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HOW MIGHT WE REVALUE TRADITIONAL WAYS OF MAKING?

A research project revaluating Shetland knitting

The Maakin Lab



Maakin **Rethinking Relationship**

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Knitting on Shetland – a living practice or material past?

*Maakin*¹ addresses an open question of how we might revalue traditional ways of making by focusing on the practice of Shetland knitting and its current status in Shetland culture.

The project has drawn together different makers, administrators and researchers into a critical exchange that is creative, analytical and experiential. The project evolved over a period of two and half years.

The process is captured as a set of experiences on the project website www.maakinlab.org and related CD Rom.

The project is one of five within the first phase of a research programme, the On the Edge (OTE) research (www.ontheedgeresearch.org) hosted by Gray's School of Art, the Robert Gordon University. The research explores the value of the arts in remote rural areas.

Research as an inquiry through practice

The On The Edge research is concerned with testing new approaches to the visual arts in situations that are marginal to dominant modes of practice and related value systems. Most ways of making, disseminating and experiencing the visual arts are urban if not metropolitan. By extension ways of judging value and the quality of specific works are influenced, if not determined by urban, metropolitan ways of being. The location of Gray's School of Art in the North East of Scotland close to the Highlands and Islands and some distance from the Central Belt, has presented an opportunity to evolve new thinking about art practice and education from a different cultural experience.

¹ 'Maakin' is the vernacular for 'making' which is used in Shetland to mean 'knitting'.

A significant part of the research methodology is the development of five live projects in different locations of Northern Scotland, working with people who live in remote rural places and others who can inform and be informed by the research. Our aim is to draw relationships between the visual arts as a practice and ways of life, interests and challenges in these locations. The resulting projects raise issues, test new artistic tactics and strategies and lead to output that is varied in form but shares an aim – that of positioning artistic practice in relation to everyday living in specific places. Our understanding of this role has emerged out of the process of doing the research. It profoundly questions the assumptions that art emerges only from the autonomous, private, symbolic space of the artist. Instead artistic endeavour is positioned within human interactions and social relations at an interstice between private and public experience.

The research is conducted with individuals who contribute their different perspectives and experiences to the process. Participants engage creatively and critically in the process. They may not necessarily deliver art but they have a say in what kind of art or craft *could happen* in the space of the project.

The programme of five projects is supported by a spine of workshops that keeps the research relevant to itself through structured critical reflection. These structured events fulfil the purpose of raising critical debate about the implications of the work. All the project partners are invited to engage with the workshop programme and make a contribution from their experience and viewpoint.

Educating the Practitioner

One of the key issues from the findings across the suite of OTE projects is the need to rethink formal education in Art and Design. Traditionally in art schools as well as in professional practice, the value of the arts as a form of cultural practice is assumed and not questioned or tested. The emphasis in educating the practitioner has been on technique or skill, style and artistic uniqueness. However, the rapidly changing nature of social, cultural and political life has challenged the academy and the profession to embrace a much wider ambition while retaining the essence of quality artistic endeavour – that of developing the *critical practitioner*.

How does *Maakin* inform the evolution of critical practice?

The tough research questions posed by the status and practice of traditional knitting on Shetland are arguably pertinent to many indigenous crafts in today's global economy. These questions focus the realities of earning a living through the development of traditional skills; the strengths and weaknesses of commodification for profit alone, as well as the consequences of dislocating ways of making from cultural meaning and human experience.

Maakin is a means of expressing a sense of place and of constructing identity². It is also an economic force. The *Maakin* project has posed a series of open questions that acknowledge that traditions change and alter through time and in response to a complexity of factors, internal and external. In change there is loss as well as gain. How are individuals empowered to manage change? What might sustainable development mean in relation to Shetland knitting?

² Susan Benn, the artist engaged by OTE defined the project as a valuing of individuals as opposed to the valuing of what they produce (within a brand for example). From this idea, came suggestions of tracing individual product to the person who had made it and in relation to their specific way of life through an extended 'label'.

The mechanism for bringing makers and researchers together has been a creative laboratory (or Lab) structured as a series of gatherings of interested and committed participants. The original partners in the research were as follows:

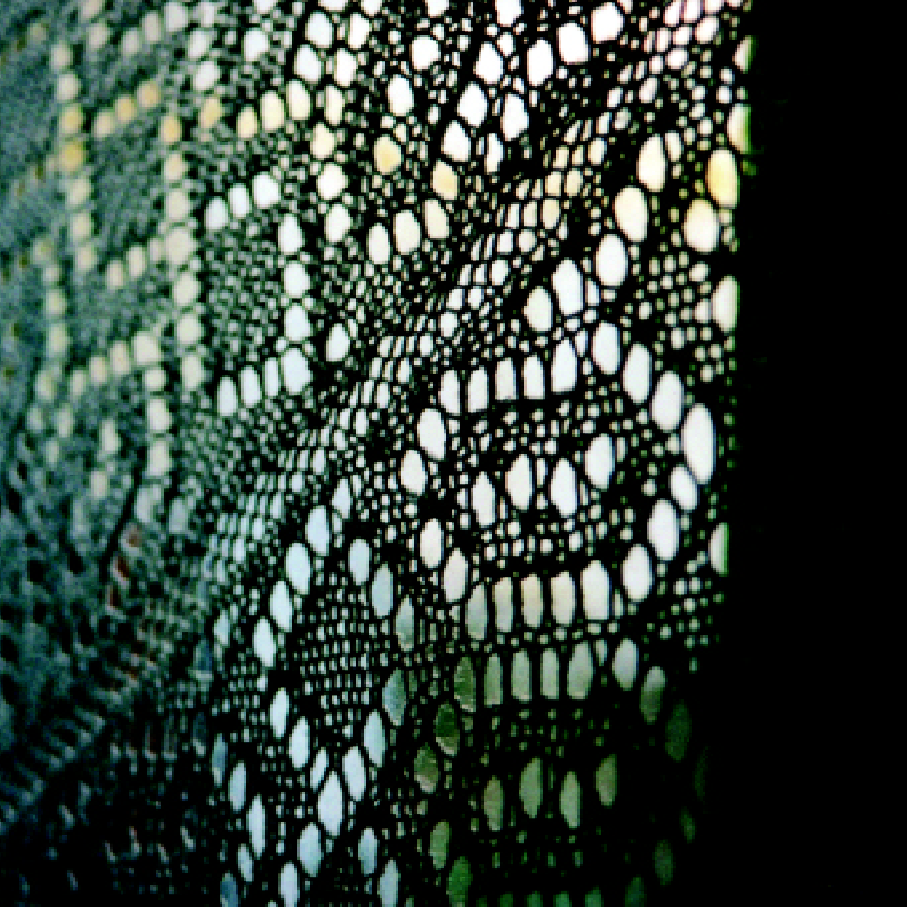
Shetland College Department of Textiles and Design, which is funded by the Shetland Economic Department to train individuals for the textile industry

Performing Arts Labs (PAL), an international London based organisation that is a research facility and seed bed for interdisciplinary collaboration between talented and creative individuals

On the Edge Research (OTE) situated within a network of partners including Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Duff House as the outstation of the National Galleries of Scotland, the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses in Fraserburgh, Shetland College and Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen.

The research questions underpinning *Maakin* are as follows

- Is traditional knitting on Shetland of value in a post oil era?
- If yes, what value does it have – social, economic and / or cultural?
- How might this craft tradition gather new energy in the light of cultural change?
- Who might be involved in a revaluing of Shetland knitting?



How are these questions meaningful to life in Shetland?

The challenge

Maakin came out of a challenge that the project partners at Shetland College identified early in the discussions with the OTE research team. Maggie Marr heads the Department of Textiles and Design and Stephanie Tristram is a lecturer within it.

On the one hand, Shetland knitting is part of the textile industry and therefore important to the economic sustainability of Shetland. On the other, the intervention of the oil industry (from the 1970's) into an economy predominantly dependent upon fishing and agriculture created alternative and more lucrative ways of earning a living. The consequence has been that few young people have taken up the knitting as a viable way of generating an income. Some of the older knitters are saddened by the lack of interest in knitting by the young. It is an activity that for them holds specific cultural meaning as well as pleasure.

The tensions between two forces - a strong craft tradition and its apparent lack of value to a younger generation, remains a key issue in Shetland College's role and remit to train new knitters. This concern is shared by the economic and development sector (Shetland Economic Development Department and Shetland Enterprise) and the arts sector (Shetland Arts Trust) who, in collaboration with the Scottish Arts Council, have appointed an indigenous arts officer, Hazel Hughson. Her role has been to review traditional craft and stimulate new ways of engaging a wider group of individuals, in particular the young. Hazel was a participant in the *Maakin* lab.

The early discussion between Shetland College and the On the Edge team indicated the need for a workshop activity that constructed an equitable creative environment between traditional knitters, contemporary designers and artists.

The changing context of Shetland knitting

The fragility of an island way of life

Knitting on Shetland has been an economic activity as well as a craft practice, forming a significant part of the crofting tradition. As such, it has supplemented the main family income from agriculture and fishing.

Ways of living in the Islands differ significantly from more complex economic systems within urban, metropolitan areas. Individuals are far more interdependent and therefore build relationships more on trust and familiarity than their urban counterparts. Any sharp change in one area of life will inevitably impact significantly on the whole network of relationships that sustain island life. The knitting or *maakin* on Shetland symbolises this interdependence between economics and social relations.

Constructing identity

Shetland knitting involves skills handed down from one generation to the next that produce value aesthetically and culturally through the manipulation of colour, form, patterns, texture and garment construction. *Maakin* is simultaneously functional and expressive. It is widely practiced particularly though not exclusively among women, who sustain and evolve the significant and rich knowledge base of the process.

However, in the following quotes it is clear that individual experiences of *maakin* are ambiguous. In the first, knitting is clearly the financial means to another end – unexpectedly so. Nan Irvine's knitting enabled her to actually carry out her job as a teacher.

'When I was twenty I would make a pair of gloves a night and bring in five pairs of gloves to sell to pay my digs and my bus. Can you imagine any teacher nowadays knitting to pay for the pleasure of teaching?'

Nan Irvine³

In the second, knitting is a means of developing one's own identity and part of what it means to be a Shetlander.

'It was very creative and something that was absolutely intrinsic. It has a meaning for you as you were doing it – it was part of your history'

Bess Jamieson⁴

Arguably the oil industry in the 70s accelerated the changing socio-cultural climate displacing the nature and value of the craft tradition. Most of the knitters on Shetland operating small to medium enterprises are between 50 and 80 years of age and upwards.

There are some for whom *maakin* represents gruelling hard work. They actively support the removal of knitting skills from the school curriculum, thereby increasing the possibility of *maakin* disappearing as a Shetland tradition.

³ Tristram 2003

⁴ *ibid*

The challenge of technology and market forces

Maakin as an economic force has also of course been challenged by technological developments in the garment industry, not least that of new fabrics that do not require to be hand washed. New computerised production techniques can reproduce the 'look' of a Fair Isle jumper without engaging in the less economically productive social and cultural aspects of making. These include the gathering together of an evening to which individuals take their *maakin* and the pleasure of developing by hand a garment without seams that a machine would be incapable of producing, or reproducing. Many of the fine lace knitted patterns are passed on from one generation to the next *through practice* and are often not written down.

The markets for Shetland knitting are predominantly the United States and Japan. Some of the women who own shops in Shetland and elsewhere explained that individuals and 'the buyers' (for retail outlets) tend to buy Shetland knitwear primarily for cultural meaning as much as functional garment. On the one hand this allows for the time to be spent in making a beautifully crafted piece to be properly costed and remunerated. On the other, it has a conservatising effect on what is made. The repertoire of patterns, processes and objects made has become locked into commodity that is externally defined as traditional. These market forces effectively rein in the experimentation that is essential to an evolving, *living* tradition. It is almost the inverse of the dynamic of product design that for its survival restlessly seeks out 'the new' and redefines itself from one season to the next. Neither situation in their extreme seems satisfactory.

Knitting and Opera – an unlikely alliance

These shifts in the tradition have also had the effect of exposing a deeply felt passion that many experienced knitters have in relation to knitting. This was recognised recently by Bill Bankes-Jones, the artistic director of an opera company, Tête à Tête⁵. Bill is currently investigating how his company might collaborate with Shetland spinners and knitters to create a new opera. Part of this involves working with On the Edge team in exploring the ideas and issues with as many knitters as possible. Early in the process Bill identified clear parallels between knitting and opera; both are predominantly concerned with building by hand and making to specification, 'the bespoke'; both 'knitting and opera suffer from the weight of their burden of history undermining the tangible excitement of the living art-form'⁶, both art forms are pursued with clear conviction by the individuals who practice them.

In his findings Bill clearly articulates why it is important to revalue making, whether of opera or knitting, because the act of making is absolutely essential to a sense of being alive.

*'I did also find it a little sad: exquisite shawls spread out to be photographed, almost in glass cases, robbed of their real beauty, which is an object in time, to be worn, to see in motion, in its human context. My own work in opera is entirely about life, motion and human value in all its elements. I feel this is the strongest reason to consider a project connecting the two art forms.'*⁷

⁵ Described as a 'useful, small scale opera company, dedicated to breaking the rules and exploring the fringes'.
Rupert Christiansen, Daily Telegraph February 2004

⁶ Bankes-Jones 2004

⁷ ibid

Where is vernacular placed in relation to unilateral design languages?

In the post oil era the Shetland Economic Department is examining traditions of making in Shetland as a way of rethinking the local economy. Shetland College, in fulfilling its remit to train for the industry, has, for the past decade or so, chosen to follow a design led route as a way of modernizing approaches to textiles on the Islands. In line with pedagogical traditions that are European wide, this approach is based on principles laid down by the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus introduced the rationality of design into a world that previously had expressed itself through a complexity of styles and vernacular forms. Design was imagined as a universal language of form, focused by replication and consumption. Students of design today are encouraged to draw directly from nature, distilling design ideas, colour palettes, textures from (in this case) the extremely rich natural environment of Shetland. In Bauhausian tradition objects and forms have elements of originality but always speak to the universality of the global market.

Traditional forms of making by definition operate within a different dynamic. They depend on vernacular conventions of form, colour, pattern, texture, and garment construction passed on from one generation to the next. These traditions undergo transformation through person to person exchanges. This suggests a subtler and more complex transition over time. It points to the specificity of languages within indigenous forms of making in which individuals master the components, the grammar of pattern construction and so on and create 'narratives' that are variations, even improvisations from these. There is a tension between what is shared in common with others and with the past, and what is newly created in ways that acknowledge the past within the present. Revaluing tradition therefore offers a very complex set of challenges and responses.

What happened?

Creating New Relationships

The OTE team was introduced to Susan Benn, Director of PAL, who for over 15 years has evolved and tested a methodology of cross disciplinary working. In visiting Susan Benn in London, I was particularly struck by the emphasis that she placed on connecting individual practice and talent (in dance, music, theatre, multimedia, broadcasting and playwriting) with the creative sector or industries. This focus on a relationship between sectors had been a starting point for On the Edge but here within PAL was a considerable track record of achieving outstanding results and methodologies tested over time and across art forms. The Labs generate new ideas and identify gaps in current thinking that can only really emerge through shared working.⁸ The Labs are also focused by production, resulting in ideas and prototypes that are then tested on the 'market' within the Lab experience. The whole process is dependent upon identifying and selecting key individuals with a desire to learn from others. They must bring considerable experience of their respective fields. The Lab environment aims to create 'a chemistry' within a group that is inquiring and productive of new ideas.

From the outset Benn challenged the combined thinking of OTE and Shetland College by opening up the Lab process to the economic and development sectors, insisting that they should be learning alongside or in close collaboration with the makers. This exposed what up to that point had been a relatively limited vision of a process that set out to influence making without engaging the wider processes of the infrastructure for marketing and ultimately economic sustainability. In the view of the OTE team, Benn had exactly the right kind of experience, positioning and methodology to take the project forward in the terms that the partners at Shetland College had identified.

⁸ For example the Dance Labs (1999-2003) resulted in dancer led (as opposed to choreographer led) production, a radical move within the field of dance that no single individual could have or would have thought of setting out to achieve. In 2001 Benn developed Broadband Lab that explored the implications of broadband for democratic participation, resulting in a number of significant developments in the field including the interactive news website www.oneworld.net.

The *Maakin* Lab

The eight day *Maakin* Lab took place on Shetland in May 2003. It was part residential at Burrastow House – a remote and beautiful family home and hotel for the initial period of the participants getting to know each other and thinking hard about what they wanted to achieve in the lab. The next stage to taking these ideas into action was an intensive experimental making period in the Textiles and Design Department of Shetland College with access to space, material, equipment and technical staff.

Benn likens the Lab methodology to ‘cooking’ – a process that is in some sense alchemical, transforming individual contributions into shared learning. Part of the process essential to the experience of creative learning is a degree of pressure, as Benn describes

‘Initial discomfort and dislocation are a necessary phase in being able to trust one’s own creativity in working with others.’

Susan Benn lab web diary (20/5/03).

Selecting Participants

The participants were carefully identified (collaboratively between the Shetland College, OTE and Benn) from a range of possible practitioners and thinkers who might have a desire or need to explore a chosen issue outside their normal working environment. These desires are often highly personal in nature.

Freddie Robins, a London based textile artist who uses knitting as a medium through which to explore human values⁹, participated in the Lab to challenge her personal use of natural fibres. Freddie described her desire 'to reinvent Fair Isle and lace knitting – techniques that I have always loved.'

The final mix brought together Shetland makers, artists, designers and craftspeople from across the UK, including the OTE research team. Each person had to commit to participating fully and be willing to explore and share ideas together as a condition of nomination.

The participants included:

Norma Anderson	textile artist
Christine Arnold	designer and lecturer in Design History, Gray's School of Art
Gordon Burnett	product designer, researcher and Reader in Craft, Gray's School of Art
Heather Delday	artist and research student to On the Edge research
Frankie Geeson	textile artist and researcher at the London College of Fashion
Carole Gray	artists, research professor and co-ordinator, On the Edge research
Margaret Hamilton	designer knitter and businesswoman
Hazel Hughson	designer knitter and Indigenous Craft Development Officer for Shetland
Freddie Robins	textile artist
Mary Thomson	designer knitter
Stephanie Tristram	textile artist and lecturer, Department of Textiles and Design, Shetland College

⁹ Robins makes garments such as multi fingered gloves 'Hands of Hoxton', 1999 and objects such as 'Knitted Homes of Crime', 2002 that raise questions on wider social and cultural issues and challenge assumptions on human behaviour.

Critical Reflection

A crucial part of Benn's methodology is that all the participants are required to make a testimonial at the end of each phase.

'For me the beauty of the Lab was the creation of a space in life and work for new growth. It was like slipping temporarily into another dimension. By physically removing myself from outside issues, work, general life and by being somewhere with the facilities to explore my project, I allowed or pushed myself further than I would have in different circumstances.'

Norma Anderson, textile artist, Lab Testimonial, July 2003

The Shetland Development Department and Shetland Enterprise Company were unable to send representatives to the final day of the Lab – the 'tasting' (as Benn describes) by the creative industries of the Lab outcomes. Maggie Marr as Head of Textiles and Design, was unable to participate in the Lab because of departmental responsibilities. The individual responses of those who did attend were overwhelmingly positive and indicated the need for further development.

'Some great ideas for us to take into our work!'

'Hope some final products eventually reach the market place. Great ideas!'

'How great it has been to bridge the gap between education, industry, craft and art and to see what happens when creative risks are taken with such enthusiasm'

Evaluation labels Friday 23 May 2003

A Shift in Ownership

Gradually we experienced a shift of ownership away from the original partnership of Shetland College, PAL and OTE to the makers who had participated fully in the process and who expected to take the developments into future action. This shift was a positive move, indicating a tentative grouping of different individual makers to lobby those responsible on Shetland for appropriate support for their development and output. It also prompted the need for more work to enable this self motivation to be accessible to others.

'I think it would be wonderful if we could conduct a series of small labs in Shetland and maintain the excitement that we have all experienced and share it with other workers. I think that could only be good to encourage creativity and communication because I really believe that if you are a creative person you really need to be communicating with other creative people, to keep your mind alive basically, because we can get very isolated and very introspective.'

Mary Thomson, designer knitter, Feb 2004

A second Lab event was held in September 2003 to discuss how to take the prototype work further. This was followed in February 2004 with a visit of the Shetland participants to Gray's School of Art. Unfortunately neither the economic or educational sectors were able to attend, despite considerable effort and available funding to secure their participation.

Feedback from these events again was extremely positive.

'This type of event is invaluable to designers in remote areas especially as one tends to become disconnected from new thinking'

Margaret Hamilton, designer knitter and owner of Fibres knitwear shop in Lerwick.

What were the outcomes of the Lab process?

The Lab produced a wide range of outputs and outcomes. Outputs, the tangible developments from the project, are explored in some detail on the website. In summary these were

- New design ideas through experimental processes and new creative tools leading to potential new product and making practices
- The need for a strong network supporting Continuing Professional Development for Shetland makers within interest groups who could undertake strategic development
- The potential for imaginative educational resources to encourage young knitters as the next generation of Shetland makers supported by expertise from Gray's School of Art and PAL
- Rethinking branding and marketing for Shetland product to reflect both traditional and contemporary values within a global arena
- Unexpected co-developments of new projects informed by the OTE experience to include for example a production provisionally entitled 'the Odyssey by Tête-à-Tête', the London based Opera Company

What did we learn?

In research terms it is the meta level of learning that most concerns us. We are trying to understand more deeply the positioning of traditional craft practice at a point of change. In this case this change is marked by the emergence of post industrial culture in Shetland, the post oil era. We are concerned to understand how craft is perceived and renewed in the lives of individuals who value and practice it, how it is passed on from one generation to the next and from one individual to the next, how as a marginalized practice it can inform the centre of industrial production and marketing with a different set of values. These might include the connection between making and sociability, the pleasure in what it means to make rather than manufacture or replicate, judgment in relation to a set of exceptional skills. How can the output be marketed in ways that do not dilute the expression of alternative values that are inherent within it? In other words, what are the real challenges facing contemporary craft?

Meeting Expectations

The points of learning through the research coincide with key points of divergence between expectations, values and management that we encountered in the process of realising the Lab. Two are worth noting.

1. The Lab process did not realise the necessity to bring representatives of the whole network of influential parties to the table. The Lab successfully engaged *key individual* artists, designers, traditional knitters and researchers both from and outwith Shetland in a productive learning experience. It failed to involve *key representatives* of the education, economic and administrative sectors of Shetland currently responsible for decisions on infrastructure that affect the future of the knitting.
2. The project did not fulfil the specific expectation of our Shetland College partners to deliver a teaching method or creative workshop¹⁰ that could be added to the existing portfolio that would enable the College to fulfil its remit of training for the industry.

To have achieved the first would have entailed a radical change in the way in which individuals from different sectors relate to each other. This experience typifies a problem that occurs across the sector of the creative industries¹¹. The second expectation is more modest and, one might argue, therefore potentially more achievable. In reality the process, did not always succeed in building the necessary trust for shared and open learning, though the experience nonetheless provided important learning for the research itself and the need for 'adjusting sensibilities'.¹²

¹⁰ Perhaps the significant difference between a lab and a workshop is that the former as developed by PAL is a space of shared learning, whereas a workshop normally distinguishes the roles of teacher and taught for the purpose of acquiring a specific skill.

¹¹ Benn's methodology and considerable international expertise (over 15 years) is motivated by the deceptively simple problem

– how to bring artists/the makers, together in dialogue with those with those with power

– the money to buy or support the creative 'product'. Interview, Delday with Benn, June 2004, London, part of PhD thesis, Delday H. *Close as a Construct to critically investigate the relationship between the artist and the everyday* (2004) Gray's School of Art

¹² Douglas and Delday 2003



‘We have got to get a way of taking ideas and networking into product development’

Linda Coutts, Shetland Island Council Development Department structured interview 18.5.04

Production and marketing of knitting on Shetland are handled within a single trajectory beginning with the individual maker who develops pieces of work. The quality of output of Shetland craft producers is then judged by two key organisations, Shetland College and Shetland Arts Trust, who make recommendations to the development and enterprise sectors. Post lab meetings followed by structured interviews (Feb and May 2004) confirmed the distance between individuals responsible for the three processes of production, quality control and funding.

‘I would always go through the Trust and get their advice on the subject (arts)...They are our experts in the field and that is what they are there for so why should we know all that stuff when they are there to do that for us....’

In discussing possible future support for the *Maakin* project participants the Development Department has certain criteria to consider.

‘I was trying to explain the problems that as a unit set up specifically to generate economic benefityou cannot fund intangibles. That is not to mean it is not valuable it is just that it is difficult when you have schemes that fund specific things....’

Linda Coutts, Shetland Island Council Development Department structured interview 18.5.04

It is clear that the Economic Development Department view their role as a source of funding on recommendations from the two intermediaries of the College and the Trust. Within a post oil era, sources of public subsidy that at one time were very healthy are dramatically diminishing, a situation that has focused thinking across the sector.

A New Proposition

The Lab offered a fundamentally different way of handling the two processes of production and marketing by proposing a joined up approach to mutual learning and creative exploration. Instead of a trajectory we were looking (at least potentially) at a relational model in which the maker could inform the marketing and economic sectors about values in the making process and the makers' requirements for sustaining their work. In turn individuals from marketing and enterprise could become conversant with ways of judging artistic quality by learning from the experts in the College and the Trust. Effectively this relational model is not based on bounded, discrete spaces of responsibility but on sharing judgement and decision making between individuals who contribute their discrete areas of expertise. The resulting shared forum is focused by learning across the sectors involved. Production within this relational space is not governed 'by a division of labour and ultra specialisation, mechanisation and the law of profitability'.¹³ It takes on another form or way of working that allows production to be informed by the values and experience of participants, and less by externally driven market forces imposed upon them. Each contributor is part owner of the whole cycle of production and trading. Their contribution is explicit and visible within it.

As artist/researchers we acknowledged the radical implications within this model. What impact might such an approach have?

¹³ Nicolas Bourriaud has developed the notion of relational aesthetics to theorise new approaches to visual art practice that take as their starting point the social realm. Bourriaud 2002:9.

New concepts emerge from shared exchanges

This potential is hinted at within moments in the Lab in May 2003¹⁴. Within the critical discussion of the Wednesday session, the team of Gray and Hughson present to the shared space a series of experiments concerned with 'gloveness'. The conversation elicits different experiences of wearing and needing gloves. Tristram describes tethering horses in the dark, a process that requires two hands where she needed both light and glove in the same object. An entirely new idea emerged in the conversation – light gloves as a safety device for children in the winter (Robins). The dynamic at work here is open ended, playful and exploratory. Ideas and experiences bounce back and forth. Ideas of quality are *recognised* more than self consciously developed in the encounter. Innovation is dependent upon individuality – with imagination feeding meaning, as well as mutuality.

The Future

The Lab in a modest way connected individuals who are 'normally kept apart from each other'¹⁵ – the internationally recognised artist from the traditional crafts person, the researcher from the maker, the educationalist from the practitioner. It opened up what had previously been new lines of questioning. The Lab is a reconfiguration of social space that is focused by a set of challenges that a community identifies for itself. The Lab is not a set of minor modifications to what already exists but a process of radically rethinking the locus of creativity. Talented individuals come together and new things happen that critically engage everyone involved to make good ideas sustainable.

Limited engagement by representatives of sectors was frustrating because it muted the potential resonance of the Lab in the imaginings of people on Shetland, who might then take the traditional knitting forward in entirely new ways.

¹⁴ Lab Diary Wednesday 21 May 2003

¹⁵ Bourriaud 2002.

Implications for training

This learning represents a fundamental shift in how craft is thought about in culture and in education. Where the Bauhaus values the individual in his or her specific time and space of production, the Lab values the social and traditional through the experience and practices of differently empowered individuals, who may, if they so wish, bring their values and ideas to the whole process – production and dissemination.

Elizabeth Johnston, a specialist in hand spun, hand knitted garments, suggests that the future for knitting is positive precisely because Shetlanders will decide for themselves. She is discussing the issues of teaching traditional knitting in schools with Tête à Tête Opera company and representatives of On the Edge.

*'It is coming from Westminster that everything has to be cut back. So we look at everything but the local Council has the last say...on what to spend the money on. Because Shetland has always spent a lot of money on education, we have to look at that too. I don't see Shetland changing their minds about what they want to spend the money on. I think it will resolve itself. I think the knitting will stay.'*¹⁶

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www.maakinlab.org

www.pallabs.org

www.ontheedgeresearch.org

¹⁶ 22.4.04 On the Edge video extract



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