 2012). In this way the National led

Government's rhetoric illustrated the contemporary contradiction noted by Weeks (2011) in Section 1.2.1 where the social and moral imperative to be in waged work has only increased since the global financial crisis, yet there are fewer full time, secure, waged jobs available.

In partial response to the Government's redundancies, restructuring of the public service and welfare reforms, Letting Space commissioned Dr Mark Harvey, to undertake a week long participatory project called *Productive Bodies* in Wellington. In framing *Productive Bodies*, Letting Space stated that the project sought to explore what it meant to be 'productive', without just measuring it in economic terms (Letting Space N.D.). Specifically negotiating '[t]he pressure to be a happy, productive taxpayer' when you have been made redundant or unemployed for some time'. Prior to the project beginning Dr Mark Harvey stated, 'We're all busy, it's the post-Rogernomics⁴⁴ condition of our society I reckon, that we're busy and self-involved and trying to show we are always accountable for our actions - as Productive Bodies - as worthy members of our work-force' (Letting Space N.D.).

In talking about the broader societal context for the project, Letting Space co-curator, Sophie Jerram reiterated many of the points noted by Weeks and Vrasti outlined in Section 1.2.1, where the idea of having a 'job for life' is fast disappearing, and redundancies now occur as swiftly and often in the public sector as well as the private sector (Letting Space N.D.). In this way the project was situated within a specific context – the ongoing restructuring of the New Zealand public service and welfare system and could be seen as a more pointed project in relation to these government decisions than many of the other Letting Space projects. However, the project also exceeded the specific politics surrounding these public service redundancies and spoke to wider debates about the nature of waged work and subjection processes which shape contemporary subjectivities.

6.2.1 Productive Bodies in action

As noted in Section 3.3.1, *Productive Bodies* involved a weeklong series of performative actions, where interactions between people constituted the art work. Prior to the project beginning there were calls for participants by Letting Space through websites and more traditional media releases. The criteria for participating (while never enforced) was that you

⁴⁴ 'Rogernomics' is a term coined to describe the neoliberal free market economic policies implemented by the Aotearoa New Zealand Labour appointed Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas in 1984.

were either unemployed, under-employed, recently made redundant, studying, or looking for work. Those who participated in the project tended to vary day to day, but there were generally somewhere between five to ten participants each day. Every day began with a two hour session in the public space of Wellington's City Gallery where those participating work-shopped ideas in preparation for the afternoon's activities. After these sessions the participants shared lunch and then moved out into the more 'public' spaces of Wellington's central business district for two hours of performative interactions (Research Journal 15 March 2012).

Given that the project ran for a week and involved different participants and actions each day, it would be impossible to capture and represent everything that occurred during the project in this chapter. Therefore in what follows I briefly describe some of the actions that happened on one of the days I attended to provide a general flavour of the project.

We began with personal introductions at the City Gallery and then work-shopped a number of different interactions. While there were no strictly defined criteria around what was appropriate, Dr Mark Harvey encouraged us to try actions that we felt could be productive in a broad sense. This framing of productivity included actions that could make people laugh, smile, feel safer, comforted, joyful, or simply more understood. These included leading each other blindfolded around the room through an obstacle course made of each other's bodies, to standing in a circle and sharing experiences from our working lives where we had made a mistake and clapping in celebration.

Upon finishing the workshop we left the City Gallery and headed towards Midland Park in central Wellington. Along the way we provided protective shields for members of the public. We formed safety barriers with our bodies to protect pedestrians at road crossings and we applauded people walking along the street, creating clapping tunnels. Once reaching Midland Park we provided members of the public we approached and who agreed to participate, with feedback on their handshakes. We then moved to the lobby of the Ministry of Health building and ended up discussing personal fears related to the health of our bodies, aging processes and death.

All of these actions were discussed and agreed through consensus decision making by those participating. We generally tried to avoid doing anything that made a member of the group

uncomfortable and we all knew that we could contribute alternative ideas or just step back and not participate. In this way the interactions reflected what Duncombe (2007) describes as 'ethical spectacles', characterised by autonomy, the active participation of people, the use of humour and play, adaptable and/or open-ended interactions, and theatrical elements.

Figure 6.1: Example of protective shields as part of Productive Bodies.
Source: Letting Space N.D.

6.3 The political potential of embodied-affective action

Various authors have discussed the contradictions in trying to write about the effects and affects created through spontaneous, performative interactions like *Productive Bodies* (see for instance; Dewsbury 2010; Latham 2003; McDowell 2010; Wylie 2005). In section 3.3.3 I discussed some of these issues, specifically the difficulties associated with trying to describe and name affects and intensities which may at times be beyond more traditional forms of academic representation such as written texts. Part of the problem with re-describing these intensities and interactions related to the distinction between what are generally understood as emotions and affect. Where emotions are often understood as personal and able to be communicated through language, while affects are felt as intensities between bodies and objects and tend to be understood as pre-linguistic. The specific difficulty here relates to the limitations of language in trying to represent and name these affects and attempting to story them (in the form of this chapter) to create something suitable for an academic context.

While the above issues may cause some to resist even attempting to write about such things, I still think it is worth attempting to explain some of these processes and will therefore privilege certain moments over others. Not to name and fix exactly what happened or provide a definitive account of *Productive Bodies*, but to explore the ways in which the project created moments where participants were able to reflect on wider discourses that shape their subjectivities, the nature of their labour, and re-figure the atmosphere of certain spaces through collective actions. In what follows I explore three themes to highlight the political potential of art practices like *Productive Bodies*. These three themes relate to the way the project enabled an exploration of dominant gender norms around hand shaking and working masculinities, allowed participants to overcome shame through sharing and provided a framework for participants to engage in a spontaneous politics of action. Following the explanation of these moments I argue that these forms of embodied and participatory encounters enabled participants to overflow the order of the sensible which values their labour in limiting ways.

6.3.1 Masculinity and hand shaking

As mentioned above, one of the ways we tried to be productive once we were out in public spaces was to provide feedback on handshakes to people we met in Midland Park. In this

section I outline how seemingly banal acts such as hand-shaking are subtly gendered and bound up with dominant discourses of the work society.

Dr Mark Harvey approached a group of younger men and women and asked them if they would like feedback on their handshakes. All the men were happy to shake our hands while the women were not. One of the men explained that they all worked together and had just undergone some handshaking training for their job. These men talked about how during this training they had been instructed to develop firm handshakes (Research Journal 15 March 2012). In an interview following the project, Dr Mark Harvey noted that it was 'so gender stereotyped. It's quite interesting and their handshakes were a certain kind of handshake, full-on kind of' (Harvey 16 March 2012). While there was an element of humour underlying the interactions we had with these men, such as when we all laughed about them attending a hand-shaking course. What I also sensed was a collective appreciation for the ways in which contemporary masculinities are both fragile and consciously disciplined. The very fact that these men had just been on a hand shaking training course clearly showed how discourses around appropriate forms of working masculinity continue to circulate in the workplace and wider society. While these men appeared to be doing their masculinity in the 'right way' (as evidenced by their strong assertive handshakes), we also had interactions with other men who shared stories of 'doing it wrong'.

In one such interaction one man shook hands with both Dr Mark Harvey and myself and then started talking about the ways in which other people judge one depending on whether they have a firm handshake and how ideas about being 'limp-wristed' intersect with how others understand your masculinity and sexuality. This man talked about how a firm cool hand is considered better by most people than a damp limp one. Yet he felt these kinds of judgements were unfair because people often can't help what their hands feel like. He then introduced us to his friend who stated that he had 'a very limp handshake' and shook our hands to prove it but didn't care stating that, 'he was very comfortable with his masculinity'. This second man then joked that he was a little 'too comfortable' with his masculinity and winked at Dr Mark Harvey and I (Research Journal 15 March 2012). Dr Mark Harvey then explained to the three of us that in pacific cultures it is considered aggressive and domineering to have a really firm handshake. He noted that growing up in a Pasifika context, he had been taught to have a soft handshake, but that a soft handshake didn't

work out quite so well for him in European/Pākehā culture (Research Journal 15 March 2012).

Butler (2006a) is credited as one of the key theorists who popularised the idea that gender is performed - not in the sense of an actor who is consciously aware of their performance, but that as subjects we become disciplined into acting in certain gendered ways. However, this is not to suggest that gender discourses are somehow fixed and unchanging, as dominant ideas about what it means to be a woman or a man differ across cultures, contexts and places and can change over time (Coe, Domke, Bagley, Cunningham, and Van Leuven 2007). What the above interactions show are the ways in which discourses around the 'right' kind of handshaking are linked to performing a socially competent, working masculinity. The men who had been on the hand shaking course displayed through their handshakes a form of hegemonic Anglo (Pākehā) sanctioned masculinity. Through their firm handshakes these men demonstrated strength, power, self-assuredness and a form of potency (see Vanderbeck 2005 for instance). While I also noted a certain amount of ironic self-awareness around their handshakes, this was primarily prompted by Dr Mark Harvey who asked what had been outlined in the hand shaking training. The men talked about how they had been advised to develop a firm handshake, pump a certain number of times (not too long however), grip the other person's hand in a specific way so that they could feel the entire inside of their palm and project an air of confidence and self-assuredness (Research Journal 15 March 2012). While I cannot necessarily be sure, my sense was that through asking about the content of the hand shaking course, these men were provided with an opportunity to reflect on how they were being encouraged to perform a certain form of masculinity, which in turn created the self-conscious, slightly ironic reflections on the course and their own hand shaking techniques.

For some women we interacted with in public, the very act of shaking hands with us (and there were more women in the group of *Productive Bodies* than men that day) was clearly outside the bounds of what they felt comfortable doing. While I could speculate about the reasons for this (and they may be as simple as not wishing to engage with, or touch strangers), I couldn't help but wonder whether part of the reason for choosing not to engage may have been linked to receiving feedback around a performative action which is often associated with masculinity. As a group, some of us informally reflected on the

encounters afterwards and some female members of the *Productive Bodies* group noted that they would have felt uncomfortable taking part for that reason. They reflected that for them, shaking hands was just much more of a 'male thing' and not something they would want feedback on from a stranger (Research Journal 15 March 2012).

Coe et al (2007, p 33) suggest that 'people are constructed as masculine by positioning themselves, or by positioning others, as embodying a set of cultural practices and expressions that carry the currency of manhood'. In the above examples where the two men talked about not having the 'right' kind of handshakes, they partially pre-empted our feedback and compared themselves to others' performances of masculinity. Their responses showed a strong awareness for how their own masculinity failed to conform to more hegemonic expectations. To me these responses illustrate two things. Firstly, the ways in which the 'wrong' kind of hand shake is defined in relation to the 'right' kind. So the limp wrist and damp hand show a lack of strength, a lack of confidence, subservience and potentially a social anxiety or sweatiness which is seen as feminine and inferior. Secondly Butler (2006a) and others have demonstrated how hegemonic gender performances tend to be coded as heterosexual. In the instance above we can see the second man alluding to this where he states he has 'a very limp handshake', yet interestingly, still claims to be comfortable with his masculinity.

The use of the word 'limp' here is striking. Six of the seven definitions for 'limp' in the Urban Dictionary (N.D.) refer to something disappointing, bad, 'the inability to maintain an erection' and generally linked to male impotence. In this way the term has become increasingly associated with both the male sex organ and the failure to use this in an appropriately masculine way. The specific sexualised connotations of the word 'limp', when linked to hand shaking also show the way in which the term could function as an indicator of non-heterosexual masculinity (see Long 1994 for a discussion about the 'limp-wristed femme'). What seems to occur in the above interaction is that the man manages to articulate an alternative masculinity through the hand shaking encounter which both acknowledges the hegemonic ideal, but disregards this for a non-heterosexual masculinity evidenced through the wink. The wink combined with the comment 'a little too comfortable' (with his masculinity) illustrate how he reclaimed a sense of masculinity that reframes the 'limp' or impotent connotations.

Through the potentially flirtatious wink the man enacted a certain agency. While this was not done so in the more hegemonic discourse, he still attempted to carve out a space from which to perform an alternative. The fact that both of these men felt comfortable revealing this kind of information about themselves, which in one sense could be understood as shame stories around their failure to achieve and perform hegemonic masculinity, suggests to me that they felt somewhat safe within the interaction. It also suggests that the interaction provided them with an opportunity to actually voice these stories, and articulate an injustice - the unfairness of being judged on your hand shake.

The interactions I have described above reveal the ways gendered discourses intersect with discourses of the work society and are mapped onto and performed through the body. As far as I was aware, the handshaking interactions were not intended by our group to raise explicit questions around gender norms. Similarly the interactions were not consciously intended as a demand that other people see such gender norms as limiting. What started within the *Productive Bodies* group as a desire to be productive by giving handshake feedback to others, ended up being a spontaneous joint exploration of some of the culturally specific gender norms around hand shaking and competent working masculinities. In these interactions we ended up enabling other men the space to explore masculine gender performances that actually revealed the ways in which gender is constructed, rather than being somehow innate or essential. This was not a case of exposing a subject or actor who was pretending to be a man, but a joint exploration of how certain behaviours came to be associated with and shape dominant understandings of what it means to be the 'right' kind of man.

As outlined in Section 2.3, Rancière argues that political moments involve an interruption of the order of the sensible. What I have illustrated above is how *Productive Bodies* participants created small scale moments which allowed for a questioning of normalising and accepted social arrangements around hand shaking in connection to the working masculine subject. The interactions facilitated through *Productive Bodies* allowed men to reflect on how these social arrangements were maintained and reinforced. As *Productive Bodies'* participants we were not necessarily demanding any specific wider societal changes – but through the more open-ended nature of the questions, enabled some men people to partially reflect on how the order of the sensible shapes their lives in relatively subtle ways.

Threats of, and allocations of shame seemed to be important mechanisms by which more dominant masculine hand shaking norms were maintained and enforced. The example which follows further explores how the participatory interactions of *Productive Bodies* enabled subjects to partially alleviate feelings of fear and shame.

6.3.2 Overcoming fear and shame

When I asked Dr Mark Harvey what his favourite moment was during the project he mentioned the ‘healing circle’ in the lobby of the Ministry of Health building. He described how when we first arrived in the lobby it felt so cold and impersonal, but through sharing fears about our bodies aging and then the various strategies we each had for dealing with these fears, we managed to change the atmosphere of the whole lobby:

Where we stood in a circle and we changed what we planned to that kind of healing circle (laughs). And how the atmosphere there changed. It really transformed! We went past making a spectacle and entertaining people to really helping to contribute a positive change to that environment in that point in time (Harvey 16 March 2012).

In talking about these interactions Dr Mark Harvey described how affect is not so much personal, in the sense of individually experienced emotions, but somehow exceeds these, resulting from interactions and assemblages in specific places. He said:

So I guess stopping and talking and listening and working it out as a group was a really effective thing. I might not have done that on my own. If it had just been up to me I don’t know... But that was a good thing about our process as a group, was this kind of guided consensus decision making that we were able to process things a lot more effectively than if we were led by one person in a hierarchical structure (Harvey 16 March 2012).

Some might critique such small scale, temporary changes as politically insignificant, however, the experience was personally significant for various participants, including myself (Research Journal 15 March 2012). For instance, one participant noted that it was the very reclaiming of these kinds of spaces where she had spent so much of her working life that enabled her to regain some confidence after being made redundant (see *Letting Space* N.D.). These kinds of smaller moments reflect Cameron and Gibson’s (2005, 320) assertion that ‘a micropolitics of self-transformation is an important part of a larger social change and

macropolitical agenda'. For instead of attempting to instigate widespread structural change around global neoliberal capitalism and the work society, the kinds of interactions described above (including the hand shaking example) connect people's everyday experiences to the order of the sensible which has shaped their lives in different ways.

Brown (2007) has written extensively about shame and argues that individualising neoliberal discourses tend to allocate shame as personal failures, rather than wider cultural narratives (see also Bondi 2005). Brown's work has investigated the subtle yet powerful feelings of inadequacy with which so many women and men in minority world societies struggle - those feelings of not being good enough employees, not good enough parents and not having the 'right' kinds of bodies. While these expectations often have very different ethnic, classed and gendered dimensions, what Brown (2007) shows is that the individualised focus of such discourses actually obscure how shame narratives circulate more widely and maintain currency. She argues that one way of overcoming the power of shame narratives is to share them in empathetic ways with others. She suggests that the collective sharing of experiences, particularly those which are difficult (and shameful) to express, can actually help us to see that these are not necessarily our personal failings, but bound up with wider disciplining societal discourses.

In the lobby of the Ministry of Health building and earlier in the day, as a group we individually and collectively shared stories of shame and fear. While we drew on personal narratives, these eventually seemed to transcend the personal and temporarily changed the atmosphere of that particular place. On a more personal level, through our shared narratives, I was also able to move from one bodily state (feeling uncomfortable, out of place and awkward in the lobby of the Ministry of Health building) to experiencing greater connection and understanding that my fears and anxieties were actually relatively common and reflected in other people's stories. In this sense the stories and sharing process enabled a form of being-with and through the sharing actually made my aging and (at times) anxious body more habitable.

As outlined in Section 2.2.1 Nancy (1991) argues that subjects desire relationships with others to alleviate some of the anxiety of singular finitude (the awareness of death). Nancy's theoretical framing helps to explain why the above example was so affecting for those who

participated – as subjects we were taken to our limits through talking about fears of finitude, fears which were intensely personal in one sense, but also collective and shared by others. In reflecting on this experience I can see how I moved between feeling more personal emotions, while also noting that these emotional resonances or the intensities created through the interactions did not ‘belong’ exclusively to me, or any of us. While the feelings and intensities generated may have originated from each of us sharing our fears, the atmosphere or affect created was a result of collective assemblages, responses and empathetic listening.

6.3.3 Politics of action

The two examples of *Productive Bodies*’ social actions discussed so far illustrate how embodied and ‘in the moment’ the interactions were. These forms of social action were not carefully formulated political strategies negotiated by those who participated. Rather, they were empathetic and playful interactions. The final example of social action I discuss below further illustrates this point.

In talking with different participants about their favourite moment in *Productive Bodies*, at least four mentioned the following example (Research Journal 15 March 2012). As noted in Section 6.2, the *Productive Bodies* group would form applauding lines for other members of the public to walk through. In one such example outside the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, the *Productive Bodies* group were applauding visitors to the museum as they entered and left. Two busloads of primary school students were watching on from the car park and then left their buses and joined in at the invitation of Dr Mark Harvey, forming two large lines which extended across most of the outdoor public entrance space. Those participants who spoke about this suggested it was the most intense and memorable experience they had during the project. They said it was amazing to see these children initially watch on from their buses and then excitedly join in.

The social actions fostered through *Productive Bodies* resonates with Day’s (2004) framing of a politics of action. For instance as I noted above, the social actions of the *Productive Bodies* group were not carefully formulated obvious political demands. Given that the project occurred immediately following the announcement of significant public sector redundancies, a more conventional understanding of politicised social action around this issue might have made direct demands towards the National led Government for a reversal

of redundancies. However, the *Productive Bodies* group never made such demands. Day (2004, 734) writes that a politics of action is a process of surprising oneself and the 'structure' by undertaking an action that 'precludes the necessity of the demand and thereby breaks out of the loop of the endless perpetuation of desire for emancipation'. As a group *Productive Bodies* were not necessarily seeking emancipation from another subject or societal structure - whether that be the National led Government, or even necessarily the relation with waged labour. Rather, the participatory process was partially about cultivating a sense of surprise within ourselves around what we imagined we were capable of doing, and what kinds of interactions were possible with others in public and quasi-public spaces. As Day (2004) notes, this kind of politics is premised on the idea that change is possible through an accumulation of small direct actions. So instead of trying to change the decisions of the state around waged labour, or even change the wider work society at some macro level, the *Productive Bodies* group undertook social actions to create the type of world we wanted to live in, thereby exercising a form of collective agency in specific local spaces.

6.4 Performing productivity

Many of the actions *Productive Bodies* undertook attempted to offer or create something: an affect; an experience; a conversation; or a playful and somewhat ineffectual wind barrier. In reflecting on the project Dr Mark Harvey talked about how it felt to him as though the project was about cultivating a kind of joy (Harvey 16 March 2012). Similarly Willis (N.D.), who participated and wrote a commissioned essay on the project for Letting Space, suggested that it seemed to be about creating a process of happiness for participants. Not that the project was focused on the product of happiness, but was about exploring how happiness could be achieved through collective, creative actions which involved being-with others. An important aspect of these creative actions was that while some were pragmatic, others seemed almost absurd or idiotic. For instance, *Productive Bodies* participants would ask people on the street 'how could I look more productive?', and 'do you think my hair cut is okay?' In another instance we all picked up leaves for 15 minutes in Midland Park. As a group we discussed how it probably looked really stupid and pointless, but then someone suggested that it also reminded them of a lot of pointless tasks they had performed in their waged work. In this way the project enabled participants to exercise creative and, at times, absurd agency.

Willis (N.D.) suggests that the process of communication employed in *Productive Bodies* was non-hierarchical and used the form of the circle to practice care for the other and foster a sense of inclusion and collectivism. So for instance, as a group we would continually come together in a circle to reflect on previous actions, discuss our next action, and plan how it would occur (Research Journal 15 March 2012). Actions were also fluid and could be interrupted or change at any point. So during one action where we held hands to protect pedestrians crossing an intersection, another woman and I both ended up suggesting that we were possibly being a traffic hazard and should stop at that intersection. The group agreed and we ceased the action and moved onto something else. In this way our communication as a group through the use of the circle and consensus decision making reflected other autonomous social actions such as those employed by the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (see Chatterton 2010; Routledge 2012). An important value underpinning these approaches is that the process must be consistent with the desired ends. This was reflected in *Productive Bodies* – where the social actions performed appeared to be less important than the form of relations and affects they generated. In this way I would suggest that a politics of action as practiced by the *Productive Bodies* group managed to prioritise the being-with others, over making any specific political demands in relation to the work society. This enabled the project and social actions to retain a certain open-ness, rather than being overly focused on what can be at times, an exclusionary or divisive politics of demand.

While at times the labour *Productive Bodies* performed may have seemed obscure or bizarre we also spoke of our desire to be ‘good’ subjects, and be seen as legitimate members of society who were engaged in meaningful work and to do something that felt good, especially if we were unemployed. Vrasti (2011, para 20) writes that autonomist Marxist thought often positions work as the:

master relation of all human interaction, [as] the place where subjectivity is produced. Or, to put it differently, the waged relation, generalized across the entire social field, is the central method of control: work on yourself, your education, your finances, your personal health, and your social relations. This over-privileging of labour might seem strange considering that, especially in places blessed with the social, cultural, and symbolic rewards of post-industrialism, capitalism is less about

producing goods and services than about reproducing hospitable forms of life (e.g., bodies, subjectivities, social relations, material processes, desires, and fantasies).

This emphasis on the waged relation being the 'place where subjectivity is produced' was definitely an understanding that the project explored. However, as I have shown above the social actions of *Productive Bodies* seemed to facilitate the reproduction of hospitable forms of life and collective happiness outside of the order of the sensible of the work society. Productive Bodies sought to create more hospitable and joyous encounters with others (through clapping tunnels and protective shields), while also broadening the understanding of what it meant to be 'productive' in society beyond just waged work. This meant that being 'productive' in the project was broad, and exceeded anything too specific. We were the (already) productive unemployed and underemployed, but we were productive on our own terms and sometimes this was done through humour or absurd actions and sometimes through more earnest conversations and extending ourselves to others in empathetic relations of care. In this way the project reflects Reiter's (2009, p 158) point that art practices can be useful in providing a 'stage for the active exercise of citizenship roles'.

As noted in Section 3.2, Kwon (2002) suggests that much social art is about trying to counter, if not give back, some form of social visibility and political power to marginalised groups, often through engaging them in the process of creating their own cultural representations. Kwon (2002, p 95) notes that one way of framing this is that the 'community' becomes the site of the work whereby a community or group of people under 'abstract designations of viewer/spectator, audience, or public, are enlisted ... to participate in the creation of an art work'. The idea is that art projects use participants' labour which helps people to see themselves in the work, and through this process, be validated of affirmed.

As already outlined Kwon (2002), Rose (1997b) and Bishop (2006) query the intention behind much participatory social art, as an underlying assumption is that a subject somehow becomes more unified through the opportunity for self-representation (understood as innate) which in turn creates political self-determination. These authors question whether such goals are actually helpful, and argue that this idea of the 'empowered subject' is a reversal of much of the traditional avant-garde.

In the case of *Productive Bodies*, the labour involved was less about articulating a fixed representation of a specific subject. Instead what was explored through the project were attributes of what it means to be the legitimate or productive subject. Being productive was explored through performative actions rather than the representation of, or naming of specific subjects and actions. In this way the project reflects Whatmore's (2006, p 603) suggestion that there has been a shift in focus to 'social agency in practice or performance rather than discourse – thinking and acting through the body'. *Productive Bodies* was more about recognising the process of labour in collective encounters with other participants and the wider public. In this way the project reflected Cameron and Gibson's (2005, 318) assertion that a post-structural participatory approach can allow subjects to explore the process of becoming - as 'a creative and productive process whereby subjects come into being, but it also means being subject to particular norms, rules and modes of governing'.

In the discussion above I have shown how *Productive Bodies* fostered social actions that involved:

- performing and recognising those forms of labour which tend to be ignored and undervalued in the work society (such as care work, listening to others);
- creating collective moments of fun and laughter;
- creating at times, moments of confusion;
- creating moments and spaces where others could share stories where their labour was not valued or where they had failed at being productive.

Productive Bodies did not attempt to cover over some of the contradictions or complexities that underlie the working self or encourage participants to necessarily become more unified or politically self-determining, or even necessarily oppose the relation of waged labour. There was no singular subject liberated through *Productive Bodies* and nor did the project have a defined end point or policy goal. Rather as participants we discussed our unease around our often contradictory and confusing positions and desires in relation to waged work. In response we managed to partially reframe our labour by performing emotional, playful and affective care work that sustains relationships, workplaces and animates public

spaces. However, we did not necessarily demand that others (whether these others be the government or the wider public) understand what we were doing and recognise this.

To gain more of an understanding of how the project affected participants, the two curators of Letting Space asked people to reflect on their experiences and published these on the Letting Space website. Participants talked about how they valued the way being involved helped them to have 'an open mind' and just to be 'in the moment', and discard the social conditioning or norms of how they should act and communicate in public spaces (Research Journal 14 March 2012). Others liked how the project fostered creative connections with other people and praised Dr Mark Harvey for investigating some of the 'devastating effects of unemployment, in terms of what our perception of being productive might be' (Letting Space N.D.). Others described the way affect worked in the project:

There was a kind of fluidity of movement, a kind of viscous fluidity of feeling projected out to people. it was amazing how the way the energy of the group, operating at its best, its highest, kind of jumped from us to them. And the public were incredible, how they just 'got it' (Letting Space N.D.).

Dr Mark Harvey suggested that embodied, performative social actions like *Productive Bodies* matter because they can raise political questions in more open-ended ways than conventional forms of protest. He stated:

I think political art has a bad name. It has a bad name for me because it often is very didactic, very illustrative. It often tries to tell people what to think, or often tries to tell people to change their behaviour. You know its kind of like 'oh ok plant more trees', alright, ok I'll do that. But what kind of trees, why? I think it's very easy to fall into that train of preaching with art that's, in this case would have been protest based, considering the current government cuts (Harvey 16 March 2012).

He went on to state that it is often more useful to use play, humour and questions, particularly through performative, embodied encounters to raise complex political questions. In this sense he felt that it was not necessarily vital to get people to vote for certain political parties, but rather influence them in more subtle ways by asking provoking questions or facilitating at times, unsettling experiences.

In thinking through the questions *Productive Bodies* raised, I would suggest that the project never rejected the necessity or importance of waged work, as in a blanket refusal of work, or a refusal to work. In fact many of the participants talked about how they were looking for work, were between jobs, or trying to sort out their next step regarding waged work. But nor did the project articulate a traditional leftist response to the predicament of unemployment such as making political demands of the state or employers on the behalf of workers. What *Productive Bodies* performed was a kind of playful interjection between more conventional responses to the predicament of waged work and unemployment.

Productive Bodies operated partly from an autonomous idea in the sense that the labour of the group was enacted outside a capitalist market. Reflecting a point Bishop (2006, p 180) makes about the emphasis on 'process over product', no one was making money from our labour, and the form of our labour was often vague, somewhat undefined and at times absurd. In this way the project partially functioned as a performative utopia, 'to provoke desire and movement, not concrete alternatives to the present' in terms of the unemployment facing participants (Vrasti 2013b). This never went as far as articulating the existential Marxist position that as 'everything is already subsumed to capitalism, doing nothing is the only virtuous option' (Vrasti 2013b). The project enabled participants to *do* something which many found fun and emotionally affecting on some level.

Vrasti (2013b, para 12) argues that a feminist ethic of care recognises that 'all forms of action and inaction are already indebted and dedicated to someone else's labour. To act therefore, is also to care or to be grateful'. Willis (N.D.) suggested that a lot of the actions performed through *Productive Bodies* were grounded in this ethic of care for others. She argued that the project provided a significant political and imaginary alternative to the National Government's current emphasis on the importance of individual/familial responsibility, accountability and a reframing of the public service so that it was less focused on caring roles for those vulnerable members of society. To my mind this ethic of care and participation was a strength of the project. *Productive Bodies* neither rejected the importance of work in participants' lives, but nor did it articulate a specific (and potentially exclusive) subjectivity based on conventional categories of the wage worker versus capitalists/employers or the Government. Rather the project was grounded in a feminist ethic of care for others, which drew on more inclusive communication processes to foster

moments of social usefulness, at times absurdity and creative affect which exceeded and overflowed binaries around both fixed identities, and also what constitutes 'productive' and legitimate labour in broader society.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted how *Productive Bodies* raised inherently political questions about a whole range of issues. From what constitutes being a productive and legitimate member of society, to norms around hand shaking and working masculinities, to ways in which we might collectively unravel the powerful yet often unexpressed feelings of shame and fear many people seem to be struggling with in relation to their experiences of waged labour. The project offered participants and others who engaged, a range of propositions and possibilities in relation to what work meant, and what being productive could entail.

The preceding three chapters have discussed five Letting Space projects. While the projects differed in terms of their foci and levels of participation, they all reflect a change Kwon (2002) identifies whereby artists are increasingly operating as cultural facilitators or educators. This re-orientation is reflected in these five projects whereby rather than producing art objects, these artists were more concerned with facilitating social processes in relation to specific issues. In this conclusion I outline some commonalities across the five projects to show how these kinds of relational art practices address the sub-questions of this thesis and provide mechanisms for subjects to expand the limiting discourses of the work society in relatively open-ended ways.

A significant theme running through these five art projects is that while they were all concerned with pressing socio-environmental issues (from the nature of the sharemarket, unemployment and waste, to global environmental collapse), all of the projects were somewhat hard to fix as protest art. While at times some of the projects prompted criticism for being bad art, a waste of resources or politically irrational (especially *The Beneficiaries Office*), what I have argued is that the projects still fostered small scale political moments because they disrupted the order of the sensible of the work society. So rather than making more conventional demands in relation to pressing socio-environmental issues, the projects tended to reframe the nature of the debate beyond simplistic binaries of being either for, or against neoliberal capitalism and the work society. Rather the projects were more focussed

on exploring and exposing how the discourses of the work society shape people's lives and wider society. For instance in Chapter 4 I argued that *Productive Bodies*, *The Market Testament*, *Free Store* and *Pioneer City* all managed to partially reframe dominant understandings of the economy as embodied, relational and able to be shaped by people in local places. In Chapter 5 I argued that *Free Store* disrupted dominant understandings of the consuming and charity subject, while *The Beneficiaries Office* disrupted dominant understandings of the welfare beneficiary and unemployed. In this final chapter on *Productive Bodies* I argued that the participatory embodied process allowed subjects to articulate fears in relation to waged work, but also overflow these through joy-filled collective encounters.

Some may see the lack of clear conventional political messages in these projects as limiting. On the other hand as the curator Paul O'Neill noted at the *Where Art Belongs* symposium, naming something can corral it, and also remove its emancipatory potential (Research Journal 29 October 2011). Because the various art projects avoided a totalising narrative around neoliberal capitalism and the work society, they were more able to foster more open-ended types of questions and relations between subjects.

In this sense the projects tended to facilitate being-with others to alleviate some of the fears of singular finitude associated with the work society. Most of the art projects foregrounded the commonalities and shared experiences of being a human subject in the work society through highlighting the constraints on all people – while still managing to point to the ways some subjects experience these constraints more acutely than others. What the projects managed to do effectively was also fix the adverse effects of the work society on the order of the sensible, rather than demonise certain subjects within it. This framing of subjectivity was important and fostered a certain open-ness of place. What was at fault were not certain subjects, and nor were more exclusionary boundaries needed to protect certain subjects from others. Rather the order of the sensible of the work society was framed as the constraining and anxiety provoking structure which was leading to adverse effects across different places.

As noted throughout these three chapters on Letting Space, the five projects emerged from in-between spaces. The projects did not emerge from the established political spaces of the

state or through established identifiable political groups (such as political parties) to create specific policies or 'outcomes'. Rather, the projects were framed as art practices curated by Letting Space, albeit with some funding from the Wellington City Council and Creative New Zealand. In this way the projects can be seen as more autonomous and provocative interventions which blurred the nature of what is generally considered political. They therefore fit within Rancière's suggestion that it is not easy to predict where political moments emerge, but rather can only be recognised in retrospect.

I pick up on some of these key points again in Chapter 9 and further develop them in conjunction with some points in relation to the Wellington Timebank. In the following and final two empirical chapters I move to discussing how the Wellington Timebank is fostering a more organised and potentially longer-term collective which re-values subjectivities and labour through being-with others.

Chapter 7: Timebanks as community

7.0 Introduction

My friend and I went to get a haircut from Claire, another Timebank member. I also interviewed Claire while she cut my hair. While driving to her house we suddenly realised that we didn't know how to get there and neither of us had smart phones so we couldn't check the address. My friend had Claire's phone number though, so we gave her a call and got directions. We arrived about half an hour late and ended up interrupting her evening dinner plans. Claire's friend arrived during the haircut and interview and started making dinner for Claire and her daughter. Claire cut my hair first and then cut my friends, all the while being interviewed and joking with us – including her friend in the kitchen. After the haircuts we talked about how long each one had taken and who was going to log the time through the Communityweaver software. On the way home my friend suggested that Claire had spent a bit more time and care on my haircut than hers, as there are quite a few long bits of hair sticking down below her new bob (Research Journal 27 November 2012).

This extract from my research journal describes a Timebank trade which captures a number of aspects that this chapter and the following discuss in greater detail. Both chapters discuss the labour practices, subjectivities and nature of community enabled and performed through the Wellington Timebank. These two final empirical chapters draw on material obtained through the various methods outlined in Section 3.3.2. These methods include ethnographic participant observation, semi-structured interviews with six Timebank members, the use of the report on the Timebank Tune-in (sourced from the Wellington Timebank) and the analysis of secondary texts.

This chapter is divided into three sections and begins by outlining a brief history of the Wellington Timebank, describing how it started and how it functions. The second section explores some of the connections between the demographics of the Wellington Timebank and place. The final section draws on Nancy's (1991; 2000) ideas and the empirical work of geographers like Bond (2011), Panelli and Welch (2005), Welch and Panelli (2007) and Rose (1997c) to explore the ways in which the Wellington Timebank enables members to engage in a specific form of community. Or, in other words – construct a form of community which

opens up space to re-imagine subjectivities and 'formulate new politics of 'being with' (that does not require sameness)' (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 355). This final section explores the nitty-gritty of performing what Nancy (1991) calls 'inoperative community' by outlining why people decided to join the Wellington Timebank and how members experience involvement. This includes a discussion of some of the membership criteria and boundary markers which define the extent of the Timebank community and at times, partially disrupt the inclusive and diversity oriented myth underpinning it.

I draw on the ideas of Nancy (1991; 2000) in this chapter to show how the Wellington Timebank provides members with a relatively open sense of being-in-common which provides some relief from the precarious experiences of singularity, finitude and anxiety created through the waged economy and contemporary urban life. In the following chapter I draw on the ideas of Rancière (1998; 2001; 2004) to suggest that the underlying ethos of all time being valued equally through the Wellington Timebank provides a radical politics of equality from which to overflow the dominant discourses of the work society. In this way these two final chapters speak to the three research sub-questions by linking the relational practices of Timebanking to a form of community characterised by a relatively open politics of place.

7.1 The Wellington Timebank

The Wellington Timebank officially started in October 2011. The initial idea to start a Timebank in Wellington City came from staff at the Newtown Community Centre and staff at what was formally known as the South East and City Primary Health Organisation. These staff members' interest in the concept happened to coincide with an offer from a Lyttleton Timebank coordinator to come and facilitate a community workshop to gauge the interest and look at the possibility of starting a Timebank in Wellington (Porter 17 December 2012). A public notice was advertised and the workshop attracted approximately 25-30 people. Of these, around 14 people were interested in pursuing the idea and further meetings were held. Through these meetings a Steering Committee was formed of around six people who then took the lead to further develop the project. The Newtown Community Centre provided a small grant to fund a part-time coordinator to begin the process of starting the Timebank. After some of the operational processes were firmed up, the Wellington Timebank was officially launched in October 2011 (Cameron 20 November 2012). Following

the departure of the first paid coordinator, another coordinator, Hannah Mackintosh was appointed in late 2011 to work 25 hours a week. This position has continued and is currently funded by a mix of grants from the Wellington City Council and the Newtown Community Centre. In this way the Wellington Timebank could be seen as an autonomous or grass-roots initiative, for while it receives some funding from the Wellington City Council, it was not conceived of, or initiated through local government or state processes. The Wellington Timebank's office is currently located at the Newtown Community Centre.

The Wellington Timebank operates in a very similar way to that outlined by Cahn (2004) in Section 1.3.4 and employs a person-to-person approach rather than a person-to-agency approach (see Gregory 2012a for further discussion of these differences). The currency is time in the sense that no money is transferred between members for services or skills that are exchanged, unless this is agreed upon, such as giving money for ingredients if someone cooks another member something. The Wellington Timebank also operates on the philosophy that everyone's time is of equal value, no matter what skill or service is being traded. Once someone becomes a member they are added onto an online database called 'Communityweaver' which is used to post offers and requests for services to other members and keep a track of trades. So for example, a member may put up an offer that they are available to provide piano lessons, or a member may put up a request that they are looking for someone to mow their lawn.

If a member completes this trade with someone else, one of them logs this in Communityweaver which keeps track of the individual's time balance. This allows individual members to keep track of how much time they have in the bank. So for instance, if a member undertook five hours of gardening for another member, their personal balance would be updated to reflect that they are five hours in credit while a corresponding five hours would be debited from the other member's account who received the service. Whenever someone logs a trade through Communityweaver, the other member/s involved are able to view and approve the amounts of time being processed. Timebank members can trade with any other member in the network and they don't owe another member

personally if they do something for them – rather the debit is reflected in their personal time balance⁴⁵.

All members' offers and requests can be viewed by any other member in the Timebank through Communityweaver. However, to facilitate trading, the coordinator also sends out weekly emails which highlight recent offers and requests. While one-to-one trades make up the bulk of activity occurring through the Timebank, there are also group trades, workshops and social events which are done under the umbrella of the Timebank. For example, members can come together and undertake a working bee at another member's home. In this case all the members providing the service would earn time credits for their involvement and the person receiving the service would have the total amount of time of all involved debited from their account. Alternatively members can donate time to a cause they may support, such as visiting elderly people in a retirement home. Members can also use their time credits to attend workshops or training seminars provided by other Timebank members.

These kinds of transactional details and membership criteria were some of the aspects which were discussed and negotiated in the public meetings and by the Steering Committee prior to the Timebank officially starting. There have also been ongoing aspects that the coordinator and the Steering Committee have had to negotiate and manage, adapting existing systems and working out how to allow people to donate time and attend workshops and other events which fall outside the more straight forward one-to-one trade. Cooper (2013) and Seyfang (2004a) suggest that these kinds of processes are essentially about creating shared understandings around how alternative currencies and markets work outside of the more dominant discourses of neoliberal capitalism and the work society. In a sense we could think about these kinds of practical behavioural expectations and understandings as part of re-subjection processes. Processes which include guidance about how software such as Communityweaver works, but also more intangible

⁴⁵ The Timebank also includes people who are interested in more traditional forms of volunteering - as evidenced by those who donate time to the 'Community Chest' which is a mechanism whereby members can donate a certain amount of time to specific projects or community groups that the Timebank partners with. The partner organisation does not go into 'debit' but rather utilises the time of members' who are willing to donate their time.

expectations and norms around how members should interact and exchange their labour with others (see Section 7.3.2 for further discussion).

7.2 Wellington Timebank membership demographics

As part of the membership induction process, people are asked to provide details about where they live, their sex, age and ethnicity. Coordinator, Hannah Mackintosh noted that while there are members from across Wellington City, the majority live in Wellington South, with the bulk of people coming from Newtown and to a lesser extent, Island Bay (see Figure 7.1). There are currently approximately 400 members and Hannah Mackintosh outlined that in terms of age, the biggest group are currently between 20-40 and the smallest group (other than under 15 years) are people between 50-60. Seventy five percent of members identify as female and between eighty five to ninety percent of members identify as Pākehā or New Zealand European (Mackintosh 31 January 2013). The predominance of women is reflected in some other Timebanks in the United States and the United Kingdom (see Collom 2007; Ozanne 2010). For example Cahn stated that seventy percent of members in his Timebank are women and ‘his twin sister calls Timebanks feminist economics’ (cited in Hess 2012, p 1). Similarly at a panel session at the Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting in 2013 entitled ‘Take Back the Economy IV: Practices of Commoning’, a speaker from the Los Angeles Timebank noted that their members were predominantly women and gay men. This is not necessarily the case for all Timebanks however. For example, Seyfang (2004) noted that in 2004 the Gorbals Timebank in Glasgow, Scotland was composed of roughly equivalent numbers of men and women. These differences point to the importance of understanding the various contextual factors and gender dynamics which shape the demographics of particular Timebanks and alternative economic spaces. For as Fickey and Hanrahan (2014, p 398) note, ‘questions of gender, class and race as lines of inequality *within* diverse economies have been somewhat neglected’ (emphasis in original).

Figure 7.1: Map of Wellington City showing the suburbs of Newtown and Island Bay.
 Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellington_City_Council

The seeming homogeneity of members the demographic statistics for the Wellington Timebank indicate is complicated however. For as Hannah Mackintosh and other Steering Committee members noted, while many Timebank members could be identified as 'middle class' in terms of family background and level of education, they were also sometimes struggling financially. Whether this was because they were outside full time paid employment, trying to start a new business, single parents, or re-training, my sense from both interviews and ethnographic work was that members were not generally the 'type' of middle class people that characterise the stereotypically wealthier Wellington suburbs of Khandallah or Kelburn.

Newtown was historically a 'working class' suburb, and while it has undergone a certain amount of gentrification over the last 20 years, it is still relatively ethnically and socio-economically mixed with substantial areas of Council and state housing compared to other suburbs in Wellington City. For example, the 2013 New Zealand census data confirmed that there are higher numbers of residents who identify as 'non-European' in Newtown than Wellington City on average. In 2013, Newtown also had a smaller proportion of high income households (those earning more than \$70,000 per year) and a higher proportion of low income households (those earning less than \$30,000 per year) than the average for Wellington City (Community Profile ID 2013b). The historical impact of more politicised working class discourses have also shaped the nature of community in this suburb which in the past has been home to various political organisations with communist, socialist and anarchist orientations (Doyle 1998).

Island Bay in comparison was settled by Italian and Shetlander fisher families. Similarly to Newtown, this suburb has a working class history, yet in more recent years it has become characterised by wealthier residents with a similar ethnic make-up to Wellington City more broadly (Community Profile ID 2013a). For instance the 2013 New Zealand census data showed that there was a larger proportion of high income households (those earning more than \$70,000 per year) and a lower proportion of low income households (those earning less than \$30,000 per year) in Island Bay/Owhiro Bay than Wellington City generally. While there are clearly broad differences between these two suburbs in terms of average incomes and ethnic make-up, both suburbs are quite clearly defined in geographic areas, located

south of the central city and have tended to be described as possessing 'strong communities' in various local government urban policies (Doyle 1998).

The historical and contemporary impacts of place, socio-political histories, ethnicity and class are potentially significant factors in explaining the growth of Timebanking in certain areas of Wellington and not others. For example, Hannah Mackintosh noted that at a regional Timebank meeting we both attended, the connections between class and wealth were linked to people's desire to join Timebanks:

I was talking to [one of the founders of] the Waikanae Timebank, she was really struggling and she was saying that she felt like it was because the area was too wealthy and so some people would be like, 'why would I join a Timebank to get someone to mow my lawn when I could just pay someone to do it and it's not a big deal'. So I think maybe the key is when people are a little bit pushed and they think, 'well that'd be great to not have to pay someone to do that' (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

In the quote above Hannah Mackintosh suggests that there could be a range of reasons why people choose to engage with Timebanking, including the impact of wealth. However, while engagement with Timebanking could be understood merely as a response to material needs, as Gregory (2012a) suggests most of the literature on Timebanking has not critically engaged with concepts of community, participation and reciprocity. He goes on to note that while research has looked at limitations of Timebanking and barriers to involvement and success of initiatives, there has not been enough critical engagement with the forms of community enacted through these process. This includes attending to the micro-dynamics of interactions, gendered relations and connections with neoliberal discourses of community.

7.3 The why of community

Complementing Gregory's (2012a) specific call for more research in relation to how community is enacted through Timebanking, Panelli and Welch (2005, p 1589) note that Nancy's (1991; 2000) work points to the wider need to better understand what 'drives human engagement with community'. Reflecting Panelli and Welch's, and Gregory's questions, the reasons why people had joined the Wellington Timebank was something that

the Steering Committee and I wanted to better understand, and was one of the key questions we asked in the Timebank Tune-in survey. As noted in Section 3.3.3 Hannah Mackintosh provided me with a summary report of this survey question and Figure 7.2 outlines the different reasons members who responded to this survey gave for joining the Timebank.

Figure 7.2: Timebank member's reasons for joining the network⁴⁶. Source: Wellington Timebank 2012.

Figure 7.2 shows that the most significant reasons why people joined the Timebank included meeting a diverse range of people, building/restoring/enhancing community, valuing skills based exchanges, and supporting the general Timebank philosophy. Supporting the general philosophy could also be considered relatively similar to an 'interesting alternative to current flawed economic system'. However, those responses included in the 'interesting

⁴⁶ Participants could list as many reasons as they wished for joining the Timebank and all their reasons are included in this figure. The survey posed this question in an open-ended way and some of the participants reasons were relatively similar and could have been grouped into fewer categories. For example, meeting a diverse range of people could be considered one way to 'build community'. However, when analysing the responses I grouped them based on the specific words people used. So if a member stated 'meeting people' was one of their reasons, this was categorised differently to 'building community'.

alternative' category specifically mentioned that they liked the idea of exchanging time and skills outside of the waged labour market. These four most common reasons reflected Hannah Mackintosh's observations about why people had joined. She described three broad reasons:

There's people who want a sense of community and they believe in the strength of a connected community and see the Timebank as a valuable way of achieving that. And then there's people who just have stuff they need or want to offer, so it's really practical... Then there are others who really believe in and know more about sort of alternative economies and sort of re-valuing work (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

These reasons for joining alternative exchange systems like Timebanks reflect work by Cooper (2013) Ozanne (2010) and Seyfang (2001; 2004a) in the United Kingdom and Aotearoa New Zealand. While Figure 7.2 shows that it was sometimes tricky to pin down the exact combination of reasons why someone joined the Wellington Timebank (as members used similar words to describe potentially different things), what is clear from the Timebank Tune-in, Hannah Mackintosh's comments and my ethnographic work is that one of the more significant reasons for joining is to experience a relational exchange and create community, as much as meeting an immediate material need. That is not to say that material needs are not important drivers for some people, and material needs can obviously intersect with more psychological and emotional concerns, like feeling isolated and socially disconnected from one's community. For example, in interviews two members stated that they had initially joined out of more material needs. '[I]n the beginning money wise, and I still am really, seriously rock bottom. There was a point where I was being fed by the City Mission... I was feeling a bit isolated' (Parker 31 January 2013).

Similarly another member said this when asked about why she joined the Timebank:

Um, broke as (laughs). My job is, not that it's not sustainable cause there's potential for it to be, but while things are not sustainable I don't have a lot of cash so I have to mind my living. When you live on a budget for a really long time you can get really bummed out that you're not living your life very well. What I like about Timebank is that you can trade time which goes beyond money. So the relationship you have

with your life is much better cause you're not trapped by this thing of money (Hewitt 27 November 2012).

While both members could have potentially been considered middle class in one sense (one was completing postgraduate study and the other was starting a small business), what their motivations show is the economic precarity many seemingly middle class people in the global north are increasingly negotiating (see for instance Aranda, Vidokle, and Wood 2011; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Butler 2006b; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). In referring to precarity here I am drawing on Vradi (2013a, para 1) who understands this as a description 'for the economic uncertainty and existential angst associated with the dissolution of fixed employment'. She (2013a, para 1) argues that this experience is further exacerbated by the 'disintegration of stable societal bonds, occupational identities, social protections and a sense of entitlement and belonging characteristic of the old proletariat'. Vradi's (2013a) relatively broad understanding of precarity captures some of the anxieties and difficulties which include, but extend beyond the lack of money facing some of the Timebank members. In this way the Timebank can be seen to provide these members with the opportunity to partially alleviate some of these anxieties and in the words of Claire Hewitt above, improve the 'relationship you have with your life'.

The different motivations and reasons for people joining the Wellington Timebank are inevitably bound up with their classed and gendered subjectivities, life circumstances and ideological beliefs. However, various Steering Committee and Timebank members suggested that it was a 'certain type of person' who joins the Timebank (Parker 31 January 2013; Porter 17 December 2012; Cameron 20 November 2012). This 'type' of person was generally understood as someone who is 'into community' or 'community minded' (Cameron 20 November 2012). As I interviewed members and reflected on my ethnographic experiences I began to see a kind of Timebank community discourse emerging, and one of the effects of this was to produce its speakers as certain kinds of people. Or in other words, the discourse called into being that which it described. For example, in explaining why some of her friends might not join the Timebank one of the Steering Committee members said:

a lot of my friends who aren't or don't do community stuff, who aren't in community, who just have their careers and their money and live their very normal

lives, I think this would be bit strange maybe. A lot of them, there would be no way they'd be joining. Those more kind of straight, middle of the road kind of people (Porter 17 December 2012).

In this way the very understanding and framing of the Timebank within a broad community discourse serves to partly structure who potentially engages with and joins the network, while also positioning those who are involved as already being 'into community'.

In reflecting further on the demographics of Timebank members, Hannah Mackintosh noted that:

Timebanks often reflect their coordinator because you are using your social networks to get it out there. We haven't really done any advertising other than a few articles in City Life⁴⁷ news and stuff. So it's not that surprising that it's majority Pākehā cause probably all the language I speak when I send out material or write up things will be speaking to Pākehā and that's something I really wanna change (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

Here Hannah Mackintosh points to a number of other factors which may be partially shaping who joins the Wellington Timebank, including the lack of formal advertising, growth in membership by word of mouth and existing social connections, and significantly, the role of ethnicity.

The demographics outlined in Section 7.2 show that the Wellington Timebank is primarily composed of a certain type of subject – youngish, female and Pākehā. I'm not suggesting that these kinds of broad descriptive identity categories are necessarily all that helpful in understanding the complexity of people's lived realities, for in the words of Butler (cited in Gregson and Rose 2000, p 437) discourse and identity labels are citational, 'constituting the identity [they are] purported to be'. Nevertheless, these demographic categories suggest that there is a certain type of person who is both attracted to the Timebank, and by implication, to whom it caters.

While the reasons why people joined the Timebank outlined earlier are important, I also wanted to get a sense of how members understand and experience this form of community.

⁴⁷ City Life was a local free newspaper that focused on publishing Wellington stories.

For as Cooper (2013, p 32) notes, while alternative currency schemes like Timebanking sound like a really positive initiative, much British scholarship at least, has neglected to explore ‘the socially textured character’ of exchanges (see also Gregory 2012a). The following section explores the social micro-dynamics of trading and draws on Nancy’s (1991) idea of an inoperative community to provide a theoretical framework to make sense of some of the mythical narratives and tensions within the Wellington Timebank community. Throughout this section I connect the more everyday trading exchanges to wider questions around how collectives can foster a more open politics of place in the face of increasing uncertainty and anxiety characterised by the work society. This section therefore addresses two of the research sub-questions by connecting specific relational practices to an open politics of place. For as Gibson-Graham (2008, p 622) and Massey (2005) both argue, academic work needs to explore how collectives in specific localities might look beyond their geographic and social boundaries without creating exclusionary, parochial localisms.

7.3.1 The Timebank community as connection

As discussed in Section 2.2.1 Welch and Panelli (2007, p 350) draw on Nancy (1991; 2000) to argue that community can ‘never be the idealised fantasy of common-being, nor a unity of experience or perspective’. For Nancy (1991; 2000) argues that we should understand community as always incomplete, shifting and porous - a collective of beings who coalesce in different configurations, beings who are brought together through the shared experience of ‘singular finitude’, which is essentially an awareness of death. Nancy’s formulation suggests that it is the ‘being-with’ that is most significant in forming any sense of self, and is integral in explaining why people desire and form communities. In understanding the dynamics of community Nancy suggests focusing on those points of continual cross-referencing, those connections and moments which are complex in the sense that they ‘*expose*, as well as *bridge*, the distances, differences and spaces separating singular (plural) selves’ (Welch and Panelli 2007, p 351, emphasis original).

A key point Nancy (1991) makes is that community need not rest on some essential or ascribed identity, but rather, that all beings could (potentially) be included in the human community, which provides for a certain radical potential. This potentially endlessly diverse human community creates a tension for people, because it is basically too inclusive to provide any alleviation for feelings of singular finitude. In what follows I discuss how Nancy’s

ideas can help make sense of how the Wellington Timebank community is mythologised and brought into existence by members. As noted above, this discussion is important because it connects understandings within the Wellington Timebank to practices which could potentially foster more open places.

Hannah Mackintosh used Figure 7.3 which shows the trading connections between various Timebank members to visually illustrate how the practice works for new or prospective members. In talking about this diagram she noted how it demonstrates the possibility for an ever-increasing number of connections (trades) between different members. Similarly one of the key words that came up repeatedly in interviews, the Timebank Tune-in and ethnographic work was this term 'connection'. For example, one member suggested that being involved in the Timebank meant, 'being connected to a group that's bigger than me and that I can help support and be part of and it can help support me and that kind of thing' (Rushton 26 November 2012). When I asked this member about one of her favourite trades she described a dinner where another Timebanker taught her how to make vegetarian meatballs. She said: 'it was awesome... [because] I had dinner with a couple of her flatmates and my flatmate did the trade with me... we had this dinner and I got to meet three people in my community I wouldn't have met otherwise' (Rushton 26 November 2012). When I questioned her further about this she noted the following:

[M]y [flatmate] is like 'why do people need these sorts of organisations to meet people?' And she knows everybody up and down the street and she's only lived there for a couple of years. But I guess I don't so easily meet my neighbours like that, so for me the Timebank is really great for that (Rushton 26 November 2012).

Figure 7.3: Trading as connections. Source: Wellington Timebank 2014.

Similarly another member described how being involved in the Timebank had increased the number of people she knew: ‘Like I remember going to the Berhampore craft market a few months ago and I remember thinking as I was there over the course of the day, I was thinking there were half a dozen people I was chatting to that I didn’t know before Timebank’ (Cameron 20 November 2012). Renee Rushton and Sonya Cameron’s experiences reflect Cooper’s (2013, p 38) point where a Timebank can accelerate ‘what is often experienced as the slow temporal process of identification with, and attachment to, community’. Timebank members I spoke with tended to juxtapose the relational process Timebanking facilitates against an increasing urban disconnectedness and wider socio-economic concerns. These concerns reflect Cooper’s (2013, p 36) research where Timebankers in the United Kingdom valued their involvement as a way to ‘forge both an

economy and community through the interrelationship and mutual enhancement'. North (2006) calls this 'relationship trading' and Sonya Cameron provided a nice summary of these kinds of ideas:

you know, we live in a changing world where, where the economic systems that we are living under may not serve us for too much longer and where, you know, community connectedness is not as good as it could be. Where, there's poverty, unemployment and Timebanking to me seems to answer a lot of the world's problems. Just in terms of building connections between people, people getting their needs met. You know all sorts of work being valued. And you know if things do, if the world does go to crap it kind of sets us up... So for me this is the ultimate community development initiative (Cameron 20 November 2012).

Sonya Cameron's understanding of Timebanking illustrates two points. Firstly we can see the ways in which she outlines some of the uncertainties and anxieties associated with contemporary neoliberal capitalist urban life - including unemployment, poverty, and potential economic and ecological change. Secondly she suggests that the solution to these kinds of issues (which we could understand as contributing to experiences of threatening finitude or singularity) is greater connection, or community and the recognition of agency coming from below or from within the community.

This framing of Timebanking as a form of 'community development' draws on complex and contested discourses around both community and development. Two terms (and practices) that have been particularly contentious and heavily debated and critiqued in geography and elsewhere, especially when they become co-opted by the state or other powerful actors (see for instance Cahill, Sultana, and Pain 2007; Green 2010; Gregory 2012a; Korf 2010; Rose 2000). My sense was that members of the Timebank Steering Committee tended to understand community development as inherently (or mythically) positive - where development meant addressing social problems on both personal and structural scales. For example, when I asked Renee Rushton whether she thought the Timebank could actually help to reduce crime or help those who suffer from mental illness she stated that it could - but that the major benefit of the Timebank was how it fosters a greater sense of connectedness. In this way Timebank members reflected Seyfang's (2004b) observations

where Timebanking is often framed as a grass-roots response to overcoming socio-economic exclusion. For example Renee Rushton stated:

Cause if you've got a community full of people who know each other. You know we have all those neighbourhood watch groups that are essentially people who get together and hang out or watch. But if you've got a community who know each other and they're looking out for each other and then incorporating the people who are perhaps falling through the cracks into the community and giving them a sense of pride through offering things and people are taking up their offers, then I mean, it's not totally fool-proof but I think it does quite a bit of that (Rushton 26 November 2012).

This framing of Timebanking as the ultimate community development mechanism was linked to both the subjectivities constructed through the Timebank and the fact that it could engage 'all sectors of the community ... It means that all parts of the community can get to know each other, whether they're rich or poor – whatever. You know everyone's got something to offer' (Cameron 20 November 2012). In this way members of the Wellington Timebank tended to understand the network as an inclusive ever-widening network of interactions, which form around geographic proximity and flow outwards. The following exchange illustrates this:

Gradon: Who do you understand as the community that the Timebank is serving?

Sonya: Well I mean I suppose... for me... we have kind of moved from being the 'Wellington South Community' to being 'Wellington Community' but I think within that you have, well I mean, like I think it's everything from your direct neighbours to that gradually widening circle of people around you and the more that you know those people and the more that you can trust, the more that people trust or will help out each other and know each other the better really (Cameron 20 November 2012).

This understanding of community as both inclusive and based around knowledge of, and connections with others is further captured in Sonya Cameron's description:

Well community is just really, well it's sort of almost starts with one to one. I mean it's, like I've done loads of, I've been involved in heaps of trades and met a lot of

people through Timebank and um I mean it's almost you just meet one person and that's another person you can say hello to on the street or that you might meet up with again and have a chat with. And the more that that happens, obviously between me and others but also that's happening all over the place. And the more people are coming along and enjoying themselves at our catch-up cafes or pot luck dinners, it's all sort of building community really isn't it (Cameron 20 November 2012).

While the Timebank was seen as an important 'community building' mechanism by members, some also noted that the Timebank could be seen as the extension of an approach that they were already employing in their life. Such a view reflects Fickey and Hanrahan's (2014) point that many alternatives such as Timebanking actually incorporate aspects of exchange and the sustenance of social life which either already exist. For example:

I guess it's a slightly different way of doing community. It's kind of like formalising it in some ways. Having more formal lines of communication and ways of interacting (Rushton 26 November 2012).

The descriptions illustrate a number of points which reflect Nancy's (1991) ideas about the importance of subjects' desire for relationship with others through community. Regardless of the ways in which the terms and practices of community development get deployed, enacted, performed (or co-opted), what became clear from interviews, ethnographic work and the Timebank Tune-in was that many members saw the concept and practice of Timebanking as an effective way to create connections and practice a form of community, which at its most basic level involves, 'knowing your neighbours'. In this way the Wellington Timebank community does not appear to be understood as some kind of achieved or static, bounded group – but rather, an ongoing and ever-deepening process of connections between people. While there are certain types of subjects with similar values who tend to be attracted to, and make up the Wellington Timebank (youngish, female and Pākehā), membership is not based on this static or ascribed identity. Or in the words of Shindo (2012, p 151), '[c]ommunity is not a circle to be completed, but a shared mode of being articulated through translated communication'.

What struck me throughout this research was that while relationships and connection may be what people are actually after, these relations tended to be mediated through trades focused on other things (see Chapter 8 for further discussion of trading and labour). We could therefore see the Wellington Timebank as one way in which people move from experiencing singularity to being-in-common. As mentioned above this being-in-common is not achieved through a static or ascribed identity, but through the act of trading which can be both flexible and open-ended. In this way the trade could be framed as that moment of connection that constitutes being. Timebank members can participate as much or as little as they like in trading, initiating a trade when they feel like they need to experience the sense of being part of a community. However, the operation of the Timebank also exceeded any one single members' response to singularity or need for community. Just as working in the wage economy means different things for different people, so too does participating in the Wellington Timebank, as evidenced by the range of reasons members joined. What I have outlined above reflects Gregory's (2012a) point that person-to-person Timebanking approaches provide more open-ended forms of social action.

The comments from Timebank members above could be interpreted as representing the Wellington Timebank as a kind of inclusive utopia, that appears to be lacking the kinds of exclusionary processes that characterise so many other communities (see for instance Panelli and Welch 2005; Radcliffe 1999; Sibley 1995). Consequently I was interested in how membership criteria operate and how members engage with the micro-politics of trading and the potential complications that can arise in what are essentially relational encounters with others. There are certain membership criteria and behavioural expectations around trading which contribute to shaping the form of the Timebank community and fostering a sense of belonging. The following section explores these processes further which serve to partially disrupt the mythic ideal and inclusive community narrative of the Wellington Timebank.

7.3.2 Community, fear and negotiating difference

Underlying the Timebanking ethos more generally is an inclusive call for diversity - diversity of members, diversity of skills and needs, and the belief that the trading system is beneficial for, and can work for everyone. For instance one member suggested that one of the underlying goals is 'to include a really diverse group of people in the Timebank, so trying to

include I guess marginalised groups in society and have ethnic diversity, age diversity, sexual diversity, gender diversity' (Rushton 26 November 2012). However, Renee Rushton and others expressed partial concerns about the lack of diversity both within the Wellington Timebank and the Steering Committee. The following exchange illustrates this tension between a desire for diversity and the reality of who makes up the Steering Committee and the wider Timebank:

Renee: The thing is our Steering Committee doesn't necessarily reflect our intentions for the rest of the Timebank in terms of diversity. We're kind of 90 percent women between the ages of 29-45 or something. White, middle class women, so I think that is a bit of an influence in terms of new ideas coming forward and I think we probably all think quite similarly because of that.

Gradon: Do you see that as a problem?

Renee: Not a problem per se, I just see that we would probably work better as a group and have more diverse ideas if we were a more diverse group. That's just a theory.... Like I don't know if that necessarily would be the case (Rushton 26 November 2012).

This desire for diversity is presumably linked to the idea that a healthy and functional Timebank is one that has a wide range of offers and requests which would be reflected in a more diverse set of people with different skills and needs (see for instance Cahn 2004; Seyfang 2004b). This desire for diversity could also be linked to contact theory (see Allport 1954) and urban tolerance discourses which suggest that urban communities are more cohesive and have less exclusion and crime if different types of people come into contact with each other more frequently (see for instance Andersson, Vanderbeck, Valentine, Ward, and Sadgrove 2011; Fainstein 2005). In Nancy's (1991) terms we could see this very desire as a form of mythic idealised urban community of connection which overcomes the potential divisions created by diversity.

As outlined in Section 2.2.1, Nancy suggests that to alleviate feelings of anxiety people tend to seek out communities based on commonality. Or, in other words – there is a constant tension where myths work community into a sense of commonality, while singularity

constantly seeks to unwork this commonality and make community inoperative. While the above example of desire for a diverse community doesn't necessarily reflect commonality in the usual ways, it still reflects contemporary progressive discourses around connected, tolerant communities which draw on myth in a sense. In the above example we could see the desire for diversity and connection as a myth, while feelings of singularity and difference heighten people's sense of division and unwork any kind of diverse collective. This is not to suggest that such desires for diversity in communities like the Wellington Timebank are not real, but that the desire for diversity is called into being via speech acts and can never quite achieve the actual diversity ultimately desired.

The reasons why this desired diversity in the Wellington Timebank may not be occurring have been mentioned earlier, including word of mouth growth, the coordinator, English language limitations, geographic location, and the underlying ethos. Additionally, there are also a number of criteria that people must fulfil to become a member of the Wellington Timebank which contribute to shaping this community. These criteria include a membership fee of between \$5-10 (depending on individual circumstances), an interview with the coordinator, the provision of two referees/references and a Police check. These membership criteria and checks which partially foster a sense of belonging and attachment to the Timebank, were negotiated and put into place during the initial planning stages of the Timebank (outlined in section 7.1). Steering committee member Sonya Cameron suggested that it was the very diversity of the Wellington South region which prompted the requirement for referee and Police checks:

Sonya: We were sort of saying, ok if you look at the Wellington South there's a great diversity, from very poor council flats to very wealthy and then a lot of ethnic diversity and people with disabilities. Whereas, say, Lyttelton was probably a lot more homogenous. So for example we said we wanted Police checks where as they had decided it wasn't necessary for them.

Gradon: And so that decision to have Police checks was to ensure a sense of safety for all members?

Sonya: Yeah I think so. I think it was sort of just feeling that if you're gonna have people going in babysitting or looking after your elderly mother then you wanna feel safe (Cameron 20 November 2012).

Based on ethnographic work, interviews and the Timebank Tune-in report these various membership criteria, particularly the referee and police checks, have generally contributed to members feeling safer engaging with others. While potentially exclusionary, these vetting processes were also seen as a strength of the Timebank community which meant that members felt they could relax and didn't need to approach each trade with tiring and suspicious caution. Additionally the psychological comfort a coordinator provides is reflected in Ozanne's (2010) work on the Lyttleton Timebank. For example, one member of the Wellington Timebank stated:

you kind of feel really secure that somebody's already been vetted so you don't need to do that for every single job that they're gonna do. And people are given the trust and responsibility that they can manage their own affairs and their own kind of personal safety or whatever. I mean you never know, something could go wrong I guess and there might be some people who are more naive and the rest of it (Parker 31 January 2013).

Similarly another member noted that even though she likes 'weirdos', 'it's comforting to know that people are vetted and even if they are unique and have their own quirks, that it's lively, it's real and it's natural' (Hewitt 27 November 2012). The following exchange illustrates this further:

Gradon: So if they weren't vetted and if Hannah wasn't, if there wasn't a coordinator involved would that change your level of comfort about being involved?

Claire: Yeah because I think what happens is you, it becomes a question of security. Is it safe to let someone into my house? Like I think the prime example is yesterday at the Timebank Birthday. Did you feel safe putting your handbag or your bag down? Could you walk away from it and think, when I go back my phone or wallet will still be there?

Gradon: I didn't even think about it.

Claire: No you didn't because we have set up this relationship which says we don't take from each other because we don't need to and that's the difference. There becomes a level of vulnerability where people could come into your house and go 'oh they've got a sweet gig'. They could case you for all you know and it just means that trust becomes an interesting thing and I think this works because you can trust straight up. Everyone's treated the same and I have never had to make any complaints. I've never had any issues and I don't anticipate any. So doubt is the thing there, because we have trust we don't have doubt and doubt leads to fear and insecurity which means I don't feel safe and then people start to exhibit things in themselves like clutching handbags or keeping to themselves and they become less of a community. So in that way it's a very important part of the process (Hewitt 27 November 2012).

Not all members however were supportive of the idea of diversity within the Wellington Timebank. For instance, when talking with one older member during the Tune-In, she described how she had joined the Wellington Timebank to make connections with people 'more like her'. She went on to describe her neighbours in Council flats and spoke in broadly fearful and derogatory terms about their non-english accents, loud voices and 'smelly cooking'. For this woman, the relative homogeneity of the Timebank community (being Pākehā and female) was what appealed to her and made her feel safe trading and more connected to others 'like her'. We could understand this member's desire for commonality with others 'like her' as a way to reduce her anxieties about being surrounded by people who could not alleviate her feelings of singularity.

As noted in Section 2.2.1 Nancy (2000) suggests that fear of others is not about difference per se, but a fear that someone else will expose our singularity. Or in relation to this context – the fear of another who may expose one's vulnerability or threaten one's existence, which could include stealing or harming a family member. Claire Hewitt outlined this threat clearly above – particularly in relation to the risks of making oneself vulnerable to other Timebank members through trading. The referee and Police checks could be understood as partial attempts to reduce these risks, or in Nancy's (2000) terms 'fix the origin' or a 'truth' of someone by drawing on wider societal categorisations and verifications of trust. However, the process employed by the Wellington Timebank is a little more nuanced than the above

discussion indicates. For instance, it is important to note that if a prospective member has a Police record that does not mean that they cannot join, but their situation is assessed by the Steering Committee on a case by case basis. For example, Hannah Mackintosh noted that since she started there have only been a few cases where Police checks have revealed a criminal record. She outlined one situation in particular where the Police check revealed a range of offences, including assault from almost 20 years ago:

That caused a huge amount of debate in the Steering Committee about what to do with that person. He was someone that some of us already knew, who had great referees and was already volunteering for an organisation. And that was really interesting and I think it showed some of the tough decisions but also some of the prejudices. It made me really aware of how people who kind of mess up when they're in the teens and 20s and get sort of, they're angry at the world or whatever and do stupid things and make stupid decisions and then they get to a certain point and think I don't wanna do this anymore, but it's permanently on their record and no one's gonna employ them and even volunteer organisations are like, I don't know if I can trust you. And how do they get back in? (Mackintosh 31 January 2013)

In this situation Hannah Mackintosh and another Steering Committee member who knew the person advocated for their inclusion. She noted that in another case, a prospective member applied who had a criminal charge pending and the Steering Committee decided that they needed to wait until the case was decided by the courts. In reflecting on these situations Hannah Mackintosh articulated one of the inherent tensions that community organisations have to negotiate:

It's hard one, I hate that side of it. My whole idea is that the Timebank is such a good way of being able to link those people back up into a community that they've been basically excluded from, and that's the same of anyone with a criminal record or drug or alcohol abuse or mental health issues or disabilities – all these people who have been excluded. And the Timebank is sort of such a brilliant way of linking them back in, but then there's like the safety of the masses that you have to worry about (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

In dealing with these tensions the Steering Committee have used a number of strategies. In the example of the member with historic criminal convictions described above, Hannah Mackintosh noted that she and the Steering Committee invited this member to come and help them make decisions on future cases, 'because we were all coming from a position of never having committed any crimes and then trying to make a decision about someone. We'd never experienced that kind of exclusion' (Mackintosh 31 January 2013). She explained that he declined because 'he wouldn't feel comfortable making a judgement on someone else' (Mackintosh 31 January 2013). In another case Hannah Mackintosh arranged a member to have a 'guardian angel' from within the Timebank who attended all trades that a particular member undertook. This 'guardian angel' received time credits for their mentoring role. In another case Hannah noted that a person fulfilled their community service by doing tasks for the Timebank, however they never went on to become a member (Research Journal 11 October 2012).

There are different ways to interpret these membership processes. They could be read as pragmatic attempts by the Steering Committee (and by extension, the wider Timebank community) to categorise and evaluate the trustworthiness of prospective members. As Hannah Mackintosh describes – a kind of balancing act to protect the safety of the masses while still allowing forms of mediated and disciplined inclusion for those who have criminal records or negative referee checks. Or more critically, these processes could be read as potential barriers to the inclusion of the very people that the underlying (mythical) narrative of diversity the Timebank is founded on. What these criteria and tensions demonstrate is Nancy's point about the inoperative nature of community. Specifically the ways in which the desire for connection with others (through inclusive diversity in this case) is disrupted by fears of exposing one's singularity and then manifests as the need to minimise the potential that others will make us feel vulnerable. Even though all are welcome to join the Wellington Timebank, the membership criteria create an interruption to this myth of diversity and inclusion. The Police and referee checks both serve to protect some people's singularity (those being 'protected') while simultaneously exposing other people's singularity by casting light on their personal histories which can either initiate them quickly into the Timebank community if they have no criminal record, or lead to potentially distancing discussions with the Steering Committee about their trustworthiness. While the Steering Committee have

tried to provide forms of flexibility and contingencies for prospective members who don't meet the safety criteria, it is inevitable that these very processes and moments disrupt the underlying myth of the community.

I do not intend this as a critique of either the Steering Committee's strategies, or the wider membership criteria. Rather, I suggest that Nancy's ideas help us to make sense of the inherent tensions going on in this example between openness and exclusion. For rather than the Wellington Timebank community being based on some essential ascribed identity or commonality such as gender or ethnicity, the community is premised on a myth of diversity and openness which is however interrupted by potential threats posed to individual singularities. Notwithstanding these interruptions I would suggest that these threats are managed in ways that still attempt to retain some kind of openness through mediation and the use of guardian angels' time in the wider Timebank. For these reasons I would suggest that the Timebank community provides some practical mechanisms through which to enact a more open politics of place that Massey (2005) advocates.

Not all Timebanks operate in the way described above. For example, some Timebank networks in Australia and the United Kingdom operate more like open source web-based databases where there are no membership fees, no referee and Police checks and no paid coordinators (see for instance the national Australian Timebanking website⁴⁸). At the other end of the spectrum, some Timebank schemes in the United Kingdom operating person-to-agency approaches require paid staff to attend all trades to reduce the possibility of any health and safety risks (Gregory 2012a; Seyfang 2004a). These kinds of arrangements require substantial investments of both time and funding and tend to reflect more organised state or local government led projects run by social and community workers, as opposed to the more grass-roots initiated approach of the Wellington Timebank. Gregory (2012a) suggests that examples of person-to-agency approaches he has researched tend to be more directed by paid staff and institutionally prescribed goals than person-to-person approaches which tend to be more open-ended as the members themselves shape the interactions and nature of the collective.

⁴⁸ <https://www.Timebanking.com.au/info/qanda.html>

Within Aotearoa New Zealand, Hannah Mackintosh suggests that the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC)⁴⁹ plays an important role in influencing the day-to-day operation of Timebanks in relation to health, safety and personal liability. This is because ACC would cover (most) of the costs associated with an injury that occurred during a Timebank trade and also remove the risk of personal responsibility, including being sued or held responsible for someone's medical care. While these different operational systems of Timebanks draw on the same underlying ethos of all time being valued equally, the development of these networks in different political, legislative and geographic contexts appear to draw on, and express, different understandings of community, agency, fear and risk and consequently, lead to different forms of connections between people.

Given that trading tends to be framed as a relational exchange as much as a skill exchange, I had anticipated that there would be some potential for disputes, personal clashes or encounters which people found frustrating or unclear. For while it appeared that most Timebank members took comfort from the referee and Police checks, many also noted that they were still careful and discussed their trades with other members. I was interested in understanding how people negotiated these more mundane micro-relational dynamics of trading which involved issues of safety and also satisfaction and pleasure. One member had this to say about these issues:

I think it is, it's a bit like Trademe⁵⁰ isn't it, like you put feedback. It's kind of like where if you were dodgy I think people would soon find out about it. Because when you meet up with somebody, the thing I've noticed is that whenever you do a trade with somebody you end up talking about how you got involved and what other trades you've done. And sometimes you talk about what's not been quite right with it and stuff. Like people might say oh I arranged to take somebody somewhere and she ended up wanting me to wait around for 3 hours for her and then... (laughs). That kind of thing. So I reckon if something dodgy happened people would know about it pretty quick. And if something really dodgy happened somebody would tell

⁴⁹ The Accident Compensation Corporation is the Crown entity responsible for providing New Zealand's compulsory and universal no-fault accidental injury scheme. The insurance scheme covers injuries from accidents both at work and outside of work and is administered on a no-fault basis, so people cannot sue for damages (except for exemplary damages). The scheme provides cover for injury treatment, lost earnings and necessary modifications (including vehicular and home) following an accident.

⁵⁰ Trademe is a buying and selling website in Aotearoa New Zealand, not dissimilar to eBay.

Hannah about it... And people would just stop responding to those offers or requests anyway (Parker 31 January 2013).

The issue of 'weirdos' joining was a concern which came up at a Regional Timebank meeting Hannah Mackintosh and I attended. Another Timebank coordinator raised the question about what to do with 'weirdos' or difficult people. The Timebank facilitator suggested that these kinds of issues tend to work themselves out and other members talk amongst themselves and ultimately people stop responding to their offers and requests (Research Journal 22 July 2012). Additionally the point made immediately above suggests that the Timebank Coordinator can also exercise a regulative or disciplinary function to either speak to certain members, or emphasise agreed forms of behaviour. Other members echoed this sentiment – noting that having a dedicated coordinator was a significant factor in helping them to feel safe within the Timebank community (Hewitt 27 November 2012; Wellington Timebank 2012).

Based on interviews, ethnographic work and the Timebank Tune-in, it does not appear that there have been significant interpersonal issues between members. The major issues that have arisen tended to relate to unclear expectations or a lack of timeliness around trading encounters, or in a few cases, dissatisfaction with the outcome of the trade itself. For example in the Timebank Tune-in three members out of 45 expressed dissatisfaction with trades. These dissatisfactions included: a member being late; a member not completing a hair dye successfully; and a trade taking much longer than was initially agreed. These kinds of individualised trading dissatisfactions have been noted by others, see for instance Cooper (2013), North (2006) and Seyfang (2001; 2004a; 2004b).

In response to such issues the coordinator emphasised to members via individual interviews and regular email communications that common courtesy and a certain friendliness is important. This includes such behaviours as being on time for a trade or contacting the trading partner if one is running late, agreeing on the nature of the trade and how much time is being traded and confirming who will input this through Communityweaver. To date these kinds of behavioural expectations appear to have fostered a community relatively free of obvious public conflict or disagreement.

This may be linked to the relative homogeneity of members and the type of people who join. Or alternatively as Cooper (2013) suggests, it may be linked to certain underlying values. Because everyone is 'caring-sharing' and the nature of exchange is also about a sense of connectedness, people may feel that complaining about others can represent 'un-community-like impatience' (Cooper 2013, p 46). Cooper suggests that these issues could actually push someone to leave the community. While I did not find any obvious examples here, I did notice a certain hesitancy to criticise others, as well as a tendency to minimise dissatisfaction when talking about others they had traded with. To me this suggests that those I engaged with had internalised a Timebanking discourse around the value of caring/sharing and their expectations around Timebank exchanges seemed to be a little more flexible than moneyed exchanges.

This section began by outlining some of the criteria around membership and moved on to discussing behavioural expectations or norms that are fostered through Timebanking. I have suggested that the Timebank is not a static community based around an ascribed identity, but rather, premised on a geographic understanding of an inclusive (and somewhat mythical) diverse community that coalesces around certain values and relational trades. This discussion explored how membership in the Timebank is contingent on a number of factors and the negotiation of these criteria (such as Police and referee checks). At times these can create a tension between maintaining the mythic inclusive orientation to the wider Wellington community and fostering diversity, while ensuring members feel safe. Nevertheless the tension between the inclusion and the exclusion of those perceived as unsafe is complex and the Wellington Timebank has used the process of collective decision making, character references and the Timebank itself and other members' willingness to be 'guardian angles'. I have argued that these processes provide practical ways to negotiate threats to singularity, while maintaining a form of relational openness.

7.4: Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn on the theories of Nancy (1991; 2000) as a lens to understand how community is enacted and performed through the Wellington Timebank. I have argued that Nancy's idea of an inoperative community is a helpful way to explain the inherent tensions between desire for connection and diversity, and moments of exclusion and distance which simultaneously play out within the Wellington Timebank. The community

that forms through trading in the Timebank is not generally conceived of as a bounded static group by those involved or one based on an ascribed or fixed identity, but a network of ever widening possible connections between subjects that are facilitated through trades.

However, this is not to say that the Wellington Timebank does not exhibit boundary markers or enforce behavioural expectations. One of the key points discussed in section 7.3.1 was the tension between a desire for a (mythical) diverse community, and the reality of what appears to be a relatively similar group of people in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. In using the term myth to frame the desire for a diverse and inclusive community, I have not meant to imply that there is something unreal occurring, or that the Wellington Timebank is not necessarily inclusive or diverse. Rather, I have suggested that experiences of finitude and singularity associated with economic precarity and social isolation in contemporary urban contexts have prompted certain people to seek connection and community through the Wellington Timebank.

As already noted, the criteria to be a part of this community is premised on a reciprocity based understanding of human subjectivity, where all subjects have needs and skills and it is through the interdependent exchange of these that an ethic of care and equality is fostered and enacted. In the chapter that follows I analyse the nature of relational trading practices in more detail. I draw on Rancière's ideas to illustrate how the underlying ethos of all labour time being valued equally provides a radical political potential to contest the dominant discourses of the work society.

Chapter 8: Timebanking, subjectivities and political moments

8.1 Introduction

This chapter explores in more detail how subjectivities are re-worked and performed through the Wellington Timebank. The first section of this chapter draws on Rancière's (2001; 2004) ideas around the disruption of the order of the sensible, to show how becoming a member of the Wellington Timebank can foster a resubjection process for members that revalues all human labour. However, there are inevitably moments when more dominant discourses that value human labour and time differently, intersect with those of the Timebank. Therefore the discussion focuses on how Timebank members negotiate these kinds of tensions. The second and final section outlines some of the connections between the Wellington Timebank community and wider politically-bounded communities - including the Wellington City Council and the Aotearoa New Zealand state in relation to funding and the ongoing survival of the collective.

This chapter addresses the three research sub-questions by showing how subjectivities are articulated through the various practices in the Timebank. I argue that participating in the Wellington Timebank provides a practical way for some people to overflow the limiting subject positions reified through the waged labour market and the inherent contradictions of the work society. This chapter draws on Rancière's (2001; 2004) understanding of the disruption of the order of the sensible as it provides a helpful theoretical framing to show how radical democratic ideas of the equality of all human labour can be enacted through a collective community of care. I argue that practices like Timebanking are politically significant because they provide subjects with one way to meet material and socio-psychological needs outside of the waged economy.

8.2 Political moments, subjectivities and revaluing human labour

As outlined in Section 1.2, Weeks (2011, p 8) argues that waged 'work is now so divorced from consumption and production that the idea we all 'need to work' is nonsense'. But as she points out, this doesn't mean that waged work is no longer important. In fact, work is more important than ever and for most subjects, work in the waged economy has become about both meeting a social contract (the basic obligation of citizenship and a socially meaningful subjectivity) as well as meeting material needs through wages. What both

Weeks (2011) and Vrasti (2013b) suggest is that for many, work in the waged economy has also become very distanced from producing the material things, or providing the care work that sustains human life. Vrasti (2013b, para 2) argues that this process has created a crisis of work, 'a crisis of a society built around work as the only legitimate point of access for income, status and citizenship rights'.

These tensions around waged work and links to dominant understandings of what constitutes meaningful subjectivities reflect some of the points made by Tao Wells in *The Beneficiaries Office* (see Section 5.3) and through *Productive Bodies*. What stayed with me throughout ethnographic research with the Wellington Timebank was how equal value was given to all human labour, and how this value was not necessarily contingent upon what was produced in terms of commodities or services. This framing of the equality of all human labour creates the potential for political moments in Rancière's terms. For instance, rather than Timebank collectives making demands of institutions or the state, the practice of trading 'renders visible and exposes the 'wrongs' of the police order' which has undervalued certain forms of human labour (Swyngedouw 2009, p 606). Through articulating this wrong, the Timebank discourse simultaneously reframes all members as being equal through the re-valuing of their human labour. In this way the Timebank philosophy does not re-inscribe aspects of the order of the sensible by demanding higher wages for those who's labour has been under-valued, such as the working poor, solo parents on benefits, or those looking after ill family. The philosophy reframes all those who participate through an egalitarian principle that is not based on the naming, placing and categorisation of certain subjects in relation to their labour or work and the money they earn (see also Seyfang 2004b).

The radical potential of the Timebank ethos relates to Cahn's (2004) point about the difference between more traditional forms of charity (including volunteering) and Timebanking. Cahn argues that Timebanking acknowledges the co-production of the exchange whereby both subjects can benefit. The nature of this reciprocal exchange and the acknowledgment that all members have something to offer as well as needs in their lives thereby reframes all members' subjectivities. So rather than more traditional forms of charity (and some volunteering) where certain subjects are designated as the object or recipient of charity (such as the welfare beneficiary) and others are the benefactor. Timebanking re-frames all subjects based on the idea that everyone's labour is equal and all

subjects have needs and things they can offer. For example, Sonya Cameron summed this up:

Timebanking is a different model from typical NGOs. I mean it's not really a typical charity of sorts where you might have professionals and a client group and the need for health needs or social needs to be met. I kind of think of it more as people meeting their own needs of sorts... and I was talking with somebody on the weekend who was involved with NGOA (the National Association of NGOs) and she was saying that she thinks that the traditional concept of charity is dying and is being replaced by this sort of more networked kind of association... (Cameron 20 November 2012).

Given that the Timebank philosophy seeks to revalue all forms of labour as equal and one of the goals is to provide people with a way of operating outside the waged economy, I was specifically interested in how this underlying radical ethos of all labour being valued equally was playing out in this particular Timebank. For example, what kinds of trades were people undertaking, how did they understand these trading encounters, and how was the alternative market of the Timebank being negotiated and co-constructed through these everyday and embodied practices?

8.2.1 Timebanking labour

A Timebank [and the labour exchanged] is basically a reflection of the community of members, so the nature of the offers and requests will reflect the skills, experiences and needs within that particular group of people (Timebank Training Facilitator at a regional Wellington Timebank meeting, Research Diary 22 July 2012).

As outlined in Section 3.3.2, for approximately six months in the second half of 2012, I compiled and edited the weekly list of offers and requests from Wellington Timebank members. Table 8.1 provides an edited snapshot of the types of offers and requests posted during this period and reflects a relatively typical example of one week's offerings.

Table 8.1: Edited example of weekly offers and requests

Requests	
Housework help	I recently injured my back in a fall and am still recovering. I'd appreciate some help on a short term basis.
Backing up and editing photos	I take Nan Goldin style documentary photos, and I need help with transferring them to back up disc...
English teacher	I am interested in having conversational English lessons.
Door repair help	I have a broken door in my flat. Any help would be appreciated.
Making a skirt	I want some help making a skirt.
Advice about recovering unpaid bill	One of my previous flatmate is refusing to pay her share of bills. I would love some advice on how to debt-collect.
Woodworking and materials	I'd after someone who has the skills and access to materials to help me learn more about woodworking.
Offers	
Dog care	I love dogs and dogs love me and I would like to spend more time with four legged folk.
Budgeting and saving	I'd like to help you set some financial goals and identify a plan to achieve them.
Spanish, French, or ESOL lessons	I'm native English speaker with a degree in French and Spanish. I've been giving French, Spanish, and ESOL lessons for over 10, and would love to help you out.
Meals for people who are busy or unwell	If you're feeling busy, under the weather or just hate cooking, I'd be happy to make some meals that you can freeze and pull out when you don't have time to cook.
Yoga therapy	Offering one on one Yoga Sessions for anyone interested in learning yoga.
Acupressure massage / traditional Chinese Medicine	I'm offering TCM (acupressure) therapeutic massage and diet, exercise and lifestyle health advice.
Sewing/mending help available	I have a trusty Bernina sewing machine and the patience to use it! I'm happy to do basic mending (patching, darning, repairing ripped seams, replacing zippers).
Fabulous foot massage	I'm a qualified massage therapist, specialising in reflexology. This means I give great face, scalp and foot massages.

As Ozanne (2010) notes in relation to the Lyttelton Timebank, the offers and requests above show how the labour exchanged through the Wellington Timebank tends to focus on the more everyday ways in which people sustain the health of their bodies and maintain their homes and lives. While some offers and requests reflect more specialised training or specific skill sets (such as massage therapy, or sewing), others are non-specialised (such as walking a

dog for personal satisfaction). In this way the forms of labour exchanged through the Timebank provide one way to reconnect people's labour back to more everyday material utility.

Another significant aspect about the offers and requests in the Wellington Timebank was the lack of focus on traditional commodity production or exchange. For while there were and continue to be requests and offers about repairing, making or swapping commodities, or help with gardening or brewing beer, the focus tends to be on the skill or labour involved, rather than the production of the commodity itself. Cooper (2013, p 40) argues that this focus on labour through Timebanking can be contrasted to more conventional understandings of commodities and capitalist time which frame consumption and production as needing to be immediate, yet also never quite realised, which induces the desire for ever more commodities. This understanding of an unfulfilled desire for ever more commodities cultivated by capitalist discourses also relates to Debord's (1966) ideas about the society of the spectacle (see section 5.2 in relation to *Free Store*). The Timebank's focus on labour (over output or commodity production and consumption) provides members with an organisational structure which allows them to partially escape the 'cult of the commodity' that participating in the capitalist economy tends to emphasise.

Section 6.4 briefly touched on the idea of a refusal of work, and a refusal to work in relation to *Productive Bodies*. Vrasti (2013b) suggests that these more extreme Marxist positions of refusing waged work (broadly) and just refusing to undertake any kind of self-sustaining labour are both political responses to the work society. They are grounded in the relatively hopeless point of view that because essentially everything (all human labour, resources and time) is already subordinated to capitalism – doing nothing is the only viable political option to challenge this subordination. Vrasti (2013b) notes that these kinds of ideas taken to their most extreme, have resulted in people starving themselves to death such as some Italian Autonomist Marxists in the 1970s, rather than undertake the 'work' to feed themselves. I would argue that such nihilistic responses to the work society reflect a capitocentric understanding of social reality – whereby everyone and every social relation is already completely subsumed to capitalist discourses.

While these more nihilistic responses outlined by Vrasti (2013b) never came up in interviews or ethnographic work with Wellington Timebank members, my sense is that the Timebank resonates with members precisely because it provides one practical response to the limitations of both capitalocentric thinking, and the dominant discourses of the work society. The Timebank ethos does not involve a refusal of work in the sense of asking members to withdraw from the waged economy as a form of political action. Nor does the practice advocate resisting the work society by refusing to do any work at all (such as the work of feeding oneself). Rather, the Timebank ethos responds to the unequal valuing of labour and exploitation involved in capitalism by revaluing all human labour beyond the limiting and unequal discourse of waged work.

In this way I would suggest that the Timebank philosophy resonates with what Vrasti (2013b, para 15) describes as a feminist ethic of care. In section 6.4 I outlined how Vrasti (2013b, para 12) described this ethic as the recognition that 'all forms of action and inaction are already indebted and dedicated to someone else's labour. To act therefore, is also to care or to be grateful'. In their editorial on 'Geographies of Ethics, Responsibility and Care', McEwan and Goodman (2010, p 103) suggest that a feminist ethic of care can be understood as 'not so much an activity as a way of relating to others'. In this sense a feminist ethic of care picks up on Massey's (2005) relational understanding of the mutual interconnectedness of places and subjects. However, as McEwan and Goodman (2010) point out, this relation is also grounded in everyday actions and questions around 'who cares'. Such questions have become even more important since the global financial crisis and the austerity policies many minority world governments have pursued to reduce state spending on paid care work. As McEwan and Goodman (2010) and England (2010) point out, these kinds of questions around care work are intimately linked to wider questions around the ongoing undervaluing of certain forms of care labour that sustain relationships and lives.

Vrasti (2013b, para 14) argues that one way to actually practice a feminist ethic of care is through resisting the 'hegemony of wage labour while maintaining the social usefulness and creative satisfaction of work [that] requires access to collective, autonomous forms of subsistence'. Vrasti argues that displacing the hegemony of waged labour needs to begin by foregrounding the dignity and centrality of reproductive care work. I would suggest that the Timebank provides a framework for members to connect their labour back to everyday

material utility and care work, as evidenced by the nature of trades taking place and the language used in the offers and requests for trade. As I suggested in Chapter 7, while trades are important because they form the main way people interact, underlying these interactions tends to be a belief in the inherent value of community focussed relations. In this way the Timebank provides one way for members to connect this type of relation to specific forms of care work outside of the waged economy. Reflecting Nancy's ideas about being-with, Popke (2006, p 507) suggests that this is integral to a feminist ethic of care, whereby the ethic is not located in an 'abstract universal of justice, but in the recognition of our intersubjective being'.

While one-to-one trades form the bulk of trading activity, members also met regularly in a range of other ways through events like monthly coffee groups, educational workshops, seed, plants and clothes swaps, pot-luck dinners and laughter yoga sessions. These kinds of proliferating activities and interactions initiated through the Timebank to some degree reflects van der Wekken's (2012, p 106) optimistic assertion that 'Timebanking can allow for the strengthening and building of different kinds of spontaneous relations, events, to be inclusive and an empowering form of organisation'. Through these various exchanges members re-distribute and collectively share surplus in their lives with others in ways not dis-similar to the gift economy of *Free Store*. While it could be argued that some of these surpluses (such as clothes and art supplies) result from, and rest on the infrastructure associated with the capitalist economy. The practice of sharing surplus and contesting economic enclosure through the gift economy is still evident here. Additionally many of the notices and events that are included in the weekly emails discuss environmental issues and other current politicised concerns related to debates around the privatisation and enclosure of common resources, such as 'asset sales' and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement⁵¹.

⁵¹ The reference to 'asset sales' relates to the National led Government's partial privatisation of state owned assets such as Meridian Energy, Mighty River Power, Genesis Power, Solid Energy and Air New Zealand. The proposal prompted a citizen's initiated referendum in late 2013 due to the unpopularity of the proposal. The 2005 Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement aims to enhance trade among a range of pacific bordering nation states. The negotiations have been heavily criticised by a wide range of individuals and organisations due to the secrecy in which discussions have taken place and the potentially far reaching effects the agreement could have on areas such as health, indigenous sovereignty and intellectual property.

Through this re-valuing of human labour and connection of material needs to everyday relations of trading, the nihilism of thinking in terms of capitalocentric binaries and the futility of resistance to the work society is able to be negotiated. This alternative valuing of labour and trading within the Timebank does not just occur though. It results from specific practices which introduce people to the Timebank community and philosophy. The section below explores how some of these processes are enacted and some of complexities that members negotiate when participating in Timebanking practices.

8.2.2 Timebanking as a re-subjectivation process

It's the first thing that everybody says, 'I don't know what I'll offer, I don't have anything to offer'. And you just have to tell them to be quiet and everyone's got things to offer and you know, they're all valuable and that Hannah's really good at helping to identify them as well (Rushton 26 November 2012).

The quote above illustrates a key barrier that Ozanne (2010) identified in relation to the Lyttelton Timebank which is that people don't value their own skills or think they are qualified to offer something because they are not a 'professional'. As part of the membership interview process which can take up to an hour, the coordinator discusses potential skills that prospective members would like to offer and things they would like to receive. This is a deliberate process which is used to orient people into the philosophy of the Timebank and as Renee Rushton suggests above, and Ozanne (2010) notes, learning to receive can be a hard thing for some people to come to terms with. The membership process and one-to-one interview actually incorporate what could be characterised as a re-subjectivation encounter premised on an asset based understanding of subjectivity and community development (see for instance Cameron and Gibson 2005a; 2005b; Gibson-Graham 2007). In this way subjects are understood as both active and self-knowing enough to identify their skills and needs.

I attempted to try and understand the effects of this process – and indeed whether involvement in Timebanking had changed the way members' thought of themselves. However, when asking participants this question directly and more generally through the Timebank Tune-in, most members stated that being involved had not really changed the way they thought about themselves or their capabilities. Yet curiously, when I discussed the actual process of trading with members other stories emerged. For example, one member

talked about how when she first joined the Timebank she had been struggling financially and had felt like a 'charity case':

Yeah, I'd been through a really rough time and I only really got through it because of people who did things for me. And that was sometimes just very small things. But once I started getting on my feet and stuff I was thinking, you know God I'm so grateful and I'd really like to be able to give something back. So it's been fantastic for me in two ways. One, I've not felt quite so, you know, I've had all this stuff off people and I've been like some sort of parasite or charity case (Parker 31 January 2013).

A similar story emerged when Claire Hewitt said:

And I think the thing about something like this is that people can re-gain a bit of themselves because they are seen individually for what they have to offer. And then it's individual connections, you're not judged on a whole because of your living situation or what your income is (Hewitt 27 November 2012).

These two examples point to the significant ways in which the Timebank reframing of subjectivities provided some members with relief from the shame of not measuring up to more dominant expectations in the waged capitalist economy.

However, the identification of potential skills and their value can be tricky, for while the ethos of Timebanking is that everyone's time is valued equally, there are still moments of slippage where more dominant discourses from the waged labour market creep in around the value attributed to labour. For example, Hannah Mackintosh described how she regularly got asked questions like:

'how could a lawyer's time be valued as much as someone who is *just* digging a hole?' And then I had another time when someone said to me 'how can a lawyer's time be valued as much as someone's time who is *putting all the work* into digging a hole?' And I was like 'ohhh wooah' (laughs) (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

The reactions Hannah Mackintosh described above draw on a range of discourses which value forms of labour differently. From middle class discourses around work which tend to value certain forms of skilled knowledge such as law more highly in the first instance. To

working class discourses which contest these by emphasising the value of physical labour over intellectual work in the second instance. While these kinds of questions around what to offer and whether one's skills are valuable can be obstacles for some members, many appear to have adopted a relatively pragmatic approach to moving beyond self-doubt. For instance Renee Rushton described how she 'just totally embraced the fact that if somebody else needs what I have to offer then that's valuable and that's the thing' (Rushton 26 November 2012). Similarly Claire Hewitt reiterated this, noting that it is the matching up of a need and skill which creates the value:

I don't think you can necessarily name something to be worthy of the time credit or not because it depends on what you need. Like at the moment I've got an ad for an administrator and to me that would be a nightmare job and way worth the 2-3 credits of time to do it... On the other hand I've also got an ad up for someone to come and cut the grass up our path... So I think I place the value on it more than how other people would – depends on what my need for it is (Hewitt 27 November 2012).

These kinds of responses show how a market is still at play in the negotiation around valuing skills, in the sense that demand, need and the willingness to offer something generally determines whether a trade goes ahead. But as other members pointed out, the ethics of this market are quite different to the capitalist waged market. Renee Rushton stated:

I think it's really good that there are those so-called 'more highly valued skills' in the capitalist market as well as the low key ones because the Timebank kind of flattens it out and makes it clear that these ones that are not valued in the capitalist society are just as valuable as these highly valued ones and I guess the basis of that is that other people need them and they don't always have access to them and so providing the access makes them valuable I guess (Rushton 26 November 2012).

Renee Rushton's point suggests that the inclusion of a wide variety of skills all valued equally fulfils an important political function. This may not be the obvious and contentious politics of say, *The Beneficiaries Office* (see Section 5.3) or *Free Store* (see Section 5.2). Yet the philosophy of all labour being valued equally provides an alternative framework to re-think how one has been disciplined into believing that different forms of labour should be

valued more than others in the waged economy. However, members were also aware that the relationship between so called 'highly valued skills' (such as law for instance) and 'less valued skills' (such as digging a hole), both within the waged economy, and also within the Timebank community was complex. The following exchange illustrates the ways in which questions about the character of labour intersects with a feminist ethic of care discussed earlier:

Gradon: When we were talking on the phone you talked about how you'd like to make sure the Timebank didn't become dominated by really skilled or specific offers. Why is that?

Fairhall: I don't know, sort of like, I don't really know what I mean – kind of like a clique thing where it's all about particular things, like natural therapies or all about the environment and gardening or permaculture, do you know what I mean?

Gradon: Yeah...

Fairhall: Cause some of those things I would like, but if there were a lot of those things I could imagine some people could get put off. Like I just want somebody to give my walls a wash cause I can't manage. You know, that's what people might think. But I don't know if that's really true. You know, there seem to be lots of diverse stuff up there so I'm obviously wrong (laughs).

Gradon: Well I thought your comment was really interesting in the sense of people feeling like what they have to offer is ok, it's like still thinking that looking after someone's kids is a legitimate offer and not feeling like they have to be a lawyer or physio.

Fairhall: Yeah that's right. Yeah to make sure it doesn't get too elitist or something (Parker 31 January 2013).

Fairhall Parker's observations reflect Cooper's (2013) point around the tension between commonality and shared affinity and the material need for diversity in relation to the types of offers, requests and skills within Timebanks. Cooper (2013, p 38) notes that many of the more middle class alternative currency and market schemes in Britain have tended to have

an 'over-abundance of 'new age' and white collar offerings' compared with more working class technical skills, like car maintenance, building and plumbing. This resonates with Fairhall Parker's point above around both the offers and requests and the wider representational aspects of Timebanking and whether involvement is seen as more elitist or classed, where only luxuries are exchanged at the expense of (potentially) more pressing, practical needs of members. However, in relation to the Wellington Timebank, as Fairhall Parker notes, there is still a wide range of different kinds of offers and requests, so at this point in the life of the Timebank community, these concerns about it becoming dominated by new age and white collar offerings may not be all that pressing.

Just as people can be incredulous about the concept of all labour being valued equally in the Timebank, there were also times where members became confused or unsure about offering skills or services they would usually supply in the waged economy. For example, I spoke with one member who had initially thought she would offer tailoring services through the Timebank. But since joining, she had started a small tailoring business and so felt that offering this service through the Timebank would undermine her ability to make a living in the wage market. She went on to explain that she could not think of anything else she could offer and at that point in her life her needs were solely related to earning money so would not be involved in the Timebank any further (Research Journal 14 August 2012). In this way she rejected the potential opportunities of the Timebank because her belief in, and material need for money was so pressing.

I have outlined above some of the ways members become introduced into both the understanding of labour equality and the alternative market that operates within Timebanks. However, there are a wide range of other expectations and relational dynamics which also form part of being a 'good' Timebanker. For instance while most members I spoke with, or who were surveyed in the Timebank Tune-in were relatively positive about their trading experiences, some noted that like any relational exchange (whether in the waged economy or not) there were encounters which turned out differently than expected. For example, Renee Rushton recounted the following about one of her first trades:

there was one trade at the start where a woman wanted a sewing lesson and I was like yeah I'll have a go and she approached me I think. I don't think I would

outwardly offer to give someone a sewing lesson. So I went round there and was trying to give her some tips and stuff and then she was like, I wanna do these pleats with this garment and I was suddenly like, oh god that's really above what I can do (laughs). And then we got chatting and I was looking for work at that time as well so I was like, oh yeah I've got all these resources on how to write a CV and how to work out what your strengths are cause she had been made redundant a while and as part of that she'd been given all this training. So it ended up being a one for one trade but I think I got more out of it that she did (laughs) (Rushton 26 November 2012).

The above example illustrates a number of points which show how members can negotiate the trading process. Such negotiations may at times require quite a degree of open-ness. Firstly, being a Timebank member requires an identification and negotiation around what one feels qualified to offer and what one may need. Secondly every trade requires a negotiation around the expectations of what will be achieved through the trade and the nature of its 'value'. Thirdly, the example above nicely illustrates Cahn's (2004) idea of co-production whereby both parties obtained something useful and the nature of the trade ended up being successfully re-negotiated in the sense that it became a one for one trade.

Timebank members also talked about how offering something, even though they didn't feel like an expert can actually be a productive learning process. For instance, Sonya Cameron described how teaching people how to make green cleaning and body products was aspirational in the sense that it helped her improve her skills, but that 'giving the lessons is always a little bit nerve-wracking' because 'I'm never quite sure whether it is actually going to work' (Cameron 20 November 2012). So while Sonya Cameron had initially told me that she didn't think involvement in the Timebank had changed the way she thinks about herself, it clearly had in some ways. She went on to describe how being involved in Timebanking can have unexpected consequences:

I have been giving lots of green cleaning lessons but one that I really liked was with [member] who is with the Pacific Budgeting Service. That's been a particularly nice one for two reasons. The first is that [they] absolutely loved the washing powder that we made. Like I think you know, big family, doing loads of washing, people in [their] family have been allergic to normal washing powders so now [they are] sort

of contacting me all the time so we now buy bulk products together. And [they've] also been talking about stuff like getting all [their] Pacific families ... to get together and do it in terms of cost savings for them and healthy products for their kids and stuff like that (Cameron 20 November 2012).

The example provided by Sonya Cameron also points to the potential of ideas like co-production – whereby the benefits of the skills shared through the Timebank are recuperated in ways which could not have necessarily been predicted. These kinds of examples reflect a key premise of Timebanking that everyone is changed, and changes through the relational practices of trading.

As mentioned earlier, one of the important values underpinning the Timebank subject is that they are understood as possessing both the agency and skills to contribute back to the Timebank community. Interviewees and Timebank Tune-in respondents talked about how being a member required a certain amount of self-motivation and being proactive in terms of posting offers and requests and making contact with potential strangers. Fairhall Parker suggested that 'you've gotta be fairly assertive and pushy – you have to be that type of person' to be comfortable using the Timebank (Parker 31 January 2013). Such comments reflect Gregory's (2012a) point that it takes a certain amount of confidence and familiarity with participation to engage in these kinds of practices. While Fairhall Parker's description suggests you need to have, or develop certain personality traits, she also qualified this by noting that a strength of the Timebank is that you can also 'choose how involved you're gonna be, you can choose whether to make contact with people or not depending on how you're feeling in a particular month or whatever' (Parker 31 January 2013). While it could be argued that this framing of Timebank subjects partially draws on more neoliberal, individualist discourses of personal responsibility, and the 'fairly assertive and pushy' description could be applied to the entrepreneurial capitalist, my sense is that Fairhall Parker was not quite meaning this. Their understanding and framing of agency and what counts as a legitimate contribution back to society is much broader than more neoliberal capitalist discourses which tend to measure this in purely economic terms.

Cooper (2013, p 38) suggests that the most optimistic framings of Timebanks create the narrative that 'community labour constituted a self-perpetuating upward momentum as

trade enhanced community relations and feeling, and community strengthened and energised local trading’. Within some literature on Timebanking and alternative currencies, particularly in the United States and United Kingdom contexts, there has been a focus on the ways in which Timebanking can re-introduce people to waged labour, through both the re-subjection process of helping them move beyond thinking of themselves as needy, and helping them develop the skills and ‘confidence’ to re-enter the waged labour market (Cooper 2013; Gregory 2013; Seyfang 2004b). Gregory (2013) suggests that many policy or Government discourses in the minority world still tend to frame those outside waged employment as lacking or deficient. The path out of this deficiency is usually seen as an individual movement to employment through motivation, hard work and personal responsibility, as opposed to a critique of wider societal structures (or the work society) which make waged employment either unbearable or impossible for some.

The tension for the Wellington Timebank in relation to this point is that in some ways, those who are most able to use and engage with Timebanking are those who are already self-motivated and the practice is therefore partially inflected with neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility. And yet, I would suggest that the underlying principle of everyone’s time being valued equally still poses a significant political critique of the waged labour market. What also emerged through ethnographic work was the strong value the Steering Committee placed on the Timebank as providing an alternative way for people to meet their needs outside the waged economy, as opposed to seeing the practice as a way to move unwaged people into waged work. I would therefore suggest that the issues of co-option for the Wellington Timebank do not necessarily reflect some of the contexts in the United States and United Kingdom where state agencies and donors have more influence in shaping the practice.

8.2.3 Confusion around time and quality

Cooper (2013) notes that one of the key barriers to the ongoing success of alternative currency and market schemes in her research in the United Kingdom was around the issue of time. Specifically she (2013, p 35) suggests ‘scarcity, confusion, dissatisfaction, and tension regarding time and temporal norms seemed key factors in explaining networks’ inability to grow, and even, in some cases, to remain viable’. In unpacking these issues around time, Cooper (2013, p 35) writes that:

[t]hree interlocking dimensions are central: time's specifically temporal qualities or character – including its rhythms, tempo, signalling, scarcity and value; its social character – in terms of its organisation, constitution, deployment and force; and its form, by which I mean the ways different temporalities, such as work-time or capitalist time, assemble and combine specific social and temporal features, and how they co-exist.

These kinds of issues around time came up for Wellington Timebank members also. For example, Renee Ruston recounted a discussion at a national Timebank meeting she went to in late 2012 where someone stated that they would not use the Timebank to provide music lessons for their children because it might take too much organising and if they were paying for the service with money they would be able to expect a higher standard. Renee Rushton described how another person responded to this by pointing out that:

just like private business can flake out, so can Timebank people (laughs). Just cause it's a formal business doesn't mean it's any more reliable. It's still people at the other end of these things... So I think this woman wanted to have a regular music lesson for her kid and I don't know, she felt like the setting up of it was too much. Oh and the communication, calling them up, arranging a time and being ok with both of you. But I think that's the same with a business as well and if you're just really clear about the hours you can do when you're advertising as well as when you're talking to people you can minimise that (Rushton 26 November 2012).

In the Timebank Tune-in and in some interviews, some members suggested that for them it was just easier to get certain services through the waged market – especially health related services as they could be sure of both their quality and timing (Research Journal 15 October 2012). These kinds of concerns around the quality of Timebank services are bound up with representations of alternatives to capitalist market structures being seen as somehow less credible. Such concerns also link back to questions of time whereby in the above example the woman Renee Rushton discussed juxtaposed the 'speed, compression and exhaustion associated with capitalist temporalities' (Cooper 2013, p 40) against the potentially slower rhythms of the Timebank which are seen as less desirable and legitimate because people feel so time-poor.

The above example illustrates both overt and more subtle ways in which alternatives to the more dominant wage system are discredited. The example shows how more dominant forms of waged labour exchange maintain hegemony and what can sometimes be the illusion of quality and greater surety. These more dominant beliefs are unsurprising given the range of institutional and bureaucratic processes in place designed to regulate and maintain the quality of goods, labour and services traded within the capitalist economy (such as consumer guarantee legislations and professional body associations and registrations for certain professions). But neglecting to consider alternative arrangements and practices reflects Graeber's (2013) point that neoliberal capitalism (and all of the supporting processes) did not evolve overnight, so why should we expect alternatives to emerge in fully formed ways.

The example discussed above also illustrates Cooper's (2013) three points about time, whereby we can see members trying to negotiate tensions between the need for and (imagined) certainty provided by capitalist work-time and the more potentially uncertain opportunities and time-frames of exchanges provided through the Timebank. Cooper (2013, p 49) writes that research in time studies has explored the ways 'contrasting temporalities – work time and home time, capitalist time and state or community time – intersect, frequently through one temporality coming to dominate or structure the other'. Cooper (2013, p 50) suggests that alternative currencies need to be able to create acceptable or normative hybrid conceptions of time and that new practices 'cannot help but be affected by the demands of capitalist time'.

These kinds of issues played out in the Wellington Timebank and in one sense, the very concept of alienable, individual time that is tracked in specific allotments through Communityweaver is partially shaped 'by the demands of capitalist time' (Cooper 2013, p 50). For the ways in which time is processed and tracked through Communityweaver (when it doesn't even ultimately matter as members can go into as much debt as they like and it is not policed), illustrate both a self-disciplinary function and partial capitalist narrative around surplus and debt. These points were clearly illustrated by one member who suggested that the time units recorded through Communityweaver should go down to 15 minute intervals rather than the current hour and half hour intervals to allow for a more accurate recording of the time spent on a trade (Hewitt 27 November 2012). In this way, the Timebank may not

actually challenge or significantly alter the way people understand and prioritise their time. Where one's labour time is still measured and accounted for in individual and increasingly specific amounts – not too dissimilar to the waged economy.

Another risk of alternative exchange networks is described by Weeks (2011, p 67) who writes that 'efforts to expand what conceptions of what counts as work also risk tapping into and expanding the scope of the traditional work ethic'. This has been a significant critique of the feminist movement which has at times called for more and better work for women, which as Weeks (2011, p 120) notes, while important, 'have on the whole resulted in more work for women'. This essentially corresponds to a lack of time and was a significant issue or limitation to further involvement in the Wellington Timebank. When members were asked in the Timebank Tune-in what was stopping them posting more offers and requests they stated the following reasons shown in Figure 8.3. Of the 45 people who responded to the survey, 17 (or 38%) stated that they were already time-poor and trading was yet another thing to fit into their already busy lives. Members noted that this included trying to 'find the time' to post offers and requests, check Communityweaver and arrange and complete trades, which for many of them, needed to be done in addition to working in the waged economy (Research Journal 12 December 2012). In this way, involvement in the Timebank could partly be seen as a further blurring of distinctions between work/home boundaries – particularly given that so many of the offers and requests focus on things happening in the home.

In speaking with some members during the Timebank Tune-in and interviews I also noticed a certain sense of guilt around lack of participation. Some members were apologetic about not being as involved as they could have been and stated that they wanted to become more involved, once they were less busy and had more time. These findings reflect Ozanne's (2010) observations about the Lyttelton Timebank whereby participants struggled with how to use the collective more as it required a shift in thinking. From the instantaneous and commodity/service focus of the capitalist exchange to a slower paced Timebanking exchange which may be as much about fostering a certain relation based on 'trust and goodwill' as exchanging a service (Ozanne, 2010, p 12). For as one of the participants in Ozanne's (2012, p 11) research stated, Timebanking is 'also about changing your way of

thinking, all of a sudden you have a different approach on this to life. How could I make use of the Timebank not just giving me work, but also asking for help?’.

Figure 8.3: Members reasons for not posting offers and requests. Source: Wellington Timebank.

Issues around the recording of time can also shape the way members interact, and related to Coopers’ (2013) second point about time’s ‘social character’. For example, when your trading partner chats for fifteen minutes about something unrelated to the trade, is this counted as part of the trade and recorded in Communityweaver? And what if one member didn’t really feel the need to chat first but wanted to just get stuck into the trade? While these issues did not seem to be of huge concern to most members I spoke with or who responded in the Timebank Tune-in – what the above responses show is that the Timebank is not necessarily changing people’s view of time, or necessarily leading to less of a reliance on the waged economy. What possibly needs to be further explored in relation to freeing up time is using the Timebank as one way to work less in the waged economy. However, this

would require quite a shift and a level of trust in the continued operation of the Timebank, that may be beyond some members, or, may take further time to develop as the Timebank continues to grow.

In the discussion above I have pointed to the various ways that involvement in the Timebank fosters a re-subjection process for members. These processes include the initial one-to-one interview with the coordinator for new members, the trading exchanges and various other social encounters where members are re-oriented into the alternative understanding of how labour is valued. However, there is something of a tension around the subjectivities enacted through the Timebank. While Timebank subjects are interpellated as equals in terms of their labour value, the everyday exchanges require subjects to be somewhat self-knowing and able to clearly negotiate what they can offer and need. What I have pointed to in the discussion above are those moments of slippage and uncertainty as the more dominant discourses of the waged labour market creep in and colour how people value their own, and others' labour. Where the reliability and quality of Timebanking exchanges are questioned and how alternatives to the waged economy are framed as poor substitutes. I have not pointed to these moments in order to critique the Wellington Timebank or members, but rather my intent is to show the complex and nuanced ways members engage with the radical political potential offered by the Timebanking philosophy, and how this actually plays out in the more everyday practices of trading.

There is still a market at play in the Timebank and just because everyone's labour is valued equally doesn't mean everyone trades or that everyone's offers and requests are necessarily taken up. People's time is still framed as an alienable resource (which is not dissimilar to the waged economy), but the focus is on valuing labour equally over the outputs of labour. While at times the discussion above has suggested that being a 'good' Timebanker requires certain personality traits (such as being self-motivated and assertive), the underlying philosophy provides greater flexibility and a wider appreciation of what is considered a 'legitimate' contribution to society than more dominant discourses of the neoliberal capitalist economy. In this way the Timebank fosters a community of people mutually interdependent where the collective offering and exchanging of labour will hopefully, partially sustain people's lives. Or, in other words, the Wellington Timebank provides one tangible way to practice a feminist ethic of care.

8.2.4 Timebanks, hippies and anarchists

Some of the discussion above has touched on the representational politics around how the Timebank is framed. Steering Committee members suggested that in many ways the Wellington Timebank is already framed by the core principles of everyone's time being equal and everyone possessing both needs and skills. However there are also different ways of communicating this and the Steering Committee tend to frame the Wellington Timebank as a form of 'community development' (see section 7.3). But this does not mean that people don't understand the Timebank and those involved in other ways.

One of the terms which came up when talking with members about the Timebank was the idea that it was 'a bunch of hippies' (Hewitt 27 November 2012; Mackintosh 31 January 2013; Porter 17 December 2012). For example, one member noted that her partner had described the Timebank as such but she felt that this wasn't fair and that most of the members were 'normal, everyday, hardworking people that just don't have a lot of dosh and would prefer not to work in a system like [that]' (Hewitt 27 November 2012). Like any label, 'hippies' is slippery and in relation to the Timebank, appeared to have different meanings and associations. It was still clearly a reference to people who were broadly counter-cultural, or attempting to operate outside wider societal norms. As Claire Hewitt noted: 'I know that the essence of the people involved are not, and even if they are hippies, it's a modern day hippy. Those that have to work still have free-thinking ways around their lives' (Hewitt 27 November 2012). When pressed about how she and her partner understood what a 'hippie' was, she said:

What he means when he says hippies is 'flouncy, time-wasting, lots of nonsense, fight for the rivers, dig your own holes, have a compost in my back garden, wishy-washiness'. And I'm all like no, it's terrible, it's like not giving us enough credit... But I don't think that we are flouncy, no-hopey, sustainability there's a tyre with dirt in it people. Yes we are, because hell, its heaps better to re-use our environment in that way, but it doesn't mean that we aren't intelligent, smart, resourceful or making a real change. And that's what I'm interested in and I think we are making a change in a little, pebble in the water way, but we're getting there (Hewitt 27 November 2012).

This concern about the framing and representation of the Timebank as ‘being a bunch of hippies’ was also commented on by Steering Committee members, as illustrated in the following exchange between myself and Anna Porter:

Anna: [Hannah Mackintosh] wanted some interview questions to ask a Timebank member for an article and I said something like ‘oh what about a question like “do you think this just a crazy hippie thing or not?”’. And she was like ‘oh really?’. And I was like ‘well I think so’, I think that maybe not the younger generation, but I think my parents would be like that, maybe the older generation. Or just, and maybe like a lot of my friends who aren’t or don’t do community stuff...

Gradon: Would they be uncomfortable with the Timebank somehow or just don’t need it in their lives?

Anna: I think um, don’t need it, don’t have time, what kind of people are in it, who am I going to have in my house, could be anybody? I have one or two friends I could imagine would be a little suspect of people and that (Porter 17 December 2012).

While to some degree the framing of the Timebank as a form of relatively apolitical community development is the pervading narrative, the examples above also point to a certain representational politics where members are more likely to be categorised as ‘hippies’ and opposed to, or possessing a desire to operate outside the dominant capitalist waged system. This invocation of the label hippies is somewhat predictable, as it demonstrates that there is an underlying ideological politics whereby Timebanking is associated with a counter-cultural or populist leftist politics. However, the way people actually engage with the concept of Timebanking and understand the political implications underlying the practice is somewhat unpredictable. For instance Hannah Mackintosh described how she was giving a presentation about Timebanking at the Salvation Army and one of the participants asked:

Hannah: ‘are you guys anarchists?’, and I was sort of like, ‘well no. I can see why you’d think that but no’. And I find that it speaks to a lot of different groups. It speaks to people in different ways.

Gradon: Was this person trying to work out your political orientation, or was it kind of in a negative way?

Hannah: I don't know, maybe he was an anarchist and like 'I could get into this'. But, so there's that whole view. There's a lot of people who are like, who are quite sceptical, like 'how could that possibly work?', especially when it comes to everything being valued equally (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

The above exchanges point to two things. In the discussion between Anna Porter and myself, she shows a desire to translate and name the Timebank and position members in specific ways, distancing both members and the practice from 'a crazy hippie thing' to something more culturally mainstream. Yet what Hannah Mackintosh appears to do in the second example in relation to the label of anarchist is almost a refusal to translate. A refusal to label the Timebank as anarchist which would categorise it as outside of the cultural mainstream.

While my overall sense was that these kinds of representational concerns were not really a matter of significant issue for either Timebank members or the Steering Committee, they do point to the more overt political questions the Timebank raises (see Section 8.2). Where framing the Timebank as a form of community development may partially avoid more divisive categories associated with democratic party politics in Aotearoa New Zealand, this may also reduce the potential that Timebanking is seen as an overtly political or radical practice. The above examples also point to a more subtle micro-politics of understanding where people try to understand Timebanking through existing socio-political categories and identity labels, or in Rancière's (2001) terms – place people and practices in the order of the sensible.

Cahn and Rowe (1992) suggest that an advantage of Timebanking is that it can appear ideologically neutral. They write 'The Time Dollar ... does not fit the standard groove. It has elements that appeal to the Right, elements that appeal to the Left, and overall, it's an idea that lies in the frontal zone that is unclaimed by either side' (p 162). Gregory (2013, p 4) is somewhat critical of this framing, suggesting that '[o]n the one hand it is a means of promoting alternative, core economy values; on the other it seeks not to promote anything too radical as to upset the political landscape'. Gregory argues that what Timebankers need

to do is actually articulate more clearly what is actually 'alternative' or radical about the practice as a way to avoid the kinds of co-option he discusses. This co-option includes the way some Timebanks have been pushed by certain Government and policies to overcome social exclusion and get the unemployed 'work ready'.

However, the flip side of framing Timebanking as community development means that it may not be seen as pressing as other more traditional political demands, thereby creating a certain ambivalence amongst members. For example Anna Porter noted that:

I mean when I think of causes to support, Timebanking would be at the bottom for me (laughs). Yeah when I think of, of course people aren't going to be donating [for fundraising initiatives]. Like when we're talking about donating stuff for this kind of thing, like there's just so much awful, horrible, heinous things going on in the world. So when we're talking about doing fundraisers and getting people to donate and stuff. It's like I don't know, fighting sex trafficking of children and all that really hard-core depressing awful, awful stuff. This is just kind of soft, well it's like would it really matter if it didn't exist, you know but I feel like there's just huge things out there like Amnesty International and stuff, have to be there and Timebanking – it's nice that it's there. If it wasn't well no one's gonna die because of it. But then I guess the good in the world starts from people caring about each other and knowing each other and looking out for each other and teaching that to your children and starting at the bottom and fixing things and creating the change you want to see in the world, you know create the good. But yeah if I had a choice between donating to Timebanking or Greenpeace I would probably go with Greenpeace (laughs).

Gradon: That's a really interesting point because in some ways when I look through the Timebank stuff I'm kind of like, oh we're just a bunch of vaguely alternative, privileged, white people.

Anna: Yeah.

Gradon: We're all like baking our bread and swapping it.

Anna: Yeah exactly, exactly. And it's not going to hurt me if I don't get my baked bread (Porter 17 December 2012).

While the kinds of concerns discussed between Anna Porter and myself reflect a certain ambivalence and privileged guilt around our own classed subjectivities and sense of powerlessness surrounding more global injustices, the point she makes is also relevant to thinking through the political effects of Timebanking. Anna Porter moves between seeing Timebanking as kind of 'soft' and 'nice', while also noting that the 'good' in the world may actually come from participating in practices like this. There is a kind of double-ness here in her account. Where words are used which appear to have their meaning elsewhere in the sense that she demonstrates a familiarity with the hierarchy of 'worthwhile causes', yet simultaneously questions these. This ambivalence around the politics of Timebanking was something with which I personally identified and it wasn't until Anna Porter said this in the interview that I consciously realised it. The slightly (mythical) utopic and inclusionary ethos of Timebanking (while still exhibiting processes of exclusion – see section 7.3.2) seemed almost too apolitical for this research initially.

However, it is interesting to note how the concept of 'worthwhile causes' is invoked in Anna Porter's comments. In a similar way to which *Productive Bodies* (see section 6.4) sought to encourage people to question taken for granted societal norms outside of more conventional political categories, my sense is that the Timebank also does this. But involvement does not rest on subjects being moved to action by a cause (such as sex trafficking). Rather involvement in the Timebank occurs through embodied relational encounters where the cause actually involves re-framing one's labour which thereby reframes another's labour. In this way the 'good' in the world could be seen as coming from these kinds of re-subjection encounters and flow on relational trades. Such embodied and locally-focused interactions (which are not necessarily parochial) are one way that people can move beyond the feelings of powerlessness associated with more globalised discourses of environmental destruction, inequality and economic precarity.

These kinds of understandings around the political significance of internal subjectivation also resonate with second wave feminist ideas that Gibson-Graham (2006) discuss of being the change you wish to see in the world. Through being this change, it becomes possible to counter the powerlessness and melancholy affect that so characterises the political left at the moment. The equality ethos underpinning the Timebank philosophy (while at times mythical and mediated in certain ways) provides a unifying function for subjects which

transcends traditional categories associated with democratic party politics and what is conventionally thought of as 'political action' or 'worthwhile causes'.

8.3 Sustaining the Wellington Timebank

As described earlier, the Wellington Timebank relies on a paid part-time coordinator to fulfil a range of functions. One of the ongoing concerns for both the current coordinator and the Steering Committee is securing funding for this role. Throughout the two years of the Timebank's operation to date, the coordinator's salary has been funded from Wellington City Council grants and funding from the Newtown Community Centre. While to date the Wellington Timebank has been successful in securing funding from the Wellington City Council, this has been based on short term contracts and Steering Committee members suggest that there is an expectation from Council that the Timebank will eventually move to self-sufficiency (Porter 17 December 2012). Anna Porter notes that the Council are 'quite keen to help start-up projects but they don't want projects to keep coming back to them for money' (Porter 17 December 2012). While Steering Committee members suggested that there were opportunities to frame the Timebank as meeting the City Council's current policy goals (and therefore being able to access funding), this was ultimately seen as a short term solution which threatened the long term sustainability of the Timebank. Steering Committee members suggested that the current success at securing funding was linked to meeting current Council objectives around 'resiliency'⁵². Anna Porter stated the following:

I know a woman who's doing a Masters or PhD in emergency preparedness stuff and she told me she met with Council and their Community Resilience team and they had said 'look we've got buckets of money to put into projects' and it's all about people knowing neighbours and people knowing each other. So when there's a disaster you can't rely on an ambulance or the Fire brigade – you have to rely on your neighbours. And that is what the Timebank does, maybe not with direct neighbours, but hopefully that will keep growing. Like give us the frickin' money, when they're like 'oh we've got all this money, what are we gonna do with it' (Porter 17 December 2012).

⁵² So for instance the current Wellington City Council 'Social & Recreating Fund' policy specifies that funding and priority will be given to projects that 'increase resilience' and 'strengthen local neighbourhood connectedness' (see Wellington City Council, N.D.).

While Steering Committee members were appreciative of this funding they were also somewhat critical of these policy discourses (see Section 8.3.1), suggesting that the Timebank achieved the kinds of policy outcomes around 'resiliency' which are currently prioritised by the Wellington City Council in relatively cheap ways:

But at the same time it's just frustrating cause I feel like, we all feel like we're essentially doing their job for relatively cheap. You know, what's like \$30,000 a year, it's not much. You know Hannah's on, the salary is the main thing and Hannah's getting \$20 an hour. If it was a Council worker doing her job they would be on much more. So I feel like they get bang for their buck and they don't like the fact that it's not sustainable. But that's just the nature of it but what can we do? (Porter 17 December 2012).

This tension between requiring ongoing funding for the labour of the coordinator and eventually moving to self-sustainability is something of a difficulty and was reflected in Steering Committee members' ideas for fundraising. For example, in one meeting I attended one Steering Committee member suggested using Timebank members' labour as a way to raise money where non-members would basically pay or donate money to the Timebank for members' labour. This suggestion created much debate and some committee members stated that such an idea was not in line with the underlying values and would simply be reverting to a waged labour relationship (Research Journal 15 November 2012). The following exchange between Hannah Mackintosh and myself illustrates this issue:

Hannah: I think the biggest challenge that we've talked about a lot is more looking at not exploiting the Timebank membership for their skills and crafts. So there was a lot of conversation at the beginning where it was like 'oh we could put on a fair or something and get Timebank members to make stuff, like crafty stuff, and then Timebank members could be on the stalls and we could charge people to come in'. And it was like all these Timebank members would be working and earning time credits but for something that was going to generate funding for the Timebank. So it was really challenging to figure out where that line is. Because you want members to be invested in the Timebank and wanna be part of it, and part of that is having to generate funds. But you don't want to be 'working them'.

Gradon: And then it basically just becomes an extension of the market, people just selling their wares and labour.

Hannah: Yeah, so I don't know where we've got to with that discussion to be honest. But we've sort of come up with other solutions. So people can donate stuff that we then sell on Trademe and they earn a time credit for their donation. It's still a massive issue – funding. And we pretty much still look towards funders rather than... I'd love to start up a business that funds the Timebank, whether people who are working there get paid to work. So it's not based on Timebankers labour, but all the profits go back towards the Timebank. It's just hard to, suddenly I need to have business skills (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

The Steering Committee and other Timebank members have come up with other ideas and to date have put on community film fundraisers, community events, run training seminars where people pay to attend and the funds go back to the Timebank. However, as many Steering Committee members pointed out, these kinds of initiatives tend to only generate small amounts of funds and require substantial effort from Timebank members which can lead to burnout and exhaustion. One of the issues with such approaches is that the focus moves from members actually undertaking trades to generating money to maintain the network. In this way wider funding pressures and policy discourses which prioritise eventual local self-sufficiency (see for instance Featherstone, Ince, Mackinnon, Strauss, and Cumbers 2012; Gregory 2012a) could be seen as a form of potential closure or threat to the more radical equality of the Timebank ethos. This is especially so if Timebank members' labour and interactions become focused on generating money to maintain the collective, rather than the relational trading which is core to the underlying ethos.

Questions around money have also arisen in relation to membership fees. Anna Porter notes that there have been times when prospective members objected to the membership fee because the Timebank was 'not about money'. In response Anna Porter noted that;

we need money to make it run! Photocopies, to have a phone line, to you know, forget about even the wages, just to be able to send you stuff in the mail. Like how do you think we're doing that? We're not using time credits to pay Telstra Clear (Porter 17 December 2012).

The above examples illustrate how alternative exchange networks like Timebanking still inevitably intersect with capitalist markets where money is required for things like stationary, computers, electricity and wages, even while the underlying values of the project attempt to overflow the limitations of the dominant market and propose alternatives. While the above example Anna Porter mentions in relation to membership fees suggest that some members thought of the Timebank as some pure (mythical) alternative to the capitalist money system, my sense is that most members do not think about it in this way. Those I interviewed, spoke with in the Timebank Tune-in and during my ethnographic work suggested that the Timebank could be seen as something which could operate alongside the waged economy (and wider capitalist market). Such a view reflects observations from Cooper (2013, p 41) who notes that many alternative currency schemes are understood as supplementary, forming a 'bridging role in conditions on contemporary labour self-management'. For example Anna Porter stated:

Um... it is really tricky... Like I read somewhere recently that Timebanking isn't there to replace the monetary system, it's just there to work alongside it. And that made a lot more sense to me. Like I think initially I was thinking of it more like 'down with money' and all that kind of stuff. But I was like no, money has its... you need it, you can't escape that kind of thing' (Porter 17 December 2012).

The discussion above has pointed at some of the ways in which the Wellington Timebank intersects with political processes and priorities at a local government, and also the wider capitalist market evidenced by needs to fundraise. The final section extends the discussion to the intersections between the Wellington Timebank community and the wider Aotearoa New Zealand state.

8.3.1 Timebanking, welfare and the State

Gregory (2013) and Cooper (2013) suggest that within the United Kingdom at least, Timebanking has at times been presented by those pushing austerity politics as a useful practice to replace the provision of social services previously provided by the state. Gregory (2013) and Featherstone et al (2012) have noted how since the global financial crisis, austerity narratives and practices have further undermined the shrinking welfare services in nations like the United Kingdom, while simultaneously presenting solutions to these cuts in terms of citizens taking greater personal responsibility for themselves and their

communities. Gregory (2013) suggests that this co-option of Timebanking within a 'resilience discourse' in the United Kingdom actually promotes a certain neoliberal economic narrative focused on getting people 'job ready' and overcoming social (read 'economic') exclusion. Such a focus does not necessarily lead to the more radical questions around why different forms of labour are unequally valued or how inequality is perpetuated through dominant economic structures.

The partial co-option and involvement by the state that Gregory (2012a; 2012b; 2013) and Featherstone et al (2012), describe in the United Kingdom is not necessarily transferable to Aotearoa New Zealand. For other than the Lyttleton Timebank after the earthquakes in Christchurch in 2010 and 2011, there has not appeared to be a significant interest in Timebanking by the current National led Government. Rather, as Cretney and Bond (2014), McGuirk (2012) and my ethnographic work shows, the interactions between Timebanks and government structures have generally tended to be at a local level in relation to funding and grants and community groups have engaged with policy discourses like 'resilience' in ways which do not equate to mere co-option. But what the discussion in Section 8.3 also points to is a subtle retreat of long-term funding and a policy priority of funding those projects which will lead to local self-sufficiency. The more nuanced and critical engagements that community groups have with government discourses around funding that Cretney and Bond (2014) discuss were also the case with the Wellington Timebank. This is not to say that some Timebank members were not aware of these wider issues around austerity, the risks of co-option and the retreat of the welfare state. For example, Renee Rushton noted the following:

I don't know eh. I've heard all that stuff and I'm really torn cause I really hate the idea of cutting social welfare. I think that is such an important part of stopping people falling through the cracks. But at the same time things like Timebanks empower people to take action for themselves in my opinion, in a small way. And the community economy stuff would take that a step further but yeah, I don't know. I wouldn't be ready to let go of social welfare or you know, any other of the many things our tax dollars pay for, free health and free education. But I don't know, do you really think that it's gonna let the state off though? (Rushton 26 November 2012).

Renee Rushton's response and earlier quotes by other members point to the political significance of how Timebanking reframes participants' subjectivities (see for instance section 8.2). The flow on effects of this reframing have implications for how members understand their role in the Timebank (not as objects of charity) and also how the state and other societal discourses frame welfare beneficiaries. Throughout this research I got the impression that Timebank members do not think that state welfare or other state funded services are unimportant, or that the Timebank would, or even could in its current form, completely replace state funded services. Rather, what tended to emerge was an appreciation for how the Timebank offers members a subjectivity which imbues them with agency and the ability to enact changes in their lives and contribute in some way to shaping their communities – outside of wider societal discourses which may position them as objects of charity or emphasise other disempowering aspects of their subjectivity. In this way Timebanking allows those members in precarious positions to no longer be only the named and placed, 'needy welfare beneficiary', but as possessing skills which are useful to others.

I have suggested that Wellington Timebank members do not necessarily see Timebanking as either a replacement for the welfare state, nor a means to justify further austerity politics and the retreat of state welfare. But rather, I suggest it is a practice that provides people with a much needed alternative to the order of the sensible which the state necessarily constructs around processes like welfare provision. This alternative Timebank subjectivity and community (while still characterised by expectations and behavioural norms which we could understand as a new or different order of the sensible) is articulated through the re-framing of all subjects as having both needs and skills. This provides an opportunity for people to partially escape some of the disciplining and shame narratives which those on welfare or in more precarious work circumstances are increasingly subjected to in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The point van der Wekken (2012) makes appears to be relevant to the Wellington Timebank, where instead of members holding out nostalgia for some former romanticised welfare state, Timebanking is seen by those involved as a pragmatic and liveable addition to their lives that makes sense in the present. This is done by creating an exchange network and community that is centred around the equality of all people's labour. In this way the practice partially illustrates a politics of action (see sections 1.4.1 and 6.3.3) whereby forms

of more flexible and open ended social action are enacted, outside formal political or state processes. For although some funding is provided by the Wellington City Council, this is not tied to specific outcomes that individual members would experience in their day-to-day trading. To me these more open ended and flexible forms of social action are significant politically and articulate what is actually alternative about Timebanking practice and the community that forms through it.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by outlining how the underlying ethos of Timebanking could be seen as prompting political moments in Rancière's terms because of the way in which the philosophy simultaneously articulates an inequality and then reframes all human subjectivities based on the equal value of their labour. Rancière (1998, p 40) argues that a 'political subject is not a group that 'becomes aware' of itself, finds its voice, imposes its weight on society. It is an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience'. I would suggest that the Timebank philosophy and subjectivities enacted partially reflect Rancière's description. There is no single, stable political subject which is constructed by, or who emerges through the Wellington Timebank. What I have attempted to show are the ways the Timebank ethos and re-subjection trading encounters enable an embodied process for members to re-think how they value their own, and others' labour.

The Timebank philosophy is framed within a community development and broadly feminist ethic of care, although significantly the term feminism/t is not used. These discourses both connect certain subjects and experiences – creating resonances among them, in this context primarily Pākehā women, while potentially limiting connections with other subjects. However, while Timebanking values around the equality of all forms of labour provide a political alternative to the more dominant waged economy, this labour is still primarily framed within an individualist and alienable understanding of work time.

The final section of the chapter moved to discussing links between the Timebank community and wider political communities (including local government and the nation state). In this section I suggested that there are some significant differences between the policy contexts of the United Kingdom (where a lot of research on Timebanks has been

done) and Aotearoa New Zealand. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Timebank members see the practice of Timebanking as a supplementary alternative to state welfare, but not a replacement for important state funded services. In this way the Timebank reflects what Van Der Wekken (2012) calls 'solidarity economics'. Where '[i]nstead of putting a blueprint up front, "solidarity economics" proposes to identify the alternatives that already exist, and from there expand the spaces of solidarity and, in the process, create new and larger ones' (p 104) (see also Day 2004; Gibson-Graham 2006). I have suggested that this approach, while seemingly apolitical, or possibly ambiguously positive at times, actually acknowledges the point that Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) and Holloway (2010) make about the complex and messy interconnections between the more dominant capitalist economy and alternative exchange networks. There is no 'pure outside' to capitalism, the wage economy or the nation state, nor is there necessarily a single revolutionary moment where capitalism and the waged economy are overthrown. There are however, complex exchanges and slippages between the capitalist (money) economy, evidenced by such things as the membership fee, paying for power and stationary and securing wages for the coordinator, and those relations which exceed the money economy.

Vrasti (2013a, para 13) suggests that '[l]iberation *from* [waged] work is a social desire that has always played a minor yet stubborn role in the labour movement and beyond. It is up to us to take it back'. Her challenge here is echoed by the likes of Cooper (2013) and van der Wekken (2012) in relation to Timebanking. For instance van der Wekken (2012 p 105) argues that:

Instead of halting at the comment about how to meet the current challenges in society – with less tax income - what about if less of our time would be spent on what is officially termed as our wage labour, and instead more of our time could be spent at those local activities and organisations around us.

Such an understanding resonates with Week's (2011) call for a 'politics of less and lesser work' (see also Jaffe 2013; Vrasti 2013a). These comments are not focused on devaluing work or even eliminating work from our lives. For as the form of labour enacted through the Wellington Timebank shows – a lot of the labour members exchange is focused on everyday reproduction and care work. What Cooper (2013) and van der Wekken (2012) both suggest

and hope for, is that Timebanking and other interdependent practices like it, will become an increasingly viable way in which people can work less in the waged economy, and labour in ways that have more meaning for them. Part of this hope involves challenging the primacy of waged work and the understanding of what it means to have a 'good life' and be a 'good citizen'. Or in other words, it means finding ways to collectively challenge the dominant discourses of the work society. I would suggest that the Wellington Timebank is one way members are actively exploring how to have a 'good life' and be a 'good citizen' outside of the limiting frame constructed by neoliberal capitalist discourses of the work society.

Vrasti (2013a) suggests that rather than thinking about precarity as the loss of some previous societal utopia where everyone was fully employed and secure, we should see it as a rallying point to imagine something different. She (2013a, para 9) writes:

how the social desire for flexible labour, that sentiment of “precarity-is-good,” can be reclaimed in a time when “the disappearance of work” is turning precarity into a ruthless mode of discipline and maybe even a health issue... If we cannot return to the old forms of regulation and securitization, could we perhaps push the contradictions of the present into a future where flexibility and contingency are an expression of security rather than a form of punishment.

What I have shown in these two chapters on the Wellington Timebank are some of the ways in which members are fostering this flexibility and contingency. Not in the form of a regular pay check or reliable food source, but in the knowledge that there is a growing community of people who are willing to experiment in co-constructing an alternative system where some forms of security can be found and material needs met.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

'To oppose something is to maintain it' (Le Guin 2000, p 143).

Le Guin points to an interesting political paradox, one which has been alluded to by various authors I have drawn on in this thesis such as Day (2004), Gibson-Graham (2006) and Driscoll-Derickson (2009). Le Guin's point about opposition, resistance and political change resonates with the broader question underpinning this research. This question has essentially explored how subjects challenge, resist and move beyond the limiting discourses of the work society in ways which do not reinforce capitalocentrism or lead to demonised subjectivities. Compounding the political paradox that Le Guin points to are the ways in which subjection and interpellation processes of the work society can foster the desire to be seen as a good subject and legitimate citizen. Here, subtle discourses encourage subjects to internalise certain ideas, contributing to a shared societal story which presses in and shapes how people think about themselves and their life options. How do subjects go about pressing back at these subtle subjection processes and making space for other stories without necessarily opposing, and therefore maintaining the more dominant ones?

Throughout the empirical chapters in this thesis I have shown the complex ways that artists, participants in Letting Space projects and Wellington Timebank members simultaneously question aspects of the work society and enact alternative socio-economic relations. To pull these strands together, given what were at times somewhat different examples, in this final chapter I speak back to the three research sub-questions to show how some people in Wellington are individually and collectively expanding the limiting discourses of the work society. These three research sub-questions were:

- How are subjectivities articulated through discursive and performative practices?
- Are these subjectivities and practices fostering alternative spaces for overflowing the hegemony of waged labour and the capitalist economy, and if so how?
- How are these subjectivities and practices fostering a more open politics of place?

In addressing the first research question I discuss some common themes around the nature of the subjectivities articulated, and the affects fostered through the discursive and performative practices of Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank.

9.2 Subjectivities, discourse and performative practices

The Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank are somewhat different in organisational structure, however, the nature of the subjectivities articulated and their discursive and performative practices bear many similarities. The five art projects and the Wellington Timebank collective are premised on the idea that there is no single aspect of subjectivity, or ascribed identity to mobilise people and draw on as a basis for collective recognition. The projects and collectives do not operate in the ways that more conventional leftist social movements based on identity politics have done, which tended to draw on the identification of common sentiments of oppression through being a certain classed, gendered, sexual or ethnic subject (Day 2004). Rather, the Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank highlight the ways that human subjects are always variously positioned in relation to more dominant discourses of the work society. What many of the art projects did and what the underlying ethos of the Wellington Timebank continues to do, is highlight the shared human-ness of subjects in relation to the work society. At different points in this thesis I pointed to how this foregrounding of human-ness played out. Examples include: when Kim Paton stated that we are all ‘human-beings’ in framing open participation in *Free Store* (see Section 5.2); the ways *Productive Bodies* framed the labour (broadly conceived) of all human participants as valuable (see Section 6.2); and the ways in which the Wellington Timebank ethos is premised on the equality of all human work (see Section 8.2).

These appeals to the shared human-ness of subjects reflects Nancy’s (1991) point that one’s sense of subjectivity is not fixed or only attributable to one aspect of identity, such as ethnicity or gender. Rather, subjectivities are co-constructed through a myriad of relations with others. Nancy (2000) argues that the only essential aspect all subjects feel is a sense of singularity - which is the awareness of one’s death. This awareness of death becomes the essence of an ethic of sharing and care because it highlights people’s present precarity and vulnerability – even though different people may experience this precarity and vulnerability in different ways. In this way many of the Letting Space projects and the Wellington

Timebank illustrate Rancière's (1998, p 40) framing of the political subject. Whereby the political subject is not some 'new' subject who emerges through a politicised encounter, but is better understood as an operator that connects different subjects and experiences within a certain context. The experiences in these examples tended to relate to aspects associated with urban precarity, waged work and more dominant discourses which seek to reinforce and further extend the logics of neoliberal capitalism and the work society.

As Rouhani (2012) and Routledge (2009b) suggest, another way of thinking about these kinds of relational identification processes is through the concept of affinity rather than identity. Routledge (2009b, p 84-85) describes affinity as 'a group of people sharing common ground and who listen to one another, and to share concerns, emotions or fears'. Rouhani notes that these processes of sharing and coming together may be transitory or coalesce around temporary common goals or issues. These authors suggest that collectives that focus more on affinity also tend to prioritise a prefigurative politics – where people enact the world as they would like to see in the here and now. Prefigurative practices tend to emphasise ideals of anti-hierarchical (horizontal) relations, radical democracy and often consensus decision-making (Maeckelbergh 2011). Drawing on Rancière (1998), Rouhani (2012, p 376) writes that these kinds of collectives often begin 'with an understanding of a democratic politics that presupposes equality, as opposed to demanding it'. Many of the instances discussed in this thesis reflect this point, whereby political moments emerge through articulating and enacting an equality that simultaneously exposes the wrongs of the order of the sensible.

Examples of articulating and enacting this right to equality played out most clearly in the discussion of *Free Store*, *The Beneficiaries Office*, *Productive Bodies*, and the Wellington Timebank. These examples reframed welfare beneficiaries, the unemployed and underemployed beyond such stigmatising categorisations of the welfare beneficiary, the 'dole-bludger', or the 'charity-case'. A key point is that the enactment of equality was generally not expressed in the form of a demand or recognition from some dominant Other, or what Rancière might term the police order. Rather, the recognition of equality was embedded in the very framing of the encounter and enacted through the process of participating in a relational art project or trading in the Timebank.

As well as these appeals to, and practices grounded in radical conceptions of equality, there were also moments that completely reframed the order of the sensible, thereby disrupting more dominant understandings of the economy, waged work, and the ways certain subjects were named and placed. Such moments are politically significant, for as Tuhiwai Smith (2013, p 229) notes '[w]e live in a time of refusals'. By this she means that questions of poverty, inequality and privilege are difficult for many New Zealanders to talk about. She suggests that we need a new discourse around poverty, inequality and work in Aotearoa New Zealand (and I would add elsewhere too) which does not demonise certain ethnic and classed groups, but reframes the very nature of the discussion.

I have argued in this thesis that many of the Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank did just this. For example, in Section 5.3.1 I outlined how *The Beneficiaries Office* articulated a lack of freedom for all human subjects in relation to the work society. I cited Tao Wells who stated '[i]f a job's a punishment then society must be a prison'. Through this statement and others like it, Wells articulated a lack of freedom relating to all, whether rich or poor, employed in waged work or not. Such statements prompted discussion beyond the usual debate around waged work, such as contests over unfair wages or working conditions, to a critique of the wider discourses underpinning the work society.

Through this thesis I have shown how the Letting Space art projects and the Wellington Timebank illustrate Ross' (2007) point about the usefulness of Rancière's framework. She (2008, para 8) writes that his theory of political moments does:

not offer prescriptions, prophecies, or norms for action. But it can make us attentive to the fractures in our own present, the moments when another version of democracy, predicated on dissensus, equality, and the emergence of new political subjectivities, may now be perceived.

Such fractures and moments of another version of democracy played out through participating in certain art projects and Timebank trades, and also through the responses and affects the art projects and trading practices prompted. Massey (2005; 2007) argues that such fractures and moments are politically significant because they illustrate a certain contingency – that things could be otherwise.

Gibson-Graham (2006, p 5) write '[t]o be leftist is historically to be identified with the radical potential of the exploited and oppressed working classes. Excluded from power yet fixated on the powerful, the radical subject is caught in the familiar resentment of the slave against the master'. In a similar way to Day's (2004) framing of a politics of demand, the more conventional leftist political disposition described by these authors creates a sense of powerlessness in subjects, a backward looking melancholia and hopelessness that there is no alternative to the current order of the sensible of the work society. To counter these kinds of affects Healy (2014, p 212) writes that the Community Economies Collective has had three foci: understanding 'the economy' as a space of difference'; seeing 'research as part of the political practice of open-ended ethical negotiation'; and 'the importance of learning to be affected in the era of the Anthropocene'. The Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank reflect the first and third foci most clearly and my research with these collectives reflects the second foci.

To me the embodied encounters are a key similarity linking the social practices across the different examples discussed. These relational, embodied practices included: participating in the gift economy of *Free Store*; co-constructing moments of humour, joy and safe spaces to share stories of anxiety and shame in *Productive Bodies*; submitting an expression of interest to colonise Mars in *Pioneer City*; and taking part in relational trades through the Timebank to meet one's needs outside the waged economy. These actions were not generally representational, such as creating fixed articulations of politically marginalised identities or groups. Rather, the relations were more about facilitating certain affects through being-with others. The relational encounters fostered through these processes acknowledged anxiety and precarity. But more importantly, they provided glimpses of alternatives and collective processes to foster other affects like feeling connected to others, feeling one's skills are valued, meeting needs outside the waged economy, co-constructing joy through clapping tunnels, and distributing and receiving free food that would have otherwise gone to the landfill. These kinds of actions actually performed the type of society desired, rather than demanding changes from others, or representing and debating some future societal utopia.

The following exchange between Hannah Mackintosh (Timebank coordinator) and myself captures this form of affect in relation to social action:

Hannah: If someone had told me about this [Timebank] and been like, yeah, you'll be able to just do it... I would have been like phhh, good luck (laughs). That sounds crazy! And then to sit in this role and just have people constantly contacting me saying, 'I wanna join up' and then see them all help each other out, it's not something I have ever experienced in my life. In the sense of so many people who don't know anyone within the Timebank being like 'yeah I wanna help out'. And then asking for stuff back, because we don't tend to do that very much. So I think that has probably changed my perception of people and ways of achieving change. I think before that I was much more, you know it was stuff like Amnesty where it's very much like, these are the rights and this is the, you know, it's much more kind of pushy... I was always part of organisations where it was a challenge to, you're always sort of trying to get people to listen and believe in what you're saying and act. It was always like, you're always sort of fighting that kind of, what's it called, where people just don't care?

Gradon: Their apathy or disinterest?

Hannah: Yeah, whereas with the Timebank because it's so positive and it creates social change in a way that is so subtle, that people are sort of attracted to it. So it's been cool being part of something really positive and seeing that you can actually make quite fundamental change in the world without having to be out there with banners... (Mackintosh 31 January 2013).

Hannah Mackintosh suggests that practices like Timebanking are a move away from the exhausting and embattled affects associated with leftist politics of the last 30 years because they offer what Hardt (2011) refers to as some kind of partial transformative promise. This promise is foregrounded in a sense of agency whereby 'everyday economic actors, operating in a collective setting, have the potential to demonstrate expertise and a capacity for action in relation to their economic lives' (Healy 2014, p 216).

While many of the art projects and the Wellington Timebank articulated what could be categorised as leftist political concerns, there was also often a hesitancy to label, translate and define these practices within more conventional political categories. Whether these be terms such as feminism or anarchism, or democratic party politics. Most of the Letting

Space projects and members of the Wellington Timebank seemed to avoid categorising their practices within these frames. This reluctance to define and translate could be seen as one pragmatic way of moving beyond these somewhat limiting and divisive political categories of the order of the sensible, particularly in relation to democratic party politics. For as Hannah Mackintosh noted in Section 8.2.4, Timebanking ‘speaks to people in different ways’ (Mackintosh 31 January 2013). And as Dr Mark Harvey noted, ‘political art tends to have a bad name and is too didactic, telling people what to think’ (Harvey 16 March 2012).

This shift is reflected in the point Scheurmans et al (2012, p 679) make that ‘[m]ore than other forms of urban protest, public art can stimulate new modes of perceiving and sensing while avoiding to ‘teach’ an explicit critique’. The projects and processes I have discussed in this thesis tended to shift the nature of debate beyond institutionalised politics and fixed political identities – to something more fundamental and potentially universal, a socio-economic system which values some people’s labour more than others. The question no longer became about who to vote for in the next election, or which policy was best to address unemployment in the waged economy. Instead the projects prompted participants to reflect on how to think beyond these often limited political choices to create communities and foster prefigurative relations that operate by different values.

Rancière (1998) suggests that ‘true’ political moments do not emerge from the order of the sensible, but from the in-between spaces, which disrupt the common sense ordering of subjects and practices. This point was reflected in Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank. Here, rather than emerging from either state initiatives or more established, identifiable political parties, Letting Space and The Wellington Timebank emerged through grass-roots responses by motivated individuals and groups. While both examples initially received and continue to receive some funding from the state and local government, the projects were not narrated as state or local government projects. On the one hand this independence provides greater political flexibility, but also comes with uncertainty in terms of funding and longevity.

The refusal to categorise and translate practices also reflects the ways in which these practices were not premised on fixed subjectivities, thereby partially managing to avoid the ways the order of the sensible attempts to name and place subjects in certain positions. For

as Swyngedouw (2009, p 615) notes, activists and social practices like these tend to be 'marginalized and framed as 'radicals' or 'fundamentalist' and, thereby, relegated to a domain outside the consensual postdemocratic arrangement'. While some of the art projects, (particularly *The Beneficiaries Office*) were narrated in mainstream media as radical and dangerous, the other art projects and the Wellington Timebank generally managed to avoid these kinds of designations. Clearly there were still moments where certain subjects got named in particular ways, such as the term 'hippies' in relation to the Timebank, the demonising of Tao Wells and some participants in *Free Store*. Nevertheless, overall I would suggest that Timebanking and *Free Store* still allowed participants a chance to partially avoid the designation of being cast as 'bad' subjects.

While many of the art projects and members in the Wellington Timebank acknowledged more dominant discourses which attempt to discredit alternative practices and subjectivities, the focus was not so much on railing against these or overthrowing them. But rather, making visible, and actively engaging in alternatives. Alternative ways of relating to others, alternative ways of distributing surplus, alternative ways of thinking about oneself, one's labour and ultimately the conditions of possibility for imagining how society could function. The examples reflect the point Healy (2014, p 218) makes about many of the projects the Community Economies Collective are involved with that are not 'guided by the presumption that resisting, accommodating or enabling capitalism is necessary'.

9.3 Beyond the work society: enacting an open politics of place

I have argued in the preceding section that the Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank were not political in the conventional sense of blanket opposition to capitalism or waged labour. My sense from ethnographic work and interviews is that much of what drives participants' engagement with these practices is a belief that the current socio-economic order (generally referred to as neoliberal capitalism) is not serving either people or the environment and some form of change is needed. Of course the nature of this change tends to be what debate revolves around. In Section 1.2.2 I discussed the debate in geographic literature around the best scale to contest the dominance of neoliberal capitalism and the work society. These questions of scale and agency around the ability to shape macro socio-economic processes came up in both Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank. However, most participants didn't identify as being opposed to capitalism or frame their

involvement in these practices as ‘overthrowing capitalism’. This is not to say that the underlying ethos of the Timebank and many of the Letting Space projects did not provide a radical critique of more dominant neoliberal capitalist discourses. I have argued that these did in a myriad of ways. But most of the artists and Timebank members didn’t frame these practices as stemming from a desire to overthrow capitalism.

Nor did participants understand the global neoliberal capitalist economy as some kind of disembodied external, all-powerful force. Instead participants tended to talk about the more everyday processes they saw going on in their communities - from rising unemployment, precarity and inequality, to vacant office spaces and the limitations of thinking about one’s life solely through a consumer/waged worker lens. These alternative ways of thinking reflect Rancière’s framing of political subjects mentioned earlier, whereby participants connected different experiences and processes, including an acknowledgment of how neoliberal capitalist discourses permeate people’s lives, and how people internalise certain limiting ideas. What I am suggesting is that most of the participants therefore didn’t see themselves or others in society as *only* passive victims of some wider neoliberal capitalist conspiracy. Rather, their practices reflect Chatterton and Pickerill’s (2010) observations about activists they worked with, as subjects who are simultaneously within, against and beyond the capitalist present.

Significantly the social relations fostered through Letting Space and the Wellington Timebank were therefore not waiting to act from some pure place beyond or outside the discourses of neoliberal capitalism and the work society. Instead, they were messily implicated within and beyond these more dominant discourses at the same time (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010). These kinds of imbricated relations were evidenced by discussions about funding with both the Timebank and Letting Space, and the ways surplus was redistributed through practices like *Free Store* and trading in the Timebank. Rejecting the binary framings of being either for or against neoliberal capitalism can be understood as both the rejection of fixed essential subjectivities, and also a way to articulate a more open politics of place.

Massey (2005, p 151) suggests that thinking about place as a ‘constellation of trajectories poses the question of our throwntogetherness’. Or in other words, how places become

socially and materially constructed raise questions of how to live together. What Massey (2005, 2007) argues is that through attempts to fix places in certain ways, a certain contingency is often systematically forgotten whereby people start thinking that there is no alternative to dominant discourses that fix certain subjects, places and processes. Drawing on Mouffe, Massey suggests that the political moment can be thought of as when this contingency is exposed and in Mouffe's (1993, p 149) words, alternatives become visible 'so that they can enter the terrain of contestation'.

The aesthetic encounters fostered through Letting Space projects and the trading relations of the Wellington Timebank exposed certain contingencies in unexpected ways and encouraged people to entertain and turn towards these alternatives. The practices provide people with glimpses of other selves, other societies and the ability to construct spatial relations that operate by different rules. The Wellington Timebank and Letting Space projects were focused on specific localised communities. But the processes they facilitated were not about the inherent identity or exclusive nature of these local subjects and places, or about constructing exclusionary identity markers. While there are behavioural norms and expectations fostered through the Wellington Timebank (due to the different nature of the collective to Letting Space), these processes and social actions were not reactionary responses to perceived threats to local communities. Instead they tended to be about posing questions (in the case of many of the Letting Space examples) and fostering certain connections at the local level.

What many of the Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank respond to is the threat of the current economic system, ecological collapse and increasing precarity, rather than some essentialised 'bad' Other. The processes and values did not scapegoat a feared Other, but expressed dissatisfaction with an economic system and limiting ideas which shape dominant understandings of legitimate human subjects. Therefore the solutions posed by letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank were not framed in a reactionary or exclusive way that demonises an Other or seeks to create policed, exclusionary places. Instead collective reimaginings and responses to precarity are pursued to alleviate social and material anxiety.

For example, I have argued that the Wellington Timebank provides a process to allow members to channel their energy into meeting their own and others' material needs. The Timebank does not turn anxiety, vulnerability and precarity into anger, or direct it at the fear of another taking one's job or resources. The Timebank expresses a radical equality which reframes precarity as a starting point to practice collective interdependence. Such processes are inherently political for as Nancy (1991, p 40) suggests, the idea of the political can be understood as 'a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing'. The very concept of the Wellington Timebank community provides a mythical container through which these myriad of exchanges are fostered and enacted. In this way, the myth-making of the Wellington Timebank community goes some way to fostering the understanding that 'being-in-common is the only collective state that can be realised' (Welch and Panelli, 2007, p 353) and seeks to practice this through everyday trades.

The examples discussed in this thesis won't 'overthrow' neoliberal capitalism and as noted above, I do not think most of the participants would even identify with such a political vision. My sense is that these people are searching for and actively practicing ways of relating to others that displace the focus of much traditional political debate about neoliberal capitalism. For as one member of the Wellington Timebank said when reflecting on the scaled differences between the Wellington Timebank and wider global concerns such as human rights abuses:

But then I guess the good in the world starts from people caring about each other and knowing each other and looking out for each other and teaching that to your children and starting at the bottom and fixing things and creating the change you want to see in the world, you know create the good (Porter 17 December 2012).

Such a view is linked to a certain affect and relocates agency from a disempowering desire for endless emancipation from some Other, to thinking about how one can practice and partially co-create the good with others in everyday encounters in certain places. This view does not discount those more powerful discourses or the very real material effects and inequalities that shape subjects – but nor does it reify these discourses as 'all' powerful. Gilligan (2011) writes that a 'feminist ethic of care is integral to the struggle to release democracy from the grip of patriarchy because it roots that struggle in the exigencies of

survival... A feminist ethic of care encourages the capacities that constitute our humanity and alerts us to the practices that put them at risk' (p. 177). What I have shown in this thesis are the ways in which some people in Wellington are moving beyond disempowering capitalocentric critiques of neoliberal capitalism and the work society to collectively enact alternative socio-spatial relations - relations that are inherently political because they expose a certain contingency and point to other ways of relating to others by encouraging a more open politics of place.

9.4 Contribution

In this thesis I have made three specific contributions. First, I have contributed to geographical knowledge at the intersection of art and geographies of social action. Second, I have extended geographical thinking in relation to how we can conceive of alternative community economies. More generally, my third contribution has been to draw out the insights three political theorists can provide in thinking through subjectivities within the work society. Each of these areas are discussed in turn below.

9.4.1 Art and geographies of social action

Through the discussions of Letting Space projects I have contributed to the body of literature on art and geography by exploring the effects of art practices outside conventional gallery spaces. I have argued that participatory art practices can be understood as place-based politicised interventions. In this way I have contributed to what Hawkins (2013, p 59) suggests are one of three foci in writing on art and geography, that of art as a form of 'politics in motion'. Through the detailed discussions of the Letting Space projects I have responded to the call by Schuermans et al (2012, p 676) to 'open up the black box' of what they call the 'socio-politics of public art' - to show how 'art becomes political not through overt struggle, but through fine-grained micro-cultural and discursive processes of exchanging meanings and ideas'. I have outlined the intentions of Letting Space artists and curators, the materialisation of their works and explored some of the effects of these works through a geographical and radical democracy lens to show how art practices can open up 'new ways of seeing, feeling, experiencing, and describing the world' without necessarily offering another grand narrative (Schuermans et al 2012, p 677). These new ways of seeing, feeling, experiencing and describing the world pointed to important

imaginative and material ways to re-imagine the work society, including contemporary working subjectivities and understandings of the economy.

9.4.2 Alternative community economies

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I discussed the various ways the five Letting Space projects raised questions about consumption, commodities, the economy, environmental collapse and the nature of waged work, without reproducing grand narratives or constrained proscriptions for action. My point here was to show how art practices can contribute to what Connolly (2002) calls an 'ontological politics of possibility'. I purposely juxtaposed Letting Space art projects against the Wellington Timebank to illustrate the ways in which relational art practices can resonate with community development practices, which in the words of Gibson-Graham (2006, p x) foster a 'transformative politics of the local'. Where more open-ended encounters are used to encourage people to turn towards alternatives which do not necessarily rest on identifying with, or adhering to grand narratives of overthrowing capitalism or being for, or against, complex socio-economic processes.

I have contributed to, and extended work in Community Economies research by paying attention to the micro-dynamics and subjectivities that emerge through the Wellington Timebank. I have used the theories of Nancy (1991; 2000) and Butler (2006a; 2006b) to look at inclusion/exclusion aspects which play out through the Wellington Timebank. I have held critical reflections about exclusion in tension with the way the Wellington Timebank provides hope-filled forms of social connection for predominantly Pākehā, middle class women who are experiencing forms of urban precarity. I have argued that in this context, Timebanking provides members with one way to practice a feminist ethic of care grounded in relation to theirs and others' material concerns and needs. As Ozanne (2010) and Gregory (2012) note, there has been relatively limited research on Timebanks which explores people's participation and the nature of community enacted through these kinds of practices.

Through Chapters 7 and 8 I have responded to criticisms levelled at some community economy literature which only focus on hope-filled alternatives (Samers 2005), as a counter to letting pessimism or critique become the only story. For as Fickey and Hanrahan (2014, p 397) note, '[a] call for a more critical (though still hopeful) analysis is certainly worthwhile as diverse economies may be experienced in different ways by different people and as such are

not immune to producing negative conditions for some'. I have contributed to this body of literature by partly exploring the role of gender and class in relation to the Wellington Timebank and the complex community relations around ensuring safety. I have explored how Timebank members understand the role of the state and contributed to discussions around the politics of representation of alternative socio-economic practices.

9.4.3 Subjectivities and the work society

In a broader sense I have contributed to literature concerned with the work society, neoliberal capitalism and progressive social action. Through the examples discussed I have drawn on the ideas of Massey (2005; 2007) to link social action to an open or progressive politics of place. To provide a theoretical frame to explore subjectivities and social action I have drawn on Rancière's (1998; 2001; 2004) ideas around the disruption of the order of the sensible to show how social art and Timebanking can articulate and enact a radical politics of equality. However, I have argued for a more nuanced and everyday application of Rancière's ideas around what constitutes the political moment to explore the complex and messy ways subjects contest and enact alternatives to the more dominant discourses of the work society. I have complemented Rancière's ideas with those of Nancy (1991; 2000) and Butler (2006a; 2006b) to provide a lens through which to explore how desire and social action work at the level of individual subjectivities, resulting in the desire for community and collective social action. I have argued that the kinds of practices discussed in this thesis manage to avoid the pessimistic affect associated with much leftist political action. Through this discussion I have explored ideas around the scaled nature of social action, affect and personal agency in terms of 'being the change you wish to see'.

9.4 Further research

This research has pointed to a number of areas where further research could be done. This further research includes work with the two empirical examples, and also wider questions around progressive social action in relation to an open politics of place. The Wellington Timebank is continuing to grow and change as new members shape the form of the collective. There are also ongoing concerns with funding the role of the coordinator and general operating costs which could be further investigated. Similarly Letting Space are continuing to produce social art practices in a range of different contexts across Aotearoa New Zealand. It would be interesting to continue to trace the effects of these art practices.

For example, another *Free Store* is about to re-open in Wellington within a converted shipping container. The organisation running this has recently received a New Zealand Government Department of Internal Affairs Lottery Grant to fund a coordinator and is seeking further donations to cover operational costs. As the Wellington Timebank, Letting Space and flow-on projects like the *Free Store* continue to develop it would be interesting to explore the ongoing effects of these practices, including looking at the kinds of participation fostered through them.

The examples discussed in this thesis also point to wider concerns around the participation in alternative urban processes. The subjectivities that appear to be drawn to, and articulated through the examples of social action discussed in this thesis tended to be Pākehā, middle class and highly gendered (at least in terms of the Wellington Timebank). These points were all raised by participants at various times. For instance, in relation to the Wellington Timebank, Hannah Mackintosh raised questions about ethnicity and whether the language she speaks limits the potential reach of the Wellington Timebank for non- Pākehā individuals and groups. Other issues which were hinted at in the empirical chapters included issues around access to technology and the need for a certain degree of confidence to negotiate and interact with the alternative practices fostered through both the Letting Space projects and the Wellington Timebank. The broader question underlying this point is whether the practices fostered only serve middle class subjects, who while experiencing forms of precarity, still possess enough psychological resources to participate. In this sense a broader question relates to whether these practices are actually fostering participation by those most in need of alternatives to the work society?

Additionally the examples in this thesis raise further questions about the scaled nature of social action. For instance, to what extent do these relatively localised forms of social action resonate with and intersect with other social actions? To what extent can these forms of social action be maintained by the collectives and continue to foster an open politics of place given the funding, timing and resource constraints? But on the flipside, if these collectives continue to gain purchase and popularity, to what extent are they able to maintain their political open-ness and radical potential?

Such questions hint at deeper concerns around the potential for collective social actions to maintain a certain radical politics without becoming a new order of the sensible which goes on to fix subjectivities in different, but still limiting ways. In this way the future questions this research points to spiral out in many directions. What interests me most here is continuing to explore how subjects can become invested in shifting those limiting work society discourses through collective actions which draw on a feminist ethic of care. And even where individuals and collectives manage to shift the order of the sensible and create new practices and communities that operate by different values, there needs to be space to question how egalitarian these are. For me this remains a key ethical task for geographers interested in fostering alternative ways of being and living together.

10: Appendices

Appendix A: Timebank tune-in report

Timebank Tune-in Summary Report

By Gradon Diprose

04/02/2013

The Timebank Tune-in was undertaken in the latter half of 2012. An open ended questionnaire with 15 questions was used. Timebank members were surveyed over the telephone and through email.

Forty five Timebank members were either contacted via telephone or replied to the emailed questionnaire. At that time this represented a response rate of approximately 22.5%.

This summary provides a report of key themes collated from the responses and follows the format of the questionnaire.

Question 1 asked members if any of their contact details had changed since signing up. These responses have been attended to.

Question 2 asked whether members receive the weekly emails. Forty three members confirmed that they receive the emails. One member stated that they are not on email and another member confirmed that they do not receive the email.

Question 3 asked members what attracted them about joining the Timebank. The following graph outlines the range of different reasons members gave. Note: members may have stated more than one reason for joining.

Members' reasons for joining the Wellington Timebank

Some of these reasons were relatively similar and could have been grouped in fewer categories (ie. meeting a diverse range of people could be considered one way to 'build community'). However I have differentiated the responses into separate categories based on the words people used. So if a member stated 'meeting people' was one of their reasons, this was categorised differently to 'building community'.

The most significant reasons for joining the Timebank included meeting a diverse range of people, building/restoring/enhancing community, valuing the focus on a skills based exchange and supporting the general philosophy. Supporting the general philosophy could also be considered relatively similar to an 'interesting exchange to current flawed economic system'. However those responses included in the 'interesting exchange' category specifically mentioned that they liked the idea of exchanging time/skills outside of the moneyed economy.

Question 4 asked members to describe how they have found involvement in the Timebank so far.

The overwhelming majority of members stated that they had found their involvement in the Timebank to be either good, great or excellent. Many members stated that they had enjoyed meeting like-minded people, valued attending the various social events and felt that the network will improve with time as it grows.

Four members stated that they had not been involved in any trades to date and approximately 15 members indicated that they would like to be more involved, but currently lacked the time. Other members outlined the following reasons which had limited their involvement:

- Timing - offers and requests not lining up at the right time;
- Feeling like they have nothing to offer;
- Not getting a response to requests or offers;
- Feeling overwhelmed by the IT side of things;
- Lack of members in northern suburbs;
- Needing to prioritise being a recipient of services too.

Questions 5 and 6 asked members if they had done any trades and whether they had put up offers and requests. The following two graphs show the responses.

Of the forty members who have undertaken trades, thirty seven noted that these had been positive experiences. Three members stated that one or more of their trades had been a mixed or frustrating experience. The reasons for this related to trading partners being disorganised or late, the trade being unsuccessful (ie. a hair dying trade which did not work out) and the expectations of the trade being unclear.

Note: Some of the members who did not put up offers or requests stated that they had responded to offers and requests.

Question 7 asked members if there was anything stopping them putting up offers and requests. The following graph outlines the range of obstacles.

Members' reasons for not posting offers and requests

Question 8 asked members to outline those aspects of the Timebank that they liked. The responses were very similar to the reasons outlined in Question 3 (what aspects had attracted them to joining the Timebank).

Question 9 asked members how they think the Timebank could be improved. The following graph shows member's suggestions.

Question 10 asked members whether they process their trades through Community Weaver. Twenty six members stated that they do, while seven members noted that they had not. The remainder (being twelve members) either did not answer the question, had not done a trade or could not remember.

Question 11 asked members whether they had been to any social events and how important they considered these to be. Thirty members confirmed that they had been to a social event and fifteen stated they had not but the majority of these members intend to go at some point in the future. Reasons for not attending included; lack of time, lack of transport, feeling shy and clashes with other activities. All members stated that they consider social events to be very important and are a vital way to connect with other Timebankers, develop trust with people and build networks for future trades.

Question 12 asked members whether they would be willing to set up a community hub. Five members stated they may be interested, six stated they would definitely be interested, thirteen stated they would not be interested and twenty one confirmed they already attended community hub events.

Question 13 asked members if there is anything else they would like the Timebank to start offering. Nineteen members stated that they could not think of anything and praised the Timebank, Hannah and steering Committee for their work so far. Other members suggested the following initiatives:

- Food cooperative/community supported agriculture;
- Online and offline film editing;
- Craft events;
- A tool/resource library;

- Community energy plan;
- Cleaning up beaches;
- Safety hub in the event of a disaster;
- Local currencies;
- People re-loading offers/requests even if they don't get a trade;
- More vegetarian dinners;
- Free exercise classes;
- Co-op housing communities;
- Freecycle initiatives;
- Community gardens

Question 14 asked members how they thought the Timebank would be useful/helpful in a natural disaster or emergency. Member's responses included the following:

- Provide a contact database to connect neighbours;
- Provide a physical hub/location for members to meet up;
- Phone service;
- Making survival kits;
- Practical jobs such as digging toilets, volunteer army, coordinating information, matching needs and resources;
- Training a civil defence volunteer/member to liaise with Civil Defence;
- Drafting a Timebank emergency plan in conjunction with Civil Defence.

Question 15 asked members if there was anything else they would like to say. The following points were noted:

- Hannah is doing a great job!
- The Timebank is really going well;
- Two members felt that the Timebank needs to stay focused on 'everyday' offers and requests and not become too obsessed with specialist technical skills;
- One member noted that many Timebank members appear to be pretty busy people;
- It would be great if the diversity of members could be strengthened;
- It could be useful to remind people that everyone has something to offer;
- Timebanking is also about a social encounter and can produce social anxiety in people (which is very often very normal). This is why social events are important.

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

Everyday activism as an 'open politics of place'

Interview Schedule:

This interview schedule outlines a list of likely questions which will be asked of participants. The format of all interviews will be semi-structured however this schedule will be used as a guide. The exact form of any questions to be asked in any given interview may change, depending on the focus of the interview and the information obtained during the interview.

List of Questions:

How did you first become involved in this group?

Why did you become involved?

What role do you play in the group?

What is the social structure of the group?

How is difference or conflict handled within the group?

How are decisions made within the group?

What unites the group? Are there any similar or shared characteristics, values, ideologies which unite people (including friendships/relationships)?

How is information disseminated to those in the group and those outside?

What are the goal/s of the group?

What actions are undertaken to achieve these goal/s?

How successful do you think the group is at achieving these goal/s?

What do you think contributes to this success/lack of success?

Does the group seek to influence local and national government?

Does the group seek to cultivate links with other organisations (both national and international)?

How does the group seek to gather support or enlist others to the cause?

How does the group seek to represent and frame itself?

Have others outside the group sought to frame and represent the group in a certain way?

Has involvement in the group changed the way you think of yourself?

Has involvement in the group affected you emotionally and personally?

Appendix C: Human ethics approval

MEMORANDUM

Phone 0-4-463 5676

Fax 0-4-463 5209

TO	Gradon Diprose
COPY TO	Sophie Bond Sara Kindon
FROM	Dr Allison Kirkman, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	20 September 2011
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval: 18797 Everyday activism as an 'open politics of place'

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 31 July 2013. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Allison Kirkman

Human Ethics Committee

Appendix D: Information and consent forms

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

Everyday activism as an ‘open politics of place’

Information Sheet for Participants

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Please read this information sheet before deciding whether or not to participate.

This research is being conducted as part of a PhD in Human Geography at Victoria University. The research aims to investigate how everyday forms of social and environmental actions can be encouraged in urban contexts to respond to the increasing challenges facing many cities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The research has two broad foci. The first involves investigating why and how people become involved in groups which are engaged in everyday social and environmental actions. The second involves investigating the types of collective actions these groups then undertake.

This research will involve qualitative data collection and if you decide to be involved you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Semi-Structured Interview Format

The interview will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. It is based on a semi-structured format so the exact nature of the questions has not been determined in advance but will depend on the way that the interview develops. Should the line of questioning progress in a way that makes you uncomfortable you can decline to answer any question(s).

Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can leave the interview or decline to be involved at any time and retract any statements made before 30th July 2013 without any disadvantage to yourself.

On the attached consent form, you are given the option of using a generic pseudonym (such as ‘participant A’), a pseudonym of your choice, or your real name.

Data Use and Storage

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only myself, or my supervisors, Dr Sophie Bond and Sara Kindon will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately, except that on which published results rely. This data will be stored securely for a period of five years.

It is intended that a copy of the thesis will be submitted to Victoria University and one or more articles will be submitted to scholarly journals and that the research may form the basis of conference presentations. You may receive a final report with the findings if you wish (please indicate on the consent form) and make any comments. You may also receive a copy of any interview transcripts.

This research has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington.

If you have any further questions at any time, please contact in the first instance Gradon Diprose, or Dr Sophie Bond or Sara Kindon (details below).

Thank you for considering taking part.

Gradon Diprose
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Ph 04-4636479

Dr Sophie Bond
sophie.bond@vuw.ac.nz
Ph 04-4635217

Sara Kindon
Sara.kindon@vuw.ac.nz
Ph 04-4636194

Everyday activism as an 'open politics of place'

Consent Form

I have read and understood the information sheet and I understand that I can request more information at any stage

I am aware that participation is purely voluntary and I can withdraw at any time, refuse to answer any questions, or retract any statements before 30th July 2013 without disadvantage

In publications, presentations and any public media I would like to be identified as (please tick):

- ☐ A pseudonym (for example participant A)
- ☐ Self-identified pseudonym _____
- ☐ My real name _____

I understand that the information I give will not be used for any purpose other than those listed below and in the information sheet without my consent

I understand I will have the chance to check the transcripts prior to publication and make any comments

I would like to receive a final report of the findings at the conclusion of the research

Y / N

If yes, my address is:

And my email address is:

I, consent to being interviewed and audio recorded by Gradon Diprose for the purposes of the research project and producing one or more journal articles and presentations at conferences.

Signed: Date

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