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**Close as a construct to critically investigate the
relationship between the visual artist and the everyday**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of The Robert Gordon University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This research was carried out in connection with the
On the Edge research programme
(Phase I, August 2001-December 2004),
Gray's School of Art,
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland,
funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

Volume I

June 2006

Acknowledgements

With sincere thanks to my supervisors
Dr Anne Douglas, François Matarasso and Prof Carole Gray
for their advice, guidance and support in different ways
and at different points in time.

Thanks also to good friends and colleagues,
especially my sister Margaret
for her clarity and humour.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents
Anna and Hamish

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Abstract

This research proposes and develops a critical framework – a 'matrix' to make sense of the artistic process from the practitioner's perspective. It draws from the research of de Certeau into everyday culture and the art historical discourse of Bourriaud that positions art within models of social interaction.

As a critical concept the everyday has benefits for re-thinking the nature of creative activity and its reception. The term participatory relational practice is used in this thesis to define an approach that situates the artist within the everyday.

The matrix is constructed reflexively through three of my art projects and by analysing two artists engaged by the On the Edge research programme to conduct two projects. Used reflectively in and on practice the matrix sensitizes the artist to judgements, values and qualities within a dynamic process of exchange and transaction.

The matrix represents a core from which judgements about practice are considered and negotiated. It comprises three inter-dependent dimensions, which the artist self-consciously models. The *aesthetic* may be defined as the intricacies of giving form to experience, the *ethical* as enabling individuals to share a freedom to think, speak or act differently, and the *polemical* as forming, expressing and enacting a view or position.

The research proposes that a nuanced critique may be defined as the interplay between the aesthetic, the playful and resistance. It responds to the need identified in the discourse to develop a multidimensional understanding of practice. The matrix is a way of considering and representing the aesthetic as part of an interdependent whole - a system of values.

The research addresses artists and critical theorists interested in collaboration and multi-disciplinary work. The matrix is both interpretive and generative. It can be used to structure and evaluate projects. It has implications for pedagogy in terms of better equipping younger artists with the skills necessary for operating within the everyday as the multi-layered fields of civic society.

Foreword

To develop an emerging practice or role as artist, I needed to find a way of thinking about practice, and this is possible through practice - by conducting art projects. This thesis is therefore concerned with artistic praxis, i.e. knowledge through action.

To develop a critical practice through research the enquiry demands more than a reliance on critical theory. Arguably criticality is not above or beside practice but within it. Theory does not provide the truth of the work and the work does not illustrate theory. At best theory and practice give mutual inspiration.

Practice-led art research is difficult because it has to resist the more widely accepted objective stance adopted in other disciplines (e.g. social science research) and it positions the individual researcher at the heart of the enquiry, where the subject and object of study are not artificially separated. This places the art researcher in a tough position of being subjectively transparent (the weaknesses and strengths of situated knowledge) and having to deal with the difficulties of articulating reflexive learning.

Note on reading this thesis

This thesis has preliminary sections preceding Chapter 1: *Introduction* which sets out the central problematic and the content of the thesis. A *Biographical note* and the *Research context* are necessary because this enquiry is practice-led art research and is linked to the On the Edge research initiative.

The *Biographical note* describes my orientation at the outset of this research and explains why *close* was selected as a potentially useful alternative way to think about art practice. The *Research context* outlines the structure and aims of On the Edge (OTE) research project, why the research is important and my relationship to this initiative.

There are two Volumes. Chapter Four is the analysis of a set of projects and is split into a second volume.

Because of the nature of this research opportunity to accompany this bound thesis there are two CD's. The *Visual Dialogues* CD are sketches from my art projects. The second CD contains a web site for the *Maakin Lab* project, one of four OTE project outputs.¹ My involvement in the five OTE art projects and the resulting four project publications was different in each case. In the *Maakin Lab* I would actually participate in the project.

Both CD's are at the back of Volume II. Reference to these is clearly indicated in the text when I need to refer to them. Also referenced in the text and located at the end of Volume II (in the Appendices) are selected published papers that extend aspects of the research.

¹ My contribution across the four OTE project publications included assisting in documenting the process (e.g. photography), generating content e.g. 'structured conversations' (interviews) with the artists, developing the content in discussion with the core research team, developing initial design layouts and assisting in editing.

Notes on guidance for the reader

Articulating practice-led research can be complex because (at best) practice and theory are mutually informing. To develop a different way of thinking about praxis (knowledge in action) is not a linear process.

Because there are a number of threads, different levels and different voices in the thesis there are a variety of paths the reader could take through this journey (thesis). We can consider this as different entry points into the thesis. Chapter 1 outlines the problematic then summarizes the content of each chapter and the development of the thesis. Chapter 2 outlines key theoretical arguments in the art historical discourse identifying the need for developing a more nuanced articulation and critique of participatory, engaged art.

In response to this the research develops a *matrix* that derives from two theoretical perspectives on the everyday (cultural theory by de Certeau and art history by Bourriaud). Drawing from these authors I propose a matrix as an analytical and interpretative construct to make sense of practice from inside practice (Chapter 3). The matrix as initially proposed (3.10) represents a way of inter-connecting and considering the research questions at the level of role, and what we understand different forms of artistic production to be. The matrix is developed and constructed reflexively through practice in the attempt to understand and deal with the varied levels that art operates on. This is dealt with in Chapter 4.

Accessing the research findings

Chapter 4 is the actual art projects and the thesis is split into two volumes. There are three of my own projects and two projects from the OTE initiative. In this Volume I introduce each project and this is followed by a *Summary analysis*

Volume II contains the fieldwork –*The process* in my own projects and *The process* understood through the interviews (or 'structured conversations') with two of the artists engaged by OTE. After each project is the *Analysis using the matrix*. Volume II also contains

two CDs as project outputs (the OTE project the *Maakin Lab* in which the researcher was a participant) and on the second CD a set of five 'Visuals Dialogues' from my own projects.

The appendices are also in the back of Volume II. Here there is a set of published papers extending aspects of the research at different points in the research time frame. These papers are less directly related to the development of the matrix, but give detail on the OTE methodology, the OTE projects and subsequent outputs. These papers are clearly indicated in the text as options for the reader.

For detail on the content of Chapter 4 and notes on the methodology see 4.1.1

Different levels of analysis and negotiating through the thesis

There are a number of levels of analysis within each project and across the set of projects. This means there are a variety of ways the reader could negotiate through the material.

The real content and detail is in *The Process* and the *Analysis using the matrix* (in Volume II). These give a richer appreciation of the findings that emerge. It is also for the art practitioner, an example of reflection in and on action.

The reader may wish to only read the *Summary analysis* (in this volume). These summaries are followed by findings from my work as a set of projects (4.5). Similarly following the *Summary analysis* of the two artists there are findings from considering both practices (4.9) then findings from across all the projects in this research (4.10). (This is like layers building up rather than 4.10 encompassing everything that is learnt).

The reader could access a single project from beginning to end (using Volumes I and II). (In my own work the most substantial project is *The Waiting Room*, 4.4).

In constructing the matrix through practice there are two parallel developments – what the matrix gives (understanding of content and process) and the development of the matrix as a conceptual tool (e.g. its dynamic qualities). The reader could access just one of the *Analysis*

using the matrix (Volume II) to see how the matrix works in terms of drawing out content (as qualities, values and judgements made) and how the matrix embodies a dynamic (the interplay of its three dimensions).

Practice is both reflection in and reflection on action. In Volume II the relationship between describing *The process* followed by the *Analysis using the matrix (the aesthetic, ethical and polemical)* is reflecting in, and then reflecting on practice (however these two modes of analysis are not sharply divided into either or).

Increasingly as the matrix is used across my set of projects its value as a thinking tool becomes more internalized and clearer. This can be traced by reading the sections *Analysis using the matrix* sequentially across my three projects (and then the work of the two artists engaged by OTE).

A summary of what the matrix gives in the analysis and what it represents as a critical construct for the practitioner is given in Chapter 5 (5.3 *The matrix as a thinking tool*). The reader could access this first and then look in detail at any of the sections in Chapter 4.

The project outputs (the two CD's) can be viewed at the beginning or the end of the any of the layers of analysis (though they are indicated in the text for each project).

Biographical note

My investigation, analogous to a journey, began with the hunch that *close* might be a useful construct to better understanding a role as artist. *Close* is a quality of everyday life in remote-rural locations. Born and brought up in Orkney (1960-1978) I worked professionally as a graphic designer for a minority language on the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides (1987-1999). In island life the interdependency of living, working and socializing means people tend to know each other as individuals first, roles or occupation second.

Graphic design: a problem solving mind set

Working in a minority language context the value of what I did in terms of fulfilling a function was very clear to me (and was made clearer through formal research)². Scottish Gaelic was in serious decline and at that time (from the mid eighties through to the mid nineties) and many organisations were being set up to help the language/culture (e.g. Gaelic TV). I began working freelance then became an employee of the main Gaelic publishing house, Acair Ltd., working closely with a small core team of three-four people. I believed that by designing and producing high quality Gaelic and bilingual (Gaelic/English) material I could play a part in the broader project of minority language development.

On one level design is about problem solving which is like moving away from something you don't want, like the language dying, or a print/production mistake or a typographic error for instance. In design presentations I would show clients different ideas so we could move away from what we did not want through a process of comparison and discussion.

There was a strong feeling of team work and I enjoyed the close working relationships with colleagues and clients I got to know through design projects i.e. the design process. On a daily basis I would deal with authors, translators, editors, illustrators, photographers, printers, artists, carriers, binders, paper merchants, Gaelic educationalists, small businesses, funding agencies, etc. I regarded these people - their roles, as the extended team. In my role I would commission, make proposals, negotiate, make presentations, do page layout, manage the print production side, make quotations, check proofs, etc.

² Unpublished MPhil; *Towards a Bilingual Graphic Imaging System*, Robert Gordon University, 1996

The design brief

The communicative aim concerns the appropriateness of text and image for a specific audience whether the purpose of the message is to educate, to inform or to persuade.

Graphic designers aim to make effective communication for a client. A key to understanding the success of a printed design was the development of a clear design brief at the outset.

This was a bench mark. If the design product went beyond what was originally conceived of in the brief, this was a sign of success.

Quality: product and relationship

Beyond the quality of the product there was the nature of relationship between the client and the designer. Part of my role involved explaining what was involved in the design process. I wanted them to be interested in design. When clients wanted to become more involved in the process I enjoyed the project more, as I imagined they did. I understood professional as an insistence on quality – which included a level of attention given over to considerations of the design solution. In this way ownership of the design was shared and not solely the designer's success or failure.

Deciding to do an MA

The motivation to become an artist stemmed largely from dissatisfaction in my life. After ten years of practice as a graphic designer I felt I had become over professionalized. Work had become routinized. I knew it so well it no longer provided the creative challenge it once had. I wanted to feel and be creative again so I needed to learn a new way of making, in other words *I needed a new way of thinking about practice*. To think differently it had to be learnt through practice. I decided to do an MA (2000-2001).³ This was a period of transition.

Towards the end of this study I proposed a method of working as an artist that seemed natural or intuitive for a designer - I would make art work and show this to a small group of people (clinical consultant geneticists) and we would have a conversation in and around the work. It was like a graphic design presentation, but there were many differences as well.⁴

³ Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University

⁴ My working relationship with a small group of clinical consultant geneticists came about because of an interest in the field of genetics towards the end of my MA study. These relationships continued into and through the PhD as a number of projects which I use to test the notion of *close*. This work is part of a set of projects with other individuals and small groups of people in different situations. These are detailed in Chapter 4.

What I felt about making an art work was not a *moving away* from something (problem), it felt more like (and still feels like) a *moving toward something*. Making art (images or objects) was not in response to an external communication need. I made something in response to what I felt (in relation to genetics for instance). The next thing made would try to develop thinking and to sharpen the idea or issues I was grappling with, a kind of refinement on what had gone before.

My training in design practice and thinking rubbed up with what I did as artist. What value did this emergent way of working have? What kind of critical theory could help develop what I could call, or know to be an art practice? What roles do artists play?

The On the Edge research (to which this studentship is attached) was prompted by living and working in a remote and rural place - the north east of Scotland. This meant working outside the predominant infrastructure for the arts which is urban based. Living in a rural place and trying to develop an emerging practice as an artist were life choices not an attempt to develop an alternative kind of practice for its own sake. However in this journey I would come to appreciate the deceptively simple and far reaching questions On the Edge posed with regard to the value of art in a rural remote (marginal) context (see Research context, xi).

My values and close

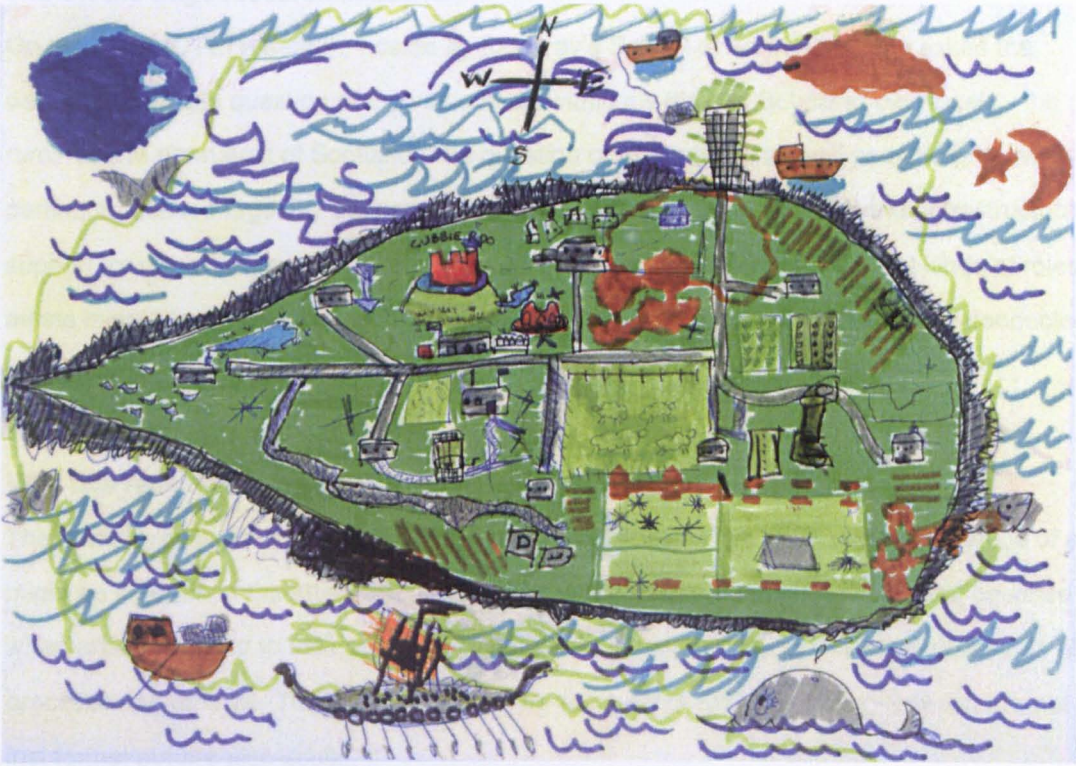
On reflection what was worthwhile could be gathered up into a single thing, or notion – *close*. *Close* was home as an island way life and feeling a sense of community (which can be stifling as well supportive). *Close* was what I valued - living beside the sea, the language, the deadpan humour, the colours of the moorland and the wild weather. *Close* as the intricacies of relationships and feeling a sense of belonging through playing a part in a minority language and culture's development.

Close is more a disposition (or an inclination) than a way of working. Forming an approach to art practice where the artist works with other people to realise the artwork *close* sharpens the research questions of why, how and what of practice.⁵ The aim of this research is to find a useful way to think about practice from the art practitioner's perspective.

⁵ I pin-pointed the concept (the word) *close* at the outset of the research in discussion with the OTE team, when reflecting on and describing a single moment of recognition between myself and a participant during my art process (see *Early work with clinical geneticists*, 4.2, Volume II).

Research context

Fig. 1 'Cubbie Roo Map' (Collaboration, felt-tip pens and laminate, July 2000)



This map was made with a five year old nephew and used to tell him stories about Wyre drawing from my childhood. Thirty five people lived on Wyre then. The Viking castle 'Cubbie Roo' is colloquial for Kolbein Hruga.

Research context

The On the Edge research initiative

On the Edge (OTE) research, hosted by the Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen asked the deceptively simple question of the value of art within it's (the Art School's) own locale - the rural/remote north east of Scotland. The question on a strategic, as well as a creative level, is pertinent because arguably the concentration of art practitioners together with infrastructural support for visual art practice is urban based. This raised the question of what kinds of roles artists might play in our context. To investigate this question five art projects were conducted along with my art projects.

Why this research is important

The meta level question or the challenge posed at the outset by OTE as what the value of art might be in terms of the artistic, social, cultural, economic dimensions is important because when artists respond to their contexts or situations, (rural, remote for instance) new kinds of practices can emerge. This also demands new roles which embody criticality which are not just formal but are also social.

This challenge is important for two inter-related reasons:

the broader issue of how artists position themselves in society,
 or the roles they can play,
 and
 what we understand different forms of artistic production to be.

The OTE art-research approach

The On the Edge research began by inviting five project partners (individuals representing five organisations) to offer up an idea or a question which they imagined the art-research opportunity might address in some way. What the five partners wanted was the art projects to, in some way, develop connections between the organisations they represented and the communities within which their organisations were situated.⁶

⁶ Community is understood to be interest group as well as the demographics of community – those living in the locale.

The OTE framework for the research – a spine of seven workshops held each six months brought the researchers, project partners, the artists and others together in different configurations as the projects developed. On the Edge set out to deliberately include the many different roles or 'shapers' which might come into play in terms of art project development. The ethos is one of shared learning through dialogue and the artists engaged by OTE to carry out the five projects worked with people who are not normally part of an art process.

My relationship to the OTE initiative

This research opportunity meant I was in a unique position to thoroughly understand a range of different art practices through living with a carefully structured set of five art projects. I would contribute to and draw from this large research initiative. This became a reciprocal relationship between my research and the OTE projects and thinking. My emerging art practice raised issues and questions pertinent to the OTE research, and contextualising (e.g. literature, attending conferences, speaking with artists) fed into the OTE thinking. My visualising skills helped us to develop the OTE program of projects and associated outputs (project publications and the OTE web site).

With an emerging practice I had first hand contact with some very established art practitioners engaged by OTE to undertake the projects. This was invaluable to compare and contrast, giving rich material to better understanding what is distinctive about their practices. I would hold 'structured conversations' (interviews) with these artists, two of which are used in the analysis (Benn and Carter, 4.7 and 4.8).⁷

The OTE initiative also gave the opportunity to meet other key practitioners based internationally (artists and academics) with which to test and discuss the research.⁸

I came to understand OTE as having a distinctive research approach to the development of art. An approach characterized by open discussion with all the players involved in the life of the art project. The research framework offered a reflective and generative space,

⁷ This is probably not a typical PhD studentship in art research, and is possibly more like a science studentship which is commonly attached to a bigger research initiative and is not stand alone.

⁸ References to these individuals are made in the thesis and include for example the artists Barbara Stevini and John Latham, Ian Hunter, the art theorist Grant Kester and cultural theorist Fred Inglis.

engendering a shared responsibility for the project between the project partners, the researchers, the artists and people within the community in which the projects were sited.

The OTE methodology is introduced in the section below and is developed in Chapter 4 (see 4.6 OTE (On the Edge): an emergent methodology)

The specific On the Edge research questions posed at the outset

The program of five art projects (along with my own work) would address the research questions:

What constitutes sustainable visual arts practice that is innovative and relevant within specific cultural contexts?

How can the process of developing new practices be visualised and understood in remote rural contexts?

What are appropriate methods of evaluating these practices in artistic as well as social, cultural and economic terms?

In a specific remote rural location such as the north of Scotland, what is the role of research and visual art practice to issues of developing and sustaining culture?

In what ways can the outcomes of research and practice within a remote rural context inform the issues of value and modes of practice in the arts in other cultural contexts, including the urban/metropolitan?

The On the Edge partner organisations

OTE identified five project partners throughout the north east with whom to develop five live art projects as the primary method for interrogating the research questions. (These were in place before the research began in 2001). These partner organisations and the individuals who took part are:

1. Duff House, Banff, with Charles Burnet (Chamberlain)

2. Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden with Chris Fremantle (Director)
3. Shetland College, Department of Textiles and Design with Maggie Marr and Stephanie Tristram (lecturers of textiles)
4. Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, Fraserburgh with David Bett, (Director)
5. Deveron Arts, Huntly, with Rae Marcus, (Chairperson)

The resulting art project names and the principal artists involved were:

1. *The Celestial Ceiling* (Duff House) with artists John McGeogh and Robert Orchardson
2. *Inthrow* (Scottish Sculpture Workshop) with artists Gavin Renwick (lead artist) Norman Shaw and Sergio Rodriguez
3. *Maakin Lab* (Shetland College) with Susan Benn
4. *Edge FM* (Museum of Scottish Lighthouses) with Paul Carter

The Deveron Arts partnership did not produce a completed project or output in collaboration with the research team and OTE decided to withdraw from this process. While failures are important in research terms the main reason was a difference in fundamental values on the nature of what this research opportunity allowed. It was not a reciprocal relationship in terms of working with OTE's practice-led research questions and Deveron Arts decided to develop a different trajectory outwith the research framework.

The OTE research framework (methodology)

To develop the art projects a spine of seven workshops held every six months was facilitated (by Matarasso). This created a structured space for critical reflection and staged the development incrementally. 'Gatherings' is the term we used as a crucial part of the emerging methodology where OTE brought different individuals together at different points during the project's development. These gatherings ranged from formal events with up to 20 people (*Celestial Ceiling*) to smaller events with 5 people in someone's home (*Inthrow*). 'Soundings' is the term we used to describe evaluation points in each of the projects (two sometimes three times) when we asked the artists and project partners to reflect on what had been learnt.⁹

⁹ The terms gatherings and soundings were coined by principle investigator for OTE Anne Douglas and Chris Fremantle, one of the project partners who became an associate researcher as the work progressed.

The core OTE research group

The core team of people involved in the OTE initiative are:

Dr Anne Douglas, principle researcher and artist

Professor Carole Gray, project co-ordinator and artist

Francois Matarasso, critical friend to the project with arts and cultural policy expertise and community artist

Myself as one of the two studentships attached to the OTE initiative looking at the artistic perspective

Claudia Zeiske, the second studentship attached to the OTE initiative looking at the socio-economic perspective with a background in anthropology and cultural development (resigned 2003)

Julie Ross evaluation from the socio-economic perspective and artist (Because Zeiske was unable to continue with the research Ross was engaged for six months to conduct an evaluation from this perspective).

A visual identity for OTE

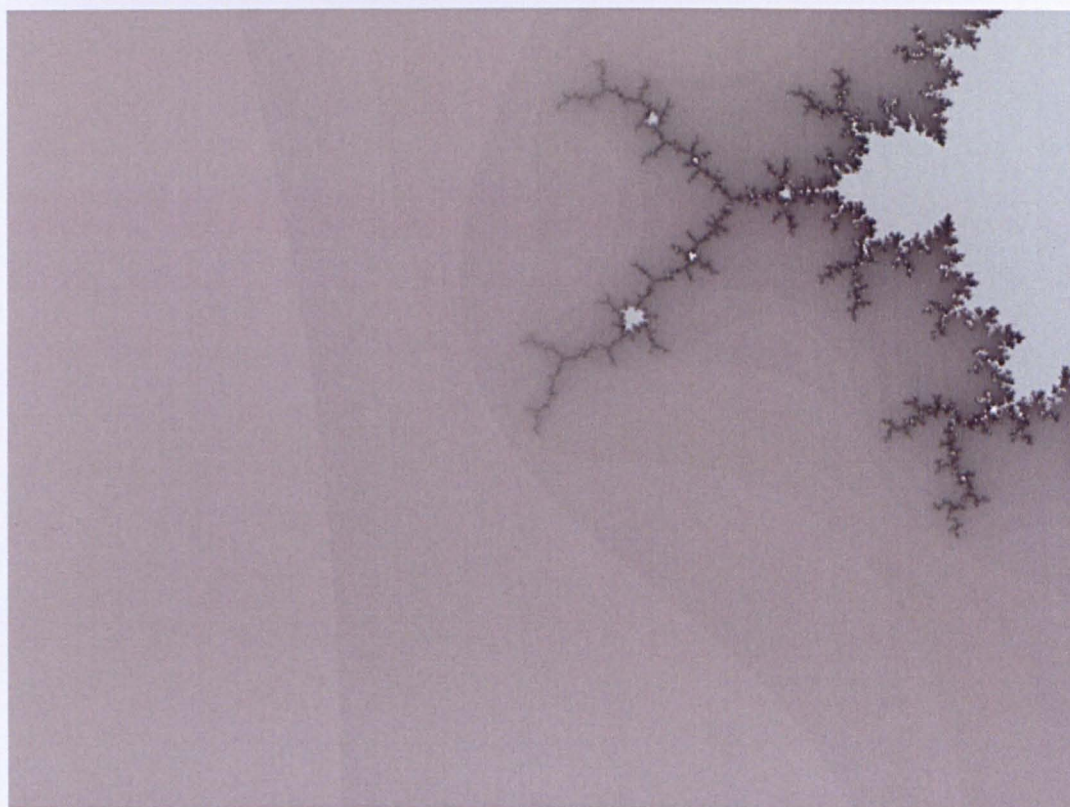
On the Edge was the name chosen for the research initiative. Geographically we were not centre we were marginal in terms of the majority of arts funding and arguably, the perceived quality (or status) of art compared to mainstream art in urban/metropolitan contexts.

I proposed and developed the fractal as a visual identity (or branding) for the research initiative. Fractals are (mathematical) growth patterns and this reflects the idea that over time the OTE initiative would grow a network of people, connected in different ways, to the research initiative. I liked the fact that with fractals the edges have edges. Symbolically this suggests that we can look at phenomena at different scales from the macro- to the micro-levels. This parallels the epistemological problem in this practice led art research of how to make sense of the micro-level detail within a process together with the value of art at the wider macro -level of the social, economic, cultural and artistic dimensions as stated in the OTE research questions at the outset.

The fractal 'edge' (below) looks like the shoreline – the space between the land and the sea.¹⁰ This resonates with the idea that the edge is not a firm boundary but a fluid and dynamic phenomena. In the design I tried to create a visual interplay between the foreground and the background (we can shift between land and sea, or what is solid, not solid).

The edge as margin (like interstice) is the space between one thing and another. I came to imagine (or describe) this as a defining characteristic of the OTE initiative where the art projects happen in the space between individuals, different disciplines and different sectors. This idea of operating in the interstices is influenced by the cultural theorist de Certeau on how we operate (creatively) in ordinary culture or everyday life (see 4.6 OTE emergent methodology). As the research progressed OTE defined the edge as a quality of engagement.

Fig. 2 Fractals used as the branding (i.e. idea) for the OTE research initiative. The fractal was used on the website (ontheedgeresearch.org) marketing material and the four OTE project outputs (publications).



¹⁰ I used a program to generate different fractals to achieve a satisfactory design. The program uses the 'Mandelbrot set' so called after Mandelbrot who devised a mathematical model to generate fractal patterns. A version is freely available on the web, see <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/~djoyce/julia/explorer.html> (Dec 2001).

For a description of the emerging OTE methodology a co-authored paper outlines the initiative (at approximately mid way through the OTE research period) see Appendix I: Douglas and Delday 2003.

To give the reader an overview of the four OTE projects a description taken from the resulting project publications (published toward the end of the OTE research period) is given in Appendix 2.¹¹

In this thesis I focus on two artists undertaking two of the OTE projects (Benn in *Maakin Lab* and Carter in *Edge FM*). An occasional reference is made to the other artists engaged by OTE to illustrate a point.

¹¹ These project descriptions are also found on the OTE web site, see www.onthecedgeresearch.org - completed projects

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

1.1 The problematic

On The Edge (OTE) research posed the question of what kinds of roles artists might play in a rural remote (marginal) context. This deceptively simple question raises challenging questions on the nature of viewing art from the predominant western-centric model of provision in which artists that are known as individuals make and present completed works of art to audiences who are anonymous. OTE raised the question of how art might be developed differently.

In the wake of modernism and postmodernism many contemporary art practices are described in the literature as being within a particular model, where distinction is made in relation to difference from one particular category or style of working. This has given the impression that roles for artists fit into something like a taxonomy of practice (socially engaged, community, public, gallery, site-specific, studio, situation, place). The fact that this exists is in part due to a top down view, the external and objectified lens of the art historical and critical theory perspectives. It is where art is described in the language of structure not the language of process. By viewing art as category we do not get to the form of art practice as it unfolds through process, or enable individuals to grow and change without this being perceived as a change of ideology.

Arguably this is fundamentally an epistemological problem reinforcing the need for practitioners (and practice-led art research) to articulate their processes. What is needed is a more nuanced critique that is able to articulate the nature and qualities of approaches grounded in the specificities of relationship and the dynamics of inter-subjectivity where artists work with other people (participatory practice).

The second related and equally serious consideration is that art practice seems separated from the culture and practices of day to day living as something apparently external (e.g. as embodied policy where art is framed to address social exclusion). But a view that takes the everyday as not a site for participatory art practice but an ontological reality is a perspective that places roles for artists within, drawing from, and contributing to the social space of day to

day living. Practice is a way of doing something invested with a way of thinking and being in the world.

This is a different way of considering and articulating art practice drawn from observations of everyday cultural practices. It is one which acknowledges the networks of relationship, the richness of spoken language, subtle exchanges and improvisation, acts of micro-resistances and the rich weaves of gesture and invention. While structures are given and our choices may be limited, like dwellers, we arrange and appropriate, transforming time, materials and places to make our lives memorable and affirmative through a pluralization of activity (de Certeau, 1984, 1998).

Close is one way to consider practice. It is not a category of practice, rather a possible trajectory of thinking about it. Considered at the outset as a disposition reflecting my rural remote (island) background it also points to an aspiration for the artist - that art can bring us closer to our feelings. Where the artist works with other individuals to make art *close* suggests a quality of engagement which is always in relation to a complex web of constraints and opportunities. In terms of forming a role *close* speaks to the co-constitution of self in the world.

1.2 A paradigm shift: new roles for artists

While artists are increasingly situating their practices as taking an active role in society in the discourse there are a number of valuable perspectives on different established models of practice. Notably there is a distinct polarity (in the discourse not necessarily in practice) between two historical models; 'signature' work where an artist authors work and presents this to an audience, and the artist who works directly with other people (usually not familiar with art) often termed 'community art' or 'new genre public art' (in the USA). While the former is attributed with having aesthetic value, the latter is attributed with social and political value but may be considered to be lacking in the aesthetic dimension.

Arguably many contemporary art practices exist within what we might imagine as a *paradigm shift* where practice is neither signature art nor community art/new genre public art. In

particular Lacy (artist and writer, 1995) notes the need for a more complex multi-dimensional understanding of art practices that engage with its audience. One that addresses socio-political issues but also includes the aesthetic dimension and the artist's thinking process. What is needed is a more nuanced articulation of process-oriented, engaged practices across its varied levels (Chapter 2).

With an emerging practice, and the desire to form a role with an ethical basis three issues arise and are dealt with in this research:

- the issue of classification (established models) and inherited vocabulary (e.g. artist, audience, participant, artwork etc)
- how to imagine practice as not principally problem solving, nor ideological (art as a corrective or as reactive with both inferring deficit)
- the need to find/develop a construct to make sense of practice (through practice) conducted as an open-ended dynamic, multi-faceted creative engagement between the artist working with other people to realise an artwork.

In response the research develops a different model of practice loosely termed 'participatory relational practice' which situates the artist *within the everyday*. As a critical concept and as an orientation for practice the everyday embeds the artist within the dynamic multi-layered fields of social living. It enables a re-imagining of the role of artist.

1.3 Structure of this thesis

Chapter 2 Close in the wider literature

The definition of art as essentially a relationship (Matarasso, 2000) mirrors what the literature on close reveals. *Close* is a useful way of considering art practice because it focuses and opens up ideas on relationship; from the relationship between artists working with other people to our relationship with places and objects.

In the literature on contemporary art practice that positions itself as taking an active role in society (Kester, 1998, 2004, Lacy, 1995, Lippard, 1997, Kwon, 2002, 2004, Doherty, 2004)

the discourse offers a set of distinctive styles of working. These critical texts highlight important human qualities where artists engage with other people (e.g. through dialogue, listening, empathy, connected knowing) but there is little detailed account of how this works. Lacy (1995) in particular recognises that while the social-political benefits of art practice are important the discourse has tended to overemphasize this to the detriment (or absence) of the subtler qualities which takes into account the artist's thinking processes and the value of the aesthetic dimension. She proposes that it is the symbolic value of art which is its defining quality and speculates that the relationship itself (between the artist and what is traditionally 'audience') might be considered the artwork and asks for a more nuanced articulation of practice across its varied levels.

Close is also found in cultural theories on the everyday. While the everyday is more a point of departure than the focus of theoretical analysis, from a cultural theory perspective it is the 'landscape' most immediately met (Highmore, 2002a) and a dialectical space (Highmore, 2002) for artists.

From an art historical perspective Papastergiadis (1998) speculatively points to the potential benefits of art being within the everyday (as opposed to about the everyday). It could bring artists closer to the pleasures and contradictions of day to day living and grounds practice in our making ethical choices and ways of humanizing relations with other people. The everyday supposes a quality of perceptual awareness by the artist (e.g. noticing, re-valuing something, drawing attention to). Curiously and despite its long art historical tradition throughout the 20th century, the everyday and contemporary art remains relatively untheorized (from an art historical perspective). Papastergiadis (1998) argues that art considered from this perspective could be the remedy for the alienating effects artists felt (and presumably other people) because of the over academicizing of post-modern theory (as also recognised by Kester, 2004 and Inglis, 2004).

The concept of the everyday is useful not as 'site' for art but an ontological reality with as many every days as individual people. If everyday life, like art practice is about the co-constitution of self and society it sharpens the fact that to understand artists' roles it is necessary to understand the why (motivation) the how (process) and the what (what effects) of practice. The problematic is essentially epistemological – how to find a way of thinking

about practice (process as experiential and embodied knowing) which brings together the subtler micro-level of practice in relation to the specificity of a given situation which is also its wider or macro-level dimensions of experience.

Close is also home, the metaphor OTE used to try and think in a different way about art. Home as a metaphor is useful at a meta level to focus and prompt discussion on value, particularly where a wide range of people are brought together to reflect and discuss the OTE projects in the workshops. (A paper in Appendix 1 gives detail on the OTE methodology; Appendix 2 summarizes the four completed OTE projects). As the research progressed other metaphors emerged (as used by the artists engaged by OTE in their distinctive practices) which interestingly were related to home e.g. cooking (Benn in the *Maakin Lab*), hearth (Renwick in *Inthrow*)

Close as an alternative to the categories of art practice (taxonomy) in the discourse became a means to an end. With an emerging practice and working within the OTE research initiative, *close* sharpened the seemingly impossible task in my research as the inter-related questions of:

how to make sense of an emerging practice, (to find a way of thinking about practice from the practitioner's perspective)

how to connect the micro-level subjective detail of process in relation to the questions posed by the OTE framework about the value of art - the macro-levels of the artistic, social, cultural and economic

how to interpret other art practices (i.e. the artists engaged by OTE to undertake the five projects)

how these set of projects (within the umbrella of the OTE initiative) relate to the wider intellectual context of ideas and practices.

What is needed from the practitioner's perspective is a way of thinking about practice as situated knowledge (knowledge as culturally and educationally shaped). A way which includes

the artist's thinking processes, the aesthetic dimension (Lacy, 1995) and its social/cultural implications for locating the individual in society.

A way forward came from texts by the French theorist and researcher Michel de Certeau. Finding his essay *Walking in the City* (1984) had strong resonances with what I was struggling with. The essay pinpoints the problematic. It was not the voyeuristic (and impossible) panoptic view from above which enables us to know a city (looking down from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre), knowledge is found down below. As pedestrians we make the city meaningful by walking through it. Knowledge is experiential, spatial, singular.

As a researcher and philosopher de Certeau became something of a companion in my research and he offered a potential key to the seemingly impossible set of questions I had.

Chapter 3 De Certeau and Bourriaud: two critical perspectives on creative activity within the everyday

To develop a way of thinking about practice from the practitioner's perspective (praxis) this chapter draws from the work of two French authors, Michel de Certeau and Nicolas Bourriaud. It introduces their thinking and by drawing the two authors together sheds light on issues underpinning an approach to making art which I loosely term 'participatory relational' art.

De Certeau's texts include his (uncompleted) research into cultural practices in our everyday lives (1984, 1998, 1997) and the single text he wrote on an artwork by the eco artists Helen and Newton Harrison (*The Lagoon Cycle*, 1985). Unlike his contemporaries (in cultural theory) his is not a systems or totalizing view, rather he wanted to scrutinize and give voice to the underlying dynamics in the flux and flow of social relations and the ways we make meaning in day to day life. It is the ordinary person, the silent productions, the marginalised majority de Certeau is interested in. This connects with my search to find a critical framework that can enlarge understanding of participatory art practice taking place within the everyday.

De Certeau inverts the logic of production and consumption suggesting that in ordinary culture it is the uses we make (as consumers) of representations which produce a different kind of production, albeit silent or invisible, enabling us to have a sense of autonomy or sense

of selves as unique individuals. His research and theoretical work is an attempt to foreground cultural practices and everyday life as a legitimate field of enquiry. He tries to find the language and tools to make this possible. His is a search for a poetics of the everyday which is an illusive phenomenon escaping easy representation and theorisation.

De Certeau is not interested in amassing examples of specific activities within the everyday, nor is he interested in identity categories of people (e.g. sub culture groups, gender). Much more ambitiously he wanted to provide the conditions for allowing us to see and articulate the everyday in the first place because it conceals a richness and diversity of activities and skills. To do this he speculatively proposes a framework he calls 'a practical science of the singular' (1998) which has three 'priorities': *ordinary (culture)*, *orality* and *operativity*. Operativity – as activity or practice, has three fundamental 'aspects', *the aesthetic*, *the ethical* and *the polemical*. It is the particular qualities of these three aspects as he defines which I focus on as potentially useful to the art practitioner.

Resistance (within the polemical aspect) is a leitmotif for de Certeau and the terms he uses in his 'preliminary hypothesis' – tactics and strategy are carefully unpacked because they are important for thinking about art practice.¹

In reviewing de Certeau's single critique on art (*The Lagoon Cycle*, by the Harrisons, 1985) he offers clues as to how the elements of an art work that is intrinsically dialogic can work together and he foregrounds the dialectic qualities of the artwork. This has relevance for representing the more process-oriented engaged art projects and a number of questions and tensions are aired which are taken up in Chapter 5 (e.g. the position of the narrator).

Bourriaud a curator and contemporary art historian draws from de Certeau's thinking on social relations and everyday cultural practice (and other theorists) to develop his theory of *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). Bourriaud detects qualities in contemporary art practices (during the 1990's) which are characterized by sociability and dialogue and are less concerned with representing the world than art work being 'a proposal to live in a shared world'. The qualities

¹ Highmore, 2002 (cultural theory) and Buchanan, 2000 (literary studies) suggest that viewing tactics as opposition to strategy has been a narrow interpretation by some theorists which ignores the interpretative potential of de Certeau's 'preliminary hypothesis' with tactics and strategy as a kind of 'operational logic'. De Certeau is trying to model human behaviour.

Bourriaud detects in relational art are arguably anticipated by de Certeau a quarter of a century previously. Bourriaud theorizes that relational art practices are characterized by being more event based, time dependent and 'fragmentary' and tend to reuse and recycle materials with a focus on interactivity by the viewer (or audience). Relational art is no longer about the 'private symbolic space' of the artist and Bourriaud suggests there is a range of different kinds of relationships between the relational work (which sometimes includes the artists' presence) e.g. guest, co-producer, witness, protagonist. The concern in relational art is something other than 'aesthetic consumption'.

I discuss the qualities of this kind of practice as Bourriaud theorizes and briefly consider the arguments against relational aesthetics and his counter argument. This highlights the hermetic argument (put forward by art curators and art theorists) of art not having real social or political value if it is within the institution of art (i.e. the mainstream of art as the gallery/museum context).

Though his theory is highly conceptual and is overlaid onto a set of practices within mainstream art, Bourriaud gives us valuable language with which to discuss art. Importantly in developing his theory of relational aesthetic (the 'political value of form') he places the value of art firmly at the level of reforming subjectivities (echoing Lacy's proposal that the artwork might itself be the relationship between artist and audience, 1995). However he does not deal with how inter-subjectivities might work in a project situation and in stating that relational aesthetics has a humanitarian aim is not the same thing as closely viewing practice where artists work with other people to make art. Bourriaud also struggles to connect his theory of form (a mixture of 'elements') to a single clear example of what relational form might be or look like in its full sense (a principle acting as a trajectory) and he suggests that 'the burning issue' for this kind of art from an art historical perspective is that it is no longer about representation. Relational art also lacks aesthetic resolution in a formal sense (compatibility of style and material).

On a deep level Bourriaud and de Certeau share the view that creative production arises from a need to resist the homogenizing and disempowering forces in contemporary western culture. To counter this Bourriaud proposes that relational practice is concerned with

sociability, for de Certeau what is important in society is the idea of collectivity and the gesture that can enable self representation (1997).

In focussing on relationship two issues are raised in reading de Certeau and Bourriaud. Representation (a conventional function of the visual artist) shifts from the art object to what the relational *form* of participatory projects might be. The second issue is the question of whether it is the event which is the most important thing or its legacy. I briefly offer two examples of what relational form might be to illustrate the idea of a) a trajectory or something lasting beyond the work and b) the mixing of elements (e.g. social facts, multiple voices).

In the final section of this chapter I consider how the three aspects of de Certeau's 'operativity' – *the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical* might be potentially useful in terms of art practice (having made the connection through my own practice). To develop this idea as a useful construct to think about art practice I visualize the *aesthetic, ethical and polemical* as an inter-related figure – a matrix, to suggest the three dimensions of what an art practice might entail. I draw out key qualities de Certeau offers and qualities from Bourriaud (the relational aesthetic) and configure them to the matrix.

While neither of these two perspectives on creative activity deal with participatory art practice as such, the matrix as it is developed in this thesis represents putting in place a construct that is both foundational (representing the locus of self) and relational in its approach (a proposal to live in a shared world). It also represents a positioning of practice where the everyday as a critical concept has ideas and theories beneficial to think about the complexities of dynamic processes from inside practice (see 2.7). This matrix is constructed reflexively through practice which is dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Using and constructing the matrix as a way of thinking about art practice

The matrix (the *aesthetic, ethical and polemical* dimensions) is a way of formulating an approach to the question of finding/developing a way to think about the why, how and what of art practice from the practitioner's perspective. The approach is participatory practice i.e. where the artist works with other people to make meaning. The matrix is constructed through practice and by interpreting other art practices. I look at (A) three projects from my emerging

practice and look in detail at (B) other practices, selecting two artists engaged by OTE to conduct two projects.

Chapter 4 is split into two volumes (with the field work in the second volume) and with the projects running in approximately chronological order.² It is at this point that the reader can access the material in different ways (like entry points). See *Notes on guidance for the reader* (iv) and 4.1.1 *Introduction to the projects and notes on methodology* in this volume.

A. Own projects

(4.2) Developing work through dialogue, co-operative working: *Early work with geneticists* (Aug 2001 – Feb 2003). This work is with a group of four clinical consultant geneticists at the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. It is here I make the initial connection with art practice and a quality of the *ethical* dimension as de Certeau describes. I then try out the other two dimensions (the *aesthetic* and *polemical*). From this series of three artworks the *polemical* is understood as how graphic design thinking rubs up with art thinking. The *aesthetic* is a transforming reuse (of materials and representation) and can be a poetic gesture by a participant (*Pandora's Box*, Aug 01) who appropriates an artwork into their world. The *ethical* is to do with a shared freedom to speak and think differently and links to learning. I understand (can describe) art being a special way of holding a conversation where making meaning can be co-produced but meaning is also contested, open ended, provisional (*Genescapes*, Feb 2003). Questions arise on the nature and the terms used for the relationship between the artist and participants ('collaboration' 'participant') and how an artwork is made available (*Inheritance*, Feb 2003). With the artwork (and enquiry) at the level of relationship I consider the different kinds of exchanges in the process.

(4.3) Understanding spatial practice and tactics: *Interference* (9th June 2004).

This work is in the same department but with other staff. In this short episode (20 minutes) recognising a tactic (parodying role) helps clarify the nature of tactics. This intervention connects with spatial practice as de Certeau describes where touch and movement (as well as looking and talking) are important. The relationship between the artist and the participants is co-dependent in this more performative work (a mutually 'transforming ruse'). Questions

² The chronology is an indication of when projects happened. However in this practice-led research a difficulty in the analysis of the projects was for two reasons, the overlapping of projects (my own work and the OTE art projects) and the fact of reflexive learning.

arise on the openness of art objects, framing participation the relationship between the two. This work highlighted the issues of capturing and giving form to the art process and the idea of 'site-specificity' is raised (where the artwork happens as having a 'transitive' quality). The office space is used for other purposes and the relations of artist-participant, work-play are more mixed or blurred.

(4.4) Developing a set of artistic tools, sharing a polemical space and the idea of autonomy:

The Waiting Room (Sept 03-June 05). This project is with a group of medical staff in a small rural hospital (a series of meetings over two and a half years). Some emergent qualities, values and artistic tools include making lists as a tactic, collage as a principle for framing participation. Fragments and close physical looking encourage complicity. Ambiguity is considered important to encourage 'thinking aloud'. With the process as a series of reciprocal exchanges I consider the idea asymmetry and autonomy as core to participatory co-operative process. However in building art through relationships it raises a number of issues and related questions (e.g. the difficulties of reporting projects and who the audience might be beyond the project or event) which are taken up in Chapter 5.

From this work I understand that the matrix helps to sensitize the practitioner to see qualities, reflect on values and consider judgements as the process unfolds. Using and constructing the matrix it is difficult to untangle qualities which only live in one dimension and I begin to appreciate that it is this dynamic embodied in the matrix which gives it interpretative value. With the aesthetic as a transformation of some kind, the ethical as a set of values the polemical can relate to the fit between these and the meanings made. In this way the polemical (in a de Certeau sense) is understood as forming, enacting and expressing a view or position, not the harder systems view of fitting (or not fitting) within a taxonomy of art models. A loose descriptor for this way of working is 'participatory relational art'.

B. Other practices

The purpose of this part of the research is to look for qualities of the artist's thinking process, how relationships are developed between the artist and participants and what specific tools and methods they use. I select two artists engaged by *On the Edge* (Benn and Carter).

(4.7) Giving form to methodology: the artist Susan Benn in the *Maakin Lab* project.

Benn has given a distinctive form to her methodology or practice which she calls 'labs'. This is a way of bringing creative practitioners from different disciplines together in a shared learning space. The lab (like a container) is adaptable to different situations and can be appropriated beyond the artist. Benn uses a variety of tools (e.g. metaphor) in this robust, yet understated methodology. The polemical (resistance) is very clear in this practice. Labs challenge the imbalance of power relations and hierarchies of value in the creative industries (a motivation and continuing concern for Benn). This is a kind of participatory relational practice, a role she describes as 'cooking'.³

(4.8) The polemical as a position of critical thinking: the artist Carter in the *Edge FM* project. Carter develops a response to the OTE project brief (for a youth group to build and transmit from a radio station) which challenged assumptions on many levels – the research, the artistic and ideas about ways of working with young people. Tactics can be read as inverting assumptions of what is expected (e.g. using low tech radio not high tech of digital equipment suggested in the OTE artists brief) which is generative (opens up possibilities). He uses a variety of tools (e.g. a project identity) enabling the group to create and occupy what I imagine as a polemical space in a physical and virtual (or ideological) sense. His practice shows an aesthetics of tricks and subtle tactics of subversion, with the project publication (*Edge FM*) acting as 'a small manifesto', giving the youngsters a voice in adult world. This is a kind of participatory relational practice, a role he describes as amateur.

What the matrix gives (in the analysis) and what it represents (as a thinking tool) is discussed after each set of projects and then across the whole set of projects. This is also developed in the final chapter (5.3).

Chapter 5 Discussion and implications

The research (like a journey) is on one level clarifying an orientation to think about practice. The everyday, as a critical concept, is a point of departure which is sympathetic to art practice which tries to hold together imagination, freedom and service in a relational sense.

³ The *Maakin Lab* project deals with the issues on how to re-value a traditional craft – Shetland knitting and lace making (and took place in Shetland). In my structured conversation with Benn (11/06/04) it became clear that she did not consider herself to be an artist in her role of identifying and realizing labs. Benn more easily equated artist with her previous profession as a photographer, yet her methodology of labs as a process (not a tangible product) seems to exemplify key characteristics of a relational practice. Benn has been creating labs for over 16 years and increasingly works internationally, see 4.7 Volume II.

The qualities de Certeau discerns in everyday life (and practices) is felt valuable for understanding and imagining qualities in artistic practice. In particular his thinking on resistance, when transposed into an art context, helps understand what a critical practice might entail. I summarize what the matrix is as a thinking tool and ways it can be applied (5.3).

While the matrix does not speak to artistic practice at a subject level, its generality is both its strength and its weakness. Some criticisms of this research identify future challenges on developing a role focused by the idea of practice having an *aesthetic-polemical* reach.

From the artist-researcher experience and the broader set of OTE projects two challenging questions are posed by this research; how art projects as sets of experiences are articulated, and what remains after the project is completed (legacy). A brief critique of the short Visual Dialogue experiments (on the CD) indicates some parameters of the problem and while de Certeau's theorization of space as 'practiced place' can help to conceptualize process based work (the art work is acted out) representing this visually is weak in this research.

Relational art shifts the focus away from the art object to ideas on form. This connects to ideas on an individual project's legacy and more broadly what relational means as an approach to art within the everyday. Specific qualities in OTE projects and at the level of OTE as an approach are outlined which indicates part of the challenge of representing the experience. The four OTE project publications are described briefly and it is suggested that future work could develop new ways of narrating the experience (in text and image). De Certeau's critique of an artwork (*The Lagoon Cycle* in Chapter 3) is considered a valuable reference for thinking about longer term projects as providing material for an artwork comprising text and image.

Bourriaud's theory (the relational aesthetic) is a theory of form which is suggestive and opens up ideas on what an artwork comprises (its elements and effects). Yet he fails to give us an example of what the political value of form might be in its fuller sense as he theorizes. His idea of trajectory is interpreted as a style of thinking and for the practitioner it is a question of understanding how art can be operationalized within the everyday.

The OTE initiative as an approach demonstrates a particular kind of relational practice which re-imagines the public sphere (traditionally audience) to a more complex model of how art is made and its reception. The defining characteristic is that audience is not assumed but is a constructed public space. In terms of role this positions the artist as also author (public figure) as mediator between project experiences through its representation and development.

Relational art as a theory of form (the political value of form) and what we understand this to be is in part based on artists themselves tackling the huge challenges of narrating project experiences. This is partially resolved in this research through producing a set of different projects outputs (e.g. books, 'Visual Dialogues', published papers) that engages with the aesthetic and ethical challenges of dealing with a multiple audience that includes the participants, the artists and academe. In the longer term we can imagine the political value of form being developed through models of participatory relational practice where the role of artist is also author in the public realm.

Finally there is a section outlining areas of future research and possible uses for the matrix (5.9).

A short Afterword, as a more philosophical reflection to the thesis, places de Certeau's hypothesis of tactics and strategy as a game played between the two teams, 'Mystery' and 'Ministry'.

CHAPTER 2

Close in the wider literature

2.1 Introduction

Close is one way of thinking about visual art as a process where the artist works with other people to make meaning.¹ While *close* is not synonymous with good necessarily, it does suggest a quality of engagement. Engagement in terms of what it is that we as artists are interested in and that the participants feel a level of interest from being involved in the creative process.

I begin the literature review by considering how art is defined then draw together resonances from art practice where artists work with other people (commonly referred to as participatory practice). An influential approach from America is 'new genre public art' a term for a broad set of practices which are often described as 'socially engaged'. Related to this are perspectives on art practice that promote dialogic and conversational approaches that are also concerned with inclusive and democratic ways of working. *Close* is also a sense of place and 'site-specificity' with a focus on *where* art takes place. From the wider literature (anthropology and design) *close* is dwelling (embodied and experiential knowing) and *close* is proximity (nearness and distance) in a physical sense and virtual sense (e.g. remembered).

Close is also home, the metaphor which *On the Edge* uses to prompt thinking on the value of art in the OTE projects. Finally I consider *close* in terms of the everyday from a cultural theory and an art historical perspective. In this thesis the everyday is not an in depth theoretical study but a point of departure.

Close asks for an understanding of the why, how and what of practice.

¹ Making meaning is a useful way to think about the value of making art where the artist works with other people. It frees up what might come from a process that is not focussed by making an object per se. This term derives from the philosopher Rorty who describes our innate need to make meaning because the idea of meaninglessness is abhorrent to us. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) is cited in Bennet, S and Melling G *Window Sills: Art of Locality* in Bennet, S and Butler, J (eds), *Art & Urban Futures: Volume 1: Locality, Regeneration & Divers(c)ities*, (2000:113-128).

2.2 Finding a useful definition for art

With an emerging art practice I needed some kind of bearing in terms of how art might be defined. To think of artists evolving roles suggests that artists have jobs and avoided the unhelpful dualism of art as considered either 'instrumental' or 'intrinsic'.² Because I was interested in genetics I looked at literature dealing with the growing interest and practices in the field of art and science. Two key texts here were helpful.

Wilson (2000) in his encyclopaedic volume draws together many different kinds of 'sci-art' projects or work in what he calls 'Information Arts'. The thrust of the book is the uses of new technology. He points out that today there is a great deal of confusion and disagreement over what art is and what it might mean:

"It has been difficult to achieve consensus on definitions of art, the nature of the aesthetic experience, the relative place of communication and expression, or criteria of evaluation." (2000:17)

From this I could imagine art, by its nature, to be contesting. He uses a definition from the Getty Museum's Program in Art Education to describe what it means to make art:

"Art-making today may be described as the process of responding to observations, ideas, feelings, and other experiences by creating works of art through the skilful, thoughtful, and imaginative application of tools and techniques to various media. The artistic objects that result are the product of encounters between artists and their intentions, their concepts and attitudes, their cultural and social circumstances, and the materials or media in which they choose to work." (ibid)

The quote seemed reasonable, and Wilson in the section on the 'Difficulties of locating a rationale for action in a deconstructed milieu' poses tough questions for artists:

²At this time I detected a theme in the literature which took instrumental or intrinsic as the starting point for considering the socio-cultural and economic value of art. For example *Art for All: Their Policies and Our Culture* (eds. Wallinger and Warnock, 2000) and *What is Art good for?* (ed. Fox, 2002). Both texts are collections of essays by different authors considering publicly funded art in terms of provision and its relationship to government policy. The debate in both texts is framed by the value of art as being either instrumental or intrinsic and while some authors take the view that the value of art cannot be either or, but is both, this framing seemed unnecessarily dualistic. It was not particularly helpful to the artist with an emerging practice.

"On what basis can artists claim that their productions deserve an audience and provide a unique world view?" (ibid:25)

and more sharply:

"What is the origin and justification of their need to create, and what is the motivation of anyone to listen?" (ibid)

Wilson's primary interest is in artists using new technology, in particular technology in science (he notes that today the two terms are often conflated). But the definition of art he offers, and his tough questions, point not to the nature of the art collaboration in terms of a relationship (here artists and scientists or technologists) but an emphasis on different disciplines.

I did not feel entirely comfortable with the phrase 'unique view' but in the context of art/science, or art/new technology of collaborative endeavour the implication is that different knowledge systems were coming together and artists have some kind of knowledge different to scientific/technological knowledge.³

A second more useful definition of the nature and the value of art as an essentially human endeavour (as opposed disciplinary knowledge or arts' material form) is provided by Matarasso:

"...a means through which we can examine our experience of ourselves, the world around us, and the relationship between the two, and share the results with people in

³ Dr Leach was employed by Welcome Trust to study the science and art collaborations in the projects they had funded. His view was that the Welcome Trust were perpetuating the knowledge or specialism division between art and science: 'The model of the single creative author dominates and precipitates the difference between disciplines' where 'the scientist is one thing and the artist another'. He argued that the ability of creating in a collaboration comes from something that happens 'between people' it is about a 'dynamic' and that the different knowledges coming together should not be about 'encompassment' through 'translation' which is the dominant model in these sci-art collaborations. He believed that artists had to be valued for their knowledge. I asked him about the nature of relationships in these collaborations suggesting that these different knowledges coming together could lead to better or new understanding. I suggested that this question at base was one of communication and is pertinent in any situation not just the big discipline divides. His response was that he is not dealing with this i.e. the nature of relationships at the level of individuals and thinks that this might be because he himself is within his own discipline. I found this slightly strange because he is a social anthropologist, but I fully acknowledged he was presenting consultancy work he had done for the Welcome Trust. Lecture by Dr James Leach (Social anthropologist) Research Fellow, King's College, University of Cambridge *Disciplinary specialisation and collaborative endeavour: Some challenges presented by sci-art projects' 18th February 2004, Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, Dundee*

a form which gives free rein to our intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual qualities." (2000)

This definition suggests an ethical basis for art practice – where the business of making art involves examining and sharing, which through some form enables 'free rein' – a freedom. It also suggests that art making is fundamentally based on relationship. Arguably making meaning or making art has a value in and of itself through the act of sharing. However what might be a gauge on the quality of the art work is the idea of examination - that art can promote a quality of thinking. This definition positions the value of art as being between the traditional divide or space of artist as 'producer' and audience as 'receiver' suggesting that art simultaneously exists within both experiences. Matarasso's definition is at the level of 'intentionality' as Searle (2000) defines - how our conscious minds relate to the world and how we make sense of being in the world as social beings.⁴

2.3 Close as participation and engagement in art practice

The shift (arguably for at least the past 30 years) of artists moving out of the gallery and museum context and finding roles which engage with social issues (and this would include environmental/ecology issues) is very rich and encompasses many different kinds of practices, ideas and activities. In the literature the term collaborative for art practice where artists work with other people has been subsumed by the terms 'participatory' and 'engaged'. Engaged practices tend not to be gallery oriented, but involve working with groups of people with quite specific goals in mind.

The complex issues posed by the nature of engagement between the artist working with other people and what value this might have is one of the most discussed areas in the literature on contemporary art practice outside the gallery context: Lacy, 1995, Lippard, 1997, Kester 1998, 2004 Jacob et al, 1998, Finkelpearl, 2001, Kwon, 2002, 2004, Doherty, 2004.

⁴ Searle uses the term intentionality to describe our subjective states. Intentionality has two 'directions of fit'. This can be 'world to mind' (like desire, intention) and 'mind to world' (like belief). These directions require 'conditions of satisfaction' and this is what Searle proposes in order to understand intentionality. There are three kinds of intentionality: observer independent or intrinsic, observer dependent or derived and 'as-if' intentionality or the metaphorical. Searle says: 'Beliefs can be true or false, desires can be fulfilled or frustrated, intentions can be carried out or not. In each case, the intentional state is satisfied or not depending on whether there is (indeed) a match between propositional content (of intentionality) and the reality represented.' (2000:103)

Lacy (artist and writer) arguably set the scene for the discussion on the value of art outside the gallery context and firmly placed art practice within the social realm in her influential *Mapping the Terrain* (1995). Lippard (artist and writer) takes the view of artist's valuing environment and place to making art which draws from the sense of a place and people's relationships to that locale. Kester (art historian and critical theorist) introduced the idea of a 'dialogic aesthetics' into the more socially engaged practice. Jacob (curator and writer), like Kester, promotes the value of dialogue in artistic practice as a democratizing and inclusive aspect of participatory art practice. Finkelppearl draws together a range of perspectives (including interviews with artists e.g. Ukeles) on urban based public art projects, that enter the public domain as practices which engage with the social dynamic in some way. Kwon usefully gathers up and analyses public art over the past 30 years (and critiques the texts by Kester, Lippard and Lacy) with a focus on context or 'site-specific' art and what that means.

A general observation on this key literature on artist practices which engage with other people is the fact that most of it comes from a very different cultural context to mine – from the USA. Doherty's recent text (2004) is an exception⁵ and an initiative by the Arts Council of England (2003) which attempted to gather together socially engaged practices from the UK by hosting a series of seminars held at the Ikon Gallery and publishing these presentations by the artists on the web (2004)⁶. This selection of artists included (amongst others) Jane Trowell of the environmental art group *Platform*, Barbara Stevini of O+I (Organisations and Imagination formerly APG - Artists Placement Group) and Roz Hall of Jubilee Arts (now called The Public) three artists I met and discussed various issues with throughout the course of this research.⁷

Questions I had (i.e. was forming) particularly those voiced by Lacy's 'socially engaged' styled practice and Kester's theory of 'dialogical aesthetics' had resonances because of the way I

⁵ A very good report from a socially engaged art project in the UK is a one year collaborative research project initiated by the staff at the School of Art and Design, University of Plymouth. Four artists were engaged and worked with the residents of Exeter. See *Window Sills: Art of Locality*, Bennet and Melling, in Bennett and Butler (eds) (2000:113-128). The project took a lead from the influential text by Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain* (1995).

⁶ interrupt: artists in socially engaged practice, <http://www.interrupt-symposia.org> (downloaded 20/4/04)

⁷ In my research an important link came through my association with Littoral Art (Ian Hunter and Ceilia Lerner) who introduced me to Lacy, Kester as well as Platform the London based environmental arts group and Ala Plastica, also an environmental arts group based in Argentina. It was through my relationship with Littoral that I would gain first hand experience of more established practitioners in conversations and the opportunity to chair a planning meeting for a third Littoral conference (London, May 2004). This association also led to my meeting and holding discussions with the influential artists Barbara Stevini and John Latham of APG (Artists placement Group, now O+I, or Organisation and Imagination). Their ground breaking work in the late 1960's and 70's repositioned the role of artists in industry and government (Civil Service) through a series of placements opening the doors for future artists to take a more active role in society. I would also meet Jay Koh from Singapore working in Asia and Europe to try to 'shift the historical colonial paradigm' which undervalues the cultural practices and arts of developing nations.

preferred to work, though my way of working with individuals on a person to person basis stemmed less from what seemed an art historical abreaction to the institutionalization of art than from my background. Practices presented in the discourse seemed pitted against the legacy of high modernism and its traditional gallery practice with artists producing signature works, where solo authorship is crucial and later (in the literature) an abreaction to post-modernism with its emphasis on difficult conceptual art which asked for theoretical deconstruction (Kester, 2005; Inglis, 2004; Papastergiadis, 1998). Never the less I share many of the values Lacy and Kester point to.

The literature on participatory and engaged art practice emphasizes the democratic and socializing effects of artists working with others. However, my impression (from the discourse, not necessarily in the practices) was that these kinds of practices often emerged or grew from some kind of problem or sense of deficit. Projects were usually urban based (apart from Lippard) and often with marginalized people such as homeless or ethnic groups.⁸ Kwon very usefully critiques both sides of the argument of collaborative work in terms of developing or promoting ideas on 'community' (and cites Kester to make the point). Trowel (interrupt, 2004) paralleled my feelings on the term socially engaged when she says the term 'in theory encompasses almost every artistic practice known to man'⁹ and she reflects Lacy's call in *Mapping the Terrain* (1995) for the need for artists who work in the social realm to be both clear and explicit about their own personal politics for working in this way.

While I admire this kind of 'new genre' (the term used by Lacy) socially engaged work, and appreciated that some artists are responsive to the environments they find themselves in (or choose to be in) the idea of beginning with a problem was not where I started from in art practice. With a design background problem clarification (as the designer's brief) and subsequent design solution was the kind of mindset I was trying to leave behind (de-professionalize, see *Biographical Note*, vii). With an emerging art practice it felt less moving away from a problem or issue than moving towards something. For instance work with a group of clinical geneticists began through curiosity about their world. This drew me to approach and work with them (see 4.2 and 4.3).

⁸ In *Mapping the Terrain*, the term 'socially engaged', coined by Lacy was a kind of more socially aware practice. The term 'new genre' was like an umbrella. Not surprisingly the collection of different artists whose practices span quarter of a century include feminist artists e.g. Judy Chigaco. Lacy's book was a deliberate political move to place this kind of practice in the public domain as a serious alternative to the institutionalisation and commodification of art in America.

⁹ http://www.interrupt-symposia.org/articles/read.cgi?it_educator_1 (downloaded 20/4/04)

Like these more established practices I obviously wanted to understand and develop a critical practice but not at the level of a single specific issue per se. Neither was I working with one kind of identity category like 'youth', 'women', or 'ethnic'. I did not want practice to be considered or become a form of corrective. I felt slightly adrift. I wanted practice to have a use value and to have distinction but not necessarily at the level of subject. I would work in this research with a range of people (scientists, knitters, health specialists).

From this overview I now look at these authors in more detail to draw out specific resonances with the notion of *close* and its relevance in terms of developing a useful way to think about practice from the practitioner's perspective.

2.3.1 Lacy's 'new genre public art' as 'socially engaged' practice

In Lacy's book (1995) her alternative reading of public art is an art that more directly affects the lives of the audience. This 'new genre public art' is an umbrella term (given by Lacy) for a collection of established art practices (e.g. Baca, Kaprow), which share the idea that art as an activity can play an active role in society. She describes commonalities in this kind of approach:

"...they have a common interest in leftist politics, social activism, redefined audiences, relevance for communities (particularly marginalized ones), and collaborative methodology." (1995:25)

New genre public art (sometimes referred to as 'socially engaged') and the questions raised by Lacy are replayed in the later literature (e.g. Doherty, 2004).¹⁰ Lacy's influential text and the difficult questions she raises gave important clues to the direction my research should take.

¹⁰ A later taxonomy for artists working with other people proposes four categories. Lind cites the Vienna-based art critic Kravagna's distinction between different working methods that are concerned with human interaction, or models of participation as 'working with others', 'interactive activities', 'collective action' and 'participatory practice' (written in 1998). See Lind *Actualisation of Space* in Doherty *Contemporary Art: from Studio to Situation*, (2004:109-116).

The first question is that of authorship of art work, namely that the artist is not the sole author. Making meaning is not a solitary activity with artwork produced by the artists and given to an audience. Lacy argues for a 'more connected role for artists' between the artist and the audience (ibid: 32).

The second related question is what we mean by audience and relationship within the art process. She critically investigates what we mean by 'audiences' for art and goes as far to suggest that it may not be the object or the performance which is the 'artwork' per se but the artwork could be the relationship between the artist and audience:

"The nature of audience - in traditional art taken to be just about everyone - is now being rigorously investigated in practice and theory. Is 'public' a qualifying description of place, ownership, or access? Is it a subject, or a characteristic of the particular audience? Does it explain the intentions of the artist or the interests of the audience? The inclusion of the public connects theories of art to the broader population: what exists in the space between artist and audience, a relationship that may itself become the artwork." (ibid: 20)

The whole issue of authorship seemed slightly odd from a graphic design perspective where I would never work on my own to produce designed material. Of course the designer responds to a need usually posed by the client. As artist this was not a motive to make work. I made artwork (e.g. objects, prints) initially as a response to my feelings and simultaneously as a way of working out a thought. By putting the art object 'out there' (giving it a material form) I could literally see a thought externalised as form. By taking artwork to show other people it prompts dialogue and other exchanges where new meanings and ideas were developed (see Chapter 4). Lacy's question of the relationship itself as being the artwork is extremely sharp, the paradox being how we might know or see the work if it exists at this level. She suggests that relationship with audience is like building a 'constituency' which might bring different people into the process:

"All art posits a space between artist and the perceiver of the work, traditionally filled with the art object. In new genre public art, that space is filled with the relationship between artist and audience, prioritized in the artist's working strategies. For some,

the relationship is the artwork. This premise calls for a radically different set of skills. For example 'juxtaposition' as an aesthetic practice may mean, in this case, bringing together diverse people within the structure of the work, exploring similarities and differences as part of the dialogic practice. Building a constituency might have as much to do with how the artist envisions the overall shape and texture of a work as it does with simply developing an audience." (ibid: 35)

She describes the new genre model as one of collective relationship as opposed to the model of individual authorship and quotes Suzi Gablic who advocates an art that is 'more empathetic and interactive and comes from a gentle, diffused mode of listening. An art practice which is about open conversation in which one is obliged to listen and include other voices.' (ibid: 36)

Lacy argues that artists who practice this 'relational model' (a precursor to the term Bourriaud uses, 2002, see next chapter) do so politically or psychologically because they feel they need to be connected to the other in society. She accounts for this need as arising from a spiritual or ethical orientation - 'a relationship with the earth and all beings that live there.' These artists have a 'sense of service'.

Although the nature of new genre public art is one characterized by activism or remedying something Lacy believes that the discussion on this kind of work (engaged practice) has been narrow, and 'superficial' being 'halted by a focus on its more political aspects' to the detriment of a broader understanding. She believes that there needs to be a 'conversation about the psychological, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of this (new genre) work' (ibid: 32) and that 'scant attention' has been paid to the aesthetic because of the 'social claims' (ibid: 45)

These are very important points, if the new genre practices were viewed or evaluated from the political or social perspectives to the detriment of a broader understanding - psychological, spiritual, ethical and the absence of valuing the aesthetic I needed to find a way of representing and considering these.

While Lacy moves the discussion from one of authorship to artist-audience relationship she also points to the importance of the artists' sense of interiority and on this aspect cites the artist Kaprow:

"It is not only the transformation of the public consciousness that we are interested in, but it's our own transformation as artists that's just as important. Perhaps the corollary is that community change can't take place unless it's a transformation within us. That familiar line -- 'I see the enemy and it is I' -- means that every prejudice, every misunderstanding that we perceive out in the real world is inside of us, and has to be changed." (ibid:32)

Kaprow suggests that in order for social change to take place the artist should challenge themselves and by doing so change themselves. What Lacy suggests (in citing Kaprow) is that the artist's intentionality (and intentions) is understood within the work.

Lacy summarizes what new genre public art represents:

"Perceived notions of change based on political and sociological models and extrapolated from personal experiential reports are necessary but insufficient in evaluating new genre public art. This work also functions, as does all art, as a representation or model. The work might, for example, hypothesize potential collaboration among people rather than demonstrate actual interaction. It might suggest a possibility for cooperation and exchange that currently does not exist, or it might be a model for artists themselves, stretching the boundaries, incorporating new forms, giving permission for invention. It is possible that process-oriented public art is at its most powerful when, as with most visual art forms, it operates as a symbol. The relationship of demonstrable effects to the impact of a metaphor must be grappled with as this work attempts to function simultaneously within both social and aesthetic traditions." (ibid:183-4)

These questions for Lacy were how she imagined the new genre practices might be discussed and evaluated. This discussion needed to address 'art not primarily as a product but as a process of value finding, a set of philosophies, an ethical action, and an aspect of a larger socio-cultural agenda' (ibid: 46). These valuable questions voiced by Lacy -- artwork as relationship, how to see or know the interiority or thought processes of the artist, the value of

art on the symbolic level and the need to include an artworks aesthetic value along with its other varied levels are crucial questions in this journey (this research).

What I struggled with was how I could find a way of thinking about art practice that addresses this fuller and more complex discussion (and evaluation) that Lacy calls for - one which tries to 'capture all the varied levels on which art operates' (ibid: 44).

2.4 Close as dialogue and conversation

In my emerging practice I try to engage other people in the artistic process by holding a conversation in and around a body of art work. The art objects are considered catalysts to making new expressive meaning collaboratively. In the literature dialogue and conversation are considered crucially important tools for some kinds of contemporary art practice particularly by Kester (art critic and theorist, 1998, 2004)¹¹ and Jacob and Brenson (art curation and theory 1998).

Kester gives us the notion of 'dialogic aesthetics'. What characterizes these kinds of art practices is the 'facilitation of dialogue across diverse communities' (2004a:76). It is about creating 'a safe discursive space'.¹² What unites these artists and collectives, Kester suggests, is that they are 'concerned with the relationship between art and the broader social and political world and about the kinds of knowledge that the aesthetic experience is capable of producing' (ibid:79). Practices which he includes in this sphere are Jay Koh working in Thailand, Burma and Tibet, Ala Plastica in Buenos Aires, Littoral in England and Lacy in the U.S.¹³

¹¹ Kester's paper *Dialogic Aesthetics* was first presented at a Littoral conference in 1998 and was later published in Variant (winter 1999-2000) has now been developed in two key texts; Kester, G, *Conversation Pieces: the Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art* in Kocur, Z and Leung, S (eds) *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, Blackwell Publishing, (2004a:76-88_ from which I quote here. His later *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press, develops his theory by looking at case studies (2004b).

¹² He cites Lacy's 'Oaklands project', specifically *Fire on the Roof*, which brought 200 high school students of Latino and African-American extraction together to sit in parked cars and have 'unscripted dialogues' on the problems they faced as young coloured people (e.g. under funding of schools, media stereotypes, racial profiling). Surrounding them were over 1,000 Oakland residents and the local and national news media. The aim was to transcend the cliches promoted by the mainstream media and for the students to take some control over their self image. This led to a six week long series of discussions between the high school students and the Oakland Police department, resulting in a videotape which became part of its community police training program. Lacy is increasingly using mass media to address issues through art.

¹³ It is interesting that in the discourse socially engaged practices which is sometimes referred to as community art tends to also include environmental art practices. See Collins et al, *Lyrical Expressions, Critical Engagement, Transformative Action: An Introduction to Art and the Environment*, [http://www.communityarts.net/reading room/archivefiles/2003/06/lyrical](http://www.communityarts.net/reading_room/archivefiles/2003/06/lyrical) (downloaded Sept 2004).

Kester draws from the Russian literary theorist Bakhtin, who argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation 'a locus of different meanings, interpretations and points of view' (2004a:79) Like the cultural theorist Inglis (2004) he suggests that this more open discursive way of working runs contrary to the post-modern view (Lyotard, Greenberg and Adorno) which defined the avant-garde in art as having to be difficult in order to stand in distinction from the other end of the spectrum, the easy or facile stuff - kitsch. Kester also cites Habermas where discursive forms of communication need to be 'bracketed from more instrumental or hierarchical forms of communication'. This is not to create some kind of universal understanding but rather a 'provisional understanding'. However what is legitimized is the 'perceived universality of the process of discourse itself' (ibid:80). In distinction to the artist as individual author, Kester suggests that a dialogic aesthetic gives us a different kind of artist - one defined in openness of listening and accepting of inter-subjective vulnerability:

"In a dialogic aesthetic ... subjectivity is formed through discourse and inter-subjective exchange itself. Discourse is not simply a tool to be used to communicate an a priori 'content' with the other already formed subjects, but it is intended to model subjectivity." (2004a:81)

Kester promotes the idea of 'connected knowing' a kind of knowledge arrived at through a conversational model, where each person tries to identify with the other. It is a kind of procedural knowledge which recognises the 'social imbeddedness and context within which each other speak, judge and act.' I would call this intuitive appreciation. The second characteristic of connected knowing is in our capacity to identify with others:

"It is through empathy that we can learn literally to redefine self; to both know and feel our connectedness with others." (ibid:83)

Kester also suggests the idea of solidarity as being an important concept for art practice.¹⁴ What the 'dialogic aesthetic' stresses is the discursive aspect from working across socio-economic, socio-cultural difference.

¹⁴ I chaired a planning meeting for a third Littoral conference (May 2004, London) where each of us proposed a theme of what we each wanted addressed in the conference. At this meeting it is interesting that Kester's view from America in a post '9/11' situation (after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre) proposed 'solidarity' as being a crucial theme. In 1998 at the first Littoral conference 'dialogic aesthetics' was synonymous with 'discursive aesthetics' which were characterized by being

While dialogue seems a fundamental method where artists try to take an active role in society, others prefer the term conversation. From a curatorial perspective, again from America, Jacob and Brenson (1998) promote a more conversational approach to developing art projects ('community art') as an attempt to overcome the idea of single authorship in making art. Jacob suggests that the spirit of conversational art lies in initiating 'unplanned directions' and provoking 'multilayered interpretations'. Brenson makes the important points that conversation with regard to developing an art project is a hopeful word in that it can be an assurance that trust is possible, that listening can be as creative as speaking and that people can be open about their vulnerability and doubt and not be ridiculed or dismissed. But he stresses that we need to be careful because the 'feel good ring' of the word conversation can suggest easy answers. In fact conversation has 'considerable risks' because of difficulties which might arise and far from being transparent it is an extremely complex process of 'candor and performance'. While conversation might suggest reciprocity and acceptance it very often is a form of manipulation (1998:120-3):

"There is little use in condemning stylized or manipulative conversations, or in arguing that some kinds are authentic and others are not. Together they reveal not only the multitude of conversations through which each individual's and each society's awareness is shaped, but also the multitude of conversations that may exist within each conversation. They are clues to the density and difficulty but also to the richness and fluidity of our private and interconnective worlds." (ibid:123)

Speaking in relation to the exhibition program *Conversations at the Castle*¹⁵ which explicitly used conversation to develop the program of art projects, Brenson suggests that they were informal, flexible and not driven by the desire to reinforce entrenched positions but by a need for common probing. The conversation is driven by a belief in the value of attentiveness. He suggests that listening can be a creative force which can 'give the potential at each moment

'interdisciplinary' having 'multiple registers of meaning'' and had 'dialogical indeterminacy' (Variant, Winter 1999-200). Possibly his recent interest in solidarity reflects the more difficult and tense socio-political climate in the USA. Other invited participants at this meeting included Barbara Stevini who wanted the issue of bureaucracy addressed. For Ian Hunter and Celia Lamer, (of Littoral) they proposed a discussion on a new rural aesthetic, reflecting their work in agriculture. For Anne Douglas (OTE) it was the issue and questions around the notion of community. I proposed the question of aesthetics in participatory practice and finding a shared language for practitioners. (Suzanne Lacy could not attend).

¹⁵ *Conversations at the Castle* was an exhibition program organized by Mary Jane Jacob in Atlanta, 1996. The publication *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art* brings together a set of texts by theorists, art historians, critics and artists reflecting on the value of the project. Along with Brenson, the theorist Homi Bhabha in *Conversational Art* (drawing from the philosopher Rorty) also makes valuable points on the value of conversation (1998:39-47).

for surprise and transformation'. That listening is essential for participants to feel they are being taken seriously even when others disagree with them. This careful listening and responding is the way that power is shared. He does not suggest that there is no agenda, or that everyone has the same knowledge and clarity on issues, some have more authority, however 'this influence is earned' and power relationships are not stable and can shift. This kind of conversation requires responsibility as well as risk and work where the give and take has 'intrinsic value' and has qualities of 'curiosity, introspectiveness, suppleness of mind, and a love of intensely engaged conversation' (ibid:124).

What is particularly interesting in Brenson's experience of a 'deep level' of conversation is that it is an aesthetic experience not unlike encountering an art work, which he suggests might be more substantial and enduring than arriving at any kind of resolution. The 'tissue of connectedness' in conversation can have poetic intensity:

"Conversation, at its fullest, illuminates the aesthetic. It can generate an aesthetic experience that may not be as self-contained and therefore as physical as one's encounters with painting and sculpture, but it can take on a comparable resonance and eventually may inhabit the same region of the imagination. Like the give-and-take between viewer and a painting or sculpture, conversation of the profoundest kind depends upon and therefore draws out virtues like attentiveness, goodness, generosity, and commitment. It also makes each person who partakes of it feel part of something larger than his or her individual self." (ibid:125).

Lacy, Kester, Jacobs and Brenson all believe in the democratic value of dialogic and conversational ways of working with people to develop art. This seems to be the single most important aspect of these more socially engaged practices. *Close* from the art practitioner's perspective implicates the human qualities of being open, give and take, empathic insight, connected knowing, and the importance of attentive listening.

2.5 Close as place and site-specificity

Two influential texts in the literature on contemporary art give two perspectives focused by the question and issues around *where* public art is made and/or is located. Lippard (a writer and artist) argues the importance of artists valuing and working with a sense of place as a motivation and basis for an ethical art practice. Kwon (art theorist) discusses 'public art' from an historical perspective developing an expanded notion of 'site-specificity' (traditionally where art objects, installations etc are situated) and raises questions on the role and challenges for artists in terms of practicing in different places over time.

2.5.1 A sense of place: Lippard

Because of living and working in a remote rural context I looked at Lippard's *Lure of the Local* (1997). Her political intention, like the new genre people with whom she is affiliated, was 'to change the power relations inherent in the way art is made and distributed' (ibid:290). She proposes an art 'governed by the place ethic' where we value and draw from our locale, and she offers a set of desirable qualities ('an ethics place art') which might characterise the making of art work in specific places (which she divides into rural, suburbia and urban). The set of qualities she offers cover the artwork itself (i.e. product) and the process. I summarize the essential characteristics of 'art governed by place' below.

Specific enough to engage lived experiences
Collaborative, at least with a view to information, advice, and getting community feedback
Generous and open-ended enough to include a diversity of cultures, classes, interpretation and tastes
Appealing enough, visually and emotionally
Simple and familiar enough not to confuse or repel viewer/participants
Layered, complex and unfamiliar enough to make us wonder and offer deep experiences
Evocative enough to recall moments, places, emotions
Provocative and critical enough to make us think and to question superficial questions
'To seek out new forms buried in social energies not yet recognised as art'

What is interesting about Lippard's ethic is its democratic principle of art having 'enough' of a particular quality to make it of value. This suggests that making art meaningful is making something that can be understood or appreciated at the level of the individual (audience, or people in the locale). What might be enough for one person might not be the case for someone else and she points to the idea of balance in the content of an art work (across the criteria she offers) but does not develop this.

Like Lacy she acknowledges the importance of the 'groundedness' of the artist. She suggests that artists working in the social realm and valuing place might 'seek out new forms buried in the social energies not yet recognised as art' (ibid: 290). I liked the idea of social energy and that artists might tap into this. There were clear resonances here with what On the Edge was trying to do.

I could not quite pin point why I did not warm entirely to Lippard's approach I imagined it at the level of a different cultural context, not a criticism of her approach i.e. her ethics of place art, which I thought valid and enlightening.¹⁶ A critique of Lippard's work by Kwon (2002, 2004) helped to clarify this and raises question on the issue of where artists actually carry out work. Kwon's criticism (below) defines two positions or views on artists in terms of where artists practice - the 'sedentary' model (and here she points to Lippard) and the 'nomadic' model, where artists are continually moving about from one place to another (often as three months of residency or the Art Biennales which are now popular in many countries). Kwon calls for a kind of middle ground because neither model is satisfactory.

¹⁶ To some degree this feeling of appreciative difference of culture was felt when I heard her give a talk to the residents on Sherkin Island, Ireland (May, 2002). Sherkin Island was running an experimental project to teach art and design on the island as distance learning i.e. using technology based at the Dublin Insitiute of Technology. Lippard introduced her talk rather self depreciatingly by saying '*I don't really know what I can tell you, you seem to be doing it anyway*' with reference to valuing place and making art in a rural remote place.

2.5.2 Kwon on site-specificity

A common thread in the literature from the USA is the founding or pivotal idea of what might constitute 'community' Lacy, Kester, Kwon, Lippard all use the term¹⁷ and it is Kwon who critiques this most effectively (2002). She points to the dangers of community in its idealized form, the dangers of a bureaucratic approach to community development and the paradox of art being used (by funders or institutions) to create a sense of difference. She suggests this approach is not unlike the branding of place or the identity of social groupings which mirrors the capitalist model of producing difference (i.e. distinctiveness) as its *raison d'être*. Art can be used instrumentally as a cultural branding (for whole cities for instance with their Biennales)¹⁸ on the 'merry go round' of identity production. Similarly ideas on art being used to strengthen community can be dangerous if it is a superficial homogenizing attitude. Kwon's main criticism of Lippard's place art is that she does not acknowledge the dialectic of space and place as Lefebvre defined.¹⁹ Both authors are concerned with a sense of self in relation to place (and in Kwon's case identity) and Lippard's argument is that if more attention is paid to the valuing of place this would help remedy the widespread feelings of displacement and disorientation (homelessness). For Lippard our connection with land and environment is key to feeling more centred and therefore less displaced. Kwon critiques this by describing Lippard's approach as being a cultural practice based on 'retrieval and resuscitation of a lost sense of place' (ibid:159). This is a little harsh in my view and Lippard does advocate 'multicenteredness', though of course there is the danger of valuing the past in a romanticized way.

Kwon offers a sharp critique on the tensions between the older public art style projects (often epitomized by Serra's infamous *Tilted Arc*)²⁰ and more community based projects. Her

¹⁷ Lippard cites David Harding in the UK and his work on community arts styled projects as being ahead of its time compared to the work in the US. Interestingly Harding was part of the establishment of the Environmental Art Department, at Glasgow School of Art (1986) which was set up to take art practice into the real world as it were – outside the traditional gallery or museum space. They used the Artists Placement Group's maxim 'context is half the work' as their starting point for an art practice which considered the role of art in terms of wider publics and the contested nature of public art – where it takes place and ideas of what public means. Harding, D and Buchler, P (eds) *Decadent: Public Art: Contentious Term and Contested Practice*, (1997). This course no longer exists. Interestingly some of the more established Scottish artists completed this course, e.g. Louis Scullion and Mathew Dalziel.

¹⁸ For instance Kwon cites the independent curator Mary Jane Jacobs and her project *Places with a Past: New Site Specific Art in Charleston* (1992) as feeding this current fashion of bringing named artists to a city as part of its identity branding of the place.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1991, Blackwells

²⁰ The fuss about this often cited work is simply that in the modernist tradition, Serra made a huge sculpture for a plaza which the people who actually used the space hated (the Federal Plaza, New York City, 1981-9). The work was removed and Serra insisted that this ruined the art work. It epitomized the high-minded attitude of the art establishment and that of the artist as being the creative authority. This example is used to contrast with a more consultative approach being adopted in big public funded art projects which aim to involve the people who live in the locale in some way. For example Mary Jane Jacob promoted this

critique is from the perspective of where art is sited or its 'site-specificity'. The site for art today can be considered to be almost anything:

"... the site can now be as various as a billboard, an artistic genre, a disenfranchised community, and institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause, or a political debate. It can be literal like a street corner, or virtual, like a theoretical concept." (ibid:3)

Her analysis on art in relation to community is particularly good in highlighting the dangers of publicly funded artists doing socially good works, and she makes a stark contrast between 'bureaucratic' community art projects which try to proscribe the kinds of political representation and benefits ('the community of mythic unity' as she calls it) and art practices which raise questions on what community might be (as 'non-essentialised' beings) (ibid:118). Of the many people she cites, Kester's critique on the dangers of this kind of work was instinctively my fear – that 'the community artist may legitimate the presumption that the cause of social problems rests with spiritually and culturally deprived individuals'. I personally find it patronizing to target a group of people in this way. By presuming a deficit one can add to a feeling of deficit. Whether community art work is considered at an individual artist level or a policy/institutional level, this kind of work is beset with difficult ethical questions. Of course there are many valuable and ethically sound community projects, but in the final analysis of community it is the idea of 'collective identities' which is dangerous ('inherently corrupt' is how Kwon describes this). I was interested in working with individual people not in tackling issues of socio-political identity as a rationale for making art in a participatory way. Kwon's thesis is that the nomadic model of artist, constantly on the move, has confused the idea of 'fluidity of meaning' with 'fluidity of identities and subjectivities, even physical bodies'. This has resulted in a romantic view of the cultural worker constantly on the go. A view which sits in opposition to the qualities of 'permanence, continuity, certainty, groundedness' (physical or otherwise) and are considered 'artistically retrograde (and) thus politically suspect' (ibid:160).

In her view neither is satisfactory and she asks that we inhabit a more nuanced practice:

approach of getting people involved in the various projects in her Charleston project (South Carolina, 1991) before any actual art objects were produced. This project is criticized by Kwon in terms of using art to brand a place (see Kwon 2002:52-3, 120-5)

“... it is not a matter of choosing sides – between models of nomadism and sedentariness, between space and place, between digital interfaces and the handshake, Rather, we need to be able to think of the range of the seeming contradictions and our contradictory desires for them together; to understand, in other words, seeming oppositions as *sustaining* relations. How do we account, for instance, for the sense of soaring exhilaration and the anxious dread engendered by new fluidities and continuities of space and time, on the one hand, and the ruptures and disconnections on the other? And what could this doubleness of experience mean in our lives in our work?” (ibid:166 italics original).

Kwon does give us two models of working (nomadism and sedentary) and suggests that we might feel a doubleness, but she is speaking very much from a public art perspective in that she assumes this is the way artists think about their practices - moving around and/or being in one place or another (or 'one place after another' - the title of her book). She suggests that in site-oriented practices we might pay attention to relational specificity which means 'addressing the uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment *next* to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing *after* another'. For Kwon site-oriented art has a kind of 'relational tension' which means artists need to have a 'relational sensibility' and it is this that distinguishes it as something which might turn local encounters into long-term commitments or 'passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks' not 'a series of undifferentiated serializations' as we move from place to place (ibid:166 italics original).

Kwon clearly represents the art theorist from the high end of western styled art practice – advice on how to think about the flux of moving around, and the need to have more concern for longer term work but gives no detailed examples of artist's practicing in this way (i.e. her theory). However her idea of relational tension and relational specificity are important ideas from a practitioner's view – the actualities of what practice might involve, particularly if art as a participatory practice is considered as being within the everyday of people's cultural experiences.

2.6 Close as proximity and dwelling

While *close* can be particular qualities of engagement between artists working with other people and *close* can be where it takes place (site-specificity), *close* can also refer to the sphere of influence or the reach an art work might have, its affecting quality. Proximity as nearness and distance can relate to the physical and psychological dimensions of experiencing an art work. Dillon and Howe (2003) speaking from a design perspective, draw an analogy from the painter Hundertwasser's notion of five 'skins' or 'proximities' in relation to inner being. They use this analogy to describe the sphere of influence a designed object can have, which can equally apply to the experience of viewing or encountering an art object:

"Hundertwasser saw himself in the world with successive levels of consciousness or what he termed 'skins' or proximities. Hundertwasser's 'skins' to his inner being are: his actual skin or epidermis, his clothes, his dwelling or house, his identity and family and finally earth or the outer universe." (Restany, 2001 in Dillon and Howe, 2003:12).

They describe these as fluid boundaries in terms of our relationship with material things or objects. Each layer or skin denotes different qualities of experience:

"Close proximity would include an air of intimacy in the sense of having cognisance of small detail and subtleties of variation in the use of the object. The intermediate proximity is like the house and family relationships. Less intimate but more potential for people to engage with object. The outer proximity lies out with these two spheres. Here images, thoughts and memories of the object reside in people's minds. No first hand contact. It may (also) be the place where the (design) object rests as an image rather than a reality and fluctuates back and forth through conversation. In this mental sense the object is still present. It is occupying a place even if the place is only notional. It is the repository and place where people who have used or contemplated the object exchange interpretations and reinterpretations of it. This is the arena where what we term residual context might exist. It is not far removed from the phenomenon of visiting galleries.' (2003:125)

Close can mean physical closeness with an object but it is also that which is remembered, when the experience is memorable - the image carried in the mind's eye.

Close is also dwelling (home as verb). Gray's (2003) description of dwelling is a practical and spatial activity. He discusses the way we use materials and space and how things take on meaning through patterns of movement and naming or giving language. All of this constitutes the making of places which is important in forming our sense of selves (identities). For Gray dwelling is embodied knowledge which he calls the constitution of knowing and meaning, which gives us a sense of belonging. Though he is discussing acts of dwelling in relation to a place (in this case it is hill farming) it is through 'spatial practices' (movement) and the way we work with objects which 'abolish distance'.

Gray describes dwelling as 'a way of seeing' (ibid:232-233). Here closeness is both a physical dimension and a knowledge dimension and he describes the feeling of 'being at home' as 'expressed as detailed knowledge' (ibid:233). Dwelling as embodied and experiential knowledge of the world is characterized by *close*. He quotes Thomas:

" ... (dwelling is) a lack of distance between people and things, a lack of causal curiosity, an engagement which is neither conceptual nor articulated, and which arises through *using* the world rather than through scrutiny" (Thomas, 1993:28 in Gray, ibid:233, italics in original).

One of the trickiest things to describe is embodied knowing. As Thomas points out it goes beyond language because it is experiential, knowledge acquired through using or doing (practice).

For the anthropologist Ingold dwelling as an active making meaning is found in storytelling. This is a primary means of forming and expressing ourselves. Considering what it means to inhabit a place he draws from indigenous cultures (aboriginal and in particular North American Indian) and their close connection to the landscape. He describes this as a kind of 'wayfaring', an experiential knowledge which sits in contradistinction to the geographer's cartographic and classificatory knowledge. 'Places don't have (mathematical) locations but have histories' and

this is 'bound in people's memories' the way we remember journeys (2003).²¹ He describes knowing a place as knowing its stories, and 'belonging is connecting the stories to your own life'.²² As Ingold points out in some indigenous cultures story telling in relation to the places we inhabit is much more than simply passing time or reflecting (possibly nostalgically) on the past. The essential value in the art of story telling shapes who we are and brings us closer to other people and our sense of being alive:

"Places take their character from events of places and awareness and orientation of being there. Every person is constituted as a recovery of where he or she has been. Story telling people are people who are perceptually attuned. The narrator draws the listeners in to the paths of his own, to draw attention inwards. So person and place, self and world, when these dissolve into one another this is true dwelling. So it is impossible to say where 'I' ends and the world begins - we penetrate each other. This can be summed up by the word 'home'." (2003)²³

Many of us know people who are good story tellers, people who are able to recount the most everyday events and occurrences so skilfully that you can clearly see it in your mind's eye. We know the world and make the world through the stories we tell. Attention is drawn inwards. Home (or dwelling) for Ingold is a deep perceptual attentiveness to the point that the story teller, the world, the listener dissolves into one, *close* in the fullest sense of being in the world actualized through the live expression of experiences.

Close from this anthropological perspective draws from phenomenology.²⁴

The next section draws from two perspectives – cultural theory (Highmore) and the art historical (Papastergiadis) which help to imagine an orientation for practice – the 'everyday'.

²¹ Ingold's anthropological perspective on wayfaring is close to de Certeau's thinking on 'spatial practices'. Both represent a shift from the purely visual in cultural theory to the notion of 'dwelling' which encompasses much more than visual perception. Dwelling includes all senses and implicates a connectedness with self and the world and self with others.

²² This resonates with my 'Cubbie Roo Map' (see Biographical note, vii). The felt-tip pen memory map of Wyre was a vehicle for inventing and telling stories to my young nephews.

²³ Prof Tim Ingold Unpublished paper *How do we know where we are even though we don't: placemaking, storytelling and wayfaring*, The Lighthouse, Glasgow 15th February 2003. Part of the *Making Places* residency at Scottish Sculpture Workshop, (in collaboration with) Wendy Gunn, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Dundee.

²⁴ This research does not attempt to deal with, but acknowledges *close* in the rich, theoretical lineage of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger as well as Bourdieu's 'habitus' which speak to the phenomenological sensual realms of being in the world.

2.7 Close and the everyday as context for art practice

The everyday rephrased as a concern to bring art and life closer together has been something of a constant in the 20th century, epitomised by Beuys and his idea of art as a form of 'social sculpture'. Other whole movements associated with the everyday as a shared subject of interest is associated with the early 20th century avant-garde responding to modernity. These movements would include Dada, Fluxus, the Situationists, the Surrealists and Pop art (Wasserman, 2003, Papastergiadis 1998, Highmore, 2002). What these movements share is 'a critique of the dominant forms of consciousness in the modern world' in particular the habits of urban life (Papastergiadis, 1998:23).

With the everyday not as subject of art but an inescapable reality (life lived), from a cultural theory perspective it is 'the landscape closest to us, the world most immediately met' (Highmore 2002a:2) and suggests a potentially useful way of thinking about art practice where artists work with other people.

2.7.1 *The everyday as the dialectic*

The term everyday is hugely ambiguous because 'it points to everything and nothing' (Highmore 2002b:37). Highmore, a key thinker and writer on the theories associated with everyday life believes the everyday goes beyond being a field of study (2002a, 2002b). He gathers together a collection of intellectuals from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth to present an intellectual survey - positing the everyday as both a problem and a possibility.²⁵ While the everyday has its roots in responses to modernity and growing urbanisation everyday life studies is not a multi or inter-disciplinary field, it is in Highmore's view anti-disciplinary because it lies outside all the different fields of knowledge, while at the same time lying across them. He likens it more to a para-field, or a meta-field (2002b:4). What this can mean is that the term everyday is problematic because of its contradictory and ambivalent meanings:

²⁵ Ben Highmore is a cultural theorist (University of the West of England, Bristol) published two key theoretical texts on the everyday. In his *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* he traces the theoretical lineage of the field which includes Simmel, Surrealism, Benjamin, Mass Observation, Lefebvre and finally de Certeau (2002a). In *The Everyday Life Reader* Highmore as editor brings together a huge range of thinkers in and around the subject of everyday or 'everyday life studies' (2002b).

“On the one hand it points (without judging) to those most repeated actions, those most travelled journeys, those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day. This is the landscape closest to us, the world most immediately met. But with this quantifiable meaning creeps another, never far behind: the everyday as value and quality – everydayness. Here the most travelled journey can become the dead weight of boredom, the most inhabited space a prison, the most repeated action an oppressive routine. Here the everydayness of everyday life might be experienced as a sanctuary, or it may bewilder or give pleasure, it may delight or depress. Or its special quality might be its lack of qualities. It might be, precisely, the unnoticed, the inconspicuous, the unobtrusive.” (2002a:2)

The everyday is both poverty and oppression as well as culturally rich and animated by festive forces, and Highmore concludes that there is no comfort for anyone wanting an ‘object’ to simply celebrate or condemn (2002a:174).

He suggests that the way we might consider the everyday as being how we orient ourselves towards the social world. Viewed like this it is not the case that the everyday ‘requires situating but (rather) our attention to it’ (2002b:37). In this sense the everyday is a paradoxical phenomenon, as the landscape closest to us (that which is most immediately met) we might not see or apprehend aspects of it. Subsequently it requires a conscious effort to make the barely discernable, opaque everyday (activities, rituals etc) intelligible to ourselves as distinctively social and cultural (and artistic) experience(s).

As practice-led art research I struggled with the problem of ‘scale’ (as I imagined it) of how to connect the micro-level subjective detail of process in relation to the questions posed by the OTE framework about the value of art – the macro-levels of the artistic, social, cultural and economic. Highmore describes this micro/macro not as scale but a dimension within the ‘particular’ and the ‘general’. In summarizing his in-depth historical study of theories on the everyday (and its inherently ambivalent and contradictory nature) he offers us a set of ‘tendencies’ (albeit a simplification in his view) that seem relevant to art practice (and art research).

Particular	General
Agency	Structure
Experience/Feelings	Institution/Discourse
Resistance	Power
Micro-analysis	Macro-analysis

He describes these tendencies as 'linked orientations' or 'poles' (2002b:5) suggesting that we might 'navigate across' them. What he offers us is a set of dialectics which are central (in his view) to the theoretical understanding and development of the everyday as a critical concept. These 'poles' have strong resonance with practice-led art research at the epistemological level. Arguably artists tend to live in the left hand side and this is in relation and response to the right hand side, so to speak.

We might in the reality of practice sit in the tension space *between* these poles. It might be that this navigating across makes art practice complex and rich in the ways we negotiate through and what we feel and experience in practice. Practice as agency and our resisting behaviours in not passively accepting, but questioning the givens of power and controls. Practice as what we do at a micro-level and how this connects with the bigger picture. It is also how we might express our feelings and experiences in relation to the institution or the discourse.

What these poles map is the kind of 'dialectical tension' Kwon describes in her summary analysis of site-specific art (see 2.5.2). Her view is that artists must 'sustain relations' in a kind of 'relational sensibility' (2002:166).

Imagining participatory practice as being situated within the dynamics of the everyday (as opposed to being about the everyday) presupposes working with the complexities of social processes. The everyday also throws up other big dialectics of private-public, self-other, home-not home and so on. The everyday as lived experience (or dwelling) as Highmore suggests is full of contradictions - self evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic.

Highmore argues that the everyday makes 'the particularity of lived culture inescapable' (2002a:16) and because of its complexity and richness it both requires a form or mode of attention and more experimental ways of representing what it is. He suggests that a more dialectic approach is necessary which could use 'explosive juxtapositions of disparate material', 'productive assemblages of related phenomena' which produce 'a general poetics of the singularity of living' (2002a:174-5).²⁶ ²⁷ His own particular interest is on how an archive of the everyday might be constructed but these ideas for cultural theorists might equally apply to artists, and not surprisingly he points to specific techniques used by the surrealists such as juxtaposition, collage and montage as methods of defamiliarisation. These art techniques could help 'find the marvellous in the everyday', to recognise the everyday as a 'dynamic montage of elements', and to make the everyday 'strange so that its strangeness can be recognised' (2002a:47).

Yet 'strangeness' in terms of an aesthetic when the artist works with others to make art means finding ways that does not alienate people. It is not a return to the shock of the new or the jolting of experience inherent to the classic early avant-garde art. However a more serious consideration is why people are involved in a project at all. What is unacceptable but not unknown in the art world is the manipulation of other people by the artist to realise a project.²⁸

²⁶ This is a clear reference to de Certeau's research and theoretical perspective on the everyday.

²⁷ Highmore chaired an international conference on de Certeau bringing experts together to discuss his work and its legacy from a cultural theory perspective, *Michel de Certeau Now: An International Symposium*, 16th September 2002, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol. In e mail correspondence with him to obtain papers from the conference, Highmore explained that he intended to write a book on de Certeau and was interested in his relationship with art referencing de Certeau's single essay on art *Pay Attention! – to Make Art*, a work by the Harrisons (1985). This essay is taken up in 3.6. (E mail correspondence, 17th September 2003)

²⁸ An example of this is by the artist Hirschorn. His visual aesthetic often involves using everyday materials to make installations e.g. masses of packaging tape and cardboard to create new spaces people can move through or use. Hirschorn draws a sharp distinction between 'social work' and 'art work' and his intention is to comment on art genre not social structure. However his approach is quite aggressive and where he gets other people to participate his work has been criticized as 'a form of social pornography' (Lind in Doherty) by making marginalized groups exotic through his projects. An example of this is the *Bataille Monument*, part of Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002. This project took place in a housing complex where various sites were made over as meeting places, which he called 'monuments' like a snack bar for instance. He paid between twenty and thirty young people to work on the project. For a description of this project see Doherty 2003:133-147.

2.7.2 An art historical perspective on the everyday

Papastergiadis (1998) detects a kind of abreaction by artists to the over theorization of critical postmodernism and its insistence on deconstruction.²⁹ He believes this led to artists feeling alienated from the contradictions and pleasures of the everyday. Deconstruction had led to artists feeling it was 'difficult to take the truth of their own experience seriously' because it seemed to be 'invented somewhere else' (ibid:21).³⁰ Yet this outright rejection of theory stemming from the over academicisation and politicisation of art (which includes feminism, postcolonialism, as well as postmodernism in the late eighties) is, he argues, not an enlightened view. Without an art historical awareness we are condemned to repeat it by other means.³¹ For Papastergiadis it is precisely the dialogue between art, theory and politics which is important, and he proposes that it is the theories of everyday which can connect them:

"The meaning of art does not just come from within, it also comes from without. If the relationship between art, politics and theory is not a zero-sum game but a dialogue, then the concept of the everyday could reveal the specific forms of engagement or objectifications that result from bringing these practices closer together." (ibid:22)

However he warns against dangers in this approach of bringing art into the everyday which can lead to 'idiocies and banalities of life being reproduced under the name of art.' He suggests that the relationship between art and life is never transparent or straightforward, but that artists need to work with the materiality of their lives and practices, yet guard against this being automatically elevated to marvellous achievements (ibid). This excellent critical text in a catalogue to accompany the exhibition 'everyday' (11th Sydney Biennale, 1998) does not reflect the content of the exhibition. The exhibition was criticised for having a very modernist and minimal styled work reflecting the interests of the curator Watkins³² (which having seen

²⁹ Here he is referring to artist-led exhibitions in galleries internationally particularly the 'new British Art' scene during the late 1990's where artists seemed to be reacting against the over theorization of art. For example exhibitions like *Minky Many* and *Sensations* in London.

³⁰ Papastergiadis is citing John Roberts, *Mad for it!: Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art*, Third Text, summer 1996:30.

³¹ This was something I could immediately relate to with an emerging practice in terms of critical theory - that I did not know enough which can lead to a feeling of not valuing one's own experiences sufficiently.

³² *In the everyday: critical & theoretical speculations on the 11th biennale of sydney* published by Artspace Visual Art Centre, Best and Green (eds) gathers eleven author's responses to the exhibition. Many of them are critical of the catch all title - the everyday and of the curator Watkins' selection of artists as giving weight to the legacy of minimalism and conceptualism epitomized by Carle Andre and On Kowara two artists in the exhibition. On Kowara is an artist associated with the everyday currently. In this exhibition he made a work entitled *I met* listing all the people he met each day in a designated period and *I Went* charting all the places he went as faint lines on a map of Sydney.

the catalogue seems the case). By taking something from the everyday (e.g. the 'mundane', the 'discarded', the 'exotic') and placing it in a gallery is derivative and does not connect with the wider implications of the everyday for artists as Papastergiadis proposes.

Papastergiadis calls for a critical dialogue rather than what can be considered superficial work by simply elevating everyday objects as being art. For Papastergiadis the term everyday asks us to confront 'the materiality and totality of the world' and a legitimization of practices which might have been considered trivial or marginal. Curiously (given its art historical lineage) Papastergiadis states that the everyday and contemporary art remains relatively untheorized and suggests that we need to consider practice as being *within* everyday life:

"Despite repeated efforts to break the divide between popular culture and high art, the concept of the everyday has remained relatively untheorised within contemporary discourse on art..... To consider art from this perspective of the everyday is to stress that the measure of art is not found by borrowing the yardsticks of other discourses, but rather its articulation and practices within everyday life." (ibid:23)

A benefit of the term everyday is that it recalls a number of philosophical traditions on praxis. From 'art and the everyday' there is but an indistinguishable step to 'the art of living' and Papastergiadis traces the genealogy of the concept of the everyday to antiquity with the ancient philosophers of Greece (ibid).³³ Papastergiadis cites Heller (1984)³⁴ who proposes that it is characterized by a multiplicity of attitudes, including the reflective:

"These attitudes are not just those which situate the self and help make sense of the world, but include those imbued with a critical force capable of offering a 'better world'. In her (Heller's) definition, the everyday life is the co-constitution of self and society. It is the aggregate of both the attitudes that shape the self and the processes of shaping the world." (ibid:24)

³³ Papastergiadis refers to Michael Featherstone, *The Heroic Life and Everyday Life*, Theory, Culture & Society, Vol.9, No. 1, 1992 and Michael Maffesoli, *The Sociology of Everyday Life*, Current Sociology, Vol.37, No. 1, 1989.

³⁴ Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1984

Crucial to Papastergiadis' understanding of the difficult or amoeba like concept of the everyday is his belief that theory is not outside practice. He suggests that an art of everyday would operate in the interstitial, the between space:

"... if we understand theory as operating *within*, rather than above and beyond, a specific context, then this perspective, which implicates the process of representation within the structures and institutions of belonging, it allows a level of critique which registers the flows and tensions within social relations. A theory of the everyday is thus located in the *in between* spaces, the margins and the disjunctive zones of the social." (ibid:24 italics in original)

There are two important points to be drawn from this in-between-ness. Firstly as I suggest earlier the everyday as a set of dialectics (from Highmore) describes the tension spaces art practice can take place within (what Kwon points to but does not articulate as such). It also suggests that practices might be more fluid working between and across the more established dominant art models and genres.

In today's society of globalisation, complexity and the fragmentation of social orders, Papastergiadis points to de Certeau's approach of focussing on the smaller more intimate details of social life and suggests that it is here that we need to focus our attention. By comparing this part-whole relationship (drawing from Lefebvre and de Certeau)³⁵ he suggests a shift in focus more attune to de Certeau's research into the everyday:³⁶

"... can art of the everyday represent the life-world of the whole nation? Or do we need to make smaller, more specific claims about the relationship between the particular, which is always a tactical response to a number of conflicting demands, and the whole, which is already too fragmented and complex to appear as a single unit. At a micro-level of everyday life, the individual is compelled to utilise intelligence, cunning and ruse in order to both survive and gain pleasure." (ibid:25)

³⁵ Lefebvre, H, *The Production of Space*, 1991, Blackwells

³⁶ He is referring to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau, 1984

In summarizing the main points Papastergiadis makes outlining the value for artists in considering art being situated within the everyday it shows *close* as an orientation in the world (what I had previously called a disposition) and *close* as an aspiration.

1. By drawing attention to intricate and reciprocal relationships between agency and structure, the theories of the everyday rejected the assumption that change could be imposed from above, or sustained by purely external forces.
2. The everyday became a concept for how the strategies of resistance in the practices of living were not always explicitly oppositional.
3. The heroics and ethics of the everyday did not appear in titanic stature or saintly guise, rather they were enacted in subtle acts of involvement and displacement.
4. The spirit of resistance did not come from above, but from within.
5. The concept of the everyday is (thus) part of a long tradition in identifying the potential for critical practice, and for offering alternatives on what makes the 'good life.' (ibid:27)

Papastergiadis' suggests that art, theory and politics are in a constant dialogue and can be understood and meaningful if the focus is placed on the interconnections between everyday life and the dominant structures. From this he makes three very important propositions for the practitioner:

(a) Making art by taking what is close to hand.

This relates to seeing (noticing) and valuing (making or conferring value) the situation we find ourselves in. Trying to make a difference in your immediate context (which resonates with OTE's rationale for where the research was conducted – in our remote rural context).

(b) Thinking about the biggest philosophical abstractions from the position of our most intimate experiences.

This suggests artists have a sensibility which is grounded in a sense of self but with an awareness of the wider context of ideas - a quality of thinking.

(c) Seeing change as being part of our choices and responses to the inventory of demands and obligations in daily life.

This points to how choice is an ethical issue and in art projects how artists might be responsive to the constraints, joys, disappointments, frustrations and the surprises as processes unfold.

Imagining an art practice situated *within* the everyday might, as Papastergiadis proposes, 'heighten our senses to the proximity of the marvellous', involve finding 'significance in the commonplace signs' and 'connect(ing) one level of subjectivity with another' (ibid:27).

The role an artist might play (or form) if practice takes place within the everyday places emphasis on self in relation to what is near or affecting, trying to develop a critical positioning by thinking about the bigger picture and the fact that we need to accept change as the natural state of things and make ethical choices and moves as best we can.

These points made by Papastergiadis seem crucial for the artist wishing to develop a role that plays an active part in the multi-layered fields of civic society. The artist is part of the flux and flows of social living where art (a small but crucial part of culture) draws from and adds to social relations in some way. It seems a very human perspective on the potential value(s) of art - and with the artist as not severed from daily living but contributing in some way.

2.8 *Close as home*, metaphor for the *On the Edge (OTE)* methodology

Close is also home and for approximately the first half the research time (whilst the project briefs were being developed) OTE used the metaphor of home as a useful way to open up thinking on the value of art practice. Home as a generative metaphor (a research tool) helped to make sense of the research approach and emerging methodology to visual art project development. The OTE approach was one of different roles (or 'shapers') coming together and being involved in the art project development through discussion and reflection to generate new thinking on possible ways forward through workshops with intermittent 'soundings' (evaluation points) and 'gatherings'.

The research methodology, a spine of seven workshops (over three years), brought the researchers, the project partners and others together throughout the development of the five OTE art projects. Home was introduced at the first workshop and at workshop III the core OTE team made a slide presentation of collected published images and words associated with home to prompt thinking and discussion.³⁷

Home spoke to values and as such was useful on a meta-level to think about the five OTE projects as a set of activities. Home was a way of prompting the project partners to think about what it was they really wanted their art project to address as well as how an art project (as opposed to some other kind of development project) might accomplish this.

From the literature home gave insights into *close*. As the primary point of reference it is where our formative values develop. It is centre or sense of self, about origins, journeys and returns (Berger, 1984). Home is the private place with house as metaphor of private-public space. Home speaks to boundaries and thresholds of self and our relations with the world, physically and metaphysically. Home as dwelling is connectedness with the world (e.g. Ingold, 2003) and Lippard (1995) points out that the root word of home (from the Greek 'eco' or ecology) is the earth. Home often appears in the literature on identity, particularly the discourse on exile, migration and displacement, home as homelessness (e.g. Holy, 1999). Here the felt need for belonging(s) and the valuing of difference and diversity is considered crucial in constructing identities (e.g. Morley and Robins, 1995, Rutherford, 1990). Home is both heim (German for

³⁷ Douglas, Delday and Gray with Matarasso

homely) and *unheimlich*, which is more than unhomely, it is also uncanny in the Freudian sense.

As a deep cultural metaphor it is saturated with emotive connotations, the most common descriptors are privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort, control (Putnam and Newton, 1990). Home is also domesticity and gendered spaces (e.g. Morley, 2000, Rybczynski, 1988). Inglis (2004) describes home as simply 'the long story of culture'.

Home was useful to think about art project development at the meta-level where the project partners represent a complexity of perspectives (e.g. arts administration, heritage, cultural policy). It was also useful to describe the projects at the outset. Possibly because home is such a broad and deep metaphor I did not actively use it to think about the specifics of art practice from the practitioner's perspective i.e. in practice (rather it is the development of a matrix for reflexive practice). Nevertheless the idea of the artistic process being like dwelling (home as verb) suggests practice is both an embodiment and enactment of values and is fundamental to the roles artists might form and play. Dwelling shifts the discussion away from visual perception to the broader perspective – the everyday as the co-constitution of selves in society. Interestingly some artists engaged by OTE to undertake the projects used metaphors in their distinctive practices which are related to home e.g. Benn, uses cooking in her practice (and the OTE project *Maakin Lab*) and Renwick uses 'hearth' in his practice (and in the OTE project *Inthrow*). I discuss Benn's metaphor in the project analysis (see 4.7.2, Volume II)

A co-authored paper (Douglas and Delday, 2003) in Appendix 1 explains the On the Edge research thinking and developments up to this mid point in the research. This published paper describes the use of the metaphor, introduces the research methodology and the five OTE art projects.

2.9 Summary and the inter-related questions in this research

From this literature review *close* as a concept is useful because it focuses relationship, the inter-relations between people, places and objects. As a quality of being in the world it is linked to intimacy and attentiveness (as in listening) and seen (or perceived) in detail. It is a defining quality in the anthropological notion of dwelling (embodied and experiential knowledge), and from cultural theory the everyday is the world most immediately met. *Close* aligns with intentionality, how we interpret and confer meaning and value. *Close* as not-distant maps 'proximities' or 'spheres of influence' from a sense of self, to our relations with other people and our relations with the wider world as described by the painter Hundertwasser (Dillon and Howe, 2003, see 2.6). *Close* as affecting concerns the material world and also the virtual world - that which is memorable (ibid). At its most simplistic *close* suggests not detached, that there is a quality of engagement in any and all of these levels.

Papastergiadis (1998) speculatively points to the potential benefits of art being within the everyday (as opposed to about the everyday). It could bring artists closer to the pleasures and contradictions of day to day living and grounds practice in our making ethical choices and ways of humanizing relations with other people. The everyday supposes a quality of perceptual awareness by the artist (e.g. noticing, re-valuing something, drawing attention to). Curiously and despite its long art historical tradition throughout the 20th century, the everyday remains largely untheorized from an art historical perspective and Papastergiadis argues that art considered from this perspective could be the remedy for the alienating effects artists felt (and presumably other people) because of the over academicizing of post-modern theory (as also recognised by Kester, 2004 and Inglis, 2004).

From the practitioner's perspective *close* considered at the outset a disposition is also an aspiration - that art can bring us closer to our feelings. What *close* does is underline the belief that to understand the kinds of roles artists might play means trying to understand the why, the how and the what of art practice by scrutinizing what actually happens in art projects and to somehow make sense of this across its varied levels. If everyday life, like art practice is about the co-constitution of self and society it sharpens the fact that to understand artists' roles it is necessary to find a way of thinking about participatory practice (where artists work with other people to make art) that includes the specific details in a given 'live' project (in this

research) and also making sense of this in terms of its relations to the wider or macro-frames of reference (the questions posed at the outset by OTE).

Lacy (1995) makes the bold and challenging proposition that it is the relationship itself between artist and others (traditionally 'audience') which may itself be the artwork. The discussion on the value of art had shifted away from the art object and visibility to process and relationship and the critical texts on artists taking an active role in society where the artist works with other people highlights important human qualities (e.g. dialogue, empathy, listening, connected knowing) but there is little detailed account of how this works.³⁸

The specific points raised by Lacy in terms the new genre public art practices give important clues to the direction of this research. She recognises that while the social-political benefits of art practice are important, the discourse has tended to over-emphasize this to the detriment (or absence) of the subtler qualities which takes into account the artists' thinking processes and the value of the aesthetic dimension. What is needed is a more nuanced articulation of practice from the practitioners' perspective that includes these dimensions. One which attends to the specific ways judgements are made in a process of exchange between the artist and those they work with.

Close as an alternative to the categorization of art practice – distinction through specific models and genres as presented in the discourse (public, gallery, socially engaged, community, place, site-specific) became on one level a means to an end. With an emerging practice and working within the OTE research initiative, *close* sharpened the seemingly impossible task in my research as the inter-related questions of:

how to make sense of an emerging practice, (to find a way of thinking about practice from the practitioner's perspective)

how to connect the micro-level subjective detail of process in relation to the questions posed by the OTE framework about the value of art - the macro-levels of the artistic, social, cultural and economic

³⁸ I found throughout this research that the issues arising from artists working with other people continues to be played out in the literature in numerous forms since Lacy's influential text *Mapping the Terrain*, 1995. For example Docherty's *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (2004) grapples with the questions of what we imagine an audience might be, where authorship lies and if a participatory practice, how truly collaborative it is.

how to interpret other art practices (i.e. the artists engaged by OTE to undertake the five OTE projects)

how these set of projects (within the umbrella of the OTE initiative) relate to the wider intellectual context of ideas and practices

The legacy of modernism and post-modernism (Kester, 2004 and Papastergiadis, 1998) seemed to sever the artist from the everyday. In the literature on contemporary art practices typical terms were context and site-specific as to where an art process might take place. For the past 30 years 'public art' has been a hugely contested subject (as summarized by Kwon, 2002). The term socially engaged itself seemed redundant (as noted by Stevini and Trowel)³⁹ as though art could somehow be anything other than part of society. A popular recent term is 'intervene' or interventions and 'situation' has appeared recently as an alternative to 'studio' practice (Doherty, 2004). The everyday as where art practice takes place is not considered an alternative label (i.e. model or genre) but implicates artistic activity drawing from and contributing to actual lived experience. With as many everyday as people, as context for practice it suggests artistic activity operating here, now and with these specific individuals. Practice which is connecting and happens within the complex networked flux and flows of shared social spaces. The everyday is where the 'intricate and reciprocal relationships between agency and structure' are lived out (Papastergiadis 1998:27).

What is needed from the practitioner's perspective is a useful way of thinking about practice. A way which includes the artist's thinking processes, the aesthetic dimension (Lacy, 1995) and its socio-cultural implications for locating the individual in society.

I would find a way forward by stumbling across the French intellectual Michel de Certeau walking in a cultural studies reader - an essay on walking in the city (1984). As a researcher and philosopher de Certeau became something of a companion in my research and he offered a key to the seemingly impossible set of questions I had (above).

³⁹ Group discussion with the researcher as invited participant, Littoral 'Traction' meeting, May 2004, London

De Certeau offers a way of interconnecting the research questions. In my interpretation of his research into (creative) everyday practices and his thinking on what constitutes culture if taken into the formal (institutional) art context is a re-positioning and revision. A re-positioning of the artist *within* the everyday and a revision on what we understand different forms of artistic production to be. In the first instance this helps locate and discuss new practices that do not fit within either the signature artist, nor the community artist or new genre public art models as presented in the discourse. With an emerging practice these rather outmoded terms of reference partition roles and methods of working. De Certeau considers qualities in human nature and social relations, not ideology. His definitions, theories and hypothesis help the artist-researcher consider the ways we negotiate through and locate ourselves in the social realm as individuals. This relates to the broader issue of how artists position themselves in civic society through roles they might play or form for themselves and, what we consider different creative activity and 'productions' might be.

The next chapter draws from de Certeau and the art historical discourse of Bourriaud that positions art within the everyday. These two critical perspectives help the researcher develop a useful way (a construct) to think about practice from the practitioner's perspective.

Chapter 3

De Certeau and Bourriaud:

two critical perspectives on creative activity within the everyday

3.1 Restating the issues

For participatory practice there is little detailed description in the literature (primarily the literature from the US on the somewhat catch all term 'socially engaged') though there is the beginning of a critical vocabulary for this kind of work (e.g. dialogic aesthetic, connected knowing, empathy).

Issues around the artists positioning (self with other) is discussed at the level of socio-political intention (e.g. working across difference, Kester, 2004, conflict resolution, political representation and critical pedagogy, Lacy 1995, 2005) and the thorny question of authorship seem to haunt the external view in the discourse when artists work with others. It is as though (in the discourse, not necessarily in the practices) the legacy of high modernism and post-modernism has given way to an abreaction with the emphasis now placed on the role of art (and artist) in society as one of problem solving, art as a corrective, as being reactive.

To make sense of, and to articulate, the complexity of interactions between people when artists work with others is on one level an epistemological problem – connecting the micro-level detail of practice with the macro-level frameworks one operates within (i.e. the framework of questions posed by OTE as the value of art in artistic, cultural and socio-economic terms). A second urgent problem in participatory art practice is the issue of language. There is currently little shared critical practitioner language in the discourse on the kinds of relationship between the artists and those they work with to describe the qualities of inter-subjective process (what *close* pointed to).¹

Two perspectives on creative activity within the everyday

To develop a useful way of thinking about practice from the practitioner's perspective I draw from the work of two French authors, the philosopher and cultural theorist Michel de Certeau

¹ Lacy notes that there is little critical language for discussing new genre public art. She proposes a 'model' for the different roles an artist might play as moving from artist as 'experiencer', then 'reporter', then 'analyst' and finally (in a mature practice) 'activist', *Debated Territory: Towards a Critical Language for Public Art*, in *Mapping the Terrain*, (1995:171-185)

and art historian/curator Nicolas Bourriaud. I focus on de Certeau's texts concerning his (uncompleted) research into practices within everyday culture (1984, 1998, 1997) and the single text he wrote on an artwork by the eco artists, Helen Meyer and Newton Harrison (*The Lagoon Cycle*, 1985). Bourriaud (2002) positions contemporary art within the everyday. He draws from de Certeau (and other theorists) to develop his theory on qualities of art practice which he calls 'relational aesthetics'.

3.2 Michel de Certeau

I met de Certeau walking in his essay *Walking in the City*. This is one essay in a set of ideas he brings to bear in his research on the nature of the everyday, or ordinary culture as it is practiced - *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 1* (1984:91-110). Walking is one activity he selects to look at and call a practice. The essay begins with looking down on the city of New York from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre. He describes the pleasures of looking down with a God like eye on the city below and speculates on how this perspective, in trying to encompass the idea of a city as a neat whole, is voyeuristic (panoptic) and impossible. For de Certeau this parallels the social and cultural theories which tended to adopt abstract totalizing theory (looking from above) from the illusive and complex actualities of social relations and practices in day to day living. He explains that to know a city is from down below, as pedestrians we make the city meaningful by walking through it. We read the details (like officially named places) and also write the city, we make our own stories by weaving through and weaving together 'fragments of scattered semantic places ... combined with things extra and other' (1984:160). Knowledge is experiential, spatial, singular. This touched a chord - I could practice art and I could read a bird's eye level of theory on art practice but they seemed utterly apart and neither was contained in the single concept of art.

Unlike his contemporaries (in cultural theory) de Certeau wanted to scrutinize and give voice to the underlying dynamics in the flux and flow of social relations in daily life – the activities and ways we make our lives meaningful. It is the ordinary person, the silent and 'marginalised majority', where micro-resistances to the pervasive rationalities of power are played out in a

myriad of ways. For de Certeau culture like the 'infinite variant' grows 'like a fungus' in the cracks 'between the micro- and the macrophysical orders' (1997:142)²

Through his deep reading of an eclectic range of theories and the activities he chooses to look at and call practices (e.g. walking, cooking, story telling) he tries to understand the singularity of experience. He is interested in the creative intelligences, improvisations and resisting activities which evade and cannot be contained nor reduced to the dominant socio-economic and rationalized order.³

De Certeau viewed everyday practices within ordinary culture, (which he calls 'our culture') as containing a richness of invention and intelligences, yet it is opaque, not seen or noticed (from the theoretical view) because it is through barely discernable acts, appropriations and uses.⁴ In order to see or apprehend the creative and the 'stubborn' qualities of the everyday and what it comprises, he needs the tools of language and theories. He tries to make (through his research) 'a poetics of the everyday' by giving voice to everyday productions and practices (Highmore 2000b:91). To understand this he gathers an eclectic range of texts, theories and activities together and his text (1984) almost defies defining or summarizing because it is heavily academic and often written in a poetically dense style. It is like a collage of ideas brought to bear on making the everyday intelligible and a field of enquiry worthy of study.^{5 6}

De Certeau describes us as 'tenants' of culture with the spaces, systems and structures we find ourselves in like the architecture of a building. 'This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment' (1984:xxi).⁷ Though our choices and possibilities may be limited, and

² In *Culture in the Plural* (1997) de Certeau discusses cultural issues (in France) including for example schools, emigration and advertising. In this text he calls for attention being paid to actual practices and human relations in order to transform the structures of social life. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) is highly theoretical and comprises a set of essays. Its companion volume by de Certeau and his two research colleagues, Giard and Mayol focuses on more specific examples of activities in daily life, e.g. cooking, shopping, a neighbourhood (1998).

³ De Certeau is acknowledged in academe as a polymath. He studied, cultural and social theory, history, was trained in anthropology, psychoanalysis and was a Jesuit priest studying and writing theological texts. For a select bibliography of de Certeau's main texts in English see Buchanan, 2000:126-28.

⁴ *The Practice of Everyday Life* is translated from the French *L'Invention du quotidien* which in its more literal translation is the invention of the everyday and seems truer to the spirit of de Certeau's research. His research was to try and foreground the opaque everyday through theories and a poetics. The French title suggests that we might literally be inventors of our own everyday which can be interpreted as de Certeau's implicit message.

⁵ It is noted by theorists Buchanan, literary studies (2000) and Highmore, cultural studies (2002a, 2002b) that de Certeau is difficult because his texts are elliptical, and illusive and he refuses to be singular about anything – he suggests an idea but does not follow this through to a clear conclusion. Buchanan and Highmore have both drawn upon and extended ideas from de Certeau in their respective fields and these authors help interpret de Certeau. De Certeau's research into the everyday was also uncompleted, a third volume was planned but he died (in 1986) before it was realised.

⁶ Conely in the afterword to *Culture in the Plural* describes de Certeau as one of the first theorists to try and combine theory and practice in the field of cultural studies (1997:149-161).

⁷ De Certeau suggests that speech act theory is a useful way to understand many of the practices he selects to look at such as walking, reading, cooking. He is interested in the 'saying' not the 'said' and makes reference to the structuralist Saussure who

space is borrowed, we make it our own (like home) furnishing it with our things, memories, hopes and desires. The everyday is a practical world where personal singular actions are combined with imagination and memories.

To rethink dwelling (culture as lived) he rejects the idea of culture as being two opposing poles of high and mass which is tantamount to saying what is creative and what is homogenous. The problematic, as he saw it, was that the very terms of production and consumption (like creativity and reception) needed to be rethought to consider how culture is actually practiced. To do this he inverts the logic of production and consumption (analogous to the weak and the strong, the colonizer, the colonized, the marginalized majority in the face of globalization) suggesting that in daily life it is the *uses* we make (as consumers) of representations, places and time which produces a different (a secondary) kind of production, albeit 'silent' or 'invisible'.⁸ Far from being passive consumers these uses, as different readings, appropriations, combinations, enable us to have a sense of autonomy or sense of selves as unique individuals. To survive, gain pleasure and make our time affirmative and memorable we utilize cunning, invention, improvisation, subtle micro-resistances. These 'truant freedoms' evade and cannot be contained or reduced to the dominant cultural economy (the 'weak' make use of the strong). In the everyday use of products, inhabiting spaces and reading of texts, images and other representations we 'poach' in countless ways. De Certeau celebrates the 'artisan-like inventiveness' (of consumers) the 'bricolage' of 'poetic ways of making do' and 'making with' through ritual and activities (1984:xv).

Importantly de Certeau is not interested in promoting the individual (or individualism), nor in identity categories (e.g. sub culture groups, women). His research into the everyday is to develop a more complex, pluralist theory of social relations within the transactions of daily

used the terms 'langue' and 'parole' to distinguish between the language system, its grammar and syntax structure, and the activation or use of language. However de Certeau cannot be classified as a post structuralist. Buchanan's interpretation is that he could be (for example) aligned with phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) or Lacanian psychoanalysis (see Buchanan discussing *Unknotting Place and Space* (2000:108-124). Buchanan makes parallels between de Certeau's thinking and Deleuze and Guattari e.g. what they describe as '*the plane of immanence*' and Buchanan draws in other critical theorists which align with de Certeau's thinking throughout this key text on de Certeau, see for example *ibid*:11-32.

⁸ For example de Certeau uses the term *la perruque* for the ways we divert time and materials to our own ends. The examples he gives are where the employer's time is diverted for other uses, such as a secretary using company time and equipment to write a letter, or a factory worker taking scraps of machinery home (a lathe is the example used) to construct for personal use. This example is not the idea of getting one over on the boss, rather the broader idea of appropriating time and goods for other ends, the weak making use of the strong to make other productions (1984:30).

living.⁹ In the 'General Introduction' to Volume 1 de Certeau outlines his ambitious research aim:

"For what I really wish to work out is a *science of singularity*; that is to say, a science of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances. And only in the local network of labour and recreation can one grasp how, within a grid of socio-economic constraints, these pursuits unfailingly establish relational tactics (a struggle of life), artistic creations (an aesthetic), and autonomous initiatives (an ethic). The characteristically subtle logic of these 'ordinary' activities comes to light only in the details." (1984:ix italics original)

In volume 1 (1984) his theoretical interest is in spatial practices like walking but also reading, story telling, journeys.¹⁰ He discusses ordinary language, popular culture and proposes a kind of cultural logic (a 'preliminary hypothesis') he calls the 'polemological' or the polemical. He discusses how the scriptural economy has replaced speaking practices. He discusses belief and the lack of language to deal with death and dying, discusses memory, the arts of theory. His eclecticism seems closer to artist than social theorist in his attempts to give voice to ordinary culture as rich with animated forces. In his related text, *Culture in the Plural* (1997) he makes his political position clear and poetically describes the energy at work at the grass roots level:

"Every culture proliferates along its margins. Eruptions take place that are called 'creations' in relation to stagnancies. Bubbling out of swamps and bogs, a thousand flashes at once scintillate and are extinguished all over the surface of a society. In the official imaginary, they are noted only as exceptions or marginal events. An ideology of property isolates the 'author', the 'creator', and the 'work'. In reality, creation is a disseminated proliferation. It swarms and throbs. A polymorphous carnival infiltrates everywhere, a celebration both in the streets and in the homes for those who are

⁹ Highmore makes the important point (as does Buchanan, 2000) that for de Certeau, unlike some cultural theorists the idea of identity as the locus of meaning in everyday life was too restricting ('blunt instrument' is the way Buchanan describes this). Highmore describes de Certeau's perspective on the social individual as being far too waywardly heterogeneous (too networked). In reality we live 'across a vast range of forces and relationships that, if taken as the basis for viewing the everyday, would obscure the singularity of any action.' (2002b:13).

¹⁰ De Certeau pairs the term space with place. Space is any ordering activity, with place as any ordering system. For instance if place were language, space is the spoken word. In this sense space is both physical and virtual. De Certeau draws from speech act theory in his spatial practices and quotes from the structuralist Sausure's definition of 'langue' and 'parole'. However he cannot be contained or described as simply a post structuralist. As a polymath he plunders and collages different theories and ideas to draw out and give voice to the subtler intelligences acted out in daily living.

unblinded by the aristocratic and museological model of *durable* production ...
Creation is perishable; it passes because it is an act." (1997:139-140 italics in original)

There are two volumes in his research into everyday practices. The second companion volume is by de Certeau and two research colleagues Giard and Mayol (*The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 2 Living and Cooking*, 1998).¹¹ This volume presents us with some subjects from field work (like case studies) which feed into de Certeau's stated research aim – to develop what he calls 'a practical science of the singular' The kinds of activities looked at include shopping, how we relate to our neighbours, propriety, Street Trade, and the largest section is on cooking or the 'nourishing arts'. De Certeau develops his science in the concluding chapter though there is little co-relation made explicit between the field work and his proposed science and the case studies (carried out by research assistants) use a typically social science (ethnographic) method of interview to gather different voices.¹² Never the less it was his intention to 'make such a discussion possible' through his research which could 'indicate pathways for further research' (1984:xi).

It is accepted in academic circles that de Certeau is a subtle and notoriously itinerant writer and theorist which resists easy academization and some texts seem intractable (from an artist perspective)¹³ nevertheless his work is important from an art practice research perspective because it offers an alternative perspective on where, and what creative productions might be considered as. He insists on a perspective which attends to the particularities of the individual actions in specific circumstances. The second related point as Highmore notes in his interpretation of de Certeau is that in attending to the everyday it is a matter of dwelling in it, and also on it, because it requires a form of attention that can register the unremarkable, make noticeable the unnoticed. (2000b:38).¹⁴ Drawing from de Certeau Highmore describes this perceptual orientation:

¹¹ These two volumes were the result of a three year research project, funded by the French government. Volume I was published in France in 1980 and translated into English 1984. Volume II was first published in French in 1990.

¹² Cooking or the 'nourishing arts' is an investigation by de Certeau and Giard and is by far the largest study (almost half the book). The interviews were not conducted by Gaird but Marie Ferrier, see Chapter 14: *When It Comes Down To It, Cooking Worries Me...* (1984: 223-247)

¹³ For example in *Theories of the Art of Practice* he draws on Foucault, Bourdieu and Kant to name just three of the many theorists he cites in this single chapter (1984: 43-76)

¹⁴ Highmore points out that much twentieth-century object-based art has insisted on the daily as discarded (e.g. Schwitters, Arman) and the daily as commodity (Pop art), but that it has been film that has best articulated the everyday as duration. (2000 b:38)

"Attention to the everyday requires a shift in tone and focus, a different pacing and a different form of listening. The problem of the everyday, simply put, is how to make visible what has fallen below the horizon of visibility, how to accord significance to the seemingly insignificant? The answer, though, may not be so simple and requires a counter-intuitiveness. Conventional thought (habits of mind) is what casts the everyday into oblivion." (2000b:39)

There are clear parallels with de Certeau's research into the everyday with research into art practice. It requires a view and articulation from within (the practitioner's view). It requires close perceptual attention to what may not be noticed or given value. It is also that participatory art practice within the everyday means attending to a complex of social relations. It is de Certeau's work in terms of trying to make sense of this which is valuable to think about art practice. Artists similarly need the means, tools and language for making sense of processes (what de Certeau calls operations).

It is de Certeau's belief that the everyday though opaque could provide the tools and means for its own articulation. To this end he proposes a framework, what he calls 'a practical science of the singular'. As noted earlier de Certeau is not interested in the impossible task of amassing insurmountable details of activities that he selects to look at in ordinary culture - the content. Nor is he interested in identity categories of people.¹⁵ Much more ambitiously he wanted to find a 'cultural logic' underpinning everyday activities and the particularities of circumstances – the form. This 'science' appeals to an older rationale, to human nature.

To develop a useful way of thinking about art practice, from the practitioner's perspective I look at his science of singularity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Highmore warns us against de Certeau's research into the everyday being easily hitched to a progressive cultural politics, rather it is politically ambiguous. On this point Highmore refers to the study of the Croix-Rousse Neighbourhood, conducted by de Certeau's research colleague Mayol, 1998: 35-70, where the easy conviviality and familiarity of conversation in the local shop could just as easily be talking negatively about the Muslim family, or the single mother down the street (2000b:42) However on balance *Culture in the Plural*, like both volumes of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, 1998), betray an optimistic élan, though his texts can be elliptical and poetically dense.

¹⁶ In the literature on art there are a few short references to de Certeau, from the performing arts (e.g. Kaye, 2000) and a more substantial work on theatre practice (Read, 1993). Highmore (personal e mail correspondence, Sept, 2003) expressed his intention to produce a book on de Certeau and was interested to note this research expressing his interest in de Certeau's relationship to art.

3.3 Three priorities for thinking about culture as it is practiced

De Certeau (as philosopher, cultural writer and theorist) wanted to register 'a poetics' of the everyday. As researcher he wanted to provide the conditions and means to allow us to see and articulate the usually opaque, subtle combinatory operations in day to day living. To do this he speculatively proposes a framework. His aim was to provide a framework which has the generality of a science which also makes possible the revealing of the singularity of experience – the 'singular action linked to one situation, certain circumstances (and) particular actors' (1998:256) though it is not tested in his research.¹⁷

His science has three 'priorities' - 'ordinary', 'orality' and 'operativity' (1998:251-256).

Ordinary culture is 'our culture' and stems from a different problematic than mass or high culture. Mass assumes homogeneity and masks the inventiveness in day to day living. High culture takes the moral high ground of being where important creativity happens. Our culture is where a 'pluralization of usage' happens through reading, appropriating and recombining representations. Ordinary culture is where the specific and particular are made from the circumstantial and the accidental. It is a making with and making do with what is available to us, materially but also our life histories,¹⁸ a kind of DIY recycling.¹⁹ Ordinary culture is a practical world of singular actions imbued with interior worlds of imagination and memories.

In today's rationalized and technocratized world where we are bombarded with information and media - 'oceans of communication', and where a 'scriptural economy' has replaced the oral traditions, de Certeau acknowledges the importance, value and skills of conversation.²⁰ He suggests 'a city breathes when *places for speech* exist within in' (1998:253 italics original).

¹⁷ In terms of making sense of art practice in this research as part of cultural activity it was reassuring to discover that Highmore likens de Certeau's invention of 'a science of singularity' to the work by Freud on understanding dreams. This was reassuring not at the level of psychoanalysis but simply that artists similarly need frameworks and theories to interpret the particularities and circumstances of an art project. De Certeau, (like Freud) had to invent the means or the conditions that make an interpretation of an everyday practice (or a dream) possible (Highmore, 2000a:92 and 2002a:170).

¹⁸ Buchanan makes this point with regard to making do. It is more than using materials (how necessity is the mother of invention to use the well known phrase) it is how we forge a sense of selves from the histories we are born into (2000).

¹⁹ This kind of DIY culture in music has massively increased in recent years. Available technologies means people can make remix and download music at home. Bedrooms become studios. One of the artists engaged by OTE is a DJ artists, see my interview with Norman Shaw, in the OTE publication *Inthrow* (2005:34-45).

²⁰ One of his passions was folktales, myths and storytelling and he describes the modern economy coming into being with the scriptural economy which replaced the oral traditions bringing a new source of control with it, the control of knowledge. For de Certeau the body itself is the site of resistance (the body resists the machine). He aimed to legitimize 'the everyday itself as a primordial understanding of human behaviour (Buchanan 2000: 98) in distinction to the primacy and privileging of a text based cultural economy.

Orality (conversation and speaking situations) constitutes community; it is the essential social and socializing activity.²¹ It has 'a founding role in the relation to the other' (ibid 251-2).

But orality is more than just speech, it is visceral. The physicality of speaking demands 'a correlation of gestures and bodies, a presence of voices and accents, marks of breathing and passions'. For de Certeau conversation is such an ordinary practice it is taken for granted yet it betrays a subtle intelligence and refined complexity. The art of speaking is where practice and theory are one - 'a way of thinking invested in a way of acting, an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using (1984:xv). Conversation is 'thick' with registers of expression, nuances through intonations, facial movements. It has a 'vocal grain' of particularities, such as timbre, stress and pronunciation. The spoken word acquires layers of meaning in the moment of speech.

He describes exchanged speech having a 'sonorous materiality' from the individual where people use inventive language games. In everyday conversation, the vernacular, we use 'ruses, semantic drift, misunderstandings, sound effects, invented words' to project our personalities (ibid 253).

These qualities clearly resonate with the more dialogic, conversational approaches adopted by some artists working in the social realm (see 2.4), yet it is de Certeau who draws attention to the importance of physicality when speaking, the actual physical presence of people being together.

Operativity is activity or pursuits. It is the process (a series of operations) to make something. De Certeau draws a parallel by looking at an artwork and the art of cooking explaining that in order to understand a painting we need to understand the gestures that gave rise to it, the palette, brushwork and stroke. Similarly cooking (or any kind of production) depends upon 'a combination of gestures, proportions, utensils and cooking or transformation methods'. He describes all forms of communication as essentially the same thing:

²¹ Recent art theorists writing on art practice in relation to the idea of community as a key the value of art cite the French philosopher Nancy. Kwon (2002:7) in her seminal text on public art from the past 30 years cites Nancy's idea of 'not common being but a being in common'. Morgan also quotes Nancy for 'a more logical metaphysics than the implausible idea of singular ontology' (2003:16).

“... a cuisine of gestures and words, of ideas and information, with its recipes and subtleties, its auxiliary instruments and its neighbouring effects, its distortions and its failures.” (1998:254)

De Certeau's perspective on culture comprising three priorities in terms of the way it is actually practiced (the everyday) can be considered three areas of concern for the artist. Orality constitutes the essential space of community. The ordinary can be understood by scrutinizing singular actions linked to one situation, certain circumstances and particular actions. In other words understanding the specificity makes the ordinary both intelligible and arguably special, or extra-ordinary. The third priority – operativity he describes as having three 'aspects' – the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical. Operativity is a focus in this research and is developed in the next section and throughout this thesis.

3.4 Cultural activity as the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical

De Certeau describes operativity or activity as having three 'aspects' - *the aesthetic, the polemical and the ethical*. It is the particular definitions he gives these that can be considered as having special relevance for art practice. To help understand and develop the qualities within these aspects I draw from volumes 1 and 2 of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, 1998). Within the collage of ideas presented in both volumes the only direct reference to his 'practical science of the singular' are sketched out in the first chapter of volume one (1984) and are extended, in the sense of giving more precise definitions, in the last chapter of volume 2 (1998) I draw these out in the table below. This summary is useful as a first step before considering key ideas he discusses that underpin his belief in and theories on what constitutes everyday practices and ways of living. Key qualities of the three aspects are later (in this chapter) adapted to a construct useful to the art practitioner.

Fig. 3 Table adapted from de Certeau (1984) and de Certeau et al (1998)²²

<p>(1984)</p> <p>Aesthetic 'artistic creation'</p> <p>'an aesthetics of "tricks" (p 26)</p>	<p>(1998: 254-5)</p> <p>'an everyday practice opens up a unique space within an imposed order' behaves like 'a poetic gesture that bends the use of common language to its own desire in a transforming reuse' or 'ruse'</p>
<p>Polemical (also the 'polemological') 'relational tactics (struggle for life)'</p> <p>'an economy of the 'gift" (p 26)</p>	<p>'the everyday practice is relative to the power relations that structure the social field as well as the field of knowledge. To appropriate information for oneself, to put it in a series, and to bend its montage to one's own taste is to take power over a certain knowledge and thereby overturn the imposing power of the readymade and pre-organised. It is with barely visible or nameable operations, to trace one's own path through the resisting social system.'</p>
<p>Ethical 'autonomous initiatives'</p> <p>'an ethics of "tenacity" (p 26)</p>	<p>'everyday practice patiently and tenaciously restores a space for play, an interval for freedom, a resistance to what is imposed (from a model, a system, or an order)'... 'To be able to do something is to establish distance, to defend the autonomy of what comes from one's own personality.'</p>

To understand operativity, (activity and pursuits and in relation to circumstances) it is necessary to consider de Certeau's thinking on resistance, and his 'preliminary hypothesis' of tactics and strategy in the polemical aspect or dimension.²³

²² The second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking* was a collaboration with Giard and Mayol, two research colleagues. In this thesis I refer to this volume as simply de Certeau (1998).

²³ De Certeau sometimes uses the rather peculiar term 'polemological' instead of polemical. It is not unusual for de Certeau to be inventive with language but also elliptical and he plays with the ambiguity of terms. It would seem that he wanted to give the polemical added meaning from the dictionary definition of disputing or controversial. It is the relations between tactics and strategy which constitute the polemical as resistance which is developed in this thesis.

3.4.1 Resistance

Resistance is a leitmotif for de Certeau and it is necessary to consider this and a pair of terms he uses which underpin his thinking on a social and cultural logic. Resistance for de Certeau is not opposition (Highmore, Buchanan) though the two terms he uses 'tactics and strategy', his preliminary hypothesis on resisting behaviour, do have strong militaristic connotations (de Certeau uses the term 'guerrilla tactics').²⁴

Resistance for de Certeau is in part a tenacious refusal to simply acquiesce to the pace of modern life, and it might manifest itself in the ways we adapt which holds on to, or allows continuities to be maintained through a 'stubbornness' and an 'obstinacy' (Highmore 2000b: 42).²⁵ Highmore links resistance to the passing of time:

"The incessantly speeding-up of assembly line of modern life wins out against the art of dawdling. Benjamin, like Lefebvre and the Situationists narrates a tale in which modernity witnesses the invasion of everyday life by the dynamics of capitalism. Against this de Certeau offers, not a counter-narrative, but a para-narrative where everyday life can be seen to move at a different pace, where the daily articulates moments of cunning and stubborn resistance." (2000a:94)²⁶

To consider what this more stubborn and tenacious resistance might be in Volume II (1998) Luce Giard, de Certeau's research colleague discusses what cooking means for her. (This is the clearest single example of the how an everyday practice is an art form). Her description of the art of cooking is a personal account. She begins by talking about her refusal as a girl to become involved in cooking with her mother because she thought cooking was relegated to the boring domestic realm – it wasn't exciting or modern and it would have no place in her life. On leaving home and trying to cook for herself she was surprised by how much she had

²⁴ Highmore's belief that from a cultural theory perspective the reading of de Certeau's work has privileged the inventive tactics especially *la perruque* 'the worker's own work disguised as work for his employment' (1984:25) over the 'obscure, stubborn life' which may be accounted for because it is the easiest to 'hitch' to an existing form of cultural politics. He also suggests this could be a gendered perspective 'privileging the street over the home, the machismo of 'cultural guerrilla' over the sensuality of the ordinary.' (2000a:97). Buchanan from a literary studies perspective (2000) thinks the 'Anglophone' reading ignores the spiritual side of de Certeau's thinking.

²⁵ Highmore warns us against imagining that de Certeau assumed the everyday modelled a progressive politics, rather it is politically thoroughly ambivalent giving as an example the clinging to ideas of community and traditions which might exclude others. Highmore is referring to the study on 'The Neighbourhood', by Mayol, (1998: 35-70)

²⁶ Highmore draws de Certeau together with Lefebvre who also insists on a counter view from below and not a top down theory of social relations.

inadvertently learnt, how the traces of memories and gestures of work in the kitchen came back to her. Giard remembers and pays tribute to the generations of women before her who had practiced the inventive art of 'organizing, combining, modifying and inventing' in the kitchen. She stresses the physical sensuality that combines with the 'persistence' of memory when cooking and when eating. Both are 'stubbornly faithful' to childhood memories, where the tricks of combining, the smells, tastes and gestures are thick with memories. This sensual realm is filled with remembrances.

Cooking is a combination of 'making-do' and 'making-with' and she describes it as containing a 'subtle intelligence full of nuances and strokes of genius, a light and lively intelligence that can be perceived without exhibiting itself, in short, a very ordinary intelligence' (1998:158). She acknowledges that for women particularly the kitchen can be both a space of creativity but equally an entrapment, but she privileges the sensuous world. Cooking is subjected to both a 'frenetic over-modernization' and an 'archaistic nostalgia':

"... room remains for micro-inventions ... to resist with a sweet obstinance the contagion of conformism, to reinforce the network of exchanges and relations, to learn how to make one's choice among the tools and commodities produced by the industrial era." (ibid)

Resistance here is linked with a choice not to, resistance being 'the force of will that stops', enabling us to have some power in relation to material culture (Highmore 2000b:43). This is like an inner resistance, the stubborn or resilient qualities we might have. In Giard's description of cooking choice connects to what we keep or select – a favourite treasured object (like a cooking utensil) as well as the memories we carry with us.

Highmore offers an interesting analogy for resistance with a view to thinking about the agency an artist might bring to a situation:

"... de Certeau figures everyday life as a sphere of resistance (both virtually and actually). But this resistance is not synonymous with opposition. Resistance in de Certeau is closer to the use of the terms in electronics and psychoanalysis: it is what hinders and dissipates the energy as flow of domination, it is what resists

representation. In de Certeau's writings about everyday life, 'resistance' is as much an activity born of inertia as it is a result of inventive forms of appropriation." (2002a: 151-2)

Highmore is careful to point out that resistance for de Certeau does not necessarily equate with productivity and the opaque everyday resists easy representation (de Certeau's research problem). Resistance is not necessarily a liberatory force and we need to exercise caution with regard to its 'heroic connotations' (ibid:90). But to imagine resistance as manipulating energy is useful for art practice. It suggests that people can both resist a flow (or force) but equally we can redeploy or redirect energies. Currents and flows of energy can converge and amplify as well as be dispersed or dissipate. Resistance as choosing not to go with the flow is a resilience enacted through choice and drawing from our pasts. This connects with the idea of continuity, the past contained in the present and informing the future.

3.4.2 Tactics and strategy

For de Certeau to make sense of the multifarious and fragmentary activities in the art of surviving, manipulating and enjoying life he proposes that we behave 'tactically'. He describes tactics as being like 'clever tricks' like a 'hunter's cunning', like 'manoeuvres', 'polymorphic simulations' and 'joyful discoveries' (1984:xix). It is where play is introduced into the foundations of power. He suggests this kind of behaviour is ancient, primordial:

"... (tactics) go much further back, to the immemorial intelligence displayed in the tricks and imitations of plants and fishes. From the depths of the oceans to the streets of modern megalopolises, there is a continuity and permanence in these tactics."
(ibid:xx)²⁷

²⁷ It is not to suggest that tactics are genetically determined, rather de Certeau wanted to break free from his contemporaries frameworks of thinking in cultural studies (as noted by Buchanan, 2000:14) though undoubtedly de Certeau does consider and speaks to the inner resistances we might feel to the strictures and constraints at the level of our bodies as well as our minds. We are not reduced to the discipline of the grid (1984). Conley describes this as 'psychogenetic' which seems appropriate with tactics being how we think. It is the irrepressible spirit - gaining a bit of freedom and make things 'habitable'. An example de Certeau gives is the creolization of language where the minority language *insinuates* itself into the majority language. (Conley in de Certeau, 1997:160).

De Certeau proposes a 'preliminary hypothesis' which underpins this quality of resistance - tactics in relation to strategy ('relational tactics'). Strategy is something which has its own boundaries. It has its proper 'place', a legitimacy from which it can speak:

"... a 'strategy' (is) the calculus of force relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.' A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research)." (1984: xix, italics original)

Tactics on the other hand do not have this 'proper' place from which to validate itself as a set of rules. It operates in time, and is characteristically opportunistic:

"... a 'tactic' (is) a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance... The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'". (ibid)

To survive in the sense of making our lives meaningful and affirmative within the inherited architecture of social living, tactics (i.e. the polemical as 'relational tactics') characterizes a way or 'manner' of thinking and acting. Tactics exist in time and constantly have to turn circumstances to their advantage, tactics 'seize' opportunities, they exist in the space of the other he tells us. But tactics are not oppositional to strategy, for strategy is the structures and frameworks within which improvisation plays. Tactics characterize a way of thinking which he suggests is not unlike poetry:

"... carried to its limit, this order would be the equivalent of the rules of meter and rhyme for poets of earlier times: a body of constraints stimulating new discoveries, a set of rules with which improvisation plays.' (1984:xxi-xxii)

Tactical behaviour is one of improvisation and subtle resistances. Tactics seem to be characterized by playfulness and linked to 'an aesthetic of 'tricks':

"The actual order of things is precisely what 'popular' tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon ... here order is *tricked* by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance, that is, an economy of the 'gift' (generosities for which one expects a return), an aesthetics of 'tricks' (artists operations) and an ethics of *tenacity* (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of a law, a meaning, or a fatality)." (1984:26 italics in original)

Highmore and Buchanan see the relationship between strategy and tactics as not oppositional (not binary terms), but more a kind of rubbing along. The nature of tactics is the inventive employment of possibilities within strategic circumstances. They can be disguise, surprise, discretion, secrecy, wit, play, bluff etc. But tactics cannot operate outside strategy this would be 'counter-strategy'. They are in the ambiguous position where 'they escape it without leaving it' (Highmore 2002a:159, Buchanan 2000:100). These paired terms 'fold back on one another' each providing the other with 'the very essence that would define them' (Highmore 2002a:154). De Certeau places tactics as a quality of thinking as operating in the between space - 'By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation' (1984:30).

Highmore tentatively suggests that the relation between tactics and strategy is 'something like' that of the unconscious and conscious worlds (2002a:164), the subconscious is never entirely accessible to us yet can bubble through. Similarly on this internal level Buchanan places strategy and tactics not as 'modalities of power (but) as indexes of belief' and likens tactics to desire suggesting that resistance (the source of tactics) is closer to 'resisting reason' (2000:87). In art historical terms this could be interpreted as being the wild card, to break out

of the strictures of thinking. An example is the work of the surrealists in their attempts to tap into the subconscious and dreams by using methods to try and break free of the conventions of rational thought. Buchanan also describes tactics as 'a set of practices strategy has been unable to domesticate' (ibid: 89).²⁸

In summary tactics can be a useful way of thinking about creative practice. It is a quality of thinking which characterizes improvisation. It could be how things are transposed or smuggled from one place (the 'proper') to another. What is peculiar and useful about relational tactics is the idea of scale. Tactics stem from the inner resistances we feel in mind and body, and could be considered anything from the way our subconscious works in relation to our conscious thoughts (Highmore) or desire (Buchanan), to the relationship an art practice might have with the givens of the more established and dominant models of art practices. Strategy (like the taxonomy of art practices presented in the discourse) has a 'proper' place from which to speak (like an institution, a city, a business) which validates its own rules, or has the power to generate its own relations to itself. Tactics operate in the space of the 'other', they are mobile and do not have the certainties and stability of place. But when tactics become part of strategy, they have become institutionalized and are separated from the everyday. In art historical terms it is easy to imagine how the early twentieth century avant-garde techniques (e.g. the use of collage) was operating tactically in relation to the art institution of that time and how these techniques were assimilated by the mainstream. But for the purposes of developing a way of thinking about practice the idea of tactics as a quality of thinking at the internal level seems useful.

²⁸ Buchanan notes that in cultural theory there has been a lot of misunderstandings about de Certeau's use of the term tactics. Firstly through its militaristic connotation, but also that they are perceived on the more obvious and possibly superficial level of small subversive acts (which some cultural theorists writing on sub cultures argue). Buchan argues that rather 'strategy and tactics are not so much modalities of power as indexes of belief' (2000:87). On this deeper level Buchanan also suggests that for de Certeau resistance can be 'resistance resistant to reason' (ibid:23).

3.5 Summary

In his research de Certeau inverts the logic of production and consumption (and creativity and reception) which connects to a general aim of the artistic approach to making meaning as a participatory practice. His attempts to register a poetics of everyday life (1984, 1998) focuses on activity ('uses' not users) and his ideas and the qualities he speaks of in spatial practices resonate with artistic activity as processes of transforming representations and places.

At the end of Volume 2 de Certeau concludes that in proposing this science of singularity the research is very much a beginning:

"We know poorly the types of operations at stake in ordinary practices, their registers and their combinations, because our instruments of analysis, modelling and formalization were constructed for other objects and with other aims. The essential analytical work, which remains to be done, will have to revolve around the subtle combinatorial set of types of operations and registers, that stages and activates a making-do [faire-avec], right here and now, which is a singular action linked to one situation, certain circumstances, particular actors." (1998:256)

This 'science' was not tested by de Certeau and his research colleagues, but proposed in a cultural studies/sociology context (in the early 80's). It seems to have special relevance for art practice research from the practitioner's view. Firstly creativity (art as 'a way of doing something') is intrinsic to acts of dwelling, not something separate from day to day living. He suggests a shift in focus to attend to the subtler combinations of micro-exchanges, the richness of language and the more 'silent' or invisible productions. He is interested, as Buchanan notes, 'not in the production of difference, but different productions' (2000:92). This resonates with the idea of art as a participatory process operating within the everyday as not primarily concerned with the production of objects per se, but with imagining other kinds of production in the ways we make meaning and confer value; a shift from object making to processes of making expressive meaning.

De Certeau's practical science of singularity points to valuable qualities which an art practitioner might have. Conversation and dialogue ('orality') are part of the tools artists are

using today (see 2.4). The everyday suggests artists developing active roles by drawing from and contributing to social processes as opposed to the everyday as a subject for art.

Perceptually the everyday, like attending to the artistic process requires a shift in tone and focus, a different pacing, a different form of listening (Highmore, 2000b:39). De Certeau's 'preliminary hypothesis' of tactics and strategy seems an especially useful 'logic' for creative practice. But it is de Certeau's idea of operativity as comprising three aspects *the aesthetic*, *ethical* and *polemical*, as he defines them, which can be useful to think about art practice (as recognised through my practice, (in *Early work with geneticists* 4.2, see 3.9.1) This idea is developed at the end of this chapter and is used and constructed in practice through art projects (Chapter 4). Before considering Bourriaud, an art historical perspective which draws from de Certeau's thinking, I look at the single text de Certeau wrote on art.

3.6 The aesthetic-political value of an artwork: de Certeau's critique of *The Lagoon Cycle* (1985)

De Certeau produced one text on visual art, a critical essay on a work by the ecology artists Helen and Newton Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle* (1985). The essay *Pay Attention: To Make Art*, was published in the catalogue accompanying the art work (*The Lagoon Cycle* 1985:17-23). This text is important because it gives insights on the values of art from de Certeau's perspective. It is also important because the art work shows how a highly authored piece can present the world back to us as a mix of reality and fantasy using images and text. The work took 12 years to complete and is exemplary in terms of narrative form.²⁹

The story is told by two characters the 'Witness' and the 'Lagoonmaker' enacted by Helen and Newton. The art work comprises seven large panels of text and image (on average seven or eight foot high and anything from three to thirteen foot wide). It is about a project that begins with the discovery of a tiny crab *scylla serrata* found in the mud in the lagoons of Sri Lanka. The idea is to take the crab and cultivate it in small tanks as a food source for many people. From the beginning complications arise – practical and psychological because both

²⁹ Their backgrounds, as de Certeau notes, is interesting because they are very different, Helen was trained in anthropology, literature and psychology, while Newton was trained in sculpture and painting.

characters have different attitudes to the project. Their dialogue reveals the Witness as the reflective one, who questions the wider implications of the project, and the Lagoonmaker as the creative active one. From the breeding of the crabs in tanks the projects ambition grows from crab pools to farms to creating large artificial lagoons to considerations of the Salton Sea, the Gulf of California right up to encompass the whole Pacific basin.

The narrative structure uses the Socratic dialogue, a poetic meditation of asking questions and mulling over them, moving back and forth and between the two personalities and as the story continues it brings in other characters. The formal visual and linguistic structure is complex and layered, drawing on myth and metaphor.

Fig. 4 A panorama of *The First Lagoon* and Fig. 5 Panel 1 from *The First Lagoon*

These seven panels make up a cycle, and move from one lagoon to the next like seven chapters in 'an animated book'. 'Pay attention: To make art', the title of his essay which draws from the work itself is apposite for artists. By focussing on the insignificant tiny crab, the Harrisons take what can be thought of as trivial but the trivial as de Certeau notes 'is also fundamental' (1997:144):

"If you pay attention, everyday things reveal their savage and stubborn existence ... Simply paying attention guarantees the transformation from a nature supposedly asleep to the work that displays nature's strange vitality. Art is what attention makes with nature." (1985:17)

De Certeau analyses the work according to its formal elements; maps, metaphors, narratives, dialogues and politics. The visual elements the Harrisons use are maps, paintings, drawings, photographs and text and the dialogue is written like prose poetry. It is the way that these elements intertwine and 'call out to each other', which makes the work layered and complex.

Fig. 4 A panorama of *The First Lagoon*



Fig. 5 Panel 1 from *The First Lagoon*



3.6.1 Maps

He describes the map as 'the founding gesture' creating a cartographic space which is 'cut out of the complexity of things'. This becomes the scene on which to 'draw the operations necessary to remake a world.' The first panel is a globe as is the last panel, with many other maps throughout. The globe presents us with a dialectic on a number of levels:

"A dialectic is begun, not only between the land and the sea (leitmotif of the work), but between what exists and what is possible. The map joins, in effect what *is* to what *could be*. The art of observing is joined with the art of inventing." (ibid:17 italics original)

Maps are about conquests, legendary worlds and ancestral dreams and the Harrisons 're-envisage' them by drawing and painting over them create metaphors which operate as 'the movement that opens up another space' (ibid:18).

3.6.2 Metaphors

'Metaphors designate transits' de Certeau tells us, they are the means of a passage from one place to another and notes that in Athens today the inter city transport systems are called metaphor. The Lagoons themselves are like mass transit systems but with this work the movement or the voyages are internal. Referring to Aristotle, de Certeau notes that metaphor is 'for a single sense, the means of passage from one form to another; there are two places for one sense'.

What makes the work come alive is the play between two forms of expression, but it is richer than the usual text image relationship where the text is also image:

"This work of metaphor also disrupts the usual system of making the image an illustration of the text and the text the truth of the image. The metaphor effects instead, mutual attractions. In the frame of the image the text finds a spatial existence, punctuated in black and white, drawn in verse and with a shape." (ibid:19)

He describes the way the narrative unfolds as 'the advancing metaphorization of space' which develops as a series of 'transgressive and poetic happenings'. The crucial point de Certeau makes on metaphor is that it takes a particular frame of mind, we have to believe. The aesthetics of this world (*The Lagoon Cycle*) poses a logic and a belief which asks for more than suspending rationality - to make believe requires a certain risk. Belief 'is the presumption that there is something else in what one sees. It is the hypothesis itself and the jurisdiction of metaphor' (ibid:20). The Harrisons subtly implicate the viewer by playing with the idea of metaphor when they say 'if this then not that', which indirectly speaks to the need to believe. To stay in the space of metaphor means more transformations can happen 'A metaphor can be a powerful instrument, if we believe it. If we enact it, it will develop a life of its own' (from *Second Lagoon*, panel 2).

Fig. 6 Panel 2 from *The Second Lagoon*

3.6.3 Narratives

De Certeau describes the quality of narration as 'unfolding in the space created by a myth'. What the Harrisons do by remaking the world is to 'give it back to life' by re-envisaging it as a myth:

"The Lagoon here is mythic; it joins opposites and furnishes a model for each economy of relations between living creatures and their environment. Like all traditional myths, it is the story of the genesis of origin: the rich mud, the primitive mixing of the waters, the savage cannibal that is the crab." (ibid:20)

De Certeau is referring to the salt and fresh water mix of the Lagoon and the text which describes one crab in the tank repeatedly eating its mates. This seemingly irrational state and primitive behaviour paradoxically points to the 'future ecological rationality'. The myth is paradoxical in that 'the beginning and the end meet.' It is as though we have to acknowledge the more primitive states, the energies which drive 'the economy of relations' between living creatures and their environment.

De Certeau points out that in the dialogue there is a subtle transition - the rational observations in the dialogue lessen as more emphasis is put on the dream (from the Fourth Lagoon onwards). Accompanying the change in the narrative and 'as the dream takes over' there is a change in the visual qualities. From the first Lagoon through to the Third, photographs and drawings predominate, with a predominance of blues, and it is scenes, from the Fourth onwards use maps as the device and it is more the colours of the desert (ochres) with projects and networks of quotations and a bright map of Sri Lanka. The imagery moves back to the blues of the Pacific at the end (the last Cycle) to create 'a general architecture'.

Fig. 7 Panel 6 from *The Fourth Lagoon*

It is too complicated to describe in detail the ways the narration unfolds but as projects grows the dialogue between the Witness and Lagoonmaker gives way to many narrators speaking from separate locations all over the world, to finally towards the end, the more philosophical reflections and speculations of the relationships between the different systems of ecology, people and belief. Sometimes these are like flows of consciousness and dream sequences. At the end the Seventh Lagoon to complete the cycle it returns the initial statement that it is 'only through each others invention that we can re-invent ourselves' (ibid:21)

3.6.4 Dialogues

De Certeau describes dialogue as 'the energy of stories':

"Dialogue is the style of the work. It characterizes all the elements we have already seen: maps, in their relationship with writing; metaphor in its context (the lagoon, a place where fresh and salt waters meet and mix) and in its conquering course (play and movement between distinct spaces); and the narration, in its network of speakers who mimic the relationships between the entire discourse and its readers. Dialogue defines the manner in which language is treated, the gesture that specifies a usage of language, a way of functioning." (ibid:21)

There are two levels of dialogue, the visual inter-textuality and the content of what is said. The many strands of spoken dialogues are between different characters, the fisherman, a friend,

Fig. 6 Panel 2 from *The Second Lagoon*

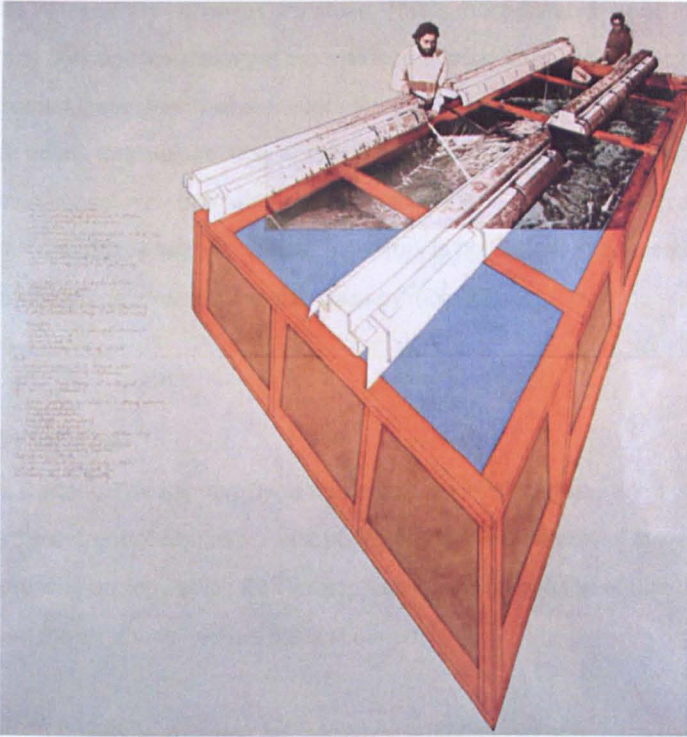


Fig. 7 Panel 6 from *The Fourth Lagoon*



the priest, a scientist for instance, and there are different states of mind in the Lagoon maker and the Witness. Some voices are close, others more distanced and in different locations. What the flow and interlacing of the dialogue does is form 'dual interplays' and this gives rise to a characteristic quality of the work - the quality of 'between', including, as de Certeau points out the artists themselves, they speak in two voices but the voices 'belong to neither'. 'A sentence is begun by one and finished by the other – a between utterance'. Finally the work 'calls for a dialogue with its visitors'. The work is not distant and closed but 'waits for the questions and desires of those that pass by' (ibid:22).

3.6.5 Politics

For de Certeau *The Lagoon Cycle* has a political level because it 'transgresses, in the name of art, the system of capitalism' and he describes the aesthetic of the work as 'science fiction ... mixed with ecology epic'. De Certeau usefully describes the nature of the relationship between the aesthetic and the political dimensions:

"If politics is an arena for managing relationships of force, a theatre of operations that makes discussions and thoughtful decisions based on collective interests possible, then we can consider political this art ..." (ibid:23)

By re-envisioning *The Lagoon Cycle* makes possible a democratic space for dialogue (thoughtful decisions). He continues by describing the work sitting in an in between space (a dialectic) it is neither professionally scientific (though it does present detailed scientific knowledge), but it cannot be categorized as simply aesthetic which for de Certeau would restrict the work as being 'reserved for amateurs and leisure time'. What the work does is 'situate itself between the two, in a space fundamentally political.' (ibid:23) The political in this work is not dealing with one system but concerns two systems, the social balance between human beings and the biological environment (ibid:23). The aesthetic interacts with and comments on the larger idea of the world and our place in it. The effect of the work is that it appeals to our desires:

"It is through art that this politics is able to call out indirectly to the interest of the spectators, to their dreams and desires. In the dialogue it institutes, a dialogue whose

value is one of democratic debate, the work asks its viewers to be attentive not to what it does but to what they desire. The dialogue introduces each person to his or her dream. It makes us journey to that other place that haunts the certainty of all existence." (ibid:23)

The work cannot be described as simply political nor is it simply aesthetic. The implication (in de Certeau's interpretation) is that by being 'between' the work transcends both by being both. De Certeau's critique sharply places the value of this artwork as *between* the political and the aesthetic and the effect (on the spectator) is to show us something which is also between - 'between what exists and what is possible'. In other words the artists enable us to imagine what could be.

The extract below is from *The Sixth Lagoon* (ibid:88)

"Pay attention to the state of belief

Pay attention to the belief stated

Pay attention to the flow of belief and willing of desire

Pay attention to the flow of belief

and enacting of desire

Pay attention to the system upon which desire is enacted

and the system that generates desire

Attend to the discourse between belief systems and

environmental systems

Pay attention to the meaning of nature

of such discourse and the nature of

the meaning of redirection After all

a discourse is a fragile transitory form an improvisation of sorts

and anyone may divert a discourse of any kind into

another probable direction

if they do not value its present direction

Pay attention to the choosing of the probable

directions and the authorship of

changes of state

Pay attention to changes of state"

In *The Lagoon Cycle* the artists used the raw material of a project (real conversations and experiments) to author a highly finished art work compared to some contemporary ways of working (as discussed in the next section). De Certeau pin-points the fundamental value of art as its enabling the re-imagining of ourselves and the world we live in. A tension in process-oriented, engaged practice (in this research) is not only that it is less visual (in terms of a completed artwork) but knowing or seeing the effects that a live collaborative project has on the people involved. Where does the aesthetic reside if not in the art object and what claims can be made about the experience?

One of the most pressing issues (as experienced in this research) is how we might articulate the experience of an art project and de Certeau's analysis of this artwork is valuable in this regard. In this research (my own art projects) with the investment in the process a tension felt is the lack of aesthetic resolution. This relates to the artistic intention and what position is possible for the artist to take as narrator of the experience.

To return to the need for a more nuanced critique on the value of art de Certeau's foregrounding of the dialectical is important. The work occupies the 'between space' visually and conceptually. By being both aesthetic and political it transcends both by being both. Arguably in process-oriented, engaged approaches to making art it is in the dialectical space that we live out the experience as the process unfolds (the everyday is essentially the dialectical space see 2.7.1). The problem of seeing and understanding the aesthetic-political qualities within live projects (as in this research) is that we need to deal with the complex inter-relations of the why (artistic intention), the how (of process) and the what (the effects). In what way can an exploratory open-ended process of collaboration be seen or known as both aesthetic and political? These issues and questions are discussed in Chapter 5.

The next section looks at Bourriaud who draws from de Certeau's thinking (and other theorists) to develop his thesis on a particular kind of art he describes as 'relational aesthetics'. He detects qualities across a wide range of contemporary practices by a younger generation of artists than the Harrisons. The relational aesthetic is political in the sense of being concerned with creating dialogue and sociability in a direct way with audiences, but lack aesthetic resolution in a visual and art historical sense.

3.7 Bourriaud's theory on the value of contemporary art as 'relational'

Nicolas Bourriaud, a curator and art historian, brings together a wide and internationally based range of contemporary artists who share qualities in their practices which he defines as 'relational art'. Building on a collection of his essays written during the 1990's he develops his theory in a key art historical text *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). The opening chapter 'Relational Form' lays the groundwork for his thesis:

"... the role of the artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist. Althusser said that one always catches the world's train on the move; Deleuze, that the 'grass grows from the middle' and not from the bottom or the top. The artist dwells in the circumstances the present offers him, so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world. He catches the world on the move: he is a *tenant of culture*, to borrow Michel de Certeau's expression." (2002:13-14 italics in original).³⁰

Bourriaud draws from de Certeau's ideas on social relations and cultural practices in everyday life (and other theorists in this text). He describes many contemporary art practices as characterized by the 'cultural do-it-yourself and recycling', with art concerned with 'the invention of the everyday and the development of time lived' (ibid:14). In the previous section we saw what resistance might mean for de Certeau and on a deep level this is shared by Bourriaud - a belief that creative activity stems from a resistance to the controls and economics of contemporary western society. Bourriaud rather passionately says:

"We feel meagre and helpless when faced with electronic media, theme parks, user friendly places, and the spread of compatible forms of sociability, like the laboratory rat doomed to an inexorable itinerary in its cage, littered with chunks of cheese. The ideal subject of the society of extras is thus reduced to the conditions of a consumer of time and space." (ibid:9)

³⁰ Michel de Certeau: *Manieres de faire*, Editions Idées-Gallimard.

De Certeau, on the cultural effects of increased mass media exposure, makes the case for having more inter-human communication, but more than this, that it is meaningful communication:

"... the most important and paradoxical consequence of the development of the mass media (is that) a rift is produced between what is said, but not real, and what is experienced, but cannot be put into words. Language becomes a fiction in relation to an everyday reality that has no language. In the society of the spectacle, the surfeit of signifiers betrays an impossibility of finding any adequate expression ... It is indicative of the system in which the more language proliferates, the less we say." (1997:137)

The implication for the artist is clear - to counter this in some way. Bourriaud's perspective on how contemporary artists are responding to the dominant or hegemonic powers is a relational way of working. Relational in terms of art is 'a factor of sociability and a founding principle of dialogue'. This is not new he tells us, art has always been relational in varying degrees (2002:15). But what these contemporary artists which he draws together share is a line of thinking about 'the fate of artistic activity'. It is no longer the relations between Humankind and deity, nor Humankind and object. Today art is about 'inventing models of sociability' (ibid:28). He describes relational art, far from having an inevitable historical evolution as 'fragmentary and isolated' (ibid:13). This marks as he traces in his book, not just a new turn in art historical lineage, but arguably points to the smaller (modest) acts of appropriation and invention within ordinary culture and day to day practices de Certeau talks about. Bourriaud describes the examples of relational art practices operating in 'real time' as 'fragmentary experiments' (ibid:45) and tending to draw inspiration from the 'flexible processes' governing ordinary life:

"... the group is pitted against the mass, neighbourliness against propaganda, low tech against high tech, and the tactile against the visual. And above all the everyday now turns out to be a much more fertile terrain than 'pop culture' – a form that only existed in contrast to 'high culture', through it and for it." (ibid:47) ³¹

³¹ Bourriaud could make de Certeau's influence on his thinking more explicit. For example the fragmentary activities clearly align with de Certeau's view of tactics being like a 'Brownian motion' - the energy at work at grass roots level. There is just one direct reference to de Certeau in *Relational Aesthetics* as quoted previously (2002:13-14).

Bourriaud's argument is that this kind of artistic activity 'strives to achieve modest connections' to 'open up one or two obstructed passages' and 'connect levels of reality kept apart from one another' (ibid:8). This idea of sociability which artists model or propose is a means of resisting alienation and social formatting replacing the older avant-garde artistic tactics of shock or protest art. These relational practices are not proposing any utopia he suggests, but are lived on a subjective everyday basis. From the many examples of artworks and practices he gathers together he explains that relational practices are not connected together by a style, theme or iconography, what they share is the practical and theoretical horizon of inter-human relations. Today's imaginary is characterized by 'negotiations, bonds and co-existences' where artists use different methods and tools for 'linking individuals and groups together' (ibid:43-45).

From the art historical perspective he proposes that relational practices (in the 1990's) tend to draw from a range of traditions including Conceptual Art, Fluxus, the Situationists and Minimal Art, but they simply use these like a vocabulary, 'a lexical basis.' (ibid:46):

"To head off any polemic about a so-called return to 'conceptual' art, let us bear in mind that these works in no way celebrate immateriality. None of these artists has a preference for 'performance' or 'concept', words that no longer mean a whole lot here. In a word, the work process no longer has any supremacy over ways of rendering this work material (unlike Process Art and Conceptual Art, which for their part tended to fetishize the mental process to the detriment of the object). In the worlds constructed by these artists, on the contrary, objects are an intrinsic part of the language, with both regarded as vehicles of relations to the other. In a way, an object is every bit as immaterial as a phone call. And a work that consists in a dinner around a soup can is every bit as *material* as a statue." (ibid:47 italics original)

Relational art is not celebrating immateriality it is more interested in 'space-time factors'. But neither is it elevating the status of the aesthetic object. Relational art practice seems more hybrid and eclectic using art historical models as 'a lexicon' from which to draw their own set of tools and methods.

To cite a few of the many artists Bourriaud collects together to illustrate relational aesthetics, Gabriel Orozco photographs depict the tiny space of daily gestures in works such as *Crazy Tourist* (1991) where he placed an orange on the stalls of a deserted market, or *Hamoc en la moma* (1993) where he slung a hammock in the MoMA gardens in New York. Other photographs (a sleeping bag on the grass or an empty shoe box etc) record what Bourriaud describes as 'the silent still life formed by relationships with the other'. These photographs operate at the point of 'social infra-thinness' where the everyday gesture shows itself as being within and defined by the big super structures (ibid:17). Another more interactive piece is by Jens Haaning who used a square in Copenhagen to broadcast through a loudspeaker amusing stories in Turkish (*Turkish Jokes*, 1994). The effect of this was to create for a 'split second' a 'micro-community' of immigrants who were 'brought together through collective laughter' (ibid:47).

Some other artists cited in the foreword to give a flavour are:

"Rirkrit Tiravanija organises a dinner in a collector's home, and leaves him all the ingredients required to make a Thai soup. Philippe Parreno invites a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line. Vanessa Beecroft dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse through the doorway. Maurizio Cattelen feeds rats on "Bel paese" cheese and sells them as multiples, or exhibits recently robbed safes. In a Copenhagen square, Jes Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jacobson install an upturned bus that causes a rival riot in the city. Christine Hill works as a check-out assistant in a supermarket, organises a weekly gym workshop in a gallery. Carsten Holler recreates the chemical formula of molecules secreted by the human brain when in love, builds an inflatable plastic yacht, breeds chaffinches with the aim of teaching them a new song. Noritoshi Hirakawa puts a small ad in a newspaper to find a girl to take part in his show. Pierre Huyghe summons people to a casting session, makes a TV transmitter available to the public, and puts a photograph of labourers at work on view just a few yards from the building site." (ibid:7-8)

Bourriaud suggests that relational art is no longer about 'the private symbolic space of the artist' but instigating relations with people. The concern is 'something other than aesthetic

consumption' (ibid:29). Different methods are used and can vary depending upon the degree of participation, the nature of the works and the models of sociability proposed and represented (ibid:17-18). Relational art tends to be event based, reusing and recycling materials and encourages interactivity by the viewer. He describes the kinds of activities as including meetings, encounters, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality (ibid:28-9). Different kinds of 'relational procedures' might include invitations, casting sessions, meetings, convivial and user-friendly areas, appointments. These methods are all considered 'vehicles' through which particular lines of thought and personal relationships with the world are developed (ibid:46).

Unfortunately he does not describe in detail the dozens of kinds of practices he brings together³² and though relational art shares a clearly stated humanitarian aim – inter human connectedness the examples are all within the mainstream (of gallery as the formal institution of art) whether this takes place within the four walls or outside of them. Neither does he deal with participatory practice. Arguably it is easier to state the symbolic value of art (which he describes as a projection of the symbolic onto the real and underpins his argument) if art is in a formal context. Also to state that relational aesthetics has a humanitarian aim is not the same thing as seeing the aesthetics and ethics within participatory art projects as the process unfolds. Relational art is still principally the artist making work for an audience.

Never the less Bourriaud's work (*Relational Aesthetics*) is important from the practitioners' view because he provides vocabulary and ideas for participatory processes (if transposed into this kind of practice). The kinds of activities which these relational artists engage with also resonate with art as a 'project' i.e. a process, more event-based and concerned with spatio-temporal factors. Bourriaud suggests it is precisely the ways relational art handles space and time as how 'it derives its main originality' (ibid:48). Relational art is described as periods of time to be lived through (not walked through). These qualities relates to his use of the word interstice which he describes as:

“... a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system.... it creates free areas and time spans whose rhythms contrast those

³² Apart from Gonzales-Torres see 2002:49-62

structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us" (ibid:16)

It is possible to imagine how de Certeau anticipated the style and qualities Bourriaud detects in art over a quarter of a century later being played out in relational practices. In particular the uses consumers make through recycling and bricolage³³ and the parallel between the interstice and 'la perruque' - de Certeau's idea of how we divert time for our own ends and how in daily life we create and enact alternative 'styles of exchange' within the dominant system.³⁴

The next section briefly reviews some criticism against relational aesthetics and Bourriaud's counter arguments. This takes us to the heart of his thesis, that relational art is not a theory of art but a theory of form and this raises important questions of what a relational form might comprise and look like.

3.7.1 Criticisms of relational aesthetics in the literature

A criticism on first reading *Relational Aesthetics*, and voiced by some authors in the literature, is that the artists Bourriaud selects work within the mainstream. Arguably this means that relational aesthetics lack any real understanding of the role of context (Morgan 2003) and from the perspective of socially engaged practice Doherty questions the collaborative nature of the work in terms of an art works direct engagement with an audience (2004:9). Stott (2004) questions the patronage of these kinds of practices.

The criticisms of relational aesthetics and its symbolic value (a proposal to live in a shared world) is that however well intended, the fact that it is within the mainstream system means the real social or political effectiveness of the work is at best stunted and at worst highly questionable. The kinds of arguments levelled against Bourriaud illustrate the minefield of what can be considered as the middle ground (for theorists, curators and art historians)

³³ Bourriaud's earlier text *Postproduction* places an emphasis on , and uses made, of cultural representation referring to de Certeau's ideas on the many 'silent productions' by the consumer - that consumption is a form of production in that we produce new material. He describes this approach as 'postproduction artists' as the 'specialized workers of cultural reappropriation'. (2000:18-19)

³⁴Both de Certeau and Bourriaud make reference to the idea of gift, which is discussed in *The Waiting Room* project (see 4.4.3, Volume II)

between socially engaged or community art and mainstream or the institution of art. However these authors do not deal with the deeper question of art having aesthetic *and* socio-political values, and the interconnections between them.

Stott's criticisms points to the ethics and economics of practising within the current system of patronage suggesting that the artists Bourriaud looks at are part of the 'exclusive cabal of artists, curators, critics, etc' who are globetrotters and who sometimes seem to be the only ones having any kind of relation to what they are doing. Stott (like Morgan) is very critical of Bourriaud's idea of 'interstice' suggesting that 'he would do well to remember that art is also the commodity-form *par excellence*' (2004:16 italics original). Morgan suggests that the idea of the interstice is 'a romantic and useless idea and though attractively utopian is inherently unrealistic' (2003:24-25).³⁵ Morgan as curator of *Common Ground* (Tate 2003), a sculpture exhibition dealing with idea of exchange, uses some of the same artists Bourriaud cites and justifies her position as founded on curatorial choice. As Morgan rightly points out any exhibition dealing with ideas on exchange has to include the idea of 'gift' (and cites Mauss' *The Gift*) but like the interstice she finds this kind of alternative system of exchange 'misguidedly nostalgic' (ibid). Considering her position, her criticisms of Bourriaud seem little more than curatorial bickering.³⁶

Stott criticises the representation of social encounters which he argues is necessary but can be dangerously close to representations becoming 'a substitute for encounters *per se*' (2004: 16 italics original). This is a serious and important criticism – the idea of art being only a representation of social relationships could, by extension, be in effect using people to simply demonstrate the sociability of a work. What Stott is pointing to though does not state, is that the values and intentions of the artists are made explicit (which Bourriaud does theorise).

Bourriaud is very clear that what these relational artists do not represent or aspire to is any harbouring of a utopian idea and his discussion on what an interstice is in terms of art is made explicit. He explains that he is drawing on the Marxist use of the term interstice to reconsider the place of art works in the overall economic system. It seems less that Bourriaud is a

³⁵ Two of the five artists making up this exhibition *Common Ground* (as opposed to the many dozens of artists Bourriaud cites to develop his theory of form) are both artist's Bourriaud includes in *Relational Aesthetics* - Gabriel Orozco and Carsten Holler.

³⁶ One of the artists Morgan includes in *Common Ground* is Thomas Hirschorn, who makes 'monuments' out of low and perishable materials. His work *Bataille Monument* part of Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002 has been criticised for 'exhibiting and making exotic marginalised groups and therefore contributing to a form of social pornography' see Lind in Doherty, 2004:109-121).

Marxist, than art offering a different kind of exchange which is not defined by economic exchange:

"It has been said of art, and Marx was the first, that it represents the 'absolute merchandise', because it is the actual image of the value. But what exactly are we talking about? About the art object, not about artistic practice, about the work as it is assumed by the general economy, and not about its own economy (?) Art represents a barter activity that cannot be regulated by any currency, or any 'common substance'. It is the division of meaning in the wild state – an exchange whose form is defined by that of the object itself, before being so defined by definitions foreign to it. The artist's practice and his behaviour as producer, determines the relationship that will be struck up with his work. In other words, what he produces, first and foremost, is relations between people and the world by way of aesthetic objects." (2002:42)

In briefly reviewing the criticisms it shows this middle ground (between mainstream art/gallery and community/socially engaged) represents the contradictory and discursive space that some contemporary art practices occupy; Morgan in terms of exchange and the role and meaning of objects (2003:24-25), Doherty questions the 'vital' engagement and collaborative nature of the art work (2004:9). Stott (like Morgan) is critical of the idea that the art work functions like a social interstice in relation to the capitalist system (2004:16). It seems a rather hermetically sealed discussion where the questions are frustratingly (ten years on from Lacy's *Mapping the Terrain*, 1995) are focused by the artist's responsibility in terms of context for art, issues of authorship which circulate round questions of participation and levels of engagement with others and, how a work (and by extension an art practice) fits, or not, within the predominant socio-economic system. Common sense dictates that unless the specific details and particularities of an art work (or project) are known the discussion stays at this level. It also raises the question on whether an artist's work can be viewed as a single project or art work, or whether this has to be viewed more broadly in terms of the artist's practice or role. For the practitioner this underlines the need for a useful way to think about practice which does not make the artist feel torn by the polemic of mainstream/gallery (where the aesthetic is discussed) versus the 'useful' socio-political work such as the socially engaged art as portrayed in the discourse.

While Bourriaud does not deal with participatory art projects (or mentions any artists within the socially engaged/community art genre) it is Bourriaud's theory of form which is important because it brings the aesthetic right to the heart of the current discussion of values in contemporary art practice. He also gives us important vocabulary for considering specific qualities an artist might have, which helps to develop a way of thinking about practice (which is dealt with later in this chapter).

Bourriaud is aware that this relational art is repeatedly criticised:

“Because they are restricted to the space of galleries and art centres, they contradict the desire for sociability underpinning their meaning. They are also reproached for denying social conflict and dispute, differences and divergences, and the impossibility of communicating within an alienated social space, in favour of an illusory and elitist modelling of forms of sociability, by being limited to the art world” (2002:81-82).

Contrary to the view that relational art is simply 'a watered down form of social critique', he points out that things are simply not this straightforward, the content of these works need to be judged formally in art historical terms specifically 'the criterion of co-existence' or the importance of what he calls the political value of form. By this he means the question of whether the work allows the viewer to 'enter the dialogue' or 'to give the viewer a chance to compliment them' and he gives two examples of past movements Pop art, and Conceptual art as both being an aesthetic in visual terms and having a political value in that it changed the way we see the world. Bourriaud seems to view the aesthetic and political value of art as the symbolic – 'the projection of the symbolic into the real' (ibid:82).

His counter argument is that relational art needs to be understood formally, namely the importance of what he calls the political value of form.

3.7.2 Relational aesthetics as a theory of form

Relational aesthetics in Bourriaud's view represents a departure from an art historical perspective because it does not represent a theory of art which implies 'a statement of origin and destination', rather relational aesthetics represents 'a theory of form' (2002:19). What is important about his theory is that it places the value of art firmly at the level of inter-subjectivity and in relational art practice inter-subjectivity is both a point of departure and an outcome (ibid:44). What form is not is the traditional idea of material form which is based on 'the inventive compatibility' of style and content. Form (or formations as he prefers) seems more complex:

"Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise." (ibid:21)

He describes art as '*keep(ing) together* moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences' giving paintings as an example (ibid:20 italics original). Form comes into being through an encounter or 'the meeting of two realities'. It assumes its texture and exists when it introduces human interaction, but this is more than the Duchampian 'co-efficient of art' Bourriaud tells us which is far from a new idea (ibid:22)³⁷. A crucial point made by Bourriaud is that an encounter involves discussion. These discussions both make the aesthetic form exist, and develops it:

"What was yesterday regarded as formless or 'informal' is no longer these things today. When the aesthetic discussion evolves, the status of form evolves along with it, and through it." (ibid:21)

Though Bourriaud is talking from the art historical perspective here, the implication for participatory practice is that the aesthetic gains a reality through talking and working with others. This lends support to the idea that it is the process which is the important thing, and

³⁷ Where the work only exists by virtue of being seen by someone

that it is here the aesthetic lies (the problem then becoming how to give form or shape to a project).

In terms of participation and levels of engagement, he suggests some relational artists make work which enables people to 'negotiate open relationships with it' and these are not resolved beforehand.³⁸ The different kinds of relationships 'waver' Bourriaud suggests 'between the status of passive consumer and the status of witness, associate, customer, guest, co-producer, and protagonist' (ibid:58). It is as though relational works make the possibility of different kinds relationships, but he does not co-relate these interesting ideas with his many examples. His art historical view is highly theoretical:

"The artistic practice thus resides in the invention of relations between consciousnesses. Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world." (ibid:22)

Bourriaud's description (his theory) of what exactly form might be is 'the bringing together of hitherto unrelated elements' in order to 'create a world'. Examples of form he gives us can be the physical lines and colours of a painting, or a performance, or a page layout, but what is crucial to form is that they are 'lasting'. But lasting is not longevity it is to do with a sense of wholeness:

"... they turn out to be lasting from the moment when their components form a whole whose sense 'holds good' at the moment of their birth, stirring up new 'possibilities of life'." (ibid:20)

This is a very good description of what something newly created might be - the artwork is analogous with a life form. It is interesting that he relies on visual examples to illustrate relational form, given that space and time are also elements in his theory of form.

He describes a particular form being like a world where artists 'get elements held apart to meet'. Today however the 'glue' that holds these elements together is less obvious as a form,

³⁸ The examples Bourriaud cites are Gonzales-Torres, Angela Bulloch, Carsten Holler, Gabriel Orozco and Pierre Huyghe (ibid:58).

not only because our visual experience has become much more sophisticated, but also what form is not. Form is not 'the simple secondary effect' of a composition which is the rational of the 'formalistic aesthetic' (ibid:20).³⁹ He describes form as coherent unit, a structure or an independent entity of 'inner dependencies' and likens this to atoms where if one atom swerves off course and encounters other atoms this has a kind of knock-on effect with other atoms causing a pile-up. This analogy from physics places artistic form coming from a deviation or 'random encounter between two hitherto parallel elements' (ibid:19). Form comes into being through its elements (like atoms) being joined together so they 'set like ice'. An appropriate metaphor given that time and space are factors in relational practices that might flow like water. (Setting like ice might also mean melting as the work's affecting quality diminishes and returns to the flow of water). Bourriaud suggests that elements relational artists might use could be a social fact which can be imagined as a thing:⁴⁰

"... an ensemble of facts that happen in time and space and whose unity (making it a form, a world) cannot be questioned" (ibid:20).

He describes that form might consist of elements which are material and immaterial (e.g. time, social facts, collisions of things) and stresses the instability and diversity of what forms can be, but beyond this the relational work acts as a trajectory:

"... the principle acting as a trajectory evolving through signs, objects, forms and gestures ... the contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination. An artwork is a dot on a line." (ibid:20-21)

Form seems to be both an idea made tangible, but the suggestion is that form is more than a set of elements with a sense of wholeness (like a dot), it is the *effect* of the work (trajectory). If we imagine the trajectory as the line this seems to be what he suggests the *style* of a work is. The style of a work (drawing from Deleuze and Guattari) he describes as 'a movement of thought' (ibid:94-5).⁴¹

³⁹ Form is not in 'the modernist tradition' to do with 'formal beauty' nor the 'compatibility' of 'style and content' (ibid:21).

⁴⁰ Bourriaud is quoting Durkheim, the sociologist

⁴¹ Here he draws from Deleuze and Guattari *What is philosophy?* Verso, London, 1994. It also seems close to de Certeau's thinking in *Culture in the Plural* when he describes cultural operations as 'movements'. What is creative is 'the gesture that allows a group to invent itself' (1997:140-5).

An example Bourriaud offers is by Tirivanija, a Thai artist who takes his traditional cooking (utensils and ingredients) into the gallery space and performs cooking and allows the audience to participate. This creates a 'convivial space', but Bourriaud suggests this is not the most important thing, it is *the fleeting image the event produces*:

"... the purpose is not conviviality, but the product of this conviviality, otherwise put, a complex form that combines a formal structure, objects made available to visitors, and the fleeting image issuing from collective behaviour. In a way, the user value of conviviality intermingles with its exhibition value, within a visual project. It is not a matter of representing angelic worlds, but of producing the conditions thereof."

(ibid:83)

Bourriaud seems again to be drawing on de Certeau's idea on social relations, where it is not the event itself but the effect which is important when he says:

"The aura of art no longer lies in the hinter-world represented by the work, nor in the form itself, but in front of it, within the temporary collective form that it produces by being put on show." (ibid:61)

For de Certeau the goal of a play, a public gathering or a rock concert is to enable a feeling of collectivity which comes into being through acts of self representation (1997:140). Here we get to the rub of knowing where the deeper value of relational art might lie. It is not the event, but the affecting quality of the event, or at least what it symbolizes.

For de Certeau co-production is not the relationship of actors and spectators it is about expression in language which is a kind of movement which 'locates a passage of collectivity' (1997:140). Whether it is an evening out with friends, going to the theatre, or a demonstration, what is common and essential to these expressions is that 'a social group is produced by producing a language.' (ibid). This is a very important idea for participatory practice. For de Certeau the reality of an expression comes into being (and what Bourriaud seems to be suggesting form is) *through being part of the expression*. De Certeau makes it explicit that the true expression of the work cannot be reduced to the recordings or to the remainders it leaves

behind, these are 'residue' (ibid). Similarly Bourriaud suggests that a relational work's 'community effect' of collective behaviour is 'a fleeting image' (2002:61).

De Certeau argues that for three quarters of a century the human sciences concerned themselves with looking for coherences in the architecture of social life and subsequently it 'neglected the operations that cut through them' (1998:145). This seems to be where Bourriaud is suggesting relational forms exist – a meeting of different realities.

If relational arts values and methods were placed within the everyday the 'glue' Bourriaud describes (which can be interpreted as an artist's way of thinking) which brings together the disparate elements seems closer to the grass roots activity of 'creations in coherencies' de Certeau speaks of in *Culture in the Plural* (1997). Relational networks become at once more complex and multidimensional. Artists might cut through the hierarchies and systems which is what de Certeau suggests cultural operations do:

"Generally speaking, the cultural operation might be represented as a *trajectory* relating to the places that determine its conditions of possibility. It is the *practice of a space* that is already constructed when it introduces an innovation or a displacement. By 'places' I mean the determined and differentiated places organized by the economic system, social hierarchies, the various types of syntax in a language, traditions of custom and mentality, psychological structures." (1997:145 italics original)

For de Certeau the disseminated creativity in ordinary culture is marginal in the sense that 'it exists precisely along the interstice or the margin that it opens up', a kind of 'rift in the system that at once lends support to it and its conditions of possibility' (ibid:141). For the artist we can imagine the interstice like cracks or fissures within the dominant socio-economic structures and systems of power relationships. The interstice is a kind of between space and is the space of potential transformation. It is (for de Certeau) where tactical activity operates. It is a moot point whether the relational practices Bourriaud cites are marginal given that they operate in the mainstream of art, but this is not my argument (though Bourriaud describes relational art practices as 'orphans' in terms of art history (2002:13)). The important point is that the aim of relational art is a proposal to live in a shared world and that relational form is

paradoxically harder to see, not simply because it may be less visual, working with time and space as materials, but arguably in its more ordinariness of its activities (relative to the traditional professional artist-author). Bourriaud quotes Guattari from thirty years ago on the more modest proliferations, the hands-on approach of relational art which tries to create 'micro-utopias' and 'imitative strategies':

"Just as I think it is illusory to aim at a step by step transformation of society, so I think that the microscopic attempts, of the community and neighbourhood committee type, the organisation of day-nurseries in the faculty, and the like play a crucial role" (ibid:45).⁴²

Bourriaud describes the underlying rationale of relational art practices:

"These days, utopia is being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in real time of concrete and intentionally fragmentary experiments It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows. That is all, but it is quite something." (ibid).

De Certeau's relational tactics are not liberatory in any material sense, but are the smaller victories in our daily lives which disrupt the fatality of the given.⁴³ It seems that (in theory) relational practices are similarly modelling tactical activities. Relational art is no longer about representing the world (a traditional function of the visual artist) but through smaller, as de Certeau might say, a *plurality* of activities which in Bourriaud's relational aesthetic try to connect different levels of subjectivities.

Although Bourriaud might justifiably be criticised for the scant way he describes the many practices he brings together to develop his theory he does offer important ideas and vocabulary on qualities which artists might have, particularly if transposed to participatory practice (artists working directly with other people to make art). What Bourriaud also does is place and discuss the value of art firmly at the level of subjectivity which is how he describes 'the political value of form'.

⁴² Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, Penguin, 1984

⁴³ Buchanan makes this point in his development of de Certeau's tactics (2000:104).

3.7.3 Subjectivity and the political value of form

Bourriaud makes it very clear that the context for relational art work is inter-human relations so the site of art work, so to speak, is subjectivity itself. (This makes the arguments against relational aesthetics earlier seem a little too quick to dismiss the subtler qualities). The root of artistic practice Bourriaud tells us 'lies in the production of subjectivity; it matters little what the specific productions method may be' (2002:102). To think about the value of art at the level of inter-subjectivity Bourriaud draws from Guattari.⁴⁴ His interpretation of Guattari's argument is that the polemic of pure genius of the artist and the death of the author is a completely phoney problem because the individual does not have a monopoly on subjectivity (ibid:93). Bourriaud sketches the issue of authorship in art historical terms:

"Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Beuys and Warhol all constructed their work on a system of exchanges with social movements, unhinging the mental 'ivory tower' myth allocated to the artist by the Romantic ideology ... The signature, which seals into the artistic economy the exchange mechanisms of subjectivity (an exclusive form of its distribution, turning it into a commodity), implies a loss of polyphony, of that rough form of subjectivity represented by the many-voiceness". (ibid:93)

Subjectivity is a 'plural subjectivity' (ibid:95).⁴⁵ He suggests that subjectivity and the style of a work in art terms are often confused by not appreciating this 'polyphony'. Yet this polyphony in terms of making meaning seems for Bourriaud at the level of linking elements of cultural representation rather than a polyphony through making art with other individuals.

Never the less Bourriaud sharply describes the value of looking at or experiencing an artwork in that it can 'fix psychic energy', enabling us to re imagine ourselves:

"Art is the thing upon and around which subjectivities can reform itself, the way several light spots are brought together to form a beam, and light a single point."
(ibid:97)

⁴⁴ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An ethicoaesthetic paradigm*, Indiana Press

⁴⁵ The philosopher Nancy (quoted in Morgan, 2003) also views subjectivity as a plurality. In an interview (with Chantal Pontbriand, pp111-119) she describes plurality as being within 'singularity' and this is not stable but is like a 'movement' because it is 'an incessant displacement in the self and in relation to others' (ibid113). Her description of art is also similar to Bourriaud, it's principle quality is to do with 'interlinking' she says that 'it (art) has absolutely nothing else to do.' (ibid: 118)

An interesting idea relevant for participatory practice is his idea of the dynamics of a relational work. He suggests that form only comes into being from the meeting between two levels of reality and it can create a two way process:

"Producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a service in a game of tennis" (ibid:23).

A second important idea for participatory approaches regards the nature of engagement - its accessibility. Bourriaud points out that the essence of sociability, more than anything else, is the need for acknowledgement⁴⁶ (ibid:24) and this links to the accessibility of a work described as a horizon:

"It is the horizon based on which the image may have meaning, by pointing to a desired world, which the beholder thus becomes capable of discussing, and based on which his own desire can rebound." (ibid:23)

This seems to describe what Bourriaud means by the political value of form. To produce form or give form to is to offer a way of entering into a humanizing process. In relational aesthetics that subjectivity depends upon and is formed through contact with other people is a given, but subjectivity far from being natural is constructed, formulated, worked on:

"We must learn to '*seize, enhance and reinvent*' subjectivity, for otherwise we shall see it transformed into a rigid collective apparatus at the exclusive service of the powers that be." (ibid: 89 italics original)⁴⁷

It is simply the case that a sense of self is formulated through relations with other people, we model ourselves 'on the principle of otherness' (ibid:91).

⁴⁶ Bourriaud is quoting from Tzvetan Todorov: *La Vie Commune, Editions du Seuil, 1994.*

⁴⁷ Bourriaud is quoting Guattari.

Bourriaud is explicit on what he regards as 'the most burning issue' in contemporary visual art - it is no longer about representation. Characterized by 'social experiments', relational art lacks aesthetic resolution in a formal sense. Forms come together through a kind of random materialism and they spread out and have a linking quality. His description of what relational form might actually comprise is suggestive and provocative yet his examples of relational art in terms of the political value of form (the criterion of co-existence) are primarily discrete events or exhibitions (e.g. Tirivanija). Bourriaud is of course talking from within his paradigm as curator and art historian but from the practitioner's perspective it is his proposal that relational art acts as a 'trajectory' that is particularly interesting. The implication here concerns the timescales we use to consider relational art on two levels. Firstly that artworks are considered (participatory) *projects* and secondly the need for a longer view on an artists' body of work - relational in terms of the *role* an artist might form. These and related issues are taken up in Chapter 5.

3.7.4 What does relational form look like? Two examples

Two examples which illustrate what relational form might be and look like are the recently acquired archive from the work of APG by the artists Stevini and Latham⁴⁸ and the work by an interdisciplinary, international collective called *multiplicities*.

APG

The artists Stevini and Latham of APG (Artists Placement Group) were the first to attempt 'repositioning art in society' by placing artists directly in industry and the civil service. In the late 1960's and 70's various artists were placed, through APG, in areas not traditionally considered sites of artistic activity (e.g. with British Steel, Esso Petroleum, Ocean Fleet, Department of Environment).

A condition of a placement involved using *The Open Brief* which stipulated a minimum of three months before any agreement was reached between the artist and 'host' organization to take a project forward. An aim was that both parties shared the risk. This model is still highly relevant (and resonates with the OTE approach). It is significant that along with *The Open*

⁴⁸ Bourriaud does mention the work by APG and cites John Latham very briefly (ibid:35).

Brief a description of the artist is given placing emphasis on autonomy for everyone involved in an art project '(all) individuals may work from their own experience, free from received ideas and dictates' (see Appendix 3 *The 'Incidental' Person*, Latham, 1977).

Now housed in Tate Britain (March 2005) the archive comprises annotated letters, (amendments and comments), typed single A4 sheets with definitions of their practice and a rather odd assortment of photos and newspaper clippings and some pieces of video.⁴⁹ Because of the vision of what they did thirty odd years ago this assortment of records is the artwork on one level. It documents in a rather sketchy way the radical idea to place artists within the decision making processes. APG opened the doors for future generations of artists to take more active roles in society - a very powerful trajectory. It is noteworthy that the archive is only now available for younger artists to see and learn from and the legacy in terms of its lasting value has yet to be presented in a more coherent and critical form.⁵⁰

Fig. 8 Documents from the APG Archive, Tate Britain, March 2005

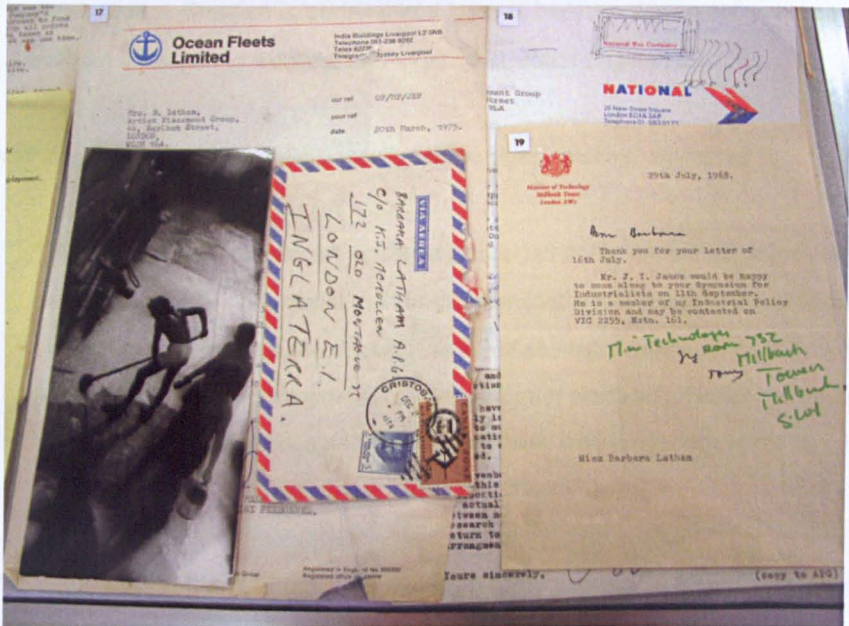
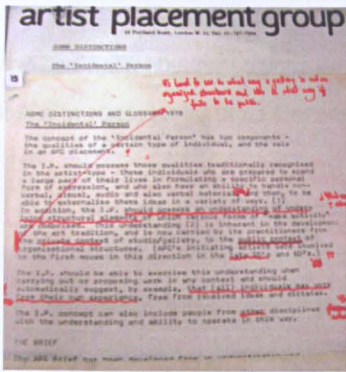
multiplicity

Another example of what a relational form might comprise comes from an artist collective *multiplicity* where artists work with many other disciplines such as architects and environmentalists to bring to light 'social facts' which are presented on the web as a set of voices. For example one of their projects *Solid Sea* takes its site as the Mediterranean and deals with the tragic loss at sea of 283 immigrants of mixed nationalities which was and is still ignored by the authorities. The art work includes interviews from the Sicilian fishermen, local police and other people and uses images, films and maps. This includes a visualization (or re-envisioning) of the Mediterranean as a 'solid space' which is 'crossed with different depths and with different vectors by clearly distinct fluxes of people, goods, information and money' (see www.multiplicity.it). This is a space where fishermen, the naval forces, tourists, and cargoes move about but do not usually connect in any way. *Solid Sea* began with fishermen finding bits of clothing in their nets and grew into an art project in the sense of bringing different perspectives together to tell this story and highlight the tragedy.

⁴⁹ I represented OTE which was invited to attend this event at Tate Britain to launch the archive *Art and Social Intervention*, 23-24th March 2005

⁵⁰ This seems an area of potential future art-academic research. For one of the few overviews of their work as described by Stevini see http://www.interrupt-symposia.org/articles/read.cgi?bs_educator_1 (downloaded 20/4/04)

Fig. 8 Documents from the APG Archive, Tate Britain, March 2005



3.7.5 Creative activity within the everyday

With the aesthetic concerned with something other than 'aesthetic consumption' (Bourriaud), it is useful to consider what de Certeau suggests creativity is. In *Culture in the Plural* he tells us:

"An ideology of property isolates the 'author,' the 'creator,' and the 'work.' In reality, creation is a disseminated proliferation. It swarms and it throbs. A polymorphous carnival infiltrates everywhere, a celebration both in the streets and in the homes for those who are unblinded by the aristocratic and museological model of durable production ... Creation is 'perishable' it 'passes because it is an act' yet 'it cannot exist without a relation to a collectivity.'" (1997:140, italics original).

To illustrate where this feeling of collectivity lies he gives us some examples:

"The goal of the rock concert, a play, a public gathering, and so on, is less one of peeling away the immemorial truth from its laminations in a work than of allowing a collectivity to be constituted through *the act of self-representation*. Its collective gesture is something marginal in relation to former practices. It is also a productive act and, if it stages various and diverse functions, it no longer obeys the law that separates actors from spectators." (ibid, italics added)

What is important about a 'co-production' of people being together at for example a rock concert where there can be a 'taking off' or 'travelling' or 'taking a trip' is the 'common ground' which depends on a feeling of collectivity by being assembled together in some sort of celebration. For de Certeau whether this is simply an evening out organized by friends, or a revolutionary demonstration the common element essential to these expressions is that '*a social group is produced by producing a language*' (1997:141 italics original). What is creative is the gesture that gives rise to this. De Certeau is referring to a collective experience, but the principle in participatory practice as a productive activity is the same.

On the symbolic level Bourriaud suggests the relational aesthetic is a proposal to live in a shared world, with feelings of collectivity as fundamental. But care needs to be exercised over this term collectivity (as with community, see Kwon, 2.5.2). As Bourriaud points out this can

be a 'fleeting moment' that issues from the experience. That collectivity is considered fleeting is important and not romanticised as a liberatory force in a political sense. As an extreme the best examples of art and ritual producing powerful feelings of people feeling united is seen in the emotional high-jacking effect of kitsch. Kitsch can be used for political ends, clearly seen in communist regimes for example.⁵¹

Bourriaud's perspective is that 'art does not transcend everyday preoccupations' what art does is 'confront(s) us with reality by way of the remarkable nature of any relationship to the world through make believe.' He suggests that the most interesting works are those which act as an 'interstice' which he describes as the 'space-time factors governed by an economy going beyond rules in force controlling the management of different kinds of public and audience' (2002:57).

Meetings, events, encounters and connecting people is the spirit of the relational aesthetic which he describes in art historical terms as 'fragmentary' activities and this seems peculiarly close to the idea of tactics as the 'truant freedoms' in everyday practices which de Certeau describes as a 'Brownian motion' in society.⁵² That these more fragmentary activities (in an art historical sense) might lack a political effectiveness is a counter point to the illusionary and unrealistic utopian ideal. (Bourriaud speaks of the momentary 'community effect' with the 'aura' of the artwork being in front of the work not residing in an object). Never the less relational aesthetics as 'a political theory of form' seems to relate to the idea of the artwork as a 'principle acting as a trajectory evolving through signs, objects, forms, gestures' (2002:20-21). From the practitioner perspective this can be interpreted as a style of thinking, (which Bourriaud describes as a 'movement of thought') both at the level of an individual project, and from a longer perspective, the role an artist might form. This relates to the challenging questions (raised in this research) on whether it is the experience of a project or event that is the important thing or its legacy.

⁵¹ The dangers and sadness of kitsch is poetically portrayed by Milan Kundera in his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* set in communist Checkeslovakia. The unifying effect of political kitsch in the Grand March of the May Day parade and the kinds of imagery and ritual used by communist ideology seeks to unite people in an emotional as well as political collectivity. Kitsch is the ultimate tool and Sabrina, the main character, describes her horror of this kind of emotional high-jacking. The sadness and irony of kitsch is described by Kundera as being both that which can most powerfully unite people and depends upon the least discriminating most illusionary romanticised feelings. (1985, Faber and Faber)

⁵² Buchanan helps to clarify the 'logic' of tactics and strategy which are far from clear in de Certeau's texts in terms of having a political and poetic value. The 'Brownian' like activities at work in society suggests a more diffused activity of escape and evasion. Buchanan places the 'truant freedoms' detected in day to day cultural practices as not 'liberatory' though they are essential to the spirit of resisting control or conditioning. Buchanan places tactics in the dimension of belief and likens them to desire. He describes them as 'the set of practices strategy has been unable to domesticate' (2000:89-90). This gives weight to the idea that tactics can have both a political validity and poetic possibility.

3.8 Summary

Ten years on from Lacy's influential *Mapping the Terrain* (1995) there is in the discourse (the external art historical and critical theory perspective) a lack of discussion that deals with the aesthetic *and* the socio-cultural *and* political values of art together.

Bourriaud goes a considerable way to countering this by placing the aesthetic and socio-political values at the level of reforming subjectivity. His is a highly theoretical view overlaid onto a very broad set of practices. But he gives us important vocabulary for the value of art, though it is not focussed by participatory practice per se. His idea on what form comprises is provocative and suggestive. Relational aesthetic he tells us is not a theory of art, but a theory of form and this is important because it concerns 'the political value of form'. Art functions as a linking element, connecting subjectivities.

'Sociability' for Bourriaud and 'collectivity' for de Certeau are central to their ideas on social relations. In focussing on relationship in the art making process two issues are raised in reading de Certeau and Bourriaud. Representation (a conventional function of the visual artist) shifts from the art object to what the relational form of participatory projects might be. The second issue is the question of whether it is the event that is the most important thing or its legacy (this is discussed in Chapter 5).

The challenge in this research is to find/develop a way of thinking about participatory art practice which includes the aesthetic, the artists' thinking process along with its other varied levels (Lacy, 1995). What is needed is a more nuanced articulation of practice from the practitioners' perspective. One that includes the multi-faceted levels of engagement when working with individuals on a person to person basis. Nuanced is an appreciative awareness of the intricate judgements and qualities in a dynamic process of exchange.

To this end the next section proposes a framework to help make sense of practice from the practitioner's perspective before moving on to actual art projects conducted in this research (in Chapter 4).

This framework – a matrix is developed from de Certeau's ideas on 'operativity' and key qualities in Bourriaud's relational aesthetic. This helps situate art practice *within* the everyday and to interrogate relational as a participatory process – where the artist works with other people to realise the artwork.

3.9 A framework for the artist to think about practice

As a way to think about practice *close* is useful in focusing relationship. As a means to an end it sharpened the need to develop an appreciation of the why (motivation) the how (process) and the what (what effect) from the practitioners' perspective. A means which includes the artists' thinking processes, the aesthetic (Lacy, 1985) as well as its other varied levels.

To understand what happens when artists work with other people means trying to make sense of how processes are played out. What is needed from the practitioners' perspective is a way of thinking about inter-subjective processes.

In this section I develop a way of thinking about practice drawing key ideas from de Certeau and Bourriaud. This is considered as putting something into the middle ground (or a more neutral ground) in the sense that art practice does not have to be considered in a polarized or oppositional way. A way of thinking that does not begin by considering the value of the artist as being either intrinsic or instrumental, nor fitting into the more established art templates. As a spectrum of practices this can be imagined as the artist as solo author creating autonomous art works for an unspecified audience at the one end (epitomized by high modernism) and at the other end, the more socially valid but aesthetically compromised community art where artists often facilitate a process for others to make or do something. This end of the spectrum includes approaches within the general term 'new genre public art' which often take socio-economic and cultural problems or issues as their starting point, practices which thoroughly question the relationship between the artist and audience and tend to work with highly politicized issues (see 2.3.1).

As noted earlier Bourriaud draws from de Certeau's thinking, yet the practices he focuses on are very much within the mainstream of art. This could (in terms of drawing from both these theorists) be thought as contrary to de Certeau's aims and belief in focussing on the hidden 'poesis' in ordinary culture and not the privileged space of institutional power and the authority of the producers. For de Certeau the consumer (like the traditional art audience) far from being passive shows an intelligence and inventiveness in the uses made of representations (texts, images, objects etc). However to imagine that there is no distinction between producers and consumers or readers and writers, where we are all a society of readers (or artists) is neither real nor helpful.⁵³ What is interesting is that artists might pay attention to these different productions – the readings and ruses (which de Certeau points to in his research). What artists might do is consider how to frame participation or set up the conditions for a set of exchanges which is a two way process which is sensitive and responsive to the participants experiences. We might imagine relational art as being participatory where artists work with the peoples' everyday cultural experiences. An approach that does not necessarily take as it's starting point a clearly delineated issue or problem in a social or political sense.

To develop a useful way to think about art practice and to not be trapped by dualistic thinking in terms of mainstream gallery art versus socially engaged nor, the art within day to day cultural practices versus artists operating within the everyday I draw out key qualities de Certeau offers us and key qualities Bourriaud offers.

De Certeau's three aspects *the aesthetic, ethical and polemical* are intrinsic to human behaviour. They are not necessarily, in a deliberate or purposeful way made explicit (intelligible) nor shared with other people (known beyond the individual). Arguably it is the artists' quality of transparency (making values explicit) and the desire to live in a shared world (as Bourriaud defines in relational aesthetic) which are important. For my purposes we can

⁵³ Read (1993) makes this point with regard to theatre and the everyday when he points to the potential value of de Certeau's thinking for theatre practice and theory. His interpretation is that the ethical, the poetic and the political are the dimensions which need to inform contemporary theatre practice. This differs from my position where the aesthetic, ethical and polemical are considered a way to think about the intricacies of an emerging practice from the practitioners' perspective. Read does not greatly extend the idea of how a theatre practice might better incorporate the audience (the consumer) but he proposes that if theatre practice were to embrace a more open styled practice sensitive to the audience it immediately implicates an ethics and politics of practice. An important parallel Read detects in the practice of theatre with the discourse on visual art is the 'gulf' between high art, or the institutionalized position and community theatre. This reinforced my belief that the taxonomic view for the practitioner is not helpful in forming a role as artist (see Chapter 2) and the need to develop a way of thinking useful for the practitioner.

imagine that *the aesthetic, the ethical* and the *polemical* are self-consciously modelled by artists in their practices.

3.9.1 Recognising a quality from de Certeau through my own emerging art practice

That de Certeau's ideas on *the aesthetic, ethical* and *polemical* (operativity) might be useful for art practice emerged from my own way of working. This approach is to initiate a process of working collaboratively by bringing art work and ideas (e.g. objects and images I make) to a small group or an individual (usually in their workplace) to initiate dialogue and begin a shared process of making meaning. These objects and/or images can act as a catalyst for creative thinking and/or something new being made. Early work with clinical geneticists (4.2) prompted feedback on a positive quality from being involved in the art process:

"What's fun about this in a way, is learning about each other, but also learning about ourselves because this is encouraging us to say and think things that normally we don't."

(Sheila Simpson, Genetics Department, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, 23 March 2003)

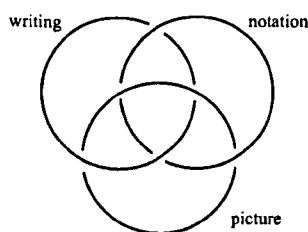
This connected with de Certeau's definition of the ethical as being 'an interval of freedom' 'a space for play' (through a series of meetings and artworks). This led to considering how the three aspects, as he defines them, could have relevance to art practice and that the specific qualities as he describes speak to what an art practice might entail. With an emerging practice the three aspects seemed like a key to make sense of practice. (See also Appendix 6. Delday, published paper - *Genescapes: visualization and value finding*, 2003)

The next step in developing this thought was a connection made with an analysis of visual culture by the theorist Elkins.

3.9.2 Making a connection and developing a construct

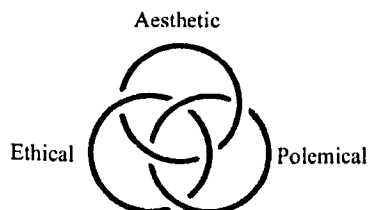
Elkins (1999) surveys, analyses and classifies all visual imagery (art and non art) as three fields - 'writing', 'notation' and 'picture'. He stresses that none of these terms are mutually exclusive, on the contrary, they are interdependent and pure examples are rare or non-existent. To illustrate this he uses the interlocked Borromean rings (as opposed to a Venn diagram) to illustrate this 'tripartite division'.

Fig. 9 Elkins' diagram of the 'domain of images' (1999:86)



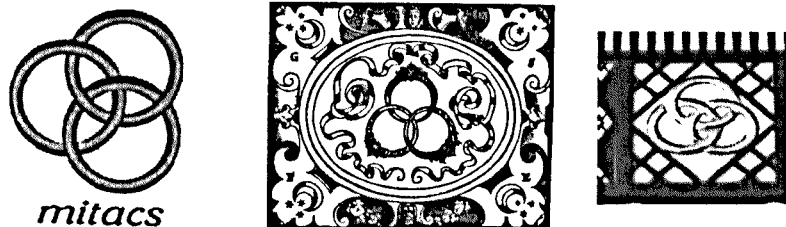
This particular way of interlocking three rings (or three fields) means that if any single ring is removed the other two fall apart. It symbolizes a whole or a unity between the fields. The next figure takes de Certeau's three aspects of operativity and visualizes them as a Borromean knot.

Fig. 10 De Certeau's 'operativity' visualized as a Borromean knot



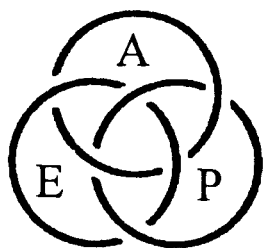
As a construct for representing a way of thinking about art practice it has rich cultural symbolism and psychoanalytical connotations⁵⁴. (See Appendix 4: Borromean Rings, for a brief description of its historical origins and its widespread use across different cultures)

Fig.11 Examples of the Borromean knot (a trademark, heraldry and from a Shinto shrine)



Elkins' use of the Borromean rings (or knot) suggested the aspects as three inter-related dimensions.⁵⁵ The figure (below) is imagined as a foundation or 'plateau' with the knot representing the locus of self.⁵⁶

Fig. 12 Dimensions of art practice



⁵⁴ Elkins points out that Lacan used this structure to suggest the psychic state in that it 'helps indicate that there is no centre to any of the fields, and that the existence of a field is a matter of its circumference – the torus that keeps it in place – rather than the empty space it encloses. For Lacan, Borromean rings are a suggestive image of the state of the psyche, formed by encircled emptiness rather than bounded by psychic 'registers.'" (1999:86)

⁵⁵ Lacan frequently used knots and links in his thinking on psychoanalysis. The Borromean rings represented 'the interrelationships between the 'Real' (the material world), the 'Symbolic' (the world of language and abstract thought, and the 'Imaginary' (the world of vision and dreams)'. <http://www.liv.ac.uk-spmr02/rings/misc.html> (downloaded 15/04/03)

⁵⁶ Buchanan's interpretation of de Certeau's tactics is 'desire' as understood by Deleuze and Guattari. Desire springs from what they call 'a plane of immanence' (2000:15) 'the plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearing in thought' (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1994:37, in Buchanan, 2000:17). As Buchanan points out this plane is not some kind of platform acting as a starting point for thought but it is 'always already begun'. The plane of immanence is all the qualities which go into a particular way of thinking. Buchanan describes this as 'a kind of plateau' which is unique to them 'on which their ideas and concepts circulate.' (2000:16)

3.10 A 'matrix' for art practice

The visual simplicity of the figure is one of its strengths. It is easy to carry around in ones mind and I will refer to it as simply a matrix.⁵⁷ The matrix could (arguably) apply to almost any creative endeavour but for my purposes it represents a plateau, the internal thing upon which judgements about art practice are considered and negotiated.

What I was struggling with - how to make sense of (i.e. how to think about) an emerging practice, and how to interpret a set of other art practices (the OTE projects) suddenly seemed possible. The third inter related question of how does this set of practices (within the umbrella of the OTE initiative) relate to the wider context of ideas was also becoming clearer.

Contemporary art practice considered as being within the everyday is considered important from the art historical perspective. For the practitioner it suggests a more optimistic perspective in the face of post-modernism's relentless deconstruction and that art has to be measured on own terms. It grounds practice as having a connected role in society where art, theory and politics are not a 'zero-sum game but a dialogue' (Papastergiadis, 1998:22). The everyday is where the intricate and reciprocal relations between agency and structure are lived out (ibid:21). The everyday is relationships, work and play and it focuses the local and the particular. It locates the artist within social processes as a connector of subjectivities, and having a sensibility that Papastergiadis suggests 'heightens our senses to the proximity of the marvellous' and 'finding significance in the commonplace signs' (1998:27, see 2.7.2). In other words it is valuing the here, now with these people and re-imagining an aspect of dwelling.

The matrix could act as a construct for thinking about practice within projects i.e. as processes unfold.

⁵⁷ Matrix seems a better term than framework because it suggests a more fluid and adaptable construct. Matrix in science is a term for 'a medium or place wherein something is formed and develops' (Oxford Dictionary of Biomedical and Molecular Biology, 1999).

3.10.1 Key qualities of the matrix from de Certeau

The next two figures draw out the key qualities from de Certeau's definitions of the three aspects as summarized earlier, see Fig.3 Table adapted from de Certeau (1984) and de Certeau et al (1998).

Fig. 13 The matrix adapted from de Certeau (1998)

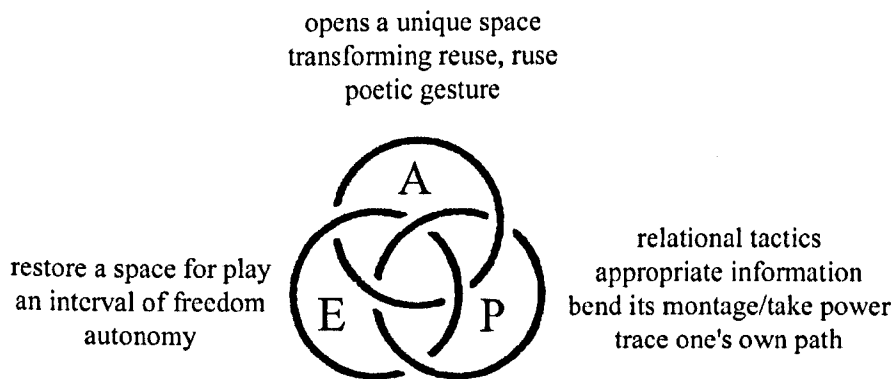
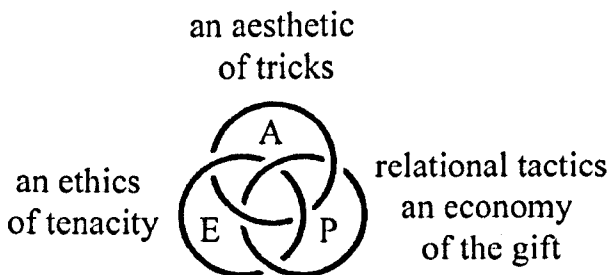


Fig. 14 The matrix adapted from de Certeau (1984)



3.10.2 Key qualities from Bourriaud's relational aesthetic adapted to the matrix

Arguably the kinds of creative activities in day to day living are not necessarily seen (i.e. made explicit) nor shared. What characterizes an artist is fundamentally an act of making something intelligible and sharing or showing this. We can imagine that developing a role as artist is a commitment to 'spending a large part of their lives in formulating a specific form of expression' (Latham, 1977, see Appendix 3: The 'Incidental' Person).

To develop the matrix I draw from the key qualities Bourriaud detects in relational art (i.e. how he defines the relational aesthetic) and configure them to the matrix. This helps to develop the matrix as an idea. We can imagine the qualities from de Certeau within an art context and Bourriaud's relational aesthetic is aligned with actual practice (i.e. not the external art historical view).

The polemical

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the deepest affinities between Bourriaud and de Certeau is the fact that creative production arises from a feeling of resistance of some kind (e.g. the commodification of time and space, the society of spectacle, the alienating effects of modern living).

The ethical

From Bourriaud the ethical dimension takes on three important concepts; 'proposal', 'transparency' and transitivity ('transitive ethic'). The underlying quality of relational art is that it is a proposal to live in a shared world. Transparency is where the artwork sets its sights on being open to dialogue and discussion. Part of the works transparency comes about from the fact that 'the gestures forming and informing it are freely chosen or invented and are part of its subject'. This transparency of making and showing would seem an essentially human thing to do, though this kind of exchange as Bourriaud points out would be 'intolerable to the bigot' (2002:41-42). Bourriaud describes the 'transitive ethic' as an act of showing something which is a condition of 'look at this' where something is freely offered or made available, as being simultaneously 'look at me'. The thing made, proposed or modelled is a direct reflection of the maker. Transitive literally means passing over.

The aesthetic

In Bourriaud's view what is crucial in judging relational art is its 'aesthetic criteria'. He defines this as three things; 'a coherence of form', 'the symbolic value of the world it suggests to us' and 'the image of human relations reflected by it' (ibid:18). Underpinning the relational aesthetic is what Bourriaud calls the 'criterion of co-existence' which is his description of the more user friendly, interactive, relational qualities. What he means by this is what it feels like when viewing or encountering an art work. He suggests we ask the following questions when looking at a work:

"Does it give me a chance to exist in front of it, or on the contrary, does it deny me as subject, refusing to consider the Other in its structure? Does the space-time factor suggested or described by this work, together with the laws governing it, tally with my aspirations in real life? Does it criticise what is deemed to be criticisable? Could I live in a space-time structure corresponding to it in reality?" (ibid:57)

This is close to Inglis' (2004) idea on the 'local aesthetic' where he proposes that artists develop a more inclusive art which does not close the viewer out as was the case with the 'antagonistic' view post-modernism engendered.⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that art is dumbed down, rather it is trying to make something which does not close the viewer out, but is imaginative enough to take us further than what we know. Inglis describes this as 'sufficiently close to be intelligible and sufficiently far away as to be hopeful.'⁵⁹ To imagine that the aesthetic can produce a kind of hopeful effect is to imagine that it might in offering a fresh way of experiencing, stretch us or take us beyond what we know. This raises important questions on how artists make judgements when working with other people to make art.

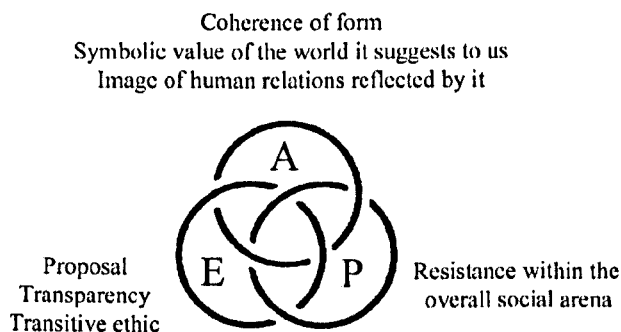
Bourriaud does not discuss relational art as projects nor give us detail on the exact nature of exchanges when people encounter relational works. His view is highly theoretical and overlaid onto a set of practices. Never the less the human qualities he suggests underpinning relational art are important for participatory practices and he adds to the emergent critical language which helps sharpen understandings in practice. (Some of his ideas and language are drawn into the reporting and analysis of projects in Chapter 4, Volumes I and II. This is

⁵⁸ Inglis describes the 'antagonistic' theoretical view as 'the legacy left by Adorno'. This view believed that 'high art' was 'the only refuge from kitsch' which is 'the easy, facile stuff'. This parallels Kester's view on the legacy of post-modernism (see Chapter 2) Inglis, F. *Culture and Affection: the love of art and the meaning of home*, Seminar, Gray's School of Art 23rd June 2004. This paper is available on the OTE website see www.ontheedgesresearch.org - Publications by the wider network

⁵⁹ *ibid*

also the case with de Certeau's thinking). The figure below configures key qualities from Bourriaud's relational aesthetic to the matrix.

Fig. 15 The matrix adapted from Bourriaud (2002)



3.10.3 What the matrix represents

Bourriaud from the art historical perspective argues that relational practices model and draw inspiration from the everyday. De Certeau's cultural theory perspective considers creative practice at the level of human behaviour. Neither perspective on creative activity deal with engaged, participatory practice as such.

To develop the thesis the question of what it is that distinguishes art as a creative activity that is distinct from creativity in everyday practices is understood (defined) in the first instance as the deliberate act of making something intelligible and showing, i.e. sharing this. (The matrix is also informed by de Certeau's broader context of thinking). It is also understood that forming a role as artist requires a substantial time commitment to develop a form of expression (sometimes over a life time).

While characteristics of the 'relational aesthetic' make clear references to de Certeau's theories of culture, key qualities of relational aesthetic are adapted to the matrix that have relevance for participatory practice. This develops the thesis in terms of putting in place a construct – the matrix, that is both foundational (representing the locus of self) and relational in its approach (a proposal to live in a shared world).

We can imagine the artist as someone who self-consciously models the aspects in the matrix. Proposing the matrix represents putting something into the 'middle ground' between the poles of established models (signature and community). It is a response to the absence (as noted by Lacy, 1995) of the aesthetic and the artist's thinking processes (in the discourse) along with its other levels. The matrix is a way of representing and considering these dimensions along with the socio-political dimensions. It also represents a *positioning of practice* where the everyday as a critical concept has ideas and theories beneficial to think about the complexities of dynamic processes from inside practice (see 2.7 Close and the everyday as an orientation for practice). The matrix is a way of interconnecting my research questions i.e. formulating a response to them.

Art *within* the everyday is taken to be working with people's everyday social and cultural experiences. This (emergent) approach places art as a process of making meaning with individuals that draws from and contributes to shared social spaces.

With these figures - the matrix it helps to imagine a kind of relational art i.e. an approach (in this research) where artists work with other people (who are not necessarily familiar or consider themselves creative in an art sense) to realise an artwork.

A loose descriptor for this artistic approach is 'participatory relational practice'.

3.11 Constructing the matrix as a response to the research questions: a note on practice-led art research

It is now possible to imagine art practice as having three inter-related and inter-dependent dimensions. Practice as having an ethical basis (a set of values), what emerges from this (the aesthetic as judgement) and the meanings made as corresponding to the polemical (resistance). The matrix is a simple (visual) structure representing a core or foundation upon which judgements and negotiations are made from the practitioners' perspective. It is a way of representing and considering the aesthetic dimension as part of an interdependent whole.

The journey of this research is constructing the matrix. As a critical framework the matrix is a way of formulating an approach to my research questions (see 2.9). To rephrase these slightly the questions are:

to find/develop a way to think about practice from inside practice

to interpret other artistic practices (from the OTE set of art projects)

to make sense of what an artist's role might entail as being the way artists engage with and position their practices in relation to the wider macro-frameworks (the questions posed by OTE, see xi)

and to deal with this set of questions as inter-connected

It must be noted that much of this thinking comes from actually constructing the matrix through practice (which is dealt with in the next chapter). A difficulty I had in this research was dealing with reflexive learning – how practice and theory can inform each other. Initially trying to be faithful to the chronology of what was learnt and at what point in time became too complicated for the reader. Subsequently the thesis was restructured. The danger of doing this is that the matrix is viewed as a prior and considered useful because the qualities fit with the practices which are dealt with. What happens in reality is a series of realisations where understandings emerge little by little. For example in noticing tactics in my own practice I begin to understand them on the deeper internal level as a quality of thinking (through reading Highmore and Buchanan in their interpretation of de Certeau). Similarly, through using the matrix to interpret other art practices (two artists engaged by *On the Edge*) the interdependencies of the three dimensions became clearer.

The next chapter deals with actual practice.

Chapter 4

Using and constructing the matrix as a way to think about art practice

4.1 Introduction to the projects and notes on methodology

De Certeau's hope is that his research and proposal for 'a practical science of singularity' will allow other people to 'uncover' or recognise 'their own tactics, their own creations, and their own initiatives' (1984:ix). Taking up this challenge in terms of art practice, I proposed and developed (in Chapter 3) a matrix comprising *the aesthetic, ethical and polemical* as three inter-related dimensions to help make sense of an approach that is loosely termed participatory relational practice.

4.1.1 Content of Chapter 4 in Volume I and Volume II

The matrix is a way of formulating an approach to the question of finding/developing a way to think about participatory practice from the practitioners' perspective. It is constructed through practice and by interpreting other art practices. I look at (A) three projects from my emerging practice. Following this I introduce the On the Edge methodology and look in detail at (B) other practices, selecting two artists engaged by OTE (Benn and Carter).

Chapter 4 is split into two volumes. In Volume II the detailed field work is presented as a step by step account of *The Process* in each of my projects followed by my structured conversations (interviews) with two artists engaged by OTE to conduct two projects. After each project is a detailed interpretative analysis using the matrix (see *Analysis using the matrix*).

In this volume there is a brief *Introduction* to each project followed by a *Summary analysis* from both *The process* and the *Analysis using the matrix* as detailed in Volume II.

My projects are:

4.2 Early work with clinical geneticists: Pandora's Box (Sept 01),

Genescapes (Feb 03) and *Inheritance* (Feb 03)

4.3 Interference (June 04)

4.4 The Waiting Room project (Sept 03 - June 05)

This is followed by findings from across this set of projects (**see 4.5**)

I then introduce the methodology of the broader OTE research initiative (**see 4.6**).

Following this I look at two artists (Benn and Carter). In each case I introduce the OTE art project challenge followed by the *Summary analysis* of the work by the two artists.

4.7 Susan Benn in the OTE project the Maakin Lab (May 2003)

4.8 Paul Carter in the OTE project Edge FM (June 2003)

Following this I give findings from interpreting these two art practices (**see 4.9**)

Finally I give findings from across all the projects that emerge from using and constructing the matrix (**see 4.10**)

Because this part of the research can be accessed in different ways please refer to Notes on guidance for the reader (iv)

4.1.2 A note on project outputs

At points in this chapter the reader's attention is directed to outputs from the research which accompanies the written thesis. These are indicated in the text:

- i) A CD containing *Visual Dialogues* which are short sequences of images with a sprinkling of texts from my projects (as Microsoft Power Point files)
- ii) A CD containing a web site for the *Maakin Lab*. Both CD's are in the back of Volume II

4.1.3 A note on ethics

Because the artistic approach is to engage and work with other people to realise an artwork (participatory practice) the ethical issue of disclosure arises. In each of the artist-researcher's own projects the participants were made fully aware from the outset that the project was part of a doctoral study.

Transcripts of conversations were given back to some of the participants to comment on and give permission for use where the material was sensitive. Transcripts of the structured conversations with the artists engaged by *On the Edge* were also given back to the artists for comment and permission. In the work with staff in a hospital (*The Waiting Room Project*) and with the geneticists a project brief was devised by the researcher at the outset and given to the participants explaining the purpose and the artistic approach as exploratory and dialogic. In all cases the participants were happy for the researcher to document the process as photographs and audio tape.

For each of the five projects in my own work an output entitled 'Visual Dialogue' served as a sketch of the experience and were given back (on CD's) to the participants prior to the thesis completion.

This also acted as a small gift to the participants for taking part.

(A. My projects)

4.2 Developing art work through dialogue - co-operative working:
Early work with a group of geneticists: Pandora's Box, 23 Genescapes,
and Inheritance (Aug 2001 – Feb 2003).

4.2.1 Introduction to the project

This project is a series of three art works in an on-going relationship with a group of clinical geneticists. The work began from my interest in genetics and the beginnings of an artistic approach (stemming from an MA study, Gray's School of Art, 2001). I made work on the subject of genetics and approached a group of clinicians to discuss and develop the work. This dialogic process led to new thinking and new artworks being made as an on-going process of exchange.

It was in this early work that I made a connection that initiated and led to the subsequent development of the matrix.

(For details of the project see Volume II)

(For an output from the project – three artworks, see Visual dialogue on the CD)

4.2.3 Summary analysis of learning about the artistic process

The matrix (the aesthetic, ethical and polemical) was useful because in the first instance it drew my attention to a value of being involved in the art process as described by one of the geneticists. The ethical as 'an interval of freedom' (de Certeau) connected with art encouraging the geneticists to 'speak and think differently' which was linked to 'learning about ourselves and each other' (Simpson, March 2003). I understood (could imagine) art as a special way of holding a conversation where making meaning can be co-produced (*Pandora's Box*) contested and elaborated on (*Genescapes*).

I understood the aesthetic as a transforming reuse of materials (*Pandora's Box* and *Genescapes*) and representation (tartan mixed with DNA in *Inheritance*). I began to identify specific aesthetic tricks and ruses of the art object as a catalyst (e.g. making sets encourages comparison, how a metaphor can be a movable object taking on different meanings, the visual gestalt of looking at something close up and from a distance in *Inheritance*).

A second transforming reuse (and a poetic gesture) came from a participant realizing the intention of an artwork (Simpson's naming of *Pandora's Box*) and then appropriating this into her context. In this way the art work spiralled out (to scientists in Copenhagen, a local church group in her village and a colleague in the hospital).

The polemical was understood as how graphic design thinking rubs up with art thinking. Resistance as not doing what I did before - not a design 'solution', not a consensus, but almost the opposite – open ended conversation. The polemical as a kind of internal resistance, or tension (like thresholds) in trying go beyond what I did before - to not illustrate, to not know or predict what might come out of the process.

I wondered whether this series of meetings, events and other exchanges was a project. It felt (and feels) more like a set of relationships. I wondered whether this was lack of direction on my part (project suggests a beginning, middle and end) and whether I should be more proactive in pushing the work out to a wider audience. I felt happy that it could be re appropriated by someone else (*Pandora's Box*) but was this lack of ambition on my part?

From *Inheritance* I considered the way art work is made available (in a corridor in a maternity hospital) and speculated on how art might '*keep moments of subjectivity together*' (Bourriard) albeit briefly. The effect of having art work was described simply as 'added value' (John Dean, Feb 03).

I began to realise the difficulty of this way of working in terms of communicating the quality of the experience. This account is vastly reduced. There were many more tangled threads and links. I felt a tension from a graphic design mind set to articulate a step by step development of actual art works made according to a linear cause and effect dynamic – a clear communicative aim refined in a design brief resulting in a design 'solution'. While it is easy to

see with *Pandora's Box* a clear co-production, I came to imagine the way objects, thinking and dialogue interweave and connect as the usually 'silent' and 'invisible' productions de Certeau speaks of (the readings, trajectories and subtexts in dialogues) but these are difficult to communicate easily. (A list of meetings and transcriptions from these conversations with the geneticists is given in Appendix 7. One of these transcriptions is included in the appendices to give a flavour of the conversations see Appendix 5).

I worried about the term collaborative, which I felt implies a defined input (by the artist and other people) to a known output/outcome. I wondered what exactly participant meant, participation was made up of exchanges which was much more than dialogue (e.g. invitations, introductions, transcripts, objects which the geneticists also brought to the table, e mails, time given). Both terms (collaborator and participant) seemed inadequate. Bourriaud suggests there are different kinds of relationships with relational artworks (witness, associate, customer, guest, co-producer, protagonist, 2002:58). Because I worked with the geneticists over time there was a level of trust. All of these words seemed appropriate but not restricted to the participants but also the artist depending on the point of time. For example the artist could be considered a guest by being in their context. When Sheila appropriated an artwork the artist could be an associate, a co-producer.

Close as a quality of engagement can be read between the lines (in the transcripts) and exchanges were tangible things (e.g. scientific documents, transcripts of our conversations) and intangibles, like the time and thinking given by the geneticists. I wondered whether if nothing much came from the meetings and dialogues if this important (e.g. Astrid's ideas on knitting not being realised)? Co-operative working seemed a better term, less fixed and looser in terms of what people wanted to give and take from the process.

It was the small (micro-level) things that mattered i.e. felt valuable - a knowing glance, an introduction to someone, the symbolism of the historical forceps (*Inheritance*) an invitation to someone's home, moments of laughter and conviviality, close as what is read between the lines (in the transcripts). Process is a series of reciprocal exchanges that are tangled and sometimes oblique. A key value is understood as a shared freedom to think and speak differently and this is linked to learning.

Close in relationship can be mutually enriching.

4.3 Understanding spatial practice and tactics: *Interference*

(9th June 2004, 2.10pm – 2.40pm)

Collaboration with staff at the Genetics Department, Medical School, Foresterhill, Aberdeen
Royal Infirmary

4.3.1 Introduction to the project

I had made printed silks as a result of working with staff at the Huntly hospital (see *Waiting Room Project 4.4*). Due to health and safety restrictions we could not use or develop these silks further (and the project developed in a different way). I had been invited by one of the geneticists (Simpson) to show and discuss the silks at a lecture she was giving to PhD students however due to unforeseen circumstances the lecture was cancelled. The ensuing event (*Interference*) was not planned and took place with administrative staff and genetics nurses who I had not previously worked with.

(For details of the project and the analysis using the matrix see Volume II)

(For an output from the project see Visual Dialogue on the CD)

4.3.4 Summary analysis of learning about the artistic process

This work is more spontaneous and improvisational than previous work. Improvisation is central in this experience and seems fundamental to the quality and nature of participation as an exploratory and dynamic process of exchange.

The 'aesthetic trick' (de Certeau) of bringing (large) printed silks invites handling them so touch, movement as well as looking and talking is part of the experience. This episode is short, fast and performative, gathering meaning and momentum. Role seems like guiding and being guided rather than facilitating a process. I recognise a deeper meaning of tactic (through parodying role as artist). This feels slightly subversive, the polemical as a deviation, shifting the use of space and time. It feels like stolen time, a playful transgression (de

Certeau) in the genetics department. I imagine artwork (process) as 'insinuating' (de Certeau) itself into the everyday.

We break with the pattern of routine in a temporary interval that reduces, blurs or mixes up the boundaries of work/leisure and artist/participant. *Close* in terms of making the aesthetic real (the aesthetic as a shared experience is co-dependent) feels as though we are all between the stage and the audience. We are simultaneously both, with art objects linking perceptions through their reuse. Reciprocal exchanges creates a mutually 'transforming ruse'.

The everyday gives rise to and acts as a foil for the aesthetic experience. In this sense the everyday as social space has a transitive effect (passing over). This is understood as a remaking of 'place' through the use of art objects acting as catalysts.

Close as a quality of engagement looks retrospectively (in the photographs) like a dance and has a visual paradox – the silks are like veils but veils for seeing through more clearly (which encouraged people to engage and experiment with the silks).

This work high lit a new challenge - the value (and potential contradictions) of capturing the experience. Taking photographs in this event is central to the experience. Questions arise on the process being the actual artwork where time, dialogue, movement are all 'elements' (Bourriaud) making up a playful, slightly transgressive episode.

Close was felt in moments in an open-ended, dynamic process of exchange.

4.4 Developing a set of artistic tools, sharing a polemical space and the idea of autonomy: *The Waiting Room* project (Sept 03-June 05)

4.4.1 Introduction to the project

This collaboration is with six staff in a small rural hospital in Aberdeenshire. The way the project began was through a connection a participant (within the OTE initiative) made. On her recommendation I contacted a member of staff at the Hospital because they were looking for an artist to make art work for the new waiting room at the health centre within the hospital. The project felt initially like a hybrid project of 'public art' and 'community art' with the artist asked to author artwork. The project became through a series of meetings over time a collaborative endeavour where we worked together to realise the artwork as a co-production. The output was a set of waiting poems as prints along with other outcomes.

(For details of the project and the analysis using the matrix see Volume II)

(For an output from the project see Visual Dialogue on the CD)

4.4.4 Summary analysis of learning about the artistic process

In this project I more consciously used a set of tools to frame participation including, the principle of collage (the art of recombining, recycling), lists, a constitution, the idea of a game space and a theme which was left in place for others to use. The theme, constitution and idea to begin a small art collection for the waiting room were initiated by this project.

Collage holds surprises in making them (a technique of collographs I had developed) and as fragments encourages making up new meanings. This was an insistence on my part on a level of abstraction and a more deliberate encouragement of the interaction between abstraction and meaning. With the miniatures, the poems and the process I tried to suggest free association and a loose editing to make new artwork. As people shared their ideas (thinking aloud) the valuing of autonomy became clear.

Processes can be metaphors in terms of describing a quality of engagement. In *Interference* (4.3) people chose to step into the process - a quality of dance. In *Waiting Room* people walked round the edge of the room, bending, picking up, looked closely, showing each other what was found, a quality of beach combing. The deeper moments of contemplation (*close*) were silent, like a pause when thoughts dwell in objects and the poems.

As artist I tried to suspend belief in what might come of the process, to invent (or recognise) tactics and tricks (tools of practice) as I go along, to not have a procedure but to develop an approach. The risk is that maybe nothing much will happen (little engagement or exchange). I shared with the staff frustrations because of the drawn out process and the Health and Safety restrictions. A certain tenacity (ethical) was necessary to see the project through.

I understood the need for something I can use to introduce my practice which outlines the values and parameters I can work with. This could be a personal constitution which describes an approach. This might be an object as well as a very short text.

I had imagined process as an activity of guiding and being guided by the participants (in *Interference*). In this project participation is a sequence of gestures so much of which depends on intangibles like intuition and tacit knowing. The quality of engagement in a process of interactions and exchange is like 'a forest of gestures' (de Certeau 1984). It includes:

listening, prompting, laughing, noticing, moving about, learning about each other, considering/consideration, explaining, describing, suggesting, handling things, focussing, congratulating, feeling tensions, asking questions, suspending belief, making meaning and making non-sense, giving, drawing from experiences, feeling frustrated, compromising, recognising extra effort, noticing the incidental, the trivial, finding the things extra and other, make believe, feeling the group dynamic, sitting, standing, showing, informal but serious, framed but open ... engagement looks like beach combing.

It took a number of meetings and exchanges to finally achieve a certain level of (perceptual) engagement. The idea of (poetic) gesture is linked to Bourriaud's idea of the symbolic value

of art, which in his view is the real value of art. But arguably the light touch of a poetic gesture, is more clearly delineated when set against the backdrop of mainstream practice, it is clearer to see in gallery (whether in or outside the four walls) because the gesture is cut out so to speak (though Bourriaud does suggest relational art is like 'a dot on a line'). This raises interesting questions on what and how to communicate *the symbolic value of art* as a participatory process of making expressive meaning.

The process is considered a series of asymmetrical exchanges (de Certeau also describes the polemical aspect as 'an economy of the gift' sitting in distinction to the dominant value system of equal exchange). If the aesthetic (as a way of doing something and how this might be viewed from the outside) is not cut out of the process (like the exhibition model) but is embedded in a set of experiences this raises questions on how to represent the experience. The subtlety of the (relational) aesthetic as a fine discrimination¹ lies in moments, the sleights of hand. An aesthetic trick (transforming reuse or ruse) or a poetic gesture might lie in a well placed turn of phrase, the sharing of a joke, an e mailed image, sharing a memory - in single defining moments.

This micro-level is important because it is where co-operative working happens (though it is of course not confined to art). With the focus on the process the question of how to re-present art projects raises challenging questions (this is taken up in Chapter 5).

A personal satisfaction came from inverting the assumption of waiting as negative, and that the staff felt some value from being involved (e.g. Eileen noticing participation by the more junior members of staff, the idea that maybe the staff who were not 'arty people' would look at art in a different way and want to participate in future). I realised my way of working has a didactic aspect and this connected to a desire to keep a level of abstraction and openness of meaning in the artwork we made.

Through Elizabeth involving the Day Care staff and patients, Eileen suggesting that they 'stick with the theme of waiting for a few years' and the other suggestions made they seemed to

¹ I borrow this term for the aesthetic in practice from Bleakley who describes the skills of the surgeon. Bleakley describes the aesthetic as 'Judgments in the sensory domain consist of discrimination between sensitivity and acuity. The exercise of such discrimination is the practice of aesthetics' *The aesthetics of medical praxis: medicine as a cultural resource in the posthuman era*, unpublished paper delivered at *Designer Bodies: Towards The Posthuman Condition: An International Symposium*, New Media Scotland and Stills, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 3rd April 2004. (2004:9)

want to take ownership of the project, a possible indication that there had been some value from being involved in the process. (A personal realization, or better, an appreciation is that because we are always hoping, we are always waiting.)

At the opening (where we celebrated the work going up) the suggestions of what could happen was rewarding in that the project felt like a beginning and there was a palpable feeling of we from the shared experience. It is the subtler, incidental things which can make a project rewarding. I liked the care and effort the staff put into the opening to make it into a bit of an occasion (bringing wine and food, laying it out nicely). A certain pride in 'we've done it'. (I overheard Elizabeth talking to the local photographer who asked if 'she had led the project' and Elizabeth replied 'it was all of us'). After the event we went into the second waiting room where the staff discussed how to make the public information 'less cluttered'.

Developing tools and finding ways to loosely frame participation creates a space of exchange (dialogue and other kinds). This space can have a polemical quality in the sense that we shared the constraints (the rules and regulations) and the staff took a critical stance (waiting becomes a theme to be used, not an issue to be avoided). The idea of mutual autonomy is essential to the aesthetic experience, where the art work as a co-production is acted out. We occupied 'place' in a de Certeau sense (physical and virtual) differently.

It felt like a mutually transforming ruse (*close*).

4.5 Findings from using and constructing the matrix in this set of projects

4.5.1 *The matrix as a critical framework to think about practice*

The matrix helps to sensitize the practitioner to see qualities, reflect on values, and consider judgements in inter-subjective processes.

Thinking with the matrix in practice artists can imagine an aesthetic of tricks, transforming ruses and re-uses. The aesthetic can be a poetic gesture coming from a participant (e.g. the naming and use of *Pandora's Box*). The artist can invent ways of trying to engage people in the process (e.g. a game, in *Waiting Room*) and questions arise on how an art object as catalyst works, how we frame participation and the relationship between the two. With the emphasis of making meaning as a process it is a series of gestures and asymmetrical exchanges (e.g. invitations, suggestions, objects, e mails, transcripts as well as dialogue) and the silent or below the horizon 'productions' (de Certeau) can include memories (e.g. in *The Waiting Room*) and appropriations (e.g. of printed silks in *Interference*). Practice seems a diffused activity, a gentle intervention like an 'insinuation'. Process felt like working towards clearing a space of time to make and elaborate meaning. I recognise (inadvertently) a didactic aspect to working with other people who are not familiar with the art process.

Tactics (which live in the polemical dimension) is a very useful way to think about practice. Tactics are like the internal thresholds (one's limitations and contradictions) and the micro-freedoms we aspire to as practitioners (e.g. going beyond graphic design thinking or a fixed mind set). Tactics as how we think can give rise to tools or methods (e.g. using lists in the *Waiting Room* project). Tactics characterise improvisation within a set of constraints (either imposed externally or felt internally e.g. *Interference*). What is important about tactics is their relational quality and that they are recognized through action. Tactics operate in 'the space of the other' (de Certeau) and can be anything from the way our subconscious bubbles through (like memories and humour) and are characteristically responsive to the moment, they live in the saying rather than the said. As a manner of thinking they are not necessarily a set of tools or methods carried from project to project. But paying attention to what tactics are is to learn

about oneself through practice (e.g. parodying a role as artist in *Interference*).² Artists can notice and refine tactics.

With the aesthetic as a transforming of some kind (the artistic means/activity), the ethical as a set of values, the polemical (micro-resistances) is how a practice takes on or assumes form through correspondence with the other two dimensions or forces.³

Resistance as relational tactics is one way to imagine thought processes (e.g. thresholds).⁴

To know what we resist is also to think of our aspirations. In this way the polemical (in a de Certeau sense) is understood as forming, enacting and expressing a view or position, not the harder systems view of fitting (or not fitting) within a specific model of art practice.

4.5.2 The aesthetic as 'transforming'

De Certeau's description of the aesthetic as a 'transforming ruse' can be considered at the level of an idea, the artist's tools and methods as well as the effects. From this set of projects the aesthetic and meaning of an artwork was realized in the moment of its naming by a participant (*Pandora's Box*, by Simpson). The aesthetic was understood as the ploy of shifting form from one sphere to another (the placing of boxes in *Genescapes*) where different readings opened up the discussion on broader issues (e.g. genetic determinism).

Considerations of the aesthetic within the objects as catalysts for new thinking and making (scale, fragments, ambiguity etc) moved to include spatio-temporal considerations (touch, movement) and the idea of how space is occupied. This connects with how participation is framed (imagined as two sides not four in *Interference*) and how the shape of a project unfolds and is not necessarily pre-planned (but can be loosely imagined).

² Lacy (1995) drawing from the artist Kaprow suggests that making art is a process of value finding - our own values as well as other peoples (see 2.3.1).

³ Buchanan describes tactics and strategy as operating on the plane of belief (see 3.4.2).

⁴ Tactics for de Certeau can be interpreted as how we internalize things.

4.5.3 What the matrix gives in the Waiting Room project

For the practitioner the *aesthetic*, *ethical* and *polemical* represent the internal dynamics. We can:

Build a practice vocabulary (ideas and qualities can be added into the matrix from the primary definitions de Certeau gives us as they emerge through practice).

Identify specific tactics (e.g. using lists to open up thinking).

Reflect on values (e.g. ambiguity and choice, the danger of spontaneity, thinking aloud linking with the idea of autonomy).

Consider where judgements (good and bad) are made (e.g. a suggestion closing down the process, using the principle of collage to keep the meaning making process open).

Be sensitive to the interplay between the dimensions as a dynamic or movement.

Draw out qualities of process (e.g. the idea of a shared polemical space).

Form description of what constitutes practice. From this work practice is imagined as trying to open up a space to share a freedom to speak, think and act differently which is intimately linked to learning.⁵

4.5.4 The aesthetic, ethical and polemical dimensions as inter-dependent

From my projects the interpretation was made by drawing out qualities of practice according to the three separate dimensions but they are inextricably linked. For instance thinking aloud (in *The Waiting Room* project) is both an aesthetic (ruse) to encourage people to project their thoughts, and a (personal) resistance to the connoisseurial silence of gallery. Similarly ambiguity (of imagery) is an aesthetic trick to encouraging playful readings prompting discussion on wider issues (e.g. genetic determinism in *Genescapes*) and could be considered an ethic of practice. It is difficult to untangle specific qualities that only live in one dimension because they temper or colour one another. Finding ways of engaging people in the process moved from objects as catalysts for dialogue on a purely visual level to more kinaesthetic considerations (e.g. touch and movement) as important to try and achieve a

⁵ Forming description of practice is crucial to imagining oneself into practice (and in the longer term a role).

richer quality of experience; the aesthetic ruse as playful in a spatial-temporal sense (e.g. *Waiting Room and Interference*).

From inside practice the interplay between the *aesthetic*, *ethical* and the *polemical* changes at different points in the process. This dynamic, embodied by the matrix, became clearer when interpreting other practices (Benn and Carter) and why it has interpretative value for the practitioner.

4.5.5 Summary of the matrix as a thinking tool

The matrix as initially proposed (3.10) represents a way of inter-connecting and considering the research questions.

In summary the matrix as a critical framework acts as a thinking tool for reflecting in and on practice. It can help to:

- a) understand *the content of an individual project*
- b) understand *the nature and form of an emerging approach* (loosely termed 'participatory relational practice')
- c) appreciate that *forming a role as artist is a refinement and clarity of intent and purpose* (through projects over time)

4.6 OTE (On the Edge) an emergent methodology

At the outset of the research initiative OTE began with a rural/urban distinction. This polarity (a binary opposition) is useful initially to take bearings in terms of thinking about the kinds of new roles artists might play (in a rural context).

As my research progressed the everyday as a critical concept is considered valuable. It places the artist within the multi-layered fields of civic society and has benefits for thinking about the nature of creativity e.g. a perceptual shift (see 2.7.2, 2.9 and 3.8). In particular it is de Certeau's thinking on culture as it is actually practiced (the everyday) which is beneficial to think about artistic activity. In *Culture in the Plural*, de Certeau tells us that cultural expressions are operations that 'cut through' the usual stratas and hierarchies of structures and systems (1997). Cultural operations (processes) can be marginal in the sense of existing in the margins of the more dominant ways of working (e.g. hierarchies, clear boundaries). The rural-urban distinction was a way of framing the research, but as the research developed and my understanding, the art (and art-research) activity is much more being within and concerned with the transitional spaces *between* the boundaries and structures that we find ourselves and the frames of reference we inherit (e.g. artist/audience, intrinsic/instrumental, producer/consumer).

OTE wanted to understand what kinds of 'new' visual art approaches and roles artists might play in our (marginal) context – remote/rural. The research process was one of inclusive incremental development where five art projects were developed to explore the value of art in terms of its artistic, cultural and socio-economic worth (see Research context, xi). The programme of projects was realised through the emergent methodology.

New (like original) may be an unfortunate or 'loaded' word in art research, creating tensions between the modernist agenda for innovation as well as evoking the academic notion of 'an original contribution of knowledge'. More accurately what happened is a clearer understanding of an orientation or positioning in terms of *an approach* to art project development. An art-research framework for the project activity brought together a diverse group of individuals in various configurations over three years. OTE was not interested in targeting groups of people for artists to work with - the model of provision (often framed by

artists tackling clearly defined social issues).⁶ The issues that were addressed in the projects came out of a more organic process of discussions and exploration. Another and more productive way of considering why art happens is to ask where ideas come from. The four OTE project outputs (publications) demonstrate a range of individual reasons on why the projects came into being and how they played out. They share in common a disposition to see challenges creatively and to draw artistic thinking into the space – not to solve problems but to enrich thinking in and around judgements and outcomes.

The first gesture by OTE was to ask the individuals representing each of the five organisations what they wanted to do with this art research opportunity. Interestingly in every case the project partners wanted the art project to in some way connect the organisation they represented and the community in which the organisation is based. From these discussions the artist's briefs were carefully constructed to meet the needs of the partners and the research objectives. The workshops were facilitated (by Matarasso) to get the most out of the meetings. For the first half of the research time (approximately 18 months) the workshops focussed on developing the shared ground or basis for projects with a clear mutual understanding of the basis of judgements.

The artists briefs were framed by questions which came from an initial challenge offered up by the project partners:

how to revalue traditional ways of making (knitting) in the *Maakin Lab*

what to do with a field (marginal land use) in *Inthrow*

how to respond to the loss of built heritage (a 16th century tempera painted ceiling) in *Celestial Ceiling*

how to make a museum interesting to local people (a museum of lighthouses) in *Edge FM*

⁶ Obviously this is not to suggest that artists do not engage with serious and urgent social questions, it is an awareness that particularly in urban contexts public funding for visual arts outside the gallery was often framed by issues or problems where 'regeneration' programmes were frequently used in a post industrial context.

what role can a town artist play (with the voluntary arts group Deveron Arts, in Huntly) in *Balfain* (a festival). This project was not completed (see Research context xi).

Clearly OTE is unusual in the sense that it represents another layer in the publicly funded commissioning of art work. While the ethos of the research is one of shared learning, OTE adopted a critical position of suspending belief in what the value of art might be. To understand the value of art across its varied levels and from different perspectives meant a relatively long development time to fine tune the artists briefs with the project partners and to select the right artist for the work. (One of my questions to the artists was how they brought participants on board in a project, e.g. Carter in *Edge FM*, 4.8, Volume II).

The artists worked directly with members of the community in remote rural places i.e. people not normally involved in the making of art. In this sense the artworks (the processes and the results of these) were marginal by taking place where creative production is not the norm. But it is important to clarify marginal. Marginal (not marginalized) in the de Certeau sense describes the character of the OTE approach. For de Certeau margins are the interstices, the 'cracks' and the 'fissures'. These are where culture grows. By developing a network of people who played different parts in the life of the projects which themselves were focused by the everyday activities of organisations, OTE (through its emergent methodology) was in effect growing a mini culture⁷ through a shared process of learning and understanding.⁸

OTE did not set out to deliberately position itself negatively (as some minority languages and cultures do). It was not standing in contra-distinction by deliberately not aligning with more established art models (we of course share qualities). I came to imagine (or describe) OTE's practice-led art research approach to developing art as sitting in the tension space of the margins; the space *between* one person and another, *between* one discipline and another, *between* one sector and another, and *between* the academic institution and the everyday cultural experiences of people not normally associated or involved in the process of making art.

⁷ I borrow this term mini culture from Dr Anne Douglas.

⁸ As we saw in the criticisms of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, institutionally sanctioned art discussed by theorists and curators can become a hermetic argument (see 3.7.1) and also Kwon who frames her argument in terms of artists moving around or not moving around pointing to the increasing popularity of the international circuit of Biennale (see 2.5.2)

OTE used the metaphor of home to prompt thinking on values and artistic positioning. This produced a set of considerations on what the value of the art projects might be. This could be considered a local resistance in the face of accepting values from elsewhere - the partners defined their own set of qualities which spoke to what they wanted in an art project (in OTE Workshop III). This example typifies the research ethos of valuing what different individuals offered up, and from the perspective of the research initiative it was both defining and being defined in a grounded way.⁹

Margins and what is marginal for de Certeau exists in a pluralist theory of social relations, one which is harder to describe but is characteristically resisting, tactical and can draw unexpected results from situations. We behave tactically (to survive) because as individuals we have to deal with unstable systems and shifting boundaries where macro-level frameworks are just too complex for us to either control or escape. Put simply the OTE research framework offered a supportive sustained structure as a reflective and generative space where a diversity of people could come together to contribute to, and draw from, the experience according to their own needs and abilities.

The OTE research framework allowed art projects to be played out in a considered way over a period of time that was felt to be realistic. The value of this was expressed explicitly by the artist Susan Benn (in *Maakin Lab*) and project partner Chris Fremantle (in *Inthrow*). For Susan it was time to really reflect on her practice and consolidate some of her thinking through a process of 'thoughtful critical discussion'. Chris expressed the value in terms of 'being able to ask questions that normally would not be asked'. (For quotes from other people see www.ontheedgeresearch.org - Completed projects and publications).

OTE's 'new' approach is of course relative and it has resonances with de Certeau's logic underpinning 'our culture' as operations which can cut across traditional or mainstream hierarchies and boundary distinctions. Time taken, thoughtful critical discussion which includes a diversity of perspectives and interests in a sustained effort are not new in themselves, but arguably OTE's approach is distinctive and unusual in developing art projects currently in the UK and further afield.

⁹ Lacy described the OTE initiative from viewing the OTE project publications and the first OTE web site as one of 'hybridity' 'multivocal' and developing a 'web of authority' also in *Time in Place: New Genre Public Art Ten Years Later* in Cartiere, C. (ed.) *Re/Placing Art*, University of Minnesota Press (at press, 2006)

4.6.1 A note on the OTE publications

My research is to develop a way to think about practice from the practitioner's perspective. It is out with this thesis to fully describe each project and the dozens of people involved. Suffice to say the most economic and informative way to see the richness of the OTE projects is in the output (three books, *Inthrow*, *Edge FM*, *Celestial Ceiling* and a web site on a CD for the *Maakin Lab*). These are intended to articulate each project as a process from a number of critical perspectives – artists, researchers and participants. I make reference to these where necessary – in my analysis of the work by Benn and Carter (4.7 and 4.8) and briefly in Chapter 5. The OTE website gives an overview of current thinking (see www.ontheedgeresearch.org).

The *Maakin Lab* web site (on the CD) is included in this submission.

4.6.2 Interpreting other art practices: a note on methodology and scope

In this section I use the matrix to interpret the work of two artists engaged by OTE to undertake two projects, Susan Benn in the *Maakin Lab* and Paul Carter in *Edge FM*.¹⁰ My questions were framed after the projects were completed in a series of structured conversations with four artists engaged by OTE.¹¹ I look for qualities of the artists thinking process, how relationships are developed between the artist and participants, and what specific artistic tools and methods they use.

To prepare for these I filter key phrases and points made by the artists in the various OTE 'soundings' (evaluation points), workshops and meetings as the projects were happening.¹²

The full transcribed conversations with Benn and Carter do not appear in the appendices. It

¹⁰ To make an in depth study of the four projects and the six artists engaged by OTE - Susan Benn in the *Maakin Lab*, Gavin Renwick and Neil Shaw in *Inthrow*, Paul Carter in *Edge FM*, Robert Orchardson and John McGeogh in *Celestial Ceiling* and my own practice is not realistic nor necessary in this thesis.

¹¹ These conversations were with Susan Benn (11/06/04), Paul Carter (04/04/04), and Neil Shaw (07/07/04) and Gavin Renwick (08/03/04) both in the OTE project *Inthrow*.

¹² Obviously the OTE projects were happening at the same time as my own and the projects (including my own set) overlapped. This meant there was not a neat sequence of development in terms of constructing and using the matrix. I benefited enormously as artist researcher from seeing and discussing these more established art practices within the thoroughly staged OTE research framework for art project development. The downside was the amount of material I seemed to be dealing with.

was felt more beneficial to the thesis to include four peer reviewed published papers which extend aspects of the OTE research. These four structured conversations informed and were used in part in other publications (e.g. an edited version of the conversation with Shaw appears in the *Inthrow* publication, the conversation with Carter informed and is referenced in the essay by Douglas in *Edge FM*). These four substantial texts could form the basis of future publications in some form.

In the interpretation of the roles played by Benn and Carter I quote extensively from our conversations. There are two reasons for this. An important point made by some of the artists (Benn, Renwick, Shaw and MacGeogh in the *Celestial Ceiling*) was that OTE had given them time to really reflect on what they were doing. Everyday reality of practice does not necessarily allow for this. I feel it is important to let the artists' voices be heard and not over paraphrase (to talk with, not about). Part of art practice is developing a sharper description to communicate what it is that one does. This connects to the second reason. Art practice is not problem solving (like design) nor is it an esoteric process. In reality art practice seems a more challenging thing to do. It is important that artists tell us about their practices in order to understand their feelings and values underpinning an approach.

Arguably artists invent roles for themselves.

4.6.3 Why Benn and Carter?

My involvement in each of the five OTE projects was different one to the next. In the *Maakin Lab* I actually participated in the lab. Benn has a mature practice where some of the other artists were less experienced. Paul Carter works with a group of young people who volunteered to participate or came on board as the project evolved. Benn very carefully selects professional adults well in advance of the project (the lab) happening.

(B. Other practices)

4.7 Giving form to methodology: The artist Susan Benn in *The Maakin Lab* project

Benn has a mature practice developed over 16 years. In her practice she brings professional people from different disciplines together to encourage new creative thinking and collaboration.

This interpretive analysis of her practice draws from my experiences from developing the *Maakin Lab*¹³ as an OTE project, and actually participating in the lab where I would collaborate with Susan.

The *Maakin Lab* output is a website on the *Maakin Lab* CD which accompanies this thesis.¹⁴
(See *Maakin Lab* the CD)

4.7.1 Introduction: the project challenge

The *Maakin Lab* project was developed in partnership with the Shetland College Department of Textiles, On the Edge research and artist Susan Benn of PAL. The research challenge offered up by the project partners (Maggie Marr and Stephanie Tristram) was how to revalue traditional Shetland knitting in terms of its relevance in the lives and livelihoods of Shetland people.

Although indigenous Fair Isle pattern and the fine Shetland lace knitting are known world wide the different socio-economic picture in the wake of the oil boom of the 70's and the old fashioned image knitting has for many of the younger Shetlanders contributed to the decline in the interest of knitting. Finding ways to revalue these traditional forms of making in artistic, cultural, and socio-economic terms was the complex question which the art project addressed.

¹³ 'Maakin' is Shetland vernacular for making and could apply to any craft.

¹⁴ My relationship with this project was to assist in the project's development, take part in the lab itself as artist-researcher and for the output (the website on the CD) work in collaboration with the OTE team to provide and develop the content and design ideas.

(See Volume II for the detailed analysis of her practice understood through a structured conversation and using the matrix)

4.7.5 Summary analysis

Benn has developed and refined her process by giving it a clear form – a light and portable methodology called labs. Labs are a specific way of bringing multi-skilled groups together in a collaborative learning environment which deliberately challenges (resists) perceived disciplinary boundaries and hierarchies of production and consumption. The labs create 'a level playing field' for producing new ideas. The polemical as questioning the givens is very clear in her practice and stems from her personal work experience (frustration) in the creative industries and her anger at the 'waste' of potential creative talent she sees in different situations (the polemical as motivation).

She usually works with professional people who are often 'nominated' or are carefully handpicked to take part in a lab. Participants are asked beforehand to state what they want to develop (an idea, a product). Normally Susan does not take part in a lab though she is usually present as an observer (this was not the case in the *Maakin Lab* because of circumstances). The 'alchemy' of the group is carefully considered beforehand with certain roles named ('Lab director' and 'co-director') to help structure the process as the process unfolds (day by day). The lab begins with a 'residential' element to allow people to get to know each other followed by an intense period of work (usually 5 days). The dynamic of the lab comes from uncertainty, risk and pressure (i.e. self imposed by people trying to push on their creative thinking). The short time span and a deadline to show the results to an external group on the last day add to the group dynamic. The lab as a framework offers a 'safe space' for 'spontaneity' and 'risk of failure' because everyone is in the same situation – struggling to develop an idea or a product of some kind. Collaborations or co-productions are assumed in labs and tend to be the norm.

The aesthetic as a 'transforming ruse' include using cooking as a metaphor to describe the process to other people (e.g. OTE and the participants) and Susan has refined a set of simple but effective tools to structure the lab (e.g. a set of documents such as 'The Welcome

Dossier', 'Testimonials'). The lab (like an invisible container) is transferable to other situations beyond herself and she works internationally across a wide range of disciplines (e.g. the performing arts, new technologies). Central to any lab is dialogue to generate ideas and she considers all the senses, speaking, listening, touch, movement essential to creativity.¹⁵ The framework (lab) clears a space for playfulness, a freedom to experiment where 'risk taking is shared all round' by the lab participants and those supporting it (financially and the project partners). It is risky because there is no guarantee of what the process will produce.

Tactics in her practice seem quite literally 'a struggle to survive' (de Certeau) on the level of PAL as an organisation continuing. Tactics, as a quality of thinking and operating can be seen in the way she identifies a need or opportunity for labs to happen, often in the interstices (of systems and structures) to make a space for 'something that hasn't happened yet'.

Susan cut to chase on the value of an art practice when she described to the OTE group (at the beginning of the *Maakin Lab* project) that 'to value knitting we are talking about valuing the knitters'. Valuing a sense of autonomy is at the heart of this practice where the artist hopes people might 'go beyond what they imagined it was possible they could do'. Her aspiration is that people might 'surprise themselves'.

While the polemical might be about redressing imbalanced power relations and cutting through hierarchical value systems it is also playfulness - an aesthetic of tricks is to flaunt the rules. Susan's tactical thinking gives room to playfulness and playfulness is at the heart of resisting dominant forms - not of representation (the traditional role of artist) - but making a space and time for collaborative possibilities which is at the heart of her perspective on creative learning.

To imagine an aesthetic of tricks is not to imagine a practice of deception, but the more abstract qualities of creative thinking. Tricks and trickster behaviour interferes with order to stimulate change - transforming social relations or our perception of the world in some way. As artist she works between Board rooms and funding agencies and the specific intricate needs of individual artists, she works with different systems of values. An aesthetic of tricks is the transforming power of a playful imagination, to trick order, to cross and mix perceived

¹⁵ This is seen clearly in her recent idea (2005-) to make a lab of the five senses, later re-named 'A pedagogy of curiosity'.

disciplinary boundaries, to chop up the logic of what is given or taken for granted (to look and ask why not), to divert time and make intervals of freedom to experiment.

Criticality is clearly seen in the perceptive and penetrating questions Susan asks – at a participant level to structure a lab, as well as not replicating what anyone else is doing ('finding new arenas'). From this analysis I understood the polemical in an art practice as a position of critical thinking. She understands how her practice sits in the wider frameworks and its value (the principles and the struggles to sustain PAL). She values the small (the micro-level) and considers the larger structures (the macro), as a quality of artistic thinking it is systemic and holistic, it is ideas and pragmatism.

From this interpretation the interplay between qualities in the three dimensions of the matrix became more paired (e.g. the ethical-polemical) and helps give interpretative insights e.g. imagining a question as Benn's sharpest artistic tool ('What is your deep desire?'). At the level of methodology, we see the *aesthetic-polemical* paired. This is like the fit between the resisting qualities (the artist's values and creative agency) and the distinction or character of a practice. The labs are like an invisible container or framework for people to improvise within.

This is a form of participatory relational practice, a role she describes as 'cook'.

That Susan did not view herself as artist is partly because her practice is process not product based and it is significant that in the artist's view the *Maakin Lab* web site (on the CD) is the most successful articulation of a lab thus far.

4.8 The polemical as a position of critical thinking: The artist Paul Carter in the *Edge FM* project

4.8.1 Introduction: the project challenge

Edge FM was developed in partnership with the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, Fraserburgh, On the Edge Research and artist Paul Carter. The research challenge offered up by the project partner (David Bett the Director) was finding a way of bringing young people living locally into the museum. The museum on the outskirts of the town in a lighthouse at Kinnairds Head is known internationally for having the best collection of lenses anywhere in the world, but its connection and role within this small fishing town seemed of marginal interest to the younger generation.

The project brief was focused by the theme of home and identity and Paul proposed and used radio as a vehicle for the project. Identifying and working with a group of young skateboarders and their friends they based themselves in one of the keeper's cottages at the lighthouse and created an identity for the project and themselves. The group, between the ages of 8 and 14 years, audio taped views from the residents of the town on what it meant to live in Fraserburgh along side their own ideas. This was edited into a one hour looped broadcast which was transmitted for two days via the radio mast the youth group erected at the back of the museum. The museum held the licence to make this broadcast and the group of young people gathered and created the content.

(For the detailed analysis of his practice understood through a structured conversation and using the matrix see Volume II)

4.8.3 Summary analysis

The polemical is very clear in Carter's practice and he develops a response to the project brief that challenged assumptions on different levels – the research, the artistic and ideas about ways of working with young people.

Tactics can be read as inverting assumptions of what is expected (e.g. using low tech radio not high tech of digital equipment suggested in the OTE artist's brief) but only in order to be generative in terms of opening up possibilities. Paul helped the group create an identity through being part of the project, rather than the project being about identity (expressing what it means to live in Fraserburgh) and the act taking ownership of the project is the point, not the quality of the broadcast. His decision to use low tech equipment as a vehicle for relations between people (the radio as the site and the means) links to his broader concern of the importance of 'owning the means of production'.

The 'amateur' – his way of describing and thinking about his art practice is a form of resistance. The amateur contrasts with 'professional' that is specialist (and constrains our imaginations) and this links with our increasing reliance on sophisticated technologies. Both of these values distance many people from the means of production whereas amateur suggests the impetus and ways of 'doing things for oneself'. (This resonates with de Certeau's 'making with' and 'making do' which is much more than the 'bricolage' of materials but our life narratives constructed from our personal histories).

In Carter's practice we see the polemical as a position of critical thinking. He is clear and uncompromising on the reasons for the project (*Edge FM*). By situating the project in the lighthouse grounds (i.e. the museum) it becomes the backdrop of adult authority, against which the project plays out. The space is used for other reasons (a transforming ruse) which he acknowledges may run contrary to the 'adult agenda' of making the lighthouse 'feel more theirs' (as indicated in the OTE project brief). This is resistance as subtly tactical because the youth group 'need' the museum 'guards' to make the project feel real. This creates a polemical space that he describes as 'not tokenistic'. A small temporary exhibition also takes place in the museum and *Edge FM* has a visual quality of the amateur, a kind of junk, post

pop art aesthetic, a youthful DIY appearance. It is deliberately not precious, a feel that it is temporary, urgent and politically serious.

While it is easy to see the political side of his practice – the reclamation of a space in the museum (by the youth group) and redrawing power relations within the town by giving the young participants a voice, the aesthetic as a 'poetic gesture' (de Certeau) the light touch and a kind of magic in this project is understood by the artist as the project experience potentially stimulating dialogue and thoughts as 'odd bursts over the future' with possible 'unforeseeable transmutations'. This has a refreshing mystery to it, with the *Edge FM* project publication like a time capsule.

Tactics (for artists) can make room for playfulness and this project seems uncannily like the tactics-strategy relationship de Certeau gives us. We test boundaries through actions within the 'proper' or givens in systems or structures, pushing, nudging, transgressing, reconfiguring time and materials. We 'escape without leaving'.¹⁶ For *Edge FM* to feel real it needed a backdrop of authority against which their project played out in what can be imagined as a polemical space in a physical and a virtual sense (or ideological as Paul describes). This kind *aesthetic-polemical* sensibility expands the limits of what was expected to something more risky and more ambitious (than the artists' brief suggested).

We see the aesthetic inextricably linked with the polemical (as subtle subversive *relational* tactics). As a quality of thinking it underpins the artist's motivation and it is embodied in the shape the project – visually and spatio-temporally. It also operates on the socio-political levels. It is characteristically *between* the political and the aesthetic, it cannot be reduced to either or, rather both enrich each other.¹⁷

From this interpretation I could imagine a polemical space, as something not unlike a bubble - it exists through having a *relational tension*. I could understand that tactics can make room for playfulness and are at the heart of resisting dominant forms, not of aesthetic representation

¹⁶ Buchanan's interpretation of de Certeau's tactics is that they operate on 'the plane of immanence'. He is making reference to Deleuze and Guattaris idea in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Quoting de Certeau he likens this plane to the 'imaginary landscape' and suggests that tactics function on a deep level like desire. The 'mobile infinity of tactics' speaks to the social imagination that can 'construct a new and indeed renewing image of culture and society' (2000:14-15).

¹⁷ Characteristic in terms of de Certeau's thinking. He discusses and describes the power of an artwork *The Lagoon Cycle* as being both political and aesthetic e.g. the political as making 'thoughtful discussion' possible. The work 'reaches out' and asks us to think about our desires and dreams, see 3.6.5.

(e.g. the DIY 'junk' aesthetic which is quite fashionable currently) but the aesthetic issuing from a resisting and enabling activity.

This kind of art links directly to 'the invention of time lived' (as Bourriaud suggests), or the invention of the everyday, (de Certeau). The participants who volunteered could re imagine themselves within their town.

The artwork (i.e. the project) is both an aesthetic and political. To quote de Certeau on the value of an artwork it 'situates itself between the two' the artwork is about 'managing relationships of force' from the micro- to the macro-levels. The artwork operates, and is symbolic of, being 'between what exists and what is possible' (1985:88, see 3.6.5). The trajectory (or legacy) in this practice as possible future effects is described as 'odd bursts' in 'sub contexts' with the project publication acting as a 'small manifesto' that might stimulate 'critical dialogue' in the future between the young participants and the adults. I imagine this to be a kind of future-present effect. As with Benn's practice valuing autonomy and the idea of mutuality are central to the project experience.

This is a particular form of participatory relational practice, a role he describes as amateur.

4.9 Findings from interpreting two art practices (Benn and Carter)

4.9.1 *The polemical as a position of critical thinking*

The polemical is a quality of thinking. In the *Maakin Lab* and *Edge FM* we see criticality by the artists in asking penetrating questions and questioning assumptions of what is taken for granted or given. It is also to go beyond what was expected. Both artists extend the original OTE brief to something more ambitious and challenging than was originally envisaged. In mature practices such as these the polemical speaks to how an artist understands how their practice relates to the wider (macro) context but it is also feeling power relations at the level of one to one.

While the means (methods and tools) they use are different what is common is opening up a space where a different set of exchanges can take place and relationships are reconfigured in particular ways. While the labs in Benn's practice are for adults and a means for creative practitioners to 'go beyond what people imagined they thought possible', in Carter's project he works with young people who were not at all familiar with art (they did not know or care about art, it was simply 'something to do' as one participant made clear). But in *Edge FM* he shares the same aspiration – to enable a group of people working together a shared freedom to think, speak and act differently. For the participants Carter describes this as simply 'the importance of doing things for oneself', for Benn it is 'to release the creative energy'.

Both artists invent and take responsibility for a process where other people can take ownership of the project experience in different ways which is very much at the level of the individuals within the group (approximately eight people in both cases). Valuing autonomy is central to their practices.

To interpret the practices of other artists we can look for tactics and read resistances. We might recognise these as clear moves or gestures that challenge the givens, but arguably it is through discussion with artists that we might really begin to understand the subtler tactics as played out in a project. We see tactical activity very clearly in Carter's practice (in *Edge FM*) and it is also in the practice of Benn but this is harder to see because it is at the level of

systems and finance to make the labs actually happen. Benn looks for 'something that hasn't happened yet' as a basis for a lab with a subtle 'hunter's cunning' (de Certeau). She works imaginatively in the interstices; between board rooms and individual makers, across disciplines and hierarchies.

That tactics are characteristically opportunistic and 'seize' the moment (de Certeau, 1984) has resulted in them being narrowly interpreted from a cultural theory perspective (Buchanan, 2000). A plurality of tactics might characterize a practice (as lived out in projects) but arguably roles are formed over time. With this in mind de Certeau's (1984) definition of the ethical dimension as tenacity seems appropriate for artists ('an ethics of tenacity'). In both these practices the polemical resists the dominant model of production-consumption (artist-audience). These projects create 'free areas and time spans whose rhythms contrast with those structuring everyday life' (Bourriaud 2002:16). Participants bring and take from the project experience according to their individual needs and the group dynamic in the project has a productive tension, a momentum and energy though this is difficult to explain.

The polemical may be about redressing power relations and controls, but it is also a playfulness of thinking. For artists tactics make room for playfulness. In this way the relationship between resistance (like creative agency) and the aesthetic as a 'transforming ruse' ('trick' or 'poetic gesture') can be read at the level of a specific method an artist uses or the shape of a project (an idea) or an artist's practice e.g. Benn giving her methodology a distinctive form (labs).

With an emerging practice I understood the polemical as forming enacting and expressing an idea or opinion – a moving towards. By interpreting the roles played by Benn and Carter the polemical is understood as a position of critical thinking.

4.9.2 The matrix enabling interpretative insights

Increasingly through using the matrix the interplay between *the aesthetic*, *the ethical* and *the polemical* became stronger. On one level considering any single dimension gives the other

two an added resonance and the interplay changes according to the specific point in time it is used to reflect in or on practice.

This interplay can give interpretative insights. For example in Carter's practice the *aesthetic-polemical* led to better understanding (imagining) a polemical space in a physical and virtual (or 'ideological') sense as core to the idea of valuing autonomy. Similarly thinking about qualities in the three dimensions revealed the sharpest tool in Benn's practice as being a question to lab participants ('What is your deep desire?'). This question clearly has an *ethical* basis (valuing autonomy) and seems radical in its directness. It is *polemical* in the sense of sitting in distinction to the predominant ways of working (the labs challenge disciplinary boundaries, hierarchies and the dominant model of production-consumption in the creative industries). It is also an *aesthetic*, it cuts to the chase of what is important and has elegance – a poetic gesture. Her question is at once (simultaneously) *ethical-polemical-aesthetic* and seems at the heart of her practice.

This fusion or convergence of the dimensions can be found in very specific things. Carter's idea of the artist as 'amateur' seems at the heart of his practice and is similarly *aesthetic-ethical-polemical*. Both Benn's question and Carter's description for artist as amateur seem metonymic – a compression and trajectory in terms of the roles these artist's have evolved. This idea of convergence helps to give the practitioner clues to why a practice has strengths or a maturity. It points to practice having richness and depth.

4.10 Findings from across all the projects

4.10.1 Developing critical language for practice

The matrix helps develop an emergent practitioner vocabulary (drawing from de Certeau and Bourriaud). On one level developing a critical practice is about developing more precise language for the way practice is imagined. It is more sharply defining the principles of practice where the aesthetic is inextricably linked with the polemical. The *aesthetic-polemical* speaks to a fit or correspondence between values and how they are enacted. We can:

imagine (mutual) autonomy not authorship as a more productive term and the important issue in participatory practice (the issue of 'authorship' haunts the discourse on artists working with other people). Artwork can be a mutually transforming ruse.¹⁸

imagine the artist enabling not empowering people (the latter connotes deficit, the former connotes potentiality as a shared endeavour)¹⁹

imagine criticality not criticism as the edgy quality in research and in art practice (with criticism as finding fault)²⁰

imagine process as reciprocal exchanges (dialogue but also other kinds) which can be considered asymmetrical from the idea of gifting (e.g. *Waiting Room*). This locates making meaning in a shared process as having a level of emotional involvement.

An 'aesthetic of tricks' (a 'transforming ruse') the artist uses can be read at the level of an *idea* (e.g. a proposal). The aesthetic can be read as the *means* an artist uses (specific tools and methods and methodology). It is also *the results and effects* of transforming materials and

¹⁸ The term 'ruse' from de Certeau in its dictionary definition can be 'deceitful'. In this interpretation it is closer to the dictionary definition of 'artful' and 'cunning'. De Certeau speaks of the 'hunters cunning' an implicit know how. In this thesis the mutually transforming ruse is the collective or group activity of making meaning – the way the aesthetic takes on a reality visually, spatially etc.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Matarasso for pin pointing this in conversation with him (July 2003). The ethical question of artists trying to empower people without their understanding or desire for this is made explicit by Matarasso (2005b). It is interesting, from the researcher's perspective, that in this later paper he foregrounds the ideas of 'autonomy' and 'resistance' in this paper.

²⁰ I borrow this distinction from Irit Rogoff, (conversation Aberdeen University, June 2005). She is a critical theorist based at Goldsmiths and has written extensively on visual culture for example see *Studying Visual Culture*, in Mirzoeff (ed) Visual Cultural Reader, Routledge (1998: 14-26)

representations but it is also the spatio-temporal dimensions - time lived with the artwork acted out.

4.10.2 *The aesthetic-polemical as a quality of thinking*

While the polemical might be about redressing imbalances in power relations and controls it is also about humour and playfulness 'an aesthetic of tricks' and 'transforming ruse'. Tactics in art practice *make room for playfulness*, which is at the heart of resisting dominant forms, assumptions and representations.

An aesthetic of tricks is a playful imagination. Artists might trick order, divert time, guide energies, play with representation and realities, chop and rearrange order and logic.

Playfulness disturbs, transgresses, subverts and interferes with structures or systems (or the 'proper' as de Certeau defines). Artistic tricks can create new or extended meaning which is not unlike humour as an intelligent way of dealing with deeper issues.

An aesthetics of tricks (like relational) is of course nothing new. The visual techniques of collage and montage now common place once challenged ideas and notions on visual representation and is enjoying a resurgence today in the 'cut and past' culture of the digital realm as seen on the world wide web.²¹ As a medium and site for art, the web is currently considered as being used tactically by artists.²²

²¹ The increase in affordable technologies (home computers and digital recorders) and the world wide web (from 1995) has produced a 'remix culture' where recycling, quoting, borrowing, collage, mixing and recontextualizing is practiced by a phenomenal number of people in their daily lives. See for example *On Bricolage* by Anne-Marie Boisvert <http://www.horizonzero.ca/textsite/remix.php?is=8&file=4&lang=0> (downloaded June 2005).

²² An area recognized (and increasingly used) tactically by artists is the digital world and the net (world wide web). For example the free software movement advocating the right to freely use, modify, and distribute software ironically used copyright law to argue its case. 'A classic act of detournement'. The free software movement has played an essential role in 'an ethic of nonproprietary software in a climate of rabid intellectual property registration.' The movement was initiated by the Free Software Foundation (FSF), whose founder, Richard Stallman, understood the damage being inflicted on the programming community in the early 1980s by the privatization of software. In the early days (1970's) working at MIT's Artificial Intelligence Lab, sharing software was considered a fundamental part of the process. See Josephine Berry http://www.monocularartimes.co.uk/texts/avantgardening/barecode_1.shtml (downloaded July 2003)

Using tactics as a means of tricking the system and revealing things in new light can be seen in a project by the artist Baker. She takes the idea of supermarket loyalty cards (Tesco) used to track and target consumers and created a bogus on line site for the card holders or 'club' members. Encouraging club members to surf on web sites which displayed the club card symbol for 'loyalty points' she rewarded them with junk mail and a print out of the database's faulty program. This simultaneously drew people's attention to the bogus nature of what was going on and the fact that they were on a database. Her hope was that the 'club' members might actually communicate with each other. See http://www.monocularartimes.co.uk/texts/avantgardening/barecode_1.shtml (downloaded July 2003). This kind of activity on the net is sometimes referred to as 'culture jamming'.

The aesthetic-polemical as a quality thinking in process-oriented, engaged practice (understood through live projects) is both the momentary choices and moves (*improvisation* and thinking on one's feet) and more broadly the *self conscious positioning of practice* in relation to the wider frameworks (social, economic, cultural as well as artistic). Understanding what the specific elements of this are (through live projects) helps understand what a *critical* practice comprises.

4.10.3 Characteristics of 'participatory relational practice'

From this set of projects we can detect qualities that characterise participatory relational as an approach to making art.

Projects as social experiments aim to *create (safe) spaces for play*. This space (like a zone of resistance) aims to make room for the imaginary where making meaning takes on its expressive meaning through, and by token of being a shared endeavour. Play is not about knowing but learning and play is intimately linked to freedom and autonomy (ethical).²³

Intrinsic to this approach are *abstract values* (as expressed by the artists) that contribute to the aesthetic as a shared experience e.g. mutuality, trust, complicity, generosity, risk, faith, belief.²⁴

Time as a resource or even a medium. This idea was proposed by Matarasso in relation to the OTE approach in developing art projects (2005a:13).²⁵ The OTE research layer in project

²³ Play can become marginalized in the adult world. Ackerman (1999) writes on the value of what she calls deep play in our lives. Deep play is a depth of perceptual immersion, about risk taking and discoveries about ourselves. It is more an altered state of mind, more a mood than specific activity. To lose this ability of play (in her view) would not only make our lives poorer but development on every level (personal, social, technological) would be curtailed. Deep play for Ackerman is riding her bicycle in the countryside, but this level of engagement with our surroundings can be anything from rituals to mountain climbing. It is not the specific activity but the depth of absorption that can be restorative and can fill us with wonder (*close*). To introduce a space of play through participatory art could aim to bring us closer to the intricacies of our feelings. Art drawing attention inwards (*close*). Art is *one way* of learning about ourselves and other people.

²⁴ In the literature on dialogic and conversational ways of developing art, we saw qualities of 'attentive listening', 'connected knowing', 'empathy' (see 2.4).

²⁵ An important point made by Matarasso which also relates to time was an observation on the *Celestial Ceiling*. The research layer afforded 'the choice not to' i.e. there was not the pressure to have to produce something. A number of artists had been approached to form a response to the artists brief and undertake the commission, but for various reasons did not take up the challenge. This required a certain belief by the group (OTE and the project participants) that something good would come from the process. The fact that this project was funded by research and private monies (the Schlieffler family who own the South Tower of Cullen House became patrons and part funded the artists) not public art funding meant there was not the same pressures

development allowed for a longer and more considered approach to art project development than is normally allowed in publicly funded art projects. This connects to the need for an exploratory open-ended phase or period. This has direct bearing on when and how an artwork's intention is realized.

Alternative ways of thinking about the role of 'artist'. Interestingly the artists engaged by OTE describe and make sense of their practices as something other than 'artist' per se; the cook (Benn), the amateur (Carter) and in the *Inthrow* project, the shaman (Shaw), intermediary (Renwick) and artisan (Orchardson) in *Celestial Ceiling*. Labels for creative activity, but worn lightly.²⁶ This seems tactical in that it is transposing one way of working to another. It is as though artists are inventing new titles to better describe activities than the loaded term artist which does not describe a specific approach.

This taking on (different) roles seems characteristic of some contemporary art practices. For example Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie (who work as a partnership)²⁷ recently worked with people from a closed down shoe factory in Northern England. The project Bata-ville²⁸ invited people from the Bata shoe factory to go on a bus tour across Europe to visit the original Czech factories. Pope and Guthrie began by occupying a room acting as travel agents then they became travel hostesses on the bus journey. (The output is a film described as a travelogue, documentary and performance piece). With qualities of the trickster they move across and between things,²⁹ the real and the imaginary, taking on a number of fictive roles. The participants also have a different relationship to the art work – they are passengers.

to have to produce something and within a tighter timescale. Rather the work was done because it 'felt right' and people understood 'how the decisions had been arrived at' through the pain staking process. (*Celestial Ceiling* gathering, July 2005)

²⁶ Renwick is currently working with the Dogrib people in northern Canada as an intermediary between the Dogrib elders and the Canadian government over land ownership rights. See OTE project publication *Inthrow* (2005).

Robert Orchardson a young artist commissioned to paint the *Celestial Ceiling* also has a more flexible role in that he has different strands to his practice. He produces his own authored work and works as 'an artisan' taking on the art historical role of apprentice by carrying out work for other artists to their specifications. In this project the relationship between his role as artist and the patrons was a process finding out the values of the patrons and this informing his response. This is described in OTE project publication *Celestial Ceiling* (2005).

²⁷ See www.somewhere.org.uk for more general information on their practices (accessed June 2005)

²⁸ See www.bata-ville.com and <http://www.edfilmfest.org.uk/movies/show/bata-ville> (accessed Sep 2005)

²⁹ Tactics de Certeau tells us are age-old, primordial, stretching back to fish and insect seen in the ways they transform and disguise themselves to survive (1984:xi). Accepting this as de Certeau trying to playfully break out of the frameworks of cultural theory at that time (to rethink culture as it is practiced) there is a curious parallel with contemporary visual artists taking on imaginary roles and disguises and artwork becoming more performed resonating with de Certeau's space and place (e.g. see *Interference*, 4.3, Volume II).

The **traditional relationships between 'artist' 'audience' 'participant' is much more indeterminate, diverse and complex.** We might imagine this as different kinds of ownerships and belongings in a project (or over a series of projects).

The more fluid roles and trickster approach can produce a mixed reality where **role can be considered part of the artistic toolkit.** This goes hand in hand with artists **using an eclectic range of tools** (what Bourriaud calls 'vehicles' to relations with others) in places not traditionally considered sites of artistic activity.

From the OTE projects we see T-shirts (in *Edge FM* and *Inthrow*) logos (e.g. *Edge FM*, *Maakin Lab*) miniature collages, Design Documents, Constitutions, evaluation blankets, posters, visual metaphors (e.g. *Genescapes*) conceptual metaphors (e.g. hearth in *Inthrow*) spoken metaphors (e.g. cooking in *Maakin Lab*) a proposal (e.g. transmit a radio broadcast, a three staged proposal from Renwick for a long term project in *Inthrow*) gathering and remixing local sounds for an event in a derelict house on a hill (Shaw in *Inthrow*) as well as more traditional mediums of paint and digital projection (in *Celestial Ceiling*).

Aesthetic tricks and tactics point to a left field approach, coming at things differently, like finding different entry points. It is almost like smuggling something in to the system or situation, trickster behaviour **playing with different elements** (artistic, social, cultural and political). Artists play with values. The artist taking on the role of agent provocateur.³⁰

One of the most pressing issues is the question of legacy – what remains after the project is completed. With the focus on the quality of experience (the more transient and ephemeral qualities) not art object per se, this raises questions on the intention of the work, what remains after the project and the relationship between the two. This relates to the question of what Bourriaud calls 'the political value of form' and the way we might understand art operating within the everyday. This question and idea is discussed in Chapter 5.

³⁰Another example of this playful taking on different roles is the French artist Thierry Geoffroy. Using the title *The Colonel*, and wearing a kilt, he used the public square in Huntly to 'interview' people by asking them how Scottish they thought were in terms of giving a percentage. The percentage was written on a card and people were photographed with this. Dozens of the towns inhabitants appeared in a special newspaper produced locally. This became the tangible art work. Thierry called this a 'crazy sociologue', playing with the idea of identity and the nonsense of statistical analysis to 'measure' identity. (I assisted him by filming his work during a residency with Deveron Arts in Huntly, 23 May 2004). In other projects he takes on other roles, e.g. the tourist.

Chapter 5

Discussion and implications

5.1 *Close* and the everyday as an orientation for practice

Close as a trajectory to think about practice stems from knowing island life. On islands the land is bound by the sea. This edge is ambiguous. Geographically remote, islands can focus creative energy inwards, a feeling of connectivity with place and people and the sea invites, necessitates journeying beyond what we know. *Close* can be stifling (we called it rock crazy) and close as going home can be the warm feeling of arriving.

close as departures and returns

As artists increasingly situate their practices as taking an active role in society there is a temptation to measure or evaluate it with yardsticks borrowed from other disciplines (e.g. social science). This is a huge debate out with this thesis, but its relevance for artists with emerging practices is the pressure felt to imagine practice as principally a problem finding or problem solving activity in a social or political sense. Another tension artists may feel, as noted by Papastergiadis, stems from the relentless deconstruction of post-modernism which 'makes it difficult for the artist to take the truth of their own experiences seriously, for it always appears to be invented somewhere else' (1998:21).

This research began without a 'proper place' (de Certeau) from which to theorize and locate practice. To make meaning with other people, and sharing the results, is one way to explore experience.¹ This deceptively simple yet profound idea meant first clearing the ground to trace one's own map. Developing a role is establishing a place to speak from (to feel that practice has value).

close as belonging(s)

To find a way to think about art practice from the practitioner's perspective, the 'everyday' as an orientation for practice makes 'the particularity of lived culture inescapable' (Highmore

¹ This is a reference to the definition of art by Matarasso (2000) see 2.2.

2002a:16). Relative to the huge frameworks and shifting boundaries (e.g. socio-economic) art within the everyday characteristically operates in the margins, the in-between spaces (see 4.6 OTE: an emergent methodology). As an outlook the everyday contests a binary perspective; the artist/audience (issue of creativity and reception) intrinsic/instrumental, (value of the artist) socially engaged or community art/gallery or mainstream practices (model/classification). As a critical concept practice can be imagined working with and between, not either or – the dialectical.

The everyday implies a form of attention; to register the unnoticed or the apparently inconsequential, to find the poetic significance in the common place, to connect one level of subjectivity with another. It is also thinking about the bigger philosophic abstractions from our intimate experiences (see Papastergiadis, 2.7.2).

close as proximity

De Certeau's search for theories, hypothesis and language to register the poiesis of the everyday is suggestive and exploratory (though sometimes difficult to understand).² The prioritization (and status) of 'how-to-do' (un faire) over the intuitive and tactic 'know-how' (savoir faire) is a motivation behind his proposing a science of singularity; 'art is a kind of knowledge essential in itself but unreadable without science' (19984:68).³ Though he does not demonstrate his science being used in the empirical field work (1998) his aim is explicit - 'to make such a discussion possible' and 'to indicate pathways for further research' (1984:xi). From the artist-researcher perspective attending to the artistic process, like registering the everyday, shares the same shifting ground. As an object of study both move in and out of focus, not unlike a game of hide and seek. The artist researcher reflects in and on practice, we try to occupy two places, try to watch ourselves from across the street.

Drawing from de Certeau the matrix derives from a rationale that is older than the western 'modern system of art' to borrow a phrase from Shiner (2001). Art as an activity can be considered a way of making or doing something (rather than a discreet category).⁴ This is not

² From the Greek *poiein* 'to create, invent, generate' (1984:xii).

³ For de Certeau science can act as a kind of mirror, a 'complementarity'. His use of the term is closer to the psychoanalytical perspective of interpretation than the harder empirical scientific paradigm of which he is critical.

⁴ Shiner notes that the English word 'art' derives from the Latin *ars* and Greek *techne*, which meant any human skill. For two thousand years art signified any human activity performed with 'skill and grace'. What he calls the 'the fateful divide' in the eighteenth century split art into artists and artisans or high art and craft. This sharply divided the contemplative/aesthetic and the

to suggest that artists do not bring special skills and knowledges, but it asks for a perspective that builds upon resistance as de Certeau theorizes. Resistance for de Certeau is closer to the term used in electronics or psychoanalysis, it works with the flows of energy.⁵ Artists might tap into social energies (as suggested by Lippard, see 2.3.1). With the metaphor of energy we can imagine currents flowing, merging, fluctuations, junctures, amplifications and blockages.⁶ Resistance as mutual attractions and repulsions.

close as engagement

The everyday, a thoroughly ambiguous term, has a long theoretical and art historical lineage out with this research.⁷ In this thesis de Certeau's thinking drawn into the realm of art practice insists on the specificity of *social relations*; the here, now and with these individuals.

5.2 Developing an approach to art practice: constructing the matrix as a response to the research questions

Constructing the matrix as a way to think about practice responds to the absence (in the discourse) of representing and considering the aesthetic dimension and the artists' thinking process that need to be included along with its other varied levels (as noted by Lacy, 1995). This rests on, and informs, three premises (understandings) in this research. Firstly that it is a practitioner view i.e. comes out of reflective practice. Secondly forming a role as artists with an emerging practice is about locating the individual in society (not necessarily fitting into a model or genre as presented in the discourse). Thirdly participatory practice within the everyday situates making within the one-to-one inter personal space. Art as a practice need not necessarily be considered in the first instance (and motivating factor) as operating within a pre-formed or ideological space. Nor does it assume a generalized and idealized audience.

useful or utilitarian. From this longer view he refers to the current situation as 'the modern system of art' which includes the various institutions of the 'art world'. *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (2001:5-16)

⁵ This analogy is made by Highmore (2000a:151-2) see 3.4.1.

⁶ See 3.4.1. This is also discussed in terms of Benn's practice, see 4.7.3, Volume II.

⁷ Common visual art themes include the mundane, repetition, the discarded, the domestic as objects or processes, consumer culture (e.g. 'pop art').

Never the less (drawing from de Certeau) we can imagine art practice within the everyday stems from a belief:

“The cultural politics of everyday life that emerges is one that both taps into the energies present in the everyday and uses them to transform it. Such a ‘politics’ (if it is one) doesn’t offer solutions, nor does it offer to overthrow oppression. This is a heuristic, experimental politics that puts faith in the everyday as a means for its own transformation.” (Highmore, 2002a:173, brackets in original).

For de Certeau the everyday is a point of resistance and invention in an increasingly commodified and alienating society and we can easily replace the word politics for art here. But these terms are hopelessly abstract unless we see the singularity of action in a given situation.

close as the why, the how and the what of practice

The matrix as constructed in this research helps to sensitize the practitioner to see qualities, reflect on values, and consider judgements in inter-subjective processes.

Art practice within the everyday is paying attention to the specific micro-level and thinking about how this connects to the broader macro-level. It is here that de Certeau’s theorization of resistance is particularly valuable for artists trying to develop a role. His ‘preliminary hypothesis’ of relational tactics inside the art process is like managing relations of force.⁸ As a manner of thinking (‘a style of tactics’) de Certeau suggests this is not unlike the poets who work with a set of rules (meter and rhyme), constraints can stimulate new discoveries (1984: xxi-xxii). The polemical as an ethical dimension is a diffused resisting activity, working with different and multiple forces. It is not a practice that necessarily sets out to address a pre-defined problem (art as reactive) nor does it assume deficit (art as a corrective). This helps locate the political dimension at the inter-subjective level. As a perspective this supposes the role an artist might play is neither preformed nor given. It is accepting of partiality in terms of developing praxis and accepting of the aesthetic as relational. Like moving towards, the polemical is imagined as forming enacting and expressing a view or position.⁹

⁸ I borrow this phrase from de Certeau’s description of a quality in the artwork *The Lagoon Cycle* (see 3.6.5)

⁹ Rancier tells us that art and politics are ‘contingent notions’. ‘The fact that there are always forms of power does not mean that there is always such a thing as politics, and the fact that there is music and sculpture in a society does not mean that art is constituted as an independent category.’ *The Politics of Aesthetics*, (2004:51).

close as becoming

De Certeau describes tactics as 'poetic' as well as 'war like' and tactics are not necessarily methods. On one level they are the *internal recognitions* of the subtler acts of involvement and displacements. We might resist imposed systems of values (Buchanan suggests tactics operate on the plane of belief, see 3.4.2) but we test (or see) our own thresholds and contradictions through practice (e.g. a graphic design mind set rubbing up with artist thinking).

Tactics can be artistic methods used to try to engage people in the creative process but the idea of relational in terms of tactics is crucial in participatory practice. (De Certeau's 'relational tactics' is the ways the 'weak' make use of the 'strong' and certainly does not imply people working together). Tactics (in the matrix) are bound up with play, freedom and autonomy when people work together in art projects.

That tactics are relational suggests a dynamic, a shifting back and forth between tactics and 'strategy' (what de Certeau calls the 'proper' which can include our own mind sets). This is like the testing and re-forming practice. The two terms fold back on one another. With resistance as not opposition but imaginatively contesting we can consider a strong practice as having the quality of strategy. But tactical thinking is always present – a practical know how, opportunities are 'seized', artists think on their feet. The dynamic between tactics and strategy is how a practice takes on a distinctive form and in mature practices such as Benn or Carter (4.7, 4.8) we can interpret resistance as the political dimensions in a relational sense - the *aesthetic-polemical*.

close as correspondences

Buchanan interestingly speculates that tactics might 'harden' into strategy (2000:102-3). From an art practice perspective this can be interpreted in a number of ways. Tactics pre-exist action if understood on the internal level, like the micro-impulse which gives rise to action. Tactics suggest themselves. That tactics are 'felt' as much as thought they might be considered hardening in the sense that they are in the first instance recognized by the artist. Hardening might mean and they are self-consciously modelled and used by the artist. Equally

given that a plurality of tactics might pepper a style of thinking and characterize a practice the moment a tactic is made intelligible (i.e. shared) it becomes more 'solid' or takes on form by token of being recognized and acted upon by someone else. (Tactics make room for playfulness). This is one interpretation, but we can certainly imagine tactics hardening by becoming prescriptive methods.

We might recognise a subtle tactic in something as fleeting as a well placed phrase in conversation (not unlike the way humour works). Equally we might view tactical activity retrospectively as an art movement that tests and nudges the boundaries of a 'strategy' in the mainstream. This quality of scale and flexibility of what tactics is depends of course on what we take strategy to be, but it is reductionist in the extreme to view this as one single big (and external) source of power or control.

That tactics are viewed as a multiplicity of things which are constantly agitating and transforming is important in terms of artistic activity on a cultural as well as a personal level. Tactics can be too easily dismissed as fleeting, opportunistic and politically impotent (as noted by Buchanan see 3.4.2). The logic of tactics as relational is useful if we believe no two projects will be the same, that we can have different parts to play in projects and the fact that roles or strategies artists form continually evolve.

The final point to make on resistance as it features for de Certeau is that it is as much at the level of our physical bodies as conscious thought. This relates to his theorization on spatiality or what he calls 'spatial practice' (like walking but also cooking, reading, shopping etc) and a second pair of terms he uses 'space' and 'place' (as discussed in *Interference*, 4.3, Volume II). The idea of spatial practice resonates with process based practice where art within the everyday does not view social spaces as the 'site' for artistic intervention but the essential fact that working co-operatively is about constructing a quality of social space (re-making 'place'). Making art is about dialogue (including the artist's internal dialogue) and different kinds of exchange, but it is also the *physicality* of being together. As a quality of shared experience the artist might pay attention to other senses including touch and movement and include these in the way participation is framed (e.g. *Waiting Room*, *Interference*). We might imagine working with found spaces which are acted out or made over.

For de Certeau the transforming ruse and reuse (the aesthetic) can be the 'poaching' in countless ways of cultural elements (exemplified in today's digital world of 'cut and past' to make something new) but his deeper aim at the level cultural activity as social relations can be interpreted as the 'invention of the everyday'. Time lived, spaces used for other purposes. His ideas on spatiality connect with the problematic of how the experience of process-oriented project art be articulated by the artist-researcher. Central to his theory on day to day living is resistance and (like the other qualities he gives us) transposed into an art practice helps understand what a critical practice might comprise (e.g. internally like thresholds, the polemical as questioning assumptions, the tactics-strategy dynamic as improvisation).

5.3 The matrix as a thinking tool

The matrix is a simple construct which can help us think about complex phenomena – the idea that art practice operates within the dynamic and multilayered fields of civic society, and forming an approach (and role) that is participatory and relational; an approach that invests in the creative process of making expressive meaning with other people (as opposed to the artist authoring objects for an audience).

As a flexible construct the matrix can be used in variety of different ways and at different points in time, and to make sense of different levels. At the level of:

- the content of a project (reflection in and on a process)
- other art practices (through 'structured conversations' e.g. Benn and Carter)
- an (emerging) approach and what constitutes role as a critical practice (refinement of clarity and purpose)

5.3.1 *The matrix operates on different levels*

Accepting reflective practice as a process of value finding the matrix acts as a locus enabling us to consider judgements, to reflect on values (our own and those we work with) and to sensitize us to qualities and issues with the aesthetic as part of an inter-dependent whole. In this way as processes unfold we become more self-conscious about how we learn and focus intuitive energy.

In the approach defined as participatory relational practice there is the difficult task of making sense of a complex, multi-faceted and dynamic process. The matrix itself represents a dynamic and takes on different shapes as it were (aesthetic-ethical, polemical-aesthetic etc) in the analysis. This can enable a richer reading of the situation and its interpretation¹⁰ of process as both reflection in action (describing *The Process* e.g. *Waiting Room* project, 4.4.2) and reflection on action (*Analysis using the matrix* - mining the experience for qualities, values and judgements made e.g. *Waiting Room* project 4.4.3).¹¹

Part of the strength of the matrix is that it is foundational and enables other language and ideas to be brought into an understanding of the experience (e.g. the way memory works from de Certeau in the *Waiting Room* project). In this way it helps (to some degree in this research) enrich understanding of practice as an open-ended process of exchange, inter and trans-action(s).

Used to interpret other artists' work it helps draw out (identify) key qualities in mature practices (e.g. Benn and Carter). Maturity of practice is like a kind of 'wholeness' where the aesthetic-ethical-polemical shows the motivation and methods used give rise to a distinctive form of practice.

A nuanced critique is understood as the inter-play and inter-dependencies between the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical inside and across the varied levels that art operates on (i.e. the why, how and what of forming a role).

¹⁰ Interpretation as literally the 'power of explaining' (CED, 1990).

¹¹ This is not to suggest that in practice we do not reflect in and on processes as they are played out. Reflecting on action is not necessarily post project. Thought and action are of course much more immediate and complexly intertwined than that (with the matrix constructed reflexively).

5.3.2 The matrix embodies a dynamic

In Chapter 4 (*Analysis using the matrix: the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical* in Volume II) we see the matrix embody a dynamic - the interplay of the three dimensions or forces. These are fluid and move at different paces. Usefully for the practitioner there is no fixed starting point but different vantage points to look at the same thing (the why, how and what of practice). From this research the dynamic revealed by the matrix encourages three ideas:

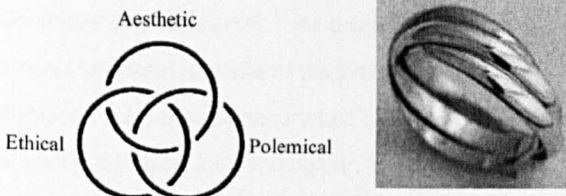
It offers different ways in (like entry points) for reflecting in and on practice (and interpreting other practices) e.g. being drawn into one of the dimensions and thinking about how this relates to the others.

Qualities in any dimension are mutually affecting and have resonance from the others.¹²

The idea of the three dimensions (or forces) converging can give insights into a practice. This can be at different scales e.g. from identifying a specific artistic tool or method, the shape of a project, or the form of a methodology. At whatever scale it suggests practice has a depth and richness.

close as convergence

Fig. 16 The matrix and the Borromean knot as a ring



¹² For example tactics are relational because they are intimately related to the idea of autonomy, freedom and play. It is suggested in this thesis that (poetic) tactics in art practice (in the space of an art project) can open up, or are generative in the context of working with other people to make art (expressive meaning). In a two way process a poetic tactic can come from a participant (e.g. *Pandora's Box*, 4.2).

As the matrix was developed through its use in this research we see an increasing drawing out of the content sequentially across my own three projects (from *Early work with geneticists*, 4.2 compared to *The Waiting Room* project, 4.4). This is in part, as a result of the matrix as a thinking tool becoming more internalized. A logical development of this is that an articulation of a project (in this research like a step by step diary) becomes *simultaneously the reporting and an interpretative analysis*. Both are one. This could mean a much more poetic presentation where the three dimensions like forces *shape* the actual narration (rather than being overlaid onto it). This has potential for experimental forms of creative writing and visualizing the experience as the process unfolds. This connects to the need to consider the relationship between framing participation and framing an articulation of that experience (see 5.9 Future research)

5.3.3 Frameworks for thinking about practice

Artists borrow, adapt and invent constructs to make sense of and generate creative activity (e.g. metaphor). Frameworks can underpin artistic thinking. A clear example of this from the OTE set of projects is by the artist Renwick in the project *Inthrow* which dealt with marginal land use. Renwick uses a framework which speaks directly to the subject of his practice. 'Place, land and folk' (from the environmentalist and town planner Geddes) underpins his interest in people's relations with land use and traditional knowledge. Interestingly Renwick also creates frameworks as the actual artworks. Firstly as his response to the OTE brief, *Inthrow* became a three stage project proposal (which also allowed other artists to become involved as a programme of events). A second framework is his list of six kinds of inhabitation stretching from Neolithic times to the future (*The Summary of Human Settlement: Cultural Continuity in Strathbogie*).¹³ As a poetic tool this helps look at (and re imagine) the landscape around Lumsden, the site of the project, through a different, extended timeframe. This displaces our sense of history and mobilizes a critical perspective. (A paper summarizing the project publication *Inthrow* is given in Appendix 8: Douglas, Delday and Fremantle, 2005)

¹³ The six kinds of inhabitation in *The Summary of Human Settlement* are 'Ancient Security', 'Archaic Colony', 'Organic Microcosm', 'Agrarian Hearth', 'Arcadian Enclosure' and 'Linear Concentration'.

The matrix, as a critical framework for artistic activity has no subject specificity. It was de Certeau's intention in his practical science of the singular to create a framework general enough for anyone to read his or her own experiences and though de Certeau's definitions of operativity do not necessarily suggest people working together (as developed in this research) it is empathic to his broader perspective on a pluralist culture.¹⁴

The definitions he offers us (e.g. transforming ruse and reuse, a space of play, an interval of freedom) could apply to almost any artist. The matrix is foundational and this generality is both its weakness and its strength.¹⁵

Using the matrix to reflect in practice and on practice (to take bearings), other ideas and critical vocabulary are added or extended as the journey progresses. For example where artists work with other people it high lit the question of what position it is possible for the artist to take and the importance of valuing autonomy and attendant questions (e.g. when does playfulness become a folly or divisive). In reflexive practice the matrix enables description and redescription of practice.¹⁶ Autonomy in a relationship is basically respect and can be more precisely defined as being mutual in the sense of being 'at once a connection and a strangeness, closeness and impersonality'.¹⁷ As the artist Carter aptly describes 'it is being with, not being like' (4.8 Volume II). It is a truism to say that description is crucial to imagining oneself into a role. However it seems significant that it was made explicit by some very experienced artists and participants involved in the OTE art projects (e.g. Benn, Carter, Renwick, Fremantle) that they valued the OTE research space to thoroughly discuss and think about what they do in their daily practices. It was this fact (along with the high quality project publications) that was felt to be particularly valuable rather than the creative challenges of operating in a rural remote context per se (on this point the artists shared a belief in a commitment to local initiatives and the value of bringing a wide range of 'shapers' into the project space).¹⁸

¹⁴ His 'science' comprises three priorities – 'orality', 'ordinary' and 'operativity'. It is operativity as he defines which is used as the basis of the matrix, see 3.9 *A framework for the artist to think about practice*. Constructing the matrix draws from his two volumes on *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) (1998) and is informed by *Culture in the Plural* (1997).

¹⁵ An interesting question asked by Matarasso was why three things for the matrix (2003).

¹⁶ Rorty uses the term redescription which refers to what he calls our 'final vocabulary' - the words we carry around to justify our actions, beliefs and lives, see *Private Irony and Liberal Hope* in *Contingency, irony and solidarity*, (1989:73-95).

¹⁷ I draw this definition from the sociologist Sennett in his discussion of welfare bureaucracy in terms of the relationship between institutions and our dependency upon them, see *Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality*, (2003:177).

¹⁸ This is not to say that there were not specific examples of the research context creating opportunities and problems for the artist. For example in the project *Inthrow* which dealt with marginal land use, the lead artist Renwick brought in a DJ artist Shaw to bring the younger people of the village into the project. For Shaw this was an opportunity to realise an ambition – to perform in a remote historic site. This is discussed in conversation between the researcher and Shaw in the publication *Inthrow* see *A DJ*

Currently there is little shared practitioner language at the level of inter-subjective processes.¹⁹ Because the matrix is foundational other vocabulary and ideas can be added in. (We might view the core aspects of participatory practice as disposition (ethical) transformation (aesthetic) and resistance (polemical) and we can use the matrix to interpret the artist's motivation, the means and the form of practice.²⁰ However the double bind for the artist-researcher is that (re)description might choke the more intuitive, unselfconscious thought and action. The danger of any conceptual framework is that it can become restricting (a master not a servant).

What was tried but was felt unsuccessful in this research is a more experimental *visual* way of using the matrix to trace the process as it unfolds (attempts were too literal like diagrams or schematics). The experience of constructing the matrix also revealed difficulties particular to practice-led art research (e.g. chronology of what actually happened and what was learnt).

Another criticism of this research in terms of developing a strong art practice (from the artist-researcher perspective) is that practice does not have an *aesthetic-polemical reach*. The challenges now are to take this forward. There are five inter-related considerations:

- designing processes for others to improvise within
- the issue of what remains after a project
- developing appropriate ways to re-present projects as processes
- the idea of working collaboratively with other artists (as well as other disciplines)
- the role of artist as also author

These ideas are discussed in the following sections.

workshop on the hills: a sonorous landscape, 2005 pp 34-45. In the project *Maakin Lab* with the artist Benn the geographical distance to Shetland undoubtedly caused problems early in the project because of the limited time available with the project partners at the Shetland College (see 4.7, Volume II).

¹⁹ We see some critical practitioner vocabulary emerging in the literature e.g. 'connected knowing', 'empathy', see Chapter 2

²⁰ Read uses the term *disposition* to describe the ethical dimension with regard to theatre practice (1993:131)

5.4 Giving form to process-oriented art projects

When art is about making meaning (not focussed by object making per se) the process cannot be viewed as merely the means to an end 'product'. There may well be completed art objects but the shift in emphasis is to the inter-personal space of a project as having value in and of itself. The values of being involved in the creative process (e.g. ideological in *Edge FM*, creative learning in *The Maakin Lab*) is also aesthetic, a quality of experience. From the practitioner's perspective the aesthetic can be the artist's idea, the means used (tools and methodology). It is also the live experience of a shared process (a mutually transforming ruse) and it is the tangible things made and the feelings that result from being involved in the process. If the 'project' is considered the artwork this raises challenging questions on what remains after it is completed in terms of seeing or knowing the aesthetic. This is not an issue of the status of form but concerns the nature of relational art within the everyday and ideas on the role of the artist in mediating the experience. This has bearing on the broader context of participatory process-oriented practice.

Lacy makes the challenging proposal that it is the space of relationship between the artist and others that 'may itself become the artwork' (1995:20). There is a real tension between giving enough detail to begin to see this (attentiveness and trying to articulate a deeper reading, e.g. *Waiting Room*) and not reducing the process to the easy sound bite level and losing criticality. It is possible that the criticism Lacy voiced (1995) on the way that socially engaged or new genre public art practice tend to be reported in the discourse (irrespective of whether they deal with a clear political issue) fell into the trap of being reduced accounts. The social and political value of art is arguably simpler and easier to state from an external perspective (e.g. the democratic concern of enabling people to have a voice, working with conflicting value systems) than the artist's thinking process and the aesthetic arising from a two way process between people.²¹

Close asks for an adjustment in focus to see the infra level. It is the below the horizon micro-moves and gestures, the anecdotal, oblique connections and invisible threads that makes the process interesting. If we consider co-productions at the level of different exchanges,

²¹ A seminal interview by Ukeles, (an artist who comes under the umbrella term socially engaged/new genre public art) gives a genuine account of a wide range of different activities (e.g. performance, installation) from over 40 years of working with 'maintenance art' in New York (Finklepearl, 2001:294-322). The personal details and practical challenges she faced particularly in the early days reveals thinking processes and the aesthetic qualities in her work as inextricably linked.

interactions and transactions how do we articulate the conversations within conversation, judgements on control/not control, the subtler reciprocal recognitions? How can participatory processes be given aesthetic form?

close as the detail and everything that surrounds

Clearly the artistic intention in the way participation is framed at the outset (e.g. an idea, a proposition, a question) has bearing on the work made but when projects are exploratory we also need to suspend belief in what might come from the process at the early stages to allow ideas to emerge. As a shared process the shape of a project evolves, takes on its own logic.

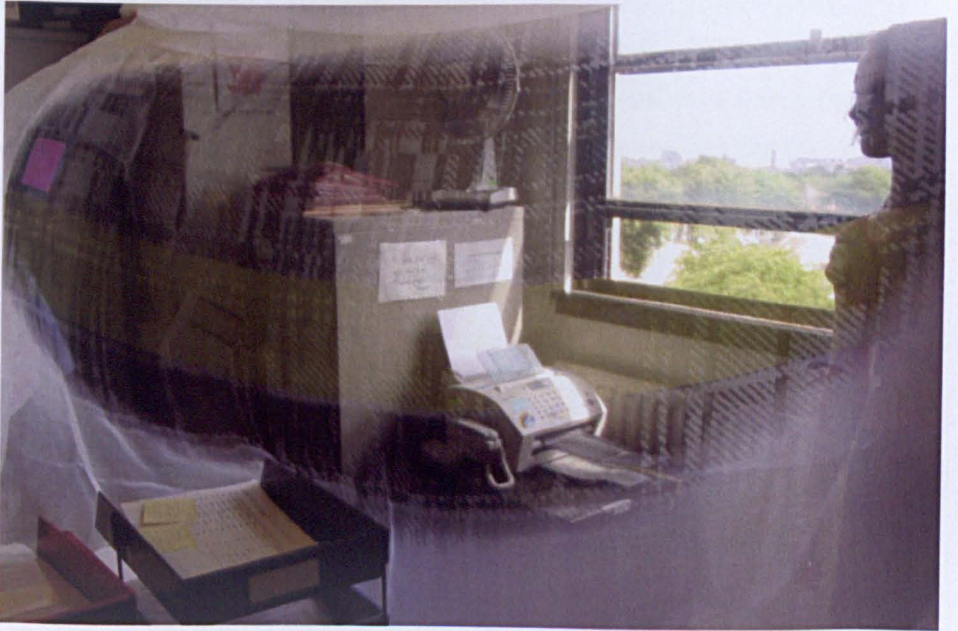
The intention of the Visual Dialogues (the short image and text combinations on the CD) as sketches of the process was to give something back to the participants. These small experiments are useful to consider some parameters of the problem in terms of re-presenting the experience. The fundamental questions are how the process itself is documented and articulated and who exactly this is made for. Accepting that in this research the texts on the projects (e.g. *Waiting Room*) were to demonstrate the use of the matrix and the Visual Dialogues were not intended for people out with the process, if the intention were to take the experience to a broader 'audience' - what form could this take?

Questions arising from these little experiments (the Visual Dialogues) include how can a sequence of exchanges and gestures not be merely aestheticizing relationship, (simply observing ourselves interact like 'Kodac moments')?²² How can participatory processes be distilled into a poetic form using text and image? (Can we imagine this as small gesture chains?) While it is the moments in a project that are valuable, can an image (or image and text) be cut out to represent the project symbolically, like a compression of a complex process? In this sense the symbolic could be a synecdoche which de Certeau describes as a fragment which replaces a totality, 'it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole' (1984:101).

Fig. 17 Images from *Interference*

²² I borrow this term from Buchanan, (2000:104)

Fig. 17 Images from *Interference* (Volume II)



While artwork can be developed through dialogue, spoken dialogue can be transformed into an artwork. Structuring a process to obtain material for an artwork can give a more resolved aesthetic. A collaboration to make an artwork complementing a much larger work *Home maker* by the artist Finlay (Aberdeen Art Gallery June-Nov 2005) used text as the basis. By bringing together a group of elderly people and gallery curators a discussion was focused by the theme of home. The resulting dialogue was transcribed and used typographically on the glass cases containing objects from different rooms. The end product was imagined at the outset (and the discussion was framed by questions). Spoken language becomes visible language and in a gallery setting is available to a wider and general audience.²³

(For a critique of Finlay's *Home-maker* interactive artwork, see Appendix 9: Douglas and Delday, 2005).²⁴

Fig. 18 Details from six cases as six 'rooms' in *Home maker* (Delday with Whitespace members and the gallery curators, Aberdeen Art Gallery, June-Nov 2005)

What the individual artist might capture or record of the experience visually can be tiny excerpts, like glimpses or fragments, as all that remains of a project (what de Certeau might call the residue, or remainders). The other end of the spectrum is a deliberate framing by the artist with an artwork imagined before hand such as setting up an event to be recorded by themselves or using other professionals to record using film for example (e.g. the project *Bata-ville*, see 4.10.3). This seems appropriate for art which is performative, visually theatrical or has a documentary feel.²⁵

If the aesthetic is symbolic of the interdependencies in a co-operative process (the aesthetic as mutually transforming) it is visual and also spatial and temporal (in the de Certeau sense). It lives in the saying rather than the said. When practice aims to open up a space to share a

²³ This collaboration accompanied Finlay's larger interactive work constructed from interviews with elderly people (*Home maker*). I held a conversation on the theme of home in the gallery with a group of nine elderly people (members of Whitespace) then edited this to short quotations which were treated typographically and placed on glass cases containing domestic objects (also working with the gallery/museum curators and Finlay). The conversation was pre-planned as specific questions on home agreed (between myself and Finlay). Because the end product was known in terms of what the output or art object would be (typography on the glass cases, each case representing a room) the conversation, relative to my other projects, was tightly framed.

²⁴ Douglas, A and Delday, H, *Home as a form of art practice in Home-Maker* by Jeanie Finlay, (ed) Sophie Hope Ruby Works, (2005:22-33).

²⁵ Another example is the OTE project *Edge FM* by the artist Carter (see 4.8, Volume II). In the project publication Carter documents quotes from the young participants in the book.

Fig. 18 Details from six cases as six 'rooms' in *Home maker* (Delday with Whitespace members and the gallery curators, Aberdeen Art Gallery, June-Nov 2005)



freedom to think, speak and act differently it takes on a performative dimension, but it is not necessarily scripted. The value in the act of making meaning and the meanings made co-constitute each other. It is lived out – negotiated and elaborated upon, but it is also provisional, spontaneous, multilayered.

It is noteworthy that a number of theorists from border disciplines (to visual art) are turning their attention to the everyday, and related disciplines make reference to de Certeau's theorization of space.²⁶

5.4.1 Space as practiced place

Though Papastergiadis notes that art historically the everyday and contemporary visual art remains 'relatively untheorized' (1998:23, see 2.7.2) the everyday is increasingly drawing the attention from a number of theorists from theatre and performance; (Read 2000a)²⁷ performance and its relationship to site-specific art; (Kaye, 2000) and performance or 'live art' and (Clarke, 2004) performance and multi-media.²⁸ These authors make reference to Certeau's theorization on spatiality. For de Certeau the world is experienced and expressed through movement (the body as memory) a form of somatic knowledge that lacks a 'proper language' within the dominant 'scriptural economy'.

'Space' de Certeau tells us 'is a practiced place' (1984:117). Spatial practice (which is any signifying practice) is story telling or more accurately ways of seeing - 'what the map cuts up, the story cuts across' (ibid:129).²⁹ It is the details and qualities of 'things *extra* and *other* (coming from elsewhere) which 'insert themselves into the ... framework' (ibid:106).

²⁶ Border disciplines include cultural theory (Highmore, 2000) literary studies (Buchanan, 2000) anthropology (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (eds) 2003).

²⁷ A recent text edited by Read combines art and architecture (a set of essays) within the umbrella of the everyday. The everyday as a critical concept as lived social experience. A particularly beautiful, long term project is an experimental 'city' in Ritoque, Chile. Artists, poets, architects and engineers use poetry as a basis for constructing a series of buildings called the *Open City of Ameriida*. See Pendleton-Jullian, A. *Autopoetic architecture: the Open City, Ritoque, Chile* in Read, A (ed) *Architecturally speaking Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday* (2000b: 253-286).

²⁸ Paul Clarke is a performance and multimedia artist who draws on de Certeau's theorization of space in his PhD *Collaborative Performance Systems*, see <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/clarke.htm> (2004). For a description of his multimedia company *Uninvited Guests*, see <http://www.uninvited-guests/net> (downloaded September 2005).

²⁹ Walking is something of a constant in art historical terms e.g. the Situationist in the 1950's used the practice of derive to disorient themselves in the urban environment to become more aware and to playfully reconstruct situations. Richard Long is another well known example where he literally uses maps to map his walks. Walking (and journeying) seems to be very popular currently as an artistic method. For a list of web sites on artists and projects using walking see <http://www.walkingplace.org/weblog/archives/000010.html> (downloaded Dec 2005).

close as writing over

When art practice invites (or frames) participation the artwork is *acted out* and De Certeau's theorization can help conceptualize process-oriented visual art practice (e.g. *Interference*, 4.3, Volume II). We can imagine art within the everyday is *the actualization of social space*. Accepting that the 'saying' of process resists removal from its context and the 'said' is the representation of experience attention could be paid to developing new ways of narrating the experience.

close as acting out

The everyday, like the art process requires a perceptual shift in tone and focus, to a different pacing and form of listening (Highmore 2000b:39, see 3.2). The artist researcher (and artist) can speak from inside the experience and try to become more conscious of using language as different modes of expression (e.g. conversational and theoretical, reflective and speculative). Like de Certeau's analogy of meter and rhyme (working with a set of constraints) we can imagine processes have a certain phrasing. Equally there could be a single image or quotation - a synecdoche of the project. This suggests a project could result in a set of different outputs for different viewers/readers. Whatever the assumed audience writing about art is difficult - to retain a critical distance yet convey something of the playful, relative and emotional qualities.³⁰

Ways forward (with an emerging practice) could be collaboration with other artists. Visual artists may also need help from writers and evaluators to capture the experience of live projects and to contextualize the work.³¹ The corollary to this is developing appropriate publishing strategies. However there is an automatic assumption here of the need to extend the experience beyond the immediate participants. The more radical question is why? This

This interest in space and spatial practices seems triggered by the increasing use of new technologies to map and to survey e.g. GPS (Global Positioning Systems) wireless technology (WiFi) as well as the increase of mobile hand held technologies. For artists using GPS see http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~catabomb/GPS_Art.html (downloaded Dec 2005).

³⁰ Ede writing on the relationship between art and science notes that a great deal written on art 'can veer from the most esoteric and self referential of post-modernist discourse to worthy Sunday school assertions which do not stand up to much scrutiny'. She advocates more help through 'open vigorous debate' on new art (2000:53).

³¹ Functionsuite, (Autumn 2003-5) was a lottery funded project for artists working in hospitals in Edinburgh. From the outset a creative writer (Kenrick, a social anthropologist) became part of the team to track and respond to the events and activities, see www.functionsuite.com (accessed Feb 2004).

raises deeper issues on the way art is made, received and circulates. The underlying question is what we regard as 'audience' and whether this is, or indeed can or should be, known at the outset of a project. We cannot make the assumption of speaking to an art audience. This relates to how we imagine art (as projects) *operates* within the everyday and the role of the artist as a public figure.

It is interesting that both Bourriaud and Lacy place the deeper value of art as the symbolic. Lacy suggests that public art is 'at its most powerful' when it 'operates as a symbol' (1995:184). Bourriaud describes the 'aesthetic criteria' as 'the symbolic value of the world it suggests to us' 'a coherence of form' and 'the image of human relations reflected by it' (2002:18, see 3.10.2). These two very different perspectives shed light on problematic of the aesthetic in terms of it being symbolic of human relationships. For Bourriaud relational art 'models' social relations (he describes the symbolic as a projection onto the real). Lacy works with the actualities of people's lives and she often produces aesthetic objects (e.g. films) towards the end of a project. These visually represent the sometimes long and complex processes of working with groups and civic authorities. Her work is underpinned by a pedagogical concern, often facilitating communication and relations with unrepresented, sometimes disadvantaged community members. The visual output is often choreographed by the artist or by other artists engaged by the artist. What is visual and symbolic of the process issues from a role not unlike a choreographer within a larger team where other artists bring their aesthetic to the project (e.g. *Fire on the Roof*, 1998). Her work has been described as 'performing community' and it grapples with very difficult questions including the politics of representation.³²

To return to the idea of what remains after a project is completed it is useful to summarize key relational qualities that emerged in the set of OTE projects. This has bearing on the challenges of re-presenting participatory relational projects (i.e. the aesthetic as giving form to a set of experiences).

close as the symbolic value

³² Lacy organizes sometimes large scale public events which are recorded. For example *The Roofs On Fire*, is part of a large and complex ten year project in Oakland, California where she worked with civic authorities and black youth. Lacy very deliberately and tactically used the national media. Creating a performance enticed the media to cover the event, thus giving the work a wider audience. Her work is sometimes described as 'performance art pedagogy' see Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics*, (1999:125-157).

5.5 Relational qualities in the OTE approach to making art

De Certeau's view on creative activity transposed into an art context raises questions on what the different kinds of artistic production might be considered as, in distinction to the production of difference, a tradition of artistic activity.³³ This anticipates qualities in a kind of contemporary practice as described by Bourriaud as relational (2002). As curator and art historian he draws on de Certeau (and others) yet his theory falls short of locating practice which engage with the specificity of the everyday. It is still the artist making work for an audience. Never the less his theory on what form comprises is suggestive and provocative. Elements 'collide' (like atoms) giving form 'a sense of wholeness' which 'stirs up other possibilities' (a kind of 'random materialism'). The relational artwork's material form spreads out. The individual art work is 'a dot on a line' (see 3.7.2, 3.7.3).

Representation (a conventional function of visual art) shifts from the art object to ideas on form. If form is considered the art project (an event structure) how do we see or know its value and what might remain after a project – its legacy. Legacy has two aspects, the experience of the project and how it is recorded and contextualized. The second aspect relates to what Bourriaud describes as 'the principle acting as a trajectory'. Extending his ideas on what form might be (the political value of form) there are two suggestions. The artwork remains open to future reworking and development e.g. in different situations. (From the practitioners perspective it is the line not the dot that is the important thing). Secondly as roles are formed the *style* of a work (as Bourriaud tells us) is 'a movement of thought' and this can be interpreted as a trajectory. In terms of role this is important – that there is some continuity of thought as well as the possible future effects a single art work might have.

The ways the artists worked in the OTE projects show relational qualities. An eclectic range of methods, objects and ideas were all 'vehicles' for 'tightening the space of relations' in the art project. The more informal qualities in the way people interacted (e.g. conviviality, humour,

³³I draw here from Buchanan's description of de Certeau's research into the everyday which he likens to *Deleuze thinking on the 'operational logic of culture'* (2000:91). To move towards the idea of a more pluralist activity as where and what the aesthetic might comprise is echoed by Rancier. Rancier believes the everyday is the ground upon which art emerges from, and tries to distinguish itself, - what he calls the 'aesthetic regime of the arts' and this is inherently contradictory. By strictly identifying 'art in the singular' (e.g. subject matter, genre) it does so by destroying what he calls 'the memetic barrier' that 'distinguishes ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other was of making and doing, a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations.' The contradiction of the aesthetic regime 'asserts absolute singularity of art and at the same time destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.' (2004:23).

play) were part of the process. This informality fits with the interesting fact that all the artists engaged by OTE described (and imagine) their practices as something other than artist (e.g. Benn as 'cooking', Carter as 'amateur'). This reflects artistic activity connecting with our everyday cultural experiences as opposed to the specialized role of 'professional'. We might think of this as a tactic of transposing one way of working (i.e. thinking) into another.³⁴ At the level of the OTE research initiative the approach can be considered relational in the sense of reconfiguring relationships (e.g. between individuals and sectors, artists and community members). It is also the way time is handled which could be considered a medium, as suggested by Matarasso (2005a). By extension we can imagine art within the everyday as an approach that takes a critical stance by not acquiescing to the imposed rhythms and pace of produce-consume. Slow resists acceleration, places the investment in process over imagery or product. This also speaks to the quality of time experienced (potentially richer or fuller e.g. *Maakin Lab*, 4.7, Volume II) and the attendant challenges of articulating this.³⁵

These qualities of practice and the ideas on time challenge the normative ideas on the production and the reception of art.³⁶ Processes are like icebergs with the single event, object or exhibition as the tip. In terms of evaluating the projects OTE defined quality as being within the performance, the experience and the artwork (Workshop III). However as the initiative evolved it became clear that evaluating the experience with these important and deceptively simple considerations in mind was difficult and complex. What was achievable realistically was a series of 'soundings' (two or three evaluation points) with the artists and with the project partners.³⁷ These responses, along with the researcher's structured conversations

³⁴ The negative connotation of 'professional' is echoed by Matarasso. With a background of working as community artist (as well as cultural policy writer and researcher) he suggested we (OTE) use the term 'serious' not 'professional' Matarasso, 'Future for Rural Cultural Development' in Douglas (ed) *On the Edge: Culture and the arts in remote and rural locations Conference papers*, Robert Gordon University (2002:151-160).

³⁵ The artist Hunter, in discussion on the OTE project *Inthrow* described qualities in contemporary practices with which he is familiar (his practice deals with rural and agricultural issues). He speculatively offers four characteristics of contemporary art practice; a) that they might seem (relative to mainstream art) slow processes working with real time, i.e. social and ecological time; b) that these participatory practices are non-hierarchical; c) artist's roles are 'de-professionalized' in the traditional sense of professional 'expert' and finally d) the importance of perseverance. OTE 'sounding' (evaluation point) on *Inthrow*, with Renwick, Trevor, Hunter, Douglas and Delday, 28th Aug 2003, Lumsden. (Jan Hunter has worked as a community artist dealing with rural and ecological issues for almost 20 years in partnership with Ceilia Lerner in the art group *Littoral*).

³⁶ The idea of working with time as a medium (Matarasso) is also pertinent the length of time it took to develop the OTE artists' project briefs – approximately 18 months. This was considered realistic in terms of shared learning through dialogue as an incremental development. This seems closer in spirit to the APG model of the 'Open Brief' which the artist group APG used in the late 1960's early 70's. Artists were placed in a company (or a department in the civil service) for a minimum of three months before a contract was drawn up between the artist and the organisation who shared the responsibility and the risk (and timescales were agreed). The UK Arts Councils adopted the 'Open Brief' idea that is now commonly referred to as 'artists residencies'. These are rarely longer than three months.

³⁷ In OTE Workshop III a set of ideas for discussing quality was created. These were 'technical competence', 'connection with audience', 'integrity of conception and production', 'capacity to more' and 'resonant and thought provoking'. These were not used in the soundings but were useful to sensitizing the project partners and the researchers to a spectrum of possibilities.

with the artists, produced material that was used directly or helped inform the four project outputs (publications).

Benn and Carter (4.7 and 4.8, Volume II) offer a structure or processes within which participants can improvise and we might imagine artists initiate an opening, an inspiration, a provocation. From de Certeau, we can imagine relational in participatory practice as the artistic tricks and tactics that displace in order to mobilize a fresh way of thinking, seeing or acting. As 'a style of social exchange' (1984:26) art insinuates itself within the dominant order. An aesthetic of tricks is the transforming power of a playful imagination, to trick order, to cross and mix perceived boundaries, to chop up the logic of what is given or taken for granted (to look and ask why not) to divert time. A play of knowledge. When artists work with others to make expressive meaning within the everyday it is an approach that aspires to holding together imagination, freedom and service in a relational sense.

close as holding

5.6 Art projects and their legacy

With relational practice being concerned with sociability, dialogue, and periods of time to be lived through (Bourriaud, 2002) visual art is becoming less focussed by the purely visual and subsequently its accessibility beyond or outside the experience itself. OTE decided to adopt a publishing strategy to try and communicate the value of the projects to a wider audience beyond those involved in the project. *The Maakin Lab* web site (which accompanies this thesis) is one of four project publications which reflect the ways relationships have been (re)configured through making art. The relations between the artist, a group of Shetland knitters, other creative disciplines and the local college in the *Maakin Lab* project. The relationships between an artist, a youth group and the adult world in *Edge FM*. The relationships between the artist and the patron in *Celestial Ceiling*. The relationships between the artist, a sculpture workshop and the community of Lumsden in *Inthrow*.

This more mixed constituency (to use Lacy's term for relations between art and audience) is thoroughly developed. In the *Maakin Lab* relations between traditional craft, contemporary life and the dominant hierarchical system of production, in *Edge FM*, relations between young people's ideas on where they live and the adult world of authority, in *Inthrow* the relations between future artists coming to the Scottish Sculpture Workshop and their relations with local inhabitants in and around the village of Lumsden. In *Celestial Ceiling* the relations between art, built heritage and patronage. These are some of the possible configurations of relationships and there are many others depending on the vantage point one takes or who the protagonist is taken to be. (For an overview of the project descriptions see Appendix 2).

All the descriptors Bourriaud offers in terms of relationship can apply in these projects. For example in the *Maakin Lab* project (revaluing traditional knitting), Benn and the other artists and researchers were guests and co-producers in Shetland as well as witnesses. At any given moment in the life of a project the different protagonists - artists, participants, project partners, community members and artist-researchers, could be any or all of these and other terms like guide, (in *Interference*) 'shaper', (the OTE initiative) 'friend' (*Inthrow*) emerged. But descriptors do not explain the quality of the experience, nor the complexity of transactions in a project. If the relational aesthetic genuinely takes inter subjectivity as both the site (so to speak) and a point of departure the more abstract values which emerged in this research as described by the artists need to be acknowledged in some way (e.g. faith, belief, generosity, mutuality, trust, complicity, reciprocity, autonomy). This is part of the challenge of representing the experience to people outside the project. It is also where the symbolic value lies in a relational sense.

close as the abstract values

It is noteworthy that both artists Benn and Carter refer to risk as something shared (maybe no one would volunteer for *Edge FM*, maybe nothing much would come out of the *Maakin Lab*). These are practical consideration, but at a deeper level when people work together to make art, the real risk is at the level of self. De Certeau tells us that belief implicates risk because it is 'the presumption that there is something else in what we see' or know (1985:20). It is these *human qualities in projects that connect with de Certeau's 'economy of the gift', an alternative*

exchange system that implicates us emotionally in some way.³⁸ An economy of the gift could be read as resisting capitalist economics but a deeper reading of de Certeau, as Buchanan makes explicit, does not ignore the spiritual side of de Certeau's thinking.³⁹ Buchanan makes the point that the obverse of power for de Certeau is not resistance (and it is not counter strategy) but 'authority', and it is this loss of authority in society that worries and saddens de Certeau. What de Certeau refers to as 'the mobility of belief' (1984:177-189) is symptomatic of a deeper social ill, the erosion of 'authority' which signifies a reality that is difficult to determine, but is nonetheless necessary. It is 'the air that allows a society to breath'. (Buchanan 2000:95).⁴⁰

It is possible that in delicate and fragile ways art keeps a certain authority. As an activity, like the age old irrepressibility of tactics and tricks, art does no more, nor no less than 'disrupt the fatality of the established order' (Buchanan 2000:105).⁴¹

Highmore cites a report which de Certeau produced with Giard for the French Ministry of Culture.⁴² In this report they describe and make specific recommendations 'for a *politics of possibility*'. The report, Highmore tells us, 'does not offer a revolutionary or oppositional form of politics; rather it offers a series of modest and everyday proposals' (2002a: 172 italics in original). The single example de Certeau gives in his 'practical science of the singular' is setting up a local radio (1998:255)⁴³ and as Highmore points out '*if the promotion of such speech events is a politics of everyday life, it isn't about having certain ends in mind, but about generating beginnings*' (ibid:171 italics added).

³⁸ A project which models a different system of exchange and one based on obligation is by Clegg and Guttman. Their *Open Public Library* (1987-1991) was an experiment which made available a unique space of exchanges, (though not physically between the artists and participants). They placed a bookshelf full of books in different open public spaces and invited the public to borrow, return and replenish with new books. Being free from attendants and any formal restrictions the system depended on trust and was tried out in different places e.g. New Jersey, Hamburg. See Kravagna, C, *Working on the Community: Models of Participatory Practice* (1998), <http://www.republic.net> (downloaded September 2005).

³⁹ Buchanan is critical of the 'Anglophone' reading of de Certeau's work as completely lacking insight into the spiritual dimension and focuses principally on the transgressive acts and appropriations in everyday life (2000).

⁴⁰ Buchanan notes that Giard, de Certeau's research colleague, explains that before his death (in 1986) de Certeau planned a third volume to the *Practices of Everyday Life* which would extend this work as 'an anthropology of belief' (2000:95).

⁴¹ Buchanan makes the point that de Certeau was not interested in individualism but that which spoke through the individual (2000:97) and I draw here from Buchanan's interpretation of tactics which he describes as existing on the plane of belief (ibid:89).

⁴² *L'ordinaire de la communication*, de Certeau, 1983, in Highmore (2002a:172).

⁴³ That de Certeau gives radio as an example is not surprising given his prioritization of speech and his pointing to the richness of conversation in everyday or 'our culture'. Speech act theory is one of a number of theories de Certeau draws on to develop ideas on spatial practices (reading, walking, cooking etc).

This links to the artist's intention and what might remain with the participants beyond the project experience. It is interesting that Benn talks of 'labness' as something that might last.⁴⁴ Similarly Carter has an aspiration for the project experience to be affecting, that it 'hopefully' might stimulate dialogue between the young participants and the adult world of authority. He describes the legacy (in the form of the publication *Edge FM*) as possible 'transmutations' in 'sub contexts' which is like a future-present effect. The *symbolic value* of an art project (e.g. *The Maakin Lab* and *Edge FM*) could be that it generates other possibilities, which is not the same thing as continuing a project. Rather it suggests a kind of 'hopeful effect' like creating potentiality.⁴⁵

close as 'between what exists and what is possible' (de Certeau 1985:17)

It is precisely these kinds of qualities and abstract values (risk, possibility etc) which make relational meaningful. But the difficulty for the practitioner (or art research) is that talking about these can sound evangelical or pretentious. The tension here is not between the aspiration (some might say vision) of the artist and what we can ever know of a project's effects (which also implicates the timescale we use to consider this). The tension lies in the need to make modest (less heroic) and very specific claims, yet acknowledge that experiencing or being involved in making art can enable us to re-imagine ourselves and the world we live in. Arguably this becomes an issue when art projects are publicly funded but it also relates how the work is contextualized.

There is a real pressure (in this practice-led research but also more generally) to substantiate the value of the experience, but how can we know what the participants gain (or not) without forcing the issue? The danger of this pressure is that it could contort projects, or be intrusive. Artists might become tactical in the sense of developing ways of gaining feedback which tries to enrich not hinder a project. This understanding arose from participation in the *Maakin Lab* and the idea for an 'evaluation blanket'.

⁴⁴ A clear example of a trajectory from the *Maakin Lab* is the current development of an opera - *The Shetland Odyssey* by Bill Banks-Jones, artistic director of *Tete a Tete*. Banks-Jones is currently working with a group of Shetland knitters to develop his interpretation and for the knitters to take part in the production. See *Maakin Lab* web site on CD - Outcomes.

⁴⁵ Charles Burnett, project partner in *Celestial Ceiling* used this term in an OTE 'sounding' (evaluation) after the commission for the painting was agreed between the Schliiffer family, the patrons, and the artist Robert Orchardson.

Fig. 19 Glimpses from a process - an 'evaluation blanket' part of the *Maakin Lab* (open day) Shetland College, Delday, May 2003

The OTE project outputs (e.g. the *Maakin Lab* web site on the CD) are something of a hybrid genre in publication terms, part research, part artist catalogue, part dialogue with multiple voices articulating the project experience. This seems appropriate for a new critical text coming out of practice-led art research (as noted by principle investigator Douglas). Each publication reflects the character of the project and aims to speak to a diverse audience. However the time and resources to produce this kind of quality should not be underestimated.⁴⁶ The issue is how to construct the narrative in a different way.

With the legacy of a project being the experience artists need to try and develop poetic ways of telling the story. Artist's interpretation of projects from inside the process might try to embody the more abstract values (e.g. that emerged in this research), and the question of including other people's voices raises the issue of representing others, and, to what end.

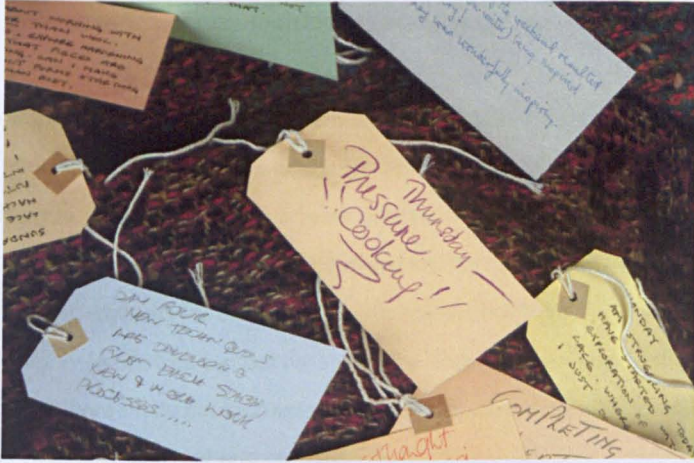
Where projects are developed with a range of people contributing and owning the project in different ways, description could move to ideas on structuring narrative. Projects could also provide the raw material for a new artwork.

5.6.1 *Artworks as narratives*

An itinerary, like a diary (used in the *Waiting Room*) is one way to tell the story. This could be developed further to a more layered, inter-textual piece using different modes of language as well as trying to include more of the participant's voices. The *Maakin Lab* (which also used a day by day diary) does this quite effectively because there was a group of people involved in the lab (providing different voices) and the combined methodologies of OTE and that of the artist Benn (her lab structure) provided the raw material for the resulting web site (see *Maakin Lab* web site on the CD). It is also that the process is highly structured.

⁴⁶ The *Maakin Lab* web site (on the CD accompanying this thesis) presents a short intense creative learning experience from the many different perspectives of the participants. In the view of the artist (Benn) this is the most successful articulation of a lab thus far. *Edge FM* was authored by the artist Paul Carter who considered the OTE project an opportunity for producing a book as a kind of diary which could have relevance in the future for the young participants. The *Celestial Ceiling* in particular shows the OTE methodology of 'gatherings' to develop thinking through dialogue. *Inthrow* presents a complex project architecture where other artists are brought into the process (by the lead artist Renwick) as the project progresses.

Fig. 19 Glimpses from a process - an 'evaluation blanket' part of the Maakin Lab (open day) Shetland College, Delday, May 2003



Where the artist works on a one-to-one basis or one with a few the challenge is how to give form to the experience which is *itself an acting out or development of a narrative space* (the way the aesthetic takes on a reality). How can this be translated to the space of a page? One way is to imagine longer term projects as providing the raw material for an artwork.

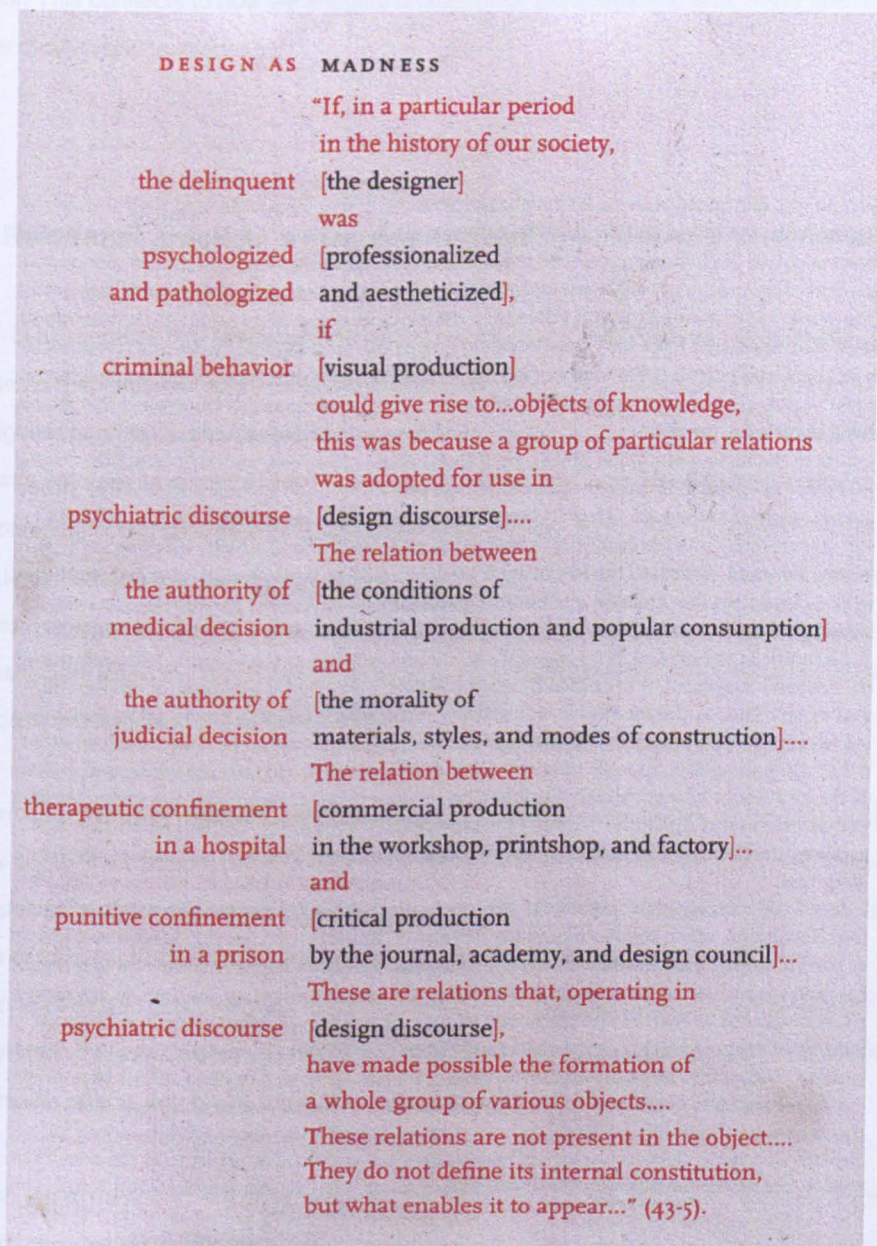
Future work could take inspiration from the highly accomplished artwork *The Lagoon Cycle*, by the Harrisons (see 3.6). This artwork is like a giant book and the panels are replicated in the catalogue. The voices in the artwork are two fictional characters enacted by the artists but they draw from real conversations and experiments. In this way the project provided the artists with the material for a complex poetic narrative which is presented as prose poetry.⁴⁷ Though highly formalized by today's tastes the *The Lagoon Cycle* has real depth and critique de Certeau offers on its component parts offers valuable considerations e.g. metaphor, the dialectic (e.g. between text and image).

Another example of a subversively playful approach to language is by Lupton and Miller (1999). In discussing graphic design they draw from Foucault's thinking on disciplines. He draws a parallel between discipline and the book as a prototype for the unity of professional discourse. A discipline such as medicine or biology cannot be regarded as a single repository of knowledge but, like the book 'while appearing to be a complete, self contained object – a model of thingness – is in fact, dispersed across a network of other texts' It is 'dispersed across a network of technologies, institutions, and services that define the discipline and its limits' (ibid:66-7).⁴⁸ They rather brilliantly use part of Foucault's text as commentary on the status and role of graphic design calling this essay 'Design as Madness'. They rework the text by replacing the word design where Foucault refers to 'madness' and 'medicine'. An extract of this in the figure below shows the typographic treatment with the original text in red.

Fig. 20 Extract from *Design as Madness*, Lupton and Miller (2000:68)

⁴⁷ Carter in his design of the *Edge FM* publication uses spoken vernacular by the young participants which has the feel of prose poetry (4.8, Volume II).

⁴⁸ Michael Foucault, *The Architecture of Knowledge* (1972). Foucault was interested in the exercise of power through bodies of knowledge and the institutions they authorize such as psychiatry and political science. Foucault's 'discipline' is not unlike de Certeau's strategy but de Certeau looked for the specific ways in daily life showing how we are not reduced to the 'grid' of dominant structures of power and controls.

Fig. 20 Extract from *Design as Madness*, Lupton and Miller (2000:68)

How a project experience is expressed and mediated implicates the role of artist as also author. This connects to how we imagine relational art within the everyday might operate - the issue of artist and 'audience'.

5.7 Relational practice: a stranger sociability and stranger circulation

Bourriaud suggests that relational artworks lack aesthetic resolution in a formal sense and suggests that relational artworks prompt us to think about the way space and time is re-configured and that it derives its main originality from this. Form sets like ice (holds good) and spreads out from its material form, it is a linking element. At the level of artistic intention it is the 'principle acting as a trajectory' (2002:20-1). An event, encounter or exhibition is like a 'dot on a line' (ibid: 21). His description of form is both how it comes into being and its intended effects. However his theory is overlaid on examples neatly cut out against the backdrop of the art institution. From the practitioner's perspective this limits the way relational art operates i.e. can be operationalized within the everyday.

Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetic as a theory of form is provocative and opens up ideas on what an artwork comprises. Yet he does not (in the examples he gives) engage with the specificity of the everyday and he fails to give us a detailed example of what the political value of form might be in its fuller sense as he theorizes. (As curator he is of course an observer of artistic activity not a producer). Form has the principle that acts as a trajectory. An interpretation of this trajectory is that it is a style of thinking, a movement of thought (as well as tangible effects that might come out of a project (e.g. *Maakin Lab*, 4.7, Volume II)

Sheikh (an art historian and critic) expands the idea of relational art in two ways. He suggests a more complex model for the production and reception of public art projects (2004b) and considers the role or function an artist might play as also author (2004a, 2004c). His argument is that we must rethink the 'public sphere'.

Sheikh makes the crucial point that relational art requires a relational audience, one which is specific and acknowledges the identity of the viewer. Taking as his counter point the

modernist position of autonomous, single authored art works and its idealized and generalized audience, he proposes imagining a more complex 'public sphere' which is both 'localizable and imaginary' (2004b:1-2). This perspective acknowledges that the work, the context and the spectator is not fixed or stable. Drawing from Warner's ideas of alternative or 'counter publics' it opens up ideas on where and how artwork evolves.

"Counter publics are 'counter' (only) to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to a stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic but constitutive of membership and its affects" (ibid:3)⁴⁹

As a model it seems realistic to art operating within the everyday and resonates with the way art was made in this research, at an individual practice level and at the level of the OTE art-research initiative.⁵⁰

A counter public is not oppositional (though they are not within the confines of mainstream art, or the culture industry of consumption and entertainment) but alternative 'parallel formations' which are 'minor' or even 'subordinate'. This approach is not one artwork or intervention aimed at a generalized public but tries to constitute 'a continuous counter-public steam' and is a form of 'self authorization' (ibid:3 from Warner). Self authorization is linked to his idea of the role or function of the artist as also author, a public figure in the construction of alternative spaces and addressing other subjectivities (2004a:1).

This resonates with the OTE strategy (within an art institution) of developing art projects with a wide range of individuals (as outlined in Research context, xi and OTE: Emergent Methodology, 4.6). The 'stream' is dialogue and a range of outputs (e.g. newsletters, web site, papers on various platforms).⁵¹ It is interesting that Sheikh suggests a more tactical use of existing systems of communication such as alternative publishing modes, the use of local and

⁴⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York, Zone Books (2002:121-2)

⁵⁰ For example in my own emerging practice *Pandora's Box* is appropriated into the world of genetics and spirals out to a science conference on genetics in Copenhagen and a local church group in a discussion on genetics in Kemnay, Aberdeenshire. The tangled lines of *Various Species of Industrial Waste* came out of the *Maakin Lab* and through conversation with a geneticist became postcards which were sent to her family and friends in Denmark. *Inheritance* is shown for one day to 30 Scottish geneticists, develops into images on printed silk and becomes a 20 minute playful episode with five geneticists in their office (*Interference*). See *The Process(es)* in Volume II.

⁵¹ Sheikh is discussing the role of progressive art institutions as opposed to individual art practices. Some examples he gives are *Copenhagen Free University*, *b_books* in Berlin, *The Invisible Academy*, Bangkok, *University of Openess*, London, see 2004a:3

national television, open source on the internet (2004b:4).⁵² The crucial point is that there is no pre-formed, nor singular public (traditionally audience) but a constructed fragmented public space - a 'public in the plural' (2004c:2).

For the artist who prefers to work one-to-one or with small groups over time, this stranger sociability and circulation where practice creates a network seems characteristically open to the contingencies, chance meetings and collisions. 'Public' as individuals is differentiated, fragmented, plural, mutually affecting. This is not necessarily large scale, but has a sense of immediacy with tangled connections amongst individuals through meetings, conversations and events. Creating or growing an alternative public space is not oppositional but it does contest the model of artist and audience on a number of levels. Firstly co-production is assumed. Secondly the way art is operationalized - how it is made, circulates and moves seems harmonious with social relations in daily life. Thirdly practice might have different strands. Self authorization can mean a hybrid role, playing different parts in different projects, using a range of activities in any single project. In spirit it seems closer living in smaller remoter places. It is not 'professional' but a pluralist model of working. It is not audience numbers but a diversity of individuals which might make up the public sphere.

It is interesting to imagine relational as an open artwork, an artwork that could write itself through its circulation and reflexivity. This thought was prompted by an example by the artist partnership of Carrington and Hope (called B+B). They understood that collaborative and participatory projects can produce 'leftovers' from the process which are distilled and presented as single artworks. Certain documents, stories and objects are prioritized and come to represent the whole project and this affects the way a project is remembered and interpreted – its legacy (Carrington and Hope 2004). Since 2000 they have been collecting material on engaged, activist and process-based projects from Europe and the US to form the basis of a 'live archive'. They use this resource in 'live archive projects' as a point of exchange. As a focus for discussion this generates fresh material for the archive.⁵³

⁵² I am grateful to Suzanne Lacy for referencing Sheikh in conversation during her visit and talk at Gray's School of Art, *Working Large, Working Small and just working: Interrogating Public Art Process* (11th November 2005). This counter public idea also resonates with Lacy's idea of building 'a constituency' (see 2.3.1). It is interesting that Lacy is increasingly using the media tactically in her work to gain a wider public audience, e.g. *Fire on the Roof*, a project involving the civic authorities, black youth and the police department engaged the news media to cover the event (1998).

⁵³ The B+B archive was taken to various venues (e.g. *Talk Show*, Chicago, 2002, *Soft Logics*, Stuttgart, 2004) At *Soft Logic* (an exhibition of three archives from the Kunsterhaus Art Centre) they describe each presentation of the archive as 'trying to re-plot the stories and the strategies of what it contains' to encourage people to make connections or think about the projects in different ways (in this case visitors and members of the Kunsterhaus). The aim was that people could reconsider the role and responsibility of their institution in the wider context of socially engaged art practice, see Carrington and Hope (2004)

These artists take on a range of activities to form a practice, hosting events, making exhibitions and workshops, acting as curators and evaluators.⁵⁴ The idea of an expanded, hybrid role seems appropriate in terms of developing a strong practice. Some artists adopt a playful approach where fictive roles worn lightly become part of the artistic toolkit in a single project (e.g. Guthrie and Pope, see 4.10.3).

For a practice to have a sense of independence (or authority) the artist partnerships or collectives have more power to deal with the complexities of making meaning than the individual artist. It is the combination of different skills but it is also, crucially, being able to share a horizon from which to view the world. This kind of self authorization or zone of autonomy is not to be underestimated. Practices with an *aesthetic-polemical* reach seem (from the OTE experience) hard earned, difficult to conceive and establish and tough to sustain.⁵⁵

5.8 Summary

The OTE initiative as an approach demonstrates a particular kind of relational practice which re-imagines the public sphere (traditionally audience) to a more complex model of how art is made and its reception. As a sustained effort (a set of art projects supported by a research methodology) co-productions takes on a reflexive inter-dependency. The defining characteristic is that audience is not assumed but is constructed. In terms of role this positions the artist as also author (public figure), a mediator between project experiences, its representation and development. The idea of *self authorization* implicates using a range of publications and different activities across a variety of alternative as well as established platforms.

⁵⁴ The B+B website is www.welcomcb.org.uk For an overview of their practice by Hope and Carrington give see *Variant*, Summer 2005 Issue 23 pp 26-7.

⁵⁵ An example of this self authorization and the expanded role of artist as also author is the group Critical Art Ensemble. CAE is a New York based organisation. Established over twenty years ago their subject is the world of genetics. Their web site contains free downloadable books in a PDF format (e.g. *Electronic Disturbance*) and Projects (e.g. *Cult of the New Eve*, *Free Range Grain*). Interestingly *Tactical Projects* is a text on a single all encompassing subject under the heading *The Therapeutic State*, see <http://www.critical-art.net/> (accessed June 2003)

For the artist who prefers to work one-to-one or with small groups over time the implication of developing a 'public sphere' is that it need not be large scale but may be harder to describe than other models of practice. As sequences of small defining moments and tangled gestures it resists the productivist rationale of difference and spectacle. Art practice within the everyday can be imagined as a gentle intervention, closer to a whisper than a shout, an insinuation.

close as an insinuation

This might seem contrary to developing an autonomous practice (a withdrawal even). But this approach neither relinquishes artistic autonomy nor views itself as separate from social reality (ideas of access, and participation are institutional terms). Co-production is where people feel part of the expression being cultivated.

Communicating the project beyond the immediate participants implicates finding new artistic-poetic ways of narrating the experience (e.g. in text and images). However we cannot assume speaking to an art audience. Participatory relational art aspires to embracing a plural, differentiated constructed public. This suggests a number of characteristics. Practice might have different strands and the idea of a single and unchanging role seems both unrealistic and restricting. Relational does implicate de-professionalization but not a sense of self authorization.

It suggests a shift in focus to a slower approach to developing art, and an insistence on the specific which is where the interplay between the aesthetic, the playful and resistances are lived out. As an approach it tries to hold together imagination, freedom and service in a relational sense at whatever scale the artist chooses, or is able to work.

Relational art as a theory of form (the political value of form) and what we understand this to be is in part based on artists themselves tackling the huge challenges of narrating project experiences. This is partially resolved in this research – resulting in a set of different projects outputs (e.g. books, 'visual dialogues', published papers) that engages with the aesthetic and ethical challenges of dealing with a multiple audience that includes the participants, the artists and academe. In the longer term we can imagine the political value of form being developed

through models of participatory relational practice where the role of artist is also author working with and for a plural public.

The everyday and participatory relational art

In the wake of the antagonistic post-modern theories that distanced art and the artist from 'audience' and the social world, the everyday as an orientation seems a very human place to work within and speak from. There are as many everyday (and everynights) as individuals. It does not categorize identities or social groupings. Theoretically it clears the ground in terms of imagining and forming a role (as in this research) that is responsive to the particularity of situations and it emphasizes the local, the immediate, the spatial and temporal, the relational networks.

The everyday is the ground upon which art emerges and distinguishes itself, it is not separate but the extra dimension. The everyday is like the foil against which we act out and make expressive meaning. It is (in a relational sense) the field of possibilities that we might draw elements from. The aesthetic task becomes finding and giving value to something, framing elements in some way - making it *more so*. When art is participatory, dialogic and like 'gentle' interventions we might try to tap into social energies, find the interstitial or the in between spaces. It is where for the artist 'by an art of being in between' we might draw and create 'unexpected results from the circumstances (de Certeau, 1985:30). The everyday itself requires a shift in focus (to dwell in and on it) and implicates a form of attention to see or bring out the marvellous, find the significance in the commonplace and connect different levels of subjectivities. But it also implicates thinking about the bigger picture from personal experience (see 2.7.2). The term itself is thoroughly ambiguous and is not unlike qualities in participatory relational art – it cannot be pinned down as either aesthetic or political. It aims at being both but is contingent on other people involved in the creative process in different ways and at different points in time.

The participatory relational approach represents a re-positioning of the artist and re-thinking the nature of creative production, its reception and circulation. The public sphere it tries to initiate and grow over time is stranger but only compared to mainstream art. As an outlook it embraces the pleasures and contradictions of the everyday and acknowledges that

constructing alternative spaces and making expressive meaning with other people is *at best* 'not about ends but beginnings' (Buchanan quoting de Certeau, 2000:105).

5.9 Future research: application of the matrix and new lines of enquiry

1. Contemporary art practice and the everyday

The everyday as a critical concept and orientation for practice is a way of grounding the meanings of art as activity (not noun). It has powerful ethical and aesthetic implications for the way we imagine art operates being 'part of a long theoretical tradition in identifying the potential for critical practice and for offering alternative interpretations on what makes the "good life"' (Papastergiadis, 1998:27). It is the ground upon which the relations between art, politics and theory are played out. Yet (in his view) and despite having a long art historical lineage, it 'remains relatively under theorized in terms of contemporary art' and the new roles that are emerging (ibid:23 see 2.7.2).

Further work by drawing from key theorists on the everyday is important (e.g. sociology, cultural studies, literature). It would help firmly situate and contextualize contemporary art as part of this theoretical tradition and contributing to it.

2. The matrix

As artists we need conceptual tools and methodologies that are subtle and versatile enough to make sense of the worth of different kinds of projects and to develop a critical practice (understood as a refinement and clarity of purpose and intent). The matrix can be used by other artists. As something foundational it can be applied to a range of contexts, and is not restricted to approaches that are participatory and relational, nor the particularism of art practice.

The matrix can be used in a variety of situations to develop specific lines of enquiry and issues emerging from this research (as detailed in A to F below)

(A) Training of younger artists

The paradigm shift in contemporary art that situates itself within the multi-layered social realm (the everyday) raises challenges for artists at the levels of artistic intention, different modes of operating and the nature of what constitutes the 'public sphere' (e.g. plural, differentiated).

Arguably there is a shortfall in the skills needed to adequately train and equip younger artists for a dynamic and varied role in public art. To develop effective methodologies and criticality that embrace formal (art historical) and social concerns a complex set of skills is required. Training needs to develop an awareness of the range of skills necessary. Skills to deal with for example:

- how to negotiate a project with other people and dealing with multiple agendas
- the (self) critical awareness of positioning in terms of the artist working with others (where do the power relationships lie)
- how do we know if we are transgressing
- ethical issues if there is public or published output
- how and when is the intention(s) of the project realized in open ended processes of exploration
- what is the nature of exchange and trans-actions in the process
- what constitutes 'co-production'
- what tactics and tricks are used in the process and why
- when is playfulness neither folly nor divisive
- what are the models for framing participation and framing the articulation of the experience
- when other people are engaged in making art what position can the artist as narrator adopt in representing the experience to people outside the immediate group
- how can other voices be included in this articulation that goes beyond using a few quotes
- what new forms of narration are possible that are appropriate and poetic

In many professional practices (architecture, medicine law etc) a period of training in the real world is required prior to independent practice being recognized as such. Art education needs

to support the development of practice through real world experience by placing artists into different contexts (formulated as 'projects') to develop practice. A mentoring system involving the educationalists and mature art practitioners with considerable experience seems crucial. This approach to educating the artist has the potential to strategically draw in practitioners from other disciplines (e.g. within the institution) to enrich understanding through discussion of a project situation as the process unfolds. This would act as a check and as a stimulus in the process.

Because art practice operates at multiple levels training needs to emphasise this and to complicate or to problematize the understanding of practice. Training criticality is to question the nuances of the why and the how as well as the what of practice. We need to more precisely understand what a *critical* practice actually comprises. (In this thesis it was developed as a concept from de Certeau's ideas on resistance e.g. internally like thresholds, the polemical as questioning assumptions the tactics-strategy dynamic as improvisation).

Using the matrix within training could involve visually mapping (as texts and words) the issues as they arise and what is learnt in projects. This could be useful to reflect on and work with in discussion with tutors and others. It would also help develop a sharper and expanded practitioner language and an awareness of the dynamics at work in a creative process.

The matrix considered as three dimensions or forces can also be imagined as *three modes of learning*. This also has implications on discussing and understanding the value of new collaborative art projects and practice-led research (see below).

(B) New collaborative art projects: understanding creative learning and the matrix as generative

The matrix could be used in a much more experimental way (than in this research) where the (creative) learning from being involved in a project and the development of the matrix is a shared process. This could also develop the matrix as not only analytical and interpretive, but also as generative.

Using the matrix in a collaborative project could involve both the artist and the other individuals actively using the matrix as a thinking tool to develop a project.⁵⁶ There are a number of potential benefits in doing this. As a two way process the matrix acts as a catalyst for developing the initial project brief (planning or imagining what could be) and then 'growing' the project as a process of value finding (finding common ground, understandings through shared and differing values, seeing instances of improvisation, teasing out thinking on the aesthetic etc). This activity could be staged throughout the project to both direct and trace development. In this way it simultaneously acts as evaluation points and helps develop the content of the project. It also makes shared learning more explicit and arguable makes us more self-conscious about learning.

Using it in a more artistic exploratory way (e.g. methods of visualizing with text, symbols, pictures together, using three dimensional modelling) the matrix could generate new thinking and ideas within the process. Used at the heart of the dialogic process the matrix could 'take-on' language, values and experiences and ideas. These 'thought sketches' (variations of the matrix) as examples of visual thinking (which is 'quintessentially beyond logic and words').⁵⁷ could by generating their own reality stir up other possibilities.

(C) New forms of narration in participatory relational approaches

For the artist(-researcher) to re-tell the *experience* we need to get closer to the 'polyphony' (Bourriaud 2002) inherent in the relational aesthetic when people work together. To somehow reflect this as part of the project's output. It needs to weave together different perspectives as *form* in a relational sense. (We might imagine 'the between utterances' de Certeau speaks of in *The Lagoon Cycle*, the use of prose poetry and other literary devices see 3.6).

Part of the making is arguably in the story telling. We could imagine the matrix as embodied in the telling - the way the matrix shape-shifts, focussing one moment on a micro-level detail then panning out to wider concerns, shifting attention from feeling micro-resistances to inventing a tactic etc. We might think of this as a movement in and through language rather than an overlaying of the matrix to analyse and interpret a situation.

⁵⁶ This was not the case in this research though it was used in the structured conversations with the two artists Benn and Carter see *The Process* in 4.7 and 4.8, Volume II.

⁵⁷ I borrow this definition from Ede (2000:75). (She is discussing the value of visualization in science and in art).

(D) Developing a critical practitioner language that can be shared

Part of the struggle in this research is the problem of inherited language to talk about art - from the models of practice that partition to outmoded frames of reference like 'participant', 'audience' 'event'. When talking about art as a co-operative venture we must try to not lose the essence of the relationships it is attempting to grasp. Adding to and inventing new descriptors for different kinds of relationships are needed that better describe the different ways individuals contribute to and own the project. Other metaphors are needed to enriching understanding (e.g. different kinds of belonging(s) and witnessing).

As a focus in art projects (extending the language and metaphor as generative) the findings would have broader relevance. We need ways of creating bridges and ties across different cultural and social experience in our increasingly multicultural society.

(E) Considerations on timescales for projects

Art in the everyday means judgements are made in response to a plurality of constrains and opportunities but in order to see this we have to see the real detail of the situation and insights into the artists thinking process (and other protagonists) within in the experience. This resists the easy sound bite. This self evident fact suggests a shift to acknowledging a longer project development time, and time slice taken to evaluate the impact, outcome and outputs of a project (durational research). This is important to see how improvisation is enacted. Improvisation is relatively easy to see *in* the fashioning of materials but much more difficult at the level of making meaning (art) through relationship by creating language that is *visual but* also verbal and gestural. It is also important (from the OTE experience) in terms of properly and incrementally developing a project that brings together a multiplicity of perspectives.

The matrix can be used at different scales and at different points in time to take 'soundings' of a project (content) and be used to interpret the artist's role (the approach).

(F) Practice-led art research

Further projects using the matrix to interpret the values and nature of different models of art practice (including participatory relational) would develop different approaches to the use of the matrix applied in practice – as *reflection in and reflection on practice*.

By offering the matrix to other artists and art-research practitioners to use in their own project(s) different examples (like case-studies) of reflective learning would emerge. This would be valuable at the broader level of practice-led art research (in a formal/academic sense) which as a relatively new field (compared with other disciplines) is beginning to establish its own ground as a legitimate and rigorous form of enquiry. Arguably we need good cross case comparisons of practice-led art research as a reflective and reflexive creative activity. At the heart of this discussion are the issues surrounding the nature of experiential knowledge and its relationship to understanding (e.g. *The first International Conference on Experiential Knowledge*, forthcoming 2007) as well what might constitute 'new' knowledge in a formal educational sense.⁵⁸

A set of planned 'case studies' with a wide range of individuals (disciplines and culturally) would provide the raw material for comparison across highly individualistic approaches to identify and begin to map the *different kinds of knowledges* (sensual, analytical, intuitive, visual, common sense, social skills etc). This would be beneficial for practice-led art researchers, for artists operating in the complex and discursive area of art in the public realm, and for the training of younger artists.

⁵⁸ This conference aims to explore the theme of 'New Knowledge in the Creative Disciplines' to examine what is understood and accepted as new knowledge in research and in creative practice, and what their role and relationship might be. University of Hertfordshire, 29th of June 2007. It is planned as the first of a series of biennial conferences.

5.10 Afterword: A game of context

Tactics and strategy have a symbiotic relationship. They need and define each other. Like the transformation impulse to intervene in the world, it is the energy or agency of artists. Ruiz describes this dynamic as a game of 'bureaucracy' which seems particularly apposite for our contemporary society in the western world.

The game is played by two sporting teams, - 'Mystery' and 'Ministry'. At one time, Ruiz tells us, they were one but they split and became sporting organizations. 'Mystery is a team that enjoys hiding'. Mystery hides its deeper nature (1995:91). In the game Mystery fabricates objects and Ministry tries to take them away. The objects Mystery makes are unique and unrepeatable (but they can be copied). When Ministry steals an object it makes prototypes, they are mass produced and become part of the circulation. Ministry scores a point. If Mystery succeeds in keeping its objects hidden, it scores a point.

close in combat

The game moves back and forth and both the teams continue to redefine each other. There are two kinds of ministry, classical and modern. Classical ministry springs out of mystery and takes on a fully formed structure that is stable it has its own rules to function and is fully accessible to everyone (like strategy). This is its strength. Mystery however comes from a different place, the place of the imaginary.

Artworks in this game are imaginary organizations of the world. There are different kinds of artworks. 'Delinquent artworks' are the imaginary transgressions, experimental or imaginary actions which 'test the cohesiveness of society'. 'Perfect worlds' are artworks which aim to create a harmony between the part and the whole, 'innovative works' concentrate on new means of fabrication, technique. Other artists are 'explorers' who discover new territories of the imagination (ibid:92-4).

We can imagine our favourite artists playing this game of context.

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www.ontheadgeresearch.org and www.maakinlab.org

***Close as a construct to critically investigate the
relationship between the visual artist and the everyday***

Heather Delday

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of The Robert Gordon University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This research was carried out in connection with the
On the Edge research programme
(Phase I, August 2001-December 2004),
Gray's School of Art,
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland,
funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

Volume II

June 2006

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Chapter 4

Using and constructing the matrix as a way to think about art practice

This Volume contains the fieldwork (*The Process*) and the *Analysis using the matrix (the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical)*. *The Process* is reflection in action and the *Analysis* is reflection on action.

The *Introductions* to the projects and the *Summary analysis* are in Volume I.

At the back of this volume are two CD's with outputs from the projects which the reader may wish to view (this is indicated in the text). Also at the end of this Volume are appendices that include papers extending aspects of the research.

(A. My own projects)

4.2 Developing art work through dialogue - co-operative working:

Early work with a group of geneticists: Pandora's Box, 23 Genescapes, and Inheritance (Aug 2001 – Feb 2003).

4.2.2 The process

"... until the genetic code was cracked in the 1960's, we did not know what we know now: that all life is one; seaweed is your distant cousin and anthrax one of your advanced relatives. The unity of life is an empirical fact."

Matt Ridley: *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters*, Fourth Estate, London (1999:22).

Background

Towards the end of an MA study (Gray's School of Art, Sept 2001) I was working with the idea of identity. My sister and a friend who is also a research scientist suggested that I look at genetics. Almost weekly at that time, there was something in the press, on radio or TV relating to genetics; GM crops, cloning, genetic engineering and so on. The field of genetics continues to raise complex questions regarding the environment, society and our future as a species and not surprisingly many artists work with genetics as the subject for their work.¹

¹ Some examples of artists working with genetics include the group Critical Art Ensemble based in USA who are highly politically motivated, see <http://www.critical-art.net/> (accessed Jan 03)
 Professor Wilson's encyclopaedic volume *Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science and Technology*, MIT, 2001, continues to expand his index of artists working in science/technology including genetics, see <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~%7Einfoarts/links/wilson.artlinks2.html> (accessed Feb 03)
 Art and genetics is also found in the field of biosciences e.g. <http://www.gene-sis.net/overview.html> (accessed Feb 03)
 An established Scottish artist Christine Borland works with questions on the implications of genetics research e.g. *Designer Bodies: Towards The Posthuman Condition: An International Symposium*, New Media Scotland and Stills, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 3rd April 2004 see http://www.mediascot.org/art/view_art.php?id=111 (accessed Feb 04)
 For other examples see references in refereed paper, Delday: *Genescapes: Visualisation and value finding*, (2003) Appendix 6.

Genetic code or DNA is made up of four chemical bases or nucleotides. This is symbolised by four letters (C, T, G and A) which interweave in different sequences. This simple four letter code replicates and is the basis of all living matter. One metaphor scientists' use is that DNA is like a book and parallels are drawn between the characters of the alphabet making words, sentences, and paragraphs. The language used to describe genetics derives from language describing language, for instance mistakes in gene sequences are sometimes referred to as misprints other key terms include translation, transcription, and expression.

With a graphics background I was attracted by the poetic nature of the code. It is full of the promise of explaining who we are. I obtained some autoradiograms (from a friend of a friend in the USA). Autorads are one method (now largely outdated) for visualising DNA. The well known bands, or 'fingerprint' derives from this method and they inspired a number of art works; *Pandora's Box*, *Genescapes*, *Inheritance* (and *Interference*, 4.3)

The following projects are with a group of four clinical geneticists. The artworks were with different configurations of staff within the genetics department at the Medical School, Foresterhill, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

***Pandora's Box* (August 01-)**

Working with Sheila Simpson (a consultant clinical geneticist) *Pandora's Box* came into existence as a kind of co-production. I was thinking about our bodies or any living thing as containers of genes. I made a box by cutting and folding an autoradiogram and photographed this. In conversation Sheila described this as being 'like Pandora's Box'. The artwork's intention was realised in the moment Sheila named the image (August 2001).

Fig. 1 Section of an autoradiogram

Fig. 2 *Pandora's Box* (Aug 2001-)

Sheila (asked me) and went on to use the image in her context (her daily practice) first at an international genetics conference on Huntington's Disease, Copenhagen (Sept 2001) and later at a talk to a lay audience, a local church group in her home town of Kemnay on the

Fig. 1 Section of an autoradiogram

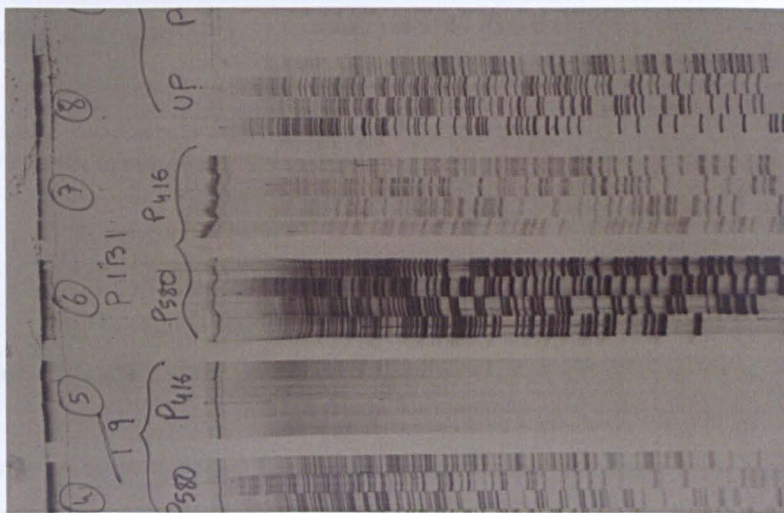
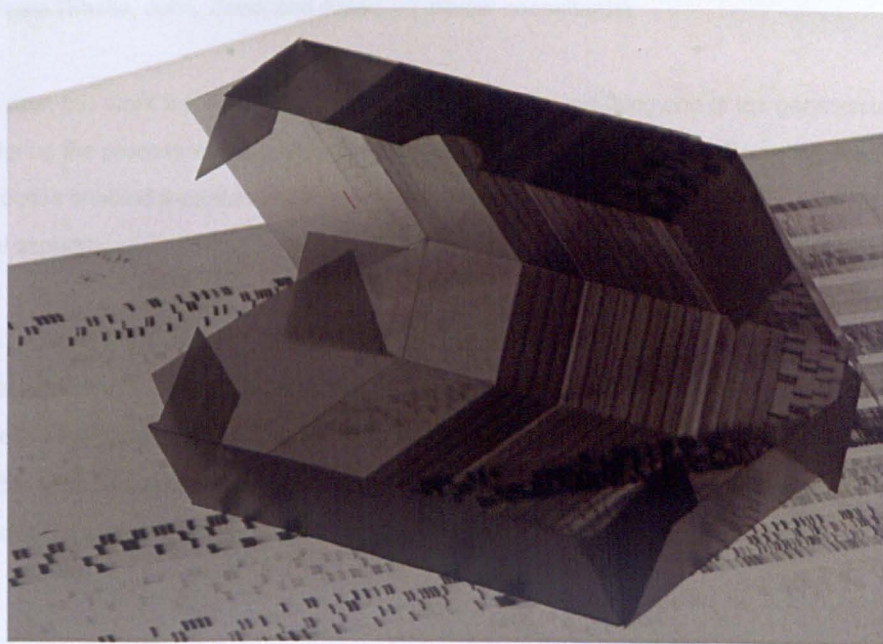


Fig. 2 Pandora's Box (Aug 2001 -)



ethical implications of genetic testing (March 03).² Sheila also gave the image to a colleague to use because Pandora's Box had come up in conversation on issues arising from new techniques in pre-natal testing (May 2004).³

See Visual Dialogue <i>PANDORA'S BOX</i> on CD
--

23 Genescapes, (Feb 2003)

This work led to *Genescapes*. I made more elegant boxes and placed them in the landscape and photographed them. As a movable metaphor they took on different meanings through different placings. I took a set of 23 black and white photographs (*Genescapes* and some other collograph prints) to the genetics department to hold a dialogue with a group of four geneticists (Sheila, John, Zosia and Astrid, all clinical consultants).

It was from this work that I made the connection between something one of the geneticists said during the process with a quality of practice as de Certeau describes. Being involved in the process enabled a certain freedom to think and speak differently amongst themselves (the ethical aspect).

I then began to think about the two other aspects of operativity, as de Certeau defines them, the *aesthetic* and the *polemical* and their possible relevance for art practice. He defines the *aesthetic* as a transforming reuse, or ruse, a poetic gesture and an aesthetic of tricks. I could view this work as a transforming reuse in a material sense (boxes made from autorads) and in a conceptual sense – as a movable metaphor (a box or container) they took on new

² Sheila Simpson invited me to attend this talk where I realized she could, and was, using the image in a very different context. At a later meeting I asked her about using the work and she described the effect in Copenhagen as an 'ahh' (a sharp in take of breath) from this science audience. She believed that the effect was 'instantaneous - it touched a chord in the audience'. I understood this as a poetic gesture by her in taking the work into this context.

³ Dr Cumming's paper is on the issues arising from pre-natal ultra sound testing 'which will disclose the genetic status of the offspring long before that individual is able to give consent to be tested. Ultrasound has now also become a genetic test and is in conflict with the ethical principle of autonomy. Another Pandora's box has been opened.' From the abstract of *U/S – Opening another Pandora's Box*, 9th May 2004 (e mail April 04).

meanings from photographing them placed in different and groupings in the landscape. The effect of this was to prompt different readings by the geneticists.

Fig.3 Two of the twenty three *Genescape* photographs (Feb, 2003)

See Visual Dialogue 23 *GENESCAPES* on CD

I made a number of artworks (prints, photographs, collographs) to bring to the geneticists. This was initially trying to make the time spent with them as interesting as I could. I was very aware that their time was precious (consultancies are on average 15 minutes long) and they were giving me time (usually over hour after their working day). I realised I was making things in sets and that this can encourage comparisons and discussion. The geneticists disagreed and discussed preferences. Different interpretations indirectly revealed things about each other. Sheila and John both commented on this.

By holding a dialogue over this work (particularly *Genescapes*) I began to understand that art can be a special way of holding a conversation. It seemed like 'a collective elaboration of meaning' (Bourriaud 2002:15) where the different interpretations and connections were offered up, to me and amongst themselves and this grew the meaning of the work. As catalysts the art objects enabled us to share a discursive space in that ideas on wider issues emerged (e.g. genetic determinism in *Genescapes*). Conversation was thick with subtexts and subtle undercurrents. Not heavy but roving, exploratory with multiple meanings and unplanned directions. Meaning co-produced but also provisional. The short extract below is an example with Astrid, Zosia and John (the full transcript is in Appendix 5: Dialogue with geneticists Feb 03).

Fig.3 Two of the twenty three *Genescape* photographs (Feb, 2003)

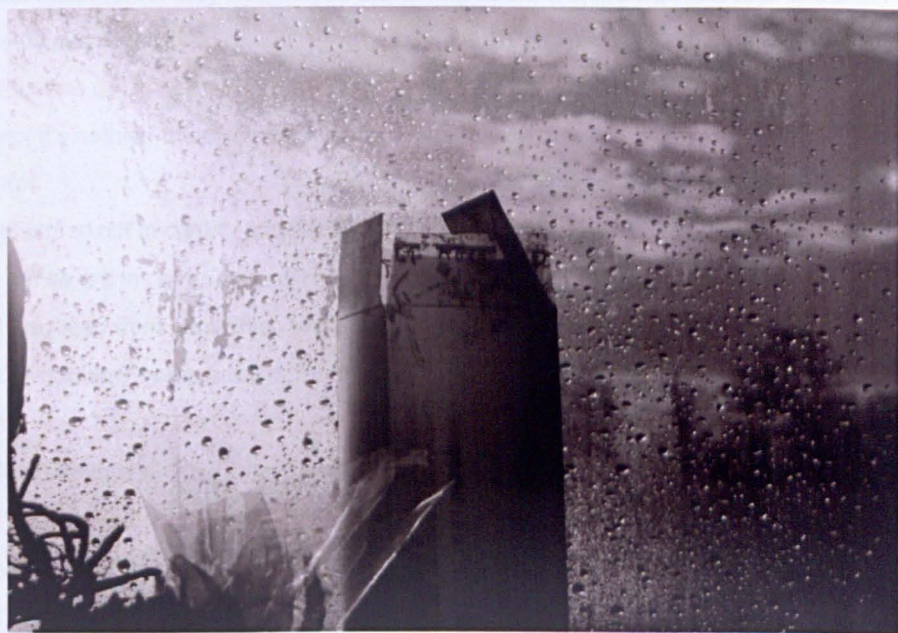
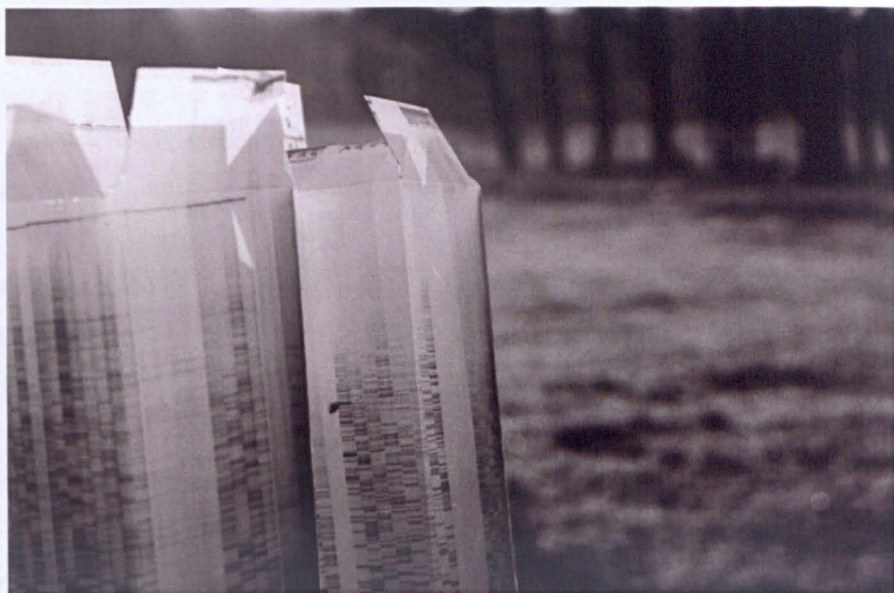


Fig. 4 An extract of dialogue - differing views on genetic determinism (Feb 03)

Linking: 2078, see Appendix 3.

A 'Yes the kind of animated nature of it - if you want go back to African primitive religions, where nature is living. For me these chromosomes were somehow a kind of semi parasite, not the negative thing as worm you've got in your gut, but somehow as small ...'

H 'Creatures?'

A 'Yes, yes.'

H 'That's interesting.'

Z 'That's a bit scary.'

J 'Yes that's very scary.'

A 'It's not scary for me.'

H 'I don't find that scary either.'

A 'You've got these animated...'

H 'Why do you think that's scary?'

J 'It's because of these things that control you, that it's who we are.'

A 'No, no, it's for me the co-operation between these small things and for me it's not scary.'

J 'I would much rather they were ... you are talking about Richard Dawkins idea of the selfish gene really aren't you?'

A 'No it's more because I'm not afraid of mutations. You think it's scary because of mutations.'

J 'No, no, it's nothing to do with mutations. It's to do with that you're not in ...'

Z 'Control'

J '... that you're not in control and Richard Dawkins hypothesis is that you're not in control. You're genes are in control, you are just their vehicle.'

H 'And they leap from generation to generation.'

J 'That's right, they're the ones that carry on we don't.'

A 'That's why I don't think they are scary because they are part of the collective.'

J 'But they are scary.'

A 'And that is why I can have this idea without being scared.'

Z 'They drive people'

J 'That's what I'm saying, they drive you.'

A 'For me it is this collection with nature.'

This work is discussed in a refereed paper, Delday, *Genescapes: visualization and value finding*, 2003, see Appendix 6.

Returning to the specific qualities de Certeau gives us in his operativity, I then considered the *polemical* – the idea of tactics and resistance in the inner sense, as being like my design thinking rubbing up with art thinking. Moving the boxes around (and photographing them) was a personal resistance to 'site-specificity' endemic in the discourse on art. I was working with how not to illustrate something specific. I was coming to value ambiguity in terms of how open an image or object might be to interpretation and the connections that might be made. Graphic design is often a matter of arriving at a consensus with clients but visual dialogue (how I described this way of working) meanings might be co-created (as in *Pandora's Box*) but also meaning is contested, and open ended, provisional (as in *Genescapes*).

What I gained from working like this was learning about the science of genetics and we were developing ideas that I took forward into art works. For example *September 11th* came out of *Genescapes* from something John said. In discussing how our environments affect our genes he connected the boxes to bodies and also to buildings that are 'imposed on the landscape'.

Fig. 5 Detail of *September 11th* (May 2003)

I began to imagine the different kinds of exchanges and dialogues being like the invisible or silent, below the horizon 'productions' de Certeau speaks of in everyday cultural practices. In a series of meetings with the geneticists exchanges included ideas, suggestions, humour, scientific objects and images (which the geneticists brought to show me), factual scientific information and personal reflections etc.

Because of the sensitive nature of what clinical geneticists have to deal with I made a point of transcribing our dialogues and e mailing these back to them. Particularly Sheila Simpson appreciated 'seeing' her voice. Although skilled in the art of imparting complex scientific information to clients, she 'had not read her own voice' and found this interesting and useful.

Usually we met as a small group after their working day in the department, though sometimes it was in one-to-one meetings and over time we developed a level of trust. For example

working with Astrid, she preferred to meet in her home and an interesting co-incidence (because of my participation in the *Maakin Lab*) was her passion for knitting. For Astrid, knitting was her way of relaxing from the daily stresses of work and many ideas were discussed (e.g. her knitting a chromosome jumper or pairs of things, starting a wool shop, the colour palette of Aberdeen in terms of wool).

These conversations resulted in new artwork. *Various species of industrial waste*, Oct 2003 (a set of six postcards) that was used by Astrid to send to her family and friends in Denmark. Astrid also introduced me to two Danish friends and this led to the idea of making some prints life sized or human height (see *Inheritance*).⁴

Fig. 6 Exchanging ideas Astrid's knitting and chromosomes (April 2003)

Fig. 7 *Various species of industrial waste*, No. 23 (October 2003)

By engaging small groups of people who share interests in similar issues art objects could act as a catalyst for dialogue and other forms of exchange. There was a lot of listening and learning about their world. It was the qualities of engagement I was interested in. I learnt from working like this that fun and humour were important to the geneticists 'we use humour I think to shield ourselves from some of the things we have to come across' (Simpson, March 03). She was not referring to the diseases, but to the emotional distress they might see in their clients. Fun 'is a coping mechanism' and she alluded to the darker humour they sometimes use ('making fun with not making fun of') and she spoke of forms of relaxation at home (reading). By bringing artwork into their working environment it enabled the geneticists to interact differently with their colleagues:

"What's fun about this in a way, is learning about each other, but also learning about ourselves because this is encouraging us to say and think things that normally we don't." (Sheila Simpson, March 03).

⁴ Peculiarly Morton (Astrid's friend and a scientist) had seen one autorad boxes in Duff House, Banff in an exhibition *homecoming(s)* which I curated and took part in with three other people and (Nov-Feb, 2002). Morton described an artwork representing 'a cubic litre of the soul' and asked me if I had seen this. Eventually I came to understand what he was talking about – it was the boxes made from autorads. I had no idea what he meant by this and he explained that when we die we loose a cubic litre in weight. The relevance of this story is the round about and oblique way an artist might gain feedback or an interpretation.

Fig. 6 Exchanging ideas Astrid's knitting and chromosomes (April 2003)

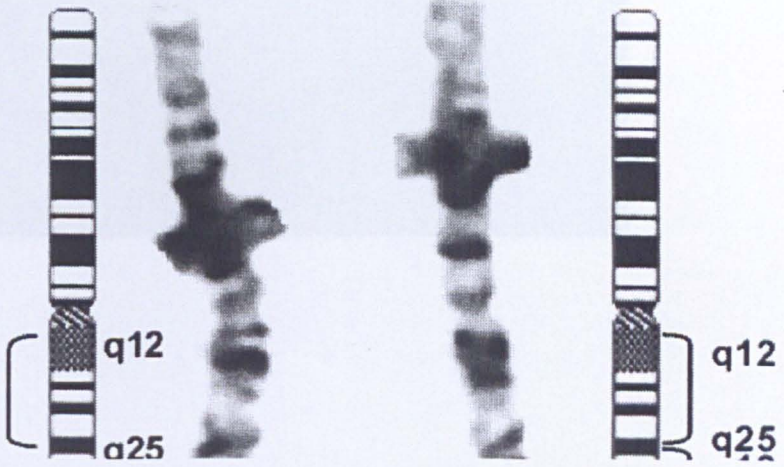
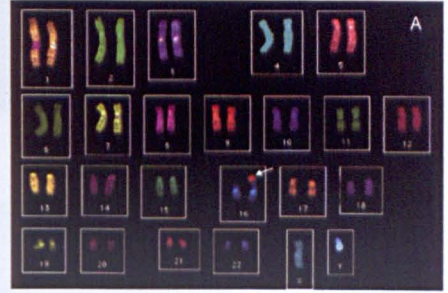
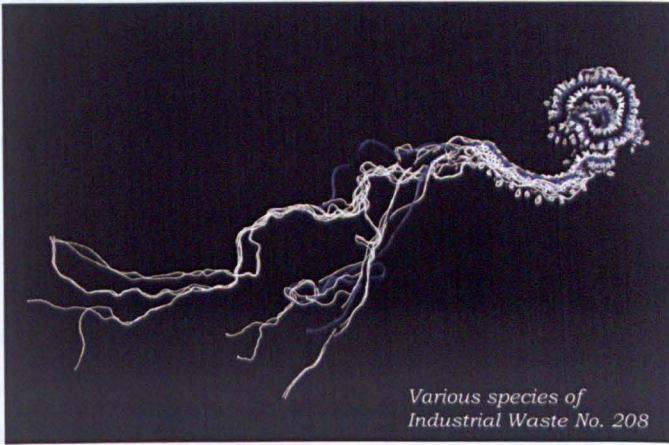


Fig. 7 Various species of industrial waste, No. 23 (October 2003)



***Inheritance* (Feb 2003)**

Other reciprocal exchanges in this way of working include invitations. For example John Dean asking me to make work for the forthcoming annual Scottish Geneticists meeting taking place in the Maternity Hospital. My response was to make *Inheritance* a set of digital prints meshing the pattern of DNA and the pattern of tartan together.

Fig. 8 Examples of *Inheritance* prints (iv and v, Feb 2003)

These prints combine our material and our immaterial or cultural inheritance. Behind this thinking was the idea of the myth, the myth of tartan and more generally the myth of authenticity in terms of cultural origins. Arguably there is a mythologizing (sensationalizing) in the popular press of genetics being the answer to all our health problems and our nemesis. The human genome project for instance seemed to hold the promise of fully explaining, and precisely controlling, life itself.⁵

The overlaying of these two patterns reminded me of a mistake in commercial printing (offset lithography) called moire pattern which disrupts the seamless appearance of normal full colour photographic reproduction.⁶ Misprints, mistakes and mutations is the language of genetics. I was reading about memes (coined in analogy with genes) where units of cultural information are replicated. Tartan was like a tourist virus, a fast spreading meme.⁷

The *Inheritance* exhibition took place in a corridor alongside two bio-technology trade stands. The thirty or so geneticists (from the meeting) queued past the prints (displayed on velcro boards) to get to a room for tea breaks. A number of people were keen to ask about the work and tell me what they saw (e.g. 'looking close up like an autorad and far away like a person', Mary Porteous, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh). I could see smiling and talking amongst themselves about the prints. Some laughed outright. I learnt later that it had been a tough meeting (discussing finances and equipment) where things had got 'quite heated' and John described the effect of having art work there as simply 'added value'. Mary Porteous

⁵ The reason Sheila Simpson gives talks in her own time and to lay audiences is her desire to quell some of the more sensationalist ideas propagated in the media around genetic testing (conversation, March 03).

⁶ In commercial printing there are four plates printing four different colours; yellow, cyan magenta and black, each with its own screen rulings. When the four colours are printed on top of one another it gives the illusion of the full colour spectrum.

⁷ The term and concept of memes is by the scientist Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*

said that 'she was in a good mood now' as a result of the work being there and our conversation. I thought about how art is made available.

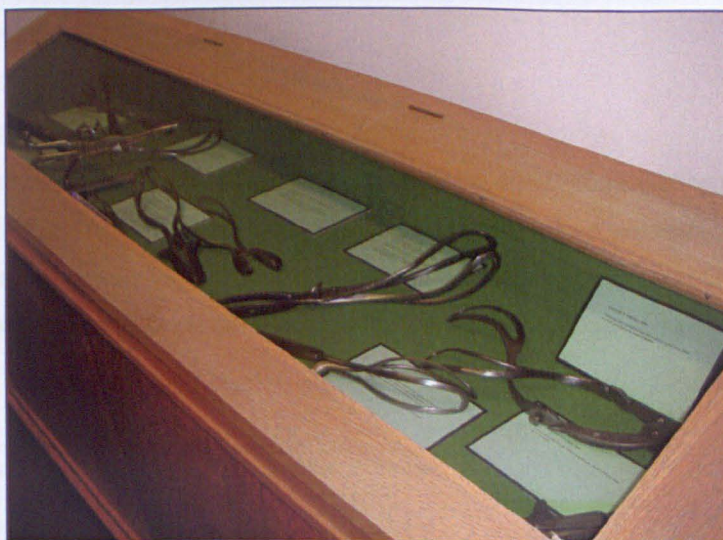
Could *Inheritance* encountered beside the queue be like Bourriaud's idea of relational art 'keeping moments of subjectivity together' albeit for a brief moment of time? The fact that we had tea and talked in a room with a cabinet of historical forceps seemed a fitting addition to the exhibition, it made it more of an event. Was the 'added value' John described only because art is not usually here? Could this work be considered participatory by being asked to make work (by John)? Where did the beginning and the end of 'project' lie exactly? It felt more like an ongoing relationship with the geneticists than 'project', but was this a lack of direction on my part?

Fig. 9 The venue for *Inheritance*, tea and biscuits beside historical forceps

See Visual Dialogue *INHERITANCE* on CD

4.2.3 Summary analysis of learning about the artistic process (see Volume I)

Fig. 9 The venue for *Inheritance*, tea and biscuits beside historical forceps



4.3 Understanding spatial practice and tactics: *Interference*

(9th June 2004, 2.10pm – 2.40pm)

Collaboration with five staff at the Genetics Department, Medical School, Foresterhill, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

4.3.2 The process

"If chronological time is like worldwide suburbia, kairological time is the genius loci, the spirit of that particular moment. Kairological time is far richer - far trickier – a concept; time enlivened and various, time as elastic and fertile as an ovulatory cascade."

Jay Griffiths, *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*, Flamingo (1999:22)

August 2003

A member of Deveron Arts (a voluntary arts group) in Huntly (through an OTE meeting) had seen the *Inheritance* prints and suggested they might be interesting for a new waiting room in the hospital there. Someone earlier on suggested the images would look good much bigger - human height.¹ The waiting room in the Huntly Hospital is large and I thought this was a chance to make huge prints. I decided to print onto silk as it would be light to hang and I liked the materials transparency (January 2004). Although this public waiting room is spacious there was unfortunately no acceptable way to hang them (e.g. picture rails). It is a Trust hospital and we could not damage the walls in any way (even with drawing pins). Health and Safety issues had also arisen (in discussion with the staff there) which were very prohibitive (see *The Waiting Room*, 4.4).

April 2004, Genetics Department

I had a short lunch time meeting with Sheila Simpson in her office showing her one of the silks. We both liked the feel of the cloth and thought they looked interesting when being handled and moving 'how we can manipulate and change what we see' Sheila said and she 'liked what the folds do' where layering pattern on pattern created new pattern.

¹ Tina, an artist friend of Astrid one of the geneticists, March 2003

Sheila invited me to come to a forthcoming talk she was giving to PhD students about the ethical considerations of genetic developments, 'the clinical issues that result because of the science of genetics and how what they (would) do impact on people'.

I came to imagine that not having art on the walls could be a good thing because it is less distanced and fixed, 'unreachable' Sheila suggested. She thought that it might be good to take the silks to their new premises which they were moving to in a few weeks time, suggesting that we could have an 'on-going exhibition that could be shaped'. We laughed at the idea of having a notice saying 'Please Touch' to encourage people to handle the silks, rather than the usual 'Do Not Touch'.

May 2004

I had taken the silks to show Eileen Cosgrove one of the GP's at the Hospital in Huntly. She liked the look and feel of them but with us not being able to have them in the hospital waiting room she asked me if she could take one home with her to show her family which she did.

June 2004

I phoned Heather (secretary, Genetics Department) to check on when they were going to move to Argyll House. The date had been re-scheduled for sometime in August.

I decided to take the silks to Sheila's forthcoming talk to students to see what might happen.

9th July 2004

I set off for Sheila's talk taking the three different sized printed silks (the smallest about a meter square, the middle size two by one meters and the biggest about five meters by one).

I arrived at room in the IMS building (Institute of Medical Sciences) where there was a notice on the door saying the event had been cancelled. I phoned Sheila and she apologized for not being able to contacting me at such short notice. I knew she felt uncomfortable knowing I had come in from Inverurie, for nothing. I was disappointed though I tried to not sound it. It seemed these prints could go nowhere.

Nearly not happening – acting on the moment

I went to the bus stop to go home, but decided to see if I could leave one of the silks in the department I might, if lucky, get some feedback later, somehow. In April, when I had last seen Sheila I resisted leaving silks with her. The rooms they work in were very cramped, and the department re-location was imminent (possibly weeks away then). Leaving a silk could be a pest - one more thing to be looked after during the move. There was still no definite date for the relocation and I decided I had nothing to lose.

When I went into the genetics department Sheila happened to be standing at the end of the corridor. I took one out one of the silks from a bag to ask her if it was OK to leave it. Someone passing by stopped, curious to know what was going on and Sheila introduced me as an artist. Jokingly I said holding up the silk:

“These are tartan DNA silks. They look better if you interfere with them, a bit like the geneticists in a way, how they interfere with DNA”

The moire pattern was in the back of my mind and also the connection Sheila had made between handling the silks and how geneticists can manipulate and change pattern at the code level.

Not planned but imagined

Interference (which became the title after the event) was not planned as a meeting with a specific group of people, but it was imagined before hand. I had seen how it worked on two separate occasions (with Eileen and Sheila). I hoped people would be interested enough to pick them up and look at them. The process was not rehearsed in the sense of being scripted.

Heather, overhearing us, came out of the office to see what was going on. Someone else passed by, became curious and asked what's this? picking up an edge of the silk. Sheila went back into her room. We went into the main office. I took out a second silk and Heather started trying out where one could hang as artwork. More people came in and joined in looking, asking, handling and talking. I took photos of what was going on and after 20 minutes we stopped and I gave them the camera to scroll through the images.

Before I left the department Heather encouraged me to go and see where they would be relocating to. It took ten minutes to walk there. At the gate it took some time to spot Argyll House because the surrounding buildings were being demolished. It was cool inside and with no lights on sunlight poured in the windows. It felt slightly spooky with no one else around. There were traces of it having been a children's hospital; a teddy bear inside a circle in the linoleum, a rocking horse behind a pillar.

I considered how we might reuse the silks again, here. By doing this it might help to make it feel more their own place, as Heather put it to me in conversation later 'to make it more lived in'.

Fig. 10 *Interference* (looking and touch)

Fig. 11 Argyll House

A week later

I posted Heather a CD with the images suggesting they could select six which I would print digitally and give them as art work

On viewing the images the episode had a quality of dance where people chose to step into the process and then step out, back to work.

See Visual Dialogue: *INTERFERENCE* on the CD

Fig. 10 *Interference* (looking and touch)



Fig. 11 Argyll House



4.3.3 Analysis using the matrix (aesthetic, ethical, polemical) to understand qualities of the artistic process

Appreciating the context of the project

The way I had been working prior to *Interference* was very pre-organised. Meetings were arranged with a time and place and with specific people whom I got to know over time. *Interference* was different in the spontaneity and seemingly natural way it happened. Though I knew Heather slightly, the other four people who took part were strangers and joined in because they happened to be passing or heard something from their rooms nearby. Why I believe the event worked (i.e. people joined in and became absorbed in the process) is partly because of the point in time it happened. This playful episode had a more serious side.

The working space was extremely cramped. Most of the five rooms housed three people though they look big enough for one person. Sheila had mentioned (April 2004) that Health and Safety had said 'there was not enough air in the rooms for the number of people'. I felt the morale of the staff was quite low this point. The genetics department (along with orthodontics and a cancer research group) were being relocated to a building which the staff referred to as 'the old sick children's hospital' (Argyll House). At one time they hoped they might be moved into the stunning newly built children's hospital. However it was felt that this was not appropriate given the nature of some genetic disorders which children might find alarming. Sheila had mentioned they were 'fighting to get their new premises painted'. The NHS budget for relocation was not the same as for the Aberdeen University which was already refurbishing some of the rooms in the genetics department for their relocation. On visiting the site I found the buildings either side of Argyll House were being demolished and no one seemed to know what would replace these if indeed anything. They were not particularly looking forward to the move. I was also aware that the team (department staff) was under extra work pressures through staff being off for various reasons (e.g. maternity leave, someone leaving their job, holidays).

Aesthetic - transforming reuse or ruse, a poetic gesture, opening up a unique space (de Certeau)

A space of gestures

More intuitive than planned the process gathered and dictated its own momentum; one comment, suggestion, or way of looking at, looking through and handling the silks suggesting the next thing. Joining in and prompting each other, some would take a lead with others watching. A shared space, like a foil for itself, made up of gestures - looking, asking, showing, moving and talking.

Polemical: micro-resistances, relational tactics, tracing one's path (de Certeau)

Recognising a tactic – improvising in real time and parodying my role

In the wayward dialogues (questions, comments, suggestions, laughter), my occasional questioning of what kind of art this might be ('is this performance art? is this interactive art? etc) was on reflection my resistance to reason (a tactic). Why should this experience be described as specifically this or that, labelled and accounted for and articulated in cause and effect terms, never mind the impossibility of gauging effect by what might or might not be said or done. In the moment of posing the question I realized I was simultaneously parodying what can sound like pretentious labels for kinds of art, and expressing a not knowing (my insecurities and frustrations of what role I was playing as artist) and it was an invitation to free up what could be going on.

Importantly this occasional questioning of what I saw happen as it happened was not asking them to do something at my behest. This tactic had the double effect of making me more aware of what was going on and of encouraging suggestions and experimentation by the staff. The way the process happened felt right, it was not imposed, but a gentle intervention like an 'insinuation' as de Certeau might say. A tactic is not a pre-defined method. Tactics exist in time and suggest themselves (to yourself) in the moment. They are 'seized' de Certeau says, they operate in the space of the other, which can be one's own mind set. We were inventing the process as it happened and the space of exchanges took on its own internal logic. The questions made us all more aware that we were playing with representation.

If I were to use this tactic again it might not be a tactic, it could 'harden' into method.² To do this again could feel prescribed, or worse, feel false (certainly if working with the same group).

² Buchanan uses the term harden with respect to tactics hardening into strategy (2000)

Ethical - a space to play, an interval for freedom, autonomy (de Certeau)

Transitivity and reciprocal exchanges

Opening up the art process is fundamentally an act of showing. This act or gesture is a 'transitive ethic' the term Bourriaud uses to describe what artists do when they show us something, the 'look-at-this' implicates 'look-at-me' (2002:24). To produce relational form is to 'invent possible encounters'. To receive form 'is to create the conditions for an exchange'. It is something like the back and forth of serving and returning in 'a game of tennis' (ibid:23)

With *Interference* this resonates with the kind of dynamic in the way the others considered and handled the silks in showing them back to me (with my camera). The silks were being (re)used in a kind of mutual 'transforming ruse' (aesthetic). In this way transitivity (literally a passing over) was happening in many directions between us all.

Ethical – freedom to and autonomy

How the artist is positioned, the idea of guiding and being guided

The way *Interference* happened made me think about my role as artist as being present with the artworks. Obviously people might have looked at the silks without my being there, but describing how and why I made the silks seemed to be interesting to the staff. This being there and making oneself available, so to speak, could be imagined as a kind of guiding (drawing attention to, answering questions) but also being guided. This was not like being a choreographer or directing, but a two-way process where I respond to what others say and do within the moment.

The idea of guiding and being guided within the process has tension – this felt playful but also serious, there is control but also not being in control (and not forcing). People are sometimes not quite sure what artist's are or do.³

³ Carter in *Edge FM* and Renwick in *Inthrow* thought being seen was important when artists arrive in a community with the intention of working with people. I suggested that people do not know exactly what role artists play and that I had felt a bit like a court jester when attending a genetics conference as the invited artists (by Niva Haites, British Human Genetics Conference, York, Sept 2001). Carter and McGeogh (in the OTE project *Celestial Ceiling*) both through this was highly appropriate in terms of what they felt like sometimes, conversation OTE Workshop VI.

What is important in terms of autonomy (being able to 'establish distance' to 'defend the autonomy from one's own personality', de Certeau) is that, like subjectivity, it is not a one way street. It is a truism to say that it is through others we see ourselves. *Interference* made available an interval for the genetics staff to behave and interact with work colleagues differently, a playful transgression of literally moving around and shifting representation and questioning what kind of art was going on. We watched each other look at, look through and experiment with the silks.

Fig. 12 *Interference* (movement, looking and laughter)

Aesthetic – transforming reuse

What does relational form look like?

In relational aesthetics it is the virtual (or conceptual) bonding quality of art which is important:

“Art keeps together moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences ... a kind of ‘bonding agent’” (Bourriaud 2002:20).

A problem in this way of working is how to articulate (re-present) the temporality of process. I understood through earlier work that a value of the process is that it could be a special way of having a conversation. With *Interference* there was a certain freedom to act and move around and the event was more visually theatrical. Photographing the experience later became the art object (digital images on the CD and digital prints). This to some degree narrowed the gap or distance between ‘the gesture and the forms it produces’ (Bourriaud, *ibid*: 47) in the sense that the act of photographing was central to generating the experience, not merely trying to capture or document the experience.

Aesthetic - transforming reuse (physical and conceptual)

Linkage and irony

Mixing tartan and DNA (originally called *Inheritance*) was about identity. From a graphic design perspective I understood the value of a visual identity as a logo in that it represents a group of people, or more accurately, it represents an idea. Bourriaud uses a French word *reliance* to describe a key quality of images:

Fig. 12 *Interference* (movement, looking and laughter)



"... art has always been relational in varying degrees, i.e. a factor of sociability and a founding principle of dialogue. One of the virtual properties of the image is its power of *linkage* (Fr. *reliance*) ... flags, logos, icons, signs, all produce empathy and sharing, and generate bond." (2002:15, italics in original).

This was slightly ironic. Was what I did as graphic designer actually relational art as Bourriaud defines? The *Inheritance* prints lent themselves to logos (as John one of the geneticists commented, 7th Feb 2003). With *Interference*, the logo in giant size on silks, were held and stretched between people and wound around bodies, creating physical links or bonds as well as (possibly) virtual or conceptual links. This linking quality was through a shared activity rather than a shared meaning through a signifier. It physically 'tightened the space of relations' between people as Bourriaud describes (*ibid*).⁴

Symbolically the silks as a medium became a unifying thread (*close*). The experience in a visual sense seemed paradoxical - silks as veils can hide but these were a veil of visibility, looking through the images (the printed areas) we could see more clearly.

Fig. 13 *Interference*: looking through – a visual paradox

Aesthetic: space and place the artwork acted out

Space as practiced place

After visiting Argyll House (where the genetics department was to be relocated) I considered a re-enactment using the silks there 'to make it more lived in' as Heather put it. The silks could be used there to make a strange place more familiar that paradoxically would be through the act of making strange. Through de-familiarizing (seeing in a fresh way) we remake it into our own place.⁵ To consider the relationship between an art work which is performative and where it happens (it's 'site-specificity') it is useful to consider what de Certeau defines as space and place.

De Certeau tells us that 'space is a practiced place' (1984:117). Place he describes as the 'proper' it is any ordering system with its own rules. For example if place were language

⁴ Carter in *Edge FM* and Renwick in *Inthrow* both designed and used logos on T-shirts to give to the young people who participated. I would design a logo for the *Maakin Lab* as a deliberate move to give a visual cohesion to the idea of the lab.

⁵ This work was not actually carried out in Argyll House because of my other work commitments.

Fig. 13 *Interference: looking through* – a visual paradox



space is like the spoken word, (like parole, it is the enunciation which gives expression). Space is an ordering activity, like writing over.⁶ For de Certeau walking (as pedestrian through the city or any spatial practice like reading) is a signifying practice 'that invents spaces' (1984:107). Spatial practices lack proper place so are a continual state of making. It is like a kind of three way movement where place (e.g. city, a room) is transformed through spatial practice (movement and thought) which remakes place. The tactical (improvisational) quality of in the way people interacted using the silks could be interpreted as place-space-place. On a symbolic level the silks were catalysts to producing things 'extra and other':

"Things *extra* and *other* (details, excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order" (1984:107 italics original).

We were working with the language of art but in their place where constructing meanings was an individual and collective activity. The art work imagined as a spatial practice (movement, interactions, gestures) gathering its meaning from the 'ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning' de Certeau describes.

Polemical – relational tactics

A tactic recognized as parodying my role

I felt an instinctive resistance to not define and categorize the experience as a single type or genre of art (is this photography? is this performance? etc). This gave rise to a tactic (a parodying of what kind of art might be going on). I understood tactics suggest themselves in the moment. In parodying, on one level I was testing out what was going on by reflecting on my role within the experience (we laughed at the idea it could be different kinds of art or be none of them, but believed 'it was something' as Heather put it). This was also a way of not taking myself too seriously, breaking down artist and 'other' (i.e. not objectifying people).

⁶ Kaye draws from de Certeau definitions of space and place (*Site Specific Art*, 2000:5) for site specific work. An interesting example offered by Kaye is *Nights In This City* (1995) by the theatre company *Forced Entertainment*. This performance took a bus load of 50 people on a night tour of Sheffield's backstreets and housing estates mixing the 'fictional' of performance on the bus with the other 'moments' of the bus tour. When *Forced Entertainment* took the performance to Rotterdam (1997) the audience were asked a series of questions, for example 'If you had killed someone and had to dump the body where would you take it?' 'If you had to say goodbye to a lover, where in this city would you most like to do it?' The performance is a process of acting out - a 'writing over' of the site (city) and a 'moving on' from the real city to an attempt to know it (ibid: 7-8), place is remade through spatial or performative art.

Close as connecting levels of subjectivity held a certain personal irony from having a graphic design background – the idea of identity and 'linkage' through the design of logos or brands.

Aesthetic – transforming ruse, trick

Kinaesthetic

Touch, physical size and scale of imagery are important consideration for the art object as catalyst. This encouraged a certain freedom to move about (as well looking and speaking) as part of the aesthetic experience (the aesthetic being kinaesthetic, or all senses).⁷ This raises questions on how open an art object might be as a catalyst for something to happen in its uses and readings which can open onto other meanings by individuals and collectively as a group; questions arise on objects as catalysts, how participation is framed and the relationship between the two.

Ethical – autonomy

Spontaneity

There is value in being spontaneous (the event would not have happened otherwise) and the event took on a quality of spontaneity. It felt loose (free) where things happened quickly and took on its own momentum. It is judging the balance of being suggestive but not forcing. It is like offering a frame and seeing what happens, but the frame has two sides, not four. The artwork exists because of the interactions, it is acted out.

Guiding and being guided – intervention like an insinuation

I had worried about how truly participatory or collaborative the process was. Now I could imagine the process as guiding and being guided. More broadly I could imagine a value of the art process as offering (or making available) an interval to speak, think and in *Interference* to act or behave differently. This event was a kind of intervention⁸ but gentle, more like an insinuation⁹ the term de Certeau uses for how we 'insert' ourselves into systems and

⁷ For de Certeau the inner resistances which gives rise to tactical behaviour stems from our innate physical needs, from the body as much as the mind. Resistance in this sense is physical, temporal and conceptual in relation to the constraints of systems or the givens of place (for instance an employer, or an institution). De Certeau (1984) gives the example of factory workers appropriating time and materials (*la perruque*) for workers own ends. Repetitive work can make us want to act out of step, to break monotony. Arguably most of us do this in little ways to make the day more interesting. The precise examples de Certeau gives of both *la perruque* and tactics are less important for the artist than the transformative potential they suggest.

⁸ Intervention is a frequently used term in the discourse for art practice which takes an active role in society, e.g. Doherty, 2004
⁹ insinuate: to introduce gently or artfully: to hint, to creep or flow in: to enter gently: to obtain access by stealth or flattery (CED 1990). Giard mentions how de Certeau liked this double meaning of the word (in the preface to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984)

structures. More like a whisper than a shout. I felt a level of trust from the more senior staff (from having worked with Sheila and John) in allowing me to do this in the middle of a working day. The aesthetic as a transforming 'ruse' (de Certeau)¹⁰ can be a playful interlude, which through defamiliarisation, can subtly make us more aware of ourselves and relations with each other.

Autonomy – between the stage and the audience

It felt like being between the actor on stage (being seen) and being part of the audience (being with). The participants were also simultaneously acting out and watching.¹¹ This temporary interval reduces, blurs or mixes up the distinction and boundaries of work/leisure and artist/participant.

Polemical

Tactics as transgressions of spaces and time

Interference was the most spontaneous and shortest project (if viewed as these 20 minutes). The precise time (timing) of an event happening can add to the quality of the experience. The apparent enjoyment was set against quite low spirits and increased work pressures. It was also a very hot sunny day. *Interference* felt like stolen time, a transgression in the working day.¹² It felt slightly subversive, the polemical as a deviation through shifting the use of place and time.

Articulating process: relational form and the everyday – the Visual Dialogue (on the CD)

To understand the constraints (or situation) within which improvisation plays out (tactics), art within the everyday presents challenges for articulating the experience. Firstly it is the detail required to give a good impression of the precise situation. Secondly the process of making new meaning through exchanges, inter and transactions between people means trying to articulate (or re present) a process that is spatial, temporal and kinaesthetic (looking, talking,

¹⁰ ruse: a trick, stratagem, artifice, artful, cunning (CED 1990)

¹¹ The Situationist International used *detournement* and *derive* as aesthetic strategies of creating new relations with the viewers which seem very like the qualities in day to day practices de Certeau talks of in terms of appropriating uses and readings for our own ends - taking representational structures and subverting them to make them fit our own life worlds. Bourriaud suggests that relational aesthetic 'updates situationism' because the idea of 'constructing situations' did not necessarily mean new relationships with other people. While Debord viewed art as 'a social relationship between people, with imagery as the go-between'. Bourriaud argues that it must be analysed in terms of 'the production of new types of relationships between people'. The Situationists by creating situations 'does not necessarily imply co-existence with my fellow men'. Bourriaud is critical of Debord in that he mistakenly understood inter-human exchange as 'the capitalist forms of exchange', not exchange in 'absolute terms' (2002: 84-5).

¹² Like 'la perruque' de Certeau, or 'an interstice' (Bourriaud) both terms refer to alternative use of time and materials. For Bourriaud this is within the dominant structure of exchange, a kind of resistance by artists to the commodification of art. For de Certeau it is closer to the transformative potential found in everyday re appropriations to make our lives a little richer.

moving, touching). The challenge posed by relational art (i.e. participatory processes) is how to give aesthetic form to process.¹³ This episode is not performance in the sense that it is scripted but it does have a performative element. Neither is it site-specific (even in Kwon's expanded definition of site as being anything from an art genre to a billboard, (see 2.5.2). Site as social space (the everyday) takes on a more transitive definition.¹⁴ It is the backdrop and the conditions for the event to happen.

While the act of photographing significantly added to the event, the images could look like Kodac moments. The Visual Dialogue (on the CD) falls short of the experience because it lacks the energy, pace and rhythm of what actually happened. It is also that I was part of the event. This raises questions on the value as well as the potential contradictions of capturing the experience, the intention of the artwork (process and its re-presentation) and who an audience might be beyond the immediate group (these questions are taken up in Chapter 5).

See Visual Dialogue *INTERFERENCE* on CD

4.3.4 Summary analysis of learning about the artistic process (see Volume I)

¹³ Bourriaud suggests the burning issue for relational art is the fact that it is less concerned with representation per se and that space and time are typically 'elements' in this kind of practice.

¹⁴ I borrow this term transitive from Kaye who uses it in terms of site-specificity (2000:4).

4.4 Developing a set of artistic tools, sharing a polemical space and the idea of autonomy: *The Waiting Room* project (Sept 03-June 05)

A project with six members of staff, Jubilee Hospital, Huntly

4.4.2 The process

"In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called metaphorai. To go to work or come home, one takes a 'metaphor' – a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories."

The Practice of Everyday Life, De Certeau (1984:115)

Background

The way I became involved in this project was a connection made by Rae Marcus (Chairperson of Deveron Arts, a voluntary arts group in Huntly) during an On the Edge workshop. She had seen prints I had made which drew from the world of genetics (*Inheritance*) and suggested I get in touch with staff at the hospital. Rae knew the Health Centre (part of the hospital) had a large new waiting room and some staff were interested in having artwork in this space. The connection Rae made, I imagined, was that genetics had something to do with medicine.

Reflection on previous projects

Another way of understanding how to involve other people in the art process is the question of how we might 'frame participation' (Morgan, 2003:24-25). I had learnt from my previous projects (4.2 and 4.3) specific qualities of art objects acting as catalyst for dialogue and other exchanges (e.g. using sets of images in photographs or prints, tactility and scale).

Participation was considered as different kinds of exchanges (e.g. ideas, objects, factual information, suggestions, coffee, e mails, invitations, humour, ideas, transcripts). By trying to open up a space for thinking, speaking and acting differently, a quality of engagement (*close*) was felt in moments (in small groups or as one-to-one). I understood this way of working as a gentle intervention in terms of time (like an insinuation) where imaginations can play, and play

off each other. Participation could be framed but had two sides not four. The first move of taking objects and ideas to a group was an invitation and the process of making meaning grew from that. The aesthetic was both the means of engaging with others and shared moments felt during the process.

I wanted to achieve a depth of engagement with the health centre staff. However unlike previous projects it felt like a hybrid project of public art and community art. In public art the artist is often expected to author the work, in community art the artist is often expected to facilitate some kind of group activity with the group being encouraged to produce the art work or event. Before I became involved the hospital staff had clear ideas of what they wanted and what they imagined an artist would do – that I would author art work for the room and they would also have a 'community board' which would be filled up by the artist instigating participation with an as yet unspecified group.

First meeting, 24th September 2003, Waiting Room in the Health Centre

Closing down the process

I met with Elizabeth (Senior Nurse) Eileen (Doctor) Kim and Phyllis (Practice Nurses) and Lottie (representing the local photography club) and Claudia (representing Deveron Arts) in the Waiting Room.

Elizabeth explained what they wanted to do - to put up a community board for people e.g. children to put pictures onto; to put up a picture rail so art work could be hung (the local photography club for instance) and to raise some artificial plants to create a screen between the waiting room and the doctor's surgery doors.

Their plan was to try and get a grant to pay for this joinery work. The health centre which was in the same building as the hospital I discovered is a Trust and leases the building. Elizabeth had contacted and obtained a quote for this joinery work by someone who I refer to as the 'buildings man' a senior administrator who is responsible for looking after the maintenance of NHS buildings in the Grampian region.

I did a lot of listening at this first meeting (as was the case in the other meetings) and it was pointed out how much people enjoyed seeing children's artwork on the walls. I noticed the

blue tack traces. Elizabeth pointed out that there were Health and Safety issues that had to be respected, and being a Trust building there were certain things we could not do. For instance I had suggested getting real plants instead of heightening the plastic ones to create a screen, but they explained that they cannot have real plants in case a child eats a leaf, (this had come up in the past when a mother complained) or if someone had an allergy.

In retrospect the project got off to an unfortunate start. When I saw the space what struck my mind was the luxurious height of the room, at least two stories high with a set of eight skylights. It was extraordinary. Down below at eye level there were two areas covered in medical and social or care support information posters and notices.

I had taken some *Inheritance* prints and *Genescape* photos to let them see the kinds of things I made in the past. I suggested it would be interesting to have something hanging up in this skylight area, maybe material like silk which would let the natural light through and alter the light in the space. A bit of excitement happened when Eileen demonstrated that these eight skylights have independently moving venetian blinds – kinetic art I joked. They thought different coloured silks might be good.

I felt we had moved from thinking about how to install and make a community board and heighten the plants towards something more interesting – how to consider the whole space. They seemed to really like the idea of silks and the moving venetian blinds added to the idea – controlling the natural light source.

I suggested that Elizabeth got the quote broken down so that the 'Friends' (a voluntary group and charitable trust who raise monies for the hospital) could see what they were supporting. They thought this a good idea. Elizabeth said she had a notice board in her garage which we could use and that maybe breeze blocks could be used instead of the expensive joinery work. She said she was sure she 'had something in her garage that would do' but worried about health and safety - how the cleaners would clean this. Clearly there were many health and safety restrictions on what you can do. She sounded slightly frustrated and apologetic that there are so many rules and regulations.

It was interesting to see people offering up things they could bring in to contribute to making the place 'better'.

I felt I had lifted the project to something more ambitious which would affect the actual quality of light in the room through hanging coloured silks way above the clutter of health information. I explained that I did not know how it would be realised, but two simple slim poles might suffice and I knew someone at the art school to get advice about this. Clearly they were open to ideas beyond the community board and rails. For the next meeting they asked me to present them with ideas (drawings) and costs for installing these silks and that funding to do this would be sought by them (or via Deveron Arts).

In my mind's eye I imagined working with them to produce patterns or images on silks and this could relate to ideas on health or on what a healing environment might be. There were no windows in this room, just the sky lights. It was painted the same colour as every other waiting room, (a kind of NHS magnolia) which is the same colour as the surgeries which, as Elizabeth explained, was to not distort skin colour during diagnosis. It was exciting to imagine what we might have on these silks, and that they could change with the changing light conditions. We spoke of the how the designs and colours might relate to the seasons.

Fig. 14 The waiting room

Fig. 15 Skylights

15th October

Experiments on silk

I got some small samples of the tartan DNA pattern printed digitally onto very fine organza silk using equipment at the art school. The samples work well and I design four images for printing onto the silk. Some of them large – human height. I imagine that I could hang them by pinning them up high on the walls, above children's reach until I worked out a permanent means of installation whilst working with the staff on ideas for the images.

Fig. 16 Design ideas for printing onto silk – DNA and tartan

What happened next

I spoke to Elizabeth on the phone and she told me she had spoken the NHS 'buildings man' (who had to approve anything being done to the building) and he had 'freaked out' about the idea and had 'shouted' when she'd talked about the idea to hang silks. I felt bad for Elizabeth, he had in my view (and hers) over reacted. At the outset Elizabeth had been very careful to point out to me that there were many Health and Safety issues in hospitals. I thought about speaking to him myself, try to explain the idea which was far from resolved. I felt angry on Elizabeth's behalf but thought it might exacerbate the situation. The main issue he had brought up was that nothing structural could be changed. We were not allowed to use pins, screws or nails either.

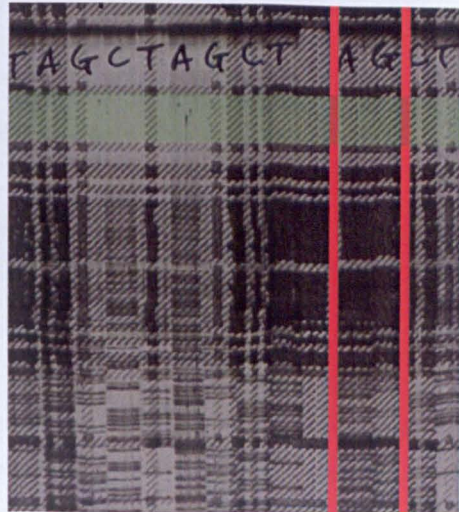
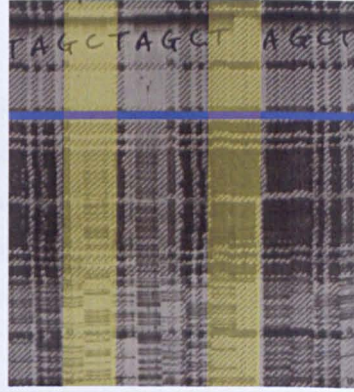
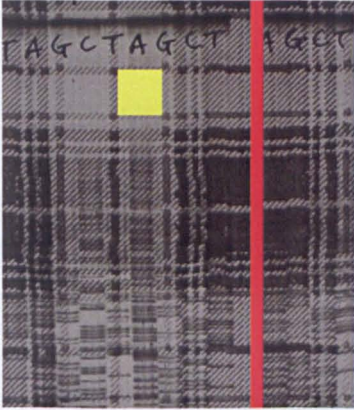
Second Meeting, 19th November 2003

Opening up the process

I met with Elizabeth, Eileen, Kim, Phyllis and Lottie (of the Huntly Camera Club) in the Waiting Room

My initial thoughts were, had I compromised the situation? Had the buildings man's response spoiled the project for Elizabeth who was clearly taking a lead with the project in terms of getting quotes, and e mailing everyone in the loop (including people I would not meet but obviously needed to be kept informed within the NHS system). Would they just be happy to settle for what they had seen (work I had shown them at the first meeting) or would they be comfortable with me extending the time to more fully explore the possibilities of working together? Could I make something imaginative enough to be better than the idea for silks and

Fig.16 Design ideas for printing onto silk – DNA and tartan



could the process itself be interesting enough for them to feel some value from being involved in the art process?

A brief

To fulfil my need – an opportunity to investigate what kinds of exchanges take place during the art process and what close means, I decided to make a brief explaining what the project could involve. This was partly to make the project more 'real' and to try and steer the focus away from simply getting something on the walls. I also needed a commitment from them, or not, that they were happy to engage in a series of meetings.

I took copies of a brief along and I introduced the project as a way of investigating how art and medicine, or healing, can work together. I explained my way of working as having a conversation in and around art work, and that this can be a way of getting to know what each other does better and this might lead to new and interesting art work being made collaboratively. I tried to suggest that a more considered process of working through what *could be* interesting to have in the Waiting Room would involve a series of meetings over about 6 months.

Images on light to think about the environment

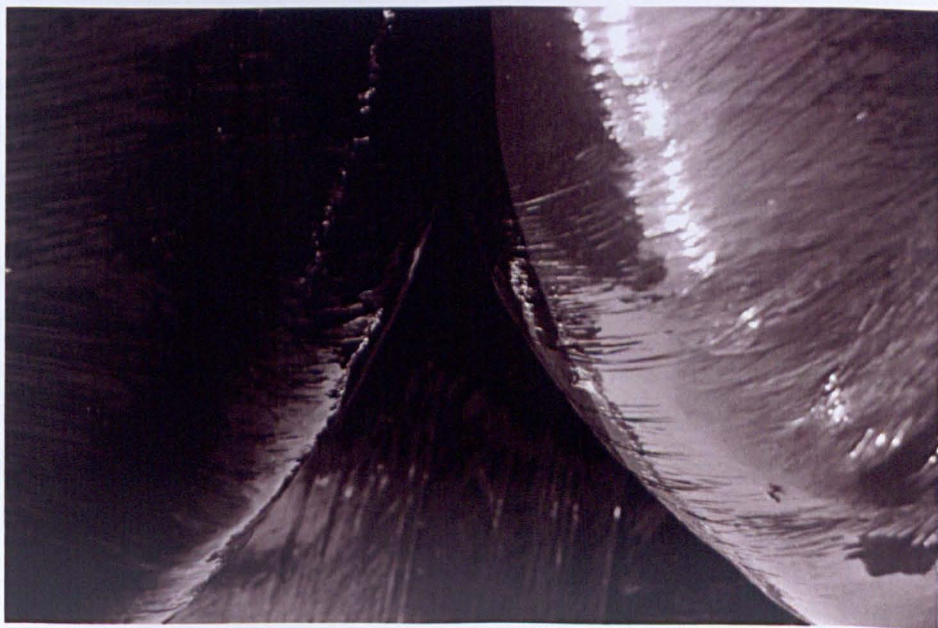
I also took photographs and prints I had made to (hopefully) show how using images can help open up our thinking on the qualities of the room. The images were of different qualities of light - transmitted, reflected, and shadows. There was no table so we handed the three packets of photos round as you would at home.

Fig. 17 Examples of images to think about qualities of light

I also brought up the notion of waiting, what it meant for me to wait, explaining that luckily I had not done much waiting in hospitals, but I had done lots of waiting in other places such as public transport and in queues.

By giving the project a title *Waiting Room* it gave the project a kind of reality simply because it focussed the nature of what we were dealing with – waiting and a room. The emphasis was on the word waiting which was italicised on the cover of the brief. I did not know if they would

Fig. 17 Examples of images to think about qualities of light



object to the emphasis being on waiting. This might be a negative thing - the implication being that people have to wait too long to see a doctor, but Lottie and Eileen picked up on the notion of waiting and Lottie said she thought the camera club might be interested in waiting as a theme and she would suggest this to them.

Everyone seemed happy to go along with the idea of working together.

3rd Dec

Pretending to wait

I meet Elizabeth briefly before I go to observe how people use the waiting room (I had asked if it was OK to come and pretended to wait to get a feel for how people use the space). In her office Elizabeth explains that Health and Safety has been a real headache for her, everything has to be not just fireproof but three times as fire retardant as household materials (soft furnishings and furniture). She had discovered this when she tried to buy new furniture for their office. This meant they can only use an approved supplier 'who charged over the odds' and they 'could not use a local supplier'. (I realise that I have to get the silks made fire retardant). I brought along sample picture frames to show her which are reusable and have perspex not glass. I imagine hanging an empty frame high up on a wall which would catch the sunlight mid afternoon this time of year.

Sitting in the waiting room pretending to wait I sketch maps and see blocks of sunlight from the skylights on the wall. Because I am looking up, others in the waiting room look up drawing attention to the unseen. I think about how I might direct gazes.

12th December

Drawing attention to Health and Safety issues

Elizabeth circulates an e mail explaining that the buildings man is not prepared to revise the quote for joinery work. Our work (under £700) was probably not a big job and he tells Elizabeth that he 'covers a huge remit'. He is not being very co-operative with us. Her e mail reads:

*"Access and safety with proximity to lights is an issue and also cleaning is an issue.
(The) Facilities Supervisor does not yet know how high cleaning is to be managed in*

the area. 'Buildings man' does not think this would be permissible and no one else would be allowed to use ladders etc within the building unless contracted by him. I think we have to abandon this part of the plan. Insurance and Health and Safety issues are complex."

The proposal had drawn attention to the fact that the air vents in the waiting room were too high for the cleaners to get at. I wondered if the staff, especially Elizabeth regretted the idea to get involved in an art project.

January 12th 2004

Search the library for waiting

A key word search in the university library on waiting was depressingly revealing. Most of the books, texts and report titles were related to issues of health; NHS waiting lists, Rationalising Health Care by waiting lists, Rationing and rationalisation in the NHS: the persistence of waiting in the NHS, Waiting and patient call, Inpatient, outpatient, Health Care Waiting lists, and so on. The only other things which came up was something about blow-out pipettes – no waiting required, and 'pragmatic solutions for the third world debt crisis'. 'Waiting for God' sounded interesting, a BBC video. Looking under the heading Details along with shelf mark and other information, the video was described as 'Elderly - television'.

It seemed health was inextricably linked to safety, and health care provision was about waiting or NHS Waiting Lists.

This was all very disheartening.

There was one book entitled 'Waiting', on the work of Degas, the title being taken from one of his pastels of the ballet dancers (*L'Attente*, 1880-82). This sparkled like a jewel amongst the cost of Health Care which seemed to be measured in terms of waiting.

Looking at the delicacy and vibrancy of this pastel by a master craftsman I savoured the lines of colours which seemed to float on the paper. And who was the mysterious woman in black waiting, the dancer's sister, mother, nanny, governess? A whole other world, it brought home the soullessness of the Health Centre Waiting Room(s).

I knew from the outset that I did not want to work with the patients waiting for an appointment. That seemed completely inappropriate, an intrusion, private thoughts in a public place. I had joked with the staff about the London underground map placed above heads on the tube, and its other value being somewhere to rest your eyes, a way to avoid uncomfortable eye contact.

I did not want to think about waiting as something to be filled, with art work as a kind of distraction away from the condition of waiting, particularly here where waiting is equated with clinical time and money.

January 10th

Trying to find the poetics of waiting – where is the artistic content?

I listen to the sounds of waiting an occasional cough, the toilet flushing, doors opening and closing.

What tools could I work with to release the content? I looked for a more playful aesthetic. Waiting for me could be daydreaming.

I have an idea to float the printed silks up to the skylights with helium balloons, (this would avoid more permanent hanging structures or going up a ladder which no one was allowed to do). Floating silently, how could I direct the gaze upwards I wondered?

February 5th

I meet a Territory Manager

In Strachans (a local newsagent in Inverurie) I met and discussed the idea of how to float silk with Susan Russel, a representative for Amscan International Ltd, balloon specialists. They described themselves as 'the party people'. Her calling card describes her as 'Territory Manager'. She reassured me over the Health and Safety aspects and tells me I can buy or hire helium gas containers. They have this in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. I get sample balloons which last up to three weeks and can be refilled. To remove them she recommends floating up another balloon with sticky tape to attach itself and pull the other one down. I take some home and do weight experiments.

12th February

Health and Safety again

I try to get the silks made fire retardant at an approved dry cleaner in Aberdeen which could supply me with a certificate. I wondered how they tested for this - did they hold a flame on it for three times as long to prove it was three times more fire proof than the household standard? Because the silk was so fine they could not do it. I spoke to a technician at Gray's (who had helped me print them) and he believed we could get them fire proofed ourselves with a chemical solution, but I would not have a fire certificate.

20th Feb*Lists and opening up ideas on waiting*

To open up the thinking on what waiting might mean I began to list waiting; waiting *for*, waiting *to*, waiting *in* and so on, I made seven. Then I made the first line the last so that the second line became the first each time. This gave me seven sets of seven lines which I used as a focus to think about what it means to wait. As I was doing this I found myself trying to give each set of seven lines a narrative sense. Some of them had a certain wholeness like short poems. I started to break the lines to give emphasis and rhythm.

Waiting on a friend Waiting in anticipation Waiting at the station	Waiting in the cafe Waiting for coffee Waiting with a cup Waiting at the table	Waiting for my turn Waiting with a book Waiting at the checkout
Waiting for the moment Waiting with impatience Waiting to leave	Waiting to pay Waiting as usual Waiting on the rain to stop	Waiting to see Waiting as now Waiting on the ending Waiting in bed
Waiting as normal		

I decided to e mail these as a set of seven poems to the staff along with the seven 'blanks' as it were, asking them to make their own poems to help develop ideas for art work for the space. Of the four people who I asked Elizabeth, Eileen and Kim all responded. This was over a couple of months.

March 31st*Waiting for real*

Eileen could not keep our appointment and for a few hours I waited for real. I made more lists by writing down the first sentence of each of the notices that I could read from where I was sitting. I took up four positions to read everything.

The posters and notices were about health, that is ill health, and issues of safety and statements on the quality of service offered by this centre – A Certificate of Quality, the complaints procedure and a statement on the lost time because of people not phoning to cancel appointments. The latter was the first thing you encounter when you come in the entrance. This was a white board which is updated each month with the number of appointments missed and not cancelled (88) set against the time lost (11 hours) with a request to make cancellations because this impacts on the expected waiting time being increased.

There was also a quality assurance notice on how the waiting time should not exceed 20 minutes from the time of the appointment. If it did you could go to the reception desk to get the appropriate form for complaints.

Fig. 18 The whiteboard used at the entrance and in the waiting room

Fig. 19 List of headlines from the information notices

In conversation with the staff we acknowledged the need for information on health care however the only other thing to read was two piles of singularly uninteresting women's magazines e.g. Belle, Chat and a massively thick laminated spiral bound copy of 'The Health Service'.

I imagine the helium balloons floating above the collage of ill health matters. Maybe on bright coloured ribbons – lines floating like day dreams. I thought of Odelon Redon's *The eye floats majestically like a balloon*. I had heard on the radio once, day dreaming is good for you. I smiled at the idea of a having a health notice saying this.

Fig 20 List of headlines from magazines

Fig 21 Light from the skylights

Fig. 18 The whiteboard used at the entrance and in the waiting room

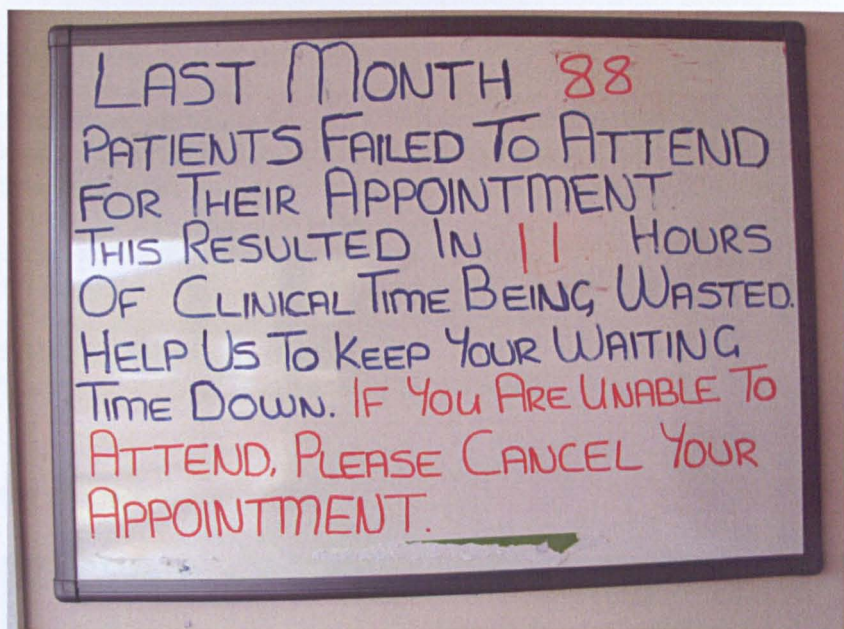


Fig. 19 List of headlines from the information notices

“Patient Line, Worried about HIV or Hepatitis?, Prescription Medicines, Help us reduce the waste in Grampian, High Blood Pressure what Can I Do?, Aberdeen Breast Cancer, Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline, Wellbeing does, North East Eating Disorders Support Scotland (Needs), Security Alert, **If you have waited more than 20 minutes**, Any questions on cancer, Arthritis and Osteoporosis, Deafness or hearing loss?, G-DENS, Make a note of it, Leaflets available from the practice, travel clinic, **If you are unhappy** with any aspect of our service, please ask at the reception for a complaints form, Need ... More, NHS 24, Useful telephone numbers, Are you entitled to free NHS treatment?, Cold? Flu? Chest Infection?” Meet A Mum, Is your number up?, Would you like to be able to, Baby changing Feeding, Security Alert!, Epilepsy?, Certificate of Accreditation, The Fire Alarm, Community Nurses, Hib, Huntly area Cancer support Group, Home-Start”

Fig. 20 List of headlines from magazines

Dying Sharon's Mum: I'll look after the children.
 Rodney with a secret can you guess?
 The quick grope that cost me my marriage.
 Maureen confesses to her son ... I chopped your Dad's head off ...
 that's why I had to give you away, can you forgive me?
 Health miracle, my doctor yanked an ovarian tumour out of my nose.
 What's it really like to be a step mum.
 Laura in love but Garry has two other women.
 I went abroad for cosmetic surgery and never came back.
 17 stone at 15, I never go out, Tracy and Roy DO IT.
 I have 6,000 nosebleeds a year.
 I'm 61, he's 37 and we married after 3 months.

Fig. 21 Light from the skylights



14th April

Safety and health, Health and Safety

As I waited for Elizabeth in the Waiting Room I make more lists from the covers of the magazines. She had suggested meeting for lunch in the Merry Kettle. I knew it would be impossible to audio record in there, or show her anything. I get the impression that the staff are getting tired of waiting for the picture rails to go up.

In the cafe she gives me her waiting poems and I comment on the white board at the entrance and in the Waiting Room. She explains this is part of the 'Charter Mark' and in bigger hospitals they give the expected waiting time giving you the chance to go off for a walk or get tea or something.

I ask her general questions about her background and how the hospital works. She is an extremely experienced nurse having worked in a few places, including being Head Nurse in charge of the Accident and Emergency department in Glasgow Royal Infirmary, where she 'saw life in the raw' which she 'sort of missed in a way'.

I explain that I hoped the initial idea of hanging silks and the fuss over the Health and Safety had not given her additional headaches – the issue of who was to clean the air conditioning vents had come up (the cleaning staff were not allowed to go up ladders like myself). She hated not having windows you could see through and that by law in a room with no windows you have to have air conditioning switched on at all times, but this is very noisy.

I comment on how I had come to realise just how much Safety is linked to Health, or Health and Safety in a Health building. She explains there were many aspects which the Trust (like all others) has to adhere to. These rules, audits, and e mails are issued from the Health and Safety Department in Aberdeen (Aberdeen Royal Infirmary) a department with a huge remit, not just for the building (which is leased to the Trust) but for all the equipment, and how the staff are functioning, in and outside the building e.g. home visits. She mentions a recent Health and Safety issue was on hand writing - that it has to be legible. Also that there are very clear reporting systems (forms to be filled in) if a patient or member of staff is injured, 'every little thing has to be reported, then they look for patterns so they can make use of it to try and prevent it happening again.' She also makes the point (sounding rather sad) that much of this is in case people sue and 'this is the culture we live in ... a culture of litigation'. A recent thing

was Health and Safety from the nurses perspective, how many owned and used their mobiles and beepers and 'why should they have to use their own ones?' She thought this was an important issue. This week the electricians had been in to check all the electrical things, the sockets and stuff. She spoke of the safety aspect in transport – as being 'colossal' that there was 'a huge potential for something to go wrong, moving patients to and from the hospital as well as within it'. There was also 'mandatory training to prove that it was safe for you (the staff) to practice', overseen by the UKCC (now NMC) the controlling body. 'All this administration is massive'.

It seemed to me that Health and Safety wise NHS were in a constant state of waiting for something to go wrong.

Elizabeth spoke about how 'waiting is not private' and how she had asked for a gynaecology sign beside a doctor's name to be removed because when names were called everyone else would know why the woman was there. She felt this was 'almost a breach of confidentiality'. and spoke of how you 'had to be sensitive to people's feelings'.

She explained that the doctors are basically self employed. The doctors do their surgeries but they also work in the hospital. They get a certain amount of money from the government then the rest is made up of bits from what they do, like immunisations for example. 'It has to be run like a business'. She was employed by the doctors, the rest of the team (Practice Nurses) was paid by the Trust. There are 4 surgeries and chiropody. She thought that this hospital was 'a friendly place where the staff valued each other's skills base, and that they rely on each other'.

Elizabeth mentioned that if she were passing through the waiting room 'You can't say, how are you?' it would be very untactful.

2nd May

Discussing the poems on waiting

By this time I had given up on the idea to float the silks, ribbons or anything else, but I did want to lift up the project from being focussed on what we could not do. I believed Eileen might enjoy the idea so I showed her a printed silk with tartan DNA pattern and a helium

balloon which floated to the surgery ceiling. I explained that waiting is a kind of in between time, like a suspension between things, a bubble of time. We laughed at the idea of balloons being too dangerous (if they burst).

Fig. 22 Helium balloon

She said she thought the Health and Safety issues which came up over the silks were an over reaction (from the buildings man) but acknowledged she 'didn't know everything about this aspect whereas Elizabeth knew more'. She thought Health and Safety rules and regulations seemed 'phenomenal and mind blowingly crippling'.

I had the poems she had e mailed me and explained that on reading everyone's poems I had realised that waiting was about different qualities of time. I mention that the Greeks had two gods for time, Chronos is clock time, linear time, time measured (we spend, save, find and make time). Kairos is the god of timing, qualitative time, time experienced. This seems to touch a chord with her. I show her some photographs where waiting could be interpreted. (e.g. permaculture using newspapers and some of shadows, time moving slowly). She laughs at the permaculture photos and recounts waiting for sunrises on a skiing holiday where each morning they got up early to 'measure' (i.e. observe) the different times it rose.

Fig. 23 Time moving slowly - waiting for the newspapers to rot

She tells me that she had enjoyed making the waiting poems and that she 'found herself thinking of something that would go with the first line and if it didn't fit scrolled down to find a better first line'. She had 'used the first line to think up a scenario and then had to think of how to do the rest of the poem' and she mentioned this 'was quite challenging'.

I suggest that it is interesting to think about when and why we pause to look at something in the first place. In waiting rooms looking can be a fleeting thing. I tended to skim read bits of information in magazines. I show her a collograph block (collage) where bits of information from newspapers and other materials are recombined.

Fig. 22 Helium balloon *waiting for the newspapers to rise*



Fig. 23 Time moving slowly - waiting for the newspapers to rot



I explain that I do not have a clear idea of images for the walls yet but I was becoming more aware through looking at images with them that in a single image there could be many kinds of waiting if we looked at it in this way.

22nd May,

More disappointment, an e mail from Elizabeth

Elizabeth explains that the grant from the Friends has been turned down, but that she and Eileen intend to approach them in person, rather than by letter.

16th July 2004

Making miniature collages

In previous work with the geneticists (Sheila and John) I had shown them collagraph blocks (e.g. *September 11th*) using a technique of collage. I had noticed that the visual quality had encouraged them to pick them up. With very dark areas seeing them in different lights (moving them around to get the right light) was important. Fragments of imagery could be half glimpsed in the juxtaposing, merging and arrangement of information. Close physical looking seemed to encourage closer inspection – searching for tiny details.

I used everyday news stories from the local as well as national newspaper; the Orcadian, The Financial Times, The Inverurie Herald, The Scotsman, The Independent, The Advertiser, The Sunday Times, The Press & Journal and other papers. I thought of all the editors, photographers, reporters, printers and newsagents creating and handling the texts and images. The collages held indexical traces of thoughts and movement from the newspaper and cloth.

Of course the technique of collage goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century to Picasso, Dada and the surrealists and later the Pop artists. Influences from my design days were artists like Schwitters with his typographic sensibility and radical recycling of discarded papers and more recently Peter Blake who incorporates the principles of collage into his paintings and the way he surrounds himself in his life with potential collage materials. Collage as is widely known was an attempt to blur the split between 'popular art' and 'high art'. Blake an ardent collector of collages from the fifties has many examples from artists and from anonymous authors. In his text to the exhibition *Peter Blake About Collage*, (Tate, 2000) he

suggests that set side by side there is no real difference in the look of the collages by artists and the anonymous 'amateur'.

The idea of tactility and close (physical) looking made me cut up the six existing blocks (approximately A4 in size) into 61 'miniatures' (approximately 10 x 7 cm) making them easier to pick up. This took the principle of newspaper 'cuttings' which had begun the collage process a stage further. Cropping (cutting to this size) took the level of abstraction further. Showing this to friends one said 'it makes me want to see the rest of the image', another 'it's like a fragment, and I have to make up the rest. You see something obvious at first and it makes you look for more, look past what's there'.

Not what I'd planned

I had made the printed tartan DNA silks for use in the Huntly hospital waiting room. Because of Health and Safety they could not hang there and I subsequently used them in another context - with genetics staff (see 4.3 *Interference*). I had made the miniature collages in response to, and with the intention of using them in work with the geneticists. They were miniature because of the idea that scientists look closely at microscopic images and size was also important in terms the cramped working conditions the geneticists worked in.

I decided to take the miniatures to the Huntly hospital staff. At this stage we had no grant for joinery work and we could not put anything on the walls.

Fig. 24 Two of the 61 miniature collages (10 x 7 cm)

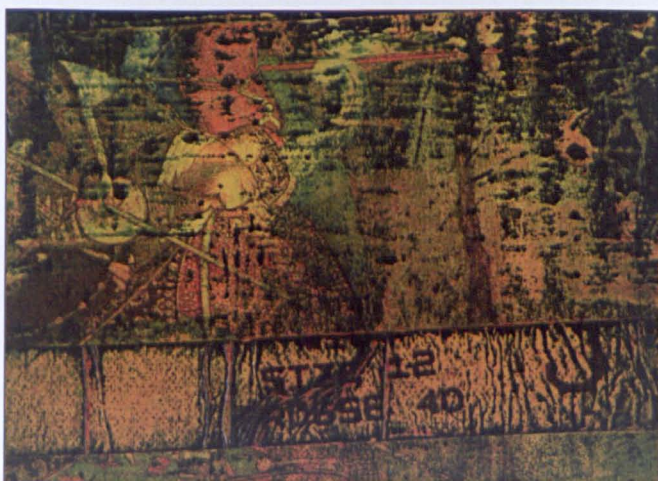
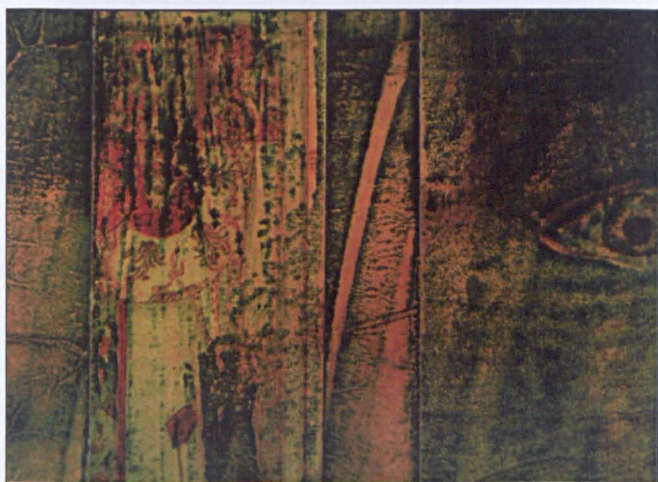
Meeting, 25th August 04, 6.15 – 7.45pm

Elizabeth, Eileen, Kim Phyllis and Frances (who I hadn't met before) in the Waiting Room

The idea of a game to make art work

I take the miniature collages (collograph blocks) and our waiting poems and set them on the seats before they arrive.

Fig. 24 Two of the 61 miniature collages (10 x 7cm)



Kim is the first to arrive. She tells me she has been doing a course on massaging babies so that she can teach this skill to mothers. I thought it quite odd the idea that babies need massage and she explains that in the western world there is a lot less physical contact between mother and child nowadays and this lack of touch can lead to behavioural problems in children. In some non western counties mothers carry their babies and young children everywhere, even up to three years old. This carrying, touching and sleeping beside very young children creates a stronger bond and makes the child feel more secure.

I find it an interesting co-incidence Kim mentioning touch.

Elizabeth Phyllis and Eileen arrive and Elizabeth begins by explaining that things have changed, the Friends had approved the £700 for the work. I could tell that she was pleased and relieved by this. At first the committee could not understand what the value of the project was and Elizabeth had to put the case to them. Elizabeth explained that to have art on the walls would be seen by a great many people. It is an extremely busy area, not just with people waiting to see their GP's but chiropody patients, as well as the practice nurses and mother and baby clinics and so on. Finally they had taken a vote. It had been quite a protracted meeting.

Elizabeth explained that 'they seemed very happy with the idea of having local scenes' by the local photography club – this had somehow 'puts their minds at rest', 'they felt comfortable with this'. I joked that 'it could have been worse - monies for two metal poles and pieces of coloured silk. Eileen said she thought about taking the tartan DNA silk along to the meeting but had visions of holding this up and reminding people of *Waking the Dead* (a current TV detective series with lots of forensic science to solve murder cases).

There was a lot of laughter.

This was twelve months since I had first met them. I congratulate them both. There was a feeling that something is going to happen at last (our application had gone to them six months previously).

Opening up the process: introducing the idea of a waiting game

I give them a print out their poems (they made seven each) explaining that what is interesting in their poems is the many different kinds of waiting as well as the similarities (for example waiting for meetings and waiting in traffic seemed to be shared by everyone). Other kinds of waiting were very specific, like waiting for the moment a race begins, for a partner to come home. A full range of emotions seemed to belong to waiting (anticipation, dread, frustration, longing, excitement etc).

I suggest we could take our poems and combine them with imagery to make new art for the walls and that this might prompt other people to think about the nature of waiting. I describe that at first I had thought about trying to illustrate their poems with images about waiting, for instance a fishing float would indicate waiting for a fish to bite, but rejected this idea in favour of using more abstract images which are more open-ended, puzzling even which allow people to make their own connections, or not.

I show examples of digital prints explaining the technical side of combining an image from a miniature with one of my poems (using Photoshop). I explain that whilst making the prints and incorporating the seven line poems, depending on the meaning I had started to split them up into verses where the line breaks help to emphasize pauses or rhythm.

I invite them to play a game of connections, to look at the miniatures and consider the interplay of image and poem and choose any that they think might work.

They looked at the small dark miniatures and considered their poems for almost an hour.

Fig. 25 Staff working with their poems and the miniatures

Towards the end of the meeting Eileen suggested that waiting as a theme could be 'opened up to everyone, to give it to different groups and see what they come up with'. That we should 'stick with this theme' and that it could 'last for a long time'.

Fig. 25 Staff working with their poems and the miniatures



Elizabeth said she would speak to the Day Care staff to see if they wanted to become involved – to make art work for the community board on the theme of waiting.

I suggested we could make a small book of waiting by collecting poems made by other people.

From their readings and connections with their poems I then produced 6 digital prints as art work for the Waiting Room.

26th October 2004

Feedback from Eileen

Eileen came to Inverurie to collect the framed poem prints on her day off. I meet her for coffee (Edwards) and show her two of the framed prints. She tells me that 'the staff had really enjoyed the process' and that probably some of the staff who'd been involved 'hadn't really encountered art before'. They were not art gallery goers or buyers but that 'this might be different now.'

She brought up the issue of meaning – what would these prints mean to others in the waiting room and that 'our meanings would be completely obscure'. I reiterated that I did not think this too important. Other people would make their own connections, their own meanings, or not. Eileen laughed at the idea of herself trying to explain what they meant to the Friends and I re-described the process adding that I would make a short text to accompany the images explaining what had happened – how we worked together, and make a sheet with titles for the six prints which would add another layer of meaning (the titles came from what the staff offered up in their interpretations and connections).

Eileen suggested that we print out the poems and have them laminated in the waiting room.

She thought that probably at best, others (the general public and other staff) 'would go up close and look at the art work for a moment', but she 'appreciated that the work had special meaning for those involved'. I told her what Elizabeth had said to me earlier about meeting people she knew in the waiting room, seeing someone she knew Elizabeth could never say

'how are you' it was not appropriate in this place. The artwork could be useful as something else to talk about.

Ownership and a constitution

Eileen brought up the question of ownership of the prints – who did they belong to, were they the artist's, the staff's, she did not think they belonged to the hospital? I suggest they belonged to the waiting room. I suggest that putting a monetary value on art work was a very arbitrary thing but we could view the prints as the beginning of a small collection of art on the theme of waiting which belongs to the Waiting Room. Something like the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary does.

This idea made me think that if the work belongs to the waiting room it actually belongs to the people who wait there for the 10/20 minutes or however long. I liked the idea of ownership being everyone who waits there. This way the work belongs to everyone and no one; not an individual, group, or organisation. I could make a constitution. Eileen liked this and the idea of starting a collection which would 'be something the Friends would understand'.

Two days later

I e mail the description of the project and the constitution to Eileen, Elizabeth and Claudia (Deveron Arts)

28th October 2004

Indirect feedback

Claudia Zeiske (Deveron Arts) told me (telephone) that when she and Eileen met at the Glenfiddoch opening a few weeks previously (a Deveron Art's project) Eileen had said to Claudia that she now understood 'why it was important to have contact with artists', 'to *really* talk with artists' and that 'it was an enrichment' and she believed that for the staff who participated it was 'a new way of looking at art' and that 'it might encourage them to look at more art or be involved in some way'. (I was glad I had phoned Claudia about another matter)

31st October

The experience of others

On meeting Elizabeth she said she remembered and was 'surprised by the excitement of that meeting'. She thought the staff would 'just want pictures' and that 'it was amazing to see what people saw in them' (the miniature collages).

It was interesting that in the feedback (from Elizabeth and Eileen) each of them referred to the experience of the others, reflection on the experience was not in the first person.

1st November 2004

Waiting for the joinery work

I went to check if the pictures would hang alright on the new picture rails. I met Elizabeth in her new office (with a window). Her new job is Locations Manager and she told me a little about this. The title intrigued me - I had also met a Facilities Manager and a Territory Manager in this project.

We had previously planned a small launch of the new art work once everything was hung including the Day Care Patients work for the community board and the local photography clubs work.

The joinery work had still not been completed and one of the boards was not fixed on properly and did not have a frame round it. It would take another couple of months for the (Health and Safety approved) joiners to varnish the rails and picture frames. Disappointingly the buildings man had e mailed Elizabeth to tell her it would cost an extra £200. On viewing the joinery work we regretted not having the freedom to buy the basic materials ourselves (more cheaply) or engage a local joiner to do the work (more quickly). Getting things done locally had come up before with Elizabeth (over furniture) and her frustration at not being able to do this because of the bureaucracy associated with purchasing something for the hospital or health centre.

April 2005

The joinery work was completed

12th May 2005

I met with Elizabeth, Eileen, Phyllis and Francis to hang the work. We decide to put the photography clubs work in the waiting room and the poem prints in the corridor leading from the waiting area to the reception desk (and the second smaller waiting room). The Day Care Staff are not there so we put their work on the community board.

I made text for the wall describing the collaboration and images with the titles. I also give Elizabeth copies of our poems, the blank sheet for people to use if they wish and the *Constitution for Waiting Room Art* for laminating.

I asked them what they thought of the project. Elizabeth expressed relief at finally getting it done 'it had been two years since she'd had the idea and could hardly believe it had taken this long'. She was 'delighted' and 'looked forward to coming in the next day to see what the staff and patients thought'.

Eileen said that although she went to art events and exhibitions sometimes she'd think 'what on earth is all that about I do wish the artist were here to explain it all to me. To see how it grows - that is one thing which is entirely different from seeing the finished thing'.

Eileen said that when she showed the artwork to the others (after picking it up) she 'had to explain it again' (the process) yet for her 'it was obvious and how we got there'. She explained that she thought the others were not very familiar with art.

She enjoyed when we were looking at the collages 'because it was fascinating to see what people saw in them. Some are strong characters but some are less so and you'd think they wouldn't say what they see, but they did'.

In Eileen having to explain the process I wondered whether I had not explained things clearly, whether it was the time lag, or whether if you are not particularly in the habit of art, that the process needs rearticulating. I remembered explaining the process to Eileen when she picked up the work which felt to me like a rehearsal (by hearing the story again) of how she would explain the work to the Friends. I came to believe that to retell the story (by the artist) is very much part of the process.

I had met managers of 'facilities', 'territory' and 'locations'. I thought about how time and space are managed but waiting time is our in between time. The short description accompanying the artwork included a short text on how we had worked and that a range of feelings belong to waiting in our poems (patience, payments, buses, files to down load, dinner time, a meeting to start, a loved one coming home, a letter, the snow plough, for a heat to start, etc).

The 'Constitution' read:

"This artwork belongs to everyone whilst they wait here. It does not belong to the artist, the staff or the Health Centre. Ownership is in the space of waiting, an in-between time. You are free to interpret as you like – to make up what these images suggest to you, or not. This is how we made these art works in the first place – we used the principle of collage.

You are invited to read our waiting poems (on the laminated sheets) and to make up new ones. If you wish you can use the template sheets *Your thoughts on Waiting*.

If you would like to make art on the theme of waiting and add to the art work for *The Waiting Room Collection* please contact Jackie Elvidge, Practice Manager at the Health Centre or Claudia Zeiske of Deveron Arts."

3rd June 2005

Elizabeth begins to make arrangements for a small celebration of the work being completed and sends an e mail to the project participants inviting contributions and further involvement. She asks everyone for suggestions and rather diplomatically and efficiently frames this as a set of twelve questions concerning where to have the event, who to invite, refreshments etc. She also kindly offers to pick me up from my home to take to me to the event.

14th June 2005

An occasion to celebrate the work being completed

We have a small opening (we call it a private view because it wasn't opening anything) to celebrate the work being in place and set tables out in the waiting room. The staff bring

refreshments. Twenty one people come including the Day Care Staff, (the patients were asked but did not manage to come), members of the local camera club, Deveron Arts and staff at the Health Centre as well as Phyllis, Francis, Elizabeth and Eileen. The local press photographer also comes (Huntly Express). Elizabeth makes a short speech thanking everyone and I briefly explain how we worked to make the waiting poems prints. The Camera Clubs photographs were along the wall in the actual waiting room with the community board on the opposite wall (with the Day Care patient's work). The waiting poems were hung in the corridor.

The local photography club has broken up and Elizabeth suggests to Lottie that 'if they wanted to re-form they could use the space as their venue'. They seem interested to do this. There is a lot of light hearted conversation about the images and about waiting (people offering up examples). I spoke to Marie, a school liaison officer who was interested to do art work with children (via Deveron Arts) and she took the blank sheet (lists for making up poems) to use to make artwork for the space. (The texts explaining the work, and the poems were laminated along with the blanks and put on the magazine table before the opening).

After the event Eileen suggests that we should try and 'really open up waiting (as a theme) for children and lots of others' and she wondered if they were 'the only Health Centre using waiting'. She thought that they needed a box in the waiting room to collect the thoughts on waiting (if people filled in the blanks). Elizabeth said she wanted to put an article in 'Up Front' an NHS newsletter to publicise the work.

I give Eileen a CD with a set of images and short texts from the project (the 'Visual Dialogue').

Before we leave Eileen, Elizabeth and Phyllis discuss and look at how various patches of sprawling information on the walls could be tidied up (like the Community Nurses Boards), and to perhaps put some of the information in ring binders. They considered how to make the second waiting room a bit less chaotic looking for areas where art could go.

Elizabeth gave me a lift back to Inverurie. During the journey she thanked me for my patience and mentioned that some of the GP's had questioned the cost of the joinery work and that they were going to write a letter to the 'buildings man' to find out why contract work was so

expensive. While this would have nothing to do with Elizabeth herself she had previously told me how one of the secretary's partner was a joiner and had offered to do the work free with just the cost of the materials, I knew her frustrations over not being able to get work done locally. She explained that in the past you would contract locally and a Clerk of Works checked it to see it was up to standard. I congratulated her for keeping the project going. She said she 'never imagined that it would take two and half years from first having the idea' but she was 'absolutely delighted now'. She said she was 'looking forward to seeing how other staff and the patients responded to the work'.

Fig. 26 Two of the final prints on waiting (*Polar Bear Stand Up* and *The Belly Dancer*)

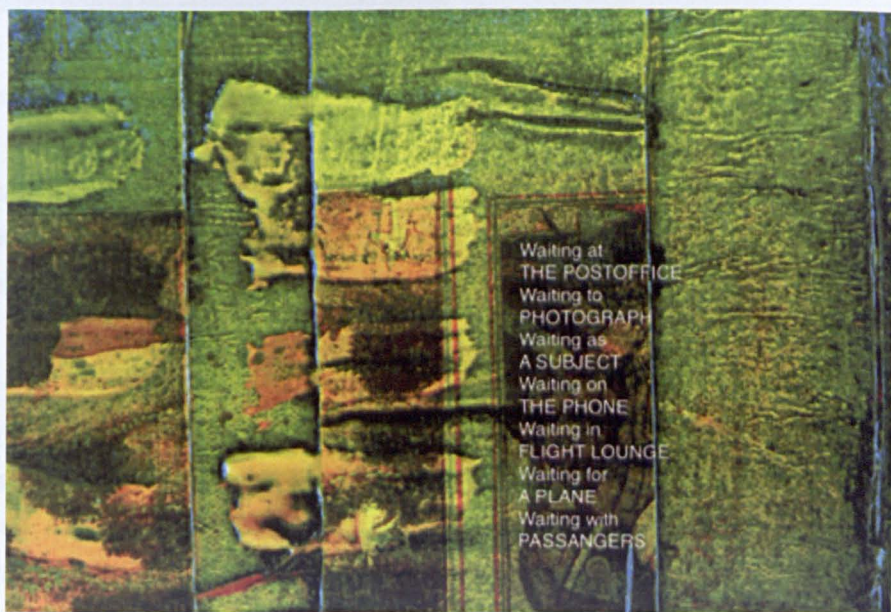
Friday 17th June 2005

"The art works have brightened up the waiting room a bit and as well as being something to look at give people something to speak about".

Elizabeth Squires, from article in the Huntly Express.

See Visual Dialogue: *THE WAITING ROOM* on CD

Fig.26 Two of the final prints on waiting (*Polar Bear Stand Up* and *The Belly Dancer*)



4.4.3 Analysis using the matrix (aesthetic, ethical and polemical) to understand qualities of the artistic process

Appreciating the context of the project

This project – a series of meetings which took place between September 2003 and May 2005 took much longer than anyone anticipated and the fact that the staff had expectations of the artist making the work and somehow filling up a community board (possibly with children's work), made the project challenging. These expectations meant it was difficult getting the staff together as a group or meeting them individually because it seemed to be dictated by the stages of applying for a grant for the joinery work and picture frames. It was also due to their workloads. When we did meet it was after their working day and often these had to be re arranged.

The interpretative analysis focuses primarily on one meeting (25th August 2004) where I feel we achieved a level of engagement in the process where we used the miniature collages and the waiting poems the staff had made previously.

Aesthetic - transforming reuse or ruse, tricks, a poetic gesture

The object as catalyst – touch and close looking

The visual quality of collage in combining and juxtaposing images (a recycling of newsprint and other materials) can give rise to unexpected new meaning (what I enjoyed in making them). Collage is a commonly used artistic technique (trick) to create an interplay of visual elements. Through being small (miniature) they could be picked up and looked at closely to see tiny details or fragments. This close physical looking seemed to encourage a level of perceptual attention as people kept them in their hands and collected a few to consider their poems or share something they saw with someone else. It seemed a more personal and a more informal way of working than where images are large often framed and can't be touched or rearranged. The miniatures did not have any fixed orientation and were often looked at

upside down (from the way they were made). Informality and deliberate open-ness of meaning was a gesture to encourage engagement and for complicity.¹

Ethical: freedom to and autonomy

Thinking aloud in visual dialogue

Saying out loud what someone saw was part of the elaboration of making meaning. This is both a declaration and a sharing. This kind of relational process (Bourriaud) does not just validate the procedure it forms the art work (as a meaning making process) where many meanings become apparent and are equally valid. This is a central value in my process. It is the opposite of the connoisseurial silence of the gallery or museum. It is the opposite of trying to second guess the artist's intention. It is the opposite of meaning as closed or circumscribed.

Retelling the story of what happened

Towards the end of the project I found myself re telling Eileen the story of the project (so she could explain it to the funders). The idea of recounting what happened as a story has wider implications. The stories we tell ourselves and to others in ordinary conversation constitute the essential space of community (de Certeau). Today we are constantly bombarded with facts and information and life seems colonized by the media and the bureaucracies we have to deal with at work and to keep functioning. Having and telling stories becomes ever more important.

Polemical: micro-resistances, relational tactics, tracing one's path

Sharing a polemical space

Space is both the physical and the virtual world for de Certeau, and the virtual can be imagined in art practice, as making space for the imaginary. We shared a polemical (resisting) space in terms of the restrictions of what we could not do, the 'mind blowing and crippling' Health and Safety rules. We also shared the knowledge of the expectations from the funders who apparently had very conventional ideas on what art might be ('they liked the idea of local

¹ Complicity means accomplice and complexity (CED, 1990). Like *close* it suggests not distanced by working together with a shared goal, and is complex to describe because co-operative working is about a dynamic inter-subjective processes of exchange and inter and transactions.

scenes' Elizabeth explained). We also, ironically given the theme, shared the frustrations of the inordinate time we waited for the joinery work to be completed (approximately six months). This kind of sharing in co-operative working can take on a feeling of a micro-resistance within the givens (in this case bureaucracy and expectations by the funders). The constraints shaped the project and gave us a feeling of collectivity, a polemical, bubble-like space. The question then follows is art making/the art project the catalyst for this quality of space or can it be achieved in non art ways?

Recognizing a relational tactic – making and using lists

Making lists came out of negative connotations (NHS waiting lists, listing what was on the walls). This became subverted into a way (a tactic) of focussing and opening up the thinking on waiting (waiting for, waiting on, etc). This was a simple construct for others to use – giving us a spectrum of feelings which belong to waiting (in our 48 poems).

Taking a critical stance

Waiting as a theme for the final artwork was for the staff an autonomous move which holds a certain risk. Particularly in this context waiting is heavily weighed with negative associations (waiting time equated with health care provision) and in the eyes of the waiting public we were at least not avoiding the issue.

Ethical - a space to play, an interval for freedom, autonomy

The danger of spontaneity

By responding spontaneously to the room at the beginning - suggesting we could hang printed silks which could not be realized, I felt I had created a situation where what we might do would feel like a compromise.

Introducing art – a series of meetings and showings

The meeting using the miniature collages and poems was preceded by a drawn out series of meetings. I feel this was necessary to develop a degree of trust where by looking at photographs and talking in and around them it was (in retrospect) a getting to know each other, and a preparation for the meeting (25th August) where people seemed confident in speaking openly and sharing their ideas. I noticed this particularly with the more junior staff

who in the two previous meetings had been very quiet with Elizabeth and Eileen taking the lead and being more vocal. (This was also commented on by Eileen later).

Describing collage as a principle for making new expressive meaning

By describing the way I made the miniature collages I hoped it would validate a method of making new meaning through re-combining. The suggestion was that by combining our poems and images (from what they saw in the miniature collages) fresh or unexpected meanings might arise in the poem prints. The principle of collage would follow through on the set prints and help to keep things open on two levels; that many interpretations are possible and desirable and that any number of recombination can have value (meaning). I was suggesting a kind of loose weave editing process where images do not have to obviously illustrate the text. The final layer of meaning added was to take what they said they saw and use this as titles for the prints (e.g. 'Malaysian snakeskin', 'Polar bears stand up').

Playful

All five staff seemed to be enjoying telling and showing their colleagues and me what they saw in the miniatures relating connections, associations, memories and anecdotes. By sharing thoughts it loosened things up, meaning was invented, shared, elaborated upon, open ended and queried 'I can't see that', 'it doesn't look like that to me it's more like ...' 'it looks like yes and a bit like ...' 'it reminds me of ...' 'I remember when ...'

Elizabeth described a particularly vivid memory from her past when during a heavy rainfall she saw snakes shed their skins when moving across a rough track.

Participatory relational practice is partly about the art of conversation. We persuade and are persuaded. We make believe.

Ambiguity as an aesthetic trick or ruse

Ambiguous images ask for interpretation, it can make us think about meaning (not about beauty or not beauty per se). Ambiguity is central to how open an art work is as catalyst, helping imaginations play and play off each other. Possibly part of the style of my practice is the (visual) trick of ambiguity, which could be considered an ethic of ambiguity. Of course being deliberately ambiguous could be considered unethical – trickery as deception but an

aesthetic visual trick seems more like mischief, an escapade with the intention of opening up the possibilities of meaning making in a process as well as leaving the interpretation on what is made open ended.

Choice

The staff spent almost an hour looking at the miniature collages and considering their poems. The fact of choice was important, (a set of sixty) enabling meaning to be personalized. Choice itself relates to the broader question of what we choose to preserve, value and exchange. It is also what we choose to project of ourselves.

Silent productions: the tactical art of memory

Elizabeth in particular spoke about her memories from her childhood in Malaysia (e.g. snakeskins). The miniatures seemed to encourage making up a narrative to complete or fill in the picture as it were. The idea that images can do this is interesting. De Certeau describes memory as essentially tactical in nature. Memory has a 'cybernetic' quality, it 'comes from somewhere else, it is outside itself, it moves things about' a displacement (1984:87). Memories 'insert' themselves into something encountered by chance, 'on the other's ground'. Memories have no fixed place but are mobilized, they are 'played by circumstances, just as a piano is played by a musician and music emerges from when its keys are touched by the hands' (ibid: 86).

De Certeau describes the 'singularity' of memory, or its potency which can depend on just a fragment, or tiny detail which in lacking a whole insert themselves 'into a circumstantial ensemble' (ibid:88). Visually it is the 'sharp details', the 'intense particulars' which we notice and carry with us as memories. Memory as fragments parallel the visual qualities of the miniature collages in asking for an 'ensemble' or a whole picture.

Yet memories cannot be described as just fragments because they also 'yield the ensemble they forget' but neither are they 'totalities' because they are not self sufficient, nor 'stable' (ibid: 88-89). Memories implant themselves but they depend upon taking advantage of the occasion, they do not create it. Memory looks for opportunity, a 'favourable ensemble' which 'given one more detail' will be 'right'. Memory tries to create a 'practical harmony' where 'there is lacking only a little something, a scrap which becomes precious in these particular

circumstances.' In this way the 'art of memory' is something like 'the tightrope walker's talent and a sense of tactics; it is the instant of art' (ibid:86).²

Visual fragments (in the miniature collages) ask for a practical harmony. A fragment sparks a micro-story conjured up from memory. These are examples of the silent or invisible 'productions' (for de Certeau reading, walking and other signifying practices are secondary productions).

The idea of event as an 'occasion'

Elizabeth spoke (after this meeting) of being surprised at the feeling of excitement she felt in the group. Close as a quality of engagement could be imagined as 'occasion' as de Certeau describes it. He likens occasion to the way memory works where it 'concentrates the *most* knowledge in the *least* time' (ibid:83 italics in original). I could *speculate* that it was touching memories that created the sense of excitement Elizabeth described.

How the artist is positioned with others (disposition)

By suggesting the idea of a game I attempted to shift from a position of knowing to one of setting parameters within which we could work together. By seeing something and choosing a miniature and linking this with their waiting poems (in a loose weave edit) the suggestion was a freedom to invent. The implication was that meaning is not fixed and by extension this applied to other people's interpretation of the poem prints (acknowledged by Eileen).

A sense of playfulness came from connecting fragments in the tangle of meaning making through showing each other, on the edge of non-sense. For instance Kim traced an outline of a mother child which none of us could see and Francis showed us a polar bear which made us laugh when we realized it was one of Eileen's choices for her poem on swimming. Eileen recognized part of a bicycle and we realized Francis' bear was upside down.

There were moments of laughter and still silent moments of deeper contemplation.

² De Certeau uses the term *metis* to describe 'the instant of art' which 'counts and plays on the right moment in time (*kairos*)' (1984:82). De Certeau uses this term to describe a quality of memory and acknowledges that it is a quality of effect: 'In the relationship of forces in which it intervenes, *metis* is the 'ultimate weapon' It is a principle of economy: obtain the maximum number of effects from the minimum of force. It also defines an esthetics, as is well known. The multiplication of effects through the rarefaction of means is, for different reasons, the rule that organizes both an art of operating and the poetic art of speaking, painting or singing.' (ibid:82).

Mutual autonomy

The aesthetic as a shared experience in participatory practice is not 'the private symbolic world of the artist' (Bourriaud, 2002). Thinking out loud, by describing what we saw, is both a declaration (of our individuality and unique experiences) and sharing. This links to the idea of autonomy, a more productive idea than authorship (a key issue in participatory art).³

Autonomy assumes that individuals bring different things to a project and mutual autonomy assumes a degree of respect. It takes a shared effort, or investment to make the imaginary real for ourselves. I considered the act of conferring value having value in and of itself and this relates to the much broader idea of systems of exchange (see below).

Polemical

Mutuality and the idea of gift ('an economy of the gift')

The idea of gift a term de Certeau uses, drawing from Mauss⁴ (1984:26-28) is developed more fully by Sennett (2003:215-222).⁵ Sennett describes (from Mauss) an exchange system which knits people together in groups. Objects of exchange are symbols of mutual respect in a ritual and this creates an expressive bond between people. This system (or dynamic) works because it not based on the condition of equal exchange where the things exchanged are considered as being of equivalent value. The gift economy is based on inequality and 'asymmetry'. By accepting a gift there is an *obligation* to reciprocate - to give back something better.

For Mauss this system of trade inverts the economics of monetary exchange, the idea of 'fair price' for something which is considered as 'an equal exchange' where the balance sheet is cleared and the relationship stops. The value of the gift system is that it does not assume equal exchange. There can never be a feeling of balance between giver and receiver, it seesaws back and forth, a continued relationship is built into the process and it is this that binds us emotionally (*close*).

³ Relational participatory practice as a model is neither the artist as solo author nor artist as facilitator for other people to make something, typical of 'community arts' style of working.

⁴ Mauss, *The Gift*, 1950

⁵ Mauss is cited by Morgan, (2003:22-23). Bourriaud describes art representing a 'barter activity'. It cannot be regulated by any currency or 'common substance'. Art represents 'absolute value' in that it defines its own value system (2002:42). It operates in the 'interstice'. Interstice seems to parallel de Ceteau's thinking on spaces made through alternative systems of exchange.

In this research a focus has been on the different kinds of exchanges in a process. The first gesture of bringing art objects or ideas as a catalyst into people's working environments creates a certain obligation, or better, asymmetry. The others might reciprocate by offering their interpretations, itself an expressive gesture. Other exchanges might be an invitation, transcripts of our dialogues (especially with the geneticists), introductions, time given over etc. Of course mutuality, (like reciprocity) is something that you cannot predict when starting a project but, like a false laugh or false smile you instinctively know if it is not happening. When it does happen it is a quality which makes the process worthwhile.

This idea of mutuality and asymmetry is important because it shifts the emphasis in participatory processes away from collaboration (suggesting equal input to produce a tangible output) to co-operative working, shifts the emphasis away from authorship to valuing (and enjoying) individuality. At this micro-level the kinds of exchanges, inter and transactions can be imagined as the usually silent or invisible productions de Certeau describes in day to day cultural practices. This is where the subtle negotiations, small gestures, tensions and generousities are lived out. For example a special moment was when Eileen asked me if she could take a silk home.⁶ Later I understood that she could 'show her family what (she) had tried to explain to them in words' (from seeing the paper prints earlier). She e mailed images of what her family did with the silk at home (e.g. hanging it over the banisters). The pay back to me was that she was interested *enough* to talk to her family and to want to do this. The value of any gift is not intrinsic. Value depends on the context of giving and receiving.⁷ This has direct bearing on participatory process as a set of reciprocal and asymmetrical exchanges and raises questions on what we consider a poetic gesture (the aesthetic). If the emphasis of the art work is considered the process not the final art object how can these micro-gestures be made intelligible? How can we give (poetic) form to process?

The kinds of activities Bourriaud calls relational aesthetics (meetings, encounters, events, a dinner around a soup) as gestures are clearly seen by being made intelligible in an art context. This seems an inherent contradiction. What was going on in *Waiting Room* was simply co-operative working, a series of events and exchanges, yet the small, the 'trivial' (which for de Certeau 'is also essential') things were part of a process and not singled out as

⁶ Eileen's use of the silks at home with her family contributed to the idea in *Interference* (see 4.3) where the silks are used to transform spaces.

⁷ This idea of gift is mentioned with regard to the artist Jeanie Finlay's work *Home-Maker*, see Appendix 9; Douglas and Delday *Home as a Form of Practice*, in *Home-Maker*, (ed) Sophie Hope, (2005:22-33).

a clearly delineated 'poetic' gesture. What do we take to be the aesthetic within dynamic inter-personal processes? Are projects articulated as sequences of moments (e.g. the Visual Dialogues) and if so who is the audience (beyond the participants)? How fully do processes need to be described to see the value across its varied levels (the aesthetic, the artist's thinking process and its socio-political levels)? These questions are taken up in Chapter 5.

A Constitution

Making a short text – 'A Constitution on Waiting' was a deliberate extension on the idea that any interpretation can be valid (a personal resistance to the sometimes esoteric 'higher' meaning ascribed to more abstract i.e. non figurative imagery). The Constitution came out of the process but it is also a declaration (to the ubiquitous 'waiting' public).

Humour

Humour can be an instinctive resistance to the rules and restrictions (like the shared moment with Eileen and the helium balloon). Humour is tactical – it pops up from somewhere. It is not like re-telling a joke, but of the moment. By juxtaposing two disparate things, inserting an idea, humour transgresses (like memory) it works in the space of the other (de Certeau). It is not a method but a disposition (an inclination).

4.4.4 Summary analysis of learning about the artistic process (see Volume I)

(B. Other practices)

4.7 Giving form to methodology: The artist Susan Benn in *The Maakin Lab* project

There are two parts to this analysis. The first focuses on Susan's background which gives insight on the values underpinning her approach. The second part concentrates on the experience of the *Maakin Lab* project.¹ This interpretation of her practice draws from my experiences from developing the *Maakin Lab* as an OTE project and actually participating in the lab where I would collaborate with Susan.

Both parts of the analysis and the quotes used draw primarily from my structured conversation with the artist (11 June 2004, London) along with other conversations with the artist and some quotes from the OTE evaluation points.

The *Maakin Lab* output is a website on the *Maakin Lab* CD which accompanies this thesis.² (It is recommended that after this analysis the reader views this web site on the CD).

4.7.2 Introduction to PAL: an organisation for collaborative learning for creative practitioners

Susan's practice is based on relationships. For over 16 years she has created spaces for usually multi disciplinary groups of creative practitioners to develop their practices in a collaborative learning environment. She calls this space a lab. Her organisation is called PAL³ (previously Pallabs) and she has refined her methodology of labs into a robust yet subtle form of artistic practice.

The lab as a construct is deceptively simple. It acts as a framework for people to explore ideas and to develop as individuals within a group dynamic. She has worked with an extremely broad spectrum of top professional people from a wide range of disciplines and labs are increasingly becoming internationally based. Beginning with labs for the performing

¹ 'Maakin' is Shetland vernacular for making and could apply to any craft.

² My relationship with this project was to assist in the project's development, take part in the lab itself as artist-researcher and for the output (the website on the CD) work in collaboration with the OTE team to provide and develop the content and design ideas.

³ PAL is a registered charity, see www.pallabs.org

arts PAL realised the process was valuable in other contexts and extended labs in other areas, for example a Chaos Lab (2002) brought nano technologists and choreographers together, a Broadband Lab (2001) brought scientists and artists together, to the more recent interest in the nature of creative learning in Labs of Learning.⁴ The company is small (Susan, an administrator, secretary and part time financial advisor with a Board of Directors), but its extended team include the many people who have acted as 'lab directors' for specific labs over the years and what she describes as 'the talent pool' of people who have taken part in labs.

Labs take place for many different reasons and great consideration and time is given to identifying the specific individuals who will come together to make a particular creative mix in a lab (often people are 'nominated' to take part). In each lab there is a Lab Director and sometimes co-directors within the group of participants. The lab process begins with a pilot lab followed by a series or what she calls a cascade of labs, each one informing the next (on average one per year over 3 – 4 years). The time span of the labs vary but always have a residential element to begin with (a few days) where people get to know each other, followed immediately by an intensive period of working. Part of the lab process is that the wider stake holding group is invited in at the end of the lab. Susan believes this is essential so that the often 'fragile embryonic ideas' can be presented to people in positions of power i.e. those with the influence and/or monies to help 'take ideas forward to the market place'. Her insistence that the infrastructure is considered and involved in the *Maakin Lab* was not what the OTE team expected, though it made complete sense once she explained her methodology and it became part of the artist's brief.⁵ The *Maakin Lab* (May 2003) to all intent and purposes was a pilot lab though there was a second three day mini lab four months later in September/October 2003.

Susan does not normally act as Lab Director (though she did in the *Maakin Lab*) but has been an observer in most of them. Over the years she has created and refined a set of tools for her methodology though she would not call her way of working a methodology (which of course is

⁴ Development of the labs was assisted through a large NESTA (National Endowments for Science, Technology and the Arts) award (2000-4) to pilot new labs. Part of the current suite of labs includes Labs of Learning and work in the area of Challenging and Volatile Learning with children and teachers in schools (2005-).

⁵ However this aspect would be very disappointing in the *Maakin Lab* because no representative from the key funding and development bodies in Shetland were able to attend the lab presentation on that day. They were approached by our project partners at the college.

a research term). Neither would Susan consider herself an artist (as became apparent in my conversation with her). Her art practice can be considered relational in the sense that PAL is about creating the conditions or opportunity for connecting people and their ideas together which can produce new ideas. The aim for any lab is for creative learning amongst the participants which may create a trajectory of some kind beyond the immediate experience (activity or product). Susan works very much in the real world of creative industries and education as a catalyst for change.

The majority of the quotes by Susan are from a structured conversation I had with her after the project had been completed (June 2004) along with some quotes from various OTE 'soundings' (evaluations) whilst the project was happening (*italics are her emphasis*).

I wanted to find out where Susan's initial idea for labs had come from. In explaining her background it would seem she has always been rather subversive in terms of challenging the givens. She left Michigan, in the USA to go to the Royal College of Art, London (1958) on 'a dare from her boyfriend' and was admitted without prior art school training. In the 60's she began work in designing textiles (Bernat Klein in Galasheils) including making experimental fabrics for Chanel. Then she worked in children's publishing during the 70's and 80's (e.g. Doubleday in America) producing books which dealt with sensitive issues in publishing terms for children at that time (e.g. divorce and sex). She also worked as a photographer and publishing consultant (Hulton-Getty).

Polemical: resistance – redrawing relations of power in creative production

The idea for the labs came from her experiences and frustrations as a creative practitioner in industry (textiles and publishing). This formative experience 'shaped' what she cares about. The big pressure in industry is time and she identified the need to be able to work in a non-hierarchical collaborative way by bringing the makers, (the creative practitioners) and those selling the creative product closer together. She believed that those with the decision making power (to buy a product) were completely divorced from the realities faced by the creative practitioner. This is a 'continuing concern' for her from a creative perspective because she has seen 'a lot of waste, a lot of misunderstanding, and a lot of genuine disinterest from the management in the nitty gritty of the creative process.'

Ethical-polemical: a level playing field (challenging traditional hierarchies of values)

The first labs were for playwrights, then screenwriters and moved on to small scale opera. The early opera labs (from 1992-8) were 'a pivotal experience' because in multi disciplinary art forms such as opera or film there were entrenched or 'traditional patterns' of making which lacked collaborative exchanges because of the hierarchies of status with the directors and composers at the top. Her intention (for any lab) is that 'the creative agenda becomes the most important thing instead of politics, and egos are left at the door.'

In conversation with her, and from the *Maakin Lab* experience, she shows a genuine understanding of the difficulties creative practitioners face on a day to day basis. An empathy which stems from her own experiences as a maker which makes her aware of being 'very very careful about respecting what people want to find out' when people take part in a lab.

The early opera labs shaped what PAL would become and identified the need to stage the process in an incremental way beginning with a pilot which identifies 'the possibilities and problems' including the hierarchies that can enable or curtail creativity and the funding scene of whatever field the labs are addressing.

Polemical as questioning, resistance as motivation

One of the driving forces for Susan is her inability to understand why some people in positions of power are not curious 'How can you live a life without being curious about how to think, about change in what you do, and to experience growth...?' She acknowledges this as a 'sweeping generalisation' but it this belief in the need to resist that which is limiting or restricting that motivates her as an artist. She describes the lab idea as 'making spaces for curiosity or inquiry'⁶.

Ethical: tenacity

The ups and downs of PAL's survival as an organisation is interesting in itself (which she traces in our conversation). Susan explains that it is tougher today (now at 66 years) to raise funds than it was when she started out in creative practice forty-five years ago, money is scarcer but stresses that she does not mind working hard for something she believes in. What

⁶ Conversation with Susan, 6th May 2004, London.

she minds is the increasing bureaucracies which can make things so much harder and for no apparent good reason. Her tenacity or staying power stems in part from her anger:

"I am very angry about the *waste* of potential in people and I am very angry about the arrogance and insular, protective devices that some people with power use to prevent people for contributing creatively in the lives they lead.... It's a lot simpler than they (bureaucracy) think and they don't have to make it so complicated or so expensive, or so unwieldy. And with a hierarchical, them and us feeling, of the power resting with the money, and not with the artist, so that artist becomes a supplicant to the commissioner etc...there's no real reciprocity or iterative exchange going on ..."

Aesthetic-ethical: ideas as the 'currency' (materials) of her practice, the ethical as freedom to exchange ideas and skills

The materials Susan works with as artist are ideas on three levels; PAL as an organization, each specific lab and the results of the participants in labs.

Susan describes ideas as 'the currency of exchange' in her life, and '*the most valuable commodity*'. Labs are 'spaces where there can be a free exchange of fresh ideas, a chance to explore each others creative passions, in an unfettered experimental environment.' She finds this very exciting but the 'toughness' and a large part of her role is to address and involve people unfamiliar with the 'struggle of the creative process' people who do not generally 'understand the value nor the complexities' of creative making yet are usually those who buy whatever is made. Her vision is firmly rooted in a pragmatism, PAL 'is not an ivory tower, it is a place of work, for workman like activities with products of some kind emerging and with the market place present in the process.'

Speaking with regard to potential funding (and at this time her worries over this) her frustrations are evident in her belief in the need to value time taken for creative learning and exchanges in today's increasingly product and target driven economy. There is a real tension for her between valuing collaborative creative learning environments and justifying this financially. The labs are not 'a kind of boot camp for creativity, where everything is a

measurable commodity' and this links to the difficulties of evaluation described as 'everyone wanting a blunt instrument, not the alchemy which is undefined.'⁷

Ethical-aesthetic: (autonomy) creative development through sharing risk of failure and connectivity

Susan's hope, the aim of any lab, is 'to release the energy and imagination of each individual who comes'.⁸ She appreciates that artists push themselves (intellectually, emotionally, and physically) and labs are a safe space in the sense that they enable this experience to be shared:

"Artists take risks. Sometimes they don't work and you have to allow for that. And if you are in the company of other people experiencing failures in a constructive way too it is less painful, and/or it is genuinely instructive ... Out of the accidents and this intense presence and focus that happens in a collective lab environment, surprising creative leaps take place – that's a given at all the Labs."

It is the differences (skills, desires etc) of people coming together which make the lab a valuable learning experience. Mutuality and autonomy are at the heart of the lab experience.

PAL as an organisation is also an idea. Susan describes PAL as not any individual but a resource which includes all the lab directors and the 'talent pool' of creative practitioners. It is also now, the organisation's connections in the cultural, economic and political frameworks which can link practitioners with people who have influence. What is particularly interesting in the way Susan operates is her tactical quality as artist. This is the third level of ideas (beyond PAL as an idea and that the labs produce ideas) – the question of what and where a lab might be.

Tactics of survival and role

It would seem the reason PAL continues to exist is because of Susan's ability (her imagination) to identify where labs might happen. Tracing the evolution of the labs she shows an ability to see and make opportunities.⁹ What she enjoys is combining unexpected groups

⁷ Conversation 6th May, London

⁸ Sounding (evaluation) 3, 14th November 2003, Gray's School of Art, Susn Benn, Anne Douglas, Heather Delday, Carole Gray with *Maakin Lab* project partners Stephanie Tristram and Maggie Marr

⁹ Susan mentions that in recent years there is an increasing amount of work undertaken with internationally based partners.

of people thereby breaking down perceived disciplinary boundaries and finding new places for labs to take place. She describes her role as a responsibility for PAL's evolution, 'a lynch pin', 'a protector' and is very insistent on not wanting to take personal credit other than 'offering space and time for collaborative possibilities'. She stresses that she does not 'feel any ownership' because 'PAL is a process' and depends on the lab directors and the participants.

PAL's survival depends on its core principle, what she describes as her philosophy of 'not replicating any one's work'. She describes this as seeking out 'new arenas' where 'new collaborative mixes might be needed', areas which might be 'controversial or experimental'.¹⁰

Tactics: working in the space of the other - a quality of thinking

Susan would describe her practice as something like CPD (Continued Professional Development) in conversation with OTE, yet the real test, the edgy bit of her practice, is that PAL continually works to not replicate what is already being done. She would describe this accurately in a post *Maakin Lab* evaluation - PAL often 'fell between disciplines'. In other words her practice sits in the interstices, the between spaces. It is this tactical quality of thinking which underpins her practice. Tactics are always in the space of the other (de Certeau) because it is not yet part the structure or system (strategy).

Susan looks for something that has not happened yet and asks why not.

An 'aesthetic of tricks'

PAL as Susan's practice means she works with the stuff of perceived disciplinary boundaries, networks and structures of knowledge and finance. Tactics as an improvisational quality of thinking gives or makes room for playfulness. De Certeau speaks of the bricoleur, the artisan like inventiveness (in daily life) which works to disrupt the strict codes, to subvert or question what is given. Susan's way of operating stems from seeing things in another way. Like the bricoleur her form of practice, the labs - are 'light and adaptable', portable to different situations. Like an invisible container for different mixtures of people and ideas. Who would think of combining nano technologists with choreographers, in a *Chaos Lab*, or knitters,

¹⁰ An example she gives at this point is children's theatre. In the UK it was mainly pantomime at this time and so she looked to children's theatre in France for inspiration.

sculptors, 3D designers, new fibre technologies and design historians in the *Maakin Lab* in Shetland?

An aesthetic of tricks is the transforming power of a playful imagination, to trick order, to cross and mix perceived disciplinary boundaries, to chop up the logic of what is given or taken for granted (to look and ask why not), to divert time and make intervals of freedom for creative learning. Labs are new configurations of people to (hopefully) weave meaningful productive relationships.

The aesthetic: transforming (the means or tools of practice) – a metaphor

To describe the PAL methodology Susan uses the metaphor of cooking. She used this with us (the OTE team) when she was approached to undertake the *Maakin Lab* project, and with the project partners in Shetland (Marr and Tristram). I asked her why this particular metaphor:

“People *need* this kind of peer group nourishment and all these words – feeding, cooking, tasting, nibbling they are all terribly relevant to what artists need.”

Her metaphor is powerful and yet understated. It is not heavy handed or laboured, it just works. In asking her where it came from and how it evolved, rather than explain this she gave me an example of where at one stage PAL employed a cook, ‘food being the heart of any lab’ and this led to a series of Cooking Labs which dealt with the serious issues of food production and selling. Cooking as a subject was extended to wider issues. This is typical of Susan’s thinking - that labs can be responsive or at least consider issues in a systemic and holistic way. (This was the case in the *Maakin Lab*).

Susan’s use of cooking as a way to describe what a lab is came from her need to explain what the lab is to other people. The fact that she could not give me a step by step account of its evolution is indicative in my view of how an artist develops useful tools in an unselfconscious way. Tools emerge and develop through using them. In my conversation with her she explained how the labs had informed each other rather than how the metaphor developed.¹¹

¹¹ From my structured conversations with the artists engaged by OTE (Benn 11/06/04, Carter 04/04/04, Renwick 08/03/04, and Shaw 07/07/04) one important thing which became clear was that they valued the opportunity to be able to reflect and speak about their practices. This in itself is indicative of the value of a research layer in art project development and was made explicit by some of the artists and some of the project partners at OTE Workshop VI. In an increasingly target oriented world the research

Why cooking is a good metaphor for the creative process

Susan describes the early research stages of a lab as selecting or assembling the ingredients (identifying people for a lab) with subsequent labs like improving the recipe. She particularly enjoys the early stages of a lab, cooking up an idea - identifying the need, the available funding, and the 'what if' factor of who comes together. Sometimes labs come out of other labs or a practitioner might approach PAL to make a specific lab (e.g. The Crime and Thriller Writers Lab, 2000), the why and how of a lab 'is not formulaic.'

What Susan calls the 'pressure cooker factor' is the creative tension in a lab environment. This tension is fundamental to creating the group dynamic which is at the heart of the lab experience (which I come to later). Finally there is 'the tasting' the presentation to the funders and stakeholders on the last day of the Lab so they can sample the products or ideas, and have direct face to face contact with the makers.

Susan had not (nor any reason to) unpack why the metaphor works in her practice but it is interesting to consider why it works for her form of art practice.¹²

Cooking (like home) is a deep cultural metaphor - a universal and singular. It has a rich language to describe itself. It is about inventiveness, born from necessity and a natural exuberance, the art of cooking is multisensorial, feeding or nourishing the mind as well as body. It is embedded in a sense of place and the diversity of cultural experiences. The practical art of cooking is to do with judgements, preferences and fine discriminations, taking care over what is made - it is an aesthetic. Recipes, occasions and meals live in our memories and in what we carry as practitioners, like the tools, techniques and tricks learnt and adapted. Skills are often passed on from one generation to another (e.g. mothers to daughters) and good cooks have an implicit, well known knowledge – a tacit know how. It is a hands-on process which you make your own by adapting or adding something to make it different or special. The results (the dishes) are often shared with other people as well as recipes and tips learnt. The preparation and enjoyment of food suggests conversation and conviviality. De Certeau poetically places the art of cooking at the heart of dwelling:

layer (particularly the facilitated workshops) allowed for a more considered developmental approach to art projects as well as the chance for individuals to reflect on their own practices.

¹² It was an interesting co-incidence that de Certeau (and his research colleague Giard) explore cooking or 'the nourishing arts'. Here I draw from some of their observations on cooking as an everyday practice which occupies almost half the book (*The Practice of Everyday Life, Living and Cooking, Volume 2*, (1998:145-247).

"The nourishing arts have come down to us from the depths of the past, immobile in appearance in the short term, but profoundly reworked in reality over the long term. Provisions, preparation, cooking, and compatibility rules may well change from one generation to another or from one society to another. But the everyday work in kitchens remains a way of unifying matter and memory, life and tenderness, the present moment and the abolished past, invention and necessity, imagination and tradition – tastes, smells, colours, flavours, shapes, consistencies, actions, gestures, movements, people and things, heat, savourings, spices, and condiments. Good cooks are never sad or idle – they work at fashioning the world, at giving birth to the ephemeral; they are never finished celebrating festivals for the adults and the kids, the wise and the foolish, the marvellous reunions of men and women who share room (in the world) and board (around the table) ..." (1998:222)

Cooking seems unusually appropriate to some forms of contemporary practices which are relational in character. Susan works with a very broad range of people and cooking works because anyone can relate to it. From the creative practitioner's perspective cooking focuses process, which is not to prioritize the ephemeral over objects, rather for the cook, whether it is a lab participant or Susan herself, practice is an ongoing, unfinished project of experimentation and refinement.

Cooking and home, comparing metaphors

Much of the literature on home is couched in the discourse on exile and displacement, or domestic issues which are often about gendered spaces. Home is saturated with emotive associations and social identities such as the safe and comfortable place (see Chapter 2). Home is useful on a meta level.¹³ From a practitioner's perspective I could see how cooking might be a more useful metaphor than home at the level of an individual practitioner.

Metaphors are tools for thinking, not truths and home as dwelling is useful to think about art. It shifts attention away from visual perception to broader issues of social relations and the roles artists might play in society. De Certeau tells us that we dwell in culture (or everyday life) and

¹³ On a meta level home was useful in the OTE initiative. It immediately speaks to systems of value and systems of production and was used in the OTE 'gatherings' as a way of generating thinking on values (see 2.8). This is discussed in Douglas and Delday *Adjusting Sensibilities*, 2003, Appendix 1).

like tenants we arranging our things in the architecture of systems which are given, and though our choices might limited we make our time affirmative and meaningful by furnishing our lives with objects, memories, hopes and desires. Dwelling (home as verb) is like life as a project, an on going and unfinished making meaning through assembling fragments, appropriations etc. But cooking is like *specific projects* which go to make up a whole practice (i.e. role). As a process and product it implies sharing with family, friends, guests, and in labs with strangers. This can be said of home, but cooking and enjoying the results seem more mobile, can happen anywhere. Labs are portable they are discrete events that take on the character of the group. Cooking is rich and direct because it speaks to sensuality and the intimacies of making the best we can - sometimes a feast, sometimes making-do, sometimes failures.

Home can be centre and speaks to the co-constitution of self in relation to the social world, but it is less useful in terms of promoting thoughts on exchange. Cooking is all about exchange (skills, knowledge, food) and is associated with specific shared times (e.g. events). Cooking and enjoying the results (like art projects) happen in a range of interpersonal spaces (e.g. as host, as guest, as customer). Cooking suggests sociability and reciprocity. Cooking not home seems closer to the polemical which de Certeau also describes as - 'an economy of the gift' (1984) a system of exchange which implicates a level of emotional involvement over time.

Aesthetic-polemical: a trajectory or legacy from being in a lab – the effects and affects and timescale

The day of this conversation with Susan she had earlier in the morning read an article in the Guardian about a now established librettist who had taken part in a lab 14 years previously. The article mentioned this was a formative experience when he was starting out. This prompted Susan to reflect on his 'desires and doubts' at that time. Clearly she felt a satisfaction from reading this, commenting that it is 'the artists are who the world will remember not the administrators or funding bodies'.

People are asked to produce a testimonial after taking part in a lab and Susan makes it clear that she would never speak on behalf of individual participants and that the 'product' or

outcome of the lab is at the level of perception in terms of how people work. There are many unpublished testimonials.¹⁴

Thinking of how labs might influence practitioners many years later, I wondered about the issue of evaluating the OTE projects and whether, and in what manifestations a positive lasting effect for the participants can ever really be known, and, at what point in time might an effect or affecting quality be understood or 'evidenced'.

Aesthetic: playful and a vision ('truth and beauty')

Susan has a very strong belief in the value artists can have in society and proposes 'a mad idea'. It is extravagantly playful and visionary:¹⁵

"I believe that in a well run society all major companies should have at least one artist on their board.... I don't care *what* the companies do. I don't care what they make. Artists on boards would create challenging thinking. But this is a mad idea for most city board rooms. It's not going to work if it's tokenism either, it's actually got to be based on a cross-disciplinary way of thinking, a trans-disciplinary way of looking at business and society, a way of injecting, without being too corny, some truth and beauty into an otherwise grasping commercial commodity driven (and more often than not greed riven) society... Life is very much about buying and selling ..."

She has a vision but is a pragmatist aware of the difficulties of communication between creative practice and funding bodies and those who administer the funds. Part of the reason this gulf exists is the lack of language to describe the 'nitty gritty' of creative processes. It is this difficult interstitial area she works in - she speaks of the 'love and passion' of doing something and creativity being quantified as 'Level Two'.

¹⁴ From 16 years of PAL there are over 3000 'testimonials' from participants reflecting on what has been gained, or not, from taking part in a lab. Susan commented that these testimonials have not been examined as a body of material which could be useful in terms of better understanding the nature of creative learning. For instance, to trace or connect these early accounts of the lab experiences with what professional practitioners are doing now – 'to find out whether they remember, what they remember and what happened to them as a result of the lab experience'. (Structured conversation 11/06/04). This would seem an area for future research from a creative learning perspective.

¹⁵ At this point we were discussing the work of APG (Artists Placement Group) with the artists Barbara Stevini and John Latham. APG was a radical move in the art world where artists for the first time began a series of 'placement' in industry and the civil service during the late 1960's and early 70's in the UK.

On asking her what gave her satisfaction as an artist she describes this as seeing people surprise themselves, going beyond what they thought they were capable of and this impacting on their practices. But this is tempered by her belief - that to effect a deeper social change means affecting those with power:

"... it's also disturbing in PAL because you think, if you could have the bosses of those people come to a lab themselves would they not liberate more creativity, unleash more talent, or come to a better consensus of activity or distillation of activity through this collaborative process, by making it *part* of their own practice."

4.7.3 Analysis using the matrix to interpret the practice of Susan Benn in the Maakin Lab

Aesthetic (transforming) artistic tools

Along with the cooking metaphor, Susan uses set of lab documents to structure the process. The first document is a 'Welcome Dossier' with short biographies of the participants and an outline of what individuals want from the process. This document has two purposes. The participants are required to write a short one page statement on what they think they want from taking part in the lab and it is circulated to the participants prior to the lab as an introduction.

The ethical-polemical: sharp questions as artistic tools

The dictionary definition of polemical is to dispute or to question. A second quality of Susan's thinking, beyond her instinct (de Certeau might say 'hunter's cunning') for where labs might be challenging, useful and feasible, concern the questions she asks. We saw this in terms of perceived discipline boundaries, imbalanced power relations and cutting through hierarchies (the motivation for PAL).

Her questions in and around the *Maakin Lab* are disarmingly sharp, and I consider them to be one of her strongest tools. These questions are not esoteric but to borrow her term for the creative practice concern 'workmanlike problems'. The first time I noticed this sharpness of thinking was in discussion over the artist's brief being developed with OTE and the Shetland

partners. She pin pointed exactly the purpose of the project when she stated *if we talk about re-valuing knitting we are really re-valuing the knitters.*¹⁶ On reflecting on the *Maakin Lab* experience she poses the simple question *Are people making things they want to make that someone else can appreciate and value?*

Before taking part in any lab the participants are asked to put on paper what it is they want from the lab. This is focussed by her asking the penetrating question *What is your deep desire?* She explains this could be a vague idea that someone has not had the time or space to explore, but the question asks us to look deep inside and really think about what we want. The final question which struck me was in relation to the way the lab experience might continue beyond the actual lab which is on one level about the infrastructural support to take things forward. But it is also the question of whether the quality of the experience for individuals might manifest itself in some way, might be 'embedded in the hearts and minds' of the lab participants. She describes this after effect (trajectory or legacy) as 'labness'. In a post *Maakin Lab* evaluation¹⁷ the question she asked is *do we really care about what it is we care about?* Far from being a eulogy, the lab is designed to enable people to be spontaneous and experimental. The implication is that we take what was learnt or made very seriously.

Fig.27 A question as a sharp tool

WHAT IS YOUR DEEP DESIRE?

The dynamic of the lab: uncertainty and risk

Susan was aware of the difficulties in explaining the lab to the project partners¹⁸. There are two basic difficulties in describing a lab before hand, both based on uncertainty - the fact that the participants may feel discomfort at first, and from a funding and partnership perspective

¹⁶ This was reiterated at Sounding II, an OTE evaluation point whilst the lab was happening in Shetland 20th May 2003.

¹⁷ Sounding III (evaluation), 14th November 2003, Gray's School of Art, Susan Benn, Anne Douglas, Heather Delday, Carole Gray with Shetland partners Stephanie Tristram and Maggie Marr.

¹⁸ Dr Anne Douglas in partnership with Susan tried very hard to explain the lab to the project partners. More time was spent with them in the development period of the artists' brief and post-lab evaluation than any of the other OTE projects. This has to be balanced by the fact that the lab model is radical compared to the predominant model of production.

that specific 'outputs' cannot be predefined, nor guaranteed. This means 'it's risk all round', but as always for Susan the real risk and focus is on the participants themselves:

"... They would be expected to try new things, to discover what they don't know they can do, what they might want to do, what they think they might want to do, and they're not even sure of *that* sometimes."

Susan spoke of the need to have belief in the process, to trust in the process which itself depends on trust. Because we did not know what was going to be produced this is 'the big limitation for people outside this process to try to understand (especially funders)' – 'how it can be valuable if you don't know what you are going to get out of it?' To make sense of the experience and to definitely have something at the end of the process we had a set of Design Documents¹⁹.

The lab can be an intense experience. Susan knows that people trying to move on creatively can feel vulnerable and challenged on a deeply personal level. This is part of the lab experience and is difficult to explain before taking part. OTE found with the project partners at the Textiles Department in the Shetland College (Maggie Marr and Stephanie Tristam) that they could not fully grasp the difference between a lab and what they were used to in further education – delivering workshops.²⁰ Both partners were invited to be the lab directors but neither wanted to take up the opportunity and asked Susan to take this role. The following quote by Susan is from post-lab evaluation with the OTE team and the project partners:

"... the most important reason we were doing this was to value each person who came in a way as a group that would stimulate that individual to revalue themselves and their work, that is the point of it for me, that is the point of PAL. So if we create an environment where you had a mixed group of people, who were opposites in many ways, who could challenge each other in a constructive way, to think differently ... to not do what you do at home, to think of another way of looking at things, that means de-stabalizing, thinking about what you care about, why you care about that ... Those

¹⁹ These design documents (Welcome Dossier, the testimonials and post lab development ideas) were part of the content for the *Maakin Lab* website www.maakinlab.org on the *Maakin Lab* CD. At this stage we did not know what form the research output might be.

²⁰ This was not helped by Marr being unable to take part in the lab and dropping out at the last minute because of other work commitments.

first few days it was floundering about and fooling around with things and it was strange and uncomfortable. I am not going to tell everybody before a lab that it is going to be uncomfortable because nobody would come, this is one of the problems"

This residential part of the lab is crucial because this is where the pressure starts, pressure to decide, to make a commitment to follow a direction (an idea) and relationships are being formed. Susan understands that the 'structure of the lab comes from pressure'. During the lab she describes a quality as 'the pressure cooker factor' with the process in as 'an accumulative building up of trust, activity, productivity and then a presentation'.²¹

Susan was asked to be the lab director by the partners. What directors in fact do not do is direct, they are more like a point of reference, a touchstone, they guide. The real paradox of the lab (from my experience as participant in the *Maakin Lab*) is that the group dynamic, the pace and texture of what a lab feels like is very difficult to explain and as Susan knows is impossible to predict before hand. The labs are very much about the *specific* individuals and interactions which happen and the shape the lab, the lab's relational form (Bourriaud)²² comes from, and is generated by, the interdependencies of the group. Susan describes what a lab director does from her past experiences:

"... you're guided by the fundamental principles and also you are guided by the artistic means and the personalities and intuition about the right mixture of these needs and personalities in a group, so that the process itself can be a dynamic one which informs the way each day works for everybody there. Each lab is a new experience so it's not a formulaic model that can produce guaranteed and similar results every time because it's too idiosyncratic. But there are some very clear 'givens' in each experience."

Some of the givens she has observed over the years are an 'intense learning between people who wouldn't otherwise meet'. The labs create the potential for moments of collaboration 'which leads to fresh thinking' and 'the unexpected'. She calls this the chemistry or alchemy of a lab.

²¹ Sounding III (evaluation), 14th November 2003, Gray's School of Art, Susan Benn, Anne Douglas, Heather Delday, Carole Gray with Shetland partners Stephanie Tristram and Maggie Marr.

²² Bourriaud (2002) describes relational form as the meeting of different realities.

Assembling the ingredients for the *Maakin Lab* was a process of suggestions and negotiation by the team (OTE, Susan and our Shetland partners) and a final list was drawn up.²³ Susan thought in the *Maakin Lab* the residential period was more intense than usual labs because of the shorter time scale (two days and one evening at Burrastow House before moving to Shetland College to develop ideas).²⁴ The residential part is a crucial point in the lab where 'complete freedom with no direction is scary'. It is when people are at their most vulnerable and 'have to look inside for inspiration'. Discomfort is going beyond personal thresholds, 'to move out of our comfort zones' was how Susan describes it at one point. What the early part of the lab represents is a liminal space - feeling 'betwixed and between', a marginal zone, where rules are questioned or suspended, it is an indeterminate state before moving on.²⁵ Susan clearly recognises this when she says of the truly creative writers in history as 'having to confront their imagination to overcome something'.²⁶ This uncertainty produces (and she has seen this across many labs) the energy of the group dynamic - an inter-dependence or closeness which produces a generosity in people:

"... when you go down into a morass of confusion, everybody is looking around for somebody to cling onto, some idea or some help. What is remarkably satisfying is that people are generous. You are all grappling with the same problem of dealing with desperation somehow, and that makes the inter-dependence which works, and a closeness ... Every group makes its own dynamic so you can never tell in advance, that's the other big risk."²⁷

²³ I researched potential knitting artists with help from CCA (Contemporary Crafts Association, London) and provided the Shetland College partners with a list of people I had spoken with and their contact details so they could approach them directly e.g. Freddie Robins who took part. The Shetland partners identified the knitters and lace makers.

²⁴ Susan expressed that she would have liked to have spent more time with the project partners at Shetland College before the lab. The greater portion of the time was spent getting to know the knitters on this initial trip (with Dr Anne Douglas). The project partners felt that not enough time had been spent with them. On a pragmatic (time and cost) level this could be seen as a disadvantage of living remotely. However this was compensated by a huge amount of communication by OTE and Benn with the partners by telephone, e mail, and a teleconference. The deeper issue here was the difficulty for the partners in understanding that labs are not workshops and that director's roles are fluid and responsive not planned.

²⁵ Liminal is a term used by the anthropologist Victor Turner from the Latin term *limen* meaning threshold. For Turner this was linked to passing over from one stage in life to the next for instance at puberty, marriage. Turner believed that strong artists writers and social critics have the ability to stand outside and look past social forms to see society from the outside and bring messages in from beyond. It is a truism to say that artists try to view and show us back the world in different ways. The point here is that, uncertainty, not knowing, being in the marginal zone is characteristic of the creative process.

<http://www.mac.edu/~rpalmer/liminality.html> (downloaded 17/09/02)

²⁶ A quality of Susan's thinking is her empathic understanding in terms of appreciating that writing can be 'the most demanding, least recognised and most solitary activity'. Some of the earliest labs were for writers (screenwriters, playwrights) and these continue. (Conversation 6th May 2004, London).

²⁷ Sounding II (evaluation) took place during the lab in Shetland, with Susan, myself and Carole Gray, Shetland College, 20th May 2003.

This kind of closeness Susan describes as energy and this turns into a collective feeling of pulling together as the week progressed (as we felt as participants in the *Maakin Lab*). Once people got making things then there was the individual and collective pressure to get work presentable for an external audience (we had four and a half days). Undoubtedly a deadline adds to the dynamic.

Fig. 28 Images from the *Maakin Lab*

Aesthetic-ethical 'Labness'

Labness is Susan's term for the effects and affecting qualities from taking part in a lab. This could be somebody making labs of their own, it could be a new collaboration coming from the lab for example, but labness is also very much to do with the more illusive, intangible changes at the level of perception and aspiration.

Artists and the everyday business of practice

Towards the end of our conversation I briefly speak about de Certeau and the everyday and sketch the matrix for thinking about practice. Susan immediately links the everyday with artists having a more connected role in society beyond 'one off grants' and points to the challenge for PAL in terms of surviving financially - the 'the eternal paradox' of maintaining an independence as an organisation and having a sustainable support structure.²⁸


Relational practice and its form

In discussing the matrix (*aesthetic, ethical and polemical*) Susan could immediately relate to this through her previous work as a photographer:

"... the juggling is always in creating the balance between the aesthetic, the ethical and the polemical *forces*. In my experience of being a photographer which is the nearest I think I ever got to being an artist ... the balance between the aesthetic, ethical and the polemical was obviously for me (points to the sketch) an intellectual challenge all the time because I was doing reportage about subjects that the mass media were not interested in. So aesthetically there was a primary concern for me, ethically the choice of subject matter was of primary concern for me (and) the

²⁸ At this point in time the NESTA grant was ending.

Fig.28 Images from the *Maakin Lab*



ANALYSIS OF MEANING

SERENDIPITY

CO-OPERATION

COLOUR

RESPECT

SENSE OF PLACE

CHANCE

SHARING

ENCOURAGEMENT

SENSE OF SELF

GROUP DYNAMICS

RISK

GENEROSITY

LAUGHING A LOT

CHEMISTRY OF PEOPLE

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

SYNTHESIS

COLLABORATION

DISTILLATION

MAAKIN LAB

Maakin Lab Diary, 15 – 23rd May, 2003

This diary has three voices.

The voices are **Susan Benn (SB)**, Maakin Lab director, **Carole Gray (CG)** and **Heather Delday (HD)**, both Maakin Lab participants and members of the On the Edge research team.

It gives a day-by-day account, and, a sense of the experience of the Lab from the perspective of the team who worked with **Maggie Marr** and **Stephanie Tristram** of Shetland College to make the project happen.

Individual accounts of the other Lab participants are in **Lab Stories**.

[click here to go to the daily entries of the diary](#)

[home](#)

[history/context](#)

[lab process](#)

[lab diary](#)

[lab stories](#)

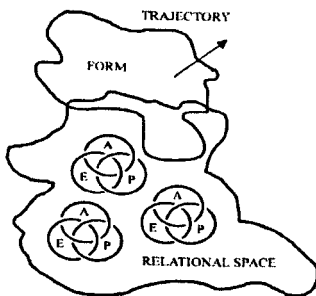
[lab outcomes](#)

polemical/resistance was fierce. So the decision-making process for me was do you cow tow and compromise to the media? (and every artist has to face this kind of dilemma) or do you do your own thing? (and not get paid much for it usually) ... and take the consequences."

That Susan views artistic activity with a product is not surprising, (a traditional view of artist). Her practice (labs) seem a highly sophisticated example of relational practice in the fuller complex sense as Bourriaud theorizes. Susan works with the stuff of systems and inter-relationships and uses a range of tools to create a space and time that is the vehicle for connecting subjectivities. Labs sit in distinction to the predominant models of creative production and creative learning.²⁹

The lab as an idea for a process (itself a product) develops its character or reality from the thousands of individual and shared moments, interactions and gestures within the group dynamic. The lab process depends upon and takes its shape from this dynamic. The lab acts like an invisible container to hold the energies which enable a freedom to experiment. Susan has given form to her methodology and rather cleverly calls the effects of participating 'labness'. Something issuing from the experience, like a trajectory. She frequently uses the term energy to describe the lab dynamic. This made me think of how energies flow, amplify, currents mingle, are re-routed, but they can also as Susan notes 'dissipate if the infrastructural support is not there to take ideas forward'.

Fig. 29 'Labness' as a trajectory



²⁹ Her most recent idea which is in development is for a *Lab of the Five Senses*. This is interesting because the site, so to speak, for the art work is the body itself. Her thinking on this is that although we learn and experience through all five senses, in today's world we tend to privilege the visual over the others and particularly in urban contexts our sensory perceptions are being bombarded with 'ambient' pollution. In her view we are simply not paying enough attention to all our senses and how we learn multisensorially.

An aesthetic of tricks (artist's role and the idea of trickster)

Susan has tactical, improvisational quality of thinking and acting in terms of why and where labs might happen and the labs themselves are designed to encourage experiment and playful improvisation. Her role as artist has qualities of an 'aesthetic of tricks'.

Tricks and the idea of tricksters and their role in society are rooted in mythology, folklore and literature, a huge area of study. An example in Greek mythology is Hermes (Mercury) who was the messenger between worlds (the underworld, people and the Gods) he crosses thresholds with ease, existing in a between place, like waking-dreaming, night-day. What is characteristic of the trickster character of Hermes (as shared with others) is that distinctions, categories and boundaries (what de Certeau would call the 'proper' or 'strategy') are blurred. It is a between space of binary opposites, a movement between imagination and reality (what de Certeau thinks the everyday comprises).³⁰

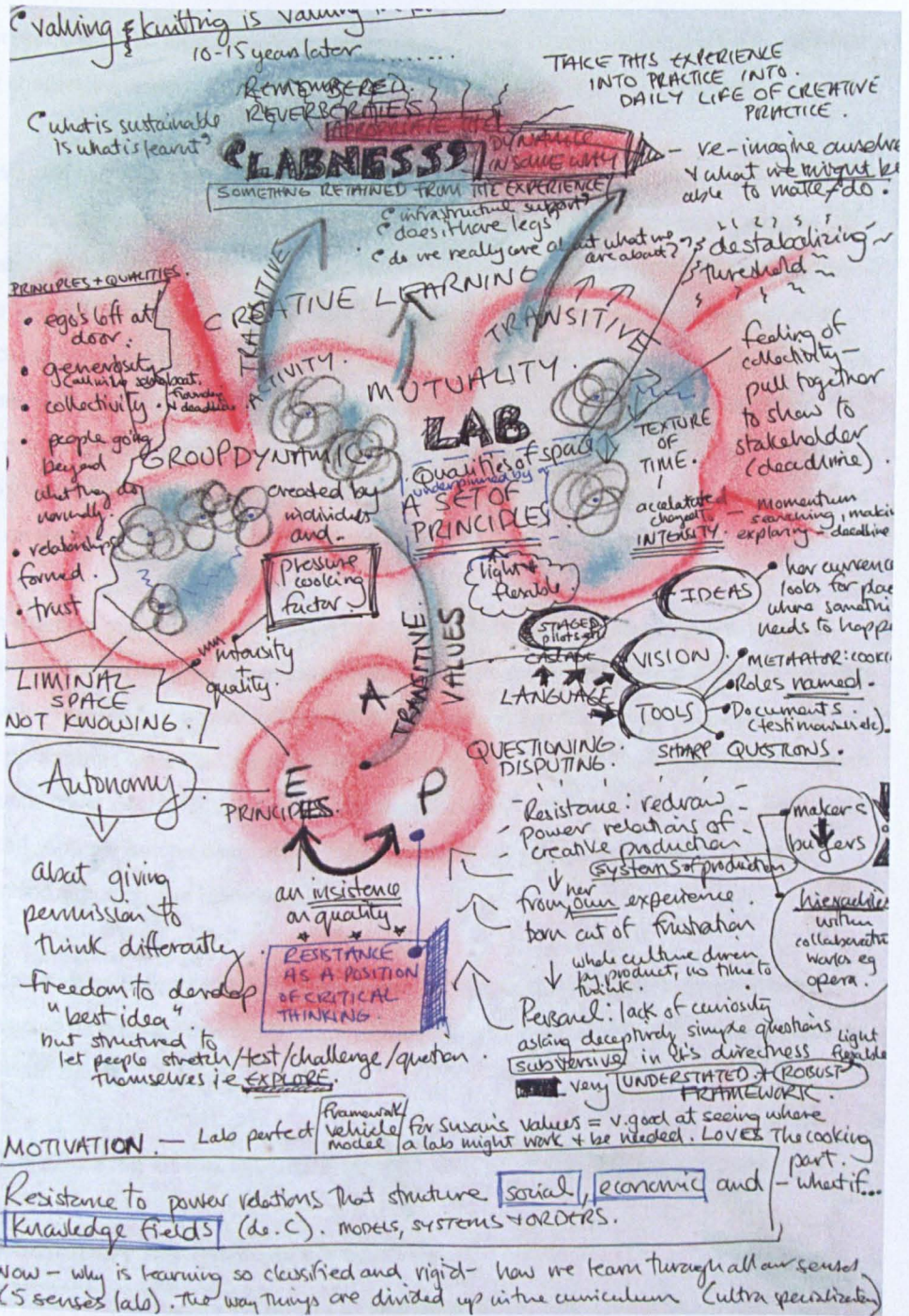
Fig.30 Using the matrix to sketch qualities of Benn's practice.

The section below refers to the *Maakin Lab* web site on the CD that accompanies this thesis

Please view *THE MAAKIN LAB* web site on the CD

³⁰ Jean Fisher writes on the ideas of tricksters from different cultures and its relevance to some art practices in *Towards a Metaphysics of Shit*, Documenta II Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue, (ed) Enwezor, O, (2003: 63-70)

Fig.30 Using the matrix to sketch qualities of Benn's practice



4.7.4 The *Maakin Lab* website

Re-presenting art as participatory projects where there are many people involved is one of the most challenging aspects in this research (my own projects and the OTE projects).

The *Maakin Lab* web site articulates a set of experiences in a rich way. This was possible through the combined skills of a lab (i.e. as a methodology developed by Benn) and the OTE research team.³¹ The lab structure ensures that process is documented (nearly always textual and some still images) but in the *Maakin Lab* it was possible to capture and reconstruct a broader continuum of experience than is usual for a lab (a research requirement). During the intense eight days (15th-23rd May 2003) a set of artist-research methods were used (e.g. a daily diary, mind mapping) using various media to capture excerpts (audio, stills and digital video). We (OTE and the artist) knew this material would form the basis of the output.³² (The diary on the *Maakin Lab* web site has three voices, Benn, Gray and my own).

As an example of artist-research methods I introduced the idea of using luggage labels to capture reflections or glimpses of the experience. Everyone filled in a label at the end of each day which I added to the 'evaluation blanket'. This was a way of getting a feeling for what the other participants were thinking. At the end of the lab the blanket was covered in labels which the public could view on the open day (see web site 'lab outcomes' – New Tools – Evaluation Blanket). Another outcome included an identity for the lab (see web site 'lab outcomes' - Rethinking Branding and Marketing)

As a participant I collaborated with Susan Benn to make a new sleeveless sweater design which acted as a foil for creating a range of 'neck pieces'. (See 'lab stories' – Heather Delday and Susan Benn).

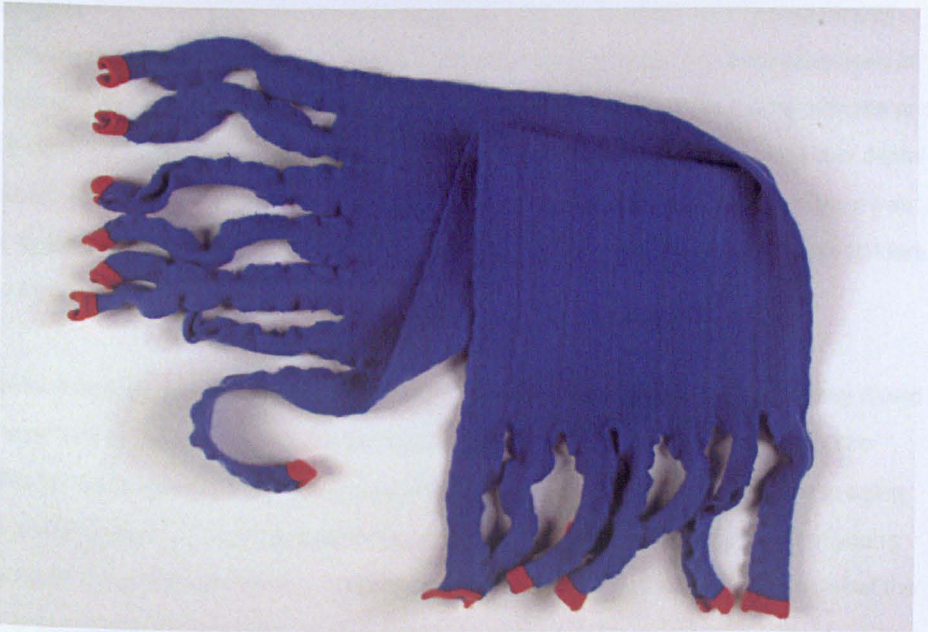
Fig.31 *Neck pieces*, Delday Sept, 2003 (post lab work from collaboration with Benn).

4.7.5 Summary analysis (see Volume I)

³¹ The key stages within the lab were 1. The drawing out of what each person wants from the lab experience. 2 The design of the dynamic of each day. 3. Getting to the heart of each person's best idea/desire for the lab. 4 Capturing these decisions/descriptions of why the individual is there. 5. Cross pollination of ideas through collective criticisms. (Evaluation document 17/03/03)

³² Myself, Carole Gray and Susan Benn had the dual role of being participants and documenting the lab experience. The OTE team would develop the website on *The Maakin Lab* CD.

Fig.31 *Neck pieces* Delday, Sept, 2003 (post lab work from collaboration with Benn)



4.8 The polemical as a position of critical thinking: The artist Paul Carter in the *Edge FM* project

Carter (a younger artist than Benn) has a strong practice with two strands. He shows work in galleries and works with participants to realise an artwork. He prefers to work with young people, which is the case in the *Edge FM* project.

This analysis and the quotes used draw primarily from my structured conversation with the artist (March 2004, Edinburgh) along with some quotes from the OTE evaluation points.

4.8.2 Analysis using the matrix to interpret the practice of Paul Carter in *Edge FM*

Polemical: questioning assumptions in response to the project brief

In developing a response to the brief Paul challenged some of the assumptions OTE held about what the project might be (OTE asked all the artists to respond to the brief, not follow it). This came from his clarity that the adult world can impose an albeit well intended set of ideas which might do little for young people in an art project situation. The brief developed in consultation with the project partner and other stakeholders⁴⁶ was that the theme of home and identity could be the focus of the project where young people might make some kind of digital work about what it meant to live in Fraserburgh. Possible early ideas included making a web site, a digital projection and the setting up of an internet cafe which some of the stake holders felt would be useful.

His critical thinking as artist can be seen on different levels in the project and is directly linked to the aesthetic of the project which in Paul's practice is clear and uncompromising. (The aesthetic for the practitioner is judgment and fine discriminations, the root of aesthetic being 'sense discrimination').⁴⁷ From the outset focus was placed firmly on what a group of young people might be interested in doing, rather than, as the brief suggested, focusing on what the output of the project could be.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Stakeholders were considered by OTE as the wider constituency of individuals representing groups in the locale who would be interested to be involved in some way. The stakeholding group here included representatives from Fraserburgh Futures, the local school, Fraserburgh Cultural Heritage Centre and a Youth Action Group.

⁴⁷ I borrow this definition from Bleakley, 2004.

⁴⁸ He explained that he had experienced this attitude in other situations and acknowledged that this was not the OTE 'agenda'.

Paul's thinking in *Edge FM* shows a strong self awareness of how an artist is positioned in a participatory practice, particularly the relationship between himself and the youth group as well as the wider set of relations of the stake holding group and OTE.

Ethical-polemical: valuing autonomy and inverting assumptions to open up the possibilities of making meaning

Paul thought the idea to use high tech equipment for web sites about living in Fraserburgh was wholly inappropriate. He wanted to make a project where the youth group felt a real ownership of the project and his idea to build and transmit from a radio station 'right into the homes of people in Fraserburgh' was a much funkier thing to do than was originally envisaged. The project output – the *Edge FM* publication has images and bits of dialogue on their views of Fraserburgh and views they collected from residents of all ages in the town. The accompanying CD (in the back of the book) has the radio broadcast. The youth group also had an exhibition in the museum for a few days using things made in and around the project.

Ethical: empathic understanding, valuing autonomy

I asked Paul to tell me the story of how the project worked in terms of relationships. How did he bring these young people into the project? Paul explains that at the beginning of the project in discussion with OTE (Anne Douglas) over the project brief there was an assumption that a group of 'young people' had already been identified, that 'it was a given'. There was also an assumption particularly he felt from the wider stake holders (in early text correspondences) that a group of youngsters would be picked for the project:

"... we would get a couple of people from this social group and a couple of people from that social group, or there could be a couple of Boy's Brigade boys come down and a couple of this that and the next thing."

The fact that this pick n' mix did not happen was in his view 'ultimately one of the strengths of the project'. But to come to Fraserburgh and find a group to work with was at the beginning of the project very 'physical problem', the artist being seen in the town, introducing himself and the question of how to amass a group.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The local police were informed by OTE and the stake holding group that this art project was happening. Paper correspondence was necessary to clarify what was going to happen.

"... to be very basic about it socially, how does a thirty-something man wonder into a town and get a bunch of young people and say 'hey do you want to do an art project? This is quite difficult."

Paul had some idea of where young people hung out (from one previous trip to Fraserburgh) and to try and get people interested in being involved he made some posters and put them up in the town but this 'categorically did not work'. The first insight I got into how he really knows how young people's minds work was when he explains that simply putting up a poster advertising the opportunity might be fine for adults but with young people 'the difference between reading the poster on Thursday and turning up on Saturday when you're fifteen is like four years, the time apart it doesn't work'. It needed a direct approach. What he did was to go out and speak to young people, at the beach, at the skate park and ask them if they were interested to do a radio broadcast and to come along to the museum in an hour. After speaking to the youngsters at the skate park he describes how he then had to wait for an hour 'and the nervousness set in' because of the risk that no one would turn up. What he calls a physical approach links to his ideas on the importance of 'immediacy', a directness of interactions between young people in an art project and how time is an important consideration:

"... they are a million miles away from last summer already.⁵⁰ Time is so different at that age and I think that has to inform every strategy from the macro-cosmic to the micro-cosmic, the immediate things like what you do that day, but also how the whole project is viewed. If (the youngsters) are the centre of a project then time has to be seen in their way, much more than ours I think."

Fortunately a small group of eight skateboarders came to the museum where Paul made a presentation showing previous work he had done. He explained his idea that it might be interesting to build a radio station, this was the idea 'but it was up to them to make it – it was their project'. In asking Paul about the way the project happened he describes having 'a *specific* group of people which spiralled out'. This spiralling out 'was healthy' and happened 'down very very specific lines of communication.'

⁵⁰ This conversation took place eight months after the project (04/04/04).

Ethical-polemical: time to develop relationships

On asking Paul about the timescale of the project (four weekends over three months) he describes that it took time to develop a meaningful (reciprocal) relationship with the group, to go beyond the superficial and understand what they cared about:

"I began as this authority figure ... and because I immediately started to ask them about the 'Broch' (Fraserburgh) and what they thought about it I got the standard answers. I think that what was important with the timescale ... is that over time they quite simply ran out of the standard answers and they started to ask the questions as well. So the dynamic completely changed and what they cared about just started to come out."⁵¹

Ethical: autonomy – mutual respect

Paul is sensitive to the intricacies of social relations and that there would be a hierarchy in terms of involvement with the project:

"I was inheriting their structure, which of course I didn't know about until I got there, and only learned as it went on ... someone was someone else's bigger sister or brother, who was going out with someone else ... I think they really appreciated that. Obviously their biggest social grouping tends to be the adult-child (relations) in society which is school and there it is pretty arbitrary. I think they appreciated that this whole project respected their own social groupings."

Paul makes the point that in terms of feeling an ownership of the project there needed to be a sense of exclusion and a hierarchy. Though I had not brought this idea up he clearly felt it important and I knew from my involvement in a voluntary community arts group⁵² inclusion and the obverse idea of exclusion are currently associated with publicly funded community arts projects (criteria for funding and evaluation):

"... I think that it had to be exclusive in that they had to feel that they had taken on the project through a kind of meritocracy. They saw it as a kind of meritocracy in the sense that we put the work into this and so it's our project. So it's not inclusive. They

⁵¹ OTE Workshop VI.

⁵² Since 1999 I have been involved with a local voluntary arts group called *Maiden Stone*, based in and around Inverurie where I live.

didn't want it to be inclusive and so in some ways I bought into that. There had to be a hierarchy of involvement in the project, and that worked out really well in the sense that when it did spiral out, people did come to be recorded or just to hang out and find out what was going on, the core group were hosting this. The core group felt that this was their space and that their girlfriends and boyfriends or who ever were being *invited by them* ... what was interesting was that I was working with a pre-defined social group but defined by them."

Ethical-polemical: socially exclusive versus organic growth – resisting the politically correct

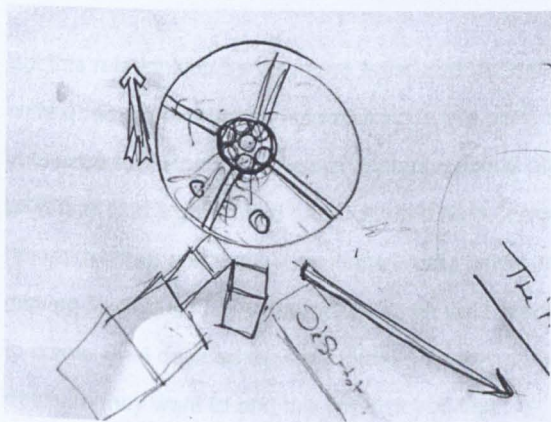
The core group of boy skateboarders in volunteering for the project felt ownership of the project because they could invite people into the project space in the museum on their terms. Paul points out how an adult view of being 'politically correct' when working with community groups in terms of having an equal mix of girls and boys can be a bit misguided and superficial if the 'agenda' is about social inclusion⁵³. He explains that in fact as the project continued (approximately two weeks later) about ten girls became involved in the project.

Considering the project as a set of inter-relationships and different kinds of involvement it seemed to grow organically, it was not forced:

"I think we could have made it *look* great, by pulling in a couple of girls but that's so surfacey. Yes I think it worked organically. The girls who came actually got really involved and interestingly they became more involved than any of the secondary group (sketches). So you've got the core group who are the guys who were the skateboarders and then this kind of secondary group starts to get involved and of them it was the girls who came that actually became more core than any of the other ones. And that wasn't being held out (insisted) I don't think by any of the core group, it was just what most of the secondary group wanted. Some just wanted to come and hang out and find out what was going on but they didn't actually choose to become much more involved."

⁵³ At this point Paul makes reference to a public presentation of *Edge FM* when it was in its early stages (Peacock Printmakers in Aberdeen) and was questioned by an audience member quite aggressively on the lack of girls in the group.

Fig.32 Paul's sketch - the dynamic of relationships of the participant group⁵⁴



Aesthetic-ethical: the artists' positioning, being with not being like

I ask Paul about building trust and building a belief in the project, about the more intangible subtle things which are not often reported in participatory projects recounting an instance when he had trusted the young skateboarders (with money early on in the project to go and buy stuff) and the day I saw the skateboarders running around misbehaving in the museum grounds. I wondered how control, not control worked in the relationship. Paul describes this and is very aware of his 'positioning' as artist and the aesthetic here in terms of relationships is well judged, *being with* them, not like them and retaining a mutual respect from being 'utterly different':

"I think it gets back to that question of the artist's position and what position it is possible to take. It's positioning yourself much more with them rather than a facilitator or something, this is the starting point for me. I'm not conscious of it but I think the language that I tend to use is much more 'we', 'we do this' and questions, so immediately I get positioned within the group. Obviously I'm not one of them and that wouldn't work even if it had become like that. I think because they assume that you are utterly different then any we-ness that comes into the conversation and the whole terminology of the project just helps to somehow pull you more towards them and

⁵⁴ As a method to help discuss and understand relationships between artists and the people they worked with in the OTE projects I suggested at the beginning of the structured conversation that we could sketch. I began by sketching the set of relations between the research, the project partners and the artist. Sometimes this helped to make sense in recounting the experience because the sketch became a focal point. See for example a sketch by Gavin Renwick in the publication *Inthrow*.

somehow if you are lucky end up in that balance where you are with them but still have that level of respect that comes from being the other as well."

But this relationship between the artist working with a group of youths can be 'hanging on a knife edge'. In recounting his experience in a previous youth project (Royston Roads Project in Glasgow),⁵⁵ Paul describes an instance where himself and a youth club leader had worked all winter with a group and had built up a level of trust and the group seemed 'utterly committed' but one sunny day in the spring time none of them turned up. Paul saw them playing football and the youth club leader was annoyed and went to get them but they refused to come. Paul decided to play football with them. He is clear that involvement must be because they want to and this is a risk you take:

"I think what would have been a problem is if I'd taken that as a real insult or a kind of problem. I think that (the youth club leader) thought that the way I responded was quite odd, that it had worked to just go and play football with them. It did remind me, well who is this project for? If it is for them and they want to play football, in some ways that's their shout – I can't make them come. I think there was always an element of that up there in Fraserburgh as well."

Ethical-polemical: inverting assumptions - the process, not product, ownership of the means of production

I ask Paul why and when he decided to use radio, a more low tech approach than the ideas suggested in the brief and he explains that this stems from a number of things. He notes that the fashionable thing in art and in the discourse is on virtuality and use of sophisticated new technologies which in his view can have alienating effect in society through its lack of physicality. He notes that today many people have little actual physical contact with making things which connects to his wider system of values and views on production and consumption. By having expensive and very professional looking (digital communication) equipment he believed that 'it positions the participants in a certain way towards the project' where 'the project is a big expensive thing and they come and consume.'

⁵⁵ The Royston Roads Project was a series of projects by different artists in the East End of Glasgow (2000-01). Paul's project with a youth group involved them collecting anonymous audio messages from the local community which were transmitted into space via the Royston Church spire. A receiver was installed in the spire which will activate a red light if a response from outer space is received (*The Royston Spire Receiver Project*, 2000-01). See Paul Carter, *Bend Sinister*, (2003:48-49).

Paul makes the point that he wanted to shift the focus of the project away from the end product to the actual process where there was a sense of owning the means of production:

“... I think the outcome of the project, the way it was proposed when I first read it, was very much geared towards what would be seen as a physical artistic or digital-artistic output. I imagined these really quite beautiful digital projections ... but in my presumption of how the art would actually come about, the actual involvement of the kids would be really quite basic... Radio is so basic they could take ownership not only of what was said but actually the means of production ... I think that while it was all digital it was going to mean that the kids could not possibly take ownership of the whole process, whereas with the radio they could take ownership from the posters, drawing a logo all the way up to actually putting up the aerial (radio mast) and things like that. Although it was reasonably expensive equipment it didn't have that *feel*, so once it was bought they could kind of own it. To own the means of production, that's important.”

Aesthetic-ethical: process as inter-relationship as the outcome

For Paul a shift in focus in participatory practice is to move away from object making where the 'artist has a vision' of what will be made, to the process itself and inter relationships:

“I think that as long as it's seen by the artist as a move towards the production of an object, or the production of a video or the production of something then the involvement of anyone else very often is just seen as a compromise. The artist has a vision and these other people come and kind of screw it up. If the outcome is actually happening there and then with the inter-relationship of the people that are there, then its much more”

Obviously there was a goal set by Paul, to build and transmit a broadcast, but what he is pointing to here is that it is the getting there that has the real value and meaning. This is not to say he does not think the publication *Edge FM* has value also (which I come to) rather that priorities shift. This shift in priorities links to his ideas on the artist as the amateur.

Ethical-polemical: autonomy as freedom to try, to take and bend the montage (of discipline knowledge) for oneself. An aesthetic of fitting things together – the amateur

I ask Paul about his use of the term amateur which has been associated with his work⁵⁶ and show him a text I found on the definition of the word. Amateur is not about training or competence but doing something for the love of it.⁵⁷ What is crucial for Paul is 'just the ability to do something' for oneself. He feels very strongly about the idea and value of amateur which sits in distinction to being professional. Professional is specialized, alienating and constraining of our imaginations:

"... I think that professionalism just reeks of specialization, and with specialization you can't be a professional at everything, but in some ways can be an amateur with a lot more stuff. I think professionalism is inherently problematic and amateurism is much more inclusive, where I think you can hit the essence of stuff. If we use flight as an example, I think if you cannot fly until you are a professional flyer then you're not going to be able to do that. But I think you can essentially get the beauty, the poetry and the art of flight in an amateur way, you essentially get what is necessary to understand, or to enrich your life ... yes or to be *alive*, to *exist*, so for me through amateurism it is an answer in that way. It's a sense of doing it *yourself*, and from that comes a reality, a hands-on ness, and a lack of alienation. So much about art, so much about contemporary society is about alienation. I think professionalism is a big part of alienation ... I think professionalism is utterly tied to the idea of being a consumer, being a professional at one thing and being a consumer of absolutely everything else."

Aesthetic-ethical: creating a project identity through visual and verbal language

I ask Paul about the tools he used in the project. The group had a room in the museum to work from and visual things were being generated by the skateboarders and Paul to create a visual presence. For example a large banner of skull and cross bones was put on the museum gate, and an identity through the name of the project and a logo was put on T-shirts and small posters. (He explains that they really took to the idea of the T shirts. He brought 8

⁵⁶ Paul used this term in an OTE sounding (evaluation) with myself, Anne Douglas and David Bett at the light house museum 2003. See also *Paul Carter, Bend Sinister: selected works from 1996 to 2003*, Fruitmarket Gallery. Catalogue published to accompany Paul Carter's Visions for the Future VI exhibition Edge of Darkness, 11 Oct-29 Nov 2003

⁵⁷ Daston notes that 'the original meaning of 'amateur' (aficonado, amatore, Liebhaber) (had) nothing to do with lack of training and competence – quite the contrary. Amateurs expertly cultivated their subjects out of affinity rather than utility, for love rather than money.' Daston L and te Heesen A. Preprint 233, *Things that Talk*, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, (2003:12)

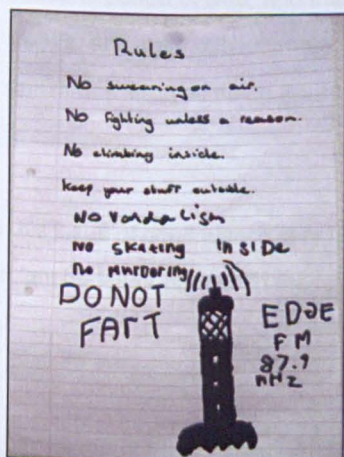
the first week, one each and had to finally make 25). Beyond this he was also using terms to make the project take on a reality in their imagination, such as 'transmission centre' 'transmission party' and 'operations'. He was enabling them to have a sense of identity *from being in the project*, so their status and relationship with their town was different, a more meaningful idea than simply getting young people to express their sense of home and identity as inhabitants of Fraserburgh – 'how young brochers feel about coming from the broch'.⁵⁸ A clear visual identity gives a group a sense of collective ownership of what could happen, a feeling of authority from being part of something. This for Paul is the important point of the project not the quality of the broadcast where the 'sound quality and the editing is terrible'. There two levels of identity, the visual and the ideological:

"... I don't actually know how many of them listened to the actual broadcast. What was important to them was this idea of doing something and affecting. The setting up a means of communication between all the people that they wanted to make a point to, let's say the councillors and people like that ... The idea of the logo, the banner, the T shirts - setting up some kind of company almost, though it was no where near as capitalist as that thankfully. It was more some kind of group ... it felt like a little political group starting. And one of the things that groups do, I suppose, is to give themselves a visual identity and then let things develop from there. So the T shirts and banner represent a visual identity and then the (audio recordings) or CD represents an ideological identity. I think both were equally important to them."

Fig.33 Images from *Edge FM*

A small temporary exhibition also took place in the museum and *Edge FM* has a visual quality of the amateur, a kind of junk, post pop art aesthetic, a youthful DIY appearance. It is deliberately not precious, a feel that it is temporary, urgent and politically serious.

⁵⁸ 'Brochers' is colloquial for people who live or come from Fraserburgh or 'the broch'

Fig.33 Images from *Edge FM*

Ethical-polemical: the project offering a voice

As the project evolved Paul realized that there was often a negative and stereotyping attitude from some adults towards the younger generation. The project was a way of giving them a voice through using radio:

“ In some ways if there was anyone on a steep learning curve it was me rather than them, and one of the things that I learnt was that ... in Fraserburgh, they did get blamed for an awful lot of things, and they really had a lot of very good reasons to feel aggrieved. I think that the project just offered them a voice - which is such a terrible kind of community cliché - but I think true when you give someone a radio station and the ability to broadcast themselves”

Aesthetic-polemical: valuing the project space, issues of time

I discuss with Paul the potential problems of evaluating projects (OTE's meta level research question) and this touches a chord in what Paul calls the ephemeral and something he feels very strongly about which is not forcing the idea of continuance in community art projects. At this stage there was the possibility of OTE going back to Fraserburgh to evaluate what the project experience was for the youth group:

“...the idea of ephemeral ness or (an artist) parachuting in (to the community) is something I'm caught in ... all artists that are working in the community or are working anywhere other than their own studio have to deal with this ... I propose that there's an inevitable ephemeral nature to these things and that that's fine and that it should be *allowed*. That it shouldn't be a kind of continued dialogue, it shouldn't be forced, especially when working with younger people ... I like the idea, or rather I think it is just inevitable that these things happen over a specific *special*, if you like, an almost *beautiful* period of time, and that's it, it's finished, it's gone, it happened. They don't want to see me much anymore, I served a purpose for them. I'm sure they'd love to go Oh how are you doing Paul? (on meeting in the future) but not to really force this to continue.”

To force this issue of continuance is in his view about 'control'. It is not that Paul is insensitive to what might be felt or happen in the future as a result of being involved in the project, but his

ideas on the timescale is not within the usual timescales of evaluation (from the public funding perspective).

“... what I want to (consider) with the (*Edge FM*) publication and the CD is to look at how from (the kids) point of view, and when in their lives it is this going to be relevant to them. I think for them it was relevant while it was happening, it was relevant over those three months during the summer ... then I think it will be really relevant to them when they are twenty six, or it could be when they are eighteen or when they're fifty ... who knows how they'll use it – (this) package like a diary, reminding them of what they did.”

Forcing art projects to continue in his view (some projects he has been involved in and others he has heard about)⁵⁹ can 'be destructive on every level' including a deep level because it distorts having faith in the project which can make 'people act faithlessly as well'. For Paul the act of participating has value in and of itself (what he describes as the ephemeral) and the aesthetic value lies within a shared experience. Never the less the publication (*Edge FM* and its accompanying CD) were important to him⁶⁰. He took responsibility for editing the extracts of the dialogues and the images. In his view the publication is how the project continues and its real value to the youngsters belongs in the future, what I describe as a future-present value.

Aesthetic-polemical: close as proximity – our relations with the material world and the importance of physicality

In briefly introducing de Certeau's thinking on the everyday (and sketching the matrix) Paul mentions an influence in his work which also stems from France, Guy Debord and the Situationists International. Paul links the everyday with the increasingly sophisticated material world we live in where we are becoming 'more and more alienated from the stuff of your own everyday life.' Ownership and control in our lives is fundamental to Paul's vision as artist and it is here we see the importance he places on physicality, in terms of human communication and our relations with the material world (close):

⁵⁹ Paul acknowledged that this was not the case with OTE, rather it is pressures of working in community styled projects.

⁶⁰ In his single other youth project Roysden Spire he produced a plaque to commemorate the project. See *Paul Carter, Bend Sinister*, (2003:48-49).

"... I think there's a kind of retro-risk or a luddite risk perhaps to investigating things like radio and pamphleteering rather than sending out bulk e mails. I would say that that's a risk that I can argue for time after time because there's an essentialness ... there's a physicality about it. If we take it that two beings, two people are physical (entities) that is how they immediately understand each other, by seeing each other. Then there is something special about the physical as opposed to ideological and that the physical carries the ideological."⁶¹

Ethical: a space to play, an interval of freedom, mutuality

The importance and value of play is clearly important to Paul and he says that what is personally rewarding working in a project like is the energies of young people:

"... its incredibly romantic thing to say but (he quotes a text) 'people in my country are emotionally dead by the age of twenty-one and my job is to try to keep them alive a bit longer'. My job as an artist is just to keep them alive a bit longer and I think there is a kind of pay-off, there is an emotional live-ness to working with younger people ... everything is immediate."

He also spoke of being pleasantly surprised by the vision the young people had for the future of Fraserburgh, that it could become 'a surfing capital'.

The way Paul edited and structured the text within the book gives another layer of identity and it conveys a sense of immediacy - young Fraserburgh vernacular. The typographic treatment presents spoken dialogue as poetry.

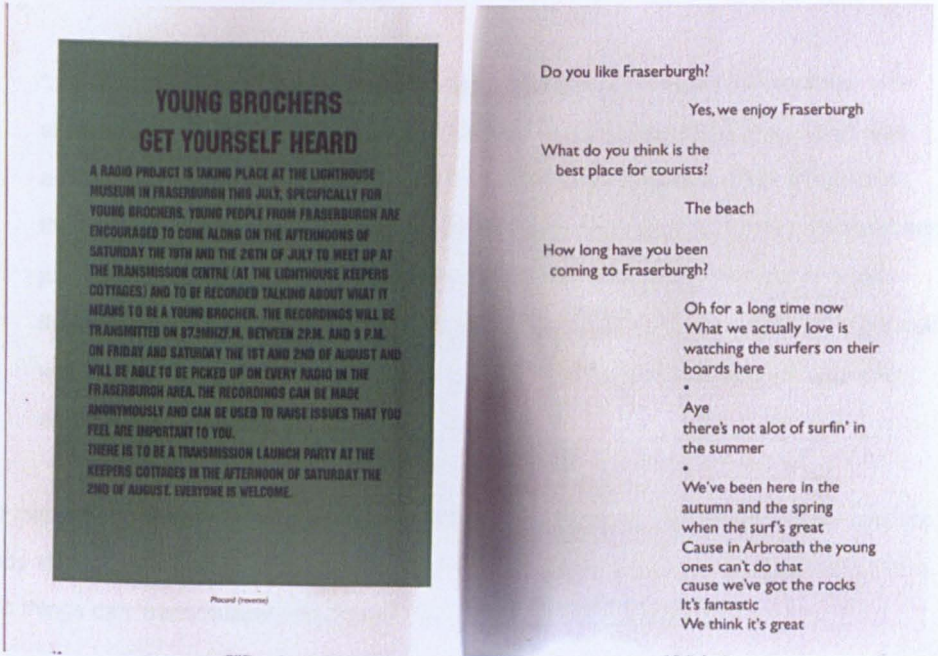
Fig.34 An extract from *Edge FM* (the project publication)

An aesthetic of tricks, tactics of subversion

Paul explains that the *Edge FM* publication might be considered 'a small manifesto' for the young participants and he likens the project to 'a tiny Situationist happening in Fraserburgh where some people were allowed to take control of their situation and argued and became

⁶¹ Some of Paul's gallery work uses assemblages of things to create imaginary scenarios or points to journeys, myths and belief. His work often plays with and uses everyday objects or events and the absurdity of this. For example *The Family* (1998/2003) was an assemblage of household things to build a nuclear shelter based on the instructions from The British Governments 'Protect and Survive' pamphlets which gave instructions for building a shelter (pub 1979). Inside the shelter was a stereo system with the Beatles 'White' album which the cult figure Charles Manson (in the late 60's) claimed had inspired his followers to commit murder. Both things equally absurd.

Fig.34 An extract from *Edge FM* (the project publication)



polemical about things'⁶². Importantly in his view the publication is not oppositional in the sense of being a set of demands. Much more subversively it is a vehicle for expressing their views and it was the process of taking ownership which has the real or empowering effect:

“...with the radio project there wasn't a set of demands. They wanted a better skateboard park, they wanted to stop being arrested for skateboarding, which was actually quite a constructive thing to do in Fraserburgh. There are little things that they weren't happy about in Fraserburgh and what they were doing with the radio was just saying I'm not happy. I think that was great that there wasn't a specific agenda that could be answered. That could immediately be seen as a problem but I think that was a great thing in the sense that the whole *act* of taking ownership was *the effect* and that was the point.”⁶³

What might be continued beyond the project time is the 'critical dialogue' which he hopes has already started. What could happen in the future is of course speculative and he likens this to where things can 'transmutate' into something unknown, in 'sub-contexts'.

Aesthetic-polemical: creating a space which is not tokenistic (critical thinking)

Continuing along this line of how to know an art projects value I ask Paul about the highs and lows of the *Edge FM* project and point out that none of the stake holding group came to the museum the day of the transmission (the OTE team were there) explaining that across the OTE projects the partners had very different relationships and levels of involvement in the projects. He counters my (naive) assumption that the stakeholders needed to be there. On this point he says he was ambivalent, not through lack of interest, but had they been too involved there was the risk that the project might have been compromised in some way. Rather 'the kids really started to get a feel that this was about amateurism, it was about them taking ownership and taking control and not going running to adults to ask them if they could have help to do this or do that'.

David (Director of the Museum) did come on the transmission day and Paul comments that throughout the project he was helpful and kept an intelligent distance allowing them to get on

⁶² On introducing the term polemical with these artists, for Susan it meant feeling the resistance towards the subjects she chose to work with as photographer. For Paul it immediately had resonances with becoming resisting in the sense of the youth group questioning and disputing.

⁶³ Paul cites the author Sadie Plant talking about the student riots and events in Paris in 1968. She describes that in Paris 'there was no clear agenda' and though the government was 'desperately trying to find one and find a leader' in the early stages neither existed however 'the revolution only collapsed when somebody eventually did issue a set of demands.'

with the project and two other stakeholders were very helpful. But for these people to turn up on the day of the transmission could have spoiled things:

"I think it goes back to that whole participant thing ... had it all gone smoothly with the stakeholder group being visible all the time, being there for the young people, turning up and shaking their hands and asking them how it was all going and having a packet of crisps with them, I don't think that the project would have been half as good."

Aesthetic-polemical: creating a 'polemical space'

We discuss the problems with evaluating a project like this and that simply being seen to be being supportive is evaluating according to the obvious (the criteria of numbers and prescribed roles not quality of experience in a participant group). To illustrate the difficulties of adults evaluating a youth project he recounts an interesting observation of why in his view, *Edge FM* 'really succeeded' for the young skateboarders. He tells me that the kids *needed* the museum as a space because this was the backdrop of authority against which their polemical space existed. The project was not a 'token' gesture of kids occupying a museum for a short time, it felt real. It is also that the output (the book and CD) is genuinely subversive because certain individual figures of authority will not necessarily like the content:

"... a really good example of how you could never really find a box to tick⁶⁴ for the youngsters in terms of understanding the project, was when some of the guards, because guards is what they almost seemed like, the guides came up and quite often told the kids not to throw water down or not to climb on the walls, or not to tear up the rhubarb in the back garden. What they were doing as I realized in retrospect ... was providing a fantastic service. It may run contrary to some of the agendas, in fact it almost definitely runs contrary to the agenda of the kids feeling that the museum was *more theirs* or what ever, (the guards) actually kept an almost oppositional thing. I think that is really important because they had to feel that they were taking over and doing something ... and it was subversive. I think when the book comes out - I hope it will be subversive - (for example) there was a police constable who was very helpful about radio because he's an amateur radio guy. I think he'll love it till he gets to

⁶⁴ I used the phrase *tick box culture* as shorthand for the more social science style of questions often found when reporting publicly funded art projects. This is not to condone a lack of responsibility rather it is the blunt instruments used to account for the value of the project. An example is the Scottish Arts Council's Awards for All - a small grant scheme for community based art projects (through the voluntary community arts group *Maiden Stone*). Evaluation is couched in terms of inclusion, educational value and broader benefits to the community and figures for each are expected along with an explanation.

certain pages about the police arresting them for skateboarding. This is the kind of project that I'd imagine they'd say oh that's fantastic and then when they actually read what these young people have got to say about them (*smile*) I think they won't be so happy. I think that's one of the big purposes"

To illustrate the potential farce of asking art project evaluation kind of questions and the shrewdness and humour some youngsters have he tells an anecdote from his experience of the Royston Roads project. When an evaluator came and asked the youth group what the project was about they said 'not taking drugs, and not smoking - they had these answers that you give evaluators' Paul was 'absolutely stunned' and couldn't believe where they had got it from. He thought 'there was a bit of that at Fraserburgh as well', on starting to ask the skateboarders questions, or where he 'started to make (his) agenda more visible.'⁶⁵

Aesthetic-polemical: thoughts on sustainability

In discussing the idea of sustainability Paul has an interesting way of describing what could be called future-present, a future event stimulated by now but unknown. He uses an interesting analogy with energy – 'odd bursts over the future':

"I think that sustainability to me has got a really kind of linear feel to it. The way something starts and then carries on until it stops. The publication hopefully means that the sustainability has kind of odd bursts over the future, so that when one of the group turns round and stands up for something, in a sub-context in the future, it might have some kind of loose relationship to what happened in the project. When somebody pulls this book out of the library shelf in the school in a hundred years time, looks through it and wonders what on earth it is, that is another sustainability"⁶⁶

The publication might start a whole new set of dialogues. What the project represents is creating the *potential* for continuing the dialogue at some unspecified time. It is an opening up of possibilities:

⁶⁵ OTE Workshop VI

⁶⁶ *ibid*

"... (like the Situationists did with their manifesto) on a smaller scale you create this possibility ... (the book and broadcast) their project was going to enter these different arenas."⁶⁷

Paul makes it explicit that 'one of the beauties' of the project is that On the Edge, the radio, and the artist 'can be taken out of the equation'. What is important is that maybe some of the adults living in Fraserburgh 'might actually speak to them about some of the issues that they raised' when their paths cross. For Paul this is 'the critical dialogue'.

I would ask all the artists engaged by OTE whether the projects had affected their practices or not. In every case the artists found it difficult to say why and viewed the OTE project as part of their on-going development of their practices. What the artists agreed upon and some of the project partners was that OTE had given them the time to really reflect on what it was they did. Reading between the lines this was the case for Paul. He couldn't say how the OTE project had affected his practice, and pointing to his sketch of the group dynamic (Fig. 32) stressed that working with other people was not a compromise but 'I see this as my practice'.

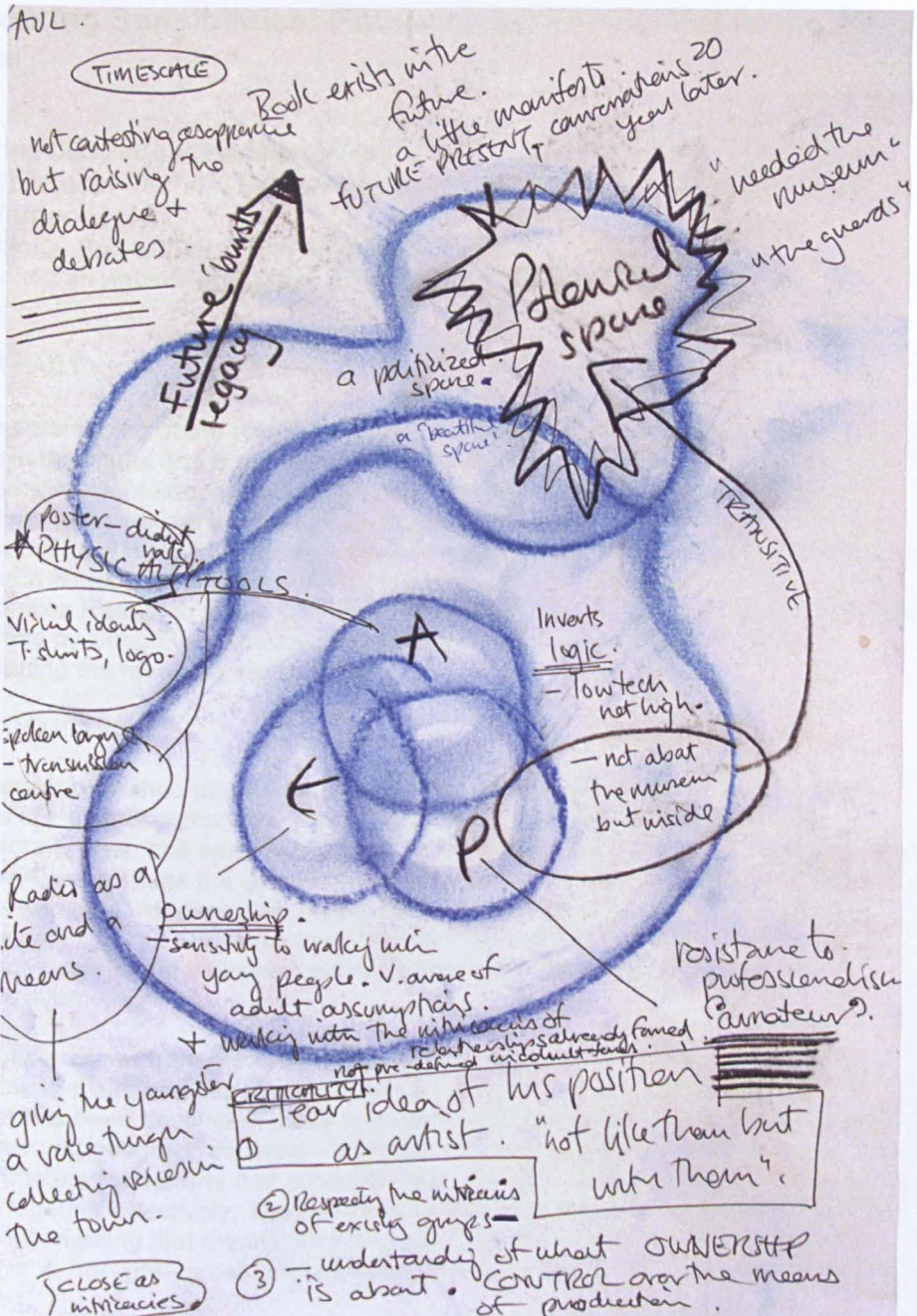
Fig.35 Qualities of Paul's practice sketched with the matrix

We finish the conversation by touching on the idea of resistance and agree that to try and make a difference it is not about the obvious protest march or being oppositional, like 'trench warfare' which does have a function in raising awareness, but lasting differences can be made at the smaller micro-level of resistance. Paul describes this as 'if you scale down what you aim to achieve, but be just as political you stand a chance of success', and likens it to 'the SAS doing specific *little* things', in other words to act tactically with the here and now with these people, and as he says 'just being specific' - dealing with the singularity of individuals and the particularity of a situation.

Summary analysis (see Volume I)

⁶⁷ *ibid*

Fig.35 Qualities of Paul's practice sketched with the matrix



Appendix 1: Douglas and Delday: Adjusting Sensibilities: Researching Artistic Value 'on the edge'

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In publication *Techné: Design Wisdom5th European Academy of Design Conference*

Barcelona, Spain, 28th – 30th April 2003.

Published on website <http://www.ub.es/5ead/princip5.htm>

ABSTRACT

An understanding of the relationship between systems of production and systems of value in the visual arts is essential to the production of new sustainable approaches to creativity. Contexts for working situated 'on the margins' such as remote rural locations focus tensions between conflicting systems of value that require us to adjust our sensibilities. This paper traces these issues through an ongoing three year research project, On the Edge (OTE) (August 2001 - 4, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB)). Key stages of generative metaphor, originally identified by Schön, are used as an analytical tool to reveal the process of developing the research methodology.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent published interview with the artist, Richard Wentworth, he recalls the image of Helen Sharman, the astronaut, looking back at Earth from her orbiting spacecraft, when she sees electric light leaking from the globe. She draws attention to how it visibly maps the world making clear who 'has' and who 'has not'. Europe glares with light. Africa is dark (Allen, 2001). In Scotland it is the central belt that shines with light, Northern Scotland is dark. The night time satellite image clearly illustrates cultures of influence which are located in centralized modes of organization.

This paper draws from the On the Edge research that tests the belief that it is possible to make and experience visual art of *quality* in remote/rural areas. The project has been developed partly in order to address a gap in arts provision in an underserved geographical area – Northern Scotland. The darkness frames a lack of infrastructure for the arts that currently does not allow artists and their audiences to come together effectively. The darkness is also symbolic of a sense of value – the assumption being that the significant space for arts development in professional terms is 'in the light'- areas of population density or urban metropolitan contexts.

This paper traces the development of our thinking from one way of perceiving this set of issues as polar opposites (light/dark, urban/rural, global/local, professional /community based) to constructing new stories and drawing on new metaphors that take these polar opposites into a shared mutually affective space. We will show how we have used the metaphor of 'home' to redraw the interrelationships between artist, audience and administrator /curator in response to the challenge of arts development in remote rural places. The paper argues that metaphors are key to exposing

systems of value and their impact on systems of production in the practice of art. Metaphors shape what we do because they embody values and beliefs.

While metaphor helps us to see and interpret our world, Schön's 'generative metaphor' can act as a framework to guide our thinking and action as a result of new 'seeing' or 'imaging'. Used as a tool this generative metaphor has six key stages: 1. 'immersion', 2. 'problem setting as story telling', 3. 'naming and framing', 4. 'moving beyond idea to action', 5. 'further questioning' and 6. 'restructuring or changing position'. Each stage overlaps with the next within a cyclical development (Schön, 1993).

This paper is concerned with opening up our understanding of the creative process by using the tension between two systems of value as a spring board from which to move forward. We have taken the initial pragmatic problem of arts provision and infrastructure to a deeper level of questioning. We are, as Schön says, '*starting with a careful description and analysis of particular instances of intuitive inquiry*' that is itself '*empirically grounded*' (ibid p160).

We are eighteen months into the three year On the Edge research period. The paper focuses the developmental period of a programme of five experimental projects that will be realized between Spring 2003-4. This programme represents a crucial aspect of the research methodology and is supported by evaluation and critical contextual thinking.

STAGE 1. IMMERSION

'Problems are not given. They are constructed by human beings in their attempts to make sense of complex and troubling situations' (ibid p144).

The funding picture in Scotland clearly demonstrates a privileging of urban metropolitan areas over rural remote areas. A survey by the Scottish Arts Council in December 2002 on per capita spending on the arts last year reveals the following information; £111.07 per capita in Glasgow, £99.41 in Dundee and £89.74 in Edinburgh (i.e. the three centres that make up the central belt of Scotland). In Aberdeen the per capita spend was £ 23.89 and in Aberdeenshire the per capita spend was £5.74.

Over a period of immersion (1996 –2000) a number of individuals living and working in Northern Scotland came together because they had felt a frustration over the lack of contemporary arts experience in their localities. Crucially, these individuals believed that visual art research and their practices together could *in some way* change their situations positively. Consequently these individuals, representing arts and heritage organizations, education and professional art practice, formed the key partnerships that constitute the OTE Network¹. These five partners constitute five experimental visual art projects (the OTE programme of projects).

¹ The Network partners comprise Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW), Lumsden Aberdeenshire; Museum of Scottish Lighthouses (MSL), Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire; Deveron Arts (DA), Huntly, Aberdeenshire; Shetland College Textile and Design Department (SC), Lerwick, Shetland; Duff House (DH), Banff, Aberdeenshire. These five are working in co-operation with Gray's School of Art, the Robert Gordon University (OTE Research Team), François Matarasso of Comedia, Scottish Arts Council and Aberdeenshire Council Arts Team.

It quickly became evident that transposing ways of working that worked in urban metropolitan contexts (the dominant model for contemporary visual arts practice) was not appropriate to remote rural contexts. The interrelationship between the players of artist, administrator/curator and audience needed to be rethought at a fundamental level. We were also aware that we were not alone in this process of questioning how visual art interacts with audience.² We were in a situation that was both *complex* and *troubling* in as far as it was not well understood and fraught with tensions of conflicting expectations. This can be seen in the two dominant paradigms for working in the visual arts; professional practice and community arts. Where professional practice characterizes itself through the notion of individualistic authorship, models of community arts subordinate individuality to shared experiences and exchange (e.g. of skills).

Although there has been much debate on the value of art and the question of how we go about determining this i.e. evaluation, this debate was largely taking place in relation to the role of art in terms of 'regeneration' or 'social inclusion' primarily in urban contexts³. Within these debates the function of contemporary art is often discussed in socio-economic and socio-political terms as that of a polarity between, on the one hand, art for art's sake, and art that serves a clear purpose e.g. social inclusion or regeneration (Fox (ed), 2002 and Warnock and Wallinger (eds), 2002). Viewed like this, in terms of accountability (e.g. spending public money) or in terms of power relations (e.g. institutional 'gatekeepers'), there is a danger of losing sight of the qualitative values of art. What exactly constitutes 'quality' in art is rarely discussed in terms of art's connectedness to lived reality, and this discussion is relegated to the realm of aesthetics rather than taking place within practice itself.

We needed to construct some clear questions out of our understanding, experiences and discussions at this point. The questions needed to focus the contribution that remoteness and ruralness could make to these debates.⁴ This period of immersion (1996 – 2000) therefore culminated in the AHRB research proposal.

² The discourse developed in the States by artists, curators and critics place the emphasis on the changing role of the artist by focusing on the relationship between the artist and audience, particularly the processes of exchange and reciprocity. They argue for the need to evaluate art from multidisciplinary perspectives, including the artist's own voice and belief system (Lacy, 1995; Lippard, 1997; Finkelpearl, 2001, Jacobs, M. J., 1998, 2001). The OTE project grapples with a similar process-orientated approach as that articulated by Lacy in the gap between 'both social and aesthetic traditions' (Lacy, 1995 p183 – 4). The OTE research seeks to take this discourse forward by constructing new approaches that are not artist centred. The OTE research investigates the culture of art production by bringing together artist with administrator/curator and audience within an activity that is defined by both production and evaluation.

³ Matarasso, F. *Use or Ornament* published by Comedia, (1997) is one of a number of key texts on the evaluation of participation in the arts by non professionals.

⁴ At this stage of the research we hosted a conference, *The On the Edge Conference*, May 2000, by drawing on a number of rural/remote models for working in the arts across Northern Europe. The conference articulated a Europe wide platform for debate through eleven case studies from across the arts representing different ways of developing the arts in remote rural places. Within the conference we examined the benefit of the arts from social, economic and cultural perspectives. The conference facilitator Matarasso, of Comedia Cultural Policy Research, drew out nine principles for successful development of the arts in remote rural locations. This provided a framework from which rethink values (see Douglas, A. 2001, pp 151-160 or www.ontheedgeconference.org).

The Research Questions

- What constitutes 'good practice' in the visual arts in rural remote areas? What is the intellectual justification for separating 'good practice' (i.e. process) from quality? How can judgements be made which take account of both elements?
- What are appropriate ways of determining the quality of artistic practice that take into account different cultures of value? On what basis do you include some cultures of value and exclude others?
- In what ways might new artistic criteria challenge established models and prompt new ways of working in the arts?
- How might the research approach (methodology) that views artistic value from a multi disciplinary perspective contribute to new thinking in cultural development?

These questions clearly position the research belief that the important function of visual art, as a form of cultural production, is fundamentally *to make meaning*. How could we know within the five experimental projects that this was happening? Understanding the worth of any endeavor is normally a process of understanding how well it has been carried out relative to professional codes of practice. It is also a process of understanding the quality of experience of the participants or audiences involved. While codes of practice and quality of experience are useful for judging the worth or otherwise of any human activity, *artistic* quality is in part a question of deciding at a fundamental level how a work can justify its production against different philosophical positions or value systems. How does it contribute to the canon or body of work that extends our experience of what is possible and believable as artistic expression? Who decides? What are the criteria?

The period of immersion had told us that what is interesting about encountering contradictory values is not the dialogue between polarities such as local and global, 'cutting edge' and traditional, *but the challenge that the dialogue presents to question our assumptions and adjust our sensibilities*, thereby evolving new ways of working.

To explore these issues the research consists of three interrelated activities:

- creative production

The Network and research team ⁵ started to prepare the programme of five distinctive experimental visual arts projects located within five communities throughout Northern Scotland. At this stage it was understood that the programme would directly address the research questions by being responsive to a sense of place and community as well as taking into account the wider discourses within the professional art world. The experimental projects were to be an embodiment of our critical thinking to date.

- evaluation

The Network undertook to participate in a series of workshops running in parallel with the project development and implementation stages to clarify thinking on the issue of the value of visual art as a shared process of reflection and to identify methods and

⁵ The OTE research team includes Professor Carole Gray, project co-ordinator; Dr Anne Douglas, principal researcher, Heather Delday, Ph.D. student, Claudia Zeiske, Ph.D. student

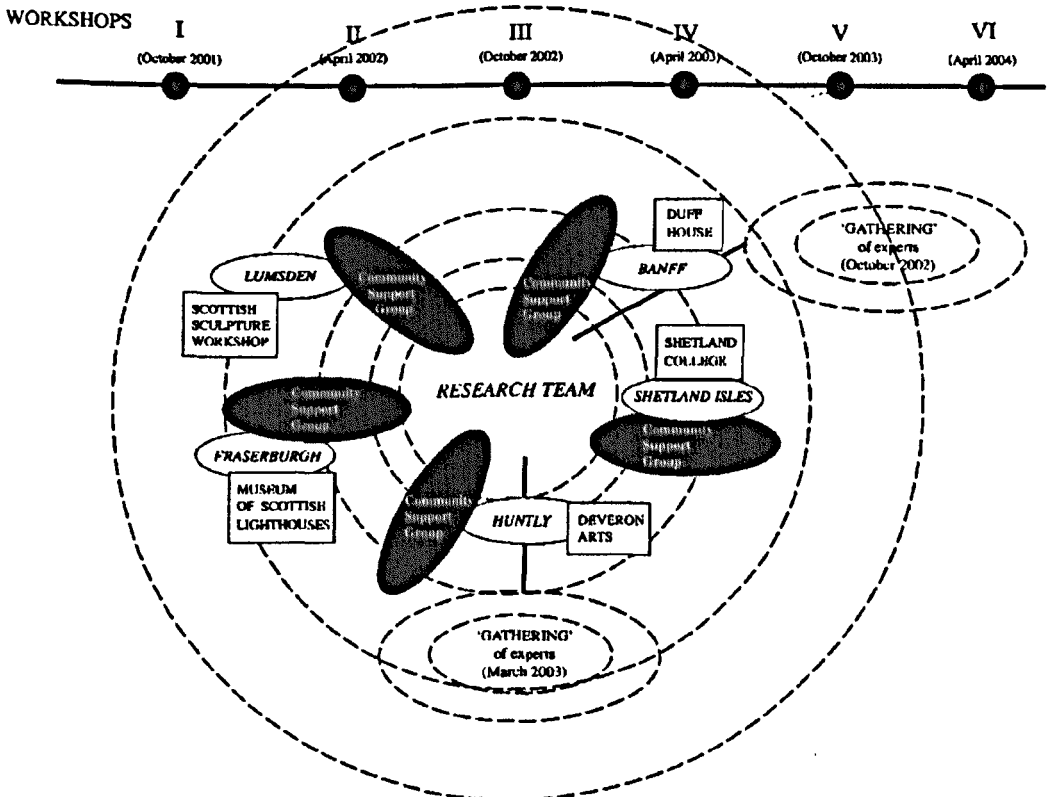
criteria of evaluation⁶. The workshops are also a mechanism for sharing experiences and questions – a culture in miniature that could support and intensify the experience of project development.

The research team identified mechanisms for consulting wider expertise by hosting 'gatherings'. These 'gatherings' are round table discussions addressing a particular project e.g. festivals, commissioning. Here key national and international experts from different fields, together with the local representatives and participants of the project are invited to contribute on the basis of their specific expertise. (see Figure 1: *OTE Network*).

• critical/contextual thinking

The research team undertook to develop an overview of the context of ideas in which the inquiry could be positioned, in particular into the interrelationship between existing systems of production and systems of value and their related metaphors

FIGURE 1. *OTE NETWORK*



⁶ These take place every spring and autumn and are facilitated by the co-researcher on the project François Matarasso of Comedia Cultural Policy Research.

STAGE 2. PROBLEM SETTING AS STORY TELLING

A situation may begin by seeming complex, uncertain, indeterminate. If we can once see it in terms of a normative dualism such as health/ disease or nature/artifice, then we know in which direction to move (Schön, 1996 p148)

The dualisms we had experienced and established as an initial framework for thinking was those of **urban versus rural** ways of working in the visual arts, **local and global**; **community and professional** ways of working. These dualisms, though limited and artificial, were important because they enabled us to begin to problematize the complexity of our situation. The dualisms in effect tells two quite different stories that are uncomfortable in their relationship to each other.

The urban infrastructure for the arts has tended to revolve around gallery, museum and increasingly public art practices. The gallery experience and urban forms of public art, including performance based 'interventions', are largely dependent upon anonymity between the artist and his/her audience. The roles of artist, curator, administrator, critic and even audience are made up of specialist interest groups. Each individual within the professional art arena is associated with one role or another but rarely with more than one. Careers and projects are carefully constructed in these specialist terms.

In contrast in rural remote locations although the same roles are at play as in urban contexts of artist, administrator, audience (more often community), these rarely shake down in quite such neat professionalized terms. Individuals take on more than one 'hat' in the process of making something happen. Audiences are not specialist interest groups but an aggregate. The artist may administrate and curate a project at the same time as making the artwork. Ideas and projects emerge from individuals but rarely take hold until they become part of a shared process of arriving at a course of action. The success of a project is highly dependent upon people becoming involved as participants, not observers or 'consumers'. Participants very often have a number of 'hats' or skills, to lend to the situation, and their involvement is crucial to the artwork or event happening at all

What is important about these two different 'stories' of urban and rural ways of working is their perception of each other- on the one hand the non professionalized world views its professionalized counter part as élitist, sophisticated, risk taking but detached from everyday 'lay' experience. On the other, the world of professionalized 'urbane' approaches reads its rural remote counterpart as amateur, less risk taking and less refined in artistic terms because of needing to communicate clearly to a 'lay' public that is also participant. The lack of explicit articulation of values attached to each representation forces the stereotypes to perpetuate 'silently'. Each world acts in autonomous organizational modes, with distinctive beliefs and expectations.

The differences experienced in the process of developing the OTE programme were uncomfortable to the point of requiring the participants to reposition themselves. The repositioning takes place slowly through extensive dialogue resulting in the development period for the programme taking far longer and becoming far richer than we had originally anticipated.

STAGE 3. NAMING AND FRAMING – THE DEVELOPMENT OF METAPHOR

Each story constructs its view of social reality through a complementary process of naming and framing. Things are selected for attention and named in such a way as to fit the frame.....a few salient features and relations from what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly complex reality.... They describe what is wrong with the present situation in such a way as to set the direction for its future transformation (Schön, p 146-7).

Institutions of visual art in urban contexts are framed by metaphors such as the 'temple' (extension to Tate Britain, London) or the 'factory' (Baltic, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear). These metaphors give clear indications of how we as audiences and as art producers might relate to each institution. The following examples will help to demonstrate this point.

In his introduction to a series of essays on the ideology of the gallery space, Thomas McEvilley, notes the parallels between the institution of the gallery and that of a medieval church:

'The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light.....The art is free, as the saying used to go, "to take its own life". The purpose of such as setting is not unlike the purpose of religious buildings – the artworks, like religious verities, are to appear "untouched by time", and its vicissitudes'. (O'Docherty, 1986 p 7)

In the discussions leading up to the Baltic contemporary art development in Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, the director, Sune Norgren, caricatures the role of the curator:

'There's no use having curators if they're not part of the creative process....most of the artists that you work with have a vision and it is your work to try to come as close as possible to that vision....it was very much me as an individual. I saw myself very much as a dictator.' (Hiller, 2000 pp 35-36)

These representations clearly frame art institutions as centres of power supporting individuals who are singled out as visionary. The distancing and need for reverence between creator and audience is resonant within the fabric of the buildings. This distance articulates a space between active artistic producers on the one hand, juxtaposed with passive audiences who 'consume' or 'revere' once the production is complete.

It became important to represent our emergent and distinctive 'method of production' in such a way that this representation could speak as clearly and eloquently as the established institutional metaphors. We needed to draw from both available paradigms, professional and community based, in the construction of a new one.

We started to become aware of the key differences between rural ways of life and urban, metropolitan ways. This initially revealed an important quality of **relationship**. Within rural ways of life a person can be known for who they are first and foremost, and secondly for what they do in terms of work. **The 'knowing' is defined by relationship between people rather than by function within a system of production.**

There seemed to be a synergy between this and discourses in an around networked culture using new technologies. Lyotard (1984) locates the individual as a nodal point

within multiple networks, some of which are 'real' within geographical places and many of which are 'virtual' and traverse geographies. 'Knowing' within this postmodern paradigm is also defined by relationship and not by function within a discrete system of production.

These observations focused by, but not exclusive to, ways of living in remote rural areas provided the On the Edge Project with clues to a way forward. By thinking of the individual artist, administrator or community/audience member as individual centres located in relationship to each other within a networking structure, we were able to understand the quality of relationship as reciprocal and not hierarchical. The network becomes a vehicle for learning and exchange. Mutual interest or the desire to make a difference becomes the driving force.

From this point we needed to understand a new relationship between artist and audience based on qualities of closeness, not distance. This issue is the key focus of one of the two studentships attached to the AHRB grant.⁷

In parallel, the literature offers a few salient features and relations from what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly complex reality. Home in its original sense means 'the centre' (Berger 1984). Home is the smallest economic unit, the site of self organization and self management on which economics are founded. The root *eco* or the greek '*oiko*' means 'home' (Jacobs, 2000). 'Home' focuses the interdependency between individuals, their state of relationship. It is the site of our most intimate and intense relationships, both positive and negative. 'Home' is an entity by which an individual negotiates a sense of self and a sense of values. 'Home' is about private and public life (Morley, 2000, Ryczynski, 1997, Attfield, 2000). In material culture, 'Home' is about choice (or lack of choice) and spatial arrangement likened to the process of making art (Lefebvre, 1996 in Attfield p157).

STAGE 4. MOVING BEYOND IDEA TO ACTION

Through the process of naming and framing, the stories make....the.... leap from data to recommendations, from facts to values, from 'is' to 'ought'... (they) make it seem graceful, compelling, even obvious (ibid p 147.)

In order to address the issues of value defined within the research questions, the programme of five experimental projects needed to challenge received values. The obvious, even compelling value that centredness revealed was the need to grow the project from within local interest and issues, rather than impose authored works. Each partner in the Network was invited to put forward a project idea based on an important aspect of local culture. These became the foundations of each of the five projects which include marginal rural land in a 19th Century planned village in Lumsden ('The Field'), a 'sense of place' and 'belonging' in Fraserburgh ('Virtual Brochers'), a local autumn festival in Huntly ('Tattiebogle'), traditional knitting and lace making in Shetland ('Langerin') and tempera painted ceilings of 16th century in Banffshire ('Celestial Ceiling').

⁷ Heather Delday's Ph.D. project (2001-) is investigating a close relationship between artist, artwork and audience by developing and evaluating her own fine art practice within this construct. The second studentship attached to the OTE research (Claudia Zeiske) is looking at the economic impact of the OTE programme.

Each project has gathered together local participants (Community Support Groups) to intensify and enrich the exploration of the issue and to transform i.e. affect change in our understanding of the project's potential. For example in 'The Field' project (project partner Scottish Sculpture Workshop), vernacular or traditional attitudes to land and landownership is drawn from discussions with the inhabitants of the village Lumsden. This is a crucial part of the process of what the artistic outcome will be i.e. opening up the potentialities for marginal rural land use. The artist's brief, in this case, is not focused by 'product' per se, but by using art as 'a process of value finding' (Lacy, 1995, p 30). (The output is likely to be an articulation of the findings, e.g. a publication).

The long process of sustained dialogue within the OTE Network and its activities has been crucial in constructing an identity through a shared sense of values. Workshop III (October 2002) was a seminal point where the specific quality of the discursive space became clear. The OTE centre is considered 'virtual' where research and practice come together in order to understand how art projects come into being. This understanding reveals the push and pull of different individual values and how these shape the final project description (aims, objectives, indicators and so on). It defines how different individuals 'own' the project in different ways. It reveals the tensions experienced between the culture of research and the pressures of managing a process within the 'real world'. This coming together represents a willingness to bring to the shared activity, the values and experiences that each sector have to offer. Through the experience of making something new i.e. realizing the five projects, each participant is demonstrating a preparedness to question their own assumptions. The quality of shared space, in particular its capacity to affect sensibilities and influence production, is described by Deleuze and Guattari as 'immanent' (Goodchild, 1996). The naming of this process of mutual influence is useful in as far as it reveals the learning process that is taking place between the partners and the researchers and the consequent depth of the projects. (see Figure 2. Immanence – a quality of discursive space).

The crystallization of thought is perhaps best demonstrated by the outcome of Workshop III where we identified key criteria of evaluation of artistic quality. These are; 'Technical Competence', 'Connection with Audience', 'Capacity to Move', 'Integrity of Conception and Production' and 'Thought Provoking and Resonant'.

At this workshop the clarity of values was drawn out *by recognising qualities* using 'Home' as metaphor. 'Home' generated thoughts and ways that were distinctive and different from what had gone before.

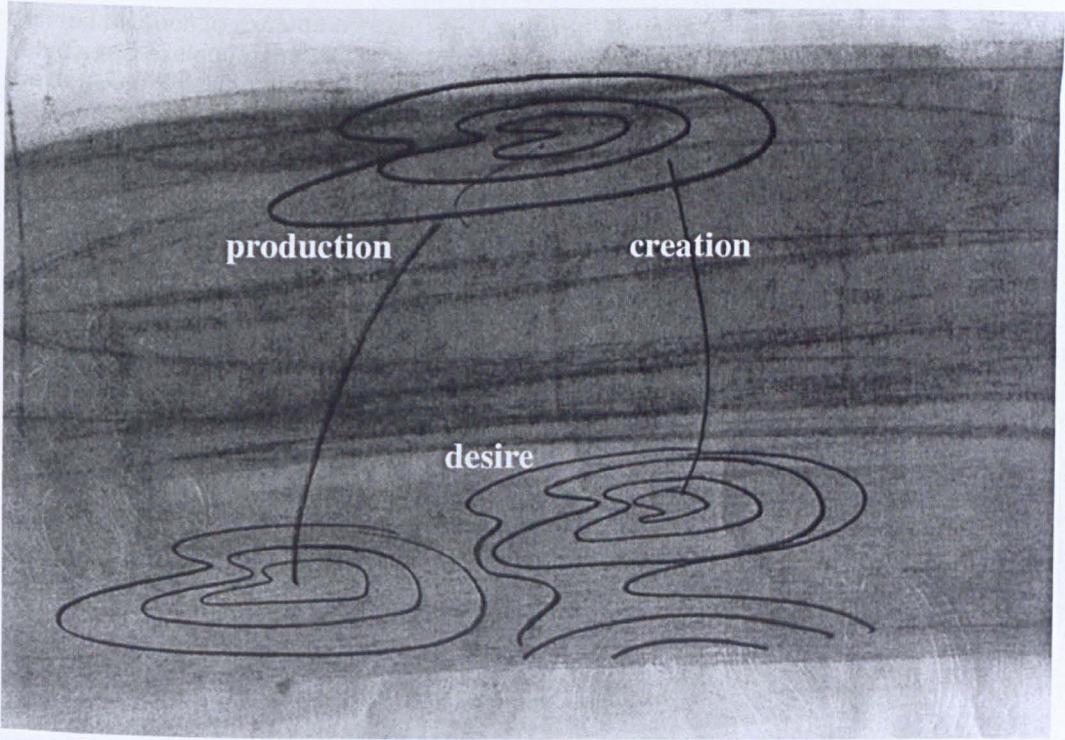


Figure 2. Immanence – a quality of shared space

STAGE 5. FURTHER QUESTIONING

Once we have constructed a generative metaphor, once we have concluded that in this story we are seeing A as B, then we can explore and reflect upon similarities and differences between A and B. In so doing we draw upon a repertoire of additional ways of perceiving and understanding both A and B (ibid p 149).

In the research process we experienced tensions between individuals and their expectations and perceptions of the projects. This was a direct consequence of bringing potentially conflicting systems of value into the same space. Situations of tension arise in particular where different cultures of value cross paths. A creative methodology evolved in an urban metropolitan context cannot easily be applied to a local vernacular issue unless trust is established within a level playing field where individuals' experience is valued as equivalent but different. Local cultures need to demonstrate a preparedness to embrace new ways that are different from their own, at the level of expectation and at the level of execution. Urban professionalized ways need to be questioned in the light of the essential role of volunteering in rural contexts. Tensions are an inevitable part of forming new creative responses by 'adjusting sensibilities', part of being present alongside others and of being influenced and affected by them.

In this sense 'Home' defines its opposite, homelessness. To concretize 'home' as an embodiment of fixed values 'privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort and control' (Putman in Morley, 2000 p) can engage difficult issues such as the lack of preparedness to engage with the 'other'. 'Home' can mean 'Heimat', the nation state

defined as such to exclude others. There is a tension between acknowledging shared values and excluding the values of others. It is important to locate such tensions at the centre of thinking about value and not at its margins. 'Home' and 'homelessness' are part of each other within human experience.

The unknown becomes a threshold or 'liminal' space between 'home' and the world beyond. 'It is neither here nor there' (Palmer, 2002). It is within liminality, rather than certainty, that new ideas and thoughts 'become' in the sense of being newly created (Turner, 1988)

STAGE 6. RESTRUCTURING / CHANGING POSITION

Subsequently the inquirers may construct new models of the situation from the stories they have told. Their new co-ordinated descriptions may then select out fixed properties which this particular situation shares with others... (Schon, p159)

The construction of new visual art models may be best demonstrated through the development of thinking and its transformative effect on each project. In this paper we illustrate how the metaphor 'home' has influenced the thinking on an aspect of one of the five projects.

- The 'Celestial Ceiling' project' (project with partner Duff House) offered the apparently straight forward problem of replacing a 16th century painted ceiling destroyed by fire, by its 21st century equivalent and this would be executed by an established painter. This simple reading of the project was transformed by focusing on the fact that the space which the ceiling enclosed was a private home; A home of a very different patron from that of the 16th century. At the 'gathering' pertinent issues of commissioning and built heritage were discussed but central to the 'expert' discussion were the personal values of the patron and current occupier. Considerations of public/private 'thresholds' were implicit; for example private space/public access, continuity of built heritage, relationship between patron and artist. The values considered important, by a 'new' patron in relation to home, family and external relationships were the sensibilities of 'play' and 'spontaneity'. These specific values, once drawn out through conversation, informed the artist's brief. The 'gathering' facilitated a process of not simply arriving at an understanding (i.e. what the requirements of the brief should be), but that of *arriving at meaning* i.e. the specific functionality of art arrived at by the players involved here.

CONCLUSION

The meta level of thinking on the research as a process has identified the use of metaphor as a way of seeing relative positions of value and related systems of production. Schön has given us a cogent set of steps that enable us to reveal aspects of process and inform new ones.

An understanding of metaphor, in particular metaphors that generate action, is key to revealing the relationship between production and value in cultures of difference, such as urban/rural. The metaphor of 'home' has enabled us to redraw the interrelationships between artist, artwork and 'audience' or 'community' so that the projects carry particular qualities. They are centred in 'people' and their interests, not labeled as either community or audience. They rely on relationships rather than institutional hierarchies, on dialogue rather than procedure, on 'homes' rather than 'temples', on participation rather than spectatorship. At the same time each project has the clear objective to achieve high quality art production, recognized as such by the professional sector as well as 'on the ground'. 'Home' speaks to each project in distinctive ways and on different levels.

The 'gatherings', one of the methods used, are instances where thinking occurs in a mutually affective space. This is the new centre. Differences are not expelled onto the margins, but are exchanged within the space. In this context art is a value finding process. The 'gatherings' and the Network represent a 'community of interpretation' where value is not fixed or given. It emerges through 'conversational realities', 'the messy, contingent communicability that meshes together a community'. (Bhaba in Jacobs 1998).

The final output of the research, due to be completed in August 2004, will be the publication of a 'toolkit'. This 'toolkit' will be pragmatic and aesthetic tool for self organisation and self determination of the arts in culture at a local level.

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Appendix 2: Description of the four OTE projects (from the resulting project publications)

How might we revalue traditional ways of making?: The Maakin Lab

The Maakin Lab project was developed in partnership with the Shetland College Department of Textiles, On the Edge research and artist Susan Benn of PAL. The research challenge offered up by the project partners was how to revalue traditional Shetland knitting in terms of its relevance in the lives and livelihoods of Shetland people.

Although indigenous Fair Isle pattern and the fine Shetland lace knitting are known world wide the different socio-economic picture in the wake of the oil boom of the 70's and the old fashioned image knitting has for many of the younger Shetlanders contributed to the decline in the interest of knitting. Finding ways to revalue these forms of making in artistic-cultural, and economic terms was the complex question.

The artist Susan Benn has developed a light and flexible methodology called labs. Labs are a specific way of bringing multi skilled groups together in a collaborative learning environment which deliberately challenge perceived disciplinary boundaries and hierarchies of production and consumption. The labs create a level playing field for producing new ideas.

The *Maakin Lab* website on the CD re-present the experience of an intensive eight days spent in Shetland. A diary of events, images, testimonials and reflections by the participants narrate the discoveries and problems from taking part. Shared thinking and exploratory making between and across the skills of knitters, artists, designers and researchers brought together from throughout the U.K reveal the sometimes intimate details of pushing creative thinking on.

The booklet accompany the CD is a critical reflection on the whole project. While the *Maakin Lab* produced tangible outcomes - embryonic ideas, products and artistic tools and processes, the lab also raises deeper questions on the nature of production and consumption and proposes a new relational model of working based on shared judgment and decision making between creative practitioners and those with the power and influence to take ideas forward – a radical model where contributors are part owners of the whole cycle of making and trading.

Edge FM

Edge FM was developed in partnership with the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, Fraserburgh. On the Edge Research and artist Paul Carter. The research challenge offered up by the project partners was finding a way of bringing young people living locally into the museum.

The museum on the outskirts of the town in a lighthouse at Kinnairds Head is known internationally for having the best collection of lenses anywhere in the world, but its connection and role within this small fishing town seemed of marginal interest to the younger generation.

The artist Paul Carter developed a response to the project brief which challenged assumptions on many levels – the research, the artistic and ideas about ways of working with young people.

The project brief was focussed by the theme of home and identity and what it meant to live in Fraserburgh. Paul proposed and used a deliberately low tech, hands on vehicle to realise the project – radio. Identifying and working with a core group of skate boarders and their friends they worked from a ‘transmission centre’ in one of the buildings at the light house first creating an identity for the project and themselves. The group, between the ages of 8 and 14 years, interviewed the residents of the town on what it meant to live in Fraserburgh, collecting audio material to be edited for a two day, one hour looped broadcast which was transmitted via the radio mast they erected at the back of the museum.

Radio became the site and the means of giving the young people a voice and a means of production where they had control over presenting the town’s voices back to the town, along with their own views on Fraserburgh. A small temporary exhibition was displayed in the museum inserting their work as a chapter within the official history there.

The *Edge FM* publication records the experience through extracts of dialogue and images. The radio broadcast is on a CD, within the book. On one level the publication designed by the artist, is the art work in its tangible form, ‘a small manifesto’ given back to the participants. Two critical essays in the book (Douglas and Jewesbury) raise issues much debated in contemporary art discourse – art as a means of social and cultural empowerment and the politicization of everyday spaces. Key questions are raised on the nature of the immaterial in art and what we can really know of the aesthetic value of art and its legacy.

Inthrow

Inthrow was developed in partnership with Chris Fremantle of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop, On the Edge Research and lead artist Gavin Renwick.

The Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW) is based in the small rural village of Lumsden, Aberdeenshire. The challenge posed by the project partner was how to build bridges between the workshop and the local community. The workshop provides facilities for sculpture such as bronze casting and accommodation for artists from around the world who come to Lumsden to live and work for a week or several months. Apart from incidental meetings in the village little meaningful interaction between visiting artists and the local community happened, nor was there a vital link between artistic activities and the stunning landscape surrounding Lumsden.

The artist Gavin Renwick has developed a practice focused by people's relationship with the land they inhabit, working primarily with the nomadic Dogrib people in northern Canada and issues surrounding the concept of 'home' and traditional knowledge.

The project brief for *Inthrow* began by posing the question about marginal rural land 'What should we do with a field?' which was prompted by the last farmer in Lumsden retiring. Gavin's response to the brief was a three stage proposal of artistic activity. A series of events and bringing two other artists into the project provided a loose architecture for participatory activity and dialogue within the village and its surrounding area, between artists, residents and researchers.

Inthrow chronicles the story of the project through the voices of the village and the artists. The work by the artists provides a set of new tools for seeing and revealing change in the landscape, for instance, the use of hearth as a metaphor, a living archive, a DJ workshop and performance in a wild remote place. Photography, diagrams and excerpts of the many dialogues in the web of exchanges in this art project present a montage of perspectives and artistic tactics. The critical texts by artists and researchers open up the idea of art practice as a process of value finding within the flux of everyday life.

A critical issue raised in the publication is the nature of knowledge in practice led art research and more broadly within culture; knowledge not as product, but a dynamic political tool for understanding and shaping change.

Celestial Ceiling: Contemporary Art, Built Heritage and Patronage

The Celestial Ceiling project was developed in partnership with Charles Burnet of Duff House, Banff, the Schleiffer family of Cullen House, On the Edge and the artists John McGeogh and Robert Orchardson.

Duff House, an Adams building, is part of the National Galleries of Scotland. The challenge posed by the research partner was how to change the image of the house from being simply a collection of national treasures to a more responsive cultural and historical resource. The project moved from the general issue of visitor numbers, to an opportunity, stemming ironically from the tragic loss of an important piece of heritage in the locale.

Charles' knowledge and expertise in Scottish history connected the researchers with the Schlieffer family, owners of the south tower in Cullen House which in 1987 had been destroyed by fire - including a unique 16th century tempera painted ceiling. The tower had been restored but the painting on the wooden ceiling was lost forever. The Schleiffer family wanted to contribute to the continuing heritage of the building by commissioning new art.

The project grew in ambition and scale and two artists were commissioned to respond to the challenge. John McGeoch works with digital technology. Through a collaborative process of researching and identifying visual fragments in various archives the material for a complete digital reconstruction of the original ceiling was sourced. John produced a large scale interactive projection displayed for the first time in Duff House. The technology enabled immersive engagement with the painting and a capacity for zooming into details which no-one in recent history had ever seen.

The second commission offered Robert Orchardson an opportunity to make a 21st century response to the original ceiling. His new painted ceiling in the space of the original encapsulates the values of the patrons – optimism, risk-taking, forward thinking. Robert's painting offers a visionary contemporary counterpoint to the original yet draws on its 'celestial' language.

The two art works are thought provoking in different ways but the Celestial Ceiling publication clearly presents the On the Edge research methodology as a radical departure from traditional ways of commissioning art. Workshops, two 'gatherings' and various evaluation 'soundings' developed the project in a reflective and generative way. The conversations at the gatherings present the shared thinking from a range of perspectives - history, heritage, art criticism, curation, art practice

Celestial Ceiling provokes new thinking on the relationship of contemporary art, built heritage and patronage through the interaction of public and private realms.

Appendix 3: The 'Incidental' Person

"Some Distinctions and Glossary 1978

The Incidental Person

The concept of 'Incidental Person' has two components – the qualities of a certain type of individual, and the role in an AGP placement.

The I.P. should possess those qualities traditionally recognised in the artist-type those individuals who are prepared to **spend a large part of their lives in formulating a specific personal form of expression**, and who also have the ability to handle non verbal, visual, audio and also verbal material, and then, to be able to externalize these in a variety of ways. In addition, the I.P. should possess an understanding of underlying structural elements of which various forms of 'make activity' are comprised. This understanding is inherent in the development of art tradition, and is now carried by its practitioners from the private context of studio/gallery to the public context of organisational structures. (APG's initiating artists were involved in the first moves in this direction in the late 50's and 60's).

The I.P. should be able to exercise this understanding when carrying out or proposing work in any context and **should automatically suggest, by example, that (all) individuals may work from their own experience, free from received ideas and dictates.**

The I.P. concept can also include people from other disciplines with the understanding and ability to operate in this way."

Unpublished, from the APG (Artists Placement Group) archive described as '*Theoretical definitions about Incidental Person*', John Latham, 1977 and 78 (Tate Britain, March 2005, bold text in original)

Appendix 4: The Borromeo rings

The Borromeo rings have a deep and rich history and an almost universal appeal - an apposite symbol for de Certeau's thinking.

What is common across very different cultures and belief systems with the Borromeo knot is its symbolic meaning because of the special interlinking. The design of the interlinked rings is such that if one is removed the other two fall apart. Another way of thinking about it is that no two rings are linked - it is only the figure as a whole that cannot be disentangled. This interlinking symbolizes a kind of strength through unity, and/or a wholeness or completeness through its three parts.

This symbolism can be found in many different fields - physics, chemistry, theology, psychology, and mythology. The rings can be found in emblems, sculptures, as carvings and are used as trademarks throughout the world.

Their origin as Borromeo rings is found in the coat of arms of the 15th century Borromeo family and can still be found on buildings and artefacts owned by them on three islands (called the Borromeo islands) in Lake Maggiore in northern Italy.¹

Fig. (A) The Borromeo rings taken from a pot from the Baroque palazzo in the building on Isola Bella



It is in fact impossible to make the design in three dimensions using planar circular rings. The craftsmen of old took artistic licence when they carved the rings in relief to suggest three-dimensionality to give the impression of being genuinely circular linked rings. When the Borromeo is drawn or inlaid onto a flat surface this impossibility is less evident.

¹ Some believe that the rings represent the three families of Visconti, Sforza and Borromeo, who, after much fighting, formed an inseparable union through intermarriages. One of the islands Isola Bella contains an impressive Baroque palazzo built in the seventeenth century by Vitaliano Borromeo (1620-1690) where there are many examples of the interlacing pattern as an emblem in the house and the garden.

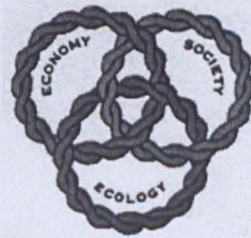
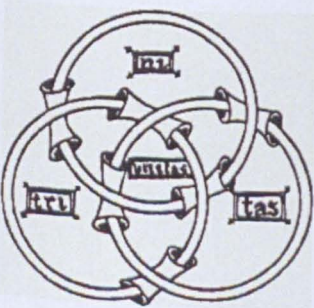
Sometimes the interlacing is like moons like these on a chandelier in the Palace of Fontainebleau or as a decorative feature in this Renaissance window at Magenta in Italy

Fig. (B) Borromean rings in architecture



Borromean rings have symbolised the holy trinity in Christian iconography the heart of a giant in Nordic mythology and are found in eastern belief systems on Shinto shrines in Japan for instance. As trademarks the appeal of the rings are that they symbolise, collaboration, the importance of co-operation and unity as strength. The rings appear on everyday images like logos for universities, on beer bottle labels (Ballantines Beer, below) as well as ancient coins, heraldry

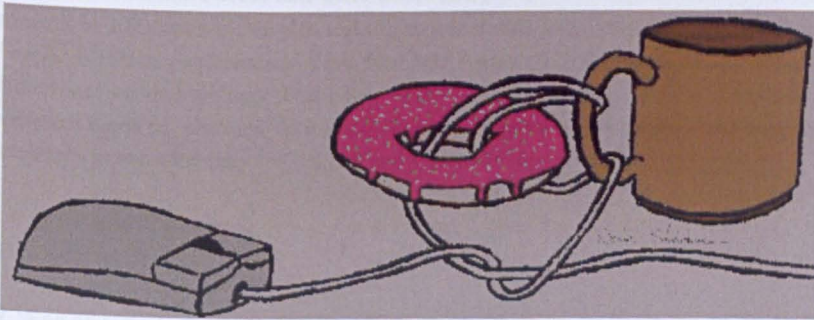
Fig. (C) Examples of the rings on 'everyday' objects



Appendix 5: Topology with genetics (23 October, 1993)

The Borromean rings are central in knot theory and belong to the branch of geometry called topology which is concerned with properties of figures which are not altered if the figure is stretched like elastic or bent or compressed. It is these special properties which make the rings of particular interest to mathematicians and computer scientists for instance. The image below is a logo for Topological Quantum Computing project based at Indiana University. We see the topology here with the 'stretched' rings as a doughnut, coffee mug handle and a mouse cable interlinked.

Fig. (D) The topology of the rings



Appendix 5: Dialogue with geneticists: (23 Genescapes, Feb 03)

7th February 2003 at 5.00 – 6.15 pm with Zosia, Astrid, John and Sheila
The library in the Medical School, Foresterhill, Aberdeen.

I lay out 23 photos on a table. I'm aware that everyone has been at the Scottish Genetics Meeting all day and I wonder whether to reschedule because everyone might be tired. We have a brief conversation to decide whether to meet as a group or on a one-to-one basis. Z and I agree that a group is best, (although S can't come at right away). It is considered best because a group can spark different ideas, it can be more conversational and spontaneous. (In this transcript the images we refer to are numbered).

Z 'I'm looking at the silage' (17,18,19)

J 'Mmmm, the bags?'

Z 'What is it about silage and DNA?'

H 'I discovered that I could take these boxes and put them in very different locations and they seemed to work in different way, they're sort of flexible in that way. I showed them amongst trade stands at the Human Genetics conference in York then later I showed them in an exhibition in Duff house in Banff. Both times inside buildings. This gave me the idea that I should take the boxes into different contexts, different kinds of 'placings' as it were. So as an experiment I took them and put them in very different locations to see what they looked like and what this suggested.'

A 'Do you know what my spontaneous idea was before you came with this explanation – what a pity for this flower (A, H, laughter)... you know to have all the contents written beside.'(7)

H 'That's interesting'

A 'I mean...'

Z 'You havn't got anything about people in any of these'

H 'No I havn't. The closest I get to people is a suggestion, where I have the box sitting on a sofa.' (21)

Z 'There's the dog here.'(18)

H 'Yes it's the only creature in these (photos). It was the black and whiteness of the day really. It was frosty and the bags and the dogs are black (18 and 20). The frost was beginning to melt at that time, you can see on the bags here (19). What I thought of the boxes was the film like quality (of the autoradiogram) almost like greyscales in the landscape....and it was a shimmery quality that I noticed.'

J 'The series of bags suggests repetition to me, and all those repetitive sequences in the DNA (17, 18, 19)

Z 'Like Protein'

J 'Well yes could be protein, but I was thinking more of tripler repeats'

H 'Tripler repeats?'

J 'Yes all genes have tripler repeats in them or tetra nucleotide repeats, the genome is full of repeats.'

Z 'I like that one visually' (9).

J 'But only a geneticist would think of repeats though.'

H 'Well it's to do with pattern, there's something here about the lines of the trees which sets up a repetition' (14)

J 'Yes'

H 'Repetition and difference is something I'm interested in as an artist because I repeat processes, but they are never exactly the same.'

J 'Yes'

H 'I might see an aspect in the process (a difference) and focus on that, then run with that, it's the next stage.'

J 'Well that's how lots of diseases arise, to do with tripler repeats, because the repeats are not copied accurately, so they expand when they are passed on.'

H 'That's very interesting, things are repeated but if not repeated perfectly it leads to this other thing.'

J 'Yes that's right, yes.'

A 'I'm looking at this and thinking is this a diseased granny? (21)

H (laughter)

A 'You know a container, a...'

H 'That's quite negative connotations for me'

Z 'You mean that was granny. She's gone and she's left her genes behind.'

J (laughter)

A 'Granny as a container'

J 'I want one...I like it, I like it...this is excellent.'

A, J, H, Z (laughter)

H 'There's something really suggestive about box, that it contains...'

Z 'On another note...'

J 'I'll have to tell you something about that when the recorders switched off.'

J, Z (laughter)

Z 'I like this visually, and I've been thinking why, and it's the light and the dark, the stripes are making me think of bands, in the way that there are bands on the boxes' (9).

A 'Mmmhmm'

H 'What I was thinking about was focus, what you can focus in on, the bit on the autoradiogram, the bit of interest, and maybe in photography an equivalent is depth of field, what is in and out of focus (1, 2).

Because the sunlight was really strong they had a strange shimmy quality in the forest in amongst the plants, they (the autorads) are a kind of big negative and they seemed to be in a different space (10).

It's hard to explain...'

Z 'It's like they've been beamed down.'

A 'Mmmm'

J 'They look more like buildings here, against the sky or on the edge of something, with an out of focus background' (3, 4)

A 'And here I see also...'

Z 'Yes and they all fit into little boxes, all the people ...'

J 'Yes, little ships'

A 'And they have some tiny.... somehow, it is the knowledge you get through these stripes, somehow you get, I wouldn't say enlightening, but somehow the transparency in these boxes... I think about them - these stripes and through the light you get these messages, you get (consider) them as small batteries, or...

H 'A transmitting thing?'

A 'Or through the light going in...you get to see the things, as small lamps if you want or as lightening containers, somehow. (9,10,11)

H 'That's quite nice that thought.'

A 'I think actually this one is the most beautiful. (9)

H 'Yes, it's also scale I think.'

Z 'It's making me wonder, Heather what you are trying to say?'

H 'Well I want to keep the conversation in our first meeting like this, very open. To talk about seeing (these photos) and our feelings, quite abstract stuff in a way. We can look at the basic idea in this set of photos and see what it suggests, there are different interpretations. There are quite immediate or clearly evident suggestions, and then there are more subtle visual things, to do with feelings. By doing this together you are influencing me in a way. I want the work to develop from this to produce new work. These photos are just developmental things. It might take six meetings till we get new work. I want to

make work in a shared space like this, where we share ideas leading to work that I feel has integrity in it. If we share ideas new work will come. Now it might be that it's not one piece of work, it might be that there are a few pieces of work, and maybe we work on a more one-to-one arrangement further on. It's difficult to know exactly how things will pan out at this stage.'

Z 'I think what I'm trying to say is it intrigues me, because I'm trying to think what message your trying to give in the picture.'

H 'Well I tried not to set out with a deliberate message in these. I tried to work on a very visual level. I had come to understand that the boxes, as metaphors for container, was quite a strong metaphor, and I could transport these to different situations as I did in different exhibitions. So one beautiful Saturday morning when the light was extraordinary I took them outside and photographed them, two thirty-six films in about three hours. I did this so that I could later stand back, as it were, and look at what the photos did. At the time was thinking about pattern and scale and so on, I suppose you could say there was a kind of nature/nurture thing going on in my head. Something I thought about whilst taking the photos was time. Photos are a fixed moment in time and the boxes were also like fixed moments in time, but a different time. This beautiful frosty day with the birds singing and the hum of Inverurie in the background, things moving ever so slightly in the breeze, life going on and these frozen moments, as it were, placed here and there in the landscape. That was the feelings I had when taking the photos. So now, to look at the photos and see what it says to us, and how it can be developed. This could be a photograph, it could be a print, it could be a 3-dimensional, it (the artwork) could be anything. We look at the visual qualities and move on from there. Already from the conversation— there are notions of luminosity, and windows in buildings, the light. They are almost like little interstices in terms of light and space. This thinking has come to mind through the thoughts here today.'

J 'This is a good building. I like this building here on the stones.'(4)

H 'You like that one?'

J 'It's where people live and it's where people live in their DNA as well.'

H 'It's a huge scale thing, from DNA to the building.'

J 'I think this one looks better because you can't see the top.' (3)

Z 'But the sharpness of that means you see the bands'(2 compared with 1)

H 'I left the lids of the boxes open like that to suggest that we are influenced by our environments suggesting that the genes we inherit are affected by the environment (e.g. 6, 11, 14)

Z 'Oh right, not running away as it were, but coming in.'

H 'Yes not like the Pandora's box metaphor* but these boxes are open to outside influences.'

J 'It's obviously a personal thing but that one doesn't do anything for me, it looks like milk cartons thrown away' (9)

J,Z,H (laughter)

H 'I think with my work I worry about coming across as too deterministic, or too essentialist. I worried about this in the tartan DNA prints too (a reference to 'Inheritance' prints). I really need to understand better what it is that you do. I have a reasonable idea but need to know more. (Here) the idea was that if we say, eat well and have a good mental state this has an effect on our genetic make up. That we are not completely pre programmed...'

Z 'Gene-environment interaction.'

H 'Yes, that's what I'm trying to say.'

J 'And so is this, because here the building is imposed on the environment, you could look at it that way.'(3)

A 'Really, yes, you should join with an architect.'

J 'Oh yes'

A 'I mean this is a really interesting design on a building to, just to get the DNA on it.'

J 'This would be a marvellous project for an architect in New York at the moment.'

H 'This brings the twin towers to mind.'

- A 'It would be really interesting to make a building with this.'
- J 'Yes'
- H 'On the sides'
- J 'Yes, it would look very interesting on the sides'
- A 'A picture to break...'
- H 'To break up the side of the building. The inside on the outside.'
- A, J 'Yes, yes'
- H 'You could project onto the building'
- A 'Yes, project or paint onto the building, or the stones, or...'
- H 'An ambitious but very interesting idea'
- J 'What's your budget?'
- J, A, H (laughter)
- A 'When I say these here, I think of human beings. This is a woman in a cold world. I see here isolation, or how you can call it, this is Granny (21). This is people on the street (22) and this is crowds. (14)
- H 'Yes depending on how they are grouped together and juxtaposed.'
- A 'I took them as an individual somehow.'
- H 'Yes.'
- A 'I still think this is your best picture'. I really like that. I like this Granny picture (21)
- H 'When you said granny at first I thought it was quite sinister...'
- Z 'She's left it all behind'
- H 'Yes it's all to do with inheritance'
- Z 'Of course it is'
- A 'Well memory for example...'
- H 'Memory, that's interesting, like the thought patterns left of someone.'
- A 'And this old, old style thing (sofa) and then you have age or something...'
- H 'The memories you have left of someone.'
- Z 'She could have fluffed up the cushion!'
- Z, H (laughter)
- H 'I'm really interested in repetition, when you (J) talked about that. All this pattern, in nature, with these big bundles (silage bales), it was like the packaging of stuff, how it is contained. And that notion of triple repeats...'
- Z 'But *just* bundles of straw'
- H 'Yes they are just filled with straw, yes.'
- J 'Empty repeats'
- Z 'Mmmhmm, meaning, just packaging?'
- J 'Just packaging'
- Z 'Oh packaging, that's what it is.'
- J 'Yes it's in straw, it's intronic repeats.'
- Z 'Yes its extragenic repeats, the big bits in your DNA'
- J 'Its extragenic repeats in fact, isn't it?'
- Z 'Yes, yes they're just packaging to keep the genes apart.'
- H 'Is that like junk DNA?'
- Z, J 'Yes'
- H 'Extragenic repeats?'
- Z 'Yes and allo repeats, they're constantly repeated.'
- J 'Yes repeated segments throughout the genome.'
- H 'I see'

Z 'And there's lots more of it than there are genes, which is why it's so much bigger than your little box.'

H 'So there is vast amount of stuff with tiny bits of interest as it were (see sketch A). The scale is quite fantastic. I don't know how long the human genome as a strip might be?

J 'Someone has calculated that actually.'

Z 'I've got it on my computer, I've got a little video clip and it tells you.'

H 'That would be really interesting to see, to go from the idea of a tower block building right down to a fragment of DNA in this mass is almost impossible to imagine. The tiny bit that's looked at, blown up to this size and then put in context and seen as building, architecture, the scale is wild.'

A 'Of our fantasy.'

H 'I think the things you are seeing are different from what I see.'

Z, A, J (hearty laughter)

A 'Some of them are *very* different!'

J 'You mean bizarre.'

A 'You need a control group to show them to.'

H 'Well artists don't really have control groups as such, we don't repeat to be the same, we...'

J 'Oh but you could, yes, qualitative research, you can do that.'

H 'Well who, I wonder how on earth...?'

J 'Pick some neighbours perhaps...non geneticists'

H 'Actually I have shown these photographs to friends, well, they were artists too'

J 'Normal people'

H 'Normal people, not scientists and not artists...'

Z 'I could provide you with an engineer (her husband).'

J,Z,H (slight laughter)

Z 'That just looks like a cardboard box to me.' (15, 16)

J 'Yes'

H 'There's no light coming through'

J 'Yes you can't see the bands.'

H 'Here where there is lots of light...I'd like to see this absolutely huge, more in keeping with the scale of the environment.' (9)

Z 'Yes and you could go up close and see the bands.'

H 'Yes'

Z 'We know that they are there, but...'

J 'To me it looks like empty milk cartons in waste ground to me.'

H 'Oh dear, that's not really how I see it, but the point made about the artist or not artist, scientist or not scientist (as audience) is interesting. Someone earlier today said, it was MP... said she would be interested in having some of the tartan DNA prints down in Edinburgh. And we were talking about the business of interpretative material, how it is necessary. What I'd hope is that with a bit of text people wouldn't see empty milk cartons. What we spoke about was the need to have just enough information to draw people into it, but not too much, to kill it dead with your own definite subjective interpretation'.

Z 'The trouble is people have to know what those bands mean. Bands mean things to scientists and doctors, but they don't mean anything to...'

J 'You know people in supermarkets might read them as bar codes, which they are in a way.'

Z 'If you were doing it for a general audience, unless you explained this is what this is made from'

J 'Yes'

H 'I'd like to imagine...this is very much an intermediate stage ... are you all clinicians who deal directly with people and have to impart complex scientific information to people?

J 'Yes'

H 'I suppose I'm wondering what kind of image you'd like to have, not really as directly part of that information process, but something that exists on a suggestive or aesthetic level, that might be on your wall. You know in a kind of background or ambient thing. Instead of a kind of graphic way, saying (for example), well we read these bands from the bottom up, there are the four nucleotides and so on.'

Z 'Mmmhmmm'

A 'Education'

H 'Yes, I've seen the chromosome book, the diagrams you use to explain science to people, where conditions are often described as missing bits. And you use metaphor and analogy... *Neva, for instance was talking about the notion of a recipe book, what you are made up of. This is very interesting – the kinds of metaphors you use to explain, and use for your own thought processes or ways of thinking about, in practice.

What I imagine we can make, maybe, is something that is not information graphics, it sits in that space where words can't communicate in terms of feelings. It is an aesthetic thing, which is a hugely personal thing – it is what you like. These thoughts ... I simply want to leave with you. What I'm trying to do in my research is to develop a language to describe the qualities of making and the things made. In art there is very little language to describe either. So I am dealing with two languages of communication – visual and textual. For instance earlier today someone said of the tartan DNA 'I like this because it is not obvious'. I can interpret this positively as being 'subtle'. But it is hard to talk about it beyond this.'

A 'It is just the border of language, I mean normal living people, living creatures – language is not all of it. Our language is very developed but our language can only be talked in time because you cannot speak three-dimensionally, and that's why you already reduce ...'

H 'Things to a code level?'

A 'Yes, because you cannot hear a three dimension language. You can hear a three dimension music perhaps.'

H 'Yes'

A 'But even there you have to have one, one...'

H 'Sequential?'

A 'Yes, sequential, I don't think we expect art to...'

H 'Yes visual art does the job that words can't in a sense. It goes beyond words.'

A 'Yes, that is why we need art, and use artworks. Also when you describe it you will have difficulty because it cannot be described.'

H 'Yes'

A 'Because you use the other side of the brain. I mean when I look at it I don't know which bit of the brain I am using at it. It's intuition.'

J 'Yes'

Z 'If I were using pictures with patients there, I would have to have an interaction to show it's a human thing and we understand people and we're not there to be scary and ... it's what we do - its about people, its not scientific and its not scary.'

H 'Yes, yes.'

A 'Also I have sometimes the picture ... I don't know why I use it myself, or for myself ... I first learnt about recipe books since I came here, and I think it is nearly all females that it works (for), and also you are cooking in the (making?) in your science.'

J 'Yes, I also talk about instruction manuals and filing cabinets.'

A 'And I thought sometimes, chromosomes they were for me somehow little living things actually.'

H (laughter)

A 'Yes the kind of animated nature of it, if you want go back to African primitive religions, where nature is living. For me these chromosomes were somehow a kind of semi parasites, not the negative thing as worm you've got in your gut, but somehow as small ...'

H 'Creatures?'

- A 'Yes, yes.'
- H 'How interesting.'
- Z 'That's a bit scary.'
- J 'Yes that's very scary.'
- A 'It's not scary for me.'
- H 'I don't find that scary either.'
- A 'You've got these animated...'
- H 'Why do you think that's scary?'
- J 'It's because of these things that control you, that it's who we are.'
- A 'No, no, it's for me the co-operation between these small things and for me it's not scary.'
- J 'I would much rather they were ... you are talking about Richard Dawkins idea of the selfish gene really aren't you?'
- A 'No it's more, no because I'm not afraid of mutations. You think it's scary because of mutations.'
- J 'No, no, it's nothing to do with mutations. It's to do with that you're not in ...'
- Z 'Control'
- J '...that you're not in control and Richard Dawkins hypothesis is that you're not in control. You're genes are in control, you are just their vehicle.'
- H 'And they leap from generation to generation.'
- J 'That's right, they're the ones that carry on we don't.'
- A 'That's why I don't think they are scary because they are part of the collective.'
- J 'But they are scary.'
- A 'And that is why I can have this thing without being scared.'
- Z 'They drive people'
- J 'That's what I'm saying, they drive you.'
- A 'For me it is this collection with nature.'
- J 'They destroy individuality, that's why...'
- H 'It very ... it's almost a metaphysical level - that thought on continuity.'
- A 'Yes, yes'
- H 'Rather than the more sinister, almost robotic drive in the gene pool, this is a very enlightening view.'
- A 'Yes or you can say I am not individually thinking enough or so. But that is why it is not frightening for me. I am not in control.'
- H 'It's to do with control?'
- A 'I don't need that control.'
- Z 'Richard and I...'
- J 'Richard and I, we need that control!'
- Z, J (laughter).
- J 'It's not all to do with control, its freedoms and you know, freedom of will, that's what it's about.'
- Z 'I've been eleven years in a clinic. I sometimes say it's like a set of plans.'
- J 'Yes, like a set of plans but then you build on those set of plans. You know you are not constrained, well you are constrained by the plans but you are not entirely dictated to by the plans.'
- Z 'You can chose whether to build a particular bit of them.'
- A 'But that is not wholly true you have to sleep at night, you still are relying on some of the rules of nature.'
- J 'You don't have to sleep on a particular night though. You can say I'm not going to sleep tonight, but I will sleep tomorrow night'.
- A 'Yes OK.'
- J 'Yes it's free will, you can chose to be tired, but the other way to look at it is that your genes tell you, you must go to sleep now'.

Z 'You can't change the shape of your nose.'

A 'No, no its, or me - it's a bit of participating in the archetypes or the collective, or something around...'

J 'Well you see to me the word collective conveys two things.'

A 'Yes it's because you're UK educated.'

J 'One thing it conveys to me is the Borg, Starship, the Borg,

Z 'Really?'

J 'Yes they organised themselves as collectives, yes and the second thing it conveys to me is communism, communism is based on collectives.'

A Oh, oh, yes I (can) see! That is too primitive; you never take the capitalist stand - that is also collective.'

J 'That is what it conveys to me. It is a word with baggage.'

Z 'In Britain it is a word that very much means tha...

J 'The third thing it conveys to me is that the Health Service is attempting to organise itself into collectives.'

A 'I mean every state has to. I guess that you, ah,...and you *are* coping with the collective thought like dressing, because someone is coming with short trousers or skipants!

J 'Yes but I don't wear any particular clothes, whereas in a collective...'

A 'But the clothes are *very* particular.'

J 'In a collective what clothes you wear for example would be determined by a collective.'

A No, no. No even when you think more collective there, people do not necessarily need to clothe collective because it is not that.

Both Z and A are keen to introduce to me to friends of theirs. Z wants to meet up for a meal with a Dutch artist who lives near her (she gives me a post card of her work) and A wants to introduce me to a young woman artist who's partner is doing a PhD in genetics here. She is returning to Scotland in March. A explains that she had to go back to Denmark for the winter because she was tired of 'the grey clouds' here. A thinks it would be good for us to meet so we can 'chat art to art and woman to woman'. They thank me and we agree the next date for meeting two (24th March). J thanks me for the exhibition saying it was 'added value'. I explain that I felt 'at least it was some light relief after what seemed to be a heavy meeting.'

Appendix 6: *Genescapes: visualisation and value finding* Delday, H

Paper given at the *Visual Knowledges Conference*, University of Edinburgh, 17th-20th September 2003, ISBN 0 9532713 3 1. Published on website <http://www.ed.ac.uk/iash/vkpublication/delday.pdf>
(This is a slightly revised version of a paper first given at the *International Visual Sociology Conference: Images of Social Life*, Southampton University, 8th-10th July 2003)

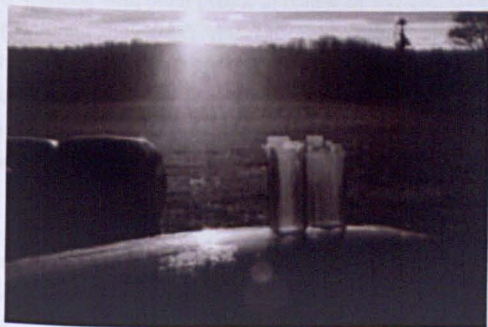
Abstract

This paper deals with locating art practice within a specific social context (within genetics). Art practice is understood as a process of transactions - a shared process of making meaning. The methodology is based on visual dialogue between myself and a group of clinical consultant geneticists. Here I make artwork which is developmental, not finalised and which was based, or inspired by DNA. The purpose of this work was to stimulate thinking leading to new artwork and new thinking. The dialogues in and around the artwork gives myself and the geneticists ideas and insights, we reflect on the experience, meet again and the artwork is developed further. This work is part of a practice-led PhD study in visual art.

Background

Currently I'm doing PhD research into visual art practice *through practice* (September 2001-). This studentship is attached to a larger research project called 'On the Edge' which is looking at the *value* of visual art from the socio economic and artistic perspectives in order to give a richer picture of art's cultural worth. (To find out more about this AHRB funded project you can visit our website: ontheedgeresearch.org)

For most of my professional life I have worked as a designer – a graphic designer. Three years ago I decided to study and practice art in order to 'move on' creatively after working in the design and publishing industry for about 10 years. This background led me to valuing a particular context in which to practice and develop a particular methodology.



As a relatively 'young' artist – in terms of practice, not age I hasten to add, I am questioning what the *role* of an artist might be. In other words how do I understand and shape a 'critical practice'. There are three areas of consideration - the artist's motivation to make art, how does art making happen and what are the effects or outcomes. At the outset of my research 'functionality' was a key question. Designers often structure their thinking

in terms of 'problem solving' and design briefs are written, sometimes by the designer and the client together, to fulfil specific communication needs. The message, the medium and the audience are clearly defined. As artist I did not have a clear message it was more a concern over a set of issues. The mediums I use seem to continually change depending on the nature of what I'm trying to communicate and the 'audience', a traditional term for those encountering art, is what I'm interested in theoretically and developing or 'growing' in my practice based research.

Because of the radical shift in the boundaries of 'art' over the last century it is now 'difficult to achieve consensus on definitions of art, the nature of the aesthetic experience, the relative place of communication and expression, or criteria of evaluation' (Wilson 2002:17). How then might we define the term? Matarasso (2000:2) from a cultural policy perspective, describes art as:

'... a means through which we can examine our experience of ourselves, the world around us, and the relationship between the two, and share the results with people in a form which gives free rein to our intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual qualities.'

This definition *suggests* an ethical basis for art practice – where the business of making art involves examining and sharing, it also suggests that art making is based on 'relationship'. Arguably it is the artistic process which is important, not necessarily the product or artwork per se. A key task then, for the artist/researcher, is to communicate what the qualities of the process might be.

Artistic approach and the notion of 'engaged' practice

In the western world the separation of the artist from society began in the early part of the Renaissance and 'emerged in full form in the Romantic era' (Freeman in Wasserman, 2000). Here the individual was elevated to a special or 'high' social status. This, coupled with the commodification of art products, led to a 'pervasive preoccupation' by artists in the west over the last century – one attempting to 'collapse the boundary between art and life' (Wasserman 2000). This would include movements such as Dada and Fluxus and individuals such as Kaprow, Beuys and Chicago to name but a few. Of course in some traditional and ancient cultures this divide between art and life simply never existed. If indeed 'art' had a label or a name at all, it was no more and no less than a natural part of everyday life (ibid 2000).

In the States the 'New Genre Public Art', an umbrella term embracing artists, curators and critics such as Lacy (1995) and Lippard (1997) advocates a 'participatory approach'. Here artists work in a more socially engaged way, by working with other people to realise an artwork. Common artistic interests are focused around 'social activism', 'redefining audiences', 'relevance for communities (particularly marginalized ones)' and 'collaborative methodology' (Lacy 1995:25). This 'New Genre' a term invented by the author, was undoubtedly a reaction against the institutionalisation and commodification of art and art's funding. Lacy's book published in the mid nineties was an attempt to *place* artistic practices in a more socially, and by extension, politically responsible position.

Lacy suggest that the artist must be 'open' to influence from other people and key qualities such as 'generosity' and 'empathy' are suggested but there is little detailed literature on how exactly in the artistic process this happens. By placing the emphasis on the process not the product per se, the focus becomes the relationship between the artist and the other. Lacy goes as far as to suggest that it may in fact be *the relationship itself* which is the 'art' or the critical practice (ibid:20)

Artists make art or 'make-meaning' in all sorts of ways. In practice based art research, understanding is taken to be 'inductive' as opposed to 'deductive'. In other words understanding is *arrived at by or through experience*.

However unlike scientists, artists do not have clearly defined research tools nor widely accepted methodologies for practice.

De Certeau, (a French philosopher and Jesuit Priest) offers a valuable framework for thinking about the practice of art. What is refreshing about de Certeau's thinking is that he inverts the top-down model of cultural production and passive consumption to a bottom-up model of consumption as a form of production. In other words it is the way human beings in 'ordinary culture' or every day life appropriate and reuse objects, information, language and spaces - a kind of 'silent' or unseen production. De Certeau suggests that people who are deprived of power (the non-producers) in relation to the given or the 'proper' that is an 'institution' or 'discipline' behave tactically and this human quality of 'tactics' is a kind of survival instinct that can be traced back to something essentially primordial - to the 'tricks and disguises that certain fishes or plants execute with extraordinary virtuosity' (de Certeau 1984:40).

In the second volume of the *Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking* (translated into English in 1998) de Certeau along with his research colleagues, Giard and Mayol deepens the enquiry of 'culture as it is practiced'. De Certeau concludes this research outlines 'three priorities', 'orality', 'operativity' and 'ordinary' (De Certeau, Giard, L and Mayol, P 1998: . His project reinstates the private personal moments, the gestures and actions we all experience calling it 'the practical science of the singular'. In ordinary culture social exchanges (or transactions) can be 'an economy of the gift', technical invention can be 'an aesthetics of tricks' and moral resistance can be 'an ethics of tenacity' (de Certeau in Giard, 2003)

What de Certeau calls the 'operativity' of everyday practices has three aspects 'aesthetic', 'polemical' and 'ethical'

Of the aesthetic he says that it 'opens up a unique space within an imposed order'. It is a 'poetic gesture' which 'bends the use of (common) language to its own desire in a transforming reuse'.

The polemical aspect is 'relative to the power relations that structure the social field as well as the field of knowledge'. Here it is how we 'appropriate information for oneself (to) put it in a series, and (to) bend its montage to one's own taste. We do this by 'tracing one's own path' using 'barely visible or nameable operations'.

The third aspect, ethical, is where 'everyday practice patiently and tenaciously restores a space for play, an interval of freedom, a resistance to what is imposed (from a model, a system, or an order)' (De Certeau, 1998: 254-255).

While everyone is essentially creative what might constitute a critical artistic practice? De Certeau gives us some clues. Maybe artists are more self consciously aware in their practice of the aesthetic, polemical and ethical aspects. Maybe artists self consciously look for opportunities and make these aspects explicit through the processes and products they make. De Certeau offers a framework or a cultural logic - providing some tools to consider what an artistic process *could* involve.

A brief comparison between artists and scientists - the notion of 'visualisation'

In recent years there has been a huge increase in the interest of what might be called the interface between art and science. Fuelling this interest in the UK are relatively wealthy funding bodies notably the Wellcome Trust's 'SCI-ART' scheme (1998-), Art Catalyst (1993-), Gulbenkian Foundation's Programme 'Two Cultures' (1997-) and NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, 1998-). Comparisons between the practices of art and science have been drawn by numerous authors and this is a huge area of interest drawing on areas of cognitive science, experimental psychology, theories of perception and creativity etc.

Key authors would include Kemp (2000) who proposes 'a set of eight features which although they come from the world of science they are applicable to the world of art'. Wilson, in his encyclopedic sized title 'Information Arts: Intersections, Science, and Technology' (MIT, 2002), draws key similarities and differences between art and science. Elkins, from a visual cultural perspective (2002) analyses the 'domain' of visual imagery bringing together the 'vast array' of 'non-art' - often scientific imagery together with art imagery (1999).

Visualisation or how we understand the world in terms of making it visible could be as Ede (2000) suggest be 'sciences crowning glory' by modelling and formulating theories. The scientific method of visualisation - diagrams, MRI scans, telescopic images etc and art work are simply, as the science writer Dennet says, two different *kinds* of 'mind tools' (Dennet in Ede: 118).

There are *two crucial* similarities between practitioners in art and science.

Firstly, the perceptual level. Both disciplines require practitioners who are adept at 'visual thinking' a term coined to reinforce the fact that 'thinking and visualising are not mutually exclusive activities'. This kind of perception and understanding is believed to be 'quintessentially beyond logic and words' (Ede, 2000:75).

The second crucial similarity is the desire or need to make images at all. Both disciplines, as Kemp describes, have a 'desire to bring the unseen and unseeable into visual form', and both use 'model building as an essential aspect of understanding, in which the remaking of nature conducts a vital dialogue with what is seen.' (Kemp, 2000:178). Experimental scientists and experimental artists produce visual material which change the way we perceive the world. In other words they affect our 'intentionality' (Searle, 2000) or the way in which our conscious minds relate to the world. The DNA double helix and cubism are obvious examples.

A difference between the *use* of images in science to that of art is that while scientific images might be open to differences of opinion, the meaning is generally agreed in the wider scientific community. In science there are clearly defined languages. Visual communication is considered successful 'if creators and viewers share the same interpretation of what they are looking at' (Ede, 2000:74). While the same could be said of visual art, in broad theoretical terms - 'canons' or 'movements' within the discipline, arguably a quality of visual art is precisely the opposite. Visual art can provoke different interpretations, it can be intrinsically ambiguous.

Ede notes that pre 20th century scientists drew from 'the role of the observer's personal understanding, intuition and memory' but that this has been gradually 'replaced by more focused technical skills of reading and interpreting figures'. This 'dominant model for scientific knowledge thus dispensed with problematically ambiguous images and illustrations.' (ibid:75-76)

In contrast artists looking at scientific images 'tend to look 'offscreen'', on the edges or even the imagination. They are used to recognising that 'pictures' have depth, layers and multiple meanings because conceptual thinking plays as much, or more, of a part in seeing as simple visualising ... Suggesting alternative interpretations is the artist's natural way of working' (ibid: 61).

This sketch of key similarities and differences between the making and the use of visual material in science and art points to why there is much to be gained by working across and between the two disciplines.

I will now briefly describe my approach to art practice and then present some work I have done with geneticists.

My approach to art practice stems from my previous work as a graphic designer where I enjoyed the push and pull of different skills and personalities coming together and shaping the final outcome. For a long time (c 10 years)

this was bilingual (Gaelic/English) books and other printed materials. Instinctively almost, making art, or *making meaning in terms of art*, had to be a *shared process* between the artist and others.

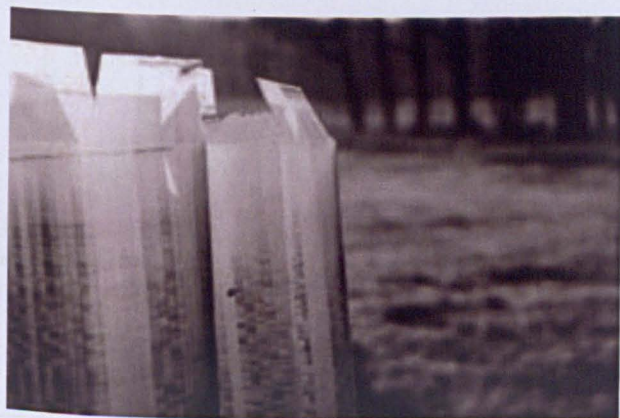
Just as an information or graphic design background is a reference for me, the world of science and their use of visual material is also an external reference as 'artist'. These disciplinary references (the polemical in terms of raising questions and contradictions) can provide a certain creative tension. Inter and cross disciplinary work offers the possibility for a richness of exchanges (dialogue, images etc). It is the differences as well as the similarities between methods and processes of producing and using visual material which can be a creative space for artists working with scientists.

Why work with geneticists?

The whole thing began because I was interested in notions of 'identity' especially Scottish iconography. Because two good friends are research scientists I began to understand a little about the science of genetics. I became fascinated by this 'other' world, their methods and interpretations at a research level and at a subject level. Currently in the media we seem continually to hear about new genetic developments which are raising social, cultural and ethical questions. Not surprisingly many visual artists are interested in genetics (e.g. Levy, 1996, Paradise Now Exhibition, 2000, www.GenomicArt.org)

Because the inspiration for the art work I was making came from genetics it was an obvious and natural step to approach and work with geneticists. I was fortunate in that a colleague introduced me to a clinical consultant geneticists which led to me meeting the whole group*. Because of what they do I felt an empathy towards their profession. As clinical consultants they are placed on the sharp edge between imparting complex scientific information and the fast changing biotechnology industry. Clearly they would be very informed, articulate and would be visually literate. As clinicians they use scientific diagrams and other visual tools to both interpret the results of a genetic test (for example in predictive testing) and they use visual materials to explain the results to their clients. With a background in design I appreciated the information and educational aspect of their profession.

My **intention** was that by working with them I could understand the science and what they do better. Most importantly their interpretations and insights to the artwork made could lead to new work.



Methodology: A conversational approach to making art

Making *meaning in terms of art* is understood as a process of **exchanges or transactions** between the artist and others.

The Process

I make prints, photographs and drawings and show this to the group of 4 people. Sometimes it's the whole group, other times the meetings are one to one. The images become the subject of conversation. This gives things to the geneticists and to me. In response to this I bring made and sourced things back to them and the conversation continues. Similarly the geneticists bring things to the table. This way of working is participatory in the sense artist plus others contribute to the development of the artwork. The process is reciprocal and is a shared experience of talking, thinking, sourcing and making.

Kinds of exchanges have been dialogues, e mails and also objects, books, introductions to other people and invitations to events.

These conversations are taped and transcribed and e mailed back to the geneticists. This is rather time consuming for me, but is a necessary part of the method, not simply in terms of accuracy of who said what, but it is part of the *reflective process* - to revisit the conversation. It is important to hear the conversation's 'vocal grain' (de Certeau 1984) - the hesitations, overlaps, interruptions, intonations and so on.

To date there have been three group meetings and a number of one-to-one meetings with the geneticists. These are usually about an hour and a half, after their working day in the Medical School where they work.

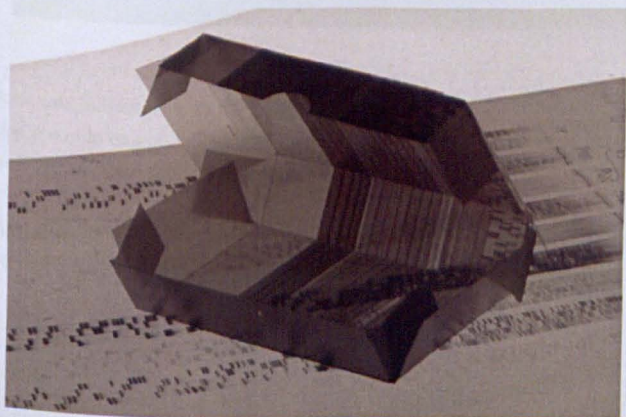
To illustrate the process I will trace one development.

Tracing an example of artwork developing

The previous images come from a set of 23 black and white photographs which were shown at a meeting with the geneticists (Shiela, Zosia, Astrid and John). These boxes are made from autoradiograms.



This is a method of visualising DNA, and what we see (above) is a genetic 'fingerprint' if you like. They look like large negatives. I took some of these cut them into templates and folded them into three-dimensional containers.



When I showed this to Sheila at an earlier meeting said it looked like 'Pandora's Box' – she gave it name or title. She went on to use an image of the box at a conference on Huntington's Disease, a genetic disorder.

This naming by Shiela and the strong metaphor of box led me make a more elegant shaped container and place these in different situations and photograph them. By re-contextualising the boxes they could take on different meanings or interpretations. I edited the photos to twenty three images, simply because that is the number of chromosomes we have, and called this set '*23 Genescapes*'.



In conversation with the group this image (Genescape No. 9) was described by Astrid as 'small lightening containers' or 'transmitting batteries'. Things which 'transmit knowledge'.



John saw buildings, with the DNA bands like windows in the Genescapes like No. 3 (above) and it was suggested that it would be good to joint with an architect and put the DNA pattern onto a building. Zosia also like the idea of buildings but she felt that there was a distinct lack of people in the artwork, something she would have preferred.

At the next meeting I took some collograph blocks. A printing technique I'd been working with for some time. Here the bands of DNA lie on top of the surface as it were. These DNA bands are like windows. There is also a

kind of gold light emitting from it. John particularly liked this and I explained that this image of 'windows' was connected to what he'd seen and spoken about in the Genescape images previously.



Serendipitously an opportunity to make artwork for a waiting room in a small rural hospital in Huntly came about through someone seeing the work I'd made with the geneticists. I am currently working with staff there.

This opportunity could extend or open out the 'audience' by working with the medical staff there, and possibly the 'general public' – the patients or visitors. This way of working can be thought of as building a 'constituency'. Lacy suggests that some artists develop or build a 'constituency' in terms of audience and suggests that this could involve a 'juxtaposition', or bringing a diverse group of people into the 'structure of the work', to listen to other 'voices' (1995:35).

With this approach, unlike the tradition of making art objects and placing it in the public domain (e.g. gallery or museum) in a fairly *anonymous* way, the artwork can be developed with others and can bring more people into the process as the work develops. For me this seems like a natural way of working, graphic designers would almost always work with other people from a mixture of 'disciplines' or backgrounds.

Analysis

To understand where the value of my approach to art making lies I refer back to de Certeau's tools or framework for thinking about everyday practices, specifically 'operativity' – how we operate. (de Certeau 1998)

The ethical aspect

Something said about the art process by Shiela when we were working together as a group is interesting. She said '*what's fun about this in a way is learning about each other but also learning about ourselves because this is encouraging us to say and think things that normally we don't.*' This connects to the ethical aspect of practice where art can 'restore a space for play, an interval of freedom, a resistance to what is imposed (from a model, a system, or an order)'.

Because we were working across disciplines we had to use ordinary language in the sense that it was less technical, but the interpretations and ideas discussed around the artwork in a conversational way meant people commented on, disagreed, interrupted, added to, thought of something else, related their own stories or a reflection on an

image, made suggestions, and made connections with other things they'd seen. The dialogues were 'multilayered' and could shoot off in 'unplanned directions' (Jacobs 1998:19). Particularly when we worked as a group people had the chance to voice their views to, as de Certeau describes, 'establish distance, to defend the autonomy of what comes from one's own personality.'

The aesthetic aspect

Sheila's naming of the artwork – 'Pandora's Box' was her appropriating meaning for herself. By giving it a name or a title she '**transformed**' the object. She later asked me if she could show Pandora's Box to an audience of scientists at a conference. In Greek mythology when the box was opened by Pandora all the evils of the world flew out. The last thing to remain in the box was hope. At this international conference the artwork shown in a Power Point projection functioned as a kind of '**a poetic gesture**' by Sheila.

I understood that where and how artwork is shown is not necessarily predetermined by the artist. Later Sheila was asked by her local church group to give a talk on genetics and ethics in the local church hall. Here she used the image again and here I saw how it could work for her - this time with a lay audience. Sheila introduced her role as a consultant geneticist as that of giving people information about genetics, (in this talk as in her daily practice), and this giving of scientific information aims to empower people so they can make their own informed decisions or choices.

The Pandora Box image used towards the end of her talk **left a kind of opening**. As an 'illustration' it pointed to how new genetic disorders are continually being discovered and that there is always hope for new cures or the alleviation of suffering. But the image also acted as accent on a deeper level too. After the talk there was much discussion from the audience ranging from biotechnologies involvement in genetic research, to, where in the life cycle researchers could use cells from foetally derived material. Sheila was comfortable with research into stem cells but there was a developmental point where she drew a line. She emphasized the fact that all of us - 'not just the scientists' are responsible for the future of genetic science - in terms of what we find acceptable and unacceptable. Sheila made it clear that her hope was that research scientists would respond ethically to the pressures of the biotechnology industry and that we all have a part in determining how this industry conducts itself. Seen in this light Pandora's Box pointed less to the fact of new medical advancements but to the hope that by giving people accurate and clear information about genetics (as in this talk) the general public can and should make up their own minds on what acceptable genetic research and its applications might be. In other words, for us all to share in the debate and responsibility of how the field of human genetics develops in the future.

The polemical aspect

On a broad level as artist I draw from a number of disciplines or 'institutions' in my practice – graphic design, visualisation in science and visual art. In this space I 'appropriate information', I 'put it in a series' and 'bend' the 'montage' to suit my 'own taste'. An obvious visual example was the use of the autoradiograms. These 23 *Genescapes* suggested alternative interpretations (understood by the responses by the geneticists) and as such raised (or pointed to) different questions or issues relating to genetics e.g. the relationship between nature and nurture, hereditary aspects. Another dimension of the polemical is that my work is usually seen outside the traditional or institutional art space of 'gallery' - in meeting rooms, at biotechnology trade shows, corridors in hospitals and church halls for example.



For example in this image (above) I responded to an invitation by John to show work at a Scottish Genetics Meeting. I called this series of digital prints 'Inheritance' (a kind of tartan DNA) which was displayed outside the room where the meeting took place - in the corridor of the Maternity Hospital at Foresterhill,

This polemical aspect is also interesting from an epistemological/methodological perspective. What practice led art research must try to do is articulate the 'tracing (of) one's own path' which operates through what de Certeau calls 'barely visible or nameable operations'. One problem in my research is simply the lack of language to describe artistic *process*, something my PhD research is grappling with. Another problem is how to evidence or see the 'hidden' productions, which can be subtle things such as the way the collograph blocks were touched and 'read', or how humour and playfulness has been a quality of the art process experience. These fragmentary 'moments' of engagement are very important but difficult to articulate meaningfully.

By way of a conclusion

I define the method I'm using – conversations in and around developmental art objects – as a 'visual dialogue'. Making meaning is thus understood as a *dialogic process*, where meanings unfold through time. In this sense 'meaning' in terms of visual art is like meaning in conversation, it is not fixed or closed but is 'multilayered' and 'provisional' (Jacobs, 1998:19). Brenson notes that the important qualities of conversation are that it is 'open', 'fluid', and he stresses the 'importance of listening' (Brenson in Jacobs 1997:). He draws a direct parallel between the experience of encountering art objects and the inter-subjective conversational experience:

'Conversation, at its fullest, illuminates the aesthetic. It can generate an aesthetic experience that may not be as self-contained and therefore as physical as one's encounters with painting and sculpture, but it can take on a comparable resonance and eventually may inhabit the same region of the imagination. Like the give-and-take between viewer and a painting or sculpture, conversation of the profoundest kind depends upon, and therefore draws out, virtues like attentiveness, goodness, generosity, and commitment. It also makes each person who partakes of it feel part of something larger than his or her individual self.' (ibid:125)

I believe visual art in particular to be a special way of having a conversation and that the art process can open a space to think, to speak and to act differently in our everyday lives. While the art object can act as a catalyst for thinking, what is valuable to me as artist is the nature of conversation, or 'conversation at its fullest' having recognised (felt) in the geneticists some of the qualities which Brenson points to.

I would like to thank the staff at The Medical School, Foresterhill, Aberdeen for their participation and support in this work.

*Heather Delday 19th September 2003, Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen
PhD student 2001-*

(This paper is a slightly revised version of a presentation 'Genescapes: visualisation and value finding' given at the International Visual Sociology Association Conference 'Images of Social Life', Southampton University, 8th-10th July 2003)

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Appendix 7: List of meetings and transcribed conversations with the geneticists

Group meeting I. Proposal to work together Dec 2002. **(Proposal given to them)**

Group meeting II with geneticists, 7th February 2003 at 5.00pm, Foresterhill, Aberdeen).

Transcript of a conversation around 23 *Genescapes* (23 black and white photos).

Notes and reflections on *Inheritance* exhibition for the Scottish Geneticists Conference, Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, MacGillvaray Centre, Feb 7th 2003 (Inheritance as logo)
(Report + key quotes from responses)

Group meeting III with Geneticists, 24th March 2003 *Half Price Sale* and *Cascade* (Sheila and John bring things to the table). **(Transcript)**

E mail the group a quote from Mazia:

The gifts of microscopes to our understanding of cells and organism is so profound that one has to ask: What are the gifts of the microscopist? Here is my opinion. The gift of the great microscopist is the ability to THINK WITH THE EYES AND SEE WITH THE BRAIN. Deep revelations into the nature of living things continue to travel on beams of light.

(Daniel Mazia, U.C. Berkeley cell biologist, shortly before his death in 1996. From Microscopy Society of America, see <http://www.msa.microscopy.com/ProjectMicro/QuotesMicroscopes> (downloaded Jan 03)

24th March 2003

Plan for Meeting III with geneticists at Foresterhill, Aberdeen with
Key thoughts from the discussion at meeting Two (Feb 4th 2003)

Thoughts and feedback on Shiela's presentation *Changing Genes: Do we have planning permission?*
25th March 2003, Kemnay Church Hall, Church of Scotland, Working Education Group, church fellowship. **Notes from her presentation, with key quotes** (I give her feedback plus references from photo library to add to her presentation)

31st March 2003, 6.00pm. First one to one meeting with Astrid at her home **(Transcript + introduced to her friends Morton and Tina)** *'One Litre of the soul'*. *Suggestion to make Inheritance life sized*

First Sheila one to one meeting 11th April 2003

We are in the coffee room sitting at a small table at the Medical School. It is a Friday at 5.00pm and Shiela has just finished work. **(Transcript)**

First One to one with Zosia, at the hospital, her room after work

16th April 2003 **(Transcript)**

Second one to one meeting with Astrid at her home, 8th December 2003 **(Transcript)**

Show her new artwork 'Sea creatures' or 'Various Species of Industrial Waste'

Telephone conversation with Astrid, 7th January 2004 9.00 pm **(Report on content)**

Astrid visit to my home (Lower Ingliston) Saturday 24th January 2004. **(Report on content and key quotes)**

Meeting with Astrid, Littlejohns, Schoolhill, Aberdeen, Saturday 7th Feb 2004
(Report on content)

E mailed *Genescapes: visualisation and value finding* paper to them all. This is approved and then post paper copy to Shiela, John, Zosia and Astrid (5th March 2004)

6th March e mail feedback from Sheila thanking me for the Genescapes paper which she 'found very interesting'

Sun 14th March Phone call feedback from Astrid and shows me new books on genetics and on knitting

30th April 04 Second one to one Sheila (show her tartan DNA silks suggestion to have an ongoing exhibition in their new premises Argyle House and she will ask the others. Also tells me Pandora's Box used by another scientist and she 'thought it would be good for my CV' and asks me to attend her talk.

Wed 9th June 2004 *Interference*

Go to IMS building to hear Sheila's talk on ethics to the PhD's students of human genetics. Meeting cancelled at last minute (one hour before hand). Take silks across to leave one with Sheila. This leads to new artwork – *Interference*

Sheila tells me there is no language to discuss human genetics apart from legal terms

26th July 2004 Astrid conversation in cafe with new neck pieces (sea) from Maakin Lab (Taped)

Astrid says '*Beauty allows me to engage with the world*' and describes 'empathy' as 'recognising the signs, the opposite of autistic'

Appendix 8: Douglas, Delday and Fremantle: The Dynamic of the Edge: practice led research into the value of the arts in marginal spaces

This paper is a slightly adapted version of

Douglas, A., Fremantle, C. and Delday, H. (2004)

The Dynamic of the Edge: practice led research into the value of the arts in marginal spaces.
In: 'Sensuous Knowledges', National Academy of Art Bergen, 26-28 October 2004, Solstrand,
Norway. Published on website

http://www1.khib.no/index.php/khib_en/ku_fou/konferanser_seminarer/papers_fra_sensuous_knowledge_creating_a_tradition

Abstract

This paper traces the development of multiple creative strategies to enhance our understanding of land and occupancy in the village of Lumsden, Aberdeenshire. The approach embraces a number of different individual perspectives and experiences of social change. This is one project within a major AHRC funded research programme in Northern Scotland – the On the Edge research. This research investigates the value of contemporary visual art practices in rural/remote contexts with a view to informing the creative potential of marginal spaces. Within *Inthrow*, one of five projects, the visual tools become a poetic means to re imagine the present within a long timescale stretching from the Neolithic to the future. This timescale frames issues of land stewardship. The paper concludes that knowledge of different practices; artistic, agricultural, archaeological and those of everyday life are not static but dynamic, enabling us to reveal and shape change as agents.

1. Positioning

This paper articulates an approach to art and design practice that questions two fundamental assumptions

- It is *not* framed by the creative practice of an individual artist delivering an authored artwork to a public or audience.
- It involves, in a creative process, people who do not necessarily or readily define themselves as creative in relation to their everyday life.

The practice of individual artists will be discussed in relation to how they operate as one of a group of people. Creative practice is developed as a vehicle for engaging a range of people (artists and non artists, researchers and non researchers, professionals and lay people) in the development of a set of experiences. These experiences are different ways of responding to change. They demonstrate the act of forming and reforming community in response to the push and pull of everyday life. The research and related projects form the conditions for a different set of exchanges between the players who together alter perceptions of what is possible.

In developing an effective relationship between the artistic process and culture, the paper aims to contribute to understanding sustainability. One of the key characteristics of sustainability is resilience *within* (different from a luddite resistance to) cultural change. Resilience in this sense means having the capacity to retain a degree of integrity, self organization and self awareness by engaging a process of finding value in the constant flux of everyday life.

Another key characteristic of sustainability that is relevant to the On the Edge research programme and to this project, INTHROW, is the development of a rich mixed ecology through multiple creative strategies. INTHROW is one of five projects within the programme. This rich mixed ecology relates specifically to a fundamental positioning within this work of not relying on artists to be the sole creator, and positively engaging a range of people in creative endeavour.

The paper will focus on process or tactics, as opposed to output or goals. It will attempt to draw out from the experiences that are constructed as a key part of the research, their significance to giving aesthetic form to everyday experience. Research and artistic practice come together to address a 'gap' in knowledge articulated by Michel De Certeau.

"We know poorly of the types of operations at stake in ordinary practices, their registers and their combinations, because our instruments of analysis, modelling and formalisation were constructed for other objects and with other aims." (de Certeau et al 1998: 256)¹

Through the project, INTHROW, the paper describes tools and methods and their use by different artists. These tools and methods reveal aspects of the world in a particular way by engaging the senses. The paper shows how traditional knowledge is significant as a point of resistance by engaging multiple hands, eyes and minds in shared strategies.

The research provides grounded case study material of how art practice operates within culture, rather than operating in isolation – the isolation of academic practice as well as artistic practice. The research is trying to take practice somewhere different from the modernist paradigm of the individual as creative genius set apart from everyday life. It is also trying to move beyond the fragmentation of meaning and relativity of values of postmodernism. The research invests in a principal of a 'local aesthetic'², making art with people at the interstice of what is known and comfortable and what is unknown and challenging.

2. Arts practice, formal research and the wider cultural context – How does the On the Edge research articulate this relationship?

On the Edge (OTE) is a three year research programme funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) (2001-4). It is one of a small handful of large research grant projects in Britain that circumnavigates the tight relationship between individual practice and research by framing and investigating shared questions across a number of interested parties.

2.1 The research question

The OTE research tests the assumption that visual arts of quality can be developed in remote rural areas and that this development is different from more dominant models of practice that are urban based, such as gallery and public art practices. OTE sets out to understand this difference as an expression of values (as opposed to skill or gap in opportunity or provision). OTE came out of a series of ad hoc projects in the visual arts with remote rural partners that sensitized us to the kinds of assumptions that the visual arts make³. Through our discomfort with these assumptions we framed the following deceptively simple questions in relation to current forms of art production

- What is made?
- Who makes?
- Who are the audience or beneficiaries?
- Who judges quality?

¹ De Certeau, M, Giard, L, Mayol, P (1998) *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 2: Living and Cooking* Edited by Luce Giard, trans. by T. J. Tomasik, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis (Originally published as *L'invention du quotidien, II, habiter, cuisiner*, copyright 1994 Editions Gallimard.

² 'Introduction to Volume 1: History of a Research Project', by Luce Gaiard, was originally published as the Introduction to *L'invention du quotidien, I, arts de faire*, copyright 1990 by Editions Gallimard)

³ Inglis, F., (2004) *Culture and Affection: The love of art and the meaning of home* Seminar paper at Gray's School of Art 23.6.04

³ These happened over a period of seven years 1994-2001

2.2 The research methodology

The research team, experienced artist researchers⁴, invited each of the five partner organisations⁵ into a sustained conversation about how they would like to use the opportunity that the research presented. Intuitively we started to build the projects within key challenges offered up by the project partners, as an opportunity to open up new ways in which the visual arts could become operative. These ways work across social relationships operating as a bridge between academe and non academic worlds, between the project partners and the communities in which they are located, between the professional art sector and other cultural organizations, between global networks and local communities, between professional expertise and the knowledge of vernacular that comes from dwelling in a particular place, knowing through dwelling.

Within this space we both create and critically reflect on projects as a set of experiences that are designed to address the shared questions. Action and critical thinking form part of a single, focused process of development. In part the work of the shared space is generative and experiential – the development of five visual art projects sited in five different remote rural places in Northern Scotland. In part the work is reflective through a spine of workshops that keeps the research relevant to itself. The project benefits from the role of critical friend through the work of Francois Matarasso, cultural policy researcher, whose role is that of contributing to the critical thinking, and facilitating events such as the workshops and gatherings.

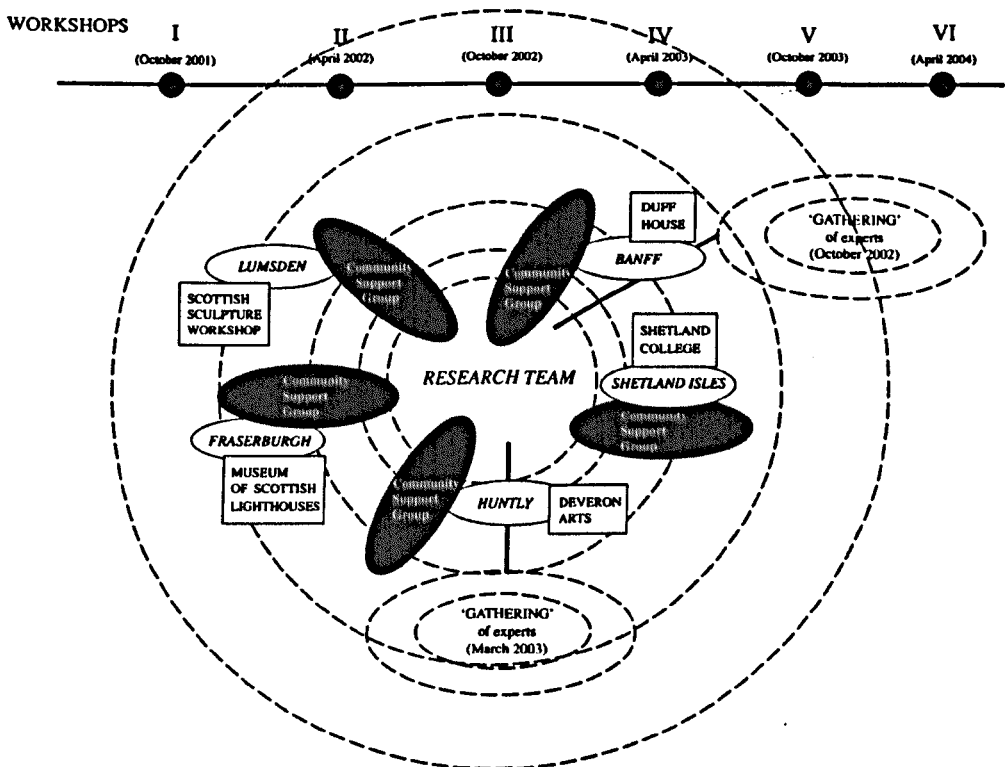


Fig 1 OTE Network

⁴ Practice-led research is a space to be creative and reflective. The researcher both makes situations and makes sense of the experiences in rigorous ways by evolving practice and critical language together.

⁵ Scottish Sculpture Workshop; Duff House, outstation of the National Galleries of Scotland in Banff; Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, Fraserburgh; Shetland College, on the Shetland Islands; and Deveron Arts in Huntly.

Each project is documented and evaluated through a series of 'soundings' at strategic points involving participants as well as external advisors. The output is across a range of contemporary visual art practice (e.g. conventional painting, performance, broadcast) as well as formal academic papers.

The quality of the shared space counters the trend towards 'increased academization and professionalisation that characterize the aesthetic field today'⁶. These different individuals come together within a level playing field that is serious as opposed to professional, self critical before accountable.

It might be tempting to view the work of *On the Edge* as socially engaged. We have resisted being labelled in this way. We have suspended judgment about styles of working and related belief systems. We have resisted applying a formula to circumstances. We have not looked for deficiency as a focal point or defined the role of art as problem finding or problem solving. The challenges that we have engaged with have had aesthetic, cultural and social dimensions. We are primarily interested in the intrinsic value of making art, but define this as being different from the intrinsic value of the artist.

2.3 The research context

It is increasingly clear that rural Scotland is challenged by issues not dissimilar to post industrial urban contexts. In particular, the interdependency between work and culture and the impact of change in work on that relationship is as significant in rural areas, as in urban. For example within the INTHROW project a key participant, Pat Dunn, retired as the last full time tenant farmer within a village traditionally focused by agriculture. This provided a significant moment that indicated a shift from an economy and way of life based singularly on agriculture to one based on multiple sources – an issue that the project sought to focus.

It is worth noting that the authors, Douglas and Fremantle lived in the village of Lumsden. The project artist or architect, Gavin Renwick, in many respects brought in the perspective of 'the outsider' to complement those of the 'insider', acting as an architect to a set of strategies that were shared. The issues of the project brought together different perspectives: those of farmers with professional artists and administrators, historians and researchers. The strategies also brought together young people and retired people. The dynamic of interaction between inside and outside perspectives holds in tension the process of forming and reforming community on a daily basis.

OTE encounters the rural not through the notion of arcadia, but as having in common processes of change experienced by individuals in relation to different ways of living. The methodologies of the artwork in an urban context are not necessarily transferable to a rural context in which there is no conventional infrastructure to support them such as gallery, museum or public square. Within this research, rurality and the urban are not the issues *per se*. It is marginalisation, change and value that are key. In realizing the projects, the urban/rural polarity has become displaced by a different positioning that is neither urban nor rural but a new context for working in which the arts are integral to everyday experience, and not an extraneous component or commodity.

2.4 The geographical location of the project INTHROW

INTHROW is one of five projects within the *On The Edge* Research programme. INTHROW is centred around the village of Lumsden. Lumsden is located 55 kilometres due west of Aberdeen, between two sets of hills – the Ladder Hills, foothills of Cairngorms, and Coreen Hills. This is otherwise known as 'God's own country'.

⁶ The outline description for the *Sensuous Knowledge Conference*, Bergen 2004

Living in the NE of Scotland

The North East of Scotland has been inhabited for more than 3,000 years. Evidence of that inhabitation is visible everywhere.⁷ This part of Scotland was relatively isolated until 19th century, although it has a University founded in 1496 and the Romans made incursions into the area. Historically Scotland was well connected with Europe and France in particular. The North East of Scotland also had, and continues to have, many connections with Scandinavia and the Baltic. For example, the harbour town of Portsoy on the north coast was for a period part of the Hanseatic League.

The locale is characterized by a distinct dialect and a strong traditional culture of music and song. The dialect, 'the Doric', is a type of Scots and is particularly strong in the rural parts such as Lumsden. INTHROW is in fact a Doric word meaning, according to the dictionary, "right through, in the heart of" for example, 'towards a fireside'. For a considerable period 'the Doric' was banned from schools, and it is only recently that the cultural significance of the vernacular language has been recognized.

The village of Lumsden is located in Strathbogie (literally valley of the river Bogie) in the centre of Aberdeenshire. It has a population of approximately 300, and is a construct of agricultural improvements in early 19th century. It is one of a significant number of planned villages in the North East of Scotland – villages laid out and constructed on 'greenfield' sites – from the late 18th and early 19th century. The village was laid out by the landowner of Clova Estate, a member of the Lumsden family, in 1820s. Prior to that scattered farm settlements characterised the area. The human impact of these changes are manifest within cultural forms such as Bothy Ballads. These are a unique form in the North East of Scotland, and one of the richest ballad traditions in the UK⁸. Bothy Ballads express in songs the loves, lives and hardships of people living and working on the land.



Fig.2 Linear Concentration

The process of creating 'planned villages' forms part of the narrative of agricultural improvement and the industrialization of cities. Very significant changes to patterns of inhabitation in Scotland were taking place at this time. These included the Highland Clearances. In fact there were significant lowland clearances as well. Lumsden is part of that history. Employment has traditionally been in farming, mostly working for tenant farmers or

⁷ For example there are large numbers of stone monuments from different periods: bronze age stone circles of a specific type (recumbent) that only otherwise occur in the South West of Ireland; iron age Pictish 'symbol stones' carved with pagan and Christian images, in some cases on the same stone; and iron age hill forts with vitrified stone ramparts.

⁸ See work of Francis Childe in recording ballads across UK

directly for estates. Bear in mind that rural Scotland is characterised by a few individuals owning huge tracts of land. The area surrounding Lumsden is divided into three estates that own everything you can see.



Fig. 3 Ancient Security

2.5 What kind of opportunity did the On the Edge research framework provide?

The development of OTE created a formal framework within which to explore the two core dimensions mentioned at the beginning. It provided a framework in which to evolve coherent and critical activities against clearly articulated questions. The framework was flexible and open, founded on enquiry rather than production, and this supported experimentation. OTE offered a research opportunity to the project partners. They reciprocated by offering up an issue, desire or challenge that we all believed would form an art project that addressed both their needs and the research aims.

3. Imagine Lumsden: raising the case for change

The Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW) had an economic relationship with the village, but no significant engagement in the community, nor did the community feel any ownership of the organisation. Many artists came to Lumsden, some explored, some made friendships. The relationship with the community was unclear. Aspects of the organisation were valued, but other aspects were completely opaque.

As Director (1996-2003), Chris Fremantle was faced with the need to make the organisation relevant, both to a new generation of artists, and to its circumstances and context. It was significant that other parties were also interested in the dialogue about the role of sculpture in the landscape, the role of the arts in rural areas, and the role of culture in regeneration⁹. The location of the organisation was identified as one of its strengths. This identification came through discussion and project activity with artists and researchers. Artists commented that the location was unusual in providing such easy access to a landscape of considerable diversity¹⁰. Increasingly this moved to the forefront, becoming a more significant attraction than the 'site for manufacturing objects'.

⁹ Thinkglobal, Cumbria College of Art and Design, 2000, published 2001 ISBN 1 85850 182 2

¹⁰ unpublished interview with John Hunter 1998

The discourse of 'site specificity' in the visual arts was very significant in this process. It was and is critical to the understanding of contemporary practice, but it also provided a pivotal concept for organisational reflection. Site specificity is an idea that enables artists to engage directly with circumstances.¹¹ It can be a form of political statement, and it can be formulaic. But when the organisation begins to think about its relationship to a location in terms of site specificity, then this brings to bear a range of complex issues and certainly engages the organisation in thinking about sustainability as more than financial security.

SSW became increasingly focused on the development of the artist, rather than merely supporting the production of work. Fremantle began to diversify the programme seeking to position the organisation not as a 'sculpture workshop' but as a 'cultural organisation' with a 'specialisation in sculpture'. The organisation moved to focus on the role as an international residency centre – a location for engaging with culture.

In parallel with this developmental trajectory a long term dialogue developed with Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen. As an academic organisation, the Art School through its research was seeking to redefine its academic role by developing relationships with non academic partners within the region, developing new thinking about the role of the artist within culture and the significance of this role to the education of the artist.



Fig 4. Imagine Lumsden

Ideas were tested through a number of SSW projects. One of the key projects took place in 1998 and was entitled 'Owergaeing'¹². This project was formative to Fremantle's thinking and also brought him into a working relationship with Renwick who later became 'the artist' in INTHROW.¹³

¹¹ Kwon, M (2002) *One Place after Another* MIT This book "seeks to reframe site specificity as cultural mediation of broader social, economic and political processes that organise urban life and urban space" p3 Kwon views the arts as an ideological system that is framed and sustained by a network of interrelated spaces and economies, studio, museum, art market, art criticism. The developments in SSW pick up on the notion of site specificity as a node of multiple transactions across different individuals and qualities of experiences – aesthetic, ethical, social, political and economic.

¹² 'Owergaeing', the artists, SSW, 1999, ISBN 0 952 8901 2 9

¹³ Renwick's practice involves aspects of art, design and architecture. His undergraduate degree is in architecture and his PhD is in fine art very much within the context of practice-led research. The PhD was focused on the cultural dimension of inhabitation of land in the context of the First Nation land claims in the Canadian North West¹³. He is currently recipient of an AHRB Fellowship to pursue post doctoral research.

4. Raising the project brief

One of the key focal points of Fremantle's programme at SSW was land, and this was carried into On The Edge. Marginal rural land that is no longer used for agriculture tends to become a prime site for housing in rural Aberdeenshire leading to developments that are an urbanisation of rural space. The core group within the project development started to question the assumptions underpinning 'development' in these terms and to play with the notion of the symbolic value of re-appropriating land from the private into the public domain. How might this happen? What would it mean as an expression of different values? Who would be involved in the revaluing? This questioning had come about through long relationship and deep understanding of place by the authors and by drawing others, such as Renwick, into the discussion.

4.1 What do you do with a field?

A provisional title of the project was 'What do you do with a field?' and a brief was prepared. The brief focused the project on the issue of marginal rural land¹⁴.

On looking back at the brief the emphasis was not purely visual – "In describing our approach as visual it is not our intention to suggest that we are simply seeking an aesthetic response to the problem. Rather, whilst the aesthetic has a role to play, we are seeking to develop a visual method for imaginative thinking about potential uses of marginal rural land which addresses a number of key issues" (INTHROW brief 2002) Reflecting later at one of the OTE Soundings Renwick commented "the briefs were an opening gambit". The brief, as in all On The Edge projects, was developed in discussion with the artist.

4.2 The artist's response to the brief – a proposition in three key stages

Renwick responded to the brief in the form of a visual document¹⁵ incorporating evidence, strategic thinking and tactics. This document was prepared following a period of work on the project and was not an immediate response to a brief in any conventional way. Rather this document sought to consolidate initial findings into a three staged process intended to motivate people to common concerted action for change.

In the document Renwick lays out a context for the work linking it to the literary traditions of the twentieth century¹⁶ that placed regionalism and the creative use of vernacular at the heart of creative practice. The introduction goes on to establish the link between land and culture.

From these 'first principles' a programme is set out that positions the experience of living in Lumsden in the present within an expanded timeframe. This stretched from the Neolithic through to the present and into the future anticipating new forms of land stewardship.

¹⁴ "This project is intended to explore one particular issue: the value and potential of marginal rural land for public use. ... We intend to place priority on new and imaginative thinking about the value and potential public and community uses of this land. We believe that this issue is of general importance to rural communities, and relates to issues raised by the Scottish Executive in *Designing Places: A Policy Statement for Scotland*, 2001.

The key issues are

- the need for approaches which enhance the visual character of the landscape and the settlement;
- the need for public space which is valuable to a range of ages and interests within a community;
- the need to generate effective models of public ownership which prioritise local democracy and empowerment;

the need to create a sustainable future for the land and communities." (INTHROW Brief, May 2002)

(INTHROW Brief, May 2002)

¹⁵ Inthrow (What to do with a field?) February 2003, Summary of Intentions revised July 2003.

¹⁶ With particular reference to the Scottish writers Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid developed a language for writing that has been described as synthetic Scots. It is developed from spoken language.

Folk, Work, Place – a research tool

Renwick's methodology draws on the work of Patrick Geddes (1854 - 1932). Geddes, Professor of Botany at Edinburgh University, was particularly concerned with the natural environment and town planning. He evolved a framework based on the concepts of 'work', 'place' and 'folk' corresponding to the historical, geographical and spiritual aspects of the city and thereby enabled planning to be approached in a complex way, as a spiritual and a cultural phenomenon.

Renwick has been working for more than 6 years with the Dogrib, a first nation tribe in the Canadian North West on their land claim to the Canadian Government. This has involved developing a means of evidencing the cultural relationship between nomadic people and the landscape they inhabit. This process has also specifically involved Renwick in the relationship between the cultural and the environmental. The nature of home as a process rather than a place, and the articulation of the concept of home as a landscape rather than a building have been central to Renwick's work.

"On Dogrib land culture is part of daily life, indeed life is interwoven into the fabric of the whole day. While on the land 'work' is neither compressed into prescribed hours or spatially isolated." (Renwick, 2004)

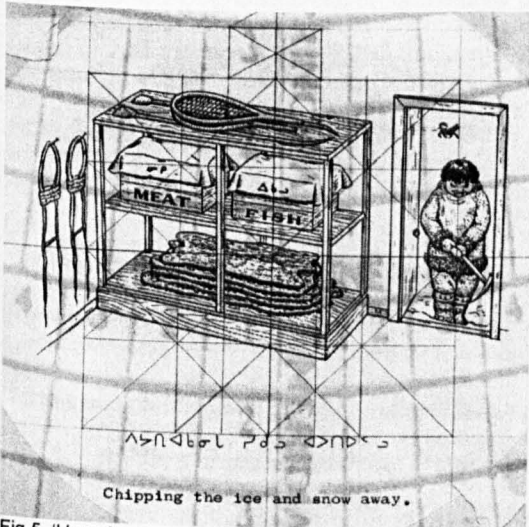


Fig 5. 'Home'
(from 'HOME: the outpost of progress, Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Spacex Gallery, Exeter, Devon, 2001)

INTHROW (hearth or home as key metaphor)

INTHROW (Doric for 'towards a fireside'), also became a key metaphor within Renwick's proposition for Lumsden. The concept of hearth is significant within the traditional cultures of the world, and is also significant in the culture of the North East of Scotland,

"In the bush the hearth is the fulcrum around which traditional extended family groupings arrange both their domestic structures and social activity. People come and go between different hearths all the time. The camp is therefore a multi-centred communal place where interior and exterior spaces are not necessarily perceived as separate..."¹⁷

Renwick returns time and again in his work to the concept of hearth. He proposes its exploration in a number of ways. Within INTHROW it is a key generative metaphor and also

¹⁷ Renwick, G., 2001 *Home: The Outpost of Progress, Spacex Gallery and Visual Research Centre, University of Dundee.*

a proposed point of action.¹⁸ It establishes a form of 'aesthetic production' drawing different individuals into conversations and activities (such as revisiting peat cutting or walking within the surrounds of Lumsden) that are linked by their relationship to values of dwelling.

In conversation with Pat Dunn

Gavin Renwick (GR): See, when you thought of home, what did you think of? Did you think of the house, or did you think of farm, the land?

Pat Dunn: Ah well, partly both, you thought of the house too, but the fairm was your living you see.

GR: In Canada, the Dogrib very much think of their land as their home – homeland – as opposed to the house.

PD: Well, I suppose the land would have been first, ken.

GR: That's what always came first?

PD: Well that was your living. You had to have the land in good nick to get the good crops.

Renwick identified the importance of developing work in Scotland as a mirror to the work in the Canadian North West. He commented on the relevance of post-colonial thinking to Scotland's new nationhood under devolution in parallel to the Dogrib land claim. The 'right to roam' legislation in Scotland parallels the change in the understanding of land ownership required for the Dogrib land claim. Community buy-outs of estates, particularly taking place in the west of Scotland, parallels the Dogrib negotiation with the Canadian Government for the return of their traditional lands. The traditional knowledge, intangible heritage, and culturally oriented processes developed by Renwick are critically relevant in both contexts.

Renwick's role in the project is in part framed by coming into the community (of researchers as well as of inhabitants) and partly framed by relating the circumstances in the North East of Scotland to those in the Canadian North West.

Valuing traditional knowledge in revealing change – tools and methods

Renwick's creative practice places traditional knowledge at the heart of the sustainability of a rural community within its environment. The focus of his work has been to reveal and value traditional knowledge and to use it as a tool with polemic as well as aesthetic dimensions¹⁹. To this end he identified a number of methods including

- A. the development of a living archive for the village**
- B listening and foregrounding key vernacular terms in the Doric language that articulated relationships between dwellers and their land**
- C the development of a visual tool – the 'Summary of Human Settlement: Cultural Continuity in Strathbogie' that connected current patterns of inhabitation with six visible phases of inhabitation of the same landscape in the past (from the Megalithic to the present)**

¹⁸ Returning to the document 'INTHROW (What do you do with a field)' the 'short term' items include, 'Design of two initial 'hearths', one replacing the village bus stop and intended primarily for the youth, one sited at a deserted clachan/fermtoun within walking distance of Lumsden. ('The distance between two points is measured in memories'.) In 'medium term' the next stages are iterated, 'Construction of hearths with the aid of youth club members', and 'Inauguration of hearths with an oral tradition programme including: Wullie Patrie and his local student'; Arthur Watson, artist; Frieda Morrison, traditional singer; Norman Shaw, artist and DJ; with the Lumsden Youth Club. Again there is a mixing of communities between artists and locals.

¹⁹ The recognition of these qualities has been enabled by the work of Heather Delday whose Ph.D research, forms part of, and contributes to the OTE initiative. She develops an analytical tool offered by Michel de Certeau, which draws together the aesthetic, the polemical and the ethical dimensions of practice. Delday, H., Dec 2004 *Close as a contract to critically investigate the relationship between the artist and the everyday* unpublished thesis The Robert Gordon University

D *enabling other artists, researchers and dwellers to engage with the different artistic tactics and take these further by involving their own skills, minds and imaginations in the discussion of land*²⁰.

A. *the development of a living archive for the village*

A living archive of traditional knowledge would take in the work already done including interviews, surveys and the artwork made by the project participants in response to circumstances. The point is not to initiate a local history society or museum for the area²¹, but rather to develop a stimulus for creativity.

B *Listening and the Vernacular*

Underpinning the concept of the archive, one key area of work developed by Renwick is around language and in particular to the Doric. Generally in Scotland there is a traditional salutation 'may your lum always reek' which roughly translates as 'may you always have a warm fire'. Edinburgh is known as 'Auld Reekie' because of the smoke. Renwick identified that within the community of older people frequent reference was made to 'there's nae reekin' lums', a crucial indicator of change for Renwick. It is also linked to the key generative metaphor of the 'hearth'. The expression is used in day to day conversation by older members of the population

Pat Dunn, Wullie Cowe again in conversation with authors over the valley, now empty of individual inhabitants.

Pat Dunn: " There was folk in Old Toon... There was a gerdner (gardner) at Clova. He stayed in the old house at the steading. There was Bogmoor and all... My granfether long ago had Bogmoor. He didna stay there. He had the grazing.

Wullie Cowe: I mine (remember) old Jimmie Davis at Cairn Gar. He said he mine 17 reekin lums across the brae face... 17 reeking lums (said with emphasis and surprise).

The expression refers to the change in patterns of inhabitation. In living memory houses, now derelict, scattered all over the valley floor and sides, were inhabited. On a still day smoke would be seen rising (reekin) from chimneys (lums). The spread of inhabitation over the land was a function of the land use pattern. This distributed population was involved in employment on the land, in farming and estate work. Now it is consolidated into the village. Of course a significant proportion of the houses in the village also have central heating, so the village does not smell of wood or peat smoke as constantly, and the lums do not literally reek.

Renwick's artistic process has been characterised by listening, holding conversations, attending meetings of local cultural groups such as the Doric language group, investigating other areas of formal research associated with archaeology and cultural studies. Tom Trevor at an evaluation Sounding identified this process as "embodied through relationships – that's where real meaning lies". Serendipity has played an important role in enabling the artist to operate within the context.

Ian Hunter highlighted another dimension, contextualising this area of work in relation to the global issues in rurality including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade and Tarriffs (GATT). The tactics of engaging with traditional knowledge and listening to individuals also belong to the

²⁰ The idea of 'revealing change' is not Renwick's description of his practice. Rather it is the critical reflection of curator Tom Trevor of Spacex Gallery, Exeter, England. Tom Trevor and Ian Hunter, Director of Littoral and polemicist for rural cultural development were invited to engage with the project in a Sounding. Both Hunter and Trevor had previously worked with Renwick and were invited to participate in the Sounding to explore the dynamics of the project. Ian Hunter described rural change as being 'like a knife that is so sharp that you don't feel when it cuts you.'

²¹ Such a thing already exists in the form of the Aford Heritage Centre.

movement resisting globalisation, and the constant reshaping of local and world maps through the movement of capital. Within INTHROW the development of a point of resilience focused on the individual and the local. It is in a relationship with other work on traditional knowledge, such as that with the Dogrib, and is about community resilience, rather than specifically about resistance.

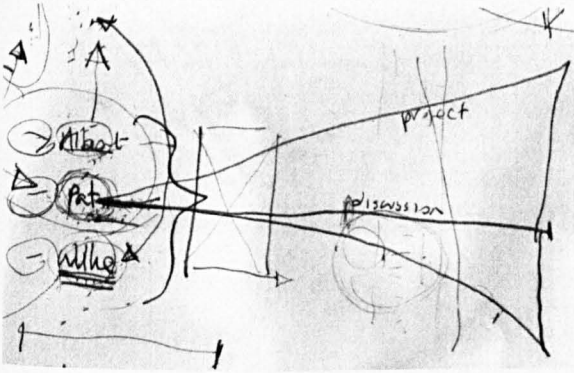


Fig 6. Listening (from interview by Delday with Renwick, Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, March 2004)

'Revealing change' as an art practice strategy can only be achieved through a process of listening, particularly with those who have experienced the change. The tactical objective is to acknowledge the change and to seek to highlight issues of value.

Another phrase that Renwick has highlighted in 'there's nae whisperin' in the braes' which roughly (and inelegantly) translates to 'there is no voices in the hills'. Historically the hills would have been alive with the sound of activity. The urban romantic ideal of the silence of the countryside is a myth. Renwick developed out of this small recurrent cultural reference an area of work.

C 'The Summary of Human Settlement: Cultural Continuity in Strathbogie' – a visual tool

The Summary is offered as a tool with which to engage the issues specific to the area. In particular the Summary focuses on inhabitation. The Summary reveals the changing patterns of inhabitation, and enables further and more detailed exploration of the community and its surroundings. Gavin developed the summary further working with other practitioners including visual artists, architects, designers and photographers.

In what way can we describe the *Summary* as a tool? In general terms it is a tool for learning about and exploring the landscape. This highlights a number of characteristics. The title sets out a scale of space and time, and indicates that the exercise is a 'summary' and therefore not comprehensive. The title also indicates that the objective is cultural, not merely architectural or anthropological, although both these disciplines are key to framing the exercise.

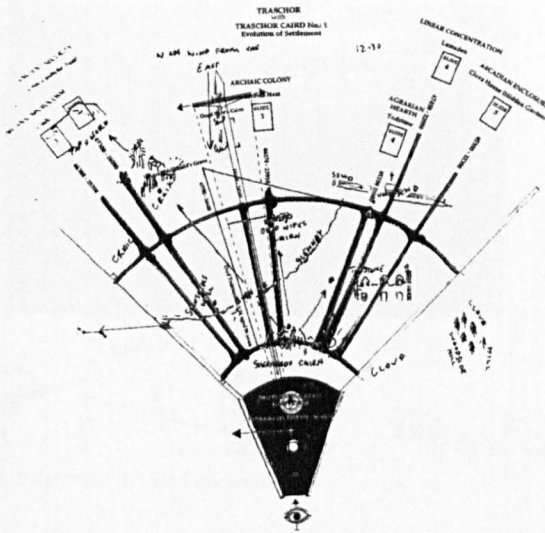


Fig. 7 The Summary of Human Settlement: Cultural Continuity in Strathgogie

Seeing and Hearing....

As with any tool it lends itself to many uses – as viewfinder and itinerary, but the tool is a thing in itself – it has an aesthetic dimension. Let us first present the structure as poetry:

Ancient security
 Archaic colony
 Organic microcosm
 Agrarian Hearth
 Arcadian Enclosure
 Linear Concentration

Renwick says: "For me in some ways it is an 'onomatopoeic' evolution.... This may be where the poetic is perceived to lie - as opposed to it being a separate considered act."²² In creating a visual structure, a poetic language evolves. In making a tool with which to learn about something, the use of 'sounds-like it is' words achieve more than description.

Gavin's work is nearer to the ground than maps can ever be, but this structure of words has some of the formal characteristics of a grid. The intention is to create a means of navigating the time and space of an area. Instead of reducing it to two dimensions, expand it to a multitude.

²² Quoted from an email exchange between Fremantle and Renwick. Onomatopoeia is literally the formation of a word from sound that resembles that associated with the thing named. The phrases used in the Summary are not literally onomatopoeic but do convey a sense which is cumulative and associated with land.

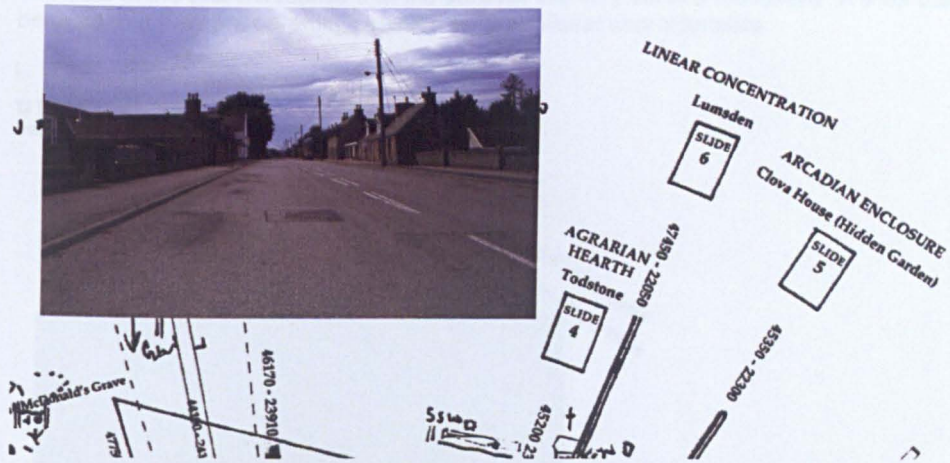


Fig. 8 Summary Linear Concentration

.... Patterns of Settlement

The landscape of Strathbogie has offered the evidence of the complexity of defining settlement in Scotland. In Scotland the structure, culture and ecology of 'settlement' has changed specifically, even in rifts, throughout history. But this history is also overlaid over itself, in so many places clearly evident: a palimpsest, overwritten time and again by later settlement and inhabitation. The *Summary* avoids the romantic invention of the rural-highland redemptive narrative that has dominated Scotland's self-image since the 19th century. Instead it focuses on a relationship between people, sites, histories and terminology and through this seeks to reveal change and cultural impact.

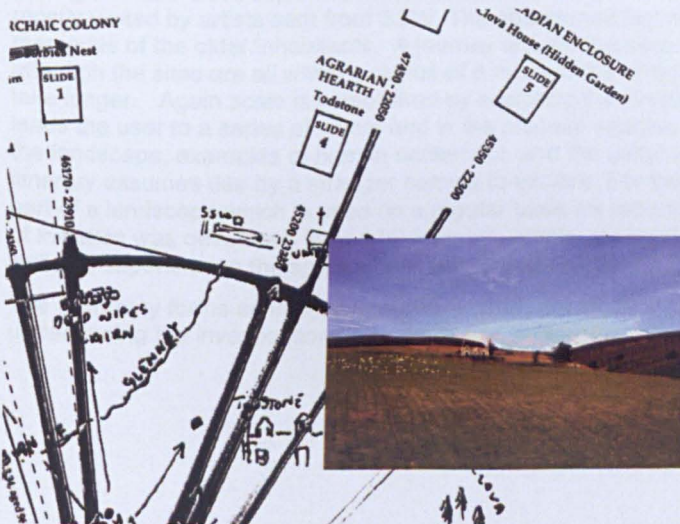


Fig 9 Summary Agrarian Hearth

.... Revealing Change

There is a visual education. By focusing the eye of the user on certain features, the intention is to reveal a process of change over the period of human settlement. The visual revelation of the process of change is intended to raise and inform the interrogation of the current context of change. The visual education through the investigation of six sites should prompt other observations. What under normal circumstances might be taken as natural is observed to be man-made, etc. The human uses of the materiality of the landscape become evident.

The user of the tool will realise that the six sites are only six of a multiplicity of sites that could be used, but they are carefully selected for their visual characteristics.

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ement

12.30

LINEAR CONCENTRATION

Lumsden

SLIDE
6

ARCADIAN ENCLOSURE
Clova House (Hidden Garden)

AGRARI



Fig 10 Summary Arcadian Enclosure

This is naturally an itinerary, an invitation to travel over the landscape. Some of the sites are frequently visited by many people, others are unacknowledged. The Tap O' Noth²³ is visited by large numbers of people regularly because it provides an outlook. The souterrain²⁴ is mostly visited by artists sent from SSW. The abandoned farms are ignored, except in the memories of the older inhabitants. A journey around the sites would take a day in a car, although the sites are all within a radius of 6 miles of the village of Lumsden. On foot it would take longer. Again scale is established by exploring the itinerary. As an itinerary the tool leads the user to a series of points and in the process enables the discovery of the shape of the landscape, examples of human settlement, and the cultural continuity of Strathbogie. The itinerary assumes use by a stranger coming to explore. For the dweller these sites are simply part of a landscape which is used on a regular basis for recreational walking. The highlighting of the sites was developed in part by villagers, artists, researchers and administrators walking, experiencing the spaces spatially as well as intellectually.

The Summary forms an important element within the whole INTHROW project by underpinning the investigation of land use and settlement.

²³ Tap O' Noth is the second highest megalithic hillfort in Scotland, three miles from the village of Lumsden and a significant landmark visible from the village.

²⁴ artificially constructed underground structures generally thought to be early Christian within one mile of the village..

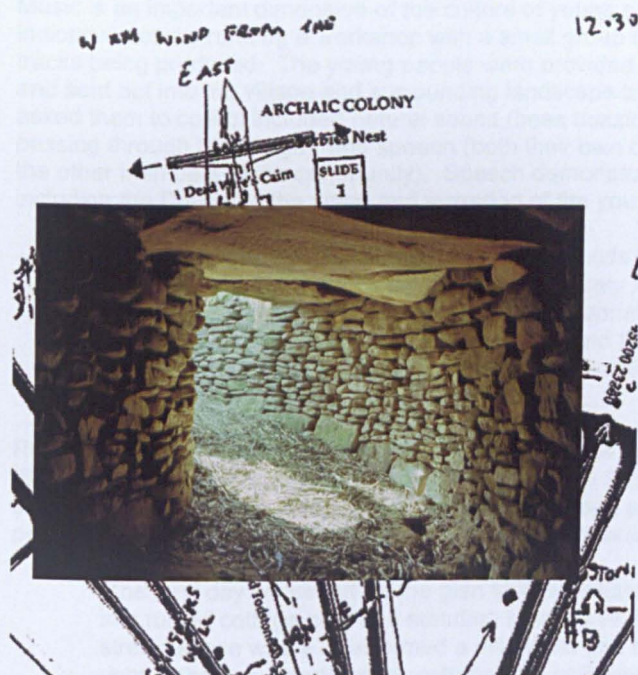


Fig 11 Summary Archaic Colony

D Enabling others: multiple minds, hands and eyes

The methods and tools identified by Renwick were appropriated by the different individuals and groups that had become involved in the project at every stage. Those involved in INTHROW to date include a wide range of members of the community young and old, students in architecture at the University of Strathclyde, recent graduates from that programme, curators, artists, DJs, archaeologists, local historians, researchers, technicians, farmers, retired people of Lumsden as well as young people in Lumsden.

In particular two other artists were drawn into the strategy, Norman Shaw, artist and DJ; and Sergio Rodrigues, photographer and Pepinieres²⁵ resident at SSW.

A DJ Workshop in the hills – a sonorous landscape

Norman Shaw is also involved in practice led research and has completed a PhD entitled 'The Sonorous Aesthetic of the Highland Landscape'²⁶. His practice focuses on working with found and pre-existing sound. The process of involving Shaw arose from discussions between Douglas, Fremantle and Renwick around engaging young people in the project more directly. Douglas identified the need to engage the young people and to demonstrate to them that their surroundings could be reinterpreted and used within contemporary urban forms such as popular music.²⁷ Shaw not only engaged young people, he succeeded in engaging the seriously disaffected.

²⁵The Pepinieres Programme is an annual EU funded exchange programme for young artists. Sergio Rolando Ferriera Rodrigues was at SSW for six months from March 2003.

²⁶University of Dundee 2003

²⁷Douglas commented that rural life is not perceived to be sexy in the eyes of young people. "They congregate at the bus stop (in many rural Scottish villages, and in Lumsden) and this is a symbol of 'getting out'. They take a great interest in fast cars. Skateboarding enables young people to appropriate urban public space and architecture through an activity that is skilful, convivial, self confirming, design led, branded, and fast. So mountain biking has begun to enable young people take over and animate the spaces around villages." The activity involves developing routes through the landscape that are challenging and fast. Obstacles and structures are built that enable the development of skills. Mountain bikers now take on a bit of the urban flaneur. "The skill is aestheticised within an event structure. Success is defined by elegance."

Music is an important dimension of the culture of young people. Shaw developed an indicative activity running a workshop with a small group of young people resulting in two tracks being produced. The young people were provided with digital recording equipment and sent out into the village and surrounding landscape to record sound. The sounds Shaw asked them to collect included natural sound (bees buzzing), man made sound (vehicles passing through the village), and speech (both their own conversations at the bus stop and the other members of the community). Speech demonstrated various forms of vernacular including the Doric and the slang and swearing of the young people.

'The basic idea was to re-appropriate the sounds of the traditional Doric culture of Lumsden and its environs within a contemporary framework, and to get younger people from the area to instigate this re-appropriation. Our main aims were to gather a team of local young people who would record the Doric language and other sounds from the environment, and to collage these sounds digitally and produce some tracks'. (Shaw 2004)

Renwick then identified Whitehillocks as the location for a performance. The site is part of the 'Summary of Humah Settlement: Cultural Continuity in Strathbogie'. It was interpreted through photography by Rodrigues and it was used for a performance by Shaw. The performance was attended by young people and other artists.

'The next day we set off up the glen to Whitehillock, where I was to do a *nimrod33* set in a ruined cottage next to a standing stone. We hauled the gear into the nettles-strewn space where I performed a mix of old and new – including our new tracks – right in the very hearth of the cottage. An unforgettable gig for me – I had to hide under a hillock of coats when it rained, then re-hatch from it when it stopped'. (Shaw with Fremantle 2004)



Fig 12 DJ workshop

Photography as the eye of the project

Sergio Rodrigues came to Lumsden through the Pepinieres programme. He is a young Portuguese photographer. Rodrigues' involvement in the project was developed by Fremantle. Renwick engaged Rodrigues in the framework and highlighted key areas of investigation. Rodrigues developed his own relations with the community and his own activity with the school as well as supporting Renwick's programme of revealing change. Rodrigues developed a piece of work with the young people in school taking their portraits. He also produced work focused around a number of Renwick's conceptual focal points including the 'Summary of Human Settlement: Cultural Continuity in Strathbogie' and during the *roup*²⁸ associated with the end of Pat Dunn's tenancy at Auchenleith.

²⁸ *roup* in the Concise Scots Dictionary means 'plunder, deprive of everything' and indicates the final selling up of a farm. It is effectively a form of redistribution of equipment by auction.



Fig 13 The Roup, May 2003

Renwick's programme, epitomised by the Summary, had created a conceptual framework for other practitioners and individuals to engage with issues of value and a process of revealing change.



Fig 14 Shaw performing at Whitehillock

5. Summary and Conclusion

The research has constructed a shared framework – shared across individual artist researchers, across sectors of arts administration, arts practice, policy making and dwelling. This has meant that we have together raised and tested questions through research and practice in the real world.

This experience has given rise to a definition of sustainability that we have tested out in five different situations specific to a particular way of life in Northern Scotland. Within this definition, we understand sustainability to be a form of resilience to change – responding to change from a sense of self and through a set of experiences that are primarily concerned with learning. The process is by no means consensual.

INTHROW was one of the five situations for understanding whether this definition of sustainability had any credibility. The project has been a series of transactions – of giving and responding between different individuals, a rich ecology of exchange. The village of Lumsden presented us with its experience of change. Fremantle imaginatively linked this with a parallel need for change within the organization for which he was responsible. That organization is geographically situated in the village but had been connected tenuously i.e only in economic terms. Fremantle gave these two interconnected experiences of change over to the research programme. On the Edge responded by developing with him and other partner organizations a project proposal to test out new ideas and approaches. Renwick as architect of INTHROW responded to the resulting brief by presenting us as participants in the project with a series of methods. These included *the Summary* and the chance to engage poetically with vernacular language among others. Other artists, Rodriguez and Shaw, as well as dwellers of Lumsden such as Pat Dunn, Wullie Cowe, Wullie Petrie and a group of young people interacted where and when these methods resonated with their lives. They were effectively responding to a dialogue initiated by the artist. In this sense the project INTHROW is not goal orientated but the beginning of a process of experiencing in new and imaginative ways, a way of life that is geographically and socially marginal. This 'seeing' generates new meaning for those who choose to participate.

Through revealing change the project has explored value. By revisiting peat cutting, an activity which no longer takes place in large parts of Scotland where it had been practiced for centuries, there is an opportunity to think about value. The value may lie in the symbolic significance of hearth, or in the involvement of the whole family in range of domestic activity, or in the knowledge of and management of the land.

Chris Fremantle: It sounds like we are being sentimental about this. Its important, people come from all over the world (to SSW in Lumsden), its important that they understand where they are....

Pat Dunn: No, aye. If they dinnae know about things, there's nothing to be said.

We have become sensitized to what is happening in ways that confer value on everyday experiences – the natural sounds of Lumsden, processes of retirement and what these mean within wider reference points of landownership, self organization and the inevitability of change. This process is neither about nostalgia, nor is it about deficiency. The focus on traditional knowledge is not based on any assumption that life was better in the past. The older members of the community have a strong cultural identity and social life. They are clear about their values and inheritance. They also live in the present and enjoy what it has to offer.



Fig 15 Pat Dunn discussing peat cutting

For example they live in houses with central heating and no longer cut the peat.

The artistic interventions are not perceived to be one off isolated projects by the participants of Lumsden. These interventions have become a kind of conduit for something else to happen. The participants have been involved in developing a new understanding and expectation of what art is. The young people of Lumsden would engage again with Shaw's workshop, given a chance. It was 'cool' and valorized their experience of youth in rural places (informal conversation with Douglas 16.11.02). Shaw as an individual, like Renwick, was given an opportunity to work in a way that was a new challenge to his practice and creatively developed him as an artist (interviews with Delday Renwick 8.3.04 and Shaw 7.7.04, Dundee Contemporary Arts). For Rodrigues, the residency in Lumsden through the mentoring of Fremantle, marked a change in direction in which he plans to link anthropology with photography within future work. For Pat Dunn, Wullie Cowe, Wullie Petrie and Alfred, the living archive is an ongoing focus of interest as denoted by the many inquiries about Renwick's return and the desire to pick up where they left off, over the statuory 'wee dram'. Without question, expectations have been raised, requiring decisions about what will continue and what will not. These present a set of choices for SSW under a new directorship related to how it perceives its relationship with the village.

In seeking to draw conclusions it is clear that the role of knowledge within practice led research, and more generally within culture is not as product. A key criterion within the discourse around academic research is the 'original contribution to knowledge'. This suggests that knowledge is not a static repository but rather a dynamic, political tool for revealing, understanding and shaping change. The academic understanding of knowledge needs to be rethought.

Appendix 9: Douglas and Delday: *Home as a form of practice*

In Home-Maker: Jeanie Finlay, (ed) Sophie Hope
Pyramid Press, 2005, pp22-31

Home as a form of practice

Anne Douglas and Heather Delday

In what sense might the making of art be related to the making of home?

Home is a microcosm of social living. Across cultures it is arguably one of the most essential ways we express our values as individuals. Home is the starting point for encounters with human beings other than ourselves. It is the locus of socialisation in the young and also the place of care for the elderly. Seen in this way home is a pivotal space in which we articulate who we are as people, for better or for worse, through the way that we live as individuals within the everyday.

For a growing number of artists, the space of the everyday rather than the private symbolic world of the artist has become the locus of new forms of practice in the visual arts. This shift in perspective has given rise to a profound questioning of the way in which the visual arts are made and presented to a public. Where the representation of the artist's private world has often taken the form of an object, these new practices tend towards process or event based structures that rely on the participation of individuals other than the artist. True participation shifts the locus of the work from single authorship to forms of co-production of an artwork that are multi vocal. The clear distinction between the roles of viewer as passive consumer and correspondingly artist as sole author or creator consequently become less clearly defined. Individuals who in the course of their daily lives may not consider themselves to be creative, are co-opted within creative roles. The process is in effect a series of encounters between people who make something new happen within social space that reflects and informs who we are and how we live as unique individuals. It is a process of giving form to our singular experiences of everyday living.

Like landscape to the 19th century and the machine age to the 20th century, in this century home in a rich multifaceted sense may be a potent metaphor for these new kinds of approaches to making art. Through home making we can express a sense of ourselves as unique and individual even if we exercise choice in ways that are limited by social, cultural or financial constraints. Arguably a sense of home is common to all human beings because it is

a framework for identifying our individual self in relation to others. We mark its loss through terms such as 'homeless' or 'homesick'. We use it to define close, to map proximity at different scales from a sense of self to our relationship with the world we inhabit.

As a way of viewing art practice, home articulates a private space of encounter, acting as an alternative to the more familiar public space of viewing or corporate space of consumption. The notion of home frames certain forms of art as a direct social experience by focusing our attention on how we interact with one another. At home and within home-making we engage with others from our own individual centre. We enact our beliefs, values and preferences either consciously or unconsciously, operating with various degrees of autonomy. Artists working with people in everyday spaces in this way are proactive in creating the opportunity for individuals to encounter others, often bringing together people who would not normally meet together. The purpose of an artist making new space in this way is to enable others to have a presence and a voice in wider culture. The resulting encounters themselves are symbolic and self-conscious. The events or projects are meticulously developed, captured and re-presented to a public in a variety of media, many of which are generic to all cultural experience rather than specialised artistic forms of transforming base materials.

Home as a form of practice is in itself a metaphor for the making of art. Viewing artistic practice in this way raises a new set of questions. For example ethics of practice move sharply into focus because this form of practice operates at the level of individual experience within the relationship of oneself with another. The nature of relationship changes. Where conventional audiences act as guests to the artistic experience, in participatory approaches the artist is guest within the everyday space of the participant. Questions unfold within a newly constructed social space such as *Who is the creator?* *How should the contribution of a participant be acknowledged?* *At what point does an individual participant become instrumental to the making of an artwork?* *How can the creative process become transparent?* *In what sense might transparency avoid the negativity of voyeurism and the danger of invading the private space of an individual?* These questions to an extent formulate areas of judgement in both developing and experiencing this kind of work. They act as new criteria in response to new expectations and tensions that arise from a shift in focus. In practice the content of a work comes through social engagement *between* individuals and not solely the experience of a single individual creator.

There are also other questions. What are the aesthetics of work that is essentially non object based (in this sense an object may be a film, an installation, a painting or a sculpture)? What is the role of the artist if it is not the representation to a public of the artist's private symbolic world? To whom is the artist ultimately responsible in making work, to him or herself, to the participants or to an audience? How can the artist involve other people ethically in the making

of work? What are the aesthetic, cultural and political consequences of engaging people in enacting values and beliefs as individuals?

***Home-Maker* viewed as artwork**

Jeanie Finlay's *Home-Maker* is without doubt a representation - but in what sense? By viewing the work as a form of practice that is concerned with the singularity of everyday life, we may uncover different expectations and issues that prompt an alternative reading of the work.

What are the elements of *Home-Maker*?

Within the installation *Home-Maker* Jeanie explores through a series of conversations the lives of older people unable to easily move out of their home environments. The individuals involved are of English and Japanese origin. As viewers we encounter two mirroring Japanese and English rooms that act as meaningful spaces for two interactive digital interfaces. Our gaze is choreographed through degrees of interaction. We are encouraged to sit in each room and to call up Jeanie's conversations with the older people, and explore with them their home spaces through significant objects. We choose pathways through the prepared material and engage at our own pace.

The artist has carefully edited the material to focus our attention on subtle but significant cultural differences – a deeper spirituality perhaps in Japan than in Britain; a deeper sense of individuality, eccentricity even, in Britain. The work focuses our attention on each individual's way of making home, creating a unique identity through their selection of what means most to them. We are conscious of Jeanie's skill in developing a set of effects that constitute possible ways of exploring the work.

Here we should pause. Jeanie's subjects are people who are perhaps vulnerable and yet seem open to the idea that the intimacy of their lives should become public. The potential of film and interactivity to intervene inappropriately in the lives of these specific individuals is a risk for both the artist and her subjects. The work could fall the wrong side of voyeurism. There is a danger that the lives of the participants are somehow lessened, reduced in the gaze of viewers whose pace and quality of life and related values may be very different. There is also a danger that these older people become objectified in the effort to make art.

If the gaze predominates in the way that we engage with *Home-Maker*, how might we confront and resolve these ethical issues? If the gaze is displaced by a different quality of

engagement with this artwork, what might this be? What needs to shift in our critical encountering of the work to generate an appropriate reading?

Let us imagine that the real locus of artistic content in *Home-Maker* does not lie within the skills of editing or installation (arguably direct equivalents to paint, pencil and the conventions of appraising artworks as acts of re-presentation). Let us imagine that for an artist like Jeanie, whose interest lies in her relationship with people, there are a different set of judgements to be made in developing the work which impact on the way we experience it, additional to those we are familiar with. Art objects can be and are made simply to be looked at, even intentionally voyeuristic as is explicit in Duchamp's Étant Donnés (1946-66). Artworks can also be part of a process of transaction in a different economy of exchanges from, for example, acts of consumption.

To understand this fully we need to go deeper into the meaning of home and home making and its role within this work.

***Home-Maker* viewed as a form of practice**

At the outset the artist develops a relationship with her subjects. She creates the opportunity for each elder to hold a conversation that temporarily transcends their isolation. Jeanie judges her questions carefully and responsively, encouraging each person to reveal their most intimate experiences of love and loss (for a spouse), of memories and hopes, of fear and spirituality, of humour and wit through expressions of taste and preference and by relating individual histories. It is remarkable the degree to which individuals who live with severe physical constraints and states of dependency express a sense of themselves. We get to know them as individual personalities, as Florrie and Monji-san, not as representative of 'the third age'.

Jeanie also judges the way that the viewer is embraced as part of the conversation through spatial decisions. We, as audience, are not just witness to a conversation that has happened elsewhere. Florrie speaks to us from her now virtual chair. We sit opposite her. The profoundly social act of home-making as an expression of one individual to another about the space that they live in is thoroughly worked and understood at every level. By giving words and images to these feelings within a space of trust, the elderly participants have a voice within our (the viewer's) space that affirms their existence in relation to ours.

Through other people we see ourselves. This mirroring is arguably a fundamental, essential role of art. Not all artworks, however, raise such challenging questions such as how artists work appropriately with others, of where autonomy lies in the process, and who is enabled to express a sense of self.

The artist in this work is clearly author and as such exercises her autonomy by constructing opportunities for dialogue with the elderly participants and by directing our gaze within the installation. To what degree are the elderly empowered through this authorship to act, to see and feel differently through their participation? *Home-Maker* does not commodify old age. It presents us with an experience of old age.

In this new reading *Home-maker* becomes a form of exchange where reciprocity is key to the meaning of what is made. A gift has no intrinsic value. Its value is dependent upon the meaning that it has for those that give and those that receive and upon the context of both giving and receiving. Jeanie initiated the exchange with her participants and developed the piece in a specific way to allow viewers to feel included. This is in part achieved theatrically through stage set and digital tools, and in part through her and our recognition in the lives of older people, of feelings and experiences that help us reflect on what home means now in the present and also what it might become in the future.

We are invited in, not to consume but to consider where our values lie.

Anne Douglas and Heather Delday are artist researchers involved in the development of the On the Edge (OTE) research programme at Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (2001 – present). The first phase of the research (2001-4) was concerned with the testing of new approaches to the visual arts within remote rural locations of Northern Scotland. Within these contexts the conventions of artist, audience and artwork have been rethought. People who live in small communities have little or no gallery infrastructure and related rituals of viewing objects. Within OTE we suspended belief about what kind of art might be made, stipulating only that it had to be of quality. New approaches were given space to unfold through the interaction between people in specific places, their interests and desires. We tried to find a language to describe how we were working and in what way it is different from dominant models of gallery or public art practice and community art practice within urban contexts. To this end we drew on the notion of home as a way of exploring shared and specific values through the making of art.