

## **The promise of the affordable artist's studio: governing creative spaces in London**

Word count: (9,997)

### **Abstract**

The role of artists' organisations in populating and popularising post-industrial urban areas is well documented. However, what are less apparent are analyses of how spaces of artistic production are organised and governed in these areas. This paper explores, via an analysis of organisational documents and practices, the techniques used by London-based affordable studio providers to imagine, calculate and make material low-cost artists' workspace. The argument made is that the negotiation of competing agendas around the production of cultural, economic and social benefit by affordable studio providers has led to the emergence of a specific form of affordable studio. This analysis will thus show how configurations of creative space emerge from mundane techniques of measurement and governance.

Keywords: arts organisations, creativity, governmentality, calculation, artists' studios

### **Introduction**

In June 2006, a mixed-use property development was opened in South-east London. The 'Galleria' was the result of a partnership between arts organisation Acme and property developer Barratt Homes. It represented a new iteration of mixed-use urban planning strategies by combining open-market and affordable housing with artists'. The buildings were erected on the grounds of a former print works and consisted of 98 residential flats, of which twenty three were reserved for low-cost social housing. There were also four floors of purpose-built artists' studios providing modernised workspace for up-to fifty artists. These 'affordable studios' were managed by Acme and offered at low rent on flexible tenancy terms to applicants.

The 'Galleria' was intended by the developers to both modernise artists' workspaces and to engage local communities in the processes of making art. *The Independent* newspaper extolled the first of these aims in an article in 2004. The article, headlined "Goodbye, Gloomy Garrett" (Markosky, 2004 no page numbers), promised new forms of studio space for artists that would make Henri Matisse, "green (or rather, olive, jade or emerald, depending on your palette) with envy". The article anticipated the excitement felt by artists waiting to move in, quoting them as being energised by the prospect of traditionally endowed studio spaces with high ceilings, white walls and large windows coupled with modern amenities such as central heating and facilities for office and administrative work. The second of these aims was to be achieved by exposing Galleria residents to everyday working practices of artists in order to demystify studio practices, and by running artist residencies programmes in the building that would create work to be situated in public spaces in the local area. The Galleria was also positioned within Peckham's regeneration strategy: "artists will settle in the area; galleries will follow in their wake; and cafes and restaurants thereafter. Cue a sharp rise in house prices. That's the plan, at least, and it's not a bad one" (Hewitson, 2006 no page numbers).

Affordable studio providers like Acme represent an organised attempt to provide a large scale, sustainable infrastructure of artists' workspaces in the UK. The organisations are representative of a process, when "places left over after planning, [are] subsequently taken over by informal groups of cultural producers who turn them into alternative cultural sites" (Mommaas, 2004 p. 508). They are constitutive of artists' networks, often in London's post-industrial areas (Green, 1999), supporting artistic production by providing spaces in which artists can work at low rents and on flexible tenancies, and by connecting those artists to

peers, galleries, residencies and other opportunities within the London arts world (While, 2003). Notable organisations in London include SPACE in Hackney, founded in 1968, and who manage over 600 studios across the city. Acme, who were behind the Galleria project, were founded in 1972 and maintain around 452 studios; ACAVA, founded in Hammersmith in 1984, provides space for over 500 artists across 20 buildings, most of which are in London. Smaller groups include Chisenhale Arts Place in Bow, which was founded in 1981 and Art in Perpetuity Trust (APT) in Deptford, and Bow Arts Trust (BAT) in Bow, both founded in 1995.

This paper contends that the affordable studios offered by groups like these are spatial expressions of institutional discourse in which a shared set of ideologies, organisational structures and ambitions imagine, measure and make material artists' workspaces. This paper argues that the affordable studio is reducible to neither traditional models of the artist studio, such as the poorly equipped garrets of popular imagination (Zakon, 1978) nor the spaces of contemporary creative labour, designed to stimulate innovation and shape working practices (Kristensen, 2004) although they may contain characteristics of both. Instead it is a spatial reconfiguration of ideas about models of creative/culture-led urban development, cultural labour and value measurement.

The material presented in this paper is drawn from research into the development of the affordable studio provision sector in London, undertaken for the author's PhD. The focus on London was chosen because the city has the highest concentration of affordable studio providers in the UK; more than thirty organisations operate in central London, occupying over ninety buildings and providing around 2,400 studios for nearly 3,000 artists (NFASP 2008). Their proximity to large galleries, auction houses centralised artistic infrastructure

such as art schools positions it in the centre of many of Britain's arts networks. The fieldwork was carried in London out between March and October 2008. It comprised three major components; 1) extensive discourse analysis of documentation published by, or concerning, affordable studio provision groups, including press releases, promotional material, websites, news articles, research papers and related policy documentation; 2) 30 semi-structured interviews with arts professionals and administrators, artists, and studio and property managers working in the field of affordable studio provision; 3) participant observation at studio sites and at events throughout the fieldwork period, including gallery openings, conferences and seminars, and visits to studios.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section of the paper, I engage with narratives about culture-led redevelopment in the city. I argue that affordable studio providers are active stakeholders in the production of creative spaces that have adapted to avoid displacement by gentrification. I suggest this has been in part due to an engagement with governmental discourses about delivering cultural, economic and social benefit. The second section establishes an analytical context to understand how that engagement is expressed in the space of the studio. To do this I adopt an approach derived from Foucault's work on governmentality. I aim to decompose how creative spaces are made and consider the means by which characteristics and capacities to shape artistic practice are conferred upon studio spaces. In the third section, I detail the conceptualisation and constitution of organisational rationales for affordable studio providers. I show how this has resulted in an organisational programme of evaluation, measurement and calculation grounded through the concept of 'benefit'. The fourth section completes the argument by establishing how these rationales have been translated into the space of the affordable studio. I conclude by suggesting that this paper addresses an absence in the literature on how 'creative' spaces are made and used, and

the impacts that this might have on our understanding of how calculative rationales can shape the spatial conditions that frame artistic practice.

### **Organising artistic spaces in urban areas**

Urban spaces labelled as ‘creative’, and their relationship to the delivery of economic, social and cultural policies, has been a subject of much scrutiny (Pratt, 2009, Jayne, 2005, Catungal and Leslie, 2009, Mommaas, 2004). The use of place-marketing strategies based, for example, on the exploitation of cultural attractions, mega-events and ‘cultural quarters’ to redevelop urban spaces has been a visible process, both in the West (Garcia, 2004a, 2004b, Evans, 2003, Balibrea, 2001, Rantisi and Leslie, 2006) and further afield (Lee, 2006, Yue, 2006, Hui, 2006). When aligned with discourses about the creative city (Landry, 2008, Leslie, 2005) and the creative class (Banks, 2009, Florida, 2002, Peck, 2005, Pratt, 2008), the importance of occupations based in the production of cultural goods and services in urban economies have been notable.

Artists and arts organisations have been shown to play a role in the spatial reorganisation of the urban areas that typify these spaces of cultural labour and consumption (Ley, 2003). Post-industrial districts in particular have been the focus of much of this activity (Helbrecht, 2004). Zukin’s (1988) account of the loft redevelopment scene in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, notes the ways in which the presence of artists willing to brave adverse urban conditions led to successful, small scale bohemian developments that were subsequently exploited by local property developers looking for a new way to market inner-city living. The story concludes that as areas become foci for redevelopment, commodification and intensive top-down development, artists move out. This process of gentrification is visible in many places from Sydney (Shaw, 2006), to Chicago (Lloyd, 2002),

Canada (Podmore, 1998) and London. In London, for example, the emergence of London's East End and Dockland districts as cultural quarters extended from their past relationship with artists (Butler, 2007), and the popularity of areas such as Hackney, Dalston, Shoreditch for artists have all become implicated in producing marketable forms of cultural and economic capital (Pratt, 2009).

This process of adapting and making 'safe' liminal urban zones has been understood largely as a process of 'opening up' urban districts for investment and exploitation by developers and commercial interests that otherwise compromise the activities of artists. Hutton (2006) notes that the emergence of cultural quarters, such as London's East End, have been related to their appeal for use as creative centres by artists. Ley (2003) writes that for artists, these postindustrial urban spaces are attractive initially because, "can be valorised as authentic, symbolically rich and free from the commodification that depreciates the meaning of place" (Ley, 2003 p. 2535).

The process unfolds when 'pioneers' in these areas, like artists, come to "derive the benefits from urban association while global economic trends elevate the importance of these practices to the reconfiguration of the neighbourhood as a site of accumulation" (Lloyd, 2002 p. 518). It has been suggested, for example by Ley (2003), that the artists' role in this process is not only one of promoting investment or inward migration through making an area fashionable, but also in changing the dispositions of the urban population,

for the artist's very presence, the deployment of a critical aesthetic disposition on the streets of old neighbourhoods, has become a principal tool for goading on

gentrification, thereby lining with gold the pockets of buyers and sellers in the inner-city property market (Ley, 2003 p. 2542)

This has led to a planning process that values some urban spaces on the basis of the everyday cultural activities of its residents, but whose aim is ultimately to stimulate consumption (Evans, 2005).

Catungal and Leslie (2009) have consequently suggested that “the recent focus on culture and creativity is not all that divergent from older entrepreneurial models of urban governance” and that in the creative city agenda “as in entrepreneurial regimes, the emphasis is on attracting investment and tourists through the construction of spectacular spaces of consumption” (Catungal and Leslie, 2009 p. 2578). In the UK this phenomenon has been contextualised within the rise of creative industries policies during Labour’s tenure in government between 1996 and 2010. In this period, creative and cultural practice came to be seen as constituent elements of a new sector of economic activity (Garnham, 2005, Hughson and Inglis, 2001, Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005). This created a context whereby, “cultural policy, previously on the margins in many areas of government, could be seen to be economically relevant in an era when policy was judged primarily in terms of its fiscal rewards” (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005 p. 7).

Although entrepreneurial regimes and economic rationales are dominant in these cultural-economic strategies, the approaches in the UK have been linked to – and justified by – social objectives. This is reflected in the wider attempt to conflate both market and social models of creativity that has been made in the UK (Neelands and Choe, 2011). The result has a growing political expectation for arts organisations to offer services that tackle social well-being

issues like inequality as a means of providing value for public money and state patronage (Lee et al., 2011, Pratt, 2005, Oakley, 2006). Cultural organisations, and arts groups amongst them, have thus been increasingly compelled to demonstrate their role in the development of urban communities. This includes demonstrating how they support economic development in urban areas by diversifying the local workforce, supporting the growth of small arts businesses and attracting investment from both philanthropic organisations and businesses (Markusen and Schrock, 2006). This infrastructure, it is suggested, also facilitates the use of space by artists for galleries, educational workshops, and public engagement programmes through which to contribute to the social well-being of local communities (Blessi et al., 2011, Markusen and Johnson, 2006).

Discourses of cultural, economic and social value become deeply embedded in the spatial networks of creative and cultural practice (Lee et al., 2011). While (2003) argues that “artists require a range of facilities and services, including (appropriately priced) studio spaces ... and access to specialist techniques” (While, 2003 p. 252). However, this supportive infrastructure can be seen not as networks of activity solely to support artists and extract financial value from the sale and dissemination of their work, but also spaces that generate social engagement practices along the way. This is visible in galleries with social outreach programmes, public engagement strategies in arts heritage sites, and, as this paper will show, affordable studio providers.

Although affordable studio providers are implicated in these processes of spatialising cultural labour and consumption, and acting as spaces that generate or promote ‘value’, they have been overlooked in much of the geographical literature. Mentions of affordable studio provision organisations are lacking (three exceptions include Harris, 2011, Pratt, 2009, Foord,



1999) an in-depth engagement with their work is also rare. The salient exception is a doctoral study on visual arts networks in London's East End by Nick Green (2001) and a paper in the journal *Rising East* (Green, 1999).

This paper builds on this work to unpack how these arts organisations shape the spaces of artistic practice in the contemporary city. Their success has been dependent on the evolution of a number of organisational practices to obtain and manage property, as Pratt (2009 p. 1052) recognises when he suggests that, “the visionaries [of urban redevelopment] SPACE and organisations like them who sought to secure owner-occupation for artists, so that they had a sustainable future”. Furthermore, as Harris (2011) points out, many of those responsible for these projects were artists themselves, and that this undermines assumptions that artists are inevitably susceptible to displacement by gentrification.

This paper is not an analysis of gentrification or culture-led redevelopment per se, but a discussion of the practical means by which spaces are afforded the capacity to support creativity and artistic labour. Bennett (1998) noted that a variety of non-governmental bodies were also responsible for taking part in, and reinforcing the governmental programmes that sought to shape social conduct through sharing and disseminating cultural value (Barnett, 1999, 2001). These included the enterprises governed by those programmes, such as those that work in, manage, and run the museums and art galleries themselves. This paper is interested in how ideas about what we term ‘creative activity’ are made material and given life in the form of the studio. Consequently, this paper asks: what are these practices of affordable studio provision? How are they intervening in the processes of urban redevelopment to generate spaces that are at once commensurate with the needs of artists, and with the delivery of reconfigured political demands for cultural, economic and social value? How are

affordable studio providers rendering the spaces of the city legible in a manner that enables them to achieve these aims? I posit that these are important questions because they speak to the way in which arts spaces are constituted and governed in London to promote creative behaviour.

### *Governing through space*

The process of organising creative behaviour in contemporary urban districts has a wide range of effects. These shape the life courses of creative practitioners (Bain, 2003), the aesthetics of neighbourhoods (Helbrecht, 2004), the communities artists encounter when undertaking the work (Blessi et al., 2011) and the political impetus to deliver ‘value’ and ideas about ‘value’ to wider audiences (Belifiore and Bennett, 2007). The spaces in which these activities are carried out are key in formulating practices we understand as creative. Designing and managing such spaces in order to deliver creative outcomes in the creative industries is not uncommon. In commercial creative enterprises, new management strategies suggest that, “companies can generate more good ideas by using the physical space more diligently” (Kristensen, 2004 p. 89) because “creativity requires a context” (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002 p. 226). Haner (2005), writing in a similar field, suggests that “work environments have become the integral parts of innovation strategies” (Haner, 2005 p. 288).

Affordable studio providers are implicated in similar processes of managing space for creative activity. At the same time, there are additional complexities added to their operation by the demands of arts policies that, for example, require educational or public engagement strategies as a condition of funding (ACE, 2006). So how does this political compulsion to generate cultural, economic and social value from their activities shape the way studio spaces are made and managed?

This paper adopts a theoretical position derived from Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault, 2008) to tackle these questions. Governmentality represents an analysis of "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflects, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit complex form of power" (Foucault, 2007 p. 108). To do this, Foucault suggested government could be "decomposed into political rationalities, governmental programmes, technologies and techniques of government" (O'Malley et al., 1997 p. 501). These 'analytics of rule' shape how those in power envisage spaces and subjects – be they state governments, social institutions, or workplace managers. Adoption of such a method facilitates an analysis of how affordable studio providers operate to imagine, envisage, and constitute creative spaces.

To date, governmentality has been deployed to good effect in work that explores the rise of 'creativity' as a governing discourse. For example, work has shown how governing through 'creativity' has led to the emergence of subjects with specific tastes in leisure and cultural activities, and political persuasions (Bill, 2008, Fougere and Solitander, 2010, Banks, 2009). Governmentality theory has also informed analyses of the way that creative industry organisations are constituted through adherence to practices of measurement and administration that seek to align their activities with state strategies for economic growth (Christophers, 2007, Oakley, 2004).

Extending this thinking in to the 'creative' city is fruitful. Analyses, for example, which focus on how political ideas or values (of which creativity could be considered one) are used to govern attitudes and behaviours within other public spaces have proved significant. This can be seen in examples where ways of envisaging and organising space variously emphasise the

catalytic effects of green spaces to promote healthy lifestyles in the ‘fit’ city (Herrick, 2009), make claims about the spatial conditions of neighbourhoods to illicit criminal activity (Herbert and Brown, 2006), or problematise the unruly nature of urban space to legitimate constant governmental intervention (Osborne and Rose, 1999). The space produced is both ideologically and materially shaped by the visions of those governing that space. Consequently, programmes of governing that foreground creativity and economic or cultural benefit will likely see spatial expressions of those values (Huxley, 2006).

As well as being implicated in the political terrain of urban redevelopment, affordable studios are also spaces of work. The spatial organisation of labour has been a subject of attention for scholars. Miller and O’Leary (1994) for example explore how organisational spaces have “been delineated, rendered thinkable, calculable, and susceptible to intervention” (Miller and O’Leary, 1994 p. 20) in the modernisation of manufacturing plants. Their argument was that the spatial reordering of the factory was made possible only by a variety of organisational discourses about the ideal means of manufacture, knowledges about those processes, and material changes of the factory floor and reassignment of the expertise of subjects associated with the production process. This body of work recognises, as Rose (1999 p. 33 - 40) points out, that space does not represent a terrain upon which government is performed, but instead is constituted through rule by the processes of government that imagine, divide, regulate and otherwise describe spatial arrangements (Elden, 2007). In other words, spaces are not only an object of management, but also a product of it.

Criticism has been levelled at governmentality for failing in some instances to provide a complete account of the empirical problem that it seeks to explore (Barnett et al., 2008). As Rose et. al. (2006) point out, however, and in line with those who argue for a supplemented

approach to governmentality (for example, Prince and Dufty, 2009, Cadman, 2010), governmentality should be regarded as an approach “good for some purposes, but not for others, and capable of being used in conjunction with other tools” (Rose et al., 2006 p. 100). This does not suggest a single prescriptive method for governmentality, but rather an open-ended approach that utilises its analytical language to explore a given empirical problem. As Rose et. al (2006) suggest, governmentality represents “an analytical toolbox” (Rose et al. p. 100) with which it is possible to ask “particular questions of the phenomena that it seeks to understand, questions amenable to precise answers through empirical enquiry” (Rose et al., 2006 p. 85). Accordingly,

we should not seek to extract a method from the multiple studies of governing, but rather to identify *a certain ethos of investigation*, a way of asking questions, a focus not upon why certain things happened, but how they happened and the difference that that made in relation to what had gone before (Rose et al., 2006 p. 101, emphasis added)

By applying this ethos of investigation to the production of artists’ workspace, this paper will show how contemporary cultural and creative policies have dually shaped the way artistic workspaces are conceived of within urban areas and governed as places of work. As Huxley suggests, “governmentality is indelibly spatial, both in terms of the spaces it seeks to create, and the causal logics that imbue such attempts with rationality” (Huxley, 2007 p. 199). The expression of the affordable studio providers’ ideologies about artistic practice in affordable studios can thus be seen as a form of governing through space. This paper unpacks this process as emerging through the affordable studio sector.

## **Constituting the affordable studio**

### *Emergent rationales*

The ways in which organisations conceptualise the nature of the spaces they are to govern plays an important role in shaping how those spaces are materialised in programmes of rule (Rose, 1999). For affordable studio provision groups, the space of the affordable studio central to the delivery of the sector's core rationales and is constituted in relation to them. These rationales internalise the various assumptions, knowledges, and claims about the affordable studio, and articulate them as a coherent set of aims and objectives (). Their function is to create 'truths' about affordable studio provision – and its ability to provide benefit – “that are in fact ‘effects of truth’ within the discourses rather than the universal truths they claim to be” (Harvey, 1996 p. 95). These rationales play an important role because they serve to both constitute and report on the field in which they operate. They thus represent “an element of government itself which helps to create a discursive field in which exercising power is rational” (Lemke, 2002 p. 55). This process is important because it produces “distinctive ways of thinking and questioning, relying on definite vocabularies and procedures” (Dean, 2010 p. 33) that are adopted in order to govern.

It is possible to establish clear organisational rationales for affordable studio providers. These can be seen to emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s during a period of consolidation where previously disparate affordable studio providers came together as a sector. The consolidation process began with a series of conferences. The first was organised by SPACE in March 1999. The organisation arranged the *UK Studio Providers Conference* with financial support from the Arts Council England. This event was mirrored by another in 2000, organised by Bow Arts Trust, Cable Street Studios and Chisenhale Arts Place, which built on a need to articulate the challenges faced by provision groups. The Arts Council

England, in reaction to this demand, funded three further conferences; *Creating Spaces* was held on 8 July 2003 at Tate Modern, London; *Opening Doors* was held on 15<sup>th</sup> July at Persistence Works in Sheffield, and *Making Space* was held one week later, also in Sheffield.

A key outcome of this series of events was the *Capital Studios* research programme. This research programme both described and constituted many of the defining characteristics of the emerging sector. It sought to define the work of affordable studio providers, the nature of affordable studios, their contribution to local economies, and the benefits they offered to the well-being of urban areas. The programme was commissioned by Acme, with a number of other affordable studio providers in 2005 and was part-funded by the Arts Council England. It was described as, “an advocacy programme which aims to raise awareness of artists’ studio workspace as an important element in urban renewal programmes” (Acme, 2006a, no page number). The Capital Studios programme published documents that variously offered advice on locating and securing property for affordable studio organisations (Acme 2006a), a comparative report on the means by which artists’ studios create public benefit (Acme, 2006b), a further comparative piece on the primary differences between affordable and commercial workspace provision for artists in London (Acme, 2006c), and a survey of artists’ studio groups in London (Acme, 2006d), itself drawn from a national survey carried out in 2004 (Acme, 2004).

One document, *Artists' Studios: a guide to securing, supporting and creating affordable studios in London* (Acme, 2006a), is explicit in arguing for the affordable studio groups’ role in creating three specific forms of value, with arguments presented under the headings ‘*Cultural benefit*’, ‘*Creating economic benefit*’ and ‘*Community benefit*’ (Acme, 2006a pp. 8 - 10). The document suggests that affordable studio providers are agents for the advocacy of

artistic practice, supporting a range of creative processes and managing cultural production through providing resources and workspace to arts workers. It also suggests that by positioning themselves as key economic actors in urban space, generating value and assisting in the process of regeneration and redevelopment, through consultancy programmes and a mobilisation of their experience with the property sector the groups offer economic benefit. Finally, it suggests that affordable studio providers have an important role to play in the development of community cohesion and social inclusion, through providing education programmes, public arts events and community-engaged arts practices (Acme, 2006a).

### *Describing the affordable studio*

These three rationales can be seen at play in the work of the affordable studio providers. At its most uncomplicated, the affordable studio was imagined to offer cultural benefit by providing “a supportive environment in which artists can flourish” (Acme, 2006a p. 8), in which artists could develop their careers, unfettered by financial constraints or threats of losing workspace. Bain (2005), for example, notes that for artists, “professional status comes largely from drawing on a repertoire of shared myths and stereotypes to help create an artistic identity and project it to others.” (Bain, 2005 p. 1). This claim is explicitly linked to the spaces of the studio in the Capital Studios Document series:

For an artist having a studio is much more than a physical space. Having a studio signifies their status as a professional person who has made a particular set of life choices. It affirms their self-image, and external perceptions of them as an artist (Acme, 2006b p. 26)



The affordable studio providers also positioned themselves, and their studios within an infrastructural framework, or Arts World (Becker, 1982) of makers, dealers and galleries. This recognised “the social production of art [as] a collective practice that depends on complex interactions between artists and a range of ‘art world’ actors ... such as patrons, dealers critics, gallery owners and collectors” (While, 2003 p. 252). There was an explicit attempt to link affordable studio provision in an historic narrative about these Arts World. Acme, for example, commissioned Michael Archer, an author, artist and lecturer at The Ruskin, Oxford, to write a history of artists’ activities in East London since the 1960s (Archer, 2001). The publication of Archer’s short essay *Oranges and Lemons and Oranges and Bananas: Artists in East London 1960 - 2000*, coincided with a major exhibition at the Museum of London, *Creative Quarters: the art world in London 1700 to 2000* which ran from 20th March to 15 July 2001. This exhibition examined the importance of a variety of sites and artists in the development of London’s artistic community, and featured guided tours of the contemporary art spaces of East End, SPACE and Acme included. This sought to give historical legitimacy to the practice of affordable studio provision.

The second rationale was that of economic benefit. Affordable studio providers constituted themselves as important economic actors by mobilising the role of the affordable studio in alleviating the requirement for state subsidy of the arts at the point of production (NFASP, 2009a). The claim that affordable studio providers could alleviate state subsidies on the arts and encourage growth in local economies was underwritten by a discourse of stability and longevity that wove together a representation of the affordable studio that was at once culturally beneficial, and economically reproducible. It provided affordable studio providers, both new and established with the evidence with which to argue for longer-term contracts on buildings, as well as pointing towards best-use for those spaces;

Moving from one short-term let to another, or being involved in campaigns or protracted negotiations to retain studios, is financially wasteful, time consuming and saps the energy and confidence of artists (Acme, 2006a p. 14)

The affordable studio becomes not a transient space of benefit only to artists, but a central and permanent means of supporting the dissemination of cultural benefit in local communities through economic frameworks: “if artists are to continue to be able to provide maximum cultural and community benefit, they need space in which to work, at a rent they can afford” (NFASP, 2009c).

The third rationale central to the production of the contemporary affordable studio was that of social benefit. Affordable studio providers position themselves as key actors in delivering community programmes on behalf of local authorities, charities and community groups to, “address social exclusion, offender, health and learning issues” (Acme, 2006a p. 11). The groups describe themselves as “engaging directly with communities through art” (ACAVA, no date) to “forge links with local, national and international individuals and groups to develop a diverse range of educational programmes” (APT, 2009) which then create, “opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, through specific talks, education projects and exhibitions” (CAP, 2009).

Affordable studio providers act as facilitators, producing a range of collaborative events, “through partnerships with a variety of strategic bodies and agencies” (Acme, 2006a p. 9). ACAVA reference a variety of past projects in schools and hospitals as evidence for its successful community engagement programme: other groups adopt similar tactics (BAT,

2009). NFASP provide evidence for the range of these activities in the form of surveys and percentages, arguing that “94% of studios in the register are involved in some form of public activity with 82% holding open studios at least once a year” (NFASP, 2009b). Additionally, “73% holding exhibitions in their buildings, 62% running workshops and over 50% holding talks or events” (NFASP, 2009b). Public engagement programmes are thus constructed as central to the majority of affordable studio providers.

The affordable studios providers claimed in these documents, and in subsequent publications from NFASP (2009b, 2008b, 2008a, 2007) to offer more than simply spaces in which artists can work. They also promised spaces that could, through their private and public use, their material form or their location, offer a means to realise social benefits. This contribution can, the groups believe, be both deliberately managed or allowed to develop. NFASP write that,

these organisations also benefit the public as a natural and more strategic consequence of artists establishing their professional lives in particular buildings and areas (NFASP, 2009c)

The affordable studio space was consequently described by its provider as one of modern cultural labour that would support the needs of the artist and provide access to arts markets. These descriptions reflected representations about artistic work practices – as described, for instance by Taylor and Littleton (2008), Røyseng et al, (2007), Bain (2005), or Menger (1999). These descriptions also linked artists to discourses about modernised spaces that provided stability, security and, “a supportive environment in a community of like-minded professionals ... digital facilities including broadband and on-going professional development training and support” (Acme, 2006b p. 11). Through these spaces, economic and social

activity would be promoted. But by what means have these descriptive rationales become constitutive of spaces? What techniques were deployed to translate the discourse of provision into material spaces? The next section considers these questions.

### *Making material the affordable studio*

Huxley (2007) argues that spaces and environments are not “simply delineated or arranged for purposes of discipline or surveillance, visibility or management” (Huxley, 2007 p. 195, see also Huxley, 2006, Osborne, 2004, Osborne and Rose, 1999) but that instead, the idea that spaces are generative of, or can promote, certain social behaviours is also part of the process of imagining and materialising organisational aims. The process by which this occurs within affordable studio providers can be seen to comprise three elements: cultural-historical readings of the nature of the artist’s studio, an economic-technical process of materialisation, and a repurposing of how artistic workspaces can support community engagement.

The identity of the affordable studio mobilises an historical imaginary about where art is made. The term ‘studio’ as a descriptor for this has historically held different linguistic, practical and social meanings and it is the negotiation of these differing representations by studio providers that has led to the affordable studio taking the form that it has. Hughes, for example, (1990) suggests that, “the very word [studio] presents a problem, if only because it still bears enough of its etymological ambiguity to trouble current usage” (Hughes, 1990 p. 34). Bauer (2008) notes, that during the development of the concept of the artist studio, “only occasionally in the course of the seventeenth century can a room designated *studio* reasonably be taken in the modern sense as the place where an artist practiced his art” (Bauer, 2008 p. 644). It was not until later that the studio came to represent, as Zakon (1978 p. 9) describes it, “the private realm where [the artist] was not only occupied with technical

processes but also where he dreamed, made choices and realized his vision”. This perpetuates a certain form of ‘romance’ for the studio, which has continued to have a strong influence over cultural assumptions about the studio well in to the twentieth century. It was to serve as a basis on which many contemporary understandings of the artist’s studio rest, and reinforce the notion that the work of art was of sufficient cultural importance to necessitate its own idiosyncratic spatial requirements. These models – in which studios were still, “inextricably tied to nineteenth-century Romanticism, and to the apotheosis of individual genius” (Jones, 1996 p. 4) – persist in the mainstream.

The diversity of what a studio represented enabled affordable studio providers to constitute their own vision their studios. Bain (2005) suggests that historical models of the artist’s studio have “a remarkably strong influence on expectations of what constitutes a ‘real’ studio” (Bain, 2005 p. 174) and this is certainly the case with affordable studio providers. The model of the studio-block housed in a former industrial building pioneered by the early studio provision groups was both a convenient and practical solution to the problem of a burgeoning artistic community, and a means of realising an ambition to offer private spaces in which artists could work (Green, 1999). However, the affordable studio provision sector came to imagine new affordable studio spaces as requiring the characteristics present in those early buildings. These were reported by studio providers during the consolidation of the sector, arguing that “there are additional basic features that should be provided including good ceiling height, natural light [and] unfettered walls” (Acme, 2006a p. 7).

Affordable studio providers recognised that artists’ studios embody distinctive cultural and social characteristics in the popular imagination: they are seen to generate creative behaviour and inspire artistic labour (Jones, 1996), they can be romanticised isolated spaces of

production (see, for example Bauer, 2008, Jones, 1996, Hughes, 1990, Zakon, 1978) or be central to the working lives and professional identities of creative practitioners (Bain, 2005, 2004). Consequently, the affordable studio would need to reflect this diverse array of practical, technical, professional and personal uses. In order to support these different requirements for space, the studio providers attempted to document a set of demonstrable material requirements. To achieve this, a technical process of measurement and calculation was undertaken.

This process of calculation formed part of a wider organisational strategy that generated knowledges about the spatial extent, and cost, of affordable studio provision in London as well as their impact on local communities. This process sought to define ‘affordable space’ in terms of its cost and size. These calculations compared the costs of affordable studios with that of the workspace available in the commercial sector (Acme, 2006c). These calculations defined the average size of studio required to accommodate most uses at around 300 to 350 square feet and the average rent to be around £8 per square foot (Acme, 2006a). What this knowledge allowed affordable studio providers to do was to not only understand ‘affordability’ in terms of cost per square foot and average studio sizes, but also in terms of what amount of space could be provided at the most acceptable annual rent. By calculating both an average rent per square foot and an average size, the groups were able to work out how to supply sufficient space in which the average artist could work, while at the same time being able to offer the largest number of studios possible in a new development in order to ensure sufficient revenue is generated to support the venture.

These measurement processes resulted in the emergence of a space that was neither traditional artistic studio, nor contemporary space of creative labour recognisable, for

example, in the creative industries (see, for example Haner, 2005, Kristensen, 2004). This is visible in the Galleria, and in the newer, purpose-built buildings of ACAVA. In these spaces, the studios reflect the calculated average size and cost of the affordable studio, but also reinforced the material characteristics of the post-industrial studio space. These include providing studios with white walls, high ceilings and access to natural light. However, this space is also modernised, featuring the addition of phone lines, central heating and in some case wireless internet access. This is noticeable in ACAVA's new southwest London studios, which they describe as follows: "the studios are newly constructed, self-contained spaces and provided with free WiFi broadband. All have excellent natural light with good access to water" (ACAVA, 2009).

Sometimes, the technical knowledges used by affordable studio provision groups to measure and make the studios material, and the practical descriptions of their uses, are at odds with a depiction of the dynamic relationship between space, subjective experience and artistic creativity (Taylor and Spicer, 2007). Affordable studio provision groups recognise, for example, that the studio is a very different workplace to the factory or the assembly line, and other creative occupations. However, the material conditions, practical uses and comportment within affordable studio spaces are contingent on the technical and regulatory procedures of affordable studio provision. This results in a complex tension in the studio, involving institutional and material conditions on the one hand, and subjective practices on the other.

I think that might be (romanticised) I think there is an attraction in certain sort of architecture ... because it has big spaces, and the ceilings are high, and I think that is a romantic thing because you know... you've got artists in New York in

the 60s and the 50s... I can see all the benefits, but I would find it quite difficult to work in that space (ND artist, home studio, interview 10/07/08)

This means that for artists in affordable studios, the potential to realise certain personal, professional and subjective goals is mediated by a relationship with those management organisations.

*Professionalising the delivery of the affordable studio*

The knowledge generated by the calculation process constituted studio providers as experts in their field who understood artists and the benefit they can generate, and offered the most professional means of negotiating property markets to realise value. This enabled the affordable studio providers, and Acme in particular with its new building projects, to position their work in line with contemporary discourses about creative clusters and labour, while maintaining a tenable and supported position within the more established Arts Worlds of London. SPACE, for example, advertised on their website, “We ‘speak’ property” (SPACE, 2009).

This professionalism in which both development partners and artist tenants can place their trust is a key aspect of updating the notion of contemporary creative spaces and their management. A quote on Acme’s website, attributed to Siân Ede, Deputy Director, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK), and found in *Acme Bulletin* (2008) encapsulates the type of representation the groups try to manage. It reads, “Acme operates with supreme professionalism, managing simultaneously to be rigorously business-like and sensitively aware of the various needs of artists” (Acme, 2009).



This professional aspect afforded providers the opportunity to describe the benefit offered by affordable studios to a diverse range of municipal audiences. Affordable studios were emphasised by their providers as enabling long-term social benefits for local communities. This emphasis constructed the studio as a permanent space of interaction between the public and the artist. This was visible in the Galleria's opening event and subsequent media coverage which highlighted the desire for the development to promote links between the arts and local communities. Then-Minister for Culture David Lammy, who attended the opening, was quoted as saying, "I think it's wonderful that we can create mixed communities in this way [...] This scheme is precisely what the Government and local authorities should be supporting" (Acme, 2006a p. 25) emphasising the popular policy rhetoric about the value of the arts in local communities (ACE, 2005).

The sector supported these claims by promoting activities that recast the affordable studio as spaces of engagement, display, consumption, and education. These subverted the private or solitary preconceptions of the artist's workspace and instead recast it as public and accessible. This was exemplified in the Open Studios programmes, which the Arts Council define as, "[happening] when a group of artists open their workplaces to the public during an agreed period of time" (ACE, 2003 p. 1). According to NFASP these events were a technique through which affordable studio providers could "demystify contemporary art by providing alternative spaces for the public to view work and meet those who create it, and to participate in and learn about the visual arts". (NFASP, 2009c). The studios in these events become spaces of engagement that promote activities that support creative practice, education and social well-being. These events are marketed widely by the studio groups, and represent an important part of their annual schedule. Other events, like the Chisenhale Arts Place Biennale serve a similar purpose. The first Biennale ran from 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2007 and featured

open studios, public film and video screenings, performance events, education events including dance and drawing workshops and exhibits in their gallery (CAP, 2007).

It is also clear that an attempt was being made by affordable studio providers to mobilise the studio as a form of space *de rigueur* for the mobilisation of new cultural, economic and social behaviour. Acting as a sort of ‘spatial rationality’ by “mobilising certain ‘truths’ of causal relations in and between spaces, environment, bodies and compartments” (Huxley, 2006p. 772) provision groups were trying to place the *space* of the studio as central to the realisation of its organisational goals. Their desire was to construct studio buildings and the studios themselves as central elements in the production of artistic practice that can contribute to “encouraging innovation and creativity across the social and regeneration agendas” (Acme, 2006a p. 7), and engaging with the public by promoting creativity. This identifies the aims of the organisations with debates around their role in promoting creativity and cultural production in the city (cf: Peck, 2005, Florida, 2002, Pratt, 2008), but also places them within broader discussions about the nature of an artistic workspace and its value to local communities (Markusen and Schrock, 2006, Merli, 2002, Matarraso, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

Affordable studio provision groups constitute affordable studios as a contemporary iteration of the artist’s studio. The paper has argued that the way in which affordable studios are afforded the ability to achieve political aims – be they to cultivate or promote creative practice, sustain economic growth, or provide valuable opportunities to build and strengthen communities – is intrinsically linked to contemporary techniques of government.

The affordable studio is thus more than a space of work; it is also a space of governing representative of a complex formation of contemporary political values about the nature of cultural labour in urban areas. This space emerges from a diverse set of institutional discourses, and it is imagined and managed for specific purposes. These purposes are aligned with wider political imperatives to demonstrate cultural, economic and social benefit through creative practice. This process is realised through organisational techniques that render the concept of affordability as a specific category of technical knowledge. The qualifier 'affordable' relates to a set of calculations and assumptions about the material needs of artists, and is an organisational practice through which a particular form of spaces emerges. This means that the resource of affordable studio providers, the affordable studio, becomes a unique type of workspace with its own set of spatial and regulatory conditions.

The claims made in this paper about the nature and role of the affordable studio move beyond an analysis of creative spaces that assumes, by the nature of their location or material make-up (Drake, 2003), that they already contain a capacity to 'be creative' or otherwise offer inspiration to those working in, or around, them. As Huxley (2007, 2006) and others have suggested, the ability for space to play roles in government is not always an *a priori*, but one that has historically linked to complex sets of relationship between rationales and techniques of governing. This analysis of the work of affordable studio providers has therefore not taken for granted the notion that an artist's workspace as a *de facto* creative environment that supports the production of cultural work. Instead it demonstrates that ideas about providing 'value' can themselves be constructed and constituted within a specific set of organisational practices. In this case, affordable studio providers mobilise the claims and forms of social value articulated in the social and arts policy of the last ten years, along with the economic benefits of promoting 'creative' labour. These are supported and formulated through a common understanding of the requirements for an artist's studio, and quantified via recourse

to a series of practices of calculation, measurement and regulation. This analysis thus constructs affordable studio providers not as passive providers of workspace, but as organisations that actively constitute creative spaces through a set of calculative rationales.

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