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'In redeveloping something, you always end up sucking some of the life out.' This was the British comedian Steve Coogan, Skyping into a recent screening of *24 Hour Party People* (2002) in Manchester. The film, in which Coogan stars, charts the history of Factory Records, the legendary Manchester label that released music by the likes of Joy Division, New Order and the Happy Mondays. Coogan was talking about the decline of the city's music underground, but his words come at a time when dazzling investments in the visual arts are bringing about a different kind of cultural transition. The multi-arts biennial Manchester International Festival (MIF), which launched in 2007, is to receive a permanent home by 2019 through a GBP£78 million development on the site of the former Granada television studios. The new 5,000-capacity venue will be named The Factory, in homage to the record label. Also impending is the transformation of Cornerhouse, one of the city's oldest cultural centres, into HOME: a new technologically impressive, GBP£25 million building that will also house the Library Theatre

Group. Whether or not these developments will prove either necessary or positive remains to be seen, but there is certainly change in the air.

It will be sad to say goodbye to Cornerhouse, which has been in its iconic city-centre building since 1985, presenting exhibitions and performances alongside a diverse film programme. Artistic Director Sarah Perks will continue to lead the visual arts at HOME, retaining a focus on artists' films, performance and new media. The year ahead, following the opening in May, is set to feature group exhibitions inspired by plays and films that will be part of the broader HOME programme and, as part of MIF in July, the venue will host *Neck of the Woods*, a collaboration between Douglas Gordon, pianist Hélène Grimaud and novelist Veronica Gonzalez Peña, to be performed by actor Charlotte Rampling. Perks says this kind of cross-fertilization is 'just the beginning': she is confident that further possibilities will emerge when artists of different disciplines converge within the completed building itself. I visited the construction site on a cold January afternoon and, with imagination, it was clear to see that it will be a flexible space, with live streaming available across the theatre, gallery and cinemas, and some screening rooms designed to host performances alongside film.

Postcard from Manchester

Change is in the air at
the city's institutions

Eleanor Clayton

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Elsewhere in the city, smaller arts organizations have been reasserting themselves. Now 30 years old, Castlefield Gallery celebrated its reinstatement as a non-profit organization with an exhibition highlighting its place within Manchester's arts ecology. '30 Years of the Future', which ran from December 2014 to February 2015, asked established artists, curators and critics who had worked with the gallery at various stages of their careers – including Ryan Gander, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Corin Sworn – to nominate emerging artists to be included in the show. The result was a fun, car-boot sale of a show, with pieces jostling against each other. *Michael's Theme* (2014), Kathryn Elkin's deconstructed chat show, comprising fractured behind-the-scenes footage from Michael Parkinson's eponymous talk show, offered a jazzy background to the characters of Timothy Foxon's juxtaposed found objects (all 2014), connected in the whirl of a glitter ball with Evan Ifekoya's wry, lo-fi music videos, *The Gender Song* and *Disco Breakdown* (both 2014), dealing with queer, racial and gender identity.

Castlefield also offers a membership scheme for artists

and opens unused spaces to the arts on a short-term basis through the New Art Spaces initiative. Their provision rocketed last year with the acquisition of Federation House, a six-storey building in the town centre hosting curatorial collectives, many with an emphasis on emerging, Manchester-based artists. Earlier this year, one of these spaces, TOAST, staged 'An Arbitrary Exhibition', a group show of entirely new work in which curator Tom Emery countered the often-flimsy nature of curatorial conceits by adhering to a set of rules, such as: 'Find a location with a gap in the programme. Your exhibition will run for that amount of time.' The artists – including Matthew Bamber, Sarah Sanders and Peter Sweetman, who are all based in the city – had complete control over what they chose to exhibit, with Emery improvising associations between the works once they arrived.

Federation House, which, at the time of writing, has just been commercially purchased, will eject New Art Spaces in May. Castlefield's programme manager, Matthew Pendergast, was sanguine about this development: 'That's just the nature of New Art Spaces. We've had

a brilliant year with Federation House, the audiences that the city-centre location has brought us, and the artists. We're definitely looking for a similar space.'

Perhaps one of the strengths of the art scene in Manchester is its increasing provision for early-career artists. Rogue Artists' Studios, in the rapidly developing Piccadilly Basin, and Salford's Islington Mill offer cheap studio spaces and engaging public programmes. Both are housed in former industrial buildings – spaces that constitute one of the greatest resources Manchester can offer artists – which recall a time when the city produced 65 percent of the world's cotton. Meanwhile, hybrid organizations like The International 3, which both represents artists and maintains a non-profit status, tread an interesting line between public space and commercial gallery. With new locations in Salford confirmed last year and an off-site programme that has included participating in the 2015 edition of Dialogues – the gallery-partnering initiative at London Art Fair, curated by Anna Colin – The International 3, like Castlefield, occupies an important position, linking studio to public exhibition venue to marketplace.

Coogan's caution against redevelopment came to mind at the re-opening of the Whitworth Art Gallery, part of the University of Manchester, which has doubled its public space over the last 18 months through a GBP£15 million redevelopment. The Valentine's Day unveiling had been much anticipated and, despite feeling nauseated by the advertising campaign urging me to 'fall in love again', a first glance into the new galleries did send my heart a-flutter. Three spaces expand upwards to delineate previously hidden Victorian roofs and the central gallery looks out onto Whitworth Park across a glass-sided loggia. Cornelia Parker's solo exhibition makes the most of these dramatic spaces: in the large-scale *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* (1991), the pieces of a garden shed hang frozen, as if mid-explosion, around a central source of light. Smaller works also focus on dematerialization, many translating violence into something delicate through the use of materials such as wire drawn from a bullet. The park provides a striking backdrop for the show-stopping *The Distance (A Kiss with added String)* (2003), Parker's take on Tate's version of Auguste Rodin's *The Kiss* (1889), covered with rope.

This close connection to the park, which features an expanding collection of public sculptures, will no doubt make the gallery popular in the summer. The importance of accessibility to the organization is also clear through the collection displays, popular choices conveyed neatly by their titles: 'Portraiture' or 'The 1960s'. But there is more: existing rooms upstairs feature concentrated bodies of work by Thomas Schütte and Sarah Lucas, while the new 'landscape gallery' boasts the European premier of Cai Guo-Qiang's *Unmanned Nature* (2008), a 360-degree environment complete with pool and created with gunpowder, a juxtaposition of explosiveness and serenity that resonates with Parker's work. The Whitworth received more than 18,000 visitors during its first weekend – a positive sign that, for the arts in Manchester at least, redevelopment may prove less a vampiric drain, and more a kiss of life.

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Architect's rendering of the new HOME building, Manchester