



**AUTHOR(S):**

**TITLE:**

**YEAR:**

**Publisher citation:**

**OpenAIR citation:**

**Publisher copyright statement:**

This is the \_\_\_\_\_ version of proceedings originally published by \_\_\_\_\_  
and presented at \_\_\_\_\_  
(ISBN \_\_\_\_\_; eISBN \_\_\_\_\_; ISSN \_\_\_\_\_).

**OpenAIR takedown statement:**

Section 6 of the "Repository policy for OpenAIR @ RGU" (available from <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/staff-and-current-students/library/library-policies/repository-policies>) provides guidance on the criteria under which RGU will consider withdrawing material from OpenAIR. If you believe that this item is subject to any of these criteria, or for any other reason should not be held on OpenAIR, then please contact [openair-help@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:openair-help@rgu.ac.uk) with the details of the item and the nature of your complaint.

This publication is distributed under a CC \_\_\_\_\_ license.

\_\_\_\_\_

Prof Anne Douglas (Director), & Chris Fremantle, Research Associate,  
On The Edge Research, Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, AB10 7QD, SCOTLAND  
a.douglas@rgu.ac.uk, +44 (0)1224 263647

- **Breaking through the aesthetics of public art**

#### **Full paper**

*Janice Parker is a dancer and choreographer who explores her medium in relation to the non-traditionally trained "imperfect" body. Her work is product based with individuals and groups as participants with whom she closely collaborates in the process phase of the work. She questions the social narrative of use value i.e. that the arts are good for (in this case disability) by engendering in her processes an unequivocal sensibility of art for its own sake. She works within the social construction of disability in a different way from health care. Individuals who participate in her art become protagonists in a field of play rather than 'medicalised subjects' through the artistic focus and quality of the work.*

*Matt Hulse, filmmaker, is flipping the conventions of film production in his current film project of The Deaf Cyclist. He is proposing to make this film 'in an ecological way' by identifying opportunities to minimise the carbon footprint of the production process. He is also proposing an alternative economic model to resource the production redrawing the kind of relationships and interdependencies a film maker might have with a funding model.*

*Suzanne Lacy, working in the context of Oakland, California (1990-2000), develops a framing device that enables marginalised individuals to participate in public discourse as individuals and for their voices to be heard beyond their own immediate social groupings.*

*The ecology artists, Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, initiate dialogue through a creative act - the presentation of a new metaphor through image and poetry to grasp a particular ecological situation - 'green heart', 'serpentine lattice' or 'greenhouse'. The metaphor defines an eco system, opening up thinking in new ways that in turn define new courses of action. In Greenhouse Britain (2008) they challenge the notion of 'development as expansion' in the context of rising sea levels. They explore the implications of retreating to inhabit high ground through a notion of 'development as qualitative change'.*

*Tim Collins and Reiko Goto are ecology artists who see their role as raising questions and developing strategies that engender empathy between man and nature. Their current project, Eden Three, works with data patterns of transpiration and photosynthesis in the leaves of different species of trees. They transfer the data patterns into sound patterns audible to the human ear. The work enables us to be in the presence of changes that trees make in response to the environment such as the passing of a cloud or a car, changes in morning, midday and evening, thereby enabling us to literally experience how trees breathe.*

*The Artist Placement Group (APG) (1966-1989), founded by Latham and Stevini, assumed that the artist had a role as an 'incidental person' within both industry and the civil service. The incidental person, operating within workplaces, was understood to be someone who articulated different values through having a different approach to, for instance, time.*

Our research is concerned with the changing nature of public art. We work with the experience of making art, drawing on articulations of process developed by artists themselves as well as theorists and historians. We also create interventions with other artists and organisations to test ideas in the public sphere.

This research builds on a substantial experience of developing public art research through the On the Edge programme (1998-present)([www.ontheedgeresearch.org](http://www.ontheedgeresearch.org) ). Current project include:

**Artist as Leader** investigates in what sense artists might be leading through their practices. This research sits within a partnership of organisations involved in the arts, cultural development and policy. Through the activities of the network, new forms of practice are beginning to emerge that place artistic quality in the foreground in relation to policy processes. The research programme has set out to explore the concept of The Artist as Leader through an investigation of practices across the arts.

**Working in Public** has evolved an international network of artists and theorists around an analysis of Suzanne Lacy's The Oakland Projects (1990-2000). Lacy is renowned for her critical social arts practice. The project has drawn together experience of the field of public art practice in Scotland with key players in the US to evolve a new discourse in relation to aesthetics and ethics, notions of quality and power in public art practice ([www.workinginpublicseminars.org](http://www.workinginpublicseminars.org) ).

For this paper we are going to focus on the work of Suzanne Lacy, and also the work of Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison. We will draw on the lectures and writings of Grant Kester, and on pragmatic aesthetics.

Our observations to date suggest that current approaches to art practice exist within two systems of value within culture - 'growth as productivity' and ' growth as creativity'. (These terms were identified by Dr Stuart Hannabuss, Aberdeen Business School and research associate to On the Edge).

Two contradictory things can exist simultaneously. We need only to consider Damian Hirst making £95 million from a sale of new work at Sotheby's whilst Lehman Brothers were going into administration. At the same time other artists work in social contexts and seek social change and, as one Arts Council officer commented, this area of work is reaching an industrial scale.

Within this conundrum, we want to focus on the issue of autonomy., looking at the practices of two

artists we have been working with recently. For us the autonomy of the artist has a mythological status. It is written into our understanding of what an artist is. But it seems to us that where artists enter into the social political realm, often seeking social change, that that mythological understanding of autonomy becomes contentious.

We need to acknowledge the influence of the economising of the arts through the creative industries agenda, and in parallel the instrumentalisation of the arts under the various policies for social inclusion.

In the examples we look at the question of autonomy is foregrounded. Moreover it appears that the practice of the artists positively values autonomy, but not the autonomy of the artist in isolation, rather the ability of the artist, through the making of a work, to encourage and promote the autonomy of those who experience the work, whether as participant, or as viewer.

In terms of a theoretical resonance, these practices align most closely with pragmatic aesthetics in which creativity is viewed as action between people that is both social and transformative, thereby opening up an ethical dimension (Shusterman, Kaprow, Gadamer and Joas). Pragmatic aesthetics extends aesthetics into the everyday, valuing the immediate felt quality of experience. Experience and reflection on experience is the basis of learning. These practices sit less comfortably within Marxist and post Marxist analyses of labour, market and modalities of production and distribution. The output rarely takes the form of artefacts per se.

Why are the concepts of 'growth as creativity' v 'growth as productivity' important? Within these practices there is an interplay with key ideas on value- society seeks to use art while art provides a critique of society. The latter is goal driven and the former open ended, seeking transformative moments in unique experiences. Through an analysis of the qualities and dynamic of these particular art practices, we aim to show how they articulate a different understanding of aesthetics that results from the way in which knowledge is constructed. While each practice is individual, collectively they demonstrate certain shared qualities as well as challenges.

It is worth briefly looking at the similarity and difference between this construction and that of Jacques Ranciere in *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Ranciere offers a distinction between the regimes of representation and of aesthetics. The regimes of representation is one where the world is imitated and that imitation isolated from function and therefore ethical utility. This takes it into its own domain with its own rules and criteria of evaluation. This is a construction of artistic autonomy..

In juxtaposition with this Ranciere uses the term aesthetic regime in a very particular way. On one level Ranciere's construction of regimes of representation is precisely a tradition construction of aesthetics we can recognise from Art Historical discourse.

But Ranciere wants to highlight a different way of reading art and its relation with culture and society. So he offers examples:

Vico discovering the 'true Homer', that is to say not an inventor of fables and characters but a witness to the image-laden language and thought of ancient times; Hegel indicating the true subject matter of Dutch genre painting: not in stories or descriptions of interiors but a nation's freedom displayed in reflections of light; Holderlin reinventing Greek tragedy, Balzac contrasting the poetry of the geologist who reconstructs worlds out of tracks and fossils with the poetry that makes do with reproducing a bit of agitation in the soul; ..."

The point for our purposes is that Ranciere is valuing the dynamic of the work of art in relation to the world, rather than its value in relation to itself. His concern with aesthetic is not formal qualities of art, but rather the relationship between art and existence (and therefore ethics). The differentiation between productivity and creativity is not in the form of the work, but in its relationship with the world.

Going back to our introductory listing of practices, each of the selected artists works in relation to a specific terrain - disability, ecology, media awareness. Each practice demands a deep knowledge of that terrain. Each captures a particular moment of change - the growth of interest in human subjectivity within medical practice, climate change, concerns for the destructive power of the media. These artists while working with the particular skills of art making - visualisation, dance, performance, film - place more emphasis on their relations with the world as a critical process than the canonical in their given medium. They create the conditions for an exchange with non artists, a common language in and around the particular issue that is at the centre of their interest. Their work constitutes an intervention in current thinking or practice that is value driven e.g. Matt Hulse and his alternative ecological approach to film making.

By effectively proposing a different set of possibilities, ways of thinking as well as practices, they question and shift the basis of power. Their work requires them to develop empathy between one person and another through the construction of dialogue. The autonomy of the artist enables autonomy in others. Within these art practices usefulness and uselessness are held in tension, sometimes uncomfortably challenging some of the fundamental tenants of aesthetics in Western Art such as artist as a specifically talented individual or 'genius'.

### **For example**

Suzanne Lacy worked for ten years 1990-2000 in Oakland, the Bay area of San Francisco. Within this period she focused on the issue of media literacy and the tensions between young people of colour, between their negative image in the media and its impact on a sense of self. She worked with knowledge of the history of Oakland as the origin of the Black Panther movement and the Porter's Union. She noted that prior to the 90s there had been a period of greater confidence among people of colour than she was currently experiencing. Her position was informed by her own direct experience of Oakland as well as current literature through writers such as Michael Males, the youth sociologist, University of Santa Cruz. Males noted a breakdown of communication between young people and the adult population and through writings such as "Kids and Guns" he challenged some of the myths of youth involvement in serious crime<sup>1</sup>. Without action, he argued, this breakdown could lead to a complete rupture and loss of civil liberty.

Over 10 years Lacy evolved strategies of interconnecting young people, the educational sector and the civic authorities through the agency of TEAM, (Teens + Educators + Artists + Media Makers). Funded in part by the Surdna Foundation, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, and Oakland's Kids First Initiative, this work enabled the young to trace the connection between negative media manipulation, their own patterns of behaviour and their desires for the future. These processes took the form of long term and large-scale projects that included workshops and classes for youth, media intervention, and institutional program and policy development punctuated by a series of performance works over the ten year period. The performances<sup>2</sup> re-presented the process of dialogue or learning to a third audience - the media itself, local government, inhabitants of Oakland. The goal was two fold. Firstly they enabled individuals, youth and the adults involved in youth, to analyse the conditions of their own oppression,<sup>3</sup>. Secondly it enabled them to communicate their emergent understanding, to targeted publics, thereby creating the conditions for change<sup>4</sup>.

Within each performance work, Lacy exercised high degrees of control through a personal artistic aesthetic in relation to the visual and to the performative. In doing so her intention was to secure effective and affective forms of communication. As an artist, Lacy has developed competencies that are not necessarily associated with the artist to the point that she could choose to pursue quite a different career. She describes being invited by the Mayor onto Alameda County's Education Panel and then resigning in order to be free as artist to avoid representing an institutional position.

"I was invited to continue working on police training and I certainly could have had a job in education running the art programme for the Alameda County Office of Education. Instead,

---

<sup>1</sup> Males, M. 2000 *Kids and Guns*, Common Courage, Munroe, Maine <http://home.earthlink.net/~mmales/contents.htm>

<sup>2</sup> These included *The Roof is on Fire* 1993-4, *No Blood No Foul* 1995-6, *Expectations* 1997, *Code 33* 1999. For detail see <http://www.suzannelacy.com/> and discussion/analysis see [www.workinginpublic.org](http://www.workinginpublic.org)

<sup>3</sup> Lacy has drawn on Friere's writings on public pedagogy (Friere (1970)). Friere argues that we learn, not by being told, but by analysing the conditions of our ignorance or oppression

<sup>4</sup> Three of these key performance works, *Code 33*, *Expectations* and *Roo* are analysed in Seminars 1-3 see [www.workinginpublicseminars.org](http://www.workinginpublicseminars.org)

I decided to stop and reflect for the next period of time on what it was, precisely, that the Oakland projects were. “<sup>5</sup>

In exercising this choice she marked a clear difference between her role as artist and that of educator or community worker, while also engaging this function as part of the whole endeavour a choice that raises more questions than answers.

"As an artist you have to walk on an edge. You have to be responsive to a community that frankly would not participate with you to the scale that you are working on unless you are to some extent serving their interests and needs. On the other hand you have, not only a set of aesthetics, but you have this overwriting condition of the art world or the art profession, to relate to. That creates a lot of complexities. At the end of this trajectory there is, for me, the question on what happens when art disappears or at what point does art disappear? As you become more and more operational or more and more functional, do you lose some of that which we know as art, which is precisely its lack of apparent functionality? Does it become just work as opposed to artwork? When working deep over a time, there is a mandate from the community. Is this work a model, or is it practical action? When art disappears, what results? Is it image? Is it intent? Is it document? Is it measurable change? Is it new publics or deeper respect for issues? Is it new institutions or is it changed institutions?"

Suzanne Lacy Guest@Gray's 11th November 2005

Through these diverse means and taken as a whole, the work establishes a different way of thinking about civic processes, in this case in relation to issues of youth and race, often leading to radical organisational change.

As a contemporary performance and visual artist working in community Lacy is forming and challenging her medium in ways that are uncharted. She is challenging conventional aesthetics. She herself describes an important quality of the work as 'imperfect'<sup>6</sup>. In allowing itself to be open to participation as an important aspect of its quality as art, the artist surrenders aspects of aesthetic control with the possibility that this could disrupt the original intention of the work. It is in this informality that Kester, art historian and theorist of this area of practice, places emphasis

"Let me look at 'Code 33' just to give you a sense of my thought process. I've heard Unique Holland talk about the process of 'Code 33' and the meetings that led up to it. I often found myself as interested in those conversations, which laid the groundwork for the project, as I was in the conversations that constitute the image of the project. Those laborious, difficult, messy, maybe even un-visual exchanges, to me, are central to the aesthetics of the piece. That doesn't mean that the staged conversations are not also essential, but they are of a different order aesthetically for me" Grant Kester, Working in Public Seminar 1

---

<sup>5</sup> Working in Public, Lacy Lecture, Seminar 2

<sup>6</sup> See [www.workinginpublicseminars.org](http://www.workinginpublicseminars.org) Seminar 3 Quality and Imperfection

The key area of experimentation lies in creating meaningful relationships between her concerns as an artist and a wider set of social experiences and individuals by contesting the dominance of one set of viewpoints over another. The work is authored without being authoritarian.

Lacy's work relies on documentation for critical response, a process that Lacy has fully undertaken throughout her artistic career and in particular in relation to Oakland, resulting in a range of output from critical texts such as *Mapping the Terrain*<sup>7</sup> to documentary/professional film footage of each intervention. The Oakland projects were tracked by professional film crews and by the media, who were invited into the process as the witnesses to a different quality of relationship with the young people of Oakland.

Within Lacy's Oakland work, the social/political construction of knowledge of the area and its inhabitants - a construction based on disaffection and breakdown in relationships, is analysed critically and displaced by another version of events. Randy....Roof is On Fire...

Lacy's demonstrates that the role of the artist can be a unique position from which to draw together other forms of social, cultural agency. There is no vested interest other than to secure dialogue based in fair terms and conditions of engagement. As an individual she is working directly with the economic and the organisational, giving these new form and related value.

For example

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison have been collaborating as a team, frequently referred to as 'the Harrisons', since the early 1970s. They are Professors Emeritus of the University of California at San Diego. The Harrisons are conceptual and ecological artists. In their case the 'idea' or 'concept' that is at the heart of the work is not abstract or self-referential. Rather it is, in their own terms, the 'ennobling' idea – the work which is devoted to the prima facie greater good:

“...the progression from an initial decision, made in '69-'70, to do no work that did not in some way look at ecosystemic well-being.”<sup>1</sup>

Helen Mayer Harrison notes that one of the contributions that led to this commitment was reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which documented the detrimental effects of pesticides on environment and in particular on birds. Their collaboration started with a series entitled *Survival Pieces* which involve the construction and maintenance, in gallery contexts, of environmental systems such as fish farms and orchards.

The Harrisons evidence an extensive knowledge across a number of disciplines. Newton Harrison

---

<sup>7</sup> Lacy, S. (1995) *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle (WA): Bay Press



trained in Fine Art at Yale, studying painting and sculpture. Helen Mayer Harrison studied Literature. But they have acknowledged expertise in the fields of ecology and can enter into a dialogue with scientists and policymakers on subjects across soil, water, forestry, climate change, architecture and landscape.

The extent of this knowledge is evidenced in the evaluation report of a different project, *Greenhouse Britain: Losing Ground, Gaining Wisdom*, where the researcher undertaking the evaluation interviewed a number of senior academics who the Harrisons had collaborated with to make the work,

The people interviewed had worked primarily with Newton Harrison, but also Helen Mayer Harrison and Gabriel Harrison. Climate change is important to all of them; their level of knowledge is high. My questions were not to do with 'awareness' or perceptions, but with the qualities of the experience working with the Harrisons, and how it may have affected them. Their responses surprised me. They *all* reported that the experience was illuminating, informative, challenging, imaginative, liberating. Their respect for the cross-disciplinary knowledge of the Harrisons was high, including both the science, the land-use planning and architectural aspects, and including Newton Harrison's ability to ask 'the right questions.' Further, they had been taken on a journey, relieved of the strictures of their respective disciplines and work practices, and had found it in some way transformative of their way of considering climate change and possible adaptations to it. But, from their responses, the exercise was not just one of being relieved of limitations, but one which was highly informed, creative, and reflective, not just of their own methods of work, but of more conventional responses to climate change. They reported feeling supported, mentored, and reported an appreciation of what this kind of process of 'art' can achieve in providing the context, the time and space for imagining possible futures, for rehearsing what may happen.

In order to address autonomy I am going to focus on the Harrisons' practice in one example, a project they undertook in Holland in the early 1990s, entitled *Green Heart Vision*. This work arose out of an invitation from the Cultural Council of South Holland to look at the issue of development and the public policy to build some 600,000 houses on what we would call Greenfield.

The work is a distinct work with clear authorship by the Harrisons. It comprises some nine texts and a dozen images. The texts are in the form of poems and the images are in the form of maps, either hand made or in any case modified.

Beyond that the autonomy of the work becomes increasingly complex. Newton Harrison characterises their work as being primarily focused on discourse:

"I don't think about our art as product at all. As a guiding thought 'product' is counter-productive .... [Generally we make installations which stand for the place and as a meeting ground for discourse]"<sup>8</sup>

The Harrisons consciously seek out metaphorical terms within the territory, the field of play, they are investigating. They talk about this in terms of figure/ground composition. In Holland the term

---

<sup>8</sup> p.64, Kester

'green heart' had been used to describe an area of traditional villages and farms framed by the major cities of Holland - Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht, Delft and others. They co-opted this term, and consciously developed it. Where it had been a loose reference they took it seriously, they actively explored what it meant. They began to define it. For example when they asked people 'How big is the green heart?' there was no consensus. So they defined its size visually. Where it was a general term for an area, they focused on its ecological characteristics. In their language, they flip the metaphor, making it central to the work and orienting issues around it. This way of working enabled a discussion of value by developing a common language. Newton Harrison tells the story of a group of Mayors of the small villages coming to the place where they had set up studio. One of the Mayors was outraged that his village was not encompassed within the Green Heart. He picked up a paint brush and extended the area to include the village. This anecdote is in no way intended to suggest that the texts and images that make up Green Heart Vision are anything other than the work of the artists, and clearly evidence their visual and textual aesthetic, but rather that the formation of the work, its 'aesthetic of process' is one which transfers the concept from the mind of the artist into the mind of the viewer in a way that empowers the viewer to think about their practical circumstances differently.

The Harrisons' aim in this project was to change urban planning policy over a large area of South Holland. The work was functional, it was intended to have an impact, and to be in a practical way useful.

Green Heart Vision was also a work that the Harrisons intended to be taken up by other people. Its most important location was not in the gallery, but in the minds of the people who saw it, and in the way it might influence their future actions.

The Harrisons talk about a transition. They author the work, drawing on their knowledge and experience. They present the work in public. At that point they talk about 'conversational drift' and by this they mean the life of the work after people have seen it, and the unknownness of that life. For them 'conversational drift' is the works; life in the world.

Most artists place great emphasis on the form of the work. Newton tells the story that Green Heart Vision was enormously successful – it was adopted as policy by the Green Party. Helen reminds him that they had a review in the Dutch Financial Times. This success lasted a matter of weeks. There was an election and the Green Party lost. All the plans were shelved. Five years later they got a phone call. Politics had changed again, and their plan was being revisited.

“We found out that what they had done is – and this is a stunning thing – they had dismantled our icon... but they had accepted the working principles: that major cities will be separated by parkland, their way. The ecosystems will be made continuous, but in their way. Their way was not to make a biodiversity ring, but to widen the rivers, and in so doing, make long continuous bands ...

We found that we were really successful in a new way. We started to design our work differently. When we designed our work, we would invent our icon. The icon would explain the work. It would be powerful in the sense that icons are. But, to enable and enact this work, we made it so that it was able to be recreated, redesigned and dismantled and put together again.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Theoretical context/History of ideas**

Lacy draws on radical feminism and pragmatic aesthetics in the theoretical framing of the work, on Jane Addams, founder of the US Settlement houses and pragmatist, as well as Alan Kaprow, artist and theorist of art and the everyday. Lacy's earlier questions "...there is, for me, the question on what happens when art disappears or at what point does art disappear? As you become more and more operational or more and more functional, do you lose some of that which we know as art, which is precisely its lack of apparent functionality?" arise because of a tradition in Western philosophy through Kant in which aesthetics lie in opposition to the practical. Lacy and x seek to counter this opposition.

**Pragmatic aesthetics** (and areas of **feminism**) view creativity as action between people that is both social and transformative. It is a view of aesthetics that extends beyond art to embrace everyday life and multiple voices within it. Knowledge is derived from an interplay between experience and articulation; action and reflection; skill, intelligence and imagination. At the outset we claimed that autonomy was a crucial point of tension in current art practices. We have gone on to define this autonomy as emerging between artist and participants yet shaped by the authority of the artist and validated by real-world criteria. Lacy insists on her artistic autonomy when driving the formal aesthetic of the performance works and the Harrisons define collaboration very tightly, acknowledging creative contributions from very few people. Kester places the aesthetic of both artists works elsewhere - within the experience of informal conversations and exchanges that take place through the social process that the artist has established over time - "Those laborious, difficult, messy, maybe even un-visual exchanges, to me, are central to the aesthetics of the

piece".. While they might disagree where aesthetics are at work, all agree that the transition of power is the point of the work. Artistic autonomy is a means to enable this transfer of power to happen.

Pragmatic aesthetics allows for an inductive tolerance of complexity and contradiction. Aesthetics in this sense does not just explain or represent experience. The artwork constitutes an experience, placing emphasis on the 'immediately felt quality of experience', beneath language and interpretation'. Kester articulates this difference clearly as a difference between aesthetics invested in the object or 'text' and an earlier (pre 19th century) understanding of aesthetics as shared experience.

" Certain orders of experience enable us to perceive the world outside of a self interested, acquisitive, possessive model of knowing. They allow us to access the underlying operations of human cognition. When we cease looking at the world as a thing to be possessed and to be turned to our needs, we reflectively become aware of the fact that *that* way of knowing the world is something that we must all share.

This brings us a sense of the possibility of a kind of community that is not externally imposed, but is felt at the individual level. It makes reference to the possibility of a larger sense of being together.

I would contend that the aesthetic is an essentially ethical discourse...

That association with collectivity gradually goes underground in the modern period...In that (mid to late 19th century ) context it becomes the form of the work that is the carrier of its universality, rather than the cognitive operations of the mind and its relationship to difference.' Grant Kester Working in Public Seminar 1<sup>9</sup>

Play in creativity is essential to reaching this level <sup>10</sup>.

Viewed this way the *whole* endeavour within Lacy's Oakland projects and the Harrisons' many works are their aesthetic. The boundary between art and life is 'blurred' (Kaprow) or continuous between art and life, form and substance, subject and object, the artist and people.

This in turn challenges conventions of value and ownership. There is no work, no 'artefact' to be owned through a monetary exchange. Instead ownership is the outcome of being willing to experience the work by participating in it. Its value is complex - potentially simultaneously social *and* artistic. Unlike the disinterestedness of 19th aesthetics, pragmatic aesthetics is concerned not just to understand but also improve/meliorate - through the cross fertilisation of ideas between

---

<sup>9</sup> [www.workinginpublicseminars.org](http://www.workinginpublicseminars.org)

<sup>10</sup> Shusterman, R (2000) *and* (2006)

individuals, across divisions of class and race. Lacy's Oakland work takes the form of a series of interventions into public space with the goal of improving the lot of its inhabitants through education and self analysis. Within this work the notion of use/uselessness is held in tension. In relation to the art world and its sense of value and ownership, many artists such as Suzanne Lacy and the Harrisons are frequently confronted with the accusation that their work is not art, indicating something of a clash in aesthetic paradigms<sup>11</sup>

We started by noting the growth of the market for contemporary art, in relation to both the economic and social urgencies of the moment – pace the creative industries. We have focused on the work of these artists, because we believe that they demonstrate the possibility of making work which plays a tension between utility and function (even empowerment) on the one hand and aesthetics and autonomy on the other.

This provides us with a more nuanced understanding of growth as productivity and growth as creativity. We conclude that both forms of growth co-exist and are dimensions of each other.

This understanding becomes extremely important in a cultural economy in which both the buying and selling of art works and the social engagement of artists have expanded enormously to the point where there is little critical understanding of their qualities.

From this point we are evolving new research

#### Take list of questions

- How do changing public art practices deconstruct and reconstruct notions of artistic autonomy?
- How may critical, collaborative public art claim to redefine value and ownership?
- How valid is it to regard collaborative public art as entrepreneurial, and which models of entrepreneurialism are relevant?
- What new aesthetic understandings emerge from examining changing public art practice? (grant and aesthetics of shared experience v aesthetics of text /object)
- How might these aesthetic understandings inform new policy and organisational practices?

---

<sup>11</sup> The counter argument to Kester's position is developed by Claire Bishop as explored by Collins, T 2008 Catalytic Aesthetics in *Artful Ecologies* edited by Daro Montag University of Falmouth 2008 pp 35-42

## References

Collins, T 2008 Catalytic Aesthetics in *Artful Ecologies* edited by Daro Montag University of Falmouth 2008 pp 35-42

Kaprow, G (2003) *Essays in the blurring of art and life*. Expanded edition edited by Jeff Kelley. Berkeley CA & London, University of California Press.

Kester, G (2007) 'Wazunga means white men: superflex and the limits of ethical capitalism', [www.workinginpublicseminars.org](http://www.workinginpublicseminars.org).

Lacy, S. (1995) *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle (WA): Bay Press

Males, M. 2000 *Kids and Guns*, Common Courage, Munroe, Maine  
<http://home.earthlink.net/~mmales/contents.htm>

Rancière, J (2004) *The politics of aesthetics*. New York, Continuum. [originally published in French Paris, La Fabrique-Editions, 2000].

Shusterman, R (2000) *Pragmatic aesthetics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Lanham MD, Rowman & Littlefield.

Shusterman, R (2006) 'Aesthetics' (pages 352-60 of Shook, J R & Margolis J editors *A companion to pragmatism*, Malden MA & Oxford, Blackwell Publishing).

## List of images

Janice

Matt (from website)

Helen and Newton Harrison

Tim and REiko

Suzanne -

APG

### Abstract for CAA Panel on Public Art Pedagogy

Current research emerges out of a period of working closely with artists who have pioneered approaches to art making in the public sphere (Steveni and Latham, Haley, Harrisons, Lacy, Goto & Collins). These approaches affect our understandings of aesthetics and organisational practice in the way that knowledge is constructed through the practice of art. These artists respond to specific personal experiences and circumstances in public life. They question shared concepts and metaphors that drive action in relation to issues such as the environment and social justice. Through aesthetic processes they reconfigure aspects of the social, cultural and organisational in specific situations, provoking the development of critical alternative ways to think and act in civic space.

This research is informed by artistic precedents, each of which captures a moment of change to manifest

itself and each of which elicit new ways of artists working with other non art sector in public life. For example the Artist Placement Group (1966-1989), founded by Latham and Steveni, assumed that the artist had a role as an 'incidental person' within both industry and the civil service. The incidental person, operating within workplaces, was understood to be someone who articulated different values through having a different approach to, for instance, time.

The construction of knowledge in these artistic approaches is different from that in institutionalised forms of art making that build on the canonical. These artists test conventional aesthetics. Their practices raise a number of critical issues including the usefulness v uselessness of art. They are often challenged by individuals who do not necessarily recognise their work as art. Their work relies on secondary documentation for critical response. In working in public these artists surrender aspects of the aesthetic in participatory processes. They develop competencies in non art fields. They reveal value through interventions. Knowledge is freed from conventional frameworks and represented within the aesthetic field of play. This brings the artists into a close relationship with the economic and organisational.

The aim of this research is to enrich understanding of how artists work now in a cultural landscape in which public art practice is increasingly converging with policy and organisational practice. The research is developing an intellectual framework that encompasses the artistic with the organisational and that repositions artists in the public domain both as practitioners *and* as interlocutors in a negotiation of concepts of value with policy and organisational practice. The research has been developed in a Scottish context at a moment of cultural and political change.

The research questions at the heart of On The Edge's current enquiry are:

- How do changing public art practices deconstruct and reconstruct notions of artistic autonomy?
- How may critical, collaborative public art claim to redefine value and ownership?
- How valid is it to regard collaborative public art as entrepreneurial, and which models of entrepreneurialism are relevant?
- What new aesthetic understandings emerge from examining changing public art practice?

How might these aesthetic understandings inform new policy and organisational practices?