

WAITING ROOM - A Journal

A waiting room travelled a pocket of South East London across two months and eight outings, for a total of 24 hours. The Waiting Room drew 127 engagements and approximately 54 interactions.*

This journal is a summary of notes, observations. photographs and research from this experience in a non-linear part-narrative, part-indexical form.

This is part one, or perhaps the first provocation, of a continuing art-research project exploring the politics of waiting, potential temporal borders + intimate revolutions, and in turn the politics of observation

Note on observation/language/ observational language

From Waiting Room's very first outing, the surprising revelation was that of the potent intimacy of a lot of the engagements.

There was an easy trust from people to engage with the space, often in a deeply personal way.

Recording the experience, quickly became an interesting consideration. Photographing people without their permission felt not only inappropriate but particularly disrespectful to this intimacy that emerged. (Of course a solution would have been to ask permission, by caption or direct question but this would have influenced the experience in a performative way, which would not have been as useful for this particular direction of investigation).

I took some photographs by phone and by camera, at distance, as a way to collect a visual record. Many of them shared here remain small in scale to reflect the private encounters.

Instead, the main record is a collection of written notes, some of which are shared here, although it is important to note that this is no less surveillance than that of photographic record. And in turn, there is a certain intimacy in observation.

That being the case, people are less identifiable in this particular written document. Which brings me to my final note here. Identity. As we look to embrace a more appropriate, flexible and representative vocabulary and grammar around gender, race, class and other ways identity is expressed, I wanted to make as few assumptions as possible. Therefore, I have chosen to identify people by an item of clothing they are wearing or a casual activity they are engaging in. It's not a perfect solution but it is an offer, as part of the record. An interesting off-note in reflection is how one then brings (un)concious bias in imagining the figures included overleaf. But that is for another study.

E.g. *Panama Hat*. These are italicised in the first instance of reference, afterwhich initials are used.



"If we go back in history, waiting has been separating those who have the power to make other people wait and people who don't have that power".

Shahram Khosravi, The Funambulist, Issue 36





17.04.21 14.27_

Shopping Companion I and II walk past, their arms extended with the weight of the bags, their paces suspended through curiosity. Their movement in slow motion. A temporal intervention.

Eye line no longer straight ahead but pivoted right. [potential collision]

→ "potentiality"

- TEMPORAL POTENTIALITY

Shopping Companion I who is on the inside nudges elbow of *Shopping Companion II* on the outside.

A mumble, an exchange. A judgement?

The presence of Waiting Room has had an impact on their trajectory, both in time and space, if only I could know if they were waiting for a revelation. Why this thing here, now?

17.04.21 14.29 __

A circus of wonder erupts from stares between *Black Dress*, *Tricycle Rider* and *Hot Dog Eaters* (the latter are less engaged) - what permission do I have/ what permission does this waiting room have to co-exist here, right now?

→ unconscious connectivity. the social choreography implicated by the presence of Waiting Room. There is a dance of eye contact. Half acknowledgements, half turned heads, pivoted bodies and a communal 'sizing up'.

Tricycle Rider gets closer, nudging an inch at a time, a toddler's visible testing of boundaries. An adult (non-plussed) pulls *Tricycle Rider* into their own time zone.

(hyper-connectivity makes us less patient) PEW research

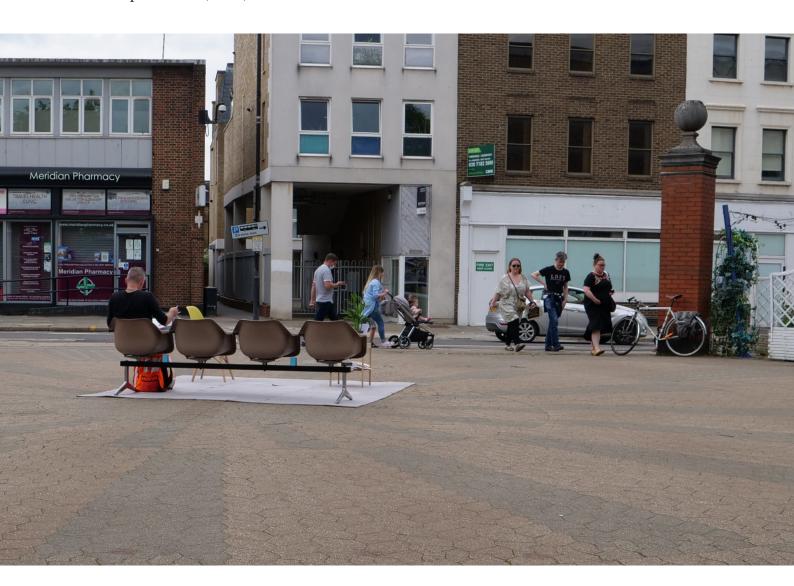


17.04.21 14.38

Fluorescent Cyclist cycles past (west to east, geographically speaking). Stops. Props bike up. Looks from a distance (6m approx). Takes photograph of Waiting Room. Stops. Considers. Begins a photoshoot as if the waiting room was their muse. Capturing detail, considering angle. Unrushed. FC heads back to Flourescent Cyclist's (unchained) bike.

--- I am left considering the meaning of the photoshoot, I start to dream up details about their life that can never be qualified. I assume the engagement is over. Pleased to have an egnagement so close to setting up.

FC makes a phone call. (14.44)



Meantime ____

Passersby in again, out again, Hokey Cokey.

→ The room entices and it repels, it intrigues and it confronts.

[time not noted] A quick snap on the phone from *Baseball Cap*, who makes up for the momentary pause by jogging a little to catch up with friends. Curiousity is not ubiquitous.

14.48

Fluorescent Cyclist is back! FC strides back to Waiting Room and sit straight down on the bench. FC removes a paper from fluorescent mail bag and sits and reads with apparent comfort and disregard for what exists beyond the space.

≥≥ how much autonomy you have over time as relevant to social status and/or privelgie?

distance - travel - cost - accessibility

14.59

At a distance *Couple with Dog* observe from a straight 12 o'clock position. They discuss what is in front of them. Fluorescent Cyclist remains unchanged, even now being observed as part of this installation. Couple with Dog head straight to Waiting Room. An [inaudible] exchange between CwD and FC ensues. CwD take a seat. Three people are now sharing an unexpected temporal exchange. Are they now the 'artwork' – is this an artwork? Couple with Dog intermittently chat, the dog waits unbothered on the carpet.

15.03

Couple with Dog fill in a slip each, one at the insistence of the other.

15.09

Flourescent Cyclist has leafed through a few reading materials. FC approaches the small table, takes a slip and returns to seat. FC spends sometime scribing. FC rises with bag and does an extensive check to make sure all is accounted for and nothing will be left (waiting) behind. heads off, on foot, sans bicycle.

15.12

Flourescent Cyclist returns again(!). FC takes a fresh slip from the stand and writes breifly. What happened in the intervening three minutes. I ask myself: can a space wait, was Waiting Room waiting for FC's return? Was it secondary inspiration, a sense of something unfulfilled that drew them back?



retremporal bordering, delaying people, keeping people in waiting, keeping people in queues outside embassies, along the borders of European states, etc. It is also about how waiting is about sense: you feel it with your body Shahram Khosravi, The Funambulist, Issue 36

15:24

A Toddler and an Adult in Hat with Pram exchange some touch negotiations. *Toddler* made the initial approach from the adjacent bus stop. Adult in Hat with Pram is not keen. It seems that whilst they are waiting (for the bus) they may not have time to wait. There is much orchestration to manage in these situations, but after a minute or two *Adult*.. relents. There is an aggressive re-rearrangement of materials to suit their needs as magazines are thrown, and chair is moved to accommodate pram. Toddler, chooses not to engage with furniture provided but to roll around care-free on the carpet (I worry about sanitation) . *Adult.*. Then proceeds to read a story from a book in the pram and they all commune around this experience. There are frequent head flicks from Adult to check on oncoming buses.

15.37

A *Toddler* and an *Adult in Hat with Pram* scoop their belongings together and scramble for the bus.

15.48

People with Coffee are headed as if through the car park, they note the presence of Waiting Room, a half chuckle (friendly, I am sure) shrug and choose to share their coffee. The conversation has an intensity and intimacy, their body language suggests they are well connected. The experience appears less about waiting and more about convenience.

They stay for approximately fifteen minutes, interestingly filling in a slip (quickly) before departing. I am surprised by this as it seemed as though they had not considered this space as anything in particular. The filling in and submission of the slip seems almost as a currency in this instance.







Beer Can + Sun Tan: "A WAITING ROOM FOR WHAT?!!"

15.05.21 17.27_

I almost miss this astonishing encounter as back at the van. What encourages such passion and rage? *Is Beer Can+Sun Tan* frustrated at the author and implicator of the waiting room for being obtuse? Is it a lack of transparency? Is it a confrontation? Is it because all the answers are out of reach. Is it just pretentious art?

Beer Can+Sun Tan drives straight through with his exclamation which is delivered with great volume to the world as they continue their strides. Without waiting for an answer.



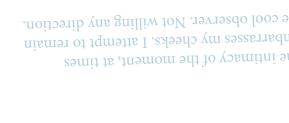
15.05.21 17.48

Conversationalists in motion "A WAITING ROOM FOR WHAT THOUGH INNIT?" – "YEAH THAT'S WHAT I WAS WONDERING" original conversation resumes.

_ - _- what is it about this set up that draws that question? Is it the location, and the contextual proximity of the waiting rooms surrounding? Is it coincidence?

15.05.21 17.54_

Another curious encounter with the *Cycling Family* the child most inquisitive - tempted? The adults are behind. Upon recognition they too wonder what it is for? One Adult suggests that it is for its own sake, the other adult dismisses this with the suggestion it is for the building 100 metres across the courtyard. They insist on moving *Cycling Family* on.





"Embrace authentic, meaningful moments as they arise; and take action to reclaim time from capitalism by radically transforming the world in which we live"

Maria Askew "Priceless moments: how capitalism eats our time" Open Democracy

15.05.21 18.07_

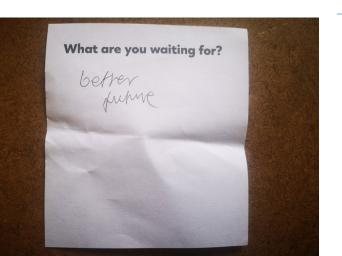
The About-Turners thriving in conversation bee-line straight past the waiting room. As if their conversation was the force that propelled their momentum it comes to an abrupt halt. They turn back towards Waiting Room.

They glance at the sign. They sit, remarkably for at least 3 minutes in silence. One with arms and legs crossed, as if their brain is catching up. One with more distracted energy, contemplates a magazine, checks the other *About-Turner* and attempts to mimic with a seemingly forced stillness.

18.10

The more active *About-Turner* considers the material, picks up a slip and turns to the other *About-Turner* "what are you waiting for?" (asking the question of someone else before themselves)

"Dunno, see what happens next"



"What of long-term waiting? What of situations in which people have been compelled to wait for years, generations, or whole lifetimes, not as the result of their voluntary movement through modern spaces but because they are consistently unable to realise their goals?

Craig Jeffrey "The Politics of Waiting" (The Guardian 2010)

Is it really possible to purely wait:



25.04.21 11.27__

I have known "square" for the 10 years I have lived in the area. I even say "hello square" when I walk to the shops. Two things: it's not actually square and it really is a piece of urban stage. Two walls and a paved stage that just always appears as a platform to me. I seize this as my opportunity. It's a different kind of experiment today, I week day morning – near a coffee shop and bus stop, but fairly residential. It's hot today. There is minimal interaction.

An extraordinary piece of choreography. I am yet again reminded of the theatre of it all. One *Panama Hat* senior, with shopping bag tucked under right short sleeved armpit is travelling eastwards towards the shop when *PH* gets about half way passed the waiting room and notices it. They stop. They pivot to their left, they face the waiting room (if indeed it can be faced) and they stare. Their body weight shifts a little more on the balls of their feet, they shuffle to the side a little, when down the other road of the corner waiting room occupies comes *Hatless* senior (also in short sleeved shirt). Their stopping is more immediate, more profound, but equally intrigued. The two seniors then seem to engage in a wordless dance moving two and fro every so slightly towards and away from the waiting room. It is as if they have been caught in slow motion. A waiting of its own kind. A dog barks rapaciously, the spell is broken, the dance is over.







25.04.21 12.01__

This is the only time this happens. A person with a tennis racquet strapped to their back strides up to the waiting room, as if it had been waiting for them all along. Sits down on the bench, chooses a magazine (an old issue of *Loaded*) and reads. They read for 7 minutes and leave. It's a remarkably clean, purposeful exchange. **Was it waiting?**

I am opened up to some new thoughts -- temporal timelines.

If there is something that *Tennis Racqueteer* - something with a known timeline - a letter to arrive. They would have been waiting regardless of Waiting Room, so what is this relationship between place and space.

- • - • - Certau, space as a practiced place, that in this instance, or perhaps in all instances, the person brings the waiting to the space (and thus it becomes the place) but the signifiers of the space (sign, bench, plant, arrangement etc) are part of this "grammar".

If *Tennis Racqueteer* was waiting for something with a non-defined timeline - self compassion - to borrow from one waiter - does attaching that to this place impact, define, intensify the experience?

What's useful in these questions?

Oid I miss a detail, or a moment, had Tennis Racqueteer seen another waiting

25.04.21 12.23

A dog-walker walks straight past smoking a cigarette, I think they acknowledge Waiting Room in the corner of their eye, but its quite fast. They steam on, then as if a button has been pressed they turn on their heels walk back to Waiting Room and say to the chairs "I WISH I COULD WAIT. BUT I CAN'T. I WANNA WAIT. I WANNA WAIT WITH YOU, BUT IF I WAIT I WILL BE LATE AND THERE WILL BE MORE WAITING, YOU GET ME?



17.05.21 15.54

Family engagement in Waiting Room is particularly curious. I get the impression that parents/guardians/responsible adults are thrilled at a (free) "activity" to occupy their children. I note here that we often, in English, talk about "occupying time", when one can argue that our time is consistently occupied by the systems that are designed to keep us working and consuming.

16.12 There's an argument in Family of 3 about "doing it right". The adult organises the occasion so that all are in sync filling in a slip about what they are waiting for. They seem to approach this task with ease and offer prompts to their young counterparts.

16.43 There is a family arranged in a pleasing composition, it's fundamentally three dimensional and reminds me of making theatre. The two children are sprawled on the floor. The adult, perched on the edge of a bench seat. I can't help noticing a feeling of disappointment that the families who engage with Waiting Room approach it as one of the free activities that could be offered by one of the near by institutional museums. I ask myself why and the response comes back as something like "It doesn't seem authentic". What exactly is my expectation of an "authentic" engagement, I have made an offer, it's simple, and it's unconditional. This reaction says more about me then the families I think. I think some more and hold myself accountable for an answer to the question on expectation. "an authentic engagement is an attempt to try and truly wait and/or to engage in the deeper questions of waiting within the structures that govern our temporal experience". Interesting. I start to acknowledge that this is part I of a much larger project.

From diary 21.12.20 The Parkopolis, in 2020 is a burgeoning market of barters for discipline and trade deals of behaviour between adult and child.



"Waiting is a particular temporal praxis, whose political dimension is more likely to be missed by those who make people wait than by those who have to wait for a visa, for food, for access to the city, etc"

Shahram Khosravi, The Funambulist, Issue 36

17.05.21 17.00

Two people of Impossible Youth see Waiting Room as a set for their photoshoot, this is one of two photoshoots that Waiting Room is commissioned for. This seems to bring a joy, the one sitting on the bench with a magazine, the photographer giving directions from behind their smart phone. I will never see these photographs.

17.05.21 17.04

The traffic around Waiting Room seems to burst and disperse and during one moment of dispersion I notice coming through the gate behind WR a couple on their wedding day enter (at least that's what their attire tells me) Someone has just got up and left WR. There are many glances at WR and fewer at the Wedding Couple. I'm semi hopeful Wedding Couple who have an entourage of photographers and support acts might take a moment to consider Waiting Room, alas their priorities do not shift from their task in hand and they glide straight past without even noticing it seems.

Can't quite catch it but *Group of 4 in Summer Bests* are engaging in jovial chatter " of course you have art in the park right by your front door, that's just so you". They are holding household mugs. They have entered the park as though it were their garden. Perhaps it is, although this park is a public space it is not under public ownership. It strikes me that they see Waiting Room as 'art' and that has particular connotations for them. And everyone.









to purely wait

Leopard Skin Coat+Sunglasses walks passed, when their attention is drawn by the waiting room in the grass on the other side of the road. Their walk turns into a joyful prowl but distance is maintained. Confirming, it is not indeed a mirage, they cross the road and stare a little longer. With an energetic movement they take seat in the lime green chair. On the edge. They clasp their hands and rock a little bit. Is this prompted by the space, the idea of waiting, the mood of the moment? They give in to the back of the chair. There are others walking by, glancing, staring, eye-balling. Some towards the bus stop others on the way home from the park. LSC+S does not seem to notice. Its as if the walls to the room exist for anyone inside of it, as this occurs often. After a few minutes pass Leopard coat +sunglasses surveys the table, picks up a slip. Without much need for time they scribble a note and post it in the box. They apply sanitiser and wait for another moment. They leave with that enigmatic energy that propelled them there in the first place. Half way across the grass, they turn back over their shoulder and smile. It is still real.

I am left with the impression this interruption to the expected was welcome, and I am thinking about waiting as revolution, the sky still dramatic.

21.04.21 19.12 ___

Two friends arrive on bikes, as if they knew the destination. There is laughter and chatter. They strew their bikes on the carpet. They have a slight nose around before sitting side by side on the bench. They get out two beers from their bag and relax into a conveniently located outside bar. After an hour or so, there are 4 beer cans on the floor. They have been chatting and watching the sun slide down the whole time.. Currency.



"They have clocks, we have time" Léopold Lambert cites it as a Kanaky phrase "Eux, ils ont des montres, nous, on a le temps"









01.06.21

Bikes whizz by this road very frequently. Some serious cyclists, some family riders, some getting from A to Q. I have noticed how frequently cyclists are drawn to Waiting Room. Some of them just for a stare (to the point at which I have concerns of a traffic accident). One cyclist in a blue t-shirt makes a particular effort to reroute and park up right beside. They remove their helmet whilst they take in the scene further, but this simultaneity of action tells me they have already made up their mind to engage. They sit on the lime chair. They look at but don't touch the magazines, Great Expectations and their gaze seems to end at the periphery of the carpet tiles. They sanitize their hands. They take a slip, and a magazine to rest on and they spend 7 minutes between writing and thinking, changing pens half way through. They don't linger except to check they leave the space as they found it and with enormous efficiency re-helmet and ride towards the sun. Did they wait?

I am struck in this second encounter of the day by the extraordinary intimacy of this experience. In this location the waiting room appears to offer something of a forcefield, of the unexpected, it is always so welcome. It's on a bit of turf in between extraordinarily expensive house, less but still expensive flats, two bus stops, and a road way to a park. It certainly looks incongruous but I learn that in this space, light is everything in the theatre of waiting. Some days the waiting room looks so large and present, others less significant, and its all to do with lighting. What we choose to light, we choose to tell.

01.06.21 19.50 _

About to pack Waiting Room up for the last time in this season of travel when I notice someone, approaching. They have circled round on their bike to engage in this curiosity. They take their time to dehelmet, and dismount. They walk to the bench chairs and have a sit. After a minute or two, they read some literature. They spend 12 minutes reading. They sit back as they had been at on the edge of their seat. They sit. They wait. Four minutes pass. They take up a slip. They write for about 8 minutes. There is a studious intensity to Blue T-shirt 2 . As if there was some recompense for not engaging in waiting room. I sense a vulnerability from watch post on the front step. Perhaps I invent it. Waiting seems to matter to this person. They leave.

22.05.21 11.45

A person in dungarees approaches. It's a bit cold. Dungarees stands for at least 3 minutes facing the waiting room (if indeed it can be faced) but their eyes are closed. They breath a noticeablefrom-a-distance breath and take off their boots. They walk to a chair, they sit, adjust their braids and then close their eyes. 5 minutes almost exactly pass, Dungarees open their eyes. They take out a book from the pocket of their dungarees and write a note. The walk directly to their boots and recover their feet. They walk on. I am struck again by the intimacy of this experience.



A photographer's serious study_________

I may have missed some but there are at least 51 photographs of Waiting Room out there. Documenting the out-of-the-ordinary is a commonplace practice of our contemporary living. But what in particular about these photographs? Do they lie in digital waiting to be reviewed, considered, forgotten, deleted?



"If we think about how time is conceptualized from ancient Greek, Chronos was a way to calculate and measure time: weeks, months, years. But there was also Kairos, which was more about the quality of time, versus the quantity of time. It's with Kairos that we can think of moments of action, moments that you can use for making a change. So many people are waiting for Kairos, moments when they can do something for their situation. It is exactly this revolutionary time that people are waiting for in countries under dictatorship, or Palestinians under occupation, or in refugee camps in Lesbos in Greece, etc. They're waiting for an opening." Shahram Khosravi, The Funambulist, Issue 36

16:52. Couple (a pregnant individual?)

16.53. Two young individuals and an older individual crossing the Heath. Older individual goes and takes a look up close. Doesn't engage.

16:54. An individual in a high heels crosses the road, engages with the WR. Big smile on their face, then a shake of the head. Then sits down and writes an entry. 2 mins.

16:57. A couple go and investigate. Don't engage directly but one takes photographs on their phone. 1 min.

16:58. Dog Walker stops momentarily, takes a photograph on their phone. Gets closer. Takes an up close picture. Departs, no slip.

16:59. Individual in pink shirt crosses the road to take a closer look. Brief glance. Departs.

17:02. Couple carrying big bags en route to the bus stop. One stops to read the slips. Doesn't engage further.

17:11. Couple — intrigued looks from the main road but do not cross the Heath.

17:13. Couple with backpack cross the road take a close look at the notes. Don't sit or leave a slip.



H

"What we witness in this indeterminate waiting is thus the daily reproduction of a mode of domination founded "on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity" Javier Auyero, Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina



"The social hegemony of the NHS waiting room provoked: Some complained about a loss of class deference and professional status, of being treated by patients as servants or 'suppliers of medicines' rather than as a medical advisers or even as friends." Michael Flexer, Waiting Times

NON-CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

There's a lacuna between my academic research and my practice research, the academic is ceaselessly articulate in disseminating the practice of waiting as a tool for political system gain and power exertion. Waiting as a tool is expressed as its own temporal border, its own exercise of colonisation, and its own slow death in the most extreme cases. (Such as Javier Auyero, Nicole Shippen, Shahram Khosravi)

Some quotes from some of these resources are shared in this journal as a continued reflection on this process, and to perhaps provoke independent consideration to a reader, it is very much a thinking-in-progress.

The practice-based part of this research in delivering Waiting Room, is more challenging to define. There are many variables to consider also: design, location, offer, demography, position. The inception of the project began during the third lockdown in England during the Coronavirus pandemic. An experience that brought with it its own kind of global waiting and a re-evaluation of the temporal currency of life. I had been researching social choreography when I drew a chair in a notebook. I then built a waiting room around it; I then connected a lot of dots. I wasn't sure the outcome or even what to expect, but I knew there was enough curiosity to offer the provocation to reconstruct a waiting room. There was an important friction for me in the initial concept in the juxtaposition of the waiting room with its environment. I wanted to see whether there was a rupture there that leant itself to a revelation of some kind. For example, a space that is clearly recognisable as a waiting room/area in a car park space, a field, on a roundabout etc.

Through this work I am now interested to consider what a sameness can provoke as much as friction. It's important to note the distinction between waiting and waiting room. Waiting is always designed, choreographed, and architected but waiting in line is different to the potential comfort of a waiting room. What would happen for instance, if the waiting room was taken to an immigration building or a job centre car park. What happens if you recharge the space? I am not sure of the efficacy of such a trial but having been so struck by the intimacy of the most memorable 'waiters' it's a curious thought.

Beyond the intimacy, the recurring and curious aspects of the experience were connected to the commitment to the activity of waiting and what people claim they are waiting for. There were no "instructions" or captions in the space. In most instances I included a selection of magazines and a form and reply box with the question "what are you waiting for?". The space identified itself by the particulars and choreography of the furniture and this alone implied waiting. The slips revealed some deeply personal reflections, that come across a little more like wishes than waitings and some seemed to flirt with the idea for instance one reply was "Godot". Perhaps a more illuminating question, if not obtuse would be: Are you waiting?

Regardless of how waiting is structured, it is in its essence, physiological. It is embodied – witnessing those sometimes-subtle body language shifts in the 'waiters', but it is slippery to define. It's also interesting to flip the coin over and ask, beyond the power dynamic behind the invisible and visible practice of waiting in our social lives, is there an opportunity to find agency or comfort in waiting. "I'll wait for you" or the joy of waiting bringing good news.

There is a complex relationship between waiting and surveillance, I have aimed to be the respectful observer, grateful for each person's time. Perhaps in moving forward it is about finding a mechanism for a deconstruction of this relationship. What this looks like, I am yet to conceive, but I think a re-thinking of the relationship between public-space-artist.faciliator is crucial

Where it appears, at this point, that the academic meets the practice is in the notional equation of waiting>change. Potentially in re-framing waiting to hold the potential for Benjamin's "jetztzeit" – the moment that holds revolutionary change. Whether that be systematic overthrow, or as people demonstrated time and time again in their waiting room slips, the will for change. So Part II, in some shape and form may look into the architecture of waiting as a space to motivate change, beyond its passive or wilful desire, either as calls for action or more intimate revolutions.





























