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'WORKING IN PUBLIC SEMINARS' PROJECT

SEMINAR THREE

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Introduction

Part one – Public art: the perspective of the Highlands and Islands (Robert Livingston)

Robert Livingston: I am the Director of High-Arts, which is the Arts Developments Agency for the Highlands and Islands. High-Arts is delighted to be working with the UHI Millennium Institute and with On the Edge to help to present this third seminar in the Working in Public programme.



It is clear that the core group who have been going through these three seminars have been working very hard because this is the homework I got in advance of this evening's seminar. It was very interesting to pick up from that some of the themes that are clearly coming through the programme we will be talking about tonight.

It seems to me that the concept of visual artists working in the public arena is in some respects still relatively new in the Highlands and Islands. We have a host of galleries – large and small, public and private – but it is still a relative rarity for work to be made and presented outside that defining frame of the gallery.

Perhaps the issue of the visibility of the artist is still there for us a slightly vexed one. After all, I defy anyone to name the sculptors who fashioned Inverness's two most prominent public artworks, Flora McDonald at the Castle and the Regimental Memorial at the Station. At this point somebody should put their hand up and say, they know – but no! Well, never mind.

This disappearance of the artist I think still happens. A few years ago, a trust dedicated to celebrating the work of the author, Neil Gunn, raised the funding for a major memorial to the author situated above Dingwall. You will learn a great deal about Neil Gunn if you visit the work, but nothing at all about the identity of the artist.

Perhaps the most impressive and monumental public artwork of recent years in the Highlands and Islands has been a set of memorials to mark the crofting wars in the Western Isles designed by Will MacLean for several sites on Lewis. The unveiling of these dramatic and imaginative works was a stimulus for large and inclusive community art events at the time. But just a few years later – now – their presence on the web is virtually zero. The ability of these memorials to contribute to, even to stimulate, awareness of and debate around the significant events to commemorate has been emasculated. They are in effect dumb.

Here in Inverness, in the early days of the generosity of National Lottery Funding has made possible the transformation of the relatively low-key premises of Highland Printmakers into a new showcase for contemporary art and ARTM, Inverness. Just a few years later it had closed and the Printmakers had reverted to their original purposes of education and provision facilities. A highly ambitious and well-funded programme of bold and often international conceptual art has been received by the people of Inverness, not so much with hostility, as with indifference. The reasons, of course, are in retrospect obvious: a lack of appropriate context, a failure of dialogue, an unwillingness on both sides to engage and participate.

Fast forward to last September and an event held here in the heart of Inverness called 'Imagining the Centre' devised by Matt Baker, lead artist for the City of Inverness Project (we will see it this evening) in tandem in with Inverness's Public Art Co-ordinator, Evi Westmore. This one-day happening (there is no other word for it) ranged to the thoughtful and the celebratory to the zany and to the bizarre and connected directly and immediately with the widest possible cross section of people out in the streets of the Old Town that Saturday. That it did so is a tribute to both the dedication of the artists involved, but also to the clarity of purpose behind it, and the open-ended process of dialogue which it initiated and which is still going on.

That event is just one part of what I think is reasonable to describe as an explosion of art in public in the Inverness area. Perhaps that is an inevitable consequence of the unparalleled growth of this new city. 'Imagining the Centre' proved, I think, how effective such work can be if it is approached in the right spirit and with the right understanding of the role and remit of the artist involved.

So that is why I welcome this programme of seminars so warmly – providing, as they do, an opportunity to step back at this critical time and take stock of issues and challenges which face artists today working in the public arena. There are probably more artists – and more interesting artists – living and working in the Highlands than ever before. But as our own recent research has shown, their roles, their identities, their places within their community, are still often unresolved questions.

I would like, if I may, to dedicate this seminar to the memory of our colleague, Evi Westmore, who in less than a year did so much to help foster this current wave of activity and whose tragically early death from cancer has robbed us all of a very rare talent.

It is my pleasure to pass over to Anne Douglas who is Director of the On the Edge programme at Gray's School of Art at Robert Gordon University and ask her to explain the wider context of this seminar programme.

Part two – Working in Public: a learning framework (Anne Douglas)

Anne Douglas: I just wanted to spend a few minutes to give you the context for this seminar. This is the third in a series of four events called Working in Public and the whole programme is funded by The Scottish Arts Council. The Scottish Arts Council is currently building a new resource for public art in Scotland called Public Art Resource and Research, Scotland (PAR+RS). Our work within that resource is to try to develop a network of artists and arts individuals and to develop the debate. Another aspect being an archive of high quality projects within Scotland.

In developing the seminars, we are actually taking advantage of Suzanne Lacy's presence with us at Gray's School of Art. Suzanne is developing her own research into a very significant body of work, which is ten years of working in Oakland, California, between the period of 1990 to 2000. The work is concerned with issues of race and colour and for us it offers a very rare example of the practice. First of all, it is very high level; secondly, it is extremely well-documented; and thirdly, it is very long term.



Suzanne's work presented us with an amazing opportunity to cluster around her own particular investigation a wider enquiry into the changing nature of art and public space. That is one dimension.

Another dimension is a very important group of artists and arts administrators who formed the Core Group within Working in Public – about eighteen individuals who have brought their considerable experience of practice, to this discussion. The Core Group have actually tracked all three seminars and contributed their own experiences to the discussion.

The final event – the fourth event – will be focused mainly by their experience. Each event has taken the same kind of format which is an evening public lecture (which Simon is going to deliver for us this evening) followed in the morning by a presentation by Suzanne of one of her projects within the Oakland suite, followed by a dialogue between the guest speaker and Suzanne, and then the wider public.

In this case, we also have Grant Kester who presented the first guest lecture. He has rejoined us for this event, and will join that dialogue tomorrow morning.

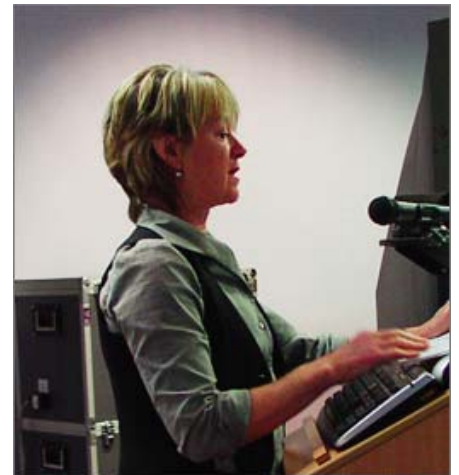
Each seminar has followed a different theme. The first one was Aesthetic and Ethics of Working in Public, the second was Power and Representation and this seminar is Quality and Imperfection. We raised those themes in discussion again about key issues that arose through the Oakland Projects. They also have resonance beyond the Oakland work. I think these themes have proved a really good platform to begin to raise the debate.

At the final event, which we hope will be in Edinburgh in September, the whole dynamic will be inverted. The work of the core participants will be at the centre instead of Suzanne's Oakland work.

Part three – The Oaklands projects: a brief overview (Suzanne Lacy)

Suzanne Lacy: As we have been doing, we decided that at each evening I will give you a brief overview of the Oakland Projects just so that you know what we are talking about. Then the speaker will be doing whatever it is he or she does, and then in the morning we will try to bring these practice and theory pieces back together.

I wanted to say that, because of my education and the era I came out of which is the activist '60s, I began art late and through that art, and through studying with Judy Chicago (a feminist activist) and Allan Kaprow (a performance and happenings artist), I had launched on a project that was, in a way, as complete as I could get it, through the Oakland Projects.



My work in this era began in the mid '70s with something I called Three weeks in May and ended around 2001 with the last of ten years of projects in Oakland. I would say that this body of work looks at the intersection between politics, performance and publics. It is a search to understand - Can you make art that is life-like, or can you make life that is like art? Where do you fail in that endeavour? and What are the possible successes in that endeavour? I have taken this time to reflect on the Oakland Projects because they are the most solid and in depth example that can inform this investigation.

I want to thank On the Edge, Carole Gray, and my thesis advisers, Anne and Grant Kester for helping me, and all of you who are part of the seminar series, for your questions and your stringent challenges because that, too, is helping in this unique form of participatory research. How could we do it in any other way, for those of us who make this kind of art?

The second part of this research is an interview process I am doing now in Oakland with between 40 and 50 people that I have worked with during those ten years. They range from kids that were 15 when I began working with them to people who were majors at the time I began working with them.

Looking back on this trajectory, this ten years of work was a collective research project into some key issues around youth. It had a political analysis that was developed over time with people in the community and with the artists I worked with. It was not so much about doing good, as investigating what I would now call 'deep strategies' of art practice. How are they part of an aesthetic practice and how are they part of community activism?

The other notion besides 'deep strategies' that is interesting to me now is, 'embeddedness' or 'embedding change' in ongoing institutions. We do understand that we embed change in the lives of people we work with, but that that issue of changing the police department, the school system and so on is an infinitely more complex process.

Let me say three things about these projects.

First the City of Oakland, I have discovered, is probably a city unlike any that you have here in Scotland. It is the most diverse of a series of diverse cities in California. The reason it is the most diverse is that there are 108 languages

spoken in the school system. Oakland has about 350,000 people. Compared with Los Angeles, this is a place where diversity is fore-grounded in people's consciousness. It is a place where power is distributed cross-race – which is very unusual. Classes of people are also represented in all the major ethnic groups. These are Asian, Asian Pacific, Latin, Latin American and African American. In fact, through the Black Panthers, the activist' strikes, the Railroad Unions and so on, there is a very strong history of African American political organising, in particular, in this region. Oakland is a town that is made up of 95% people of colour in its public schools, and 95% white in its private schools. It is a town that has one quarter youth under the age of 25 and it lives in a State where they said, 'Where California goes, there goes the nation'.

A series of important political trajectories took place throughout these ten years. These could be understood through the context of work that began to analyse and interpret these political trajectories. There was a constant feedback process in which groups of people were trying to understand the situation in which we lived. We worked around the theme of youth. We worked within four systems: the schools, the criminal justice system, health care, and public policy. The seven or eight major works that we developed throughout those ten years addressed various aspects of the system.

As we moved along, one piece created the next piece. The team that worked with us from artists to young people grew up and became leaders from one project to another - from politicians to school board principals. People left one office and took another. People in media would do a documentary and then come back to report on another documentary, or report on another event. They travelled with us so that that network of producers got to be very large by the time the projects were over.

There were eight major performances. There were installations as far away as Japan. There were museum events, but for the most part, everything took place in the public sector without being sponsored by a particular museum. Instead, the strategy was to get everybody to buy in to the sponsorship - from the mayor's office on. The museum was one step along a very complex way. It involved most of the NGOs in the community, of which there are many.

I just want to finish by saying that there are three themes I would think that are very important to this work.

One is that it was an artistic practice. This research was always framed as art, thought of as art by a few key artists. Other people thought of it as either art of a different stripe or they weren't really concerned with that question. But that did not matter.

For those of us embarking upon this very intensive research into the nature of public art, visual things took a priority. The negotiations and the quality of the negotiations had a performative quality. The fact that we were deconstructing media imagery was an art process, but we were looking at mass media instead of a painting. The fact that it was an artistic practice was very important.

Second, we had a deep obligation to youth development so that every project that was made became, perhaps, infinitely more burdensome but also much more intriguing because we needed to build in support systems for the great numbers of young people that participated. In the last project, 'Code 33', there were 350 young people just attending workshops and 1,000 over the ten years.

Finally, the idea of youth was not just young people as in education. It was youth as in a political metaphor. It was the way youth operated at that time, in 1990, as the notion of youth culture and the way in which race is so much a part of this discourse. That was basically the way in which we were exploring it. We were not just doing a project for youth, we were looking at the social condition of young people. We were looking at youth development and we were looking at youth as a political metaphor.

I am very honoured to have Simon Sheikh here tonight, and Tom Trevor and Grant Kester to support me in this research and to be here to share their thinking with you as Scotland moves forward in, I think, a very interesting way. This is

one of the most collective national processes to look at where you are going to go in terms of public art. Thank you very much.

The Public and The Imaginary

Simon Sheikh

Guest lecture: Seminar 3 Working in Public: Quality and Imperfection

Thanks to Anne and Suzanne for inviting me. It is the first time I have been to the Highlands, so it is very exciting. I will talk about a couple of things tonight. It might be a bit theory-based. Then at the end I will also show you a video of an artwork and I will explain later why I have chosen that work.

I will talk mainly about two things: one is how do we define the public – not only as public space, but the public as a group of people. I am very interested in these issues both in a curatorial and a theoretical sense. Those in the core group have read some of these thoughts so they will be familiar to you, but I thought maybe it would good in this context to go into some detail.

Then I will move from that to the idea that a public is not a given thing. It is not something that exists. It is something that is partly produced from a mode of address. It could be a work of art. It can also be a political speech act. It can be a piece of architecture. In order to construct such a mode of address, one has to try and *imagine* the public. This is the current research project that I have just started. It will probably end up in a book in three or four years' time. The book will be about what you might call the 'imaginary' as a conceptual tool. (I will talk about that a bit more later on). What is the relation between art production and exhibition-making on the one hand, and on the other what we can call the political imagination. That is - how do we imagine the world, and how do we imagine the world being different?

First I will try and map out the territory of the public sphere and see what the changes are that have happened within it. What do those changes mean for art production? I would name this a toolbox for communication and for the politics of representation or representational politics in the public realm. Perhaps the Oakland projects revolved around these concepts.

I will take as my point of departure different conceptions of the public sphere based on practice and spectatorship. This idea of public space (even as a construction) is fundamentally fragmented. It does not exist as a unitary space, as 'a' space. It exists as a number of fragments – perhaps. I will then explore the problematic but also the potential that lies in this idea of a fragmented public sphere. What kind of politics lie behind the construction of a particular public space (as real or imaginary)?

Where is work in a public sphere located today? Is it in a public space or is it in the media, perhaps? Is it in parliament and politics? Is it in newspapers or to use an old word, in letters? We do not know. How can critical interventions be made into this public sphere? How can artistic interventions be made into this unlocalised public? How can *critical* artistic interventions be made into it?

How do you perceive, or construct, a specific public, a position or a participatory model for spectatorship? How is this different from a more generalised modernist notion of the public? Does this entail a reconfiguration of what was known as 'the bourgeois notion of the public sphere'? Does it entail a completely different arena, or perhaps a number of different spaces and spheres? To put it in other terms: 'What can be put in the place of the public sphere?'ⁱⁱ This is double-edged of course. If there is a place of the public

sphere, what can you put in it; and, on the other hand, if the public sphere as an historical formation is disappearing - and that is arguable, what would we put in its place?

Finally, I will talk about the connection between the public and the imaginary. As a simple example, whenever one is involved in a certain speech act, a certain representation, one tries to imagine one's public. Even in this case, I can probably see most of my public (except from the virtual public on the screen), but I can still only imagine how you will receive the way I speak. I can try to speak in a way that I think is interesting to you, or that would make me look interesting, or that will make me look convincing, that will make me have a certain authority, or I can try to deconstruct my own authority. I can use different kinds of speech in order to try and produce you, as a public, in a way that will fit to my – let's say – politics of desire, or intentionality.

We tend to know instinctively what public art is. Traditionally it was very simple what it was. It was an object placed in public space – usually the city square. This has also been called 'plop art' by some people. It is supposed to be distinguished from art made in the private sphere but it is basically gallery art. Private spaces are not public spaces, even though some people tend to think of galleries as public spaces. Museums, on the other hand, *are* public spaces. Public art in museums would traditionally (or at least from the middle of the twentieth century until today) entail a different audience, a different notion of spectatorship. What was done in a gallery could be elitist but in public space you would have to talk in a much more universal way to everyone at the same time. It had to be unassuming and, usually, abstract or representational in a very historical way.

Interestingly enough, the debate around the public artwork still takes place as much before the conception of the work as after. That is completely different, of course, from galleries or museums where, if there is any public debate, it is after the work is shown. There might be a scandal, or it might be a joyous occasion. Everyone might think this is *the* show, record high numbers of people coming to see it, such as the artificial sunset at the Tate Modern in London, Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, Oct 2003-March 2004. In public art, there is always a debate by which you have to ask the community, 'Do you like the sculpture here?' or 'Can we have it there?'. There is a whole consultation process to determine the materials of the work. I mean material in both senses: the way the work is constructed (its formal language) and its content. This material has to last for generations. When we put up something in public space, it has to last for a long time. It has to supersede history. These sets of issues involve a long political and planning process.

Sometimes there is also a lot of debate after the work has been sited, resulting in the work's removal or re-siting in other locations. The most recent example of public sculpture gaining great symbolic value through its siting and subsequent removal, is the monument for the liberation of Estonia in 1945 that had originally been put up by the Soviet Union. A large number of Estonians (or rather the current National Estonian Government) considers what happened in 1945 as *not* a liberation from fascism (even though it certainly was that as well). They see it mainly as colonialism from Communist Russia and an end to their independence (which it undoubtedly also was). So they wanted to remove this sculpture that had a very significant site and put it elsewhere. All of a sudden there was a lot of tension because the Russian minority felt that removing this work was an attack on them. There was a big public debate around sculpture that no one had really, otherwise, noticed.

The interesting question to ask is - What public was produced here? Why did the politicians take the decision at this point in time to remove the sculpture? This is not a representational act. I would describe it as an act of de-presentation - that is to remove a certain history and remove certain ideas from the imagination of the citizens in a country. They wanted to remove that history, but in doing so, produce conflict with the effect of

demarcating clearly the Estonians from the Russians. It was very complicated because the Russian minority does not have the same rights to citizenship as the people who are ethnically Estonian. The Russian minority is actually about 40% of the population.

With public sculpture it is just a question of what can be installed where, and for whom is it installed – not *how*, but *for whom*. In modernism, this was very easily answered because the form of the work addressed the issue by being form in itself. It was a synthesis. The architectural form of modernist buildings would somehow correspond to the sculptural form that was produced from a similar modernist matrix. Adding a sculpture to a square meant continuity, rather than discontinuity. There was supposed to be a unity between the public sphere – as such – and the public artwork.

Today this seems to also hold true to how these modernist sculptures can seamlessly fit into corporate architecture. Interestingly enough, we can see that this kind of public sculpture was extremely popular both in so-called communist countries and in so-called democratic countries. Similar modernist matrices were employed.

However, this unity has been heavily deconstructed and criticised, first of all, by art practice and later by art theory and art history. It was always a construction – an ideal – to claim unity between the artwork and the site.

The public sphere is no longer considered a unified space. It was never entered and used uniformly. This corresponds to the difference of art and gender. Artworks had different conceptions and significations that were read in different ways. That is why we now talk about fragmentation or differentiation of public space on the one hand, and, dematerialisation of artworks on the other as a strange double-movement within art production itself. On the one hand there is now an expanded field of artistic practice (an expansion of what is art) and, on the other hand, a dematerialisation of artworks by which these works no longer use conventional (sculptural) materials.

This strange double movement means that we have a different understanding of 'public'. It is no longer unitary. And we have different interpretations of the artwork. Perhaps we can say that both have been dematerialised to some extent. This means that in the post-modern era (arguably in the modernist era as well), the communicative possibilities and methods of an artwork have had to be renegotiated.

Neither the form nor the context of an artwork, nor its potential spectators, is fixed or stable. They can be conceived in multiple terms, rather than in terms of the singular.

By separating the artwork from its traditional form and context, it has become dependent on another set of notions and parameters, that I have tried to describe as spaces of experience. This entails notions of spectatorship and networks around the artwork that are dependent on, let us say, contingency and specificity. It means that there are very different points of departure in terms of the spectator. The gaze of the spectator is not just dependent on the work, and where the work is sited. It is dependent on where the spectator is situated in terms of age, class, ethnic background, gender, and also this person's politics – this person's imagination. Broadly speaking, what is referred to here can be called experience and intentionality.

I have tried to argue that we should speak of three variable categories when talking about public artworks today - the work itself, its context and the spectator. Rather than a dualistic model, we have to have a triad. None of them are givens. They are often in conflict with each other. We could even call their relationship agonistic.

When we think about contemporary production and representation (and I think this really goes for both artistic production and political representation), we need to negotiate these terms of reference individually. What do they mean in themselves and also in relation to each other?

Art since the 1960s has demonstrated that you cannot fix meaning. In the same period, I think, we have come to realise that the public sphere or public space is not something we can take for granted either. It is as elusive as it has become deconstructed. If we look at some of the major theories of public space (or the public sphere, rather), we have a nominative model, and then we have a critique of that model.

The nominative model was mainly formulated by Jürgen Habermas, the German sociologist who was very influential in Germany in the post war period. He was closely allied to the Social Democrats. He made an historical survey of the emergence of the idea of a public sphere that he attributed to the ideals and self-understanding of the emerging bourgeois class in the nineteenth century that had posited a notion of public space as a space for political deliberation. In Germany at the time (that Habermas was writing) private institutions for art were called *Kunstverein*. These spaces required active membership by subscription. They were actually seen as the precursor to the invention of democracy and political speech. They were very strategic: They worked within the assumption that going to the art gallery, looking at these strange things and developing a rational discourse around them, trained you in rhetoric and in political speech. You could then use this experience in the bourgeois transformation of society or, in some cases, bourgeois revolution.

Public space then had to support the self-understanding of an emerging dominant class - the bourgeois class. That meant that public speaking was something you did in society and of society and thus, always, outside of yourself. In speaking in public, you had to speak in a specific way beyond personal interests, beyond the irrelevant, beyond the personal, anyway. You had to speak in a rational way. Therefore it was important to have a separation between the private, which was the family and the house and (very importantly) your property, the State with its institutional laws and the public, which was the cultural and political arena in which you could then discuss and legislate.

This is also why access to the public space was, by definition, restricted. Hannah Arendt has written about this: How can you actually speak beyond yourself, beyond your living conditions effectively if you are not independent in an economic sense? In reality only property owners can speak in a rational way beyond themselves because they are not thinking about their daily survival when speaking about society. The same applies to gender: really only men could speak in this rational way because women were confined to the home where they would speak about private matters.

Thus, in the 1970s, the famous feminist slogan - 'The personal is political', is a complete reversal of the bourgeois notion of public space where you have clear separation between the private and the public. All of a sudden the private became public, and thus political.

We now think much more of public space as a fragmented space. Part of this has to do with different critiques of Habermas' model. This model was considered to be normative and a reconstruction of a bourgeois project. Habermas did not say that there should be limited access, but he clearly felt that everybody in a modern democracy should speak in this rational way in public space in order to have a sensible, critical, conversation. For him, the big enemy – the destroyer of democracy and this pure public space – is the media, because media reiterates the personal and the irrelevant all the time.

There has been a critique of Habermas' version of public space. The first came from two other German theorists. One was an artist – a film maker, Alexander Kluge, the other, Oskar Negt, a sociologist (who had actually worked with Habermas). They wrote a book with a very instructive title - *Public Sphere and Experience*ⁱ. They are saying, 'Well, this may be the ideal, but our experience of public space is completely different from the ideal'. This text was written in 1972 as an answer to Habermas' book of the early 1960s. They said, first of all, we do not all have equal access to speech enactment in this bourgeois public space. Secondly, it is always an individual space – not one for collective experience. So where is collective experience formulated? Then they said, in our life experience, what is public? Where we are formed is, for most people, the work place or the school or the home. These are, what has later been called counter-publics (and I will return to that shortly). For them, it was fairly clear that life experience (lived experience) was in the factory. Then maybe you would go to the pub, which comes, of course, from *public*, and then you would go home. Women would be confined to the home, mainly, and children to schooling and so on. A lot of institutional spaces that were considered outside of the public arena, were actually those through which we are socialised, those through which we have to fight our political fights. They were the arenas for struggle. They are not an abstract space of rational deliberation, but rather the space of life experience, which would be, in their case, mainly the factory.

Interestingly, Kluge and Negt also have a very negative notion of the media, but quite different from that of Habermas. They call it a 'programming industry'. It is there to programme us into thinking in a different way. Of course, if we look at the history of television, we can see how it actually functions exactly through a kind of space/time division. So you have programming that is structured around a day. In the mornings you have children's programmes. During the day, you have a romantic television series that are for housewives and again programming for the kids when they come home from school. Then you have the news for the father of the house. Then you have some light entertainment. At the end of the evening, you have dramas and thrillers and, late at night now (at least on certain channels) you will then have pornography.

There is another notion that I want to mention within the idea of what can be called the 'counter-public'. That comes, not from Marxist theories such as Negt and Kluge's, but from queer theory. One of its theorists is Michael Warner, an American scholar who published *Publics and Counter-Publics*ⁱⁱⁱ. Warner says that a counter-public has many of the same characteristics as the so-called dominant public, namely that they exist as an imaginary address. They produce, let us say, a 'fanzine', like a magazine in nineteenth or even eighteenth century Britain. The 'fanzine' tries to imagine there is a circulation of readership that they did not try to get to know through exchanges of letters sent in and so on. This is an imaginary address in relation to a specific discourse or a specific location (it could be the art space, for instance). It always involved circulation and reflection and as such Warner would say that counter-publics are as much relational as they are oppositional. They would become oppositional only under specific conditions.

Let us look at this in relation to the art world. There is a huge fetish around the notion of the alternative space. It is considered to be oppositional to dominant spaces. But if we look at how it is architecturally structured, if we look at how the exhibition is structured, we will see that they are very similar to normal gallery spaces and big museums. It is the same white cube. It is the same idea of having an opening night. It is the same idea that the audience exists through the people on your mailing lists and passers-by. It consists of a three-week show of some kind and it usually has posters announcing the artist. There is very little opposition. It is a complete mirroring of large museums and galleries.

What Warner says is that counter-public should be understood as a parallel formation of a minor or even subordinate character, but a place where oppositional discourse and practices can be formulated and circulated.

Where the classic bourgeois notion of the public sphere claimed universality and rationality, counter-publics often claim the opposite and, in concrete terms, entail a reversal of existing spaces. So, we take an existing space (it could be the art space) and reverse it into a space for a different activity - a different kind of identification and identity and a different practice. The most famous example, of course, is the notion of recruiting. A public park is made for a specific type of behaviour. During the day it is a place for leisure for heterosexual families, but at night it turns into something quite different, namely an area for cruising. Here we have an architectural framework, the park, that remains completely unchanged, but the usage of this framework is drastically altered. As another scholar, George Chauncey, has famously put it, 'Acts of privacy are performed in public' – very concretely in the case of cruising. A completely different subjectivity is produced in this space and one that goes completely against what the architecture was designed for.

A counter-public is a conscious mirroring of the modernity and institutions of the nominative public in an effort to address other subjects and, indeed, other imaginaries. To quote Michael Warner (this is his definition of when it becomes, not just pure mirroring, but a different type of subject): "Counterpublics are 'counter' to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability (*because in the public it is usually the strangers that are gathered – just like here own comment*) and its reflexivity: as publics, they remain orientated to stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership and its affects."

Naturally, it is not that we had a dominant public sphere and then we have counter-publics. It is rather that we have a lot of parallel formations that can overlap and emerge in different ways as is the case with alternative space. On the one hand you can say it is clearly connected to the classic gallery space. On the other hand it is also in some opposition to it. It is a relation of both opposition and compliance, in a way. It is a complicated endeavour.

In the same way that the modernist singular artwork, and the idea of the spectator as a universal, the bourgeois public sphere seems historical to us. It seems to be as much a fragment as any other kind of sub-public or counter-public. Indeed, we can ask whether it ever existed as anything other than a projection – an ideal. I would say it is imaginary. It is a projection that I would argue does not seem very useful – this idea of the rational, universal, and masculine speech acts. It does not seem useful in what we can now call a modular society that is both multicultural and hyper-capitalistic.

Perhaps this modulation or division of society into different arenas and specialised disciplines (one of them being art, perhaps) should be seen as the foundation for the realisation and fragmentation of the public sphere into different camps and/or counter-publics. However, it is not only from the kind of critical idea of queering of space that the bourgeois notion of rationality has been criticised, deconstructed and replaced. It is also that the idea of the bourgeois public space has also been left behind by the cultural industries (I would argue) because, for the cultural industries, the notion of *the public* with its contingent modes of access and articulation is replaced by the notion of *the market*, implying a commodity exchange and consumption as the modes of access and interaction. Basically, if you can consume, you are welcome. So you can have, as in the case with queering - 'Well, OK, they are queers, so we can make a market for them and we can do it in certain cities and certain areas in these cities and they can stay there and do whatever they want, as long as they pay'.

Returning to art production this also means that the notion of the Enlightenment, of rational, critical subjects and the disciplinary social order that we know from museums and from public sculptures is replaced by a notion of entertainment as communication. Entertainment as the mechanism of social control and the producer of subjectivity. If we

look at the old Enlightenment museums, we see that they are less and less involved with educating the public than they would have been from the early nineteenth century into the latter half of the twentieth century. They are rather interested in entertainment. We can see this in how they are designed spatially. There are more and more place for gift shops and cafés. The National Art Gallery in Copenhagen where I come from even has church services. They have concerts. They have fashion shows and they now have guided tours not by art experts, but by celebrities. Celebrities show their favourite pieces in the collection and they are extremely popular, more popular than the art experts. I would rather go to one of those – I have to say. I think it must be much more interesting to hear whatever a rapper or actor has to say about the National Gallery than a trained scholarly person.

As I mentioned with the example of marketing for gay people, fragmentation and different spaces of experience are not the same deconstructive threat to the current hegemony of cultural industry as was the case in the historical formation of the bourgeois public sphere. Rather, fragmentation and difference can be mapped in terms of consumer groups as segments of a market with particular demands and desires to be catered to. They are thus to be commodified – commodification of desires; commodification of identities. Indeed, fragmentation must be seen as a condition of the new liberal market hegemony.

In order to construct new models, new public sphere formations can be seen, not an answer to such a question, but as attempts to indicate the routes one has to follow if we want to try and answer such questions. I would argue that such projects must distinguish themselves, not by creating single interventions in a generalised public sphere, but rather try to constitute a continuous counter-public stream.

Such projects must attempt to perceive and construct a specific public sphere and a model for spectatorship as opposed, of course, to the modernist generalised ones. We cannot talk of a general audience. We can only talk of specific audiences and one that is imagined and new every time, one that is produced through the mode of address employed.

If we are then only talking of a completely fragmented society, the task becomes how are they connected? How does an art practice today conceive of its public? How does it conceive of *the* public, or *its* public? How does it conceive of interfaces with publics, and worthwhile aims? Relational publics are also specific. One really has to map these strategies and this, perhaps, has to do with quality and imperfection. Perhaps there is a quality too in imperfection, also.

As I have tried to argue, any kind of public speech, and thus any kind of artistic endeavour, is the making of a public and thus the imagination of a world. It is therefore, in my view, not a question of 'art for art's sake' or 'art for society' or of poetics or politics. They are rather a matter of understanding the politics of aesthetics, and the aesthetic dimension of politics, or to put it in another way, it is the mode of address that produces the public. If one tries to imagine different publics (different notions of what was called stranger relationality), one must reconsider the mode of address itself or, if you will, the format of the artistic production, the format of the project, the format of exhibition-making. Any exhibition or artwork must imagine a public in order to produce it and to produce a world around it – a horizon.

Here I will move into the second part of my talk.

If we are satisfied with the world and with the art world we have now, we should continue to make projects as it was always done – repeat formats and circulations. If, on the other

hand, we are not happy with the world and art world we are in, we will have to produce in a different way. We have to produce other subjectivities through other imaginaries.

I would argue that the great division of our time is not between various fundamentalisms, as some argue, since I think they all ascribe to the same script although with a very different idea of who will win in the end. I would argue that the great division of our time is between those who accept, and thus actively maintain the dominant imaginary of society, subjectivity and possibility – and those who reject the current imaginary of society, subjectivity and possibility, and, instead, partake in what I will call other imaginaries.

Here I am mainly referring to the work a deceased Greek French philosopher called Cornelius Castoriadis^{iv}. He had a very interesting trajectory because he worked as an economist for the OECD, and then he was involved in a group called, '*Socialisme ou Barbarie*'. In the 1950s in France, they broke with the Stalinist Communist Party. He also taught philosophy, and then, later on, he became unhappy with working for the World Bank, so he trained as a psycho-analyst and started practising psycho-analysis in the 1970s up until his death in 26 December 1997.

According to Castoriadis, any society is not something that appears naturally or along a kind of evolutionist line. It is always a symbolic construction that is held together by specific social imaginaries and specific institutions. These institutions are as much fictional as they are functional. That does not mean that they do not produce real effects. The best example is money. Money is pure belief. We believe that this note is worth what is printed on it. Why, I do not know because the International Gold Standard was given up in 1973 and even gold is a completely imaginary endeavour. And why gold would be worth more than a rock in the first place, I also do not know.

So societies are not created through any kind of natural rationalism or through an historical progressive determinism. They are instituted, he says, through creation, through imagination. Society and institutional forms and norms are, as I said, fictional and not only functional. Castoriadis then calls society an imaginary institution. He says, 'that what holds society together is, of course, its institution'. This is really meant in all senses of the word – the whole complex of its particular institutions, what I shall call 'the institution of a society as a whole'. The word, 'institution' is taken here in its broadest and most radical sense: norms, values, language, tools, procedures, and methods of dealing with things and doing things, and of course, the individual itself – both in general and in the particular type, form and gender– given to it by the society considered.

These institutions, and the way of instituting (meaning subjectivity, for instance, legality and so on), appear as a more or less coherent whole, as a unity, but can only appear so through practice and belief. This also means then that these social imaginaries can be redefined through other practices or even collapsed when no longer viewed as adequate. Social change occurs through discontinuity rather than continuity, either in the form of radical innovation and creativity. An example that Castoriadis used is Newtonian physics - one creative act changed the whole way everyone looks at the world; or in the shape of a symbolic and political revolution also completely changed the world – France in the 1789 revolution. These creative acts, he says, can never be predicted or understood in terms of determinant causes and effects or an inevitable, historical sequence of events – the way, for instance certain Marxists believed that conditions of production would inevitably lead to revolution or the way, nowadays, liberalist commentators view the fall of the Communist Block as being brought by natural law of economics.

Change emerges, rather, through the establishment of other imaginations without pre-determinations through practice and a will that establishes another way of instituting. This requires a radical break with the past in terms of language and symbolisation and thus with ways of doing. However, as you probably know, one of the problems of any

revolutionary project is exactly this: how do we implement radical change? Not just in the significations and sedimentations of institutions, but in how they institute and how they can produce social relations in you.

This discussion then finally brings me back to the question of contemporary art and the notion of the imaginary. How are new languages created? Which new languages can be produced and which languages are only old things said with new words? We can put it in another way. What can be imagined, and what can not be imagined? What modes of critique are affirmative, and which are transformative? Which artistic creations are illustrative, sometimes even celebratory of the current hegemony? An aesthetic gesture, I would argue, consists like a political one in the creation of a new ensemble of things in a restating of what we perceive as real. This also means that one cannot, I am sorry to say, distinguish between political and non-political works of art or, in a broader sense, representation. The very imaginings of each specific mode of address lies, the politics of aesthetics. Jacques Rancière^v, a contemporary philosopher, developed this term in another context. Nonetheless it is a useful notion to illustrate what I am talking about.

For Rancière the politics of aesthetic practices lie in how they partake in what he called 'the partition and distribution of the sensible'. This is used here not in the sense of rational but in the sense of what can be seen, and not seen; what can be sensed, and not sensed; what can be said, and what can not be said or in the terms that I have used, what can be imagined, and what can not be imagined?)

In the very imaginings of each specific mode of address lies the politics of the aesthetic. In contrast, the political, in connection with works of art, is historically described in two ways: either as use value (which could even be propaganda); or, secondly, in terms of the politics of representation – How is a subject represented by an artwork? Who is the speaking subject behind it (the identity of the speaking subject)?

We have to expand on the notion of what political representation means and analyse artworks through their imaginary character, namely - what kind of horizon do they set up, or set themselves up against? What kind of horizon do they feel limited and framed by without these aspects necessarily being in opposition to each other? The politics of an artwork lies then, not so much in the intentionality of the artist nor, only, in the reception of the spectator i.e. the politics of reading. The politics of an artwork does not nor exclusively lie within the politics of representation i.e. how things are shown, who is represented and who is not included. It lies with both artist and spectator and how they imagine what we can represent or, as I mentioned with the example of Estonia, de-present. How can certain ideas be removed from the spectrum? What we can think and not think; include or exclude; amaze or shock; entertain or lecture – and so on.

An artwork can, in my mind, be seen as a way of instituting; of producing and projecting other worlds and a possibility for the self-transformation of the world. It can be seen as an institutionalisation that is produced through subjectivity, rather than only producing subjectivity. It can, very simply, offer a place from which to see and, hopefully, from which to be seen differently, from which to imagine another world – as much as an object to look at.

We have to rephrase our notions of the critical and the affirmative in artworks according to how they attempt to institute a particular imagination of the world or, if you will, of the phantasmagoric. In the latest Berlin Biennale we can see this current wave in a lot of large-scale exhibitions. These move away from the content based on what was called the 'enigma of art' to a kind of de-presentation, as a political move that really is not about the political intentions of the artist, but rather in its politics of aesthetics. So, in this case, an artwork that does not partake in creating a different horizon is, by definition, affirmative of the current horizon, of what art is and what politics is.

It is primarily in the imagination and sometimes in the lack of imagination of the work, and not the intentions of the producer, in which the politics of aesthetics are located. What is at stake is the future as well as of the past and how it is imagined. It is what Walter Benjamin would have named as 'past as future'. It is the way in which the work produces other imaginaries of the world and its institutions, rather than merely reiterating existing ones – even if it does so in critical terms. It is what can be called affirmative critique.

It becomes then a matter of what horizon can be imagined as well as ways in which to institute it. So, again taking the cue from Castoriadis and his analysis of society as self-created and existing through institutions, we should then speak of other ways being instituted, other ways of instituting. To say that, if there is one world, and this is created through an imagination, also means that other worlds are, indeed, possible. So self-institutionalisation actually becomes crucial, not just as an organisation of collective experience, but also as a mode of address in works that politicise aesthetics rather than the other way around. Any political aesthetic is not just a representational act that supports politics, but also a mode of address that politicises aesthetics. To paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard: 'It is not a matter of making political films, but of making films politically'. By that he meant how you sequenced the images and sounds and also the working relations of the people producing the film, how the film was distributed, what were the politics of distribution?

Therefore one must reconfigure the very mode of address itself and, in turn, its imagined subjects be they audiences, constituencies, communities and/or adversaries or perhaps all of them at the same time. That is a reconfiguration of both the mental and material conditions of the work itself.

This is also concerned with the setting up of horizons. Before I show you the work by Katya Sander, I just want to mention an interesting debate in terms of the idea of horizon: how to construct an horizon that can formulate your imaginary. In revolutionary images, this is extremely important. If you remember all historical depictions of Lenin, he is always pointing outwards in the distance. Where is he pointing? He is pointing to the horizon. That is where we have to go. He shared an obsession with time along with the Bolshevik Revolution had. When they gave away the Ukraine to the Germans, Lenin famously said, 'I'll give up space to gain time.'

There is a book that came out a couple of years ago which was trying to attest to the crisis of the left. This is a dialogue between three theorists - Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek about hegemony, contingency and universality^{vi}. They tend to disagree more and more as the book goes on, which is very interesting. They each have a first set of questions, then they each have a contribution, and then they have an exchange so the book is constantly divided between the three voices. They really end up in a huge fight when they started out with common goals. Notoriously, Žižek, always being the provocateur, accuses his interlocutors as being well and squarely based within the dominant imagination of liberal capitalist democracy. They cannot imagine anything else than that, therefore all their political thoughts are useless, he says. This gets a rather strong reaction from Laclau that I will quote because it is an example of theory also being quite amusing. Laclau is saying, 'I can discuss politics with Butler because she talks about the real world, about strategic problems people encounter in their actual struggles, but with Žižek it is not possible to even start to do so.' He says later on, 'I have no idea what other worlds Žižek is talking about and I am beginning to have the feeling that he does not either.'

The interesting thing is Žižek's response which is - Well, what is the real world? Is it an imaginary (even though he does not refer to Castoriadis' ideas)? In order to achieve change, where is the horizon? Should perhaps that horizon be close to you? Is it to say – can we get these people into the City Council and these people out? Or is it to say, we

have to smash capitalism? To post a horizon that seems faraway. I do not know. These are strategic questions. But Žižek's answer is that, in effect, today one cannot even imagine a viable alternative to global capitalism. Laclau, however, situates politics in the real world, even though being a Lacanian, I am sure he knows that the real is a wholly imaginary enterprise.

I think there is a certain poignancy to Žižek's claim about the imagination, that only by imagining an horizon far away can one advance in giant steps. The closer one is to a horizon, or rather, the more limited our horizon is, the less imagination we have, the less space there is for movement and thus for social change and, yes, progress. Rather than accepting this current horizon of what has been called 'post-politics' and what we can call the 'aesthetics of administration' that we see everywhere, we have to posit another world, socially, sexually, economically, politically as the imaginary institution of a society to be or the community to come. We need to posit that other worlds are indeed possible or, for our present situation, that another art world is indeed possible if we want it.

I will just end with a quote before showing you the film. It is a film that deals with the notion of horizon. It is not so long and it is, hopefully, entertaining. Castoriadis said,

'The super session of present society which we are aiming at because we will it and because we know that others will it as well, not because of such other loss of history, the interest of the proletariat or the destiny of being, the bringing about of a history in which society not only knows itself, but makes itself as explicitly self-instituting, implies a radical deconstruction of the known institution of society in its most unsuspected nooks and crannies which can exist only as a positioning and creating not only new institutions, but a new mode of instituting and a new relation of society and of individuals to the institution.'

It is not a question of just changing institutions, but actually changing how we institute, how subjectivity and imagination can be instituted in a different way or, as the poet, Delmore Schwartz, once wrote, 'In dreams begin responsibilities'.



ⁱ Sheikh, S ed., 2002, *In the Place of the Public Sphere? or Critical Readers in Visual Cultures* 5 b_b books Berlin

ⁱⁱ Negt, O., & A. Kluge, 1993 *Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* University of Minnesota

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Warner, M., 2002, *Publics and Counterpublics* New York: Zone Books
- ^{iv} Castoriadis, C., translated Kathleen Blamey, 1998, *The Imaginary Institution of the Society* MIT Press: Cambridge
- ^v Rancière, J., 2004, *Politics of Aesthetics: The Limits of Art and Politics* Continuum Inti Publishing Group
- ^v Walter Benjamin, 1999, *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press
- ^{vi} Butler, J., Laclau, E. & Zizek, S., 2000, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* WW Norton, Co Inc

Guest lecture questions and answers

1. "Lead response"

- Grant Kester

Grant Kester: Thank you, Simon, very much. I really enjoyed that presentation. I would like to raise a couple of thoughts.



I was trying to pick up on the question of defining the public and I will bring the discussion back just a little bit to issues of contemporary art practice, especially collaborative or collective art practice and the construction of the public. I just want to put on the table a couple of registers – ways to maybe orientate us to thinking about the construction of the public in art practice. I think of these as a kind of analytic continuum, a set of factors that we can use in assessing this question of quality and imperfection. Maybe this can provide a starting point for our conversation about metrics.

The first would be the continuum that exists between the micro and the macro level in a project. When I refer to the micro level I'm thinking about are the very specific situational processes that take place in a given work, the subjective ethical considerations, for example, that take place in negotiation with a particular audience or community or a context, the nuanced language of haptic physical experience and discursive exchange and the way those are handled and modulated in a project. The macro level of analysis also operates within a continuum. You would have the broader political context, say, in the case of the work that I discussed in Aberdeen, that would have been a discourse of neo-liberal economic theory, related to the operation of NGOs and development agencies in countries such as Africa. The political horizon lies in the way in which a certain terminology, a certain set of implicit understandings, pattern the kinds of knowledge that can be produced locally or situationally. I am interested in understanding the macro and the micro as they are related in working through a project. Of course, really productive work is conscious of both of these factors in the way that the work is modulated relative to larger political concerns or debates.

I am thinking of people who work in urban spaces, who might want to be conscious of the politics of urban development and regeneration at a national level in a country like the UK. What are the stakes of investing yourself in a neighbourhood in terms of things like gentrification? If you are a thoughtful practitioner, you have some knowledge of the ways in which gentrification and regeneration are operating nationally and then how those ramify into the local context.

Then the second register would be the register between what I understand as the work-as-prototype and the work-as-readymade. I think of the ready-made as a more conventional art category. A readymade, as with Duchamp, seeks to produce a profound rupture in the discourses of art. But the readymade can't be replicated. As soon as you make a second toilet (as in Duchamp's Fountain) and put it in a museum, then the disruptive power has been betrayed in some way and the work has been enshrined in the institution. The prototype is a very different model. An idiosyncratic example would be Tatlin's Tower, which only ever existed as a little maquette that was towed around Moscow in a horse-drawn trailer because there were not enough motorised vehicles to display it in a city. And yet Tatlin's goal was for the monument to be reproduced on a mammoth scale. As a prototype it presented itself as something that was eventually meant to be re-integrated and actualized. It represents a very different understanding of how the work of art functions vis-à-vis social and political context.

Both of these registers, obviously, impinge on the construction of a public, an audience, and spectatorship. I just lay those out very briefly as just some thoughts that popped into my head as Simon was speaking. I'll conclude with a couple of questions for Simon, and then everybody can join in.

I will just make it one question because they are kind of related: You mentioned the idea that the work needed to create a different imaginary. My question would be - How do we understand the orientation of a different imaginary? For example, if my different imaginary is a theocratic regime in which I have absolute control over non-believers, how do I differentiate the ethical orientation of a different imaginary? I raise this question because that conceptual framing

seems to have the effect of deferring the question of the ethical orientation of a new kind of imaginary. Maybe you can respond to that a little bit, about how we understand one orientation as better than, or preferable to, another one?

Simon Sheikh: If we look at Castoriadis's work, he basically tries to discern between two types of societies. One is autonomous and the other one is heteronomous. Heteronomous would be, as you mentioned, where its beliefs are founded on something outside of itself that is supposedly bigger, which is a kind of ordering, basically, from God. The autonomous society is the one that is aware of its own self-institution. So, I think, that would be the starting point. He is mainly known as the philosopher of autonomy. That would be, for me, the kind of route to follow which is, I hope, a little bit different than exactly this kind of post-political line Laclau has, where it is about articulating existing elements in a different way. I think that happens all the time. I do not know what that means. Does that mean then, in order to reform society, that let us say, for instance, the left should also use racist arguments?



This has been done now, of course, to some extent by Oskar Lafontaine in Germany. He is saying that the problem for German workers is immigrants. The Socialist Party got a lot of votes and won elections by catering to that sentiment. These kind of ideas are actually heteronomous. They are saying there is something outside of the institution of society that is holding society together as a symbolic order whereas questions of immigration and unemployment are not instituted outside of the society but instituted through the institutions of society.

Robert Livingston: Can I open up to the floor then?

2. "Multiculturalism as a different imaginary"

- Chris Fremantle

Chris Fremantle: This is not a question, exactly, but more a thought that was going through my head which is that, in a sense, in the UK, the discourse on multi-culturalism started in reaction to the neo-liberal agenda as an alternative imaginary. It maybe has something to do also with fragmentation and trying to find a way to deal with the fragmented nature of the public. It has become absorbed and is now almost an agenda about integration. I just found that quite interesting in relation to what you are talking about – that, actually, the one can become the other simply because of a changing set of circumstances.

Simon Sheikh: I agree, integration has really very little to do with multi-culturalism. That is exactly where we can see a lack of imaginary. All over Europe immigration is perceived as a problem, regardless of your political position. Some say, 'Kick out the people who immigrate into our pure country'. Others say, 'No, we can't do that. That's not nice. We have to integrate them.' That tends to be the right and left-wing divide at the moment, but it might as well have been completely the opposite. No politician today will have the guts to say, 'Immigration is great. Let's open our borders.' I think that would be an interesting position. I do not know where it would lead to. That would be a different imaginary for me.

3. "Agonism and Public Art"

- Sarah Munro

Sarah Munro (core group): I was interested when you were talking about the notion of agonism. It made me think that one of the problems in this field is often consensus – particularly with funders and all the rest of it, that they want a very consensual view of what public art is. I just thought that those notions of agonism which break that down, and agree to differ – I just wondered if you can expand a bit on your feelings around that notion.

Simon Sheikh: Yes, that is difficult because I am beginning to be unsure. I used to think that this could be a very productive term to try and counter official cultural policies, but I do not know any more if it is so useful. It has been picked up in all sorts of ways. Chantal Mouffe mainly has advocated turning antagonisms as a fundamental condition of human society to agonism. I find that maybe not so useful any more, because I have seen a lot of projects that end

in this way - 'We have to give equal space to everyone because that is democratic, so let's bring the immigrant and the racist together in a room and see what happens.' Then you just, once again, give representation to a certain script.

I would rather see my kind of projects as part of another debate, rather than an agency that facilitated the debate. I mean, I would not be interested in giving space to a fascist but a lot of people have done that, curators for example. They think it is very interesting to have them on panels. I do not see why they should get yet another public space, because they have so much of the public space already.

4. "How do you define public art? How do you transform or translate the notion of 'imaginary' into a practical context?"

- Ed Carroll

Ed Carroll: This is a pretty hard question for me to ask because this is the second time, Simon, I have heard you speak. I was down in Clare when you were in Ireland. It is great to hear you speak again, and to have that chance to try and understand what is coming through in your perspective.



There is a whole range of questions that come up for me based on your presentation and you have set these questions yourself. How do you define public space? How do you define public space on the one hand when we are locked within this notion of liberty, freedom, personal freedom, and then security. There is a sense in which public space is eroding. It is being held up. That for me is a question that comes out.

The other question: Tonight was about quality. I was trying to think of someone who works in terms of trying to understand the question of quality as it relates to collective practice or collaborative practice – all these words! How do you transform or translate some of the things you have been saying into the practical context? That is another question, for me.

And then, I suppose, the main question that comes out for me: maybe it is more an anecdote, but it is interesting. Recently I was reading this very interesting story, I suppose, between Emmanuel Levinas re-speaking some of the historical moments. We are in a very particular, interesting debate between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer in 1932. It is called 'The Devil's Debate'. Levinas was a very young student at the time, listening to these very interesting different perspectives. There is something in your reading of the horizon of the imaginary that veers towards a Heideggerian notion of subjectivity that resists definition, but also resists any sense of naming the notion of the idea and the ambition and the visioning. I am interested because Cassirer, in that debate, very strongly felt that there was something about cultural production that had to project a notion of ideal and of real as opposed to an imaginary. Coming out of that debate in an interview in 1982 (I think it was with *Le Monde*), Levinas remembered going to visit the widow of Cassirer and said to her, 'I really apologise'. He wanted to do so because after that debate he had made little of the fact that Cassirer was presenting a notion that was different from the Heideggerian vision that had become very dominant in '32 when a very strong social realist rationality had taken over – and we know where that led to.

I just wondered - maybe it is completely off the wall - but I just wonder whether there is something of that re-verb to a sort of a Kantian interpretation that sits within your perspectives around notions of horizon and imaginary and questions of quality being something that is imagined rather than quality as something that we have a social responsibility towards.

I finish up with a last little anecdote which is in a talk with Krzysztof Wodiczko recently where he really laid out the responsibility of art to, not just respond to public space, but to generate public space by ventilating the experience of the Other more strongly than that tradition of Levinas, more than a conceptual notion.

It is a long-winded way and I am just sort of grasping a little bit in the dark to try and project something to ...

Simon Sheikh: I had not thought of any possible Heideggerian aspects. I certainly will have to try and get rid of them. I mean, when I talk of the imaginary in the sense of Castoriadis – it is not in opposition to what is real. It is rather the

way something appears as real; the way we agree that something is real, is part of our imaginary. It is not about a fantasy.

I can see that the notion of horizon might be seen that way. Why I am interested in it in terms of false or artistic production is that perhaps art is the place where we can really try and put up some horizons that are not realistic (as we are always asked to be realistic), to put up some goals that are not realistic in order to achieve something.

It is more that I have this feeling (but I might be wrong), this is the idea I have had and this is also where it relates to the other question. If you had asked me a couple of years ago, I would have said, well, it is very important to stress works should not create consensus and it is very good that not everyone likes them. I still believe that, to an extent, but I do not know if I think that that any longer works in an argument with the 'realpolitik'; with real politics; with funders and so on. I am not sure it works any more. It might have worked a few years ago – exactly because of the first thing you mentioned which is the security discourse is now over everything else. So, actually, you have to have a kind of consensus because these things could go against security and security is, strangely enough, what guarantees freedom. In order to achieve freedom, we are willing to give away a lot of freedom for the other to secure our own freedom, and even freedoms of our own. This is interesting. I do not want to lose a sociologist's truth value because sociology, again, imagines something that is produced through its mode of address. But no-one seems to mind all the surveillance of public space everywhere. People think it is great. When you ask them, they say, 'If you have nothing to hide, what is the problem?' However, it is not a question of what you have to hide, it is rather a question of how you have become visible and how you then become instituted as a subject through that surveillance.

In the last part you mentioned about the Kantian aesthetics. I am also not sure about that. I think it is certainly interesting that a lot has been forgotten in the Kantian aesthetic. It is a very political notion. It is very undemocratic. The reason why you say something is beautiful, and what you choose to say is beautiful is to demand consensus. Otherwise it is an unimportant statement. So there are ethical and political implications of the Kantian aesthetic. That, I think, is interesting to think about in terms of a politics of aesthetics, to say that, actually, the Kantian is not something that is often used that stands in opposition to the political. It is a very political idea. So, abstract works, works that claim to be Kantian, claim to be working with the sublime, are very political in their distribution of the relationship between the work and the spectator; their relationship to power and knowledge and through history.

Robert Livingston: Particularly when they are being funded by the CIA.

Simon Sheikh: Well, yes, there is that aspect, yes.

5. "Ownership, Affection and Subversion in Public Art"

- Jenny Hardie

Jenny Hardie: All the time that you were speaking, I kept getting this one image which has to do with the Angel of the North which is probably one of the most enormous and iconic public art projects to be done in Britain for a century. Within about two months of it having been opened and inaugurated and left on its own, person or persons still unknown went to enormous trouble to put it into a Newcastle United football shirt. As far as that was concerned, it had to do with ownership; and it had to do with affection; it had to do with the fact that the thing actually succeeded. But, surely, when you put a piece of art into the public arena, you are starting a discourse; you are inviting a whole lot of other imaginations and other horizons which, in this case, happen to be to do with its particular location and football shirt and everything else.

It is rather like, when The Daily Mail got very upset during a demonstration around Parliament where somebody gave Churchill a green Mohawk with some grass.

But again, there is an element of affection. It was Churchill. You are inviting a discourse and you are inviting subversion – possibly even of your own idea when you put it there. I am sure the football shirt was the last thing in Antony Gormley's mind when he designed the Angel of the North. He is particularly vulnerable to it, actually. His men on the

Liverpool coast have also had football shirts put on them. But, you invite even the subversion of your own ideas, surely? That is partly what it is about.

Robert Livingston: When I saw the Angel of the North last year a pink Duracell bunny was climbing up the back of it. It was doing quite well: it got 18 feet up and was still going!

[bell]

You have five minutes to come back on that one, Simon, if you want to!

Simon Sheikh: If we look at monuments, they are often placed from the top down, and not the other way round. That does not mean that you cannot do things with them. You can do a lot with them, exactly because of their sign value. The Little Mermaid is a significant sculpture in Denmark, in Copenhagen, and it has been subject to quite a lot of artistic interventions. Famously, the first time it happened a situationist cut its head off in the 1960s and stored it somewhere. It has not been found. Later on, there were many beheadings. Someone put it in a burka recently which I thought was a really great intervention considering there has been a huge debate around the burka in public space in Denmark recently – and many other things. They are a side, of course. But that is only a temporary intervention. It is occupying a space of the other, and then retreating again, which is a more tactical than a strategic move. So even those things that one would maybe feel least connected with at times are actually exactly the places where one can intervene in a symbolic battle – if you will – symbolic struggle.

6. "Anthropocentrism"

- Kate Foster

Kate Foster (core group): I am a bit hesitant since I am a novice in the literature that you are describing but looking around this room for a horizon – I can't see one when all the curtains are drawn. Perhaps you will forgive me for mentioning the public sphere is very much shared with other species. And perhaps you can comment on the idea that, in terms of ethics, one factor or one thing to consider is the sustainable use of material resources.

Simon Sheikh: Yes. I hear you. Yes – absolutely. It is interesting, actually, to return to this. How can one think of instituting that in artistic practice – and actually, they are starting a new art school in Tromsø, which is northern Norway. They are starting it from scratch. When they were announcing the post there, they said, you should apply with what you think a contemporary department should be. This friend of mine – I don't know if I should mention her name because I do not know if she has got the position yet – but someone told me! But when she applied with this great project which was about ... she said, 'Ok, it should be an art department for feminism and sustainable development.' This is that department. What it will be, I do not know. I do not think she hardly knows because she was saying, 'I do not know – but these are the things that interest me. Let's make an institute of that.' So we will see how it goes.

Robert Livingston: The imaginary horizons that have been opened up (despite the curtains) could clearly keep us discussing for a long time yet but, sadly, we have to draw things to a conclusion for this evening.

Can I thank all our speakers on your behalf this evening for widening our horizons very considerably and for opening up many new areas of thought.

Thank you very much.

The Oakland Dialogue

Suzanne Lacy: One of the things Simon said last night that I found very interesting was - How do we imagine the world; and how do we imagine it differently?

In the processes I work in, it is the act of listening that, in fact, changes and challenges our pre-existing imaginations. Listening collectively shapes another imaginary through multiple experiences. This is one of the points that I want to make through the one project I am talking about today.

One of the questions that Simon's work raises for me is -What happens with that notion of multiple imaginaries? What happens to the notion of a multiple and fractured public when you move into ever proportionately larger works of art within ever proportionately larger public spheres?

The project that I am going to talk about this morning is one that we have not discussed. Simon and I agreed last night at about one o'clock that quality was not something that we naturally associated with as an idea, but imperfection was certainly something that we were quite comfortable with. I think that I could have applied this sort of thinking about quality and imperfection to any of these projects.

The notion of imperfection probably emerged about the middle of Code 33. Imperfect Art: Working in Public is the title of my book on this series. We had removed the glass from a giant window up above the entire parking structure and I was standing up there in the wind, looking down several floors at the Free Mumia protesters. They were just about to blow an entire three-years' worth of work, and I thought, 'Ha! That is really interesting, isn't it?' It was a sort of bemusement – a disinterested bemusement on the inevitability of imperfection in this work and its complexities.

I certainly would consider some of my works as perfect. What I mean by perfect is that aesthetic sense that it 'works'. Sometimes that happens. It is rare. More often it does not work. If I use my own criteria of this sort of inner-sense of aesthetic competency or completion or wholeness, then most of my work does not really measure up to my interior gauge of what aesthetic quality is. Perfection is not the right word. In fact, the aesthetic operates on many, many dimensions from the visual to the relational or negotiable to the political. In which one of those spheres, or in what way are we going to assess a work's excellence or quality?

No Blood, No Foul 1995-6

Simon and I also had another conversation late last night. This was around whether or not it was even important to make that assessment. I am certainly open to the fact that the work represented in the Oakland series is a product of a different mode of address from mainstream art. I started arguing for this kind of work in 1970. At that time the easy dismissal was, it was not art. It evolved from that to - it was not good art. I think throughout the history of this kind of work, its positionality with respect to the art world is somewhat tortured and therefore quite interesting.

The work I am going to show you this morning, called No Blood, No Foul 1995-6, is part of a series of three inter-connected works. Starting with Roof is on Fire 1993-4 (which is not one of the inter-connected works), the young people identified the subjects that were of deepest interest to them to pursue. The relationship of youth to the criminal justice system was one. To begin that, I leaned over at the screening of No Blood, No Foul to the police chief, Joe Samuels, who I had just met and said, 'Wouldn't it be interesting to do a piece like this with police officers?' And he said, 'That's an interesting idea.' Between that moment in 1995 and 2000 (which was the completion of Code 33), all the works leading up to that were a way of intervening in the police department culture to allow the Code 33 piece to take place.

The project began with a workshop called Youth, Cops and Videotape. We did a six-session seminar series with 15 kids and ten police officers. We facilitated the conversation and encouraged them to challenge each other. We got to a point of familiarity. We also took this workshop to different sites of contestation in the City. For example we took the workshop to a lake where there had been a youth riot. The police had come down heavy-handedly. We sat on the

banks of the lake and talked about property. Even the police acknowledged that they represented the property owners in the neighbourhood. It was a very wide-ranging discussion that ended on the top of the roof where we did *The Roof is on Fire* and later *Code 33*. Sitting on top of that roof, the police officers began to talk about their own experience with drugs when they were in high school and how they had skipped out of school. There was a kind of evolution of familiarity and comfort with that project. We videotaped it (leaving out, of course, the officers' drug experience) and the tape was used in police training for a period of time.

The second piece was the one that I am going to talk about – *No Blood, No Foul*. The third piece, *Code 33*, was what I was ultimately aiming for during the course of those five years.

No Blood, No Foul is a basketball game (fig1). I have talked more than once about the condition of youth in California. I will just briefly mention that because it is critical background for this piece. California is one of the most diverse states in the United States. It has now reached the 50% people-of-colour mark and that has caused a great deal of consternation and adjustment within the white population. Oakland happens to be a kind of epicentre of dialogue on race and race relations. It is a community that has a long history of inter-marriage, inter-relationships between Black, White, Latino-White and Black-Latino. It is a very rich environment and that is particular to the success of this work. The work would operate differently in a different context. Certainly, this work would operate very differently in Los Angeles with the LAPD and its particular history. In California, the increase in diversity, like many places in the world, has brought with it a widening of the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest people. In fact, one of the statistics that I found most interesting was that as youth of colour increased in the population of California, the poverty rate of youth increased in parallel.

In the '90s in Oakland, youth culture was becoming a conversation. Oakland, alongside Brooklyn, was one of the two or three major epicentres of youth culture in the United States. *No Blood, No Foul* was part of a process. By the time that I was developing this work, I was working with a group of artists and a group of young people as well as City Council people. One of them, Sheila Jordan, decided to initiate the development of a youth policy. At that time I had just come back from Vancouver. Seattle had instituted a youth policy. In a few places around the country, councils had begun at city-level to institute youth policies. These policies gave certain rights and acknowledgements to young people as citizens. They were framed differently in different places, but they often delivered a stream of funding and even a youth bureau or a mayor's youth council.

In creating the Bill that would go through City Council to generate our youth policy, we developed a process of community consultation. When I say 'we', I want to be very clear that is not exclusively an art project. This is a project concerned with sharing a vision with Oakland. There was myself as artist, Sheila Jordan as a City Council and a group of people -the Urban Strategies Council that had carried out a lot of assessment of the indicators of youth wellbeing in Oakland. We were operating together to develop a consultative process. Some of those youth leaders that I had worked with in *Roof is on Fire* became the youth leaders of the City Council process in this project.

The art performance of *No Blood, No Foul* would operate as an announcement of the youth policy to the public the night before they were going to vote on the policy in City Council. We made sure the mayor and all the City Council people were there as well as the news media and a very large audience. The audience consisted of the breadth of people that live in Oakland - Latino, White, Black and Asian in terms of the constituencies that were probably fairly representative of the town across social class, education levels and generations (fig2). I think there were maybe 500 people in the audience.

How did we decide on a basketball game? It was a way of using social engagement in a form that police culture was familiar with. We did not invent this form. There is a practice in the United States of young people and police officers playing basketball together. The performance was a much more mediated version and directed towards much more specific political ends.

Simon's thinking stimulated me to think about the various kinds of addresses that went on within this piece and the people and the publics that were collected here. There were young people - children, as well as teenagers from 14 to

18 (fig 3, fig 4, fig 5). There were a lot of artists, art spectators, NGO organisers, activists, city politicians and police. There were the patrons of Club 1, the health club in which the performance was held. It was actually my own health club. The patrons were still working out around the edges of this performance. The performance took place during an open night. Then there were many family members.

The game was constructed with a set of rules that were pre-determined. These rules established in my mind, the event as performance. It distinguished it from midnight basketball games where cops went out and played with the kids (fig 6).

This health club is interesting because it is the health club right next to City Hall so a good number of the politicians attend. It is also unique in its integration. African-American, White, Latino and Asian people all exercise alongside each other and all share fairly similar left-leaning political sentiments. That is the nature of Oakland and the nature of the professional class within it. It had an open session of basketball and so included working class people. Basketball is a very important sport in Oakland. It is one that almost everybody – men and women – engage in. During lunchtime this very high professional-orientated health club had people that would come in and pay their \$5 off the street and play pick-up ball with each other. This was a very active centre for the significance of that sport in the city centre.

We moved out all the exercise bikes. We installed a ring of television monitors in the back of part of the audience (fig 7). We installed an asphalt paper with lots of chalk and then placed various kinds of stereotypical questions such as 'When was the last time you encountered a police officer?' and 'What do you think about youth?'. Around these we had statistics of youth and prison incarceration that punctuated the space. The performance was also on television monitors that recorded the game with cut-aways to factual things like 'Homicide is the leading cause of death for youth in Oakland'. In addition, every time there was a foul, the lights would dim for a minute, and all the television monitors would come on. Either a police officer, or a youth, would talk about an experience with a police officer or a youth, or experience as a youth. Sometimes you could not tell the police officers from the young people. They would talk about being jacked by police officers when they were young, and how they were themselves now police officers.

The foul would be read as a discursive historical element of the players. In addition, we had what is called a basketball-of-colour commentator. That was a professional who was called upon to 'background' the players such as 'Jason is a youth who lives in Nickerson Gardens' and so on. This was the kind of narrative about the people that were playing ball.

Those were some of the framing devices. Others included young people who were moving through the audience interviewing the audience about the youth policy and their perspective on young people. They had a set of questions. There were telephones in the lobby so that, as you went to the lobby or you left, you picked up and directly registered your opinion into a hotline for City Council members. There were youth documenters taking photographs.

There was quite a bit of tension in the beginning between the young people who were not selected for their particular 'appreciation' of the police officers. The officers, by and large, had a little more experience with the youth than this particular group had 'in a pleasant way', with the police officers. At the end of the game, the house lights went down and everybody went into small group huddles - officers and kids. After the adrenalin of a really hard-played basketball game, they had a different form of conversation with each other. They had a set of questions that loosely framed the discussion.

Youth Development and the Oakland Projects

As I mentioned last night, youth development is an important criterion of all of this work. I would not have gone into the community knowing in advance. This is something about which the young people and activists educated me through the course of this work. Most of the politics of this work are collaboratively framed. They do not just start as 'I have a brilliant insight into this problem and I do my work'. What happens is - 'I have an observation. I become curious. I bring my background to the picture and simply begin as we would do in this room. We would start talking and then the talking circles get wider and you even get referred to people who fundamentally disagree with you'.

For example, Pueblo was a police watch group who, fundamentally, disagreed with working with the police. Their position was, I think, a valid one. Their position was that one of the important ways of working with young people is to educate them into how to stand up to police officers. They would even give the young people cards that they would whip out of the back of their pocket articulating that young person's rights in any confrontation. I think that is as valid an operating procedure as is mentorship.

This work operates, as I have said repeatedly, in the context of a very activist community. The work is not only done by artists. It is participated in and designed by people in all forms of community.

Youth development, in particularly our case, did not mean learning your rights as a kid. It meant deconstructing imagery – particularly imagery of yourself as it existed in the media. It meant acquiring skills of public presentation. We taught the young people public speaking. We took them in front of Community Councils, Neighbourhood Watch Groups. It consisted of learning how to talk to the media as you will see in one of these news clips. It also consisted of skills in photography, video and performance as public communicative skills. Leuckessia (you might recognise her from Roof is on Fire as that articulate young woman) now has had some more training in working with the media. That is our notion of youth development. There is another area - how you take care of young people and make sure they are supported through the process of the work –that is different from youth development although it has relationships to it in terms of mentoring. The production team was made up of police officers, basketball jocks, teenagers and City Council people. They actually planned the performance itself along with artists.

The interesting thing to me about the game was that at each quarter we changed the referees. The first quarter was adult referees. In the second quarter we had young people as referees. It was not particularly announced but it became apparent that these were now different people making the calls. The third quarter was the no-referee – and that is 'no-blood-no-foul', the street game. If you do not draw blood, then it is probably not a foul. It means that basically you are calling your own game and the call is represented by the blood. At this stage there were no referees – it was just a game. In the fourth quarter the audience became referees and the colour commentator. Every time there was a foul, the colour commentator would ask the audience to vote on whether it was a foul or not, and whose foul, and so on. By this time the audience was screaming their lungs about one side or the other.

What I am going to do is show you a highly mediated version of this piece that is through news media. It is about six minutes. It is a couple of news clips. Keep in mind that, of course, it is filtered through the conventions and stereotypes of the media which are one of the forms of address (as Simon put it) that we have to think about as very complex. I wanted you to be able to hear a few of the people even though it is media-speak and also see some of the things that I have pointed out in the background like the television monitors.

I am not naïve enough to think that, obviously, this transforms the relationship between youth and police and I am also very aware of a lot of the complexities and difficulties of everything from ethnicity to class that intervene in the system. Kids are beaten up. They are not going to stop being beaten up by cops. One of the key reasons we had decided to do the project is because of the incarceration rate in California i.e. at least three quarters of the people incarcerated are people of colour. One out of four young men in Oakland between 18 and 25 have had contact with the juvenile or the adult criminal system.

Justin, the young man who said 'we want to show the police a better aspect'? had gone to a juvenile gaol because the police misidentified him from one of his buddies in a housing complex doing drugs. He refused to tell the police that he was not the person. He refused to rat on his friend. What would have happened to him if he had ratted is also very complex. The culture of alignment against police and seeing the police as the enemy, and the culture of being gangsters against the police, badmouthing the police, is basically the first point of intervention between that young person (usually a young man) and the incarceration rate in California.

We decided we would work on that moment of contact. Pueblo was also working on that moment of contact by teaching young people their rights. We got feedback from the officers that worked with us (there are many officers

that did not) about how their experience transformed their attitude towards young people, specifically on the street. Oddly enough young people began to develop allies in the police department. We also had anecdotes. Since I am not a great believer in anecdote as defining a reality, I am not going to tell you a lot of those except to say that we made the political decision to operate at that point of intervention in the street as a result of the larger social factors.

That is all I am going to talk about in this piece. It gives us a background. The imperfections in this work are many. The complexities about its political positioning, the contradictions and points of conflict in the work are many. My being white working in a largely Latino/Black community (as I pointed out many times) is one of the biggest problems.

I wanted to bring this project up today in connection with the notion of imperfection because, of all this series, this is the one work that people have had a hard time seeing as an artwork. They will accept other performances or installations but this work attracted the comment, 'Well, it is an interesting basketball game' or 'It is an interesting social or political event, but is it art?' So I thought that might serve as a background for our conversation.

Grant and Simon, do you want to join me?

The morning discussion in this series is an expanded thesis advisory session. I begin by asking some questions of my colleagues. Grant is my adviser, but we have invited Simon to give input. I admire his work and I think it is very important for me to chew on it in terms of how it relates to my work.

You will all have questions as well from your own practices. I know you will jump in very quickly.

The Oakland Dialogue questions and answers

1. 'Just as there is no complete ideal work, there is no ideal generalised spectator'

- Suzanne Lacy

Suzanne Lacy: Simon, you said in one of the essays, 'Just as there is no complete ideal work, there is no ideal generalised spectator', and I agree with you. Yet, last night we talking about this word 'interesting' and maybe how 'interesting' as a word itself might cover up value judgements.



You showed an artwork that was a series of symbolic acts, I would say, rather than 'applied' in the way that my own work is - though it too is also symbolic to some degree.

Why did you show this work? What qualities did you single out as worth your while? If you do not want to talk about that work, maybe we could talk more abstractly. Are there specific characteristics that validate our attention to some work over others? I am asking not only about a personal level (that would be all be well and good if we were all operating just personally). There is a professional situation that we also operate in as artists and so, the question is, how do we evaluate this work and thereby begin to create an aesthetic framework or an aesthetic idea or, is that even a relevant question anymore? Is that just a generational question? Is that something that I grew up with but that may not be as pertinent?

Simon Sheikh: Well, it can be answered in many ways. First of all, I chose that particular video because I think it talks about the lack of imagination that I am interested in.



When I use a theoretical framework, I try to use it as a kind of prism through which to look at work, or even at the world. It is a toolbox. It is a limited view, like seeing through a filter. Through that theoretical framework we can have a discussion that is more discursive around artworks rather than about taste or a judgement of taste.

Let us say we are in a particular context and we try to identify that context in a specific way. Then we ask - How does an artwork relate itself to the delimitations of its horizon or the horizon of a current political hegemony at any given point? What will that tell us of the work? How can we then use our understanding to work within? This was the idea behind showing the work yesterday.

There were other reasons as well, namely that the film depicted a landscape that was difficult to identify. I thought that it would be an interesting thing to show here, rather than something that was very easily identifiable to a specific cultural context. I think it is a deliberate artistic choice in the film to have that landscape, namely to say that capital exists as a kind of universalising factor in the world today and that it appears almost like nature and as an endless horizon. This is why it is important to say that the work has to be installed with its glass wall so that you actually have an endless horizon.

Secondly, I think the film has a lot of imperfection in it. Maybe I should explain a little bit about how it was made in case some people were wondering. It started with a number of interviews with people on the street and with friends. These were then put into sequence. Scripts were created and then given to a number of actors who are all artists and friends of the artist. We asked them if they could say the words. The actors would retell the scripts in their own words, live and not read from the scripts. That is how it was made. It was a kind of re-representation of this impossible idea of the vox populi – that there is a voice of the people.

There are some strange metaphors at play. On the one hand, you have the voice of the people, but on the other hand you have the silent majority. I do not know how you can hear the silent majority if it is silent. I always wondered about that. In summary, that was why I chose that piece.

Suzanne Lacy: Can you tell us what is successful about the film? What would be your own criteria for aesthetically, politically, compelling artwork?

Simon Sheikh: Yes, I think it is actually quite difficult. Maybe my second answer is a more theoretical answer. It has to do with the idea of dematerialisation. I would actually say that the discussion of whether this basketball game is a work of art or not, is completely irrelevant to me because those boundaries are so dissolved and anything can be a work of art. I think we just have to accept that as an historical situation. Some might bemoan that, but ...

Suzanne Lacy: But is it a good work of art? Because I think that is only the same question in advance.

Simon Sheikh: If we do not have a concept of what something is as an object of study, then it is impossible to have a value system that is coherent in any way. I think that is why art criticism seems to be so random. Is it maybe also why art criticism is increasingly irrelevant - irrelevant, that is, for the market. It has been said that the role of the critic has very little influence on the market these days compared with the art consultant.

If we look at the dematerialisation of the art world, it has happened simultaneously to the supposed dematerialisation of labour, though it is arguable as to whether labour has been dematerialised. I would say 'immaterial' labour should be understood as the fact that no-one is working in factories any longer. Labour should rather be understood as the way in which we all work in a global factory of knowledge production and production of goods.

One of the major theorists of this, the Italian, Paolo Virno, has a very interesting discussion of this in his book, 'The Grammar of the Multitude' that came out in 2004 where he talks about the problem of remuneration for this kind of work. He says that now work is language-based, primarily, how do you judge it? He suggests that it has to do with aptitude - skills of a political kind. How can you actually advance through language?

We can look at this problem very simply. We remunerate traditional kinds of work such as that of the farmer for turning nothing into something. We can set a price or value on that. Then we have the industrial worker who transforms something into something else. We can remunerate that, as Marx shows, through the hours of work put into the object.

The problem is, first of all, art has never been remunerated according to the hours of work that was put into the object. Secondly, there is dematerialisation and what constitutes work. So how do we actually judge quality?

Virno uses two examples. How do we judge who is a good priest? How do we judge who is a good journalist? We can say exactly the same thing about artists today (the kind of post-conceptual artists). With the good priest, it is impossible to measure how many converts he has. As for the journalist we cannot measure how many people changed their minds, how many people felt informed about the writings of this journalist. What we can measure is how this person advances. The good priest is the one who becomes a bishop and the good journalist is the one who becomes an editor or who gets h/her own column in a newspaper. Exactly the same thing happens with artists.

Reading that made me realise that this is why the CVs are in every goddamn catalogue and they are as important as the imagery. Why are they there? I have actually wondered about that for a long time. Now I realise why. It is because you can see - Oh, this person showed at Documenta. This person was in Venice. This person is in this collection, so h/she is a good artist. You have to put your CV on every grant application so that the assessors can say, 'This person had that show, so - here's the grant.'

It is the same system of remuneration as outlined by Virno.

Suzanne Lacy: Do you want to jump in, Grant - at any point, please.

2. "The issue of quality in socially engaged practice"

- Grant Kester

Grant Kester: The quality issue is interesting. Questions of quality and evaluative criteria seem to come up regularly with socially engaged art, but very rarely in discussions of mainstream art practice.



I'm always somewhat surprised when critics of socially-engaged practices attack them for failing to foreground "artistic" or "aesthetic" meaning, but make absolutely no effort to define what either of these terms mean. What they generally mean, I suspect, is that activist work is too proximate to other areas of cultural or political practice; that it doesn't maintain a sufficient degree of ironic detachment or ambiguity relative to a given life world. Critical distancing may or may not be intrinsically artistic, but it's hard to have a conversation about it. It's become so naturalized as the only proper role for art to play that it's not even visible as a distinct aesthetic paradigm. I would argue that there is more than one way to produce critical insight, and that the conventional avant-garde technique of an artist-administered ontic disruption is only one of them.

This paradigm emerged in part through the growing academicization of art education during the 1980s, and the consequent demand in universities for a codifiable "theoretical" component in the development of graduate school curricula. It represents the confluence of neo-conceptual art practice and post-structuralist theory during this period when you see a lot of theoretical material, drawn primarily for poststructuralist sources, beginning to be taught in art schools, not just in North America and Europe but in Latin America as well. It lends itself in particular to what I identify as a textual paradigm of art practice, based on a principle of repetition. The artist constructs an object, an event, or a performance that is then "set in place" (Gestellen, as Heidegger would say) before the viewer, who is summoned to the scene. The work of art essentially replicates an idea, image or insight devised by the artist. Typically the textual work is intended to derange or destabilise conventional forms of meaning or signification. After several decades, of course, this approach has become almost entirely naturalized, or maybe ritualized is a better way to describe it. That's why so much contemporary art practice comes off as a kind of potted cultural studies in which the artist selects a particular social, cultural or representational system, identifies the (often self-evident) ideological compromises and complicities committed by its various participants, and then boldly "intervenes" by pointing out these gaps and aporia, confident that he or she has radically subverted, destabilized, or otherwise transformed the consciousness of all involved.

I would argue that any number of art practices that we might identify among artists in this room also have the effect of dislocating, destabilising or challenging conventional forms of identification or meaning, but they do not do so via the same 'textual' approach, or by maintaining the same sort of custodial relationship to the viewer. They proceed through a different set of procedures and, because of that, this work isn't legible to critics trained in the canon of poststructuralist art theory.

Rather than proceeding from the ethical/epistemological opposition that structures most textual criticism (i.e. coherence is bad, fragmentation is good, stability is bad, disruption is good, etc.) I find it more useful to view a given project situationally, in the context of a continuum of ideological, institutional and discursive forces, from the micro to the macro level. A lot of the work I'm researching currently is involved with the corrosive impact of neo-liberalism on local economies or on the operations of NGOs in the so-called developing world, and the ways in which artists and art collectives are working strategically to challenge the neoliberal paradigm.

Context is crucial here. Suzanne mentioned (I think, appropriately enough) that this project, No Blood No Foul, could happen in Oakland because Oakland already has a politicised activist community that is concerned with racial issues. It would not work so well in many other places. Park Fiction's work in the Hafenstrasse, for example, would never have come into existence if it was not in a community that had essentially barricaded itself against the German police two decades before. So, the complex negotiation of accommodation and co-optation could not have existed otherwise than in that setting, against the ground of the violent resistance that occurred in the Hafenstrasse in the 1980s.

Suzanne Lacy: Let me jump in to the first part of your argument. It is true that this form of discourse is forced upon this kind of work. It is also true that some of us have taken it on as opposed to having it forced on us. As a result, I think of three things. What, perhaps, distinguishes this as art from political activism, is precisely this questioning - 'Is it art? Is it not art? Is it good art? Is it not good art?' Those are stupid framings for what is essentially an enquiry into the nature of what you are doing. I think that is the legacy of a certain kind of avant garde thinking.

I would never have been an artist if I had not gone to Cal Arts. When I went to Cal Arts, I was introduced precisely into this kind of enquiry as the underpinning of this sort of work. The Oakland projects, for me, are a culmination of that enquiry. I do not know what the results are, but I know I am ready to sum it up.

There are two other issues that are part of this question of the aesthetic or the evaluative criteria.

One has to do with the close linkage between a lot of this work - theatre and performance art. I am critiqued as much in theatre as I am in fine art. Theatre seems to have a comfort level with the intentional act, the act that is not on stage in a way that I think the visual does not. It is interesting to see the moment when some of us in LA and around the world began to call ourselves performance artists. I was one of the first group. We weren't sculptors who did performance. We were performance artists. It is interesting to see the trajectories that kind of work took from the very theatrical, people like Spalding Gray to the large-scale theatrical works of Robert Wilson, Laurie Anderson. They were all part of this early performative art group.

That is one issue - how do you bring that aesthetic of temporality or even a discussion of it into the visual art world?

I think the other issue that has just recently occurred to me is the relationship between the visual display of whatever you have done that exists very deeply in a particular community and the taking of this into a gallery. I have taken this work to various galleries at various times, but what happens to the work? Where is the work? Is there a fundamental problem with the visualisation of the people that you work with that is somehow linked to visual art (whether it is good visual art or not)? I think that is not just that, 'Gee, too bad ... We have to deal with this issue. Nobody else does.'

There are some very particular issues of aesthetic that are quite interesting in this type of work.

Simon Sheikh: I think the gallery space has certain conventions of representation that one has to work with. It does not mean that you cannot circumvent them, but you have to work with them. I am not sure that documentation is the right way of representing, or presenting, this work. Perhaps there are other ways to do it.

Then, of course, I think I will have to give again an economic answer to how your area of work becomes part of the visual art world. It does so now not exactly as an object, but as a commodity. If you can commodify your piece, then it is not a problem. A lot of '90s relational aesthetics art was exactly about this. How can you commodify these practices? I would go as far to say, it was all about that.

Suzanne Lacy: I am not sure it was! I am actually not sure it was the commoditisation of these practices. I think these practices came from another source, and that there has been a commoditisation of the look of these practices.

Simon Sheikh: Well, yes. It amounts to the same, I would say.

Suzanne Lacy: It amounts to the same in the art world.

Simon Sheikh: Yes. That is what I mean. If you were to commodify it, it does not really matter if it took place in Oakland in that gym ...

Suzanne Lacy: Right ...

Simon Sheikh: ... that does not matter. But if you can present that performance in a commodifiable form in a gallery, then that kind of work is fine and people will take it at face value. Art critics will not, then, investigate what actually happened at all. That is unimportant. So, you know, you can just cook some fancy food for people or whatever in a gallery space and – pff – you can sell the work to an audience.

Suzanne Lacy: Ok, but I raised this in Glasgow - Why would we call ourselves artists? If we did not, then we could just go about doing what we do, and not have to deal with the institution if the notion of commodification was abhorrent.

It is not so much that it is abhorrent, but that it raises some very tricky ethical issues.

Simon Sheikh: A lot of people left art in the '70s and said, 'Ok, I am simply evacuating that position and doing other kinds of work' – a lot of it for political reasons.

Interestingly enough, the way art history is then being re-written is that a lot of those artists are now reclaiming that work as art by saying, 'Oh, I know, I was working with Relief Help for Africa, but that was an art project that I did between '73 and '79.' This is very odd.

Suzanne Lacy: That is interesting – I did not know that.

Simon Sheikh: Yes! Certainly in Scandinavia – there is one art historian who is writing a whole book on that period. It is going to be a revisionist history because he is basically going to show that there is a connection between people who left the art world and their activism. The book reinstates the work as art and is the foundation for some other clearly commodifiable art groups that existed in the late 1990s. There is a direct continuum from those kinds of social practices into relational aesthetics.

I find it very troubling, but I find it also very troubling that the people are very happy to be inspired by that kind of history.

3. "Controlling the conditions for art"

- Jay Koh

Jay Koh: At the moment I am working in a cross-community project in Dublin – a three-year project dealing with the emerging Chinese community and the Irish community. I have a background working in different structures, like the military government in Burma or communist government in China or in Belarus or, at the moment now, in Ireland. It is from this background that I give the feedback to your question in this session about quality.



First I have to ask Simon - Who are the artists that you showed in the horizon piece?

Simon Sheikh: It is Katya Sander, a Danish artist .

Jay Koh: I worked with her for three days examining the different positions and properties of dialogical practice. She used a very similar piece of work like this to present her dialogical position. Horizon was not the position that she took up as a piece of work. It is very clear that the person answering the question in the piece are actors prepared by her – that is her whole projection.

You use a lot of words like 'communication' and 'imagination'. I find these very central to the position of the artist who becomes both popular and very privileged.

In public space I think we have to destabilise this position of artist as the person who creates an idea. The work that Suzanne showed today is a very constructed work as in a laboratory or Art School. It is highly structured. But we are dealing with a public that is real. We have to control the conditions in which such a construction becomes possible,

where the artist becomes merged with the public as a part of the public, as a kind of performance in everyday life that the artist goes into.

[Addressing Suzanne] I am very aware that you have controversial critical processes as you have said. You initiate something and different members of the community come and work with you and create this product.

But once the work of placing the project is done, it seemed essential that the entertainment becomes the main part of the piece because the game did not stop. The television became part of that entertainment behind the scenes. But I doubt that people really looked at the work. They understand the dignity of the project, its visibility. But I doubt that any boy was going to spend two minutes reading the screen and its contents, the information that you were trying to show. I have problems with that.

With this in mind, how do I look at the issue of quality? The easiest way for me to look at quality is to look at the artist's intention, how he works, what I would refer to the work's imagination and ideas. We need to look in a deep sense in terms of how the relationships work, as Grant says, at a micro level or process. You are working in a society where there is a high level of competency in terms of civil consciousness and vocality. What happens if you transpose the way you create this work to another society or culture where these skills and values are not practised, the thinnest society where people do not communicate? How to get them to communicate?

In Burmese society understanding of crime is totally different from in a democracy, where there is accountability or transparency. How does this relationship work when a work is being presented in this way? I am interested in this different level of examination.

Suzanne Lacy: Well, I would just say, briefly, that I would not do a piece like this in Finland! I have done works in Finland and they were not like this.

Jay Koh: Have you shown this work outside America?

Suzanne Lacy: Yes, I showed it in Japan.

Jay Koh: That is very interesting, because Japan does not have an open culture – so how does it work there? A lot of Western artists fail in their projects by trying to revamp the school system.

Suzanne Lacy: When I showed it in Japan, it was in the form of documentation that was re-setup in the midst of a lot of other international works. I did not redo this in Japan. You could not have done so. The whole relationship between youth and police, and youth and adult authority, is very different. I took youth to Japan and they talked to other Japanese youth – but it was very superficial. It was an exhibition, not a two-year process of work.

I do not want to go too far in this direction responding because we can do that later. I want to make sure that people have a chance to talk. Is that ok, Jay?

Jay Koh: Ok.

4. "The profiling of artists and participants"

- Jean Cameron

Jean Cameron (Core Group): I am picking up from what Simon was saying that quality, currently, is about visibility – where art is seen. Thinking about the context in Scotland, I have been really aware that is very different from the States. You were looking at profiling for practices that are really marginalised here in terms of live art, performance art, and artists working in public.

My questions are really about profiling or engaging different publics with the project we just looked at.

Firstly, about the hotline to the City Hall - When people were leaving, there was a hotline to the City Hall. I am interested in who was at the other end of that phone? What were those conversations? Were they used in any way beyond the event?

Secondly, in terms of the media coverage we looked at, there was very much a disappearance of the artist. We did not hear the word 'artist' or the notion of an art project being mentioned there. I just wondered whether that was a deliberate strategy? I am thinking about the core group and our final event in terms of the artist and citizenship, the profiling of the artist outwith conventional settings as having a value in current society. Was that a deliberate construct in terms of your communication with the media? How much did you profile art and artists there?

Suzanne Lacy: I will respond quickly to the issue of the hotline as I am sensitive to the fact that I do not want this to become a back-and-forth. A series of questions were consolidated and given to the City Council people. It was a tape machine and yes, it was a conscious strategy to leave my name out of it as artist.

Should we do what we have done before which is take a whole bunch of questions and then we will address a selection?

5. "Relinquishing Power"

- Adele Patrick

Adele Patrick (Core Group): I wanted to return to Simon's question from yesterday about how come certain new ideas or imaginations are represented. I also want to address Suzanne's remark that I hope we are not going to lose in this discussion - the notion of artists listening and the rigorous research and reflective process that goes on before a large-scale artwork in public is actually launched and constructs different publics in a way that you, Simon, were discussing yesterday.

I am really interested in the political potential of when artists choose to embark on an almost explicit engagement with communities in the making of the work in the first place. I am interested where they might choose to refuse a privileged position to create a collective mode of address in the construction of these different publics.

It seems to me, related to this question of imperfection, that there is both a critical and fiscal risk in relinquishing power in that process. It is explicitly saying, 'This is, first of all, a collective imagining and a collective construction of different publics'.

I am picking up that idea of plurality and what happens when you do decide to have different visions and bring them in. This does seem to me to involve risks. Could we talk more about the negotiation that an artist might make today in embarking on these large-scale projects? It seems to me that the issue is not only to listen, but to almost say, well this is actually a collaborative thing and there are plural voices and so on.

6. "Metrics and Renumeration"

- Robert Livingston

Robert Livingston: I was very struck by the equivalence between Simon's description of how we remunerate the priest and Grant's description of the paradigm of the mainstream conceptual artist. These comments link back to what you were saying about the CV. It seems to me that what happens in that part of the world is that the mainstream artist is similarly remunerated or rewarded within the system as an internal process. You cannot actually tell how many people have had their perceptions, their views of reality, changed; but what you can see is how critically that person has advanced through the judgement of their peers.



This is perhaps at the heart of the unease we are feeling about the kind of practice that Suzanne is describing. What a project like that opens up is the legitimacy for a whole range of publics to actually define whether they have, in fact, had their perceptions or their interactions changed. A project like Suzanne's opens up a multiplicity of dialogues and not just the single paradigmatic description of the art-world itself.

Against that, I would set what happens within funding. The Scottish Arts Council recently sent out (for information) the assessment form that all independent assessors are asked to complete when viewing a project of any kind. Across the top it said, 'You are reminded that your comments must be based on objective aesthetic criteria and not your own personal tastes.'

How do we set the need to embrace a multiplicity of views of the effectiveness of this work against the notion that there are in fact a set of objective aesthetic criteria by which funding decisions will be made in future?

7. "The participant's perspective of involvement"

- Katy Maynard

Katy Maynard: I am an artist and I was formally a youth worker as well. I was interested in the way that Suzanne described the process of involving the young people and the Youth Development Program. I wondered whether that included an investigation with the young people into the meaning of public art and of engaging with the process of creating an artwork. Did the young people really understand the nature of the artwork that they were contributing to? Were they really seen as part of the public? Were they actually co-producers? If so, how did this affect the quality of the work? How would that affect the control of the artist over the work and the authenticity of the work?

Sally Thomson (Core Group): I was actually going to ask a complicated question about funding and conflict of interest. Instead I am interested in your answer to Jean Cameron's question about authorship. Why was your name kept out of No Blood, No Foul as the author and the artist in that collaboration?

8. "Speaking Out"

- Eva Merz

Eva Merz: I think that this is more of a comment, than a question. You ask - Why do we call ourselves artists? I just have a comment to that. Since coming to work in Scotland four years ago from Scandinavia, I have worked with social issues. I have just finished a residency that is concerned with the regeneration of a community in Tillydrone, Aberdeen (see core participant: Monika Vykoukal).



I have learnt, in Britain, that people who are working as politicians or social workers in different organisations have difficulty in actually expressing their views. They can be very frustrated about lack of funding, a lack of support, in the case of social workers lack of understanding from politicians. They feel that they cannot speak about it in public. As soon as they are dependent on funding, they will say, 'You do not bite the hand that feeds you.' I have had a lot of experience of this because I have interviewed a number of people about this.

It is very difficult to get that through in public. I see my work, my art, as being a way of communicating and trying to start a debate in public among people who could not otherwise engage. I call myself an artist in the sense of the anarchist who can act as a catalyst in relation to problems that no one else can raise. As soon as you can say 'I am an artist and I am doing an art project', you can get some funding and in a sense do whatever you want. I think that freedom is really important. Apart from that it does not really matter to me whether you call it art or not.

Heather Delday: I would like to ask the panel if they could possibly offer a metaphor to help frame the way we think about critical practice where art operates through relationships and possibly speaks more directly to 'structures of feeling', which is a lovely term, that Simon introduced.

Speaker: I am an artist and also an arts development worker. I am really interested in what came first - the artwork or the project using the art to help community cohesion. Is it an artwork primarily to be shown around galleries, or was it the idea to open the eyes to council people and the police that art could be used for the benefit of the community? I really think that the art itself is a tool for community cohesion in this project and not an artwork in itself to be put into a gallery space.

Speaker: I am quite uneasy about the comparison between the success within society of the artist and the artistic endeavour itself. It seems quite obvious to me that success within your peer group does not equate to good art and that, over a period of time – the artist may have deceased or may not have been widely accepted – but they produced stunning art. I am quite surprised to hear that comparison between success within a peer group and good art.

9. "Imperfection and authorship"

- Simon Sheikh

Simon Sheikh: I think the political task is exactly the challenge in relation to social issues. I cannot give an optimistic answer to that.

I do not think that historical value in art is about the hope that the work gets picked up at some point. There is a system of museums and the economy that equates with quality and is about a judgment of taste. That is why the notion of quality is not so interesting to me. It is circumscribed in a certain system of value.

Imperfection is actually much more interesting. It has to do with the idea of collective experience that was mentioned at the beginning. That has to do with how the system of remuneration works and how history is written. It is always written about individuals. It is very difficult, for instance, to imagine a kind of collective organisation of artistic work because everyone, nowadays, has to have their own contracts and individually negotiate their fees and so on.

I do not know if it is possible any more to discuss collective organisation of artwork. There were experiments where some people said, 'Ok, we are running this institution'. These were mainly in theatre but it also happened at least in one art institution in the late '80s and early '90s, namely the Schedhalle in Zürich where everyone worked to equal pay. I do not know if that is possible today. I think a lot of artists would be very unhappy to do that. They would be happy to do community work, but they would still want to have their authorship somewhere. That leads into a very interesting question - When is it opportune to use the historic figure that the artist is anarchic and when is it opportune to draw it back from it?

Suzanne Lacy: I will address two or three of the pragmatic questions about my practice.

Jay, we can return to the very complex one that you raised. I would say that I tend not to work in cultures that are not western. I work in cultures that I am familiar with. I am bound by language to an extent. If I work in another language it has to be through an interlocutor who is in fact really the collaborator in a very significant way, even the leader of the collaboration. I worked in Medellín, Columbia with Pilar Riaño, who is an anthropologist. I am pretty clear about my limitations in relation to a United States based culture. My practice ranges from the intimate with two people to the very large.

Interestingly enough, there is a very different response to this work from Asian-specific people, even living in Oakland. The young people do not have the same form of performative discourse that, for example, the African-American culture has.

There are all sorts of complexities in this practice that I am sensitive to, but I am certainly not aware of all the cultural differences in the world. It means that I am humble about my ability to negotiate those differences.

The use of my name and/or my figure as an artist is one that I have always use very strategically. Christo is an artist who heroically carries his name throughout the process. That is the fallback position. If you deconstruct documentaries

and look at the way the media operates, the mass media looks for the personality that drives the event. I tend to be absent, particularly in mass media. I have a hell of a time working with television and media producers who make documentaries on my work because I am always saying, 'Can't you find another voice to tell the story? Can't we think about this in a different way other than Suzanne narrating the event?'

Now that is complicated. You have to be careful about a representation in which you are the hidden convener of the whole. The works I make tend to be fairly large and happen over a long period of time. I develop pretty intense relationships within these works. I tend to be open about 'Suzanne the artist as the image and the construct'. When I make images, I do represent both my own cultural perspective, and also a set of desires and I am very clear about that.

I will say 'I do not like that image; I am sorry'. I had a big fight with women in prison once where we undertook within the project to have a conversation about where a particular image would come from, based on whose experience, how the image might be arrived at collaboratively. We really did shape the image together but it was not a simple process.

The last question I want to speak to is youth as co-producers of the work. There is a whole range of work that is art as pedagogy for youth. Many colleagues work with youth. These are different positions within a spectrum of working within a social situation. We all go through that social situation, some more intensely than others. In America this work is highly influenced by race, class and issues of how you go through youth, work with youth and how they are seen as youth.

As a teacher, I would do the kind of artwork that is me and the young people doing what the young people precisely and exactly want to do. When I enter the arena as an artist, it is a much more negotiative process. As I have said before, there is no way I can persuade 300 young people to do something in Oakland that I want them to do that they do not want to do. I have no hold over them. They do not even particularly respect the white woman who walks in through the door. They do not respect the professor and they do not respect the artist particularly. You have to earn their respect through a complex process of negotiation about my desires to make an image as artist and their desires to make an image as young people. They bring a whole other set of desires for self-presentation to the situation. These are usually not what I would consider my particular, specific and rather small desire in the situation – which is to make art.

I do not think, in the scheme of things, that making art is the answer to the world's problems. I do hold on to that as something that gives me a very deep pleasure and structures my practice. However, I am a very political person. Whether I was a doctor or a lawyer or an Indian Chief (as they used to say when I was growing up), I would be working politically. As an artist, I am simply working politically.

10. "Working across cultures"

- Reiko Goto

Reiko Goto: The comment about language issues – I think to show your work in a different culture is very important because our human imagination is primitive. We have to keep trying to extend our imagination. If we only work in one culture and the understanding of why we live in that culture, we think we know everything. Our discussion is then based on that limitation. Our imagination cannot go beyond it.



In my country, the Prime Minister has said that black people are lazy. When things like that happen amongst Japanese people, we cannot solve the problem. It is just that the person was rude. We need outsiders to come in and talk about it. We need good artists, good curators and good educators. They start to unpack what we look at as a work of art and then these issues start to make sense. But our imagination – we cannot start imagining if we do not live in Oakland, California.

Simon Sheikh: Unfortunately, it is not just a question of knowledge, you know. We have now a newly elected president of France who called black people animals.

Suzanne Lacy: Really?

Simon Sheikh: Yes. It does not have to do with distance. You can be very close to the problem. He is, by the way, the son of an immigrant! These language games can be used in very different ways.

Jay Koh: It is not just whether the artist can control whether you want to work on something. It is about what you produce (like that grand book that has been read in a different space and now there is a taboo translation in Chinese, in Taiwan). You have no real control as an artist over the reception of the work. Nonetheless the reception or acceptance of what you create depends on what you have projected and the way you have prepared for it.

So I am an artist because it gives me the highest level of freedom, greater than a sociologist, an anthropologist, or a lawyer. When I became an artist, I made use of the perception in a community of art as chaotic, as defying definition. I use that as a reverse strategy in order to be accepted by adopting different positions - that of a politician, for example.

Suzanne Lacy: That is what Eva was saying, yes.

Roxana Meechan: I think what you are saying is very interesting, but it makes it even more complex when you are an artist working also for the local authority, when you are effectively working for local politics. There is a perception of artists who are working in the community that they might be there because you were not successful as an artist, so you have become an arts worker. This project has been a great project for me because I see myself now as an artist who works in a dialogical practice. I have rediscovered the origin of why I wanted to be working in this sphere – so thank you for this.

11. "Emotions and Democracy"

- Anita Haywood

Anita Haywood: It seems to me that Simon's articulation of history and economics as underpinning art discourse now needs to account for the emotional as a structure, particularly when you mentioned agonism.



Grant Kester: The agonistic argument is developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. It is the idea that democracies have to be premised around an irresolvable kernel of difference because otherwise they will ride roughshod over all singularity and difference. Agonistic dissent is productive of good democracy.

Anita Haywood: I just feel that this is becoming the contemporary structure, now.

Simon Sheikh: This is actually what I worked on in the latest curatorial project I did. It exactly concerns the connection between our emotions, our subjectivity and capital. I think that we are in such a dominant phase of capital that we cannot distinguish our emotions from commodity.

You see it in language. You see economic language when you talk about emotions. You say, 'Well, I cannot invest in this relationship any more' and so on. Economic metaphors are part of our structure of feeling, so in that sense yes. I do not know if that is what is what you meant.

Suzanne Lacy: I think that is, yes.

12. "Sustainability"

- Roxanne Permar

Roxanne Permar: I am interested in the relationship after a project is finished. Suzanne, you talked about the intensity of some of the relationships that you formed. I am interested both in how we sustain relationships and how considering sustainability then impacts on the processes and kinds of achievements that happen within the context of the project?

Suzanne Lacy: Let me just say that I am really reluctant, in one sense to talk about relationships. Privately, I do, of course, talk about the relationships I have with the people in Oakland. There is a lot of racism in this (your) culture but I do not know if you are aware enough of it to know that there is this stereotypical thing that white people do in America. That is to say 'my best friend is black'.

I would say at least 50% of the people I worked with were black and at all levels: artists, kids, politicians, and so on. One of the problems with talking about my relationships with people is because it is such a rich community. It becomes problematic for me to use my complex and ongoing relationships with the people in Oakland as any kind of justification for the work. I would rather say that in the process of making of work that is complex and meaningful, ongoing relationships are formed by a lot of people on a lot of levels and they do continue by virtue of the fact that many of those people live in the same community. I still have a home in that community so I am there quite a bit.

I am curious about whether or not this issue of relationships is in any way part of the evaluative criteria of the work. To go back to what Robert said, it certainly gives us an opportunity to look more closely at the multi-vocal criticism that exists within the work. If I can talk to 50 people whom I worked with, who still have very rich and full perceptions of this work however they want to frame it, then that adds to our knowledge base. Whether that is a criterion of the work or not is a loaded issue when you are doing cross-racial work, particularly.

Chris Fremantle: Can I pick up on that thought of Roxanne's? It troubles me when the artist develops a project in a community and then goes away. Roxanne triggered an experience I had in the past.



I worked in a hospital for a while. I have worked in a museum. I have worked in various places and I have a set of relationships with people because I have worked with them. When I move, almost all of those relationships fall away. Even if you were best buddies and would go out for drinks and all of that, you move on. Actually, fundamentally, those relationships are about work and only a few of them become personal. Is that actually fair, or do we have an expectation because we think it is engaged practice and we are doing all these 'good' things for the world and all of that, that it should be more than that?

Suzanne Lacy: We are looking for it not to be paternalistic and seeking evidence to that effect.

Jay Koh: This kind of questioning around relationships after the work is completed has been conceptualised in the terminology of concrete intervention. Concrete intervention determines that something should be sustained after the artist leaves. If the project falls apart after the artist leaves, then it is a failure.

For me, the relationship is already an issue that is considered at a pre-research phase. I direct my research onto the question of ownership at this early stage. If this ownership does not happen early on, then the project is stopped.

It comes down to how I would direct my work.

13. "Educating the Artist"

- Anne Douglas

Anne Douglas: I want to pick up on an issue that Ed Carroll raised in Seminar 2. How do artists learn in this very complex landscape of practice? Allan Kaprow, I think, said that in art-like art, you could accept the art work and there

was no need for feedback, but in life-like art, you had to construct, not just the experience, but an understanding of what that experience meant in context i.e, you had to construct feedback loops within the practice itself with participants and with the art world.

It seems to me there are implications for not being able to easily replicate these practices. One of the ways that artists traditionally have learned is through copying – and copying in a very literal sense of copying the visual element in order to get inside the understanding of the practice. Where are we now with that learning process, now that we have this very complex landscape of issues that we cannot easily replicate? When we replicate, we have to judge very carefully how to tell the story, what issues to raise.

How do we learn in this field of practice?

Simon Sheikh: Working as an educator with artists, I do not distinguish between different forms of practice. The discussion we will always have is, why they choose to work with a certain format, or what I would call a mode of address, what is indicated in that choice, historically and in the present. I believe that the intention of an artwork is not always clear in the work, and especially when you are working within education. As a consequence the discussion becomes, 'What is the intention and what is the function of the particular work?' I think that is an evaluation that all artists do continuously.

Some artists do not have to carry out this kind of evaluation if their intention is to have fun doing what they are doing in their studio and there are galleries that like what they do and people want to buy their work. That is totally valid and I do not mean to be critical about it.

There are other things where I would question the ethics and that is when you work with people and you turn them into images that are, for instance, paternalistic – which is happening in a lot in relational aesthetics. I have huge ethical problems with that.

In terms of my prism, Walter Benjamin said that the work with the correct political tendency also has to be formally the most innovative. I still think that it is a good strategy not to separate between form and content, that you actually say that the form defines the content and vice versa but that is a huge discussion. A lot of artists think that you can make that separation. They say, 'I know I work with a commodity, but the commodity is very critical of the work at large' and maybe it is. I mean, a book is a commodity, but there are still good things in it – so.

Grant Kester: I think it is a good point. It has to do with the paradigm shift that is represented by the movement away from object-based art practice. We tend to see a more heuristic approach to site, an attempt to engage with the continuity of forces that operate in a particular location as creatively as possible and to toggle back and forth between an immersion in that site, and the capacity to stand sufficiently far outside to grasp the totality of forces operating within it. This standing back is not an expression of some naïve outsiderism ('I cannot afford to intervene in this space, because once I do, I risk too many compromises'). At the same time it avoids the equally naïve model of the Gramscian, "organic intellectual," who can speak with absolute authority from the belly of the beast. It is that toggling, back and forth that I find most productive.

Suzanne Lacy: Ok. Thank you very much.

Summary and Reflection Seminar 3: Quality and Imperfection

Professor Anne Douglas

Perceptions of quality: Quality as use value v inherent character

In embarking on *Working in Public*, we started out with an implicit assumption that criteria for judging quality in art in the gallery and museum were widely understood and broadly agreed, whereas quality of art in the public sphere was less well understood. The work of the series therefore set out to create a new level of thinking that would allow art in public to account for its value (not least in relation to significant investment in terms of public funding).

In experiencing the seminar series and the diversity of positions represented, a new horizon (as Simon Sheikh might put it) has emerged. The focus has shifted towards understanding 'quality' in a different sense - quality as inherent character explored through its interplay with context - artistic, social, cultural and political.ⁱ

To focus on *criteria* for judging quality is to evoke a use or exchange value - What is art for? What is it worth to us (in equivalent monetary terms)? Focusing on quality in the sense of 'inherent nature' raises a different question 'What *is* art? And 'What is art in relation to other ways of being in the world?' What are the (aesthetic and ethical) implications of practising one way or another?

When Suzanne Lacy asks of the Oakland projects - 'When does this work spill over into becoming life?', when Grant Kester investigates art projects that propose alternative value systems to those of neoliberalism, or when Simon Sheikh articulates the role of art in terms of constructing diverse publics, they are not constructing an economic justification for art - its use value. They are testing the thresholds that they each perceive between art and other forms of conceptualising and experiencing the world. It is striking in each case how radical these thresholds are.

By extending our horizon from use value to symbolic experience, the discussion has shifted away from justifying one artistic approach over another. The latter operates within *an assumption of art* rather than an articulation of art as a practice and its place in the world. It also locks the discourse narrowly into alternative styles of making- gallery *or* public, allowing the one to be easily dismissed by the other. (Currently in Scotland and further afield this is where most of the heated debate in art is situated.)

I would argue that the real challenge lies in much bigger stakes - of art refinding its place in the world. It is a world in which communication technologies are fluid and shape the everyday in powerful ways. It is a world of significant cultural differences, not least deepening economic discrepancies between the very rich and the very poor. Globally we are increasingly challenged by our relationship with the world. David Haleyⁱⁱ argues that this is manifest in the significant discourse on climate change (our relationship with the environment) and the discourse on cultural diversity (our relationship with other cultures). We have reached a point in human history that demands that we listen and reflect on the implications of different systems of value; cultural, social and economic. That was the starting point in a particular context of the Oakland series - observing young people and hearing the alarm calls of a breakdown between youth and the adult world.

The *Working in Public* discussion has engaged in an open ended exploration of dynamic and radical forms of creativity and their power to create meaning. In so doing it has seriously questioned the intellectual basis for a current hierarchy of values - (such as 'art in museums and galleries is more authentically art than art in the public sphere that is compromised by other agendas').ⁱⁱⁱ

Seminar 2 questioned whether we can ever *assume* value in either place - gallery or non gallery. It placed emphasis on continually exercising criticality and gaining a thorough understanding of

the power at work in acts of representation (whether in or outside of conventional institutional contexts) and of understanding where authority really lies.

A practice led inquiry based on first principles

One of the leitmotifs of research in *On the Edge* has been the notion of 'suspending belief'. Art or creativity is often referred to as an act of faith, a kind of chancing one's arm in response to deep intuition (in Perkins' sense of intuition as compressed learning/knowledge). Suspending belief is different. It takes the stance that we actually know very little about what we experience until we revisit experience and return to first principles.

By 'suspending belief' I would like to trace how the new horizon that I discuss in this introduction has emerged. There are pressure points within Suzanne Lacy's articulation of the Oakland work that amount to contradictory perceptions of quality and imperfection. These pressure points prompt different but complimentary theoretical positions, one focused in art history and aesthetics (Grant Kester) and the other in the relationship of art to notions of public (Simon Sheikh).

The pressure points are perhaps best evidenced within Suzanne's own position on aesthetics.

"What I mean by perfect is that aesthetic sense that it 'works'. Sometimes that happens. It is rare. More often it does not work. If I use my own criteria of this sort of inner-sense of aesthetic competency or completion or wholeness, then most of my work does not really measure up to my interior gauge of what aesthetic quality is. Perfection is not the right word. In fact, the aesthetic operates on many, many dimensions from the visual to the relational or negotiable to the political. In which one of those spheres, or in what way are we going to assess a work's excellence or quality?" Seminar 3 am

Suzanne acknowledges aesthetics in two senses - a formal 'wholeness' as well as 'relational'. In making art, these different senses frequently clash.

What are first principles of Quality and Imperfection?

Art in the institution of the gallery reaches its public or audience after the artist has authored a piece of work. The gallery audience is a group of individuals already sensitised and accustomed to a set of rules of engagement. The economic, cultural and political forces that shape the context of that experience - the gallery system, are implicit unless the artist as author chooses to bring these to the foreground.

In contrast, art in the public sphere is shaped in response to political, social, contextual forces in an explicit way. Rules of engagement are not pre-established but evolve as part of the creation of the work. This places the artist in a different relation to authorship and 'audience' or 'public'. These variables influence the way that artists work, the way that the work is experienced as well as how quality is judged and by whom.

"Most of the politics of this work are collaboratively framed. They do not just start as 'I have a brilliant insight into this problem and I do my work'. What happens is - 'I have an observation. I become curious. I bring my background to the picture and simply begin as we would do in this room. We would start talking and then the talking circles get wider and you even get referred to people who fundamentally disagree with you'. Suzanne Lacy Sem 3 morning session

Established forms of art making are well rehearsed protocols, elegant, controlled and 'perfect' in their own terms of reference. However, Francis McKee (Seminar 2) described museums and galleries as 'quaint and strange' in the light of a changing landscape in which art is proliferating within a new economy in the art world. Speaking of the changes to CCA as an art institution he comments

'Reconsidering everything leads us to reinvent ourselves in some way because I think there is a niche that we have in the new world, but it is a different niche, and we need to think it through". (Seminar 2 evening session).

Public art is open to contingent factors outside of the aesthetic control of the artist. It is by its very nature 'imperfect' in the sense of not being completely within the formal control of the artist, because it operates in relation to multiple, possibly conflicting terms of reference. These can go to the point of questioning the identity of the work as art.

"I wanted to bring this project (*No Blood, No Foul*) up today in connection with this notion of imperfection because, of all this series, this is the one work that people have had a hard time seeing as an artwork." Suzanne Lacy Sem 3 morning session

Suzanne Lacy's Oakland projects clearly demonstrate art operating in relation to public agenda issues: youth, race and issues of youth such as education, health and relationships - issues that most affect a particular social grouping in their every day life. In relation to the Oakland work, Suzanne questions where the 'work of art' is located and how it shifts and transforms at certain points in the process into no longer being art, to becoming a social process. To reinstate the work's specific 'artlike' character, Suzanne consciously punctuates her longterm involvement in the Oakland community with performance works, creating points of hiatus that represent the work back to a wider constituency as a symbolic experience. (Many projects in Scotland and many of the examples discussed recently by Grant do not have this kind of formal hiatus). She insists upon her aesthetic control as artist at these points. while also acknowledging the dependency of the work on its participants.

"We had removed the glass from a giant window up above the entire parking structure and I was standing up there in the wind, looking down several floors at the *Free Mumia*^{iv} protesters. They were just about to blow an entire three-years' worth of work, and I thought, 'Ha! That is really interesting, isn't it?' It was a sort of bemusement – a disinterested bemusement on the inevitability of imperfection in this work and its complexities." Suzanne Lacy Seminar 3 morning session

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a Pennsylvania journalist who exposed police violence against communities. He has been on death row since 1982. Suzanne gave the *Free Mumia* protestors an opportunity to participate in *Code 33* as a platform for their protest. Instead they chose to disrupt the event by exploiting the presence of the media to draw attention to their movement and away from the performance.

The narrative of the *Free Mumia* protestors at *Code 33* describes the potential of contingent factors to disrupt, even destroy the symbolic intention of an artwork. The way that Suzanne tells the story exposes the push and pull of control and judgement that exercises an artist working in the public sphere within symbolic systems that compete and contradict. Her personal response- "a disinterested bemusement on the inevitability of imperfection" articulates the way in which she clearly sees a tension between artistic control and public freedom, both qualities that she seeks in the work but that may also destroy the work's reason for being as art.

Suzanne is also curious to understand how her work might address mainstream gallery/ museum culture appropriately and powerfully. She is interested in confronting the contradictions and potent issues that arise in bringing these two systems of value together. In the discussion in Seminar 2 she says

"It is not hard to go into a gallery and figure out some of the visual strategies being employed now. Imagine a pregnant teenager with a very large belly talking about the kind of information I have access to on a very big television monitor in a very dark room. That

works. It is also massively exploitative and I would not do that. But I have seen artists that do that, and maybe even do it (*probably* even do it) with the permission of the massively pregnant teenager. I would not do it because I think there are issues of body, and whose body, that are both political and aesthetic." Seminar 2 morning session.

A different aesthetics

Grant suggests that in the visual art world we are currently working with two quite different notions of aesthetics. Within art objects, we are working with a notion of art as 'text', where 'objects' are invested in as the carriers of meaning. The role of audience is to interpret what is said. These 'texts' are located as objects of value within institutions.

The avant garde can and does from time to time smash through conventions, displacing by breaking the linguistic and aesthetic codes of the establishment. These movements and counter movements only make sense if they take place within a frame of reference (such as the gallery) that give these codes meaning in the first place. One frame creates the catalyst to a counterpoint in an endless agonistic cycle.

Grant establishes a different aesthetic for public work. In working directly in society some artists develop spaces of experience that stand outside of either politics or religion. This is different from an aesthetics based on 'text' and interpretation in engaging experiences of *meaning making* that are specific to context, inhabited by and shared between artist and interlocutor. They are haptic, physical and discursive.

Grant's thinking resonates with aspects of Kaprow's notion of the unartist - the artist reaching beyond the gallery /institution into life itself, of creating spaces (mental and imaginary as well as social) that exist for their own sake. Drawing on Huizinga and the notion of play being 'for its own sake', Kaprow conceives these spaces as in some sense 'ritual spaces' that articulate a particular moment in which meaning is 'grasped'. These rehearse what later might take organisational form. Grant, however, is specifically interested in forms of art that critique the fundamental paradigms that shape existing organisational forms and that model alternatives. He suggests that artists in this area of work do so through a set of procedures that are not recognisable by canonical forms of art making

"For my purposes, a lot of the work I am looking at now, negotiates with the impact of neo-liberalism, whether it is the impact of neo-liberalism on local economies or the impact of neo-liberalism on the operations of NGOs in the so-called developing world and the way that then reads off of and impacts the local and situational strategies of artists and groups working in particular contexts." Grant Kester Seminar 3 Morning Session

Park Fiction supported a process of urban regeneration in the area of the Hafenstrasse in Hamburg that inverted the aesthetic values of modernist aesthetic purity, developing extemporised spaces that directly address the ways and values in which the space is *actually* inhabited - dog walking, skate boarding, an interest in kitsch.

Grant positions his judgment of quality in art by examining practices that challenge by extending our focus of vision to embrace fundamental questions about how we organise ourselves in the world. Grant's analysis of recent case studies (Superflex and Park Fiction) emphasise the social/political critical stance of these practices that are deliberately aesthetically ambiguous in terms of their visuality but have the potential to be transformational in terms of habitual ways of thinking and operating.

Suzanne, Grant and Simon share this political interest in the relationship of art to society but come at it from different positions.

Dematerialising the artwork in the development of new publics

Suzanne asks of Simon

"There is a professional situation that we also operate in as artists (i.e. beyond the personal) and so, the question is, how do we evaluate this work and thereby begin to create an aesthetic framework or an aesthetic idea or, is that even a relevant question any more? Is that just a generational question? Is that something that I grew up with but that may not be as pertinent?"

Simon Sheikh responds

"I would actually say that the discussion of whether this basketball game (*No Blood, No Foul*) is a work of art or not, is completely irrelevant to me because those boundaries are so dissolved and *anything* can be a work of art. I think we just have to accept that as an historical situation."

Suzanne Lacy & Simon Sheikh Seminar 3 am

Viewed as part of the changing nature of the public sphere

In Seminar 3 Simon Sheikh opened up a trajectory of thinking that enabled us to see the artist/public relationship as part of a dynamic re-conceptualisation of the public sphere. Simon challenges Habermas' notion of a single public sphere that is the locus of a rational discourse. He views public as in reality housing many diverse positions constituted through differences of gender, race, economic circumstances and levels of education leading to the potential for a diversity of publics that have value in their own right and that are fluid, that may cross into private space such as the home. We need to embrace and accept this diversity without attempting to rationalise or unify it.

Dominant publics generate counter publics that mimic these dominant forms but to very different ends. Gay cruising in public parks does not involve any change in 'park' as a place but alters its usage.

Public art engages a vigorous debate from the moment of its idea through to its inception where gallery art is discussed only once it is completed. This engagement /participation in the potential of an artwork is a source of real energy in terms of the artwork's power to construct a public as part of the work's own emergence. As public art has increasingly developed in this way, it has become less and less material.

The making of a public is in fact the imagining of a world. Any work of art needs to start with its public, imagine a public in order to produce a world around it- a horizon. We re-imagine the world when we are no longer satisfied with what it gives us. All social institutions are the outcome of imagining and then instituting that imaginary as a social construction - even money.

In thinking this through in relation to new forms and languages of art making, we have to consider art as one mode of address among others. We need to consider who is the 'speaking subject', who is being addressed and in relation to what systems of values is this configuration (speaker, addressee and context). So for example, in making a film we can ask about the formal properties of film, of how one sequence follows another but we can go further and ask, who is involved and why, what are the relations between people in making the work and what are the politics of the work's distribution. By pushing this threshold from the aesthetics of formal construction to the politics of making, we are in fact talking about the politics of aesthetics. This places attention on the political meaning of certain judgements. It is more than poetics.

Simon advocates that critical attention should scrutinise what horizon is being imagined through art and the hidden forces that shape it - who is included and who is excluded. Who has the power

to de-represent, to remove ideas? What is real about our world and what is imaginary? At what point does the imaginary become in some sense real?

"How does an artwork relate itself to the delimitations of its horizon or the horizon of a current political hegemony at any given point? What will that tell us of the work? How can we then use our understanding to work within?"

Simon showed us a film by the video artist, Katya Sander depicting a far horizon within an anonymous landscape and characters who manifest a lack of imagination, a lack of curiosity about their surroundings. He suggests that this symbolises the idea of a silent majority in a disturbing way. The film is constructed. Actors draw on real interview material. He explains that the film becomes a metaphor for an idea of *vox populi*, but one that lacks imagination.

This observation resonates with Tom Trevor's Home series, Spacex that set out to challenge the homogeneity implicit in the idea of Middle England (Seminar 2).

Conclusions

Is the artworld now struggling to accommodate challenges of cultural change? The myth of the avant garde suggests that art prefigures, anticipates or at least resonates actual change before the public imagination has caught up. The question is important because art is arguably crucial to sensing how we are in the world. Non artists have as much say in shaping the art of any one moment in time as artists.

Sander's film seems to demonstrate that the theory - the potential to create imaginary horizons and to institute that imaginary, is far greater than we as ordinary people, as 'public' have grasped. Suzanne Lacy's practice (taken as a whole and not just as a series of performance works) demonstrates the potential of art as a transformational process more than an affirmative process (the representation of life as it is). Suzanne's practice does not create change directly but creates the conditions for a public in a particular context to re-imagine itself.

Does this insistence on formal quality and degrees of authorship contained by the performance as work of art, undermine the full implications of a transformative practice and the inevitability of imperfection? To trace the potential of transformation, we need to see that practice as a whole process, as Grant argues, at its micro and macro levels and as a social, political, cultural endeavour. In being emergent and open to interaction, arguably the very qualities that define it, this practice is imperfect. Alternatively, does Suzanne's insistence on aesthetic form firmly anchor the work in art, creating moments of clarity in the messiness of life that are unequivocally symbolic and not real?

In becoming drawn to the museum and gallery, does Suzanne offer a challenge to that sector to extend its horizons, its own imaginary of what an artist could be, or what the relationship between artist, 'public' and context could be in any one moment? What myths or preconceptions of art might we have to abandon in the process of developing this kind of feedback loop? Is it the case as Simon suggests that now *anything* can be art? Or Are new forms of art making emerging that are capable of developing real insight in a complex world?^v

Across the *Working in Public* series I believe that we have recovered energy in terms of the role of the artist in the public sphere, its potential and its complexity. This new energy has in part come through an in depth exposure to a particular and significant body of work, Suzanne's practice as well as new theory and curatorial practices. Kaprow stressed the importance of feedback in two directions, feeding back through the institution of art for the purposes of the work' recognition as art, and feeding back with participants to understand the different viewpoints -that of the artist and the interlocutor in order to learn.

These theoretical or artistic positions suggest that perfection in the sense of resolved statement/object/noun is not important. They suggest an open endedness of process as verb with the potential for the unexpected.

This new energy also comes through the act of participation itself - the importance of being an active part of a discourse that has drawn together a complex set of positions: artist, administrator, theorist, curator as well as interlocutor of art and of bringing one's own experience to that discourse to learn from and through others.

ⁱ Svendsen, L. 2005 *A Philosophy of Boredom* Reaktion Books

ⁱⁱ David Haley is an artist and ecologist, research fellow at MIRIAD (Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in **Art** and Design)

ⁱⁱⁱ Grant Kester's response to this cliché is to argue that gallery/museum practice, has been sequestered, protected from the degree of scrutiny that public art is subjected to.

^{iv} In Seminar 1, Grant drew on two edgy examples of artworks, Superflex and the Biogas project and Park Fiction's regeneration of the Hafenstrasse. The practice of Superflex marks an absence of any conventional notion of formal aesthetics. We appraise this work as art through the way that Superflex themselves locate their work within a discourse by drawing contemporary critics into an evaluation at a conceptual level. It is almost as if we are left to decide whether we accept the works as art/ not art.